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Solving Suspicion in Mystery Films

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand how viewers engage mystery films, and how they are engaged by them. Mystery films present a problem for the viewer to solve, from identifying a killer to uncovering a conspiracy, and engage viewers in solving this problem by arousing suspicion. This feeling of suspicion represents points of fixation for viewers within a film's narrative. Mystery films arouse suspicion using repetition, isolation, duration, and predisposition, and by playing on viewer expectations surrounding the mystery genre and type. When viewer suspicion is aroused, they engage in a form of problem solving to try and resolve ambiguity in the text and reach a solution to the problem in the film.

To address these research questions, this thesis employs a range of empirical methods, including quantitative analysis of editing data, neoformalist analysis of mystery films, and a human experiment to determine how specific film practices influence viewer's perception of suspicion. By focusing only on what can be observed and comprehended, and not on interpretations of a text, Neoformalist analysis may be considered an empirical research method. This range of methods is directed by a set of guiding principles that underpin the thesis, aimed at contributing to our understanding of the experience-of-film. In total, the thesis examines 87 mystery films from 2004-2013 to provide a comprehensive study of contemporary mystery cinema.

The thesis demonstrates that viewers primarily engage with mystery films through a form of problem solving, guided by their experience of suspicion. Mystery films are constructed to arouse suspicion and encourage viewers to attempt to solve the problem at the centre of a film. Mystery films use editing structure, problem types, filmic practices, and expectations of genre to curate the viewing experience, attempting to prevent viewers from reaching a solution prematurely. This is largely achieved by cultivating recognition in viewers, ensuring they identify important clues within the film, but fail to synthesise this information into a solution. Viewers can draw on meta-knowledge in an attempt to decode and decipher these practices, leading to new forms of engagement with mystery films. Finally, this thesis illustrates the potential for an empirically informed, interdisciplinary approach to researching screen texts, and the potential for future investigations into the viewing experience.

DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

- i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,
- ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
- iii. the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, bibliographies, and appendices

Signed:

PREFACE

This is to acknowledge that:

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- ii. Editing support for this thesis was provided by Mel Campbell. This was restricted to copyediting, in accordance with the Australian Standards for Editing Practice. Mel Campbell holds a Master of Arts degree by research in cultural studies.
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Part I: Introduction

1

“Are you watching closely?”

The Prestige (Nolan 2006) begins with a direct challenge to the viewer: “Are you watching closely?” The film follows the rivalry between two magicians, Robert Angier (Hugh Jackman) and Alfred Borden (Christian Bale) and their attempts to uncover each other’s method for performing an instant teleportation trick, “The Transported Man”. Despite the very first scene of the film depicting the death of Angier, the challenge does not refer to solving the murder, but to the very same objective as the protagonists, solving the problem of how the magic trick is performed. By learning the method for both “Transported Man” tricks, viewers can unravel the ambiguity surrounding the two men and their lives, in addition to solving the murder. While the two men are motivated by ambition and revenge, the viewer shares no such incentives. Instead, in the case of *The Prestige*, as with any other contemporary mystery film, viewer engagement is driven by genre, both the meaning making practices employed by mystery films and viewers’ expectations of the genre.

In this thesis, I argue that mystery films present viewers with a problem to be solved, as described above, and engage viewers in solving that problem through the arousal of suspicion. Further, I contend that the viewing experience is governed by this engagement with a problem, and that the experience of suspicion motivates viewers to seek out possible solutions within the text. Moreover, I argue that the presence of the mystery genre itself, identified through its features, tropes, and practices, primes viewers to engage in this problem-solving mode. Ultimately, this thesis, through an investigation of how mystery films are constructed to engage viewers, and how viewers engage with mystery films, highlights the role of suspicion and problem solving in the unique viewing experience that the mystery genre produces.

Genre remains a valuable tool for understanding different kinds of films and their audiences. Films do not belong to a genre; they must be given a genre. Theorists, critics, film-makers, and most importantly, audiences perceive films to belong to a genre based on

their own expectations and beliefs surrounding what that group means. Films are organised, classified, and categorised in relation to similar works. For this reason, the “generic system” (Ryall 1998, 329) remains one of the most effective tools for studying film viewers and their engagement with films. Genre can efficiently describe the practices used to construct meaning across related films but is most effective in doing so when directly linked to how these practices engage with viewer expectations.

Genre is intimately related to the familiar. As Barry Keith Grant asserts, genre is used to “tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations” (2007, 1). Genre operates as a form of “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein [1953] 1963, 32), providing audiences with a framework for overlooking variations, and instead focusing on recognisable shared similarities. However, genre depends on “the constitution and maintenance of a stable, generically trained audience” (Altman 1996, 279). Thus, any research into genre will be inextricably linked with the film viewer, and their engagement with the genre both within and outside of films. All of the above qualities make genre an excellent vehicle for examining viewer practices and engagement with film, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis.

Steve Neale argues that “the question of the social and cultural function genres perform” (1990, 45) is central to any understanding of genre. This social and cultural function of genre is, I will argue, communicative, and primarily observed in discourse surrounding screen texts. In their collection *Rethinking Genre in Contemporary Global Cinema* (2018), Silvia Dibeltulo and Ciarra Barrett speak to the timeliness of a review of “the theoretical parameters and the practical iterations of genre” (3). Genre performs a vital role in new engagements with popular screen media, from personalised recommendations on Netflix to organising media libraries on Plex. By identifying genre within discourse between film-makers, audiences, and film texts, my work seeks to contribute to this review, offering practical applications for the study of genre through a reconsideration of theories of genre. My work provides a new approach or “*process* of genre analysis” (Silverblatt 2007, xiii - emphasis in original) that utilises these new ways in which audiences organise, discuss, select, and consume films in relation to genre.

While my work focuses on the ‘practical’ applications of genre in film research, any study of a genre must overcome the theoretical challenges in the identification and classification of individual films. Previous attempts at conceptualising the study of individual genres have identified problems (Bordwell 1989b; Moine 2008), conflicts (Stam 2000),

contradictions (Altman 1984) and dilemmas (Tudor) with the concept of genre. My own work aims not only to address these theoretical concerns, but through a pragmatic approach, offer a solution to the study of individual genres and their generic corpus. This thesis highlights the potential for empirical evidence, observations of how genre is used by film-makers, distributors, and audiences, as a way past these challenges and towards a better understanding of genre's function.

The study of individual genres has produced historical, cultural, and critical insights into film genres. In *Science Fiction Experiences* (2011), Angela Ndaljian is interested in “exploring a diverse range of science fictional experiences that our mediated worlds offer” (3) and the Science Fiction genre that “asks its audience to contemplate” and “ponder” the intersections between technology, science, and society (2-3). In the edited collection *The Horror Film* (2011), Stephen Prince identifies the “anxiety at the heart of the genre” (2) as distinguishing the genre and asserts that “the experience of horror resides in this confrontation with uncertainty” (2). In both cases, the authors highlight the significance of the viewing experience, and the ability of a genre to motivate specific kinds of viewer engagement. This thesis does the same for the mystery genre, identifying suspicion as the primary affective experience of viewing mystery films, which motivates a problem-solving mode of engagement.

This thesis builds on the burgeoning body of work investigating the film viewing experience empirically. Journals such as *Media Psychology* and *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* have provided a space for the discussion and examination of screen viewing within an empirical context. In particular, work published in *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* over the past decade highlights the potential for cross- and interdisciplinary research in the study of screen viewers. Collections such as Ted Nannicelli and Paul Taberham's *Cognitive Media Theory* (2014) and CarrieLynn D. Reinhard and Christopher J. Olsen's *Making Sense of Cinema: Empirical Studies into Film Spectators and Spectatorship* (2016) speak to the timeliness and importance of viewing experience centred research, as well as the empirical and cross- and interdisciplinary methods for investigation and analysis. The range of research methods incorporated across this thesis borrow from the epistemological underpinnings of each of these collections, seeking a deeper understanding of the activity and engagement of viewing a film, and the ways in which a text can motivate these viewer responses.

A significant debt is owed to the work of Barry Salt for providing a pathway for studying, and valuing, the editing and pacing in film as applied throughout this thesis. His work in ‘Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures’ (1974), *Film Style and Technology: History & Analysis* (1983) and *Moving into Pictures: More on Film History, Style, and Analysis* (2006) outlines a measured and precise method for collecting empirical evidence of shot lengths and durations from films and analysing them statistically. As Buckland (2008) asserts, Salt “almost single-handedly established statistical style analysis as a research paradigm in film studies” (219). Salt’s work is so important to my own as it serves to quantify film pacing across a related body of texts. Although previous work has sought to understand historical, cultural, and generic factors that impact the average duration of shots between films, my own work demonstrates the significance of the relative pacing of shots within a film, and how this change occurs over a film’s duration. Salt’s work provides the framework for making the viewing experience of film editing visible and tangible to researchers, something previously immeasurable and thus often overlooked. Investigations into the rhythm and pacing of film editing, such as James E. Cutting and Karen Pearlman (2019), continue to demonstrate the potential for quantitative editing analysis to illuminate film making practice, and the relationship between editing structure and bodily responses and experiences for viewers.

My research contributes to the aforementioned bodies of work of theorising genre, spectatorship, and the film viewing experience, through a specific examination of the mystery genre. The methods and analysis conducted in this thesis have the potential to inform research across a diverse set of genres, the application throughout this thesis is focused on understanding the mystery genre and the specific mode of engagement it fosters amongst audiences. When Alfred Borden asks viewers “Are you watching closely?” in the opening shot of *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006), they are challenged to scrutinise the film, to try and discern some meaning hidden or obfuscated by the text. Viewers are motivated by the film to uncover how the magic tricks are performed in *The Prestige*, and to do so before the protagonists (or possibly before their peers in the film audience). The mystery genre is uniquely distinguished by setting a problem that viewers are encouraged to attempt to solve (Cawelti 2004). The “challenge” (Leitch 2002, 55) for viewers comes from the problem itself, as well as its presentation within the film. Mystery films are constructed to make a solution difficult to identify, sometimes misleading or deceiving audiences to achieve this end. The mystery genre signals to viewers the presence of a problem and motivates a problem-solving mode of engagement that shapes their viewing experience.

Viewers of mystery films are constantly seeking “progress from ignorance to knowledge” (Lehman 2000), but this process has gone largely unexamined. Historically, the genre has been closely associated with cheap, populist literature publications such as penny dreadfuls and pulp magazines, leading to a perception that the genre is of low quality. Mystery fiction was dismissed as a kind of menial game, ranking “somewhere between smoking and crossword puzzles” (Wilson 1945). Despite the range of film theory re-examining historically ‘pulp’ genres such as fantasy, thriller, and horror, and the proliferation of mysteries in both film and television, the genre has received relatively little attention in contemporary screen theory. This omission may be a result of the mystery genre’s frequent application alongside, or within, a broad range of other genres. The mystery genre is rarely perceived as the “dominant formulaic principle” (Cawelti 1976, 43) and functions as a kind of meta-genre or “supergenre” (Cawelti 2004, 328). In doing so, mystery films may be primarily marketed and consumed under the label of another genre, while still having a dominant influence over the viewing experience by emphasising “the central role of reader involvement in the narrative” (Cawelti 2004, 343).

John Cawelti’s *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (1976) and subsequent *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture* (2004) provide the most in-depth examinations of the genre; however, both focus primarily on literary texts.¹ Further, Cawelti’s work takes a formalist approach, and as such does not examine audience engagement of mystery texts. I address these gaps by focusing exclusively on mystery films, closely examining and testing viewer engagement with mystery films, and updating Cawelti’s work to reflect contemporary expression within the genre.

The theorisation of complex narratives and storytelling in screen texts, particularly Warren Buckland’s edited collection *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (2009) and subsequent *Hollywood Puzzle Films* (2014), have prompted detailed analysis of contemporary mystery films focusing on how a challenge is created for the viewer.²

¹ Mystery is not the primary object of study in either of these collections. In *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (1976), adventure and romance receive far greater attention; mystery is seen as a subsidiary genre that is often used as a subplot in other more prominent genres. This position is modified in *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture* (2004), where the mystery genre is conceptualised as a “supergenre” (328); however, the genre remains a secondary study in comparison to the collection’s focus on the role of popular culture in storytelling.

² Complexity in screen narratives and storytelling can be broadly broken into two areas of study: narrative form and the effect of this form. Research on narrative form includes “forking-path narratives” (Bordwell 2002), database narratives (Kinder 2002), “modular narratives” (Cameron 2006, 2008), “complex narratives” (Mittell 2006, 2015; Simons 2008; Staiger 2006), and “multiform” narratives (Campora 2014). The effect of this narrative form, and the films that employ it, have been labelled as “puzzle films” (Buckland 2009, 2013; Panek 2006), “mind-game films” (Elsaesser 2009, 2018), and “mind-tricking” narratives (Klecker 2013).

However, this analysis has not placed the role of the mystery genre as central to these films. In *Impossible Puzzle Films: A Cognitive Approach to Contemporary Complex Cinema* (Kiss and Willemsen 2017), the authors consider “under what conditions do viewers abandon a rationalising and problem-solving approach, and exchange it for, for instance, a more metaphorical or symbolic reading?” (3), distinguishing certain puzzle films from the problem-solving focused mystery. My work addresses this gap by examining the mystery genre, and the way that it shapes engagement with films, irrespective of their narrative complexity and form.

This thesis draws on several key concepts from narratology describing expositional modes and narrative structure. Narrative information is central to mystery films, and the restrictions on this information for the viewer are fundamental to how mystery films are engaged. Restricted narration refers to when the viewer is limited to what a character within the film knows (or less), while unrestricted or omniscient narration refers to when the viewer is provided with more information than any one character holds. As Bordwell highlights, these categories describe “two ends of a continuum” (2016, 88) and films can divulge or conceal information in a myriad of ways. This focalization, “a restriction of ‘field’” (Genette [1983] 1988, 74) adopted by the narration limits the viewer, or pushes them towards certain conclusions based on the information available. Narrative information may also be restricted, or manipulated, through narrative structure. Narrative structure can be considered in relation to the fabula and syuzhet, with the fabula describing the chronological order of events contained within a narrative, and the syuzhet describing the order these events are presented to the viewer (Bordwell 1985). The syuzhet offers opportunities within mystery films to withhold information from the viewer, as in Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000). *Memento*, by reversing the fabula for a large part of the syuzhet, allows the story of an unreliable narrator to slowly be untangled by the viewer.

This thesis aims to determine what mystery films are, how viewers engage them, and how mystery films are constructed to engage viewers. The mystery genre in film is an important object of study, and the lack of direct attention thus far is something worthy of addressing. Films within the mystery genre invite a specific and unique form of engagement by setting a problem that the viewer can attempt to solve. While the problem itself may be made explicitly or implicitly, viewers hold the reasonable expectation that when engaging with a mystery film, they will have the opportunity to attempt to solve that problem. This

distinguishes the mystery genre, with no other genre providing as clear instruction on how to engage a film.

By setting such a specific task for the viewer, one that viewers can readily engage in, mystery films offer an opportunity to directly examine how theories of human cognition and perception may be applied to understanding the film viewing experience. When engaging in a specific task, viewer attention is directed in a purposeful, and predictable way (Yarbus 1967; Borji and Itti 2014). I have previously argued for the potential of mystery films in eye-tracking research for their capacity to direct attention, the influence of the task, and interactions with event boundaries (Orth 2018). My primary research approach seeks to contribute to the growing field of experience-of-film theorising (see Section 2.1) by following three guiding principles. These are: to produce verifiable or testable theories of the viewing experience; to apply research methods that match the scale of the problem under investigation; and to acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of the film-viewing experience and ensure cohesion between disparate disciplinary research. By setting a problem for the viewer, the mystery genre is uniquely positioned for advancing our understanding of the viewing experience. To examine this, this thesis incorporates a range of different methods under this broader set of guiding principles, each of which are outlined in Chapter 2: Guiding Principles.

Lastly, mystery texts, by placing emphasis on solving a problem, must perpetually invent novel solutions. This difficulty for mystery creators has long been recognised by critics of the genre.

The detective story itself is in a dilemma. It is a vein which is in danger of being worked out, the demand is constant, the powers of supply variable, and the reader, with each one he absorbs, grows a little more sophisticated and harder to please, while the novelist, after each one he writes, becomes a little more exhausted. (Connolly 1936)

As mystery author Mary Roberts Rinehart asserts, “the mystery story is two stories in one: the story of what happened and the story of what appeared to happen” (cited in Chandler 1971). The “story of what happened” must seem inevitable to readers/viewers but cannot be seen as predictable. How the mystery genre has continued to adapt to this problem, and to perpetually more sophisticated viewers, is something contemporary research has yet to discuss, and something I aim to address in my analysis of the genre.

Thus, the mystery genre has unique properties worthy of study, and significant gaps exist in our current understanding of its role in film. To address these gaps and to better understand the mystery film I aim to answer three central questions—what are mystery films, how do viewers engage with these films, and how are these films constructed to engage viewers? I define mystery films by their practice of setting a problem for the viewer to engage and identify 87 mystery films released between 2004 and 2013 for analysis.³ This group of films will henceforth be referred to as the Study Set. I argue that the way in which viewers engage mystery films is by attempting to solve the problems presented therein. Mystery films elicit a problem-solving mode of engagement from viewers, shaping the viewing experience. Viewers rely on hunches, intuition, and suspicions to guide them through this process while searching for a solution. This thesis will demonstrate that films in the Study Set present clues to viewers in a way that they are readily noticed and recognised as part of the film’s solution, while impeding efforts to reach that solution ahead of time.

To fully address these questions and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of mystery films and their viewers, this thesis takes a multifaceted approach. Firstly, I will re-evaluate the mystery genre from the perspective of the viewing experience, defining the mystery film and its viewers through their engagement in problem solving. Secondly, this thesis will highlight the importance of narrative, editing, and filmic practices to this process of engagement between viewers and the mystery film. Thirdly, I will develop theories and a vocabulary to describe and explain how viewers engage in problem solving, and their experience of suspicion when viewing mystery films. Much of this work culminates in an experiment testing my hypothesis that viewer perceptions of suspicion may be increased through the use of editing and filmic practices. By examining how viewers engage with mystery films, and how mystery films engage viewers, we may better understand the mystery film genre and the unique viewing experiences it can produce.

As outlined above, an important part of this thesis involves developing appropriate language to describe fundamental mystery practices and forms of engagement, addressing a long-standing gap in analysis of the genre. A mystery film can include many individual problems; however, there is usually one at the centre, the answer to which constitutes the film’s conclusive solution. I describe the problem at the centre of inquiry within the film as the *core problem*, and its solution as the *core solution*. The core solution will often consist

³ Discussion of how these films were selected can be found in Section 2.2 and in Chapter 4.

of a synthesis or application of several solutions to other, smaller problems from across the film. For example, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006) the core problem is to identify how the “Transported Man” trick is performed. This involves correctly identifying that Borden uses a double (his twin), but also how he is able to do so (such as amputating fingers to mirror an injury sustained by one of the brothers). In this way, the core solution can be the culmination of solutions to a set of interrelated problems presented over the course of the film.

As viewers work towards solving a film’s core problem, their goal is not simply to arrive at the core solution: it is to do so ‘ahead of time’, before the solution is made obvious to all viewers.⁴ In this thesis I refer to the moment that a mystery film reveals the core solution as the point of *anagnorisis*. *Anagnorisis* in Ancient Greek refers to the moment a character in theatre or literature recognises the truth of a situation, defined by “a change from ignorance to knowledge” (Aristotle [335 BCE] 1895). In relation to mystery films, I use *anagnorisis* to refer to the latest moment that this revelation is experienced by viewers (as opposed to characters on screen), or, in other words, when the film removes all remaining ambiguity surrounding the core problem’s solution.⁵

1.1 A THESIS IN FIVE PARTS

This thesis is split into five parts, beginning with a series of questions about mystery film engagement, moving to their answers before bringing those answers together to demonstrate their potential. Firstly, in Part I: Introduction, I ask what mystery films are, how viewers engage with them, and how they engage viewers. In Part II: Genre, I address the question of what mystery films are by defining and identifying them. In Part III: Viewer, I examine and explain the ways viewers engage with mystery films. In Part IV: Film, I analyse how mystery films engage viewers. Finally, in Part V: Conclusion, I present a close analysis of *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006), applying my findings from throughout the thesis to demonstrate their value in understanding mystery films and the viewing experience.

⁴ Although viewers may not always or regularly achieve this goal, they are still motivated by it.

⁵ In many cases, the viewer’s and character’s revelations occur simultaneously. For example, in *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan 1999) Crowe’s realisation that he is dead is the point at which ambiguity is removed for the viewer. Similarly, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006) Angier and the viewer share the moment of revelation as Borden reveals he performed his trick using his twin brother.

Part I: Introduction

Part I lays the foundation for investigating mystery films. Chapter 2: Guiding Principles outlines the methodological aims and approach employed throughout the thesis. Building on the cognitivist approach, I propose an experience-of-film methodology that primarily seeks to understand how viewers experience film. Further, I outline how this methodology shapes the use of methods across the thesis.

Part II: Genre

The mystery genre is often most recognised by the classic whodunnit format in films like Jonathan Lynn's *Clue* (1985).⁶ The film sets a clear and explicit problem for viewers (who killed Mr Boddy?), and entices them to follow a series of clues, alongside characters on screen, in order to identify the killer. *Clue* (1985) is unique in that it includes three different endings, each with a different solution. These different endings explore possible interpretations of the evidence and make explicit the thought processes viewers may have gone through. Despite the fact that the film subverts viewer expectations for one 'true' solution, it remains instantly recognisable as part of the mystery genre by setting a problem for viewers and allowing them to work towards a solution by applying reason and logic.

While *Clue* (1985) represents the quintessential mystery film to some, this is certainly not true for all viewers. This thesis seeks to understand the broader cultural perceptions and expectations of the mystery genre by viewers and draws on a range of theoretical and empirical evidence to define and identify mystery films. Part II defines the mystery genre and reveals the role genre plays in viewer engagement. In Chapter 3: Defining Mystery Films, I argue that genre is best understood as a form of cultural consensus. I discuss how audiences and industry construct genre through usage, and how this use shapes new representations and perceptions of the genre.⁷ I trace the important markers in the history of the mystery genre and distinguish the key elements that influence contemporary audience conceptions of the genre. In particular, I argue that mystery films are defined by the inclusion of a problem and demonstrate how this thread has persisted throughout the genre's history.

⁶ *Clue* (Lynn 1985) is a whodunit murder mystery based on the popular board game *Cluedo* (Pratt 1949).

⁷ The exact process by which audiences construct and inform the use of genre is beyond the scope of this thesis. Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* (2013) provides an excellent introduction to the topic and some of these practices.

In Chapter 4: Identifying Mystery Films, I construct a practical method for identifying mystery films, in a way that reflects cultural consensus surrounding the mystery genre. This chapter addresses several problems of genre definition and outlines how each can be resolved by drawing on screen discourse. I detail how the genre classifications from IMDb, Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix DVD and Jinni can be used to approximate cultural consensus on genre, and to identify contemporary mystery films. Using this method, I identify 87 mystery films, which form the Study Set and are the subject of analysis in Part IV.

Part III: Viewer

Part III turns its focus away from the mystery genre and towards film viewers and their experience addressing two key questions: how do viewers engage with mystery films? and what motivates their engagement? In Chapter 5: Textual Problem Solving, I argue that each film in the Study Set includes a problem, and that the way in which viewers primarily engage with mystery films is by attempting to solve these problems. To understand this process, I investigate theories of problem solving from the psychological sciences and describe how they apply in the context of mystery film viewing. To describe the unique form of problem solving that takes place when viewing mystery films, I create the concept of Textual Problem Solving. This form of engagement does not require the viewer to 'solve' the mystery ahead of the film's narrative, but merely requires that their attention and interest is driven by a desire to reach this perceived completion state or information-based goal.

In the following chapter, Chapter 6: Feeling Suspicion, I examine how viewers employ informal problem-solving processes in response to information relating to a film's core problem. I argue that the presentation of such information in mystery films triggers suspicion in the mind of viewers. Suspicion involves the perception of ambiguity in something recognised as important: a belief in a certain truth about significant events, usually negative, without certain proof. To discuss suspicion when aroused during film viewing, I create the concept of Viewer Suspicion. The concept describes when a viewer recognises something as important or related to the mystery at hand, but ambiguity surrounds the meaning or application of that information. In this way, Viewer Suspicion functions as a way of eliciting and engaging specific pieces of information relevant to the task of Textual Problem Solving.

The decision to refer to screen audiences as viewers was a purposeful one, intended to emphasise the individual's viewing experience, and to highlight the dominance of visual stimuli in multisensory environments. Witten and Knudsen argue that, "vision dominates our perception of space" (2005, 489) and that it can shape our experience of non-visual stimuli.⁸ The experience of multisensory material, such as film, is modulated by what the viewer sees. Further, when describing viewers and the viewing experience throughout this thesis, I refer to a particular conception of screen audiences. My intent is twofold, to understand real viewers and their experience, and to develop theories that can predict how viewers would engage and respond to mystery films.

My conception of film viewers draws on Ian Christie's (2012a) "imagined", "recorded", and "observed" audience. The "recorded audience" describes real viewers, who have been recorded in some way, such that we can make specific claims about their experience based on the available empirical data. The "imagined audience" describes hypothetical viewers who have not been observed but who we feel confident in making predictions about how they did or would experience a film. I combine these two conceptions to study a realised viewer, Christie's (2012a) "observed audience", drawing on theories of human cognition, cultural phenomena, screen theory, and empirical evidence of screen experiences, to reflect the social, cultural, psychological, and physiological components involved in a viewer's experience.⁹

Part IV: Film

Part IV focuses on the way in which mystery films are constructed and presented, in order to illuminate how those films arouse Viewer Suspicion and prompt Textual Problem Solving. Drawing on the Study Set of 87 mystery films, it investigates the structure and pacing of mystery films, through an analysis of editing data; multimodal analysis, informed by multiple viewings of each of the films; and an experiment to test how the manipulation of editing impacts Viewer Suspicion. I use software to identify when each cut occurs and the duration of each shot within films in the Study Set. Further, I analyse the content of these films over multiple viewings, identifying common trends and practices. I conduct a

⁸ Two well-known examples include ventriloquism and the McGurk effect. Ventriloquism uses a visual cue to influence the location from which a sound is perceived to originate [See Hershey and Movellan 2000]. The McGurk effect involves pairing images of a person making a particular sound (e.g. ba-ba) with a similar but different sound (e.g. ga-ga), resulting in the perception of a third sound (e.g. da-da) [See Tiihonen 2014].

⁹ This thesis does not attempt to explore the theories around spectatorship central to the screen studies discipline. While they have significant potential to further the work on mystery genre engagement, they were determined to be beyond the scope of the central aims of this thesis.

human experiment to observe how viewers respond to different edits of a pair of scenes from two films in the Study Set. This experiment is designed to partially test my hypotheses about how mystery films engage viewers. I conclude this part with a close analysis of *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006) and the way it sets a problem for the viewer (see *Figure 1.1.1*).



Figure 1.1.1—The challenge is set for the viewer in The Prestige (Nolan 2006).

Here, I begin with Chapter 7: Piecing Together Mystery, in which I analyse the editing of films in the Study Set using Video Shot and Scene Segmentation (VSSS) software. The analysis of editing within this thesis distinguishes between cut and non-cut transitions. A cut is a transition between shots whereby the last frame of the first shot is followed by the first frame of the next shot. A non-cut transition (NCT) is any other way of presenting a change in shot or scene, whereby something is included in between these two frames. Examples include a fade, dissolve, wipe, whip pan, and morph. The vast majority of transitions in contemporary film are cuts and intended to be hidden to maintain continuity. I use the data generated by this software to argue that the editing in mystery films impedes viewers' attempts to reach the film's core solution prior to anagnorisis. Specifically, I argue that mystery films strategically employ editing to inhibit or support cognitive practices by the viewer essential to researching this core solution.

Subsequently, in Chapter 8: "I knew it all along.", I analyse the practices and narrative forms found in films in the Study Set. I argue that these films are defined by a mode of presentation that largely impedes viewers from solving the core problem, prior to anagnorisis, but ensures that viewers recognise the key parts of that solution. Unlike Carroll's (1985) conception of film's erotetic model of narrative, where the narrative offers and answers questions for the viewer, mystery film narratives use this problem/solution

model, but encourage a different form of engagement, whereby the viewer aims to arrive at the solution themselves, ahead of the solution's presentation in the film. I argue that the 87 films in the Study Set are best understood by their recognition mode, and that this mode guides how the films are constructed and how they engage viewers in Textual Problem Solving. Through Chapter 8, I identify the types of problems that these films set for viewers, and the filmic practices used to convey salience to viewers in order to achieve this experience of recognition. I conclude the chapter by articulating how problem types and filmic practices shape the perception of salience and ambiguity and arouse Viewer Suspicion.

In Chapter 9: Increasing Viewer Suspicion; An Experiment, I test how repetition can be used in mystery films to increase feelings of suspicion in viewers. To do so, I used two sequences from films in the Study Set and examined how repeating information within those sequences affected participants' ratings of their suspicion. Additionally, I asked participants to describe their suspicions in their own words, providing insight into how viewers reflect on problems within mystery films. The results of the experiment demonstrate that repetition can be used to increase viewers' rating of suspicion, which supports the theories of Textual Problem Solving and Viewer Suspicion that are put forward in Part III.

In Chapter 10: Watching Closely, I demonstrate many of the findings of the thesis, including how mystery films engage viewers in Textual Problem Solving and arouse Viewer Suspicion, and how viewers engage with the film. I provide an account of how these practices function over the entirety of a narrative film, and the relationship between narrative and Textual Problem Solving. Further, the chapter discusses how the film presents critical clues to ensure viewers recognise them, and the ways in which viewers are impeded from reaching a solution ahead of time. Building on the findings of the experiment in Chapter 9, the chapter identifies social cues, particularly facial expression, as a primary motivator for Viewer Suspicion and Textual Problem Solving.

Part V: Conclusion

Part V concludes the thesis by outlining the key findings, limitations, and applications of the thesis. In particular, I highlight the contributions I have made to the study of the mystery genre and their broader applications and value within screen theorising. In addition, I argue for the potential of mystery films as a pedagogical tool, with the capacity

to develop media literacy and critical engagement with screen texts by engaging viewers in Textual Problem Solving.

2

Guiding Principles

In this thesis, I aim to define what a mystery film is, describe how viewers engage with mystery films, and explain how mystery films engage viewers. To do so I develop a number of original theories, drawing on work across a range of disciplines. I support this theoretical work with empirical evidence, drawn both from existing film databases and from original data generated by analysing the Study Set. I see my methodology as part of a movement within journals such as *Projections* and *Participations* to seek interdisciplinary and empirically informed methods to describe the viewer's experience when watching film, and to produce testable and verifiable claims about viewers. I work in this interdisciplinary space, frequently drawing on research and methods from across disciplinary borders. Research from the psychological sciences, neuroscience, economics, television studies, genre studies, literary theory, and film theory all contribute to the theories about mystery films produced over the course of the thesis. Further, my research includes several distinct projects that apply innovative and interdisciplinary methods to analyse mystery films.

This chapter provides a detailed account of the method employed at each stage of research and the motivation for these decisions. Before doing so, I discuss the role of the cognitivist film theory movement in shaping empirically informed research methodologies. I posit that after David Bordwell and Noël Carroll's *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996) there has been a concerted effort by researchers to employ interdisciplinary practices and methodologies to better understand the film viewing experience, aligning with my own aims for film research. I describe this movement as an effort towards constructing a theory of the *experience-of-film*.

Employing a wide range of methodologies and approaches in a cohesive and efficacious manner poses a significant challenge to quantitative research in film. The interdisciplinary approach I employ is bound by a common purpose, satisfying a specific role in the process of creating, developing, and testing a hypothesis about how viewers engage with mystery films. While my methods combine elements from a range of disciplines, the methodology

employed at each stage of the research is aimed at achieving a specific and clearly stated goal. In Section 2.2 I provide an outline of each of the individual methods applied in chapters across the thesis and explain their role within my broader methodology examining the experience-of-film.

2.1 EXPERIENCE-OF-FILM THEORY

Experience-of-film theory describes the body of research aimed at understanding the screen viewing experience. By experience, I refer to sensory stimulation produced by light and sound, the emotional responses to the film, the physiological response based on that stimuli or emotion, and the cognitive processes engaged by the viewing process. Further, experience refers to peripheral behaviours: those that take place prior to or after viewing, such as fan engagement, film selection, and viewing preferences. As opportunities for tracking and observing these experiences have increased with technological advancements, there has been increased academic interest in understanding how viewers experience film, what films do to produce these experiences, and what influences these responses. However, with increased opportunities for empirically supported theories on the viewing experience, a considered examination of method is required to ensure efficacy and quality in the work.

My own methodology investigating the experience-of-film is guided by three primary goals. Firstly, I aim to produce verifiable theories of the viewers' experience-of-film, necessitating an engagement with empirical evidence and the testing of hypotheses. Secondly, I aim to apply methods that correspond to the scale of the problem under investigation. Finally, I aim to recognise the interdisciplinary nature of investigating the experience-of-film and ensure cohesion in the application of theories from different fields. These same goals are evident in a range of contemporary research that aims to investigate the experience-of-film.¹⁰ Exemplary work can be seen in the areas of eye tracking research (Redmond and Batty 2015), screen audiences (Christie 2012b), film in education (Film: 21st Century Literacy 2012) and shot duration analysis (Cutting et al. 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2013). This research draws on the foundation established by the cognitivist movement within screen studies, while seeking to address some of the criticisms and weaknesses of the approach when investigating problems of viewer experiences in film. What follows is a discussion of

¹⁰ For an introduction to this body of work see *Research into Film* (Redfern 2009a). The blog provides hundreds of examples of film research investigating the experience-of-film based on the principles outlined above, with a particular emphasis on statistical literacy for film researchers.

some of the most relevant concepts in the history of cognitivist film theory and the recent transition towards theorising the experience-of-film. I do so to distinguish my own approach and outline how I build upon early cognitivist approaches to film by emphasising the role of the viewing experience.

Virginia Brooks (1984), writing on film perception and cognition, provides one of the earliest comprehensive introductions to the cognitive approach in film theory. Theorists like Bordwell (1989a) offered cognitivism as an alternative, or supplement, to existing theories of mind that sought to address the mental processes of the film viewer, primarily through recourse to research from psychology. However, it was not until the 1990s that the movement started to see more widespread discussion.¹¹ The American cognitivist movement built on Noël Carroll's philosophical critique of 'Grand Theory' and his critique of the practices within film theory at the time (Noël Carroll 1988). This conceptual alignment was cemented in the essay collection *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Bordwell and Carroll 1996). Cognitive film theory enabled new ways of investigating and understanding the viewers' experience-of-film as well as the operations involved in their engagement. Instead of describing an innate quality of storytelling or film expression, researchers began to examine the role of inferences and learned practices in comprehending, or making meaning of, a film (Bordwell 1989b). Film engagement leads to active participation on the part of the viewer, requiring them to, "resolve hypotheses about the narrative" (Chandler and Munday 2011) to understand and enjoy a film.

The cognitivist approach has come to refer to a broad range of practices and theoretical positions in screen studies. In an appraisal of the field, Plantinga (2002) asserts that, "cognitive theorists are committed to clarity of exposition and argument and to the relevance of empirical evidence and the standards of science" (20). Although this definition of cognitive theory lacks specificity, Plantinga (2002) argues that this breadth is necessary to properly capture the range of practices and approaches used in cognitive film theorising. Similarly, Daniel Reynolds (2013) argues that the breadth of cognitive film theory "allows for any number of ways of describing cognition, excluding only theories that ignore or deny the central role of cognitive activity in film spectatorship" (100).

¹¹ In addition to the work of Brooks (1984) and Bordwell (1985, 1989a) in the 1980s, a scientifically informed approach is most notably observed in the writing of Hugo Münsterberg (1916[1970]), Sergei Eisenstein (1949), and the work of the Filmologists.

This latitude has been both a strength and weakness of the cognitive approach. The most significant limitation of the movement has been an inability to produce clear and constructive pathways for conducting the research for which it advocates. Bordwell and Carroll argued for the necessity of “piecemeal theorising” or “middle-level research” (1996, 26-58) that breaks problems of film down into smaller parts, as opposed to producing encompassing or “Grand” theories. I believe this has led to a piecemeal application of methods rather than the intended focus on building smaller theories of specific phenomena. The experience-of-film cannot adequately be described through a simple combination of explanations of the component phenomena involved. Researchers should be sensitive to the scale of their problem and apply a methodology that allows the problem to be addressed in full. I believe this limitation in the cognitivist approach goes against the intent of its early advocates and was instead a result of the reactionary position opposed to all-encompassing or “Grand Theory”.

The cognitivist ‘stance’ was introduced to avoid the “inexact formulations” (Buckland 2012, 2) and sweeping generalities (Bordwell and Carroll 1996) of previous theoretical work by generating empirically informed film research. These goals remain important for contemporary film research but require a “transdisciplinary practitioner” (Colman 2014, 2) to synthesise, not just utilise, research from a range of theoretical fields. Bordwell (2010) recognised the shift in film studies towards questions of spectator engagement and experience, describing this new approach as “empirical-experiential” (5). Bordwell argues this approach focuses on the “dynamics of the cinematic experience” and the “regularities of ... moviegoers” (2010, 6). I argue that the “empirical-experiential” approach identified by Bordwell has expanded further to become a theory of the experience-of-film. This approach maintains the cognitivist’s emphasis on empirical work and interdisciplinary practices but aims to respond to the scale of a problem in its approach to gathering evidence.

Film data

The past decade has seen substantial growth in the collection of data in the study of culture and screen media, facilitated by new research tools, and more accessible spaces for audience discourse. This has created opportunities for empirical studies of film and viewers, as seen in eye-tracking studies and Cinematic analysis.¹² However, these advances

¹² For a collection of research on eye tracking the moving image, see Dwyer, Perkins, Redmond, and Sita (2018). For examples of Cinematic analysis, see Cutting et al. (2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2013).

have not always been accompanied by rigorous theorisation of how data should be collected and applied within the field. My approach draws on interdisciplinary theories and methods to gather evidence on the use of genre, film editing, narrative, and viewer responses to mystery films.

Online spaces facilitate new forms of audience participation and engagement with screen media. Further, these interactions are often public and can be measured in a variety of ways, including ratings, subscribers, comments, and so on.¹³ These spaces allow audiences to share their opinions and discuss what they are watching. This information accounts for a significant amount of all current online discussion.¹⁴ At the same time, these websites mean researchers now have access to written records and responses from millions of screen viewers. Social media analysis software is widely available to record and compare the response to specific events, keywords, or films by examining likes, shares, comments, and reactions. Software has also been developed to automate visual analysis of moving-image media. Examples include: facial recognition that identifies when faces are on screen and the proportion of the frame they occupy; colour charting to plot the dominant colours in each frame over the duration of a film; motion detection that calculates how much the camera is moving and how much objects or characters on screen are moving; and sentiment analysis that classifies language use to determine the emotional intent based on a film script or discourse surrounding film.¹⁵ Finally, film and television databases such as IMDb and TV.com have expanded, compiling previously undocumented details about screen media by drawing on users to contribute and edit information on the sites.

Over the past two decades there has been significant growth in the number of researchers looking at film empirically. Film data has become more readily available with greater digital tools for collecting and publishing this data. Several government and industry organisations have begun to publish research on a broader range of questions, including assessments of the cultural, economic, and social value of cinema, improving data collection practices, and publishing this data as a resource for researchers.¹⁶ The methodology applied in these reports serves a different purpose to experience-of-film

¹³ For some examples of research examining audience participation see the work of García-Avilés (2012) and Quintas-Froufe and González-Neira (2014).

¹⁴ In one study, discussion of TV programs accounted for 32% of Spain's Twitter traffic during peak periods (Tuitele 2013).

¹⁵ Frederic Brodbeck's *Cinemetrics* (2011) project includes each of these forms of analysis. Other examples include Arandjelovic and Zisserman's (2005) facial recognition research; Charlie Clark's (2014) colour charting; Cutting, DeLong, and Brunick (2011)'s screen motion analysis; and Liu's (2012) sentiment analysis.

¹⁶ For examples, see MPAA (2008; 2017), Screen Australia (2011; 2012; 2016), and BFI (2016).

theory, but still generates valuable film data for experience-of-film researchers. When collecting or analysing film data, some researchers have collaborated across disciplines, synthesising methodological and theoretical approaches. An example of this can be seen in the collaborative work of Todd Berliner, a professor of film studies, and Dale Cohen, a professor of cognitive psychology.¹⁷ Berliner and Cohen (2011) proposed that “classical editing devices exploit and accommodate the cognitive processes people use to perceive the physical world” (44).¹⁸ They base their work on a theory of perception as “constructive” (Rock 1997), whereby the “perceptual system builds models of the world by proposing and testing hypotheses based on sensory input” (Berliner and Cohen 2011, 45). The essay functions within an interdisciplinary space by drawing on theories of film and editing from within film studies, as well as theories of cognition from psychology. The work of Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson (1988) helped shape Berliner and Cohen’s conception of film and classical editing, allowing them to apply models of perception to the experience-of-film.¹⁹ Berliner and Cohen’s work builds an argument for a particular relationship between classical editing and cognitive processes by demonstrating how the two relate, drawing on illustrative examples from the cinema and from experiments conducted in cognitive psychology. Their work demonstrates the potential for the synthesis of disparate methodologies and theories to produce interdisciplinary work on the experience-of-film.

Quantitative film research primarily focuses on three key areas: audience, industry, and the films themselves. Audience film viewing practices play an increasingly important role in the research of national and industry institutes. Several cultural economists have assessed the film industry, specifically the Hollywood system and box office earnings, using quantitative research methods.²⁰ The metric that has received the most attention within film research has been shot length or duration. Shot length analysis has a long history within film studies. An early example of such work compared the average shot length (ASL) of German and American films and the progression within films to faster editing at

¹⁷ Other examples include the collaboration between Sean Redmond, an associate professor of media and communication, and Jodi Sita, a senior lecturer in neuroscience and anatomy (Redmond, Sita, and Vincs 2015); and the collaboration between Tim J Smith, a lecturer in psychological sciences, and David Bordwell, a professor of film studies (Smith and Bordwell 2011).

¹⁸ Interestingly, Hugo Münsterberg ([1916] 1970) proposed that technical qualities of film were external reproductions of mental processes. While his specific examples have not been substantiated, the idea that technical qualities such as editing may evolve to best engage our perceptual system appears to have support in the article by Berliner and Cohen (2011).

¹⁹ This includes inattentional and change blindness, unconscious inference processing and modelling, and active perception. Some of these theories or their components are addressed in greater depth later in the thesis.

²⁰ Examples can be found in the work of Smith and Smith (1986), King (2007), and Gomery (2009).

the narrative's climax (Stindt 1926). Studying shot lengths gained greater recognition with the work of Barry Salt, who investigated film style through statistical analysis of a range of metrics including shot length (1974). The average shot length of over 50 films was assessed and a range of insights into historical practices and trends were made possible by the collection of this data. Determining shot length has traditionally been a manual process; several researchers have used a digital tool to assist in this process, as seen in work by Salt (1992; 2006), Tsivian (2004), and Bordwell (2006). Shot duration, like a number of other cinematic metrics, cannot be properly observed during normal viewing.²¹ Instead, accurate analysis often requires the assistance of a tool, or the frequent slowing or stopping of the film. In recent years, attempts have been made by other researchers to automate this process using shot transition detection software.²²

Those practising the manual process (primarily users of Cinemetrics) have criticised automation as imperfect and unreliable.²³ Although automated practices are imperfect, they can be tested to quantify their error rate, which can be incorporated into statistical analysis of any results.²⁴ Conversely, the error rate of the manual process is difficult to calculate accurately and can change based on viewing conditions or the state of the viewer. Subsequently, users are not able to evaluate the strength of other researchers' data sets without manually repeating the process. To date, there has been minimal research that utilises existing data sets produced by this manual process; many researchers prefer to trust only the data they produce. As such, I argue that automating the quantitative analysis of film editing can accommodate the assessment of larger volumes of films and address data reliability concerns.

Alongside this growth in the availability of film data, and empirical research on film, there has been a greater emphasis on the viewer's experience-of-film and on the ability of theories of cognition to offer insight into that experience. Despite this growth, there remains a significant gap in data collection procedures, software solutions, and publicly

²¹ In addition to shot duration, there are several metrics relevant to the study of the experience-of-film that are difficult or impossible to measure during normal viewing. These include dominant colour usage across the film, frequency of shot length types, screen time of specific objects or characters, or the amount of motion within the frame, or by the camera.

²² For examples see Adams, Dorai, and Venkatesh (2000), Cutting, DeLong, and Nothelfer (2010), Cutting, DeLong, and Brunick (2011), and Shon, Kim, and Yim (2012).

²³ Discussion of automating the analysis process can be found on the Cinemetrics discussion boards (Cinemetrics 2006) with contributions from Yuri Tsivian, David Bordwell, Lev Manovich, Nick Redfern, Jeremy Butler, and Gunars Civjans.

²⁴ Errors made by software are somewhat predictable: the software struggles with certain identifiable conditions, such as low lighting, CGI action sequences, wipe transitions, and so on. This allows users to supplement their data accordingly or to select software based on the set of videos to be analysed.

available data sets. Cinemetrics (2005) currently stands as the largest database on film shot lengths and frequencies. The work of Cutting and colleagues (2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2013) stands as the most substantial contribution to shot length research that uses software to automatically detect shots. Regrettably, Cutting and his collaborators still use a manual assessment of shots within film, employing detection software as a guide for further stages of evaluation. While this research is highly accurate, it is incredibly labour-intensive and thus difficult to reproduce and verify.

There has been a lack of critical engagement with the practice and methodology employed in empirical research on film, in part due to the infancy of the practice.²⁵ For example, Cutting and his fellow authors (2011b) describe how average luminance in films has decreased over time, and offer several reasons for this change. In another study, Cutting and colleagues (2011a) argue that visual activity has increased in films over time. It is problematic that their measure for visual activity is determined, in part, by luminance. The authors do not make clear if and how they controlled for this variable, which potentially undermines the validity of the new measure. In addition, they have previously acknowledged similar errors in their method, including those discussed in a later study (Cutting et al. 2013). A wide range of research has been built from the arguments presented by Cutting and his collaborators, but without sufficient critical scrutiny these works may perpetuate inaccuracies.²⁶ I address this below in an outline of my own methodologies and methods.

2.2 PROJECTS AND METHODS

Throughout the thesis I have employed a range of methods to best examine the experience of, and engagement with, mystery films. Firstly, I developed a method for identifying mystery films using IMDb and other prominent film websites to represent a cultural consensus on the mystery genre classification (see Section 4.2). I then applied several additional criteria to determine films for inclusion within this thesis, constructing the Study Set (see Section 4.3). I analysed the 87 films in the Study Set using software to extract

²⁵ I have emphasised transparency and reproducibility in my own work to attempt to address these concerns. This includes a clear statement of assumptions and theoretical impetuses behind each part of the work, as well as complete data sets for all quantitative work where viable. Further, the steps involved in collecting and analysing data, as well as the software or sources used, are made available for scrutiny.

²⁶ Examples include Chandler and Pronin (2012); Shimamura, Cohn-Sheehy, and Shimamura (2014); and Patel et al. (2014).

editing data from each (see Section 7.3), after testing the software on a small sample of films. I then used a combination of neoformalist and multimodal analytic methods to evaluate the content of films in the Study Set. Finally, I conducted a human experiment to test a hypothesis about how the practices in mystery films influence viewer responses. The experiment involved participants watching one of two versions of a scene from a mystery film and observing the differences in their ratings of suspicion. What follows is an account of the steps taken to complete each project and the specific limitations or assumptions directing this work.

Experiment design

To test the theories and concepts developed throughout this thesis, I conducted a human experiment that measured the influence of filmic practices on viewers' experience. The experiment asked participants to rate their feelings of suspicion towards a particular character or characters after watching two sequences: one from *A Perfect Getaway* (Twohy 2009) and one from *Dream House* (Sheridan 2011). Participants were shown one of two versions of each sequence: either the original theatrical cut of the sequence, or a modified re-edit of the sequence that replaced one shot with a repetition of a shot from earlier in the sequence. Only the images were modified, with no change to the sound. The modification was designed to be seamless, providing no new information or alternative meaning. Instead, the repetition was simply used to reinforce a piece of information participants had already been shown from earlier in the scene. The modifications to these sequences required minimal technical knowledge to create for the experiment, and were completed using Final Cut Pro.

Participants rated their suspicion of a target immediately after viewing each of the sequences and were asked to describe the mystery in their own words. In the sequence from *A Perfect Getaway*, factual information was repeated for viewers, showing the names of two hitchhikers written on their baggage. The sequence from *Dream House* repeated emotional information, showing a character's apprehensive reaction to another character. The entire experiment was completed by accessing the online Learning Management System at the University of Melbourne. Participants could complete the experiment by attending an in-person session held in a computer lab at the university campus, or remotely online between these sessions.²⁷ Participants were sourced from a range of different

²⁷ No statistically significant difference was found based on participation mode.

backgrounds and did not receive financial or academic incentives for participation, and the experiment was granted full human ethics approval.

Selecting Films for Study

In Chapter 3, I define genre as a form of cultural consensus that reflects audience expectations and historical trends. In Chapter 4, I create a practical method to identify films that fit this theoretical conception of the genre for study in the thesis. This approach seeks to define a measure of film genre by locating consensus between prominent film websites. By taking an empirical approach to studying genre my work can avoid privileging subjective qualities based on predetermined conclusions and allow observations of audiences and genre use to dictate films for inclusion. In doing so, my work can best represent how genre is used and understood by audiences. To identify my Study Set I included several criteria in addition to mystery genre to refine the scope of the research, and to address limitations in the project. Eighty-seven titles, released between 2004-2013, met all of these conditions and were included in the Study Set (see Figure 2.2.1).²⁸ Interestingly, repeating this process today will produce different results, as new titles have been added, and genres for many films have been changed, including or excluding some of the titles from my original search. This feature affirms IMDb's capacity to represent genre's inherent mutability and reflect changes in genre that occur over time.

²⁸ The process outlined here was designed to be reproducible by other researchers; however, results will vary depending on when the process is completed. IMDb is updated frequently, and new titles have been added that meet the original search criteria. Additionally, in June 2015 Jinni withdrew its public service that allowed database searches (Jinni 2017). Since that time the database can only be accessed through consumer services, making searches more prohibitive. The results of a search using the specified parameters used on IMDb can be found at <<https://imdb.to/2UBYKUw>>.

List of all 87 Study Set films

88 Minutes (Avnet 2007), *A Perfect Getaway* (Twohy 2009), *Abduction* (Singleton 2011), *All Good Things* (Jarecki 2010), *Answers to Nothing* (Leutwyler 2011), *Awake* (Harold 2007), *Birth* (Glazer 2004), *Blindness* (Meirelles 2008), *Brick* (Johnson 2005), *Bubble* (Soderbergh 2005), *Changeling* (Eastwood 2008), *Cold Weather* (Katz 2010), *Disturbia* (Caruso 2007), *Dream House* (Sheridan 2011), *Eastern Promises* (Cronenberg 2007), *Echelon Conspiracy* (Marcks 2009), *Fascination* (Menzel 2004), *Flightplan* (Schwentke 2005), *Freedomland* (Roth 2006), *Gone Baby Gone* (Affleck 2007), *Grand Piano* (Mira 2013), *Hate Crime* (Stovall 2005), *Hollywoodland* (Coulter 2006), *Hugo* (Scorsese 2011), *I Know Who Killed Me* (Sivertson 2007), *Ice Blues: A Donald Strachey Mystery** (Oliver 2008), *In My Sleep* (Wolf 2010), *Inception* (Nolan 2010), *InSight* (Gabai 2011), *Knowing* (Proyas 2009), *Lady in the Water* (Shyamalan 2006), *Meeting Evil* (Fisher 2012), *Michael Clayton* (Gilroy 2007), *Mystery Team* (Eckman 2009), *Nancy Drew* (Fleming 2007), *November* (Harrison 2004), *Passengers* (García 2008), *Passion* (De Palma 2012), *Perfect Stranger* (Foley 2007), *Premonition* (Yapo 2007), *Righteous Kill* (Avnet 2008), *Scoop* (Allen 2006), *Secret Window* (Koepp 2004), *Sherlock Holmes** (Ritchie 2009), *Shock to the System** (Oliver 2006), *Shooter* (Fuqua 2007), *Shutter Island* (Scorsese 2010), *Silver City* (Sayles 2004), *Sleuth* (Branagh 2007), *State of Play* (Macdonald 2009), *Stay* (Forster 2005), *Stoker* (Park 2013), *Stolen* (Anderson 2009), *The Black Dahlia* (De Palma 2006), *The Bourne Legacy** (Gilroy 2012), *The Box* (Kelly 2009), *The Da Vinci Code** (Howard 2006), *The Dead Girl* (Moncrieff 2006), *The Forgotten* (Ruben 2004), *The Fourth Kind* (Osunsanmi 2009), *The Ghost Writer* (Polanski 2010), *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo** (Fincher 2011), *The Good German* (Soderbergh 2006), *The Illusionist* (Burger 2006), *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (Gilliam 2009), *The International* (Tykwer 2009), *The Invisible* (Goyer 2007), *The Limits of Control* (Jarmusch 2009), *The Missing Person* (Buschel 2009), *The Night Listener* (Stettner 2006), *The Nines* (August 2007), *The Number 23* (Schumacher 2007), *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006), *The Raven* (McTeigue 2012), *The Village* (Shyamalan 2004), *The Woman in the Fifth* (Pawlikowski 2011), *Trance* (Boyle 2013), *Transsiberian* (Anderson 2008), *Twisted* (Kaufman 2004), *Unknown* (Brand 2006), *Unknown* (Collet-Serra 2011), *Where the Truth Lies* (Egoyan 2005), *Whiteout* (Sena 2009), *Wicker Park* (McGuigan 2004), *Wish You Were Here* (Darcy-Smith 2012), *Youth Without Youth* (Coppola 2007), *Zodiac* (Fincher 2007).

Figure 2.2.1—Study Set film list²⁹

In Part IV, the Study Set is analysed in three stages: a quantitative evaluation of editing structure; a qualitative assessment of narrative types and filmic practices; and an experiment testing the response of viewers to mystery films. My intent is to address the films on a range of scales, both in relation to individual films and the set of films in its entirety. This includes individual cuts, shots, scenes, and entire narratives. The Study Set is analysed on a scale of editing structure and pacing, common practices and trends within the genre, and viewer responses to films within the set. By doing so, my research is able to address questions regarding the genre as a whole, but also the specifics of watching a film, which is central to understand the experience-of-film. What follows is a detailed account of the method and decisions made in executing each of these stages of the research.

²⁹ Films marked by an asterisk have sequels or are part of a series or collection of some form. While sequels and prequels were excluded from the Study Set, initial titles and stand-alone works (as listed by IMDb) were included.

Detecting and Comparing Transitions using Video Shot and Scene Segmentation (VSSS) software

Editing plays a crucial role in constructing meaning within a film, structuring information across and between shots. By examining editing on a macro scale, the pacing of a film is revealed. The pacing of mystery films shapes how and when viewers are presented information, and how cognitively demanding that presentation is. Mystery films present viewers with a problem to solve, and the pacing and structuring of information through the use of edits can complicate attempts at reaching a solution. Examining the editing structure of mystery films can illuminate these strategies.

The editing in each film in the Study Set was analysed using a digital copy of each film and visual analysis software.³⁰ Video Shot and Scene Segmentation (VSSS) software created by Vasileios Mezaris, Evlampios Apostolidis, and Alexandros Pournaras (Mezaris, Apostolidis, and Pournaras 2014) was used to detect and compare all shot transitions in each of the films and identify the specific frames between which a cut occurs. This software was only developed and made widely available in 2014, based on algorithms published by Vasileios Mezaris and colleagues. (Apostolidis and Mezaris 2014; Sidiropoulos et al. 2011). VSSS is part of a broader improvement in the accessibility and capabilities of visual recognition tools, facilitating new research on film. Visual analysis software has seen significant growth in recent years, including substantial advances in face and object recognition, shot framing, location or set identification, and transition/segmentation analysis.³¹ While these tools for analysing images have advanced significantly over the past decade, film research utilising these tools has lagged behind.

³⁰ This included digital download, DVD, Blu-ray, and streaming services. Efforts were made to avoid versions significantly modified from their theatrical release, such as director's cuts and television broadcasts. While there may remain some differences between the selected digital copies of each film and their theatrical release (due to region, format, or type of release), these differences are expected to have minimal impact on the editing data extracted by the VSSS software.

³¹ For instance, DeepFace is a facial recognition system that is reportedly as accurate as the average human at identifying and recognising faces (Taigman et al. 2014). This software has the potential to identify actors in films, calculate how much screen time is spent focusing on human faces, or even estimate the type of shot in a scene based on the size of the identified faces. Applications like Google Goggles and CamFind can identify objects in images, particularly famous landmarks or artworks, and could be used to determine location in a particular piece of footage, identify identical set pieces or stages across films (reusing these was common in a lot of early cinema studio productions), or track the presence of common or culturally significant objects and their appearances in film. To date most technological analysis of film has focused on editing or transitions.

The full automation of editing analysis has the potential to neglect narrative context and qualitative factors or may lack the accuracy of a human.³² I address the first two concerns within the thesis by pairing the editing data with a qualitative assessment of the films and their content. To address accuracy concerns, I tested nine different pieces of software for extracting editing data.³³ Of these, VSSS had the highest accuracy when attempting to identify the location of transitions in scenes from three films: *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009), *Abduction* (Singleton 2011), and *Scoop* (Allen 2006). Accuracy was determined by comparing the software output with a manual assessment, viewing each scene frame-by-frame and recording the location of transitions. VSSS outperformed the other pieces of software and generated highly accurate results for each of the sequences, with an average of 98.86% accuracy (Figure 2.2.2).³⁴ By comparison, Cutting et al. (2010) were able to achieve 99.6% accuracy using a three-stage process, two stages of which were manually completed.

VSSS accuracy	Precision	Recall	F-score
<i>Sherlock Holmes</i> (260 transitions)	0.98473	0.93722	0.98851
	98.47%	93.72%	98.85%
	4 false positives	2 false negatives	
<i>Abduction</i> (192 transitions)	0.99471	0.97917	0.98688
	99.47%	97.92%	98.69%
	1 false positive	4 false negatives	
<i>Scoop</i> (104 transitions)	0.99038	0.99038	0.99038
	99.04%	99.04%	99.04%
	1 false positive	1 false negative	

Figure 2.2.2—VSSS accuracy for detecting shot transitions

However, video analysis software is more likely to encounter errors when non-cut transitions (NCTs) are included. Over and colleagues (2007) report that transition detection software achieved accuracy of 90% for cuts and 80% for NCTs (described as dissolves, fade in/out, and other) when tested at the 2006 TRECVID conference. Apostolidis and Mezaris (2014), the creators of VSSS, tested their software on 431 minutes

³² These concerns are echoed by a number of scholars, including Yuri Tsivian, Nick Redfern, Lev Manovich, and Barry Salt, among others. A discussion thread on this specific topic can be found at http://www.cinematics.lv/topic.php?topic_ID=8.

³³ This included ShotDetect, Shot Logger 2.0, VidSeg, Video Shot and Scene Segmentation, HandSaw DS, DaVinci Resolve, Cinematics by Frederic Brodbeck, Wondershare Filmora, and VideoReDo.

³⁴ By comparing the retrieved instances (the targets identified by the software) with all relevant instances (the desired targets) it is possible to assess the accuracy of the software. Precision refers to the fraction of retrieved instances that are relevant, while recall refers to the fraction of relevant instances that are retrieved. Retrieved instances that are not relevant are known as false positives (FP) while relevant instances that are not retrieved are known as false negatives (FN). F-measure or F-score is a combined measure of precision and recall. The tables in this chapter calculate F₁ score using the harmonic mean: $F_1 = 2 \times ([\text{precision} \times \text{recall}] / [\text{precision} + \text{recall}])$

of television and archive footage. These sequences had a high volume of NCTs. Conversely, NCTs accounted for only 0.9226% of transitions from a sample of mystery films. To assess the software’s performance on video with a relatively high volume of NCTs, two sequences—from *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006) and *National Treasure* (Turteltaub 2004)—were selected. While the accuracy for these sequences was lower than for the previously analysed scenes, it remained over 95.5% (Figure 2.2.3). This suggests that even for film content with a relatively high concentration of NCTs, the software continues to produce satisfactory results.

VSSS accuracy	Precision	Recall	F-score
<i>The Prestige</i> (223 transitions)	0.98123	0.93722	0.95872
	98.12%	93.72%	95.87%
	4 false positives	14 false negatives	
<i>National Treasure</i> (152 transitions)	0.95513	0.98026	0.96753
	95.51%	98.03%	96.75%
	7 false positives	3 false negatives	
Apostolidis and Mezaris Results	0.887	0.917	0.902
	88.70%	91.70%	90.20%
	unreported	unreported	

Figure 2.2.3—VSSS accuracy for NCT concentrated sequences

After I determined VSSS to be the best tool for automating the identification of all transitions, all 87 films in the Study Set were analysed using the software, detailing the location of every transition in these films down to the frame.³⁵ The output for the software includes the start and end frames of each shot, from which time and duration can be calculated using the video’s frame rate.³⁶ When analysing this data, end credit sequences were removed from each film as they distorted trends and averages while including no

³⁵ The publicly available version of the VSSS software v1.4.1 <<http://mklab.itl.gr/project/video-shot-segm>> required the video files be no longer than 10 minutes each. All film files were converted to the standard mp4 format and split into segments of 10 minutes or less using MP4Box. To restore the split films the results of each file were sequenced to create tables for full films. Cumulative totals were created to ensure each frame was correctly labelled and the cuts created by the gaps between files were removed from the data set by combining the last shot of each segment with the first shot of the following segment. This does allow for a cut that occurs precisely at this frame pairing to go unobserved. However, this represents a very insignificant risk. At 25fps a single frame-to-frame comparison is missed every 15,000 frames. It is statistically unlikely that even a single cut within the data set went undetected due to the segmenting of films: there were fewer than 800 segments in total, and 0.747% of frame pairings resulted in a transition, meaning the 800 missing segments combined had <6% chance of including a transition.

³⁶ As frame rates reported in file information can be incorrect, frame rates were calculated based on the total number of frames and the duration of the film. The resulting frame rates ranged from 23.976023 to 25 and match existing PAL and NTSC converted frame rates. These frame rates allowed frame numbers to be converted into time codes.

narrative content.³⁷ The opening titles can include significant contextual information for the viewer, as in *Watchmen* (Snyder 2009), or can establish the tone and style of the film through powerful imagery and music, as with the work of Saul Bass, and were thus included in analysis. The aim in collecting this data is to better understand how editing is used in the Study Set, and how it structures and paces these films.

Neoformalism and Multimodal Analysis of the Study Set

I supplement the more quantitative analysis of editing with an analysis of the content of the films in the Study Set. My analysis uses a combination of neoformalist and multimodal approaches, with the aim of identifying and explaining what is presented to viewers and how it is presented to them. My goal in doing so is to provide an account of how mystery films engage viewers. To begin, I focused on what could be considered explicit, rather than symptomatic, components within the films. Bordwell (1989b, 8-9) makes this distinction in his discussion of film “comprehension” and film “interpretation”. Tzvetan Todorov asserts that “signified facts are *understood* ... the reader need only know the language in which the text is written” (1990, 43 [emphasis in original]), while interpretation requires consideration of social, cultural, and personal context. My analysis aims to illuminate how mystery films engage viewers, and thus must focus on how meaning is presented to viewers.³⁸

Despite the best efforts of Bordwell and Todorov, the meaning that exists within a text cannot be so easily distinguished from that which is added by the reader. Todorov (1990, 43-44) asserts that readers require knowledge of the text’s language, emphasising the shared experience of viewers consuming a text. By doing so he assumes some level of structural framework within which a viewer operates, wherein signified facts are merely correct observations based on this framework. Hofstadter offers a similar explanation, asserting that “meaning is part of an object to the extent that it acts upon intelligence in a predictable way” (1999, 165).³⁹ When textual meaning is defined as something that can act

³⁷ Some researchers exclude all credit and title sequences from their analysis (Bordwell 2006; Salt 1992) while others only exclude these sequences if they do not contain “scenic shots” (Cutting et al. 2011, 571). Unfortunately, no clear definition of credit or title sequences has been established within the field that distinguishes where such a sequence begins and ends.

³⁸ Hermeneutics offers a possible avenue to investigate this aspect of mystery films, however my own research has focused on cognitive work and film comprehension and experience. Although interpretation can play a significant role in this experience, a deeper analysis of hermeneutics was beyond the scope of this thesis. For a discussion of how cognitive sciences and hermeneutics can be applied in unison, see Gallagher (2004).

³⁹ In this case, intelligence can be seen as a broad structural framework of experience but, as Hofstadter (1999, 171) qualifies, it is deeply human-centric and carries only one possible interpretation of meaning.

on a viewer in a predictable way, the concept becomes testable and verifiable through observations. In this way, signified facts may best be understood as the meaning conveyed by a text that is understood in a consistent way within a culture.⁴⁰ This definition of signified facts does not provide a framework for analysing a film but describes the intent of the analysis in making predictions about how mystery films engage viewers. My analysis identifies a set of prominent filmic practices used in the Study Set that act upon viewers in a predictable way. My goal is to develop a hypothesis from this analysis that can then be tested experimentally. To achieve this, I looked to neoformalism and multimodal analysis as the best ways of achieving this goal.

Neoformalist film analysis plays an important role in informing the approach I applied in the qualitative component of this thesis. Kristen Thompson introduced neoformalism to contemporary film theory as a form of aesthetic analysis. Thompson (1981; 1988) outlines the approach and intent of neoformalist analysis, drawing on the work of the Russian formalists, Sergei Eisenstein (1994), André Bazin (1967), and Noël Burch (1981). Thompson's work distinguishes art from other forms of communication, arguing that a model of message, sender, and receiver places primacy on the effectiveness of a medium for reproducing messages clearly (1988, 8). Instead, she asserts that art "defamiliarizes" a viewer from "habitual perceptions of the everyday world" (Thompson 1988, 11) to engage and interest them.⁴¹ Thompson argues that neoformalism is grounded in two core assumptions about film: "that films are artificial constructs and that they involve a specifically aesthetic, non-practical type of perception" (1988, 35).

While my approach accepts this first assumption, the characterisation of viewer perception as non-practical is imprecise. Instead of being a different form of perception, film perception and comprehension can be rational, practical, and task driven. This thesis examines how viewers engage with information in the resolution of a problem. As such, the term "non-practical" is incompatible with my conception of mystery film viewers. Thompson's claim that film perception is non-practical overlooks the pleasure-seeking practices employed in games, puzzles, and other forms of problem solving, which are pertinent to the study of mystery films. Researchers, such as Colin Burnett (2008), have applied a problem-solution model to address this difficulty with neoformalist assumptions.

⁴⁰ I will later discuss this in relation to the concept of a common cultural consensus surrounding genre in Chapter 3.

⁴¹ Neoformalism has received general criticism for its focus on formal and stylistic qualities. Critics assert that by doing so, certain cultural, social, and ideological issues remain unaddressed, irrespective of their importance to the text (Chandler and Munday 2011).

By adapting the expository models put forward by Bordwell and Thompson it is possible to resolve this issue.⁴² If engaging with aesthetics is a rational and intentional choice by the viewer, then it can no longer be said to serve no practical purpose.

Neoformalist approaches to the analysis of film have effectively incorporated a range of theories by focusing on the technical elements involved in the construction of meaning within a film. Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's (1988) description of film style incorporates a mix of quantitative descriptions and in-depth analysis of the technical components of film. Their work goes beyond describing Hollywood cinema to discuss modes of production and the resulting practices implemented by filmmakers to convey meaning. Bordwell has applied a similar neoformalist approach in researching a range of questions on film (2006; 2008). The neoformalist approach has influenced a wide range of research on film including the work of Ian Christie (1998; 2012b), Barry Salt (1992; 2006), and Yuri Tsivian (2002).

Multimodal film analysis in some ways extends the ideas of neoformalism, seeking to produce "systematic and empirically grounded investigations of the filmic medium" (Bateman and Schmidt 2013, 2). The approach applies theories of cognition to establish a common framework through which an audience will apply reasoning and come to identify meaning within a work.⁴³ In addition, Bateman and Schmidt assert that film structure influences perceptions of salience, and that films will "directly inform viewers which pieces of information have to be brought together, which not, and when" (2012, 1). Multimodal film analysis focuses on viewer comprehension and engagement with film, highlighting the need to identify predictable interactions with audiences and the conditions necessary for such results.

Like neoformalism, multimodal film analysis takes the artificial creation of film and its discourse as axiomatic. Bateman and Schmidt use an example of film technique, arguing that for meaning to be expressed, continuity must "be created" and cannot simply "happen" (2013, 14). This claim makes it clear that the object of investigation in multimodal film analysis is not limited to the meaning that exists explicitly within the film; it extends to the frameworks established within a film and their application upon that film by viewers. The authors provide another example describing camera zooms. When a continuous zoom

⁴² These expository models include the rational-agent model, the institutional model, and the perceptual-cognitive model (Thompson 1981; 1988).

⁴³ This approach draws on similar assumptions to Bordwell's conception of "informal reasoning procedures" (2008, 136) used by audiences while viewing films.

occurs across two shots of two objects, the shared use of the technique across shots necessarily groups them together, establishing a relationship recognised by the viewer (Bateman and Schmidt 2013, 6). They describe this process as “filmic textual organisation” (Bateman and Schmidt 2013, 7). Todorov speaks to this practice when he writes that “it suffices for the author to spend a little time teaching us how to interpret the events he evokes” (1990, 44). The organisation and presentation of material within a film can change the way it is understood, training audiences how to respond to particular practices by first establishing those practices’ meaning.

Multimodal film analysis thus operates within two frameworks. Firstly, theories of cognition that describe how viewers engage with meaningful stimuli are used to establish common ground among viewer experiences. Secondly, the organisation of salient components within a film, achieved through filmic techniques, establishes extra levels of meaning distinct from free interpretation. Bateman and Schmidt build their framework from Metz’s conclusion that “certain cinematic processes acquire a fixed meaning only in relation to filmic systems” (1974, 134). Edward Branigan (1984) also influenced the development of multimodal film analysis. He provides a succinct example of how meaning operates through film techniques, asserting that “a dissolve in film does not inherently signify a short lapse of narrative time; in a particular system, however, a dissolve may mean just that” (Branigan 1984, 29). It is not context alone that provides meaning to the film technique; the organisation of filmic elements can be crucial to an accurate examination of the viewer experience. By investigating the presence and application of techniques, not as meaningful in themselves but as the realisation of “discourse organisation” (Bateman and Schmidt 2013, 161) within film, multimodal analysis attempts to identify how most viewers perceive meaning.

The approach applied to the analysis of film within this thesis may best be described as an investigation. I focus on the components of film that may provide the greatest insight into the viewer experience. In the case of mystery films, I define these as points of salience, particularly when Viewer Suspicion is aroused. The aim of this approach is to develop theories that can make reasonable predictions regarding a viewer’s response to changing elements within a film. Further, by testing my conclusions, evidence may be collected to determine the efficacy of utilising these elements in the development of such theories. Not unlike a criminal investigation, I aim to collect evidence, or points of salience from within the film, that represent the facts of the case. Subsequently, I apply a range of pertinent

frameworks—including genre, discourse, and theories of cognition—to determine possible engagements with meaning by the viewer. It is from this point that I believe film analysis is best positioned to substantiate claims about the viewer and their experience-of-film.

Part II: Genre

3

Defining Mystery Films

Genre facilitates cultural discourse and is constructed within it. The term *genre* is used to describe both a system and the classifications within that system. Genre is a system for classifying texts, distinct from other forms of categorisation and classification used across the humanities. Simultaneously, it describes a communally recognised and understood group of related texts within this system. Films are linked by a form of family resemblance, whereby a shared history of film production and viewer engagement creates relationships between texts in these genres. Film viewers use genres for convenience, as a shortcut to expressing something commonly understood. Conceptions of genre shape how viewers approach a film, and, in turn, their perceptions determine which films exist within a genre. Viewers thus consume and construct genre, all taking place through forms of screen discourse.

This chapter begins by defining genre as a group of both common descent and common consensus that is revealed through its use (Section 3.1). I describe these uses and their different purposes for viewers and filmmakers before analysing what effect genre has on viewers. I end this section by highlighting the need for further study of the mystery genre. I argue that, in contrast to assertions made in previous screen scholarship, mystery is an independent genre, and thus worthy of individual study. Firstly, the mystery genre describes a group of texts sharing a common descent, which is recognised and used by audiences. Secondly, the mystery genre classification is used to convey meaning about a type of film and is reflected in screen discourse, from film promotion and advertising to reviews and fan discussions. Finally, the recognition of the mystery genre within a film activates a set of assumptions and expectations in viewers, orienting audiences in the same way that recognition of other genres does. The mystery genre merits study in its own right for the simple fact that it is used and understood as a genre by filmmakers and film viewers.

Having defined genre, and asserted the value of studying mystery as genre, I proceed by defining the mystery genre itself—and hence the mystery film (Section 3.2). This section

begins by analysing the unofficial rules of genre, as written by mystery authors, that have shaped expectations of what a mystery must do. Viewers expect mystery texts to contain patterns that are identifiable, conceivable, and convincing.⁴⁴ Extending this desire, there is an expectation that the climax or turning point of the narrative is resolved through nontrivial action or discovery. For a viewer to accept that a ‘missed’ clue was nontrivial, its importance must be instantly recognisable when the core solution refers back to it. These practices are ingrained in the history of the mystery genre and continue to inform viewer perceptions and expectations of film today.

Subsequently, I examine the detective and puzzle prototypes within the mystery genre, and their influence on contemporary conceptions of the genre. These two forms were selected to represent the genre’s history (in the detective), and its present (the puzzle film) and due to their influence on all contemporary mystery production. Both forms of film include a problem for viewers to solve: either explicitly, by presenting a crime as in most detective films; or implicitly, by challenging classical generic practices to construct a complex narrative form.⁴⁵ The suspicion and critical scrutiny generated by genre-bending films highlights how entrenched the established modes of identifying and examining clues in the mystery film have become. To conclude this chapter, I argue that the fundamental quality of the mystery genre is the inclusion of a problem for viewers to solve. By analysing the film *Birth* (Glazer 2004), which fits neither the detective nor puzzle form, I argue that the mystery film is best defined by the mode of engagement it establishes with the viewer—one of problem solving.

3.1 MYSTERY AS GENRE

What Genre Is: Commonality

Genre refers to a group of common descent (from the Greek *génos*) and the type or kind of text being described (from the French *genre*). At its core, genre is a framework for

⁴⁴ Zillman describes a set of mystery films that break this norm, presenting the viewer with a confusing series of events that cannot be reasoned to a solution. The “incomprehensible happenings often remain incomprehensible; events do not necessarily abide by the commonly accepted laws of physics, and ‘resolutions’ may entail more magic and foster more bewilderment than earlier occurrences” (Zillmann 2013, 602). Audiences largely reject these films, unsatisfied by the false suggestion of the mystery format, which produces lower ratings of enjoyment among viewers.

⁴⁵ While there is a degree of circularity in arguing for a mystery genre containing crime/detective films and complex narrative films—which are possible genres unto themselves—it is necessary to recognise that contemporary applications of the mystery genre include these films and form a substantial portion of mystery film.

classifying and categorising texts. In one of the earliest works on genre, Aristotle classifies texts into one of three categories: the tragic, the comedic, and the epic. His study of poetry “itself and of its various kinds” (Aristotle [335 BCE] 1895, 7) examined modes of imitation and the narrative form, to identify the genres that exist and classify texts within them. Genre has continued to function in this way, used to describe the relationships that link a body of texts. These classifications shape the way viewers engage with a text; no text exists in isolation. As Jacques Derrida argues, “there is no genreless text; there is always a genre or genres” (1980, 65). A text is necessarily positioned or placed within a genre once engaged by an audience—but need not “belong” to that genre, as a text may exceed generic conventions and norms (Derrida 1980, 57). In this way, new genres may emerge from existing genres, by resisting classifications or conceptions held by audiences, while still relating to other works. “A new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination” (Todorov 1976, 161). As such, genres are characterised by an inherent mutability, capable of adapting as practices and perceptions change over time, and historicity, necessarily constructed from the repetitions and traditions of what has come before (Neale 1999, 165).

As a group of texts sharing common descent, genre relies upon perceptions of “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein [1953] 1963):

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. (Wittgenstein [1953] 1963, 32)

Family resemblance describes how audiences can recognise films as dissimilar as *Inception* (Nolan 2010) and *Nancy Drew* (Fleming 2007) to be related by their relation to, and use of, the mystery genre. Both films are considered to be part of the mystery genre by virtue of sharing similar traits with existing works in that genre, rather than by conforming to a specific set of rules. This model recognises that genres change over time to incorporate contemporary trends and practices. Further, it allows for works to share a range of common features without necessarily belonging to the same genre. For example, the presence of a detective alone does not warrant inclusion within the mystery genre, just as the inclusion of jokes and gags does not preclude a work’s consideration as a mystery.

For audiences, genre functions as a form of schema, “a structure of information” (Frow 2007, 1631) that organises categories and the relations between them. Schemas operate as frameworks for groups or categories of knowledge that guide a person’s actions and beliefs. As with Wittgenstein’s model of family resemblance, genre describes the organisation of concepts, events and information into meaningful associations. These associations are developed by repeated exposure to patterns within the text and influence each new interaction with related texts. To illustrate this, Frow uses the analogy of metadata—a set of information that provides a structure for the identification and organisation of a group—to describe how an audience may use genre to comprehend and interpret films (Frow 2007, 1631).

The structure that genre provides is not innate to individual texts. As such, genre is something learned by engaging with texts and through the discourse used to classify them. David Buckingham (1993), an expert in children’s interactions with digital media, conducted a series of interviews to identify how children of different ages understood and used television genres. Based on this work he determined “that children progressively acquire (or at least come to use) a discourse of genre as they mature” (Buckingham 1993, 154).⁴⁶ Buckingham found differences in use and understanding of genre among children of different age groups and among children from different social backgrounds. His findings emphasise genre’s function as an acquired tool for the construction and interpretation of meaning within a text. I argue that this process continues beyond childhood, as genre is perpetually constructed and acquired through discourse surrounding screen texts.

A large part of genre acquisition relies on a viewer’s prototypical conception of a group. The term “prototype” refers to the primary instance or example of a category in the mind of users of that group. A genre’s prototype describes the fundamental characteristics to which objects of association must reasonably cohere (Bloor 1983).⁴⁷ Without this standard of reasonable coherence, almost any two items can be related, given a sufficiently long series of associations, making such relationships meaningless.⁴⁸ Eleanor Rosch’s (1975) early research into prototypes demonstrated that the length of time an individual took to

⁴⁶ It should be noted that Buckingham (1993) was restrained in his claims based on interviews with children. He describes the work as “a reading of the children’s talk” (Buckingham 1993, 61) and cautioned against using their speech as an accurate reflection of their understanding, knowledge, and beliefs.

⁴⁷ What constitutes “reasonable” coherence is subjective; however, this does not necessarily denote a flaw in the definition.

⁴⁸ See Stam’s (2000) problem of extension, discussed in the following chapter.

recognise an item as belonging to a category corresponded with the item's relation to the prototype. For example, films such as *Brick* (Johnson 2005) or *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009) would be more quickly recognised as mysteries than *Birth* (Glazer 2004) or *The Village* (Shyamalan 2004). The fact that *Birth* and *The Village* include no crime or detective makes them atypical examples of mystery films, while *Brick* and *Sherlock Holmes* possess features most commonly associated with the category. The prototypical features of a category exist within “an abstract ordered set of inclusion probabilities ... with the probabilities ordered according to the internal structure of the category” (Rosch 1975, 226).

While prototype theory affirms the existence of principal qualities, these are not necessary for inclusion within a category. Principal qualities “are insufficient for picking out all and only the class members, and hence a family resemblance description is still required” (Armstrong, Gleitman, and Gleitman 1983, 270). For most audiences, a film's “communicative purpose” remains the prototypical quality or key determinant of genre (Swales 1990, 52). Features such as narrative, editing, and setting are then examined within the interrelated network of texts that constitute a genre. This network of texts serves to supplement and position filmic qualities, and audiences determine genre based on the complex relation of historically established features and texts, ongoing prototypes, and the communicative purpose of the content. In this way, genres are defined by a “common cultural consensus” (Tudor 1974, 138) wherein any given genre “is what we collectively believe it to be” (Tudor 1974, 139). Throughout this thesis, I borrow from Altman (1999, 210) and his “pragmatic” approach to genre definition that emphasises the use of genre in discourse (discussed further in Chapter 4).⁴⁹

In practice, genre is best understood by examining how it is used in discourse. For film viewers, genre is part of the everyday, appearing in trailers, movie posters, or their conversations with friends. As Bordwell and Thompson argue, “genre is easier to recognize than to define” (2001, 94) as viewers express a shared understanding of genre. Although genre is formed and defined through consensus, it is through the uses of genre that this consensus is reached. What follows is a discussion of how genre is used within discourse surrounding screen media.

⁴⁹ Further discussion of Altman's (1984; 1999) pragmatic and semantic/syntactic approaches, and the contradictions they seek to redress, can be found in the following chapter.

How Genre is Used: from Viewers to Filmmakers

Genre is used for a range of different purposes—which vary depending on who it is used by, the context of its use, and what the user intends to communicate. “Genre functions as a blueprint for industry production, a marketplace label for advertising and distribution, a viewing contract informing audience consumption, and a critical label for critique and review” (Lobato and Ryan 2011, 190). Viewers use genre as a shortcut to cultural phenomena and experiences, to describe preferences and tastes, or to describe commonalities across multiple films. Filmmakers use genre to streamline production processes, to attract audiences or funding, and to plan release schedules. Academics and historians use genre to facilitate analysis, categorise works, or study trends among industry or audiences. Thus, genre is best defined as “a label for cultural convenience” (Mittell 2004, 7) that reflects the combined result of each of these uses.

Viewers use genre for its convenience, as a shorthand code for classifying films, to facilitate their understanding of a film, or as a means of describing a film to others. Viewers are quick to recognise the genre(s) of a film, especially when presented with the film’s title, posters, trailers, style, score, or the names of directors and actors. Gray (2010, 32) avers that audiences require only a matter of seconds to identify a text’s genre based on clues in the content, method of presentation, and their past viewing experiences. Technology supports this process of classification, as digital video retailers, streaming services, and media libraries organise films by genre for the convenience of viewers.

A film’s genre(s) frames how an audience conceives of and experiences that film, yet audiences will not always associate a film primarily with the genres it is assigned by distributors and producers (Christie 2012b, 230). Similarly, some films are classified within a genre based on audience responses, in spite of authorial intent.⁵⁰ Viewers are “autonomous, highly participatory, knowing and even creative makers of meaning” (Monk 2011, 180). Through the growth of social media and online forums, audiences have been afforded a greater role in shaping genre through the discourse that takes place, with respect to both individual films, and genre as a category (Gray 2010, 113).

⁵⁰ This is particularly visible among cult films such as *Troll 2* (Fragasso 1990), *The Room* (Wiseau 2003), and *Birdemic: Shock and Terror* (Nguyen 2010). In each, the viewer responses to the films have forced a redefinition of their genre classification. Tim J Smith (2005) suggests that in addition to spatial and temporal forms of continuity, object continuity must be considered. He argues that viewers have expectations regarding the appearance of an object, as well as how, where, and when that object will appear following a cut. Research has shown that changes to an object across cuts generally go unnoticed without specific attention to the classification applied to the work to remain relevant and informative for audiences.

Filmmakers use genre classifications because they allow for the efficient expression of well-developed concepts (Fowler 1989, 215). The efficiency with which genre classifications can convey meaning allow them to operate effectively in advertising such as posters or trailers for films and be instantly identifiable and recognisable by audiences (Gray 2010, 32). This code can be seen as a form of discourse between producers, distributors and audiences that develops meaning prior to the consumption of a text.

In this way, genre is communicated through a film's paratext. According to Klecker, paratextual material refers to "any kind of additional information about the film that a viewer has access to, for instance, from reviews, posters, trailers, and interviews ... cast, director, awards and nominations, box-office success, and the like" (2015, 406) and it can "heavily influence the viewers' expectations long before they actually see the film" (Klecker 2015, 406). Interpreted broadly, paratext encompasses anything outside a text that plays a role in constructing meaning within that text. Production teasers, distribution trailers, audience forums, and other paratexts use genre to provide a framework for audiences prior to viewing (Gray 2010).

Filmmakers use paratexts to clearly communicate the mystery genre and the presence of a problem to solve. For example, the taglines of many mystery films allude to a problem that the viewer must solve by learning the truth behind a mystery. Examples from films in the Study Set include "The truth lies outside the frame" in *November* (Harrison 2004), "One passenger is taking control ... to find the truth" in *Flightplan* (Schwentke 2005), "Seek the truth" in *The Da Vinci Code* (Howard 2006), "Listen for the truth"—*The Night Listener* (Stettner 2006), and "Find the truth"—*State of Play* (Macdonald 2009). Film trailers mirror this language—"We haven't heard the truth once yet"—and introduce a specific problem to be investigated: "We don't know how she got out" [both from the official trailer for *Shutter Island* (Scorsese 2009)]. In addition to presenting the tagline of a film, movie posters repeat genre-specific signifiers that distinguish the work. Mystery film posters frequently include a lone male figure in dark shadows standing still, holding a gun, and staring to the side (Figure 3.1.1). This image contrasts with the typical action poster, where the protagonist is often seen in motion, facing forward toward the viewer, and in bright light or colour. Together, these paratexts provide a framework for the viewer in which they will be asked to follow a protagonist's attempt to solve the mystery and exclude contrary frameworks; the solution will not come through force or action alone.



Figure 3.1.1—Movie posters for 88 Minutes (Arnet 2007), Gone Baby Gone (Affleck 2007), Inception (Nolan 2010), Shooter (Fuqua 2007)

Paratexts, specifically trailers, have been used to construct and legitimise genres with regard to viewer expectations (Kernan 2004, 14). This material serves “as anchorage for the

generically pertinent iconography they almost always also contain” (Neale 2012, 35), which shapes both the ideological framework a film will operate within and the framework an audience will use to engage the film. Hollywood trailers cultivate and satisfy desire for generic qualities that are then represented in other paratexts they produce (Kernan 2004, 45-6). Further, paratexts use “genre signifiers ... to appeal to the broadest possible audience by emphasizing the film’s variety” (Kernan 2004, 19). However, once genre has been identified by audiences “it may prove hard for an individual viewer to easily shrug off” (Gray 2010, 50).

In addition, genre can itself act as paratext for a film. Gérard Genette (1987) introduced the idea of paratexts as a way of conceiving of that which exists outside the text but gives it meaning. A paratext does not operate as a boundary for the work by trying to determine its scope in exclusive terms. Instead, paratexts act as a vestibule, a threshold (*seuil*) through which an audience enters into the meaning-making of a text. For Genette, “the paratext is made up of a heterogeneous group of practices and discourses” that shape how an audience engages with a work: they “surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it” (1997, 1-2). While paratext usually refers to a tangible object, Genette includes the possibility of “implicit contexts” (1997, 7) that are characteristic of a factual paratext such as authorial, generic or historical characteristics.⁵¹ As such, genre itself can function as a paratext, by framing an audience’s engagement with a text. “Genres can work as strong paratexts because they frequently enjoy communal definition and widespread use, and because they are cultural categories used by the industry, reviewers, audience members, politicians, and policy makers alike, often with a relatively shared or at least dominant definition at any given point in time” (Gray 2010, 51).

Filmmakers’ use of genre is not exclusive to paratexts or communicating with potential audiences. During pre-production, film genre plays an important role in financing (Neale 2012, 218-9). The majority of investment in Hollywood film is based on a select number of metrics and their historical performance based on financing models.⁵² These measures include budget, release date, target audience, genre, and distribution schedule, while

⁵¹ For example, a reader may know the gender or age of an author and draw on this knowledge in their reading of a text.

⁵² JP Morgan Securities’ Entertainment Group is noted as “arranging 95 percent of financing for major movie studios and independent film producers” in 2004 (White 2004). This estimate is reduced to 80% of all Hollywood film loans by 2005 (Grover 2005).

omitting factors such as script and plot (White 2004; Grover 2005).⁵³ Thus, film studios' use of genre is more closely related to the investment and funding of movie projects, as opposed to conventions, features or practices (Shon, Kim, and Yim 2012). Once a project has been approved genre is used as, "an important vehicle for conveying producers' message and directing audiences' expectations" (Shon, Kim, and Yim 2012, 3). Genre has regularly been identified as the most important factor for viewers in movie selection (Austin and Gordon 1987; De Silva 1998). However, genre is not simply prescribed by filmmakers and accepted by viewers; it is constructed as an intersection between these groups (Tolson 1996, 92; Chandler 1997, 5). Genre is "a process of categorization that is not found within media texts, but operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts" (Mittell 2004, 32).

What Genre Does: Setting Expectations

Genre is used as "a means of constructing both the audience and the reading subject" (Fiske 1987, 114), forming a textual schema that audiences develop through exposure (Chandler 1997, 7). This schema includes the way films are presented (in advertising and other promotion), discussed (by critics, fans, and peers), produced (who is directing, starring in, or producing the film?), as well as the historical background of all films the viewer has been exposed to that share this generic classification. Consequently, viewers may have slight differences in their beliefs and expectations for a film but can strongly agree on the genre to which a film belongs. This convergence on similar ideas of what a specific genre is, and the films to include within it, is a necessary condition for genre to serve its communicative purpose. The effect of this communication varies: orienting viewers in relation to a film; setting their expectations about how it will unfold; and establishing a backdrop from which the film can be compared. What follows is a discussion of what genre does for a viewer, and the significance of this for mystery films.

Genres are "systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject" (Neale 1980, 19). Orientation describes how a viewer is first positioned relative to a film. Genre establishes where the viewer should start, and it is from this starting position that expectations can be upheld or subverted. This has a priming

⁵³ Epagogix is a film analysis company capable of estimating the earnings of films within a small margin. It includes plot and narrative-based components in its assessment, in addition to genre, along with thousands of other factors. Its analysis has shown that apart from four exceptions, individual cast members do not affect the expected earnings for a film. While Michael White's article suggests JP Morgan does include cast in its assessment, Ronald Grover's article states the financier does not include this variable in assessing a work.

effect on viewers, positioning them in relation to the film subject (Gledhill 1985, 64). Further, genre activates a series of expectations about what can happen within the film, and what is likely to happen. Films and their paratexts highlight specific generic qualities to orient audiences and engage their expectations about the genre (Esquenazi 2001, 43). These expectations are drawn from convention and allow viewers to quickly identify and engage with the meaning expressed within the film. Alternatively, conventions may be exploited to subvert viewer expectations, generating interest or surprise.⁵⁴

For instance, in mystery films viewers are primarily positioned by the problem set before them. The mystery genre alerts viewers to the existence of this problem, even before they know what the problem is. In some instances, such as in twist films, the problem is never explicitly stated until it has been solved. To solve the problem in these films, viewers must have foreknowledge that a problem will exist within the text. The mystery genre also sets expectations around what can reasonably occur, and thus, sets the parameters of the problem. When watching *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), viewers can reasonably deduce that the villain's impossible feats have a rational and scientific explanation—one that does not rely on magic or the supernatural. Although paratexts can use genre in different ways to orient viewers, there remain some expectations that are grounded in the history of the genre (Neale 1999, 165). Certain conventions must be maintained to satisfy viewers' expectations of the genre⁵⁵—for instance, the solution to the mystery must be logical—while other conventions are mutable.⁵⁶

As previously discussed, genre can operate paratextually, creating a conceptual framework that shapes meaning within the film and primes viewers to act and react in ways complicit to that construct.⁵⁷ Contextual framing can shape how audiences understand and attribute emotions and mental states to characters within a film. The best-known example of this is the Kuleshov effect, whereby the meaning of a shot is changed by its interaction with another shot. Kuleshov demonstrated this in a series of experiments in March 1921 (Tsivian et al. 1996) that showed participants a shot of an expressionless face, followed by

⁵⁴ This has been examined in depth with regards to script and language in Taylor (2004; 2006).

⁵⁵ For example, many of the supernatural elements of the horror genre are incompatible with setting and solving a problem. *The Grudge* (Shimizu 2004) presents a mysterious death in a haunted house but does not present the supernatural elements in a way whereby a logical conclusion can be reached, either by the viewer or the protagonist.

⁵⁶ For example, in the television series *Elementary* (Doherty 2012–2019), Sherlock is an American alcoholic and Watson is a female sober companion, not a doctor.

⁵⁷ There has been significant research into violence within visual media and the priming effect it may have on an audience. An overview of the topic can be found in Huesmann (2007).

a shot of a funeral or a child playing. Depending on the pairing, participants would infer an emotional state to the expressionless actor, assuming a meaningful relationship between the scene and actor. The significance and influence of this experiment grew from conversations between Truffaut and Hitchcock in 1962 (Truffaut [1984] 2017) and provided guidance to early efforts at establishing a cognitivist approach to film theorising (Bordwell and Carroll 1996), grounded in empirical evidence and the testing of hypotheses. Outside of film theory, these results have been extended by psychological researchers, demonstrating that priming can affect how the “brain encodes, categorizes and recognizes objects and people” (Mobbs et al. 2006, 100).

Viewers hold a set of beliefs about genres that shape the way they engage with a film. These beliefs depend “on the maintenance of a standardized distribution/exhibition system” (Altman 1996, 279). In this system, the film studios produce a constant flow of films that are recognisable for their generic qualities to a sustained and experienced audience, which is familiar and satisfied with those very qualities. The relationship between artist, film and audience is central to genre production and perpetuation (Ryall 1975, 28; Fiske 1987, 114). As a result, “[m]ost theories of film genre are based primarily on analysis of the Hollywood studio system” (Langford 2005, 11): viewers’ beliefs about genre are used to select and judge films, and the Hollywood studio system establishes and reiterates conventions to support the application of these beliefs.

Genre and narrative are prone to conflation; many genre definitions simply describe plot and story events. Williams (1984, 121) suggests that the vast majority of discussion surrounding film genre refers specifically to narrative. The flow of the narrative can be shaped by the viewer’s perception of its genre, establishing the relationship between “the time of the thing told and the time of the telling” (Metz 1974, 18).⁵⁸ For example, in most genres, “spectacle is considered in opposition to narrative” (Higgins 2007, 75), putting the story on hold while the visual and sonic sensations govern attention. However, in the action genre, fights, chases, and special effects are essential to advance the narrative (Higgins 2007, 76; Smith 1998, 13). Similarly, mystery films produce a distinct temporal

⁵⁸ The coincidence of discourse and event established through narration binds the two for an audience (Genette 1966). Unlike literature, cinema sets the duration of discourse (*défilement*). *Défilement* refers to the movement of the filmstrip across the projector, the progression and continuity of the film object and the regulation of duration within the mechanical apparatus (Kuntzel 1977).

“The narrative and the actions which constitute it must constantly move forward in order to ‘keep up’ with the *défilement* and maintain the economy which joins the two durations as one” (Jacobs and de Cordova 2009, 297).

relationship between event and duration that viewers readily recognise as pertaining to the genre. The pacing of a mystery narrative can determine whether a viewer is able to fully observe, consider, and hypothesise with a problem set out in the film (which is discussed further in Chapter 7). The mystery genre signals to the viewer how to engage with narrative and temporal features to form meaning from the film, and to guide the flow and pacing of their engagement.

Why Study the Mystery Genre?

The mystery genre is rarely studied as the primary influence on interpretations of a text—what Cawelti describes as a “dominant formulaic principle” (1976, 43). Instead, the mystery genre is typically described as a subsidiary principle, acting as a subplot within stories that are seen as primarily of the adventure, romance, and melodrama genres (Cawelti 1976, 43). The mystery genre is often conflated with suspense, thriller, crime, and noir, or simplified as either detective or spy stories.⁵⁹ However, in doing so, much of the previous work on the mystery genre fails to identify the function and form specific to mystery films. Cawelti’s later work arrives at a similar conclusion, arguing the mystery genre acts as a “supergenre” (2004, 328) that emphasises “the central role of reader involvement in the narrative” (343).

Nevertheless, the mystery genre must be considered an independent genre, as it performs an essential role in orienting viewers and setting their expectations about a film. In particular, viewers do not automatically assume that a film will include a problem for them to solve. For example, the viewer does not expect that they will have to figure out how to bring the parents together when watching *The Parent Trap* (Meyers 1998), or how to defeat General Zod when watching *Man of Steel* (Snyder 2013). However, the viewer reasonably expects they will have to try and figure out who the killer is when watching films like *Clue* (Lynn 1985). In this way, the mystery genre performs the crucial function of orienting viewers, signalling the presence of a problem and the potential for viewers to attempt to solve it. Further, the presence of the mystery genre signals to the viewer that the solution to the mystery will conform to the logic established within the fictional world.⁶⁰ Without this expectation, any attempt at solving the problem would be completely undermined,

⁵⁹ Examples of this in books on or related to the genre can be found in Keating (1982), Derry (1988), and Rubin (1999). This conflation extends to popular websites for both film and literary mystery texts, where the mystery genres are collapsed with suspense—categorised as “Mystery & Suspense” on Rotten Tomatoes (2018), Google Play, and Penguin Random House—or with thrillers, as in Amazon’s “Mystery and Thriller” (2018a) and “Mystery, Thriller & Suspense” (2018b) categories.

⁶⁰ This remains true even when the story includes fantastical elements, such as *Lady in the Water* (Shyamalan 2006), or elements of science fiction, such as *Inception* (Nolan 2010) and *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006).

because any solution, no matter how illogical or improbable—or impossible—would be permitted.⁶¹

The expectations that viewers hold about the problem presented within a mystery film, and about the options they have for resolving that problem, form the scope of that problem. Audience conceptions of what is fair and reasonable within a mystery text are informed by a long history of the genre across different mediums. In the next section, I examine this history to identify the prototypical forms that have shaped the genre, the enduring qualities that inform conceptions of the genre, and the principal qualities that define it.

3.2 THE MYSTERY GENRE

Across its long history, the mystery genre has remained unmistakably entwined with crime and the detective figure. Viewers and readers held the reasonable expectation that a mystery would present them with a problem, usually a crime or act of espionage, that would be solved by a detective or sleuth by the film's conclusion. In the mid-1990s, more films began to employ complex storytelling forms and twist endings.⁶² While these were not exclusive to the mystery genre, complex narrative forms and twists did potentially represent a problem or puzzle for viewers to solve. Instead of merely foreshadowing the twist, directors began to include clues for a viewer to conceivably predict the film's ending ahead of time. Now, directors can exploit viewer expectations surrounding the medium and genre to create a new type of mystery for audiences to engage: one grounded in the complex storytelling mode. The following discussion examines the two most prominent mystery prototypes, the detective story and complex narrative films, to illuminate the features of the mystery genre's history that shape contemporary perceptions of the genre.

Transcending both of these prototypical forms is the mystery genre's principal quality: the presentation of a problem to test their audience. Throughout the genre's history, authors have attempted to articulate the rules of this engagement, highlighting the importance of fairness, transparency, logic, and reason. What remains constant between authors is the requirement that the mystery text sets a problem for the reader or viewer that they may

⁶¹ For example, the use of a *deus ex machina* plot device would completely undermine a viewer's desire to work towards solving a problem set by the film.

⁶² Staiger (2006) argues that this "surge of complex narratives" (2) closely followed the success of *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino 1994).

attempt to solve. This amounts to a challenge to the reader or viewer, motivating them to engage with the problem and seek out a solution from clues within the text.

A Challenge to the Viewer

The detective story is central to contemporary conceptions of the mystery genre, as it has been the most preeminent and successful expression of “pure mystery” (Cawelti 1976, 43), wherein “the solution of the mystery is the dominant line of action” (Cawelti 1976, 41). One reason the mystery genre has been conflated with detective stories is that the genre’s defining principles were first articulated to be specific to those detective stories. Of these principles, “the search for hidden secrets” (Cawelti 1976, 43) by audiences has remained central to the mystery genre in all of its forms. The “challenge to the reader” (Leitch 2002, 55), and the framework that guides the viewer in partaking in that challenge, are essential to understand the mystery genre.

The ideals that guided the relationship between text and audience in the detective story, and thus the mystery genre, were made explicit by a number of “Golden Age” (Symons 1985) writers, listing a set of rules that all writers should abide by.⁶³ Ronald Knox ([1929] 1982) reproaches attempts to deceive a reader and dismisses illogical story elements that rely on the supernatural or on racial stereotypes. Raymond Chandler ([1948] 1976), a popular author of hardboiled detective fiction, argues for honesty with the reader but places greater emphasis on technical accuracy, plausibility, and realism. He asserts that a mystery should be written such that “the reader does not guess the complete solution” but that “[t]he solution must seem inevitable once revealed” (Chandler [1948] 1976). SS Van Dine (1928) stresses the importance of the genre’s puzzle elements: he describes it as “a kind of intellectual game” and lays out a number of rules or laws within which the game must operate. Of particular note are his first two laws:

1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.
2. No wilful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself. (Van Dine 1928)

⁶³ ‘The golden age of detective fiction’ was a phrase coined by John Strachey (1939), referring to literary works produced between the two world wars. The phrase was reiterated in the work of Ernest Mandel (1984).

Like Chandler and Knox, Van Dine emphasises detection and reasoning by the detective and requires the crime to be solved by “strictly naturalistic means” (1928). Further, he places the same emphasis as Chandler on the rationality and technical accuracy of the story. The rules set out by these three authors were in no way codified or enforced; however, they speak to a general cultural consensus regarding the mystery genre, setting audience expectations and shaping the way they may engage with a text. The mystery of the Golden Age created “a civilized game of logical inference for the audience, all climaxing with a ‘Challenge to the Reader’ ... an invitation to solve the mystery on the basis of the clues presented to detective and reader alike” (Leitch 2002, 55).

Similarly, mystery issues a ‘challenge to the viewer’ by restricting their knowledge through a number of practices.⁶⁴ By restricting access to knowledge, the viewer is left to rationalise actions, motivations, and sequences of events, drawing on their curiosity to build suspense. The film provides the viewer with an “equal opportunity” (Van Dine 1928) to solve the mystery by restricting their knowledge to that of the detective or primary investigator in a mystery, bound to the temporal space of the actions at hand. Bordwell argues that the detective film interrupts this presentation with “brief marks of an unrestricted narration” (Bordwell 1985, 65) for the purpose of enhancing the suspense or to act as a form of narrative punctuation. This practice can substantiate or challenge viewer expectations of intrinsic generic norms (Molloy 2010, 49). By restricting the audience to the knowledge of the detective, the film must present information in a codified form specific to the genre or medium, engaging the audience in an “intellectual, reasoning activity” (Cawelti 1976, 43). In this way, the mystery film is limited by audience expectations of “fair play” (Bordwell 1985, 65) in the way it presents information and how deceptive these practices can be.

The Detective Story

The detective story has played an essential role in defining the principal qualities of the mystery genre. The history of the detective in fiction continues to inform contemporary conceptions of what a mystery is and does. One of the earliest examples of this figure came from the Arabic collection of stories *One Thousand and One Nights*, compiled during the Abbassid dynasty (750–1258). The collection includes a story of Ja’afar, official advisor to

⁶⁴ This challenge should not be confused with that described by Elsaesser (2009) in his discussion of mind-game films. While both “delight in disorienting or misleading spectators” (Elsaesser 2009, 15), mind-game films (and complex narratives) disorient or mislead viewers through “narratological problems or puzzles” (19). Mystery films can employ narrative form to set a problem for the viewer, but can also set the problem within the narrative, and employ a classical storytelling mode.

the region's ruler, who investigates the murder of a young woman, and uncovers who caused the murder through deceit.⁶⁵ Similarly, Gong'an fiction, from China during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), told stories of government magistrates solving court cases.

The detective story was popularised in English-language fiction in the mid-19th century with Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) and *The Purloined Letter* (1844). His detective stories were intended as “tales of ratiocination” (Silverman 1991, 171) promoting thought and reasoning as paramount to the detective.⁶⁶ Cawelti (1976) attributes the classic detective formula to Poe's works, consisting of four aspects: situation, pattern of action, characters and relationships, and setting. The situation is typically an unsolved crime that a detective works towards solving. The patterns of action revolve around the investigation and solution of that crime. The setting involves some combination of an isolated space, filled with clues and marked off from the rest of the world, and the chaotic outside world, usually a bustling city where the reason and logic of the crime scene falter. Cawelti (1976, 91) identifies three primary characters in classical detective fiction: the detective, the criminal, and any victim (current or future). Wollen (1982) identifies these same three characters but defines them instead as roles “which characters rotate among” (1982, 43) at different points within the narrative. These roles are defined by their knowledge and understanding of the problem or “secret” (Wollen 1982, 40) within a mystery narrative. Of particular importance to the detective story was the abilities of the detectives themselves, and their particular method or approach to solving a problem. Sherlock Holmes, introduced in Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), epitomises this emphasis on the unique method of the detective. The proliferation of Holmes across literature, film, television, and video games has strengthened audience associations between logic, reason, and the mystery genre.

Literary fiction has provided the source material for many of the detective films produced during the silent era (Wlaschin 2009). The transition to film was a logical choice for classical detective fiction, where “investigation and narrativization are linked to optical technologies” (Cameron 2008, 103). Detective fiction experienced a “Golden Age” (Symons 1985) in the post-war period, alongside the transition from silent to sound productions in film. One of the most successful early ‘talkies’ *Blackmail* (Hitchcock 1929) followed a detective's investigation into a murder, cementing the detective figure within the film genre. Literary

⁶⁵ *The Three Apples*

⁶⁶ Ratiocination is the process of reasoned thought through the application of purposeful methodology, rationality, and logic to a problem.

fiction continued to provide source material for mystery films of the era: work by Agatha Christie, Dorothy L Sayers, Ellery Queen (the pseudonym of collaborative authors Daniel Nathan and Manford Lepofsky), and SS Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright) all made it to the big screen.

Detective fiction featured prominently in comics of the 1930s, and the detective continued to play a prominent role. This period saw the introduction of a number of now famous detectives, including Batman (in *Detective Comics* #27, 1939), Dick Tracy (in *Detroit Mirror*, 1931), and The Phantom (in *The Singh Brotherhood*, 1936), which have each continued to appear in comics, television, films, and video games. Comics, along with the newly established Penguin Books,⁶⁷ provided a relatively inexpensive option for readers and led to mass consumption of printed material during this period, further popularising the mystery genre and stressing the role of the detective.

In the years to follow, the ‘whodunit’ and ‘howdunit’ mysteries came to dominate the genre, featuring prominently in the new hardboiled detective format. The hardboiled detective was an antihero and extremely cynical of the legal system, often operating outside the law to serve his or her own sense of justice. Despite the significant shift from the classic detective archetype, these stories continued to emphasise the puzzle elements of the genre, valuing transparency for the reader in a mystery’s unravelling. American hardboiled detective fiction would become the primary literary influence on the emergence of Hollywood’s film noir.⁶⁸ Film noir’s popularity ensured the mystery genre maintained a strong presence on screen, while the genre began to see popularity in new areas, including magazines, radio, television, and even board games.⁶⁹ The growing popularity of the genre,

⁶⁷ Penguin Books introduced the idea of reprinting established books in paperback format. Sir Allen Lane, the founder of the company, had the idea to publish paperbacks after returning from a visit with Agatha Christie. The early Penguins included a vast range of mystery titles: over 70 such titles were released within the publisher’s first year of operating. (<http://www.mysterynet.com/timeline/history-of-mystery/>)

⁶⁸ The detective figure features prominently in film noir; however, their presence is not essential. As Durgnat (1970) notes, “film noir is not a genre, as the Western and gangster film, and takes us into the realm of classification by motif and tone” (38). The motif and tone that classifies film noir is not intrinsically linked to the mystery genre; however, the period remains important as it hosted many of the iconic detective stories that have persisted to shape contemporary conceptions of the mystery.

⁶⁹ *The Detective Story Hour* was a radio drama series that featured a master detective known as the Shadow. This character starred in a series of stories in *The Shadow Magazine* (1931–49) and from 1937 starred in a self-titled radio drama, *The Shadow* (1937–54). These series ran for several decades and were incredibly popular in the US; a number of feature films and television series arose from the character. Probably the best-known television mysteries from this period appeared in Hitchcock’s *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955–65) series, which supplemented his growing cinematic work in the genre. This period also saw the release of the classic board game *Cluedo* (also known as *Clue*), which has players solve a murder mystery through deduction and reasoning.

and its flexibility across different formats and purposes, led to an expansion of conceptions of the detective figure and the mystery genre as a whole.

The Cold War led to a growing interest in espionage and spy literature and films, replacing the traditional detective, while the private eye and cop detective continued to feature prominently on television. Television series such as *Columbo* (Levinson and Link 1968–2003), *Kojak* (Mann 1973–78), and the *Rockford Files* (Huggins and Cannell 1974–80) were hugely popular and prompted interest in further expansion of the genre’s appeal. Younger audiences were introduced to the mystery genre on screen; the popular cartoon series *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* (Ruby and Spears 1969–70) and *The Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Mysteries* (Larson 1977–79) featured amateur teenage sleuths. This period saw an increased emphasis on action over problem solving in detective and spy films, most prominently in the *James Bond* films and the work they inspired, but the classic detective story continued to thrive in works such as *Blowup* (Antonioni 1966), *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974), and *Murder on the Orient Express* (Lumet 1974).

The detective figure, and the mystery genre, remained popular on screen over the following decades. Two series stand out as defining the genre: *Murder, She Wrote* (Fischer, Levinson, and Link 1984–96) returned to the Golden Age’s spinster sleuths, and *Law & Order* (Wolf 1990–2010) redefined the crime procedural. Neo-noir rose to prominence in cinema during the 1980s, as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Garnett 1981), *Body Heat* (Kasdan 1981), and *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982) reintroduced the hardboiled detective to a contemporary audience. The neo-noir style emphasised concealment in mystery films, both in the criminal act being described and in the form the story is told. “In accordance with its narrative emphasis on concealment and mystery, the detective film harnesses its narration to the restriction of the viewer’s knowledge” (Bettinson 2009, 176). In many ways, this period represented a nostalgic return to the ideals of Chandler, Knox, and Van Dine, placing the detective and problem solving at the genre’s forefront.

Types of Mystery Plots

Historically, work on the genre has focused on four types of mystery plots: the “whodunit”, the “howdunit”, the “whydunit”, and the “Had-I-But-Known” (Knobloch 2003, 386-87). Throughout the Golden Age of detective fiction, most texts presented the reader with a whodunit, leading the term to become “a synonym for mystery” (Knobloch 2003, 386). The Had-I-But-Known mystery, first appearing in Rinehart’s *The Circular Staircase* (1908),

tells a story from an individual's point of view, showing that in hindsight, their choices placed them in unforeseen danger. This plot type was popular during the early 19th century but has not had a lasting presence throughout the genre's history.

The howdunit was also present in this early period, but only accounted for a small portion of texts. Its growth in the late 19th century is largely attributed to the popularity of the “medical mystery” and the rise of the “scientific detective story” (Queen, 1969). R Austin Freeman's Dr Thorndyke was typical of these mysteries, operating as a “medical juris practitioner” solving crimes through forensic investigations.⁷⁰ Freeman is credited with introducing the “inverted” detective story, in which the culprit's identity is revealed to the reader from the beginning.⁷¹ This narrative form works in opposition to the whodunit and focuses on the practicalities of how a crime was committed. The howdunit was born as a reaction to the whodunit and remained primarily focused on the investigation of a crime. This period also saw the development of the whydunit, alongside public interest in psychology and featured prominently in mystery films from the 1970s to 90s. The whydunit offered an alternative way to tell the inverted detective story, with the focus on the motivations of an already identified culprit. The recent expansion of mystery plot types has paved the way for the complex storytelling form of the puzzle film to shape contemporary mystery production and viewers expectations.

Complex Storytelling and the Puzzle Film

Over the past two decades, complex storytelling and the “puzzle film” have become a prominent feature in the contemporary mystery genre on screen (Buckland 2009; Panek 2006).⁷² “The puzzle film is made up of non-classical characters who perform non-classical actions and events. Puzzle films constitute a post-classical mode of filmic representation and experience not delimited by mimesis” (Buckland 2009, 5). Ambiguous and fragmented

⁷⁰ Dr Thorndyke was first introduced in *The Red Thumb Mark* (1907) and appeared in more than 20 novels by Freeman over a period of 35 years.

⁷¹ *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) by Edgar Allan Poe has been described as the first ‘inverted’ detective story (see Knobloch 2003); however, Freeman's *The Singing Bone* (1912) marked a significant shift to telling new types of mysteries.

⁷² It should be noted that while theorisation of complex storytelling and the puzzle film provides some insight into the mystery genre, the two are not mutually inclusive: not all mysteries employ complex storytelling, and not all complex narratives are considered part of the mystery genre. For example, *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino 1994), *21 Grams* (Iñárritu 2003), and *Groundhog Day* (Ramis 1993) are described as modular narratives (Cameron 2008); *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer 1998), *Adaptation* (Jonze 2002), and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry 2004) are described as puzzle films (Buckland 2009); but none are considered part of the mystery genre. Puzzle films, like mystery films, create a challenge for the viewer. However, they do so through complex storytelling and narrative form, complicating comprehension for viewers, while mystery films may create a problem contained within the narrative, facilitating comprehension but exploiting viewer expectations to mislead or misdirect.

storytelling features prominently in the puzzle film, setting a problem for the viewer that engages the cinematic form. The puzzle film challenges viewer expectations surrounding narrative and storytelling logic, with particular emphasis on the cinematic form, in order to create new types of problems with which viewers can engage.

The puzzle film can present viewers with a problem by constructing a complex narrative form and by challenging established generic practices. This can be seen in a film that “bends” genre, “exploit[ing] our familiarity with its genre to make us uncertain about the meaning of the film, in effect using generic conventions for the purpose of deception” (Berliner 2001, 29). Berliner discusses films such as *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974) and *The French Connection* (Friedkin 1971) that set a “booby trap” for the audience, upsetting expectations of the genre while primarily working within its confines. Historically, viewers have relied on the detective to provide insight into a case based on their instincts and expertise. When a detective’s judgement fails, as does Jake Gittes’ in *Chinatown* (1974), there is no active deception of the viewer. The detective makes no claim that their knowledge is reliable; they simply provide the viewer with a true representation of their beliefs at a specific point in time. However, viewer presumptions of the infallibility of the detective, at least in solving the core problem set within a mystery film, are so strong that this subversion can feel deceitful. These films upset viewer expectations surrounding the mystery genre, causing them to question their understanding of generic practices and the role of the detective.

At the same time, puzzle films can provide insight into how the presentation of information shapes attention and memory. Daniel Barratt (2009) looks specifically at the ways in which *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan 1999) prevents its audience from observing the clues that would reveal the film’s twist ending: that the protagonist, psychiatrist Malcolm, is one of the “dead people” his patient Cole can see. Viewers are primed to seek out plausible explanations for why no one but Cole speaks with or directly interacts with Malcolm. The film directs viewers’ attention to accentuate actions that may appear as a response to Malcolm, even if purely coincidental, such as when Malcolm’s wife reaches for the bill at a restaurant. In the scene where Cole reveals his secret to Malcolm, the camera pulls in closely on Malcolm, framing him as the subject after each statement regarding the qualities of these dead individuals (“I see dead people”, “walking around like regular people”, “they don’t know they’re dead”, “they’re everywhere”). Despite this, viewers are unlikely to connect these statements to Malcolm at the time and only by the film’s

revelation are they able to recognise the patterns in Cole's description and Malcolm's life. By presenting the mystery using restricted narration, the film allows audiences to recognise the solution, without being able to formulate it themselves. It encourages the viewer to reflect on how the problem was constructed, and why they may have failed to arrive at that solution. Many puzzle films, including *The Sixth Sense* (1999), facilitate this moment in the film by showing the viewer shots or scenes from earlier in the film to highlight the validity of the solution they have presented.

Problem Solving Mystery Films

Most narrative films include some problem that characters within the film must overcome or a task they must carry out. What distinguishes mystery films is the way they engage viewers in this process, setting a problem that the viewer can attempt to solve in the course of viewing the film. The viewer is incapable of changing the outcome in these texts but is motivated to solve the problem nonetheless.⁷³ Their engagement is not contingent upon a positive result within the plot; instead, they derive satisfaction from simply engaging with the problem. As Daniel Bor (2012) argues, humans derive this satisfaction from identifying the "hidden structure in a puzzle":

It's as if we were addicted to searching for and spotting structures of information, and if we do not exercise this yearning in our normal daily lives, we then experience a deep pleasure in artificially finding them.

The prototypical mystery presents a problem and follows the protagonist's attempts to resolve it. Information is structured logically, as the problem is intended to be resolved primarily through reasoning and deduction, as opposed to through force, technical skill or influence.⁷⁴ As DeAndrea writes, "the intellectual appeal of the mystery lies in its heuristic elements" (1994, ix). These features do not require the viewer to solve the mystery ahead of time. As Cawleti writes, "the puzzle or riddle aspect ... depends less upon the reader's own ability to solve the mystery than on giving him enough participation in it to enable

⁷³ There are limited exceptions that do allow audience interaction to play a role in the narrative, such as the interactive content developed by Netflix. By incorporating viewer feedback and responses to make certain narrative choices (similar to *Choose Your Own Adventure* books) and by allowing more direct character engagement (as seen in video games), titles such as *Bandersnatch* (Slade 2018) allow audiences play a more pivotal role in the outcome of the film's story.

⁷⁴ Traditional detective or crime mysteries within literary fiction ended shortly after the resolution of the puzzle. Once they had identified the culprit or criminal through examination of the evidence, that person's capture was simply a formality. Instead, contemporary mystery films will often incorporate a chase or physical struggle following the resolution of the primary problem or mystery, with the result that a large number of films work as a hybrid of the mystery and action genres.

him to better appreciate the wit of the detective and to understand the new perspective on which the explanation depends” (1976, 89). This active engagement of viewers with a problem is the principal quality of the mystery genre.

The mystery film is best defined by the problem-solving mode of engagement it establishes for viewers. Even in the absence of the detective, a crime, a conspiracy, or a puzzle narrative, mystery films will always set a problem for the viewer to solve. For example, *Birth* (2004) follows the story of Anna (Nicole Kidman), who becomes convinced that a young boy, Sean (Cameron Bright), is the reincarnation of her dead husband of the same name. The film contains none of the hallmarks or features of a puzzle narrative, such as “fragmented spatio-temporal reality”, “time-loops”, “unstable characters with split identities” or “unreliable narrators” (Buckland 2014). There is no crime committed; nor is there an investigator trying to resolve the film’s core problem. The boy demonstrates intimate knowledge about the adult Sean and his relationship with Anna, and the viewer is invited to determine whether he truly is a reincarnation, or if some other explanation exists that can account for the facts of the case. The mystery film invites a problem-solving mode of engagement from viewers.

Viewer interest in solving the problem set by mystery films has led to a preponderance of discussion that examines the evidence and possible solutions within these films. Discourse surrounding the mystery genre has shaped the development of contemporary definitions, including those used by popular film resources such as the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) website. The website provides guidelines for classifying mystery films, asserting that those films “[s]hould contain numerous inter-related scenes of one or more characters endeavouring to widen their knowledge of anything pertaining to themselves or others” (IMDb 2015b).⁷⁵ By themselves, these guidelines are too broad for practical use, and thus require interpretation by users to classify films, drawing on their understanding of what the mystery genre is and has been. In the next chapter, I attempt to resolve this issue and outline a practical method for identifying mystery films.

⁷⁵ This guideline can be found at <http://www.imdb.com/updates/guide/genres#mystery> and includes the note “Usually, but not always associated with Crime”, acknowledging the extent of overlap between viewers’ conceptions of the two genres.

4

Identifying Mystery Films

As discussed in Chapter 3, genre is a group of common descent, formed and expressed within discourse. It is used by both industry and audience alike to communicate about the group, or about texts perceived as part of that group. Further, genre sets viewer expectations, orienting viewers before viewing and structuring information surrounding those texts in recognisable or familiar ways. The mystery genre sets a problem for the viewer to solve, with prototypical qualities of this engagement, as ingrained by the work of Van Dine (1928), Knox ([1929] 1982), and Chandler ([1948] 1976). The mystery genre's long history of ratiocination in detective and complex narrative films forms the foundation for contemporary conceptions of what a mystery is and does. In the previous chapter, I defined what genre is, how it is used, what it does, and specifically what the mystery genre is.

The primary aim of this chapter is to identify a set of contemporary films for which there is consensus on their inclusion within the mystery genre. I do this by constructing a practical method that encompasses the theoretical conception of the mystery genre. I have defined the genre by its practice of setting a problem for the viewer to solve, but this alone is insufficient for identifying films within the genre. To ensure the films within the Study Set reflect a common cultural consensus surrounding the mystery genre, the process of identifying films within the genre must draw directly on information produced and consumed by film viewers. As such, this chapter outlines a practical method to identify mystery films based on the theoretical conceptions established in the previous chapter, while addressing theoretical concerns surrounding the study of genre.

To begin, I address these theoretical concerns surrounding the application of genre definitions when classifying films. Altman (1984; 1999) Stam (2000), and Tudor (1974) identify contradictions, conflicts, and a dilemma, which highlight the impracticality of applying a definition of genre to identify works within that genre. I examine the solutions and approaches these authors put forward and propose screen discourse as the best option

to mitigate these issues. Subsequently, I examine how screen discourse functions and where it takes place, and its role as an intersection between the film industry and audiences. To utilise screen discourse when identifying film genre, there must be an objective measure that can reflect common consensus on the mystery genre. This measure is taken by examining sources that host and facilitate screen discourse. In particular, I put forward the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) website as pivotal in this role. The IMDb genre classification for a film represents a cross-section of the dialogue taking place between viewers, industry, and the filmic text. When there is consensus between IMDb and several other prominent film websites in their genre classification of a film, a common genre classification has been identified that best represents “what we collectively believe it to be” (Tudor 1974, 139).⁷⁶ This common genre classification provides a robust and empirical measure of genre within screen discourse.

My approach may be considered a form of folksonomy, incorporating bottom-up classifications to define genre. A folksonomy describes the classifying structures produced when large online communities collectively and publicly tag resources, similar to a taxonomy (Vander Wal 2005). Researchers have demonstrated folksonomies to be a valuable tool in predicting film viewing preferences and have demonstrated the value of IMDb as a source of these public online tags (Szomszor et al. 2007). However, IMDb classifications are not entirely a community production and can represent a top-down classification applied by film creators and production companies. As such, when applying this approach specifically to the mystery genre, I include several restrictions and limitations to best represent the audience that takes part in, and consumes, the discourse taking place within the selected film websites. Some of these limitations are applied to reflect the scope and feasibility of the research, while others are intended to address the impact of other genres on mystery’s prototypical qualities. When applied in full, these limitations and common genre classifications are used to identify 87 films from 2004 to 2013 that constitute the mystery genre. This set of films, which I refer to as the Study Set, can be classified as common mystery films, and form the foundation of my analysis of the mystery genre throughout the remainder of the thesis.

⁷⁶ The term ‘common’ is not intended to speak to a universal quality within the texts, as this would ignore the predominantly Western context within which this analysis occurs. Rather, it speaks to the shared experience among a specific community, and the customary or ordinary qualities that this genre has within that community.

4.1 A PRACTICAL DEFINITION OF GENRE

Genre theorists have identified contradictions, conflicts, and a dilemma that problematise any attempts at defining a genre and classifying works within it. To put into practice the theoretical conception of genre established in Chapter 3, an approach must overcome these problems. Definitions of genre vary widely and the attribution of qualities to a genre is an undeniably personal and subjective process. As Chandler asserts, the classification of works into genres by viewers “is not a neutral and ‘objective’ procedure” (1997, 1), but one dependent on individual beliefs, expectations, and assumptions. The film industry’s classification of films into genres is driven by commercial interests, taking into account audience expectations.⁷⁷ Genres do not always share the same frames of reference (Moine 2008, 24): some are defined by theme, others by structure, setting, style, or ideology (Stam 2000, 14). For example, thematic concerns need not relate to plot or events but, rather, to the values and beliefs of the audience. “What emerges as a social problem (or dramatic conflict) in one genre is not necessarily a problem in another” (Schatz 1981, 25). Genres can be the products of different categorical distinctions and allow for “enormous individual variation” (Pye 2012, 240). Further, genres adapt over time and in relation to other works (Neale 1999), making rigorous taxonomies impossible. In spite of these difficulties, viewers are comfortable engaging with cinematic genre in routine conversation, unfazed by potential subjective differences.

While genre classification can be subjective, it need not be indiscriminate (Redfern 2012b). By comparing different approaches to genre, and the results of the research they produce, we can assess the robustness of a particular conception of genre. Redfern identifies that some trends within genres emerge across a range of research methodologies using different conceptions of genre. This suggests that some consensus about genre exists and can be identified. While this does not resolve the problem of definition, it allows genre to continue functioning as a useful tool within empirical film research. As Redfern writes, “[w]e want

⁷⁷ The film industry does not have a standardised set of rules or criteria that dictate the genre of individual films. Shon, Kim, and Yim (2014) argue that this makes genre ineffective for classifying works in empirical research on film. The authors demonstrate that movie type indicators (MTI), identified through a survey of audience reception and interpretation of film, are a more reliable measure for predicting a film’s box office success than genre. However, as part of their research all films included in the survey were assigned a single genre, with no details as to how these genres were initially determined and subsequently filtered. While their approach can have potential benefits for reflecting audience expectations, the treatment of genre in the study is far from conclusive.

useful knowledge about genre, and we can get it despite our uncertainty about genres” (2012b).

Problems with Genre as a Framework

One of the greatest challenges in understanding and applying genre in research is defining genre as a concept, or what Bordwell describes as “genre as a *principle*” (Bordwell 1989b, 146, emphasis in original). In other words, how is genre distinguished from other types or concepts of categorisation, such as mode or narrative formula? Raphaëlle Moine (2008) reiterates this problem:

If we consider film genres as categories of classification, one can only note the vitality of generic activity at an empirical level, and the impossibility of organizing cinema dogmatically into a definitive and universal typology of genres at a theoretical level. Categories exist but they are not impermeable. They may coincide at certain points, contradict one another, and are the product of different levels of differentiation or different frames of reference. (24)

Additionally, genres establish a “*system of genres*” (Bordwell 1989b, 146, emphasis in original): a framework by which they can be distinguished from one another, unable to exist in isolation. For Bordwell, these two problems pose a far greater challenge than any definition of a single genre. They demand that any conception of genre must account for adaptations within audience and industry perceptions, and for the interplay between generic form and practices (Bordwell 1989b, 147; Tomashevsky 1978, 55).

Conflicts in Genre Definition

Beyond the concept of genre, Robert Stam (2000) identifies and labels (italicised below) several conflicts in how individual genres are used and defined. Genre classifications can be so broad as to convey nothing meaningful or be so specific as to be ineffective as a classifying tool—a problem that Stam (2000) calls *extension*. Preconceived ideas of genre criteria also risk making genre a prescriptive tool as opposed to a descriptive one (*normativism*). Individual films can operate within a wide range of genres and thus refuse a *monolithic* definition. “Genres ... are permanently available for reconfiguration” (Stam 2000, 129) and do not operate within a standardised lifecycle or remain true to essentialist qualities (*biologism*). Each of these issues problematises any attempt to define genre and undermines attempts at applying genre within film research.

Stam (2000) avers that genre is most useful “as a set of discursive resources” moving from “static taxonomy to active, transformative operations” (Stam 2000, 129-30). Instead of seeing genre as a fixed classification, we can more usefully view it as a process of change, variation, and interplay (Cohen 1986; Neale 1999). Genres are a set of viewer expectations, the historical corpus of a genre, and the rules or practices that govern each, or some, “extrapolation from those facts” (Genette 1992, 66). Expectations and practices are changed or reinforced to “determine the scope ... [and] the borders of a genre-structure” (Jauss 1982, 47). The interrelation between these components leads to the development of genres over time; and any practical definition of genre must allow for the classifications of films to change along with shifts in opinions and practices.

The Empiricist Dilemma and Contradictions of Genre Classifications

To study a genre in film, there must be a set of films that adhere to that genre. When researchers select which films to study, they determine which qualities belong to the genre through this selection, rather than through a study of the genre itself. Thus the “principal characteristics” of a genre are predetermined in the effort to discover empirical evidence to support that categorisation—what Tudor describes as the “empiricist dilemma” (1974, 138). To resolve this problem, Tudor argues for the adoption of a “common cultural consensus” (1974, 138) as a way to define a genre’s core and as a starting point to theorise from. In this way, “[g]enre is what we collectively believe it to be” (Tudor 1974, 139) and remains open to changes in viewer perceptions. A practical definition of genre must thus have the capacity to generate or incorporate a cultural consensus surrounding genres.

Attempts at defining genre must also overcome three core “contradictions”, as identified by Rick Altman (1984). The first contradiction exists between two different processes used to generate a genre’s corpus: inclusive and exclusive selection. Exclusive selection describes when a characteristic is considered necessary for admittance within the group, whereas inclusive selection describes when a characteristic is sufficient, though not necessary. Inclusive selection accommodates a broader range of generic features, and better accommodates changes within the genre, but risks being so broad as to be meaningless. Exclusive selection prescribes genre based on a set of rules, but in doing so has a clear communicative function. Altman (1984, 7) argues that the presence of two opposing concepts of generic corpus allows for individual works to be simultaneously included and excluded from a single generic corpus, further weakening genre’s capacity to meaningfully describe a text.

Altman's second contradiction refers to the dichotomy of timelessness and mutability: Platonic conceptions of genre do not change, whereas the historical analysis reveals changes within genre (Altman 1984, 7-8). Conceptions of genre as immutable rely on the aforementioned exclusive characterisation, defining genre by some essential meaning shared across a body of works, and which remains unchanged. The historical conception of genre recognises changes in the practices and features of specific genres over time, building an inclusive corpus. Metz (1974, 18) supports this historical formation, arguing that genre can best be conceived as a form of interplay rather than an inherent quality in a body of texts. If genre is either wholly immutable or entirely malleable, as Altman (1984, 8) argues, then different conceptions of genre will actively contradict one another, making classification difficult.

The third contradiction identified by Altman describes the ritual and ideological approaches to genre. In the ritual approach, genre functions similarly to myths—something passed down over time by the telling of stories between people—and audience desires, and their relationship with genre, determine the types of films made. Rather than recognising genre, audiences imbue a work with genre through interpretation (Frow 2007, 1631). In contrast, the ideological approach holds that film production determines the meaning or ideology represented within the film, and the type of films that are made determines audience conceptions of genre. Audience desires do not dictate the genres of film production; rather, film production aims to invest viewers in repeated story structure and types.⁷⁸ McQuail encapsulates the ideological approach, describing genre as “a practical device” (1987, 200) for the efficient and consistent production of mass media that sets clear expectations for consumers. These two approaches are at odds, locating meaning at either an audience-centric or a production-centric source.

Altman (1984) offers an approach to address these contradictions through a unification of “semantic” and “syntactic” approaches. The “semantic/syntactic” approach requires a simultaneous application of inclusive and exclusive classifications, changeable and unchangeable genres, and ideologically and ritualistically guided productions. It is important to note that he does not refer to his theory as a solution, but as a “critical strategy” (Altman 1984, 10). Altman does not resolve the contradictions he raises, but extends his

⁷⁸ Genre should be distinguished from “genre films”. Genre films seek to tell a story through classical structure and convention. “[T]he plot is fixed, the characters defined, the ending satisfyingly predictable” (Sobchack 1986, 102). The genre film seeks to satisfy the viewer and maintain the status quo (Wright 1974) but does not have qualities that specifically engage the viewer in problem solving. For these reasons, the focus will be on genre applied to films generally, as opposed to specifically “genre films”.

work, adding the “pragmatic” approach to his theory of genre (1999, 210). The “pragmatic” approach seeks to capture *uses* of genre, addressing the discursivity of genre construction and placing the concept as something created through discourse among users. In this thesis, I borrow from Altman’s approach in my own conception of genre, highlighting the purposes of film genre and their role in cultural discourse.

A pragmatic approach to film genre is posited as a response to theoretical concerns but provides no concrete examples of how genre can be defined and applied in research. In much of the empirical work on film, the critical issues of defining genre are neglected, with little discussion of how a film’s genre is determined within the study. Despite this, much of the empirical work on film uses genre as a way of classifying and relating groups of films together.⁷⁹ Just as social scientists will assess a data set based on demographics such as age, sex and race, film researchers apply genre to make observations regarding a select population of films. Given the challenges in defining genre, the value of empirical work that uses this classification must be able to demonstrate the value in its use.

A practical definition of genre cannot fully resolve each of the concerns raised within genre theory. It should, however, detail how these concerns can be addressed, and attempt to do so in a way that best captures what genre is and how it functions. Genre must be understood as selective and purposeful, with a clear expression of meaning to its users. Further, users of a genre should be able to recognise that genre in the practical approach to defining it. The definition must account for a wide variety of adaptation and variation and be capable of change over time. Finally, it must function discursively, and reflect a common cultural consensus about what genre is and does. The only way to achieve all of these goals is by measuring genre at its source, within screen discourse.

4.2 MEASURING GENRE IN SCREEN DISCOURSE

Screen discourse is any communication related to screen texts, which takes place among and between audiences, film distributors, and filmmakers. A conversation is maintained through media, forums, film attendance, ratings, and reviews, which shapes how films are made and seen. Audiences influence how and what films are made, and filmmakers respond to audience preferences and taste. Film distribution practices feed back into the

⁷⁹ Examples include Bordwell (2006), Cutting, DeLong, and Brunick (2011), Hsu (2006), Perretti and Negro (2007), Redfern (2012a), Salt (1992; 2006), and Sobchack (2014).

industry, influencing production and consumption through “a series of intricate relays and feedback loops” (Lobato and Ryan 2011, 192-3). Throughout this cycle, genre is constructed, applied, and perceived by audiences and the film industry alike. In the past two decades, screen discourse has shifted from physical objects and spaces to a primarily online setting. The online spaces that inform audiences about films, and provide space to discuss, rate, and review films, have become central to contemporary screen discourse. Below, I outline the relationship between audiences and screen discourse, and the significance of these changes. Subsequently, I argue that IMDb acts as a point of intersection between industry and audience, and thus plays a central role in constructing and representing current perceptions and uses of genre. Finally, I argue that when a film’s genre is consistent across IMDb and other prominent film websites, a “common cultural consensus” (Tudor 1974, 138) of that genre has been found, and can be measured empirically.

Viewers’ Role in Screen Discourse

As film consumption moves further from the cinema, attempts at engaging film viewers has moved into new spaces. The majority, 88%, of film viewing occurs in the home across TV (57%), DVD/Blu-ray (23%), and downloaded or streamed sources (8%); traditional cinema viewings account for only 6% of all film viewing (BFI 2011). Shifting film consumption away from the cinema and into the home has increased the importance of a diversification of screen discourse beyond the cinema. As audience engagement with screen discourse has increased online, social media has become critical in maintaining discourse between filmmakers and audiences. The global and instantaneous nature of social media content intensifies word-of-mouth effects (Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Chen and Xie 2008) surrounding film discourse, and fan communities play a pivotal role in sharing and promoting marketing material. The importance of audience engagement online has led to the use of viral marketing, in which paratextual content is produced specifically for online audiences.⁸⁰ In this context, paratexts play a more critical role in establishing genre across different platforms and fostering screen discourse across platforms and viewing modes.

⁸⁰ An illustrative example was the Project Prometheus campaign for the film *Prometheus* (2012). The campaign included a TED talk set in the year 2023 and given by one of the film’s characters, print and video advertisements for the film’s star android, David, as well as a Twitter account to ask David questions. These were supported by a range of other materials that provided background context for the film and built the world in which the film is set for viewers who engaged with the campaign.

As audiences more regularly engage with discussion and reviews of films, they begin to play a more active role in processing that information. Film viewers are largely informed about the types of film they regularly view and have clear and critical expectations. With regard to genre, this means that viewers establish a relationship with a set or type of films and react to new films within the set reasonably predictably. Audiences are more likely to rate films from within a genre they frequently view more highly than films from outside that genre (Moon, Bergey, and Iacobucci 2010, 111). Further, audience historical ratings of a genre can be used to predict their rating of a new film from within that genre (Moon, Bergey, and Iacobucci 2010, 111). Filmmakers and distributors thus have very strong commercial incentives to ensure the screen discourse relating to a film conveys the right genre to its target audience.

Over the past decade, on-demand streaming and download services have become prevalent, highlighting genre's role in categorising films by organising enormous catalogues of content. While some platforms offer individual films for a one-off download, others work on a subscription model that offers access to all content for an ongoing fee.⁸¹ In addition, television networks such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the British Broadcasting Corporation offer access to their content online.⁸² There is also a wide range of films freely available for viewing on The Internet Archive, YouTube, and other video-sharing websites. The amount of content available to viewers has increased the need for an effective and efficient way to categorise or classify films. The prominence of these services has cemented the role of genre as the dominant tool for quickly distinguishing and suggesting different types of content. Further, viewers' conceptions of genre are expanded by accessing a broader range of films through these platforms, and production practices must be responsive to these conceptions of genre.

Contemporary audiences engage in a broader body of screen discourse when seeking film recommendations. Trailers continue to play a significant role in audience choices surrounding content viewing. In the report *What to Watch* (Screen Australia 2012), respondents listed "saw the trailer" as one of the main reasons for viewing a feature film.⁸³ In a survey of Australian VOD viewers, 9% listed online recommendations based on previous choices, such as those made by Netflix or IMDb, as the greatest influence on

⁸¹ Notably, each of these services allows users to search its catalogue by genre.

⁸² This can be seen via ABC iView and BBC iPlayer respectively.

⁸³ 9% of respondents reported that seeing the trailer was the primary reason they watched the film for cinema viewing; 6% reported the same for television viewings, 10% for DVD/Blu-ray viewings, and 11% for online viewings. These ranked in the top five responses in each category of the 16 reported options.

choice, while another 6% listed “suggestion lists” such as those on IMDb as the greatest influence on choice (Screen Australia, 2012).

Before watching screen content, viewers are highly likely to seek out information online: 34% of Australian viewers surveyed in 2017 watched trailers; 31% browsed screen retailer or streaming websites, such as Netflix; 30% read film-related social media posts; 28% visited general film websites, such as IMDb; 22% visited the official site for a film or TV series; and 18% read interviews or reviews (Screen Australia 2017). Audiences also reported active engagement with online discussion of content: 14% posted a comment on social media after viewing screen content; 12% shared a link to where it can be viewed; and 10% posted on a blog or discussion forum (Screen Australia 2017). The most actively engaged viewers⁸⁴ are “more often guided in their decision-making by social media and other online resources like Rotten Tomatoes, IMDb and official movie or program sites” (Screen Australia 2012, 19) and are most likely to share their opinions, both through social media and direct online communication with friends and family. These figures suggest an expanding base for screen discourse, with points of intersection such as websites like IMDb playing a pivotal role in shaping viewer perceptions and directing preferences.

While genre is adaptable, it still has distinct boundaries in the minds of viewers. Category boundaries are important when marketing a product and failing to conform to perceived category boundaries can result in a loss of profit (Zuckerman 1999; Zuckerman et al. 2003; Hsu, Hannan, and Koçak 2009). However, in cases where category boundaries are fuzzy, viewers are more likely to be receptive to hybrid products (Carroll et al. 2010).⁸⁵ In some cases, users “may even view the incorporation of features from secondary categories as something that complements or enhances their products” (Hsu, Negro, and Perretti 2012, 1431). The clarity and strength of existing genres is something film production companies must consider when attempting to engage a potential audience, as this will determine viewers’ expectations of a film and genre (Jensen 2010; Schatz 1981).

While some films blur the lines between genres, many employ multiple genres in a primary and secondary arrangement (Shamsie, Martin, and Miller 2009). That is, viewers primarily focus on narrative, setting, and themes when determining the primary genre of a film, while subplots and minor tones convey a secondary genre to viewers (Perretti and Negro 2007).

⁸⁴ Screen Australia (2012) describes these viewers as “Connectors”; they make up 34% of the study’s population.

⁸⁵ Fuzzy categories contain ambiguity or lack a fixed definition.

Even when viewers consider a film in terms of a primary and secondary genre, they hold expectations of how the two can relate. For instance, comedy has been successful in crossing with a wide range of genres in a primary or secondary role, while fantasy remains more resistant to hybridisation. This reflects a strong set of beliefs viewers hold about film genres, which are revealed when production does not conform to expectations. These beliefs are represented through contemporary screen discourse but are also largely built on a genre's history and the media associated with it. What follows is an account of the mystery genre and its historical practices, which continue to shape contemporary perceptions of what a mystery is or “should” be.

IMDb's Role in Screen Discourse

Commercial incentives can potentially drive the representation of genre in online spaces. However, audience perceptions of genre provide an equally strong counterbalance, given the risks involved in misrepresenting the genre of a film. For these reasons, I selected IMDb as the source of screen discourse that most accurately reflects audience and industry perceptions and uses of genre. IMDb is the most effective individual source of Anglophone screen discourses surrounding mainstream film and genre, because of its size, popularity, and variety of content types.⁸⁶ IMDb is central to screen discourse as it hosts the largest public film database, is viewed and contributed to by film audiences and producers alike, and is considered accurate for metrics that require evidence when submitted, such as cast, budget, box office return, release dates, and genre.⁸⁷ During the selected period (2004–13), IMDb has remained one of the most popular websites in the world, with an estimated 21 billion visits per year (siterankdata 2017). IMDb hosts discussion forums, reviews, trivia, and user-curated lists contributed entirely by fans, in addition to its exhaustive listings of production details. The website is predominantly in English and provides its most comprehensive coverage for Hollywood productions. 42%

⁸⁶ The Western or ‘Americanised’ audience that constitutes the majority of IMDb users aligns with the body of cognitive research this thesis draws on, which is founded on empirical studies of North American and European subjects. To apply these cognitive theories universally, devoid of the cultural context of the research subjects, would define a viewing subject outside of their viewing context.

⁸⁷ As at Wikipedia, users can contribute to the website and make changes; however, these must be approved by IMDb employees and follow strict contribution guidelines [<https://help.imdb.com/contribution>]. In evaluating the reliability of IMDb as a source, Wikipedia lists unreviewed user submitted content such as trivia or reviews, and information regarding projects in development, as inappropriate sources; but it accepts all other information on the site as valid for use as tertiary or primary sources [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_IMDb].

of IMDb's visitors are from US, UK, Australia and Canada the US accounts for 31% of total visitors (Alexa 2014; see Figure 4.2.1).






	Visitors (%)	Rank in Country
 United States	31.0	29
 India	11.2	32
 United Kingdom	5.2	25
 Canada	3.4	26
 Australia	2.3	25

Figure 4.2.1—IMDb Audience Geography as of 9 July 2014 (Alexa 2014)

Due to the popularity of IMDb, a film's page on the website plays an important part in the marketing and distribution of that film.⁸⁸ Marketing companies stress the importance of establishing and building a presence on IMDb by adding 'teaser' content such as production photos, trailers and other material of interest to audiences (Candler 2013). For example, the producers of *The Raven* (2012) decided to completely forgo a traditional and standalone website for their film, instead opting to host all such content through IMDb (IMDb 2012). Genre classifications have a prominent role on IMDb, appearing at the top of individual pages and used as the main classification tool in searches. Genre is used to efficiently convey meaning to potential audiences on IMDb, and film distributors ensure they use this classification effectively.⁸⁹

Given the financial incentives that drive IMDb, there is a risk that some of the data, including genre, can be in some way biased. It is possible that IMDb could be incentivised to define genres and classify films in a way that benefits affiliated corporations, such as parent company Amazon. However, IMDb also has strong incentives to conform to

⁸⁸ A movie's IMDb page is primarily created by production companies, rather than ordinary users. IMDb's eligibility criteria prevent titles from being listed without substantiating 'general public interest' through evidence of screenings in cinemas, on television or at a festival. Films still in production have a higher burden of proof, requiring evidence of an advanced stage of development. This includes "contact info for the production, announcements in the media/trades, interviews with key cast/crew members confirming the status of the project, casting notices, evidence of development deals, etc." (IMDb 2017). As this evidence is only available to the production team for the film, they control the initial data for the film. While this means viewers do not directly contribute to the initial creation of a film page—and thus the listing of genre—their use of the site and engagement with it create a system in which production companies are incentivised to accurately reflect viewer perceptions of genre in their own listings.

⁸⁹ IMDb genre submissions must adhere to specific guidelines set out for each of the site's 28 genres; however, these guidelines are broad. Of these 28 genres, only 24 apply to film; Reality-TV, Talk Show, Game Show and News are exclusive to television. IMDb omits 'Adult' and 'Short' film classifications from its genre search; however, guidelines are included for these genres in addition to the primary 22: Action, Adventure, Animation, Biography, Comedy, Crime, Documentary, Drama, Family, Fantasy, Film-Noir, History, Horror, Music, Musical, Mystery, Romance, Sci-Fi, Sport, Thriller, War, and Western (IMDb 2015a; 2015b).

viewer expectations of genre—as has been previously discussed—in order to remain one of the definitive tools for viewers gathering information on films. The front page of the website, which promotes trailers, film news, and other film promotion, can serve a commercial role, while the verified film information on individual works' pages, such as genre, remains uncompromised. Despite these concerns, using IMDb in this way addresses Stam's (2000) concerns of normativism, as discussed earlier. Conversely, studies of the film noir by Borde and Chaumeton ([1955] 2002) and of the western by Bazin (1971) and Warshaw (1962) rely on a preconceived conception of those genres to select works for study.

A Consensus on Genre

IMDb genre classifications address some of the concerns surrounding a practical definition of genre but cannot simply be used as a substitute for genre. IMDb's genre classification, in isolation, cannot sufficiently represent the values and beliefs about the mystery genre shared across a community of screen viewers. However, the classification can be useful as a paratextual object, a direct declaration by film producers to an audience. As a paratext, IMDb's genre classification orients viewer expectations while engaging with cultural preconceptions of what those generic qualities represent. IMDb's mystery classification shapes viewer expectations surrounding the inclusion of a problem, and the potential for its resolution through the acquisition of knowledge. Film production can use IMDb's mystery genre classification to communicate to an audience what to expect and to maintain a “standardized distribution/exhibition system” (Altman 1996, 279). Further, by operating outside of the film itself, IMDb's mystery genre classification addresses Tudor's (1974) previously discussed empiricist dilemma, forming an observable classification through cultural discourse on screen texts. IMDb's mystery genre classification reflects a “common cultural consensus” (Tudor 1974, 138) on the mystery film and reveals a collective belief about any specific work.

Using a common genre classification addresses the inconsistencies and subjectivities of other approaches using preconceived notions of a genre. This is because the common genre classification is a direct measure of parts of screen discourse, incorporating elements from film production, distribution, and audience responses. While the ability of film studios to simply assert or set a film's genre seems to lie in opposition to arguments for a “common cultural consensus” (Tudor 1974, 138), the influence such classifications have on audience expectations cannot be ignored. As Gray asserts, once a film genre has been

identified, “it may prove hard for an individual viewer to easily shrug off” (Gray 2010, 50). Additionally, this system can only be maintained if producers respond to changes in audience preferences and expectations. Common genre classifications can adapt as prominent websites change their classifications, and thus are sensitive to cultural shifts over time, incorporating genre’s temporal nature. This mutability of the classification is a strength of the tool, and can better respond to and represent current values, beliefs, and expectations surrounding genre.

To find this consensus, I searched for films that have an IMDb genre classification that is confirmed in at least three of four other prominent film websites.⁹⁰ These are Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Metacritic, and DVD Netflix. To ensure these additional websites represent a range of purposes within screen discourse, websites were chosen to include user ratings, critical reviews, user/audience reviews, catalogue recommendation tools, and taste-based content suggestions. Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Metacritic, and DVD Netflix were selected to include a range of the above purposes and based on their popularity and audience size.⁹¹ I selected Jinni and DVD Netflix for their catalogue organisation and recommendation functions. Jinni is a search and recommendation engine for screen media that uses semantic analysis to determine classifications, including genre, based on user preferences. As Jinni’s profits are driven by their ability to make accurate predictions about user taste, their genre classifications must reflect how viewers use and perceive genre (Jinni 2017). Netflix is a subscription-based streaming, video-on-demand, and DVD rental service. There has been an “unusual volume of discourse surrounding Netflix’s recommendation algorithm” (Hallinan and Striphas 2016) and its use of extremely niche genres and subgenres to make recommendations to viewers.⁹² I selected DVD Netflix as it uses the

⁹⁰ For the purposes of this thesis I have selected five websites representative of online discourse on film that list generic classification. The common genre classification is not intended to be limited by these arbitrary restrictions and should instead be seen as a model for investigating genre through existing quantifiable discourse available to viewers. Future applications could use a large set of film websites, weighting their importance based on the number of users, or could utilise social media to define a common genre classification, searching for references to genre in all discussion of a film on Twitter, Facebook, etc. Further, the concept of a common genre classification is not limited to film. Television, literature, and music could all be assessed using a similar approach.

⁹¹ Alexa global rankings for Netflix [32], IMDb [58], Rotten Tomatoes [406] and Metacritic [1267] (Alexa 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2017d) suggest these websites play a prominent role in informing film viewers and hosting screen paratexts and discourse. Jinni’s global ranking peaked in 2010 [10,595] (Rank2Traffic 2017); however, the search engine is used by a range of prominent video-on-demand or media library services, including Microsoft, Ooyala, Prisa, TELUS, Comcast, and AT&T, suggesting a much wider audience.

⁹² Netflix has publicly invited attempts to improve upon the recommendation system through The Netflix Prize <<http://www.netflixprize.com/>>. The prize offered a reward of one million US dollars for the team that could improve Netflix’s existing recommendation algorithm by 10% based on a data set of only user, film, rating, and date of rating.

same genre classifications as the Netflix streaming service but includes a more extensive catalogue (DVD Netflix 2017). Metacritic and Rotten Tomatoes were selected as film review and ratings aggregators. Metacritic achieves this by weighting ratings based on the critic's standing and productivity. The site uses 25 genres, including "mystery", in its movie listings (Metacritic 2017) and hosts user reviews and ratings for each title. Unlike Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes does not weight individual reviews, and instead creates a rating based on the percentage of positive reviews (>60% rating) a title has received, separating critic and user reviews. Rotten Tomatoes uses 17 genres, including "mystery & suspense", in its movie listings (Rotten Tomatoes 2017).

Each of these five sites has distinct commercial interests and provides the public with relatively little information about its internal processing of information. Although the sites provide little to no information on how they determine the genre of a film—with the exception of IMDb—the commercial interests of each site rely upon attracting and maintaining users. Each has specialised to meet the needs of its audience and influence a large population of viewers in their viewing practices. As such, the way the sites use genre must be recognisable and familiar to their audiences for ease of use. Their popularity among film viewers, alongside the prominence of genres on each of the sites, makes these websites a useful resource for measuring screen discourse and, in turn, viewer perceptions of genre. The genre classifications from IMDb, DVD Netflix, Jinni, Metacritic, and Rotten Tomatoes form the central criteria for determining a film's genre within this thesis. The goal of this chapter is to identify films that conform to a cultural consensus of the mystery genre. To achieve this, I have identified the films that are classified as part of the mystery genre by at least four of these five sources. These films are then evaluated against six additional criteria, discussed below, to ensure an accurate reflection of viewer beliefs, and to address practical concerns surrounding the research within this thesis. The films that share mystery as a common genre classification and meet the requirements of the below criteria are what I describe as common mystery films.

4.3 COMMON MYSTERY FILMS

I use a common mystery film classification to identify films that are represented as part of the mystery genre by a consensus of IMDb, DVD Netflix, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, and Metacritic. My intention is that by doing so, the classification reflects a common cultural consensus on the genre and the films that construct it. In addition to the mystery genre

requirement, I apply six additional criteria to determine works within the group to best reflect contemporary conceptions of mystery films. These are: feature length film; English language; release date between 2004 and 2013; earned and lists a US box office; is not a serial film; and does not include the horror genre.⁹³ From this process, 87 films were identified as part of the common mystery film group.⁹⁴ Classifying films in this way as common mystery films offers a practical application of genre that encapsulates its mutability, historicity, and cultural construction, while accurately reflecting its uses within screen discourse. Further, the definition is selective and purposeful, but avoids subjective bias in preconceived notions of genre. The common mystery film classification reflects a collective belief about what the mystery genre is and, importantly, is recognisable to the genre's viewers.

Feature Length Film

The high level of viewer familiarity with the feature film format, combined with the significant volume of titles listed on IMDb, allows for robust analysis of the mystery genre. IMDb includes 11 different title types for screen texts, including film, television, and video games.⁹⁵ Of these title types, IMDb has the most data on the feature film, continuing the work from which the database originated and maintaining its position as the most recognised online film resource. The feature film format remains broadly popular, given that 71% of the Australian and US populations have attended the cinema at least once in the last 12 months (MPAA 2017; Screen Australia 2017b). In the same period, 588 films were released in Australian cinemas, while 718 films were released in the US (MPAA 2017; MPDAA 2016). Additionally, the feature film is independent of viewer responses during a screening, unlike video games, where players can input a solution and receive feedback or change the content they see.⁹⁶ Each of these factors allows the IMDb "Feature Film" classification to identify works that best reflect common conceptions of the mystery genre.

⁹³ All evaluations based on the IMDb data for each film, with the exception of the common genre classification, which is composed of data from Jinni, Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, and DVD Netflix in addition to IMDb.

⁹⁴ See Chapter 2 for a full discussion of the method of applying these criteria to identify mystery films.

⁹⁵ The current format types listed in IMDb's advanced title search are "Feature Film", "TV Movie", "TV Series", "TV Episode", "TV Special", "Mini-Series", "Documentary", "Video Game", "Short Film", "Video", and "TV Short" (IMDb 2019).

⁹⁶ This is beginning to change, as Netflix's interactive content allows viewers to "make choices for the characters, shaping the story as you go" (Netflix 2019). While the early interactive content was produced for children, the release of *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018) marks a shift to a broader application of the format. Importantly, several of these titles offer no linear alternative, and can only be viewed in this interactive format.

English Language

The Americanised audience described above primarily watches English-language films, thus informing their conception of the genre. For example, US films constituted 31% of all films released in Australia in 2016 and accounted for 85% of the nation's total box office (Screen Australia 2017). In the US, foreign-language films accounted for less than 1% of all local box office earnings in 2016, earning just \$106.9 million of the total \$11.4 billion (Box Office Mojo 2017). Additionally, in 2014 almost one third of all visitors to IMDb were accessing the website from within the US (Alexa 2014). The audiences likely to engage in discourse through IMDb do so predominantly in English and consume predominantly English-language films at the cinema. By restricting the classification to only include English-language films, and given the thesis's focus on Western audiences, there is a greater expectation that viewers share the culture context relevant to the film.

By including only English-language films, the common mystery film classification minimises the impact of subtitles on viewers. Initially, subtitles do not appear to present a challenge to film research. A viewer's ability to process information from subtitles increases with experience (d'Ydewalle and De Bruycker 2007; d'Ydewalle and Gielen 1992). Scene recognition does not appear to decrease as cognitive resources are applied to subtitle recognition (Lang 1995; Perego et al. 2010; Shuhua 2004), and in some cases subtitles have even been observed to improve general visual comprehension (Bryant 2004).⁹⁷ However, while overall scene recognition remains unimpeded when engaging with media with subtitles, viewers focus their attention on visually salient regions without exploring the scene as comprehensively (Lautenbacher 2009; Perego et al. 2010). In the mystery film, this can represent a critical failure to attend to visual elements crucial to solving the mystery when information is presented outside these visually salient regions; and as such, films with subtitles are excluded from the common mystery film classification.

2004–13 Release Date

I selected to examine mystery films with release dates between 2004 and 2013 for this thesis.⁹⁸ My primary aim in doing so was to describe a contemporary screen audience and

⁹⁷ Bryant et al. (2004) hypothesise that the increased visual attention they observed comes with a trade-off in decreased auditory perceptions by viewers. This finding further problematises the use of subtitled works when observing problem solving in viewers, as information intended to engage the viewer can go unattended.

⁹⁸ The release year for each film is the year linked to each title on IMDb. "For movie titles this year is either the year of general release or of a festival presentation if earlier (note that closed screenings for the crew or the media or test screenings of the unfinished product for marketing reasons do not count as public screenings" (http://www.imdb.com/help/show_leaf?titleformat).

their viewing experience. IMDb, Netflix, Jinni, Metacritic, and Rotten Tomatoes were prevalent during this period, making them an effective resource on mystery films. Additionally, resources such as automated edit detection software have been developed to address the kinds of content produced during this period. These resources would not be as effective if attempting to study any earlier period in film history. I selected a 10-year period to improve the chances that the period of films would be long enough to reflect genre's capacity to change over time and narrow enough that the relationship between films remains clear. Studying a greater period of films would not only be impractical due to the volume but may also increase the likelihood of comparing drastically different movements within the mystery genre.

US Box Office > \$0

Films that report US box office earnings on IMDb form a more representative picture of the mystery genre within popular culture, thus contributing more to screen discourse. For cultural consensus to form around a text or genre, there must be evidence of viewership. While IMDb lists almost 2,000 mystery film titles from 2004 to 2013, only 273 of those have US box office figures reported.⁹⁹ Films without a reported US box office on IMDb rarely receive a full theatrical release and are primarily screened at film festivals or in a limited release. Films that meet this minimum threshold are more likely to contribute to popular culture and general screen discourse, which is essential to the construction of genre and viewer expectations. Further, by excluding films with no US box office earnings the identified films will be culturally focused on an 'Americanised' audience, primarily from North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.¹⁰⁰ As this thesis has limited the scope of study to such audiences, these films best reflect audience perceptions of the genre. However, box office data does not reflect how viewers consume media. This has the

⁹⁹ IMDb box office data is limited and is frequently unavailable for independent and smaller release films. This limitation leads to a greater proportion of larger studio productions, but this bias is intended to better reflect popular audience consumption.

¹⁰⁰ Within the 'Americanised' audience there remains significant cultural diversity. As Richard Matlby writes, viewers are not, "hapless audiences deceived ... into abandoning their cultural patrimony to become 'temporary American citizens'" but instead are "local agents accommodating and adapting Hollywood movies to the cultural topography of their immediate environment" (Stokes and Maltby 2004, 7). Within this thesis the 'Americanised' audience speaks to those viewers familiar with the popular culture, editing style and narrative content of Western production, primarily from Hollywood. Unfortunately, an investigation of the cultural factors that inform viewer reception or film practices relating to viewer suspicion is beyond the scope of this thesis.

potential to generate unpredictable omissions that shape the conception of the mystery genre in the common mystery film.¹⁰¹

Serial Films

Serial films must be considered in relation to their predecessors, problematising comparisons with other, self-contained films. These works present a broad narrative arc that spans multiple films, similar to serial television.¹⁰² Attempts at solving the core problem of a mystery serial are significantly protracted, because a clue can appear in one film that is not realised until a later film. In these cases, analysis of an individual film cannot capture the viewer's experience. Excluding sequels and prequels has the advantage of confining analysis to individual films and facilitates reasonable comparisons between texts.¹⁰³ Excluding these films from the common mystery film classification improves the comparability of the selected films, limiting the viewing experience to a more controlled and closed context.¹⁰⁴

Horror Films Excluded

The expectations set by the horror genre are incompatible with those necessary for mystery film viewing. Horror films prevent the viewer from reasoning and ratiocination, emphasising emotion over logic. Fear, dread, and disgust define the horror film, creating “[a]n atmosphere of terror ... [that] destroys logical thinking” (Chandler 1976).¹⁰⁵ Both mystery and horror present a threat for the viewer. However, while the threat in mystery is “visible”, and thus “manageable” by attempting to problem-solve, the threat in horror “cannot be controlled by reason” (Hanich 2011, 159). Horror films produce an “overwhelming horror-fear ... [that] baffles our (emotional) agency and leaves us powerless” (Laine 2011, 15). Where the mystery film engages the viewer in a problem by

¹⁰¹ Identifying works with significant viewership outside of cinema box office could not be objectively and exhaustively completed based on current publicly available data. The use of films without box office data is impractical given all other considerations.

¹⁰² Television serials produce narratives that can reject episodic or self-contained conventions (Mittell 2006). Serials’ “increasingly horizontal ... utilization of time” (Williams 2012) allows for multiple narratives to extend over a varied length of episodes. These factors make the identification of suspicion problematic as evidence and clues can span multiple texts. Serial films—sequels and prequels—present similar challenges and are thus excluded, as discussed subsequently.

¹⁰³ Excluding serial films minimises the influence of popular franchises on the film set as a whole. For example, six of the *Harry Potter* films were only excluded due to their seriality. If they had been included, the techniques and practices within that series could be overrepresented.

¹⁰⁴ This decision excludes the analysis of how viewers engage mystery texts in serial narratives; however, such texts would best be addressed independently of self-contained screen texts.

¹⁰⁵ IMDb states that the horror film “[s]hould contain numerous consecutive scenes of characters effecting a terrifying and/or repugnant narrative throughout the title” and is “usually based in fear or abhorrence”. [<http://www.imdb.com/updates/guide/genres#horror>]

arousing suspicion (see Chapter 6), the horror film evokes only suspense, leaving little to no recourse in addressing the threats that are presented on screen.

Horror films use strangeness and secretiveness as the primary tools for inhibiting understanding. Viewers are often excluded from attempting to solve the film's core problem through the denial of necessary information. An example of this can be found in *The Grudge* (Shimizu 2004), a film listed in both the mystery and horror genres on *IMDb*.¹⁰⁶ The film follows the story of a cursed house in Tokyo that leads to the death of those who enter. While the film alludes to something being amiss within the house, no explicit problem is made available to the viewer. Further, there is never an opportunity for the audience to engage with the information relating to the house's past. There are few clues as to the exact nature of the events that took place within the house and no world order or logic is established that a viewer can use to rationally comprehend or explore those events. The film makes it clear that traumatic deaths occurred within the house and that this has caused "the grudge", but substantial details of these events are withheld until a single sequence near the conclusion of the film.

While viewers are incapable of changing the outcome of a film through intervention, the horror genre emphasises this incapacity. It "derives much of its power to thrill from the fact that the viewer cannot intervene in the trajectory of events. While viewers might feel an impulse to help beleaguered characters in a horror film, they can never do this directly" (Krzywinska 2002, 19). Instead of actively engaging the viewer in resolving a problem through reasoning, the horror film holds them helpless to watch as the action takes place. As films within *IMDb*'s horror genre prevent the viewer's attempts to solve the problem that is prototypical of the mystery genre, such films were excluded from the common mystery film classification.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *The Grudge* (Shimizu 2004) was part of a preliminary examination of mystery films on *IMDb*.

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, since originally searching for and identifying the 87 common mystery films in 2015, several changes have been made to *IMDb* genre classifications. Although all 87 films are still listed as mystery, several films are now also listed as horror, including *Passengers* (García 2008), *Perfect Stranger* (Foley 2007) and *Whiteout* (Sena 2009), and so would have been excluded from analysis. Based on my content analysis of these films, I would argue that the horror elements of these films do not preclude the mystery genre because the films set a problem for the viewer. It could be that a change to conceptions of the horror genre has broadened its application across film titles on *IMDb*. If this process were to be repeated there would need to be a closer assessment of horror/mystery titles to try to identify when the two genres conflict with one another. While this could be perceived as a weakness in my process, I would argue that it highlights one of its strengths. The process allows for perceptions and uses of genre to change over time and captures these in its expression of genre classifications.

87 films

In this chapter, I have argued that to accurately measure a common consensus on genre, we must draw on screen discourse. Further, by doing so we can address several issues within genre theory when attempting to classify films and define a genre's corpus. Additionally, I have outlined a practical method for applying theoretical conceptions of genre in empirical study and have thus identified 87 common mystery films from 2004 to 2013. These common mystery films represent the mystery genre as it is used and understood by viewers, and how it is presented to them in contemporary media and screen discourse. These 87 films constitute the Study Set for my thesis and act as the primary evidence in my analysis of how the mystery film engages viewers in solving each film's core problem. Together, this and the previous chapter have constructed a foundation as to what the mystery film is, how it is perceived, and which contemporary films constitute the mystery film genre. In what follows, I turn my attention the film viewers, and the experience of watching mystery films.

List of all 87 Study Set films
<i>88 Minutes (Avnet 2007), A Perfect Getaway (Twohy 2009), Abduction (Singleton 2011), All Good Things (Jarecki 2010), Answers to Nothing (Leutwyler 2011), Awake (Harold 2007), Birth (Glazer 2004), Blindness (Meirelles 2008), Brick (Johnson 2005), Bubble (Soderbergh 2005), Changeling (Eastwood 2008), Cold Weather (Katz 2010), Disturbia (Caruso 2007), Dream House (Sheridan 2011), Eastern Promises (Cronenberg 2007), Echelon Conspiracy (Marcks 2009), Fascination (Menzel 2004), Flightplan (Schwentke 2005), Freedomland (Roth 2006), Gone Baby Gone (Affleck 2007), Grand Piano (Mira 2013), Hate Crime (Stovall 2005), Hollywoodland (Coulter 2006), Hugo (Scorsese 2011), I Know Who Killed Me (Sivertson 2007), Ice Blues: A Donald Strachey Mystery* (Oliver 2008), In My Sleep (Wolf 2010), Inception (Nolan 2010), InSight (Gabai 2011), Knowing (Proyas 2009), Lady in the Water (Shyamalan 2006), Meeting Evil (Fisher 2012), Michael Clayton (Gilroy 2007), Mystery Team (Eckman 2009), Nancy Drew (Fleming 2007), November (Harrison 2004), Passengers (Garcia 2008), Passion (De Palma 2012), Perfect Stranger (Foley 2007), Premonition (Yapo 2007), Righteous Kill (Avnet 2008), Scoop (Allen 2006), Secret Window (Koepp 2004), Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009), Shock to the System* (Oliver 2006), Shooter (Fuqua 2007), Shutter Island (Scorsese 2010), Silver City (Sayles 2004), Sleuth (Branagh 2007), State of Play (Macdonald 2009), Stay (Forster 2005), Stoker (Park 2013), Stolen (Anderson 2009), The Black Dahlia (De Palma 2006), The Bourne Legacy* (Gilroy 2012), The Box (Kelly 2009), The Da Vinci Code* (Howard 2006), The Dead Girl (Moncrieff 2006), The Forgotten (Ruben 2004), The Fourth Kind (Osunsanmi 2009), The Ghost Writer (Polanski 2010), The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Fincher 2011), The Good German (Soderbergh 2006), The Illusionist (Burger 2006), The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus (Gilliam 2009), The International (Tykwer 2009), The Invisible (Goyer 2007), The Limits of Control (Jarmusch 2009), The Missing Person (Buschel 2009), The Night Listener (Stettner 2006), The Nines (August 2007), The Number 23 (Schumacher 2007), The Prestige (Nolan 2006), The Raven (McTeigue 2012), The Village (Shyamalan 2004), The Woman in the Fifth (Pawlikowski 2011), Trance (Boyle 2013), Transsiberian (Anderson 2008), Twisted (Kaufman 2004), Unknown (Brand 2006), Unknown (Collet-Serra 2011), Where the Truth Lies (Egoyan 2005), Whiteout (Sena 2009), Wicker Park (McGuigan 2004), Wish You Were Here (Darcy-Smith 2012), Youth Without Youth (Coppola 2007), Zodiac (Fincher 2007).</i>

Figure 4.3.1—Study Set film list

Part III: Viewer

5

Textual Problem Solving

Mystery film “conventions cue the audience to look for an answer by seeing gaps as temporary and looking for clues” (Panek 2006, 77). The film provides viewers with an opportunity to solve a problem, often alongside a detective or investigator, by reflecting on the information provided within the plot. This ‘challenge for the viewer’ motivates viewers to seek out a solution before it is revealed within the film. In this chapter, I argue that problem solving is the defining feature of viewer engagement with mystery films, and that viewers engage with this problem in specific ways. Further, I argue that viewers must engage in some form of problem solving to comprehend the plot of a mystery film. This does not require a formal and concentrated approach on the part of the viewer, but these processes continue to take place as part of the way viewers come to understand mystery films. Instead, viewers engage in problem solving to guide their engagement with mystery films, without the need for a conscious decision to do so.

I begin, in Section 5.1, by defining what problem solving is, and how viewers problem solve mystery films. I distinguish the type of problem solving that takes place when viewing mystery films—what I call Textual Problem Solving—from other forms of problem solving and describe how those differences influence what viewers do. In particular, I describe the different stages involved in solving a problem, and how viewers may work through them whilst engaging with mystery films. This accounts for how viewers problem-solve but does not describe the viewing experience when engaging in Textual Problem Solving. I arrived at Textual Problem Solving as central to mystery films by focusing on the experience-of-film, and through analysis of the 87 films in the Study Set. In Section 5.2, I describe the cognitive processes central to problem solving and address how viewers primarily problem solve without conscious awareness of these processes. Instead, viewers rely on informal solving strategies, such as heuristics, as a shortcut to understanding the mystery plot and solving the problem put before them.

Subsequently, in Section 5.3: Motivating Textual Problem Solving, I examine what motivates viewer engagement in Textual Problem Solving. In part, viewers are motivated because of the satisfaction they can derive from engaging in problem solving and attempting the ‘challenge’ the film sets. This challenge can change depending on how the viewer is driven to engage with a film and its problem. Some viewers are motivated by the story and seek to solve the problem alongside characters within the film. Others are motivated by a desire to understand how the mystery is constructed, concealed, and revealed throughout the text, drawing on their familiarity with the mystery genre or the film itself. I conclude this chapter by highlighting the role of intuition, hunches, and suspicion to the viewing experience, and their function in Textual Problem Solving.

5.1 SOLVING MYSTERY FILMS

Mystery films set a problem for the viewer to attempt to solve. A problem can be defined as a question, situation, or task to which there is no immediate or established answer available. For example, in the official trailer for *Brick* (Johnson 2005), Brendan states that “I set out to know who put her in the spot, who put her in front of the gun”. This search by the film’s protagonist functions as a problem for the viewer to attempt to solve. Karl Duncker (1945) describes a problem as “whenever one cannot go from the given situation to the desired situation simply by action”, and problem solving as the subsequent “recourse to thinking” (Duncker 1945, 1). Problem solving, within psychology, describes the cognitive processes and strategies employed to acquire the understanding required to reach a specific goal. This can include searching for additional necessary information (Robert 2014; Rothman and Potts 1977), restructuring available information to provide insight (Knoblich et al. 1999; MacGregor, Ormerod, and Chronicle 2001), or breaking a problem into smaller and more easily conceived components (Armstrong, Denniston Jr, and Gordon 1975). A problem is comprised of a goal, givens, and operations. The goal is “the desired termination state” (Wang and Chiew 2010, 82); the givens are any conditions or constraints present in the problem; and the operations are the actions available to a problem solver (Wang and Chiew 2010). Problem solving is influenced by how a problem is framed, where attention is directed, what a person can remember, as well as previous experiences with similar problems.¹⁰⁸ Further, as a cognitive process, problem solving is a

¹⁰⁸ Framing refers to the influence of context and presentation on an individual’s conception of information. Framing is primarily split into two key approaches: psychological and sociological (Borah 2011). These can

way of organising information, related closely to learning and perception (Ormrod 1995; Wang and Chiew 2010, 81).

The idea of film viewers as problem solvers is not entirely original. In his work on narrative films, Tan (1996) argues that problem solving is a component of all narrative film comprehension (91), though it must be considered with “restrictions to this description” that recognise the unique qualities of film viewing. Further, he argues that narrative films create “problems that the viewer can attempt to solve but that are ultimately always solved by the film narrative itself” (Tan 1996, 93). In developing my own definition, I am interested in the specific qualities of this “problem-solving activity” (93) for mystery film viewers, and how this differs from other types of problem solving.

Problem solving when viewing a film has three features that distinguish it from other forms of problem solving. Firstly, mystery film viewers do not produce any output. Instead, viewers must form and evaluate their solutions cognitively, relying on their ability to accurately recall important details and manipulate them in a mental problem-solving space. Secondly, there is usually little at stake when trying to solve the core problem in a mystery film. Viewers are “in a position of knowledge without power, unlike characters within the action” (Wollen 1982, 48) and can have no effect on the outcome of the narrative. As Tan (1996) writes “the danger of failure is almost totally absent” (92). When viewing mystery films there are no rewards for accurately solving the problem, beyond the satisfaction a viewer derives from that success. Thirdly, the problem-solving process is usually ancillary when viewing a mystery film with viewers more concerned with following an interesting or entertaining story.

For these reasons, I define viewer engagement with mystery films as Textual Problem Solving. Textual Problem Solving is the process of engaging the problem set within a mystery film and attempting to solve it within the constraints of film viewing. This process is distinguished from other forms of problem solving by the three qualities described above. Although this process differs from other types of problem solving, many aspects of problem solving remain relevant to understanding how viewers engage with mystery films. In particular, the steps involved in solving a problem are paralleled within mystery film viewing and can provide insight into viewer engagement.

be most clearly distinguished as the study of frames in communication (Entman 1991; Gitlin 2003; Goffman 1974) and the study of implicit frames within individuals and how they may be activated (Domke, Shah, and Wackman 1998; Iyengar 1991; Kahneman and Tversky 2000).

Stages of Problem Solving

Problem solving has been observed to occur in stages. Duncker (1945) identified these stages by having subjects speak aloud their thought process while working on problems. He argued that the subjects' responses revealed a sequential process to the stages involved in problem solving (Duncker 1945). While there are sequential elements to the stages of problem solving, the process is rarely linear; problem solvers move back and forth between problem-solving stages to reach a solution. This is important when considering mystery film viewers, who are forced to reflect on and reassess their understanding of a problem as new information becomes available. Newell and Simon (1972) organise problem solving into two primary processes: understanding processes and search processes. Others describe search processes as "solving processes" (Kahney 1986) to distinguish them from information gathering activities (part of the understanding process). "The 'solving process' involves identifying, analysing and synthesizing knowledge gathered during the 'understanding process'" (Hurst, Dean, and Trickey 1991, 1445). Ellis and Hunt (1993) describe three stages: problem recognition, formation and application of solution, and evaluation and testing of solution. Research into mental health, education and instruction, and the psychological sciences have identified between four and six different unique stages in the problem-solving process (Eilders 2010; Green 1966; Hayes 1989; Hill 1979).

In a review of 55 different models from the psychological sciences, describing the steps individuals go through when solving a problem, Hurst et al. (1991) found the five most commonly identified stages to be "problem identification", "problem assessment/data collection", "planning interventions", "selection and implementation of strategies", and "evaluation/verification of solution". Similar categories are supported by a contemporary analysis of problem solving literature in the cognitive sciences (Ohlsson 2012, 123). Within mystery film viewing, the planning and implementing of strategies is collapsed, as there is no pause in the film that allows these two stages to occur separately. For instance, if a viewer plans to look for a person wearing red, they are already implementing that strategy; if they plan to pay attention to a suspicious character, they will implement this as soon as the decision is made. The four stages of problem solving in mystery films describe how a viewer engages with the problem, and what actions they take in response to the film at specific times. What follows is a discussion of each of these four stages and their implication within Textual Problem Solving.

Identifying the Problem

The first stage of problem solving is identification. Payne et al. (2013) writing on problem-solving processes, stress the importance of the identification stage, determining if a problem exists and within what framing. For mystery film viewers, problem identification primarily occurs by recognising the film as part of the mystery genre. As I discussed in Section 3.1, genre and paratexts are used to communicate to viewers the presence of a problem within mystery films, and many paratexts include an explicit question to entice the viewer. As such, most viewers know, before the film begins, that they will be presented with a problem to solve and thus engage in Textual Problem Solving from the outset of the film. Even if the viewer does not identify the film as a mystery prior to viewing, many mystery films start by setting the problem for the viewer. However, these viewers are not initially engaged in Textual Problem Solving and may overlook relevant information. In some mystery films, foreknowledge of the presence of a problem is all but essential to reach an accurate solution. For example, *The Sixth Sense* (1999) successfully suppressed Textual Problem Solving by marketing the film on its supernatural elements, with no reference to the mystery or twist ending.

Assessing the Problem

The second stage of problem solving involves an assessment of the problem. This stage moves beyond simply identifying the presence of a problem and assesses the specific qualities of the problem with the intention of devising strategies to solve it. Problem assessment occurs in mystery films as viewers recognise the type of problem the film is presenting. Knobloch identifies four different types of mystery plots: the ‘whodunit’, the ‘howdunit’, the ‘whydunit’, and the ‘Had-I-But-Known’ (2003, 386-387). Each of these types distinguishes the specific form a solution must take. The whodunit is resolved by identifying a responsible agent; the howdunit by identifying how a situation or event occurred/will occur; the whydunit by understanding the motivation or reasons behind an agent’s actions; and the Had-I-But-Known by identifying the situation a narrator cryptically refers to when telling a story.¹⁰⁹ The target form of a solution guides viewer attention and engagement, shaping what is perceived as important and how it may be understood or applied. In Section 8.1, I build on this work to identify five problem types

¹⁰⁹ In Chapter 8 I establish my own set of mystery types based on the contemporary mystery film.

in mystery films, including the whodunit, howdunit and whydunit, and my own contribution of the whatdunit and the binary problem.

Problem types matter, as they describe the characteristics of the task viewers have been asked to complete, the very form of a mystery's core problem. Research has shown that tasks have the potential to modulate attention. Yarbus (1965) found that eye movements around a still image differ according to the question the observer is trying to answer about the image. A number of researchers have supported these results, including Borji and Itti (2014), who conducted a meta-study/reproduction study of Yarbus' work. I define problem types by the form their solution must take: that is, what the viewer is looking for to solve the mystery.

Part of assessing the problem in mystery films involves identifying the types of operations available to viewers. Greeno (1978) identifies three types of operations that are used in problem solving: arrangement, inducing structure, and transformation. Problem types describe the form of the problem, but also the operations a problem solver must employ to reach their goal (Reed 2012, 295). In Greeno's (1978) framework, arrangement describes when information must be rearranged to form a new relationship. He argues that inducing structure refers to the recognition of an existing relationship within objects and applying it to gain new information. Finally, in Greeno's work, transformation describes when a series of manipulations must be made to reach a specified goal. In Section 8.1, I employ Greeno's framework to examine how certain operations are related to specific problem types, and how these shape viewer engagement in Textual Problem Solving.

In addition to problem and operation types, problems can also be classified as well-structured or ill-structured (Jonassen 2003; Sutton 2003). Well-structured problems involve a clear statement of givens and goals and require a limited number of operations to successfully solve the problem. In contrast, ill-structured problems will often require the problem solver to define the constraints and the goals. Mystery films present viewers with both well-structured and ill-structured problems, requiring the development of goals, constraints, and measures to test solutions, or presenting definitive answers producible from outlined givens. Certain problem types, such as the whatdunit, are more likely to

include an ill-structured problem, and can shape the way viewers engage with films of that problem type.¹¹⁰

Planning, Selecting, and Implementing Strategies

Once a problem has been identified and assessed, problem solvers plan out possible strategies to solve the problem. These strategies are a direct response to the problem type, the available operations, and the givens of the problem. The problem solver then selects and implements one of these strategies in an attempt to reach a solution. This stage has enormous scope for variation. As Ohlsson writes, “Strategies are as infinitely variable as the tasks to which they apply, and for any one task they vary from person to person” (2012, 113). Despite this variation in problem solving, viewers are quite limited in what they can do during Textual Problem Solving, with no way to manipulate the film itself. Instead, viewers identify a set of possible targets related to the problem type and direct their attention in a way to ensure they are noticed. For example, in a murder mystery, the viewer may choose to pay particular attention to targets that would substantiate the means, motive, or opportunity of a suspect. This may involve looking for stains on a suspect’s clothes, an injury on the suspect’s body, suspicious objects in the suspect’s possession, or listening closely to their statements relating to the crime and victim.

Viewers may already have strategies for solving certain types of problems that they then draw on in Textual Problem Solving. Robertson (2001) and Sutton (2003) argue that cases where a problem solver already knows how to solve a particular task cannot be considered problem solving. Lester (1978) and Yackel (1984) advocate a similar position by arguing that a problem refers only to tasks that do not have a readily accessible algorithm.¹¹¹ However, in some cases, algorithmic solutions are a strategic choice for problem solvers, who must evaluate a situation and consider factors such as efficiency and practicality. For example, when viewing a mystery film, viewers are time-constrained, and using an algorithmic solution may not guarantee success before the solution is revealed. The decision of when to use a strategy is the central feature of this stage of Textual Problem Solving. This position is supported by Anderson (1980) who argues that automated and algorithmic procedures that require skill or strategy in their implementation are “no less problem solving” (Anderson 2000, 241) than any other procedure.

¹¹⁰ The relationship between problem types in mystery films and their use of well- and ill-structured problems is discussed further in Chapter 8.1, describing how viewers engage with problems of this nature.

¹¹¹ An algorithm is a set of procedures that will always produce a correct solution when completely exhausted.

Evaluating the Solution

Once a potential solution is found, it must be evaluated. In some situations, a solution can be formally tested. The problem solver needs to reflect on the problem, the goal, and the likelihood that their solution best satisfies the criteria established in the problem. When watching mystery films, viewers evaluate whether new information continues to support the conclusions they have made, or if an alternative should be considered. Viewers construct a narrative that solves the film's core problem, accounting for the information within the film.

Part of the challenge of this task is that mystery films will often present the viewer with a narrative that appears as a viable solution but is not. For example, in *A Perfect Getaway* (Twohy 2009), a pair of hitchhikers named Kale and Cleo are framed for a series of murders. The film shows Kale losing his temper, and the murder victim's teeth being found in Kale and Cleo's bags. The film only corrects this misconception for the viewer when the real killers are revealed. Thus, viewers must evaluate the strength of a solution against all the other information and recognise the prospect that a possible solution may not be the correct one. This stage of Textual Problem Solving is not completed until the film ends, as viewers often must continue evaluating their current hypothesis against new information as the plot unfolds.

If a solution is deemed unsuitable, a problem solver normally returns to a previous stage of problem solving to correct the error. The mistake can originate in the original assessment of the problem, in the planning and selection of strategies, or in the implementation of that strategy. Mystery films often mislead viewers in some way, requiring viewers to reassess their assumptions about the problem or re-evaluate their solving strategy. For example, in *The Illusionist* (Burger 2006) viewers are led to believe that the Duchess, Sophie, has been murdered and that to solve the problem they should identify her killer. The film's conclusion reveals that Sophie had faked her death: a solution that does not conform to the problem when it was conceived of as a search for a guilty party. Viewers must reassess the problem to evaluate how this was achieved and why it might have been done. As viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving, they are frequently presented with information that hints at the need for a reassessment or re-evaluation of assumptions, creating a challenge for the viewer. When watching a mystery film, a viewer

will move between stages repeatedly as new information is constantly made available.¹¹² Mystery film viewers work through the above stages of problem solving as they work towards a film's core solution. These stages are motivated by the kinds of information made available to the viewer, and how that information fits within preconceptions of the problem and its possible solutions. In this way, these stages of problem solving provide insight into the viewing experience, but also allow us to map these processes based on how information is presented within a mystery film in relation to its core problem.

5.2 THE VIEWING EXPERIENCE

An account of the viewing experience during Textual Problem Solving differs from a description of its stages. Textual Problem Solving, as a set of cognitive processes, includes the use of attention, memory, and comprehension to obtain information related to the problem, and to form an understanding of that information. Viewers draw on generic knowledge and cues, paratexts, and other discursive information to identify and assess the problem in mystery films—requiring the direction of attention, recollection of relevant information, and synthesis of information into understanding.¹¹³ Furthermore, viewers actively seek resolutions to problems with which they are presented, but are rarely consciously aware of this process.¹¹⁴ This process requires the application of heuristics¹¹⁵ and other informal problem-solving strategies, to facilitate comprehension and work towards the film's core solution.

Cognition: The Role of Attention, Memory, and Comprehension

Viewer engagement in Textual Problem Solving is driven by three aspects of cognition when viewing mystery films: attention, memory, and comprehension. Together, these

¹¹² This new information may not consist of explicit clues within the film, such as the discovery of an object or fact relevant to the problem. Instead, much of the information used in Textual Problem Solving is only available at a meta-level, requiring viewers to draw on their familiarity with generic and medium practices and their meanings. When arriving at a crime scene a detective may make explicit reference to a clue (“the attacker was taller than the victim, based on the direction of the stab wounds”) or provide the viewer with a line of inquiry to consider or investigate (as when the detective smells a small piece of fabric at the crime scene and raises an eyebrow knowingly).

¹¹³ As Davidson asserts, “Problem solvers must be aware of cues, patterns, and anomalies in the environment (attention and perception)” (2003, 16).

¹¹⁴ For research on how individuals seek solutions to a problem see Davidson and Sternberg (2003) and Newell, Shaw, and Simon (1958).

¹¹⁵ Heuristics offer significant potential for better understanding the experience of film and other screen texts. A better understanding of the rules of thumb employed by viewers in response to film representations, practices, and techniques would constitute a significant contribution to the discipline but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

processes provide insight into how mystery films are constructed in such a way as to foster Textual Problem Solving in viewers. What follows is a definition of each of these cognitive processes, a description of how viewers engage in these processes, and an explanation of how they function in relation to Textual Problem Solving.

Attention

Attention describes the process of concentrating on one piece of information, perceptual (external stimuli) or cognitive (internal origin), over other information. It can be seen as the allocation of cognitive resources to a specific task to improve performance. Attention plays an important role in shaping the experience of the viewer. Within the psychological sciences, attention determines whether a viewer perceives certain actions or changes (Smith and Henderson 2008) and how likely they are to observe something (Torrallba et al. 2006). Attention has been shown to strongly correlate with the focal point of where a person is looking (Deubel and Schneider 1996), and thus “it is common for eye-tracking studies to take gaze position as a proxy for visual attention” (Buscher, Dumais, and Cutrell 2010). Eye-tracking research on film has identified several techniques and features that influence where a viewer will look: faces and gestural cues act as strong attentional cues (Smith, Levin, and Cutting 2012). A growing body of work on subtitles in video presentation has also revealed the written word to be one of the most powerful attentional biases in capturing viewer attention (Kruger and Steyn 2014).

Attention is often a necessary condition for details and events to be added to working memory (Marchetti 2014). As such, what a viewer attends to will determine what they may consider when solving a problem. Payne et al. (2013), examining policing strategies, determines the significance of the initial framing of a problem and the context it is presented within. Subramanian et al. (2014) demonstrates that visual attention (eye fixations) strengthens memory of scene details in emotional movie clips. In examining professional revisers, Robert (2014) showed that the solution-seeking strategy employed by readers influenced where attention is focused. Further, attention can be guided by knowledge, as salient objects within the story are capable of attracting attention without strong visual cues.¹¹⁶ Viewers are able to guide visual search more efficiently when

¹¹⁶ This may be described as top-down processing, where existing information or knowledge is applied to shape perceptions. This is in contrast to bottom-up processing, where the perception is used to shape information processing. Searching for car keys is an example of top-down processing, where task and intent direct perception, while quickly turning after a loud noise is an example of bottom-up processing, where the perceptual stimuli dictates response.

searching for an object whose appearance is already known (Wolfe 1994). Attention is thus pivotal for determining what enters a viewer's memory and how that information is understood (Arrington et al. 2014). As such, attention is essential to the way viewers watch mystery films, determining what information they have available to apply when engaging in Textual Problem Solving.

Memory

Memory follows directly from attention; it describes how viewers process, store, and recall information they have attended to. Once information has been attended to it must be assessed and organised, allowing viewers to retain and synthesise information. When a viewer gathers information while watching a film, they draw on working memory to recall crucial points. Working memory describes the “cognitive processes that are maintained in an unusually accessible state” (Cowan 1999, 62). New information is also synthesised with previously acquired information by activating long-term memory (Baddeley 2012), facilitating the reassessments and re-evaluations that take place during Textual Problem Solving, and which were described in Section 5.1. Working memory primarily relies on “executive control” incorporating “separate visual and verbal STM [short term memory] components” (Baddeley 2012, 20). When a viewer attempts to engage in Textual Problem Solving, all relevant information must be accessible for the strategy to be applied effectively. Here, working memory plays a fundamental role when a viewer seeks to understand information presented over time, as it is when watching a film, by reviewing information from both the immediate and distant past.

Memory is limited; most viewers cannot hold all information presented in a film in working memory. The limitations of memory depend on the task an individual is engaged in and the types of information presented to them (Hulme and Roodenrys 1995), as well as the number of distinct objects or “chunks” they are attempting to store (Halford et al. 2005; Hummel and Holyoak 2003). The limitations of memory provide an opportunity for mystery films to undermine viewers' attempts at reaching a solution. If the information viewers need to solve a problem is presented too rapidly through fast-paced editing, includes too many details, such as a crowded room full of distractions, or is difficult to relate together—for instance, if characters have similar appearances—then attempts to reach a solution will be frustrated.¹¹⁷ In this way, mystery films can be perceived as ‘fair’,

¹¹⁷ The impact of the pacing of editing in mystery films and its effect on Textual Problem Solving are discussed further in Chapter 7.

showing the viewer everything they need to know to solve the problem, while maintaining a challenge for the viewer.

Comprehension

Comprehension describes the way a viewer understands the narrative within a film, and the way they synthesise prior and new information. In film, a narrative is a sequence of causally related events that have been organised to convey meaning, which improves viewers' ability to recognise patterns and remember how events are related (Finlayson and Corman 2013). However, relying on recognition, in the absence of recollection, can lead to errors as viewers identify similar, but inaccurate solutions (Tulving and Thompson 1973). Thus, filmmakers can rely on familiar patterns or story forms to mislead viewers into making assumptions about the relationship between events and objects. Comprehension is influenced by differences in individual viewers, as well as their existing knowledge of a subject or text.¹¹⁸ Existing knowledge of a subject or text shapes viewers' comprehension of material (which will be discussed further in Section 5.3) and the speed at which they can pay attention to salient information in the text (Gegenfurtner et al. 2011). Comprehension is the fundamental process for understanding meaning within a film, and draws on the information gathered, stored, and organised by attention and memory.

Film comprehension requires a viewer to “progress from ignorance to knowledge” (Lehman 2000) over the course of a film, by paying attention to the story and the details that explain how its parts relate. The task of comprehending a film can be challenging in various different ways: a film can be confronting, experimental, philosophical, or stylised to an extent that makes understanding difficult. What distinguishes mystery films is the way in which this understanding is gained. While viewers may argue about the ‘true meaning’ of *The End of Evangelion* (Anno and Tsurumaki 1997) or appreciate the psychedelic surrealism of *Holy Mountain* (Jodorowsky 1973), neither requires the same logical game demanded by mystery films. For mystery film viewers, comprehending the film and its twists and turns requires some form of Textual Problem Solving.

Film Comprehension as Informal Problem Solving

One of the greatest difficulties in studying problem solving is that its processes are rarely consciously observed, and thus are difficult to record (Kafadar 2012, 198). When watching

¹¹⁸ Age (Daisuke et al. 2014), emotional state (Baddeley 2013), and diet (Crichton et al. 2012) have all been shown to influence the effectiveness of working memory.

a film, the viewer is rarely consciously engaged in the sequential stages of problem solving; instead they achieve the goals of these stages through ordinary engagement with the film. If stopped and asked explicit questions about the problem and their current suspicions, viewers could easily articulate their thoughts, but viewers are rarely asked to do so during viewing. While some research conceives of problem solving as exclusively a process of trial and error (Thorndike 1898), the Gestalt movement proposes that humans, and certain animals such as chimpanzees, can create a problem space in which solutions may be tested through mental manipulation (Ormrod 1995, 167).¹¹⁹ Importantly, contemporary research suggests that this manipulation does not require conscious awareness on the part of the problem solver (Solso, MacLin, and MacLin 2008). If viewers are not consciously aware of how they problem solve during viewing, what can we know about this viewing experience?

Textual Problem Solving is best considered in relation to informal problem solving processes. Informal problem solving contexts are those that “arise during the course of normal human activity” (Zimmerman and Campillo 2003, 234) and “often eschew formal symbolic solutions” (Zimmerman and Campillo 2003, 235) in favour of more intuitive or emotional responses. This may involve diagnosing a fault in a car, preparing a meal, or caring for an injury. These problems “require continuing adjustment of one’s approach to shifting conditions” (Zimmerman and Campillo 2003, 235) rather than making a singular determination about the problem in one instance. For example, if nursing a sprained ankle, individuals test the ankle to see how it feels over time, adjusting treatment and activity to accommodate the injury. Additionally, most of this evaluation happens unconsciously or automatically, such as adjusting your stride to take weight off a foot if in pain. Similarly, Textual Problem Solving requires the viewer to hold certain beliefs about the problem at hand, and constantly update those beliefs with new information that becomes available as the story unfolds. This need not be a conscious effort on the part of the viewer, as evaluating these aspects is a precondition for comprehending the narrative.

When viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving, they are applying informal problem solving processes. Ohlsson (2012) argues that this kind of problem solving is the result of an array of cognitive functions addressing specific needs, rather than a formal and unified system. “When solving problems in informal contexts, learners must be able to cognitively

¹¹⁹ The importance of this conceptual space is discussed further in Section 7.1 in relation to viewers’ capacity to form a mental representation of the diegetic world represented on screen.

anticipate potential outcomes of various courses of action and ... restructure the immediate problem context into a more conducive one, such as by seeking out information that is missing” (Zimmerman and Campillo 2003, 234). This process accurately describes the way mystery viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving, attempting to anticipate what happens next, assessing and reassessing the problem, and seeking out relevant information to make these judgements.¹²⁰ One example of an informal problem-solving process applied in film viewing is the representativeness heuristic, where individuals determine the likelihood of an event by comparing the subject to an existing prototype.¹²¹ When watching *A Perfect Getaway* (Twohy 2009), viewers compare Kale to their prototype of a violent criminal, and determine he is likely the killer because of his tattoos and his temperament. Individuals are more prone to personal and cognitive biases when using these generalised strategies (Griffin et al. 2012). For viewers, Textual Problem Solving surfaces and submerges over the duration of the film as specific clues attract scrutiny.

For mystery film viewers, film comprehension engages informal problem-solving processes. For example, in the neo-noir mystery film *Brick* (Johnson 2005), Emily speaks cryptically about a “bad brick”, “pin”, “tug”, and “poor Frisco”. When Brendan begins to investigate Emily’s situation and discusses the cryptic phrases with The Brain, who identifies “Pin” as the head of a local drug ring. With this additional context the other words become meaningful: the “bad brick” likely refers to drugs, possibly tampered with or of poor quality; “poor Frisco” likely refers to a victim of the drug organisation; and “Tug” is another person involved in some way. Using context to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words is common to everyday life, and fits within informal models of problem solving. Viewers rely on context, syntax, and generic cues to understand these words, without having to explicitly analyse their use and concentrate on why each word means what it does. Further, viewers rely on feelings, intuitions, and rules of thumb when making conclusions. These informal problem-solving practices explain how viewers can engage in Textual Problem Solving without becoming consciously aware of the process, for the most part, and explains why the viewing experience is directed by hunches, feelings, and suspicions—as I will discuss in Chapter 6.

¹²⁰ When viewers attempt to anticipate events within the film, they are making a predictive inference about what will happen, or what will be revealed to have already happened. In Section 7.4 I argue that predictive inferences are a necessary component of Textual Problem Solving.

¹²¹ Heuristics are a set of rules or logical tools that allow the simplification of complex cognitive tasks, often representing a suboptimal but sufficient approach (Manktelow 2012, 11).

5.3 MOTIVATING TEXTUAL PROBLEM SOLVING

Viewers are strongly motivated to attempt to solve the problem presented within mystery films. Films are made knowing that the viewer will critically engage with the text to try and reach this solution. The film viewer is always a critical spectator and “even the most ingenuous among the spectators ... cannot help but fix his [sic] attention on the way [the text] is put together” (Eco 1990, 95). Simply by trying to comprehend the narrative of a mystery film, viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving. Viewers are motivated to reflect on how information is presented in the film, and why it is presented in that way. Viewers are aware that a mystery film is intended to challenge them in some way and are engaged in critically assessing information to reach a solution, consciously or otherwise. Solving the problem may be their primary reason for engaging with the text, or it may be secondary, or incidental, to following the story unfold. However, in each of these cases, viewers are motivated to engage in Textual Problem Solving for the pleasure and satisfaction that doing so elicits. Viewers “experience a deep pleasure” (Bor 2012) in finding patterns and solving problems in mystery films.

The satisfaction a viewer gets from Textual Problem Solving is not limited to solvable problems. Viewers primarily derive satisfaction from the process of seeking and identifying patterns within mystery films. However, these films still need to adhere to viewer expectations of ‘fairness’ for the challenge to be appreciated. To achieve this “[t]he solution must seem inevitable once revealed” (Chandler [1948] 1976) and viewers must trust that “the mysteries will resolve without ambiguity or anticlimax” (Gray and Mittell 2007).¹²² Although the solution presented within a mystery film plays a significant role in viewer judgements of the challenge, it does not need to be surprising or unexpected. In a study of twist and mystery literature, researchers found that readers report higher levels of pleasure when they know how the book ends ahead of time (Leavitt and Christenfeld 2011). Although the process of Textual Problem Solving is changed by advance knowledge of the solution (as I will discuss shortly), it does not preclude the problem solver from finding pleasure in this process.

¹²² The producers of the television series *Lost* (Abrams, Lieber, and Lindelof 2004–10) acknowledged this fact when addressing fans’ fears of an unsatisfactory end to their series. They identify the anticlimax of previous TV mysteries such as *Twin Peaks* (Lynch 1990–91) and the far-fetched storylines of shows such as the *X-Files* (Carter 1993–2002) as examples they aim to avoid.

This seems contradictory to common understanding of narrative engagement. As Gray and Mittell write, “a typical story uses its techniques of storytelling and narration to create suspense, emotional engagement, and pacing—to break its narrative design by gathering advance information is to violate well-established storytelling norms” (2007). This raises the question; why does breaking this storytelling norm produce higher ratings of enjoyment? Laura Carroll (2005) argues that the first reading of a text is overvalued. The revelations of the plot do not make up the entirety of the text or its pleasures for a viewer. Instead, a viewer may focus on the problem-solving process, the construction of the mystery, and the steps taken to arrive at the known solution.

For example, the inverted detective story demonstrates that engagement with a text is not contingent on a naivety surrounding its conclusion.¹²³ In the inverted detective story, the crime and the perpetrator of the act are revealed to the audience from the beginning while the narrative focuses on the question of how or why. Mystery films can operate on multiple levels, where different knowledge states arouse different modes of inquiry that can still allow satisfying engagement in Textual Problem Solving. A viewer unfamiliar with the mystery genre may follow a film trying to determine who the culprit is, only to recognise them at the conclusion of the film, while a more experienced or informed viewer identifies the culprit ahead of time. In both cases, the mystery film can present a ‘challenge to the viewer’ by the way that viewer is driven to engage mystery texts.

Driving Viewer Engagement

Mystery film viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving based on where their attention is focused in relation to the text. As Panek (2006) writes, “[w]hether or not the viewer sees a film as a cognitive puzzle or an affective experience may shape his or her interpretation of the film” (78). For this reason, I classify viewers into two groups: story-driven and problem-driven.¹²⁴ Story-driven viewers primarily follow the narrative and engage with the problem set within the text as the narrative unfolds. Problem-driven viewers primarily follow the problem, its construction, and its resolution over the course of the text, using meta-knowledge to identify hidden clues or to dismiss ‘red herrings’ intended to mislead.¹²⁵

¹²³ The inverted detective story is a mystery where the killer is identified for the reader/viewer from the start of a text, and the story follows the detective’s efforts to solve the mystery.

¹²⁴ Bordwell makes a similar distinction in describing the problem for viewers set by classical narratives and art films. He identifies the problem “born of *story*: what is her past? What will he do now?” and contrasts it with the problem “of *narration*: who is telling this story? How is the story being told? Why tell the story this way?” (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 2000, 374, emphasis in original).

¹²⁵ A red herring, in the context of a mystery, is a literary device that misleads or distracts audiences in relation to the core problem, guiding them to an inaccurate conclusion.

This meta-knowledge may include familiarity with the mystery genre, knowledge of the source material the film was derived from, paratextual information surrounding the film, or a previous viewing of the film and the corresponding knowledge of its core solution. Story-driven viewers follow the story to move from a problem to a solution, while problem-driven viewers follow the use of the problem throughout a film, to identify how its construction leads to resolution in that film (see Figure 5.3.1). Importantly, for a viewer to shift from a story-driven engagement in Textual Problem Solving to a problem-driven one, their meta-knowledge must be sufficient to drive their attention away from how a problem is solved to how that problem is crafted. By doing so, problem-driven viewers are able to make predictions about what will happen next or reach a core solution that eludes story-driven viewers.



Figure 5.3.1—Objects of focus based on viewer drive

Problem-driven viewing requires recognition of the role of meta-knowledge within mystery films.¹²⁶ In a discussion of adaptations, Linda Hutcheon (2006) describes audiences as either “knowing”—those familiar with a source text—or “unknowing”, those without knowledge of a source text. For a text to be experienced as adaptation “we need to recognize it as such, and to know its adapted text” (Hutcheon 2006, 120-121). Similarly, for a mystery film viewer to be problem-driven, they must recognise how their meta-knowledge reveals some aspect of the film’s construction. Paratexts, such as trailers, posters, tag lines, and fan discussions, can all provide meaningful insight into a film’s plot, tone, and approach. Knowledge from paratextual material engages viewers with a film, creating an “extended intertextual engagement” (Hutcheon 2006, 35) between works related to, and including, the film. For example, the tagline for *Knowing* (Proyas 2009), “What happens when the numbers run out?”, is a clear statement of the film’s core problem. Armed with this information, a problem-driven viewer can more closely observe

¹²⁶ Some mystery texts are written specifically for these problem-driven audiences. For example, the “metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions—such as narrative closure and the detective’s role as surrogate reader—with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot. Metaphysical detective stories often emphasize this transcendence, moreover, by becoming self-reflexive (that is, by representing allegorically the text’s own process of composition)” (Merivale and Sweeney 2000, 2)

the construction of the problem within the film with full knowledge of what that problem will be.

Adaptations, and other forms of meta-knowledge, “function similarly to genres” (2006, 121) by setting audience expectations and guiding viewer engagement. Viewers are presented with a familiar or predictable narrative but turn their focus to the construction of that narrative, rather than the narrative itself. “[E]ven on repeated viewings a text allows and, indeed, induces innovative reading” (Iser 1972, 286). For example, on a repeat viewing of *Brick* (Johnson 2005), a viewer with full awareness of how the film ends may still engage in Textual Problem Solving.¹²⁷ Repeat viewers may seek to identify how the film constructed the mystery and what crucial information may have been overlooked or misunderstood on a first viewing.

Contemporary mystery films are created to attract repeat viewers, to engage fans through paratexts, and to reward viewers familiar with the genre. Textual Problem Solving is central to how viewers engage with mystery films. For story-driven audiences, the narrative centres on some problem or unknown, which they attempt to understand by the film’s conclusion. Despite knowing, or predicting, the core solution of a mystery film, problem-driven viewers remain engaged in Textual Problem Solving by scrutinising how the mystery is constructed, and critically evaluating how and why information is presented within the film. In Chapter 8 and Chapter 10 I examine how these two viewing drives function in specific mystery films, and how it impacts their viewing experience.

Through this chapter I have contributed the concept of Textual Problem Solving to theorisation of the mystery genre. This concept describes the primary form of viewer engagement with mystery films, and my work identifies the specific stages of this process, derived from research in the cognitive sciences. Further, Textual Problem Solving explains how the puzzle or intellectual game presented by mystery films is engaged intuitively and unconsciously, without requiring the viewer to examine the processes in which they are engaged. Viewers instead rely on informal problem solving processes, using hunches, intuitions, and most importantly, feelings of suspicion to direct their engagement. Textual Problem Solving, as a concept, provides insights into the unique processes that viewers

¹²⁷ The issue of repeat viewing of mystery films has been widely recognised as a “paradox of suspense”. The foundation of this paradox is that suspense requires uncertainty, and awareness of a story’s outcome precludes uncertainty. Although I distinguish ambiguity (and suspicion) from uncertainty, the paradox may still apply to mystery film viewers. For a fuller account of alternative explanations of how suspense functions in these cases, see Yanal (1996), Gerrig (1997), Carrol (2001), and Smuts (2008).

engage in when attempting to solve mystery films, while also isolating the specific practices and features within mystery films that motivate, influence, and shape this engagement. What follows in Chapter 6 is an exploration of the experience of mystery films while engaged in Textual Problem Solving, and the role of suspicion in driving this engagement. In particular, I define the concept of Viewer Suspicion as distinct from previous conceptions of suspense in the mystery genre and illustrate how this unique experience is generated by mystery films.

6

Feeling Suspicion

Suspicion is a feeling aroused when a viewer recognises that something in a mystery film is important to the problem, but ambiguous in its meaning or application. In his essay on the topic, Bacon ([1625] 2001) argues that suspicion is a symptom of “know[ing] little”, which can be remedied by seeking knowledge. He acknowledges that suspicions can be well founded but warns that holding suspicions without attempting to confront them can cause emotional harm—what I will describe as emotional tension. Suspicion is a way of motivating action, to prevent negative emotional states or to satisfy desires related to this gap in knowledge. Suspicion is best understood as simultaneously a rational search for knowledge and a strong emotional response or feeling surrounding a belief. In the previous chapter, I argued that Textual Problem Solving is an informal process, relying on emotions and intuitions. In this chapter I examine the experience of suspicion, which viewers feel as they watch a mystery film, and argue that this is the primary way viewers are engaged in Textual Problem Solving.

I begin this chapter, in Section 6.1, by defining suspicion as a three-stage response born from a gap in knowledge. I discuss examples from film where suspicion is aroused and explore the relationship between suspicion and knowledge. I conclude this section by defining the response of viewers, when their suspicion is aroused during a mystery film, as Viewer Suspicion. In Section 6.2, I examine how the experience of suspicion and suspense during film viewing differs. I argue that the two are primarily distinguished by viewers’ response when presented with a gap in knowledge, either ambiguity (suspicion) or uncertainty (suspense). I continue to explore the relationship between suspense and suspicion by discussing their use in the mystery and suspense genres, and the types of suspense these films elicit. To conclude in Section 6.3, I argue that the feeling of suspicion during mystery film viewing is a pragmatic response by the viewer. Suspicion, as a way of engaging in Textual Problem Solving, motivates viewers to solve a problem to relieve emotional tension, or to enjoy the satisfaction when those suspicions are confirmed.

Together, these sections demonstrate how and why viewers engage with mystery films and the viewing experience that this engagement creates.

6.1 A GAP IN KNOWLEDGE

What is Suspicion?

In ancient Roman law, suspicion referred to an opinion or belief grounded on a small amount of verifiable evidence, from which a conclusion could not be determined with certainty and thus no conviction could be made (Berger 1953, 727). If suspicion occurs when there is insufficient information from which to draw conclusions, what purpose does suspicion serve? Suspicion is pre-emptive, aiming to reach a conclusion prior to its certainty, often to prevent or neutralise a potential threat. We are taught to be suspicious of strangers, of information disseminated in the media, and of anything out of the ordinary.¹²⁸ Suspicion is often associated with fear, paranoia, and insecurity, priming individuals to pre-emptively identify threats; however, it more broadly concerns any situation where some individual addresses a problem with incomplete knowledge. An investor may have suspicions that the market will shift; a lawyer may become suspicious that a witness is not telling the whole truth; or a teacher may suspect that a student has not completed a set reading. Any situation wherein an individual is addressing a problem with incomplete knowledge has the potential for suspicion to be aroused.

Suspicion is closely related to suspense; both responses arise from the recognition of a gap in knowledge, and both occur in three stages. The two differ in how this gap in knowledge is identified, in the affective response that follows, and in an individual's ability to act as part of the response. The first stage is the catalyst of the response, where an individual identifies a gap in their knowledge and deems that knowledge important. The second stage is an affective response to this gap in knowledge, and the individual's feelings about their capacity to resolve that gap in knowledge. The third stage is the individual's reaction to the gap in knowledge and subsequent affective state, including their efforts to resolve this gap

¹²⁸ In recent years, the saturation of media describing the threat of terrorism has added to general levels of suspicion. Campaigns across the globe employ some version of the phrase "If you see something, say something", which is currently a registered trademark of the US Department of Homeland Security. The slogan draws on an implicit assumption that people automatically notice that which is out of the ordinary as important, and thus possibly a threat.

in knowledge. The differences between suspense and suspicion at each of these stages is detailed in the table below (Figure 6.1.1) and discussed further in Section 6.2.

Stages	Suspicion	Suspense
Catalyst	Recognition of <i>ambiguity</i> and salience in a piece of information, identifying a gap in knowledge.	Recognition of <i>uncertainty</i> and salience in a piece of information, identifying a gap in knowledge.
Affect	Emotional tension surrounding lack of knowledge, and tension between possible interpretations of that information.	Emotional tension surrounding lack of knowledge, and tension about an inability to address this gap in knowledge.
Reaction	Formation of beliefs about the gap in knowledge and attempts to address that gap by gathering information.	No response beyond the arousal of an affective state.

Figure 6.1.1—Stages of suspicion and suspense

An example of this can be seen in the film *Rope* (Hitchcock, 1948) where Brandon and Phillip murder a former classmate, David, minutes before hosting a dinner party. The guests at the party are all familiar with David, but none are aware of his murder. Rupert, a former teacher of the three men, becomes suspicious of Phillip’s nervousness and Brandon’s excitement when discussing David (*catalyst*). He becomes worried about David’s wellbeing (*affect*) and suspects that Phillip and Brandon are hiding something related to David’s absence. He begins to look for information that may support his suspicion (*reaction*). Rupert’s suspicions deepen after catching Phillip in a lie and noticing a hat belonging to David in the coatroom. Importantly, Rupert is never entirely certain about David’s disappearance throughout this process, as the situation is ambiguous. Suspicion marks the instigation of an investigation: the beginning of a process that seeks to clear this kind of ambiguity about the motives of others or the meaning of some piece of information.

Suspicion has long been considered a crucial component of knowledge acquisition. In ancient Greece the Skeptics advocated the suspension of judgement, or *epoche*, as a form of examination of the world (Suber 1996). Cartesian doubt applies this scepticism to all beliefs in order to identify axioms: indubitable knowledge from which further knowledge can be derived (Bermúdez 2008). Both examples describe a way of being suspicious about knowledge and its sources. Suspicion is considered essential to attaining knowledge through the recognition of rival interpretations, or ambiguity, in the world (Descartes [1637] 2006; Hume [1784] 2000). Ambiguity, as opposed to trust or distrust, is required for this knowledge acquisition as it represents a reservation of judgement and a willingness

to consider multiple meanings. Thus, suspicion is a way of questioning or scrutinising information, distinct from a certain determination of meaning.

Knowledge gaps are fundamental to the narrative film. As Sternberg writes, “No ignorance, no conflict; and no conflict, no plot” (1985, 173). A knowledge gap is any unknown information perceived as relevant to the story that is obtained within the film. This gap can be “flaunted” or “suppressed” (Bordwell 1985, 55) by drawing viewers’ attention to the gap or avoiding drawing attention to it. When a mystery film sets a problem for the viewer, it often involves flaunting a specific knowledge gap to establish a problem for the viewer and motivating engagement in Textual Problem Solving. Bordwell argues that “gaps are among the clearest cues for the viewer to act upon, since they evoke the entire process of schema formation and hypothesis testing” (Bordwell 1985, 55).¹²⁹ Knowledge gaps are created by providing the viewer with certain pieces of information but obscuring or withholding others (Bordwell 1985). By doing so, mystery films can direct viewer attention surrounding a problem and shape their engagement in Textual Problem Solving.

This knowledge gap can be considered part of the hermeneutic code describing narrative “units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution” (Barthes [1970] 1974, 17). The gap itself can be created through restricted narration, denying viewers access to information beyond that observed by a character/characters within the film. Further, focalization may be used to promote a specific, but false solution, frustrating viewers from reaching the correct solution. A knowledge gap may also be created through the order of events in the *syuzhet*, with viewers unable to reconcile this information without the entire *fabula*.

In mystery films, knowledge gaps can shift as the story progresses. When viewers learn something from within the knowledge gap, they relate it back to the problem to reassess the scope of that gap. In literature, “gaps give the reader a chance to build his own bridges, relating the different aspects of the object which have thus far been revealed to him” (Iser 1989, 9). The knowledge gap is demarcated by the relationship between the available information and the information a viewer hypothesises must exist for the problem to be solved. Identifying and re-evaluating outstanding knowledge gaps is critical to Textual Problem Solving. Viewers can address these gaps by synthesising or evaluating information

¹²⁹ This process of schema formation and hypothesis testing fits within the model of Textual Problem Solving Stages outlined in Section 5.1: Solving Mystery Films.

within the film “by referring the text to external, verifiable factors” (Iser 1989, 7). The unfolding of the plot motivates viewer interest by presenting an ever-changing knowledge gap, which shapes viewer interactions with the mystery by encouraging them to engage in Textual Problem Solving.

In defining suspicion, social psychologists highlight the importance of distinguishing ambiguity from uncertainty and distrust. Suspicion is the state in which a participant identifies and considers different, possibly conflicting, beliefs about another person’s motives (Fein 1996). This is neither affirmation nor refutation of the trustworthiness of that agent; it is neutral or a reservation of judgement. While suspicion, “presuppose[s] a lack of trust ... this lack of trust means experiencing ambiguity about a target’s motives” (Sinaceur 2010, 544) instead of making a judgement. Sinaceur (2010) argues that the binary of trust and distrust involves making a “unidirectional judgement” (positive or negative) whereas suspicion can be seen as an experience of ambiguity. Further, he differentiates between ambiguity and uncertainty. “While uncertainty is when people generally do not know for sure about something, suspicion [through ambiguity] goes one step further: it is specifically about thinking that something can have rival meanings—hence, inclining in no particular direction” (Sinaceur 2010, 543). This is an important distinction for mystery film viewers. Uncertainty describes a situation where there is both a gap in knowledge, and a gap relating to possible ways to resolve that gap. In contrast, ambiguity describes a situation where possible solutions have been identified, or are assumed to exist, providing a pathway to close that gap in knowledge. Suspicion, as a way of engaging in Textual Problem Solving, is thus composed of ambiguity rather than uncertainty, as it describes a situation where the viewer is capable of identifying and evaluating possible solutions to a problem.

The role of ambiguity in motivating individuals to seek out further knowledge has been tested experimentally by Fein (1996). In the study, participants were placed in pairs and told to trust their partner “very much”, “not at all”, or “moderately”. While the first two statements offer near certainty, the third creates ambiguity. Fein found that participants who were advised to trust their partner moderately were more likely to consciously consider the partners’ motives and were more inclined to search for further information. The work demonstrates that when ambiguity is present in a task, individuals are motivated to seek out more information and consider the motivations of other actors within that task. The presence of ambiguity in a task has also been shown to improve individuals’ ability to discriminate between valid and invalid information (Schul, Burnstein, and Bardi 1996).

Thus, by enabling the identification of ambiguity, suspicion motivates specific strategies that result in better knowledge acquisition.

Suspicion is neither a positive nor a negative response, though it can be motivated by feelings of empathy, curiosity, anxiety, and fear. Like a hunch or an intuition, suspicion is a belief grounded in emotion before analytical thought. Emotions play an important role in motivating an individual to confirm or deny their suspicions by seeking knowledge. Suspicion is both a pragmatic and affective response to ambiguity. It describes an active attempt to resolve the problem by identifying possible solutions, or by addressing and neutralising possible threats. Furthermore, suspicion is a chiefly affective response, experienced by viewers as a strong feeling about a person, object, or impending event within mystery films.

What is Viewer Suspicion?

To describe the viewer's response when they experience suspicion while viewing mystery films, I employ the term Viewer Suspicion. Viewer Suspicion is the primary affective state aroused by mystery films and represents points of fixation for viewers within a film's narrative. Like suspicion and suspense, it occurs in three stages including a catalyst, affect, and reaction (see Figure 6.1.2). Viewer Suspicion is a direct response to the problem set out by the film, aroused when viewers identify information that is both salient and ambiguous (*catalyst*). Salience refers to the viewer's perception that information is important to the problem or has the potential to be. Viewer Suspicion is also the emotional tension generated in response to this ambiguity, and tension surrounding how the problem may be solved (*affect*). Finally, Viewer Suspicion includes the formation of an opinion or belief that the viewer tests or verifies by searching for further information. Together, these three stages are the primary way that viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving when watching mystery films. Viewers adjust their expectations and responses to a film based on the presentation of characters, situations, and objects, and the film's engagement with implicit frameworks used by audiences (Kahneman and Tversky 2000) when viewing mystery films. The information within a mystery film that arouses Viewer Suspicion forms the building blocks for any attempt to solve that film's core problem.

Stages	Suspicion	Suspense	Viewer Suspicion
Catalyst	Recognition of <i>ambiguity</i> and salience in a piece of information	Recognition of <i>uncertainty</i> and salience in a piece of information	Recognition of <i>ambiguity</i> in a piece of information in a film, and recognition of its significance to the film's core problem
Affect	Emotional tension surrounding possible interpretations of that information	Emotional tension surrounding lack of knowledge	Emotional tension surrounding the applicability or validity of that information
Response	Formation of beliefs about the gap in knowledge and attempts to address that gap by gathering information.	No response beyond the arousal of an affective state	Formation of beliefs about the film's core problem and an attempt to seek out information that will resolve the suspicion and that problem.

Figure 6.1.2—Comparison of the stages of suspicion, suspense, and Viewer Suspicion

Viewer Suspicion requires a problem with which the viewer can engage. This may involve searching for more information (Robert 2014), breaking the problem down into more manageable parts (Armstrong, Denniston Jr, and Gordon 1975), or building new connections between what they already know (Knoblich et al. 1999). For Viewer Suspicion to be aroused, there needs to be ambiguity as to how to interpret *evidence*, or ambiguity about an *agent* based on that evidence. The viewer need not know the identity of the agent, or the reason for the viewer's feeling of ambiguity, in the moment Viewer Suspicion is aroused (*catalyst*). Here, evidence refers to any piece of information that motivates interpretation. Agent refers to any character or force capable of causing something to happen.¹³⁰ Viewer Suspicion, as catalyst, is aroused when evidence is perceived as salient to solving a core problem. By recognising salience and ambiguity in a piece of information, the viewer classifies this knowledge as a *clue*. A clue is the information relating to a problem, and the multiple interpretations of meaning, including rival interpretations, that the viewer generates around it.

The mystery genre invites “the isolation of clues, the making of deductions from these clues, and the attempt to place the various clues in their rational place in a complex scheme of cause and effect” (Cawelti 1976, 43). When viewing a mystery film, viewers develop a search strategy for identifying relevant information that can facilitate new interpretations or support existing ones. The search strategy is a manipulation of attention and cognitive resources by the viewer in pursuit of a solution to a problem presented within the film. It

¹³⁰ Daniel Frampton (2006) and Tarja Laine (2011) argue that the film itself can be considered to have agency, thus making it a possible target for Viewer Suspicion.

may also refer to the investigative strategy employed by an agent within the film that viewers identify with, or whose point of view they are limited to. Viewer Suspicion, as reaction, is thus a way of engaging in Textual Problem Solving within mystery films. The viewer is not required to ‘solve’ a mystery ahead of the film’s narrative to engage in Textual Problem Solving. By directing their attention in response to Viewer Suspicion, and seeking knowledge to resolve ambiguity, viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving.

Viewer Suspicion has the potential to inform viewers’ approach at each of the four stages of Textual Problem Solving. For example, Viewer Suspicion can be aroused by the music in a film, alerting the viewer to the presence of an as-yet-undefined problem (*catalyst*). A viewer can become suspicious of a particular character, and use this in their assessment of a problem, or in determining which strategies to apply (*reaction*). Finally, viewer suspicion may continue to be aroused even after the viewer believes they have arrived at the correct solution, motivating them to evaluate that solution and its likelihood (*affect*). Viewer Suspicion has a modulating effect on how viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving throughout mystery films.

6.2 DISTINGUISHING SUSPICION FROM SUSPENSE

Viewer Suspicion is at the centre of every mystery story. Whether focused on suspicious individuals, actions, or motives, mystery films are propelled by the ambiguity that surrounds the central narrative events. However, suspicion, as a viewer response, has rarely been examined in research on film. This is primarily because Viewer Suspicion has been conflated with suspense. Suspense has received significant critical attention, both in literature and in film. Viewer Suspicion and suspense both arise from the same point of origin—the recognition of a gap in knowledge. For example, a viewer may have reason to believe a character is in danger, but not know how or when this threat will be realised. Suspense refers to the emotional state experienced by audiences. Zillmann argues that the majority of screen suspense is restricted to “apprehensions about future events” (2013, 580). When a viewer perceives that some negative outcome—normally suffered by the film’s protagonist—is highly likely, they can be held ‘in suspense’ about its eventuality. This suspense is experienced as an “uneasiness and distress about anticipated negative outcomes” by the viewer (Zillman 2013, 584). Allen agrees, asserting that suspense generates “a state of anxious uncertainty about what happens next” (2003, 163). The

exception to this conception of suspense, Zillmann notes, is the mystery genre. He avers that while the mystery genre can hold viewers “in suspense”, the definitive feature of mystery is its ability to hold viewers “in suspense *about*” (Zillmann 2013, 602 [emphasis added]). While Zillmann identifies this distinction as two forms of suspense, I argue that the latter is instead Viewer Suspicion.

Viewer Suspicion and suspense differ in their response to a gap in knowledge. The viewer assesses whether or not there is an opportunity to resolve this gap by seeking knowledge. Viewer Suspicion requires the viewer to perceive a problem and hold a reasonable expectation that they can gather information to work towards a solution. Suspense presents a problem that the viewer is powerless to resolve, short of leaving the cinema. Suspense cannot be resolved by implementing a search strategy or engaging in Textual Problem Solving. Instead, the viewer is ‘held in suspense’: restricted to an emotional response with no opportunity within the text to induce resolution. In this way, Viewer Suspicion (*affect* and *reaction*) may be seen as response to the threat of being ‘held in suspense’. Suspense is a state of emotional tension, an elongated experience of the catalyst emotion, whereas suspicion is a search for a way to relieve or avoid this tension through the engagement of information. Importantly, Viewer Suspicion still includes the possibility of experiencing tension and suspense. However, by engaging in Textual Problem Solving, mystery viewers have an opportunity to resolve this tension. Suspense offers no recourse but to wait for an expected, but uncertain, event to occur. Viewer Suspicion allows a search for clues that provide possible answers, resolving this uncertainty, and the emotional tension associated with it.

My conception here contrasts with the definitions of suspense and mystery put forward by Alfred Hitchcock. In a Master Seminar (American Film Institute [1970] 2009), Hitchcock states that mystery and suspense “are absolutely miles apart”. Hitchcock argues that suspense requires the filmmaker to provide viewers with information, while mystery requires information be withheld. However, what is important, in both mystery and suspense, is that viewers have some, but not all information.¹³¹ Wollen (1982, 47) characterises suspense as when viewers have more knowledge than the characters on screen, while mystery involve parity in the knowledge of viewers and characters. Thus, suspense involves the knowledge of what the secret is, but uncertainty about what will

¹³¹ Richard Allen (2003) highlights the importance of withholding information to both mystery and suspense in his discussion of Hitchcock and “suppressive narration” (172).

happen. Mystery involves certainty of a secret's existence, but ambiguity as to what that secret is. These gaps in knowledge, as I have previously asserted, is the catalyst for each of the responses, but the differences in this gap create an important distinction between mystery and suspense, one Hitchcock has rightly identified as a source of "great confusion" (American Film Institute [1970] 2009).

In much of the writing on suspense, ambiguity is conflated with uncertainty. "[U]ncertainty allows the audience to imagine different possible outcomes that could impact positively or negatively on the characters" (Knight and McKnight 1999, 108). However, this consideration of "rival meanings" (Sinaceur 2010, 543) is more accurately defined as ambiguity. Suspense is a response to uncertainty, while Viewer Suspicion is a response to ambiguity. In both responses, the viewer is certain about the existence of a problem or threat. In suspense, the viewer is certain that a threat exists, but is uncertain how or when it will be realised. In Viewer Suspicion, the viewer is certain that a problem exists, and that the problem can be addressed, but does not know which possible solution is correct.

Research on mystery literature has shown a strong link between problem solving and an experience of suspense in the mystery genre—that is, what I will describe as suspicion. Gerrig and Bernardo (1994) demonstrate that when additional limitations are added to a problem presented within a literary text, readers report a stronger experience of suspicion. Problem solving is structured to generate suspicion where "the readers' initial state is ignorance and their goal state is enlightenment" (Gerrig and Bernardo 1994, 471). Gerrig (1996) asserts that suspicion results, in part, from a viewer's experience of ambiguity about potential outcomes. As outcomes are excluded, a participant's experience of suspense heightens (Cheong and Young 2006). Limiting the action-based options available to a character, as when an imprisoned character witnesses the removal of the door's only key, can produce this heightened experience of suspicion. Alternatively, this can be achieved by limiting knowledge-based options: for example, as suspects are ruled out in a murder investigation. The fewer options available—whether knowledge-based or action-based—the more intense the experience of suspicion for the viewer, so long as multiple interpretations still exist as possible outcomes.

Suspense and the Mystery Genre

The suspense and mystery genres have been widely discussed in relation to one another.¹³² Knobloch argues that “the arrangement of time concerning narration and narrated events” distinguishes the suspense and mystery genres (2003, 391), although both include the experience of suspense. In the mystery genre, the resolution of ambiguity occurs on reflection; something must have already occurred for an investigation to begin, such as a crime, a deception, and so on. In contrast, the resolution of uncertainty in the suspense genre occurs in prediction and observation: something the viewer dreaded or hoped for occurs, ending the conflict or problem. Contemporary mystery films often include both components, building some tension through action and events, while also building anticipation regarding the solving of a logical problem.

The distinction between knowledge/understanding and action/event resolutions is key to viewers’ experience of mystery films. The problem in a mystery film is resolved by knowledge or understanding on the part of the viewer, as opposed to by some action or event. This necessitates a split in the narrative structure, whereby the completion of a mystery need not signify the completion of the story. In many cases the mystery or problem is answered by identifying a solution; however, this knowledge must then be acted upon for the complication to be completely resolved. Viewers’ engagement in Textual Problem Solving is defined along these lines. A viewer can engage with a problem by acquiring knowledge but is unable to act upon that knowledge to change the events within the film. In this way, once a viewer has successfully solved a problem, they are more likely to experience suspense about the film’s conclusion than Viewer Suspicion.

Viewer Suspicion, devoid of any tangible threat to the viewer, demonstrates the capacity and desire of viewers to engage in a form of intellectual play, considering different possibilities based on the clues and suspects they have identified. The ambiguity presented by mystery films “is not to be feared. It is, instead, to be explained” (Zillmann 2013, 603). By offering the viewer an invitation to attempt to solve a problem, this experience of fear can be avoided (Bennett 1979), but the experience does not become an entirely cerebral one. In fact, many mystery films exploit Viewer Suspicion to generate suspense. This can be achieved by manoeuvring between Viewer Suspicion and suspense, providing viewers with the opportunity to reduce ambiguity, but in doing so, to identify new problems or

¹³² Examples of research linking mystery and suspense can be seen in Brewer (1996), Carroll (1996), Knobloch (2003), and Zillmann (2013).

threats. For example, when the viewer suspects that a character in a film poses a threat, they will be held in suspense as other characters interact with that suspect. This is particularly pronounced when characters within the film have expressed a suspicion about the suspect (Zillmann 2013, 615). In this way, mystery films captivate viewers by distributing story information to generate feelings of suspense about forthcoming events and revelations (Laine 2011, 37).

Viewer Suspicion, as a response elicited by mystery films, always includes some aspect of suspense. The presence of suspense may simply be as a point of departure, motivating viewers to relieve emotional tension by engaging in Textual Problem Solving, or it may be a more nuanced application of ambiguity and uncertainty throughout a film. To better distinguish Viewer Suspicion and suspense, and to examine the ways in which they interact in mystery films, I examine the different types of suspense in film.

Types of Suspense

Suspense is primarily categorised into one of four types, which reflect a viewer's response to uncertainty (Laine 2011). These types include: the anxiety experienced awaiting an anticipated negative event (*dread*); the desire for a positive outcome for an expected, possibly negative event (*hope*); the apprehension awaiting an expected but unconfirmed event (*doubt*); or the positive excitement surrounding an expected but unknown event (*curiosity*). The type of suspense provoked describes the emotional state of the viewer, whether secure or afraid, excited or nervous, attracted or repulsed. These types describe how a viewer responds to tension generated within film, and the typology provides insight into what motivates viewers to generate Viewer Suspicion in different circumstances. Viewer Suspicion allows viewers to feel like active participants in the problem or mystery explored within a film, thus transforming their experience of emotional tension. How this transformation occurs can be better understood by examining these four types of suspense.

Dread is the anticipatory fear of some negative forthcoming event. It relies on the tension between a belief that some future event will occur, and the viewer's fear of that future event occurring (Hanich 2011). The viewer fears some negative outcome but strongly believes that outcome is likely due to the presence of some related threat. As Hanich writes, "[t]he essential prerequisite is that *we* strongly expect that something will happen—and therefore fear for the characters and ourselves" (2011, 159). Zillmann argues that when a viewer is confident or certain that a negative outcome is forthcoming, they will no longer

be held in suspense; therefore, uncertainty (or ambiguity, as I would argue) is a crucial component of suspense (2013, 588). Hanich addresses this point, arguing that “[i]n dread, the exact nature of the threat to the characters is still uncertain” (2011, 161). For Viewer Suspicion to be aroused in this context, there must be some information which provides a clue to the nature or timing of the threat. For example, *Se7en* (Fincher 1995) follows two detectives investigating an active serial killer. As they search for the killer, they continue to uncover new victims. Instead of experiencing dread with each new clue, viewers can work to solve the problem alongside the detectives, and therefore experience Viewer Suspicion. By engaging viewers in Textual Problem Solving, the film can arouse Viewer Suspicion rather than dread, even when the viewer does not arrive at a solution.

In suspense, *hope* refers to a viewer’s focus on a positive, albeit unlikely outcome. As Laine writes, hope in response to suspense is a form of “hopeless hope” wherein the viewer recognises that few alternative interpretations exist that would allow for a positive outcome (Laine 2011, 28). While viewers recognise the unlikelihood of a positive outcome, they still seek closure through story resolution. A viewer is more invested in seeing the outcome of the story than in leaving the theatre to avoid seeing the potential threat realised. In these conditions, as with dread, Viewer Suspicion is aroused by a search for information to resolve ambiguity. Rather than waiting and hoping for some positive, but unknown resolution to an overwhelming threat, Viewer Suspicion, as reaction, is the search for plausible interpretations with positive outcomes. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus 2002), Harry is poisoned during the climactic fight. The reference to the healing properties of phoenix tears, included earlier in the film, arouses Viewer Suspicion and allows viewers to predict how Harry will survive. A viewer unaware of this fact may be held in suspense as they must hope against all odds that he will be cured of the poison.

Suspense and anticipation can be generated without fear of negative outcomes (Hanich 2011, 160). Instead of being held in suspense while dreading or hoping for a particular outcome, viewers can anticipate the resolution of their “uncertainty about the veridicality of circumstances” (Zillmann 2013, 602). Viewers are presented with circumstances that force them to challenge or *doubt* the belief sets they have established thus far. Doubt, in suspense, is the recognition that certain beliefs and feelings may have been contrived, and that alternative interpretations exist—even rival ones (Leonard 2013, 66). When a viewer is held in suspense, there is no opportunity for them to sufficiently evaluate these

alternatives, meaning that a belief, or the source of a belief, retains its ambiguity. Once a viewer is able to actively consider and evaluate these alternatives, they are viewing with suspicion. As Zillmann argues, the mystery genre is founded on the viewers' doubts surrounding questions of who, why, and how of some central act (Zillmann 2013, 603).

For a gap in knowledge to lead to suspense or Viewer Suspicion, there must be some motivating factor: a desire on the viewer's part to know more. The experience of *curiosity* may seem contradictory to my previous conceptions of suspense, wherein the viewer is unable to identify a way to 'know more', to resolve ambiguity. Instead, curiosity in suspense is sated when the viewer continues to watch, waiting for more to be revealed. Unlike in the reaction of Viewer Suspicion, viewers held in suspense by curiosity do not need a search strategy or process for satisfying their desire to know more; they simply need to continue watching. Curiosity is "often a central element in suspense" (Laine 2011, 28), maintaining tension by the viewers' desire to continue—whether this is towards a positive or negative outcome. Elias Baumgarten (2001) argues that curiosity is normally a virtuous trait, closely related to concern, but can become immoral. When the object of curiosity is seen as socially inappropriate, the act of viewing can be seen as a form of "morbid curiosity" (Baumgarten 2001, 170).

Interestingly, some writers distinguish curiosity from suspense, arguing that curiosity refers to the satisfaction of some prior event while suspense refers to expectations regarding a forthcoming event (Tan and Diteweg 2013, 296). Others have found that the emotional experience of the viewer differentiates along lines of suspicion and curiosity, depending on whether the film is classified as a thriller or a mystery (Knobloch-Westervick and Keplinger 2008, 118). This lack of agreement may indicate there are in fact two kinds of curiosity being examined as I propose here: suspense and suspicion. Empirical evidence adds support to this proposal, finding that readers of the mystery and thriller genres experience appreciably different emotional responses based on the structuring of an event in generic formulations (Knobloch et al. 2004).

Suspense, like Viewer Suspicion, is motivated by the perception of a gap in knowledge and an engagement with narrative. This distinction between the two is important for two reasons. Firstly, it helps illuminate how viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving, and why they do so. Secondly, distinguishing the two responses resolves the issues in studying mystery film viewing that have arisen from a conflation of the two responses. Viewer Suspicion describes how viewers respond to a gap in knowledge in a mystery film when

they are not bound by dread or fear, undermined by doubt or uncertainty, waiting with hopeless hope, or simply satisfying a morbid curiosity. Instead, Viewer Suspicion allows the viewer to resolve these emotional tensions by working towards closing this gap in knowledge, whether or not such efforts are successful. Simply by engaging in Textual Problem Solving, the viewer is no longer held ‘in suspense’, and begins to consider what has or could happen, and how best to gather more information to close the gap in knowledge.

6.3 SUSPICION AS A PRAGMATIC SOLUTION

A mystery film poses no physical threat to the viewer, but the anxiety or distress produced by tension within the film can motivate viewers to search for answers. Others are motivated by feelings of curiosity, intrigue, or *fiero*;¹³³ and Viewer Suspicion is a critical tool of engagement when following a mystery narrative. Viewer Suspicion is a pragmatic response to a gap in knowledge; we are suspicious of something because it is seen as important and relevant to the relief of tension within the film or the production of pleasure or satisfaction. By this I mean that Viewer Suspicion is both a rational and emotional response. The identification of a gap in knowledge (*catalyst*) and the effort to form opinions and work to resolve the gap (*reaction*) are rational responses when trying to solve the film’s core problem. However, this reaction is largely directed by the way viewers feel in response to the gap in knowledge (*affect*), rather than logic or reason. Viewer Suspicion, as a reaction, is a way of engaging in Textual Problem Solving. It is a practical and rational response, given the problem set by the film, but should be considered in relation to the emotions motivating viewers’ engagement.

The emotional response to suspense, at its peak, diminishes viewers’ capacity to critically evaluate the text to identify a solution, whereas Viewer Suspicion enhances this capacity, motivating viewers to search for information to determine how things will play out. Rather than focusing on the components of suspenseful films, Laine examines the emotional states produced by the viewing experience, including “terror, inquisitiveness, curiosity, concern, and fascination” (2011, 28). Laine highlights the potential for emotions to direct viewer attention and influence how viewers construct meaning from a text. In particular,

¹³³ A term coined by Isabella Poggi (2012) referring to the pride and satisfaction that are experienced when overcoming a challenge.

“cinematic emotions” can be developed by engagement with plot, story, and character, but may lead to the direction of attention away from the screen, to considerations, inferences, and beliefs (Laine 2011, 4). Viewer Suspicion and suspense both utilise cinematic emotions, but Viewer Suspicion directs attention away from the screen for the purpose of problem solving: considering evidence to generate inferences or evaluate beliefs. “Emotions are determinate patterns of salience among objects of attention, lines of inquiry, and inferential strategies” (de Sousa 1980, 137) and are thus crucial in understanding how viewers experience both Viewer Suspicion and suspense. Viewer Suspicion requires the engagement of reason and logic, and the direction of attention based on a search strategy as determined by the viewer. In both cases, viewers play a significant role in the creation of meaning in screen texts, defining the discourse through which a film can communicate and represent meaning through their interactions (Laine 2011, 11).

Viewer Suspicion can also be seen as a pragmatic response to the emotional tensions arising from gaps in knowledge. This is because Viewer Suspicion, as a reaction, resolves emotional tension and allows a viewer to work towards a solution to the core problem in a mystery film. Further, viewers derive satisfaction from engaging in Textual Problem Solving, and this satisfaction is influenced by the success of their suspicions. As Sayers argues, “it may be that [in mystery stories, the reader] finds a sort of catharsis or purging of fears and self-questionings. These mysteries made only to be solved ... comfort him [sic]” (Sayers 1929, quoted in Cawleti 2004, 336).

In a study of mystery readers, Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger (2008) found that the accuracies of readers’ suspicions influenced their enjoyment. Readers showed higher levels of enjoyment for simpler mysteries and indicated lower levels of enjoyment when their suspicions were inaccurate (Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger 2008, 125-126). In addition, suspicion—which the authors describe as uncertainty paired with curiosity—has been shown to predict higher levels of enjoyment (Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger 2006). Accordingly, the authors identified that clues were central to the viewer experience, as “they govern recipients’ uncertainty” (Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger 2008, 119). Zillmann argues that viewers actively seek to problem solve while viewing a mystery film, using clues to consider a range of possible solutions, and finally deriving pleasure based on their success (Zillmann 2013, 604). Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger (2008) concur with this statement and argue that mystery enjoyment is closely linked to the viewer’s suspicions. In particular, they recognise the importance of changes that occur to these

suspicions over time, as viewers adapt to address new pieces of information and alternative interpretations as the plot unfolds (Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger 2008, 119).

Resolving Suspicion

When watching mystery films, Viewer Suspicion is a starting point for thinking about how to solve the problem, as well as a means of relieving the emotional tension associated with the experience of suspense. In this way, viewers address ambiguity by considering alternative interpretations, linking relevant information, or engaging in other forms of Textual Problem Solving. Viewer Suspicion is a way for viewers to change their engagement with a text and, in the case of mystery films, partake in the resolution of some task or problem. The conditions that arouse Viewer Suspicion may otherwise hold a viewer in suspense, if it were not for the viewer's awareness of a problem, and their desire to solve it by engaging in Textual Problem Solving.

In this chapter, I have defined Viewer Suspicion as a pragmatic yet emotionally driven response to the perception of ambiguity. This engagement relies on viewers' perception of a problem, and a belief that by engaging with the problem, they may make the transition from a state of "ignorance" to "enlightenment" (Gerrig and Bernardo 1994, 471). When viewers perceive information as both ambiguous and salient to the film's core problem, they experience emotional tension and are presented with problem-solving opportunities. The combination of emotional tension and a pathway for resolving this tension by engaging in Textual Problem Solving, produces the strongest motivation for viewer engagement with mystery films. Thus, the production of Viewer Suspicion is an essential tool in the construction of mystery films, and its application across the narrative shapes the viewing experience. Further, Viewer Suspicion highlights the importance of clues, information that appears both salient and ambiguous, to mystery film viewers. In Part IV, I identify how mystery films engage viewers in Textual Problem Solving through the arousal of Viewer Suspicion. In particular, I examine the role of film structure, narrative, problem types, and filmic practices for conveying salience and ambiguity to viewers and motivating viewers to engage in Textual Problem Solving.

Part IV: Film

7

Piecing Together Mystery Films

In this chapter, I examine the narrative structure of mystery films, and the role of this structure in shaping viewer engagement. “Structure is the strategic organization of the events in a narrative to create a coherent and compelling experience of story and ideas” (Pearlman 2015, 281). I argue that mystery films are edited in a strategic way to produce a ‘challenge to the viewer’. To achieve this, mystery films facilitate and frustrate viewers’ engagement in Textual Problem Solving—which was defined in Chapter 4—at different times throughout the film. To engage in Textual Problem Solving, the viewer must be able to produce a mental model of the film’s diegetic world and to direct appropriate cognitive resources to the problem-solving task. Mystery films use continuity editing and narrative cohesion, and minimise extraneous cognitive load, to allow viewers to engage in these processes. However, by increasing the cognitive difficulty of comprehending a film’s structure, mystery films can frustrate viewer attempts at Textual Problem Solving, preventing viewers from reaching a solution at a critical point in the film.

To begin, in Section 7.1, I argue that cohesion and continuity are necessary to allow viewers to construct mental models of the diegetic world. Further, I argue that these models play an essential role in the way viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving, creating a conceptual working space that is used to consider and test ideas. By doing so, viewers can determine the scope of a problem and the limitations that must be placed on any solution. By creating a narrative that rewards the presumption of cohesion, and by using continuity editing, films in the Study Set enable viewers to engage in Textual Problem Solving. Subsequently, in Section 7.2, I examine how films go about directing viewer attention, and the role of attention in Textual Problem Solving. Film editing and event segmentation have been shown to influence when perceptual stimuli is processed and encoded by viewers (Swallow, Zacks, and Abrams 2009, 252). By directing viewer attention and cognition, editing structure can facilitate viewer engagement with Textual Problem Solving, presenting specific objects as salient and hiding others to frustrate viewer attempts at reaching a solution.

In Section 7.3, I support my claims in the previous two sections using the editing data from the 87 films in the Study Set (as identified in Chapter 4). I outline the key trends and practices in the editing of films in the Study Set and discuss how these trends relate to Textual Problem Solving. In addition, I argue that genre strongly determines the pacing of film editing, which suggests that editing practices are tailored to specific viewing contexts. Finally, I argue that films in the Study Set are structured to facilitate viewer engagement in Textual Problem Solving for the majority of the film, before frustrating this engagement as the film approaches conclusion. Films in the Study Set achieve this by using a higher concentration of shorter shots, increasing extraneous cognitive load, and diminishing a viewer's capacity to synthesise new information with existing information. Because the film diminishes the viewer's capacity to form mental models of the diegetic world and to direct attention consciously, the viewer is less likely to accurately solve the film's core problem. Mystery films are thus designed to engage the viewer in Textual Problem Solving, maintaining engagement with the core problem while preventing a premature arrival at a film's core solution.

To conclude the chapter, I argue in Section 7.4 that viewers produce predictive inferences when viewing mystery films. Viewers draw on their mental model of the diegetic world, influenced by where their attention has been directed, to pre-empt what will happen next in the film. By doing so, the viewer is engaging in a form of solution testing: obtaining feedback on their comprehension of the problem by determining whether it can be used to predict future events within the narrative. In the context of mystery film viewing, predictive inferences are fundamental to Textual Problem Solving and represent the viewer's attempt to resolve suspicions generated during viewing. I argue that the editing structure of films in the Study Set is so effective at frustrating attempts at Textual Problem Solving specifically because it inhibits the viewer's capacity to produce and assess predictive inferences.

7.1 FORMING MENTAL MODELS

In cognitive psychology, a mental model is an internal cognitive construction that attempts to correspond with external stimuli (Morgan 2014). Viewers form a mental model when viewing a film, conceptualising how objects, agents, and actions relate to one another within the physical spaces depicted or referenced in the text. Mental models are constructed to represent a perceived reality—fictitious or otherwise—and to understand

the consequence of actions within that model (Ritter, Baxter, and Churchill 2014). Bordwell argues that mental models draw on developed conventions, such as genre, schema, and heuristics, and that they underpin all “spectatorial activity” (Bordwell 1989c, 27). Problem solving uses mental models to conceptualise what the problem is composed of, how things interact within the problem, to anticipate the consequence of operations within that problem. For example, the Tower of Hanoi is a puzzle consisting of three rods, and a set of discs of different sizes stacked in ascending order. The puzzle requires the solver to move all discs from one rod to another, without ever placing a larger disc on top of a smaller disc. Without a physical set of pieces or something to mark as a representation of game states, the solver needs to create a mental model of the puzzle and manipulate the pieces within this model.

Similarly, when viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving, they must rely on mental models. Viewers conceptualise the space and time in which the problem exists, and each of its moving parts—that is, the objects and characters within the film—to develop a hypothesis or to ‘test’ a solution, conceiving of a possible outcome based on the constraints set out within the film. The formation of a mental model of a film narrative reflects viewers’ comprehension of the film and is an essential tool in generating and evaluating possible solutions to the film’s core problem. The viewer’s mental model is a representation of spatial, temporal, action, and event relationships within the film, and serves as the structure for the possible manipulations, transformation, and permutations available for solving the core problem.

Viewers use this mental model to evaluate new information, seeking to determine how this new information fits within the model and how it can be understood using that model. When viewers use this evaluation to make predictions about what has or will happen, they are making a predictive inference. A predictive inference is a hypothesis based on evidence and reasoning about future actions or revelations, and within mystery films it describes a viewer’s attempt to conceive of a possible ‘termination state’, or solution, to a problem.¹³⁴ The production of predictive inferences during viewing is one of the central ways in which viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving (discussed further in Section 7.4). For example, in *Flightplan* (Schwentke 2005) Kyle Pratt claims her daughter has been taken from her during a flight, although airline staff and other passengers deny the girl’s existence. Viewers

¹³⁴ This conception need not be accurate. Many mystery films will play on the viewer’s confidence in their mental model, revealing its construction to disrupt or surprise them.

assess whether the disappearance and denial of the daughter's existence is best explained by a conspiracy against Kyle, or a delusion on Kyle's part—given that we have been shown parts of the film from Kyle's point of view—by drawing on a mental model of the film's diegetic world.¹³⁵ That mental model could consist of the layout of the plane, the duration of time in which the child disappeared, and the possible motivations for deceit among the passengers and crew. By doing this, the viewer is engaging in Textual Problem Solving, playing out possible scenarios and critically evaluating the available information.

Mental models are not unique to mystery film viewing and play a role in viewer comprehension of any narrative film. However, mystery films have a heightened requirement for facilitating the production of mental models during viewing, due to viewers' engagement in Textual Problem Solving and the centrality of this process to the advancement of the film's plot. Mystery films offer a constantly evolving set of relations and the viewer must work to preserve their comprehension of the diegetic world, updating the structure to accommodate new pieces of information as the plot advances. Mystery films facilitate the formation of mental models, by creating cohesion and continuity, to direct viewer expectations toward specific responses to a film's core problem.

A Presumption of Cohesion

Correctly interpreting and comprehending a cohesive narrative in a film requires a presumption that cohesion exists within the text. By presuming so, viewers accept that meaningful links exist between different parts of the film and use this information to work towards a solution. In a “well-structured” problem (Greeno 1976, 479-80), the scope and limitations of that problem are explicit; however, in film problems are rarely presented in this way. Films often start *in medias res*, delaying exposition crucial to understanding and solving a problem. Without a presumption of cohesion, viewers cannot navigate the changes in time, space, and knowledge states that are present in mystery films. To effectively assess the problem, and to provide the structure necessary to solving it, viewers assume that exposition will come. By doing so, viewers can strategically *contain* the problem,

¹³⁵ For viewers to arrive at this conclusion they must be familiar with the genre, recognising the possibility that our alignment with Kyle and the scenes viewed from her perspective may be misleading. It is not until Kyle finds physical evidence of her daughter's presence on the plane that the audience can dismiss their distrust. Interestingly, while the scene is constructed to act as proof for the viewer that the child was on the plane, the possibility that Kyle is hallucinating remains. No other character is witness to this proof and as such the scene is no different to those that preceded it.

establishing a conceptual working space to construct a mental model of the diegetic world as the plot unfolds.¹³⁶

For example, *Inception* (Nolan 2010) begins with a scene that cuts between three different locations without an explicit explanation of how each space relates to the others (Figure 7.1.1). Cobb and Arthur are trying to steal from Saito in a Japanese castle; Cobb's team has Saito sedated in an apartment in Kenya; and Cobb's team is sedated alongside Saito in a private compartment on a bullet train. The film gives viewers enough information that, with a presumption of cohesion, they can build a narrative that connects these otherwise disparate scenes. Cobb and Arthur explain how it is possible to enter another person's dreams, while shots inside the apartment show the men from the castle sleeping. The sequence provides viewers with clues as to the rules within dreams, establishing that sleepers feel pain but wake up when killed, that time moves more quickly inside a dream level, and that individuals can be brought into other people's dreams. If this exposition was further delayed, or if the viewer lost trust in the film's cohesion, they would fail to comprehend the film and identify its core problem.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ This is not to say that viewers' perceptions of the problem cannot shift or be subverted throughout a film, simply that the presumption of cohesion largely facilitates viewer comprehension and understanding. Additionally, viewers can utilise this presumption to identify and arrange preliminary pieces of information together, forming an outline of the problem.

¹³⁷ Maintaining viewers' presumption in cohesion is also essential in puzzle films, ensuring viewers perceive the complex narrative form as a problem to be engaged rather than disconnected and haphazard shots or scenes.



Figure 7.1.1—Inception (Nolan 2010) moves between these three different realities before explaining their relationship to the viewer. To follow these drastic changes a viewer must presume cohesion between the film’s parts.

Films must be made to support a presumption of cohesion, rewarding viewers with a narrative whose component parts come together in a logical and ordered structure. This structure is essential for mystery films to function as a “game of logical inference” (Leitch 2002, 55), and to encourage viewer engagement in Textual Problem Solving. Film comprehension relies on conventions, including a presumption of cohesion and logic. These conventions are not inherently assumed by viewers and must be learnt over time

and through experience with films. Research into viewers that lack this presumption of cohesion suggests that editing plays a primary role in conveying this structure to viewers.

For example, in a study by psychological scientists Schwan and Ildirar (2010), members of an isolated Turkish community with no previous exposure to film and television were shown a series of short films. The same films were shown to two other groups with greater experience viewing screen texts. Each group was asked a series of questions to gauge their comprehension of scenes, particularly their interpretation of what change a cut signified in different contexts (Schwan and Ildirar 2010, 972-3). For example, viewers were asked the location of a character after a cut that changed the position of the camera. Their responses were compared with “standard interpretations” (973) determined by a survey of the more experienced viewer groups. Inexperienced viewers showed little difficulty interpreting crosscutting shots; however, they struggled to produce the standard interpretation for POV shots, establishing shots, and shot/reverse shot pairs (974-5).¹³⁸

Schwan and Ildirar (2010) observed that perceptual discontinuities (scenes in which editing replaced natural perceptual search or movement) often confused inexperienced viewers (974-5). However, scenes that included an event or task familiar to the viewer showed some resistance to this effect (975). They suggest “what makes film clips intelligible for inexperienced viewers is ... the existence of a familiar line of events that establishes semantic coherence across shots” (975). A “familiar line of events” (975) refers to a process or order of events that is well known and understood by the viewer. When such a familiar line of events is unavailable, the viewer resorts to real-world perceptual inferences that produce non-standard interpretations of a scene. Ildirar and Schwan (2014) argue that pictorial, causal, and conceptual associations between shots are understood “due to their close relationship with everyday perception and cognition” (15). In contrast, other types of shots must be interpreted using learned practices, such as film conventions and the presumption of cohesion.

Film comprehension is sensitive to the presentation of images, from the position of the camera to the use of cuts. As Schwan and Ildirar (2015) identify, first-time viewers’ comprehension is “fragile” (15), as changes in shot range or camera position regularly produce inappropriate perceptions of spatial and temporal relations. For example, an establishing shot of a house followed by a shot of a person inside a room was not

¹³⁸ The inexperienced viewers could interpret film as a pictorial representation of a real-world scene and did not mistake it for reality (Schwan and Ildirar 2010, 973).

understood to represent the same house, from outside and in (Schwan and Ildirar 2010, 975). In addition, first-time viewers failed to make predictive inferences about diegetic events and could not identify inconsistencies in the editing (Schwan and Ildirar 2014, 145). For viewers to produce predictive inferences they must have a clear understanding of the potential consequence of actions within the diegetic world. First-time viewers struggle with the presentation of events in film due to a lack of presumed cohesion, and must thus focus on interpreting film editing, rather than the causal potential of events.

Another example of how viewers rely on a presumption of cohesion to comprehend a film comes from a cognitive psychology study of children aged between four and eight (Munk et al. 2012). The study investigated the children's understanding of cuts in screen texts at different ages. They found that the eight-year-old children, like adult viewers, showed increased eye movements following a cut that violated spatial continuity (262). This primarily refers to shots that change the relational position of objects or characters within a scene, including reversed-angle shots (Hochberg 1986; d'Ydewalle, Desmet, and Van Rensbergen 1998). This increase in eye movements is an attempt by viewers to re-establish the relational position of important characters and objects, updating their "spatial-cognitive schema of a presented scene" (Munk et al. 2012, 258). Interestingly, the children aged between four and six did not show an increase in eye movements following such violations (262-3). Without the presumption of cohesion, younger viewers have no reason to expect that the shot following a cut will relate to the previous shot and respond accordingly. Munk et al. (2012, 263) argue that children gain an understanding of editing techniques and convention through a combination of cognitive development and increased experience with screen texts.

"Conceiving films as coherent narratives provides an appropriate interpretive schema that motivates viewers to actively look for meaningful relations between shots" (Ildirar and Schwan 2014, 16). Doing so allows viewers to develop elaborative and predictive inferences about the film narrative and to interpret stylistic expressions of meaning. Interpreting the relationship between shots is something viewers learn over time, through exposure and experience with screen texts. The examples above suggest that meaningful interpretations of film come from familiarity, either with events or with representational practices. These events and practices can differ between cultures, time periods, and even

genres.¹³⁹ A presumption of cohesion facilitates a search, by viewers, for meaningful relationships between shots; but it is in the editing of a film that these relationships are clearly communicated to the viewer. This is primarily achieved by establishing continuity between shots, through the use of continuity editing.

Continuity Editing

The vast majority of feature films construct narrative through the depiction of a sequence of events. Editing techniques are used to facilitate a meaningful interpretation of continuity in the film's narrative, assisting viewers to understand and follow the narrative while minimising interruptions to attention (Bordwell 1985). These practices are referred to as continuity editing and describe a general set of expectations or guidelines for the manipulation of action, time and space within a film. My discussion here considers continuity editing broadly, including both Classical Hollywood style, and Postclassical Hollywood style, including Bordwell's conception of "intensified continuity" (2002). The 87 films in the Study Set predominantly employ continuity editing style. The practice builds on a presumption of cohesion and facilitates the construction of mental models of the diegetic world to facilitate engagement in Textual Problem Solving. There are general principles to continuity editing; however, these are not a definitive set of rules, with many different approaches capable of achieving the overall purpose of establishing a meaningful interpretation of shots for the film viewer.

The transition between shots is often used to communicate their relationship with one another. The majority of transitions in contemporary films are cuts (Cutting et al. 2011c). Continuity editing seeks to minimise the disruption this change causes, attempting to simulate "the continuous stream of linked images" experienced in reality (Murch 2001, 5-6). The viewer must make inferences or assumptions in order to perceive a meaningful relationship between images. Magliano and Zacks (2011) argue that "cuts are invisible because they are created such that viewers perceive a strong sense of situational cohesion across the cut boundary" (1491).

For example, continuity can be maintained by holding some elements constant across a cut while others change. This can include space, sound, music, characters, time, or action. As suspicion can be aroused by the identification of difference or ambiguity, continuity

¹³⁹ See Section 7.4 for evidence of the editing data from films in the Study Set that demonstrates how different genres can be structured in different ways through editing.

editing controls when this difference is more likely to be perceived. Continuity editing reinforces the perception of narrative cohesion, which is vital to the production of Viewer Suspicion as it was defined in Chapter 6. It provides viewers with the tools to relate information between shots towards a goal. Furthermore, continuity editing practices support the formation of clear mental models of the diegetic world. By maintaining spatial, temporal and object relations between shots, viewers are able to develop conceptual models of the events taking place and use these models to identify and classify information as suspicious. The following subsections outline the different ways in which continuity editing is used to establish or maintain the perception of continuity for film viewers, and the role of this continuity in mystery films.

Spatial Continuity

Continuity editing is employed to preserve viewers' comprehension of events within a narrative. To a large extent this relies on the viewer's ability to perceive spatial relations. Spatial continuity refers to the arrangement and setting of actors and objects within a scene, and how their position in relation to one another is held constant across cuts. This cohesion is primarily maintained by the 180-degree rule, or the "axis of action" (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 231). By ensuring that all shots frame the action from the same side of this vector, a 180-degree space is established. This ensures that the relative position of objects and characters remains constant during a scene. It also provides the viewer with a location within the scene. As Bordwell and Thompson write, "the viewer always knows where he or she is with respect to the story action" (2008, 234). This practice minimises the difficulty of orienting oneself following a cut and allows the formation of a mental model of the space.

The axis of action can shift within a scene by establishing a new point of focus. In *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009) the axis of action starts between Sherlock Holmes, on the left, and Lord Blackwood, on the right (Figure 7.1.2). Following a taunt by Blackwood directed at John Watson, the axis of action shifts (Figure 7.1.3). This allows the spatial relationship of Holmes and Blackwood to reverse while the spatial relationship between Blackwood and Watson is maintained. The axis of action shifts as Sherlock Holmes moves from Blackwood's left Blackwood to his right across shots. Continuity is maintained by ensuring Blackwood remains left of Watson across both shots.



Figure 7.1.2—Sherlock Holmes on the left of frame and Lord Blackwood on the right of frame in Sherlock Holmes (Ritchie 2009)



Figure 7.1.3—Sherlock Holmes on the left of frame and Lord Blackwood on the right of frame in Sherlock Holmes (Ritchie 2009)

Spatial continuity is also maintained through the use of eyeline matching, where the first shot displays a character looking and the second shot shows what they were looking at. In *Dream House* (Sheridan 2011) this match is used to misdirect viewers, as Anne appears to look back at Libby in the second shot (Figure 7.1.4). In this scene Libby is a hallucination of Will's, and Anne is simply looking to where he gestured in the shot before. Match-on-action cuts are also used to establish clear spatial continuity across cuts. This technique involves an action or movement that begins in the first shot and is shown continuing or completed in successive shots, following a cut.



Figure 7.1.4—Will calls to Libby, who says she will be down in a minute, before Anne looks up the stairs, seemingly at Libby, in Dream House (Sheridan 2011)

Temporal Continuity

Temporal continuity describes the sequential arrangement of events, the duration of shots and scenes, as well as the number of times an action or event is presented on screen. *Inception* (Nolan 2010) maintains temporal continuity across several dream layers, although time operates differently in each level. Crosscutting is used to show events within each of the layers, with footage slowed down in upper layers to reflect these different operations

of time in relation to the deepest layer. The simultaneity of actions across dream layers is reiterated by events that impact the dreamers' bodies, feeding up or down through the layers. By establishing temporal qualities as constant across shots, the viewer is able to infer a meaningful relationship between these actions and overlook the differences in spaces and actions. In doing so, they produce a mental model of how the events take place in time. Mystery films maintain continuity through temporal order, frequency, and duration, using transitions and concurrent action to support the construction of temporal models by the viewer. A representation of the temporal order of events allows critical examination of causal relationships within the film, which in turn facilitates Viewer Suspicion and Textual Problem Solving.

Object/ Action Continuity

Tim J Smith (2005) suggests that in addition to spatial and temporal forms of continuity, object continuity must be considered. He argues that viewers have expectations regarding the appearance of an object, as well as how, where, and when that object will appear following a cut. Research has shown that changes to an object across cuts generally go unnoticed when viewers are not paying particular attention to the object's appearance. This failure to detect change is commonly known as change blindness (Simons and Rensink 2005; Smith and Henderson 2008). For the change to be noticed, a viewer's attention must be caught by the resulting visual transition, or they must have a mental model of the object to compare with the new visual presentation. As Smith writes, "in the absence of focal attention or an explicit change detection task, adults will perceive existence constancy based solely on spatiotemporal continuity even if the object information has changed" (2005, 211). Object continuity also describes a viewer's expectations regarding how an object will appear in a shot and what actions or movement to expect. This returns to a focus on cause and effect as emphasised by Bordwell in his writing on intensified continuity (2002; Bordwell and Thompson 2008) and reveals the importance of viewer expectations and inferences.

Continuity editing supports film viewers to develop mental models of spatial, temporal, and causal relationships. The style rewards the viewer for making assumptions that elements of the narrative are cohesive and meaningfully related. By doing so, the viewer is able to make necessary links between the presented information. In the psychological sciences, continuity editing creates the "appropriate interpretive schema" (Ildirar and Schwan 2014, 16) for viewers to seek meaning in the pairing of shots and enables them to

extrapolate from that representation. Viewer Suspicion is facilitated by expectations surrounding the film medium and the mystery genre and is aroused under conditions where a mental model of events exists. This mental model relies on viewers' engagement with film, and their expectations of events.

Event Structure Perception

Similar to the processes of film editing, a cognitive process known as event structure perception breaks down perceptual information into a series of discrete events (Newtson 1973; Newtson and Engquist 1976; Zacks and Tversky 2001). The process is vital to making predictions about what will happen next, and how to act in response (Zwaan and Radvansky 1998). Individuals use mental models of event structure, known as event schemata, to produce predictive inferences, drawing on knowledge about the current event, previous similar events, and situational factors that may influence how the event unfolds (Zacks et al. 2007). When developing a mental model of the diegetic world, viewers activate these same event schemata. The way mystery film viewers break down an event influences what information they assess when engaging in Textual Problem Solving, and can be influenced by filmic conventions, editing, and their perception of the genre.

The perceived structure of events has been measured by asking people to watch actions and identify where they perceive event borders to exist. Studies have revealed that individuals tend to concur as to where events start and finish; and further, participants can segment events into smaller or larger units depending on the instructions given, while continuing to show high levels of agreement (Newtson, Engquist, and Bois 1977; Zacks 2004; Zacks, Speer, and Reynolds 2009). Event segmentation occurs even when an explicit task is not set for participants. In the psychological sciences, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has been used to show that “[a]lthough participants did not know about the segmentation task during the original viewing of the movies, a network of regions in the brain increased in activity around the points in time participants later identified as boundaries between units of activity” (Zacks, Speer, and Reynolds 2009: 307-8).

The way viewers break down an event in mystery films can shape their perception of the problem and how to solve it. For instance, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006) Angier attempts to figure out how Borden performs the “Transported Man” magic trick. The performance of the trick can be broken down into larger or smaller units. If the event is conceived of as a single unit (Borden teleports across stage), the viewer assumes the unseen transportation

of Borden's body. If the event is conceived in slightly smaller units (Borden enters a box and instantly exits a box across the stage), there is a greater opportunity to critically evaluate how the trick is performed. Finally, if the event is conceived of in even smaller units (Borden announces his trick, has an audience member test a rubber ball, bounces the ball across the stage, enters a box on one side of the stage, and instantly exits a box on the other side to catch the ball), the trick becomes more difficult to decipher as distractions—such as the rubber ball—are considered. Thus, event structure perception plays an important role in how viewers conceptualise the actions that take place within the film, and how to use this information to solve the film's core problem.

Magliano and Zacks (2011) frame object continuity as a form of action continuity, arguing that it is particularly significant to viewers when establishing a comprehension of an event within a series of actions. Action—specifically, movement—requires the engagement of motion detection processes within the viewer. Maintaining these processes across shots, with only a short interruption to reorient the location of important objects, allows individuals to perceive continuity after changes in perspective (Troje, Westhoff, and Lavrov 2005; Alaerts, Swinnen, and Wenderoth 2009). The authors found that cuts which break continuity of action, as opposed to spatial/temporal continuity, have the most robust effect on the segmentation of events. Further, continuity editing has been shown to regulate viewer responses and expectations surrounding cinematic events (Magliano and Zacks 2011, 1513). Event structure and film editing interact to change viewers' responses to either component individually. Depending on the location of a cut in relation to the conclusion of an event (the event boundary), viewers may be distracted or focused. Editing across event structure has the potential to guide viewers' attention and make clues more or less salient to them. Event structure perception and continuity editing work together to facilitate the generation of mental models by film viewers, organising information so that Textual Problem Solving may be engaged.

7.2 DIRECTING ATTENTION

Attention can be defined as a concentration on sensory input or a cognitive task. This could include fixating on the physical features of a person's face or trying to remember where something had been seen before. By focusing cognitive resources towards a task or perceptual stimuli, attention transforms our engagement with that task or percept. It increases the speed and depth of processing the target information, facilitating a quicker

and more efficacious response (Egeth and Yantis 1997). Films in the Study Set have used editing and event structure to direct viewer attention strategically, allowing viewers to engage in Textual Problem Solving, but frustrating their efforts at critical points so as to prevent their arrival at the correct solution. Textual Problem Solving is fundamentally about a series of attentional shifts, whereby attention shifts from gathering new information from stimuli to processing and organising new information, and then to synthesising and testing applications for that information. By examining where and when a viewer's attention is directed, we can also determine when Textual Problem Solving is facilitated, and when it is frustrated.

Where a cut is placed, and in what context, shapes viewer attention and engagement with Textual Problem Solving. The location of a cut can suggest when viewer attention is focused on external stimuli, and when it is focused on encoding or processing information. Four cognitive phenomena are outlined below that demonstrate the importance of where and how editing is used, including edit blindness, directing attention, event boundaries, and cognitive load. Across these four cognitive features, filmmakers have the potential to strategically direct viewer attention to engage with Textual Problem Solving, allowing progress towards a solution but preventing viewers from solving the core problem entirely. Further, they demonstrate the influence of editing on attention, and viewers' ability to complete concurrent cognitive tasks—such as attempting to engage in Textual Problem Solving.

Continuity editing and Edit Blindness

When a film maintains an element or elements constant across a cut, viewers can overlook the sharp changes in favour of visual and narrative continuity and cohesiveness—a phenomenon described by perceptual psychologists as “edit blindness” (Smith and Henderson 2008). Smith (2005) proposes that if viewers perceive discontinuity in a cut, they will shift attention away from the interactions taking place within the cinematic world and towards the editing itself. This is not to say viewers are blind to continuity editing, but rather that attention is more likely to remain focused on the film's images. This difference has been demonstrated in a number of experiments in the psychological sciences examining perception and continuity editing (Reeves et al. 1985; d'Ydewalle and Vanderbeeken 1990). In his attentional theory of continuity editing, Smith (2005) investigates four techniques involved in limiting the amount of attention that is captured by the changes present during a cut. These techniques include: having the viewer focus on

a constant; meeting expectations during visual change; suppressing attention; and directing attention internally (Smith 2005, 345). While each of these techniques has been demonstrated to effectively direct attention away from a cut, it can also be used within mystery films to direct attention away from the periphery, allowing clues to be hidden.

Research in the psychological sciences on inattention blindness suggests that when a viewer focuses on a specific object, changes in their peripheral vision may go unattended (Mack and Rock 1998). This type of transition is very rare in film. As Smith (2005) points out, this kind of cut is normally focused on surprising a viewer rather than maintaining continuity. For example, the camera may zoom in to a character or object and zoom back out to reveal a change has occurred. This effect is used to hide a join between shots but disrupts expectations regarding temporal or spatial continuity. Smith concludes that focusing a viewer's attention on a visual constant, in isolation, is unlikely to account for edit blindness.¹⁴⁰ Although the viewer does not notice peripheral changes when this transition is employed, they may have a heightened perception of the focal object. The disruption to spatial and temporal continuity requires the viewer to assess what has changed and what has occurred before and after these changes. Rather than accepting the gradual changes, the viewer is drawn to a sharp change and will scrutinise the clues presented before them, providing an opportunity for the arousal of suspicion. In this way, edit blindness is not a lack of visual perception, but a focusing of it towards a specific target, to the detriment of others.

Alternatively, it may be possible to focus viewer attention by satisfying their expectations across a visual transition, thereby minimising attention to changes. These expectations can be quite general—for instance, looking to a character to respond when spoken to—or more specific—something learned or established within the context of the film. Expectations can mirror real perceptual events, such as matching a person's gaze, or may draw on experience with screen texts. Smith argues that “[e]xpectation provides an attentional and conceptual bridge across changes in viewpoint” (Smith 2005, 71). Film

¹⁴⁰ It has been suggested that editors have an opportunity to mask cuts during the suppression of visual information that occurs during blinks and saccades (Murch 2001). Contemporary research has shown that blinks are not synchronised among audiences (Fukuda et al. 2005) and that viewers' pattern of blinks shows no significant differences based on the location of edits (Smith and Henderson 2008). This suggests that blinking does not play a major role in maintaining the perception of continuity for viewers. However, there may be opportunities to suppress attention by having viewers conduct a saccadic movement across cuts. It has been established that visual information is suppressed shortly before, during, and after a saccade. Further, eye tracking research has provided evidence that audiences synchronise their saccadic movements while viewing moving-image displays (Smith and Mital 2013).

viewers have expectations about what they will see next, which creates a form of “perceptual inquiry” (Hochberg and Brooks 1978). The purpose of film structure and editing in this instance is to meet those expectations, reinforcing viewers’ beliefs about the event, while answering that perceptual inquiry. When viewers receive the expected stimulus, they remain focused on the event as something continuous, instead of focusing on the cut itself. To put this another way, viewers’ attention moves from one focal object to another across a cut due to their expectations and understanding of the spatial relationship of the two objects, reducing the chance that extraneous changes capture attention (Most et al. 2005).

Editing can imitate real-world perceptual inquiry in that “one image follows another as our attention is drawn from this point to that in our surroundings” (Lindgren 1948, 54). Movement can attract our attention (pull) or direct it (push/point) as we respond to directional cues. Looking where a person points, as opposed to the hand they moved to point, is a fundamental social directional cue. However, in film, a cut will often complete this movement for viewers. Instead of requiring us to turn our heads or move our eyes in anticipation, the film uses editing to cut between these two shots. Viewers rely on deictic cues to develop a mental model of what they see in film (Nadaner 1984). This representation allows for an experience of continuity in film (Bordwell 1985; Dmytryk 1986), but also allows real-world perceptual responses to be fulfilled by a cut. The viewer can recognise the cut as the fulfilment of an instinctive perceptual response to attentional cues within the film space. So long as the shot meets viewers’ expectations regarding spatial continuity, or answers their perceptual inquiry, editing will not draw viewer attention away from the object of focus on screen.

Editors capture and shift visual attention just prior to a cut to synchronise viewer responses and to suppress attention during a cut (Dmytryk 1986; Pepperman 2004). This can be achieved by fulfilling viewer expectations about a scene, as discussed above. When one character asks a question of another, the viewer looks towards the second character in expectation of their response. The effect can also be achieved by using motion to shift attention across a cut and coordinate this shift with a new point of focus in the following shot. Match-on-action cuts regularly meet these specific requirements. A study using eye tracking demonstrated that the majority of transitions result in a change to the point of focus, requiring saccadic movement (May, Dean, and Barnard 2003). In addition, the study found that certain types of cuts were associated with a predictive saccade by viewers. This

included cuts from POV shots and close-ups, cuts during conversations, or over-the-shoulder cuts. Shots that included information about where action would likely next occur were more likely to produce this predictive saccadic response. In this way, mystery films can combine action and cuts to strongly direct viewer attention to parts of the screen, or away from others.

Smith (2005) conducted an experiment to test how viewers reacted when the object of their focus moves completely off screen. In particular, the study examined what happens when this focal-object is moved out of frame and re-enters the frame on the opposite side of the screen after a cut. The author titled this cut a “matched-exit/entrance cut” (Smith 2005, 28) based on previous writing on editing (Dmytryk 1986). Smith compared the response of viewers when a cut occurs before the focal-object leaves the screen, and when a cut occurs immediately afterwards. In both cases viewers quickly responded to the change created following a cut but did not make predictive saccadic movements (Smith 2005, 348). When the focal-object completely exited the screen frame, saccades would relocate attention to the opposite side of the screen frame reflexively. When a cut occurs before the focal-object fully exits the screen frame, viewers responded by scanning the image to relocate the focal-object. This suggests that while viewers notice and respond to the cut, they do so in a way that maintains some level of spatial and temporal continuity, based on an understanding of the formal components of film.

This research also suggests that viewers make inferences based on their perception of event structure. They reflexively seek the return of the focal-object because they perceive an event to be in progress, as opposed to nearing completion. The perception of event structure, and in particular event boundaries, has significant impact on attention and the perception of salience. In the psychological sciences, Huff, Papenmeier, and Zacks (2012) conducted a study wherein participants were asked to identify when a visual target appeared while watching a computer-generated soccer game. They found that immediately following an event boundary, participants showed a lapse in visual detection. Changes in action—that is, event boundaries—were thus seen to regulate attention during viewing. “These results suggest that when there is a change in action, perceivers reorient to the perceptual world, forming a new representation of what is happening now” (Huff, Papenmeier, and Zacks 2012, 863). At the same time, when an event boundary is accompanied by a cut, the event is seen as more salient. In these instances, the viewer is

more capable of “building up the cognitive representation of the activity sequence” (Schwan, Garsoffky, and Hesse 2000, 222).

The perception of salience is crucial to the identification of information pertinent to the viewer’s problem-solving strategy. Continuity editing engages attention, accentuating visual difference or maintaining awareness of a focal-object. In doing so, viewers are guided in their determination of the importance of clues with the potential for suspicions to be raised. Smith (2005) proposes that perceptions of cohesion, meaningful relationships between shots, and the formation of a mental model of the diegetic world all rely on the manipulation of attention achieved by continuity editing. However, Textual Problem Solving requires an endogenous orientation of attention, such as identifying a problem, instigating a search for clues, or committing detailed information to memory.

Endogenous Direction of Attention

To effectively scrutinise clues and identify ambiguity when watching mystery films, viewers need an opportunity to direct their attention endogenously. Endogenous direction of attention refers to when an individual is able to direct their attention based on an objective or goal—a top-down process driven by cognition. In contrast, exogenous direction of attention describes when stimuli, rather than cognition, direct a viewer’s attention. Attention involves a period of internal cognitive processing including the encoding, organising, or synthesis of information (Lamme 2003). This process is not always anchored to sensory input and perception. For example, when two visual targets are presented in quick succession, viewers are incapable of identifying the second—a phenomenon known as attentional blink (Shapiro, Raymond, and Arnell 1997). This is also supported by research on implicit perceptual processes, such as change detection (Hollingworth and Henderson 2002) and memory (Williams, Henderson, and Zacks 2005), showing that concentrating on a sensory input and consciously becoming aware of that input occur separately. For the viewer to properly consider information and engage in Textual Problem Solving, there must be an opportunity for them to think without perceptual distraction, to direct attention endogenously.

Event Boundaries

While a viewer is focused on mental processing, they will have fewer cognitive resources available to attend to visual changes resulting from a cut between shots. If visual events that demand attention occur immediately prior to a cut, this may afford editors a short

window in which to place cuts that will go undetected. Smith (2005) investigates this possibility by exploring the role of event segmentation theory. Event segmentation theory describes how viewers break events down into pieces and place them within an overall event structure. Research on event segmentation has found that event boundaries correlate with memory and attention, in addition to sharing properties with continuity editing. Event segmentation creates boundaries for cognition that may be used to minimise external attentional demands, facilitating the turning of attention inward, and the opportunity to engage in Textual Problem Solving.

“[E]vent segmentation influences when information is encoded and when that information is most accessible” (Swallow, Zacks, and Abrams 2009, 252). Viewers are able to better recognise and recall activity that occurs shortly before an event boundary (Schwan, Garsoffky, and Hesse 2000, Sargent et al. 2013). Event boundaries are “points of perceptual and conceptual changes in activity separated by periods of relative stability” (Swallow, Zacks, and Abrams 2009, 236); they function as markers or boundaries for memory (Swallow, Zacks, and Abrams 2009, 254). For suspicion to be aroused, important information should be shown just prior to an event boundary, affording viewers the best opportunity to encode and store the information. How, then, can event boundaries be identified in relation to film editing?

Magliano and Zacks (2011) found that cuts played a role in determining when a viewer would perceive event boundaries. Magliano, Miller, and Zwaan (2001) also suggest that a viewer’s perception of events within film is influenced by continuity editing practices. Specifically, the authors found that cuts which include a break in the continuity of action, space and time, as opposed to visual or spatial/temporal discontinuity, “have a large and robust effect on event segmentation” (Magliano and Zacks 2011, 1500). Given the impact of event boundary perception and the influence of these perceptions on comprehension, continuity editing plays an essential role in shaping film viewing. Continuity editing can regulate viewer responses and expectations regarding events with a film (Magliano and Zacks 2011, 1513).

Other researchers have arrived at similar results, noting that the perception of an event boundary coincides with film edits where there is a change in scene (Schwan, Garsoffky, and Hesse 2000). For example, multiple studies have found that when a pause in a screen text (such as a commercial break) occurs at an event boundary, memory of screen content just prior to the end of the event is improved (Boltz 1992, Schwan, Garsoffky, and Hesse

2000). Mystery films are thus able to facilitate internal attention in the viewer by presenting content that arouses suspicion at the end of a scene. By placing information pertinent to the problem in mystery films at an event boundary, the viewer is more likely to consider that clue and more deeply encode and synthesise it in their representation and conception of the cinematic world.

Memory and Cognitive Load

Viewers need to be able to process information in working memory to extrapolate from clues or speculate on how events will unfold in mystery films. This can be particularly difficult when clues are complex or presented only briefly. Cognitive load describes how much of working memory capacity is being used by a task. The theory is applied in the context of learning and instruction but is also used to describe cognitive activity during problem solving. As mystery films engage the viewer in problem solving, cognitive load impacts that engagement. Without sufficient cognitive resources a viewer cannot consider and reflect on the presentation of clues. Sweller, Ayres, and Kalyuga (2011) define three categories of cognitive load: intrinsic and extraneous cognitive load, and germane resources. *Intrinsic cognitive load* refers to the amount of working memory dedicated to processing information in and of itself. *Extraneous cognitive load* describes the amount of working memory devoted to “the manner in which the information is presented or the activities in which [viewers] must engage” (Sweller, Ayres, and Kalyuga 2011, 57). *Germane resources* are the mental processes devoted to the application, generation, or modification of schema during learning or problem solving. Sweller, van Merriënboer, and Paas (1998) argue that problem solving effectiveness can be improved by reducing extraneous cognitive load while increasing germane resources, so long as cognitive capacity is not exceeded (*cognitive overload*). In this way, the event and shot segmentation of mystery films can be edited to influence cognitive load and produce conditions that either support or inhibit viewers’ ability to effectively problem-solve.

Mayer and Moreno (2003) argue that segmentation is influential on overall cognitive load, determining the extraneous cognitive load of film viewing and to some extent the germane resources available. Increasing the duration between segments of information, or reducing the frequency of cuts, can reduce extraneous cognitive load. Additionally, discontinuity cuts can potentially produce cognitive overload (Bolls et al. 1995; Bolls et al. 1996) For example, a study of viewers who were simultaneously viewing a television clip and performing a task showed slower responses following a discontinuity cut (Geiger and

Reeves 1993, Lang et al. 1993). Viewers perform worse on recognition tests when the learning stimuli and test stimuli are shown from different viewpoints following a cut. This occurred in studies using moving-image displays (Garsoffky, Schwan, and Hesse 2002) and static displays (Diwadkar and McNamara 1997). A change in viewpoint achieved by a cut, as opposed to a single continuous camera movement, produced significantly lower performance on recognition tests (Garsoffky, Huff, and Schwan 2007). The authors suggest that this is because a continuous movement “allows for a continuous mental upgrading of their relative position” (Garsoffky, Huff, and Schwan 2007, 372). Minimising the cognitive load of forming a mental model of the diegetic world allows viewers to process information and affords an opportunity to engage in Textual Problem Solving more deeply.

While all information carries some intrinsic cognitive load, the presentation of that information can shape what a viewer can understand and consider. The frequency and types of editing used in a film can influence what a viewer is capable of processing. The shift to an intensified continuity style (Bordwell, 2002) has placed greater demands on viewer attention, with “shorter duration shots, more closeups, and an increasingly roving camera” (Cutting and Candan 2015, 41).

Rapid editing obliges the viewer to assemble discrete pieces of information, and it sets a commanding pace: look away and you might miss a key point. In the alternating close views, in the racking focus and the edgily drifting camera, the viewer is promised something significant, or at least new, at each instant. (Bordwell 2002, 24)

By obliging viewers to attend to information at such a rapid pace, rapid editing undermines the film’s ability to convey salience to the viewer, because the excess of ‘significant’ information complicates and distracts from the task of Textual Problem Solving.

To operate within this intensified cinematic space, viewers rely on cognitive schema, heuristics, and genre to develop a robust and adaptive mental model of the film space. The mental model relies on a viewer’s developed experience with continuity practices to facilitate the intensified continuity style. When each shot is available to the viewer for only a brief period, with minimal contextual information, the identification of salience becomes a more challenging task. As Bordwell argues, “even ordinary scenes are heightened to compel attention and sharpen emotional resonance” (2002, 24). The result is that viewers

are restricted in their “recourse to thought”, relying more frequently on informal problem-solving practices and their ability to recognise a problem and its salient features. Whether relying on an informal approach or given the opportunity to consider and reflect on salient information, viewers produce predictive inferences about what will happen next. In mystery films, these predictions represent an engagement in Textual Problem Solving, proposing some form of solution and testing it against new information.

7.3 EDITING STRUCTURE OF FILMS IN THE STUDY SET

Thus far, I have established the importance of viewer attention and the formation of mental models to facilitate Textual Problem Solving, and that editing structure plays a central role in these processes. What follows is an examination of the editing data from the 87 films in the Study Set to determine how mystery films are structured through editing, and how this shapes viewer engagement in Textual Problem Solving. My findings suggest that mystery film editing is structured to frustrate viewer attempts at Textual Problem Solving just as they are closest to reaching a solution. By cutting more rapidly as the viewer approaches a solution, mystery films can delay viewers from prematurely solving the film’s core problem. In addition, editing is relatively slower paced throughout the body of the film to exert a lower cognitive load and provide viewers with problem-solving opportunities. This satisfies viewer expectations, leaving them feeling as though they were on the cusp of a solution, and thus provided a fair opportunity of solving a film’s core problem.

This section analyses the editing structure of the films in the Study Set and the timing of all transitions. The editing data from these films is significant in size, particularly so for its focus on a specific genre and period.¹⁴¹ Rather than simply examining the absolute values of shot durations, I explore the relative length of shots across each film to determine when the pacing or rhythm increases or decreases in speed. The rhythm of a film sets viewer expectations about how transitions will be paced within the narrative and when to expect important or upcoming events. These expectations are created early in the film and create

¹⁴¹ Here I must recognise the work of Barry Salt (2006; 2009), as well as numerous projects by James E Cutting (Cutting et al. 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2013; Cutting and Candan 2015) that have examined a far greater number of films. However, it is hoped that the concentration on a single genre and single decade provides greater depth and insight into mystery films and to the structure provided by film editing.

something recognisable for the viewer, to which the film may return repeatedly—what Pearlman (2015, 284) describes as a rhyme. Pearlman (2015, 283) uses the metaphor of entering a “grand marbled foyer” and forming a sense of the building to explain how viewers form expectations about the structure of a film. This familiarity influences perceptions of genre, of how to interpret events, and their importance within the narrative. Thus, by establishing editing structure and pacing early on, the film may exploit viewer expectations to direct, or misdirect, attention surrounding the film’s core problem.

Editing Data and Statistics

To investigate the viewing experience, it is not possible to rely solely on viewer accounts of their experience. Despite the importance of film editing, the viewer is rarely aware of how a film’s structure is constructed by editing during viewing. The average film from the Study Set includes 1364 shots over a period of 102 minutes. The sheer volume and frequency of transitions, in combination with continuity editing, makes an accurate account of these details impractical during viewing. Further, continuity editing is primarily employed to prevent transitions from attracting viewer attention, instead focusing it on the features that are maintained across shots or between events. As such, empirical investigation of editing and shot durations has the potential to illuminate how films engage viewers, in ways that individual viewers cannot describe. For each film included in the Study Set, I used Video Shot and Scene Segmentation (VSSS) software to identify the location of each transition between shots (see Section 2.2 for a full outline of method). This created a quantitative measure of the duration of each shot and the location of each transition between shots, and ultimately revealed each film’s pacing. These data allow for a closer examination of how shots are arranged within a film to create structure, and their purpose within mystery films.

Results and Discussion

To begin, the average shot durations for each individual film in the Study Set were calculated. The mean was calculated as the total duration of a film divided by the total number of shots in that film. The median was calculated by arranging all shots from shortest to longest duration within a film and identifying the middle value—or an average of the two closest values, when there was an even number of shots. After this process was completed, the mean and median of all films was calculated by averaging these initial film means and film medians. The mean of all films’ shot duration means was 5.36 seconds, and the mean of all films’ shot duration medians was 3.39 seconds. The median of all films’

shot duration means was 4.66 seconds, and the median of all film’s shot duration medians was 3.00 seconds (Figure 7.3.1).¹⁴² These results fit within the established literature on film editing data.¹⁴³ In Bordwell’s analysis of film editing data he finds that “in 1999 and 2000, the ASL [average shot length] of a typical film in any genre was likely to run three to six seconds” (2002, 17). Cutting and colleagues (2011) observe a similar range in their analysis of 150 films, placing “ASL” just under four seconds by 2010 (Figure 7.3.2), which remained accurate when the analysis was applied to a set of over 9,300 English-language films (Cutting and Candan 2015).¹⁴⁴

	Mean(s)	Median(s)
Average of Film Means	5.36	4.66
Average of Film Medians	3.39	3.00

Figure 7.3.1—Comparison of different averages across films in the Study Set

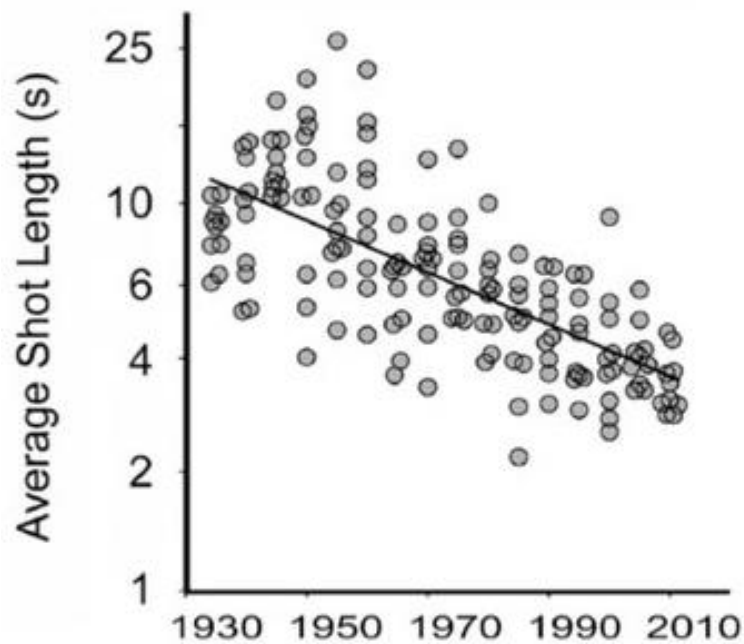


Figure 7.3.2—“Average shot length”, 1930–2010 (Cutting et al. 2011)

¹⁴² Throughout this thesis I will describe the amount of time a shot is displayed on screen as ‘shot duration’ rather than ‘shot length’ to distinguish from shot sizes and focal lengths. When referring to other authors’ work, I will continue to use the labels and phrasing they have elected to use and include quotation marks.

¹⁴³ The fact that these results generally reflect those already established within the field provides support for the use of software in extracting editing data.

¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, most research does not specify how the ASL of a set of films is calculated. Based on discussion by relevant authors on the Cinemetrics website, it is assumed ASL is calculated for each film individually as the mean of all shot durations. The mean of these means (the average of all ASLs within the set of films) is then calculated to represent the overall ASL. While there is some debate surrounding the value of the mean versus the median when analysing shot durations (see Redfern 2009b and Tsivian 2009), I agree with Redfern’s (2009b) assessment. Shot duration distributions are typically asymmetrical and the mean “is a poor statistic when the data is asymmetrical” (Redfern 2009b). I report both values for transparency and to allow comparison with previous work.

Within the Study Set, there is a clear positive relationship between the standard deviation and the mean shot duration within each film. As the mean shot duration for a film increased, so too did the standard deviation (SD) of shot durations (Figure 7.3.3).¹⁴⁵ Standard deviation is not simply a reflection of shot durations, as films with extremely long shot durations can have very low standard deviation. For instance, *Rope* (Hitchcock 1948) has a mean shot duration of 464.80 seconds, but a standard deviation of only 106.90 seconds (23% of the mean). Interestingly, the standard deviation for each film in the Study Set is proportionately higher (~125% of the mean), with a concentration of shot durations close to the mean, suggesting a purposeful construction of pacing for the viewer when structuring edits in a mystery film. Looking at the four films with the greatest mean divided by standard deviation, the minimum shot durations in each film remains static, while the maximum shot durations increase with the mean (Figure 7.3.4).

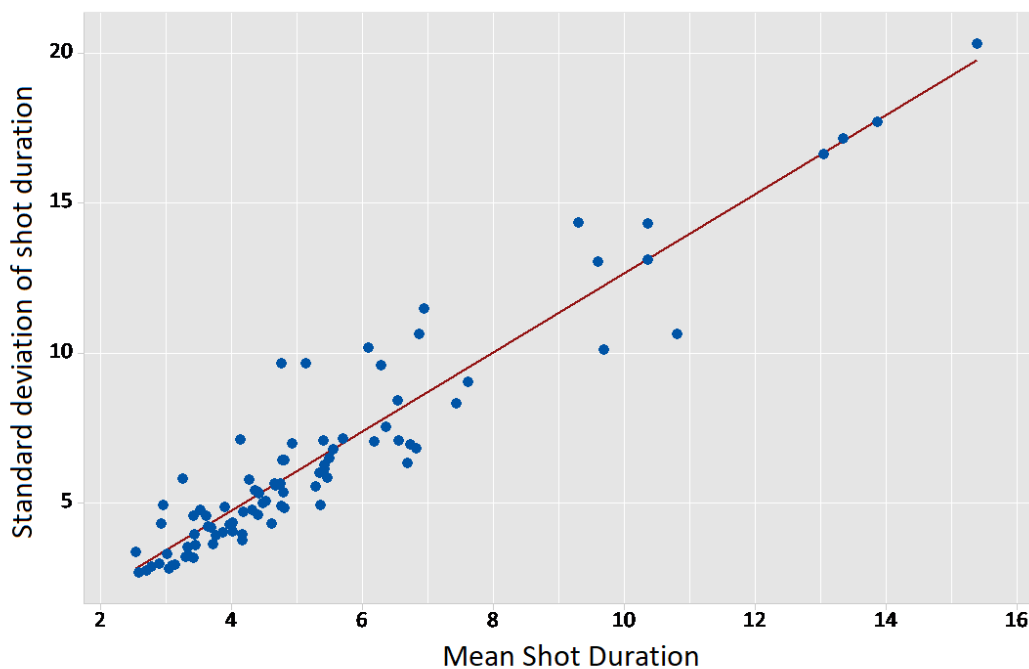


Figure 7.3.3—Scatterplot of Standard Deviation Shot Duration(s) vs Mean Shot Duration(s) for each film

¹⁴⁵ This trend is to be somewhat expected, as there is a floor on shot durations, but virtually no ceiling, meaning an increase in standard deviation requires an increase in mean. However, the strength of the correlation between the two values suggests that films are paced in a way that uses the full diversity of shot lengths within a specific range.

	Year	Run Time (m)	Mean (s)	SD (s)	Min (s)	Max (s)
1. The Village	2004	99	15.39	20.31	0.60	182.00
2. The Woman in the Fifth	2011	78	13.87	17.70	0.56	176.48
3. Scoop	2006	92	13.34	17.17	0.56	145.40
4. The Good German	2006	102	13.04	16.64	0.52	148.92
9. Lady in the Water	2006	103	9.59	13.05	0.56	110.56

Figure 7.3.4 – Films with highest mean/SD

Of note, both films directed by M Night Shyamalan—*The Village* (2004) and *Lady in the Water* (2006)—from the Study Set had relatively long mean shot durations (first and ninth, respectively), and greater SD (first and eighth, respectively). A similar stylistic fingerprint can be seen in Christopher Nolan’s two films in the Study Set, *The Prestige* (2006) and *Inception* (2010), which had relatively short mean shot durations (82nd and 74th respectively) and lower SD (77th and 69th respectively). Directors influence the editing pacing of their films, but despite the significant differences in Shyamalan’s and Nolan’s approaches, their work maintains the same ratio between mean and SD within the Study Set, suggesting an adherence to general editing structure within the genre.

The above results weight the average shot durations within each film equally; however, this does so at the expense of each individual shot. The averages of all shots, not grouped by film, are significantly shorter, with a mean of 4.49 and a median of 2.76 (Figure 7.3.5). Further, when examining all shots from films in the Study Set, I found that more than 75% of shots have a duration below five seconds, despite the mean across films being greater than five seconds. This means that for the majority of viewing time, audiences are viewing shots of greater than five seconds, simply due to their longer duration. However, the majority of shots within films in the Study Set are under three seconds in duration. Given the heightened potential for event boundaries to coincide with a cut, cognitive resources are significantly influenced by shorter shot durations. Further, short duration shots generate a greater cognitive load for viewers. For example, research has shown that viewer attention is disrupted by editing, making target detection more difficult immediately following a transition (Shimamura et al. 2015). The viewing experience and engagement with films in the Study Set is primarily shaped by these shorter duration shots, and their structure across the length of the film.

	n	Mean(s)	SD(s)	Q1(s)	Median(s)	Q3(s)	Min(s)	Max(s)
Action	25687	3.09	3.55	1.24	2.09	3.64	0.52	92.20
Comedy	4913	7.20	10.98	1.72	3.52	7.64	0.20	145.40
Crime	56499	4.19	5.77	1.56	2.64	4.64	0.20	212.20
Sci-Fi	11347	4.44	5.40	1.72	2.92	5.12	0.48	102.48
Thriller	104823	4.33	6.04	1.60	2.71	4.84	0.08	212.20
All films	118657	4.49	6.27	1.64	2.76	4.96	0.08	212.20

Figure 7.3.5—Descriptive Statistics for Shot Duration(s) of films in the Study Set by genre

Genre has a clear impact on the pacing of films within the Study Set. Films included in Study Set have additional genres listed on IMDb, and these IMDb genre classifications were reflected in the pace of editing used in each film (Figure 7.3.6). While the mean of shots from films in the Study Set was 4.487 (Figure 7.3.7), the mean for shots in films with the Action genre classification was 3.09 (69%), and for shots in films with the Comedy genre classification was 7.20 (160%). The averages for the Crime and Thriller genre classifications were very close to the averages for the entire set of films. This is unsurprising as at least one of these two genres appeared in the majority of films (45% and 86% respectively). Interestingly, films with the Sci-Fi genre classification also had averages very similar to the overall totals, with only a slightly lower SD, despite appearing in only 9% of all films.

Additional IMDb Genre Classifications	n	Percent of Study Set
Action	12	14%
Adventure	5	6%
Biography	1	1%
Comedy	6	7%
Crime	39	45%
Drama	61	70%
Family	2	2%
Fantasy	9	10%
History	3	3%
Romance	10	11%
Sci-Fi	8	9%
Thriller	75	86%

Figure 7.3.6—IMDb genre classification listings other than Mystery for films in the Study Set

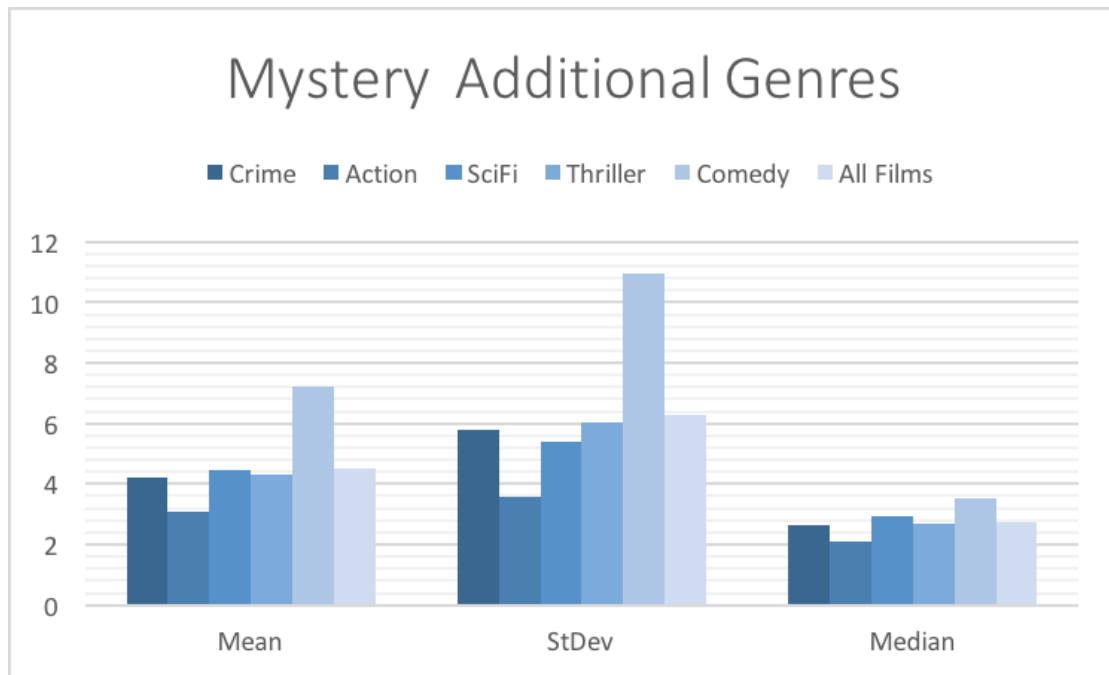


Figure 7.3.7—Additional genre shot duration comparisons

The differences between genres are more pronounced when comparing all Action shots with Non-Action shots, and all Comedy shots with Non-Comedy shots. Action shots were 64.2% as long as Non-Action shots [3.094/4.818] (Figure 7.3.8), and Comedy shots were 164.7% as long as Non-Comedy shots [7.197/4.370] (Figure 7.3.9).¹⁴⁶ Comedy films did not have particularly longer maximum shot durations—despite having the longest mean shot duration—and seven Non-Comedy films had shots longer than the longest Comedy shot. Similarly, only two of the 20 shortest minimum shot durations were from Action films, although Action films had the shortest mean shot duration. Speaking broadly, comedy films were more likely to show all participants in a conversation, capturing both the delivery and reaction to dialogue, reducing the requirements for cuts. Action films were more likely to use match-on-action shots, breaking a single ‘event’ into multiple shots. This was particularly prevalent in hand-to-hand combat and gunfights across films in the Study Set. These findings suggest that genre has a direct impact on the structure and duration of shots within a film, and that these films’ editing data has the potential to reveal otherwise intangible aspects of the mystery genre. However, to identify these aspects requires editing data to be paired with qualitative data, such as scene analysis, to provide relevant context.

¹⁴⁶ The results of these additional genre comparisons should be taken as preliminary, given the relatively small sample size of only six Comedy films and 12 Action films in the Study Set. With further research and better analytic tools, it may be possible to conduct far better cross-genre analysis, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

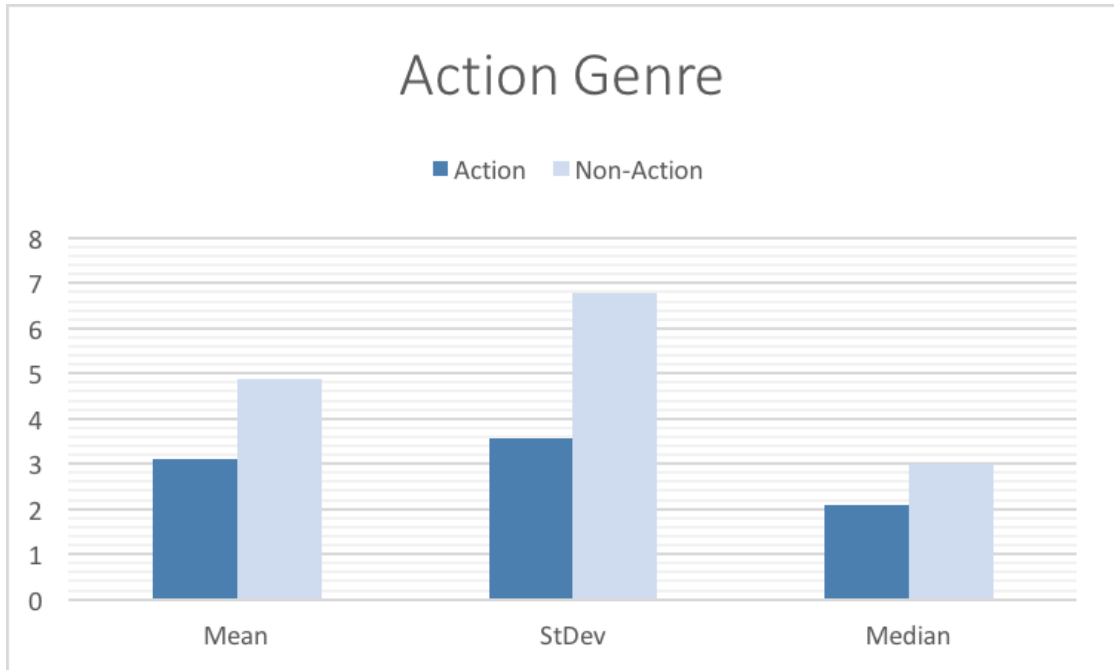


Figure 7.3.8—Action genre vs Non-Action genre shot durations

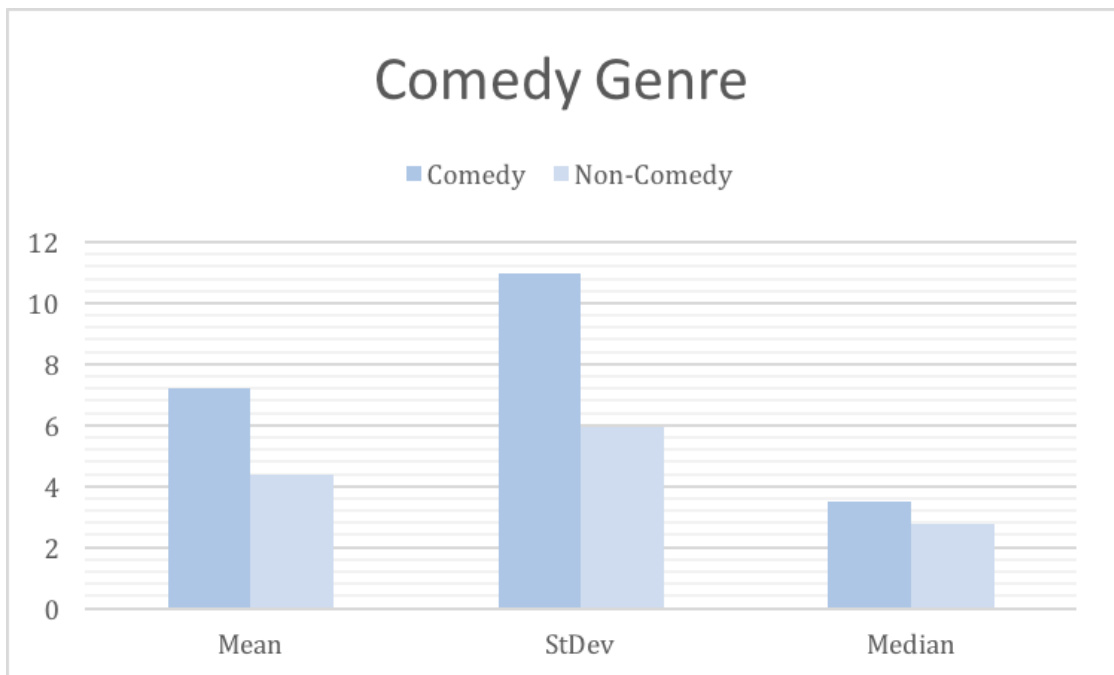


Figure 7.3.9—Comedy genre vs Non-Comedy genre shot durations

While a film may include a range of short and long duration shots, where they occur in relation to one another establishes this structure and sets the pace for the viewer.

To measure how editing is structured across films, their run times were normalised, allowing the comparison of shot durations as a percentage of total run time. The median shot duration was selected to provide a more robust measure of central tendency when comparing across films, which are often of disproportionate durations. Based on a

preliminary viewing of a sample of mystery films it was predicted that the data would show that shot durations significantly decrease as the film approached anagnorisis. The data confirms this: median shot durations were significantly lower between 85% and 95% of a film's running time (Figure 7.3.10).

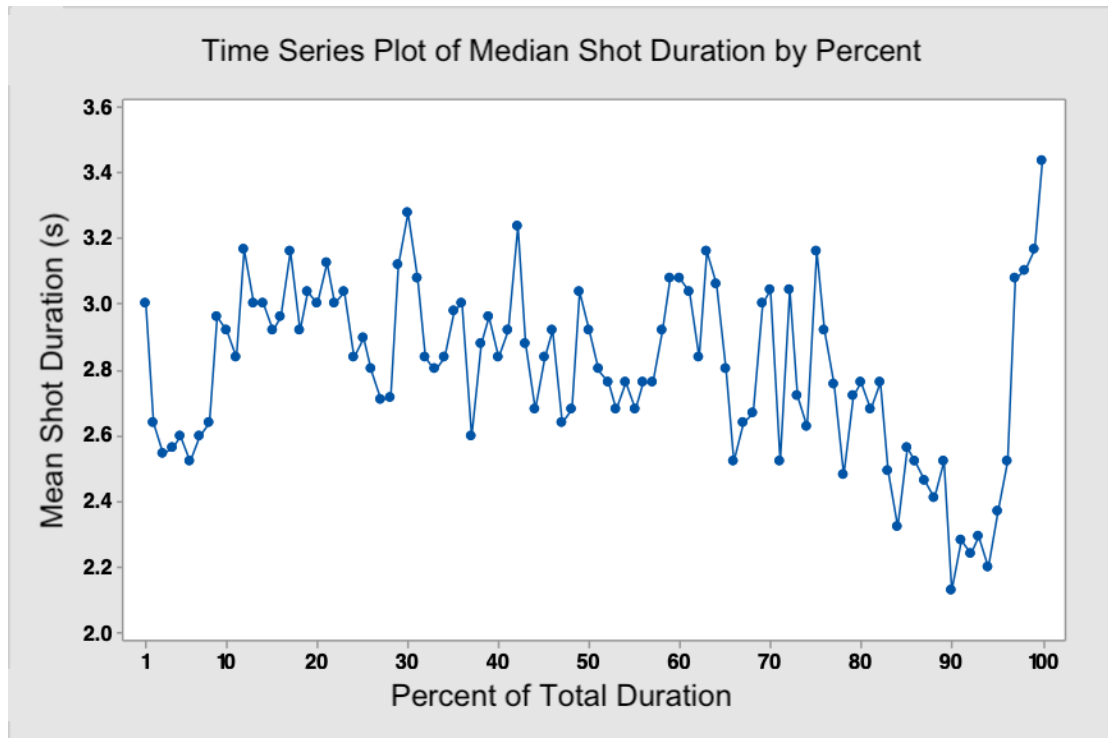


Figure 7.3.10—Time series plot of median shot duration(s) at each percent of total duration

Mystery films have strong incentives to increase the frequency of shots as the viewer approaches anagnorisis, the moment when all remaining ambiguity surrounding the core problem's solution is removed. When the spaces between segments of information are shortened, such as with the quickening of edits, extraneous cognitive load is increased (Mayer and Moreno 2003). Additionally, the presence of a cut lowers event comprehension and visual recognition, relative to a single continuous shot containing the same information (Garsoffky, Huff, and Schwan 2007). Increasing the pace of shots requires the viewer to devote more attention to the visual field, inhibiting internal cognitive processing such as encoding information, committing it to memory, or consciously considering or synthesising that information (Lamme 2003). Together, all these factors suggest that mystery films may be able to frustrate viewer attempts at Textual Problem Solving. By employing faster shots as the viewer approaches a solution, mystery films may strategically delay solving of the core problem until after the solution has been made explicit on screen.

Viewer expectations are set by the pacing of a film, meaning the concentration of faster editing need only be quick relative to the pace set throughout the film. For this reason, the majority of the film would require a slower, more stable pacing in order to facilitate viewer engagement with Textual Problem Solving, and to set expectations about how events will be presented within the narrative on screen. To examine shots of a short duration, relative to others within the film, I identified all Q1 shots. Q1 refers to the 25% of shots with the shortest duration within each individual film. When examining only shots within this first quartile of each film (Q1 shots), there is a clear concentration of these relatively quicker shots near the end of each film (Figure 7.3.11). Therefore, the highest concentration of the shortest shots in each film, relative to the pacing of all other shots within that film, was in the last quarter of each film’s duration. Thus, irrespective of the absolute pacing of shots prior to this final quarter of the film, the editing pace quickened towards the end of each film.

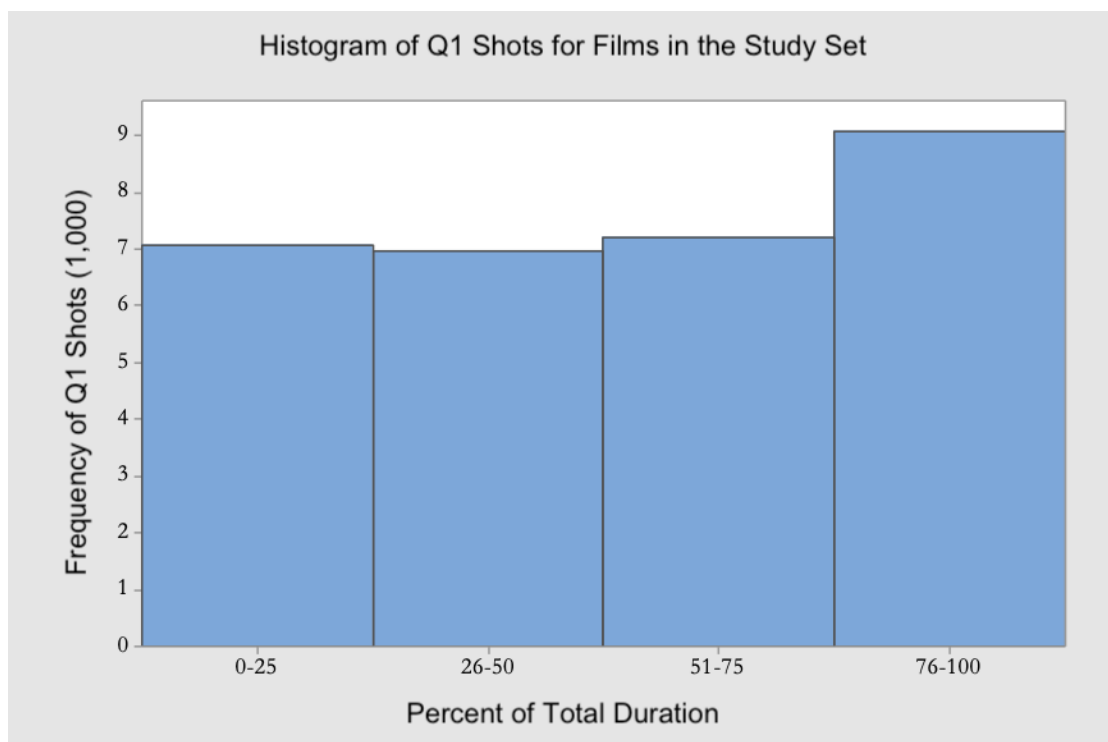


Figure 7.3.11—Histogram of Q1 shots for films in the Study Set (25% gradient)

At a finer gradient, the concentration of Q1 shots drops in the last 4% of each film (Figure 7.3.12). The pattern that emerges may best be explained by Thompson’s (1999) four-act structure for film narrative.¹⁴⁷ The narrative is broken into five parts: Setup, Complicating

¹⁴⁷ Rather than asserting that a four-act structure exists, Bordwell argues that films are composed of several large-scale parts of “roughly 25-35 minutes” (Bordwell 2008), and that films of longer duration include more parts. The average duration of films within the Study Set was 102 minutes, potentially conforming to Bordwell’s proposition.

Action, Development, Climax, and Epilogue (Thompson 1999, 27). In mystery films the “Setup” is used to set the problem for the viewer, while the “Complicating Action” defines (or redefines) the scope of the problem. The “Development” describes the period in the film when investigation occurs, and potential solutions are formulated and verified. Following this, the “Climax” reveals the core solution (anagnorisis) and includes the events that immediately precede this revelation. Finally, the “Epilogue” may be used to explain to the viewer the full extent of the solution offered, so that the viewer understands the solution, rather than simply recognising its component parts. To facilitate viewer engagement with each part of this narrative, the editing must set a pace for the viewer that shapes expectations and constrains viewers from arriving at a solution prematurely.

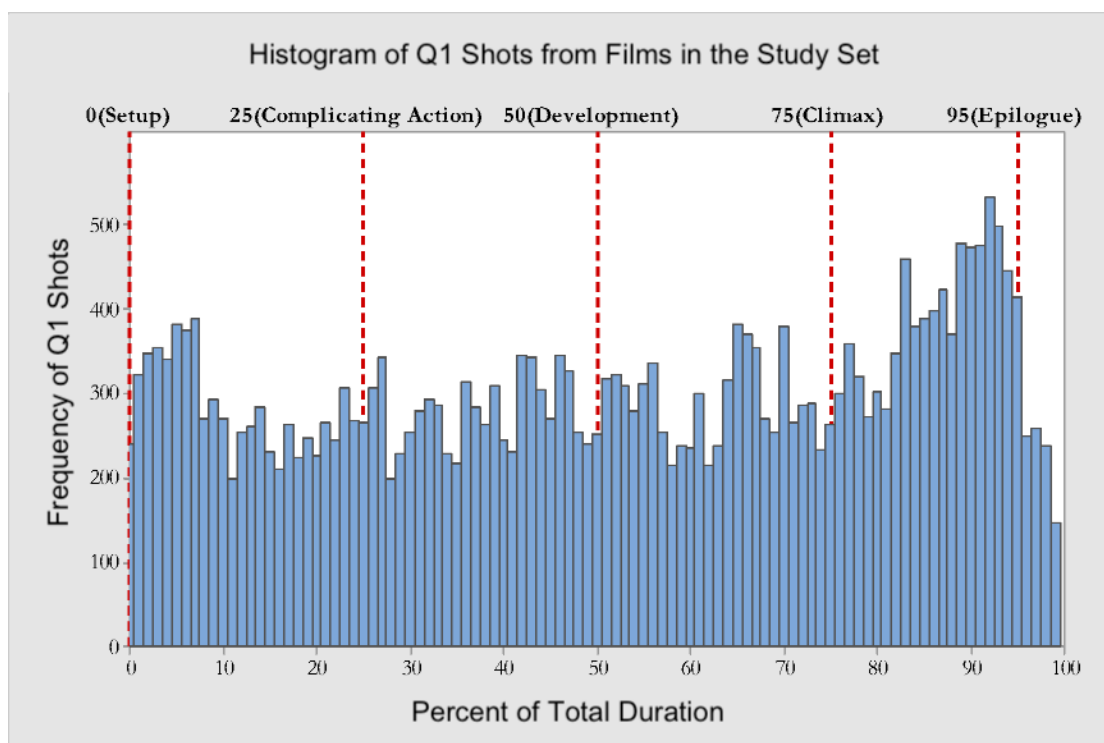


Figure 7.3.12—Histogram of Q1 shots for films in the Study Set (1% gradient)

The presence of a four act structure, with a short epilogue following the climax, has been supported by James E. Cutting’s (2016) quantitative evaluation of narrative structure across 150 films. He argues that there has been “consistency in the sequential structure of the syuzhet in popular English-language movies... for the last 70 years” (Cutting 2016, 1715). Not only does Cutting find that this narrative structure is apparent in the frequency of shots (Figure 7.3.13), but that it is also evident in the brightness of shots and the amount of motion on screen (2016, 1724). What this suggests, as I have argued, is that editing structure of films reflects and provides insights into their narrative form. Thus, by

describing the pacing of events and cuts within a film, it is possible to reveal the purpose and function of a film’s narrative structure on the viewing experience.

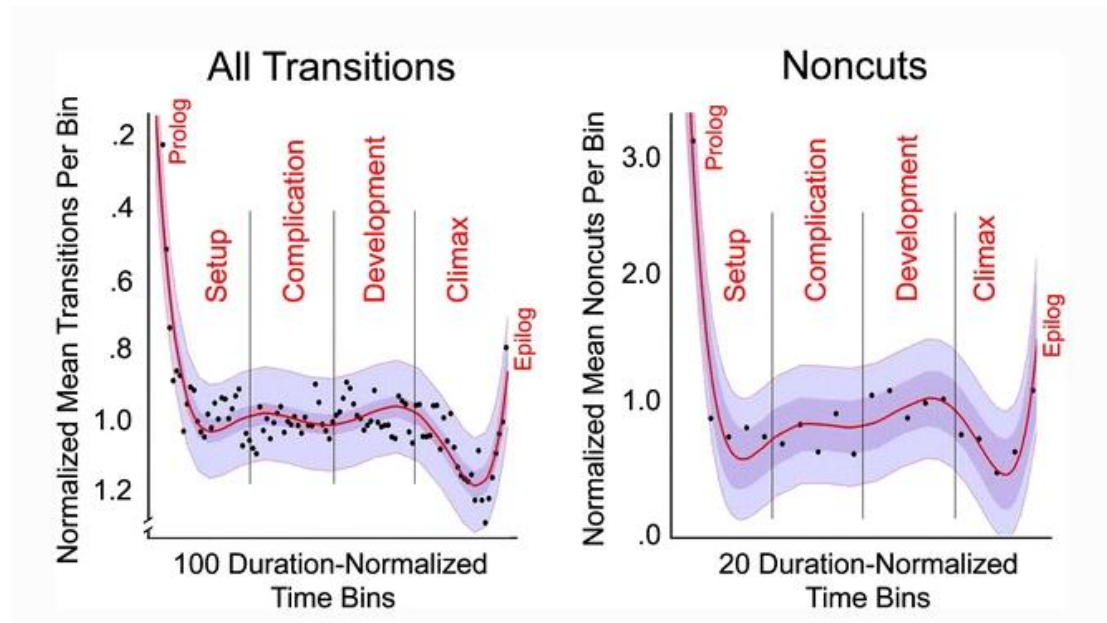


Figure 7.3.13— Median density of shot transitions across 150 films (Cutting 2016)

This structure is not unique to the mystery genre, nor is its observance unique in the study of editing pace. As Bordwell notes, “many modern filmmakers seem deliberately to weight the first part with long takes in order to enhance a fast-cut climax” (2002, 26). What is unique within mystery films is the purpose of this structure. This editing structure serves two purposes: to enhance the emotional impact of a climax while increasing the challenge of ratiocination as the viewer attempts to solve the film’s core problem. Hitchcock’s films use this same effect, whereby “the spectators time of interpretation is frequently cut short before that of the characters, in order to build up suspense” (Wollen 1982, 47) and to increase the chance of “misinterpretation”, thus denying them the solution to the film’s core problem. Viewer expectations are set by the pacing and structure of the editing in mystery films, and are integral to the facilitation, and frustration, of viewer attempts to engage in Textual Problem Solving. By strategically employing pacing, mystery films engage viewers in attempting to solve the film’s core problem, while preventing that solution being determined too soon and diminishing viewer engagement.

The editing of shots within mystery films sets a pace for events on screen, shaping viewer engagement with Textual Problem Solving at different points throughout the film. The editing data from the films in the Study Set reveals how mystery films are paced and structured with respect to the variation in shots used, the influence of genre, and the

changes in pacing across the length of the film. The shots provide points of insight into the viewing experience, shaping their ability to form a mental model of the diegetic world, and influencing where their attention is directed, and their capacity for engaging in cognitively demanding tasks such as problem solving. However, to complete this understanding, this information must be contextualised by what happens on screen. In the following chapter I illuminate the filmic practices, mystery types, and modes of viewing, that shape viewer engagement with Textual Problem Solving through an analysis of all films in the Study Set, building on the understanding achieved within this chapter.

7.4 PRODUCING PREDICTIVE INFERENCES

A predictive inference is an expression of a viewer's expectations, conforming to their mental model of, and assumptions about, the text. Predictive inferences are a viewer's way of expressing their suspicions, forming them into a blueprint for what will happen next, and suggesting how to engage new information. They are a key aspect of any attempt at Textual Problem Solving. When a viewer predicts an outcome or explanation of events, they can better target their search for clues to support their conclusion. Predictive inferences can encompass a series of shots or events, or an individual event and its conclusion. These predictions can be large, overarching statements describing a remote future such as the resolution of the core problem, or smaller predictions about the immediate future.

Discontinuity occurs when viewers' mental models are inaccurate or are not reflected in the representation of events on screen. For example, when shown a series of match on action cuts, participants in a study reported a preference for several frames of overlap between the shots (Shimamura, Cohn-Sheehy, and Shimamura 2014). When action from the first shot was repeated in the second shot for around 125 milliseconds, participants reported the movement as smoother.¹⁴⁸ Shimamura, Cohn-Sheehy, and Shimamura (2014) suggest "that the viewers are 'blind' to sensory information across the edit" but found that repetition was required even following a short pattern mask, suggesting an expectation about what the second image should include. Thus, mystery film viewers make predictions about what events will occur, and how they will be represented on screen.

¹⁴⁸ This quality of match-on-action shots had previously been noted by a number of film editors (Dmytryk 1984; Anderson 1996).

Film viewers are more likely to produce a prediction when it is supported by multiple cinematic devices, including *mise-en-scène*, montage, framing, and dialogue (Magliano, Dijkstra, and Zwaan 1996, 218). Further, viewers “converge on specific rather than abstract predictions”, suggesting that there is a common experience within an audience to the presentation and interpretation of information (Magliano, Dijkstra, and Zwaan 1996, 218). The production of predictions relies on a presumption of cohesion and a search for meaningful relationships between shots, and the direction of attention to relevant targets.

[P]redictive inferences ... are pragmatic, explanation-based inferences in which the viewer implicitly asks, “Why does the filmmaker stick this information here?” Viewers can explain anomalous information by generating a causal inference that either connects it with the prior or future story context. (Magliano, Dijkstra, and Zwaan 1996, 219)

The identification of anomalous information is the point at which a viewer recognises difference or ambiguity—the point at which Viewer Suspicion is aroused. For example, in *Birth* (Glazer 2004), Clara (Anne Heche) buries a wrapped gift box in park, digging with her hands, while a small boy watches. The contents of the box, her motivation for burying it, and the identity of the onlooker remain ambiguous until the film’s conclusion but arouse Viewer Suspicion when first shown. Cinematic devices can be used to direct viewer attention and “make salient the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the predicted events” (Magliano, Dijkstra, and Zwaan 1996, 218), leading viewers to attempt to predict the significance of this buried box. Viewers generate predictions without explicit instruction, actively engaging in Textual Problem Solving to anticipate what will happen next in the film.

Viewers draw on film conventions, genre familiarity, meta-knowledge, cinematic devices, and their mental model of the diegetic world to develop predictive inferences, and to engage in Textual Problem Solving. The production of predictive inferences by mystery film viewers addresses the emotional tension generated in the experience of Viewer Suspicion. Films in the Study Set facilitate the production of mental models and predictive inferences—and thus viewer engagement in Textual Problem Solving—for the majority of their duration, with the use of continuity editing and longer duration shots. However, as the core problem approaches a solution near the film’s conclusion, these processes are frustrated by a concentration of quicker edits that deny the viewer the necessary cognitive resources to continue solving the problem. By increasing the pacing of shots, viewers are

denied the “time to understand” (Wollen 1982, 41) and consequently efforts to move from “seeing” to “knowing” are impaired. Thus, mystery films are strategically structured to heighten the challenge the core problem poses for viewers while allowing for a deeper engagement in Textual Problem Solving for the majority of the narrative, during the Setup, Complicating Action, and Development. In the following chapter, I examine how the films in the Study Set maintain the appearance of fairness after actively frustrating their attempts at Textual Problem Solving when approaching the revelation of a solution.

8

“I knew it all along.”

Influenced by the “golden age” of detective fiction, viewers expect the mystery genre to be presented as a game of observation, reason, and logic. Mystery films engage audiences by presenting a problem for the viewer to solve. This problem should present a sufficient challenge to viewers to make this engagement satisfying and enjoyable. Filmmakers achieve this by creating unfamiliar narratives or innovative problems and solutions. However, creators face several obstacles to achieving this goal. Contemporary audiences are more familiar with the tropes and motifs of the genre as there is an abundance of information available surrounding mystery films; however, this abundance also poses a risk that trailers, fan theories, and other paratexts will ‘spoil’ the film by providing the means of solution prior to viewing. Further, the problem should not be too difficult or rely on specialist knowledge or skills (see Section 3.2). To address these obstacles, films in the Study Set present an unreasonably difficult problem, to ensure the challenge to viewers is sufficient and novel. If, when the solution is revealed at the moment of anagnorisis, viewers felt that it would have been impossible for them to reach, the mystery would be rejected as unfair. To avoid this, films in the Study Set have focused on presenting the most important clues in the film so that viewers easily identify them. When the solution is revealed, viewers *recognise* each of these clues, having identified them earlier, and thus believe they could have reached the solution prior to its revelation. These films encourage viewers to feel as though the solution was just out of reach for viewers, or on the tip of their tongue, by ensuring that viewers recognise the most important clues, and that the solution affirms the importance of these identified clues.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ This experience created by mystery films exploits the hindsight bias, whereby humans perceive events that have already unfolded as having been more predictable than they actually were (Roese and Vohs 2012). This bias is sometimes referred to as the “I knew it all along’ phenomenon” (Massaro et al. 2014) based on the title of a seminal paper by Baruch Fischhoff and Ruth Beyth (1975) on the cognitive bias.

I classify this approach as the recognition mode and argue that all 87 films in the Study Set utilise this mode.¹⁵⁰ The recognition mode ensures that viewers are made familiar with information critical to the core solution so that it will be recognised at the revelation of this solution, while simultaneously preventing viewers from arriving at that solution ahead of time. The recognition mode is a way of constructing mystery films to gratify viewer expectations of a challenge and satisfying solution, whilst addressing their inability to continually construct novel solutions for an increasingly informed and experienced audience. Films using the recognition mode present information such that each of the individual pieces of the core solution is well recognised, but critical information about how they fit together is withheld from viewers.

For example, in *The Village* (Shyamalan 2004), the viewer is aware that the monster is not real, and that the Elders of the village are willing to deceive the other villagers to prevent them from leaving, but these clues require a significant leap in logic to determine that the film is set in modern day, and that the Elders have created the village as a retreat from the modern world. The core problem may be impossible to correctly solve textually, but the viewer's suspicions, their engagement with clues, and their generation of predictive inferences are still affirmed when the solution is presented. As Cawelti (1976) asserts, "the puzzle or riddle aspect ... depends less upon the reader's own ability to solve the mystery than on giving him [sic] enough participation in it to enable him to better appreciate the wit of the detective and to understand the new perspective on which the explanation depends" (89). Viewers are rewarded for engaging in Textual Problem Solving, by identifying key elements of the core solution while failing to arrive at the solution before the moment of anagnorisis.

If the solution presented in a mystery film was completely unfamiliar or unrecognisable to the viewer, the "rules" of the game or challenge that mystery films establish would be broken. However, while all solutions must involve some experience of recognition for the viewer, the extent to which this supplants the problem solving process defines the recognition mode. The recognition mode is used to largely deny viewers the necessary meta-information surrounding clues within mystery films and rely on the experience of recognition to satisfy the problem solving process. This is not true of all mystery films and appears to have been a recent shift or development in the genre. For instance, *Clue* (Lynn,

¹⁵⁰ The mode may describe a much broader range of mystery films, but due to the focus of this thesis, I will contain my discussion primarily to films in the Study Set.

1985) presents the viewer with a plurality of possible and plausible solutions, providing the viewer with ample clues and information on how these clues may relate to the series of murders. Here, the solution remains ambiguous not because it could not be reached, but because the correct solution was obscured by the volume of possibilities considered by the viewer. *Clue* typifies this approach by including several alternative endings, demonstrating that multiple interpretations of the clues represent valid solutions to the core problem.

More recently, *Knives Out* (Johnson 2019) shows movement beyond the recognition mode. The film presents clues as salient to the viewer, ensuring they are recognised when their true meaning is revealed. However, unlike the films from the Study Set, *Knives Out* generates a plurality of meaning in key narrative moments, or “looks” (Wollen 1982), to construct the challenge for the viewer. The film introduces us to a personal nurse, Marta (Ana de Armas), who lethally poisons her employer, Harlan (Christopher Plummer), through a mix up of medications. Harlan, to protect Marta from the consequences of the mistake, slits his own throat, leaving a drop of blood on Marta’s shoes. The viewer is shown this small droplet of blood in an extreme close-up of Marta’s shoes, making the clue salient to viewers. However, viewers are not denied the necessary information surrounding this clue and are instead provided an abundance of information, leading to concern not about the significance of this blood, but how and when it will be used to discover Marta’s secret. When the viewer recognises the full significance of the clue, it is not in service of the core solution of the film, but instead, a detail explaining the motivations and actions of characters in pursuit of that solution, in this case the private detective Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig). In this way, recognition serves the mystery narrative, but does not subsume the problem solving process at the moment of anagnorisis.

The recognition mode engages viewers in Textual Problem Solving, through the presentation of a core problem and information related to that problem. Problem types and filmic practices are used to arouse Viewer Suspicion and engage viewers in specific Textual Problem Solving modes. This chapter identifies popular trends and practices in contemporary mystery cinema and proposes a new language for describing and analysing these films. My analysis of the Study Set, and the recognition mode in which they operate, aims to provide a foundation for future discussion and examination of the mystery genre and its form on screen.

In Section 8.1 I argue that the way viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving is shaped by the type of problem the film presents. I identify five types of problems in mystery films

and discuss how these are applied and engaged. These problem types determine the mode of viewer engagement with Textual Problem Solving, acting as a filter through which all information is evaluated. The five types include an update to several historical classifications—the whodunit, howdunit, and whydunit—and the development of two new classifications: the whatdunit, and the binary problem. These problem types can classify all mystery films and provide a useful taxonomy for the study of the mystery film genre. Further, problem types prompt a corresponding Textual Problem Solving mode for viewers to engage in. As viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving, they determine what is relevant and pertinent to the problem in relation to their perception of the form the solution should take.

In the recognition mode, problem types are designed to engage with meta-knowledge, creating opportunities for problem-driven viewers to arrive at a solution ahead of time. The core problem may not be solvable from the clues within the text alone, but by applying knowledge from outside the text, previous viewings, or across works within the genre, viewers can produce accurate solutions. For example, a viewer familiar with the twist in Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999) will be better positioned to predict the twist in *The Village* (2004) by virtue of their familiarity with the director's work. However, directors are aware that audiences may be familiar with their previous work and can in some cases use this to mislead or deceive problem-driven viewers. Problem-driven viewers can engage mystery films on a different level, using their meta-textual knowledge in the Textual Problem Solving process. The prevalence and success of the recognition mode in contemporary mystery is, in part, a result of their ability to engage with and reward meta-viewing practices during Textual Problem Solving.

When watching mystery films, Viewer Suspicion is aroused when a piece of information is perceived as both ambiguous and salient. Salience, in mystery films, refers to information that is both pertinent and significant to the core problem. In the recognition mode, salience is conveyed through context and the application of a range of filmic practices. In Section 8.2 I describe the filmic practices that are used to convey salience in mystery films. These films use context, repetition, isolation, duration, and predisposition (bias) to signal to a viewer that the information being presented may be important to solving the film's core problem. These practices capture viewer attention by distinguishing something as different, which the viewer then assesses in relation to the problem at hand. If the viewer identifies

ambiguity in the validity or applicability of this salient information, Viewer Suspicion is aroused.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how films in the Study Set use editing structure to strategically engage the viewer in Textual Problem Solving. However, this structure alone is not sufficient to arouse Viewer Suspicion and motivate viewers to engage in Textual Problem Solving. Instead, viewers are motivated by a problem and the way that problem is presented. To conclude this chapter, in Section 8.3, I analyse sequences from two films that use the recognition mode, *Awake* (Harold 2007) and *Passengers* (García 2008), as examples of how Viewer Suspicion is aroused, and how a viewer may respond. These examples illuminate specific qualities of Viewer Suspicion, such as the importance of diegetic social cues, and mystery practices, such as the inclusion of important clues in a film's opening scene. By reflecting on the form of mystery films, including the mystery mode, problem type, and filmic practices, this chapter illuminates how mystery films motivate viewers to engage in Textual Problem Solving, and shape that engagement.

8.1 MYSTERY PROBLEM TYPES AND TEXTUAL PROBLEM SOLVING MODES

The type of problem a mystery film sets for viewers determines how viewers understand and approach that problem. When problem solving, individuals conceptualise the problem before addressing how best to solve it (Mumford, Reiter-Palmon, and Redmond 1994). Mystery problem types set the specifics of the task for viewers, influencing what kinds of information they search for, how they relate that information to the problem, and what a feasible solution should look like.¹⁵¹ As such, mystery problem types are a crucial tool for shaping the way viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving when watching mystery films. From my analysis the films in the Study Set are composed of five problem types. These are the whodunit, howdunit, whydunit, whatdunit, and binary modes. By problem type, I refer to the core problem that is set by the film for the viewer, and the qualities of that problem. Each film in the Study Set employed at least one of these problem types, and many films use multiple types over the course of the film. The whodunit, howdunit, and whydunit problem types have previously been identified in analysis of the mystery genre narratives; however, the whatdunit and binary problem types are my original contributions.

¹⁵¹ For research on the influence of task setting see Wang (1996) and Friedman, Förster, and Denzler (2007).

As the mystery genre has changed over time, new problem types have emerged that require new modes of engagement for viewers when engaging in Textual Problem Solving.

Each mystery problem type has its own corresponding Textual Problem Solving mode, which is the approach a viewer takes to solving such a problem. While problem type describes how the problem is constructed within the film, the Textual Problem Solving mode describes the experience of a viewer. Textual Problem Solving modes describe the strategy and process required for a viewer to effectively engage with a mystery text and its core problem. Textual Problem Solving modes are a direct response to the kind of problem a viewer is engaged with, the steps required to reach a solution, and the form a solution will take. Mystery films motivate viewers to employ a Textual Problem Solving mode by presenting them with the necessary information to assess and determine the problem type. While this practice is employed in the majority of mystery films, it is essential for films in the recognition mode to do so. These films use problem type to ensure viewer attention is directed toward information relevant to the core solution, that viewers need to recognise when the solution is revealed to them at the point of anagnorisis.

To reach a solution, the viewer engages in Textual Problem Solving, applying cognitive operations to a set of information. According to Greeno (1978) all problems involve at least one of three operations, wherein the problem solver must *arrange*, *induce structure*, or *transform* information available to them. For example, problems of arrangement require the formation of new associations or links between available information to identify the solution, while problems of inducing structure require the identification of a pattern or existing relationship. In contrast, transformation problems explicitly state the solution and require the solver to identify the series of operations or changes required to reach that goal from a starting point (Reed 2007). In the recognition mode, each problem type is primarily associated with one of these operations to arrive at a solution, based on the goals and givens set within the film. One way that films using the recognition mode can present a challenge for viewers is by misleading them as to which operations will lead to a solution or by disrupting efforts at conducting this operation.

The Textual Problem Solving mode that viewers employ is a direct response to the type of solution they believe will resolve the problem. For example, the whodunit is resolved by identifying an agent of action, the whydunit by determining motivation, the howdunit by determining method and process, and the whatdunit by identifying the rules or system that govern the story world. These four modes respond to questions of who, what, how—

which includes where and when—and why. The binary mode asks questions such as ‘did he...?’, ‘will she...?’, ‘are they...?’, and are answered in the affirmative or negative, referencing a specific action, intent, or state of affairs. The way that mystery films present a problem for the viewer is central to how those viewers engage with the film. Between them, these five categories provide a useful taxonomy for all mystery films and describe the Textual Problem Solving processes that viewers engage in when viewing a mystery film. Further, these problem types help classify the possible goals, givens, and operations involved in Textual Problem Solving mystery films. I will use these problem types to describe how films in the recognition mode present information to viewers so that they recognise that information at the point of anagnorisis, and how these films prevent viewers from solving a film’s core problem ahead of time.

The Whodunit

The plot of a whodunit invites the viewer to solve the problem of *who* is responsible for an act or identify *who* is in possession of something valuable. The whodunit is usually a problem of arrangement, with several potential clues and suspects that must be tested against each other; viewers often identify with an investigator throughout this process. Mystery films often use restricted narration, limiting the viewer to the investigator’s sometimes subjective or unreliable point-of-view. This restricted narration will often be combined with moments of unrestricted narration, allowing viewers to draw conclusions beyond those of the investigator, or to sow seeds of distrust about the accuracy of an investigator’s perceptions and determinations. When engaging with a whodunit, viewers assess whether there is a plausible reason for associating a clue with a suspect and, if so, what that implies about that individual. For example, in *88 Minutes* (Avnet 2007), forensic psychologist Jack Gramm tries to uncover who is responsible for a series of murders. He suspects the culprit is someone close to him and the film follows his evaluation of his aide, several of his students, and a strange man stalking him. For viewers, the whodunit Textual Problem Solving mode commonly involves considering several potential agents as the targets of their search before deducing the correct target. The whodunit involves inducing structure in the problem, and then spotting a pattern or a break in that pattern in order to identify an existing relationship between clues and targets of suspicion.

The whodunit need not be the investigation of a crime, or the search for an individual. For example, *Lady in the Water* (Shyamalan 2006) depicts a group of neighbours trying to protect a mythical creature by identifying who among them has the required skills and abilities to

do so. As with *88 Minutes*, viewers can assess individual targets sequentially, or multiple targets concurrently, seeking to eliminate incorrect targets. The identification of a target is frequently based on the discovery of a hidden motive, as in *Whiteout* (Sena 2009), a unique identifier tied to the target(s), as in *A Perfect Getaway* (Twohy 2009), or the disproval of an assumed fact, as in *Shock to the System* (Oliver 2006).

The whodunit is the most frequently occurring mystery type in literature (Bryant et al. 2000)—and in the Study Set, it occurs in 33 of the 87 films (see Figure 8.1.1). This problem type often presents a well-structured problem with a clearly defined goal, set of actions, and solution state. To prevent whodunit mysteries from becoming too predictable, these films frequently include a second problem type requiring a shift in Textual Problem Solving mode by viewers. Of the films in the Study Set, more than half included a second problem type. Of these, the most common transition was from the resolution of a whodunit to the setting of a how- or whydunit problem. In a crime mystery, this usually involves the identification of a guilty party, but a lack of evidence with which to convict them. The story moves from a criminal investigation to a legal prosecution with the focus on how or why a crime was committed. This has been popularised by TV franchises such as *Law and Order* (Wolf 1990–2010) and *CSI* (Zuiker 2000–2015), which epitomise the police procedural format.

Problem type	Single	Multiple	Total number of films
Whodunit	18	15	33
Whatdunit	24	6	30
Whydunit	9	11	20
Binary	11	8	19
Howdunit	3	4	7

Figure 8.1.1—Problem type in the Study Set (includes multiple problem types where relevant)

The Howdunit

A howdunit problem asks viewers to solve *how* something has happened or will happen. Howdunits are often problems of transformation, providing the viewer with an end or goal state, and requiring the identification of actions to reach that goal. In the Study Set, the howdunit was the least common problem type, occurring in only seven of the 87 films (see Figure 8.1.1). *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009), where the detective seeks to prevent a series of murders by Lord Blackwood, is a clear demonstration of this problem type. Unlike in the whodunit, the killer is known to Sherlock and the audience from the outset. To prevent further killings, Holmes must identify how Blackwood has been able to perform

seemingly impossible acts—including resurrection, a locked-room murder, and a man’s spontaneous ignition. When attempting to solve a howdunit, the aim is to identify the actions and context required to produce a known or expected outcome.

The howdunit Textual Problem Solving mode requires viewers to think about the mechanics of an action or event. Unlike the whodunit mode, which works with a set of potential suspects, the howdunit examines a set of potential methods for reaching a specific outcome. Viewers are frequently required to explain something out of place or identify a flaw in a perceived restriction. This requires the rearrangement of information to generate possible solutions, which can be tested against arguments and evidence presented within the film. For example, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006) when Angier asks how the magician Borden disappears and reappears instantly on the other side of the stage, his engineer states that he must use a double. While this proves to be true, much of the film aims to dissuade the viewer of this solution. The two men have identical gestures, manner, and share a unique disfigurement. Further, Angier’s attempt to employ a double in his own show ends disastrously. Critically, each of these details describes the difficulty and improbability of using a double without ever ruling the possibility out. In a howdunit, viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving by critically evaluating these different methods, attempting to support or reject explanations based on the evidence within the film, and considering explanations the film does not even suggest, but fails to refute.

The ‘how’ of a howdunit need not refer to crime. For example, in *Awake* (Harold 2007), *The Illusionist* (Burger 2006), *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006), and *Trance* (Boyle 2013) the core problem asks how a deception was achieved. Each of these films remains crime-adjacent, and the deception is directly involved in a criminal act in three of these films. Only *The Prestige* presents a howdunit where the mystery relates to a non-criminal act: the method for performing the “Transported Man” magic trick. The method of this trick is key to understanding the motivations and choices of characters throughout the film and demonstrates how a howdunit can present a core problem about non-criminal action.

The Whydunit

The whydunit problem asks *why* something was done, focusing on the motives of an individual or group. To solve the problem, a viewer must identify why an agent behaves in a certain way or commits a specific act. The whydunit primarily requires the viewer to induce structure by identifying patterns or relationships, or to arrange information to create

new relationships that account for or explain the observed facts. It may examine an action with obvious potential motivations and require an assessment of those possibilities. For example, in *Brick* (Johnson 2005), drug use, stolen drugs, and jealousy are all presented as possible motivations for Emily's murder by an unknown culprit. Conversely, the whydunit can present an inexplicable act where no potential motivations are clear. This plays out in *Meeting Evil* (Fisher 2012), when a murderous stranger takes a particular interest in the protagonist, John. The whydunit occurred in 20 of the 87 films in the Study Set (see Figure 8.1.1) and presented both well-structured and ill-structured problems, depending on whether potential motives are presented to the viewer to assess.

When a viewer is unable to identify a reasonable justification or motivation for an agent's actions, they must instead rely on familiarity with the genre and its practices. For example, in *Grand Piano* (Mira 2013) a concert pianist is held hostage by a sniper hidden in his audience. The sniper threatens to kill the pianist if he makes a single mistake in his performance. Until the end of the film, no logical reason for these demands is apparent, and the viewer must generate possible motivations. Their success is significantly improved by understanding the genre and its tropes, because jealousy, revenge, and greed motivate almost all screen crime.

In contrast, the well-structured whydunit provides a clear set of options for the viewer to consider. In *Eastern Promises* (Cronenberg 2007) Nikolai Luzhin works for the Russian mafia but acts in ways inconsistent with his position. He plants evidence against his employer for the police to find, repeatedly counsels against violence, and treats people outside the mafia with respect. The film presents three potential motivations: Nikolai plans to rise within the mafia by sabotaging his superiors; he is an undercover cop; or he strictly adheres to his own moral code. The viewer is presented with evidence that supports and undermines each of these possible motivations. Thus, the challenge is to determine what confluence of these factors best explains his choices.

The Whatdunit

The whatdunit problem poses the question: *what* explains or accounts for everything taking place in the story world? There is no specific target of the investigation; any piece of information is potentially a salient point. This mode compels the viewer to induce structure in the problem, requiring the recognition of a pattern within the diegetic world. The whatdunit can refer to a problem where a collective or force is responsible for a set of

circumstances, as distinct from the focus on an individual or discrete group in the whodunit. In most cases the whatdunit is an ill-structured problem, with no, or few, possible explanations presented to viewers. The whatdunit form appears in some classic science-fiction mysteries, such as *Planet of the Apes* (Schaffner 1968) and *Solaris* (Tarkovsky 1971), but became more common in the 1990s with the growth of complex storytelling and puzzle films including *The Devil's Advocate* (Hackford 1997), *The Game* (Fincher 1997), and *Pi* (Aronofsky 1998). The whatdunit is featured in many complex narrative and puzzle films, where viewers “take pleasure in trying to figure out the rules of the narration that presents the story to us” (Panek 2006, 87). Among the Study Set the whatdunit was the second most common problem type, occurring in 30 of the 87 films, and was the most common solitary problem type (see Figure 8.1.1).

The whatdunit can be resolved by revealing the existence of something impossible in the real world, drawing on fantasy, sci-fi, horror, and so on, or by setting a story in the real world with strange events that are often explained by some conspiracy or an unreliable point of view. Examples of the former include *Knowing* (Proyas 2009) and *The Forgotten* (Ruben 2004), which are both resolved by the revelation that extra-terrestrial beings have intervened in human affairs. M Night Shyamalan's *The Village* (2004) initially seems to fit into this category because it includes supernatural and monstrous elements in what appears to be a historical setting, but it is later revealed to be taking place in the modern-day real world. The whatdunit often hinges on the authenticity of supernatural elements; the viewer is tasked with determining if they are real or illusory in the film's diegesis.

These are problems of transformation, requiring viewers to make changes to the information available to them to reach a solution. A transformation often requires a challenge or re-evaluation of some assumed fact, such as when *The Village* is revealed to take place in the present day, or when John Shooter is revealed to be a fictional character in *Secret Window* (Koepp 2004). The whatdunit presents a problem where the axioms or assumptions about the real world must be challenged to work towards a solution. This problem type includes a broad range of potential solutions that are difficult to assess without some way of determining if the story is set in a fantastic or realistic world.

The Binary Problem/Mode

The binary problem has been a part of the mystery genre from an early stage but has not previously been defined as a unique problem type. The binary problem presents the viewer

with a question that has only two possible solutions. This question involves the acceptance or rejection of a hypothesis, normally by the film's protagonist: yes/no, true/false, did/didn't. This type of problem is evident in a number of mystery films including Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941) and *Rear Window* (1954). In the Study Set, a binary problem was presented in 19 of the 87 films, and in 11 of those it was the film's solitary problem type (see Figure 8.1.1). However, writers on the genre have not distinguished these texts from other problem types; many such problems are described only as psychological thrillers. Binary problems are often related to one of the other problem types, as viewers are asked to evaluate if a particular explanation of *who*, *what*, *how*, or *why* is correct. In *Disturbia* (Caruso 2007), Kale Brecht suspects that his neighbour is an active serial killer and the viewer is tasked with determining whether this suspicion is correct. In *Birth* (Glazer 2004), Anna believes a young boy is the reincarnation of her dead husband and viewers must evaluate if this could possibly be true. In both examples, the narrative revolves around the confirmation or denial of this one belief, and the viewer is often privy to information the protagonist is not. This information is ambiguous or unclear to the viewer, and many binary problems are resolved when the protagonist obtains this information and reveals its relevance and importance.

The binary problem requires the viewer to evaluate two points of view concurrently, evaluating two possible conclusions. Although binary problems are distinct from other problem types, they may appear to have quite similar solutions. For example, in *Disturbia* (Caruso 2007), it transpires that the neighbour is a serial killer. However, the question posed by the film is not *who* the serial killer is, but *whether* the neighbour is a serial killer. For example, in a whodunit, viewers may consider several individuals as potential perpetrators of a crime and try to determine who is guilty. Each of the possible solutions involves identifying an agent who committed the crime. In a binary problem that evaluates someone's guilt, one solution involves identifying an agent—much as in the whodunit—but the other solution does not require a different target to be identified. Instead, if the binary problem is solved by answering in the negative, a new problem may emerge. For example, in *Perfect Stranger* (Foley 2007), Rowena Price investigates Harrison Hill regarding the death of her friend. For the majority of the film, the viewer is trying to determine if Hill is guilty or not. Once the viewer learns that Hill is not guilty, the problem becomes a whodunit, with the viewer trying to determine, if not Hill, then who is guilty? Mystery films can shift between problem types as the narrative unfolds.

Multiple Problems and Modal Transitions

While mystery films always present a viewer with a problem, that problem is not always presented in a way that viewers will attempt to solve. There are times where the viewer is prompted to observe the method of an investigation or investigator. Rather than proactively seeking to solve a mystery, the viewer does not have one clear question to investigate. Instead, they are directed by the findings and discoveries of characters within the film as they try to solve some mystery. The viewer is kept at a distance from the problem, with little opportunity to evaluate solutions or search for information, and so there is an absence of Viewer Suspicion. When clues are provided, their meaning and implications are discussed fully, leaving little ambiguity to arouse Viewer Suspicion. For example, in *Silver City* (Sayles 2004), Danny the private investigator does not have a clear task. He has been hired by a politician to investigate the circumstances surrounding a dead body, and potentially link the death to a political opponent. Like Danny, viewers are uncertain whether the problem at hand is a murder mystery, a political conspiracy, or some other form of corruption. Until the problem type becomes clear, viewers simply follow the actions of the investigator, waiting for the problem to be revealed. When mystery films engage viewers in this way, they do so strategically. By presenting the problem in this way, mystery films can lull a viewer into complacency while presenting important information to a problem the viewer is not actively looking to solve, but that will become apparent later in the film.

Mystery plots that follow the method of a detective or investigator are a staple of the crime and mystery genres in film and television.¹⁵² During this period clues do not need to be interpreted or analysed by the viewer, as an investigator does this explicitly. This keeps the viewer closely aligned to the knowledge of the protagonist, resulting in shared knowledge, but also shared blind spots. In this context, viewers are unable to generate informed predictions about how some piece of information may be relevant to a problem. Thus, when the plot shifts to one where Textual Problem Solving is once again required, viewers may fail to attend to the ambiguity present in clues. For example, *Zodiac* (Fincher 2007) begins by following an investigation, with obvious and unambiguous findings, and inquiries that reach dead ends. The certainty present in this first half of the film is challenged in the latter half, when the investigations by police and journalists uncover new information in previously dismissed clues. This produces a challenge for viewers, where

¹⁵² This occurred for extended periods in seven of the 87 films in the Study Set.

they need to ‘catch up’ with the story, re-evaluating past information they had believed secure and resolved.

Many mystery films use this same practice of positioning the viewer so that they believe themselves in possession of the relevant facts, before sharply moving to a different problem type. For example, in *Perfect Stranger* (Foley 2007), investigative journalist Rowena Price seeks to expose Harrison Hill as an adulterer and murderer. The viewer is largely restricted to Rowena’s point of view and the film presents Harrison as guilty of the crime Rowena believes him to be. The plot presents a binary problem to the viewer (“is Harrison a murderer?”) but presents Rowena as so certain of Harrison’s guilt that the question becomes one of resolution (“how will he be caught?”). However, once the film shows Harrison is innocent, the plot moves from a binary problem to a whodunit (now asking “who is the murderer?”). Not only does this change the Textual Problem Solving strategies a viewer will need to utilise, it also requires a re-evaluation of all previously assessed information for a new purpose. Information previously viewed with certainty may now be seen as more ambiguous, and act as a potential source of suspicion. The volume of information a viewer must re-evaluate, combined with the limited time available to do so, produces a challenging task for the viewer. By transitioning between different Textual Problem Solving modes and changing the ‘givens’ of a problem, filmmakers can surprise viewers and prevent them from solving even simple or well-known mystery problems.¹⁵³

Solving Mystery Films with Meta-Knowledge

When watching mystery films, viewers must recognise the features of a problem type to determine how best to resolve it. Viewers who are familiar with the mystery genre and its practices can more quickly identify when a film has set a problem and identify the problem type. Viewers who use meta-knowledge to solve the core problem in a mystery film are engaging in a problem-driven mode of engagement. These viewers draw conclusions based on information or knowledge from outside the film, not within it. This may include paratextual knowledge, such as knowledge about the film and its production, genre-specific knowledge, or implicit knowledge of problem types. Problem-driven viewers are better equipped to detect the problem type and identify when a problem type change. Problem types can convey meaning through the repetition of tropes and trends; however, these

¹⁵³ 22 of the 87 films in the Study set included multiple problem types.

patterns are only noticed by problem-driven viewers who have the necessary background knowledge to recognise them.

Films in the Study Set had a number of common features directly related to the problem type used in the film. For example, the whodunit ensures that the culprit is mentioned relatively early in the story.¹⁵⁴ In the whydunit, the solution invariably involves material gain, revenge, or the protection of a loved one. The howdunit frequently includes some reference to the supernatural, as in *The Illusionist* (Burger 2006), *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006), and *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009), although the mechanics of the solution remain grounded in the real world.¹⁵⁵ In the Study Set, the whatdunit was the most likely to present an ill-structured problem, making it the most difficult of the problem types to solve. Films such as *Shutter Island* (Scorsese 2010), *Blindness* (Meirelles 2008), *Hugo* (Scorsese 2011), *Inception* (Nolan 2010), and *The Village* (Shyamalan 2004) thrust the viewer into a world where many of the rules must be learnt. *Inception* describes the rules of its dream world both through dialogue—“Killing him will just wake him up”—and through demonstration, as with Mal haunting Cobb throughout the film. In most of these films, the viewer continues to gain an understanding of the world’s rules until the very last scene or minutes of the film; a complete solution is rarely provided earlier.

The binary problem at first appears simple, due to the limited choice set for solutions. However, engaging with the problem in the film means engaging cognitive hierarchies, which involve a limitless number of logical extensions to each assumption or conclusion.¹⁵⁶ For example, a viewer could reason that a solution is too obvious, but then reason that the film may use this obviousness to ensure viewers overlook or dismiss it.¹⁵⁷ These cognitive hierarchies describe a strategic situation where the current thought process can always be superseded by a thought about that thought process. For instance, in *Perfect Stranger* (Foley 2007), the viewer may presume that Harrison Hill is guilty of murder, given the evidence put forward by Rowena. However, given his guilt seems so certain, and from such an early stage in the film, one may assume that there is more to the story, and he is not the killer.

¹⁵⁴ This practice adheres to the first of Ronald Knox’s ten commandments of detective fiction (1929).

¹⁵⁵ *The Village* (Shyamalan 2004) also adheres to this pattern but is composed as a whatdunit rather than a howdunit.

¹⁵⁶ For an introduction to cognitive hierarchy theory, see Camerer, Ho, and Chong (2004).

¹⁵⁷ An example of the extension of cognitive hierarchies plays out in the famous ‘Battle of Wits’ scene in the film *The Princess Bride* (Reiner 1987). In the film, Westley shows Vizzini an odourless poison before placing two glasses of wine behind his back and then placing them on the table and challenging Vizzini to choose one. Vizzini attempts to deduce which glass the poison is in by continuing to work through logical hierarchies based on what Westley likely would have done, given that he intended to trick Vizzini and knew that Vizzini knew that Westley would try to trick Vizzini.

The viewer could extend these steps further, convincing themselves of Hill's guilt or innocence in a game to stay one step ahead of the film's mystery. The binary problem rarely provides guidance as to when the appropriate level of meta-thought has been reached until the solution is revealed, leaving little chance of a certain and accurate prediction. This lack of certainty maintains ambiguity throughout each of the binary problems.

Films in the Study Set are all classified as common mystery films utilising the recognition mode, and the majority are classified as part of several additional genres. Of these, the thriller and drama genres are most highly represented in the Study Set.¹⁵⁸ This genre hybridity can shape the way a viewer engages with the film and affect their approach to Textual Problem Solving. What arouses suspicion in the mystery-thriller may be perceived as parody in the mystery-comedy. Genre hybridity creates new challenges for viewers, increasing the importance of correctly identifying both genre and Textual Problem Solving mode as each is used to define the problem and the best approach to solving them. Viewers who employ a broad range of metatextual information, drawing on their expertise and familiarity with the genre, are rewarded with a greater ability to predict the core solution when viewing mystery films.

Mystery films in the recognition mode regularly present a narrative that appears to provide a viewer with all information surrounding a problem, and thus, the path to a correct solution. Once arriving at this initial solution, the viewer is led to believe the mystery has been solved, and that all that remains is for a character to act on that knowledge, and so stop seeking ambiguity. The film ceases the use of techniques and practices (as will be described in Section 8.2) that have been used to arouse Viewer Suspicion in order to reinforce the idea that a solution has been found. This misleads viewers into thinking the core solution has been found and that they can stop seeking out information critically. Viewers still identify visually salient information, but they do not apply this information to the problem within the film, allowing important clues to be hidden in plain sight, later to be easily recognised by viewers at the moment of anagnorisis.

Viewers can apply meta-knowledge to avoid making this mistake. For example, the length of a film gives a hint to viewers about the legitimacy of information. Even without explicit knowledge about the length of a feature film, most viewers can rightly assume that the

¹⁵⁸ Thriller (75), Drama (61), Crime (39), Action (12), Romance (10), Fantasy (9), Sci-fi (8), Comedy (6), Adventure (5), History (3), Family (2), Biography (1) as per IMDb.

core solution will not be finalised in the first 45 minutes. The viewer can thus conclude either that a new conflict will arise or that the current problem or conflict has not been correctly solved. In both these cases, the Textual Problem Solving mode the viewer engages in will differ from that of a viewer who has not considered the film length and the pacing of events.

Mystery films in the recognition mode often present the viewer with a solution that could not have reasonably been identified without the application of meta-knowledge. They are unsolvable with the information within the film alone, which leads viewers to become familiar with the components of the solution but be unable to describe how these come together. For example, in *Unknown* (Brand 2006), a group of men wake up in a warehouse with no memory of their identities. Mr Coles and an associate were kidnapped and taken to the warehouse, before a gas leak puts the men and their kidnappers to sleep, causing memory loss. The film builds tension by keeping the identity of Mr Coles a secret and following Mrs Coles' interactions with police on the outside. After Mr Coles is identified, Mrs Coles continues to appear on screen, despite the absence of further tension or scenes that further the plot. From this, a viewer familiar with the mystery genre may rightly assume that her continued presence is purposeful; indeed, Mrs Coles later revealed to be an orchestrator of the kidnapping. There was no way a viewer could logically come to this conclusion from the evidence in the film, but by drawing on knowledge of the genre and its practices, it is possible to generate inferences about who or what is important.

Meta-knowledge has become one of the primary tools for viewers seeking to solve a problem in mystery films utilising the recognition mode. Viewers are required to make unreasonable leaps in logic to arrive at a solution when working with only the material within the film. However, by creating a viewing context whereby viewers are rewarded for drawing on meta-knowledge, the recognition mode facilitates alternative viewing practices. Further, by rewarding knowledge of paratexts, genre, and screen discourse, viewers are incentivised to be more engaged outside of the film. Although meta-knowledge is critical for viewers looking to solve the core problem ahead of time, the majority of viewers remain focused on targets that arouse Viewer Suspicion when engaging in Textual Problem Solving.

The type of problem a mystery film sets for viewers influences the mode of Textual Problem Solving they engage in, which determines what information viewers seek out to resolve the core problem. To draw attention to this information, mystery films using the

recognition mode use several filmic practices to present information as salient to viewers. What follows is a discussion of how mystery films use context, and several filmic practices that distinguish some information for viewers, in order to assist them in recognising the key clues, and to arouse Viewer Suspicion.

8.2 SALIENCE IN MYSTERY FILMS

Salience in mystery films refers to how material is presented as important or prominent, in order to capture a viewer's attention. Filmic practices can have a modulating effect on viewer attention, and thus can be used to present information as salient. The goal of these filmic practices is to present information quickly, clearly, and with minimal conscious processing. For this reason, viewers can easily identify what they believe to be salient within a scene but may not know why they identified the information as salient. Salience can be conveyed through narrative, visuals, sound and music, paratexts, or the activation of meta-knowledge. While this is an important aspect of all mystery films, it is essential for films utilising the recognition mode to do so effectively, to ensure certain images or information are recognisable to viewers at the point of anagnorisis. Films in the Study Set used four key practices to communicate salience. These are *repetition*, *duration*, *isolation*, and *predisposition*. These practices share one common feature: they each distinguish information as salient by conveying difference. The context within which these filmic practices are employed influences how they are received by viewers, and thus plays an important role in determining when Viewer Suspicion is aroused. What follows is a definition of each of these predominant filmic practices, and an explanation of how they are used to convey salience in films from the Study Set. This includes a discussion of techniques for limiting what viewers pay attention to, including priming, agenda-setting, and framing. Further, I detail the specific mechanics by which filmic practices convey salience to viewers, and the impact of problem type and Textual Problem Solving mode on their perceptions of salience.

Repetition

Information can be presented as salient through the repetition of shots, “weighting attention to a particular moment” (Donaldson, 2014). In literature, the repetition of a word can be used for emphasis, to develop a pattern or structure, or to draw parallels between two characters or events. In the same way, films can repeat a shot that conveys a particular

piece of information to emphasise its importance or relevance. The repetition of visual or aural elements, as well as the repetition of events or themes, conveys salience to a viewer by establishing a pattern, distinguishing an object or action, or by providing viewers an opportunity to re-examine something in a new context. When a film presents a piece of information multiple times, it becomes distinguished from others and thus attracts scrutiny.

Because the recognition mode requires the repetition of some piece of information, viewers may be primed to attach significance to that stimulus. For instance, in *Stolen* (Anderson 2009) a boy is abducted at a carnival, with only a small tin toy left behind. Throughout the film similar toys are used to draw a connection between the abduction and a 50-year-old murder. The significance of these toys to the father's search for his son attracts the viewer's attention. Once viewers have identified something important to the core problem, they are primed to identify repetitions of that information or contextually related information.

When viewers watch a film, they are aware of the constructed nature of a text and recognise that repetition likely conveys some salient point pertaining to the film's mystery, due to their presumption of cohesion, which was described in Section 7.1. Repetition can be used to convey difference by repeatedly presenting some information, while not doing the same for other information. Alternatively, repetition can be used to generate structure within the pacing of editing or narrative, allowing a pattern to form that the viewer may use to generate predictive inferences. A film may also produce salience by breaking from this established pattern or subverting an expected repetition. Repeating key images, sounds, actions, or thematic concerns can produce each of these effects for the viewer.

Visual repetition utilises symbols, distinctive facial or body features, or characters to draw associations between agents or actions within the film. In *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009), objects related to Lord Blackwood's crimes are shown twice: first in the present and then in flashbacks to the objects' use in the past. In *All Good Things* (Jarecki 2010), the scene of David Marks dumping a body into a river is shown in fragments throughout the film, with each repetition showing more of the scene. Repetition is also used to show when a character's attention has been captured, as in *88 Minutes* (Avnet 2007). Jack Gramm is repeatedly shown surveying a crowd of people, with individual suspects presented in separate point-of-view shots. Salience is conveyed by Gramm's gaze, which returns to a specific individual, as in the sequence below (Figure 8.2.1). The series of shots conveys

Jack Gramm's suspicion about Guy LaForge to the viewer, and legitimises this suspicion, as Guy watches Jack from afar.



Figure 8.2.1—Three sequential shots showing Jack Gramm noticing Guy LaForge watching him, in 88 Minutes (Avnet 2007)

Aural repetitions can convey salience to a film audience, whether through dialogue, music, or sound. The repetition of dialogue can be used to convey a character's thought process and may reflect a reconsideration of what was said by a character on screen. In *Awake* (Harold 2007) Clay Beresford is undergoing a heart transplant while his fiancée, Sam, and

mother, Lilith, are in the hospital waiting room. A resident doctor at the hospital asks Sam, “Haven’t I seen you around?” which she denies; she shows her engagement ring to stop his advances. When this occurs, it is the first time Lilith has learnt of the engagement, and she is focused on when the proposal occurred. However, later in the film when Lilith begins to suspect a conspiracy against her son by his surgeons, the repetition of this dialogue indicates her realisation that Sam is also involved in the scheme.

The repetition of music can draw a link between two otherwise disconnected scenes, characters, or pieces of information. The repetition of sound or music prompts the viewer to consider the links between the occurrences, and their significance to the film’s core problem. By repeating music, the film may enable viewers to identify a pattern of use, recognising the significance of music to the representation of a character or outcome within a scene. For example, in *Inception* (Nolan 2010), the Édith Piaf recording of *Non, je ne regrette rien* (1959) is used prominently within the film’s diegesis as a cue for characters to sync “kicks” across dream levels. As such, when the song plays outside of this purpose, the association with entering and exiting dream states suggests to the viewer that something important is occurring.

Like music, unique sounds can be associated with specific characters or events. By repeating one of these sounds in the absence of the associated character or event, the film encourages viewers to evaluate the relationship between what is currently on screen and the character or event—a problem of arrangement. For example, sounds can have identifying characteristics suggesting weight, speed, force, density, size, or shape of the source of a sound, allowing a viewer to scrutinise what they see and hear. In *Shutter Island* (Scorsese 2010) the sound of being submerged under water is repeated to emphasise the importance of Edward Daniels’ dreams about the drowned little girl, which are later revealed to be a memory of his own child.

November (Harrison 2004) repeats elements to provide the viewer clues as to the reality behind the three versions of events Sophie experiences surrounding an armed robbery and the murder of her boyfriend. Photography, headaches, and strange noises and voices that only Sophie hears, all provide some insight into the film’s core solution. The viewer can recognise these constants as salient due to their repetition. They guide the viewer to understand the real series of events, culminating in the revelation that Sophie has been shot as part of the armed robbery. Repetition plays an important role in providing structure

to a narrative, and for distinguishing something as salient to the viewer, directly related to the core problem that viewers are seeking to solve.

Duration

Duration involves the manipulation of time to mark something as salient. It can refer to the use of extremely long- or short-duration shots, freeze frames or jump cuts, or an increase or decrease in the frame rate, speeding up or slowing down diegetic time. Many films in the Study Set used incredibly quick shots in rapid succession, each one less than a second in duration, to draw viewer attention and bookend salient details. This interruption was used to represent a flashback to an important memory in *Whiteout* (Sena 2009) and *Trance* (Boyle 2013), and an intrusion on a dream or hallucinatory experience in *November* (Harrison 2004), *Passengers* (García 2008), and *Stay* (Forster 2005) (see Figure 8.2.2).



Figure 8.2.2—Intrusions on the dream world showing reality, in *Stay* (Forster 2005)

The manipulation of time can be used to convey salience to the viewer. When time is slowed down, otherwise overlooked features can be examined in greater detail. Conversely, when time is sped up, emphasis is placed on action or consequence, as finer details cannot be observed. An example of the sped-up time can be seen in *Inception* (Nolan 2010), where important events in the top dream level are shown in slow motion. This allows the viewer to see how the dreaming members of the team are affected in minute detail, which is then translated into significant changes in their respective dream levels.

Humans are excellent at identifying new patterns and at applying patterns in new contexts (Mattson 2014). Further, processing “is enhanced by perception of the patterns in an

emotional setting” (Mattson 2014). This means that viewers can recognise a pattern in the pacing of shots within a film, associate that pattern with particular emotional states, and identify when the pattern is broken (Cutting et al. 2011). When a shot breaks that pattern, it will attract viewer attention as salient (Southwell et al. 2017). In a quickly edited film a shot of longer duration may stand out, whereas the same shot may seem unremarkable in another film. For example, in *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009) a shot of approximately 31 seconds depicts Lord Blackwood, on the eve of his execution, threatening Sherlock with three more murders. While the duration of this shot would appear ordinary in *The Village* (Shyamalan 2004)—which has a mean shot length of 15.40 seconds, SD of 20.31, and median 8.44—it is an outlier in *Sherlock Holmes* (Ritchie 2009, which has a mean shot length of 2.53 seconds, SD of 3.37, and median of 1.59]. The importance of Blackwood’s words is emphasised through repetition, playing in Holmes’ mind as he attempts to solve the mystery, and directly conveying their significance to the core problem to viewers.

Isolation

Isolation is used in the mystery films to present something as different by separating it from others, either spatially or compositionally. Visual isolation is achieved by presenting an object or piece of information that stands out to the viewer from its surroundings. This can be achieved by presenting only one significant item in the shot (see Figure 8.2.3) or by drawing on attentional biases relating to text (see Figure 8.2.4) and human faces (see Figure 8.2.5). In almost all instances, these forms of visual isolation will frame the object centrally to ensure salience is conveyed.



Figure 8.2.3—A bloodied knife in close-up on a plain carpeted floor, from *In My Sleep* (Wolf 2010)

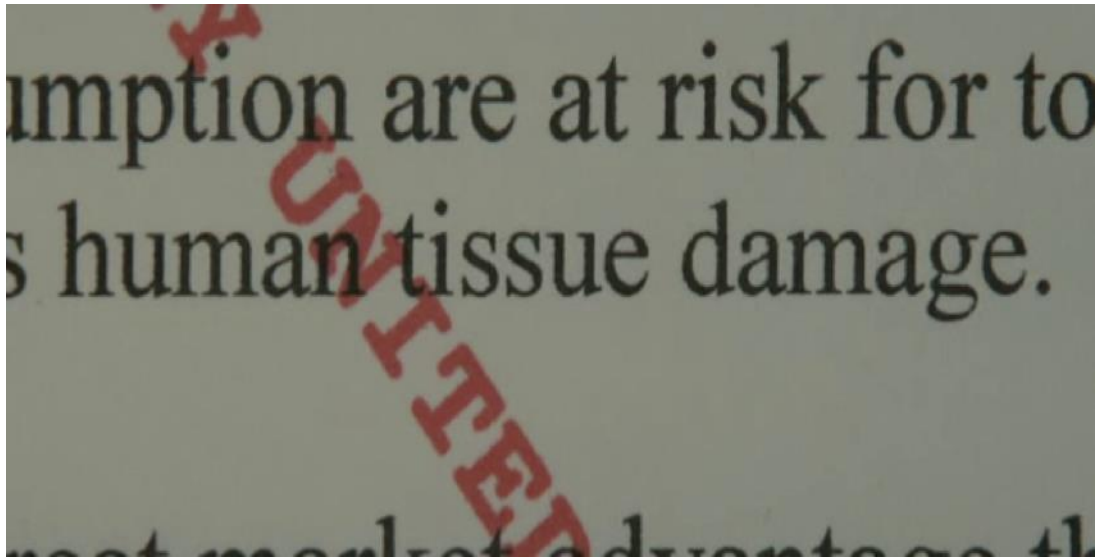


Figure 8.2.4—Extreme close-up of classified documents with target text centred, in Michael Clayton (Gilroy 2007)



Figure 8.2.5—Human faces attract attention against a plain background, in A Perfect Getaway (Twoby 2009)

Visual isolation can be achieved through the use of contrast (see Figure 8.2.6), by movement (see Figure 8.2.7) or by differences in image quality or focus (see Figure 8.2.8). Incongruous objects of attention, such as a large red button on a small wooden box (Figure 8.2.9), also attract viewer attention. Finally, isolation can be generated by the actions of a character within a scene. When Sherlock Holmes picks up a rock at the scene of a crime and brings it to his nose and mouth, the object is seen as important (Figure 8.2.10). In each of these examples, the object or information on display is vital to the film's problem, and several are directly related to the solution.



Figure 8.2.6—The bright faces provide contrast in the dark photograph, in Grand Piano (Mira 2013)



Figure 8.2.7—The spinning top stands out from the other objects, motionless on the table, in Inception (Nolan 2010)



Figure 8.2.8—The security footage is shown in focus, while the darkened room is out of focus, in Sleuth (Branagh 2007)



Figure 8.2.9—A strange box with a glass bubble lid, small key lock, and large red button, in The Box (Kelly 2009)



Figure 8.2.10—*Sherlock picks up a rock, smelling and tasting it, in Sherlock Holmes (Ritchie 2009)*

Audio isolation is created by removing some of the sensory information competing with a salient target. This can be achieved by focusing the camera away from the action, while allowing the sound to continue to track that action. When a viewer can hear the outcome of an encounter without seeing it, not only is salience produced, but also ambiguity. For example, in *Scoop* (Allen 2006), Sid Waterman is driving his car to try and save Sondra Pransky from being killed, but in his haste, loses control of the car and swerves off screen, followed by the sounds of a loud crash. Sid, played by Woody Allen, is one of the film’s protagonists, so when the film denies the viewer visual confirmation of his death there remains ambiguity about the outcome. This ambiguity is resolved when we later see Sid on a ferry crossing the River Styx. Audio isolation can also be produced by suddenly removing all sound with the exception of a single source. The removal of ambient sounds, to isolate a specific one, focuses viewer attention on the meaning and importance of that sound, such as when a character overhears conversation from across the room.

Context

The way information is presented and the context in which it is presented can dramatically change the comprehension of a problem (Jacoby 1983; Pirolli and Mitterer 1984). When making decisions, viewers draw on the information they deem most salient to the problem at hand (Hastie and Park 1986). Viewers will often determine saliency by “the ease in which instances or associations could be brought to mind” (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 208). For this reason, the priming, agenda setting, and framing effects play a critical role in understanding how an individual engages with a problem. These effects shape viewer

perceptions by limiting what information they consider and pay attention to. Screen media can use each of these techniques to manipulate how viewers engage in problem solving when viewing mystery films.

Priming

Previous experience and exposure to certain stimuli can influence the way a viewer responds to new stimuli, even without conscious awareness of those influences or their source. This effect is known as priming (Jacoby 1983; Meyer and Schvaneveldt 1971). An example of the effect is demonstrated in *Focus* (Ficarra and Requa 2015), where a con man, Nicky Spurgeon, describes to his colleague how he can prime a target to pick a specific number. Nicky goes to great lengths to ensure that the target sees the specific number over and over throughout the day before being asked to pick a number. Repeatedly exposing a person to a particular stimulus increases the speed at which that stimulus can be processed, which makes it more likely to be the ‘first thing that comes to mind’. Priming has been shown to affect how viewers are likely to respond after a significant visual change in video, and how they conceive and approach a task or problem.¹⁵⁹ Genre and paratexts can be used to prime viewers, presenting narrative features characteristic of that genre to increase the speed at which viewers recognise those features (Olney 2013).

Priming effects can be observed in the ways that viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving. For instance, Ansorge and colleagues (2012) found that continuity editing allowed viewers to more quickly reorient their gaze after a cut. Their research suggests that after a cut, viewers are primed to seek out visual features that appeared in the pre-cut shot or scene. Barratt (2009) argues that the film *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan 1999) exploits priming to effectively mislead audiences about the film’s major twist. Malcolm, played by Bruce Willis, is shot and killed at the beginning of the film, but he and the viewer are unaware of this fact. Because the film shows Malcolm interacting with other characters, the audience assumes he has survived. Scenes such as the anniversary dinner with his wife, or the meeting with his patient’s mother, conform to social expectations that the lack of a direct back-and-forth conversation is not uncommon. The viewer is primed to expect certain interactions in these situations that provide plausible explanations for why these characters do not speak to him. In this way, priming extends beyond the film presentation, but

¹⁵⁹ For discussion of priming effects on visual change in video see Itti and Baldi (2009), Huber-Huber, Valuch, König, and Ansorge (2013), and Ansorge and Becker (2012). For examples of how priming influences how a task is conceived and approached see Philippot, Schaefer, and Herbette (2003), and Fiedler et al. (2005).

engages a viewer's social and cultural schemas. In using priming, filmmakers can frustrate viewer attempts at Textual Problem Solving when they rely on film conventions rather than formally evaluating the problem at hand.

Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting involves focusing discussion of an issue or problem on a particular aspect, at the cost of other aspects. It is a way of focusing attention on part of a problem, while limiting the amount of attention received by other parts of that same problem. When media presentations emphasise certain aspects of an issue, audiences are likely to place greater importance on those aspects. This relationship between media presentation and audience is referred to as agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). Agenda-setting and priming may be understood as sequential stages in the determination of salience in screen media (Scheufele and Scheufele 2013, 6). Firstly, an agenda is set by a text that expresses salience of an issue to an audience. Priming may then activate related concepts in the viewer to increase this salience. Viewers utilise these salient aspects and related concepts in subsequent decision-making processes, such as during Textual Problem Solving.

Framing

Framing describes a cognitive bias whereby the same information or outcome is treated differently, based on how it is presented or described. Framing shapes how information is processed, based on the way it is presented to an audience. It involves presenting some aspect of the stimuli as salient in order to encourage a specific "treatment" (Entman 1993, 52) or response. Entman argues that framing is used when defining a problem, when diagnosing its causes, when evaluating its effect, and when prescribing a strategy towards solution. For example, in the film *A Perfect Getaway* (Twohy 2009), Cydney and Cliff shape audience perceptions of the couples they meet as potential suspects by voicing negative interpretations of these suspects' characteristics and traits, framing viewer perceptions. When the film later reveals Cydney and Cliff to be the killers, we learn that these negative interpretations were completely unfounded, and that the killers have feigned these responses as part of taking on the identity of their previous victims. By doing so, the film can frame viewer perceptions of what behaviour is suspicious, what clues to expect, and what a correct solution may look like.

Familiarity with screen texts can also have a framing effect on the way a viewer engages with the material in front of them. For example, Smith and Nako (2013) compared an experienced and inexperienced viewer watching an episode of *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan 2013). They used an eye tracker to demonstrate that the two types of viewers moved their eyes around the screen in very different ways. In one scene, the experienced viewer was able to identify and locate the protagonist in the background while the inexperienced viewer focused primarily on the foregrounded characters. In a later scene, the experienced viewer looked to where information would be revealed before it had been, drawing on their experience with the scene. Experience with a task, such as playing soccer or driving a car, also changes the way a viewer watches content (Smuc, Mayr, and Windhager 2010; Scott et al. 2013). In the same way, experience with a genre, and in particular the mystery genre that sets a problem for the viewer, may shape the way a viewer approaches a film.

Predisposition/Bias

Viewer predisposition refers to the inclination audiences have to respond in a specific way to particular attributes, features, or qualities within a film.¹⁶⁰ In films from the Study Set, this can include knowledge and expectations about the mystery genre, engagement with paratextual material and pre-viewing discourse, as well as general stereotypes, biases, and character tropes. Mystery films play on social stereotypes to instill beliefs in the viewer about a character. For example, assertive female characters in supporting roles are often shown in these films to be unfaithful, dishonest, and a physical threat. In *Meeting Evil* (Fisher 2012), Joanie, whose husband has been abducted, is strong, forceful, and unapologetic in defending her husband's character when questioned by police. The film perpetuates a stereotype of assertive women by revealing that Joanie is an adulterer and has hired an assassin to murder her husband. Many films in the Study Set relied on prejudices and negative stereotypes in the portrayal of characters. Non-compliant women are presented as deceitful; a tattooed character warrants heightened suspicion; and when evaluating a number of possible suspects, non-Caucasian individuals are the likely guilty party for any crime. While gay male characters are generally presented in a positive light in films from the Study Set, non-heteronormative female characters are not. In almost all cases, films including these characters would reveal at least one as a murderer, though sometimes a sympathetic one. Examples include *88 Minutes* (Avnet 2007), *Passion* (De Palma 2012), *The Black Dahlia* (De Palma 2006), and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Fincher

¹⁶⁰ This section refers specifically to the biases held by the typical audience of films in the Study Set.

2012).¹⁶¹ The prevalence of this stereotype demonstrates the extent to which these films will employ bias/predisposition to direct viewer attention.

In the same way that the discovery of a boot print at a crime scene may influence viewers to look for a suspect wearing boots, biases and stereotypes prime viewers to sometimes suspect characters based on unreasonable grounds. When a character that fits a known stereotype relating to the problem is shown, the stereotypical quality may be perceived as salient. For instance, if the problem involves identifying a drug dealer, viewers may be more likely to scrutinise the young black male wearing baggy clothes due to previous representations in media. Of course, these biases are also used to subvert viewer expectations, as in *Freedomland* (Roth 2006), where Brenda, a white mother, blames a black man for stealing her car with her young son still inside. Brenda later confesses that she killed her son by accident and had fabricated the story of the carjacking. *Perfect Stranger* (Foley 2007) relies on the narrative trope of the adulterous husband murdering his lover after learning she is pregnant. Rowena Price investigates Harrison Hill with the intent of uncovering evidence to prove his guilt, before shifting her attention to her researcher Miles Haley, an obsessive stalker. These predispositions keep the viewer's attention away from Rowena, who is revealed to be the film's real killer.

Salience, in mystery films, is the subversion of expectations, or a confirmation of expectations of difference; thus, it is crucial to the way Viewer Suspicion arises, and reflects viewers' conception of the problem at hand. This is of greater importance to films in the recognition mode, which rely on arousing Viewer Suspicion to ensure that viewers notice critical clues and recognise them later. The practices discussed above outline the ways that the recognition mode can engage viewers in Textual Problem Solving. However, to identify the specific ways in which individual films engage viewers requires a closer assessment of the context and form information is presented in. The following section examines how these practices are used to direct viewer attention and arouse Viewer Suspicion in two films from the Study Set.

¹⁶¹ The only exception to this stereotype was Josie, the personal assistant of Harrison Hill, in *Perfect Stranger* (Foley 2007).

8.3 AROUSING VIEWER SUSPICION

The recognition mode can be seen as an unfair stacking of the deck against the viewer. While these films are presented as a fair and logical game of wits, like the classic mystery, viewers are unlikely to be able to reach a solution from the material within a film itself. However, viewers may still engage in Textual Problem Solving, and enjoy correctly identifying the clues that will play a role in a film's core solution. This is primarily achieved when these films arouse Viewer Suspicion by presenting information as salient—as described above—and ambiguous. Ambiguity can be generated when a viewer is uncertain how a piece of information relates to a problem (applicability), or when they are uncertain of the accuracy of their interpretation of some piece of information (validity). When the applicability or validity of salient information is ambiguous, Viewer Suspicion is aroused. One important way this is achieved is by allowing viewers to see something, while inhibiting them from noticing it. The viewer may watch the screen intently, but without specific intent, may not notice some of the details they are shown. As Wollen (1982) asserts, in the pursuit of knowledge in mystery narratives “what is important... is precisely what is noticed rather than what is simply seen” (42). What follows is a discussion of two films that utilise the recognition mode, *Awake* (Harold 2007) and *Passengers* (García 2008), and the ways in which they arouse Viewer Suspicion. I discuss examples from both films that demonstrate how critical information is presented to viewers such that it is recognised at the point of anagnorisis, and how it would be impossible for most viewers to use this information to arrive at a correct solution to the film's core problem.

Ambiguity in *Awake*

In the film *Awake* (Harold 2007) we are presented with ambiguity in the treatment of Sam's mail. During the opening titles, we see Sam collecting her mail, with the mailbox clearly labelled “S. Lockwood” (Figure 8.3.1). However, one of the letters she withdraws from the box has a different name. While it is too small to make out the letters entirely, there is a distinct lack of the raised letter “k” from the middle of her surname on the mail (Figure 8.3.2). The framing of the mailbox door as it is opened, and the close-up of the letter, presents the two objects as salient to the viewer. Even if a viewer overlooks these minute details, the viewer is still positioned to recognise their importance to the film's solution. The viewing context and the ambiguity about the significance or meaning of this clue arouse Viewer Suspicion about this letter. When Clay's mother discovers Sam's deception

by noticing these details on the letter, that suspicion is confirmed for the viewer (Figure 8.3.3).



Figure 8.3.1—Samantha opens her mailbox, with the label “S. Lockwood”, in Awake (Harold 2007)

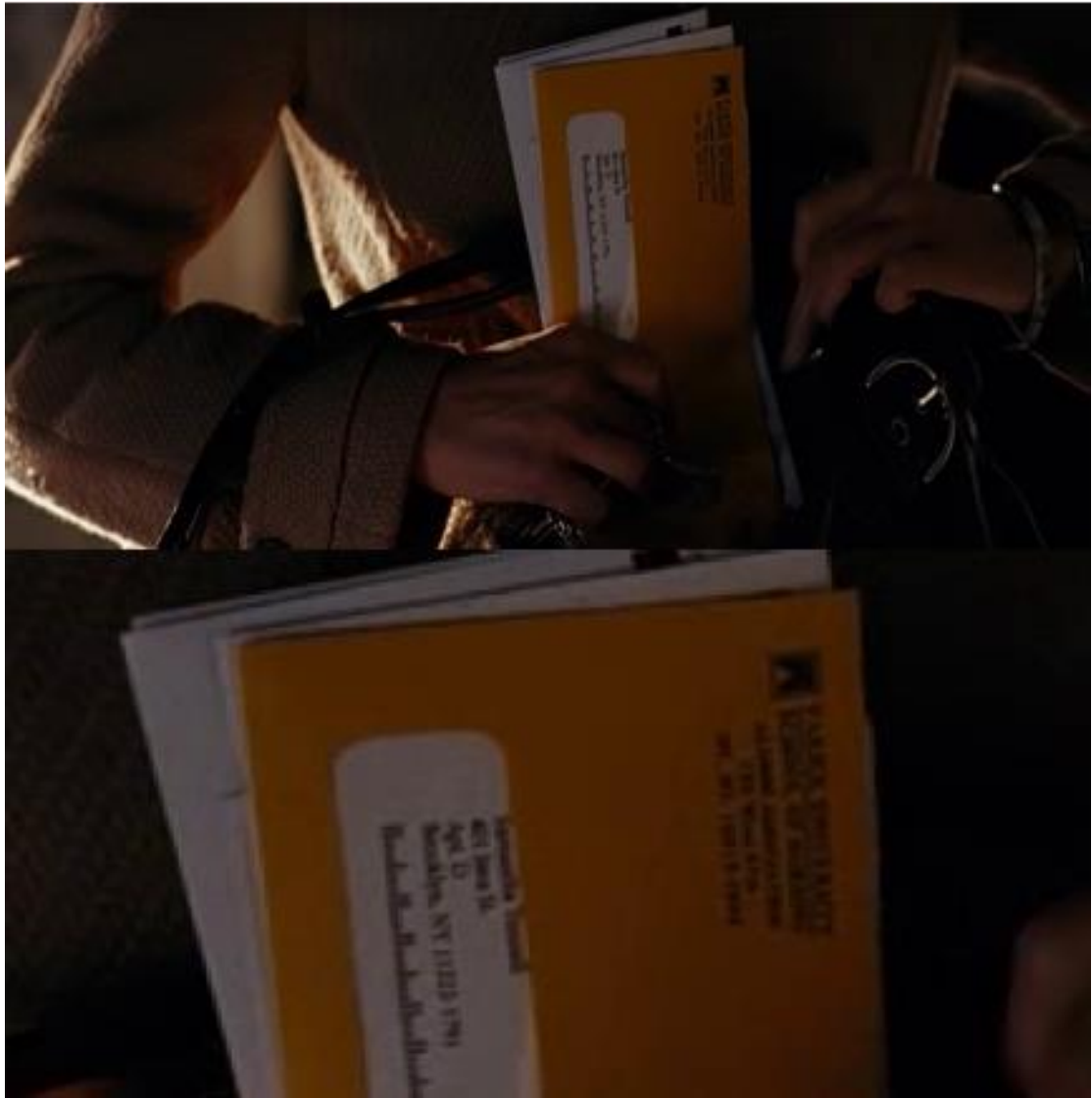


Figure 8.3.2—A letter from “Varick University School of Nursing Alumni Association” shows Samantha’s name as “Samantha Tunnell”, in Awake (Harold 2007)



Figure 8.3.3—A close-up of the same letter later in the film, when Clay's mother recognises Samantha's deception, in *Awake* (Harold 2007)

For Viewer Suspicion to be aroused, the viewer cannot believe they know the solution entirely.¹⁶² For this reason, mystery films are designed such that viewers with different knowledge sets still experience ambiguity about salient information. In the above example, viewers who notice the difference in the names perceive ambiguity about the validity of the information. Does the difference in names suggest something sinister? For viewers who see, but do not notice this detail, and merely note the letter as important, ambiguity arises from a question of applicability. Why is this letter important and how does it relate to the core problem?

¹⁶² As previously discussed, some films will allow the viewer to believe that the solution is fully known as a strategy to prevent suspicion, allowing information relevant to the problem to go unscrutinised.

Ambiguity in mystery films allows viewers to bring more of their own knowledge, thinking, and beliefs to a story. These films reward viewers who are familiar with the workings of the mystery genre, and the problem type, with different ways to engage. While most viewers only experience Viewer Suspicion, without applying that information towards a solution, they may still derive satisfaction from having their suspicions recognised as relevant. This operates as a kind of visual search game, not dissimilar to picture-hunt books but with the addition of editing, sound, and narrative. For problem-driven viewers, meta-knowledge provides structure to an ill-structured problem, providing a set of possible actions or interpretations for each clue. This suggests that responses to Viewer Suspicion are an implicit or intuitive response, sharing more in common with problem solving in daily life than under academic circumstances. Pearlman (2016) argues that intuition draws on explicit and implicit knowledge and can be “developed, enhanced, and even acquired” (14) like other skills.¹⁶³ This involves a “smooth non-self-conscious transfer of learned actions from working memory, stored in frontal lobes, to the pre-motor and motor areas that transform the working memory” into an effective response (Restak 2004, 22).

Hiding Clues in the Beginning

Mystery films utilising the recognition mode must ensure the viewer feels challenged by the problem set in the film and must find ways to present information critical to the film’s solution so that it is noticed by viewers. The following examples describe two common features used to achieve this: the use of human faces and facial expression to attract heightened attention; and the tendency to include a part of the core solution at the very beginning of mystery films. *Passengers* (García 2008) follows Claire Summers, a grief counsellor, as she treats the survivors of a plane crash. As the plot progresses, Claire learns that she was one of the passengers on the plane and that there were no survivors. The film depicts her and each of the other ‘survivors’ in a state of limbo, coming to terms with their sudden death before ‘moving on’ to the afterlife. During the opening titles, the audience is given a significant clue to solving the film’s problem. We are shown a series of shots from inside the plane just prior to the malfunction that leads to the crash, including a number of the survivors who are later treated by Claire. One pair stands out: a close shot of Eric sipping from a cup with an empty seat beside him, followed by a shot of a woman one seat over, reaching to adjust the air-conditioning (Figure 8.3.4).

¹⁶³ This was my experience as I worked my way through the Study Set. Trends and practices emerged that informed my viewing, and as such my ability to predict outcomes or turns improved with each film viewed.



Figure 8.3.4—Eric sipping coffee one seat over from a woman reaching for the air-conditioning, in Passengers (García 2008)

The woman's face is noticeably blurred and cannot be clearly made out. This attracts attention, not only due to its abnormality, but also due to several human biases towards processing and recognising human faces (see Simpson et al. 2014; Tsao and Livingstone 2008). The shot only lasts a couple of seconds but gives enough time to identify the woman as the passenger beside Eric, and that the image of her face is distorted (Figure 8.3.5). When the shot is repeated at the end of the film, Claire's face can be seen in full focus in the seat across from Eric (Figure 8.3.6). After the shot of the crash wreckage, we cut to Claire in her bed. Her phone rings and she is startled and gasps for air, as if emerging from a nightmare. This use of digital blur is quintessential to the recognition mode. By using this technique, the film shows the viewer the significant shot—of Claire on the plane—so that it may be recognised in the film's solution but prevents them from using the information to reach that solution.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ The only clue viewers are given is Claire's reaction following the scene, when her sleep is disturbed by an event she should have no knowledge of. While premonitions and intuitions are regularly used within the



Figure 8.3.5—Plane crash sequence at the beginning of Passengers (García 2008) with Claire's (Anne Hathaway) face digitally blurred



Figure 8.3.6—Plane crash sequence at the end of Passengers (García 2008) with Claire's (Anne Hathaway) face in full focus

The use of distortion on a character's face to obscure a core solution was not unique to *Passengers*. The same technique was applied in *Awake* (2007) with a photograph in the office of Dr Jack Harper, Clay's surgeon. It shows Jack and the other doctors who planned to kill Clay in a close-up that obscures one woman. When viewers are shown the photograph in full it is out of focus and her identity cannot be determined (Figure 8.3.7). By the end of the film, after Sam's involvement has been revealed, the face is shown with clarity (Figure 8.3.8).

mystery genre, their appearance within films utilising the recognition mode can suggest the existence of a constructed reality, such as a dream, as in *Stay* (2005), a hallucination, as in *Secret Window* (2004), or a person's dying moments, as in *November* (2004), and because of this uncertainty they cannot easily be interpreted.



Figure 8.3.7—Photograph in office of Dr Jack Harper, Clay’s surgeon, shown at the start of Awake (Harold 2007)]. The photograph in the top right shows the members of Clay’s surgical team, and an additional woman whose face is blurred



Figure 8.3.8—The photograph from Dr Jack Harper’s office repeated at the end of Awake (Harold 2007), with Samantha’s face in full focus

The above examples point to two broader practices for arousing Viewer Suspicion within mystery films. Viewers rely on faces to convey non-verbal information, including intentions, desires, and feelings. The inability to see someone’s face, due to distortion, a mask, or shadows, arouses Viewer Suspicion. An expression that suggests nefarious intentions, or an expression of trepidation towards another character, can arouse the same suspicions in a viewer. Faces and facial expressions, due to their importance in non-verbal communication, are fundamental in making determinations about characters and their intentions, sometimes in spite of what they verbalise. Secondly, mystery films are likely to include something that arouses Viewer Suspicion, and pertains to the core problem, in the

very beginning of the film. This occurs, in part, as the viewer orients themselves to the film. The film begins in the middle of some action or event and viewers are unsure who or what should be the target of their attention, heightening the potential for ambiguity. There is also a greater sensitivity to possible attentional cues as the viewer attempts to establish who or what is important, increasing the overall likelihood that Viewer Suspicion is aroused.

The idea that mystery texts will hide important clues, in particular the identity of a killer, at the beginning of the narrative is hardly novel. Writing and screenwriting guides abound advising authors about the necessity of introducing audiences to the criminal early in the narrative and that “the best time to ‘hide’ clues in any sort of story is at the beginning... when the audience is still trying to learn all the characters’ names and concerns and acclimate to the fictional environment” (Hamlett 2002, 90-91). However, there is a clear distinction between obscuring clues through their position within the narrative structure, and a literal visual distortion to mask critical information from the viewer. What I have demonstrated here is that not only do mystery films use narrative structure to frustrate viewer attempts at solving their core problem, but that when employing a recognition mode, will deny viewers many of opportunities to decipher and interpret clues. The recognition mode displaces the satisfaction of ‘solving’ a mystery film, with the satisfaction of seeing (noticing) (Wollen 1982, 42) salient clues and recognising them in the solution. In the following chapter, I examine how suspicion is influenced by filmic practices in the context of a human experiment, asking viewers to report their level of suspicion in response to a scene. In particular, Chapter 9 examines the role of facial and diegetic social cues in shaping the strength of a viewer’s experience of Viewer Suspicion.

9

Raising Viewer Suspicion

When mystery films present a problem for viewers, viewers respond by searching for information they perceive as salient to that problem. In the previous chapter I outlined how the type of problem a film presents, and the filmic practices used to present information, shape the way viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving, as it was defined in Chapter 5. Specifically, problem type and filmic practices direct viewers' attention, facilitating the arousal of Viewer Suspicion, which was defined in Chapter 6. In this chapter, my aim is to observe how viewers respond to mystery films, and measure how filmic practices influence viewer reports of suspicion when watching sequences from films in the Study Set.

I begin this chapter, in Section 9.1, by outlining my hypothesis that repeating information related to a potentially suspicious target will increase viewer perceptions of suspicion. I outline how my theories surrounding Textual Problem Solving—defined in Chapter 5—and Viewer Suspicion, and my observations of films in the Study Set throughout Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, have led to me to this hypothesis. Further, I discuss the considerations made when developing the experiment in the context of screen theory. In Section 9.2, I outline these experimental design decisions, including the selection and manipulation of film sequences, the implementation of the experiment, and an analysis of participant demographics. Subsequently, in Section 9.3 I report the results of the experiment, including the impact of the edited sequences on viewer ratings of suspicion and the support for my proposed hypothesis.

Lastly, I discuss the implications of the experiment and results in Section 9.4. I argue that the experiment provides clear evidence that viewer ratings of suspicion are increased by repeating the presentation of information related to a target of Viewer Suspicion, which was defined in Chapter 6. This section addresses the limitations of the work, before examining the role of facial expression, identification, and diegetic social cues in heightening viewers' experience of suspicion. Further, I discuss the influence of prior

knowledge about the film sequences, and the mystery genre, on the arousal of Viewer Suspicion. I conclude by asserting that the results of the experiment are, in part, a result of the methodology employed throughout this thesis, and offer support for future projects to employ a similar approach.

9.1 HYPOTHESIS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Viewer Suspicion is aroused when a viewer perceives a piece of information as simultaneously salient and ambiguous. Ambiguity may relate to the validity of a piece of information or to its applicability to a specific problem. Information is presented as salient within mystery films through a variety of filmic practices, including repetition, duration, isolation, and predisposition. These four practices describe a range of techniques in editing, visuals, and audio, which direct viewer attention and convey salience. Thus, these filmic practices are the tools with which filmmakers can express salience to the viewer and arouse Viewer Suspicion. In this chapter I seek to demonstrate how one of these practices, repetition, can be used to strengthen the experience of Viewer Suspicion in the presence of ambiguity. To do this I have conducted an experiment whereby the visuals of a shot are repeated later in sequences from two mystery films, and I measured the effect on viewer ratings of suspicion.

By measuring this effect, this chapter serves to test the strength of my conception of Viewer Suspicion as outlined throughout the thesis. I hypothesise that if Viewer Suspicion is a combination of salience and ambiguity, then increasing salience around a target will lead to an increase in Viewer Suspicion of that target. However, this hypothesis could not be directly tested as salience cannot simply be increased or decreased. Instead, to test this theory there must be some way of influencing viewer perceptions of salience within mystery films. To this end, the filmic practices identified in Section 8.2 offer such a tool to manipulate viewer perceptions of salience, and thus potentially heighten the arousal of Viewer Suspicion. Repetition was selected as the best candidate for conveying salience as the practice can be achieved using material already present in a film without generating new, and potentially confounding, sounds and images. Further, because the experiment materials were designed entirely from the two source films, the work can be better replicated than would be possible if new materials were generated.

Despite the importance of experimentation to empirical research, it has rarely been used to test theories of film. Of the research that has used experimentation, much of it has been applied to commercial questions, such as the potential of product placement (Gupta and Lord 1998), or film's impact on tourism (Kim and Richardson 2003). However, more recently there has been greater interest in addressing questions of emotion and cognition in film audiences through experimentation (Silveira et al. 2013; Valentijn, Tan, and Molenaar 2010). Experimentation is necessary when looking to use empirical evidence to test a hypothesis, rather than simply to describe a process or observation.

Lev Kuleshov's montage experiments, and his findings of the 'Kuleshov effect', remain the most prominent example of empirical experimentation in film theory. The simplicity of Kuleshov's experiment, and the clarity with which the findings can be expressed, have shaped the design of my own experiment. Kuleshov's work examined the influence of montage on audience perceptions of expression and emotion. At its core, my own experiment can be seen as a continuation of this work, instead examining the role of editing in influencing the *strength* of an emotional response by viewers. Further, the Kuleshov effect played an important role in my own research by highlighting the significance of facial expression in prompting and directing viewers' emotional responses. This led to the experiment repeating an actor's facial expression in one of the two sequences, to compare the strength of diegetic social and emotional cues with an inanimate source of information. Kuleshov's experiments, alongside experiments conducted by Hugo Münsterberg (1916[1970]) remain foundational to the cognitivist movement within film studies, and for all empirical studies of film such as my own.

Smith (2015) argues for the importance of experimentation in eye tracking research on film. He asserts that experimental design is necessary "to identify the causal contribution of any factor" (Smith 2015) and that "too much meaning" can be attributed to purely observational empirical data. In particular, he commends the work of Robinson, Stadler and Russell (2015) who tested the impact of sound on eye movements while viewing a scene from *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg 1998). In their exploratory study, they were able to observe that the presence of sound during the viewing of a scene focused viewer attention "more tightly" than the same scene with the sound off (Robinson et al. 2015). While this study and Smith's advocacy are grounded in eye tracking research, they exist within a growing field of research that is interested in the viewing experience and the

production of verifiable theories about that experience. What follows is an outline of the method employed in my own experiment and the results of this study.

9.2 EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

I have previously outlined the design of this experiment in Section 2.2 but have not provided specific detail on the two key subjects of the study: the mystery film sequences and the participants. This section provides a detailed description of the sequence used from two films from the Study Set, and details how these were modified within the experiment. Further, I discuss the demographics of the participants of the experiment, how these participants were sourced, and their familiarity with screen media generally and the two films used in the experiment specifically.

Film Sequences

As part of the experiment, participants were asked to view two sequences, one from *A Perfect Getaway* (Twohy 2009) and one from *Dream House* (Sheridan 2011). These films were selected for their relative obscurity among the Study Set, out of concern that familiarity with the works may skew results. Participants were shown one of two versions of the sequence from each film, either edited or the original. The experiment included four different conditions alternating which versions each participant viewed (Figure 9.2.1). The edited version of each sequence included minimal changes to ensure participants did not notice when a sequence had been modified.

Condition	<i>A Perfect Getaway</i>	<i>Dream House</i>
1	Edited	Edited
2 (Control)	Original	Original
3	Original	Edited
4	Edited	Original

Figure 9.2.1—Test conditions and sequence versions

The edited versions of each sequence were changed to repeat a shot from earlier in the sequence—what I will refer to as a source image. No changes were made to the original audio or the duration of the sequence. In both sequences a newspaper informs the viewer of recent murders in the area where the scene takes place (Figure 9.2.2).



Figure 9.2.2—Newspaper headlines describing nearby murders: “Young Couple Butchered in Honolulu”, in *A Perfect Getaway* (Twoby 2009); and “Multiple murders shock community”, in *Dream House* (Sheridan 2011)

The edited sequence from *A Perfect Getaway* repeats a piece of factual information, while the edited sequence from *Dream House* repeats an emotional response of one of the characters to another. The *A Perfect Getaway* sequence lasts 4:06 seconds, with the modified section lasting 1.2 seconds, and the *Dream House* sequence lasts 4:38 seconds, with the modified section lasting 1.3 seconds.

The *A Perfect Getaway* sequence begins with a shot of a newlywed couple—unnamed in the sequence—leaving a supplies store in Hawaii and getting into their car. As the car drives away the camera cuts to a close-up of a newspaper on the gravel, which reveals the headline “YOUNG COUPLE BUTCHERED IN HONOLULU” (see Figure 9.2.2 above) before the shot fades to black. Following this is a series of establishing shots showing the island and the newlywed couple’s car from the distance, with discordant strings and dull synthetic drumbeats creating an ominous tone. As the camera approaches the car, the ominous music is replaced by a pop song and the following shot shows the couple inside the car singing along. They pass a pair of hitchhikers, Kale and Cleo, along the road and the husband decides to pull over to pick them up. The wife questions why he would stop and is concerned that it may be dangerous. As the hitchhikers arrive at the car, they throw their

bags in the back; one bag is marked “Kale ♥ Cleo”. This shot is used as the source image for this sequence; see Figure 9.2.3.



Figure 9.2.3—Source image for A Perfect Getaway sequence, from A Perfect Getaway (Twoby 2009)

The newlywed couple is uneasy about the hitchhikers, asking them to wait for the next car to come along, but eventually they offer to drive them. Throughout this conversation Kale is framed such that his face is not visible; he either has his back to the camera, or his face is obscured by the edges of the car windows. Kale notices from glances between the newlywed couple that they are uncomfortable with him and refuses when they eventually offer a ride, yelling “Cleo, get the fuck out of this man’s ride.” The newlywed couple exchanges a concerned glance as Cleo slams the door on her way out and Kale removes their bags and throws them to the ground. The sequence ends with a long shot behind the hitchhikers, as Cleo sits on the side of the road and Kale stares towards the newlyweds’ car as they drive away.

In the edited version of this sequence, the source image (see Figure 9.2.3 above) is repeated when Kale throws the bags on the roadside after rejecting the newlyweds’ offer. The source image is modified to fit the new location within the sequence by rotating the image, zooming in to obscure surrounding details—as the bag is meant to be thrown on the road—and colour correcting to match the lighting where the bag was thrown (Figure 9.2.4). Further, the movement of the bag in the shot is synced with the original sound of the bag hitting the road. This shot was selected as it provides factual information surrounding a possible target of suspicion, the names of the hitchhikers Kale and Cleo. Further, it was placed at this point in the sequence as it fit within the action of the sequence but provided the information to viewers just as Kale and Cleo act aggressively, with Kale swearing and Cleo slamming the car door. In the original sequence there is a shot of Kale’s feet from

underneath the car as he throws the bags to the ground before cutting to the husband's reaction (Figure 9.2.5). In the edited version of this sequence (Figure 9.2.6), the shot of Kale's feet cuts to the modified source image as the sound of the bag hitting the ground plays, before cutting back to the husband's reaction.

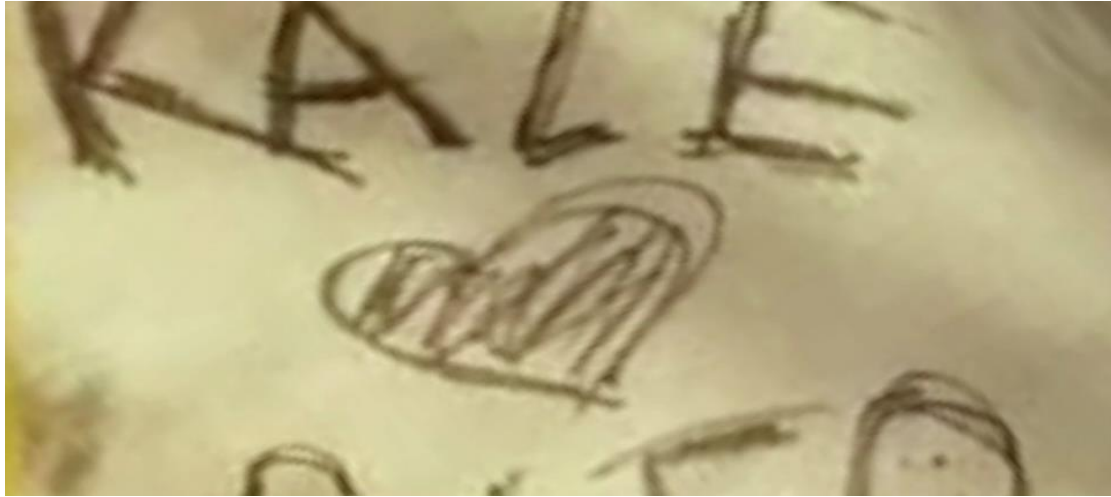


Figure 9.2.4—Repeated source image with modifications, from A Perfect Getaway (Twoby 2009)



Figure 9.2.5—Original sequence, in *A Perfect Getaway* (Twoby 2009)



Figure 9.2.6—Edited sequence, from A Perfect Getaway (Twoby 2009)

The *Dream House* sequence begins with a medium shot of the upstairs landing of a family home. Libby rushes up the stairs, telling her husband Will that she cannot find their children. As the parents search, a high-pitched tone plays. Will searches the children's room and discovers a secret door in the back of their closet, leading to a room filled with toys where the children are playing. The toys belong to two young girls who previously lived in the house, Katherine and Beatrice, whose names are written on a book and a box. In the next shot, Will is looking at records from the public library and finds a newspaper with the headline "Multiple murders shock community" to which Libby responds, "That's our house, Will." On another page from the newspaper it shows that the victims included two adults and two children, presumably Katherine and Beatrice. In the next shot Libby is patching a wall when the doorbell rings. Will answers the door and talks to the neighbour, Anne Patterson, who is dropping by to offer some stew. A high-angle shot of a mirror at the top of the stairs frames Anne and Will at the bottom as he calls up to Libby to join them. Libby says she will be "down in a minute" and turns to look down the stairs but appears to dread the prospect. This shot is used as the source image for this sequence—see Figure 9.2.7. Anne says she should leave, and Will asks if she'll come back, but receives no response. The next shot is outside and shows Anne walking through the front yard as Will calls to her asking about the previous occupants of the house. Anne turns to face Will as he asks the question, but does not respond, and turns to walk away again. The sequence ends with another high-angle shot of the mirror, framing Will downstairs as he returns through the front door.



Figure 9.2.7—Source image, from *Dream House* (Sheridan 2011)

In the edited version of this sequence, the source image (see Figure 9.2.7 above) is repeated after Anne turns to leave and Will asks her if she'll come back. The source image is modified by zooming in and positioning Libby slightly closer to the centre of the frame,

while showing the latter half of the shot to avoid having her head turn a second time (Figure 9.2.8). I selected this shot as it conveys a strong emotional response by a character within the sequence but is ambiguous as to what Libby is concerned about. The repetition was placed in the sequence as Will asks if Anne is coming back, as it further accentuates Libby's concern as a response to Will, Anne, or the fact that Will and Anne are conversing. In the original sequence, Will steps back and watches as Anne leaves before chasing after her with his question about the previous occupants (Figure 9.2.9). In the edited version of this sequence (Figure 9.2.10), the repeated image is shown during this pause as a reaction to Will asking Anne if she'll come back.



Figure 9.2.8—Repeated image with modifications, from Dream House (Sheridan 2011)



Figure 9.2.9—Original sequence, in Dream House (Sheridan 2011)



Figure 9.2.10—Edited sequence, from Dream House (Sheridan 2011)

Method and Analysis

The experiment involved 79 participants: 47 female, 31 male, and 1 undisclosed.¹⁶⁵ Participants were sourced through a general call for participants in Sydney and Melbourne, including several calls for participants at the University of Melbourne. Twenty-two of the participants were students, ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate students, while the remaining participants came from a diverse range of backgrounds. The group was predominantly young—50.6% were under 25 and only 20.3% were over 35 (see Figure 9.2.11)—and had English as a first language; only 15.2% reported English as an additional language. Participants were high-volume consumers of media: 64.6% viewed 15 hours or more of screen media per week (Figure 9.2.12). Finally, 8.9% of participants reported having seen one or more of the film sequences before; however, this was not shown to have any impact on ratings of suspicion.

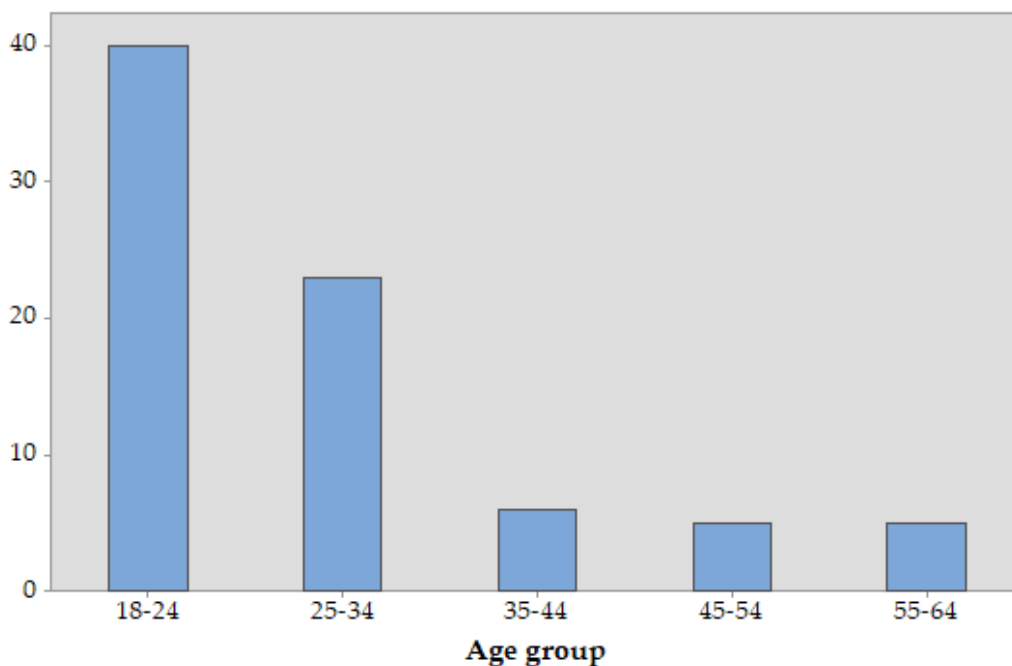


Figure 9.2.11—Age of participants

¹⁶⁵ Participants were given a text box to respond to the question, “What gender do you identify as?” to allow for non-binary responses.

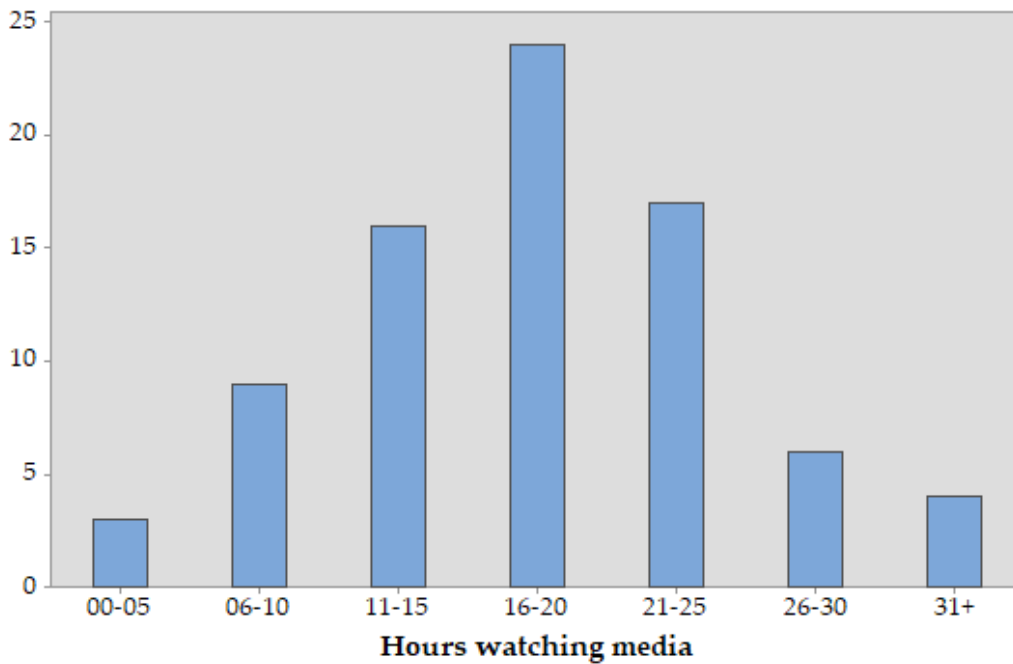


Figure 9.2.12—Reported number of hours viewing screen media per week by participants

Participants were provided with a plain language statement, a consent form, and a series of instructions for how to view the film sequences and respond to the survey questions. The survey was structured so that participants would watch one of the sequences then answer two questions about that sequence, gauging their level of suspicion immediately after viewing. They would then view the second sequence and answer two questions on it before proceeding. The final ten questions primarily assessed demographics, including age, gender, media consumption, and genre familiarity. Participants were also asked if they had seen the films before, if they could identify if the sequences had been modified, and to provide a one-sentence summary of the mystery in each sequence.

9.3 RESULTS

The first question asked participants whether or not they believed the hitchhiking couple in the *A Perfect Getaway* sequence was suspicious. Of the participants who viewed the original version of the sequence (n=38), 52.6% responded yes (*Figure 9.3.1*). Of the participants who viewed the edited version of the sequence (n=41), 70.7% responded yes. The difference in the percentage of respondents who described the couple as suspicious was +18.1%; however, the result provides weak evidence against the null hypothesis (P = 0.093).

Outcome	Percentage Edited	Percentage Original	Difference of Percentages		
			Edited - Original	95% CI	P-value
Suspicious of couple	70.7	52.6	18.1	-3.2, 37.4	0.093

Figure 9.3.1—Suspicious about hitchhiking couple in *A Perfect Getaway* (Twoby 2009)

The remaining three questions addressing suspicion in the sequences asked participants to rate their suspicion of a particular target. In the *A Perfect Getaway* sequence this was a rating of the hitchhiking couple (APG), and in the *Dream House* sequence, this was a rating of Anne Patterson (DH AP), and of the family in the home (DH F). As there were multiple targets of suspicion in the *Dream House* sequence, I also report the maximum suspicion rating for either target (Figure 9.3.2).

Outcome	Edited			Original		
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD
APG	41	6.3	2.1	38	5.4	2.0
DH AP	41	8.1	1.7	38	6.5	2.6
DH F	41	6.2	2.9	38	5.4	2.1
DH Max	41	8.5	1.4	38	6.9	2.2

Figure 9.3.2—Ratings of suspicion by participants for edited and original sequences

In all four cases, the edited version of the sequence led to an increase in the mean suspicion rating (Figure 9.3.3). The hitchhiking couple (APG) and the family (DH F) produced a difference in mean ratings of suspicion of +0.9 and +0.8 respectively. In both cases there was weak evidence for a rejection of the null hypothesis ($P = 0.065$, $P = 0.157$). In the case of Anne Patterson (DH AP) and the maximum ratings from *Dream House* (DH Max), the edited version of the sequence produced a difference in mean ratings of suspicion of +1.6 and +1.7 respectively. In both cases there was very strong evidence for a rejection of the null hypothesis ($P = 0.002$, $P < 0.001$).

Outcome	Mean Edited	Mean Original	Difference of means		
			Edited - Original	95% CI	P-value
APG	6.3	5.4	0.9	-0.1, 1.8	0.065
DH AP	8.1	6.5	1.6	0.6, 2.6	0.002
DH F	6.2	5.4	0.8	-0.3, 1.9	0.157
DH Max	8.5	6.9	1.7	0.8, 2.5	< 0.001

Figure 9.3.3—Difference in mean ratings of suspicion for edited and original sequences

There was a high level of variance in responses to rating the suspicion of the family in the *Dream House* sequence (DH F), particularly in the edited version of the sequence (Figure 9.3.4). Conversely, there was a low level of variance in responses to the edited version of the sequence for both Anne Patterson (DH AP) and the maximum from that sequence (DH Max). Both the edited and unedited versions of the *A Perfect Getaway* sequence had a high level of variance in ratings of suspicion.

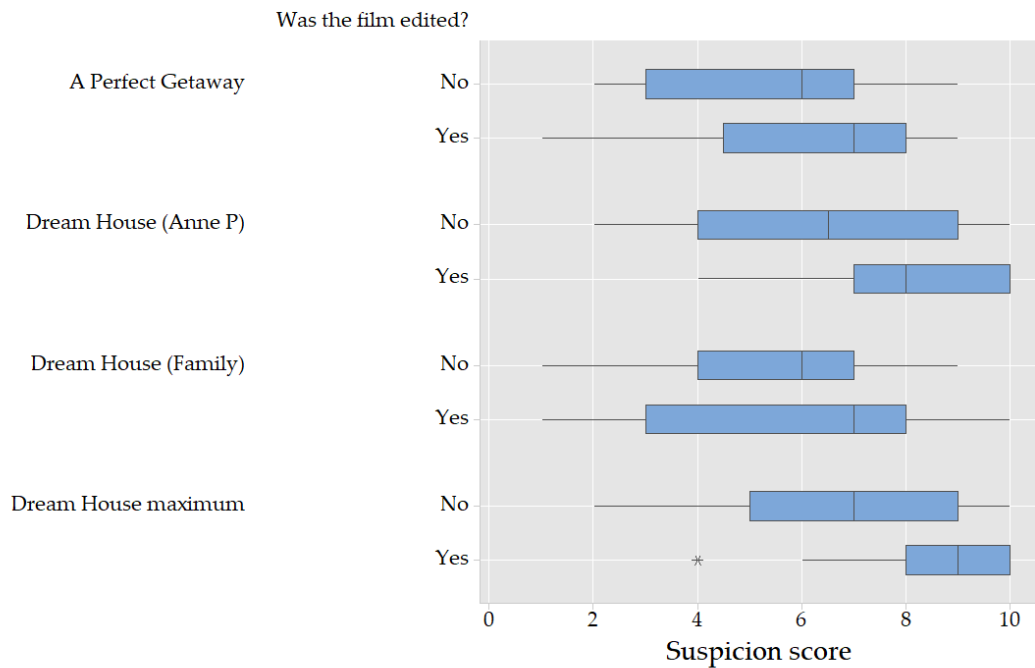


Figure 9.3.4—Box plot of participant ratings of suspicion for edited and original sequences

On all four primary measures of participants' suspicion, the mean rating increased in response to viewing the edited version of the sequence (Figure 9.3.5). The effect size was largest for the maximum (DH Max) and Anne Patterson (DH AP) ratings from the Dream House sequence, with almost twice the impact on suspicion ratings as the ratings for the family (DH F) and the hitchhiking couple (APG). While the evidence for these two smaller effects was weaker, it remained consistent with the trend observed in the other measures of suspicion, increasing in the edited viewing conditions.

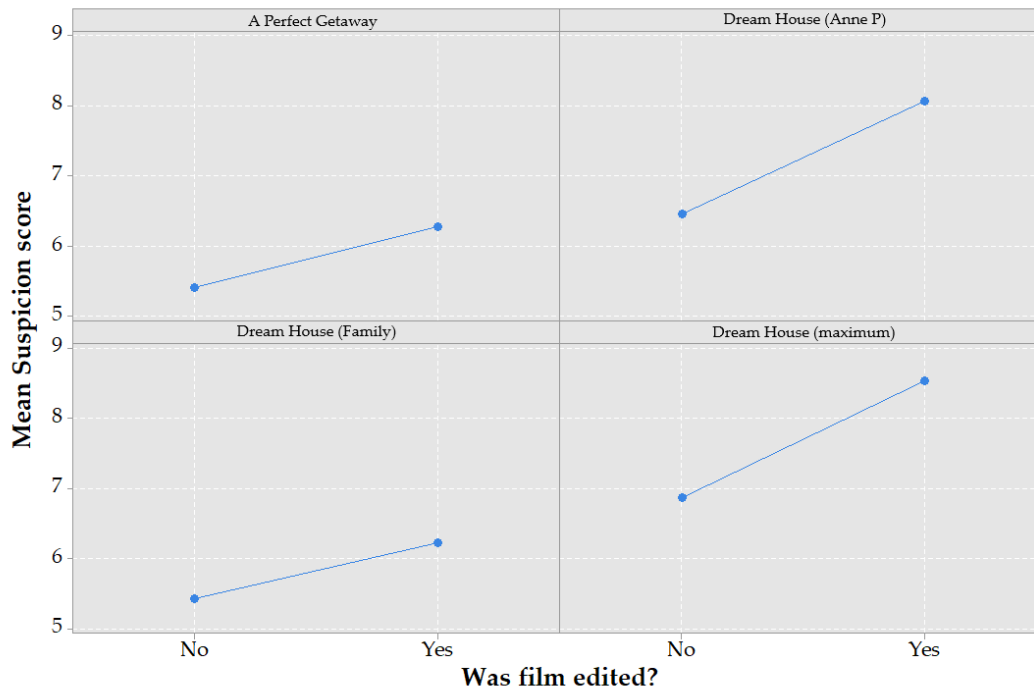


Figure 9.3.5—Line plot of participant ratings of suspicion for edited and original sequences

Participants were consistent in their rating and judgement of suspicion. The mean rating of suspicion was 4.03 for participants who denied that the hitchhiking couple was suspicious ($n = 30$). For participants who agreed the couple was suspicious ($n = 49$), the mean rating of suspicion was 6.96. The difference in suspicion ratings based on the initial judgement of suspicion was +2.93 and provides strong evidence for a rejection of the null hypothesis ($P < 0.001$).

Participants were asked to identify if one or both of the sequences they had just viewed were modified or edited from their original version. For the *A Perfect Getaway* sequence, 50% of participants ($n = 38$) correctly identified the original sequence and 47.5% of participants ($n = 40$) correctly identified the edited sequence. The results provide very strong evidence of the null hypothesis ($P = 1$), suggesting the judgement by participants was entirely random. For the *Dream House* sequence, 43.2% of participants ($n = 37$) correctly identified the original sequence and 51.2% of participants ($n = 41$) correctly identified the edited sequence. The results provide very strong evidence of the null hypothesis ($P = 0.656$) suggesting that as in the previous sequence, judgments by participants were entirely random.

Participants were asked to rate their familiarity with the mystery genre in film out of 10 ($n = 79$). Ratings of familiarity with the mystery genre was reasonably high (mean = 5.7, SD

= 2.0) and familiarity with mystery films was only slightly lower (mean = 5.5, SD = 2.0). The familiarity ratings were then compared to the suspicion ratings given for each of the four measures (APG, DH AP, DH F, DH Max). In all cases there was little evidence to suggest the two ratings were in any way correlated (Figure 9.3.6 and Figure 9.3.7).

	Correlation	95% CI	P-value
DH AP	0.115	-0.109, 0.328	0.311
DH F	-0.139	-0.349, 0.085	0.221
DH Max	0.069	-0.154, 0.286	0.544
APG	-0.006	-0.227, 0.215	0.956

Figure 9.3.6—Correlation between participant ratings of familiarity with mystery genre and ratings of suspicion

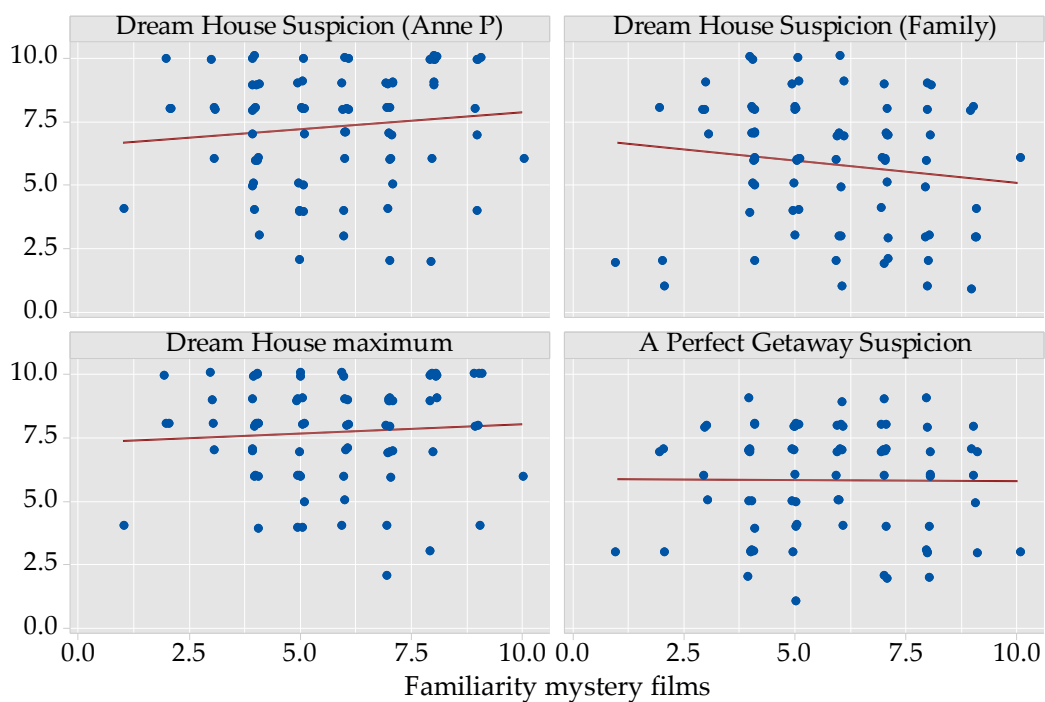


Figure 9.3.7—Dot plot of participant familiarity with mystery films against ratings of suspicion. Note that this plot has been jittered to show overlapping points

9.4 DISCUSSION

The results of this experiment support the hypothesis that repetition may be used to increase viewers' ratings of suspicion when watching mystery films. Further, the results demonstrate that the effect on suspicion is stronger when the repetition focuses on an emotional response rather than a factual piece of information. The edited sequences that repeated Libby's concerned look in *Dream House* had almost twice the effect on viewer ratings of suspicion that the repetition of the labelled bag had in *A Perfect Getaway*. This

outcome supports my argument that viewer attention is guided by diegetic social cues on screen, particularly facial expressions. If a character on screen is suspicious of another character, this response is a strong cue for Viewer Suspicion to be directed in the same way. In the case of the experiment, the repetition of Libby's concerned look as if directed at Anne Patterson produced much higher ratings of suspicion for Anne, in comparison to the family, and in relation to the original sequence.

The experiment demonstrated that by repeating a shot from within a sequence it is possible to increase Viewer Suspicion. The power of editing to drastically change the emotional response of audiences is widely recognised, most famously with the Kuleshov effect (demonstrated by Mobbs et al. 2006). However, there are limited examples of experimental research directly linking a specific filmic practice with an intended effect on audience perceptions. This experiment provides evidence for such an association between repetition and salience and has implications in several areas of screen research. Firstly, it demonstrates a strong link between emotional and diegetic social cues in directing viewer attention and arousing Viewer Suspicion. Secondly, the experiment rejects the argument that prior familiarity with the film or the mystery genre would influence the strength of participants' rating of suspicion. This suggests that story-driven and problem-driven viewers both continue to engage in Textual Problem Solving through the arousal of Viewer Suspicion when watching mystery films. Before discussing these points, I will first discuss the limitations of the research, and potential avenues for future projects to explore.

Limitations

The experiment outlined in this chapter is focused explicitly on mystery films and viewers' experience of suspicion. When I hypothesised that repeating specific images would increase viewers' rating of suspicion, this was based on my analysis of the Study Set and the predominant filmic practices used to arouse Viewer Suspicion. These practices, including repetition, do so by increasing the saliency of a piece of information presented to the viewer. One possibility is that my findings do not reflect how the repetition of an image influences viewers when watching mystery films, but reveal a general filmic practice for conveying salience, independent of genre. For instance, it may be that when saliency is increased in the thriller genre, viewer ratings of suspense increase, or in the drama genre, viewer ratings of joy or sorrow increase. Given the limited scope of the experiment it is impossible to determine how the use of repetition would influence viewer responses in other genres. It may be that the filmic practices identified as critical to eliciting Viewer

Suspicion are in fact, quite general filmic practices, which are used to engage viewers in an affective state established by the context and genre of the narrative.

Alternatively, it may be that repetition in film does not convey saliency, and the increased ratings of suspicion were a by-product of some other effect. To better substantiate the specific processes that influence the experience of Viewer Suspicion, a broader assessment of filmic practices and genre is required. This experiment tested the repetition of images, but would the same effect be observed with sound, or with theme? Would the same effects be observed using one of the other filmic practices identified in Section 8.2, such as isolation, duration, or predisposition? Would these same filmic practices have a different effect when used in films from a different genre, and would that effect be a heightening of the film's affective impact? These questions are beyond the scope of this thesis but hold significant potential for future research.

Another limitation to the experiment was the focus on short sequences within each film. Although efforts were made to select a sequence where viewers were fully equipped with the context within the scene, it cannot be said to be identical to viewing a film in its entirety. Thus, the results cannot be used to describe how Viewer Suspicion functions in relation to the narrative as a whole. Narrative and context play an important role in shaping viewer engagement with Textual Problem Solving and mediate viewer perceptions of saliency and ambiguity. Future work looking to examine this aspect of viewer engagement would benefit from real-time observation over the duration of an entire film. By giving participants a way to convey their suspicion levels throughout the film using a rating dial, researchers could potentially examine when suspicion is aroused, how long suspicion is maintained, and how it fluctuates as a narrative unfolds. In addition, eye tracking technology may allow for the target of suspicion to be identified when paired with the suspicion rating data. While such an experiment is outside the scope of this particular project, such an endeavour is a clear step towards a better understanding of how viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving in mystery films.

Diegetic Social Cues: Facial Expression, Identification, and Aversion

The results of the experiment highlight the important role of diegetic social cues in directing viewers' attention and for arousing Viewer Suspicion. In particular, participants focused on faces in their descriptions of the overall mystery presented in each scene. In *A Perfect Getaway*, multiple participants noted that the fact that Kale's face was never shown

in full aroused their suspicion: “the camera never shows his full face, provoking suspicion around his identity”; “a dysfunctional couple acting suspiciously made evident when the camera doesn’t get the domineering man’s [Kale’s] face”. In *Dream House*, the repetition of Libby’s face, reacting to Anne, produced an increase in ratings of suspicion, stronger than when repeating purely factual information.

Facial expression is used to make assessments of characters, and shapes how viewers feel about those characters. After viewing the sequence from *A Perfect Getaway*, the majority of participants justified their suspicion in terms of an emotional discomfort surrounding Kale’s character, describing him as “threatening”, “aggressive”, “weird”, “strange”, “angry”, “creepy”, “unhinged”, “irrational”, and “dangerous”. A similar pattern emerged in participants’ response to the *Dream House* sequence: many described Libby’s response to Anne as “afraid”, “scared”, or “concerned”. More than half the responses to this sequence focused on Anne Patterson, either by name or as “the neighbour”, in describing the mystery. In both sequences, viewers are able to observe characters in the scene reacting to each other. The newlywed couple from *A Perfect Getaway* display their discomfort around Kale and Cleo through facial expression, body language, and the tone of both of their voices, to such an extent that Kale also recognises their discomfort and is offended by it. In *Dream House*, both Anne and Libby give a concerned look in response to a request from Will, and Will reacts to both of their concern. Viewers are able to draw on these social diegetic cues to make their own assessments when engaging in Textual Problem Solving. In Part V, I will discuss the impact of identification with, or aversion to, characters in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006).

The experiment demonstrates the strength of emotional cues over factual cues within a problem-solving context. This bias may be beneficial as a social adaptation, whereby humans are better suited to identifying and responding to threats by trusting the responses of others. However, this bias may also be exploited through advertising, or diminish our capacity to critically evaluate a problem. The relationship between repetition, salience, and suspicion may have potential applications in teaching problem-solving strategies in specific contexts, which respond to or evaluate emotionally charged information with greater scepticism. This research may have significant implications for narrative-based learning that uses “emotionalization” (Glaser, Garsoffky, and Schwan 2009) towards a goal of problem-based learning. The increased application of narrative-based learning in multimedia anchored instruction (Wang 2016) suggests that the construction of moving-

image media will play an important role in shaping the success of its application in learning environments.

Story-driven and Problem-driven Viewers

As part of the experiment, participants were asked to rate their familiarity with the mystery genre in film, and in other mediums. The results show that there was no significant relationship between a participant's familiarity with the genre and their rating of suspicion within each sequence. Additionally, of the participants who reported having seen at least one of the films prior to the experiment, there was no significant difference in their ratings of suspicion compared to other participants. These findings correspond with my previous assertions about viewer orientation in Section 5.3. Problem-driven viewers and story-driven viewers both engage in Textual Problem Solving when viewing mystery films through their experience of Viewer Suspicion. What distinguishes the two groups is not the presence or the strength of Viewer Suspicion, but the way suspicions are considered and applied when engaging in Textual Problem Solving.

Problem-driven viewers address the film from a different perspective, and thus have different objectives when evaluating information. However, this does not prevent them from having their suspicion aroused by the film in the same way as story-driven viewers would be. In fact, problem-driven viewers must remain sensitive to the arousal of suspicion through filmic practices. One participant, describing the *Dream House* sequence, commented, "I want to know why the wife seems so afraid or concerned when her husband is talking to the neighbour (is the house stuff misdirection for an affair he had?)". The participant demonstrates a conscious awareness of where attention is being directed by filmic practices, but assesses them critically, searching for other possible explanations that would satisfy or explain the importance of Libby's concern. In response to the *A Perfect Getaway* sequence, several participants dismissed Kale as a suspect for the murders as it was "too obvious". These participants showed an awareness of the influence of film techniques and practices and sought to engage them as a source of knowledge: why might the filmmaker want me to suspect Kale/Anne?

One participant went so far as to use the survey questions to inform their suspicion about the solution to the mystery in *Dream House*. They wrote "your question about the strange family leads me to suspect that the husband might be the murderer in the news, and the other family members are just his hallucination!!" This accurate description of the film's

first 'twist' was generated by using the questions in the survey to infer salience surrounding targets of suspicion. Although most participants directed their suspicions toward Anne Patterson, this participant wondered why one of the questions asked about the family and sought to explain their strange behaviour in the sequence, and their prominence in the questions, based on the available information.

Increasing Suspicion

The results of this experiment strongly support my conceptualisation of Viewer Suspicion as an affective response to ambiguity moderated by saliency and demonstrate that by repeating several seconds of footage, viewers' perceptions of suspicion can be significantly increased. The experiment provides empirical support for the role of salience and filmic practices in eliciting Viewer Suspicion. Given that this experiment uses only one of five such practices, and for such a brief period, the potential for filmmakers to influence the viewing experience through the generation and modulation of Viewer Suspicion in mystery films is profound. Further, these findings gesture towards a broader relationship between the viewer and Textual Problem Solving, positioning suspicion as an emotional response that is guided more by characters on screen than a logical evaluation of factual evidence. In addition, the experiment provides insight into the thought processes of viewers when engaging with mystery films. The participants' descriptions of the mystery in each sequence reveals the use of stereotypes and biases in the way viewers conceptualise a problem within mystery films. Finally, the results reveal some of the strategies employed by viewers when evaluating the problem within mystery films, in particular, the use of metaknowledge.

Beyond the direct contributions of this chapter to our understanding of mystery viewers, the success of these empirical methods highlights the potential of the approach to screen theory and substantiates the efficacy of the methodology employed throughout the thesis. My conceptions of Viewer Suspicion and Textual Problem Solving were developed by drawing on theory and methods from across a range of disciplines and employing them empirically through analysis of films in the Study Set. This process required an interdisciplinary view of the experience-of-film and the application of a range of methods appropriate to the scale of the problem at hand to produce testable and verifiable theories, as outlined in Section 2.1. As such, this chapter demonstrates that my conceptions of Textual Problem Solving and Viewer Suspicion have clear and predictive potential in the analysis of mystery films and their viewers. The results of this experiment and previous empirically focused chapters, allow for a more informed and grounded theorisation and

analysis of mystery films, providing greater insight into their practices and the viewing experience. In the following chapter I aim to further demonstrate the value of these concepts, in addition to the findings presented throughout the thesis, through an analysis of Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006).

10

Watching Closely

Viewer Suspicion establishes a problem-solving mode of engagement, one that cannot be measured by looking only at the moment of arousal. In this chapter, I use *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006) from the Study Set as a case study to illustrate how mystery films engage viewers, and how viewers engage with mystery films. I address the central questions of this thesis and describe, in detail, specific ways *The Prestige* presents a problem, arouses Viewer Suspicion, and cultivates an engagement in Textual Problem Solving. Further, I examine how viewers can draw on meta-knowledge to decode and decipher the techniques that the film uses to misdirect viewers from determining the core solution. This analysis examines how Textual Problem Solving and Viewer Suspicion function across the entirety of a mystery narrative, and the effect of problem type, filmic practices, editing structure, as well as diegetic social cues and meta-knowledge, on the experience of watching, and attempting to solve, *The Prestige's* core problem. Subsequently, this chapter demonstrates the significance of my contributions to screen theorising of the mystery film.

To begin the chapter in Section 10.1, I provide a synopsis of the characters, plot, and problem type in *The Prestige*. Secondly, in Section 10.2, I discuss the influence of diegetic social cues on the arousal of Viewer Suspicion. As viewers are often forced to rely on informal problem-solving processes during viewing, emotional or intuitive judgements based on diegetic social cues are comfortable and familiar to audiences. *The Prestige* uses these social cues to arouse Viewer Suspicion, and to direct viewer attention away from the core solution, preventing viewers from guessing the conclusion ahead of time. *The Prestige* uses non-verbal expression, character transparency, and identification with characters to direct viewers' attention as they attempt to solve the film's core problem.

For repeat viewers, readers of Christopher Priest's source novel *The Prestige* (1995), or viewers deeply familiar with the mystery genre or the real-life rivalries that inspired the screenplay—such as Chung Ling Soo and Ching Ling Foo—the viewing experience is fundamentally changed. Instead of asking how “The Transported Man” is performed,

problem-driven viewers closely scrutinise how the film answers this question, and how information is presented to withhold this solution. In Section 10.3, I discuss how problem-driven viewers are able to engage with clues throughout the film by seeing through the misdirection intended for story-driven viewers. The film conceals meaning throughout the text, using the film's structure, a disconnect between image and sound, and foreshadowing to hide critical clues to the film's core solution. Problem-driven viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving by attempting to identify this hidden meaning, and by piecing together the clues present throughout the text.

10.1 SYNOPSIS OF *THE PRESTIGE*

Key Characters

Robert Angier (AKA the Great Danton, AKA Lord Caldlow)
John Cutter (Angier's ingénieur)
Julia McCullough (Angier's wife)
Root (Angier's double for performing "The Transported Man")
Owens (Lord Caldlow's Solicitor)
Alfred Borden (AKA the Professor)¹⁶⁶
Bernard Fallon (Borden's ingénieur)
Sarah Borden (Borden's wife)
Jess Borden (Borden's daughter)
Olivia Wenscombe (Angier's assistant, later Borden's lover)

Plot Summary

The Prestige tells the story of two rival stage magicians, Robert Angier and Alfred Borden, as they each seek revenge for a series of escalating harms. Set primarily in early 1900s London, the film presents a non-linear narrative, moving between four different timelines. The fabula includes:

¹⁶⁶ The twin brothers who share the identity of Borden and Fallon will be distinguished as Alfred and Freddy, with their current identity in parentheses. For example, "Freddy (Borden) is followed down the streets by Angier, who in turn is followed by Alfred (Fallon)." Alfred (Borden/Fallon) refers to the twin who loves Sarah, while Freddy (Borden/Fallon) refers to the twin who loves Olivia and is executed by the end of the film.

T1 Borden's journal: detailing events from just a few days after Borden and Angier meet until Angier's trip to America after he obtains the keyword to Borden's journal.

T2 Angier's journal: detailing events from Angier's arrival in America to meet Tesla until his return to London with Tesla's machine.

T3 Immediate past: including events from Angier's final performance and the arrest of Borden up until Angier's death.

T4 Present: scene showing John Cutter performing a magic trick for Jess Borden before reuniting her with her father.

The syuzhet is an arrangement of the first three timelines (*T1*, *T2*, and *T3*), with *T4* bookending the film as the first and last scene. While the film shows events in a non-linear fashion, transitioning between scenes from each of the different timelines, each individual timeline is presented primarily in the order that events occurred. To clarify, events from *T1* are presented in the film in the same order that they occurred, despite being interspersed with scenes from *T2* and *T3*.¹⁶⁷

The film begins with John Cutter describing the components of every magic trick (*T4*), which is cross-cut with Robert Angier's performance of "The Real Transported Man" at a sold-out theatre (*T3*). Alfred Borden uses a disguise to sneak backstage during the trick in the hopes of discovering how the trick is performed. As Angier disappears from the stage, he drops into a water tank in front of Borden underneath the stage. Borden tries to free Angier but is unable to save him from drowning.

Borden is put on trial for the murder of Angier. While in prison Borden is visited by a solicitor representing Lord Caldlow, who is looking to purchase Borden's tricks in exchange for the welfare of Borden's daughter. He gives Borden a copy of Angier's diary as a sign of good faith. Angier's journal describes his trip to America seeking Nikola Tesla, and his work to translate Borden's journal (*T2*). The first entry in Borden's journal describes Borden and Angier working for Milton the magician as shills in a performance of a water escape by Angier's wife, Julia (*T1*). The two men disagree on a number of things, including which knot should be used to ensure Julia's safety when performing the trick.

¹⁶⁷ The same is true of *T2*, *T3*, and *T4*. Each event in these separate timelines occurs in chronological order. There are several exceptions, but for the most part each individual timeline moves forward chronologically.

While performing a smaller show with Milton, Borden meets and falls in love with a woman named Sarah.

Cutter meets with the judge of the case in private to explain the machine and the rivalry between the two men (*T3*). During a performance of the water escape, Julia drowns, and Angier blames Borden for tying the more dangerous knot (*T1*). After the accident, Borden breaks off to perform as a solo magician and is now expecting a child with his partner Sarah. Angier uses a disguise and sneaks into one of Borden's shows, shooting him in the hand during a bullet catch.

Cutter reaches out to Angier looking to work together on a new trick. The two hire Olivia as an assistant and procure a theatre to perform in. At the opening night Borden sneaks in using a disguise and ruins Angier's finale, causing the theatre owner to cancel his remaining shows. Angier continues talking to Tesla's assistant, seeking an audience with the inventor (*T2*). Angier first observes Tesla's machines at a technical show in London, where he notices Borden also in the audience (*T1*). Angier follows Borden in the streets but stops when he sees him with his wife Sarah and daughter Jess.

Jess and Fallon visit Borden in prison and he agrees to sell his tricks to Lord Caldlow (*T3*). Angier is finally able to meet with Tesla in person and commissions a machine to be built that would allow him to teleport from one location to another (*T2*). Angier uses a disguise to sneak into another of Borden's shows and sees his new trick "The Transported Man" (*T1*). He steals the trick for his own show, titling it "The New Transported Man", and begins performing it using a body double named Root. While the new trick is a success, Angier is dissatisfied using a double as he must listen to the audience's applause beneath the stage. He wants Borden's secret and tells Olivia to go to work for Borden and steal it from him. Olivia is reluctant but goes to work for Borden. Borden meets Root in a bar and suggests that a double can blackmail a magician, which Root then does to Angier. Borden then sneaks into Angier's show and removes a landing pad, breaking Angier's leg as he falls below stage. Borden appears in Angier's place on stage, revealing Root tied up with a sign that promotes his own show.

Angier confronts Olivia, knowing she likely told Borden how to find Root. Olivia admits she has fallen in love with Borden but gives Angier Borden's journal. Angier requires a keyword to decipher the journal so kidnaps Mr Fallon and holds him ransom until Borden relinquishes the keyword: Tesla. Borden's relationship with Sarah is strained and he writes

in his journal he has been having an affair with Olivia. Angier reads the last page of the journal, which asserts that Borden had Olivia give away the journal on purpose to get rid of Angier and admits that Tesla has nothing to do with the method of his trick (*T2*). Angier goes to confront Tesla for deceiving him but discovers the machine is working, just not as expected. The machine doesn't teleport an object but leaves a duplicate in both locations. Borden's relationship with Sarah deteriorates further as his relationship with Olivia continues. Tesla completes modifications to the machine and leaves it for Angier to take as he returns to America.

Angier addresses Borden in the journal, predicting Borden would be sent to prison for Angier's murder (*T3*). Borden claims the journal must be fake and refuses to provide the full details of his tricks to Lord Caldlow's representative without seeing his daughter first. Sarah is certain of Borden's relationship with Olivia and hangs herself in his workshop (*T2*). Angier returns to London and prepares to perform his new trick "The Real Transported Man". Olivia breaks up with Borden after he shows no remorse for his wife's death and tells him that Angier is back and performing a new trick. Borden goes to see Angier's new trick but cannot figure out how it is performed. He sneaks beneath the stage to learn more, but witnesses Angier fall into the water tank and drown.

Borden is sentenced to death for the murder of Angier (*T3*). Lord Caldlow brings Borden's daughter to visit him in prison, where Borden learns that Caldlow is Angier, still alive. Borden pleads his innocence to the guards, but to no avail. Cutter meets Angier/Lord Caldlow at his residence when delivering Tesla's machine and admonishes him for what he has done. Borden is hanged for the murder of Angier. Cutter helps Angier take Tesla's machine to his workshop to be destroyed and passes Mr Fallon on his way out. Angier is shot by Fallon, who reveals himself to also be Borden. He explains that he is one of twin brothers, and that they took turns playing both Fallon and Borden. As Angier dies, he reveals the secret to his trick and the sacrifice it entailed, "not knowing if I'd be the man in the box, or in the Prestige". Cutter performs a magic trick for Jess before reuniting her with her father, now as Borden (*T4*).

Mystery Problem Type and Setting the Problem

The Prestige sets two howdunit problems for the viewer to engage with. The two problems require viewers to engage in Textual Problem Solving to determine *how* Borden performs "The Transported Man" and *how* Angier performs "The Real Transported Man". The

problem type is established early in the film with Cutter's refusal to reveal Angier's trick in open court, and Owens' offer to purchase Borden's trick while in prison. The problem type is reinforced when questions of the *who* and *why* of Angier's murder are answered in the film. Viewers are shown Borden watching Angier drown, and they see the rivalry between the two magicians that begins with Julia's death. By presenting the viewer with these two important secrets, and by closing off other modes of inquiry, *The Prestige* directs viewer attention towards clues to the method of the "Transported Man" tricks.

For the majority of the film, emphasis is placed on Borden's method for the "Transported Man" trick. In the first half of the film both Owens and Cutter offer to buy Borden's secret, with Angier explicitly asking, "how does he do it?". However, once Tesla's invention is shown to work, this focus is reversed. Cutter and Fallon watch with suspicion as the water tank used in Angier's version of the "Transported Man" trick is transported between the theatre and storage. Freddy (Borden) yells "what is going on under that stage" in frustration, when trying to figure out Angier's method with Alfred (Fallon). Finally, and most importantly for viewers, when Freddy (Borden) meets Angier in prison, just prior to his execution, he gives Angier a small note with the secret to his method written on it in an attempt to secure his daughter's safety. Angier tears up the note and tosses it away, exclaiming "whatever your secret was, you have to agree, mine is better". While the film initially grounds the viewer in an investigation of Borden's secret, the second half of the film is devoted to misleading the viewer, and dismissing its importance, instead turning attention towards Angier's method.

In addition, the film directs viewer attention surrounding the core problem using priming, agenda setting, and framing. For example, in the very first shot of the film viewers are primed to associate the top hats with the film's overarching secrets. In the first 10 minutes of the film Angier is seen donning the hat, associating him for viewers with the film's core solution. The film sets the agenda for viewers by what it chooses to show in relation to the central characters of Borden and Angier. While the majority of scenes from Angier's perspective focus on developing, performing, or deciphering magic, the scenes from Borden's perspective primarily focus on his relationships with other characters, including Sarah, Jess, Olivia, and his rivalry with Angier. By doing so, the film suggests that viewers should pay attention to Angier, not Borden, if they wish to think about the secret to the "Transported Man" magic trick. Additionally, Angier repeatedly frames Borden's "Transported Man" as a "complex illusion", leading viewers to dismiss simple or obvious

explanations. Together, these techniques are used to limit what viewers attend to, and thus what they consider the film's core problem to be, and what goal they should be striving towards.

The moment of anagnorisis in *The Prestige* typifies the way mystery films reveal a film's core solution to the viewer. The film cross-cuts between Freddy (Borden) just before he is hanged, and a shadowy figure entering Angier's theatre. As Freddy's neck is snapped by the noose the film cuts to a rubber ball bouncing towards Angier. As Angier catches the ball, he is shot by the figure dropping to the ground as the ball rolls away. A medium close-up is used to show the ball being picked up by the assailant, revealing his hand to be missing two fingers before the camera tilts up to reveal Alfred (Borden) as the shooter. What follows is a series of flashbacks, replaying moments from throughout the film that aroused Viewer Suspicion, and presenting new scenes that resolve the ambiguity they contained. Many mystery films use this practice, employing flashbacks to remind the viewer of all of the important information they identified, ensuring a recognition of the film's solution and its parts.

10.2 HOW DIEGETIC SOCIAL CUES AROUSE VIEWER SUSPICION

Viewer Suspicion is primarily directed by diegetic social cues in *The Prestige*. Unlike physical or verbal evidence, which can easily be contextualised within a shot or scene, social evidence often requires a much broader context within the film to fully grasp, as it relies on interpreting relationships and non-verbal communication. While diegetic social cues are generally considered softer forms of evidence, they have a greater ability to arouse Viewer Suspicion than other harder forms of evidence (see Section 9.4). Rather than operating as a task of pure reason and logic, Textual Problem Solving is an emotional and social engagement with characters, expression, empathy, and identification. Rather than working at odds with the harder forms of evidence analysed in previous chapters, diegetic social cues work alongside filmic practices to enhance and direct Viewer Suspicion, with incredible precision. This is, in part, due to the viewing context. Viewers are motivated by compelling characters and emotional narratives.

The forward momentum of a film's narrative, or the *défilement* of film (Kuntzel 1977), impedes analytical assessment or re-evaluation of a problem throughout the film. By

engaging the viewer with sympathetic characters and a compelling story, and by obstructing their recourse to analytical thought, the film can present viewers with all of the pieces of a solution without identifying how they fit together—a recognition mode for mystery films. Viewer Suspicions are confirmed when the targets of those suspicions are shown to be part of a film’s core solution, even if the viewer does not reach that solution themselves. In this way, a viewer can ‘feel’ they are engaging in the full process of problem solving, when in fact they are limited to successful ‘problem identification’—determining what the problem is—and ‘data collection’: seeking information relevant to solving that problem.

The Prestige uses diegetic social cues to arouse Viewer Suspicion in three key ways: through non-verbal expression, particularly the way faces communicate the concerns, fears, and suspicions of characters on screen; by presenting the characters of Alfred Borden and Bernard Fallon as obscure and mysterious, guarding the secret of their method; and through viewer identification with Borden, Fallon, and Cutter, and their attempts to learn Angier’s secret. These are effective forms of misdirection throughout the film, which distract from the core problem of Borden’s own secret. By arousing Viewer Suspicion in each of these ways, the film familiarises viewers with its core solution, but inhibits them from solving the problem in advance.

According to Wollen (1982), the mystery narrative is built upon a series of looks, between characters and by the viewer, that establish their respective knowledge states in relation to a secret or problem. Within the hermeneutic code there are three times or moments; “the instant of the look”, “the time to understand”, and “the moment of conclusion” (Wollen 1982, 41). These times describe the presence or absence of knowledge that stem from a series of looks. In *The Prestige* the instant of the look is illustrated in the performance of the vanishing bird cage trick that Borden is an assistant to. Sarah’s nephew sees (notices) that the bird that vanished is not the bird that disappeared, while the audience is blind to this. After seeing Borden’s “Transported Man” for the first time, the time to understand is illustrated as Cutter correctly interprets the method of the trick, by using a double, while Angier misinterprets, claiming that such a conclusion is “too simple”. The moment of conclusion comes as Angier is shot by Alfred (Borden) and realises that Borden is a twin. Wollen also describes a period of belief, where a character (or viewer) is tricked into believing they know the solution to a mystery’s problem, only to have the true solution revealed at the moment of conclusion.

Wollen's (1982) application of the hermeneutic code emphasises the significance of the look to mystery narratives, both looks by and between characters, and by viewers. These looks identify the time in which information is gathered, opinions and beliefs are formed, and conclusions are realised or made. As such, the diegetic social cues provided by characters on screen, the very act of looking and seeing, drives Viewer Suspicion within mystery films. These looks establish the space "when 'belief-worlds' of characters proliferate, conflict, and are filtered out till only one shared 'knowledge-world' remains" (Wollen 1982, 47) by characters and viewers alike.

How Non-verbal Expression Arouses Viewer Suspicion

Viewer suspicion is directed by the expressions of characters on screen, their faces providing social cues that convey their response to the events they are witness to on screen. *The Prestige* repeatedly uses the gaze or expressions of characters to present them as suspicious to others, or to reveal their suspicions to the viewer. When a character on screen directs their attention to a specific object, action, or other character, viewer attention is also directed there, mirroring the effect of joint attention (Salley and Colombo 2016). "Facial dynamics form the core of social interactions" (Vö et al. 2012) and the face is an information-rich source when interpreting dynamic scenes within a film.

For example, Angier's gaze is shown to arouse Alfred's (Fallon) suspicion as Angier stalks Freddy (Borden) through the streets. As Angier follows Borden, Fallon trails closely behind with a loaded pistol. When Angier turns away from Borden to look down an alley, looking back to Borden before darting into the alley, Fallon repeats this action (Figure 10.2.1). By repeating these looks, Borden conveys to the audience his own suspicions about Angier and the threat he poses. While the use of repetition here conveys salience to the viewer, it is the representation of Fallon's suspicions that arouse the viewer's own. The viewer is witness to the moment of the look, as Fallon sees Angier turn down the alleyway, and the "time of interpretation", as he considers whether to follow Angier or to stay with Borden. Through these looks the viewer can arrive at the conclusion Fallon makes, that Angier's actions are suspicious and pose a possible threat. What Fallon misinterprets is who the threat is aimed towards, and viewers share in this false belief until the "moment of conclusion", as Fallon is trapped by Angier and Cutter.



Figure 10.2.1—Fallon following Angier following Borden, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)

Olivia arouses Viewer Suspicion when Borden questions her motives as she offers to work for him. As Borden asks, “This is the truth, is it?”, Olivia’s expression conveys fear, insecurity, and uncertainty. Initially she confidently meets Borden’s gaze, with a soft smile and raised cheeks. As the question lingers, her gaze drifts slightly to the side before meeting his gaze again. When she does so her eyes dart from left to right, suggesting a glance between Borden’s eyes to scrutinise his expression (Figure 10.2.2). Additionally, her face has sunken, with the cheeks dropping and the edges of her lips slightly curving downwards. The close-up of her face, paired with Borden’s verbal challenge, arouses Viewer Suspicion. The long duration of this shot conveys salience, with a fast-paced conversation suddenly silenced as Olivia fails to respond. By elongating the “time to understand”, and denying the viewer access to the “moment of conclusion” (at least temporarily), Olivia’s look is frustratingly ambiguous, arousing Viewer Suspicion and engaging the viewer in Textual Problem Solving.



Figure 10.2.2—Olivia hesitates to respond as Borden questions her honesty, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)

In both of the above cases the viewer is rewarded for following these suspicions. Fallon was right to be suspicious of Angier, who subsequently traps him and holds him for ransom. Borden was right to be suspicious of Olivia, who we know was sent by Angier to steal his secrets. By presenting these suspicions as accurate, *The Prestige* teaches viewers to trust in the suspicions of characters on screen, and to look to them to direct their attention.

How Obscure Characters Arouse Viewer Suspicion

Viewer suspicion can be aroused around a character by their personality, history, appearance, and manner. *The Prestige* shrouds mystery around the characters of Alfred Borden and Bernard Fallon, as several characters on screen express concern about the two men. The secret of their method for “The Transported Man” becomes intrinsically tied to the secrets each of the men keeps in his personal life, and each omission or inconsistency in their actions provides another opportunity for Viewer Suspicion to be aroused. The film uses the characters of these two men to direct Viewer Suspicion and to legitimate viewer concerns by voicing them through on-screen characters who interact with the men.

Alfred Borden attracts the suspicions of Angier, Cutter, Olivia, and Sarah at different times throughout the film. After reading Borden’s journal, Angier writes, “his mind is a divided one. His wife and child tormented by his fickle and contradictory nature.” Viewers are able to witness these contradictions in Borden’s character and actions, but the scenes present no mitigating factors to justify them, or to assuage the suspicions directed against him. By speaking ambiguously, referring to himself in the third person, or as a “part” or “half” of himself, Borden arouses further suspicion. His careful choice of words allows him to avoid lying, without revealing that he shares a life with his brother. For example, when Borden turns down his daughter’s request to go to the zoo, she reminds him that he made her a promise, to which he replies, “I promised, did I?” When speaking to Olivia after Sarah’s death he tells her: “Part of me never loved Sarah... the part that’s sitting here right now.” Borden, through his own admissions, establishes the idea for the viewer that there are two parts to him.

Borden’s inability to recall which knot he tied before Julia’s accident arouses Viewer Suspicion. At Julia’s funeral Angier asks which knot Borden tied, wanting him to admit fault in her death (Figure 10.2.3). This question is repeated in a later scene when Angier holds Borden at gunpoint demanding an answer (Figure 10.2.4). The question is repeated a third time when Angier reads Borden’s journal entry of the incident: “One half of me

swearing blind that I tied a simple slipknot, the other half convinced that I tied the Langford double. I can never know for sure.” Upon reading this, Angier becomes enraged, yelling, “How can he not know?” The scene then moves to Borden reading Angier’s journal as Angier’s voice continues, “He must know what he did. He must.”

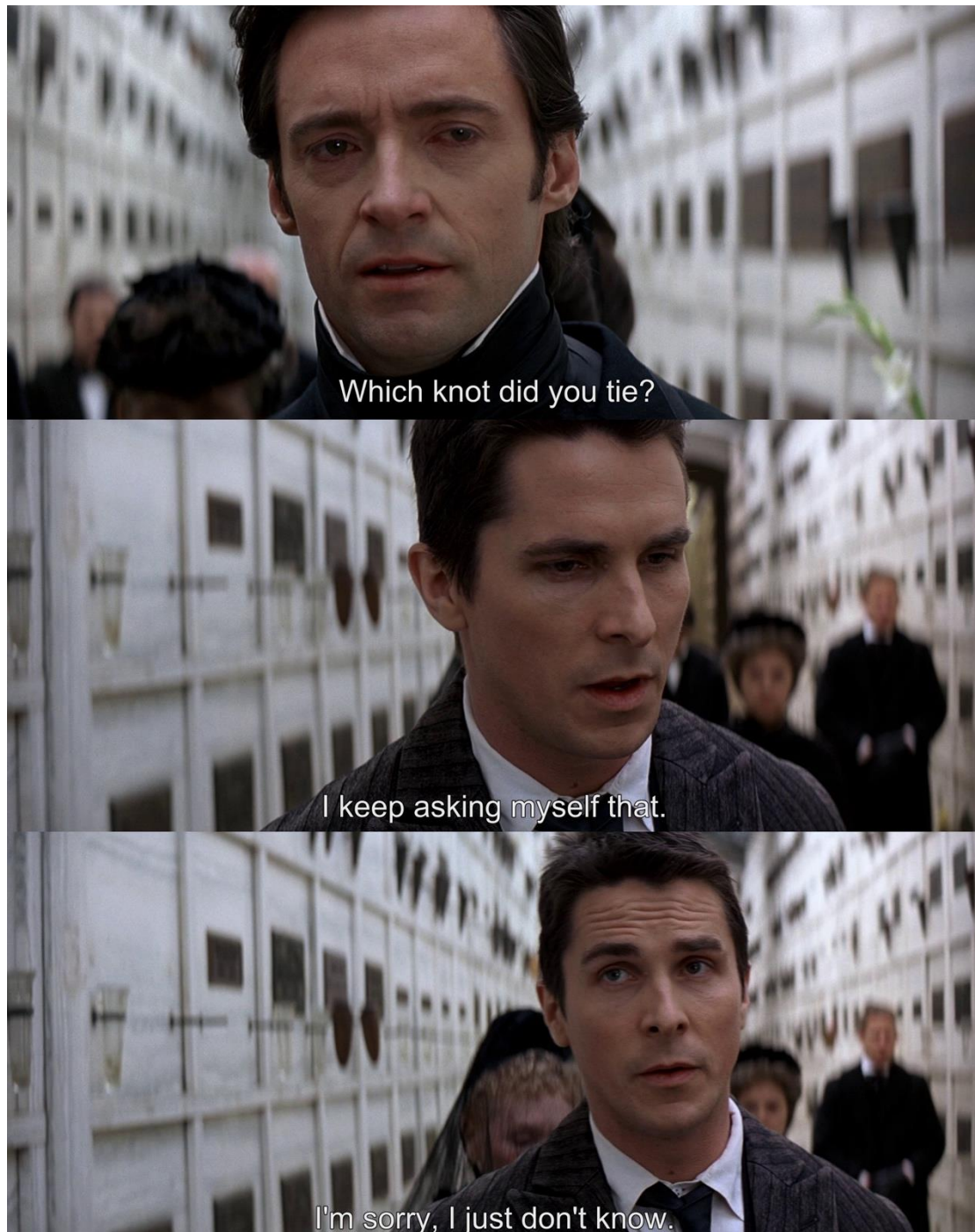


Figure 10.2.3—Angier and Borden at Julia’s funeral, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

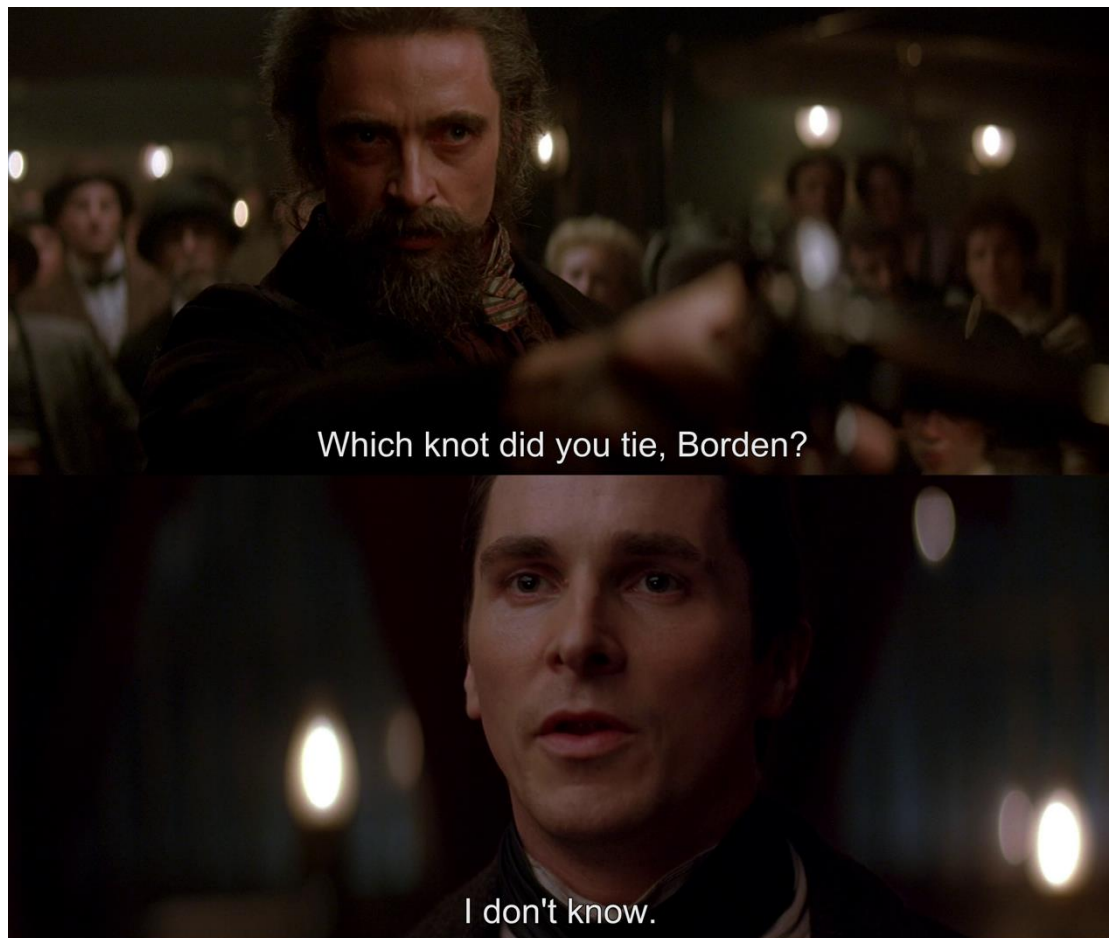


Figure 10.2.4—Angier threatening Borden with a loaded pistol during a performance of a bullet catch, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)

The repetition of Angier’s question conveys saliency to the audience, while Borden’s inability to answer the question produces ambiguity. Their combination culminates in the shot of Borden reflecting on the events in his prison cell, giving no indication one way or the other (Figure 10.2.5). In each repetition, we see Borden’s reaction to the question in a close-up of his face, showing concern and consideration, but never certainty. Borden’s reactions align the viewer with Angier’s inquiry, from a specific question (“which knot did you tie?”) to a broader and more fundamental one (“how can he not know?”). Here, Viewer Suspicion is aroused not only through the presentation of information as salient and ambiguous, but also through the suspicions of characters on screen.



Figure 10.2.5—Borden’s reaction after reading Angier’s dismay that Borden’s journal does not answer the question of which knot was tied, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)

Sarah’s observations of Borden’s divided personality arouse Viewer Suspicion and foreshadow Borden’s fate. The relationship between Borden and Sarah deteriorates as she struggles with his “fickle and contradictory nature”. After announcing their pregnancy, Sarah and Freddy (Borden) have the following exchange:

Freddy (Borden): I love you.

Sarah: Not today.

Freddy (Borden): What?

Sarah: Well, on some days it’s not true, and today you don’t mean it. I like being able to tell the difference.

Sarah’s words are turned against her later in the film, when she asks again whether Borden loves her, to which he replies, “Not today.” During the same argument Sarah makes her suspicion clear to the audience, though their meaning remains ambiguous: “You can’t hide it anymore because I know, Alfred, I know. I know what you really are.”

In the following scene, Sarah prepares to hang herself in Borden’s workshop. The shots of doves and rope have dual meanings and play on the visual and thematic motifs throughout the film. Sarah’s gaze at the birds suggests a reflection on the beginning of her relationship with Borden, a part of the magic show when the two first met, while the rope reflects her current state of mind and plans to take her own life. Sarah’s suicidal intentions are confirmed in the following pair of shots, which show her limp body hanging from a crossbeam in the workshop.¹⁶⁸ The effect of her death on Borden heightens Viewer

¹⁶⁸ Alternatively, the scene can be seen to foreshadow Freddy’s (Borden’s) death: the birds represent the death of a twin brother (as observed by Sarah’s nephew when she first met Borden), and Freddy (Borden) is

Suspicion of the character and demonstrates the severity of the discord between the two halves of Borden's life.

Bernard Fallon is a physical embodiment of Borden's secret method that viewers are cued to scrutinise. Fallon is depicted in a way that draws on viewer predispositions about untrustworthy or shady characters. His face is always hidden, either turned away from the camera, obscured by glasses, hat, and facial hair, or resting in shadows (Figure 10.2.6). For the majority of the film, he is presented as a stoic loner, entirely mute and drawing mistrust from Olivia ("he was lurking around ... I don't trust him"), and the courts ("a man with a past almost as obscure as your [Borden's] own").



Figure 10.2.6—Fallon keeps his face obscured, turning his head down and to the side while tipping his hat low over his eyes, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)

The hidden visage of Fallon contrasts with the trust Borden has in him, generating ambiguity about their relationship and the justification for this trust. Fallon is treated like a member of the family; Borden responds to Sarah's pregnancy announcement by stating that "we should have told Fallon". Fallon is shown comforting Jess while Sarah and Borden argue, and when Olivia admits her mistrust of the man, Borden responds, "you trust me? Then trust Fallon." This trust is demonstrated when Borden asks Fallon for assistance with Sarah (Figure 10.2.7). How Fallon could assist with Borden's relationship with Sarah, and what it is she knows, is completely obscure to the viewer, and arouses suspicion about the characters of both men. The disparity between the shady figure portrayed visually, and the man Borden trusts as family raises a number of questions about Fallon, generating ambiguity about his role.

sentenced to death by hanging. The rope is of particular significance in the film, playing a role in the death of all characters (Julia, Sarah, and Freddy) except for Angier.



Figure 10.2.7—Borden asks Fallon for help with Sarah, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

When Fallon breaks his silence, he reveals Borden’s secret to the astute viewer. Throughout the film Fallon has not spoken a single word, even when threatened and buried by Angier. This arouses Angier’s suspicion; he states, “Fallon wouldn’t tell me. In fact, he doesn’t seem to talk at all.” As Angier makes this statement his facial expressions communicate confusion and uncertainty, but also show a shift as his suspicions about Fallon turn towards Borden. Borden’s goodbye to Fallon before his execution, and Fallon’s response, include two details that reveal their method.

Freddy (Borden): You were right; I should have left him to his damn trick. I’m sorry. I’m sorry for a lot of things. I’m sorry about Sarah. Didn’t mean to hurt her, I didn’t. You go live your life in full now, all right? You live for both of us.

Alfred (Fallon): Goodbye.

Borden’s words suggest that Fallon had warned him to stay away from Angier, when Borden spoke these words *to* Fallon in an earlier scene (“Let him have his trick ... don’t go back there, you leave him alone”). More revealing, though, is the sound of Fallon’s voice. The scene removes all other diegetic sound, maintaining only a monotone score, as Fallon whispers, “Goodbye.” His voice is particularly low and gruff, identical in tone to that used by Borden when narrating scenes from his journal—revealing Fallon as Borden’s twin brother.

How Viewers Identify with On-screen Suspicions

The viewer identifies with characters on screen because much of the film is directed by the inquiry into a secret by different characters, including Borden, Fallon, Cutter, Olivia, and

Angier. After Angier returns to London with Tesla's machine, the viewer identifies with the suspicions of Borden, Fallon and Cutter about the method of Angier's "The Real Transported Man". Borden is obsessed with what takes place underneath the stage, while Fallon and Cutter are confused by the secretive transport of the water tank after each performance. Cutter's suspicions are also aroused when Angier keeps him from working backstage on the show. By this point in the film the narration is unrestricted, viewer knowledge surpasses that of the suspicious characters; the machine's ability to create doubles has already been demonstrated. Due to the structure of the film narrative and editing, viewers are more likely to be guided by the suspicions of these characters than if viewers made a reasoned assessment of the problem from the information available in the film.

Borden's obsession with Angier's trick serves two functions: to arouse Viewer Suspicion concerning what takes place beneath the stage, and to distract viewers from the fact they already know the answer. Borden watches the performance intently, noticing the trapdoor that drops Angier beneath the stage. The scene emphasises the importance of Borden's look: his face is shown in medium close-up or close-up in 11 separate shots (Figure 10.2.8). Almost a quarter of the scene (40 seconds of 3:04 minutes) is devoted to watching Borden's silent reaction. The following scene makes Borden's suspicions explicit: he tells Fallon "all that we know is he uses a trapdoor" before asking, "What is going on under that stage?" The repetition of close-up shots of Borden's face conveys saliency to the viewer, and his suspicions become our own.



Figure 10.2.8—Borden watches as Angier has audience members examine his machine on stage, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)

However, the viewer has already been shown what takes place under the stage, in the very first scene where Angier drowns. The scene shows Borden sneaking underneath the stage

and observing a water tank placed beneath the stage, with a small slit in the stage allowing light in. Viewers are shown Angier dropping through the trapdoor and into the water tank. By aligning viewer attention and motivations with a character on screen, *The Prestige* misdirects viewers, causing them to assess the problem from the position of a character with more limited information than their own. By doing so, the film prevents viewers from realising that they already possess the solution to the problem Borden faces. Engaging in Textual Problem Solving, and identifying a problem late in the film, suggests to the viewer that further data collection is required before arriving at a solution. By inverting the ordinary structure of problem solving, the film reduces the likelihood that viewers will correctly synthesise existing knowledge towards a solution of a newly identified problem. In doing so, *The Prestige* can achieve an experience of recognition in viewers, having provided them with all the relevant information to solve the problem, while preventing them from arriving at the solution ahead of time by frustrating attempts at Textual Problem Solving.

Fallon and Cutter arouse Viewer Suspicion around the role of the water tank. Fallon observes the water tank, covered in cloth, loaded into a cart and taken from the main stage to Angier’s rehearsal space. The series of shots is repeated at the destination; however, the silhouette of a man wearing a hat is revealed to be Cutter. The visual symmetry conveys a relationship between Cutter and Fallon, and the importance of the role of the water tank in Angier’s method (Figure 10.2.9). Once again, Viewer Suspicion is aligned with the concerns of characters on screen.



Figure 10.2.9—Fallon watches the water tank leave the stage and Cutter watches as it is delivered to the rehearsal space, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)

Cutter’s suspicions mislead the viewer about the role of the water tank. When Angier tells Cutter “I don’t want you backstage” the look on Cutter’s face suggests some scepticism

about Angier's motives. After observing the water tank being transported to the practice theatre, Cutter enters to observe. Inside he finds Angier, who confronts him, repeating the line, "I don't want you backstage on this one." The repetition of these words conveys saliency to the viewer, while Cutter's expression and clear mistrust of Angier arouses Viewer Suspicion (Figure 10.2.10). However, this mistrust is not apparent in Cutter's court testimony as he denies the involvement of the tank in the trick. When the defence lawyer asks, "How, then, can we know that the tank wasn't simply some part of the trick that went wrong?" the viewer is presented with a false dilemma. The viewer is primed to see Angier's death as an isolated event caused by some accident or mistake. However, as Angier later reveals, the tank was part of the trick and functioned correctly in every performance, its purpose being to dispose of the copy of Angier that drops from the stage. While Cutter grows suspicious of the tank, his testimony in court and the lawyer's response create a false dilemma for viewers, making the problem more difficult to solve ahead of time.



Figure 10.2.10—Cutter reacts as Angier reasserts "I don't want you backstage on this one", in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

While the film misdirects viewers about Angier's secret, the focus on Angier's secret is itself a form of misdirection. The "Real Transported Man" problem distracts viewers from the "Transported Man" problem, preventing solution of the latter. The syuzhet orders the events so as to focus viewer attention initially on Borden's method, before prioritising Angier's method later in the film. The first two-thirds of the film's running time display Angier's obsession with Borden's method, until 1:31:30 when Angier tests Tesla's machine on himself. The outcome of the test is not shown to the viewer at this point; Angier ends his journal entry directly addressing Borden ("Yes, you, Borden. Sitting there in your cell"). This shift in focus is emphasised when Angier later obtains Borden's secret only to toss it

away, proclaiming, “Mine is better.” At the film’s conclusion, when both secrets are revealed, viewer attention is focused on Angier’s trick. All of the characters direct viewers’ attention in this way by scrutinising “The Real Transported Man”, or by dismissing “The Transported Man” as worthy of no further scrutiny.

The Prestige uses social cues to engage the viewer in Textual Problem Solving, arousing Viewer Suspicion around the key components of the two magicians’ secrets and ensuring an experience of recognition. At times the film uses Viewer Suspicion to mislead or misdirect the viewer to prevent them from arriving at the solution/s ahead of time. However, unlike many of the other films utilising the recognition mode, *The Prestige* treats the viewer fairly, providing the viewer with the information to explain how those clues fit together. Cutter and Olivia explicitly and repeatedly tell Angier that Borden uses a double. Cutter tells the judge that Angier’s machine “has no trick. It’s real”. Using social cues, Viewer Suspicion is directed to ensure viewers are familiar with these solutions, but to also ensure the majority do not arrive at them ahead of time.

10.3 HOW PROBLEM-DRIVEN VIEWERS ENGAGE WITH *THE PRESTIGE*

Mystery films are designed for audiences to enjoy, whether they know the ending or not. Mystery film audiences include story-driven viewers, who I have focused on in my discussion above, and problem-driven viewers. Mystery films employ many of the same practices to engage these two groups in different ways and provide opportunities for problem-driven viewers to engage in Textual Problem Solving. Instead of looking to solve the problem itself, problem-driven viewers search for an explanation as to how the text constructed a mystery that viewers would struggle to solve ahead of time. Problem-driven viewers have prior knowledge that has the potential to lead to a film’s solution, through familiarity with paratexts, the genre, source materials, or by virtue of having seen the film before. These viewers still engage with clues presented in mystery films, however, their focus and their response to Viewer Suspicion differ. Problem-driven viewers recognise how their knowledge influences the viewing of the text, and notice clues that a first-time or unfamiliar viewer could not have understood. Mystery films cannot guarantee ignorance on the part of the viewer, so must cultivate an enjoyable experience for all types of viewers. In the recognition mode, this is achieved by drawing the attention of problem-driven viewers to the construction of the text itself, leading them to follow how clues are placed

within the text, and challenging them to identify the full significance of details hidden throughout the film. *The Prestige* includes numerous details that require metatextual knowledge to fully appreciate and understand. In this section I will discuss the three main ways that the film engages problem-driven viewers: by using the order of events to present meaningful clues before a viewer can properly decode or understand them; by hiding critical evidence or information in plain sight, but distracting viewers through cinematic and narrative practices; and by placing essential details to the core solution or the film's conclusion in its beginning.

Putting the Solution before the Question

The Prestige presents the viewer with details laden with hidden meaning, which can only be understood when viewing with the relevant background knowledge. Most prominently, the film presents the viewer with clues as to Borden's method for "The Transported Man" before the trick is first performed (successfully) on stage. In this way, the film presents one of the best clues to the core solution of the film before the viewer is fully aware of the problem they are trying to solve. Borden's first mention of the trick, his attempts to impress Sarah on their first date, and the film's official trailer all contain clues as to how "The Transported Man" is performed. By including the details, the film provides an opportunity for meta-viewing, drawing on relevant knowledge about the text to engage in Textual Problem Solving, even if the solution to the problem is already known.

The official trailer for *The Prestige* presents the film as a dangerous thriller, "a rivalry that became a battle", and performs the critical role of focusing viewer attention on the mystery of Borden's trick. The trailer establishes this problem as the primary purpose for viewers, and centrally places Borden's first mention of the trick.

Borden: A real magician tries to invent something new: something that other magicians will scratch their heads over.

Cutter: I suppose you have such a trick.

Borden: Actually, I do. It's the one they're gonna remember me for.

The trailer then cuts to Angier's reaction to first seeing the trick (Figure 10.3.1). The trailer primes the viewer to focus on Borden's trick, and his discussion of it.



Figure 10.3.1—Angier reacts to watching Borden's "The Transported Man" for the first time, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

Borden's first discussion of his trick, in full, provides two clues as to his method. Borden claims that "no one else could do my trick", to which Cutter replies, "it might be only he's prepared to do it". Together, these statements suggest the trick requires a rare or unique quality in the performer, and that the trick may be technically simple, but require either sacrifice or risk to perform. This logical conclusion is echoed by Borden when revealing his secret to Angier ("Simple maybe, but not easy. Sacrifice, Robert, that's the price of a good trick"). However, without knowledge of the genre and the potential significance of such offhand comments, this clue is easily dismissed as simply banter or boasting on Borden's part.

Sarah's reaction to Borden's first performance of "The Transported Man" disarms viewers, distracting from its overall significance. During their first meeting, Alfred (Borden) asks to come into Sarah's apartment for tea but is refused for fear of creating a scandal. Sarah watches Borden leave as she closes the door behind her before locking it. Just as she finishes doing so, she turns to find Freddy (Borden) inside her apartment holding a kettle (Figure 10.3.2). This is the first time the audience sees the twins work together to create the illusion of teleportation, but the feat is played down in the scene, with both Sarah and Borden laughing and the scene quickly ending. For viewers familiar with Borden's secret, the scene reveals how the emotional responses of characters are used to direct viewer attention, making the significant seem insignificant, and vice versa. This scene also points to *The Prestige's* broader presentation of the problem for the viewer, placing clues "in plain sight", while using narrative, character, and structure to hide them.



Figure 10.3.2—Borden asks Sarah to invite him in for tea but is declined. After Sarah watches him walk away and locks the door behind her, she turns to find him in her apartment with kettle in hand, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

Hiding Clues in Plain Sight

The Prestige hides many clues for the viewer in plain sight by presenting conflicting pieces of information. Throughout the film, there is a repeated pattern in which visuals are used to deceive the viewer, while words are used to communicate the truth to viewers. This practice is used to exploit viewer assumptions, pairing truthful statements with ambiguous or misleading images to deceive viewers. This practice is effective, in part, due to human biases for visual information over sound in bimodal presentations, known as the Colavita Visual Dominance effect (Spence, Parise, and Chen 2012). This means that viewers are more likely to interpret what they hear through what they see, rather than critically evaluating what is said. Further, many of the ambiguous combinations of image and sound have a simple and straightforward interpretation that most viewers will accept, unless they have explicit knowledge that challenges that interpretation. In this way, problem-driven viewers can engage in Textual Problem Solving, seeking clues hidden in plain sight within the film.

The two howdunits set for the viewer in *The Prestige* direct attention towards the method or mechanics of the different versions of “The Transported Man”. However, viewer attention is also directed away from clues that illuminate the correct solutions to these problems. As critics Mike D’Angelo (2016) and Evan Puschak (2016) argue, *The Prestige* hides its secret “in plain sight”: on numerous occasions, characters tell the viewer the truth, but the presentation of information or its contexts leads viewers to dismiss the statement. This is most clearly demonstrated in the following instances: Cutter’s insistence that Borden uses a double and Angier’s inability to “fathom it”; Borden’s self-referential

statements, which are simultaneously ambiguous and truthful; and by the contrast of image with words. In many ways, *The Prestige* operates similarly to a stage magician, speaking honestly to the audience about what will be done, but distracting them from seeing how it is done.

Cutter's repeated insistence that Borden uses a double is deflected, by the structure of the film, and by the insistence of other characters. When Cutter first watches Borden's trick, the film prevents the audience from seeing its conclusion, the 'prestige' of the trick. This means that while the viewer has the general awareness that Borden's trick is a problem to be solved, when Cutter first insists it requires a double the audience has not even seen the trick itself (Figure 10.3.3). By structuring events in this way, the film maintains a distance between Cutter's verbal claims, and the visual reality of the trick. The film repeatedly plays with the arrangement of the spoken word and images to prevent viewers from arriving at a solution.

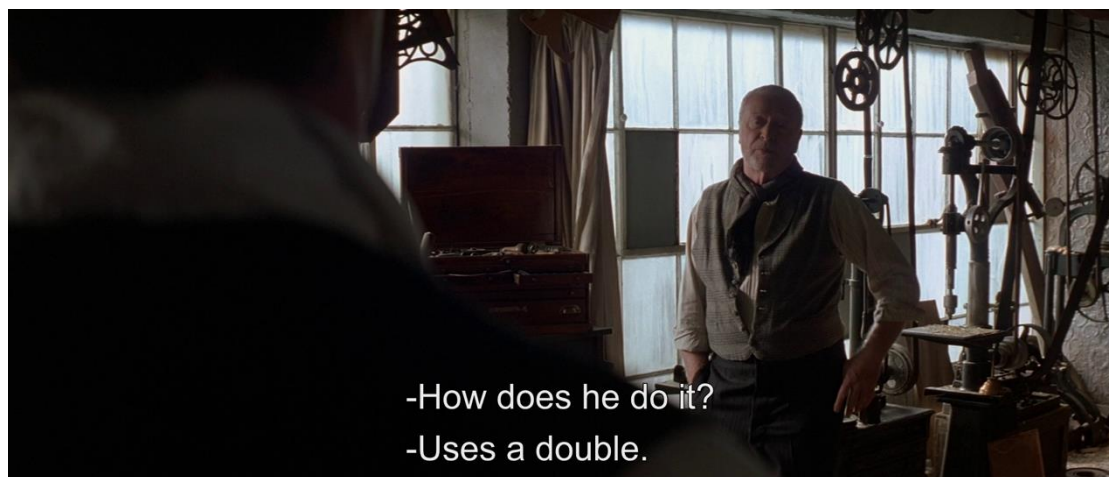


Figure 10.3.3—From the beginning, Cutter insists that Borden uses a double to perform “The Transported Man”, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

For problem-driven viewers, the counter-arguments presented by Olivia, Angier, and the reference to Tesla are seen as misdirection from Cutter's assessment. The following dialogue occurs at the first discussion of the trick.

Angier. No, no, no, it's too simple. This is a complex illusion.

Cutter. You only say that because you don't know the method. It's a double that comes out at the end. It's the only way.

...

Olivia. It's the same man. He wears padded gloves to hide his damaged fingers, but if you look closely, you can tell.

Angier's insistence is supported by Olivia's observation; however, her conclusion omits the possibility that the double could share or fake this detail. When Angier later obtains Borden's keyword, Cutter again insists that Borden uses a double, but when the keyword is revealed to be Tesla, the significance of this name has already been imbued with such importance as to outweigh Cutter's objections, both for Angier and viewers.

Angier's insistence that Borden does not use a double reveals a selective bias in his reasoning, and the film causes the viewer to identify with his suspicion. While problem-driven viewers may be aware that Angier's assumptions are misdirection, for most viewers his suspicions direct their own. By presenting the audience with Angier's death at the beginning of the *syuzhet*, and his wife's death shortly after, towards the beginning of the *fabula*, the film fosters sympathy for the character of Angier, forging identification with the character and his goals. This sympathy leads audiences to trust in Angier's insistence that Borden's trick is "a complex illusion", not the use of a double. By the time viewer sympathy for Angier wears thin, the belief that Borden does not use a double has long been accepted.

When Angier and Borden watch Chung Ling Soo perform his "goldfish bowl trick" (Figure 10.3.4) to identify the method, "Borden saw it at once; I [Angier] couldn't fathom it". The trick simply requires physical strength to perform, but Chung Ling Soo masks this by acting frail and weak whenever in public, even outside his show. This blind spot, by Angier's own admission, makes him ineffective at identifying Borden's method. When Olivia agrees with Angier, saying Borden does not use a double, he accepts her reasoning, despite the possibility this detail was insufficient to rule out the use of a double. When later Olivia insists Borden uses a double, Angier calls back to the fishbowl trick, yelling that Borden is performing "all the time". Angier cherry-picks aspects of Borden's personality and details from his performance that conform to his own conceptions of how the trick is performed, misleading story-driven viewers in their suspicions.



Figure 10.3.4—Chung Ling Soo’s method for the goldfish bowl trick involves the use of great physical strength, which he disguises by acting frail whenever in public, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

For some problem-driven viewers, the method to Borden’s trick is revealed through the performance of the goldfish bowl trick. Much of the plot of *The Prestige* is loosely related to the real Chung Ling Soo (William Robertson) and his magician rival Ching Ling Foo. Foo challenged other magicians to identify the method of his water bowl trick, which is similar to the fishbowl trick appearing in the film and offered a \$1000 reward. Robertson identified the method, but Foo refused to see him and accept his solution (Cullen, Hackman, and McNeilly 2004, 224-25). Robertson then used Foo’s tricks to create his own show and performed under the name Soo. The American-born magician convinced audiences he was Chinese through the use of disguise, costume, and by never speaking a word of English while in character—with one exception. During a bullet catch trick like the one that injures Borden, Robertson was shot and exclaimed, “Oh my god. Something’s happened. Lower the curtains.” Other aspects of Robertson’s life are mirrored in the lives of Borden and Angier, such as marrying one assistant, and having an affair with another.¹⁶⁹ Any viewer familiar with the life of Chung Ling Soo would be able recognise these traits in Borden, performing “all the time” to deceive his audience.

A disconnect between words and images is repeated throughout the film; viewers can only decipher it by considering the film in its entirety. The earliest scene in the film’s fabula, described in Borden’s journal and read by Angier, is marked as significant for occurring “just days after we [Borden and Angier] first met”. The repetition of the words “two young men” imbues it with salience for the viewer (Figure 10.3.5). This salience could arouse Viewer Suspicion, were identity of the two men being discussed not obvious to the viewer;

¹⁶⁹ For a detailed account on Chung Ling Soo see Jim Steinmeyer’s *The Glorious Deception* (2005).

however, the camera moves across the audience and focuses on Borden, and then Angier. The visuals suggest to the viewer there is no ambiguity in these words, but for the problem-driven viewer the two young men refers to the twin brothers, arousing Viewer Suspicion as the viewer identifies the deception perpetrated by this disconnect.



Figure 10.3.5—The first scene in the film’s fabula, showing Borden and Angier as sbills in the audience of a magic show, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

The disconnect between image and word occurs again as Sarah treats Borden’s wound. Sarah states, “I don’t understand how it can be bleeding again. It’s as bad as the day that it

happened” (Figure 10.3.6). As this is the first time the viewer is able to see the wound, the words are thought of as an exaggeration or quirk of expression. However, for problem-driven viewers, this line is an example of the film telling the audience the truth but misleading them through visual associations.



Figure 10.3.6—Borden’s hand bleeds days after being injured and treated, in *The Prestige* (Nolan 2006)

Foreshadowing in the Beginning

The mystery genre often hides clues to its solution in the very beginning of a text.¹⁷⁰ *The Prestige* begins with a question, directed at the audience, with Borden’s voice asking, “Are you watching closely?” The use of Borden’s voice here suggests the film’s focus should be on him, while the presence of the hats is later associated with Angier. This isolated image, appearing with no context and with a solitary voice providing a cryptic challenge, portrays the hats as salient. This belief is rewarded when Tesla’s experiments succeed in duplicating Angier’s hat, removing the ambiguity that surrounded the image. However, the question posed by Borden is not so quickly resolved.

The question is repeated another three times over the film. Borden asks the question to Sarah’s nephew when showing him a magic trick. This diminishes the ambiguity, with the question passed off as artistic flair and part of the magician’s performance. He asks the question to a guard in prison before performing another trick, further reinforcing the line as something inconsequential. However, when the line is repeated as Borden is about to be hanged to death, Viewer Suspicion is aroused. The question is a challenge to the

¹⁷⁰ This practice is particularly common in crime mystery television. The short format requires suspects be shown to the viewer early in an episode to prevent the viewer feeling ‘cheated’ by the solution if the culprit has only just been introduced or is completely unknown to the viewer.

certainty of his predicament and is a reference to his twin surviving him. For problem-driven viewers, the meaning hidden in the opening question is clear, and each repetition throughout the film reveals how the clue was constructed and concealed from most viewers.

At the start of the film, the shot of the top hats is immediately succeeded by a scene where Cutter explains the three acts of a magic trick. The film cross-cuts between Cutter performing a trick for Jess and Angier's performance of "The Real Transported Man", with Cutter's explanation of the pledge, the turn, and the prestige. Without yet knowing her name, we see that the girl for whom the trick is being performed is the same one standing with Fallon in court, waving to Borden (Figure 10.3.7). The film later reveals she is Borden's daughter, Jess. Her presence with Cutter arouses Viewer Suspicion, as very early in the film Borden and Cutter are shown to part ways after the accident leading to Julia's death. Further, Cutter is performing this trick for Jess in Borden's workshop (Figure 10.3.8). This fact is not observable until much later in the film, when Olivia visits Borden offering to work for him. From these two small details, we can presume that Cutter and Borden are in some way reconciled by the end of the film and working together, as Cutter is in Borden's space, entertaining his daughter, at a time we know to be after the accident with Julia, and most likely around the time of the court case, due to the age of the girl. While it is unreasonable to expect most viewers to identify this on a first viewing, problem-driven viewers are able to connect each of these details together. In doing so, the problem-driven viewers engage in Textual Problem Solving with the construction of the mystery and the methods for concealing its solution from viewers.



Figure 10.3.7—Jess in the opening scene, watching Cutter perform a trick, and in the courthouse scene, watching the trial with Fallon, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)



Figure 10.3.8—Cutter performing a magic trick for Jess in Borden's workshop and Olivia arriving at the workshop offering to work for Borden, in The Prestige (Nolan 2006)

In this chapter, my analysis of *The Prestige* aims to illuminate one essential quality of mystery films: synergy. Mystery problem type, filmic practices, generic cues, editing structure, narrative, diegetic social cues, and viewer drive each function in combination to arouse Viewer Suspicion and engage viewers in Textual Problem Solving. The study of each, in isolation, reveals only an aspect of the experience when viewing a mystery film. What this chapter highlights is the significance of their combination, both in the practices used to construct mystery films and the diversity of viewer responses, when considering mystery viewing as a complete experience. Although mystery film viewers may not notice every clue, may not correctly interpret every scene, and may not solve the film's core problem in advance, they will be motivated to engage the film in an attempt to do so. By studying this engagement, we may better understand the mystery genre's unique viewing experience and the mystery viewers themselves.

Part V: Conclusion

11

Solving Mystery Films

The presence of a problem or puzzle in mystery films is fundamental to the genre. Mystery is synonymous with a struggle from some point of ignorance to knowledge. The problem in mystery films defines the plot, the progression of narrative, the characters, the ending, and viewer expectations and beliefs. Yet, despite this significance, little attention has been focused on problem solving and feelings of suspicion among mystery film viewers. By placing problem solving as central to viewer engagement with mystery films, this thesis has developed a framework for defining and evaluating the genre, how and why viewers engage with mystery films, and how these films are constructed to engage viewers. My answers to these questions, the development of critical mystery concepts and language, and the application of innovative methods to investigate these questions, stand as substantial contributions to research on the experience-of-film and to the genre of mystery films. What follows is a brief summary of these findings, and the limitations they must be considered within.

In Chapter 3, I established that the mystery film genre is best understood in relation to the challenge it sets for the viewer. The mystery genre signals to viewers that there will be a problem to solve, and that solving this problem will only require the application of reason, logic and deduction on the part of the viewer. In Chapter 4, I argued that mystery films are best defined through common consensus, and that this consensus can be measured using sites of screen discourse. I created a Common Mystery Film classification to identify films that best reflect viewer conceptions of the genre, as represented in popular screen discourse. Having identified my Study Set, I examined how viewers engage with them. In Chapter 5, I argue that viewers respond to the challenge set by mystery films by engaging in Textual Problem Solving—a unique form of problem solving that takes place between viewer and text. Textual Problem Solving provides a lens for understanding what motivates viewer engagement with mystery films and how they go about solving the problem presented within a film. Further, in Chapter 6, I argue that this process is primarily modulated by affective experiences of suspicion. I define this experience as Viewer

Suspicion and outline how it is generated through the identification of salience and ambiguity in a piece of information presented in mystery films.

Textual Problem Solving and Viewer Suspicion provide an explanation for how and why viewers engage with mystery films. I used these concepts to then analyse how mystery films engaged these practices in viewers. In Chapter 7, I used software to analyse the use of editing in the Study Set. My analysis showed that these films use a higher concentration of short-duration shots as they approach their conclusion and argued that they do so strategically to deny viewers an opportunity to reflect on the film's core problem, frustrating attempts at solving it ahead of time. In Chapter 8, I argued that the films in the Study Set aimed to produce an experience of recognition for viewers, presenting key clues in ways that viewers would notice and remember, while encumbering them from reaching a film's core solution on their own. Further, I identified and classified the types of problems used in these films, as well as the practices they used to direct viewers' attention and arouse Viewer Suspicion. In Chapter 9, I tested my theory of Viewer Suspicion by using one of these practices, repetition, in an experiment of mystery film viewers. The results of this experiment supported my hypothesis that repeating an image could increase viewers' rating of suspicion when watching mystery films.

In culmination, my work has provided an extensive expansion of theorising on the mystery genre in film. My research on problem types provides a more complete taxonomy of the mystery genre and provides an update to existing conceptions of mystery types. My work on editing structure in the mystery genre reveals one of the strategies employed to misdirect viewers and minimise their chance at resolving the core problem prior to anagnorisis. Additionally, I provide further evidence of the significance of film editing in the analysis of narrative form and structure. My identification of the recognition mode in contemporary mystery practice further exemplifies the strategies employed by mystery film creators to create the perception of an inevitable, or recognisable, solution to a problem the viewer was unable to solve ahead of time. Most importantly, my conceptions of Textual Problem Solving and Viewer Suspicion provides a foundation for future theorisation of viewer engagement with mystery films that was previously absent in the field.

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the empirical analysis of film, generating quantitative and qualitative data on contemporary mystery films, the result of a thorough examination of the editing, trends, techniques, and practices used across 87 films. Further, I contribute to the empirical examination of film and viewer responses with the results of

my experiment and the responses of 79 participants, recording their familiarity with screen texts, the mystery genre, mystery films, and viewer perceptions of the problem as presented in two mystery films. The contributions of Kuleshov's empirical experiments on film "undergird many of our fundamental assumptions about editing and the viewer's interpretation of cinema" (Prince and Hensley 1992, 73) largely as they present observations, rather than interpretations. It is hoped that, in some small way, my own empirical contributions remain of value to film scholarship beyond my specific purposes and arguments and allow for a deeper examination of the mystery genre.

Further, my research provides the groundwork for comparative analysis between mystery and other genres and enables future research to better consider the mystery genre and its role in screen texts. Using the concepts of Textual Problem Solving and Viewer Suspicion, it may be possible to better reflect on the mystery genre over the past century, and across different languages and cultural contexts. In addition, by using different measures of cultural consensus it may be possible to examine how conceptions and practices within the mystery genre have changed over time.

The Common Mystery Film classification was designed based on the practices taking place in screen discourse relevant to the period of study. However, as viewing practices continue to shift and evolve, the method for identifying a common cultural consensus on genre may also need to change. While I believe in the efficacy of the specific methods employed within this thesis, the approach remains a theoretical framework for resolving practical questions, as opposed to an explicit set of instructions that can be employed in all cases. This means that other researchers could employ the same framework, even if the specific methods are unproduceable. This allows the approach to be applied to whatever the researcher determines as the most appropriate sites of screen discourse that reflect audience expectations about the genre. Further, it allows the study of film in other cultural contexts by examining relevant sites of screen discourse, or the study of other screen mediums by examining the spaces in which medium specific discourse takes place. Future implementations of the classification may incorporate a broader range of sources, including social media, to more fully capture cultural consensus of a genre or object of study.

My work has examined predominantly Western media, with an emphasis on English-language and US film production, with the experiment findings based on Australian participants. For these reasons the applications for this research are limited to a culturally

specific audience, as outlined in Section 1.1 and in Chapter 4. Further, my work predominantly focuses on what the mystery genre does, and not on specific comparisons with other genres to understand how they differ. There is potential to address this gap in future studies that may identify more features unique to the mystery genre. By empirically defining and examining more genres, there is greater potential for comparison and insight into what distinguishes a genre of film, including narrative and theme, editing and pacing, or affective response and forms of viewer engagement.

11.1 RESEARCH APPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

By developing theories to conceptualise viewer engagement with mystery films, this thesis has facilitated a deeper examination of the mystery genre and how it functions in other screen texts. The concept has the potential to facilitate a wide examination of the mystery genre in television. In the last decade there has been a surge in the production of mystery television. This includes a renewed interest in detective stories, such as in *Sherlock* (Gatiss and Moffat 2010–), *Top of the Lake* (Campion and Lee 2013–17), *True Detective* (Pizzolatto 2014–), and *Broadchurch* (Chibnall 2013–17), the revival of several completed mystery series, including *The X-Files* (Carter 2016–2018) and *Twin Peaks: The Return* (Frost and Lynch 2017), and teen or young adult ensembles, such as *How to Get Away with Murder* (Nowalk 2014–), *Riverdale* (Aguirre-Sacasa 2017–), and *Pretty Little Liars* (King 2010–17). The TV mystery has become so popular that several non-English series have been remade for US audiences and released on Netflix, including *The Killing* (Sud 2011–14), a remake of *Forbrydelsen* (Sveistrup 2007–12), and *The Returned* (Cuse 2015), a remake of *Les Revenants* (Gobert 2012–15). The tools developed in this thesis are well positioned to analyse the increasingly popular genre on screen.

There has also been a significant increase in the use of complex storytelling in screen texts, employing some form of mystery or puzzle. Viewers are engaging in practices similar to Textual Problem Solving when viewing popular TV series such as *Game of Thrones* (Benioff and Weiss 2011–19), *Westworld* (Nolan and Joy 2016–), *Mr. Robot* (Esmail 2015–), and *Star Trek: Discovery* (Fuller and Kurtzman 2017–). The popularity and preponderance of complex storytelling in “quality” television highlights the importance of theories that can help us understand how viewers go about comprehending challenging screen texts. My own theories of Textual Problem Solving and Viewer Suspicion can be applied to these

texts to support a greater understanding of complex storytelling and puzzle films, as well as viewer engagement with these texts. This includes how viewers engage with complex narratives, what practices direct viewer attention, and why these kinds of texts generate so much discourse and speculation by audiences. In the case of *Westworld* (Nolan and Joy 2016–), Jonathan Nolan revealed he had to rewrite a plot twist in the then-unreleased Season 2, as fans had already guessed what would happen from the first season and the new season’s trailer (Grobar 2017). By examining sites of screen discourse, viewer engagement with paratexts, and the arousal of Viewer Suspicion from the first season, we may be able to better understand how and why viewers developed these predictions.

More broadly, my contributions to film scholarship on the mystery genre provide an opportunity for greater theorisation of mystery narratives. My focus in this thesis has been on the viewing experience, the ways that mystery films are constructed to engage viewers, and the ways viewers engage mystery films. As such, the potential of Viewer Suspicion, Textual Problem Solving, and Mystery Problem Types remains untapped with respect to narrative theory. The significance of Wollen’s (1982) conception of the times of the look, and the role of the hermeneutic code for mystery narratives, has only been touched on within the thesis and deserves further attention with respects to the contributions of this thesis. Due to the considerable attention complex narrative forms have received in contemporary screen scholarship, the potential for Viewer Suspicion and Textual Problem Solving to be applied to narrative theorisation, both within and beyond the mystery genre, is significant.

The form of Textual Problem Solving described throughout this thesis is specific to mystery films but may provide insight into other screen viewing contexts. In particular, Textual Problem Solving may allow for an alternative examination of the problem solving that takes place when playing video games. Research into how players problem solve in video games has primarily examined problem-solving strategies relating to gameplay. However, there is the potential for Textual Problem Solving to provide a framework for examining how players engage with narrative in games. Storytelling games such as *The Walking Dead* (2012–2019) and *The Wolf Among Us* (2013–2014) by Telltale Games, *Gone Home* (Fullbright Company, The 2013), and *Life is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment 2015) are focused on exploring a world and gathering information, with minimal mechanical gameplay challenges. Instead, players engage in similar practices as those employed by mystery film viewers. In addition, the inclusion of complex storytelling forms in games

offer new avenues to investigate how different forms of problem solving interact when challenged by both narrative and gameplay to arrive at solutions.

One of the goals of this thesis was to develop a comprehensive approach to investigating questions about the experience-of-film and to produce theories that may be tested on real viewers. Further, by developing an approach that moved from theory to observation to experimentation, I hoped to address the flaws that are inherent in a more piecemeal approach to empirical research on film, which were outlined in Section 2.1. While the findings of the experiment are noteworthy on their own, the success of the experiment acts as validation of the approach employed throughout the thesis. Over the course of this thesis I have developed concepts to explain viewer engagement with the mystery film, analysed a set of mystery films to refine these concepts based on empirical evidence, and conducted an experiment to test the predictive power of these theories. In doing so, this thesis puts into practice an interdisciplinary approach to experience-of-film research.

Further Research

Eye-tracking research has the potential to improve investigations of viewer engagement with mystery films in future research. By eye-tracking participants during mystery film viewing, it may be possible to determine how and when viewer attention is directed, and how strongly this relates to the filmic practices outlined in Section 8.2. Further, eye-tracking research has the potential to illuminate how viewers notice specific clues by identifying when viewers attend to specific objects, characters, or actions. Not only does eye-tracking research have the potential to benefit the investigation of mystery film viewers, mystery films may also have the potential to improve eye-tracking studies, as I argue in *Audiences as Detectives: Eye Tracking and Problem Solving in Screen Mysteries* (Orth 2018). Because mystery films set a task or problem for the viewer to solve, they may illuminate when viewers' assignment of attention matches their gaze, and when viewers are afforded the opportunity to interpret, encode, and store information.

Mystery films demonstrate the potential to engage viewers in a task, without explicit instruction, and may offer insight into how to set a task that leads to participatory engagement. Content that engages viewers in tasks without explicit instructions may have pedagogical applications, valuable in the design of educational media or testing problem-solving skills. The way a task is set can influence how the task is perceived, and how—or whether—it is attempted or completed. By gaining insight into how mystery films engage

viewers in problem solving, we may better understand what motivates viewers to engage in specific tasks, and how to generate similar responses for a variety of purposes.

The findings of this thesis may have pedagogical applications. By studying how viewers engage in problem solving during mystery film viewing, it may be possible to gain insights into how individuals problem-solve in other informal situations. This kind of problem solving is part of an individual's 'soft' skills, the significance of which has become widely recognised in recent years. In 2017 the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) introduced "General Capabilities" to better provide and assess these 'soft' skills (2017). A report by Deloitte Access Economics (2017) shows that there is a growing demand in Australia for job applicants with strong soft skills, such as problem solving, and that there is a gap in the supply of sufficiently qualified applicants with these skills. In a study of tools for teaching problem-solving skills, McDonald (2017, 79) found that "practicing [sic] problem-solving scenarios ... results in a measured improvement of this skill". The findings of this thesis may provide a pathway for developing or utilising screen media to assist in problem-solving and critical-thinking education.

The understanding of viewer engagement with mystery films that I have developed throughout this thesis may be applied more broadly to the study of cognition and its role in the viewing experience. By setting a task for the viewer, mystery films establish purposeful and predictable modes of engagement, and in doing so, strengthen the application of those theories of cognition to film viewing practices. Using mystery films and the problems they set for viewers, it is possible to pinpoint viewer motivations and intentions across a film's duration and develop a greater understanding of the viewing experience as a whole. This may allow for a better understanding of how viewers engage or are motivated by film techniques and practices, and the influence of affective response on film comprehension.

Beyond the mystery genre, it is hoped that future studies are encouraged to use the methodological approach outlined within this thesis, focusing on the experience-of-film. There is currently a significant gap in the available quantitative data on films and film viewers. The development of new tools that can automate visual analysis, and their wider accessibility, makes an expansion of this research a likely prospect. However, these data must be supported with more qualitative assessments of films, and the development of resources that can supplement existing commercial databases for the explicit purpose of academic research. As new tools continue to emerge for evaluating and collecting data on

film, there is the potential to better substantiate what is currently understood about genres, and better measure how those genres change and develop over time.

Part VI: References

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Part VII: Appendix

A

Study Set Film Data

Building the Study Set

I began the process of identifying mystery films by examining films listed on IMDb, using the database's prominence to reflect cultural knowledge. An initial list of films was created using an advanced title search on the IMDb website with the following criteria: Title type = Feature Film; Release Date = 2004-01-01 to 2013-12-31; Genres = Mystery; US Box Office Gross = 1 to -; Languages = English. The search was run in January 2015 and identified 287 titles. Three films were then excluded based on their release date being outside the specified window, incorrectly included in the results by IMDb. From this corpus, all titles listed by IMDb as serial and horror genre films were removed, leaving 193 titles. Serial titles were removed to ensure films were comparable, with a self-contained and complete narrative that did not rely on knowledge of other films within the series. Horror films were excluded due to the conflict between the mystery and horror genres (detailed in Section 4.3). For all 193 titles, the mystery genre listing was checked against four other film websites: Jinni (which employs a category called 'mystery'), Rotten Tomatoes ('mystery & suspense'), Metacritic ('mystery'), and DVD Netflix ('mystery') [see appendix for full details]. All films that were shown to match the mystery genre on at least three of these four sites were included in the Study Set.¹⁷¹ Due to the limited search features of each of these websites, this process was primarily manual. The entire process was repeated to ensure accuracy.

¹⁷¹ There is an inherent risk for bias with the inclusion of each of the selected film websites, due to their primarily commercial purposes. However, it is believed that this risk is minimal, as the websites are incentivised to provide classifications that are in accord with their audiences' expectations. Further, by including databases with a range of commercial purposes, the risk for any individual bias amongst these resources is minimised.

Film Metadata and Problem Types

88 MINUTES (2007)

Director	Jon Avnet
Running Time	108 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.9
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	He has 88 minutes to solve a murder. His own.
Problem Type	Whodunit

A PERFECT GETAWAY (2009)

Director	David Twohy
Running Time	98 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.5
Genres (IMDb)	Adventure, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Everyone needs a place to escape
Problem Type	Whodunit

ABDUCTION (2011)

Director	John Singleton
Running Time	106 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.1
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	What if your entire life was a lie?
Problem Type	Whydunit

ALL GOOD THINGS (2010)

Director	Andrew Jarecki
Running Time	101 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.3
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	The perfect love story. Until it became the perfect crime.
Problem Type	Whodunit

ANSWERS TO NOTHING (2011)

Director	Matthew Leutwyler
Running Time	124 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.2
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Romance
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Sometimes it's the small steps we take in life that reveal themselves later to be the most courageous ones.
Problem Type	Whodunit

AWAKE (2007)

Director	Joby Harold
Running Time	84 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.5
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Every year, one in 700 people wake up during surgery.
Problem Type	Binary Problem, Howdunit

BIRTH (2004)

Director	Jonathan Glazer
Running Time	100 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.1
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Be careful what you wish for.
Problem Type	Binary Problem

BLINDNESS (2008)

Director	Fernando Meirelles
Running Time	121 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.6
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	This fall, our vision of the world will change forever.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

BRICK (2005)

Director	Rian Johnson
Running Time	110 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.4
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	A detective story.
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whydunit

BUBBLE (2005)

Director	Steven Soderbergh
Running Time	73 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.6
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Another Steven Soderbergh Experience
Problem Type	Binary Problem

CHANGELING 2008

Director	Clint Eastwood
Running Time	141 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.8
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, History, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	To find her son, she did what no one else dared.
Problem Type	Binary Problem

COLD WEATHER (2010)

Director	Aaron Katz
Running Time	96 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.2
Genres (IMDb)	Comedy, Drama, Mystery
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	
Problem Type	Whydunit

DISTURBIA (2007)

Director	D.J. Caruso
Running Time	105 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.9
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	Every killer lives next door to someone.
Problem Type	Binary Problem

DREAM HOUSE (2011)

Director	Jim Sheridan
Running Time	84 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.0
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Once upon a time, there were two little girls who lived in a house.
Problem Type	Whatdunit, Binary Problem

EASTERN PROMISES (2007)

Director	David Cronenberg
Running Time	100 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.7
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Every sin leaves a mark.
Problem Type	Whydunit

ECHELON CONSPIRACY (2009)

Director	Greg Marcks
Running Time	105 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.8
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Crime, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Even the truth can be killed.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

FASCINATION (2004)

Director	Klaus Menzel
Running Time	95 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	3.4
Genres (IMDb)	Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	She's either the love of his life... Or the end of it.
Problem Type	Binary Problem

FLIGHTPLAN (2005)

Director	Robert Schwentke
Running Time	98 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.3
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	This Fall, one passenger is taking control... to find the truth
Problem Type	Binary Problem

FREEDOMLAND (2006)

Director	Joe Roth
Running Time	113 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.1
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	His Streets. His Rules.
Problem Type	Howdunit, Whydunit

GONE BABY GONE (2007)

Director	Ben Affleck
Running Time	114 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.7
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Everyone wants the truth... until they find it.
Problem Type	Whodunit

GRAND PIANO (2013)

Director	Eugenio Mira
Running Time	90 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.9
Genres (IMDb)	Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	Play or Die
Problem Type	Whydunit

HATE CRIME (2005)

Director	Tommy Stovall
Running Time	103 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.2
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	It's about Love. It's about Intolerance. It's about Justice.
Problem Type	Whodunit

HOLLYWOODLAND (2006)

Director	Allen Coulter
Running Time	126 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.5
Genres (IMDb)	Biography, Crime, Drama, History, Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Living in Hollywood can make you famous. Dying in Hollywood can make you a legend.
Problem Type	Whydunit

HUGO (2011)

Director	Martin Scorsese
Running Time	126 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.5
Genres (IMDb)	Adventure, Drama, Family, Mystery
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	One of the most legendary directors of our time takes you on an extraordinary adventure.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

I KNOW WHO KILLED ME (2007)

Director	Chris Sivertson
Running Time	105 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	3.6
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	If you think you know the secret...Think twice.
Problem Type	Binary, Whodunit

ICE BLUES (2008)

Director	Ron Oliver
Running Time	98 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.4
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Your favourite gay private investigator is back.
Problem Type	Whodunit

IN MY SLEEP (2010)

Director	Allen Wolf
Running Time	104 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.6
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Sleepwalking can be deadly.
Problem Type	Binary Problem, Whodunit

INCEPTION (2010)

Director	Christopher Nolan
Running Time	148 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	8.8
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Your mind is the scene of the crime
Problem Type	Whatdunit, Binary Problem

INSIGHT (2011)

Director	Richard Gabai
Running Time	92 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.0
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	
Problem Type	Whodunit, Binary Problem

KNOWING (2009)

Director	Alex Proyas
Running Time	121 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.2
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Drama, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Knowing is Everything...
Problem Type	Whatdunit

LADY IN THE WATER (2006)

Director	M. Night Shyamalan
Running Time	110 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.6
Genres (IMDb)	Fantasy, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	Time is running out for a happy ending.
Problem Type	Whodunit

MEETING EVIL (2012)

Director	Chris Fisher
Running Time	89 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.3
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Evil comes knocking
Problem Type	Whydunit

MICHAEL CLAYTON (2007)

Director	Tony Gilroy
Running Time	119 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.3
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	The truth can be adjusted
Problem Type	Binary Problem

MYSTERY TEAM (2009)

Director	Dan Eckman
Running Time	97 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.8
Genres (IMDb)	Comedy, Crime, Mystery
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	One big case. Zero clue.
Problem Type	Whodunit

NANCY DREW (2007)

Director	Andrew Fleming
Running Time	99 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.9
Genres (IMDb)	Comedy, Crime, Family, Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	Small town girl. Big time adventure.
Problem Type	Whydunit, Whodunit

NOVEMBER (2004)

Director	Greg Harrison
Running Time	76 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.5
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	The truth lies outside the frame.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

PASSENGERS (2008)

Director	Rodrigo García
Running Time	93 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.9
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	The truth can't hide forever
Problem Type	Whatdunit

PASSION (2012)

Director	Brian De Palma
Running Time	102 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.3
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	No backstabbing. Just business.
Problem Type	Binary Problem

PERFECT STRANGER (2007)

Director	James Foley
Running Time	109 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.7
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	How far would you go to keep a secret?
Problem Type	Binary Problem, Whodunit

PREMONITION (2007)

Director	Mennan Yapo
Running Time	96 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.9
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Fantasy, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	Reality is only a nightmare away
Problem Type	Whatdunit

RIGHTEOUS KILL (2008)

Director	Jon Avnet
Running Time	101 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.0
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Most people respect the badge. Everybody respects the gun.
Problem Type	Binary Problem

SCOOP (2006)

Director	Woody Allen
Running Time	96 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.7
Genres (IMDb)	Comedy, Mystery
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	The perfect man. The perfect story. The perfect murder.
Problem Type	Binary Problem

SECRET WINDOW (2004)

Director	David Koepp
Running Time	96 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.6
Genres (IMDb)	Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	The most important part of a story is the ending.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

SHERLOCK HOLMES (2009)

Director	Guy Ritchie
Running Time	128 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.6
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Adventure, Crime, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Nothing escapes him
Problem Type	Howdunit

SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM (2006)

Director	Ron Oliver
Running Time	91 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.7
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Some secrets kill.
Problem Type	Whodunit

SHOOTER (2007)

Director	Antoine Fuqua
Running Time	124 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.2
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Yesterday was about honor. Today is about justice.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

SHUTTER ISLAND (2010)

Director	Martin Scorsese
Running Time	138 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	8.1
Genres (IMDb)	Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Someone is missing.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

SILVER CITY (2004)

Director	John Sayles
Running Time	128 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.1
Genres (IMDb)	Comedy, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Vote early. Vote often.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

SLEUTH (2007)

Director	Kenneth Branagh
Running Time	88 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.5
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	Obey the rules.
Problem Type	Whatdunit, Whydunit

STATE OF PLAY (2009)

Director	Kevin Macdonald
Running Time	127 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.1
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Find the truth
Problem Type	Whodunit

STAY (2005)

Director	Marc Forster
Running Time	99 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.9
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	Between the worlds of the living and the dead there is a place you're not supposed to stay.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

STOKER 2013

Director	Chan-wook Park
Running Time	99 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.8
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Do not disturb the family.
Problem Type	Whydunit

STOLEN 2009

Director	Anders Anderson
Running Time	91 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.2
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Secrets from the past don't stay buried.
Problem Type	Whodunit

THE BLACK DAHLIA 2006

Director	Brian De Palma
Running Time	121 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.6
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Inspired by the most notorious unsolved murder in California history.
Problem Type	Whodunit

THE BOURNE LEGACY 2012

Director	Tony Gilroy
Running Time	135 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.7
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Adventure, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	There was never just one
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE BOX 2009

Director	Richard Kelly
Running Time	115 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.6
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	You are the experiment
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE DA VINCI CODE 2006

Director	Ron Howard
Running Time	149 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.6
Genres (IMDb)	Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Seek the truth.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE DEAD GIRL 2006

Director	Karen Moncrieff
Running Time	85 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.7
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	One life ends. Seven others begin.
Problem Type	Whodunit

THE FORGOTTEN 2004

Director	Joseph Ruben
Running Time	91 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.8
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	You'll never forget the ones you love
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE FOURTH KIND 2009

Director	Olatunde Osunsanmi
Running Time	98 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.9
Genres (IMDb)	Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	There are four kinds of alien encounters. The fourth kind is abduction.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE GHOST WRITER 2010

Director	Roman Polanski
Running Time	128 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.2
Genres (IMDb)	Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Read between the lies.
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whatdunit

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO 2011

Director	David Fincher
Running Time	158 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.8
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Evil shall with evil be expelled
Problem Type	Whodunit

THE GOOD GERMAN 2006

Director	Steven Soderbergh
Running Time	105 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.1
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	If war is hell then what comes after?
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whatdunit

THE ILLUSIONIST 2006

Director	Neil Burger
Running Time	110 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.6
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Netflix
Tagline	Nothing is what it seems
Problem Type	Whodunit, Howdunit

THE IMAGINARIUM OF DOCTOR PARNASSUS 2009

Director	Terry Gilliam
Running Time	123 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.8
Genres (IMDb)	Adventure, Fantasy, Mystery
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE INTERNATIONAL 2009

Director	Tom Tykwer
Running Time	118 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.5
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	They control your money. They control your government. They control your life. And everybody pays.
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whydunit

THE INVISIBLE 2007

Director	David S. Goyer
Running Time	102 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.3
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Fantasy, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Life, death and something in between.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE LIMITS OF CONTROL 2009

Director	Jim Jarmusch
Running Time	116 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.3
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	For every way in, there is another way out.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE MISSING PERSON 2009

Director	Noah Buschel
Running Time	95 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.2
Genres (IMDb)	Comedy, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	John Rosow is a private investigator. And an alcoholic. He just got the case of his life.
Problem Type	Whydunit

THE NIGHT LISTENER 2006

Director	Patrick Stettner
Running Time	91 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.9
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Listen for the truth.
Problem Type	Binary Problem, Whydunit

THE NINES 2007

Director	John August
Running Time	100 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.4
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Fantasy, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Y9u never kn9w when y9ur number is up
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE NUMBER 23 2007

Director	Joel Schumacher
Running Time	98 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.4
Genres (IMDb)	Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	The truth will find you.
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE PRESTIGE 2006

Director	Christopher Nolan
Running Time	130 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	8.5
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	A friendship that became a rivalry.
Problem Type	Howdunit

THE RAVEN 2012

Director	James McTeigue
Running Time	110 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.4
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	The only one who can stop a serial killer is the man who inspired him.
Problem Type	Whodunit

THE VILLAGE 2004

Director	M. Night Shyamalan
Running Time	108 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.5
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Their days of peace are over
Problem Type	Whatdunit

THE WOMAN IN THE FIFTH 2011

Director	Pawel Pawlikowski
Running Time	84 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.3
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	What you can not resist, you may not survive
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whatdunit

TRANCE 2013

Director	Danny Boyle
Running Time	101 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.9
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	
Problem Type	Howdunit, Whydunit

TRANSIBERIAN 2008

Director	Brad Anderson
Running Time	111 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.7
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Arrive on time.
Problem Type	Binary Problem

TWISTED 2004

Director	Philip Kaufman
Running Time	97 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.2
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Every murder has a mark.
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whydunit

UNKNOWN 2006

Director	Simon Brand
Running Time	85 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.5
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Trust no one. Fear everyone.
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whydunit

UNKNOWN 2011

Director	Jaume Collet-Serra
Running Time	113 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.9
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Take back your life.
Problem Type	Whodunit

WHERE THE TRUTH LIES 2005

Director	Atom Egoyan
Running Time	107 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.5
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whydunit

WHITEOUT (2009)

Director	Dominic Sena
Running Time	101 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.5
Genres (IMDb)	Action, Crime, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	See your last breath.
Problem Type	Whodunit, Whydunit

WICKER PARK 2004

Director	Paul McGuigan
Running Time	114 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.0
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery, Romance, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Passion never dies.
Problem Type	Whydunit

WISH YOU WERE HERE 2012

Director	Kieran Darcy-Smith
Running Time	89 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	5.9
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Mystery
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	Four Went. Three came back. Only one of them knows what happened.
Problem Type	Howdunit

YOUTH WITHOUT YOUTH 2007

Director	Francis Ford Coppola
Running Time	124 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	6.3
Genres (IMDb)	Drama, Fantasy, History, Mystery, Romance
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes
Tagline	
Problem Type	Whatdunit

ZODIAC 2007

Director	David Fincher
Running Time	157 minutes
User Rating (IMDb)	7.7
Genres (IMDb)	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller
Common genre	Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, Netflix
Tagline	There's more than one way to lose your life to a killer.
Problem Type	Whodunit

Common genre classification results

The table below lists the films identified by IMDb as part of the mystery genre (and meeting all other selection criteria) and which other websites (from Metacritic, Jinni, Rotten Tomatoes, and Netflix DVD) the film is also listed as part of the mystery genre.

TITLE	Metacritic (Mystery)	Jinni (Mystery)	Rotten Tomatoes (Mystery & Suspense)	Netflix (Mystery)
88 Minutes (2007)	✓		✓	✓
9 (2009)				
A Day Without a Mexican (2004)	✓		✓	
A Perfect Getaway (2009)	✓		✓	✓
A Scanner Darkly (2006)	✓			
Abduction (2011)		✓	✓	✓
Afterschool (2008)				
Alex Cross (2012)	✓		✓	
All Good Things (2010)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Answers to Nothing (2011)	✓		✓	✓
Arnolds Park (2007)				
Atlas Shrugged: Part I (2011)	✓			✓
Atonement (2007)	✓			
Awake (2007)		✓	✓	✓
Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (2009)	✓		✓	
Birth (2004)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Swan (2010)			✓	
Blindness (2008)	✓		✓	✓
Brick (2005)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Broken Flowers (2005)	✓		✓	
Bubble (2005)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Buried (2010)	✓		✓	✓
Changeling (2008)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chloe (2009)			✓	
Closed Circuit (2013)	✓		✓	
Cold Weather (2010)		✓	✓	✓
Cracks (2009)			✓	
Death of a President (2006)	✓		✓	
Deception (2008)	✓		✓	
Disturbia (2007)	✓	✓	✓	
Doubt (2008)	✓			

TITLE	Metacritic (Mystery)	Jinni (Mystery)	Rotten Tomatoes (Mystery & Suspense)	Netflix (Mystery)
Dream House (2011)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dreaming Lhasa (2005)	✓			
Eagle Eye (2008)	✓		✓	
Eastern Promises (2007)	✓		✓	✓
Echelon Conspiracy (2009)	✓		✓	✓
Edge of Darkness (2010)			✓	✓
Enduring Love (2004)			✓	✓
Enemy (2013)	✓	✓	✓	
Escape Plan (2013)	✓		✓	
Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close (2011)				
Fascination (2004)		✓	✓	✓
Flightplan (2005)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Flypaper (2011)				
Four Brothers (2005)	✓			
Fracture (2007)	✓		✓	
Freedomland (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fur: An Imaginary Portrait of Diane Arbus (2006)	✓			
Get Low (2009)	✓		✓	
Ghosted (2009)			✓	✓
Gone (2012)			✓	✓
Gone Baby Gone (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grand Piano (2013)	✓	✓	✓	
Hallam Foe (2007)				✓
Hate Crime (2005)	✓	✓	✓	
Hollywoodland (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hostage (2005)			✓	
How to Rob a Bank (2007)	✓		✓	
Hugo (2011)	✓	✓	✓	
I Know Who Killed Me (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓
I, Robot (2004)	✓		✓	
Ice Blues: A Donald Strachey Mystery (2008)		✓	✓	✓
In My Sleep (2010)		✓	✓	✓
In the Valley of Elah (2007)	✓			✓
Incendiary (2010)			✓	
Inception (2010)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Inescapable (2012)	✓	✓		
InSight (2011)		✓	✓	✓

TITLE	Metacritic (Mystery)	Jinni (Mystery)	Rotten Tomatoes (Mystery & Suspense)	Netflix (Mystery)
Jindabyne (2006)	✓			
Kaboom (2010)				
Keane (2004)	✓		✓	
Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (2005)	✓			✓
Knowing (2009)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ladies in Lavender (2004)	✓			
Lady in the Water (2006)	✓	✓	✓	
Last Passenger (2013)	✓		✓	
Limitless (2011)			✓	
London River (2009)	✓			
Look Both Ways (2005)	✓			
Max Payne (2008)	✓		✓	
Meeting Evil (2012)	✓		✓	✓
Michael Clayton (2007)	✓		✓	✓
Mindhunters (2004)	✓		✓	
Monster House (2006)	✓			
Mr. Brooks (2007)	✓		✓	
Murder Dot Com (2008)				✓
Mystery Team (2009)		✓	✓	✓
Nancy Drew (2007)	✓	✓	✓	
National Treasure (2004)				
November (2004)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Now You See Me (2013)	✓		✓	
Oblivion (2013)	✓			
On the Other Hand, Death (2008)		✓	✓	
Orphan (2009)			✓	✓
Paranoid Park (2007)	✓			
Parkland (2013)	✓			
Passengers (2008)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Passion (2012)	✓		✓	✓
Pawn (2013)			✓	
Perfect Stranger (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pooh's Heffalump Movie (2005)	✓			
Premonition (2007)	✓	✓	✓	
Prometheus (2012)				
Proof (2005)				
Quid Pro Quo (2008)			✓	
Red Road (2006)	✓		✓	

TITLE	Metacritic (Mystery)	Jinni (Mystery)	Rotten Tomatoes (Mystery & Suspense)	Netflix (Mystery)
Revolver (2005)	✓		✓	
Righteous Kill (2008)	✓		✓	✓
Safe House (2012)	✓		✓	
Salt (2010)	✓		✓	
Scoop (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Secret Window (2004)	✓	✓	✓	
Sherlock Holmes (2009)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shock to the System (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shooter (2007)	✓		✓	✓
Shutter Island (2010)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shuttle (2008)	✓		✓	
Silver City (2004)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow (2004)	✓		✓	
Sleuth (2007)	✓	✓	✓	
Slipstream (2007)	✓			
Slow Burn (2005)	✓		✓	
Snowtown (2011)			✓	
Sound of My Voice (2011)			✓	
Source Code (2011)		✓	✓	
Spartan (2004)	✓		✓	
State of Play (2009)	✓		✓	✓
Stay (2005)	✓	✓	✓	
Stoker (2013)	✓		✓	✓
Stolen (2009)	✓		✓	✓
Super 8 (2011)		✓		
Surveillance (2008)	✓		✓	
The Adventures of Tintin (2011)	✓			
The Best Offer (2013)	✓			✓
The Black Dahlia (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Bourne Legacy (2012)	✓		✓	✓
The Box (2009)		✓	✓	✓
The Constant Gardener (2005)			✓	✓
The Da Vinci Code (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Dead Girl (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Forgotten (2004)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Fourth Kind (2009)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Ghost Writer (2010)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011)		✓	✓	✓

TITLE	Metacritic (Mystery)	Jinni (Mystery)	Rotten Tomatoes (Mystery & Suspense)	Netflix (Mystery)
The Good German (2006)	✓	✓	✓	
The Illusionist (2006)	✓	✓		✓
The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus (2009)	✓	✓	✓	
The International (2009)	✓		✓	✓
The Invisible (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Jacket (2005)	✓		✓	
The Life Before Her Eyes (2007)			✓	
The Limits of Control (2009)	✓		✓	✓
The Losers (2010)	✓		✓	
The Manchurian Candidate (2004)	✓		✓	
The Missing Person (2009)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones (2013)	✓			
The Night Listener (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Nines (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Number 23 (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Oxford Murders (2008)			✓	✓
The Pink Panther (2006)	✓			
The Power of Few (2013)	✓	✓		
The Prestige (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Raven (2012)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Return (2006)		✓	✓	
The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (2005)	✓			
The Trial (2010)			✓	✓
The Village (2004)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Walker (2007)	✓			✓
The Woman in the Fifth (2011)		✓	✓	✓
The Words (2012)			✓	
The Wrong Man (2006)				
The X Files: I Want to Believe [also X Files 2] (2008)	✓	✓	✓	
Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (2011)			✓	✓
Total Recall (2012)				
Trance (2013)	✓		✓	✓
Transsiberian (2008)	✓		✓	✓

TITLE	Metacritic (Mystery)	Jinni (Mystery)	Rotten Tomatoes (Mystery & Suspense)	Netflix (Mystery)
Twisted (2004)	✓		✓	✓
Unknown (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Unknown (2011)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Upstream Color (2013)		✓	✓	
Van Helsing (2004)	✓			
Walk on Water (2004)	✓		✓	
Watchmen (2009)	✓			
Where the Truth Lies (2005)	✓	✓	✓	
Whiteout (2009)	✓		✓	✓
Wicker Park (2004)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wish You Were Here (2012)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Without a Paddle (2004)	✓			
Wrecked (2010)			✓	✓
Wrong (2012)				
Youth Without Youth (2007)	✓	✓	✓	
Zodiac (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓

B

Editing Data Descriptive Statistics

Film	Mean	StDev	Q1	Median	Q3	Min	Max	N
88 Minutes	3.6850	4.1808	1.625	2.542	4.25	0.583	76.5	1716
A Perfect Getaway	3.5205	4.7839	1.36	2.26	4	0.52	97.64	1762
Abduction	3.6107	4.5867	1.24	2.12	3.92	0.56	58.32	1660
All Good Things	5.3544	4.9494	2.42	3.88	6.54	0.56	52.52	1077
Answers to Nothing	6.5319	8.4303	2.4	4.24	7.53	0.56	135.68	1090
Awake	4.6163	4.3208	2.44	3.56	5.51	0.56	53.84	1020
Birth	6.8596	10.6319	2.4	3.74	7.15	0.56	142.56	772
Blindness	5.4186	6.1565	2	3.48	6.32	0.56	69.64	1246
Brick	4.8029	6.4303	1.627	2.794	5.13	0.542	66.9	1314
Bubble	10.8085	10.6292	4.48	7.68	13.74	0.72	91.72	410
Changeling	4.7583	4.8987	2.08	3.28	5.84	0.56	70.56	1713
Cold Weather	9.6858	10.1303	3.35	6.2	12.41	0.2	63.04	586
Disturbia	3.3268	3.5363	1.418	2.377	3.921	0.542	41.208	1795
Dream House	4.5156	5.0513	1.88	3	5.44	0.08	59.48	1125
Eastern Promises	4.7724	6.4286	2.169	3.253	5.318	0.542	113.28	1177
Echelon Conspiracy	2.7708	2.8719	1.16	1.92	3.32	0.52	52.68	2186
Fascination	5.4887	6.4891	2.04	3.64	6.1	0.56	68	1097
Flightplan	4.8041	4.8254	1.88	3.4	5.96	0.52	46.88	1157
Freedomland	3.2459	5.8038	1.32	2.16	3.52	0.52	212.2	2001
Gone Baby Gone	4.1767	4.7207	1.835	2.794	4.463	0.542	60.602	1557
Grand Piano	5.1307	9.6570	1.7205	2.836	5.047	0.542	164.623	900
Hate Crime	6.2813	9.6021	2.24	3.6	6.48	0.56	142.28	943
Hollywoodland	4.6678	5.5901	1.96	3	5.28	0.52	75.2	1527
Hugo	3.7094	3.6430	1.71	2.711	4.379	0.542	44.92	1912
I Know Who Killed Me	4.6547	5.6654	1.64	2.96	5.28	0.56	72.24	1305
Ice Blues	4.1365	7.1128	1.52	2.52	4.2	0.2	155.64	1189
In My Sleep	3.6339	4.2058	1.52	2.4	4.04	0.52	58.72	1599
Inception	3.1384	2.9305	1.376	2.252	3.795	0.542	41.041	2686
InSight	4.0110	4.3340	1.76	2.84	4.64	0.32	49.76	1287
Knowing	3.8947	4.8657	1.64	2.64	4.52	0.52	78.08	1775
Lady in the Water	9.5945	13.0463	2.08	5.28	10.92	0.56	110.56	644
Meeting Evil	3.9680	4.2927	1.48	2.72	4.92	0.52	56.44	1283

Film	Mean	StDev	Q1	Median	Q3	Min	Max	N
Michael Clayton	6.7353	6.9684	2.88	4.88	8.22	0.56	92	1013
Mystery Team	10.3620	14.3171	2.44	4.68	11.44	0.72	102.36	559
Nancy Drew	3.4259	3.9425	1.4	2.32	3.71	0.56	40.24	1612
November	5.4181	6.2589	2.04	3.76	6.48	0.52	61.4	758
Passengers	5.2887	5.5451	2.32	3.6	6.16	0.56	65.68	951
Passion	9.2918	14.3600	2.6	4.52	9.49	0.56	133.76	600
Perfect Stranger	3.8666	4.0345	1.68	2.68	4.64	0.56	59.92	1507
Premonition	4.2717	5.7903	1.68	2.76	4.64	0.48	77.28	1253
Righteous Kill	2.8857	2.9812	1.28	2.08	3.36	0.56	36.44	1989
Scoop	13.3429	17.1647	3.4	7.08	15.64	0.56	145.4	415
Secret Window	5.3964	7.0980	1.88	3.24	6.16	0.56	117.6	1019
Sherlock Holmes	2.5306	3.3669	1.001	1.585	2.794	0.542	63.48	2907
Shock to the System	4.4730	5.0128	1.96	3.2	5.28	0.56	84.36	1194
Shooter	3.0127	3.3030	1.36	2.16	3.52	0.56	92.2	2407
Shutter Island	4.1586	3.9616	1.84	3	5.16	0.52	45.6	1878
Silver City	6.0852	10.1741	1.84	3.2	6.29	0.52	125.92	1218
Sleuth	4.7561	9.6599	1.36	2.24	4.32	0.56	110.04	1064
State of Play	4.1635	3.7666	1.92	3.08	5.16	0.56	39.44	1740
Stay	3.7570	3.9326	1.56	2.68	4.44	0.56	54.64	1450
Stoker	4.9202	6.9780	1.76	3	5.32	0.56	88.08	1152
Stolen	4.7846	5.3457	1.96	3.16	5.36	0.56	61.04	1093
The Black Dahlia	6.9425	11.4940	1.85	3.48	7.06	0.56	126.2	1012
The Bourne Legacy	2.6939	2.7459	1.12	1.96	3.36	0.56	40.32	2791
The Box	6.3564	7.5427	2.92	4.32	6.96	0.52	102.48	1019
The Da Vinci Code	3.4151	3.1684	1.64	2.52	4.16	0.52	65.6	2373
The Dead Girl	5.6971	7.1678	2.16	3.56	6.32	0.52	74.2	899
The Forgotten	4.0113	4.0646	1.72	2.76	4.84	0.52	55.52	1291
The Fourth Kind	5.5479	6.7912	1.84	3.48	6.74	0.56	77.96	997
The Ghost Writer	6.1768	7.0472	2.52	3.92	6.73	0.56	88.12	1198
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	3.0894	2.9034	1.46	2.294	3.712	0.542	47.506	2966
The Good German	13.0437	16.6354	3.52	7.4	15.32	0.52	148.92	471
The Illusionist	6.5517	7.0873	2.56	4.28	7.8	0.56	72.28	955
The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus	4.4030	4.5942	2.08	3.16	5.12	0.56	82.04	1503
The International	3.2906	3.2146	1.52	2.4	3.92	0.56	67.28	2024
The Invisible	2.9570	4.9323	1.36	2	3.2	0.52	177.52	2125
The Limits of Control	6.6834	6.3318	2.96	4.72	8.04	0.52	57.68	985
The Missing Person	10.3624	13.1100	3.08	5.32	11.88	0.56	96.88	523
The Night Listener	7.6148	9.0530	2.8	5	9.44	0.56	128.56	599

Film	Mean	StDev	Q1	Median	Q3	Min	Max	N
The Nines	5.3448	6.0216	2.08	3.52	6.08	0.56	72.96	1080
The Number 23	4.4158	5.3243	1.56	2.72	5.2	0.56	70.16	1252
The Prestige	3.4391	3.5934	1.418	2.377	4.254	0.542	71.238	2172
The Raven	4.3540	5.4238	1.4	2.6	5.08	0.52	64.48	1435
The Village	15.3912	20.3135	4.96	8.44	16.72	0.6	182	386
The Woman in the Fifth	13.8660	17.7035	3.83	7.78	17.44	0.56	176.48	338
Trance	3.0373	2.8093	1.32	2.24	3.72	0.52	28.84	1892
Transsiberian	3.3454	3.2560	1.56	2.44	4.04	0.56	71.32	1896
Twisted	4.3807	5.3907	1.52	2.68	5.04	0.52	54.6	1219
Unknown	2.9233	4.3271	1.2	1.96	3.27	0.56	100.48	1668
Unknown	2.5854	2.6992	1.08	1.8	3.06	0.52	37.16	2417
Where the Truth Lies	7.4250	8.3162	2.92	4.72	8.38	0.56	76.48	824
Whiteout	3.4124	4.5879	1.12	2.12	3.92	0.56	91	1688
Wicker Park	4.3095	4.7591	1.84	2.8	4.96	0.56	51.56	1471
Wish You Were Here	4.7445	5.6480	1.72	3.12	5.5	0.56	70.44	1129
Youth Without Youth	6.8128	6.8370	2.92	4.64	8.32	0.56	84.64	1088
Zodiac	5.4633	5.8482	2.2	3.6	6.28	0.56	73.96	1681
Total	4.4870	6.2715	1.64	2.76	4.96	0.08	212.2	118657

Mean	StDev	Q1	Median	Q3	Min	Max	Range	Count
4.487	6.271	1.640	2.760	4.960	0.080	212.200	212.120	118657

C

Experiment Results and Documents

Experiment Questions and Details

1. Do you think the hitchhiking couple is involved with the murders?
2. On a scale from 1-10, how suspicious are you of the hitchhiking couple in this scene?
3. On a scale from 1-10, how suspicious are you that Anne Patterson is hiding something serious about the people who lived in the house?
4. On a scale from 1-10, how suspicious are you that there something strange about the father and family?
5. What is your age?
6. What gender do you identify as?
7. Is English your first language?
8. In an average week, how many hours would you spend watching moving image media (TV, movies, etc.)
9. Had you seen any of the film scenes before your session today?
10. Please write a one sentence description of the mystery from Scene 1. The mystery is the question raised or investigated in the scene.
11. Please write a one sentence description of the mystery from Scene 2. The mystery is the question raised or investigated in the scene.
12. Some of the scenes you viewed may have been edited differently than their theatrical release. This could be all scenes, no scenes, or some combination of scenes. Please tick the box that you believe is most accurate.
13. On a scale from 1-10, how familiar are you with the mystery genre in films? (1 = have not seen any mystery films, 10 = actively try to watch as many mystery films as possible).
14. On a scale from 1-10, how familiar are you with the mystery genre across all mediums? (1 = not familiar with any mystery texts, 10 = actively seek to consume as many mystery texts as possible).

For Test IDs

1. Both edited
2. Both original
3. Sequence 1 edited, Sequence 2 original
4. Sequence 1 original, Sequence 2 edited

For Q12

0. No Sequences changed
1. Sequence 1 changed
2. Sequence 2 changed
3. Both sequence 1 and Sequence 2 changed

Experiment Full Results

ID	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q12	Q13	Q14	Test ID
1	Y	6	10	8	25-34	F	N	11-15	N	3	3	4	1
2	N	4	10	3	18-24	F	Y	16-20	Y	0	8	9	1
3	Y	8	10	1	18-24	F	Y	6-10	N	1	6	6	1
4	N	1	8	8	18-24	F	N	6-10	Y	1	5	8	1
5	Y	5	8	9	18-24	F	Y	11-15	N	0	3	4	1
6	N	3	4	7	18-24	F	Y	16-20	N	3	4	5	1
7	Y	8	10	2	25-34	M	Y	21-25	N	3	4	4	1
8	N	5	9	5	18-24	M	Y	26-30	N	3	4	5	1
9	Y	9	10	10	18-24	M	Y	21-25	N	0	6	5	1
10	N	7	10	1	45-54	F	Y	>31	N	3	9	10	1
11	Y	5	8	7	18-24	F	Y	21-25	N	0	4	4	1
12	Y	8	6	7	35-44	M	N	16-20	N	2	8	8	1
13	Y	8	6	6	18-24		Y	16-20	N	3	6	6	1
14	N	3	10	5	35-44	M	N	6-10	N	2	8	6	1
15	Y	7	9	10	35-44	M	Y	11-15	N	1	4	5	1
16	Y	9	7	6	55-64	M	Y	21-25	N	1	7	8	1
17	Y	7	8	8	25-34	M	Y	16-20	N	0	5	3	1
18	N	7	9	2	55-64	M	Y	16-20	Y	0	7	6	1
19	Y	7	9	10	18-24	F	Y	21-25	N	2	4	4	1
20	Y	8	10	3	25-34	M	Y	21-25	N	3	5	5	1
21	Y	7	6	8	25-34	F	Y	21-25	N	2	4	4	1
22	N	7	9	5	25-34	F	Y	21-25	N	1	7	4	2
23	N	3	8	2	25-34	F	Y	0-5	N	1	2	3	2
24	Y	7	10	3	18-24	F	Y	16-20	N	3	9	8	2
25	Y	8	10	8	25-34	F	Y	21-25	N	3	9	6	2
26	N	6	8	9	18-24	F	Y	11-15	N	3	7	8	2
27	N	4	4	4	18-24	F	N	16-20	N	2	5	7	2
28	N	3	5	6	18-24	M	N	16-20	N	2	4	5	2
29	Y	8	9	9	25-34	M	Y	26-30	N	0	5	4	2
30	Y	5	4	6	18-24	M	Y	16-20	N	0	5	6	2
31	Y	6	7	7	25-34	F	Y	11-15	N	1	6	6	2
32	N	3	2	5	45-54	F	Y	21-25	N	1	5	5	2
33	N	3	6	6	18-24	F	Y	16-20	N	3	10	10	2
34	Y	6	4	4	18-24	M	Y	21-25	N	0	9	7	2
35	N	2	5	6	18-24	M	Y	>31	N	3	7	5	2
36	N	4	4	4	18-24	M	Y	16-20	N	3	7	7	2
37	Y	5	8	7	25-34	M	Y	26-30	N	2	6	5	2
38	Y	7	9	7	18-24	M	Y	26-30	N	3	7	6	2
39	Y	7	8	7	35-44	F	Y	11-15	N	2	6	7	2
40	Y	8	7	8	25-34	F	Y	6-10	Y	3	7	5	3
41	N	6	10	2	18-24	F	Y	11-15	N	2	8	7	3
42	N	5	7	8	25-34	F	N	21-25	Y	2	9	9	3

ID	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q12	Q13	Q14	Test ID
43	Y	9	9	6	18-24	M	Y	21-25	N	3	8	6	3
44	Y	7	10	8	18-24	F	Y	11-15	N	2	2	2	3
45	N	7	8	1	55-64	M	Y	11-15	N	3	2	2	3
46	Y	6	9	8	18-24	F	Y	11-15	N	1	5	4	3
47	Y	8	8	10	18-24	M	Y	16-20	N	1	5	4	3
48	N	3	4	2	25-34	F	Y	6-10	N	0	1	1	3
49	N	3	5	7	45-54	F	Y	16-20	N	2	4	6	3
50	Y	8	6	6	25-34	F	Y	26-30	N	2	4	5	3
51	Y	7	8	9	18-24	F	Y	16-20	N	0	6	6	3
52	N	2	7	8	18-24	F	Y	21-25	N	1	4	3	3
53	Y	7	10	8	25-34	F	Y	6-10	Y	0	8	9	3
54	Y	5	8	9	35-44	M	Y	11-15	N	0	5	7	3
55	N	2	6	7	18-24	F	Y	>31	N	0	7	9	3
56	N	4	8	8	18-24	M	Y	11-15	N	0	4	3	3
57	N	5	7	2	55-64	F	N	6-10	N	3	6	6	3
58	Y	3	8	3	55-64	F	N	16-20	N	1	9	8	3
59	Y	6	9	9	25-34	M	Y	26-30	N	2	8	7	3
60	Y	3	3	4	45-54	F	N	0-5	N	0	4	4	4
61	N	3	10	9	18-24	F	Y	21-25	N	2	8	8	4
62	Y	7	8	7	25-34	F	Y	6-10	N	2	4	4	4
63	N	7	9	3	18-24	F	Y	21-25	N	0	7	7	4
64	Y	8	4	4	35-44	F	Y	0-5	N	2	5	4	4
65	Y	8	9	3	25-34	M	Y	11-15	N	1	6	4	4
66	Y	8	7	6	25-34	M	Y	21-25	N	3	5	5	4
67	Y	7	4	3	45-54	M	Y	11-15	N	0	6	7	4
68	Y	8	6	7	25-34	F	Y	11-15	N	1	3	3	4
69	N	4	3	5	18-24	F	Y	16-20	N	2	6	5	4
70	Y	8	2	2	18-24	F	Y	16-20	N	3	7	3	4
71	Y	7	5	6	18-24	F	Y	16-20	N	0	5	5	4
72	Y	7	6	7	18-24	F	Y	16-20	N	0	7	7	4
73	Y	7	10	5	18-24	F	Y	>31	N	0	4	2	4
74	Y	9	6	6	18-24	M	Y	16-20	N	3	4	3	4
75	Y	4	5	6	18-24	M	Y	16-20	N	0	5	6	4
76	N	3	2	3	25-34	F	Y	16-20	N	1	8	8	4
77	Y	7	8	6	25-34	M	Y	6-10	N	2	7	3	4
78	N	2	10	1	18-24	M	N	11-15	N	3	8	5	4
79	Y	8	8	8	18-24	F	N	16-20	N	3	3	4	4

Question 10 responses

ID	Test_ID	Response
1	1	Usually couples with seemingly different characteristics give me alarms
2	1	Are the tattooed couple responsible for the "butchering" reported on the front page of the newspaper in the first scene?
3	1	What relationship do the hitchhikers have with the murders in Hawaii?
4	1	The couple who drive the car may meet something strange in their trip after meeting another couple, something related to the couple in the photos.
5	1	A couple has been murdered on Honolulu
6	1	A killer is on the loose killing holidaying couples
7	1	Are the hitchhiking couple connected to the murders shown in the newspaper from the first shot as the honeymooning couple departs.
8	1	In the bright sunshine of Hawaii an innocent couple drive over a newspaper outlining a murder in Honolulu which raises questions when they stop for a disfunctional couple acting suspiciously made evident when the camera doesn't get the domineering man's face.
9	1	A couple rents a car then we see a newspaper that shows a different couple has been "butchered". Then they pick up some people trying to hitch a ride but they are weird so they leave them.
10	1	The scene is set by the newspaper article, so that when the hitchhiker scene plays out you are being led to believe that they are the culprits and will murder the couple in the car.
11	1	Are Kale and Cleo the ones who butchered a young couple?
12	1	What are Kale & Cloe up to?
13	1	Did the second couple commit the murder from the front page of the newspaper?
14	1	The name on the bag should be related to the victim of the murder.
15	1	The hitchhiking couple might have murdered some other couple on an island.
16	1	puzzling
17	1	who killed the couple? was it the hitchhikers?
18	1	Who butchered the two people?
19	1	Are Kale and cleo the killers
20	1	There seems to be a history of young couples being murdered in Honolulu, and the mystery seems to be who are the killers, and what role do the backpackers play in these murders?
21	1	I think the couple is in danger and the hitchhikers are angry with them and may be murderers.
22	2	Do the hitchhikers have anything to do with the murder of the couple in Hawaii?
23	2	With possible knowledge that a couple who were murder suspects were on the run on the Island, the couple in the car pick up two hitch hikers who appear nervous and erratic, leaving the viewer to question whether they may be the couple at large.
24	2	Whether or not the hitchhikers in the scene were involved in the murders mentioned in the newspaper at the start of the scene, as the male hitchhiker was acting suspiciously.

ID	Test_ID	Response
25	2	As a newly married couple sets out in a Jeep to explore Hawaii they run over a newspaper of which the camera presents a close up. The front page headline details a recent murder. As the couple are driving they come across a couple hitchhiking. The wife of the first couple is uneasy about picking up hitchhikers, and as conversation between the couple and the female hitchhiker ensues the male hitchhiker becomes concerned about the set up. It is significant that the camera never shows his face in full, provoking suspicion around his identity. The male hitchhiker commands his partner to leave the car aggressively, inferring that the couple are shielding a secret. By virtue of this scene following that which presents the close up of the newspaper, the viewer is positioned to link the hitchhiking couple to the murder.
26	2	The mystery in sequence one revolves around the safety of the couple driving the car in their new environment, the makes you nervous because the tattooed guy was creepy.
27	2	Who is the Honolulu killer?
28	2	A couple is murdered on Honolulu and the main characters are afraid of Kale.
29	2	A couple on holiday meet a pair of newlyweds who might be killers
30	2	there is a killer on the loose and the hitchhikers seem dangerous
31	2	Is Kale dangerous?
32	2	A suspicious couple tries to hitchhiker on a deserted island road.
33	2	whodunnit murder
34	2	A threatening man and his girlfriend try and hitch a ride but are refused as they might be killers.
35	2	some couple has been murdered on Honolulu
36	2	who is the killer
37	2	When a couple goes on holiday a crime makes them suspicious of others
38	2	Two couples meet on an island highway but the first is wary of the second due to recent murders
39	2	I think the film is about the couple figuring out who murdered the couple from the front of the newspaper.
40	3	a mysterious couple are hitchhiking and ask to be taken up the road but act strangely when the other couple seem wary
41	3	There have been people murdered in Hawaii
42	3	The mystery surrounds who killed the couple in the papers.
43	3	Who murdered the couple (as shown by the newspaper article) and what are the hitch-hikers hiding.
44	3	The mystery from Sequence 1 concerns the identity of the person responsible for the murder of the young couple in Hawaii.
45	3	are the hitchhikers the murderers mentioned in the newspaper
46	3	who butchered the couple in Honolulu?
47	3	A suspicious newlywed couple might be killers.
48	3	Two people have been murdered and we're not sure who did it
49	3	One couple is afraid of giving a lift to another couple due to a recent murder in the area.
50	3	A suspicious couple makes another couple uneasy when refused a ride.
51	3	A couple has been murdered and the main characters get scared after picking up some hitchhikers
52	3	A couple is driving down a road and meets some hitchikers who appear unhinged.
53	3	Who is committing murders referred to in the newspaper

ID	Test_ID	Response
54	3	Kale and Cleo try to hitch a ride but Kale is aggressive and makes the others uncomfortable. They may be related to the crime in the newspaper.
55	3	I am wondering if Cleo and Kale are the killers (probably too obvious).
56	3	is one of these couples the killer?
57	3	Who killed the young couple and may kill again?
58	3	is the male hitchhiker the murderer of the butchered couple?
59	3	Is Kale a murderer?
60	4	The mystery is well-established in Sequence 1, enough for me to want to know what happened next, but not enough for me to conclusively say what the mystery is about.
61	4	Will this couple be murdered just like the young couple that was murdered and covered in the news?
62	4	A recently married couple on their honeymoon in Honolulu pick up Kale and Chloe; a mysterious couple of hitchhikers who carry a single strangely shaped bag and show flashes of irrational anger.
63	4	The mystery surrounds the murders of a young couple in Hawaii, who killed them, why and whether they will kill or attempt to kill the young couple in the car.
64	4	A couple are murdered while on holiday in Hawaii
65	4	How likely is the hitchhiking couple to be involved in a murder?
66	4	A couple is enjoying their holiday until they try to pick up some backpackers
67	4	Kale is made to look pretty guilty but I doubt it is that simple.
68	4	Are the hitchhikers also the murderers?
69	4	Are Kale and Cleo dangerous?
70	4	This seems like a thriller or horror movie, I didn't really see the mystery part.
71	4	are the couples involved in the murders?
72	4	Is it meant to be about the movie or just the clip? I think the movie is about the Honolulu killers but the clip doesn't really have a mystery.
73	4	Question raised
74	4	Murder mystery?
75	4	A couple picks up some hitchhikers but after offending one of them they leave them.
76	4	Two couples meet on an island where there has been a recent murder.
77	4	a newly married couple passes another couple of hitchhikers in hawaii where there have been recent murders
78	4	mystery is raised in the sequence and there is foreshadowing of possible (but highly unlikely) suspects(too obvious).
79	4	

Question 11 responses

ID	Test_ID	Response
1	1	Neighbourhood hides a case where a family of four was murdered... and history might repeats itself
2	1	What does Anne Patterson know about the family who lived in the house before the current owners?
3	1	Why did the previous family living in the house get murdered?
4	1	The mystery would be solved through the family finding more and more clues in their house, children are an important medium between truth and people.
5	1	Parents can't find their kids in a new house and discover a hidden room.
6	1	A family moves into a house where a psychiatric patient used to live
7	1	What were the true circumstances of the murders that occurred in the house the family lives in.
8	1	A young family discover a disturbing fact about their new house in regards to a murder which the neighbours feel reluctant to share information about.
9	1	A husband and wife can't find their kids then a neighbour comes to visit but won't talk about something that happened in the house. The kids also found something of the previous owners.
10	1	From the mother's immediate panic at the children being discovered in the hidie hole,, to the discovery of the press coverage of the massacre of the previous family, you are led to believe their is something strange going on the neighbourhood, and this is supported by the music.
11	1	What does Anne know about what happened in the people who used to live in the house?
12	1	Why is Anne afraid, and why is the other woman afraid? Did something happen in the house that they won't talk about?
13	1	Who lived in the house before and what happened to them?
14	1	Now, your question about the strange family leads me to suspect that the husband might be the murderer in the news, and the other family members are just his hallucination!!
15	1	The wife is afraid of the neighbour for some reason.
16	1	intriguing
17	1	why is the blonde woman acting strange? what happened in the house?
18	1	What happened in the house?
19	1	what happened to the family from the house?
20	1	The house this family moved into was the site of a grizzly killing spree in the recent past, but no one has warned them about it up front, or talks about - but why?
21	1	The father and mother lose their children then find a secret room. The mother seems angry with the neighbour for visiting and is maybe jealous?
22	2	Does Ann know anything about, or did she have anything to do with, the murder of the family that used to live in the house?

ID	Test_ID	Response
23	2	A family stumbles upon a concealed room in their newly purchased house and, after finding information about the grizzly murders that were perpetrated by one of the previous owners, are left to question whether their reticent and somewhat nervous neighbour may know more about the murders than they were able to discover through media reports.
24	2	What happened to the family that lived in the house before the current residents, and why Ann Patterson was reluctant to share what she knew of them and the mystery surrounding their deaths.
25	2	A couple living in a decrepit, spacious house looks for their young daughters and ultimately finds them in hidden space beyond the daughters' closet. The daughters are playing with toys left by two girls, assumedly the previous residents of the house. The next scene demonstrates that the couple previously living in the house was murdered. After this a neighbour appears at the house who has ostensibly met the husband before, though he doesn't know her name. Upon prompting from the wife, this woman reveals her name to the husband, Anne Paterson, but then leaves abruptly, looking concerned. The husband calls after her, asking if she knew the family previously living in the house. Anne looks disturbed and refuses to answer. It seems that she is hiding something about the family who previously inhabited the house.
26	2	The mystery in Sequence 2 revolves around who murdered the family that previously lived in the house and how much the people in the surrounding area know about the murder.
27	2	What does Anne know about the murders in the house?
28	2	A series of murders occurred in a house and now the family that has just moved in is learning about it.
29	2	A family in a new home discover that some strange things happened in their house.
30	2	children find a secret room and the house has a mystery about its past
31	2	What happened in the house (or what is the deal with the murders?)
32	2	A friendly neighbour refuses to discuss the previous occupants of a house.
33	2	mysterious haunted or secret house
34	2	A neighbour comes to welcome a family into their new home but is scared when asked to talk about what happened to the previous owners.
35	2	Something weird happened in the house
36	2	what happened to the previous owners?
37	2	When a family moves into a new home they search for clues as to what happened in the house
38	2	Children find a secret room in a house and a meeting with a neighbour suggests something strange about the house.
39	2	This film seems to be about a family moving into a house that an insane person used to live in that scares the neighbour.
40	3	the couple and their children are frightened to not find their children then a neighbour acts mysteriously when she comes to the door
41	3	There was a murder of four people in the house before the new family moved in and everyone is quiet about it.

ID	Test_ID	Response
42	3	Same as sequence 1, mystery surrounds who killed the family in the house. The neighbour knows a dark secret.
43	3	Why were the previous residents of the house murdered?
44	3	The mystery from Sequence 2 concerns the murder of the house's previous occupants, and the impact it has had on the neighbourhood as a whole.
45	3	Was there some foul play involved with the previous occupants and is the neighbour who showed up part of that
46	3	what happened to the people in the house before?
47	3	A family learns about the secrets of their house's history
48	3	A family died in this house and we don't know the circumstances surrounding it or what happened
49	3	A father is trying to figure out what happened in his new house before his family moved in.
50	3	A mother and her husband search for their kids who have discovered a secret room.
51	3	Two young girls find a secret room in their new house and their parents are a bit freaked out about what happened to the previous owners
52	3	The family's new neighbour knows something about the house she won't say.
53	3	What happened in the house?
54	3	A pair of daughter find a hidden room with children's toys but scare their parents. The neighbour visits but only leaves more questions about the house and its past.
55	3	I want to know why the wife seems so afraid or concerned when her husband is talking to the neighbour (is the house stuff misdirection for an affair he had?)
56	3	what happened in this house to the previous family?
57	3	What are the malevolent forces inhabiting this house?
58	3	how is the visitor, anne patterson, connected or involved in the mystery of the multiple murders in the house?
59	3	What isn't Anna saying?
60	4	It is a mystery about a house with a possible dark history.
61	4	What is Anne Patterson hiding from this family about the house's old occupants?
62	4	The neighbours appear to be hiding something from the new occupants of a house with a violent past.
63	4	The mystery surrounds the previous owners of the house, who they killed, why and whether a similar situation will occur with the new owners.
64	4	What are the circumstances around the murder of four members of a family, and why has this been concealed from the new owners of the house?
65	4	How likely is Anne Patterson to be hiding something about the previous family in the house?
66	4	A family is renovating their new home but learn about a series of murders
67	4	There is something off about the way the wife reacts to the neighbour.
68	4	Did something bad happen in this house?

ID	Test_ID	Response
69	4	Why does the wife seem scared of the neighbour?
70	4	This also seemed like a horror movie or some kind of psychological thriller. Everything just seemed a bit off.
71	4	what does ann know about the murders?
72	4	Everything is mysterious so I can't pick. The house, the kids, the wife, and the neighbour all act strange and there is the newspaper clipping of a psychiatric clinic.
73	4	Investigated in the sequence
74	4	Haunted house?
75	4	Two girls go missing in the family's new house, until they are found in a secret room.
76	4	A family has just moved into a new house and the neighbour seems concerned but won't talk about the history of the house.
77	4	a family moves into an old home formerly occupied by a troubled family
78	4	The mystery is investigated in the sequence with queries of anne and negatives from camera reel.
79	4	Suspicious creature in the house

Questionnaire, Plain Language Statement, and Consent Form

Below are the questionnaire, plain language statement, and consent form as they appeared in the experiment.

QUESTIONNAIRE

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Instructions

You will be viewing two film scenes today. After viewing the first scene turn to the second page and answer the two short questions. Following this, view the second scene before turning to the next page and again answering two short questions. After completing both of these tasks you may proceed and complete the questionnaire. There are 14 questions in total. Please answer each question as best you can. For multiple choice questions, only select one answer. Do not make marks between boxes as only a single answer directly on one of the available options will be considered a valid response.

-DO NOT TURN PAGE UNTIL VIEWING SCENE 1-

1. Do you think the hitchhiking couple is involved with the murders?

- Yes
- No

2. On a scale from 1-10, how suspicious do you believe the hitchhiking couple is in this sequence?

(1 = not at all suspicious, 10 = absolutely certain of their involvement)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

*Begin viewing Scene 2 after completing questions 1 & 2.

-DO NOT TURN PAGE UNTIL VIEWING SCENE 2-

3. On a scale from 1-10, how suspicious are you that Anne Patterson is hiding something serious about the people who lived in the house?

(1 = not at all suspicious, 10 = absolutely certain she is hiding something serious)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

4. On a scale from 1-10, how suspicious are you that there is something strange about the family currently living in the house?

(1 = not at all suspicious, 10 = absolutely certain there is something strange about the family)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

-DO NOT TURN PAGE UNTIL ANSWERING ALL QUESTIONS ABOVE-

Questionnaire

5. What is your age?

6. What gender do you identify as?

7. Is English your first language?

Yes

No

8. In an average week, how many hours would you spend watching moving image media (TV, movies, etc.)

_____ hours

9. Had you seen any of the film scenes before your session today?

Yes

No

10. Please write a one sentence description of the mystery from Scene 1. The mystery is the question raised or investigated in the scene.

11. Please write a one sentence description of the mystery from Scene 2. The mystery is the question raised or investigated in the scene.

12. Some of the scenes you viewed may have been edited differently than their theatrical release. This could be all scenes, no scenes, or some combination of scenes. Please tick the box that you believe is most accurate.

No scenes changed

Scene 1 changed

Scene 2 changed

Both *Scene 1* and *Scene 2* changed

13. On a scale from 1-10, how familiar are you with the mystery genre in films? (1 = have not seen any mystery films, 10 = actively try to watch as many mystery films as possible).

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

14. On a scale from 1-10, how familiar are you with the mystery genre across all mediums? (1 = not familiar with any mystery texts, 10 = actively seek to consume as many mystery texts as possible).

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

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Project: "Spotting Whodunnit: Viewer Suspicion in the Mystery Film"

Introduction

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Jared Orth (**PhD student**) of the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. The aim of the study is to investigate the effect of editing in mystery films on viewer perceptions of important information. We are interested in your beliefs about the pertinence of different items in a short scene from a mystery film. The experiment will involve viewing two scenes and completing a short set of responses after each. Following this we will provide you with a brief questionnaire about what you have seen. This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

What will I be asked to do?

Should you agree to participate, you would be asked to contribute in two ways. First, we would ask you to watch two scenes from different mystery films. Each scene will be no longer than 5 minutes. Secondly, we will ask you to complete a brief 7-minute questionnaire, shortly after the viewing. This questionnaire will ask you about your familiarity with the mystery genre and about your comprehension of the scenes. We estimate that the total time commitment required of you will not exceed 20 minutes.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that you supply. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers, for example, in order to know where we should send the results of the project should you be interested. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. We will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity, however, you should note that as the number of people we seek to interview is very small, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you. The data will be kept securely in the School of Culture and Communication for five years from the date of publication and may be destroyed after this time.

How will I receive feedback?

Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be available to you on application at the School of Culture and Communication. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences and in published papers.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice. Your decision to participate or not, or to withdraw, will not affect any relationship you may have with this department or University and will not affect any services you may receive now or in the future.

Where can I get further information?

Please contact the researchers if you have any questions or if you would like more information. The researcher contact details are available above. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the project which you do not wish to discuss with the research team please contact the Manager, Human Research Ethics, Office for Research Ethics and Integrity, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

How do I agree to participate?

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the consent form and returning it in the envelope provided. The researchers will then contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time for you to view the film scene and complete the questionnaire.

CONSENT FORM



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

School of Culture and Communication

Spotting Whodunnit: Viewer Suspicion in the Mystery Film

Name of participant: _____

Name of investigator(s): Jared Orth, Dr Wendy Haslem, Dr Radha O'Meara _____

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.
2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.
3. I understand that my participation will involve **viewing scenes from two films, a short response to each individually, and the completion of a questionnaire**. I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
4. I acknowledge that:
 - (a) the possible effects of participating in the **observation and questionnaire** have been explained to my satisfaction;
 - (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
 - (c) the project is for the purpose of research;
 - (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
 - (e) I have been informed that with my consent **my questionnaire responses will be collected and I understand that this data** will be stored at University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after five years;
 - (f) my name will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;
 - (g) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I agree to this.

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings **yes**
no

(please tick)

If yes, please include your email address to receive the summary report. Otherwise please leave blank.

Email: _____

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____