Dario Martinelli

What You See Is What You Hear

Creativity and Communication in Audiovisual Texts

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To my son Elmis.
In memory of Gino Stefani (1929–2019).

Preface

This monograph allows me to pursue a systematic, comprehensive, and coherent approach, which is intended to acquaint the reader with my theories on audiovisuality, as well as leave them satisfied that they have received a general introduction that is fair and clear. I wrote with two main purposes in mind, and in the same spirit that inspired my recent book on the subject of animal communication (Martinelli 2017), from which I intend to borrow—or rather steal—a few words by way of introduction.

First, influential in my work is a deep, professional interest in audiovisual communication through the study of various paradigms, which include, among other things: communication studies, film semiotics, creativity studies, narratology, media studies, auteur theory, film and TV studies, and multimodality studies. My engagement also extends to topics of a varied and idiosyncratic nature such as the audiovisual representation of animals; Alfred Hitchcock; the relationship between audiovisuality and popular music; genres and schools (western, sci-fi, Italian cinema, and Hollywood); politics and ideology in audiovisual texts; and more besides. All of these I have expressed in articles in various publications, congress papers, and lecture courses. Notwithstanding, I have never taken the opportunity to construct a plain, systematic overview on audiovisual communication in such a way that both my personal research and the works of my influential and learned colleagues could be applied.

The second purpose of this book is to bring together material of pedagogical value that can be used as either a student textbook or supporting text. I have no wish to write a standard contemporary textbook (see Martinelli 2017) featuring the full catalogue of "student services" or course material for teachers looking to guide their classroom activities. Typically, the latter would include chapters of the same length with an introductory summary, a schematic list of the topics, a final summary, a self-assessment test, etc. Frankly, I think it is time to stop mollycoddling university students and treat them as primary school children. Students enrolling in a higher education institution are young adults: if we insist they act as such then we should also treat them as young adults with all the expectations that go with it. My belief is that in the last two decades universities have overloaded courses with all manner of additional material and activities. This is a misguided attempt to steer so-called millennial students through that terrible and dangerous jungle of… of what—really? Of a written text! My goodness, what a shock: a written text! We schematize and sterilize the information because we assume that the students might find the narrative too difficult. Unsurprisingly, we disavow the natural time flow of data, and instead become more and more like YouTube tutorials. In other words, we assume that they are idiots.

My hunch is that it is *we,* the academic community with our style of pedagogical management, who has made them so. Today, the narrative (the *good old fat book*) has been demonized in most academic courses, and while it has saved time for students it has also eroded their ability to develop vital skills in information processing and critical analysis. The analogue is like eating artificial vitamin integrators rather than enjoying a balanced diet that contains fruit and vegetables. We save time, yet we kill the "narrative" of food intake, the one that suggests what food to eat, and with what, how much, when, and so forth.

By the same token, have we ever stopped to consider that students might like to sit on a sofa with a cup of tea, and *actually read a book*, instead of a collection of schemes and tutorials? Have we ever thought that a well-written book is a pleasant and more effective way to study? Don't get me wrong, I have no argument with the need to develop and freshen up didactic strategies, as well as any other academic activities. I would hope that my previous publications (see Martinelli 2016) demonstrate this fact. If anything, I regard myself as an advocate of "appropriate technologies", and here I merely suggest that a textbook, as such, should adopt a "narrative" strategy, because along with the teacher's lectures this is the very source of information to process. By packaging the latter we offer preprocessed information to the student that is almost certain to be poor quality, rather like those ready-made frozen dishes, which can never be as good as those prepared with fresh ingredients. In reality, any phenomenon of "learning" needs to go through this two-step procedure. First, we absorb information in a "narrative" by seeing the whole picture, the natural flow of time, the many variables. Next, *we* process it in a schematic way, distinguishing the more relevant from the less, generalizing the single elements into groups or patterns, and so forth. Hence, the role of the teacher is to help the student along this path, rather than walk in their place. I would suggest this is a much better way for our teaching profession to understand student potential and help us to bring that out.

Perhaps the main challenge in writing a book such as this is how to offer a clear and engaging reading experience—clarity being the very reason why schematizations and tutorials came to replace narratives, and engagement being the very reason why students are less and less eager to invest time in study. This monograph accepts the challenge, and just like "fresh food" it leaves the important task of "processing the information" to the reader in the belief that this will stimulate greater understanding of the concepts. Besides, this is why I have written this book in more informal (if not colloquial) tones, rather than follow the formal, but often dry and cold, academic style.

I hasten to add that my teacher colleagues—those generous enough to adopt this book in their courses—are not my servants. I have no right to point out those parts I consider to be relevant or not, or how they should phrase them. Certainly, as a teacher I would reject any imposition of this kind. Rather, a monograph used as a textbook must be a *tool* for the lecturer, and not a bible. The lecturer should be able to do whatever they like, for example, whether to exclude parts that I might consider crucial. Just like the student, so it is with the lecturer who must work on the book and not rely on ready-made information. The abovementioned information processing is, or should be, cooperation between teacher and student.

Finally, it is my belief that academic courses have become somewhat "messy". For those of us old enough to remember there was a time when a course consisted of a limited number of components. Let us consider a prototypical situation: the teacher arrives in the classroom, does most of the talking, then offers a list of books for students to read and carefully study as preparation for the exam. End of story. None of the people of my generation appear to have suffered serious trauma under this regime. Instead, what we now have is a glorious parade of handouts, Moodle accounts, midterm exams, mock exams, workshops, discussion groups, self-assessment processes, and so on and so forth. Anything goes, except a clear and engaging textbook—at least most of the time.

Please don't mistake my intention as conservative. I prefer the experimental and have no argument with this new regime although it adds greatly to my workload. Certainly, I could use that time in more useful ways for society—including students themselves. I would just like to perform an experiment to reestablish a direct dialogue between course material and students. I suspect that (a) the general decrease in interest and preparation we are witnessing in today's students has nothing to do with a "traditional" textbook, especially if the latter is clear and engaging and (b) a storytelling-oriented approach to teaching is not more difficult or time-wasting than the schematic approach. Rather, it is simpler.

In conclusion, my intention is not to make a case for choice. Indeed, this preface makes clear my viewpoint, which is where such commentary belongs and nowhere else. The subtitle of my book is *Creativity and communication in audiovisual texts*, which is all I intend to convey here, rather than the injunction, "towards a comeback of good old textbooks," which is somewhat presumptuous. If the truth be told the book is ordered logically by providing a glossary, *ad hoc* references, and numerous descriptive tables and illustrations. Regarding this last point I must offer an apology. I could find only a limited number of useable images sourced from the audiovisual material (movies, TV series, videos, etc.) in my analysis. Ideally, I would have used any image I needed to best illustrate particular notions under discussion, but this was not possible due to copyright restrictions imposed by commercial organizations. Instead, I resorted to images available in the public domain, in the Creative Commons (bless them!), or to personally prepared illustrations, which was limiting. "Fair use" is a poorly defined notion, and an archaic expression that translates into: "put that image if you must, but then just pray that you won't be sued."

So, loud and clear, I would like to state that it is a shame that researchers and educators are bound to accept what amounts to the greed of copyright holders determined to profit from the everyday, over which they hold only a spurious claim. Little or no profit attaches to an academic monograph such as this; in any case to make an artwork more visible to the readership can only be beneficial for that artwork. Its inclusion could never inflict reputational damage. Scholarly work aims to produce knowledge and understanding, and knowledge and understanding produce a better world. Anything that gets in its way should be scorned and averred.

On a more practical side, I am also saying this, because I would like to invite you to implement the reading of this book by searching for those images and videos that I mention and could not provide adequate illustration for. A lot of such material can be easily found on the web, so there should be no need to invest extra budget to fully enjoy this text.

To conclude, this book was written in a period of tough personal transitions for me, and while I do not intend to delve into matters concerning my private life that should have no place in any public platform, I wish to express my deep gratitude to my whole family. Thank you also to the affiliation I proudly represent in this book, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, and particularly the whole staff at the Faculty of Creative Industries. Thanks to Ron Ringer for his impeccable language editing and the rhymed messages we exchanged in the process, to my ever friendly and helpful referents at Springer, and to the two anonymous reviewers who have helped me improve the text with their critical recommendations. Immense gratitude to my wonderful son Elmis for all the reasons in the world, and for being a great model in some of the pictures you see in the book.

I hope the reading of this volume will be inspiring and enjoyable for you all. Thank you.

Dario Martinelli
Vilnius, Lithuania
2019

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Introduction

This monograph, as declared in the subtitle, is about creativity and communication in audiovisual texts and will be subsequently referred to as audiovisual creative communication (AVCC). This expression of the universe of audiovisuality is potentially enormous, and so I must use this introduction to explain my terminological choices in order to define the field of investigation in the clearest possible way.

First, "**audiovisual**" (adj.) lies at the heart of this enterprise. I have assigned this word to describe any material or item that conveys any type of information by using at the same time the visual and the acoustic channels. By this I mean images and sounds, and technological tools and platforms used to produce and display such material, e.g., camera, TV, cinema hall, Internet, etc. There is no requirement that these channels must be together all of the time; throughout the same item we can have specific moments when only images and/or sounds appear, although in its totality both must be present. That is why, a radio program or a book, for example, is *not* audiovisual material, because they contain only acoustic and visual information, respectively. Throughout the text, I will abbreviate this adjective to "AV" (AV genres, AV culture, etc.). Consequently, the noun, "**Audiovisuality**", is used to refer to the "quality", the "experience", and the "phenomenon" of being audiovisual.

From the outset I draw attention to the fact that audiovisuality involves what we also call "technological tools and platforms", because, taken to the letter, the practice of merging visual and acoustic channels into a communication item can also be referred to "flesh and blood" live actions, such as a theater play, a church mass, or a conference. Quite simply and ultimately, it can also refer to an ordinary linguistic conversation between two people, which, yes, involves in principle other channels if the communication is of a "linguistic" type, then it is mostly based on sound and visual stimuli such as spoken words and gestures, respectively.

Given the scope of this volume and its obvious limitations in terms of extent, the book is not just about *any* form of communication. The type of audiovisuality we are talking about here is a "mechanically-reproduced" (whether analogical or digital) audiovisuality, which, put simply, requires the presence of a "screen" as a symbolic threshold between the actual item and the witness. For this reason, I have devoted a specific section to the particular notion of "screen" for it is this very object that determines the correct circumscription of our field of inquiry. The "audiovisual texts" we refer to in this book are "screen-mediated audiovisual texts".

Having introduced the word, "**text**", perhaps the reader might wonder what that is? A "text" is any item of any size and length that conveys meaning. So, a movie, a TV program, a commercial, a music video, a color music artifact, etc. are all "texts". Texts are usually thought of, produced, and interpreted in accordance with conventions associated with a style, a culture, a genre, a society, or other contexts, and within a particular medium of communication (in our case, cinema, TV, Internet, etc). Unsurprisingly, in this book you will find numerous references to "audiovisual text", which we abbreviate to AVT(s). Indeed, unless we talk about notions that apply to only one type of text, e.g., the use of drawings as something that characterizes a cartoon, though not a live action film, we refer to "texts" in order to imply that the notion in question can be applied to any medium, or any genre, or any item, e.g., the notion of "montage".

When we use the word, "**communication**", we refer to the process of transmission and reception of a message, so that some "sense"—meaning—is conveyed, exchanged, understood, or misunderstood. With this in mind, what interests us about AVTs are the meanings they convey, and how the AVT(s) convey them. Perhaps, the construction of such meanings is ensured by every single step of the creative process, with little, if anything, left to chance.

Finally, by "**creative/creativity**", we refer to the ability to transform ideas into meaningful and possibly original texts. These can be artistic, although I prefer to avoid this adjective in order to avoid entanglement in a redundant discussion about what is art and what is not. Can a TV commercial be considered art? Is a mainstream crowd-pleasing movie art? Are soap operas art? While certifying the "artistic" status of these texts may be challenging to some people, we should confine ourselves to understanding how they are products of "creativity". At the same time, the presence of the "creative" element in our scope is important if we are to filter the types of AVTs under consideration. When we Skype with a friend, or present some data and sounds on PowerPoint, we create AVTs, yet this falls outside the scope of this monograph. Hopefully, the notion of creativity helps us to draw the line. Some might say that "entertainment" would probably do a better job in emphasizing this distinction, but it is important to note that we are also interested in a great many AVTs, and among these are the experimental and the avant-garde that are hardly meant to be "entertaining".

The preface stated clearly that this monograph does not offer a general overview of existing theories, but rather an approach to AV studies that is not likely to be found elsewhere. Hopefully, this book offers innovative components at both the methodological and the theoretical levels. There is little by way of repetition/synthesis of existing analytical models, except for introductory purposes, but more in terms of ideas and concepts I developed during my research. Of course, this does not mean that we will not use other paradigms, for there will be many of those. Informing us are writers working in the areas of film and media studies, multimodality studies, structuralism, narratology, "auteur theory" in a broad sense, and so forth. By combining and reinterpreting these existing works, and by adding new material, I am proposing an analytical interdisciplinary model which, hopefully, can help us to view AVTs from a fresh and easily understandable perspective.

I hope that all the notions you will learn in this book are useful and important, although I do not claim that the way you will be informed here is any *more* useful or *more* important than existing books and existing theories. My intention is to avoid oversimplifying concepts by presenting (packaging) them in "binary" forms, but rather let you, the reader, make up your own mind. Let us avoid basic binary oppositions—black or white, yes or no, and speak more about a "time and space" dichotomy, "realism versus fiction", and so forth. There may be occasions where you may regard some of the concepts as having been packaged in an oversimplified manner: we shall have dichotomies such as "time and space" and "realism versus fiction", and so forth.

Of course, this is an intentional reductionist approach to concepts that are much more complex, but we shall perform this action for purely pedagogical purposes. We already know from children's education the importance of installing concepts of "yes" and "no" (so-called "propaedeutic" concepts), so that they are able to understand what they should or should not do. Only at a later stage can we introduce the concepts of "maybe", "probably not", "who knows", "almost", "it depends", and so forth.

That said there is also a deeper, cognitive reason for such a choice, which also explains why in so many of life's situations we tend to categorize the world in dichotomies, or very few variables. Our interaction with the reality that surrounds us consists of two important stages, one that we may call "perceptive-behavioral", and another one that we may call "mnemonic-organizational". The former is of an analogical nature, whereas the latter is in contrast of a digital one. For example, when we walk we act analogically in a continuous manner, whereby our movements flow naturally and are not marked by discreet stages. Yet, when we classify the act of walking in our mind, we tend to segment it into discreet units, just as if it was composed of separate moments, like "backward", "forward", "slow", "fast", and so forth. Similar forms of cognition occur roughly in every moment of our life, and apply to the most diverse objects, events, people, groups, etc. This is quite understandable, because it is an impossible task to perceive analogical information and process it analogically. Not even computers are able to do this, instead their enormous potential to store information is due to repeating a multitude of separate acts of digitalization (bits), so numerous as to "resemble" analogical processes. However, as we know, they are never so, and the example of the increasing perfection and quantity of pixels in an image is paradigmatic: a high-resolution image can look like a real one, but it is still composed of pixels, that is, digital units. As humans, we, too, need to somehow digitalize information, decompose it, divide it into stages, rather than coping with a continuous flux of events. And, of course, the fewer the units the easier it is to manage information. So, dividing the world and its components into very few parts (usually two) is typical of human beings who need to understand and store information. It is no coincidence that Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of the greatest anthropologists in history approached the culture of those communities that Western people barely knew the existence of in the same way. Lévi-Strauss knew that in order "to begin to understand" these unknown cultures, it was important to describe them in a clear and simple manner—a "binary" manner indeed. He called this description "structural oppositions". For example, he found that all these communities had a moral concept of "good" and "evil". Now, we all know that good versus evil is not the end of the story, and that there are many gray areas between these two extremes, including *transformational* areas, i.e., good that becomes evil, or evil that becomes good. Nevertheless, we understand that the gray areas are something we need to approach at a later stage, only when we have fully grasped what good means and what evil means within a given society.

With that in mind, and having hopefully earned some allowance in my choice of simplifying some important topics, I would now like to give an overview of the topics covered by this book.

Excluding the preface and the present introduction, this monograph consists of five main chapters. In ► Chap. 1, I provide information on the general contents of the book: first, two of which I called "the basic dilemmas" of audiovisuality: the dualism between realism and fiction, and that between description and prescription. For each relevant (and not general) part of the book, I have provided a more thorough investigation of some specific case. In this ► Chap. 1, the two dilemmas will be exemplified through the analysis of Walt Disney's classic *Bambi*. ► Chapter 1 will continue with a paragraph on the types of texts we will be dealing with in this book, here classified in media, formats, and genres. Finally, I propose a rather schematic, though not necessarily short, history of audiovisuality.

In ► Chap. 2, I present the main novelty provided by this book: an analytical model for AVCC that shall be called M.A.P., as in "Means", "Axes", and "Properties", but also playing with the concept of "mapping", as the goal is to sort out the complexity and the articulation of the various topics. I first provide a general introduction to the concept of communication (accompanied by a case study on the 2011 TV series *The Borgias*), and then I trace "the M.A.P." in its constituents, setting the bases for the next three chapters of the book.

► Chapter 3 inaugurates a deepened analysis of the three areas of the M.A.P., starting from the "A" (axes): time and space. This will be implemented by discussing the dichotomies "diegesis and non-diegesis" (case study on *The Truman Show*), "steadiness and unsteadiness" (case study on *The Birds*), "foreshadowing and sideshadowing" (case study on Roberto Benigni), plus the notions of "narration" (case study on *Star Wars*), and "montage" (case study on the national branding commercial *Dynamic Korea*).

In ► Chap. 4, we focus on the "M" of the model: the "means". These are "sound", meant both as sound design and soundtrack (case study on *Back to the Future*); "image", with a particular focus on the significance of colors, and on camera shots, angles, and movements (case study on *King Kong*); and "language", both spoken and written (case study on rhetoric and dialogues in various AVTs).

► Chapter 5—finally—will focus on the "P" of the model: the "properties". These are: "taxonomy", which is the expression we shall use to discuss media, formats, and genres (case study on the western genre); "culture", an umbrella term that we will use for various social, political, and cultural processes (case study on the stereotypical AV representation of vegetarians); "thematicity", an expression that covers themes, values, and archetypes (case study on the city of Marseille in AVCC); "performance", which does not just mean "acting" (case study on three Beatles' videos); and "technology", covering all the various tools, devices, and platforms employed in AVCC (case study on the notion of "screen").

The goal, to reiterate, is clarity and engagement. I do hope that the way I analyze (to M.A.P.) audiovisual texts will be of some help in understanding a topic that is as complex as it is fascinating and compelling.

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Note on the Illustration

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Abbreviations

AV	Audiovisual
AVCC	Audiovisual creative communication
AVT (or AVTs)	Audiovisual text/s
MAP	Means, Axes, Properties

Defining and Classifying Audiovisual Texts

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1.1 The Basic Dilemmas

There are many possible ways to kick off our journey into audiovisuality; commonsense would suggest a traditional approach, based on literature review and historical summary. However, I suggest that we start in a slightly more philosophical way, discussing two basic dichotomies that are at the core of anything audiovisual—the tension between realism and fiction, and that between description and prescription.

Every single form of AVCC needs to be located somewhere between these two sets of extremes. A realistic text is one that has a (legitimate or not) claim to represent reality in a reasonably faithful way, whereas the fictional introduces several elements that are outside the empirical world. Similarly, a descriptive text is one that represents a certain situation (realistic or fictional) as it is, without persuading us, as spectators, to judge that situation in some particular way. A prescriptive text, on the contrary, is an "opinionated" one, and attempts to orient our judgement in a certain direction. If we think about it, any text we are exposed to addresses questions of these sorts: from the "realistic" weather forecast program to the "fictional" sci-fi TV series, from the "descriptive" faithful filmic adaptation of an existing text (e.g., a novel) to the "prescriptive" commercial that tries to persuade us to buy a given product.

Now: these are the *ideal* distinctions—neat separations between the extremes. However, as we may easily guess, the reality is much more complex and the lines blurred. In the following paragraphs we shall try to explain this complexity, and we will also provide the first case study, the animation film *Bambi*, to practically illustrate it.

1.1.1 Realism Versus Fiction

Let us consider two of the most famous villains in the history of cinema—Hannibal Lecter and Darth Vader. According to the famous list of "100 heroes and villains in cinema history" compiled by the American Film Institute, Hannibal is the worst bad guy of all times, and Darth Vader is the third worst (for the record, the second is Norman Bates from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*). So, definitely, the main thing these two have in common is that they are evil characters. No doubt about that: they both kill people, they are both scary and intimidating figures, and so on.

However, there is one important difference between the two: Lecter, the cannibal psychopath we know from Thomas Harris‘ novels and various movies like *The Silence of the Lambs* (where he was masterfully portrayed by Anthony Hopkins), is a human being: admittedly an unusual one, but still human in all respects. Part of the reasons why he is a terrifying character is that we sense that a guy like him may actually exist—and in fact, they *do* exist (the news reported such creepy cases of cannibalistic serial killers like Armin Meiwes, Issei Sagawa and others). Hannibal Lecter as such may not exist as a specific person, but his character is somehow verisimilar.

The feelings evoked by Darth Vader are of another type: in this case, we feel more the threat of the unknown, of the fantastic. Darth Vader is not a human being: he is a cyborg serving the Galactic Empire, wears a very powerful black armor, has supernatural (telepathic) powers, speaks with an eerie hiss, and so forth. In other words, he is "not realistic": he is a pure work of fiction.

If we understand that similar emotions (fear and threat, in this case) may be inspired equally by both a realistic element and a fictional one, we have understood the basic, very positive, tension that animates all audiovisuality, and in fact all forms of art: the tension between **realism** and **fiction**.

This issue which we will address in historical paragraph, ► Sect. 1.3 is so well embodied by the first two fundamental schools of cinema: the Lumière brothers school on one side and the Georges Méliès school on the other—both active at the same time (between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth). Auguste and Louis Lumière, we shall later see, were particularly interested in portraying reality as it is—they saw cinema as a continuation of photography, a way to *animate* photography: their first films consisted of people leaving a factory after the working day, trains arriving at a station, parents feeding a little child, and so forth. Ideologically, cinema was supposed to *document* reality. Méliès had just the opposite ideology: he was intrigued by the thought that cinema had the potential to *manipulate* reality, creating fantastic scenarios where people disappear and reappear, are able to multiply their heads, or travel to an anthropomorphic moon inhabited by nasty aliens, etc. The ideological opposition of these two schools is summarized in ◘ Fig. 1.1.

As we have mentioned already, every AVT, with no exception, operates at any point between these two ideal extremes. Sometimes, it tries to be *very* realistic, sometimes a bit so, sometimes to stand more on the fictional side, and so forth: there are thousands of nuances. Some examples: a TV documentary on, say, animal behavior, a music video portraying a band in the act of playing their song in a recording studio with their instruments, a video report from a news portal on the web, a movie based on real events… these are all AVTs oriented, each in the own degree, towards realism. On the other hand, the following are examples of AVTs oriented towards fiction: a sci-fi movie; a Mickey Mouse cartoon; a video portraying Michael Jackson singing and dancing his song along with zombies; and a videogame such as *Destiny*.

Let us discuss the two extremes in more detail. How "real" is the most extreme realism, and how "fictional" is the most extreme fiction? Can an AVT literally "overlap" with reality or, on the other hand, create totally unreal and unimaginable scenarios? The answer is a categorical no. There is no such a thing such as a realistic AVT that is totally detached from fiction, and there is no such a thing as a fictional AVT that is totally detached from reality. This is an important point, and deserves an explanation.

Let us start by considering the most realistic AVT one could possibly produce—something even more realistic

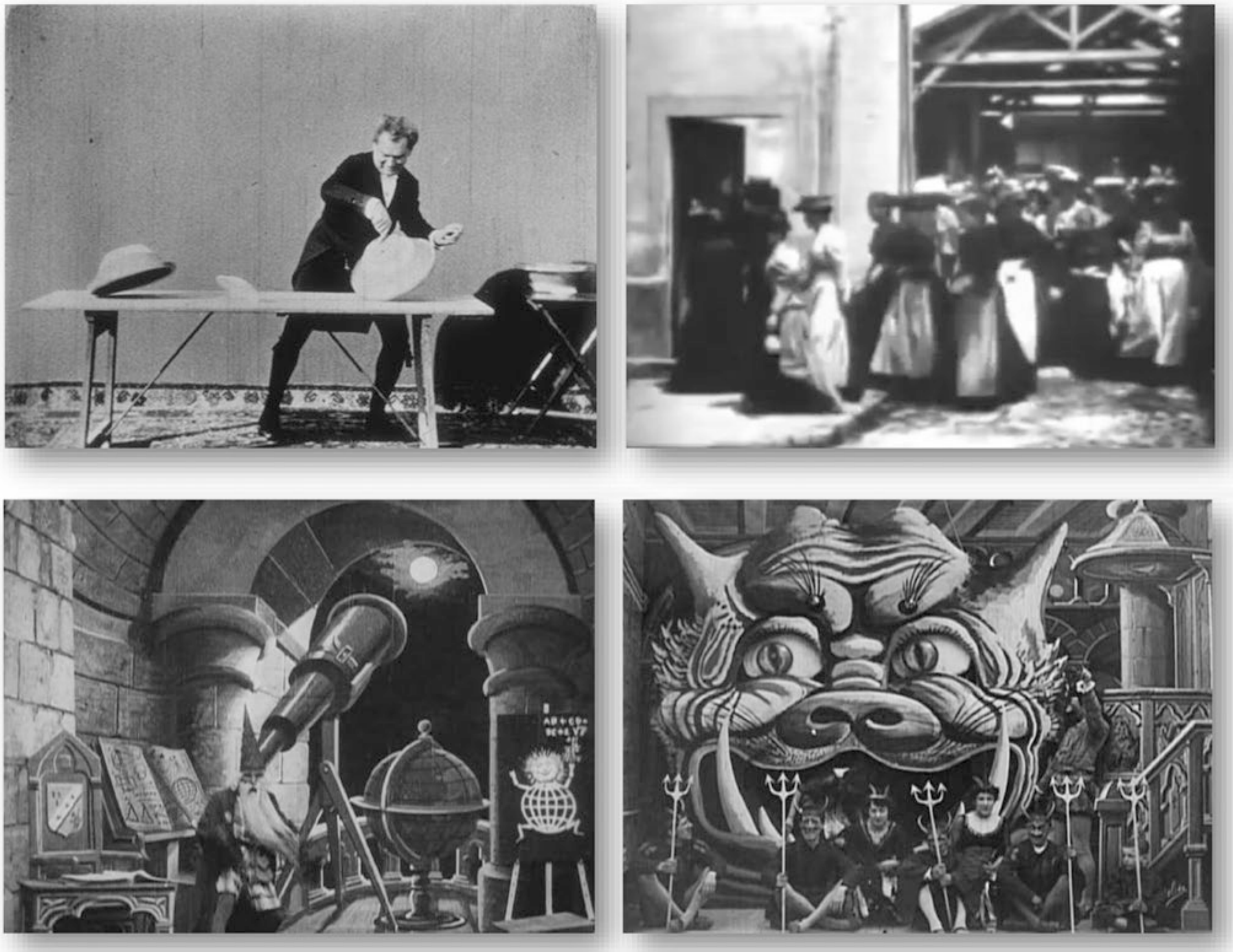


Fig. 1.1 Lumières' realistic approach to cinema (top images) versus Méliès's visionary one (bottom). *[Images of public domain]*

than a documentary program: a video that we ourselves take with our smartphone, during a party, and that perhaps we broadcast live on Facebook. Certainly, when we think of shooting this kind of video, we have the Lumière approach in its purest sense: we want to portray reality as it is, without manipulations of sort. And probably, as we finalize the video, we think we have achieved that kind of result. Or, have we?

Well, there are two major problems with our smartphone video and "reality" as such. The first, crucially, is that our smartphone is smaller than the world: it is not, and it will never be (perhaps not even in a super-technological future) able to capture reality in its entirety. Consequently, *we make choices*, choosing what part of reality is worthy of capture in that rectangle (the smartphone monitor) by which we access the party. Please, pay attention to this gesture, because it is another defining moment of audiovisuality: this is, at the same time, the moment when we (a) cope with this limitation of not being able to film the whole world; but also (b) create art, and (c) exercise ideology.

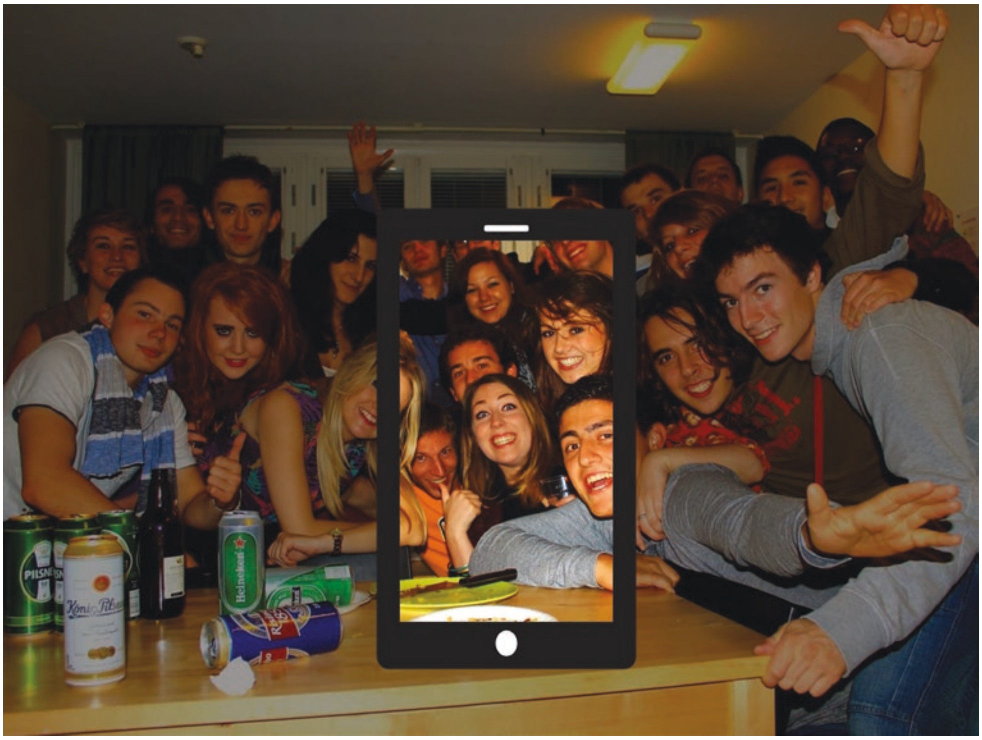
By (a), we mean that the handicap of a filming device that can capture only a portion of reality forces us to choose a portion anyway.

By (b), we mean that this choice defines our taste and our aesthetics. Hence, we usually decide what is "nicer" to look at—a certain person instead of another. Or it might be a corner of the party where there is more action than elsewhere, or where it is more boring than elsewhere. It could be certain movements of our phone camera instead of others, or a certain "narrative" of the filming; we usually start filming what is closer to us, then we walk somewhere else, we follow a path, etc. In other words, there is a sense of what comes first and what comes next, and so forth. We are the directors of this video, and we have the right and the duty to decide what of this party should be left to posterity.

By (c), we mean that this choice is not only artistic, but also ideological: we are not only choosing what is "nice" to film, but also what has "worth". Try to remember what kind of party videos you have been taking in the past (if you did), and the reasonable guess is that you had a certain idea of the party (*that* party in particular, and parties in general), and that your filming stuck to that idea. For example, you may conceive a party as an event where people have fun, so there is a chance that you preferred to film those friends of yours who were having particular fun on that occasion. You might also conceive a party as an event where there is action and movement, so there is a chance that you filmed more people dancing than people sitting, or whatever type of action versus non-action may have occurred. Also, you may think of that video as something that *you* (first and foremost) will benefit from as a memory to share in the future, or as a new post in your social network. Indeed, there is a chance that you may have filmed your own friends more often than other people in that party, and so on and so forth. You made choices that were both artistic and ideological, although you did *not* portray reality, but rather presented a carefully selected portion. Your video was "realistic", but it was still, unmistakably, a form of fiction. This fictionalization of reality proceeded by *subtraction* from reality itself. Please, remember this idea, because we shall use it again later on.

There is also another phenomenon that contributes to this fictionalization—this time not caused by the "director" of the video, but by the "actors". Have you noticed what happens when you point a camera at a person, and this person realizes that they are being filmed? Perhaps not always, but most of the times, this person invariably starts to *act* in some way: they may gather a certain composure "to look nice" in film; they may try to escape being filmed; they may try to be funny (poke out the tongue or suchlike); they may pretend to be some public character (particularly an actor/actress). In other words, this person is not *being natural* anymore: they do not behave in the same way as when they were not being filmed. The condition itself of being filmed created the mindset of the fiction, *at the expense* of reality and realism. A person who pokes the tongue out when filmed is not "less real" than a person who does not, of course, but they are "less realistic" in comparison to the condition of that person when they are not filmed. Could we argue that this person would have poked their tongue out on their own account, if they were not filmed? In principle, it is possible that they would have felt that urge anyway, but in practice we very much doubt that, without the filming, this would have happened.

Both the filmmaker, thus, and the people on the other side of the camera tend to fictionalize reality. Take this as a golden rule: the very moment you introduce a form, *any form*, of reproduction/representation of reality (such as, indeed, an AVT), that is the moment when you *renounce* to communicate reality as a whole, and the most you can do is simply *tend towards* a high degree of realism—fiction is *always* there. We may summarize this process in ▣ Fig. 1.2.



▣ Fig. 1.2 The (failed) attempt to reproduce reality in an AVT. When we video a party such as the one in the figure, we perform a number of actions that compromise the illusion of total realism. Instead, we introduce elements of fiction: our smartphone is not able to capture the whole reality that surrounds us, so we need to choose limited parts of it. We make these choices on the basis of what we consider "nice" and "relevant", so we filter out other things. The monitor of our smartphone allows us to see *some* cheerful people, but not others. We see two plates with some crumbs of food, but we do not see the beer cans. Our view of the window is limited, but we do not see the curtains, etc. Also, upon becoming aware they were being filmed, our friends started to "act" in some way, giving a slightly different picture of themselves as compared to how they behaved normally. All of these actions "fictionalize" reality

Let us now address the opposite dilemma. Can an AVT (or any other artwork) be *entirely* fictional? Can it be the exclusive work of our imagination, with no connection whatsoever with reality? To answer these questions we shall perform a very simple yet (you will see) rather frustrating exercise. The exercise is: think about something that is totally unreal, something completely fantastic, bizarre… anything that simply *does not* exist in the real world. A hint of encouragement: nobody ever managed to do that, in the whole history of humankind.

You have 5 min from this moment. Or take 1 h, one month, one year… any amount of time you fancy, really!

Have you done that? What was the result? Of course, everybody tends to think about different things. For example, in my university career of about 20 years my impression is that very many students imagine a totally blank (white or grey, usually) space, where just nothing happens or is visible. Some others imagine curvy, messy shapes that have no resemblance to any particular object. Others go for otherworldly creatures of one sort or another. Yet, there is a common thread to this and all the other exercises. Whatever weird, absurd entity you may have constructed in your mind, you have always—always!—constructed it by employing items that belong empirically to the real world. You have used colors, shapes, materials, and sounds: even if the final result was something that was never seen before, you were obliged to "borrow" all the components from reality.

Let us take a look at ◘ Fig. 1.3, where one of the monsters of the videogame *The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing* is depicted. What we see is a terrifying, electrically charged lycanthrope of abnormal size and behavior: as such, it is an entirely fictional creature. Nevertheless, in order to create it, we had to borrow from hundreds of empirical elements: this monster has eyes, ears, mouth, legs, tail, arms… it has a fur of a brown color, shreds of a pair of trousers, metal gloves… the list is endless, and it is entirely based on items and characteristics that we can singularly find in the real world: it is only the sum to be fictional. We may all agree that we actually did not see the monster, but we also agree that none of its part is inexistent.

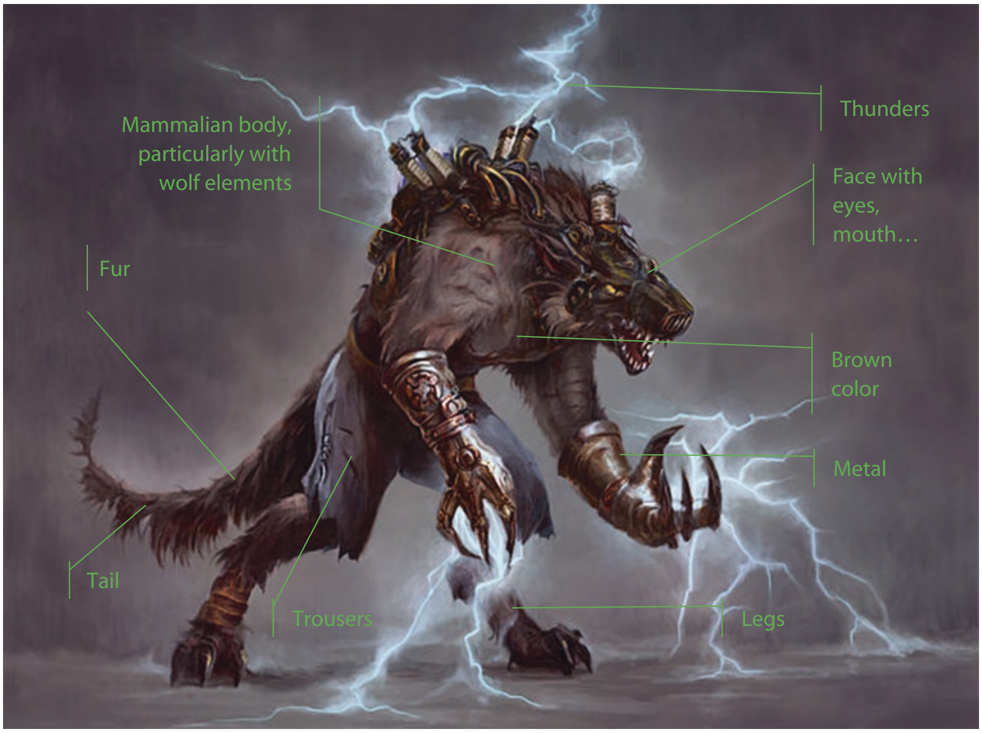
In conclusion, it is important to remember that "pure" conditions of realism or fiction do not exist, if not in theory. AVTs are suspended in a situation where the representation of reality is never entirely faithful and where imagination is not without its limits.

For more on this dualism, you may want to check Barbero et al. (2013), Sohn-Rethel (2015) and Wood (2008).

1.1.2 Description Versus Prescription

> Through the deep silence of the deserted avenue, the carts made their way towards Paris, the rhythmic jolting of the wheels echoing against the fronts of the sleeping houses on both sides of the road, behind the dim shapes of elms. A cart full of cabbages and another full of peas had joined up at the Pont de Neuilly with the eight carts carrying carrots and turnips from Nanterre; the horses plodded along of their own accord, their heads down as they moved forward at a steady but lazy pace…

This is the very beginning of *The Belly of Paris*, a novel written in 1873 by Émile Zola, one of the greatest writers in French history. Among other things, Zola was known for



◘ **Fig. 1.3** A monster from the videogame *The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing*. Even when dealing with such a fantasy/horror context, and with a creature that, as a whole, does not exist in reality, we recognize multiple elements that are not fictional, but in fact belong to the realm of the empirical. In the figure, we emphasize nine of them, although there are many more his remarkable ability to provide long, detailed descriptions of any location he chose to write about, and these went for page after page, until basically the reader is left with the impression that nothing has been left out.

Now, we all know what a "description" is. We may define it as a more or less accurate account of a given item, event or situation. When we have been on holiday somewhere and we wish to share our experience with our friends, we "describe" that place: we say what was there, what we saw, what we did, who we met, and so forth. Similarly, when we have been to the cinema and we want to give account of the movie we saw, we "describe" that movie—its story, actors, some interesting elements such as effects, location, sequences, etc. Later, we will discuss this in more detail, although in the meantime the need for storytelling is innate in our species, so a distinctive inclination to describe things and situations also appears to be important for us. Descriptions, as we said, can be more or less accurate, but it is interesting that, in many cases, we use descriptions to *replace* accuracy. If, say, we go to a shop and we do not exactly know the name of the item we are looking for, we use a description to fill that gap. For example, we may be looking for a "VR box" without knowing that actual denomination, and so we may address the shop assistant as follows: "I would like that thing that looks like a scuba diving mask, but it is used to watch those videos that look like they are real". The shop assistant, of average competence will understand what you are talking about, and will show you the models of VR boxes available in the shop. Or: we go to the doctor having no idea what kind of disease we have, therefore we *describe* the symptoms, hoping that our physician will have enough elements to formulate a diagnosis, or at least to understand which part of our body is worthwhile checking.

But there is something else we do with descriptions. That is: we use them to express our opinions, and possibly to persuade our interlocutor that the given opinion we have of that given fact we described is actually the opinion that they should have as well. For this purpose, we formulate our sentences and pick our words in such a way that the particular opinion comes across convincingly, and our interlocutor may be inspired to think alike. It is usually the case that if we are describing the movie we saw at the cinema, then we do not just do it neutrally. From our words, our tone, our body language, and many other features, we convey also our opinion about that movie. Did we like it, did we not, do we recommend it to our friends, was it better than the previous one from the same director, what were the strengths, what the weaknesses, and so on? Sometimes, we go so far with that attitude that our interlocutor reproaches us for being too opinionated, or for trying too hard to persuade them over the quality of the movie, and whether they should go and see it or not. As a matter of fact, when we do that we are not so much "describing" but "prescribing" something. I use this word in the same spirit, as would a doctor. Doctors write prescriptions for drugs and therapies, in other words they give us their considered opinion as to what we should do about our illness. First, they "describe" what we have, and then they "prescribe" what we should do. More accurately, some doctors tend to be prescriptive at the general stage of description: we go there with—say—a certain pain at the back, and they will not only explain what we have, but they will also add things like "this kind of pain usually comes when one is sitting too much and taking little physical activity". With a statement like this, the doctor is already implying (prescribing) that we should spend less time at the computer and more outside.

Once more, therefore, we create a dichotomy, a tension between two important extremes: the neutral and the partial, which is better described as ideologically engaged. For the purposes of this book, we shall call **description** the act of constructing AVCC in such a way that the material is displayed *as it is*, that is, without judging it, but providing as much as possible a multilateral account of the events and the characters in it. This way, we encourage receivers (audience, readership, etc.) to make up their own mind, i.e. we do not encourage any particular point of view. On the other hand, we shall call **prescription** the act of constructing an AVT in such a way that the material is *filtered* by our judgement, and we let the latter transpire more or less clearly. In this case we want the receivers to access our opinion, reflect on it and—possibly—develop a similar view on the events and characters.

Let us return to Zola's passage: when we read it—we may all agree—there seems to be no particular point of view expressed by the writer on the events narrated. We have these carts full of vegetables heading towards Paris, coming from different directions at a slow pace, and joining around the bridge at Neuilly. What is Zola's role in all this, we may ask? Does he like it that these carts are heading towards Paris? Does he express any opinion on this particular event? Of course, when we read the whole book, the situation changes a bit—but let us stick to these few lines now. From this passage we are led to understand that Zola is an "observer". He speaks about these carts in a neutral way, and not incidentally. This is why I chose Zola for he is regarded as the godfather of "literary naturalism", which, among other things, is a style that advocates the author's emotional detachment from the events they narrate.

Now. Let us play a bit with the text, and make just a few changes, although may the gods of literature forgive me for doing this to the great French writer:

> » Through the EERIE silence of the deserted avenue, the carts made their way towards Paris, the SCREECHING jolting of the wheels echoing against the fronts of the sleeping houses on both sides of the road, behind the CREEPY shapes of elms. A cart full of cabbages and another full of peas had joined up at the Pont de Neuilly with the eight carts carrying carrots and turnips from Nanterre; the horses MARCHED along of their own accord, their heads down as they moved forward at a steady but THREATENING pace…

Here we go. We have changed only five words, without altering any sentence order, or try to produce a more sophisticated version of the text. Five words only, and all of a sudden Mr. Zola seems to be rather opinionated about these carts. Now, he sees them as scary figures that are probably going to Paris to do something evil. And now, he seems to want to persuade us not to be too sympathetic towards these carts, but rather fear them. Added to which, the genre of the novel appears to have changed: no longer do we embrace the celebrated "naturalism" of Zola, but have entered the realm of gothic literature, with its frightening and ominous signifiers.

When it comes to audiovisuality the idea that tiny elements can make a difference between a descriptive and a prescriptive attitude is hugely important. When we spoke about realism and fiction, we emphasized that a completely realistic approach to a text is impossible, because, anyway, in the AVT we "cut a portion" of reality, so that we cannot display its entirety. One reason for this is technical: a camera (or similar) does not allow us to capture the entire context and all of the sensorial experiences it offers. The other reason, as we specified, is ideological: we capture what we consider *worthwhile* to capture—we make *choices*. When not forced by circumstances, a choice is always ideological, meaning that it is the result of our taste, past experiences, education, personal and/or cultural inclinations, political ideas, and so forth. All these form our opinions about things, and we reflect those opinions by making a selection of what, to us, is *important*, or *significant*, or *pertinent*, and suchlike.

A small difference in capturing one portion of reality over another can make this ideological difference. Moving a few centimeters on one side, getting a bit closer or further, capturing that portion in a given moment or a few seconds later, changing a single item in the picture… And, let us be clear about one thing: we need tell no lies in order to convey an ideologically engaged message: the difference between description and prescription does not overlap with the difference between truth and falsehood. Often, it may be the case that a text manipulates reality and deceives its readers to make the message more effective, which is typical in the case of political propaganda where we are presented with political and economic information that gives the misleading impression that things are better than they really are. Yet, this is not compulsory, and it is not necessarily the point of a prescriptive approach. Let us repeat; what we really need is *choices*—that choosing to show X instead of Y is an intrinsically ideological action.

Let us consider Fig. 1.4, which are my own photographs taken in a room where two office chairs of the same type were standing next to a wall. In picture 1, on the left side, we observe both chairs: one is almost seen in its entirety whilst only a small part of the other chair is visible. No matter, we get a clear idea that there are two chairs because the picture leans on the "descriptive" side, and is faithful (and neutral) to the fact that the place has indeed two chairs—no more and no less.

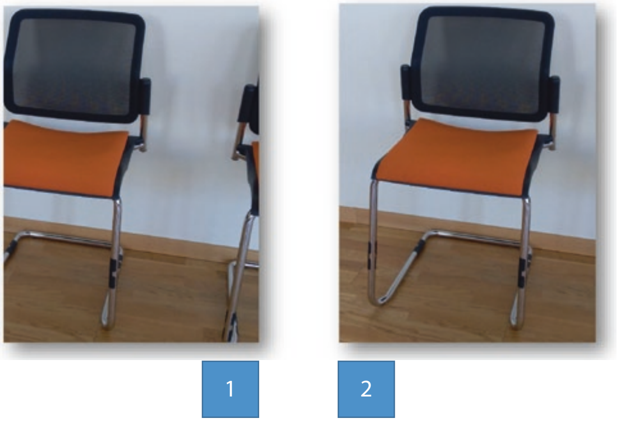


Fig. 1.4 An environment containing two chairs is portrayed first in a descriptive way (1) then in a more prescriptive one (2), the latter leading us to believe there is only one chair

Now let us consider the second picture in Fig. 1.4 where on the right we see only one chair, which sends the message that this is all we have in the whole place. When taking these photos, all I did was simply *choose* to take my shot a few centimeters to the left: the same items, the same distance, the same perspective… everything was the same except a little movement on the left. That movement turned out to be "prescriptive", because from this new position I was now able to convey an entirely different message—one of singularity, as opposed to one of plurality. And, depending on how we contextualize this image, we may also elaborate on this meaning, for example creating a sense of solitude, or one of desolation, or one of individuality, or one of preciousness, etc. There are many possibilities. Did I *lie* about those chairs? Not really: I simply chose to take a picture of that portion of reality that shows one chair only, but my picture is exactly the same size as the one that shows two chairs, and was taken in exactly the same environment. Both pictures are "sincere", but one leads us to imagine a situation that conforms to reality (two chairs in that room), another one is ideologically engaged, because it reflects my decision to show only one chair instead of two. And, at the same time, both pictures are the result of an active choice, not only the second one. I could have taken both chairs in their entirety, I could have taken a higher or a lower angle, I could have shot in black and white, I could have turned my attention somewhere else… in both cases, I *edited* reality, but in doing so captured only a small portion of it.

On the other hand, we should not confuse "description" with "realism": while a text that describes a real situation obviously tends to be realistic, we must keep in mind that one can be descriptive also in relation to a totally fictional situation. If we imagine, say, a bunch of fictional aliens from a fictional planet in a fictional era of the future, and we are able to represent them in a neutral way that would not imply that we should fear them, or destroy them, or befriend them, or anything that would orient our opinion in any direction, then we would be equally descriptive in our effort to depict these aliens.

If we accept that such small details can make a big difference, then we can observe more obvious cases of prescription in AVCC. Indeed, while we make tiny choices such as moving a few centimeters on one side or another, we also make very bold ones. Advertising is a case in point, extending to all those texts pertaining to the complex realm of ethics and politics, which put another way, means "how we see the world" and "how we think it should be". We certainly do not need to elaborate on the prescriptive nature of a commercial, so advertising aside we should note that AVTs are able to convey important messages about our society, which in some cases are very clear. For example, the AVT may be overtly political such as the movie by director, Elia Kazan, *A Gentleman's Agreement*, which is clearly a movie that condemns anti-Semitic prejudice. Or when we take a music video like Radiohead's "All I need" it is clear that it takes a stand against child exploitation in developing countries. Then of course we have the whole area of political propaganda, with AVTs created with the exact purpose of promoting a given regime to the people over whom it rules. Film directors such as Leni Riefenstahl (Nazi Germany) or Sergei Eisenstein (Soviet Union) were adept in creating a positive image of their respective countries, showing them as just, efficient and flourishing, but most of all faithful to the values for which they stood—supposedly. In fact, who needs dictators such as Hitler or Stalin when propaganda AVTs can also be realized within democratic contexts? Despite appearances, a film such as Sylvester Stallone's, *Rocky IV* is more about the Cold War and American-Russian political relations rather than the obvious plotline, i.e. boxing and sport. Its intention is to elevate America and American values over those of the Soviet Union. The character of Ivan Drago, the Soviet boxer, is depicted as the villain and that of Rocky, as the good guy, with the great majority of the events and circumstances in the film made to appear as an opportunity to create a comparison between the USA and USSR that would be favorable to the former. So, the American boxer is made to appear human, humane, authentic and honest, while the Soviet boxer clearly shows little or no emotion, is merciless (he pummels his first opponent Apollo Creed who subsequently dies), and is made to look and act like a cyborg. There is even a 7-minute sequence where the training methods of the boxers are edited in order to juxtapose their individual "style". Hence, Rocky trains in a forest, and is seen running, throwing and chopping trees, whilst Ivan trains in a hi-tech lab where is supervised by white-coated staff who administer doping substances. Released in 1985, *Rocky IV* spectacularizes the American way of life and Reaganism in particular, and by any definition qualifies as a "propaganda film".

This example should remind us that one does not need a politically committed AVT to make a political point. Several texts considered by many to be pure fun are often filled with prescriptive aspects. Science fiction in any shape, e.g. literature, cinema, TV, is a good example, and more often than not carries messages of warning about the future of our societies or our species. Scenarios of dystopia (e.g., in *Blade Runner*), environmentalist warnings (e.g., *Avatar*), anti-racist messages (e.g., *District 9*) and so forth are extremely common themes in sci-fi AVTs, even if most of us choose to watch them for their spectacularity and entertaining qualities.

To conclude, the same warning applies as the paragraph on realism and fiction. In this case, too, it is not possible to talk about descriptions that are totally neutral and deprived of prescriptive components, and prescriptions that bear no neutral elements. We are not robots, we have opinions and we make choices. As much as we can try to avoid them, there is always some detail that creeps into the text that actually reveals something of our preferences and views.

The Greek director Costa-Gravas once said, "Personally I believe that all movies are political. […] I think the cinema has to bring emotions to the public and speak rightly about the problems and then the audience can decide what to do. The audience must be free and independent. I don't believe the cinema should impose ideas they don't like. I think the cinema is entertainment but it's necessary to have some content too."

Similarly, it would be delusional to attribute, say, social or political meaning to every single element we capture and represent in our AVT. The variables at play are virtually endless for us to expect to be in control of each and every one of them. The average AVT displays a fair balance of descriptive and prescriptive features: it is often possible to detect a *tendency* in one direction or another, sometimes a clear tendency, and sometimes an openly-stated tendency, but we never reach a point where either category becomes completely invisible.

For a more thorough analysis of these topics, I suggest Coban (2018), Nichols (1981) and Ronen (1997).

1.1.3 Case Study: Bambi Between Realism, Fiction, Description and Prescription

Bambi, released in 1942, is considered to be one of the classics of animation cinema and was the fifth full-length animated feature film by Walt Disney. It is among his best known and most appreciated films, received three Academy Awards nominations (sound, song, music), and was hailed as the third best animated movie of all time by the American Film Institute.

The direction of *Bambi* was outstanding, with the team supervised by animator, David Hand, who also worked on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The major innovation was the realistic approach in the animation, rather unusual at the time: we shall return to this theme later. Adapted from Felix Salten's book, *Bambi*: A *Life in the Woods*, the movie follows the growth of the white-tailed deer Bambi from his early days until adulthood, and his mating with the doe Faline. Along the way, in what is arguably one of the all-time best remembered death sequences in the history of cinema, Bambi loses his mother, who is shot by an off-screen hunter that spectators never see. This is the defining moment of the film, and the focus of our attention here, as it is the main embodiment of the prescriptive aspect of this film, of the "message" it carries.

The most solid legacy left by *Bambi*, indeed, is its uncompromising environmentalism, in particular its disapproval and disavowal of hunting. Literally, thousands of people who are drawn to animal advocacy refer to the mentioned hunting sequence as the emotional catalyst for their interest in animal rights. This phenomenon, known as the "Bambi Effect" (or occasionally "Bambi Factor" or "Bambi Syndrome"), commenced immediately after the movie's release. American hunters were the first to react, and were infuriated at having been cast as villains, especially after centuries of heroic depictions of the *Little Red Riding Hood*-type. As *Bambi* became more and more successful, Disney was asked his permission for the use of that very sequence (as well as the one with the forest fire, which appeared later in the movie) for promotional campaigns against the use of firearms, and in support of nature conservation. Incidentally, the hunter who kills Bambi's mother has become one of the ultimate villains, and currently occupies the twentieth position in the already-mentioned American Film Institute's survey on the 100 all-time cinematographic villains. This is an outstanding acknowledgment to the emotional power of that sequence, if one considers that (a) the hunter kills only one individual (not even a human, although—of course—"a mother with a small child"), and (b) the character is actually *off-screen* and never visible (the only case in the 100 villains surveyed by the Institute). If that is not impressive enough, just consider that *Bambi*'s hunter is rated a meaner character than Terminator (n.22 in the list), Dracula (33) and Freddy Krueger (40).

What, then are the main characteristics that make this such an effective case of AV prescription, to the extent that it generated a social phenomenon, and also considering that the film utters not one word against hunting? Obviously the scene where Bambi's mother is killed has a poignancy that is almost unsurpassed. We do not see the hunter (we only "hear" him, via not more than two rifle shots), we do not see Bambi's mother dying or dead, we only see Bambi running in the snow and finding shelter in a small cave. When he comes out, happy to have made it, he repeatedly calls out for his mom until finally his father appears and tells him "your mother can't be with you anymore". The emotional power of this sequence has been explained in various ways, one of the most convincing being the following:

> » This death scene is central to the film's anti hunting message. The dog pack chasing Faline, the shooting of Bambi, and the general panic among and killing of the wild animals during the hunt certainly contributes to this message. It is, however, the death of Bambi's mother that people remember. Disney spent nearly three-quarters of the film building sympathy for Bambi as a cute, lovable, vulnerable child. His mother nurtured and cared for him, and then, just as they had come through winter's hardships, she was killed. Bambi was left a virtual orphan, without his principal caregiver, alone until his loving but aloof and uncommunicative father appeared. The film never voiced a word against hunting. The anti hunting message was conveyed on a completely emotional level through sympathy with its characters. It was targeted at children in their most impressionable, formative years. The memory of the incident remains with them even into adulthood (Lutts 1992: 162)

Also, from a narrative point of view, the choice of placing the mother's death halfway through the movie (a choice of course due to Salten's novel) possibly creates an even stronger emotional impact on the spectator. Indeed, if it is true that having a scene like that as the movie's ending would have been an ultimate tearjerker, it is also true that the actual early timing of the tragedy forces the spectator to emotionally struggle *during* the film, and feel pity for poor Bambi, while *seeing* him instead of processing the grief in a "far from sight, far from heart" more comfortable situation, as we usually do with sad movie endings. The Bambi Effect proves its power also because, despite all the optimism following the mother's death (spring, friendship, love…), most spectators never really get over the tragedy, and leave the theatres with the bittersweet aftertaste of something that, yes, ended positively, but will be forever marked by sadness, loss and unfairness. And, needless to say, *Bambi*'s narrative and visual ingredients provide the most effective background for such feelings: a cute and inoffensive species, an archetypical type of tragedy (mother's death and orphanage as such) and the total innocence of the character (they have done nothing to deserve this).

However, this is not the end of the story. There are other factors that contribute to the effectiveness of *Bambi*'s anti-hunting message. As mentioned, one of the chief characteristics of the movie is its realism, especially as it constitutes a significant aesthetic contrast to the heavily fictional and anthropomorphic animals previously pictured in Disney cartoons (just think about the likes of Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck, for instance). For this new production, and despite the fact that—as usual—the animals would be talking human language (a highly fictional characteristic, of course), Disney specifically aimed, as much as possible, at a realistic movie—something which is almost a contradiction in terms, since this was an animated feature and not live-action. However, the plan must have been quite successful, given that a few critics, at the time, received this type of animation negatively, remarking that Disney had "lost his magic". To pursue Disney's goal, a professional animal painter, Rico LeBrun, was hired to lecture the animators on how to draw realistically the various animals. Also, two real deer (named Bambi and Faline, just like those in the movie) were shipped from a zoo to Disney studios so that the animators could study their movements.

The taxonomic inspiration for the main characters was the white-tailed deer *Odocoileus virginianus* (see a comparison between the cartoon and a real specimen in ◘ Fig. 1.5), the most common deer species in America, despite the fact that the original protagonists in Salten's novel are European roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* (Salten is indeed Austrian). The urban legend goes that Disney chose the *Odocoileus virginianus* because it was the most hunted species in the USA, but the truth is that he simply wanted an animal that the American public could easily recognize. This intended realism was extended also to behavior as such: some elements of the deer's biology are indeed represented in a fairly faithful manner, the most evident example being the lack of paternal care. So, quite interestingly, and

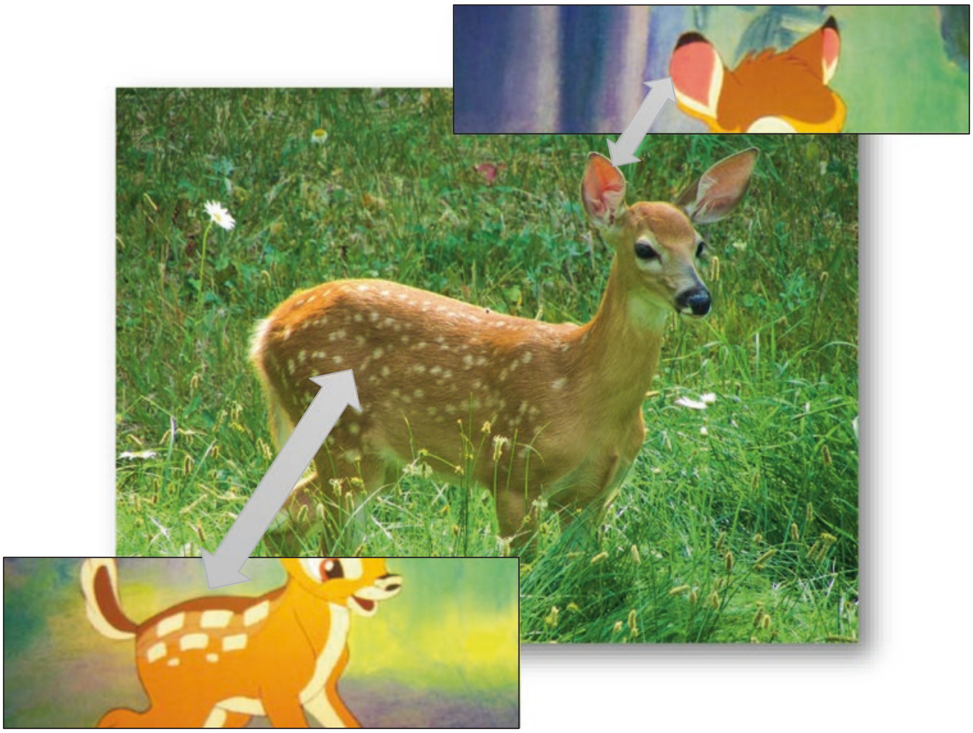


Fig. 1.5 A comparison between Bambi and an actual white-tailed deer. While several features in the cartoon are definitely anthropomorphized (e.g., the eyes), the overall result is much more realistic than most other Disney animation movies. *[Fair use—Photos personally assembled and edited for demonstrative purpose]*

despite the fact that this is an *animated* movie *for children* (two good reasons to be fictional by definition), *Bambi* is noteworthy for its effort to be rather realistic and descriptive of nature and animals, both visually and ethologically. It is also (mostly?) thanks to this approach that the audience is more inclined than usual to *believe* the story, or at least the values and messages it carries.

The relationship between Bambi and his father, the Great Prince, is another important aspect of this movie, and another factor contributing to its prescriptive program. The father appears as a kind of mythical figure: he provides wisdom but not affection, honesty but not care, and—as we have read in the quotation above—is "aloof and uncommunicative". For this reason also, besides the tragedy in itself, the loss of Bambi's mother appears as irreparable, for at the moment she is killed all of us know that Bambi is entirely on his own, at an age where he is not ready. Yes, he can count on good *advice* from this mythical figure, but parental *affection* and *presence* are lost forever. In this sense, there is also a feeling of unaccomplishment about this relationship, and that is probably why, when *Bambi II* was released, in 2006, it was not structured as a **sequel**, but as a **midquel**, focusing on the time immediately following the mother's death, and before Bambi grows up (as already shown in the original 1942 release). During this time, *Bambi II* elaborates exactly on the relationship between the protagonist and his father: we see more frequentation between the two of them (practically the Great Prince commits to take care of Bambi from the mother's death to the next spring), and we also see the fawn doubting his father's feelings towards him. While this implementation of the story does not fully heal our Bambi syndrome, it compensates a bit that sense of loneliness that we all attributed to the young fawn in the period between his mother's killing and the coming of spring. The original *Bambi* had left us with the feeling that he had been entirely on his own: with *Bambi II*, at least, we are told that he enjoyed the support of his father. Having said that, the father's limited participation in Bambi's parenting was consistent with Disney's realistic approach: in nature, indeed, deer are among those many mammalians whose family structure is such that only mothers nurture the young ones.

Finally, the movie is not only committed to an anti-hunting message, but to more general environmentalist sentiments. Intentionally or not, Walt Disney, after *Bambi*, became a sort of spokesman for environmentalism, sustaining this reputation in many of his subsequent productions. As a private citizen, Disney's opinions certainly did not exceed a conservative type of environmentalism: we do not find any evidence of a more radical commitment to animal rights. He has been praised for having created sympathy for species traditionally despised, such as—famously—mice, but he also received criticism for the so-called Disneyfication, i.e., that particular process of anthropomorphization that projects on animals not only human *physical* traits, but also (both negative and positive) characterial aspects, contributing to general deceiving perceptions of this or that species. More generally, the diverse ideological and ethical stands taken by Walt Disney through his productions have been the subject of repeated controversy. Anti-Semitism, racism, male chauvinism, and a general perceived encouragement of discriminatory stereotypes (very often expressed from the position of the "white middle-class male"), are only some of the various accusations moved towards his films. As for his explicit political ideas, Disney's only relevant "recorded" action remains his anti-communist collaboration with the House Un-American Activities Committee, which he actively helped by testifying against some of his collaborators. Whether the latter activity displays continuity (or not) with his alleged prejudices may of course be subject to debate.

Regardless of Walt Disney's personal opinions, one cannot deny that Disney productions continue to convey environmentalist messages. In that sense, we could even say that Walt Disney was himself victim of the "Bambi effect". A leitmotif of Disney movies is the criticism of human arrogance that imprisons or destroys other animal species. Occasionally, these movies point the finger on specific practices of exploitation or mistreatment, as in the case of fur in *101 Dalmatians* or captivity in *Dumbo*. This attitude appears in *Bambi* as well, and it certainly constitutes another meaningful prescriptive element. The message, in this case, is conveyed through Disney's legendary sense of image and visual representation:

> Humans, although never seen in the film, are the sole source of evil in the Disney view of nature. (…) Hunters not only kill Bambi's mother, they also kill the woodland creatures indiscriminately, their dogs attack Faline, and their fire ravages the forest. The fierce, hungry flames that devour the forest and its creatures become a surrogate for Man that continues and subliminally magnifies the hunters' destructive hunger for the lives of Bambi and his friends. Hunters are represented virtually as a satanic force. Disney adds to this impression by using crows, circling and cawing ominously over the forest, as dark harbingers of Man. (Lutts 1992: 166)

In conclusion, we have seen in *Bambi* at least three main strategies to make a message particularly effective, even without a single open/explicit statement: the audiovisual construction of specific sequences (the killing of Bambi's mother and the fire in the forest), the visual and ethological representation of the characters (a certain realism in depicting the various animals), and the role assigned to specific characters (Bambi's father, the Great Prince).

Besides Lutts (1992), I also suggest Whitley (2008) for a more comprehensive study on the idea and representation of nature in Disney productions.

1.2 Media, Formats and Genres

Hopefully, having understood the fundamental distinctions that define the mere nature of AVCC, and most of all their endless nuances, we can now classify the different types of AVTs, and then their historical development.

Previously, we have discussed how the lines between what is fictional and what is not, and between descriptive and prescriptive texts, are in fact blurred, and that it is factually impossible to find a text that bears a given set of such characteristics without bearing a bit of their opposites as well. We need to keep this in mind as a golden rule, and nothing of what we will say in the following lines should affect this axiom.

At the same time, at face value all AVTs present themselves with a certain, so to speak, *identity document*, which says, at any given time, "I am a realistic text", "I am a fictional text", "I am a descriptive text", etc. As we have seen, a documentary may have its own fictional elements, and may not display a total "realistic purity", yet it is presented to us with the ID of a realistic text, and—most of the times—a descriptive one as well.

This notion of the ID may help us to determine a functional classification for the existing AVTs. My suggestion is to place the two oppositions over two Cartesian axes, and thereby create four quadrants using the combination of the four terms (see ◘ Fig. 1.6).

This way we have:

1. Texts that present themselves as fictional and descriptive, e.g. many movies and series (particularly those based on real events and fairly faithful to them), AV reconstructions of real events (usually historical ones) made with professional actors, and some music videos, etc.
2. Texts that present themselves as fictional and prescriptive, e.g. movies and series with some kind of explicit social/political message, most music videos, and most commercials, etc.
3. Texts that present themselves as non-fictional and descriptive, e.g. most documentaries, news programs of different sorts, sport programs, and interviews, etc.
4. Texts that present themselves as non-fictional and prescriptive, e.g. propaganda documentaries, some commercials (even if one could seriously object that they are actually "non"-fictional: let us say that "officially" they display the real virtues of real products), and most "making of" programs (which are usually meant to promote some film or record or else), etc.

Remaining on this *surface*-type of level (how the texts presents themselves, which may be different from what they really are or turn out to be), there are three broad conditions that distinguish fiction from non-fiction. First, as we said, there has to be some kind of explicit ID: the text will announce itself as part of a group of texts conventionally associated with fiction or non-fiction. For example, if we switch on the TV to watch a weather forecast program, we expect "non-fiction" because the program claims to report a *real* assessment of weather conditions made by *real* specialists of the field. Quite often, and not by chance, it is one of those specialists who are asked to host the program, and not a professional TV host, although the latter may speak better, show more confidence, and so forth. The presence of the specialist adds up to the perceived objectivity and realism of the program.

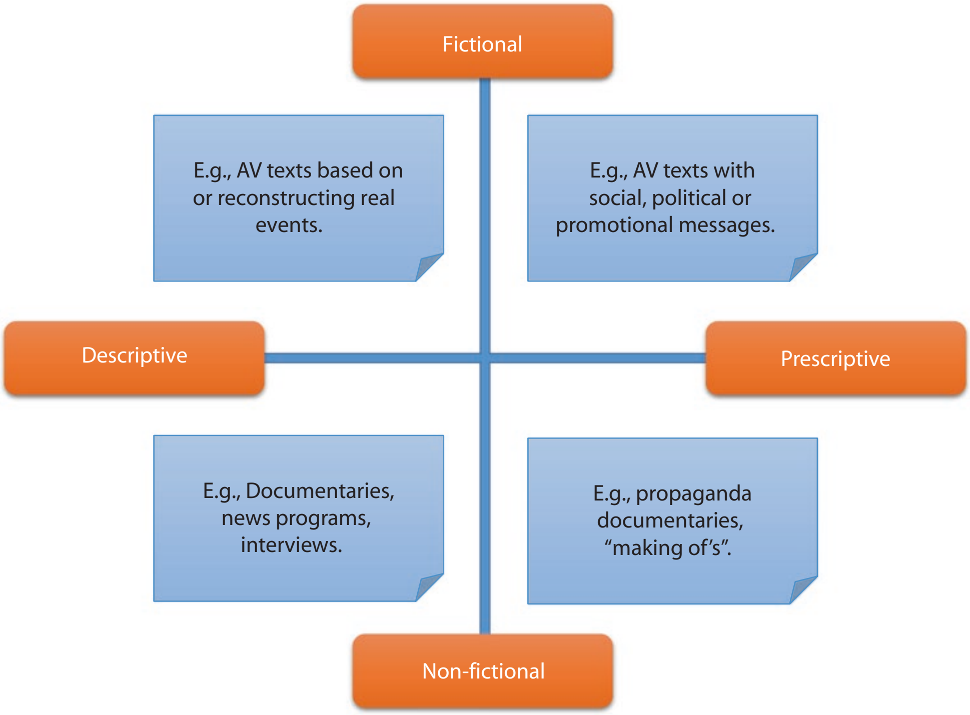

Fictional
E.g., AV texts based on or reconstructing real events.
E.g., AV texts with social, political or promotional messages.
Descriptive
Prescriptive
E.g., Documentaries, news programs, interviews.
E.g., propaganda documentaries, "making of's".
Non-fictional

Fig. 1.6 The possible combinations among the dualisms realism/fiction and description/prescription, as represented on a Cartesian plane

Second, a difference can be drawn by whether the material we see on the screen is staged or not. A documentary or a news program usually show material that is not staged, and from that we may infer they are non-fictional. Of course, those unstaged images may be manipulated in all sorts of ways (through montage, comments, and others), but in principle one starts by assuming their faithfulness to reality.

Third, a different degree of creativity is presented in the text. The fictional text presents itself as a creative text in both form and contents; the non-fictional (again: "officially") presents itself as creative only in form. The news program may be hosted in a fancy, attractive studio; it may have a catchy jingle at the beginning; it may display—say—a set of statistic data through innovative digital animation, and so forth. But when it comes to *what* is being shown, what news is reported, there should be no creativity involved, merely the reporting of events.

Similarly, the surface distinction between description and prescription can be drawn from three factors. The first is the same as above, the ID. A commercial is by nature prescriptive, and there is nobody of average intelligence who would regard the advertisement as anything else than a text persuading potential customers. In fact, in many countries, there is a legal obligation to provide an adequate caption (usually on the bottom of the screen) that the text in question is in fact a "promotional message". Some texts, thus, are already expected to be descriptive or prescriptive.

The second factor is the source that spreads out that particular text, which often, although not always, may tell us about its intentions. For example, when we watch two news reports about the same football game (one from the national television and one from the thematic channel of one of the two teams involved) we know that we can expect a more objective/descriptive report from the national TV, and a very partial one from the thematic channel, aimed at convincing us that the given team has either fully deserved its win or was unfairly defeated.

Thirdly, we may assess the figure of the mediator between the text and us. By mediator, we mean whoever shapes the text in a way that can be brought to us in an understandable form: mediators are of course authors, directors, producers, but also the narrator of a documentary, the commentator of a sport game, the host of a talkshow, and so on. When the mediator takes mostly the position of the uninvolved *observer*, then we tend towards description, when they already offer an interpretation of the events, then we tend towards prescription.

All this is a preliminary, yet crucial, way to distinguish one AVT from another. It is mostly a conceptual distinction, but as we said, it is at the core of the very essence of audiovisuality, which is—evidently—a practice that *interacts* with empirical reality, in ways that may be closer or further from, and neutral or critical to, it.

I propose that when we engage in more technical details and more taxonomical classifications (we shall see more in ► Sect. 5.1 and in the case study ► Sect. 5.1.1) we consider three forms: **media**, **formats** and **genres**. They are not mutually exclusive and are transversal to each other: the same format may be used in different media; different genres may be used in the same medium, and so forth.

Needless to say, the historical roots of these notions are very ancient, and in Western terms, would appear to date back to the times Plato classified literature into poetry, prose and drama, which is a distinction that may be read as either dealing with formats or with genres. When it comes to genres, literature is indeed the main point of reference that AV arts (theatre first and then AVCC later, the way we mean it in this book) adopted in order to elaborate their own taxonomies. As with many other cases (as hopefully this book will show), the path was mostly traced by the cinema medium, the first "proper" AV art to develop an identity of its own, and certainly the most influential over the following forms of AVCC that appeared during the twentieth century. However, the appearance of the TV medium first, and digital media eventually, created whole new forms of text classification, generating new formats and new genres.

Since having taken its first steps at the end of the nineteenth century, and until the end of the silent era in the 1930s, cinema mostly developed formats and genres that were directly imported from literature and theatre, particularly nineteenth century works. As for formats, full-length features emerged as the equivalent of novels, short films as the equivalent of short stories and novellas, documentaries as the equivalent of nonfictional, informative literature, and so forth. By this early stage, we are seeing the birth and development of all the existing cinema formats. As for genres, dramas, westerns (in America), horrors, comedies, and action-adventure (including war movies) were the first to be developed in a recognizable form. During this stage, formats and genres developed their respective paradigms and were usually followed by authors and performers reasonably faithfully in both the aesthetic and thematic sense.

The 1930s and 1940s witnessed the sonorization of the previous genres, plus the emergence of others that were specifically bound to the employment of sound, such as—evidently—musicals. Some time later, particularly during the 1950s, more genres acquired mainstream appeal: hitherto, sci-fi in particular had made few appearances, but now became one of the most popular genres. In the space of about 30 years genre paradigms became more solid and complex, and more than a few genre-defining movies were released.

At the same time, in the years following the end of the Second World War, TV broadcasting became popular and television sets became increasingly affordable to families, businesses and institutions. This propelled the creation of a completely different idea of "format" and "genre", which was no longer bound to literary/theatrical/cinematic practices. History's first TV schedule appeared in USA in September 1946, with two broadcasting channels involved: DMN (DuMont Network—a company dissolved in 1956) and the still-existing NBC (National Broadcasting Company). When we take a look at the programs broadcast in the first week by these two channels we find formats as diverse as game shows (*Face to Face*), documentary series (*Serving Through Science*), educational programs of a different nature (the titles should give a hint of their contents: *I Love to Eat*, *Geographically Speaking*, *The World in Your Home* and *You Are an Artist*), infotainers (*Television Screen Magazine*), sport programs (*NFL Football Magazine* and two boxing matches broadcasted live), soap operas (*Faraway Hill*), news programs (*The Esso Newsreel*), variety shows (*Hour Glass*) and music programs (*Voice of Firestone Televues*). With the exception of the documentary series and the soap opera, none of these formats could be subject to a format or genre categorization remotely similar to the cinematographic one (Fig. 1.7).

Faraway Hill
the entire production written and directed by
DAVID P. LEWIS
DUMONT
NBC
BOWLING
The Broadway Hollywood
RADIO CITY

Fig. 1.7 Three pieces of early TV history. Clockwise: the opening cards of the soap opera *Faraway Hill*, the logo of the DuMont channel, and the original building of the NBC channel. *[Images of public domain]*

During the 1950s, the horizons of TV expanded, with the strengthening of its existing formats one the one hand and the introduction of more stylistic differences on the other. For example, increasingly, fictional series began to follow the rich genre template of cinema movies, whilst also new formats were introduced, e.g., the first talk show in 1952.

The 1960s, as we will repeatedly encounter throughout the book, was an innovative and rebellious decade in many ways: one of them was the popularization of reinterpretations of genres that had previously been subject to a standardized/stereotypical treatment in both the aesthetic and ideological sense: for example, they had always displayed moral clarity and a neat distinction between heroes and villains. The most relevant forms of reinterpretation include historical revisionism, that is, a more objective retelling of historical events that inevitably brought a greater complexity of themes—the classic example being the recasting of Native Americans as morally positive characters. Moreover, and more specifically for the purposes of this paragraph—the decade also witnessed forms of hybridization of genres. Thanks to schools such as the French *Nouvelle Vague*, the American New Wave or the generation of Italian "maestri" (Fellini, Antonioni and the likes), genres started to be crossbred, so to speak, generating hybrids that more often than not would escape any specific classification. This became a regular pattern from the 1980s onwards, with the popularization of crossovers such as sci-fi westerns, comedic horrors, erotic noirs, etc.

Television, too, made giant steps in the quality and social awareness of contents, but particularly in terms of influence, becoming a sheer cultural phenomenon and catalyzing most of the general attention around virtually anything happening in the world. It is no wonder that illustrious intellectuals, like media philosopher Marshall McLuhan, warned readers about the power that was being acquired by TV (and advertising in particular) over people's minds. In 1970, the centrality of television in the social discourse, and the increasing perception that things *do not really happen* unless we see them on TV, were sharply targeted in Gil Scott-Heron's legendary protest song "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised".

The 1970s also witnessed the appearance of genre-parodies, that is, spoofing or mocking rather established and identifiable genres including western, horror, sci-fi and the likes. Mel Brooks was an acknowledged master of the category. In turn, TV, started to assume the shape that we are familiar with today, with more fiction (including soap operas and so-called "telefilms"), programs that were more socially conscious, increasingly spectacular variety shows, and generally more diverse contents and styles. At the same time the decade witnessed the death, or drastic reduction, of programs that had characterized the early stage of TV broadcasting, but that seemed to no longer meet the audience favors and demands. Typically, this included so-called "Hillbilly" shows: fictional and non-fictional programs with rural contents, showing country life, folk music and the likes, all dipped in a large pot of light atmospheres and frivolous sentiments.

Most importantly, however, the 1970s was the decade that witnessed the birth of the digital revolution. Arcade machines and home video game consoles quickly acquired a prominent position in the entertainment industry; the development of personal computers like the Commodore PET and Apple II (both in 1977) gave people domestic access to the computer, and launched a brand new set of formats and genres. These innovations came of age in the 1980s (e.g. the appearance of the first laptop is dated 1981) and culminated in 1989, when Tim Berners Lee invented the World Wide Web whilst working at CERN.

The digital revolution was more or less complete by the late 1990s with the popularization of the Internet, the introduction of the first of the smartphones, social media (the first, Six Degrees, was launched in 1997, but Facebook appeared only in 2004) and ever-more efficient new technologies (better operating systems, faster browsers, search engines, Bluetooth, etc.). The twenty first century soon became known as "the digital age".

We shall comprehensively explore this historical path of AVCC in ▶ Sect. 1.3, but for now it is important to have an idea of how the development of audiovisuality was also a development of taxonomical groups related to structure, aesthetics, style and ideological approach to the texts.

Let us examine in more detail how such groups can be classified and understood. If you are interested in deepening your knowledge on these topics and classifications, you may want to check at least Grodal (1999), McLuhan and Lapham (1994), Miller and Kelly (2017), Paxson (2010), Silverblatt (2007) and Valdivia (2003).

1.2.1 Media

The word "media" derives from the Latin "medius" ("middle") and is actually a plural noun. The singular is "medium", and, believe me, there is nothing that irritates a media scholar more than someone who thinks that "media" is a singular noun, with the plural being "medias". Medium/media refer to any means of communication (an outlet, a tool or a device) which stand exactly mid-way between the sender and the receiver of a message, whether it be newspapers, drawings, TV, movies, musical works, etc.

An audiovisual medium, therefore, is any outlet, tool or device that "stands in the middle" by means of sounds and images at the same time. That means that the main audiovisual media currently in use in human societies are three (in chronological order):

- **Cinema**: developed since the late nineteenth century, cinema comprises live action and animation movies of any genre, length and contents. As I have already mentioned in the introduction, cinema will receive more exposure than other media in this book, due to the fact that its strategies of packaging and delivering contents have set the bases, and most of the rules, for all forms of AVCC.
- **Television** (or simply **TV**): developed since the 1920s, but only available to a general audience from the late

1950s onwards, TV comprises entertainment, information, commentary, advertisement, propaganda and education, and is broadcast through different technologies, including terrestrial, cable, satellite and digital. The variety of programs produced by the TV medium is so wide that there will be plenty of opportunities to discuss television texts mostly in relation to their specificities.

- The **digital media** (or **new media**): has developed somewhat erratically in recent times, and only became widely available to the public from about the early 1980s. Digital media includes software, apps, digital videos, videogames, any Internet text with audiovisual contents (e.g., social media) and any "smart" technology with audiovisual contents (starting of course from smartphones and tablets). With the fundamental exception that these texts possess in most cases a characteristic that the other two media normally do not possess, i.e. interaction, digital media generally derive from the other existing media, in both forms and contents, and this is one main reason why they will receive less exposure in this book, as compared to the previous two media.

In terms of function, media can be:

- **Informative** (news, notifications, public announcements, documentaries, emergency alerts…);
- **Entertaining** (movies, shows, games, music videos…);
- **Persuasive** (advertising, propaganda, politics, public relations, marketing…);

When they are meant to reach a wide audience, media are referred to as "**mass media**". In turn, mass media can be of two types:

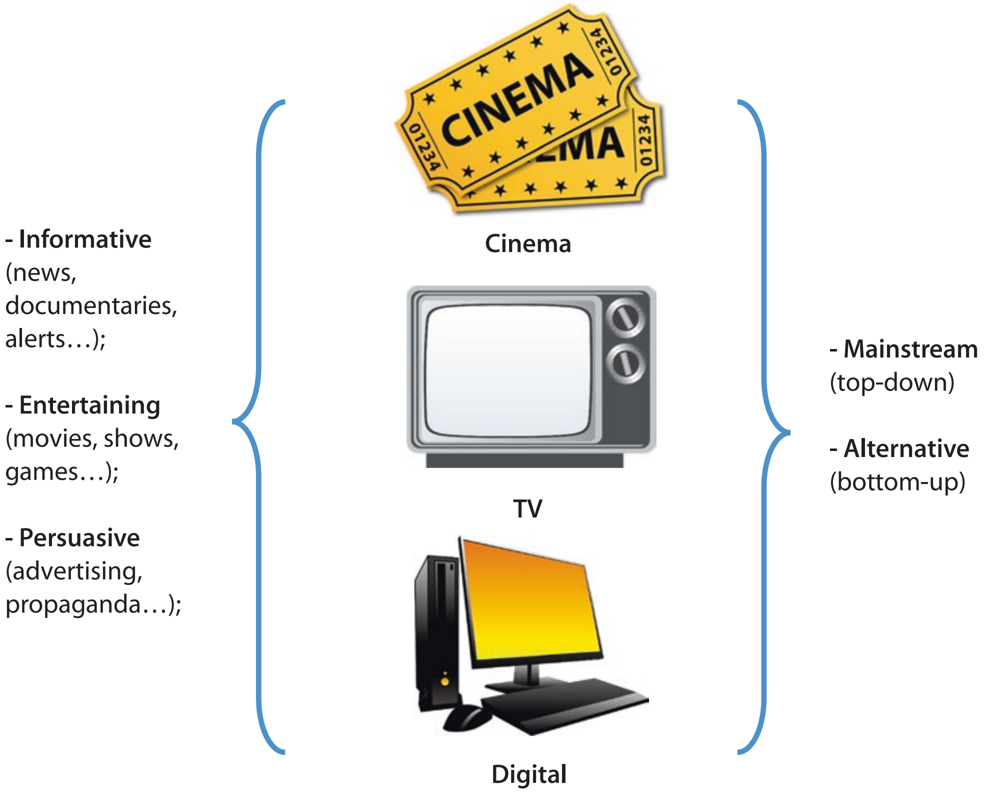
- **Mainstream**, when basically the outreach is a top-down process, that is, the information conveyed is in line with governing institutions, aimed at confirming the social and political status quo, and generally crowd-pleasing in form.
- **Alternative**, when the outreach is a bottom-up process, that is, it departs from non-governing organizations or individuals, with the aim of questioning/criticizing the social and political status quo (including the audience itself), and with a form that tends to be more confronting and less crowd-pleasing (Fig. 1.8).

1.2.2 Formats

Next to media, AVCC can be classified by "formats", that is by the typology of text, regardless of the media employed or its genre (something we shall see in the next paragraph).

In the language of TV there is a specific usage of the word "format" that is similar to the idea of "franchise", and refers to the particular concept behind a specific program, so that the latter can be exported in other countries while retaining the same structure and the same aesthetics with only minor adaptations. Many talent shows (*MasterChef*, *Got Talent*, *X Factor*…) are formats in this sense, as are numerous quiz shows (*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, *The $64,000 Question*, *Jeopardy*…). Here, however, we employ the term

Fig. 1.8 The three media, their functions and their types. *[Images of public domain]*



"format", in the same way musicology employs the term "forma" to distinguish a sonata from a symphony, a song from an intermezzo, etc. In this sense, in our classification, it is the talent show or the quiz show as a whole to be formats, independently from the specific characteristics introduced and franchised by a Simon Cowell or a Franc Roddam.

There is no pretention here to make a full inventory of the formats existing in the ever-expanding galaxy of AVCC. However, it is worth attempting to compile a fair list of the ones we are exposed to more often, and which are clearly distinguishable from the others. Of course, if we engage in the intricacies of the various hybrids there can be no way back!

Format	Description
Usually meant for cinema	
Animation	Fictional movie produced using manual, mechanical or computer-assisted animation techniques. It is listed under "cinema" only because chronologically it was employed there first, but it is actually a format that is equally relevant in all media, and for the most diverse functions (from full-length movies to screensavers, from cartoon series to credit sequences, etc.)
Documentary	Usually nonfictional movie documenting aspects of past, present or possible reality, mostly meant for instruction, education or historical record. A number of sub-formats are specifically related to performing arts, particularly music (concert films, rockumentaries, making of…)
Experimental/ Abstract film or animation	Unconventional text that adopts alternative and imaginative themes, aesthetics and narrative. The format includes also AVTs not designed for cinema but for other contexts (e.g., installations, VJing, etc.)
Full-length live action film	Fictional movie produced using real actors and locations. It is the largest portion of the music industry, where most of the genres (that we shall list in the next paragraph) are applied
Short (either animated or live action) film	Usually fictional movie of less than 40 min in length. They can be quite similar to full-length films in terms of contents (although they normally focus on shorter and less-demanding narratives), but they are often distinguished from those in terms of producers and funding institutions (which are often, in this case, grants, NGOs, low-budget or no-budget student projects, etc.)
Usually meant for TV	
Commercial	Usually short text that promotes a product or a service. A particular sub-format, typical of small private channels, is the shopping show, a phone-in (often live) show where the product is advertised by one or more hosts, and spectators may purchase it by calling on the phone
Documentary series	Documentary program segmented in episodes, usually introduced by a host in a studio
Live event	Live broadcasting (usually with commentary) of events of various nature: sports (the most common), concerts, ceremonies, parades, etc.
Music video	An entertainment text that visualizes and accompanies a song, meant mostly for the commercial promotion of the latter
News program	Information program that reports on news of current concern, and of different types: national and international politics, economy, sports, entertainment, weather, etc. It features numerous sub-formats, related to the broadcasting time, the type of audience, the degree of analysis of the news, and so forth
Series	Usually fictional text (with some exception) segmented in episodes and seasons. It implies a great variety of sub-formats, including sit-coms, soap operas, cartoon series and several others
Variety show	Entertainment program featuring the combination of different performances (music, comedy, dance, interviews…). It is a wide umbrella that covers several types of program, definable either as genres or as sub-formats, including stand-up comedy, game shows, talk shows, etc. While the emphasis remains on the entertainment side, variety shows can also have informative and/or educational value
Usually meant for digital media	
Creative audiovisual software	Any software or app specialized in the creation or the editing of AVTs, such as Premiere, Filmora, Resolume, etc.
Digital texts with occasional audiovisual contents	This is not really a format, but an umbrella for the dozens of digital texts that *may* contain AV contents, but not as a rule, and anyway not in any original form. I am referring to personal pages, web portals, social media, chat groups, numerous software programs, and so forth, which may, occasionally or even often, include AVTs that are however only borrowed from other existing formats (usually videos or animations)
Audiovisual application	Any software or app that provides educational, entertaining or informative contents by means of AV communication. A typical example is educational apps for children, or interactive maps with guiding voices

Format	Description
Interactive advertisement	A particular form of AV advertisement that allows the user to handle the product/service for some time, before considering its purchase. A typical example is the interactive ads of videogames, where the user can play with the given game for a few seconds
OVP material	An OVP (Online Video Platform) is a video-sharing service available on the web, where any user can in principle upload contents. OVPs include YouTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion and the likes. While the contents uploaded tend to be quite derivative from existing formats (the classic example being music videos, TV programs or even entire movies), the spreading of OVPs has created a number of specific sub-formats and genres, accompanied by specific professions/hobbies (YouTubers, Vloggers, etc.)
Simulated Reality	Any interactive sensorial experience that takes place within a simulated environment, by means of different technologies (the best known of which are virtual reality and augmented reality)
Video games	Any of the multiple forms of interactive entertainment produced digitally

As you may have already noticed not all of these formats qualify for a neat definition of AV *creative* communication, but we can safely say that in all of them one or more creative elements are present and necessary.

We shall not return too often to the notion of "format" (in case study ▶ Sect. 5.1.1 we focus on genres and sub-genres), and therefore here we may wish to discuss briefly the communicative potential of formats as such, regardless of what genre they manifest themselves as, or what medium they are contained within.

Take the example of a news program meant (usually) for a TV channel (be that a cable TV channel, a web channel or else). In such a program, we have at least the following characteristics:

(1) A combination of different AV segments, located in variable environments. One is regular, and is the TV studio, where the newscaster, or anchor, speaks (sometimes you can have more than one anchor), and which does not change significantly unless some restyling is made (it usually happens every few years) or the actual program moves into another studio altogether. The others, the stories, may also change radically from one corner of the world to the very opposite, from a Parliament House to a concert hall, from a royal celebration to the site of a murder.

(2) Sometimes these locations recur consecutively in more than one program (e.g., a given political event may be monitored for several days in a row), sometimes they only appear once (e.g., the site of a car accident), and sometimes they reappear at regular intervals (e.g., the weekly appearance of a football pitch for the local national championship).

(3) The program usually goes live in certain parts (e.g., when the newscaster speaks and announces the news, or when some live feed is shown from somewhere), and is pre-recorded in others (e.g., when footage is shown during a story).

(4) Anchors usually appear in formal clothes; they speak a clear language devoid of any regional accent or hesitation; they are filmed for most of the time in a range between the medium close-up and the medium wide shot (in ▶ Sect. 4.2.2 we shall illustrate all the main shots); they sit at a desk; they look at the camera, making it clear that there is no separation between the medium and the audience and it is *us* they are addressing, and so forth.

(5) The program is broadcast several times during the course of the day, keeping the audience up to date with reports of various events.

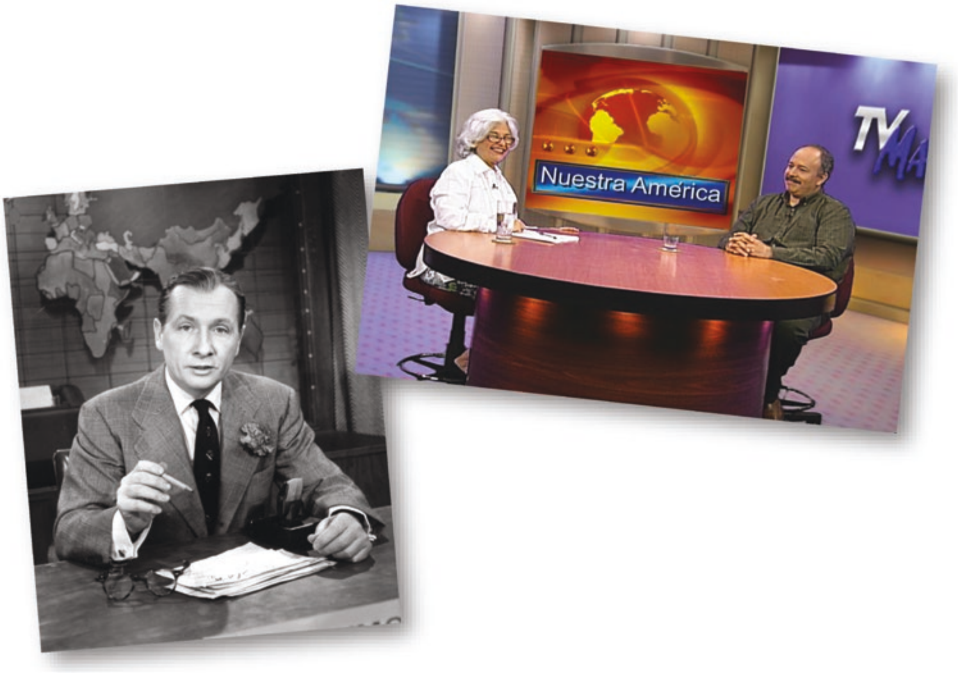
(6) The program follows a rather standard order of events, though exceptions are not rare. In this order, the newscast begins with one or more "lead stories" (the most important events that occurred during the day, and that are often national stories, unless something really exceptional at international level occurred); it continues with "other news" (the so-called "B-block", with slightly less important events, such as local crimes, arrests, updates on old stories, government activities, cultural events…); it proceeds with information on the weather (including the day's weather, a forecast of the next days, and more specific information on potentially dangerous weather events); it then reports on the main sport events, starting from the most popular sports in that particularly country (e.g., in Italy one usually starts with football, in Lithuania it would be basketball, in Finland ice-hockey, etc.); and then it concludes with the so-called "kicker", a final segment often featuring a bizarre or humorous story intended to end the news on a lighter note. When some exceptional history-changing events occur (such as a tsunami, the assassination of a president or a big terroristic attack), this structure may be changed up to become almost entirely devoted to the event in question.

(7) Several newscast programs also feature special thematic sections, either on a particular day of the week or on a particular time of the day. Typical topics covered by these sections include health, tourism, arts, education and else.

(8) Despite the fact that forms of news report (then called "newsreel") were screened in cinema theatres during the early years, we are now accustomed to newscast programs aired on TV-like platforms (including web portals).

For our purposes, let us consider the abovementioned eight features, although there would be several more worth

Fig. 1.9 Two examples of news program. *[Images of public domain]*



speaking about. We may all agree that, taken separately, they all present something in common with other formats. One or more people hosting the program by sitting at a desk in formal clothes is something that may bring together a newscast and a talk-show; having an order of topic of current concern to run through and discuss is something that also a so-called infotainer program does, and so on. However, when we gather these single items into one sum, we have something unique that can only be called "news program", and this is how we have a "format" (Fig. 1.9).

1.2.3 Genres

By "genre" we usually mean a set of (explicit or implicit) stylistic conventions that are applied within the same format.

Not every single AVT can be labelled as explicitly belonging to a "genre", yet, most of the time we can identify a number of genre-oriented aesthetic and communicative choices that make the given AVT part of a recognizable semantic field, inhabited by "similar" texts. The music video for a melodic pop ballad, for instance, will have very different stylistic conventions than the video for an aggressive punk song: to begin with, it is very unlikely that the singer of the former will head towards the camera, and scream the song a few millimeters from it, in an extreme close-up that would make the face look distorted, due to its close proximity to the camera lens.

Excurse 1

Of the three taxonomical groups we have mentioned, genre is the one most open to debate. Not everybody believes that AVTs should be divided by genre, the categorizations looking sometime too artificial and limiting for the text involved. Artists in particular tend to get quite irritated if you try to cast their work into a genre.

In defense of such classifications, however, we must say two things: first, as we have discussed already, categorization is an adaptive necessity of our brain, and it helps us to understand phenomena much more than it impairs it. Certainly, things are always more complex than how we perceive and interpret them, but this is not sufficient an excuse to give up any point of reference. The hyper-relativistic "it-all-depends" attitude introduced (or at least celebrated) by post-modernism, is to my mind more counter-productive than the risks of exceeding in a structuralist attitude, as one may fear while reading the last few paragraphs, so full of categorizations and "putting-things-in-boxes" attitude. As the twenty first century approaches its third decade, post-modernism is no longer untouchable: it is evident in publications, congresses and lectures that the atmosphere has altogether changed, and a general tendency to investigate academic problems in a more systematic way has partly replaced the habit of aprioristically refusing any attempt to develop a discussion in the pragmatic mode. Without wanting to make a plea for a revival of structuralism, I remain convinced that AV studies are at their best when they provide a scholar with "handy" tools necessary for "tidying up" the complexity of a multilayered, idiosyncratic constellation of topics and theoretical problems. Genres are one of such constellations, and we should regard the analytical work of this book as animated by this particular spirit. Many of the categorizations and "boxes" we have produced throughout this monograph will probably prove incomplete or unsatisfying, however I feel they remain a useful exercise to (try to) clear our way through a very foggy issue.

In general, might I suggest that we consider academic/scientific inquiry as the activity of "(riskily) making sense out of chaos": sometimes, a bit too often in the last few decades, I have had the perception that humanistic research was more inclined to "safely making chaos out of sense". It applies to genres in particular, but in fact it applies to most of the analysis you will be exposed to in this monograph.

Secondly, we should remember that genres are often "self-imposed" artistic boxes, and not the idea of some critic or scholar. Partly for reasons of purpose, target, budget, etc., and partly for intrinsically-creative reasons, authors producing, say, a western movie or a horror TV series, are all too well aware of producing westerns and horrors—no matter what they will say in interviews to sound "above such trivialities". Whatever stylistic crossover or individual variation they introduce in their texts still *depart* from the awareness of a solid foundation they simply build on. Sure, boundaries are blurred—perhaps increasingly so, as time goes by—but it remains fatally difficult to see an alien, an unknown planet and a dystopic future in an AVT, and not call it "science fiction".

There are still recurring patterns and conventions, which—put together, in a "the more the better" mode—create a stylistic consistence in the text, informing us, more or less "safely", of the presence of a given genre instead of another. The most relevant of such conventions are:

1. A certain setting/period (e.g., the American frontier in westerns, outer space or the future in sci-fi…);
2. Certain types of character/characterization (e.g. the detective in a crime film, a clumsy character in comedies…);
3. Certain objects, stereotypes and contexts (e.g., six-shooters and ten-gallon hats in westerns, killing instruments and locked doors in horror films…);
4. Certain ways of representing contents and subjects (e.g. chase sequences or fights in Action films, the "falling in love" stage in romances…);
5. Certain techniques and tricks (e.g., extreme close-ups in westerns, high-resolution filming in sci-fi…);
6. Certain musical strategies (e.g., eerie music for horror, upbeat for comedy…).

Having clarified this, systematizing all the genres in AVCC is a titanic enterprise, which we certainly do not need (nor have the competences) to perform here, in full form. Once more, it sounds reasonable to make a selection of not only the genres as such, but also of the various ways, and logic behind, of classifying them.

Some more preliminary information, before embarking on the list:

- As we shall see, we do not always need the same type of classification (typically, the stylistic/thematic one we use for movies: crime, romance, comedy, etc.), but we may also put an emphasis on function, context, or else. The following are the classifications that I suggest as particularly effective in understanding such diversity within each format;
- At the same time, please note that I have excluded the possible classifications by age and social target. We shall therefore take for granted that many genres can be slightly or extensively modified to be adapted to a particular age or social group (e.g., nearly every genre may feature specific texts for children, there are specific news programs for hearing-impaired spectators, specific series for elderly people, etc.);
- Needless to say, we are skipping with both feet over sub-genres, hybrids and the likes. An entirely different book would be needed only for those;
- Formats with derivative AV contents (such as some OVP material, those digital texts that borrow pre-existing AVTs) are obviously not considered. Also omitted are the "creative AV software" format, whose contents (and therefore genre) depend exclusively on the user, and the "simulated reality" format, which shall be considered as featuring derivative contents *plus* a more realistic visualization and, in most cases, a heightened sensorial experience;
- As we already specified, the format "variety show" is an umbrella for basically any combination of texts and performances. In that sense, the genres classification I propose here should be considered as something in between actual genres and the intermediate category of "sub-formats".
- By "live events", we shall not mean just *any* program that is broadcasted live (e.g., several variety shows), but only those that take place *outside* AV environments, and that AV media "cover" by showing them entirely or in part;
- Finally, in the "formats" column, I shall include those formats that fully relate to the genres listed, and also those that relate only in part (e.g., some video games can be classified in a similar way as movies, some other need a classification of their own).

Formats	Genre	Description
1. **Film genres** *Fully applicable to:* – Animation – Full-length live action films – Short films – TV Series *Partly applicable to:* – OVP material – Simulated reality – Music videos – Video games – Documentaries – Experimental films	Action	AVT typically involving physical challenges, chases, violence and a fast pace
	Adventure	Similar to action, but with emphasis on traveling, discoveries and exotic locations
	Biopic	AVT based on the life of a real person
	Combat	Again similar to action, but with a specific emphasis on fights, fighting sports or warfare
	Comedy	AVT deliberately designed to provoke amusement and laughter
	Crime	AVT depicting the actions of criminals, and/or of people who investigate on/fight them, either legally or not (professional or improvised detectives, police, vigilantes, lawyers…)
	Drama	The closest thing to a classic novel. Serious and realistic characters and situations, in tones that are not extreme in any way (not too funny, not too violent, etc.), but are prominent in the emotional sense
	Historical	AVT depicting real or imaginary events from any past historical period
	Horror/Thriller	AVT deliberately designed to provoke fear or so-called "edge-of-the-seat" excitement by representing either realistic (thriller) or supernatural (horror) events and characters
	Musical	AVT with a strong emphasis on usually spectacular musical and dancing performances
	Pornographic	AVT focused on explicit sexual activities, deliberately designed to arouse sexually. When the depiction is more subtle, and part of a larger narrative context, one employs the term "erotic" and the genre falls under "drama"
	Sci-Fi	Short for "Science Fiction", a sci-fi AVT is a visionary and imaginative depiction of events and characters from the outer space and/or the future
	Western	AVT representing real or imaginary events or characters from the Wild West epoch in US
2. **Documentary genres** *Fully applicable to:* – Documentaries – Documentary series *Partly applicable to:* – Animation – Short films – Digital animation – Children shows – Educational programs – Infotainers – News programs – AV applications – OVP material – Simulated reality – Video games	Expository	Text that represents the subject in a detached, authoritative way, usually with a voiceover and with images that tend to be as descriptive and informative as possible
	Interactive	Here, the author is much more present, and in fact may be the actual protagonist. They are visible in the interviews, they comment, they set the tone, and so forth
	Observational	Text with mostly a "realité" approach, with a more direct/involved representation of events and an author who tries not to intervene much, if at all
	Performative	A more poetic type of text, again not so much focusing on the events represented, but on the emotional dimension of them. To an extent, it is the closest a documentary can get to a fiction film
	Reflexive	Text about the idea itself of documenting, so the focus is not so much on the events represented, but on "how" they are filmed and "how" they are represented
3. **Experimental genres** *Fully applicable to:* – Experimental/abstract films or animations *Partly applicable to:* – Animation – Simulated reality	Experimental film	Unconventional movie that follows the paradigms of some avant-garde movement, and deliberately breaks the filmic conventions (irregular montage, anti-narrative, etc.)
	Visual music	A.k.a. "Color music", it is an experimental form of abstract visualization of music dating back to the avant-gardes of early twentieth century, particularly Futurism
	Site-specific installation	Either informative/educational or entertaining AVT that employs various techniques (particularly digital ones) and may be projected on conventional and unconventional "screens" (including art galleries, facades of monuments, walls, grounds, ceilings, etc.). If often adopts 3D animation (also in the educational contexts of a planetarium or a museum)
	VJing	The AV equivalent of DJing, a VJ performance consists of the live creation or manipulation of various forms of images and animation in synchronization to music. It is mostly, but not exclusively, a practice involving digital technologies

Formats	Genre	Description
4. **Advertising genres** *Fully applicable to:* – Commercials – Interactive advertisement *Partly applicable to:* – Music videos	Authoritative	Text that promotes the product not through its intrinsic quality, but through some element of authority: a certain country of origin (e.g., "Made in Germany"), a long presence in the market (e.g., "est. 1908"), etc.
	Celebrity endorsement	Text employing a VIP from any field to promote (or at least be connected with) the product, creating an association between their success and the quality of the product
	Comedy	Text whose attention-grabbing feature is humor, which may or may not be directly related to the product
	Demo	Similar to the → Praising type but subtler, the "demo" is a text in which the quality of the product is promoted by what appears to be a formal/scientific description of it
	Erotic	Seductive text based on (not so) subtle associations between the product and some erotic element (e.g., a car associated to a female model). Theoretically, it is a sub-genre of the → Transfer commercial (see below), however it is such a recurrent strategy that it deserves a category of its own
	Pastiche	Imitation, in the form of parody, quotation, paraphrase or else, of one or more existing items of popular culture, arts, historical event or else
	Praising	Perhaps the most traditional genre, it consists of a direct, hyperbolic celebration of the product as "the best", "the first" or "the most" in something
	Problem-Solution	Text in which the product faces, and brilliantly overcomes a challenge. Like the → Praising type, this one, too, is among the most traditional forms of advertisement
	PSA	Acronym for "Public Service Announcement", it does not promote a product or a service, but rather creates awareness about a topic of social concern: street safety, alcohol consumption, a new law, harassment, etc.
	Shocking	Text deliberately meant to stir controversy by means of violence, sex, politically incorrectness, taboo topics or else
	Sponsoring	Short promotion of the product as a presentation to another AVT (e.g., "This program is brought to you by…")
	Subliminal	Covert advertisement of a product within a non-promotional AVT (e.g., product placement in a movie)
	Surrogate	Promotion of a product through another product of the same brand, which however cannot be promoted directly, usually for legal reasons (e.g., promotion of a cigarette brand via a clothing line bearing the same name and logo)
	Targeted	Text aiming at a very specific niche of consumers, excluding all the others by means of particular communicative strategies that only the niche can relate to
	Transfer	Text that creates a direct or metaphorical association between the product and a positive/attractive value (happy family, friendship, good mood, success…), with the idea that the product goes beyond its intrinsic quality and it is actually responsible for causing such positivity
5. **Music video genres** *Fully applicable to:* – Music videos	Abstract	Text using abstract, seemingly random imagery and animation to portray the song, mostly catching its so-called "vibe" (e.g., Future Islands' "A Dream Of You And Me")
	Fans' video	A recent genre, it consists of footage filmed by fans, in a more or less organized way, or also through a "challenge" launched by the artist him/herself. On occasions, fans' videos become more of a sensation than official ones, as in the case of the version of Foo Fighters' "Learn to Fly" realized by a collective of fans called "Rockin' 1000", from the Italian town of Cesena, which became one of the most popular YouTube videos of 2015, prompting Foo Fighters themselves to give a free concert in that town
	Footage	Montage of previously existing material, usually taken from the artist's concerts, earlier career, private videos, etc. It often has a celebrative tone, and may be often produced after the artist's death (e.g., Queen's "The Show Must Go On")
	Interactive	Video in which viewers can intervene (by means of software like "Flash"), affecting and personalizing the outcome (e.g. Sigur Rós' "Stormur")

Formats	Genre	Description
	Live	The artists are filmed while performing the song live, in either a traditional musical setting or in a unusual one (e.g., OkGo!'s "Needing/Getting")
	Lyrics	Another recent genre, often unofficial (i.e., created by fans), and quite typically broadcasted on OVPs, it consists of an imaginative, animation-supported display of all the lyrics of the song, almost in Karaoke-style (e.g. Elvis Costello and The Root's "Walk Us Uptown")
	Meta-video	A video that quotes other videos, other artists or any other item pertaining popular music culture (e.g., Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Dani California")
	Narrative	A.k.a. "Plot clip", it is a video structured as a short film, with an identifiable plot. It may or may not be acted by the artists themselves (e.g., Robbie Williams's "A Love Supreme")
	Pastiche	Similarly to the eponymous genre in advertising, it is a video made in the style of one or more existing items of popular culture, arts, and historical event or else (e.g., Faith No More's "Last Cup of Sorrow"—an explicit homage to Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*)
	Saga	A set of two or more videos structured as different episodes of the same series (e.g., Moby's "In This World" and "Sunday")
	Semi-performance	A video (usually of the above-mentioned "narrative" type) in which the artist is seen performing not continuatively, in an extra-musical context and usually while engaged in other activities (e.g., Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun")
	Surrealist	Video adopting a twisted narrative and visionary/absurd imagery. Compared to the abstract genre, it is more figurative, and often features the artists themselves (e.g., The Chemical Brothers' "Let Forever Be")
	Symbolic	Video whose imagery takes inspiration from one concept (or even just word/line) appearing in the song, which however is not necessarily its central theme, or it is not a theme at all (Kylie Minogue's "Come into My World", a classic love song, whose title however inspired director Michel Gondry to create a "world" inhabited by many Kylie Minogue's)
	Unlikely performance	The artists are seen distinctively performing, but in an unconventional location or context, not really meant for a musical performance. (e.g., The Traveling Wilburys' "End Of The Line")
	Verisimilar performance	The artists are seen distinctively performing in a conventional location or context, such as a stage or a recording studio. Usually, in these cases, the full equipment is visible, including microphones, headphones, cables, etc. (e.g., Sting's "If I Ever Lose My Faith in You")
6. **TV variety genres** *Fully applicable to:* – Variety shows *Partly applicable to:* – Audiovisual applications – Animation – OVP material	Children show	Program specifically meant for the younger audience, featuring different entertaining and/or educational activities
	Container	A type of program that runs for several hours (usually in the afternoon) and includes different variety genres together
	Educational	Information program aimed at different forms of knowledge transfer (medical advice, cooking recipes, correct use of a given service…). Sub-genres include the so-called lifestyle show (a program showing houses, places, jobs and else in a usually-celebrative way) and the makeover show (a program following individual transformations, such as radical weight-loss, change of image, rehabilitation after accidents…)
	Game show	Entertainment program featuring a contest/challenge among competitors for a prize in money or goods. The most typical sub-genre is the so-called "quiz show", based on questions and riddles
	Infotainer	A combination of information and entertainment where selective current news are presented in more extensive form than news programs, but with lighter tones. It often involves elements of → Talk show
	Prime time show	Variety show scheduled in the so-called "prime time", mid-evening, when most viewers are expected to sit by the TV. Similarly to → container, it includes a combination of different texts, although—generally speaking—it runs for a shorter time. Due to its important location in the schedule, it is also the show with the biggest financial investment, featuring the most spectacular performances and segments, the most prestigious guests, and so forth

Formats	Genre	Description
	Reality show	Supposedly nonfictional/unstaged text presenting (often live) real-life situations, generally related to a specific profession
	Sketch comedy show	Entertainment program mostly based on comedy performances (e.g., → Stand-up comedy, but not only), and that also includes other forms of light (but not strictly humorous) performances, such as music or interviews
	Stand-up comedy	Entertainment shows where different comedians perform monologues on a stage in front of an audience
	Talent show	Performance-based program where non-famous participants display their talent (and are usually judged for it) in a particular art/activity
	Talk show	Nonfictional program in which one or more guests discuss topics put forward by the host. It may have lighter or more serious tones
7. **Video game genres** *Fully applicable to:* – Video games *Partly applicable to:* – Simulated reality	Action	Dynamic game with an emphasis on physical challenges (e.g., fighting, running, shooting…). It includes numerous sub-genres, such as shooters, platform games (games with paths full of obstacles and prizes), survivals, and others
	Adventure	Unlike → Adventure films, adventure games are not focused on locations, and are not necessarily fast in pace. The player is usually required to solve puzzles by interacting with game characters and events, often choosing among possible options
	Board game	AV reproduction of traditional board games such as Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit and the likes
	Casual	A game designed to be played for short time and irregularly, without particular demands or need for continuity (e.g., *Candy Crush* or *Toy Blast*). Many of these are derivative of classic "Arcade" games
	Educational/ Trainer	Game specifically designed to learn and/or exercise real-life skills, usually by simulation of the latter. Most of such games are developed for children, but there are several for adult professions as well (e.g., flight simulators)
	Logic/Trivia	Game based on riddles, puzzles, questions and other problems solvable through reasoning, calculation and general knowledge
	MMO	Acronym for "Massively Multiplayer Online", it is a type of game played by a large quantity of users, and which therefore can only be played online. Such quantity is key to the development itself of the game, which is based on different forms of competition, cooperation, mutual interests, alliances, etc.
	Party game	Game designed to be played by many players (often simultaneously) and consisting of different successive tasks
	Role-playing	The equivalent of the eponymous type of board game (such as the legendary *Dungeons and Dragons*), this genre focuses on a real time narrative developed by the players themselves. Save few exceptions, it requires more than one player, either physically present or online. As a story-based game, it features sub-genres that are more or less equivalent to film genres (horror, drama, sci-fi…)
	Simulation	Game that simulates given aspects of reality, and particularly focused on activities of management of different contexts and/or communities (a house, a city, a historical age, etc.)
	Sport	Any game that allows us to engage in any sport competition by controlling one or more players/teams
	Strategy	Game whose success depends on the employment of strategic and tactical skills, particularly of military type
8. **OVP genres** *Fully applicable to:* – OVP material *Partly applicable to:* – AV applications – Simulated reality – Animation	Compilation	More or less professionally assembled collection of sequences, either with their own audio or with an added soundtrack. It usually serves the purpose of displaying "favorites" and "best-of" in a given more or less specific category ("funniest epic fails", "Ronaldo's best free-kicks", etc.)
	Educational/ Tutorial	"How-to" video usually produced by users/costumers of a given product, which therefore often presents less "institutional" guidelines (e.g., a trick to spare on certain accessories, a way to combine the product with another product from a competing brand, etc.)

Formats	Genre	Description
	Gaming	A video that shows a user playing a given game in real time, while also commenting the events (usually in a mix between informal chat and sport program style). Typically, it visualizes the game in full screen, and the user in a smaller frame at one corner
	Live stream	Any contents, professional or not, displayed live in real time
	Product review	A video where the user shares their impressions about a given product/service. Like the → Educational/tutorial type, it may also feature more informal and alternative comments A particular type is the "unboxing" video, showing the user discovering a new product in whatever way (operating a new machine, listening to a new record…) and sharing their first reaction to it
	Video podcast	Like an audio podcast, it is a sum of various segments that fairly resembles a TV → Infotainer
	Vlog	The AV equivalent of a blog entry: a generally short commentary on a specific theme, or a diary-like informal report on the user's activities and/or feelings
	Web series	The OVP equivalent of a TV series, although sometimes produced in semi- or non-professional conditions
9. **Live genres** *Fully applicable to:* – Live events *Partly applicable to:* – OVP material – Variety shows	Full coverage	The event is followed from start to end
	Highlights coverage	The live event is inserted in another type of program, and live segments are shown only in selected key-moments
	Multiple coverage	Different live events may be shown at the same time (typically, during the Olympic Games, a program may switch quickly from one competition to another)
	Variety-implemented coverage	The coverage is enriched with variety elements, such as guests commenting from a studio, on-location interviews to passers-by, short breaks for other types of segment (e.g., a musical number), etc.
10. **NEWS genres** *Fully applicable to:* – News programs *Partly applicable to:* – Infotainers – OVP material	Bulletin	A brief news summary lasting very few minutes. Bulletins are also typical of so-called "24-hour news" channels, where they are broadcasted on a loop until a more updated version replace the ongoing one
	In-depth program	News program in which one or more current issues are thoroughly analyzed and commented by a host and often by some experts as well. It occasionally borders with the → Infotainer and/or the → Talk show
	Newsreel	News program in documentary form, originally meant for cinemas during pre-TV days, and nowadays almost disappeared
	TV news	Perhaps the most traditional type, it is an extended bulletin lasting several minutes (up to an hour, also), with more news, introductions by a host and some comments. Like all other news genres in this list, and despite the "TV" in its name, this kind of program can also be made specifically for the web

At the end of these long lists of media, formats and genres, I can only apologize to the reader for any category that is not mentioned, but should have been. My selection has been primarily functional, focusing on what I considered the most significant examples within the purposes of our analysis, and within the boundaries of what I consider especially relevant in the context of AVCC. I am sure I have made numerous important omissions, and I have no doubt that more than one reader will not fail to contact me personally to point them out, as they have done on other occasions—particularly two recent books I wrote on cinema and popular music respectively, which prompted more than one colleague to play the "Find the missing movie" or "Find the missing song" game. We are all aware that there will always be omissions in endeavors like this, no matter how hard one tries, but at the same time I hope that such omissions (here, as well as in the next pages of this book, where other classifications/lists will be proposed) will not affect too negatively the overall understanding of the topics addressed.

1.3 A (Not So) Short History of Audiovisual Creative Communication

Without wishing to again sound apologetic, the disclaimer here is that it is far beyond the scope of this book to reconstruct an acceptable history of AVCC. I have endeavoured to summarize what I consider to be the most significant events, including comments that will hopefully help contextualize such events, and perhaps adding a note or two of color.

Initially, I had considered creating parallel timelines where each main format (or at least medium) would be treated separately, but then decided against it for two reasons. First, the sheer volume of grey areas that I would need to handle, e.g., videogame consoles that were designed to be connected to TV sets. Is this part of a history of TV or of digital media? Secondly, we would miss the fascination of seeing crucial events in totally different areas of audiovisuality happening almost at the same time. For example in 1967 Ralph Baer created the first prototype of a home video game console, and at about the same time the first worldwide broadcasted TV program was being produced, with The Beatles singing "All You Need Is Love".

The history will proceed schematically and in chronological order, with an indication of a date (or period), an event (or string of events) and a more articulated description.

3000–15 BC	Prehistory of AVCC: **light** as spectacle. Sunlight, reflections, shadows, darkness and so forth seem to fascinate humankind since the dawn of times, and may be considered the original inspiration to the idea of audiovisuality.

Before we discuss in more detail the development of early and modern AV devices and concepts, it may be useful to trace a very general "prehistory" of audiovisuality. The management of, and the interaction with various light sources for entertainment purposes may have been the first form of human spectacle based on the ideas of reproducing and projecting visual stimuli, and mediate them via some kind of device.

Since 3000 BC, different civilizations around the world (Celts, Egyptians, Greeks, Mycenaeans, etc.) built constructions and devices to create appealing light effects and perform rites and theatrical activities. Take the Stonehenge monument in Wiltshire, England, which was built exactly between 3000 and 2000 BC. We have learned from archeologists that one reason for the characteristic disposition of the standing stones had to do with the creation of different light reflections that the Neolithic Britons would use for what were probably spiritual ceremonies.

On another side of the world, an important ancestor of audiovisual art was shadow playing, probably originated in China during the Han dynasty (i.e., between 202 BC and 220 AD). These fascinating theatrical performances would mostly employ puppets, but there could be human bodies as well. The performances combined images with dialogue and music (so they were audiovisual in the general sense), and had different versions around the eastern and western world, the most famous possibly being the Wayang tradition, in various Asian countries.

The spectacular aspects of light were also subjects of scientific research. For example, as the Roman architect Vitruvius, around 15 BC, developed a whole treatise dedicated to Roman architecture, called *De Architectura*, he wrote an entire chapter on theatre and on different ways to use natural light (Fig. 1.10).

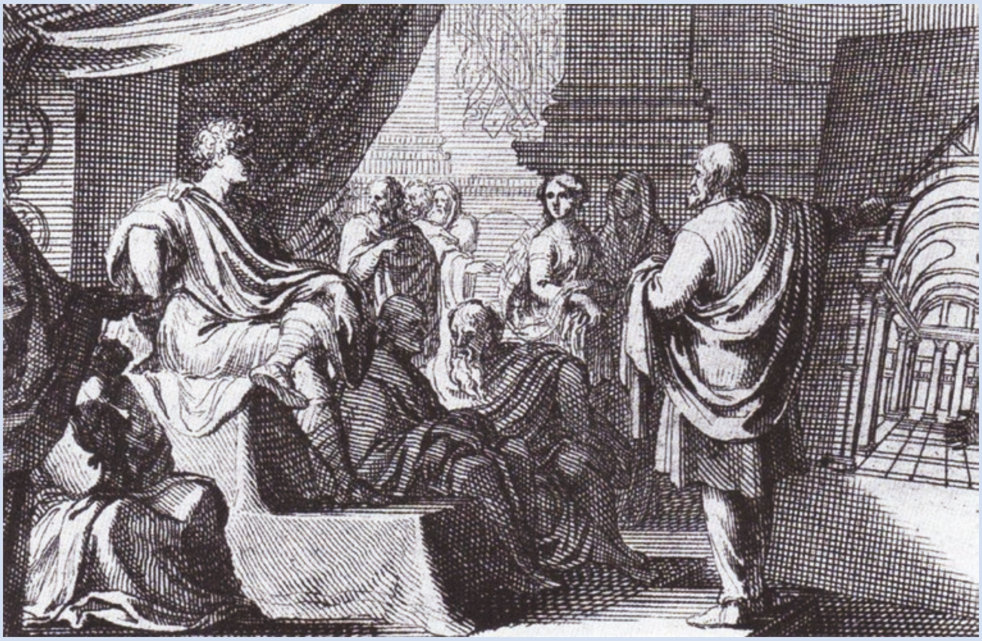
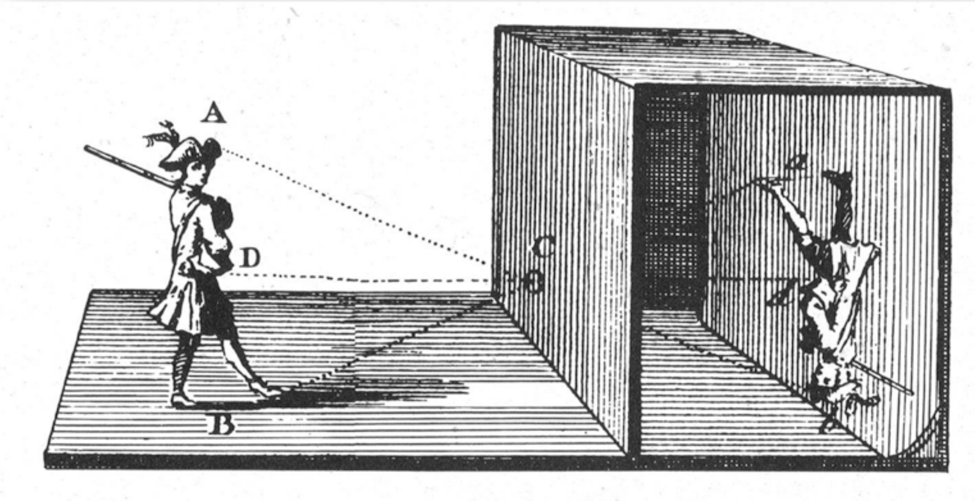


Fig. 1.10 An illustration representing Vitruvius while he presents his *De Architectura* to Augustus. *[Image of public domain]*

400 BC–1500	Discovery and uses of the principle of **camera obscura**.

One of the most important discoveries related to audiovisuality took place around 400 BC, as the Chinese philosopher Mo Tzu noticed that light travels in straight lines. In particular, he found that when light is seen through a hole, it produces an inverted image in a dark room. The principle became later known as "camera obscura" (indeed, "dark room" in Latin), and was, as we know, at the basis of the photographic process. Incidentally, it is intriguing that the word "photography" comes from the Greek words *photos* (light) + *graphé* (written representation): so, photography actually means, "writing the light".

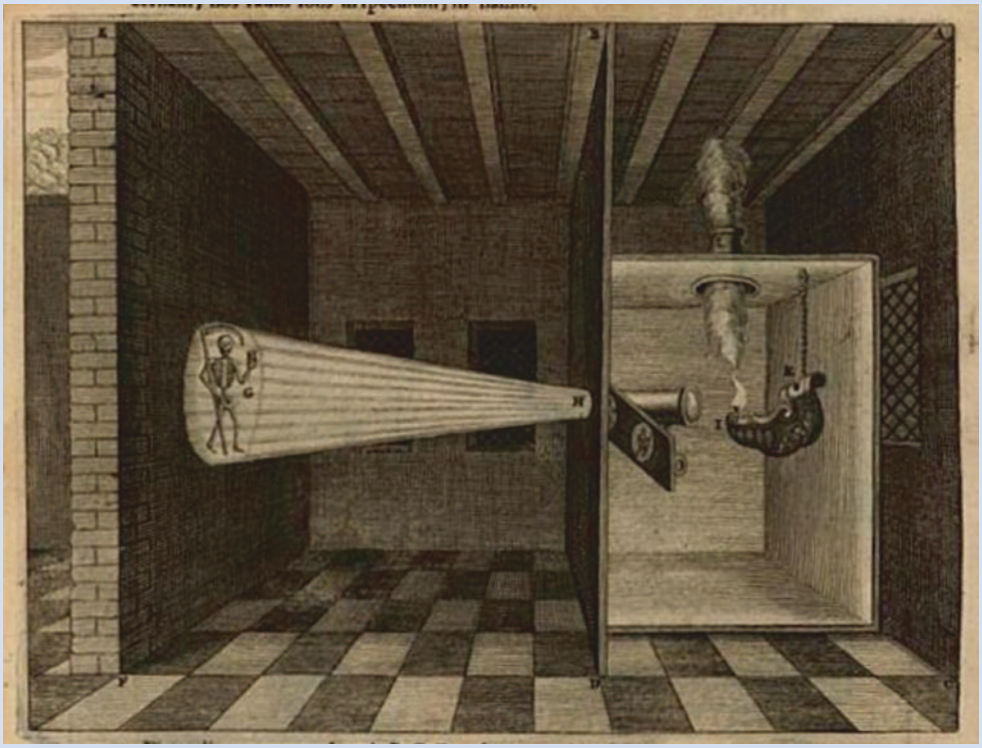
A few centuries later, around the year 1000, the Arab scientist Hasan Ibn al-Haytham (known in the western world as Alhazen) developed the technology of the camera obscura with lenses that improved and developed the optic image. At about the same time similar research was also being conducted in China by the scientist Shen Kuo. As the influence of the Renaissance began to be felt, the likes of Filippo Brunelleschi, Leonardo da Vinci and Canaletto, among many others, started to describe the camera obscura in their treatises, and—most of all—they began using it for drawing with more precision. Curiously, or not so much, considering his character, Leonardo had actually written an accurate description of the camera obscura in 1500, except that—as he would do pretty often—he wrote backwards, in such a way that the notes could only be read through a mirror. For this reason, the contents of such notes remained undeciphered for about 300 years (◘ Fig. 1.11).



◘ **Fig. 1.11** An illustration of the principle of the dark room. *[Image of public domain]*

1656	Dutch inventor **Christiaan Huygens** builds the first known **magic lantern**.

The time was now ripe for the increasingly complex use of the camera obsucra. In 1645, the German polymath Athanasius Kircher, in his *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* ("The great art of light and shadow"), provided an accurate description and some drawings of a tool of his invention, called stenographic mirror, a device that could project images on a large surface. The tool was just an idea, but in 1656 Christiaan Huygens brought it to life by constructing the first known "magic lantern", an actual image projector that employed pictures on transparent glass plates, a lens (or more), and a light source. The invention, mostly aimed at entertainment purposes, was commercialized in 1658 but was initially used for educational purposes. Its popularity increased during the eighteenth century as an entertaining device used by travelling showmen who would delight their audience with a magic lantern (◘ Fig. 1.12).

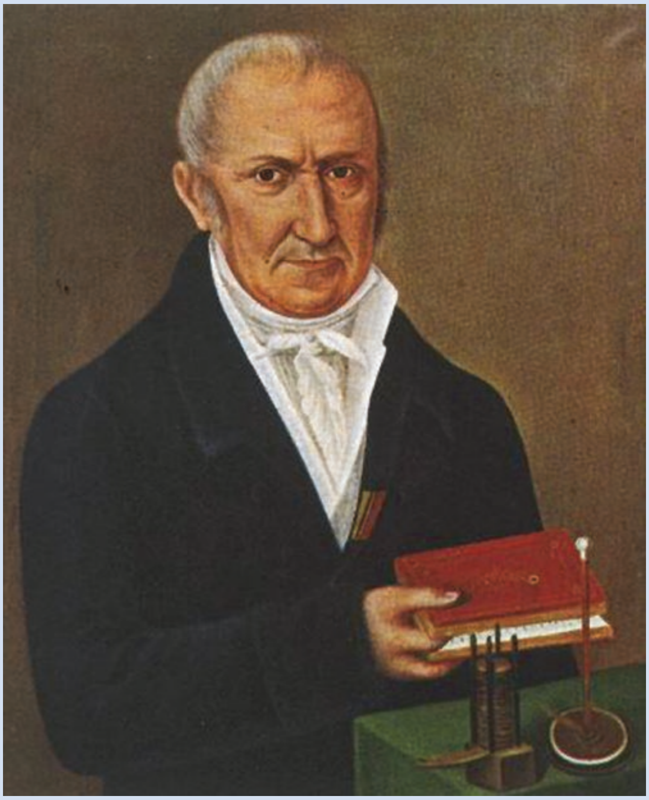


◘ **Fig. 1.12** An illustration of the magic lantern as appearing in Kircher's *Ars magna lucis et umbrae*. *[Image of public domain]*

1775–1906	Steps in the study and applications of **electricity**.

Audiovisuality, as we know it nowadays, is made possible through a combination of various technologies, most of them not directly related with sound and moving images as such. To discuss all of them in this chronology would certainly be a prohibitive task, so we shall just mention a couple of those whose importance is so prominent that it cannot be ignored.

One of them is surely the discovery and the various applications of electricity. The end of the eighteenth century and the entire nineteenth century brought crucial innovations in this area, of which we should at least mention the following: Alessandro Volta's production of static electricity by friction (1775); Luigi Galvani's discovery that electricity is also generated biologically (the theory of "Animal electricity"—1791); Humphrey Davy's production of the first electric arc light (1808); Michael Faraday's discovery that electricity can travel through vacuum tubes (1830); Alexander Bain's invention of the pantelegraph, an electrical method to transmit images over a distance (1843); Joseph May and Willoughby Smith's discovery of photoconductivity, which transforms images into electrical signals (1873); and Thomas Edison's invention of the carbon filament light bulb (1879). As you might guess from these events, through the development of the study of electricity, the world was getting ready for television (◘ Fig. 1.13).

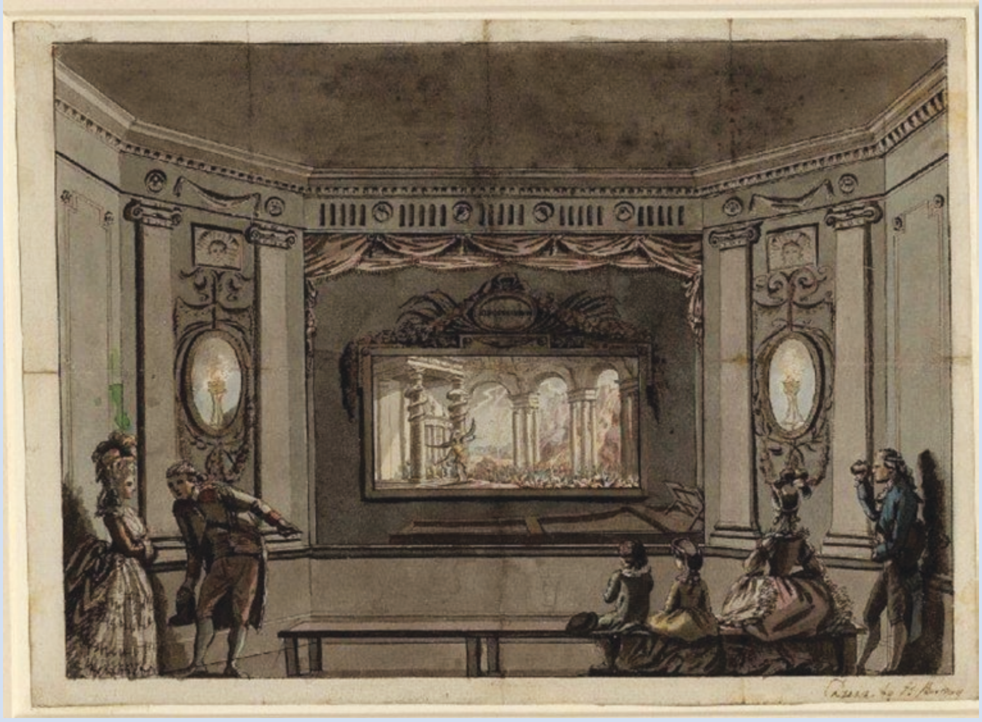


◘ **Fig. 1.13** A painting of Alessandro Volta displaying his battery. *[Image of public domain]*

1781	French painter **Philip James de Loutherbourg** presents the first ***eidophusikon***.

The *eidophusikon* (from Greek words standing for "image of nature") was a form of moving theatre based on the combination of different techniques known at the time: it would employ lights, mirrors, colored glass and actual paintings, usually representing scenes from literature and spectacular natural phenomena like sea storms and tempests. Music and sound effects would complete the picture, adding more realism and spectacularity to the performance. Besides the idea itself, what turned out to be particularly influential was the fact that the *eidophusikon* would employ the juxtaposition of several layers of image, in order to move (or not to move) different images in different ways.

De Loutherbourg opened the first performance in Leicester Square, London, in a small theatre, for the enjoyment of about 100 spectators per show, so that the *eidophusikon* soon became a top attraction in the English capital (◘ Fig. 1.14).



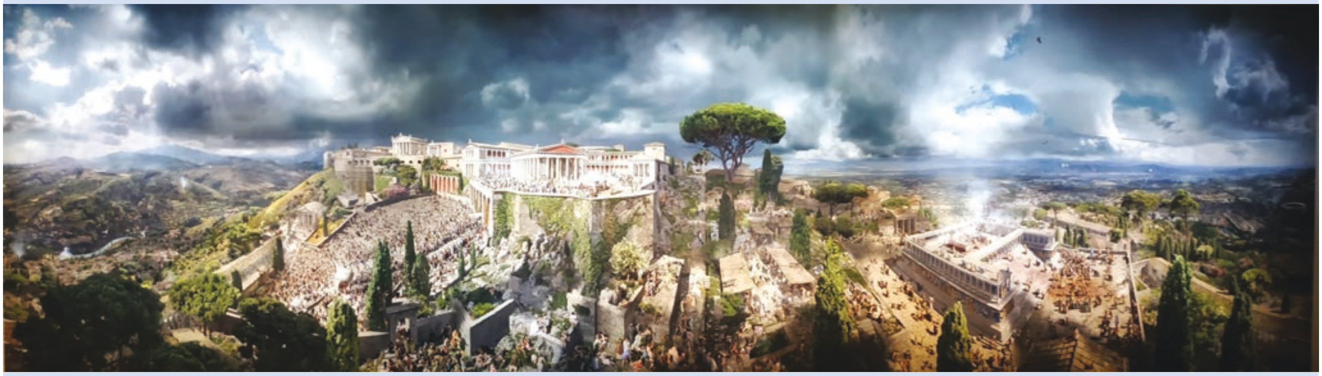
◘ **Fig. 1.14** An illustration of the eidophusikon. *[Image of public domain]*

1787	Irish painter **Robert Barker** has the idea for the **panoramic paintings**.

Panoramic paintings were huge artworks displayed on a cylindrical room representing wide, 360-degree views of subjects like landscapes, military battles, or other historical events. Barker had first developed this idea as his own artistic style, but then he decided to patent it and try to make a business out of it. In 1792, he built a specific theatre (in cylindrical shape, indeed) in that same Leicester Square in London where the *eidophusikon* performances were taking place, and arranged exhibitions for a paying audience. With that particular setting, the spectators would be in the middle of the scene, in a sort of primitive “virtual reality” environment. Basic forms of animation (such as lights going on and off, creating day and night effects) could be added, making panoramas a kind of theatrical performance.

In 1848, the Moving Panorama appeared, and basically turned the attraction into an AV performance: a scrolling device would show a series of paintings, in narrative form, and also a narrating voice and accompanying music were added.

Imitations and competing versions quickly and predictably proliferated: among the many, worthy of mention is the Myriorama, developed in New Zealand in 1896, which employed the magic lantern instead of paintings (◘ Fig. 1.15).



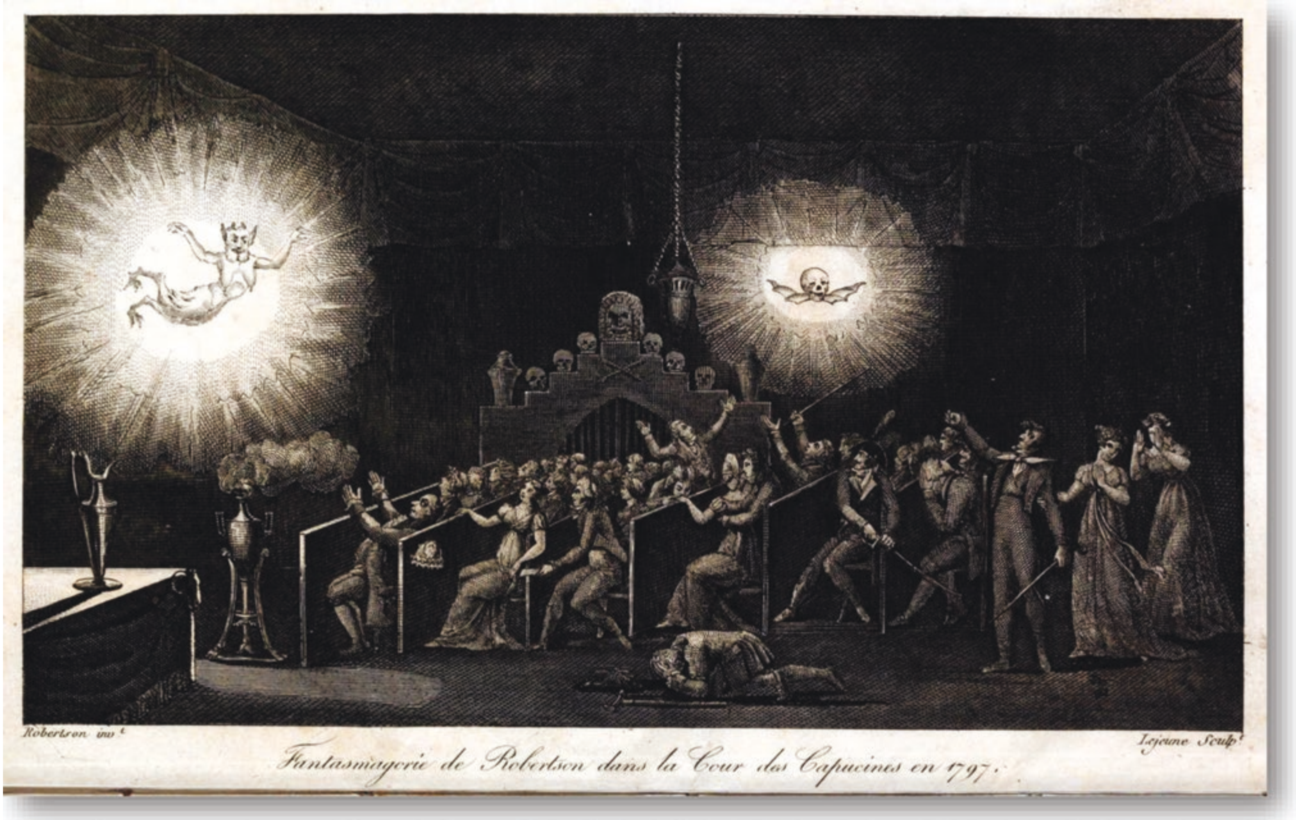
◘ **Fig. 1.15** The spectacular panorama painting of the city of Pergamon in the Pergamon Museum at Berlin

1797	Belgian inventor **Étienne-Gaspard Robert** presents in Paris the first **Phantasmagoria**.

Phantasmagoria was a form of horror theatre, based on one or more magic lanterns projecting creepy images such as ghosts, monsters and skeletons onto surfaces like walls, smoke, or semi-transparent screens. Rear projection was usually employed to keep the lantern out of sight. The images could be animated by using several portable projectors that would allow the projected image to move and change size on the screen, and to quickly switch from one to another.

The performances were completed with frightening decorations, total darkness, scary presentations, and sound effects. It is also rumored that hallucinogenic drugs could be distributed to the spectators in order to make them more prone to believe what they would see.

Needless to say, with such premises, the attraction was a success and spurred numerous imitations. On a more general note, it certainly says a lot about this historical period, so inclined to the "wow effect" in arts and literature, that three grand and spectacular forms of entertainment such as phantasmagoria, *eidophusikon* and panoramic paintings were developed in a few short years (◘ Fig. 1.16).


Robertson inv.t
Lejeune Sculp.t
Fantasmagorie de Robertson dans la Cour des Capucines en 1797.

◘ Fig. 1.16 An illustration of a phantasmagoria performance. *[Image of public domain]*

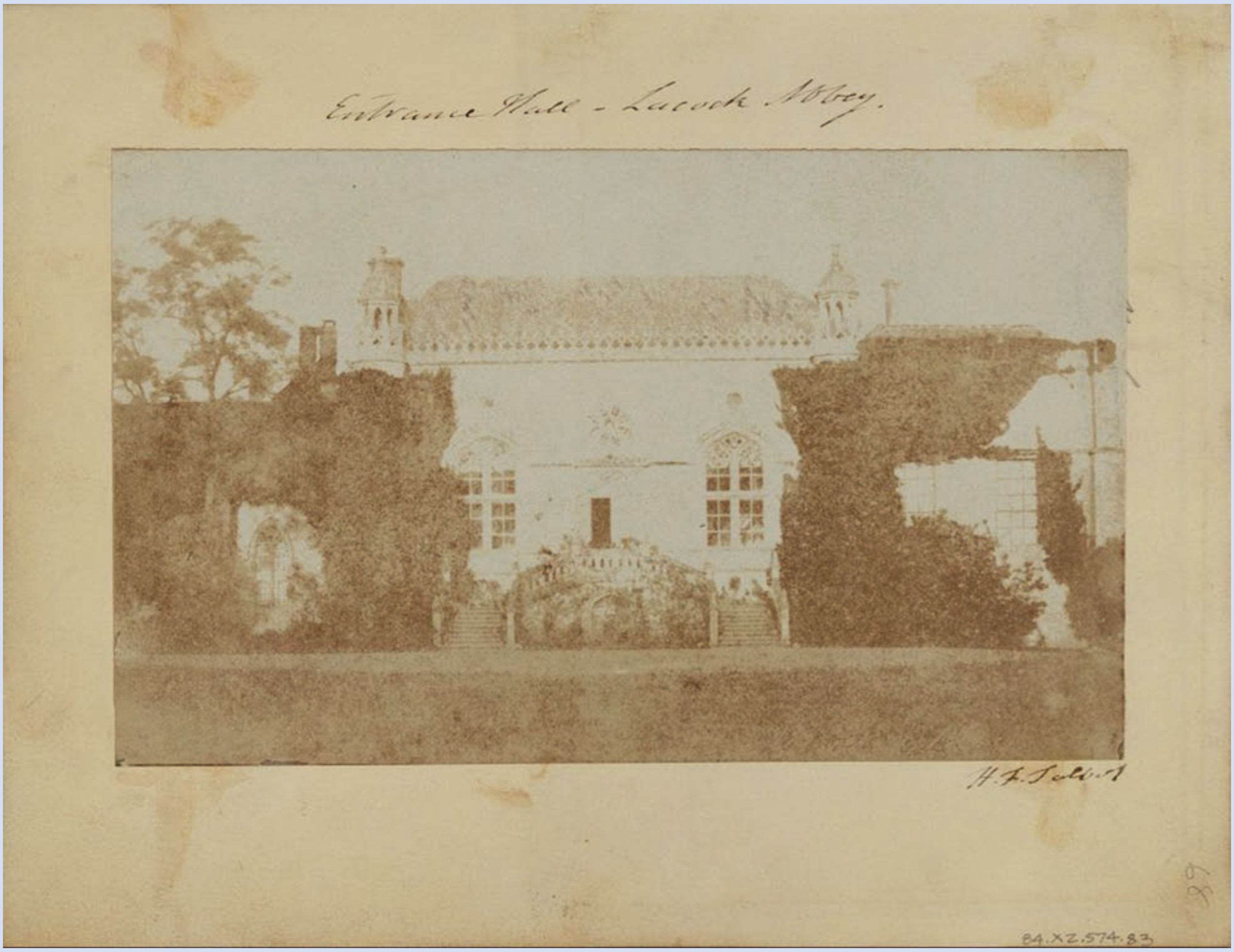
1822–1850	Technological advancements in **photography**.

Although not directly related to audiovisuality (we are not talking about moving images, here, nor of course is there any sound involved), photography remains very important for our history, because it represented a crucial step forward in the process of reproducing and representing images, both from a technological and from an aesthetic point of view. It is thus worthwhile to summarize the main advancements achieved in this first half of the nineteenth century.

In 1822, French inventor Nicéphore Niépce produced the first photogravure (or photoetching): using once again the fundamental principle of the camera obscura, Niépce was able to create a photographic image from an engraving copper plate. The process is rarely used today, due to the costs involved, but it produces prints that have the subtlety of a photograph and the art quality of a lithograph. In fact, several of the images from the nineteenth century that we believe are early photographs are actually photogravures.

Exactly because of the high costs of this technology (but also the extended time required to finalize a single image), Niépce himself, with his collaborator Louis Daguerre, began a number of attempts to improve the device, reaching already fairly functioning prototypes in the late 1820s. However, it was only after Niépce's death (1833), that Daguerre finalized the new device, which he called daguerreotype (1837), and which should be considered the first successful photographic process. The daguerrotype was also the first "photocamera" to be commercialized (in 1850).

As it often happens, the idea must have been “in the air”, because similar devices were also made in Brazil (the photographie, by Hercules Florence, in 1832) but most of all in England, in 1835, where William Fox Talbot invented the calotype process, which was able to create negative images. Of these early technologies, indeed, the calotype should be considered the closest to modern photographic processes. The picture entitled “Lacock Abbey” (1835—see Fig. I.3.8) is commonly considered the first photograph created from a negative in the calotype process (◘ Fig. 1.17).

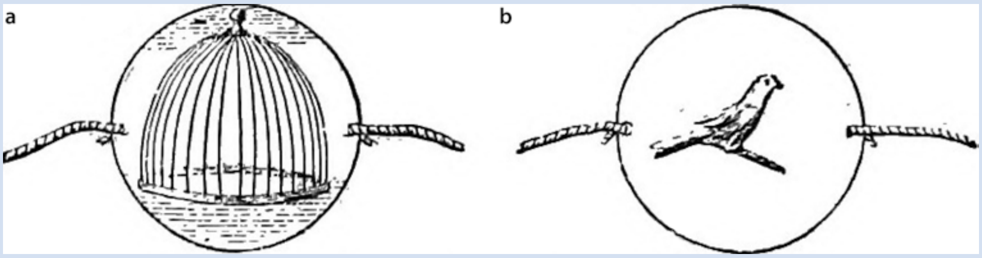


◘ **Fig. 1.17** Talbot’s “Lacock Abbey”, arguably the first photograph created from a negative. *[Image of public domain]*

1824	British physician **John Ayrton Paris** invents the **thaumatrope**.

The thaumatrope was a popular Victorian toy based on a very simple principle: a disk with a picture on each side was attached to two pieces of string. By quickly twirling the strings between the fingers, the two pictures would seemingly blend into one. Some of us may have built one of these objects as a child.

Although just a toy, the thaumatrope raised the important question of the human eye retaining images already gone. On December of the same year, British physician Peter Mark Roget presented a groundbreaking paper entitled “Explanation of an optical deception in the appearance of the spokes of a wheel when seen through vertical apertures”, which was based on the effect of the thaumatrope, and introduced the concept of the “persistence of vision”, a very inspiring issue in the creation of moving images, and therefore a central concept in audiovisuality (◘ Fig. 1.18).

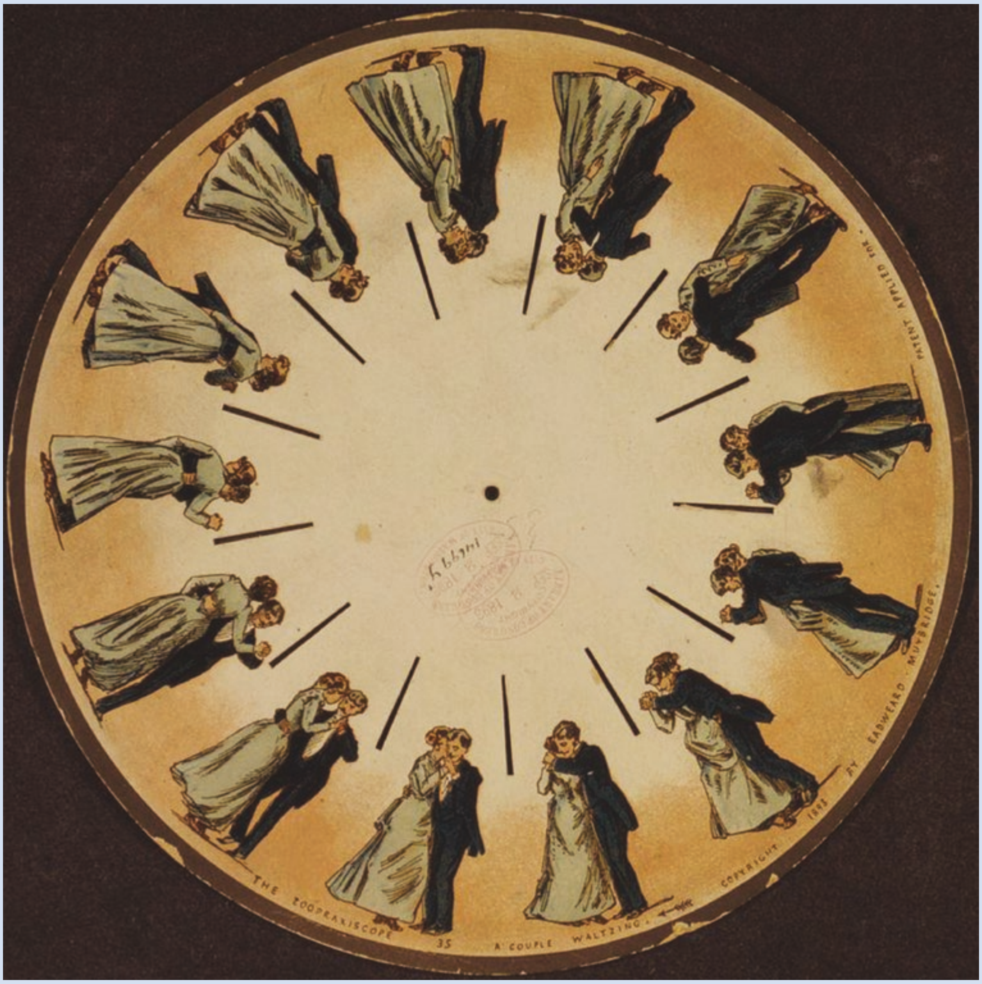


◘ **Fig. 1.18** Old illustration of a classic thaumatrope effect: the bird in a cage. *[Image of public domain]*

1832	Belgian scientist **Joseph Antoine Ferdinand Plateau** invents the **phenakistoscope**.

After Roget's presentation and the thaumatrope, numerous devices adopting the principle of the persistence of vision were developed. The phenakistoscope was one of those: a spinning wheel that gives the illusion of pictures moving, it quickly became a popular toy during the first half of the nineteenth century, but had also some applications in science and research. Most notably it was employed by Eadweard Muybridge (whom we shall later talk about in this chronology) to build his own machine, the zoopraxiscope.

The phenakistoscope had literally dozens of imitations, with other (similarly-difficult to pronounce) names: Periphanoscop, Phantascopic Pantomime, Fantasmascope, Laughingatus and so on (▣ Fig. 1.19).

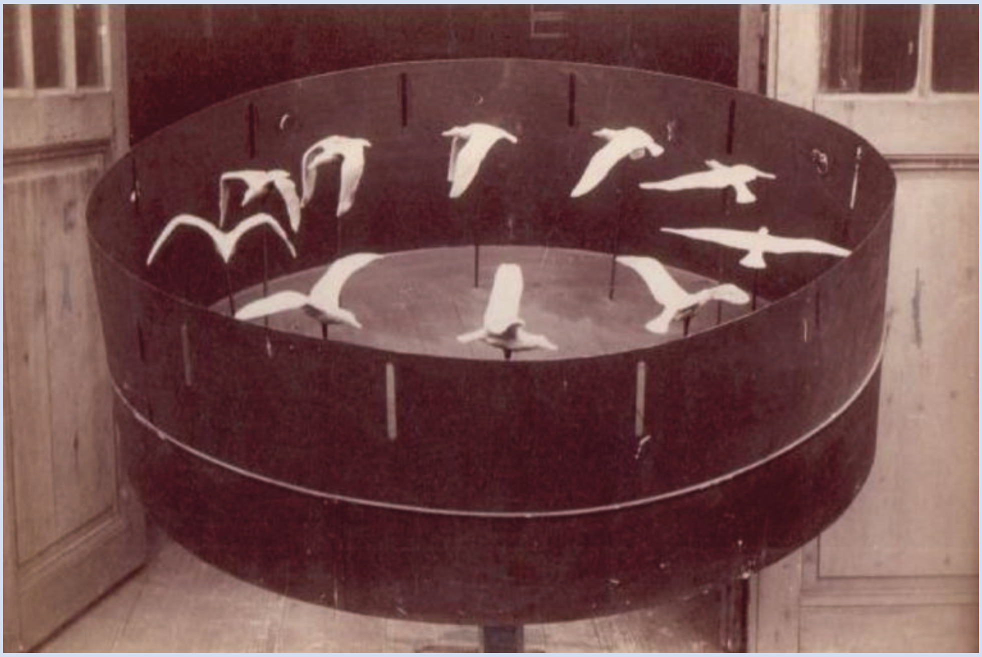


▣ **Fig. 1.19** A phenakistoscope spinning wheel representing two dancers. *[Image of public domain]*

1834	British mathematician **William George Horner** invents the **zoetrope**.

The zoetrope was a cylinder filled with pictures that, like the phenakistoscope, when spun, would give the impression that the image is moving. Although the usually western-centric historiography assigns the invention to Horner, and locates it in the nineteenth century, ancestors of the zoetrope, based on the same principle and very similarly-looking had appeared already in Iran some 5000 years ago, and in China about 2000 years ago.

Like other similar tools that preceded and followed it, the zoetrope, too, was mostly a toy for children's entertainment. It was revised and improved several times, and there were also 3D versions (with little sculptures instead of images) and giant versions, with life-size figures, such as the one built in London in 1867 (◘ Fig. 1.20).

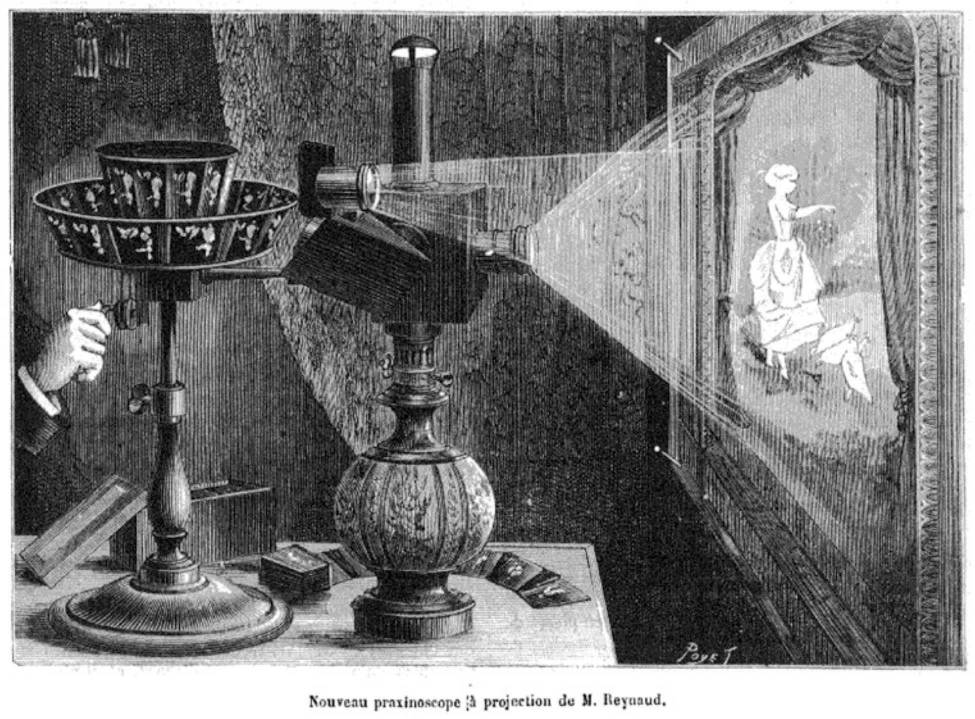


◘ **Fig. 1.20** An old zoetrope from late nineteenth century in a period photograph. *[Image of public domain]*

1877	French inventor **Charles-Émile Reynaud** creates the **praxinoscope**.

The best known upgrade of the zoetrope, the praxinoscope stood out from the former because it used a system of mirrors that would make the view more comfortable. It also became an appealing item of furniture (usually looking like an elegant table-lamp), which of course helped the product's sales.

It was subject to various improvements and became the basis for Reynaud himself to develop his most important invention, the optical theatre (we shall see that later) (◘ Fig. 1.21).

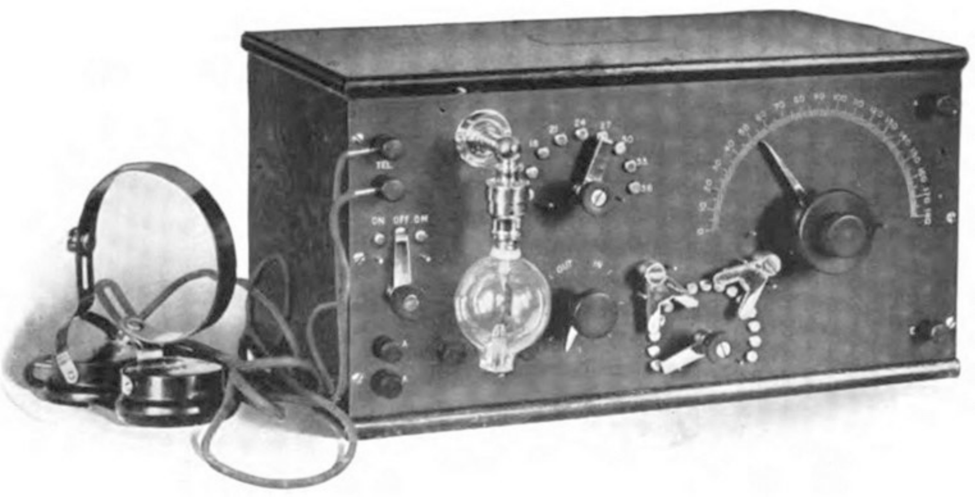

Poyet
Nouveau praxinoscope à projection de M. Reynaud.

◘ **Fig. 1.21** Illustration of a praxinoscope in function. *[Image of public domain]*

1880–1906	First steps in the development of **television**.

Thanks to the rapid progress in the study of electricity and its potentials, but also via other paths, the decades between the nineteenth and the twentieth century prepared fertile ground for the birth of television. In 1880, the Irish inventor Denis Redmond created the electric telescope, a technology that allowed the electric transmission of images. In 1884, the then-23-year-old German student Paul Nipkow proposed and patented the Nipkow disk, a device that created simple moving images using a filtered light viewed through a spinning disk. In 1897, the German physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun invented the cathode ray tube (CRT), a vacuum tube that contained electron guns and a phosphorescent screen that could display images. A few years later, in 1906, the American inventor Lee de Forest made an upgrade to this invention, called Audion, which was also able to amplify the signals.

Meanwhile, in 1900, during the 4th edition of the International Electrotechnic Congress in Paris, the Russian scientist Constantin Perskyi used for the first time ever the word "television" to define the process of electric transmission of images that was being constantly improved in those years (◘ Fig. 1.22).



◘ **Fig. 1.22** A photograph of a radio receiver featuring De Forest's Audion. *[Image of public domain]*

1882	French scientist **Étienne-Jules Marey** invents the **chronophotographic gun**.

As the name itself suggests, the chronophotographic gun was a photocamera implanted on a rifle, which was able to catch twelve consecutive frames per second, and therefore (thanks again to the principle of persistence of vision), when reproduced was able to give the illusion of movement of the subject filmed.

The original purpose of chronophotography was to support science in the study of human and animal motion, but the invention was soon used for other purposes as well, such as catching specific actions like a sport race, or the movement of inanimate objects. As one may easily imagine, this invention became an important link between photography and cinematography (◘ Fig. 1.23). A very important anticipation of this principle occurred in 1878, thanks to Eadeward Muybridge, who hadmanaged to capture the movement of a galloping horse by lining a row of cameras with shutters connected to aseries of tripwires, so he could photograph the horse as it galloped past. The resulting sequence, called *Sallie Gardner* at a *Gallop* (after the horse's name) is often considered the first "movie". We shall return on this in ourcase study on *King Kong*.

1891	Thee American **Thomas Edison** and the Scottish **William K.L Dickson** invent the **kinetoscope.**

The kinetoscope was a motion picture exhibition device designed to be viewed by one individual at a time through a peephole viewer window at the top.

While not really a movie projector, this device introduced the very approach that would eventually characterize cinematic projection. It created the illusion of movement through sequential images on a strip of perforated film, set over a light source and moved by a high-speed shutter. The device went public in 1893, and quickly became a popular attraction with short films of a varied nature.

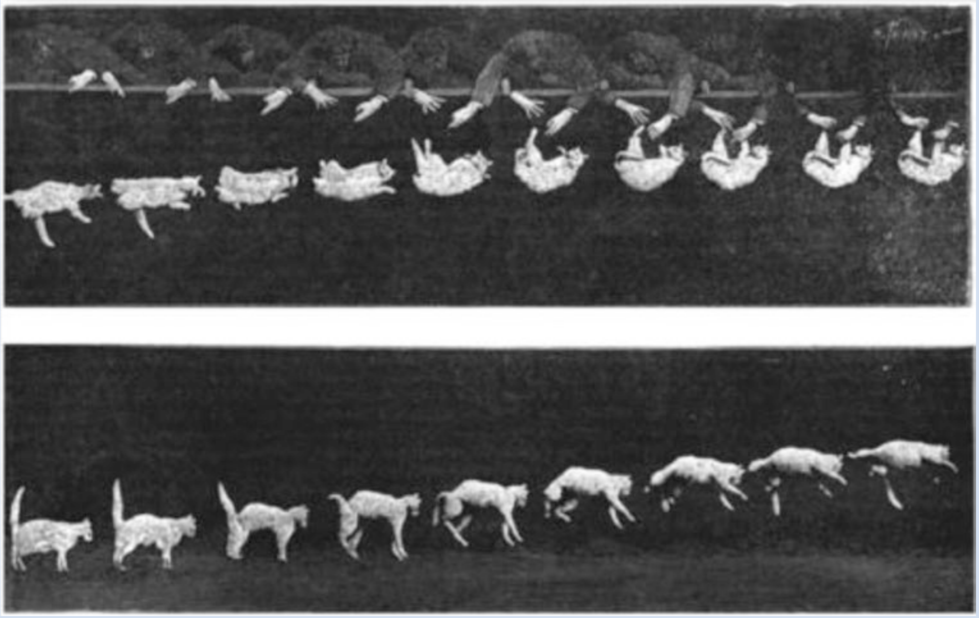


Fig. 1.23 Photographs of a falling cat taken with a chronophotographic gun. *[Image of public domain]*

As the idea of copyright and intellectual property was rapidly developing, most of the Kinestocope films became copyright-protected. The short *Fred Ott's Sneeze*, released in 1894, shot by Dickson himself, is nowadays the oldest surviving motion picture with a copyright (Fig. 1.24).

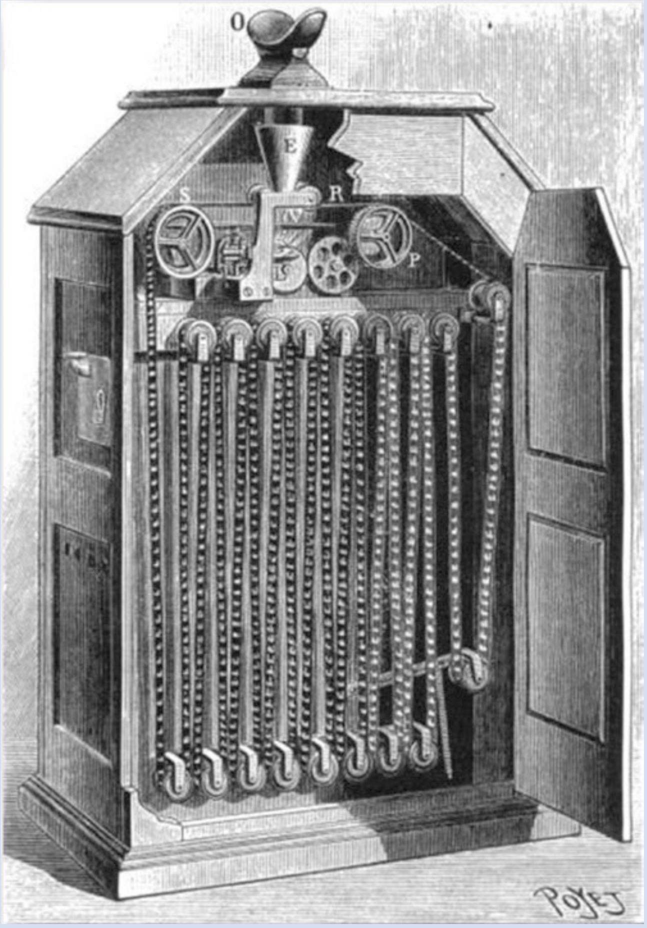


Fig. 1.24 Illustration of a kinetoscope. *[Image of public domain]*

1892	**Charles-Émile Reynaud** launches the **Théâtre Optique** (optical theatre).

Reynaud had been working to expand the potentials of the praxinoscope. Already one year after his invention, in 1878, he had created the praxinoscope theatre, a device that could use the projections of the praxinoscope with changeable backgrounds, allowing richer scenery and more "action". The next step was in 1880 with the projection praxinoscope that projected a large image of the praxinoscope through the magic lantern. The Théâtre Optique was the final step. By using additional rotating mechanisms on a leather belt (not unlike modern reels), he was able to use more than one sequence on the praxinoscope, creating more complex animations. It was the first presentation of projected moving images to an audience, three years before brothers Lumière: to some scholars, the first show of the optical theatre, called *Pauvre Pierrot*, presented in Paris in 1892 to a paying audience, must be considered the very first movie in history. A piano accompaniment (provided by pianist Gaston Paulin) throughout the whole film, the serenade song that Pierrot sings to his beloved Colombine, and even some dialogue lines were all performed live during the show, making the optical theatre a complete AV experience (Fig. 1.25).

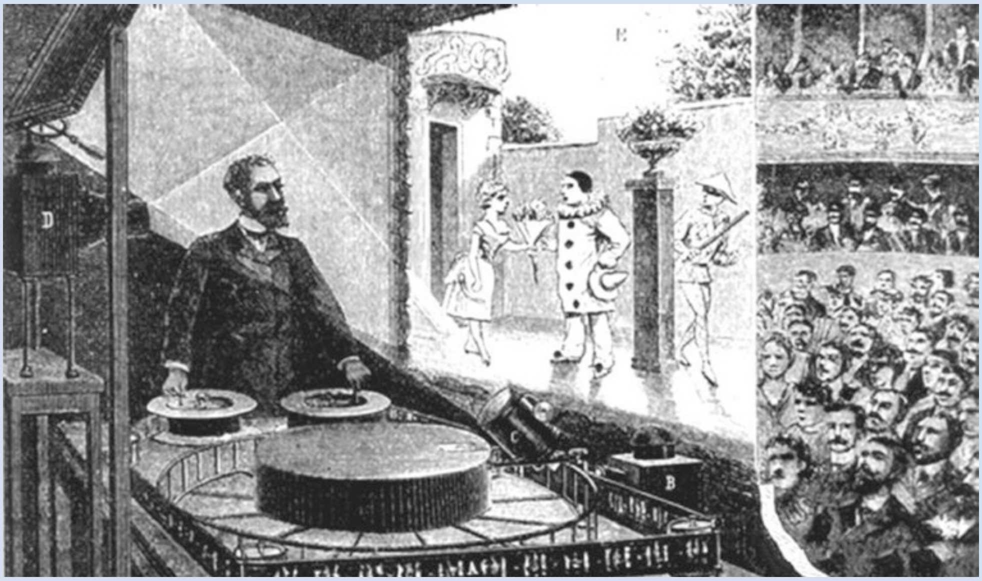
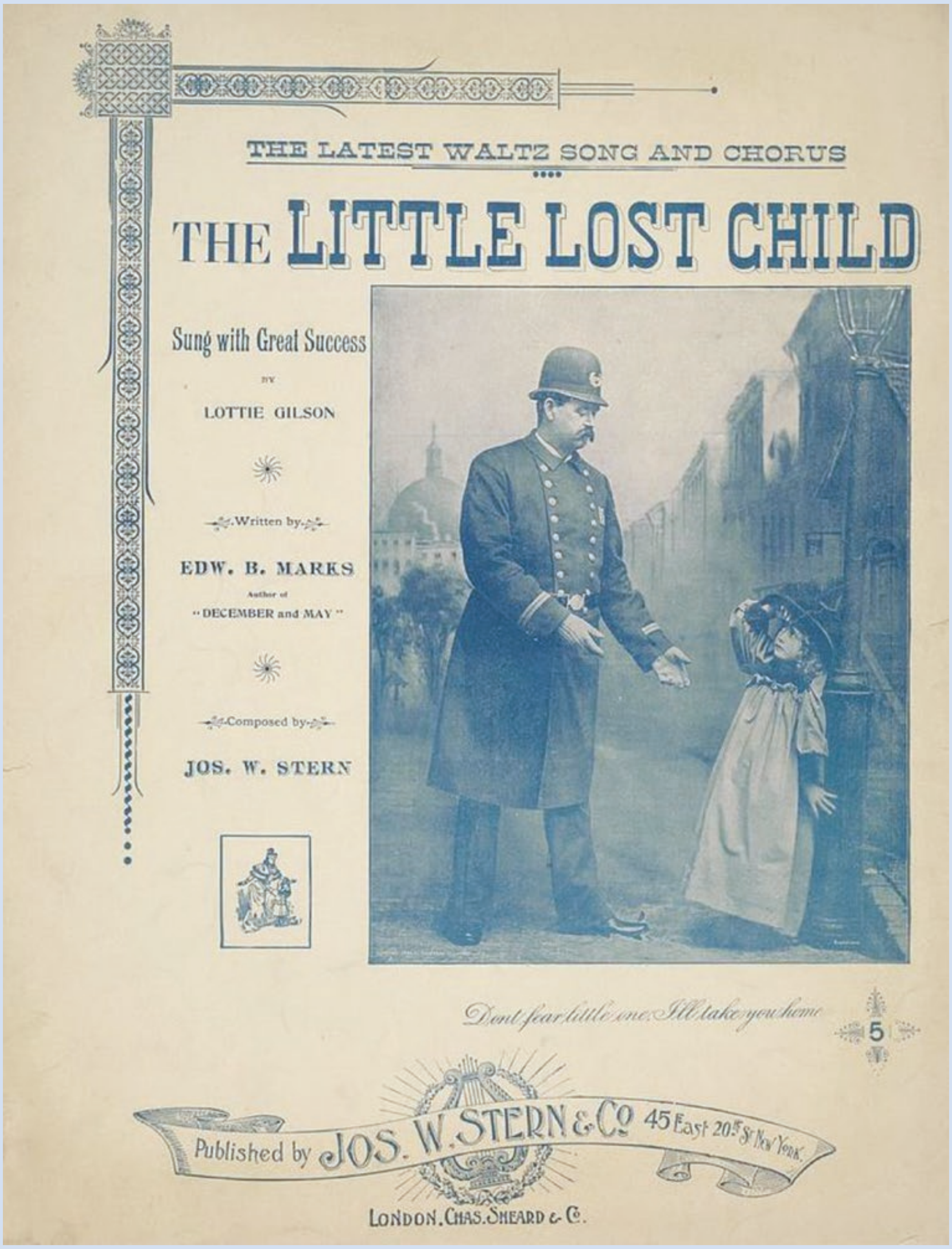


Fig. 1.25 Illustration of Reynaud screening *Pauvre Pierrot* on the optical theatre. *[Image of public domain]*

1894	Two sheet music publishers named **Edward B. Marks** and **Joe Stern** invent the "**Illustrated songs**", the first pioneer of the music video.

Before reproduced music (cylinders first and then vinyl discs) the only way the music industry could make money, besides concerts, was publishing and selling scores and lyrics of songs, so that people could play them at home, or other musicians could include them in their repertoires. At this point in history, sheet music was a very important and profitable activity.

Marks and Stern were thinking of some way to increase the sales of their song "The Little Lost Child", and they hit on the idea to create what we nowadays would call a "slide-show", by using the →Magic lantern. They hired an electrician named George Thomas and some performers, then they rented a theatre, where they could screen the pictures illustrating the song, while the performers would play the song live. This idea proved to be quite successful, making illustrated songs a popular form of entertainment in the years that concluded the nineteenth century (◘ Fig. 1.26).


THE LATEST WALTZ SONG AND CHORUS
THE LITTLE LOST CHILD
Sung with Great Success
BY
LOTTIE GILSON
Written by
EDW. B. MARKS
Author of
"DECEMBER and MAY"
Composed by
JOS. W. STERN
Don't fear little one, I'll take you home
5
Published by JOS. W. STERN & Co 45 East 20th St New York.
LONDON. CHAS. SHEARD & Co.

◘ **Fig. 1.26** Front cover of the score of "The Little Lost Child". *[Image of public domain]*

1895	The French inventors **Auguste and Louis Lumière** finalize and (several months later) arrange the first public screening of their **cinematograph**.

As you may have noticed (and will still do so in the following entries of this chronology), there was intense competition in developing many different types of AV devices in the closing years of the nineteenth century. In fact, there were many more than we have listed here, so hopefully we selected those with greater technological relevance and impact. Lumière's invention was, and remains, *the* landmark in AVCC history, and also the most iconic event. The cinematograph was a device that allowed a film to be shot and projected on a wide screen. This discovery is regarded as the birth of cinema.

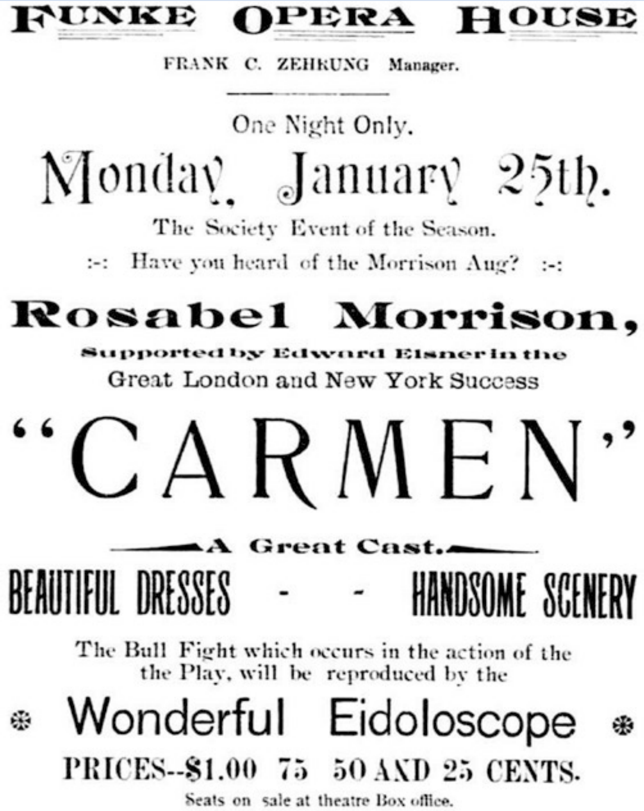
We have already mentioned in ► Sect. 1.1.1 that the Lumière's did not only create a "tool", but were also the main figures at the forefront of the two most important ideological approaches of AVCC: the "realistic" type. Their vision was that the cinematograph had to be an instrument in the service of "truth"—a way to show people what really happens in life, without particular manipulations. When we check the titles of the first films screened in public on December 28, 1895 we see mere descriptions of what was really portrayed there: *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* (literally, "The exit from the Lumière factory in Lyon"), *Le Jardinier* ("The Gardener"), *Le Débarquement du Congrès de Photographie à Lyon* ("The disembarkment of the Congress of Photographers in Lyon"), *Repas de bébé* ("Baby's Breakfast")… these films are exactly what their titles promise: short fragments of real life experienced by real people.

Arguably, Lumière's most famous film is *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* ("The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station"), and the reason for such fame also to do with an urban legend. Supposedly, when the film was first shown the realistic sequence of the life-sized train drawing closer and closer provoked a terrified reaction of some people in the audience who fled screaming. We do not know if this story is true or merely apocryphal, but it is certainly verisimilar that more than one spectator may have had one of those "is this for real?" moments. At any rate, the story is a meaningful metaphor of the realistic power of cinema. It is also useful to note that all of Lumière's films ran for no longer than 60 s (▣ Fig. 1.27).

▣ **Fig. 1.27** Auguste and Louis Lumière. *[Image of public domain]*

1895	The French inventor **Eugene Augustin Lauste** and his team invent the **eidoloscope**, arguably the first wide-screen film format, with a 1.85 ratio.

The Eidoloscope was not as well known as the Kinetoscope, however it offered lower start-up costs to any public place willing to engage into this business. Indeed, due to the fact that one person could only watch Edison's invention at a time, at least 6 kinetoscopes needed to be purchased in order to operate a fairly profitable business. On the contrary, a business only needed to purchase a single Eidoloscope because the image could be projected on a bigger screen, and be enjoyed by several customers at the same time (◘ Fig. 1.28).



FUNKE OPERA HOUSE

FRANK C. ZEHRUNG Manager.

One Night Only.

Monday, January 25th.

The Society Event of the Season.

:-: Have you heard of the Morrison Aug? :-:

Rosabel Morrison,

Supported by Edward Elsner in the

Great London and New York Success

"CARMEN"

A Great Cast.

BEAUTIFUL DRESSES - - HANDSOME SCENERY

The Bull Fight which occurs in the action of the
the Play, will be reproduced by the

❄ Wonderful Eidoloscope ❄

PRICES--$1.00 75 50 AND 25 CENTS.

Seats on sale at theatre Box office.

◘ **Fig. 1.28** The "wonderful eidoloscope" supports a representation of the opera, *Carmen*, along with "beautiful dresses" and "handsome scenery". *[Image of public domain]*

1896	The French illusionist **Georges Méliès** shoots his first movie, intrigued by the possibilities of using the cinematic medium to create spectacular effects.

So it was that on December 28, 1895 the audience at the first public screening of Lumière's films included an eccentric French gentleman by the name of Georges Méliès. Impressed by the medium, although not particularly excited by this "faithful-to-reality" idea of filming, Méliès was drawn towards the different ways to manipulate films in order to create special effects. His inquisitiveness gave rise to the other fundamental ideological approach to filmmaking—the fictional (see again ► Sect. 1.1.1). Méliès experimented with techniques of image manipulation that became influential in the following years and characterized cinema for several decades: multiple exposures, time-lapse photography, dissolves, hand-painted color and others. Through these techniques, and his own imaginative storytelling skills, Méliès created a fantastic world populated by wizards, devils, aliens, impossible physical performances, multiplying doppelgangers, heads that move on their own, and so forth, inventing *de facto* genres and sub-genres like sci-fi, horror, fantasy, absurd comedy and others. A brief look at some of Méliès's productions will give us the idea of his imaginative repertoire: *Le Manoir du diable* ("The Haunted Castle"), *Le Cauchemar* ("A Nightmare"), *L'Hallucination de l'alchimiste* ("An Hallucinated Alchemist"), *Le Cabinet de Méphistophélès* ("Mephostopheles' laboratory"), *L'Auberge ensorcelée* ("The Bewitched Inn"), etc.

In the same way that the Lumière brothers had their most iconic sequence in their most iconic film ("The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station", with the supposedly-terrified audience escaping from the theatre), Méliès too is widely-identified through one film and one frame in particular: *Le Voyage dans la Lune* ("A Trip to the Moon", 1902), in which an annoyed anthropomorphic moon is hit in the eye by a space rocket. You must have seen this image a million times (most notably, as cover of books about cinema—which says a lot about the "mythical" status of that frame). Among the numerous homages from a different field of AVCC, we shall certainly mention the video for Smashing Pumpkins' song "Tonight Tonight".

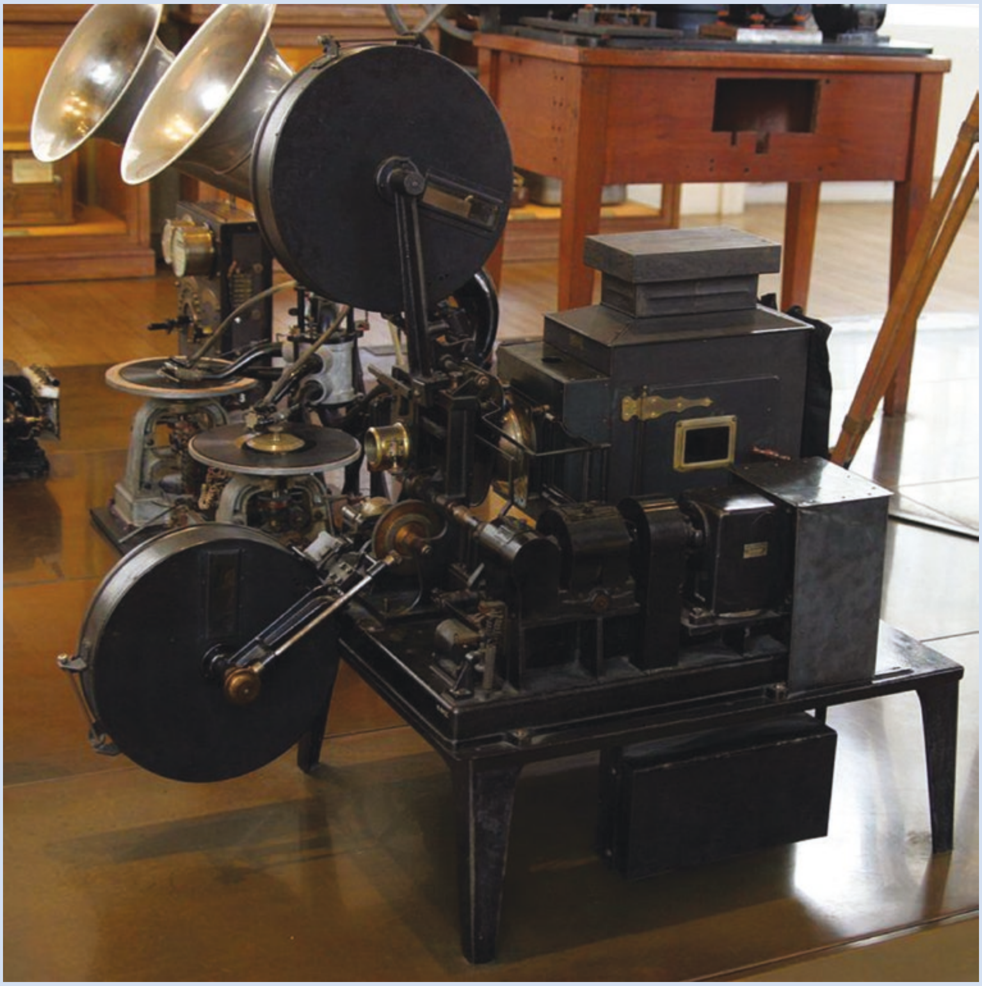
Méliès produced something like 520 films between 1896 and 1912, although unfortunately many are now lost (Fig. 1.29).

Fig. 1.29 One of the most iconic film images ever: the anthropomorphic moon hit by the rocket in Georges Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon*. *[Image of public domain]*

1902	French inventor **Léon Gaumont** creates the illusion of a sound movie, through a device called **Chronomégaphone**.

The chronomégaphone was a device that allowed the operator to manually synchronize a music recording and a film, so that they could be synchronized and thereby played together. From the start of the twentieth century devices for music reproduction began to be marketed, and it became possible to play recorded music to an audience without having to hire expensive musicians. Also, the screening of films after the introduction of the cinema by the Lumière brothers now became a regular event in theatre halls that were equipped with a screen.

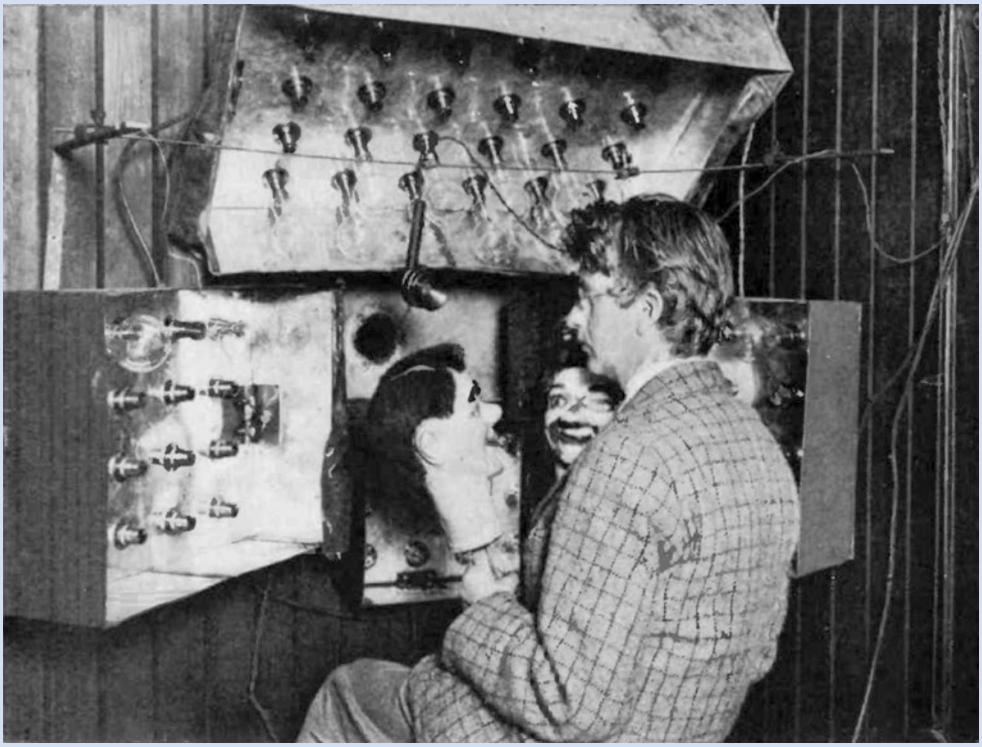
Gaumont's invention anticipated sound in cinema, providing us with another early ancestor of music videos. The synchronization (being manual) was not always perfect, but the result was still remarkable. Short films of actors miming songs were produced, and played along with the recording in front of a paying audience (◘ Fig. 1.30).



◘ **Fig. 1.30** A 1910 model of the chronomégaphone. *[Photo by Rama, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

1925	Scottish inventor **John Logie Baird** makes the **first television demonstration**.

Baird used the Nipkow disk to create a prototype video system that could broadcast images through radio waves. On March 25, 1925, he gave the first public demonstration at Selfridge's Department Store in London. Originally, his idea was to show a human face in motion, but since a real face could not provide the contrast needed for this rudimentary system, Baird chose a ventriloquist's dummy (Stooky Bill)) whose painted face had higher contrast. Some scholars regard this as the actual birth of television (▣ Fig. 1.31).



▣ **Fig. 1.31** John Logie Baird with Stooky Bill while making the first television demonstration. *[Image of public domain]*

1926–1927	The era of **sound movies**, or "talkies", is inaugurated with *Don Juan* first (1926, containing however only music and sound effects) and *The Jazz Singer* later (1927—first proper "talkie", containing also dialogues)

Curiously, when sound was introduced in cinema producers did not think of making many movies with "dialogues", but rather many with "music". Musicals were among the most popular genres of early sound cinema, and remained so until the late 1950s.

There are various reasons for this. First, the idea itself of cinema as a place for "spectacular entertainment" that aligned to the idea of having songs and dances, rather than spoken words.

Second, opera was still one of the most important forms of entertainment (after having been dominant in the nineteenth century), so that it felt natural to create a sort of "filmed opera", which is what musicals were.

Third, the exact equivalent of musical films was musical theatre, especially in America, where places like Broadway were beloved by the public. The first musicals in cinema were basically transpositions of Broadway musicals, most of the time employing the same personnel. From a business perspective it was like making two shows for the price of one, at least in terms of human resources.

Fourth, and perhaps more importantly, there were the music records, since by now the gramophone was a common feature in many households. Vinyl records were sold by the millions, and the market was flourishing, although at this point there was no such thing as a VHS, a DVD, or anything that would allow someone to buy "movies" for home consumption. Thus, the only way for companies to make a profit after ticket sales in cinema was to sell their "music".

Musicals screened at cinema theatres were perfectly suited to provide the profits needed by the emerging film and music corporations. Each musical allowed the release of at least 2–3 songs, which were selected as audience favorites. American music in this era brings to mind famous songs and songwriters such as, "Night and Day", "Blue Moon", "White Christmas", "Singing in the Rain", i.e. the compositions of George Gershwin, Cole Porter, and Irving Berlin….

As surprising as it may seem, many of these well-known songs were featured in musicals, or even specifically written for them. Musicals were the best platform to make such songs famous, or even more famous than they already were (Fig. 1.32).

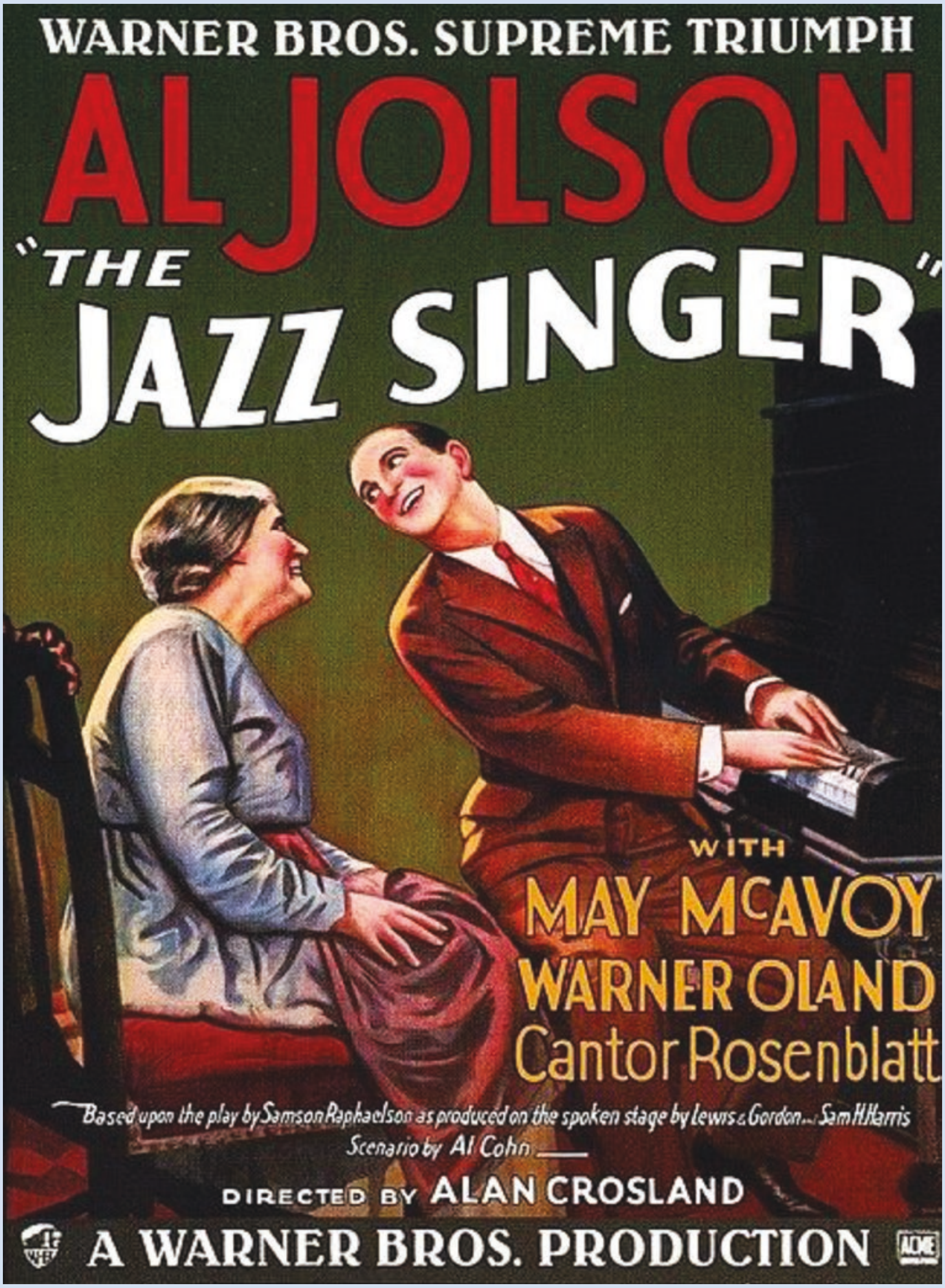

WARNER BROS. SUPREME TRIUMPH
AL JOLSON
"THE JAZZ SINGER"
WITH
MAY McAVOY
WARNER OLAND
Cantor Rosenblatt
Based upon the play by Samson Raphaelson as produced on the spoken stage by Lewis & Gordon … Sam H. Harris
Scenario by Al Cohn
DIRECTED BY ALAN CROSLAND
A WARNER BROS. PRODUCTION

Fig. 1.32 The original film poster of *The Jazz Singer*. *[Image of public domain]*

1928	The **first TV station** is born.

The still-existing WRGB (then called W2XB) is said to be the first TV station in history.

W2XB commenced broadcasting from the General Electric facility in Schenectady, NY, and was initially an experimental station. Later in the same year (1928) it began its official broadcasting with the crime-drama *The Queen's Messenger*.

An interesting note of TV aesthetics: technical limitations were so great and viewing screens of early TV sets so tiny, that only the actor's individual hands or faces were visible at one time. The filming crew used three cameras, two for the characters and a third for images of gestures and whatever stage prop was called for at a given time. Two assistant actors would display their hands before the third camera whenever needed (▣ Fig. 1.33).

▣ **Fig. 1.33** The General Electric plant in Schenectady, as it looked like in the 1920's. *[Image of public domain]*

1929	**Walt Disney's** *Silly Symphonies* is the first series of **short musical animations**, another ancestor of music videos.

Another strategy to ensure that songs could be properly advertised was to showcase them in short animated films (usually cartoons, but there were also other forms) that would be played in theatres before a movie would start.

Nowadays, when we go to a cinema, the first 15 min or so are filled by commercials and trailers of upcoming movies. In those days this time would be often occupied by these animated shorts.

The two "giants" of animation of the period were Walt Disney and Warner Bros, and it is no wonder that they enjoyed the lion's share in this particular business. The first animated series of this kind was produced by Walt Disney and it was called *Silly Symphonies* (1929), while Warner Bros replied with three series in two years: *Looney Tunes* (1930, basically an imitation of Silly Symphonies), *Spooney Melodies* (1930), and *Merrie Melodies* (1931).

A number of these series were important for the history of animation in particular, because they launched characters that are still popular: Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and others for Walt Disney, Duffy Duck, Bugs Bunny and others for Warner Bros. Of all these series, *Spooney Melodies* was probably the most interesting artistically, because it was not exactly "cartoons", but more imaginative Art-Deco creations, interlaced with live-action filming. Only five Spooney Melodies were produced before Warner Bros turned to the "more commercial" and lucrative Merrie Melodies (Fig. 1.34).

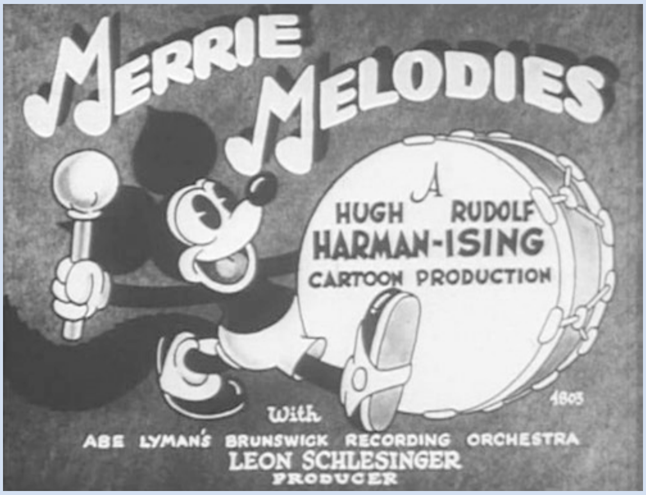


Fig. 1.34 The title card of the first *Merrie Melodies* episode by Warner Bros, featuring Foxy, a character rather suspiciously looking like Mickey Mouse. *[Image of public domain]*

1938	**Sergei Eisenstein's** film ***Alexander Nevsky*** is released. It features a novel approach to soundtrack, in which actors are asked to move at pace with it, rather than adding the music in post-production.

In *Alexander Nevsky* we see long scenes of battles with a music score by Sergei Prokofiev. This would be nothing new, since it was customary to put epic-sounding music during battle scenes in war movies, except that Eisenstein hit on a new idea. He played the soundtrack *during* the filming, asking the actors to "move according to the music"—almost as if dancing. Actors were riding, running, fighting, falling and in general moving "in step" with the music. Working film music in this way was a revolutionary idea and it became quite influential in subsequent years. For example, Quentin Tarantino often uses this technique whereby he plays a song while filming, so that the actors become aware of it, and move accordingly (Fig. 1.35).

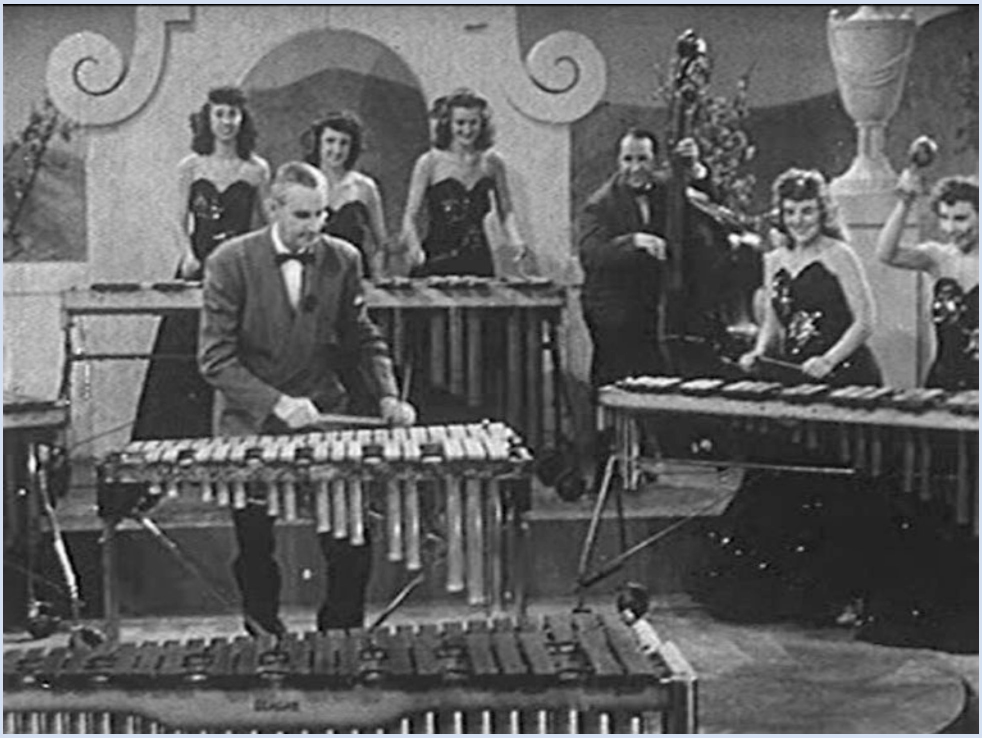
Fig. 1.35 A shot of actor Nikolay Cherkasov as Alexander Nevsky. *[Image of public domain]*

1939	The first Panoram visual jukebox is produced, which launches the **Soundies** during the 1940s. Soundies are an early type of music video whose aesthetics start to resemble more closely today's music videos.

During the 1940s, bars, cafeterias and the likes started to introduce a new type of furniture—the visual jukebox, of which, Panoram was the first and most important model. Just like a regular music jukebox, customers would put a coin in the machine and select a song to be played, but in this case they would get a video as well, which was played by a monitor installed in the machine.

The videos that customers would watch became known as *Soundies*. They were not "new" songs, but had attained great popularity and were made relatively cheaply for the exclusive consumption of the visual jukebox. The settings were basic, production was basic and the scenery quite simple, and they would usually be performed live with the subsequent arrival of "lip-sync". Usually, the classic setting was (a) the band of performers; (b) an indoor location (it could be a stage, a studio, but it could also be something less obvious, like an apartment); and (c) a bit of scenography that would more or less give an idea of what the song was about. For example, if the song had a kind of holiday/tropical flavor, performers might wear flowered shirts and white trousers, and a palm tree could be included on the stage).

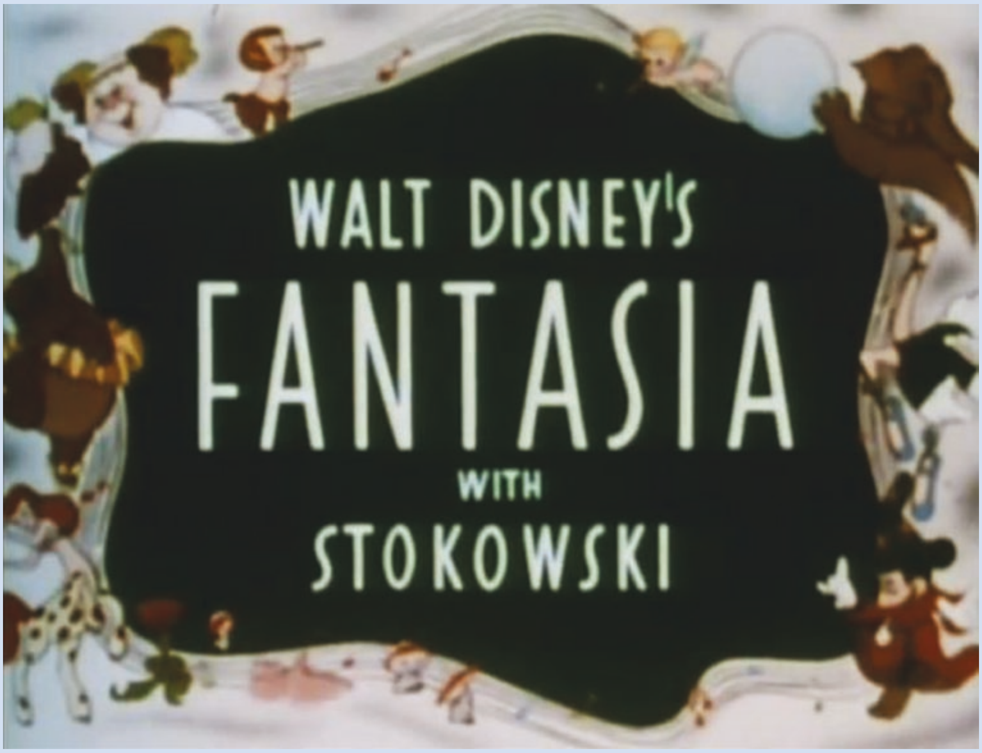
The Panoram was popular in the late 1940s and 1950s. The most popular *Soundies* were made by comedians, dancers and most of all, Afro-American jazz/swing musicians (▣ Fig. 1.36).



▣ **Fig. 1.36** Still from the soundie "A Study in Brown" by Reg Kehoe and his Marimba Queens. *[Image of public domain]*

1940	**Walt Disney's** *Fantasia* is a mainstream/popularized form of **visual music**.

Unlike all of his previous movies which were regular animations with a storyline, Disney thought of *Fantasia* as a collection of animations based around famous pieces of classical music, which were among his favorites. In common with Eisenstein's approach to *Alexander Nevsky*, Disney's technique was to adapt images to music, and not vice versa. Some animations were more abstract, such as the sequence based on Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D minor*, which was almost a copy of Mary Ellen Bute in her visual music experimentations—including one on the very same piece. Some others were more traditional Disney animations, including a sequence with Mickey Mouse himself, famously acting as wizard's assistant (◘ Fig. 1.37).



◘ **Fig. 1.37** Title card for Walt Disney's *Fantasia*. Note the prominence given to Leopold Stokowski, the famous orchestra conductor who appears in some sequences of the movie. *[Image of public domain]*

1940–1964	First steps in the development of **videogames.**

There is an open debate on what should be called "the first" videogame, or at least the first in the "modern sense of the word". For our purposes we shall use one of the most commonly acknowledged turning points, that is, the period between Ralph Baer's creation of the first TV console for videogames and the appearance of the legendary coin-operated "arcade" game *Pong*. Therefore, in this segment of our chronology, we shall briefly cover the main events preceding these two.

In 1940, Edward U. Condon designed a computer capable of playing the popular game *Nim*, where players compete in avoiding to pick the last matchstick. The game was presented at the Westinghouse display at the World's Fair the same year and was an instant success, with thousands of visitors playing it. The computer's algorithms for the game must have been set at quite a high level since the computer won 90% of the times.

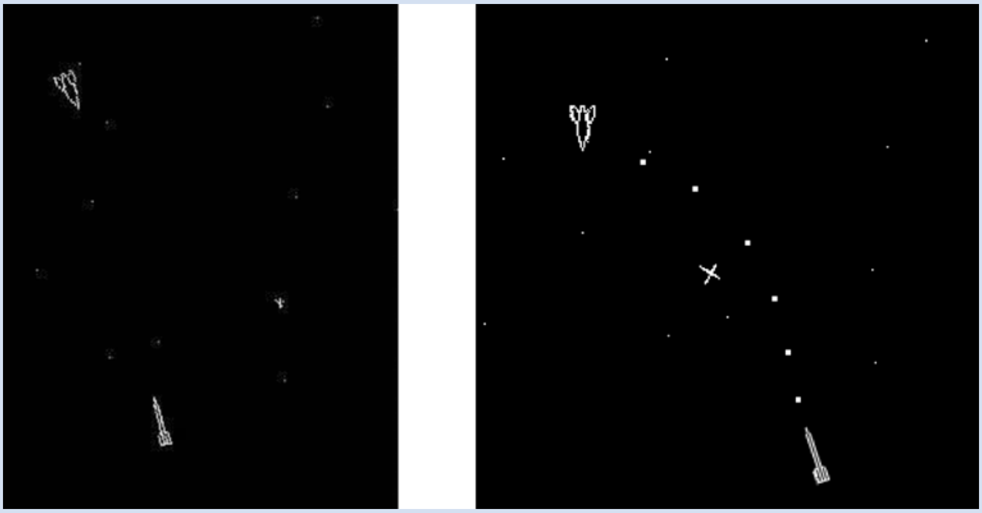
In 1947, Thomas T. Goldsmith Jr. and Estle Ray Mann created a shooting-on-target game by using a cathode ray tube hooked to an oscilloscope display. In 1950, Alan Turing created the first chess program by following the guidelines published in a scientific article entitled "Programming a Computer for Playing Chess", by Claude Shannon. In 1952, Alexander S. Douglass created *OXO*, a tic-tac-toe game for the EDSAC computer installed in the labs of Cambridge University. It's worth pointing out that in these early days computers were not really interchangeable in their performance: each machine had its own characteristics. In 1954, the team at Los Alamos lab, in New Mexico, the same place where the atomic bomb was developed, programmed a blackjack game on the IBM-701 computer.

In 1955, the US Army developed *Hutspiel*, a simulation war game between America (blue player) and Soviet Union (red player, of course). During these Cold War years it is not surprising that similar games would be developed, particularly after the 1961 missile crisis in Cuba, which is widely regarded as the closest the world came to nuclear war. In this regard, worth mentioning is *Grand Strategy* developed by the Raytheon Company in 1961, and *STAGE* (Simulation of Total Atomic Global Exchange) developed by the US Defense Department in 1963, exactly as a consequence of the 1961 crisis. In this game reportedly it was deduced that in case of thermonuclear war America would win. In full honestly, though, I am not sure how much this was a relief to the Defense Department, since in the same years scholars of game theory had advanced the so-called MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) principle, which asserted that both the USA and USSR had enough weapons to destroy each other completely no matter how the war would end. Incidentally, the MAD principle inspired Stanley Kubrick's idea for the Cold War parody *Dr. Strangelove*.

Back to our timeline, in 1956, still on the IBM-701, Arthur Samuel created a checkers video game and demonstrated his innovation on TV. In due course (six years after its creation) it would become the first game "smart enough" to defeat expert players in the field. In 1957 one upgrade of the same IBM computer (the model 704), enabled Alex Bernstein to develop a chess game far more advanced than that programmed by Turing in 1950. Bernstein's program could evaluate the variables for the next four moves, which as any chess player will know is quite remarkable. It was another forty years until a chess program could take on and defeat a world champion, which happened in 1997 when the IBM *Deep Blue* program beat the chess master, Gary Kasparov.

In 1959, students at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) created a game for the Tx-0 computer called *Mouse in the Maze*. This allowed the player to draw a labyrinth with a light pen, and then the mouse character would navigate inside it, in search of cheese. In 1961, Paul and John Burgeson developed the first baseball computer program for the IBM 1620.

In 1962, still at MIT, a student by the name of Steve Russell created *Spacewar!* which was perhaps the first computer game to bear a resemblance with the early arcade games later produced in the early 1970s. Not by chance, the first of this category turned out to be an upgrade of the 1962 game. An important breakthrough occurred in 1964 when John Kemeny created the BASIC programming language. From this point forward hundreds of games were being produced, programmed by anybody around the world with a reasonable knowledge of this language. The creation of BASIC is also the point of transition between this pre-history of videogames and the events that followed (▫ Fig. 1.38).



▫ **Fig. 1.38** Two screenshots from *Spacewar*!. *[Image of public domain]*

1941 **First commercial** aired on TV.

The beginning of the long, and often annoying, history of advertisement on TV, began on July 1, 1941, on the New York station WNBT (now called WNBC). Before a baseball game between the Brooklyn Dodgers and Philadelphia Phillies, the spectators were exposed to a commercial for Bulova watches. It lasted only 10 s and it showed a single image of a map of the United States, on which a Bulova clock dial was applied. After a few seconds an off-screen male voice was heard saying, “America runs on Bulova time!” (Fig. 1.39).

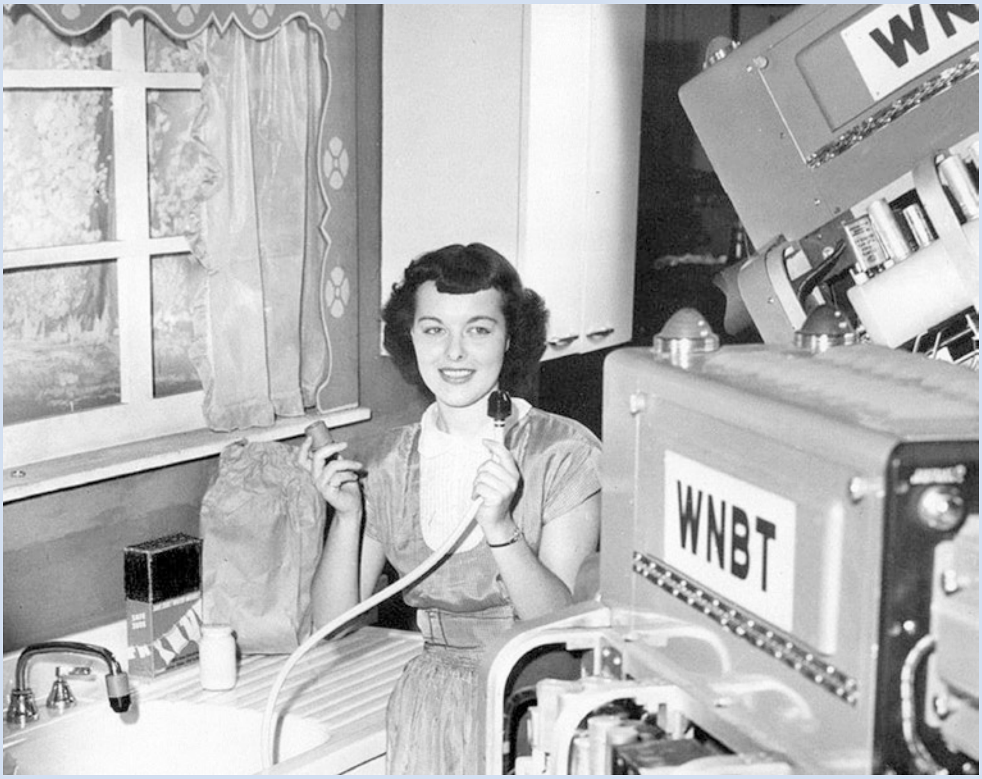


Fig. 1.39 The making of a 1948 commercial for the WNBT station. *[Image of public domain]*

1950 **Snader telescriptions**, another early form of music video, start to be broadcast on TV.

The Snader Telescriptions were simple videos showcasing popular songs and ran for a limited period of time from 1950 to 1954. Similar to soundies in terms of their aesthetics (musicians mostly performed live in front of the camera), the telescriptions were more varied in terms of musical styles covered.

Since each video was no longer than 3–4 min, telescriptions were useful as so-called “fillers” that were run in-between programs. With TV sets now considered a necessary item in most family houses, there was a growing demand for a wider variety of broadcast programs. However, there would be gaps between one program and another; as yet broadcasting did not run, non-stop 24/7, with every single second filled, as it is today. Also, in these pre-digital times it was difficult to predict the exact schedule of each program. A sport event presented particular difficulties for TV programmers. For example in tennis there is a huge difference (matter of hours, literally) between a tight match that ends at the fifth set with several tie-breaks, and a straight 6–0, 6–0, 6–0 that may last just about an hour. “Fillers” were therefore pre-made short programs that could be relied upon any time there was a gap before the next planned program. With hundreds of telescriptions at their disposal, TV producers were sure to cover any needed gap, knowing that, due to their popularity, the public would appreciate watching them and would remain at the TV (Fig. 1.40).

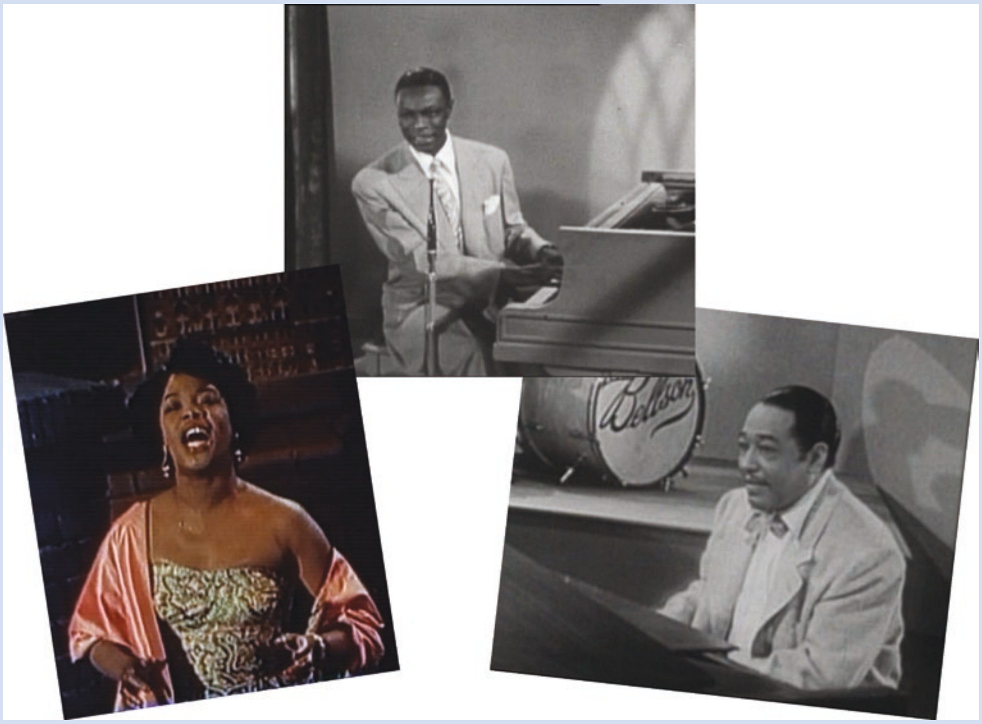


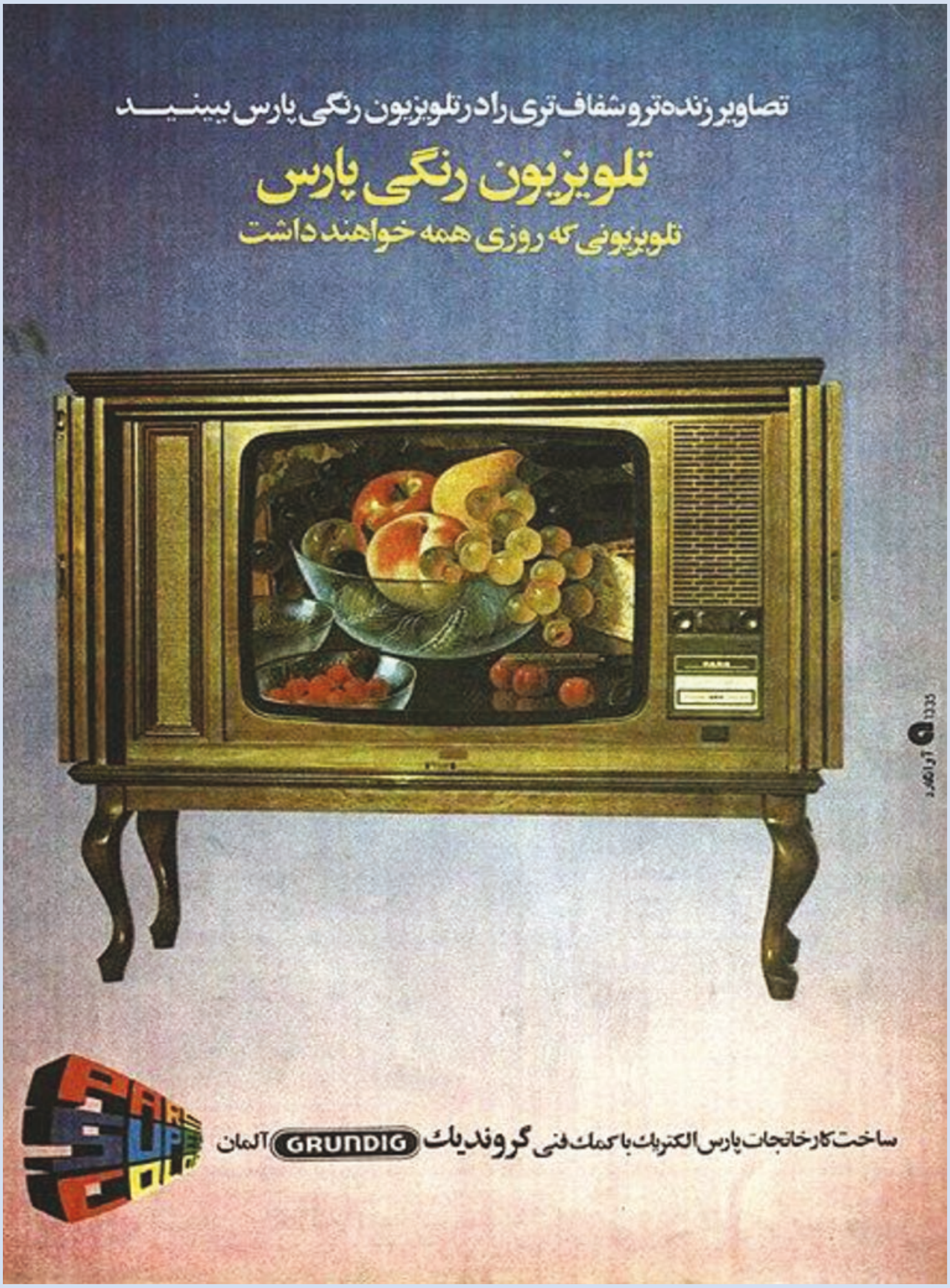
Fig. 1.40 Three great Afro-American jazz performers, as appearing in Snader telescriptions. From left to right: Sarah Vaughan, Nat King Cole and Duke Ellington. *[Fair use—Photos personally assembled and edited for demonstrative purpose]*

1953	**Color TV** becomes available in people’s houses.

The technology for color television had been elaborated since the early 1940s, yet it was only in 1953 that it became available publicly. The United States was first to benefit, with Cuba the second country in 1958, although color broadcasting was suspended in 1959 due to the Cuban Revolution, and was only reintroduced in 1975.

Color television sets were expensive so that only the affluent (usually less than 3–4% of the population) was able to afford one. A series of breakthroughs occurred only in the mid-1960s in different parts of the world with the rapid fall in prices, with the result that more stations were encouraged to broadcast in color. By the early 1970s, more than half of the population in industrialized countries possessed a color TV.

This different technology was accompanied by different aesthetics to the black and white TV programs which were made in such a way that colors would not necessarily be relevant, or at least easy to guess from the context. On the other hand, color unleashed creativity and the celebration of colors, tones and contrasts, although it left itself open to the criticism that it was less realistic than B/W. Perhaps the best example of early colour production was the first *Batman* TV series, which was not only glossy and colorful in itself (if you remember Robin's costume, you will know what I am talking about), but also added cartoon-like visual effects, such as the onomatopoeic words for various noises, in bright and saturated colors (◘ Fig. 1.41).

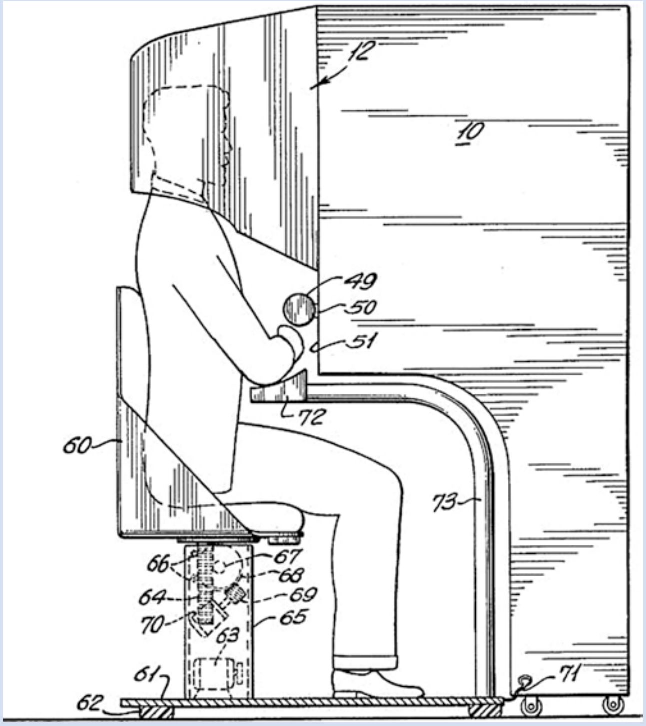

تصاویر زنده‌تر و شفاف‌تری را در تلویزیون رنگی پارس ببینید
تلویزیون رنگی پارس
تلویزیونی که روزی همه خواهند داشت
1355
PARS SUPER COLOR
ساخت کارخانجات پارس الکتریک با کمک فنی گروندیک GRUNDIG آلمان

◘ **Fig. 1.41** An old Persian ad for a color TV set. *[Image of public domain]*

1956–1960	American cinematographer **Morton Heilig** creates Sensorama, the **first Virtual Reality machine**, and then Telesphere Mask, the **first head-mounted display.**

Sensorama was a large booth able to host four viewers at a time, and consisted of a combination of different technologies aimed at offering a full sensorial experience. Full color stereoscopic 3D videos, sounds, tactile stimuli (such as vibrations or atmospheric effects), and even scents were all combined into what critics acclaimed as "the cinema of the future". Heilig created six short films for his machine, but Sensorama was not the market breakthrough as he had anticipated.

Much more impactful, at least as a concept (it is still a template for modern VR masks) was the Telesphere Mask, patented in 1960, which provided stereoscopic 3D images with wide vision and stereo sound. There was no motion tracking at this point, but the bases for this crucial accessory for virtual reality were set (▣ Fig. 1.42).

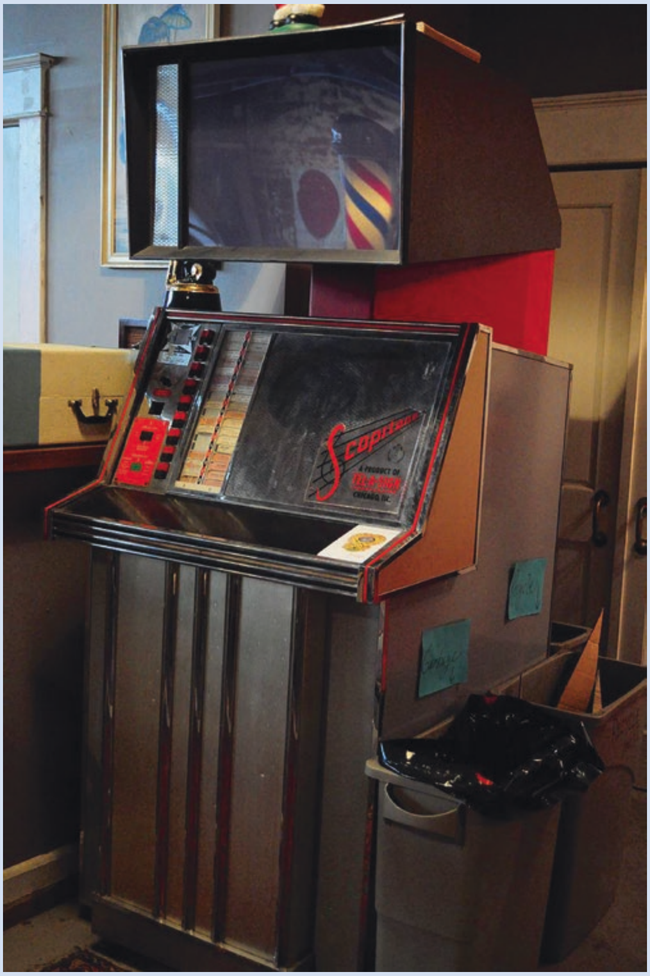


▣ **Fig. 1.42** The sensorama patent. *[Image of public domain]*

1958	The first music videos are filmed in France for a more modern and perfected type of visual jukebox, the **scopitone**.

With the approach of the 1960s, a new idea for a visual jukebox was invented in France. Previously, the Panoram had used a particular technology for aerial photography that had been developed during the Second World War. If you have seen war documentaries or fiction films, which included airplanes, you may have noticed that towards the end of the war pilots had a small monitor at their disposal—a kind of TV. The same technology was adapted to create the scopitone, which was an upgrade to the visual jukebox, and used for the same purpose in bars and cafeterias. The scopitone soon became a hit in France, and was imitated in other countries.

The videos produced were still quite simple and primitive, however in the US the scopitone achieved great success within a short space of time. It had a vivid quality, and the productions were far superior than previously the case thanks to bigger investments. In fact, so profitable was the business that the Mafia moved in which obliged the authorities to close down the business and order the removal of the machines from public places (▣ Fig. 1.43).



▣ **Fig. 1.43** A Scopitone machine used in America in the late 1950s. [Photo by Joe Mabel, CC-BY-SA-3.0]

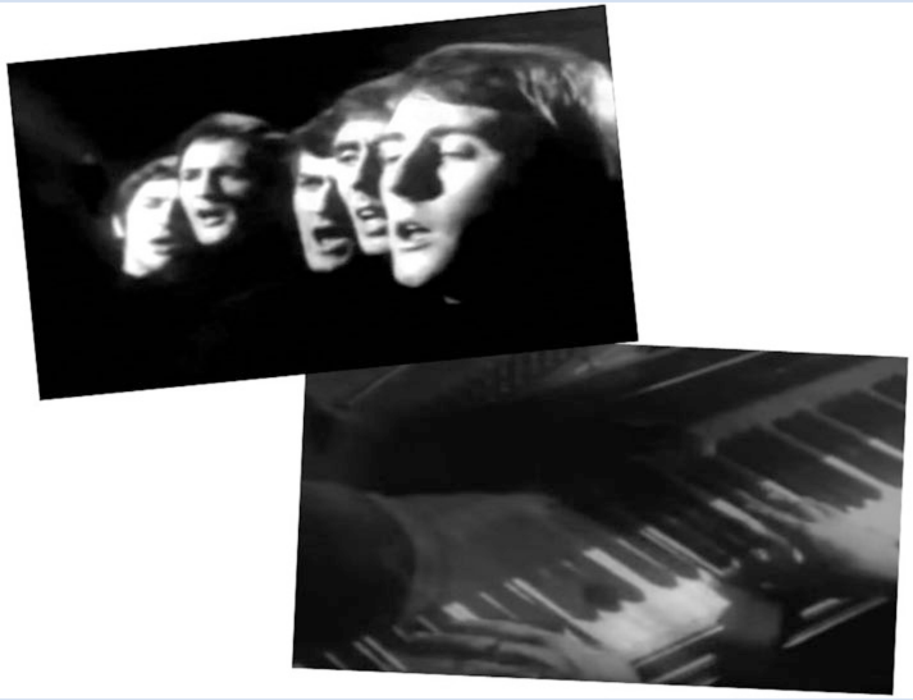
1964	**The Moody Blues**' video for "Go Now" inaugurates the era of **promotional clips**.

The world changed rapidly during the 1960s, with TV playing a central role. More and more audiences demanded to see their favorite singers/bands on TV shows and for the first time in the history of popular music, England displaced the USA as the epicenter of the industry. The "British Invasion" commenced in earnest with stars of the time—The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, The Kinks, The Moody Blues, etc.—feted by TV hosts and mobbed by hysterical teenage fans.

Firm favorites of the audience, rock bands were not always able to appear on TV programs because of their touring or recording commitments. This prompted the recording companies to produce pre-recorded video-sequences showing the band playing their latest song in lieu of a live performance.

While this idea did not (yet) represent any innovation from an aesthetic point of view, it did provide a radical change in terms of function: music videos ceased to be an item of pure entertainment, based on already-popular songs (as in the case of soundies, telescriptions and the likes), and became a form of marketing, a tool to *promote* new songs. This gave rise to the notion of the promotional clip, or shortly *promo*, which to some scholars marks the birth of the modern music video—as we know it today.

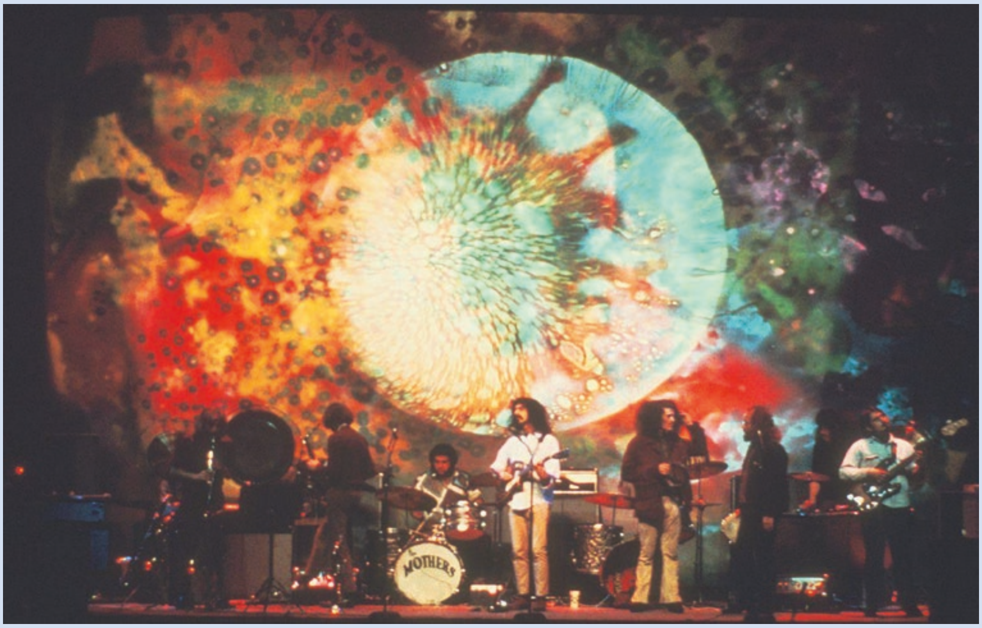
In chronological order the first promo was "Go Now", from The Moody Blues. We briefly discuss it in the case study on ► Sect. 5.4.3, which is focused on the promos of the biggest stars of the 1960s, The Beatles. Incidentally, the videos featured some ideas (such as the close-ups on the band's faces against a dark background) that would later inspire the hugely successful and innovative video for The Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" (◘ Fig. 1.44).



◘ **Fig. 1.44** Two stills from The Moody Blues' "Go Now". *[Fair use—Photos personally assembled and edited for demonstrative purpose]*

1965–1966	Artist collectives **The Joshua Light Show** and **Brotherhood of Light** create psychedelic **visual shows** for The Grateful Dead concerts.

By combining different techniques, such as projection of pure color, concrete imagery, light manipulation and liquid effects, these performances initiated a trend that would be taken up by psychedelic and art-rock bands such as Pink Floyd or Frank Zappa, and clubs like London's UFO. More importantly, for our history, many regard these shows as the beginning of VJ'ing (◘ Fig. 1.45).

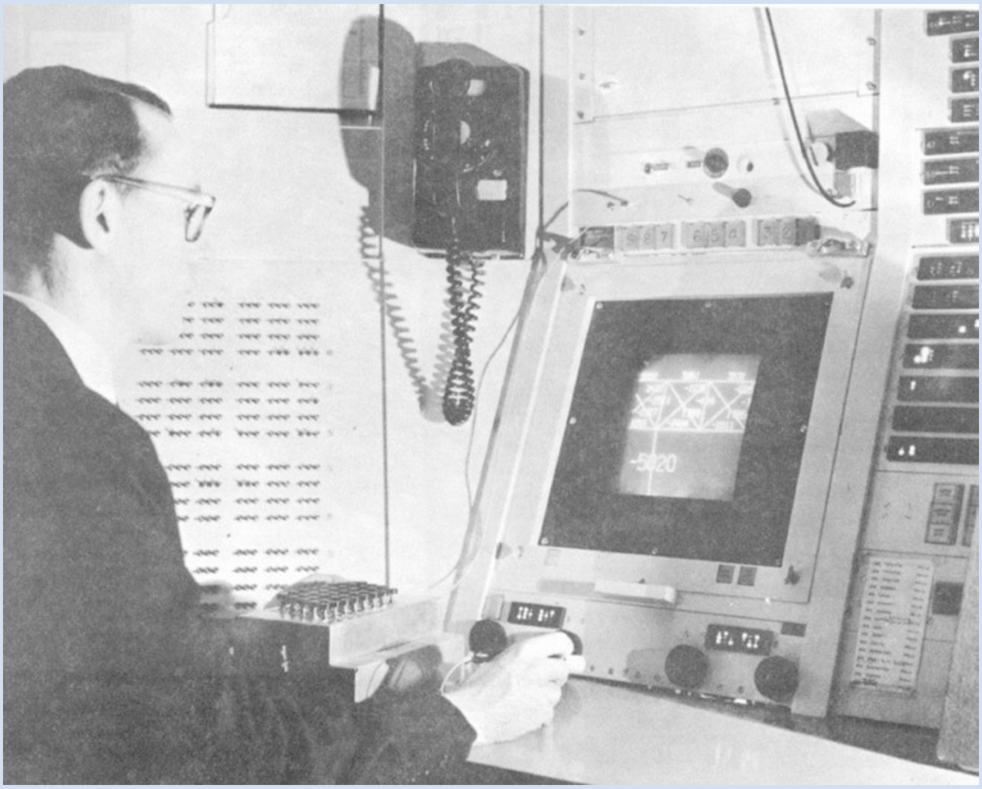


◘ **Fig. 1.45** Frank Zappa performing with the Joshua Light Show. *[Photo by Guyrichardssmit1, CC BY-SA 4.0]*

1965–1968	American computer scientist **Ivan Sutherland** first envisions modern virtual reality and then realizes the **first VR head-mounted display**.

In 1965, Sutherland wrote a paper that many regard as the “blueprint” for virtual reality. His paper discussed the idea of the “ultimate display”, a computer-mediated room able to create a representation of reality that would be impossible to distinguish from the real thing.

Three years later, and with help from his student Bob Sproull, Sutherland devised a head-mounted display connected to a computer called The Sword of Damocles. It was quite primitive in terms of user interface and graphics, but was the first display to have head tracking that could follow the user’s gaze. Too heavy in weight and complicated to use, The Sword of Damocles remained a lab prototype and was never taken to the market (■ Fig. 1.46).



■ **Fig. 1.46** Ivan Sutherland in his lab. *[Photo scanned by Kerry Rodden from original photograph by Ivan Sutherland, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

Late 1960s	Important developments in **music videos.**

Without being too specific about dates/events, we should note some steps in the progression of music videos. As we will discuss at length in ► Sect. 5.4.2 (again, with The Beatles as case study), in the second half of the 1960s, promos developed into an artistically-challenging mode of AV expression, inheriting techniques and imaginativeness from cinema, including its more experimental forms.

As most acts started shooting promos as a rule, they also began experimenting with different formats. One of them was a long feature movie, that could basically be labeled as a “musical”, but which was in fact consisting of assembling various promos with a more or less visible red line (for example, all of them would feature the same location). Notable examples of this genre include The Beatles’ *Magical Mystery Tour*, The Rolling Stones’ *Rock’n’Roll Circus*, Joe Cocker’s *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, and in the early 1970s Pink Floyd’s *Live at Pompeii*.

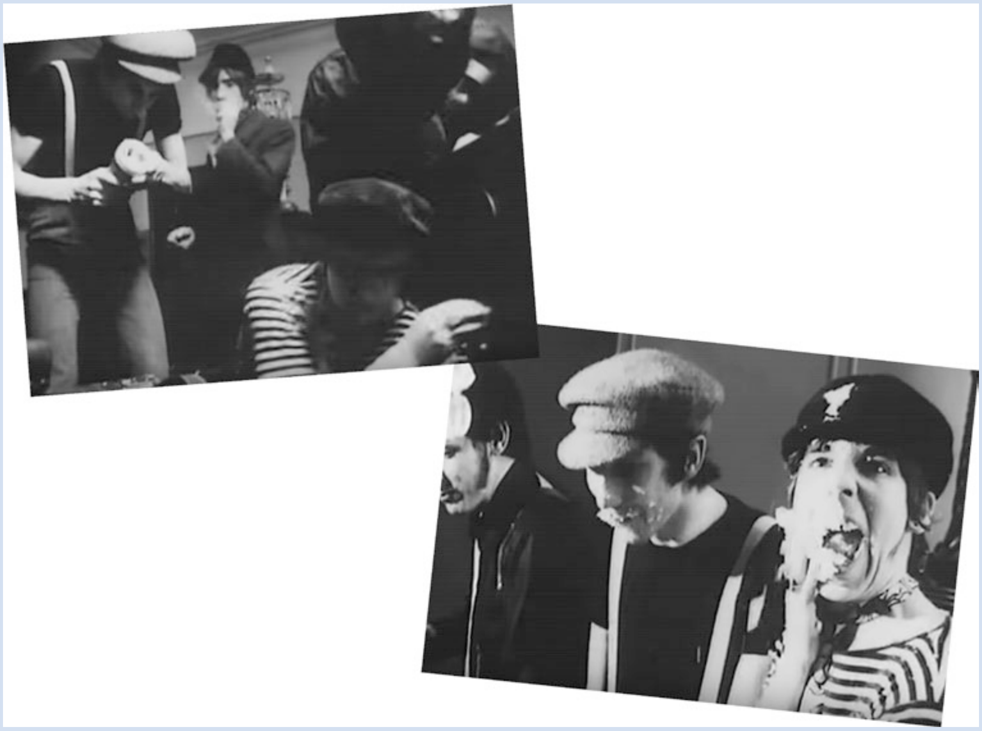
Back to more ordinary music videos, another idea that originated in those years—and that, once again, will be extremely influential in the future—was the so-called “plot-clip”. A plot-clip, as the name itself suggests, is a video with a story. Until this point, music videos were mostly portraying the performers themselves while performing. There would be, as we have also discussed, situations where one or more musicians would not be exactly playing (like Ringo Starr pedaling on the exercise bike instead of playing the drums in the promo of “I Feel Fine”—we shall see that in ► Sect. 5.4.2), but all considered the main idea conveyed by videos so far was “to see the musicians playing and the singers singing”. With plot-clip a new idea was introduced: the musicians became actors and staged a story that had a distinct narrative with a beginning and an end, and that usually had nothing to do with playing music as such.

This is of course an idea that is very common nowadays, but the first examples, once more, were popularized by bands from the "British Invasion" phenomenon: The Kinks (with the promo for "Dead End Street") and The Who (with the promo for "Happy Jack"), both in 1966. Many others followed after these two. In "Happy Jack" we see a comedy-farce of four burglars (the four members of The Who, of course) who break into an apartment in the attempt to open a safe. The attempt proves not to be successful, but in the meanwhile one of the burglars finds a cake. The four initially eat some of it, but then they start throwing pieces at each other, finally involving also a police guard who meanwhile had been attracted by the noise and had gone to check on the apartment. It is a simple and short story, but it serves the purpose of showcasing the song in an attractive and humorous manner. Among other things, The Who, like The Beatles, had members with a very recognizable personality. Just like The Beatles had a funny one (Ringo), a witty one (John), a cute one (Paul) and a quiet one (George), The Who had their own characters: Pete Townsend, the guitarist and main songwriter, was the erratic brain of the band; John Entwistle, the bass player, was the quiet virtuoso; Roger Daltrey, the singer, was the "star"; and Keith Moon, the drummer, was like Ringo the funny one. A video like "Happy Jack" therefore would also give the fans an interpretation of such roles: we see John as the most serious character (with a scar on the face, too), Keith as the most clownesque one, and so forth.

Plot-clips, like all other promos at this point in history, were still produced without great financial investments. They were usually filmed in one day or so, with few cameras and a small troupe. While constantly improving in terms of ideas and artistry, there was not yet a professional standard in terms of techniques and technologies.

One final and important thing happening in the 1960s was the beginning of a closer cooperation between videos and traditional cinema. Some celebrated film directors develop an interest in popular music as a phenomenon, and were consequently attracted by the idea of working on promos, so they began producing crossovers between cinema and video art. The most famous example is probably that of Jean-Luc Godard's *Sympathy for the Devil* (1968) which combined footage from The Rolling Stones recording the eponymous song in their studio with images from the late 1960s society, particularly the protest movements of the 1968 and in general the youth/alternative culture. This match cinema-video became more relevant from the 1980s onwards, when renowned movie directors would be asked to shoot videos for popular acts of the period (you may remember Michael Jackson working with John Landis for "Thriller" or Martin Scorsese for "Bad"; Public Enemy working with Spike Lee for "Fight the Power", and so forth).

Other directors, on the other hand, became so enamored with the music video art form that they actually became specialists of that and reduced their traditional cinema work to the minimum. Notable examples include Michael Lindsay-Hogg and Peter Whitehead (▣ Fig. 1.47).



▣ **Fig. 1.47** Two stills from The Who's "Happy Jack". *[Fair use—Photos personally assembled and edited for demonstrative purpose]*

1966–1972	The **modern videogames** era begins.

In 1966, while waiting for a friend in a bus station, German inventor Ralph Baer had an idea for a TV-based videogame system, a console that could be connected to a television set and allow users to play at their homes. The idea became a prototype in 1967, and an actual commercial product (distributed by the company Magnavox) in 1968, under the name Odyssey. This is often regarded as the birth of modern videogames, in fierce competition with another major event, occurring four years later: the birth of the arcade game *Pong*, programmed by Nolan Bushnell and Al Acorn, and produced by Atari. Arcade games, or coin-op (as in "coin-operated") games, became one of the pop icons of late 1970s and 1980s. Arcade machines were installed in all sorts of public businesses (particularly restaurants and bars) or in game rooms of their own (the actual "arcades"), becoming actual contemporary amusement parks, and subjects of sociological analyses (including the suspicion that, like gambling, they could provoke addiction and psychological problems). While *Pong* has remained the most iconic of the early arcade games, the very first one, *Galaxy Game*, had actually appeared one year earlier, in 1971, and it was actually an upgrade of Steve Russell's *Spacewar*!, which we have mentioned in a previous entry of this chronology (Fig. 1.48).

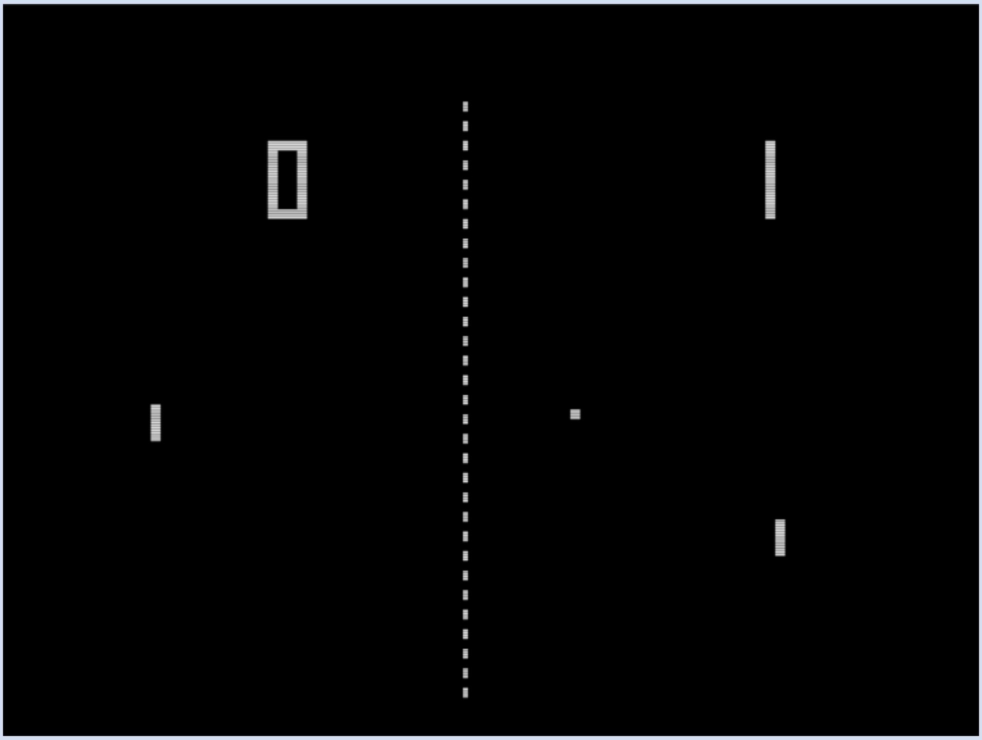
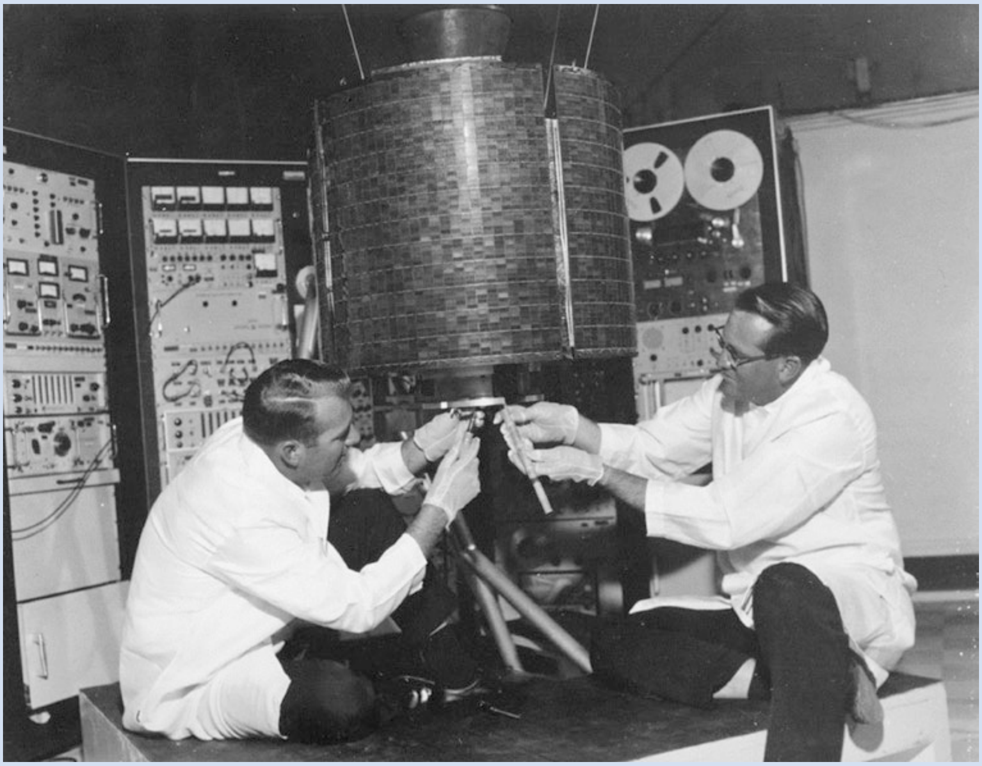


Fig. 1.48 The legendary *Pong* game. *[Image of public domain]*

1967	Satellite television appears. *Our World* is the **first worldwide-televised program**, with broadcasts from Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States and West Germany.

During the program, every participating country had one or more 5-minute segment to exhibit something characteristic of their community. While viewers were exposed to geographical sites, work activities and folk traditions of the various countries, it is to the English producers' credit that their choice ended up being the only segment that anybody ever remembers from that program: The Beatles, who specifically wrote and performed the song "All You Need Is Love" for the occasion. Facing the opportunity to speak to the whole world, but also in consideration of the fact that the program was being broadcasted just a little while after the tragic 6 day Arab-Israeli war, The Beatles opted for a hippie message of peace and love, through a song that, after that circumstance, gave them an undying fame of spokesmen of the pacifist movement (▣ Fig. 1.49).

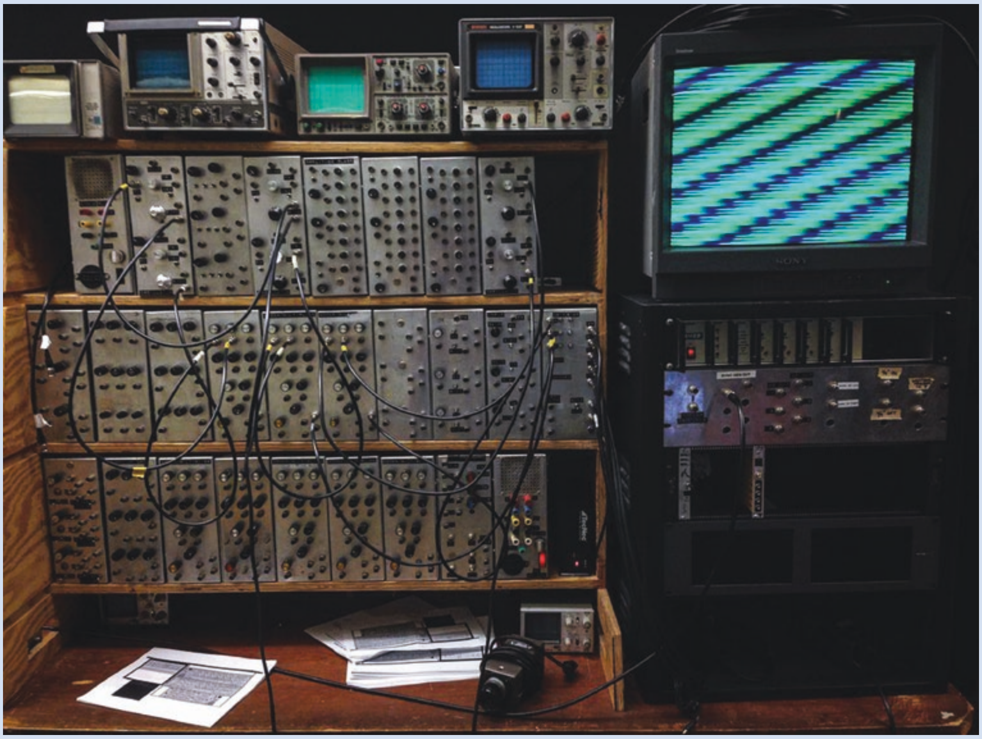


▣ **Fig. 1.49** One of the satellites used in the program "Our World". The technical name was "Intelsat I", but it was nicknamed "Early Bird". *[Image of public domain]*

1971	American video and computer artist **Daniel Sandin** invents a **video synthesizer** called Sandin Image Processor.

The Sandin Image Processor was an image processor that would mix and modify basic video signals in a fashion similar to how a music synthesizer like Moog would do with audio signal (hence the expression "video synthesizer"). With this kind of technology, video artists were given a wide range of creative possibilities to perform live videos, particularly together with musical performances. Clubs like the *Hurrah* in New York specialized in these shows, propelling the development of VJing.

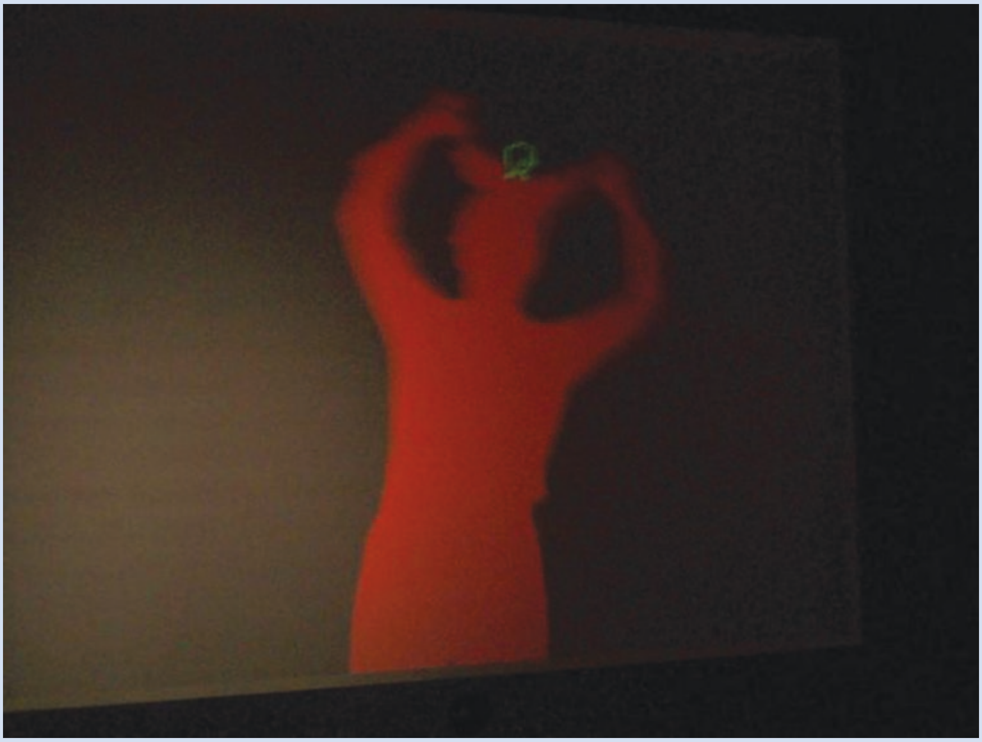
An interesting trivia: the Sandin Image Processor was made available to users for free, according to a principle that years later would be known as "Open source" (◘ Fig. 1.50).



◘ **Fig. 1.50** The Sandin Image Processor, the "synth" of audiovisuality. *[Photo by Rosa Menkman, CC BY 2.0]*

1975	American computer artist **Myron Krueger** launches Videoplace, the **first interactive VR platform**.

Displayed at the Milwaukee Art Center, Videoplace consisted of dark rooms with large video screens that surrounded the user. The VR effect was achieved by combining computer graphics, projectors, video cameras, video displays and position-sensing technology, but no goggles or gloves, which appeared later. The user could see their silhouette and movements, and could interact with other users' silhouettes in other rooms (◘ Fig. 1.51).



◘ **Fig. 1.51** An image produced by Videoplace. *[Photo by Dave Pape, CC BY 2.0]*

1975	**The Queen's** "Bohemian Rhapsody" is the **first high-budget music video**. The music industry acquires full awareness of the commercial potential of videos, making them soon central to the business.

As the 1970s began, the style and the articulation of the music video art did not seem to show any particular advancement: promos kept on being produced at a low cost, and used similar ideas as those released in the 1960s. The situation changed completely in 1975, as a then-emerging band, The Queen, embarked into their most ambitious recording project. After releasing two modest-selling albums, the band led by Freddie Mercury achieved encouraging success with their third album, *Sheer Heart Attack*, and by 1975 there was a general expectation that this band was on the verge of superstardom. For this reason, their label EMI decided to make a great financial investment on their upcoming album, *A Night at the Opera*—in fact, so great that the album became the most expensive production until then (a record that will be kept until the 1990s when the band Jellyfish—whose style, curiously, has some resemblance with The Queen themselves—released a more expensive, but much less successful, album).

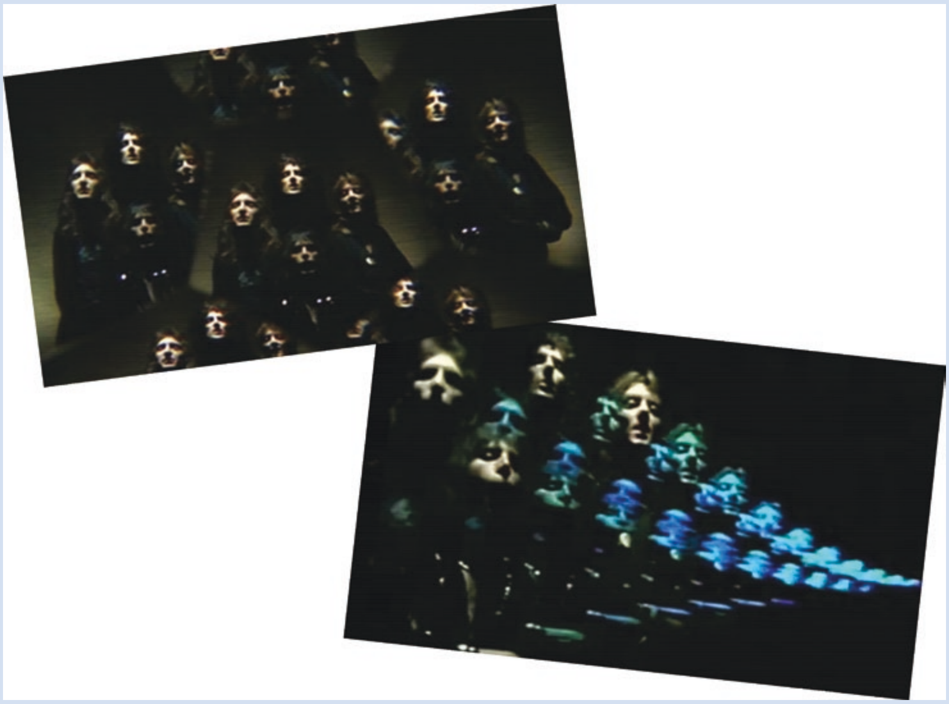
A Night at the Opera was indeed a lush production, that perfectly showcased The Queen's ability as musicians, their accurate work on the vocals, and in general their "baroque", over-the-top, aesthetics. As the release date approached, the label asked for a catchy, commercial single to launch, but the band came up with the most bizarre proposal: a very long song (usually singles should last 3–4 min, while this one was nearly 6), divided in various parts, with a ballad section, a rock section, two opera-inspired sections, at the beginning and in the middle, plus a coda again in ballad form. It looked like a commercial suicide, but the band was extremely convinced of its potential.

The staff at EMI finally agreed, but to be on the safe side, they also decided to release a promo that would be much more professional than the previous ones seen in the past. "Professional" meant more expensive, of course, but the people at EMI must have thought that they had already spent a fortune on the album—a little extra at this point could not harm anymore. As they say, "in for a penny, in for a pound". The video was thus produced with a great investment in resources, under the direction of Bruce Gowers. A local theatre in London was hired for the filming.

With a little inspiration from The Moody Blues' promo for "Go Now" (as we have seen), the video presents numerous interesting features. The band is seen performing the song as if in a concert, but with a more spectacularized attitude. What is however impressive is the camera work and the post-production, the montage in particular, but also several effects. Everything is in the right place: the editing of the sequences is done in such a way that each passage of the song gets the right spotlight, with the right timing, the right angle, and so forth. If we hear just piano and bass in the song (as it happens in the "Mama, just killed a man…" part) you can be sure we see only Mercury playing the piano and John Deacon playing the bass; if there is a guitar solo we will have significant close-ups over Brian May's playing; if Roger Taylor's drums are more prominent, we get to see them, and so forth. The camera work is rather quiet during the ballad part, and starts frenetically zooming in and out during the rock part. The lights on the stage provide the additional value of adding different color nuances to the sequences, and to create light-dark contrasts. The acapella beginning is released with an image composition of the four faces that is a quotation of the cover of The Queen's second album (called *Queen II*). And of course the operatic middle part is the most outstanding in terms of effects, particularly in the pioneering use of "visual feedback" (when we see the faces "multiplying" by the dozens at passages like "Magnificoooooo" or "let me goooo") and "honeycomb effect" (when the images are split in hexagons, such as in the choir response "He's just a poor boy, from a poor family").

In sum: the investment paid off. The song, which was already doing well in the charts (much better than anyone expected with such an unusual song), became one of the most successful singles ever, after the video was shown on the main musical program of the times, *Top of The Pops*. "Bohemian Rhapsody" still remains nowadays the third best-selling UK single of all times—and even managed to go back at the #1 position in the charts in 1991, after Freddie Mercury's premature death.

After that promo, and the success that followed, all recording companies realized the high commercial potential of videos, and started commissioning them on a regular basis to launch a single or an album. Nothing would be left to chance or improvisation anymore: music videos became now an important component of the music industry. The video-age was about to begin (◘ Fig. 1.52).

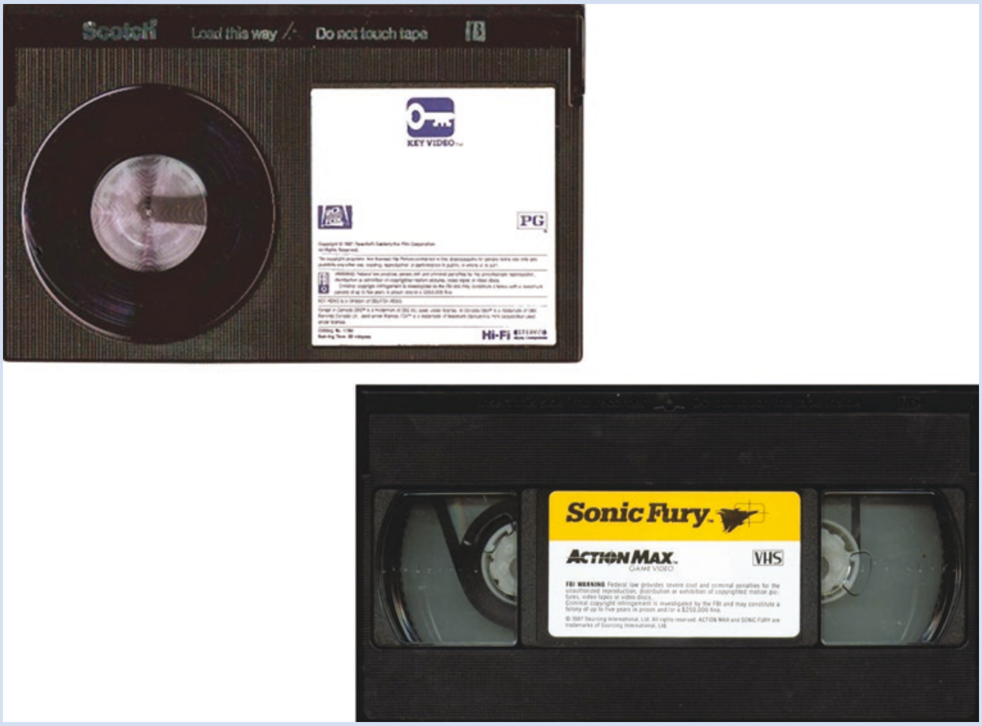


◘ **Fig. 1.52** The honeycomb and the visual feedback effects on *Bohemian Rhapsody*. *[Photos personally assembled and edited—Fair use]*

1975–1976	Sony introduce **Betamax** and JVC introduce **VHS.**

Betamax was the first of a long series of systems to record videos at home. It was quickly followed by the more successful VHS system, both technologies being developed by rivalling Japanese companies. Additional formats would be introduced literally year after year, some successfully and some not. Among them: SuperBeta, Broadcast, LaserDisc, VCD, DVD, DV, MiniDV and BluRay.

Besides the importance itself of this new technology, home video recording was a game-changer in the whole television culture. Among other things: it introduced a more active approach to the TV experience, with consumers being more in charge of their viewing schedule (e.g., an awkwardly-scheduled program could be recorded from TV and watched at a more convenient time); it started the "rent-a-movie" business which became, for over 20 years, a massive revenue for the film industry; and finally it reshaped the industry itself, creating a market niche for "home video-only" products that would skip the theatre distribution and would be straightaway released for domestic consumption (the most radical shift occurring in the pornographic industry, which by the 1990s turned entirely to home video releases) (◘ Fig. 1.53).



◘ **Fig. 1.53** A Betamax and a VHS tapes. *[Image of public domain]*

1975–1977	Atari releases two iconic home video game consoles.

Three years after its appearance in coin-op machines, *Pong* was released as a home videogame, played by connecting a console to the TV set. It was an absolute bestseller, and it made a cultural impact far beyond its predecessor home console, Odyssey.

Curiously, Atari's founder Nolan Bushnell was not able to secure a partnership in the toy business, so, instead of being sold in toyshops, *Pong* was sold for the first years in sport apparel shops. This may have been due to the difficulty in recognizing *Pong* as an actual toy, or, more likely, to the fact that other stakeholders in the toy industry were preoccupied of possible losses in their business.

The latter was certainly a legitimate concern, due to the success of the game, however, things got even better for Atari as they released, in 1977, the Video Computer System (a.k.a. Atari 2600). It was a console that introduced two major innovations that affected the videogame industry for decades (as of 2019, both principles are still applied in most consoles): the possibility of playing different games by inserting different cartridges, and practical joysticks to handle movements and actions in each game. The console was a runaway success and for several years millions of letters to Santa Claus were received by Atari requesting this console, or for one or more cartridges (◘ Fig. 1.54).

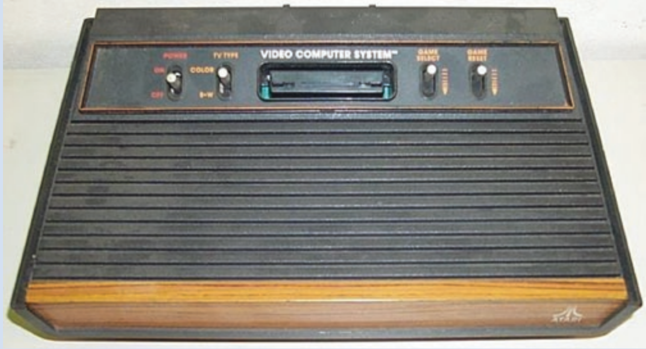


Fig. 1.54 The Atari VCS 2600 console. *[Image of public domain]*

1978	The videogame ***Space Invaders*** is released.

If *Pong* certainly deserves the title of most iconic *early* arcade game, *Space Invaders* should probably get the cake as the *all-time* most iconic one (with the sole possible exceptions of *Pac-Man* and *Mario*, which we shall mention later). Developed by Toshihiro Nichikado for the Japanese company Taito, and soon licensed for the American Midway Games, it broke several records in terms of sales and social impact. In just a few years it generated revenue of US$500 million in the USA, and for a short time Japanese cities ran out of 100-yen coins needed to operate the *Space Invaders* machine. Being able to save the best scores inspired tournaments and competitions. In short, Atari ushered in the golden age of arcade games, characterizing the end of the 1970s and most of all the whole decade of the 1980s.

Curiously, the game was not immediately released in home version (as would be the case with *Pac-Man*): probably the arcades industry feared a loss of customers (Fig. 1.55).

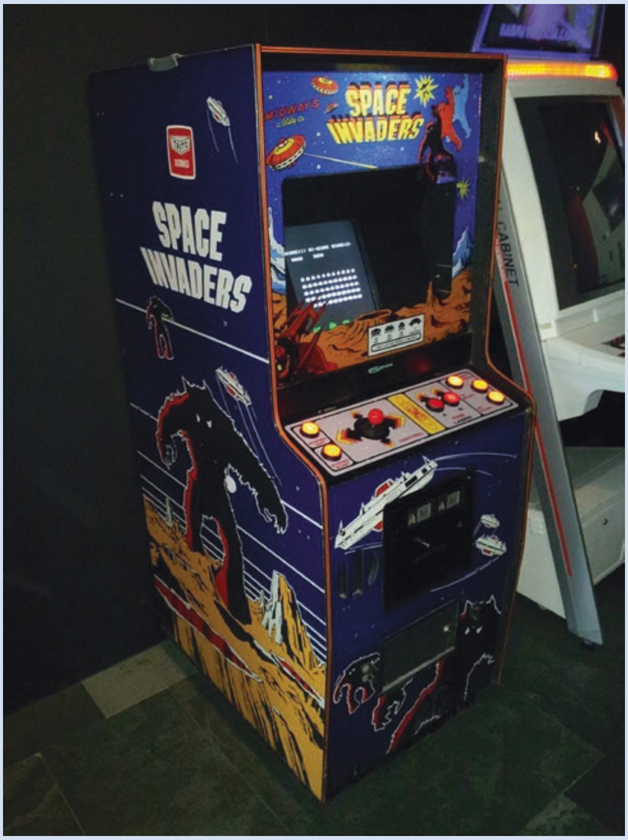


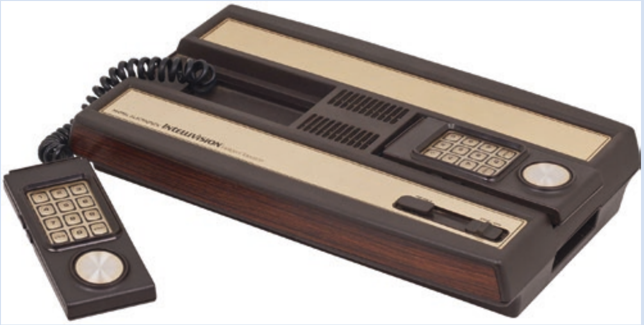
Fig. 1.55 The iconic Space Invaders arcade. *[Photo by Coentor, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

1979	Mattel releases the **Intellivision** console

Intellivision was the main competitor of Atari 2600 and was a console with similar games, although in some cases names had to be changed for copyright issues (e.g., *Space Invaders* became *Space Armada*). What made Mattel's console more attractive to one market segment was its specialization in sport games, which were more varied and with more action options.

While operating in a very similar way as the competitor, Intellivision featured a rather different type of joystick, resembling something in-between a calculator and a remote control. The most distinctive feature was the adoption of a rotating disc to control the movements, instead of the more commonly used lever.

On a personal note, Intellivision was the console of my childhood: my brother and I played it incessantly, up to the point of wearing out the brass-coated discs of the joystick. My favorite game was *Soccer*, his was *Utopia*, an embryo of those strategy games like *Civilization* that appeared years later (▣ Fig. 1.56).



▣ **Fig. 1.56** The Mattel Intellivision console. *[Photo by Evan-Amos, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

1980	American filmmaker **Merrill Aldighieri** becomes the **first professional VJ**.

During a performance at the nightclub Hurrah (which, as we have seen was important in promoting VJing), Aldighieri combined live ambient visuals in real time with a DJ set, creating a new profession, the Video Jockey, which specifically pointed out so as not to confuse it with any other of her activities as a video artist and filmmaker. After the launch of Video Jockey Aldighieri worked on numerous VJing projects, contributing to the establishment of this professional figure, which, several years later became a standard addition to many DJ and live music performances.

That evening at the Hurrah venue gave MTV managers attending the performance the idea of regularly placing VJ hosts on their channel (▣ Fig. 1.57).

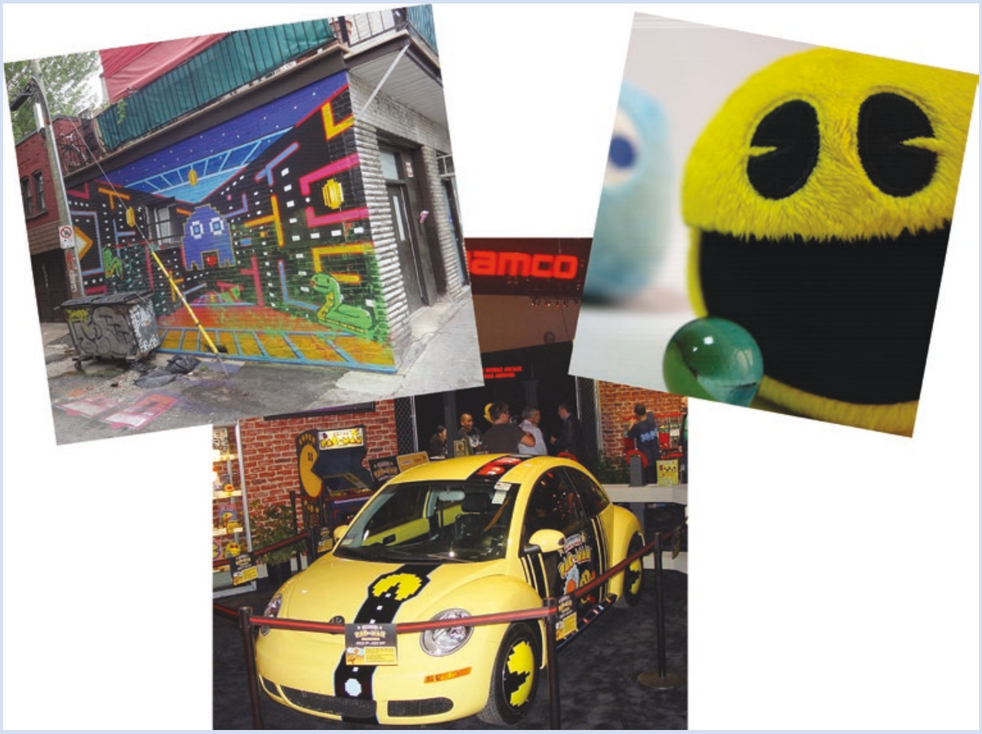
▣ **Fig. 1.57** A VJ in action. *[Photo by Ian Stannard, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

1980	***Pac-Man*** appears as arcade game and, soon after, as home videogame.

Another pop icon of videogames was *Pac-Man*, designed by Toru Iwatani for Namco. To describe the ever-hungry yellow protagonist of the game, people would often use the metaphor of a pizza with a missing slice, unaware that this was *exactly* what had inspired Iwatani to create his character in the first place.

Itself a record breaker, just like *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man* was also the first game to generate colossal revenues in associated gadgets and merchandising. Nearly everything, from small pins to giant cushions would be sold in the shape of Pac-Man himself or of any of his fierce ghost predators.

One highly successful sequel to the game was *Ms. Pac-Man*, which was less of a social phenomenon than its predecessor, but turned out to be the best-selling arcade game of all times (▣ Fig. 1.58).



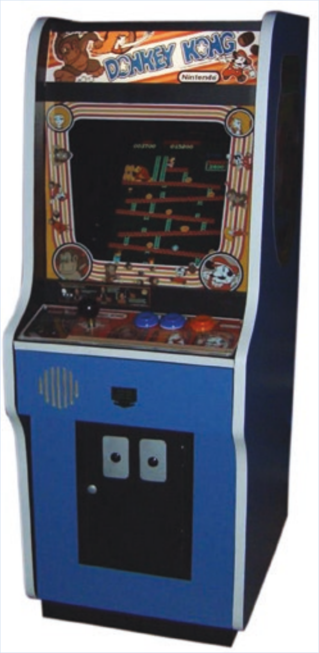
▣ **Fig. 1.58** Just a vague idea of the impact of *Pac-Man* on popular culture. *[Fair use—Photos personally assembled and edited]*

1981	The videogame *Donkey Kong*, with its legendary character **Mario**, is released.

The third contestant for the crown of most iconic videogame ever was designed by Shigeru Miyamoto. As a game, *Donkey Kong* did not have much impact, at least not in comparison to *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*, but its main character enthralled its fans; the stereotypically Italian-looking Jumpman, soon better known as Mario (or later Super Mario), with his moustache and plumber outfit.

Mario became the most recognizable figure in the gaming industry (a 1990 survey showed that children were more familiar with him than with Mickey Mouse), and he was chosen as the mascot of the Japanese gaming company Nintendo.

As a videogame character, Mario outlived his game *Donkey Kong*, and quickly became a good-for-all-seasons character for the most diverse videogames, usually named after him (▣ Fig. 1.59).



▣ **Fig. 1.59** The *Donkey Kong* arcade. *[Photo by Joshua Driggs, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

1981	**MTV** begins broadcasting. The music video industry rapidly expands and important technological and aesthetic innovations repeatedly occur.

In 1981, six years after the success of The Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" every major pop act was releasing new songs accompanied by a high quality video. Already, videos were counted by the thousands, and demand for them—not only specialized music programs such as the previously-mentioned *Top of the Pops*—was exponential. The times were ripe for the regular rotation of videos on TV, in the same spirit of song rotation on the radio.

This was the basic idea behind the birth of MTV (Music TeleVision) in 1981. At the time of its birth MTV was a channel that employed end-to-end video programming without any other conventional program. Nowadays, MTV also features different types of program including reality shows, series, and so forth, however in the decade of the 1980s the principle was simple: continuous music videos 24/7. MTV staff symbolically marked the beginning of their broadcasting, choosing as their very first video, and a song by the "one-hit-wonder" band called The Buggles, which had been released two years earlier. The prophetic title of the song was "Video Killed the Radio Star".

With MTV, the video became a regular part of the pop business, and no longer a fancy "value add". Videos now made it possible to create a closer association with the music contents, and also with the musicians and, in many cases, their stardom status. Video was useful in celebrating star status by helping to create the desired image of the performer.

The 1980s are considered to be the definitive video-decade. In fact, several of the most famous acts of that period built their fame due to their videos, and the type of image they projected through them. Notable examples include Madonna, Michael Jackson, Prince, Duran Duran and others. Duran Duran, for example, inaugurated with "Union of the Snake" (1983) the habit of launching the music prior to the actual record release.

As financial investments increased, videos became more and more a visual sensation, not rarely with true artistic value. Technological innovations in filmmaking and special effects were often tested on videos, making them the pioneer of given techniques. For example, A-Ha's "Take On Me" (1985) was an early employment of rotoscope animation for aesthetic purposes, and Dire Straits' "Money for Nothing" (1985) was one of the first to use computer animation.

Music videos started to develop stylistic orientations, trends, genres (see the previous paragraphs on genres), often becoming meta-texts by referring to other videos, or other visual and AV texts. Quotations and self-quotations increased in number: artists made reference to themselves or to other bands, or to the history of popular music in general.

Finally, a video could also become the object of controversy and media scandal. Such sensation would often be instigated on purpose in order to excite attention around a certain band, such as in the case of Duran Duran's "Girls on Film" (1981), which featured nudity and the depiction of sexual fetishes in ways that flouted censorship laws. Whilst a cut version was released, everyone who was aware of the controversy or had seen the original preferred the "naughty" version. Of course, this gave Duran Duran exposure that would not have been otherwise possible with a "tame" version.

The history of music videos continues, however we will end our timeline here because the 1980s was the decade of the 1980s when music videos took their (so far) final, contemporary shape, and in all respects, including—as we have seen—the economic one. Videos soon ended up as the very centre of the music industry, a condition that is even more evident now in the twenty first century with the progressive disappearance of the "album" and traditional, "material" musical formats such as vinyl, CDs and the likes (▣ Fig. 1.60).

▣ **Fig. 1.60** A still from the video of "Video Killed the Radio Star". *[Photo by Russell Mulcahy, CC BY-SA 4.0]*

1982	American video artist **Daniel Sandin** and computer scientist **Thomas DeFanti** invent **Sayre gloves**.

Sayre's wired gloves were a significant step in the development of virtual reality and marked the beginning of gesture recognition. The gloves could monitor hand movements by using light emitters and photocells. When the user moved their fingers the amount of light hitting the photocell would convert finger movements into electrical impulse (▣ Fig. 1.61).

▣ **Fig. 1.61** A recent picture of Daniel Sandin. *[Photo by User: Davepape, CC BY 2.5]*

1982–1987	More iconic releases in the **videogame industry**.

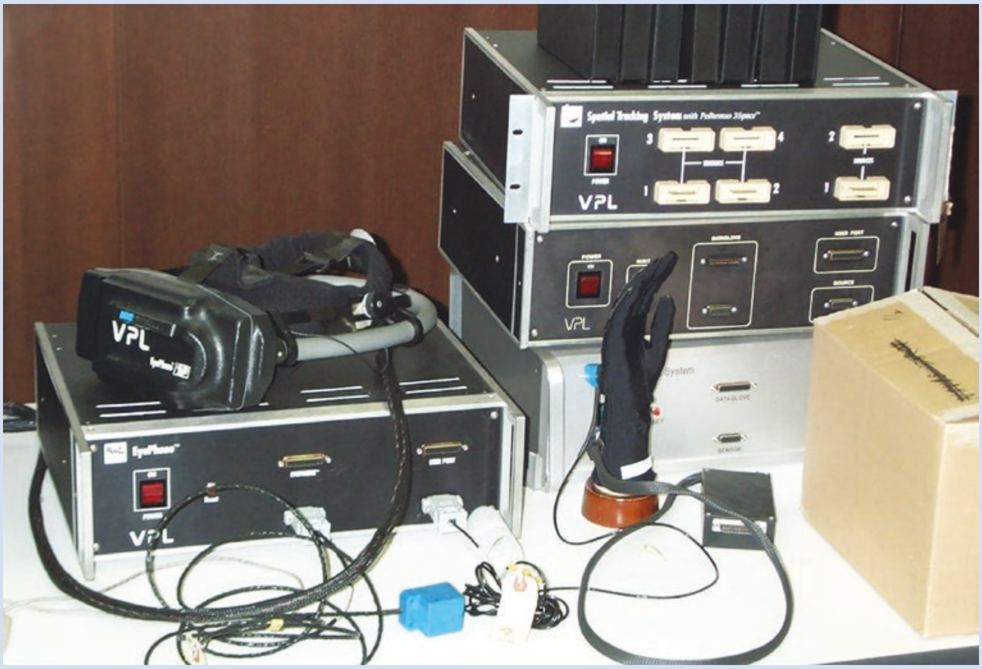
With arcades and home consoles being very profitable businesses of the period, it is no wonder that the 1980s are filled with market releases that are still remembered for the success and social impact. To mention just a few: Disney's *Tron* (1982) (and early example of a video game advertised through an eponymous film—or vice-versa if you like); Soviet Union's best known contribution to the videogame industry, *Tetris*, developed by mathematician Alexey Pajitnov in 1984, and the golden year of role-playing videogames with the contemporary release of *Legend of Zelda*, *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Leisure Suit Larry* (1987) (▣ Fig. 1.62).

asters
TETRIS
FROGG
TETRIS
Dahlco

◘ Fig. 1.62 The *Tetris* arcade machine. *[Photo by Kichigai Mentat, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

1985	American computer scientist **Jaron Lanier** founds the **VPL Research** company.

Already known for having popularized the expression “virtual reality” in the late 1970s, Lanier founded VPL Research with the idea of developing a number of tools for VR technologies. Some of them proved particularly effective and influential in future VR projects: the DataGlove (eventually employed by Nicole Stenger in the VR movie *Angels*), the EyePhone and the AudioSphere (◘ Fig. 1.63).


VPL
VPL
VPL
VPL
EyePhone
Spatial Tracking System with Polhemus 3Space

◘ Fig. 1.63 An Eyephone head mounted display and a Dataglove. *[Image of public domain]*

1986–1989	**Thomas A. Furness III** develops **flight simulator** *Super Cockpit*

Nicknamed “the grandfather of virtual reality”, Furness made numerous contributions to the growth of this particular field, one of which was a flight simulator developed and upgraded between 1986 and 1989. Super Cockpit featured computer-generated 3D maps, state-of-the-art infrared and radar imagery and the possibility for the pilot to see and hear in real-time. The helmet’s tracking system and sensors enabled pilots to control the aircraft through gestures, speech and eye movements. The program became a template for numerous other flight simulators: among these, the Virtual Cockpit, developed by the British Army in 1987 (■ Fig. 1.64).

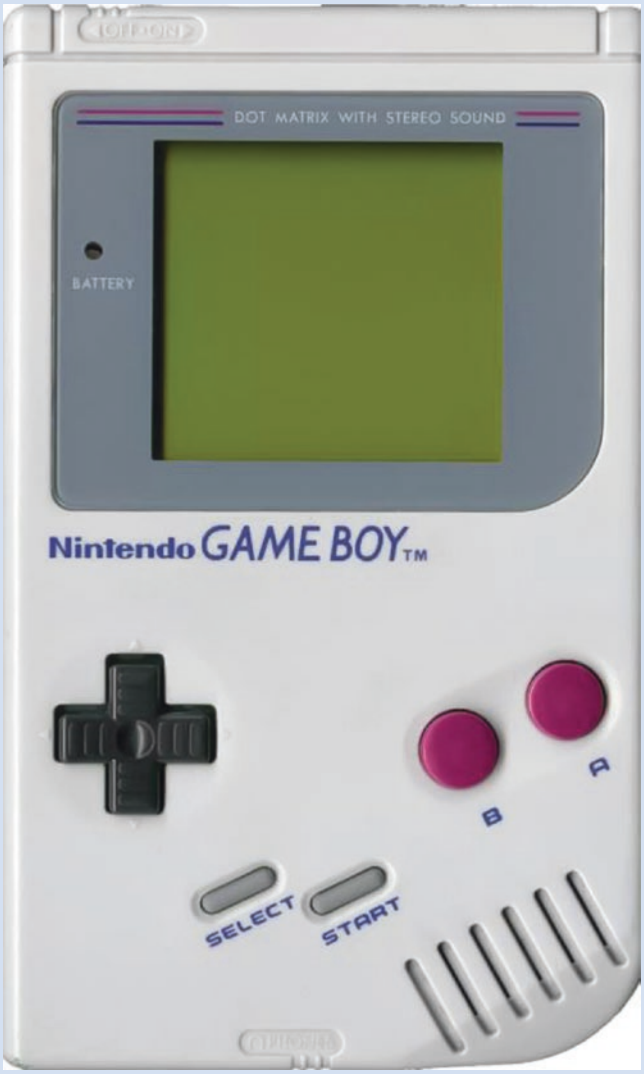
■ **Fig. 1.64** A recent picture of Thomas A. Furness III. *[Photo by Lhcarey, CC BY-SA 4.0]*

1989	Nintendo launches ***Game Boy***.

While not the first handheld portable console (Milton Bradley’s *Microvision* had been released ten years earlier), *Game Boy* was by far the most successful and impactful, thanks also to its more developed graphic appeal, its ease of use and—not least for the ever-eager average player—a long battery life.

Parents and teachers of the twenty first century complain repeatedly about their children being fixated by their smartphones, but tend to forget that they as children spent much of their free time playing *Game Boy*.

Nintendo is a modern giant in the videogaming industry with a long history that dates back to 1889 when it was founded by Japanese businessman Fujisaro Yamauchi. Originally a small company for producing handmade playing cards, it remained so until the 1960s when its new owners branched out into cab services and even love hotels. It was only during the 1970s that Nintendo turned into what it is now, a video game company that is now ranked Japan's third richest business (◘ Fig. 1.65).



◘ **Fig. 1.65** The first Game Boy. *[Image of public domain]*

1990	Microsoft's creation of a card solitaire for PC brings back **videogaming on computers**.

A new niche in videogame culture emerged following the release of a videogame version of *Klondike*, a popular card solitaire for personal computer on the 3.0 version Microsoft Windows' operating system. The game was meant to release stress during breaks in working hours (emphasis on "breaks"), but soon became every employer's nightmare, who would often catch employees playing the game rather than working.

More of such games followed in subsequent versions of Windows (and other operating systems), with similarly disastrous impact on the professional ethics of numerous office jobs.

The increasing availability of ever more powerful—and inexpensive—desktop and laptop computers ensured that the PC videogaming became something more than just a short break for bored workers. By the mid-1990s software companies exploited the market potential and began releasing videogames for both consoles and PCs. Popular sport or adventure games such as *Tomb Raider* (first released in 1996) were probably played as often on PCs as they were on consoles, while simulation and strategy games (due also to their slower pace) ended up being more suitable for computers. Examples abound, including Sid Meier's *Civilization* (1991), Will Wright's *The Sims*, (2000) or Markus Persson's *Minecraft* (2010), the latter being the absolute favorite of my son Elmis.

Another step in the evolution of computer gaming occurred when internet speeds and connections became faster, cheaper and more reliable, allowing endless online playing and multiplaying options. The appearance of platforms such as *Steam* (2003), full of different online games, turned PCs into virtual arcades (Fig. 1.66).

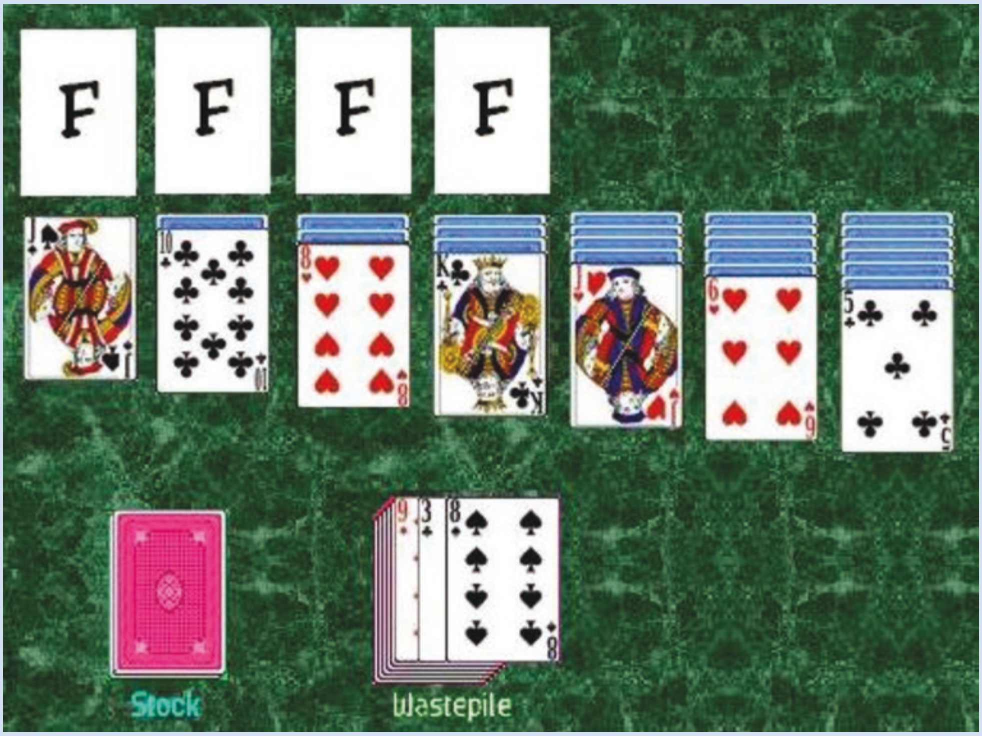


Fig. 1.66 One of the early versions of *Klondike*. *[Image of public domain]*

1991	Sega launches the videogame ***Sonic the Hedgehog***.

Sega was a major player in the videogame business during the early 1990s, well before Sony Playstation put it out of the race, and had one of the most popular home consoles of the period, called Mega Drive, which was released between 1988 and 1997. Just like Nintendo had adopted the character of Mario as its mascot, Sega used the protagonist of this popular videogame for the same purpose. Sonic was a witty and superfast blue hedgehog, and during those years would be one of the most recognizable faces in the gaming industry (Fig. 1.67).

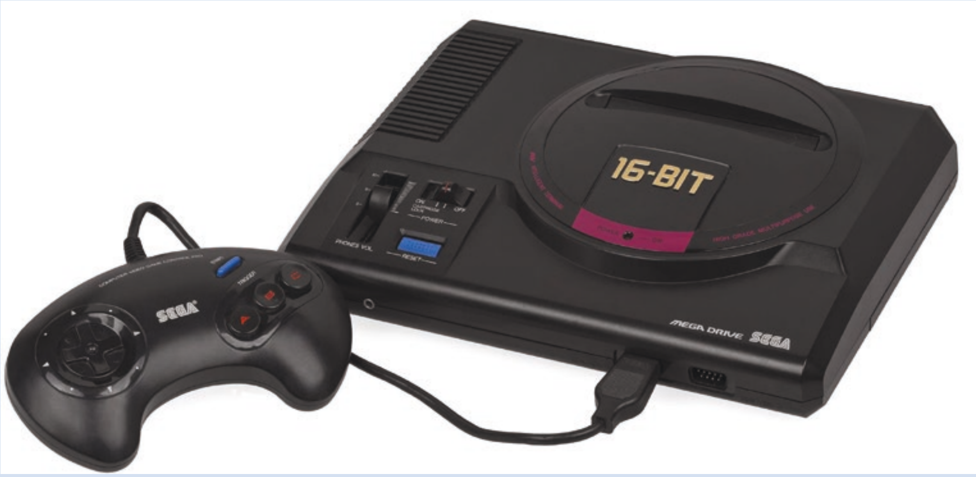
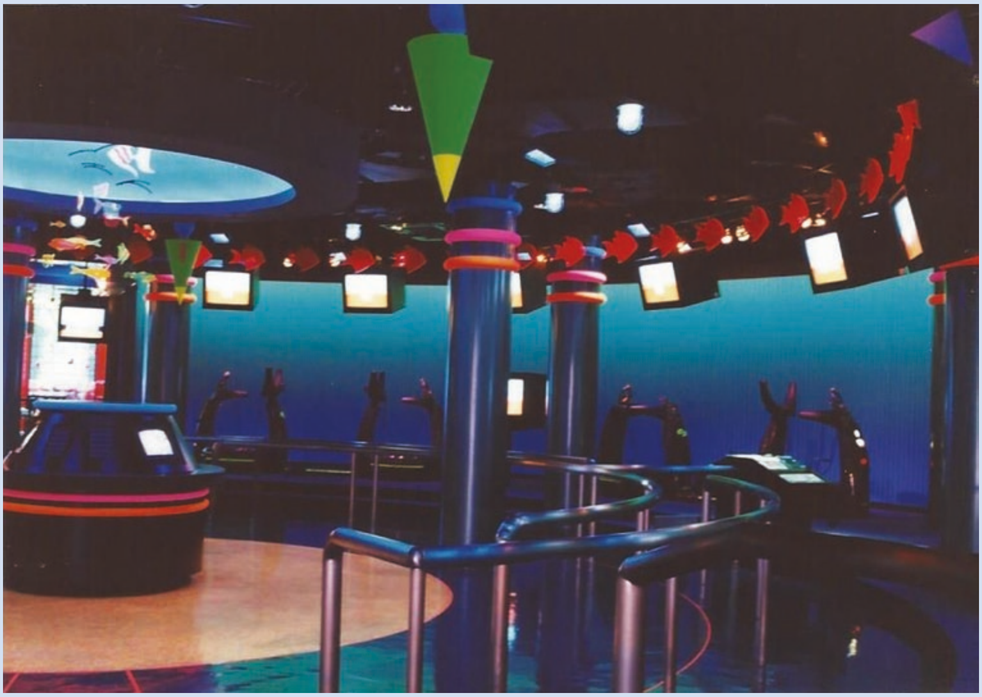


Fig. 1.67 The first version of the Mega Drive console. *[Image of public domain]*

1991	Virtuality Group launches Virtuality, the **first VR arcade machine**.

Virtuality was the first mass-produced VR entertainment system. It consisted of a set of arcade machines that allowed gamers to play in a 3D environment, with VR headsets and real-time fairly realistic stereoscopic 3D images. The possibility of connecting one machine to another would also allow multi-playing. Besides games specifically devised for Virtuality, also some of the popular games of the time, like Pac-Man, received the VR treatment.

Sega, which we have seen was a particularly prosperous videogaming company at this point, announced the imminent release of futuristic VR headsets inspired by popular sci-fi films of the time, such as *Robocop*, to be used both in the arcade games and their Mega Drive console. However, the fear that the headsets might actually damage the player's health, worked as a deterrent and the product was never released (◘ Fig. 1.68).



◘ **Fig. 1.68** A Virtuality attraction in the Japanese resort town of Wakayama Marina City. *[Photo by Oddjob84, CC BY-SA 4.0]*

1992	French-American artist **Nicole Stenger** releases *Angels*, the **first VR fully immersive movie**.

Programmed and produced in three years, with work performed in MIT and in the Hitlab in Washington University, *Angels* was a sort of "travelling in paradise" experience, where users could interact via three senses, vision, audio and touch (though the latter was limited to the simple interaction with the environment, without a specific tactile differentiation of textures and materials), and through two advanced tools of the time: the VPL Dataglove gloves and the HRX goggles. *Angels* and her subsequent works in both VR and internet in general made Stenger one of the most important female artists of her generation (◘ Fig. 1.69).

◘ **Fig. 1.69** A recent picture of Nicole Stenger. [Photo made available with no copyright by Nicole Stenger]

1994–2003	Transition to **digital television**.

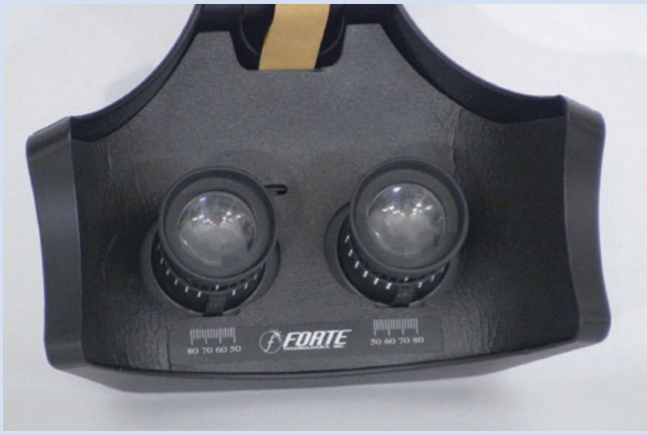
Digital television (DTV) is the transmission of both audio and visual signals through digital encoding, as opposed to the analog signals of the earlier television technology. It is usually considered the most important evolution in television technology since color TV in the 1950s. As the system was perfected and became more reliable during the twenty first century numerous countries opted for the so-called analog switch-off, turning entirely to digital encoding.

Summing up the main step of the process, we should mention at least the first launch of a commercial digital satellite platform, operated by DirecTV (US) in 1994; the launch of the first digital terrestrial platform by ONdigital in UK; and finally the world's first analog switch-off, occurred in Berlin in 2003, while the first country as a whole to do so was Luxembourg in 2006 (▣ Fig. 1.70).

▣ **Fig. 1.70** The logo of the British digital terrestrial platform ONdigital. *[Image of public domain]*

1995	Affordable home **VR headsets** are released.

After imperfect or discontinued attempts, two companies in the same year released affordable and reliable VR headsets: I-Glasses (released by Virtual IO) and VFX1 Headgear (released by Forte) (▣ Fig. 1.71).



▣ **Fig. 1.71** The optics of the VFX1 Headgear. *[Image of public domain]*

1995–2006	The three market-dominating **home video game consoles** of the twenty first century are released.

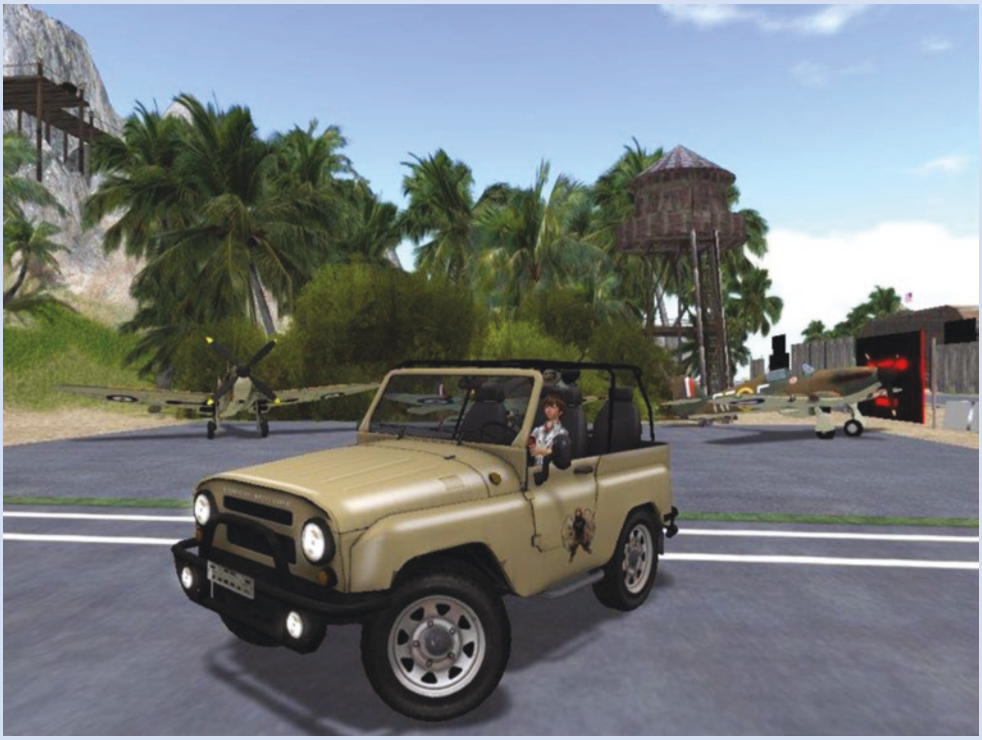
In 1995, Sony released the first, and highly successful, Playstation, cleverly pricing it US$100 cheaper than the best-sold console of the time, Sega Saturn. The arrival of Nintendo 64 in 1996 further weakened Sega, and when Playstation 2 hit the market (it turned out to be the best-selling console ever) Sega stopped making consoles as a result. Microsoft, too, entered the console industry by releasing in 2001 the first Xbox and in 2005 the Xbox 360, which represented a significant step forward in graphic quality and realism. One year later, Nintendo broke another barrier with the first Wii console: its motion-sensitive remotes got gamers off the couch, allowing various and realistic physical movements. For the first time doctors, until then fierce opponents of videogaming, found themselves advising too-sedentary patients to exercise with games like Wii-Fit and Wii-Sports.

As of 2019, Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft are the three undisputed leaders of the console business (■ Fig. 1.72).

■ **Fig. 1.72** A group of friends play with a Nintendo Wii. *[Photo by pauldwaite, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

1999	American entrepreneur **Philip Rosedale** founds **Linden Lab** in San Francisco.

Linden Lab intended to develop VR technologies and equipment, but experienced some initial difficulties in the business until it made a huge breakthrough (and impact on VR culture) with the software *Second Life*, in 2003, arguably the most complete and all-encompassing VR experience to date. By 2013, *Second Life* had gathered ca. one million regular users (the so-called "residents"). Rosedale was very firm in pointing out that *Second Life* is not a game, but an actual life simulation that has no pre-manufactured plot or objectives: just like in real life, anything can happen, with the residents being in charge of their own destinies, based on their choices and their interaction with other users (■ Fig. 1.73).



■ **Fig. 1.73** A still from *Second Life*. *[Photo by Walt Faulds, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

2009–2019 — The era of **social and mobile videogaming**.

The new and so far, latest frontier of videogaming was inaugurated by the launch of extremely popular game apps for social network (such as *Farmville*) or tablets/smartphones (such as *Angry Birds*). Smartphones in particular are by now at the epicenter of people's activities and communication. The principle of historical circularity rules in our societies. The streets and buses during the 1980s were filled with kids playing on their Game Boy and the adults reading newspapers. Today's streets and the buses are filled with kids playing on their smartphones and adults reading news on their smartphones, or rather *pretending* to do so while in fact playing as well or posting on their social network profiles. Even specific gaming traditions from the past are being resurrected and re-purposed in a "smart" version. A case in point is certainly the "treasure hunt" augmented reality game *Pokémon Go* (Fig. 1.74).

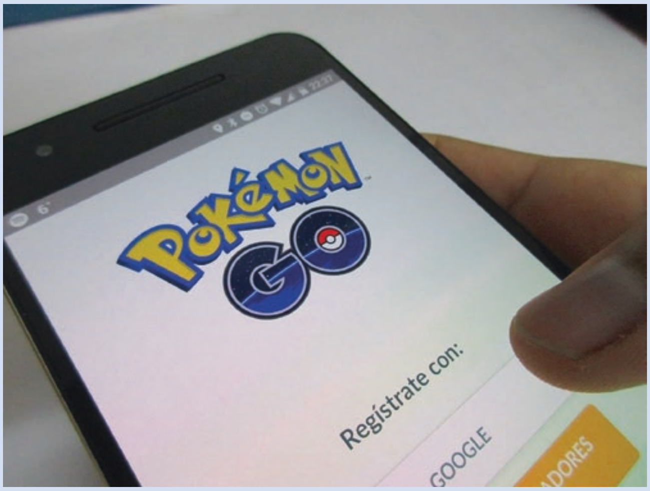


Fig. 1.74 The *Pokémon Go* app on a smartphone. *[Photo by Eduardo Woo, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

2014–2019 — **Virtual reality products multiply** and become easily affordable to the general public

Curiously, the advancements in VR were stagnating in the early years of the twenty first century, with lower investment and a general perception that, all considered, this was an unpractical and cost-benefit ineffective technology. However, from about 2010 the business was rekindled with a number of significant events dispelling investor fears: VR suddenly became practical and affordable.

In 2014, Facebook invested in VR by buying the Oculus VR company, and started making various VR products/apps available to the social media users. Sony announced Project Morpheus, a VR headset for PlayStation. Google released the Cardboard—a cheap but effective VR headset for smartphones. Samsung announced the Samsung Gear VR, a specific headset for the Samsung Galaxy smartphone. Generally speaking, the possibility of using smartphones to experience virtual reality has increased exponentially the users of this technology.

In 2015, numerous media used VR to enhance information and education services: the BBC created a 360-degree video of a Syrian migrant camp; The Wall Street Journal launched a VR roller coaster to playfully follow the movements of the Nasdaq Stock Market; The Washington Post created a VR experience of the Oval Office at the White House, and so forth. Also, the VR gloves technology experienced a major improvement with the release of Gloveone, which allowed a more realistic tactile experience and interaction with virtual objects.

By 2016, most of the headsets had the so-called dynamic binaural audio, which allowed a more complete audio experience. During the same year the HTC company released the VIVE SteamVR, a headset provided with sensor-based tracking which enabled users to move freely in a given VR space.

As of nowadays (2019), VR has made significant and quick developments, both in technology and uses. While gaming remains an important application, VR has greatly expanded its educational and medical applications: it can be now used in schools, in training environments and it is also used to treat some psychological disorders (◘ Fig. 1.75).

◘ **Fig. 1.75** The Samsung Gear VR. *[Photo by Maurizio Pesce, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

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Understanding Audiovisual Communication

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2.1 The Basics of Communication

Communication is at the same time both a complex and a simple process. Paradoxically, it is simple *because* it is complex, meaning that there are so many ways to communicate, for quantity and for quality, that even in the most challenging situations we can still manage to find a manner to convey some message. We may be in a foreign country, not knowing the local language nor the local rules of interaction, and yet we can perform basic messages with gestures, by indicating something we want/need, by emphasizing nonverbal aspects in our voice (such as tone or pace), by making an impression of a person or a shape, and so forth. We may not always be able to debate on the concept of transcendental apperception in Kant's philosophy, but we will always manage to ask for shelter or buy some food.

Communication is "easy" also because it occurs independently from our will. Communication *happens* anyway, whether we like it or not, whether we choose it or not. Our sole existence (in general or in the "here and now" of a situation) says something about ourselves, and generates perceptions and interpretations from the side of those who see/hear/smell/etc. us. And that is because not only communication is complex, but also it is the whole reality to be so. So, what we have here is two golden rules that should guide our understanding of communication in general and AVCC in particular:

1. It is impossible not to make sense.
2. Reality is very complex.

In the following paragraphs we shall see what they mean and why they are important. I encourage you to deepen these concepts and others that are equally important, although to do so here is beyond the scope of our book. There are literally hundreds of texts available, but I would like to suggest at least (Chandler 2007; Hall 2007 and Rothwell 2016).

2.1.1 Two Golden Rules

It is impossible not to make sense. Whatever happens, whatever "is" in the world is meaningful to something/somebody, sometime, somewhere. There is no way anything or anyone is *meaningless*. In principle, there may be something that is not provided with a meaning *yet*, just because it is an undiscovered entity that (still in principle) may have not been perceived by anybody yet. This is what the American semiotician (Deely 2001) called the **things-objects** distinction. A "thing" exists regardless of whether we are aware of it or not, while an "object" requires "a relation to a knower". We do not know how many "things" exist in the universe, probably many, but we are increasingly confident that there are fewer and fewer "things" left in this planet, and that they are all turning into "objects" (e.g., new animal or plant species are discovered on a very regular basis). The moment a thing becomes an object it becomes meaningful. Mind you, this distinction is different from the real versus imaginary one. An entity does not necessarily need to be real in order to be an object. Indeed, we can also create the so-called *possible worlds*, a fundamental notion in all forms of narrative arts, like indeed the AV ones. Language in particular is able to produce them: there is no such a thing like unicorns, yet there *is* such a thing like unicorns, at the very moment at least one person linguistically produces a concept, or an idea, of them. So, unicorns are "objects", because they *do mean* something, even if they do not exist.

When it comes to AVCC, it is important to realize that every single element we will employ in a text—the items we place in a scene, the sounds that are uttered, the words that are spoken, the technologies that are used, and so forth—*will make sense*. This is why it is important to try and be in control of all such elements, in order for them to make the kind of sense we intend to convey in general (or at least that they are not contradictory with it). Usually, the better AVTs are the ones that leave the least amount of variables to chance. One of the best pieces of advice a young artist can receive is: "mean all that you say and say all that you mean—do not leave anything to chance, because it may damage your work".

Let us provide an example. In one of my classes that was part of a MA program called "Media Philosophy", as a final assignment, I asked my students, who were mostly of philosophical background, to create videos that would represent a philosophical concept of their choice. One group decided to make a video based on Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, with some passages from his masterpiece *Being and Nothingness*. The idea was visualized, among other things, by a young man slowly walking in a forest with closed eyes. The colors were very soft, it was early morning, and the boy had a bare chest, white large trousers… and—wait for it—a big, fat pair of bright red Crocs. Bang! All of a sudden the Crocs were the center of attention: more colorful than the rest and completely out of place in a context like that, almost to the point of making me think that this video was actually a parody of Sartre! I asked the students what they meant by those Crocs, what was the symbolism behind it (maybe a nod to consumerism that ruins Nature?), and they simply told me that they had not thought of it. The boy who was asked to act came wearing white trousers and Crocs (plus a T-shirt that was luckily removed), and so they filmed him. Nobody thought that such an outstanding color, on such an out-of-context item, would have diverged the viewers' attention, damaging the overall (and serious) intention behind that video. They could have asked the boy to walk barefoot, they could have made sure *not* to film his feet, they could have edit the Crocs out of the picture… there were dozens of solutions to be "in control" of the situation, but unfortunately the inexperience of my students played a role in the final result, and some unwanted "meaning" affected negatively the rest. In short: not all that was said was actually meant.

Now. While of course young amateur students cannot be blamed for mistakes like this, the appearance of similar forms of confusion in professional AVTs is something harder to forgive, and it is usually a good method to discern their quality. For example, good historical AVTs can be easily distinguished from the bad by the amount of historical inaccuracies and anachronisms one finds. The cheap costume dramas tend to overlook the fact that a certain object was invented in a later epoch, a certain dress was typical of another civilization, a certain event took place in a different type of environment, etc.

Reality is very complex. We live in a beautiful world, which, unfortunately we are destroying through greed and arrogance—but that is another issue. It is an extremely rich place, inhabited by billions of living forms, regulated by the most diverse phenomena and processes, and offering an endless variety of contexts and situations. In a word, reality is a total chaos. A beautiful chaos, yet chaotic. To take into account every single "variable" that this chaotic reality is characterized by is simply impossible for the limited brains we possess. We can manage the chaos up to a certain point, but then we need a break, we need to simplify things. For these reasons, the processes of perception (by which we acquire information in our brain) and categorization (by which we classify information) are always intended as a form of "reduction" of the chaos. Instead of facing the endless complexity of reality, we choose to divide it in compartments, we put (what appear to be) similar items into the same box where we can sort them out a bit more easily. That is not always "fair" towards reality, because we put in the same box things that after all are not so similar, but most of the times, this action works, and it makes our relationship with the world less of a headache.

Analogical versus Digital. We could say that this "sorting out the chaos" principle is based on the fact that our interaction with reality consists of two steps: the perceptive-behavioral, which is of analogical type, and the mnemonic-organizational, which is in contrast digital. Whilst this may seem banal when we walk, we act analogically, i.e. in a continuous manner. Just like anything that happens in Nature happens in an analogical way. However, when we classify the act of walking in our mind, we tend to segment it in discreet units (as it was composed of separate moments, like "backwards", "forward", "slow", "fast", and so forth), because we cannot just imagine understanding the act of walking as something composed of endless stages and provided with endless features. Similar forms of cognition occur roughly in every moment of our life, and apply to the most diverse objects, events, people, groups, etc. This, let us repeat, is totally understandable, since perceiving analogical information and processing it still analogically is an impossible task as we have seen. Not even computers do it: the power and the potential of a computer depends on the amount of binary digital units (the famous Bit) it can handle. All the computer does is to divide the information into yes or no options (or, to be exact, I/0). The more "I/0" options a computer gets to handle, the closer it gets to reproduce reality. To put it trivially (IT specialists will forgive me for this over-simplification), if you give the computer the task of finding Keith Richards among The Rolling Stones, the computer will not do the (analogical) action of looking at a Stones' image, pointing the finger towards one guy and saying "Yes, that's Keith Richards!" The computer will rather go like "Does he only sing (I) or does he also play an instrument (0)?" and (once we know the correct answer is 0), "Does he play a string instrument (I) or a percussion instrument (0)?", then (once we know it is I), "Is the string instrument a bass (I) or a guitar (0)?", then finally (once we know it is 0) we will be reduced to two options only (the two guitarists in The Rolling Stones): "Is it Ron Wood (I) or Keith Richards (0)?", from which finally the computer will be able to pick the right guy. Having done it in four steps, we say that this information was worth 4 bit (also called "nibble"), according to the sequence 0I00 (I repeat: this is an over-simplification). At this point it's worth saying that computer scientists among the readers could be excused if they throw this book in the trashcan.

We need to somehow digitalize the information, decompose it, divide it in stages, rather than coping with a continuous flux of events. And, of course, the fewer the units the easier the information management. Let us take politics as an example. The range of people's political opinions is of course an analogical whole of elements: everyone has their own opinion, the same opinion has different nuances, and so forth. A first necessary digitalization (in order for a community to be fairly represented) is the division of opinions in political groups, currents and ideologies—and we know that there are very many around. Then, we have parties: Communist Party, Radical Party, Neo-Fascist Party, Liberal Party, etc. Then we get to political tendencies: extreme left, left, center-left, center, etc. Finally we get to the poles: left and right, with the possible inclusion of center. Which stage of complexity can be handled is a matter of personal inclinations and resources: some people are so interested and competent in politics that they meticulously identify themselves into a specific current, within an area, within an ideology, within a party, and so forth. Some others may vaguely say, "I am left-wing". Others still may even reject any political association for whatever reason, usually mistrust towards politics. In this process of continuous refinement of reality by approximation, our perception "sacrifices" several variables, thus somehow considering them less relevant. When these variables appear, we pay less attention or no attention at all: they would just create confusion.

The fact that reality is very complex means that every single living form inhabiting it has their own story, their own life, and their own events. This is where AVCC comes in: an AVT, even one that most closely wants to resemble reality, will never be able to display such an endless variety of stories at the same time and hope that we will be able to follow all of them. Usually the attention is focused on a very limited number of situations: one, or a couple, or anyway not more than a few. In other words, as we shall see later in our book, AVCC operates "by subtraction" from reality:

it presents much less complexity (literally: much less stuff) than a similar situation if it was real. Many variables are sacrificed and put aside: we see less images, hear less sounds, read less words. Everything is reduced in order to limit the confusion and focus the attention on the few stories that are meant to be told.

This is also where the two golden rules blend: if we add complexity to the AVT, we add meanings, and if we add meanings we add complexity. Both processes are already subject to strong limitations in our perception and categorization of the real world: in AVTs this happens even more distinctively. Summing up, AVCC is a particular form of (a) controlled and (b) simplified communication: the meanings conveyed are less in number, less complex and less random.

2.1.2 Conditions for Communication

There are many factors that can make an instance of communication possible, but three are necessary and unavoidable: we need a **text**, that is, some kind of message, which is emitted by a **sender** and which reaches a receiver, or **reader** (we shall use this word here). In principle, nothing else is needed.

Senders do not necessarily need to be living individuals, such as human beings or other animals. Several machines, nowadays especially, are capable of producing texts: the fact that they do not have an "intention" to communicate is not necessarily a problem, for our purposes—but please be aware that it *is* a widely discussed issue in any field of communication studies. In fact, we may also *not* have an identifiable sender (living or not), but a combination of phenomena that serve as sender. If we consider natural phenomena like, say, rain, we have texts and readers, but (unless one believes in God) no specific sender. The "sender" is that combination of events by which some atmospheric water vapor form droplets of liquid water, and when these become heavy enough they fall under gravity. Still, we receive plenty of information from it, and we act accordingly: we may dress up in a certain manner, we may decide to stay home, we may change the location of a certain event, we may get inspired to write poetry or songs, we may be happy, we may be sad… This is quite important to keep in mind because the interpretation of an AVT does not necessarily have to go through a "certification" of the author's intentions. AVTs do not only communicate what their authors intend to communicate, but—as we shall see later—the amount of sense received exceeds the amount of sense produced: AVTs are both texts with identifiable senders and texts like "rain", where the meanings detected go well beyond the significance of the phenomenon itself. AVTs are received and interpreted by different readers, they have a certain historical positioning, a certain social impact, certain cultural characteristics… all these aspects transcend the specific intentions of the "sender" (an author, a director, etc.).

Texts, in turn, as the totality of messages that constitute the entire amount of meanings that a sender intends to convey in any given situation, are composed of smaller units, that we shall call signs. A **sign** can be a word, an image, a sound… anything that represents the smallest meaningful unit of a message. The medieval philosopher St. Augustine had given a simple, yet perfect definition for sign: "Aliquid stat pro aliquo". That is "something that stands for something else". For the Swiss linguist (de Saussure 1916), a sign is defined as the combination of two elements: the **signifier** and the **signified**—that is, precisely, that "something" and that "something else". The signifier is the way the sign appears, and the signified is what the sign means. If we say the word "watch" we are using a signifier (the very word), which stands for an actual item, a signified (a real watch). "Watch" as word and "watch" as real item (as we shall see in the next paragraph) are not similar elements, in fact the word-watch does not look, feel, taste, smell, sound nothing like the item-watch, yet we use that particular term to have a common understanding of the item we are talking about. The American philosopher (Peirce 1931–1936) thought that a sign is actually composed of three parts, not two: a **representamen** (which is more or less like the signifier for Saussure), an **object** and an **interpretant**. Object and interpretant somehow split the concept of signified in two parts: by object, Peirce meant the real "objective" meaning of the representamen (the "watch" in a general sense, as a meaningful category that everybody can understand); by interpretant, on the other hand, he meant a "specific example" of the representamen that is bound to our experience. That is: when someone says the word "watch", we are all thinking about the same thing "in general", but in particular we are all thinking about a *particular* watch: one person will think about the watch they own, another person will think about the watch they would like to buy, another person will think about a famous watch model, such as a Rolex or an Omega, and so forth. We are all thinking about the object "watch" but what really comes up in our mind is a specific interpretant "watch", and that is probably different from everybody else's interpretant. In Fig. 2.1 you can see a summary of Saussure's and Peirce's concepts of sign.

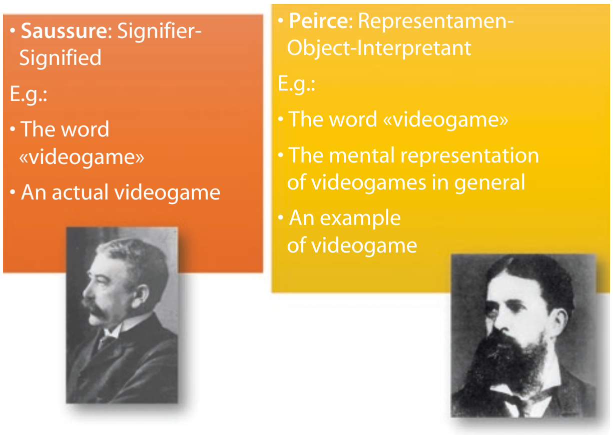

• Saussure: Signifier-Signified
E.g.:
• The word «videogame»
• An actual videogame
• Peirce: Representamen-Object-Interpretant
E.g.:
• The word «videogame»
• The mental representation of videogames in general
• An example of videogame

Fig. 2.1 Saussure's binary concept of sign compared with Peirce's triadic concept

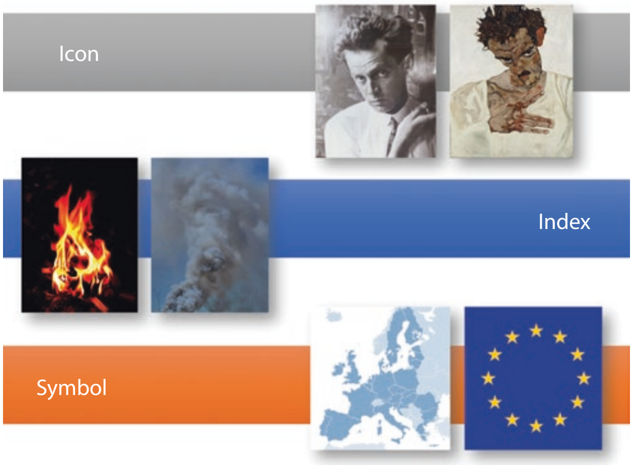


Fig. 2.2 Peirce's concept of icon, index and symbol. As a form of physical resemblance, the self-portrait painting of Egon Schiele is an "icon" of the real Schiele. As a form of physical consequence, smoke is an "index" of fire. As a form of convention, the EU flag is a "symbol" of the whole European Union

Peirce not only spoke about the structure of the sign, but also its typology. He produced several models in this respect, but the one that was most influential for the scholars who followed him was the repartition among three types of sign: the **icon**, the **index** and the **symbol** (see Fig. 2.2). An icon is the type of sign where the representamen is physically resembling the object: the representamen looks like, or sounds like, or smells like, etc., the object. In this sense we say that Van Gogh's self-portrait is "iconic" of Van Gogh himself; or a rose perfume is iconic of a rose in that it smells like the latter. An index is a sign where the representamen is a natural consequence of the object. If we see a dog wagging the tail, we understand that it is happy, but not because the wagging tail has any resemblance with happiness: it is more a physiological result of the emotional state—the wagging tail is indeed a *consequence* of the dog's happiness. Or: yawning is an index of tiredness—it does not look like, but it is a consequence of, the latter. Finally, a symbol is a sign where the representamen and the object are linked by an arbitrary and conventional decision. It is our decision to assign certain street signs to their meaning, but in principle there is nothing in common between the "no parking" sign and the act of not parking. A word such as "beautiful" is not more beautiful than the word "ugly", and the word "short" is actually longer than the word "long". And so forth. Of course, due to this arbitrary nature, we can change symbols any time: all we need is to agree on the new symbol. To keep up with the previous example, for all we know, a watch could be called "xghytzzzgxhy", if we all agreed that it should be called "xghytzzzgxhy". It may not be very elegant to wear a xghytzzzgxhy—as compared to wearing a watch—but we would be actually talking about the very same thing. We shall see more about symbols in the next paragraph, while talking about "codes".

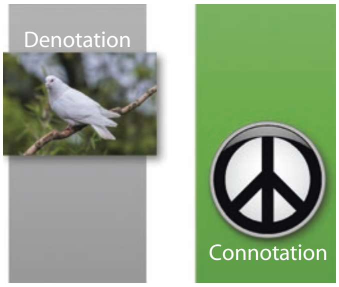


Fig. 2.3 An example of denotation and connotation. The white dove denotes a bird of the family *Columbidae*, but it has many connotations, including the idea of "peace"

Transversal to this typology, there is another that distinguishes the concept of **denotation** from that of **connotation**. A denotation is the strict, literal, "scientific" if you like, meaning of a sign, devoid of any emotion, attitude, expectation or else. The connotation of a sign, instead, adds elements of emotion/attitude/etc. presenting not the strict meaning, but one or more meanings "associated" to that sign. For example, the word "fox" *denotes* an omnivorous mammal of the genus *Vulpes* that inhabits the forests of various parts of the world, and so forth. This is of course the literal, scientific meaning of the word. On the other hand, a word like "fox", as we know very well, can be applied to a human person that we may consider particularly cunning, or a human woman that we consider erotically attractive. These two are *connotations* of the word, and are indeed meanings which we "associate" to the sign, based on certain feelings and attitude we have towards the real fox (Fig. 2.3).

The role of the reader, too, is subject to peculiarities: for instance, the reader may not be there when the sender produces the text, neither spatially nor temporally. Texts can be read in a totally different place than the one they are produced, or also in a totally different epoch: Aristotle died well over 2000 years ago, and yet he still "talks" to us, through his writings and his reflections. Or: a Facebook user may be streaming live from, say, India and be seen at that very moment in Guatemala. Especially when it comes to artistic communication, authors do not necessarily have in mind a specific reader, but a kind of "ideal" one (and this, too, will be discussed later on), one who would be capable to understand (and appreciate) the text. For example, the director of a musical will not know specifically and personally who will go to the cinema to watch their movie, but they certainly imagine (and hope) that the spectators, on average, will have an appreciation for musicals, will have a passion for music and/or dance, and so forth.

The transition from sender to reader, as you may imagine, is not smooth and mechanical. If the sender means ABC, it does not automatically follow that the reader will understand exactly ABC: communication aims at understanding, but it also produces misunderstanding. Most of all, the reader does not just "receive" the message: they "interpret" it as well, and this is not the same thing. Interpretation as such can occur in various ways.

First of all, interpretation is a form of **translation** (and vice versa). Any translator with a modicum of experience will tell you that literal translations are rather rare occurrences in their job. More often than not a translator has to "interpret" the message uttered in one language and "adapt" it to the other language. If we read the Italian sentence "Scoprire l'acqua calda", we read an idiomatic expression that stands for "to say something very obvious that everybody knows already"; however, this is not how the Italian sentence reads in English. The literal translation would be: "To discover hot water", which kind of sounds weird. Therefore, the translator who works on a sentence like that will have to interpret and adapt the Italian to the English. As it happens, English too has an idiomatic expression that is equivalent to "Scoprire l'acqua calda", and that is "To rediscover the wheel", which is not a literal translation, but an exact correspondence. The translator, therefore, will go for that one, even if a "wheel" is something totally different from "hot water".

Second: interpretation implies the management of several **variables**. In the previous case we have shown a sentence that does not have a literal translation in the other language, but at least it does have *one* exact equivalent. There are cases that are open to *many* interpretations, and choosing one instead of another may actually lead us astray from what the sender meant. Let us imagine being in a room with someone, and this person says "I'm cold!". The way we may react to this sentence is open to many options. We may reply "Oh, sorry to hear that!"; we may close a window if we see that it was open; we may switch on a radiator if we see that it was off; we may lend our jacket; if we are in a restaurant, we may ask the waiter to accommodate us on a warmer spot of the hall; we may say "I told you to put warmer clothes" (if we are that kind of "I told you so" annoying person), and so forth. Once again, we need to "interpret" the message, and in this case (since many variables are possible) we need to carefully scrutinize the surrounding environment, in search of the best solution (is the window open? Is the radiator off? Are warmer clothes available?…). Mind you: an example like this is still quite manageable. If we instead enter the realm of arts, including AV arts, we may be facing texts that are open to literally hundreds of interpretations.

Third: the reader has **expectations**. All of us have gathered some experience in life based on our individual characteristics, the education we received, the social and cultural processes we have been exposed to, and so forth. This means that any instance of communication we are involved in is not necessarily *new* to us: we may have experienced something similar in the past (and sometimes repeatedly), so when we recognize a certain familiarity, we tend to react in a way that is consistent to the previous time/s. Let us make an example: imagine being the owner of a record shop. At some point a tall gentleman comes in: he has a long black leather coat, black leather trousers, a black T-Shirt with an inscription in Gothic characters and a drawing of some scary skull-headed monster. The gentleman has long hair and a beard and he is of Caucasian ethnicity. The man asks you if you can recommend him some good music. Now you: what do you think you will recommend? A hip-hop record, a jazz record, a heavy metal record or else? My guess is that you are thinking about a heavy metal record: based on your previous experience, indeed, the man who visited your shop looks very much like a heavy metal fan, and it is very possible that his standards of "good music" includes the likes of Metallica, Iron Maiden, and so forth. So, interpretation is also affected by factors that are external to communication as such and the "here and now" context where the instance is generated: your "life story" matters too. Before continuing, however, it would be good to dismiss any suspicion that "expectations" should encourage "prejudice". To expect that a person dressed like that is a heavy metal fan is somehow useful in terms of that previously mentioned necessity to cope with the complexity of reality, by organizing and reducing it. On the other hand, we must be equally ready to accept and welcome the possibility that this person is actually into musicians like Kenny Rogers or Dolly Parton, and we should just accept this apparent anomaly as yet another confirmation that the world is beautiful because it is varied. Moreover, and most importantly, whatever expectation we have about people should never be an excuse to "judge" them, e.g., if we happen to hate heavy metal, then we assume that this person is not a pleasant one.

Fourth: the **role** senders and readers play in each communication act is of certain importance, as well. Our own predisposition to produce and interpret messages is significantly related to the *kind* of senders and readers we are in a given situation. Example: two people meet in a class—one is a teacher, the other is a student. The type of communication that occurs in this instance has certain characteristics: one speaks more, the other mostly pays attention; the student does not really interrupt the teacher, if not for asking questions; there may be some joke here and there (to make the lesson lighter), but generally speaking the communication is serious; the topics are of a certain type and thematically connected throughout the whole lesson, and so forth. Now let us imagine the same two people meeting in the evening in a bar. The type of communication changes: both speak more or less the same amount of time; interruptions and jokes are more frequent; the topics can be of all sorts and hardly connected, especially after a few drinks, etc. In other words: the same people with their own "life stories" communicated in a different manner as soon as they picked up different roles.

2.1.3 Codes, Channels and Modes

If interpretation, all in all, seems to be a process that is, yes, necessary, but that also makes things a little more complicated, and there are some devices, employed in communication acts that in fact facilitate them. First of all, sender and reader usually try to communicate in ways that are understandable to both: they try, that is, to find a common denominator of signs and messages that decreases the chances of incomprehension. For example, they usually try to communicate in the same language. This common ground is known as **code**. A code is the totality of the rules of transformation, shared by at least two subjects, and normally by an extended community, through which signs are more or less deliberately associated to one or more meanings (they are therefore "symbols", as we learned in the previous paragraph). When we consider the word "book", or the Italian "libro", or the French "livre", or the Lithuanian "knyga", etc., we realize that none of these words have actually any resemblance with the object "book". All these words were deliberately chosen to designate that particular object, and an agreement was made that, from a certain point on, those objects will be called books (or libri, or knygos, etc.).

A code requires social interaction in order to be created, and—after being established—allows an increase and an improvement of such interaction. Importantly, a code is a set of rules based on convention, arbitrariness and ritualization. This means that (a) two or more subjects have to "agree" on the various signs contained in the code, (b) there is no specific association between a sign and the object it represents (as we have seen with the word "book"), and (c) that association becomes a habit for the community and gets ritualized. This often means institutionalized, since a word like "book" becomes an official word of an official language that entire countries use as their main means of communication. Within the same community, codes may be subject to progressive variations and adjustments, due to different factors: increasing efficiency of a new sign-meaning association, as compared to an old one of the same type; introduction of new subjects from a different community, who carry a different sign-repertoire, etc. This means that new conventions may replace old ones if they prove to be more effective. To make an example drawn from the field of AVCC we could mention the various conventions (called exactly "codes") of morality in AVTs throughout the years. In the early days, scenes of violence, sex and immorality had to be extremely mild, or even just suggested if authors did not want to go through heavy censorship. The idea itself of "immorality" was very different from nowadays: until the 1960s, in American cinema, immoral were things like homosexuality or interracial marriage, which sounds (justly) ridiculous today. Scenes of violence had to be rather soft, not showing blood or other explicit features. Those were the "codes of morality", but then society became more permissive and more tolerant, so we can have, not just scenes, but entire AVTs depicting homosexuality as something perfectly normal (see movies like *Brokeback Mountain*, game apps like *Gaydorado*, music videos like t.A.T.u.'s "All the things she said"…), or we can witness rather extreme sequences of graphic violence without censorship (see the movies of directors like Quentin Tarantino, game apps like *Granny*, music videos like Nine Inch Nails' "Closer"…). More on censorship in AVCC (with a focus on theatre and cinema) can be found in Aldgate and Robertson (2005).

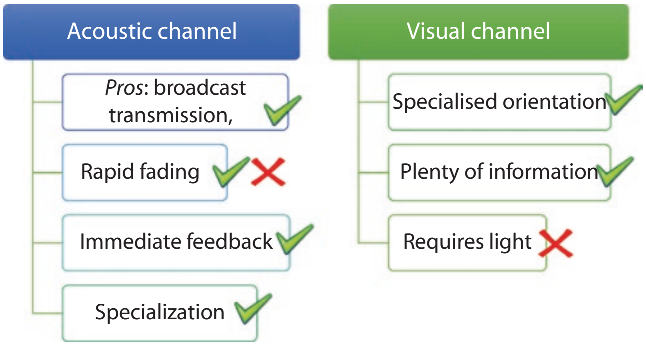


Fig. 2.4 Characteristics, pros and cons of the acoustic and the visual channels

As we can guess from these examples, codes are not only based on words, but can actually take all kinds of shapes, established through any of the **channels** available. Channels are the "sensory modes" used to transmit a message. This roughly corresponds to (but does not overlap with) the notion of "senses", which, as we know, are five in the case of human beings, and more if we consider all living beings. Channels can be (a) chemical, which is the sensory mode that groups the olfactory and the gustatory senses (both present in human beings); (b) tactile, which groups the tactile sense (present in human), but also the thermic and the electric (which we only find in some non-human animal species); (c) acoustic, which relates to the sense of hearing; (d) visual, related to sight; and even (e) magnetic, referring to the capacity (possessed by some animal species) to move and orient by using magnetic fields.

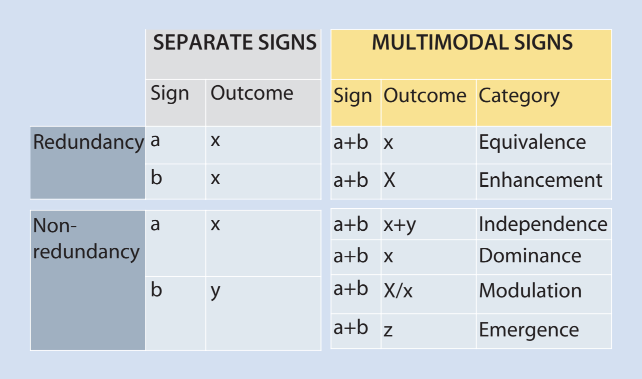
As the area of our interest, here, implies only the acoustic and the visual channels, we could perhaps say something more about these two (see also Fig. 2.4 for a summary of their characteristics).

The **acoustic channel** is the sensory mode connected with the production, emission and reception of sounds. In the human experience, acoustic signs can be produced through the vocal apparatus, or by hitting parts of the body or the environment (and by "hitting parts of the environment" we also mean the likes of pressing the "play" button on *Spotify*). Every channel has its pros and cons, and this is why we are provided with more than one, and as we said before, communication is easy because it is complex: having many sensory modes at our disposal is part of this precious paradox). The main pros of the acoustic channel are the so-called "broadcast transmission" (i.e., the possibility of communicating in darkness, around corners, etc., and still being heard), the rapid fading of a sound (which makes a fast continuation and response possible, thus increasing the communicative potential: just think about how many things we can say in few seconds), the immediate feedback (we hear what we say and we can quickly check if the reader has received our text), and a very high degree of specialization (as the example of language, developed first of all as a vocal-acoustic sign system, clearly demonstrates). On the other hand, the main limitation of this channel lies in the rapid fading itself, which—besides its aforementioned advantages—also implies that a message does not last in time, and must therefore be replaced by other means of communication in those cases where an enduring message is needed.

The **visual channel** is the sensory mode connected with the production, emission and reception of visual signs. All things considered, from a cognitive point of view, this channel perhaps represents the main perceptive vehicle for the human species, even though it is hardly the best specialized (many other animals can see much better, sharper and further than us). When we think about it, more and more things in our society are based on visual stimuli and visual displays: the best examples are probably smartphones, which have replaced tools that were traditionally based on exclusively acoustic messages (we used to have telephones only for talking and listening, originally), by adding up more and more visual messages (photos, SMSs, social network posts, apps…). Truth to be told, "talking" at the phone has become the least reason for possessing a smartphone. Visual signs can be divided into extrinsic and intrinsic. An extrinsic sign is produced in the subject's environment (we leave visible traces of our presence: tracks, constructions, manufacts…), while an intrinsic sign is part of our own body or behavior (our appearance, out expressions, how we move…). The main advantage of the visual channel is the great (virtually endless) quantity of information that may be conveyed, while the biggest limitation is the need for light (some animal species are better in the darkness than us, but still a minimal light condition is crucial for every animal).

Just like the topic of this book/course shows, communication may occur by using more than one channel at the same time. However, also within the same channel, various forms of communication are possible. If, let us say, we decide to communicate visually, by using what we have learned to call "intrinsic signs", we are not necessarily bound to use one type of them. Communication may occur by using, say, hand gestures, facial expressions and posture: three different signs, but all visual. This means that the richness and the variety of communication forms do not only occur thanks to the presence of multiple channels, but also what we shall call **modes**. Indeed, most of the times communication is multimodal.

Multimodality is defined as a process of communication when different patterns coexist to display one or more texts. It operates in almost every communication context, except the most elementary ones. The interesting part is that this coexistence takes different shapes, which can be either cooperative or even competitive. If we take a look at ◘ Fig. 2.5 we see the most important forms of combination, as studied by the ethologists (Partan and Marler 1999).



	SEPARATE SIGNS		MULTIMODAL SIGNS		
	Sign	Outcome	Sign	Outcome	Category
Redundancy	a	x	a+b	x	Equivalence
	b	x	a+b	X	Enhancement
Non-redundancy	a	x	a+b	x+y	Independence
			a+b	x	Dominance
	b	y	a+b	X/x	Modulation
			a+b	z	Emergence

◘ **Fig. 2.5** Multimodality and its various processes

The left side of the scheme depicts so-called redundant (above) and non-redundant signs (below) as separate components (a and b) with consequent outcomes (x and y—the same letter indicates the same qualitative outcome; different letters indicate different outcomes). That is (keeping up with our example of visual intrinsic signs): we have a facial expression (a) and a hand gesture (b), and they are performed in two different moments, forming two communication acts. When a and b mean the same thing (let us say: the facial expression is a smile and the gesture is a thumbs-up sign) then we speak about redundancy, when they do not (let us say we have thumbs-down instead of up) we speak about non-redundancy.

On the right side of the scheme we have the outcomes of combined multimodal signals (a + b), so now our two visual intrinsic signs will be performed at the same time, as part of a single communication act. The meaning of a single sign may be either redundant or non-redundant, in that different signs may produce the same message (smile and thumbs up), or two different ones (smile and thumbs down). The advantage of redundancy is the reinforcement of the message and the reduction of the risks of interference (that is why these signs are also called "backup signals"): we smile and we make the thumbs-up sign so that there is no misunderstanding on the fact that we are communicating some message of approval/acknowledgment/satisfaction. Non-redundant signs, on the other hand, have the advantage of providing more information per time unit. Empirically, the two typologies of sign can be distinguished by the reaction of the receiver. When emitted separately, redundant signs should provoke the same or a very similar response from the reader, whereas non-redundant signs should provoke different reactions. However, when the signs are combined simultaneously into a multimodal communication act (see the right side of the scheme), we may have quite different results. Redundant signs combined might provoke the following reactions:

(1) **Equivalence**—the multimodal sign provokes the same exact reaction as the signs emitted separately (shown in the scheme as small x letters). For example, we may be seeing the two visual signs performed by a person who is combining facial expressions and hand gestures all the time, as a personal habit, so we are not particularly surprised/impressed if they are smiling and putting the thumbs up at the same time.

(2) **Enhancement**—the multimodal sign produces a reaction that is increased in intensity (shown in the scheme as a capital X). If the person who is showing their approval is someone who rarely performs hand gestures, to see him/her putting the thumbs up could be something particularly significant: this person must be especially satisfied.

A multimodal communication act based on the combination of non-redundant signs produce a wider range of possibilities:

(1) **Independence**—The two signs are independent and produce distinct reactions that are not in relation with each other, although they are combined. For example, the sender may smile and scratch their nose at the same time, simply because the nose is itching. The former and the latter signs are unrelated, even if they occur at the same time. The reader will get two separate messages: the approval/satisfaction of the smile and simply the sender's small discomfort.

(2) **Dominance**—One of the two signs prevails over the other. It is a typical case in some playful activities: when we play mock-fights with small children, we usually make aggressive gestures with our hands (such as boxing or kung-fu poses), but then at the same time we are again smiling. The child knows very well that the smile dominates over the fighting pose: the fact that we are joking (condition conveyed by the smile) prevails over the aggressive gestures (conveyed by the fighting pose). If the child perceived the opposite, they would think that we are about to hit them and that we are also taking pleasure in doing so.

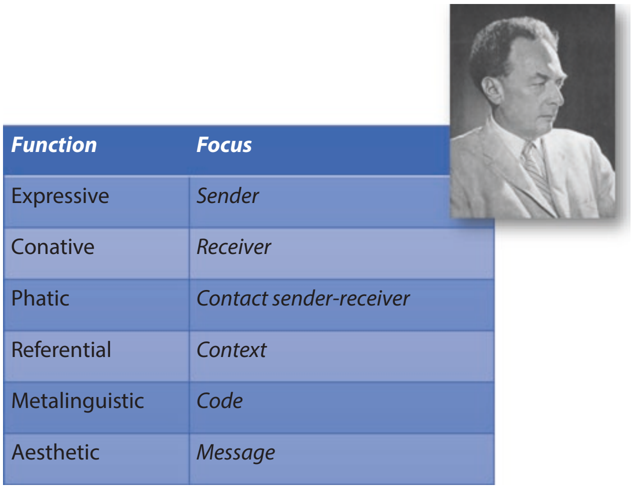
(3) **Modulation**—One non-redundant sign affects the other, by modulating its effect. Here, the previously mentioned combination between the smile and the thumbs-down gesture may also not be a conflictive one: someone in a party is doing some terrible karaoke singing and we show the thumbs down *plus* a smile. The smile "modulates" the thumbs-down, in that our judgment remains negative, but (thanks to the smile) we do not mean anything offensive by that: we are just teasing our friend after their performance.

(4) **Emergence**—the multimodal sign provokes an entirely new reaction that has nothing to do with the two separate signs. Let us say that we smile and we make the boxing pose with someone, in order to play mock fighting, but the latter, instead of joining in, starts singing the famous theme song from *Rocky III*, "Eye of the Tiger". That combination of signs, that is, generated an association that conferred a new, "emergent", meaning to the multimodal sign.

Multimodal communication is extremely important in all forms of audiovisuality, which indeed rely on numerous sources of communication: we may have a character talking, making gestures and facial expressions, and that already counts as three acts of communication; then we may have a musical soundtrack that adds one more act; then we may have a certain narrative situation that produces yet another act; then we may have a certain montage, certain camera work, and so on. Theoretically, every shot of an AVT is a carrier of multiple signs: how such signs will combine and what message/s they will produce is very much a multimodal issue. We shall indeed return to this topic again in the course of this book.

2.1.4 The Functions of Communication

Having understood what makes communication possible, and the various ways it can be implemented, we should now consider its basic functions. There is a famous model developed by the Russian linguist (Jakobson 1960: 353–357) that became rather popular in all fields of communication studies. Jakobson classified six main functions within a communication system, each of which concerned with a particular constituent of the communicative process: **expressive** (a function directly referred to the sender), **conative** (referred to the reader), **phatic** (referred to the establishment of contact between sender and reader), **referential** (referred to the context of the message), **metalinguistic** (referred to the code used in a given communication act), and **aesthetic** (referred to the form of the message). None of these functions must be considered in isolation or as mutually exclusive. A message is usually the intersection between two or more functions, even if one of them is often dominant and more evident. To explain them all, we could take this time the example of soundtracks in any AVT. We know that the employment of music in any of such texts aims at empowering the overall communication (and we shall see this more in detail later on): music can emphasize situations and feelings, can create contrasts, and can anticipate events and so forth. In this sense, it has many "functions". Let us see them in accordance to Jakobson's model (see also ◘ Fig. 2.6).



Function	*Focus*
Expressive	*Sender*
Conative	*Receiver*
Phatic	*Contact sender-receiver*
Referential	*Context*
Metalinguistic	*Code*
Aesthetic	*Message*

◘ **Fig. 2.6** A summary of Jakobson's six functions of communication

By the term "expressive" we mean the use of communication in which the most relevant part is the display of the emotional state and the identity of the sender. All kinds of messages more or less display some feelings or emotions, and certainly that is the case within human communication, or the communication of any other animal species (a datum that can be easily confirmed by anybody who enjoys the company of a cat or a dog). A basic function of soundtracks can be indeed that of conveying an emotional state: when two characters fall in love we hear some kind of tender and romantic music, when a hero is dying we hear a sad or even tragic theme, and so forth. In all these cases, music serves an expressive function within the AVT.

By the term "conative" we mean the use of communication in which the sender uses the message in order to induce the receiver to react consequently. Conative functions stand out clearly in all requests, questions, orders, rhetorical statements, and so forth. Taking things to an extreme, we could even argue (as some biologists have done in the past, while theorizing communication) that the nature itself of communication is conative, because, deep down, the very factor that motivates us to engage into any communicative interaction is the need or wish to influence the reader in some way, in order to get some kind of benefit. But then again, deep down communication always displays all of the functions we are mentioning here, or nearly so: in that sense, it is still reasonable not to paint with a broad brush—as they say. Emphasizing differences and specific cases is still important, and while it is true that every communication act features a bit of everything, it is also true that, depending on the situation, certain functions stand out more clearly than others. An interesting conative use of soundtrack lies in those cases where a certain contrast exists between what the images are showing and what the music is conveying. For example, the images may show that everything is fine and cheerful, but the music sounds eerie and threatening. In this case the music is "warning" us that things are not as happy as they look and that some incumbent danger is on the way. In other words, the music (the sender) wants us (the readers) to be preoccupied and not to relax.

Next in line is the "phatic" function. This term refers to the use of communication mainly aimed to establish and/or keep contact between sender(s) and reader(s). Such a function is probably best illustrated by the words we use to initiate conversations: "Good morning", "Hello" (including the "hello?" at the phone), "Excuse me", and so forth. All these expressions have the main purpose of connecting the sender to the reader. Similarly, opening musical themes in any AV program (talk-shows, soap operas, news, quiz shows…) have the function to reach out to the spectators to tell them that the program is starting—establishing, indeed, a contact. You may have noticed, in particular, that the majority of them starts in a rather emphatic way, with strong dynamics and usually with a so-called "hook" (the most memorable part of a theme: it can be a refrain, a riff, a simple chord… anything that we tend to remember more easily than the rest—think about the very opening of *X Files* or *Twin Peaks*).

The fourth function of communication, according to Jakobson, is the referential one. In this case, signs refer to the context, to the surrounding environment, i.e., to everything except the sender of the message (and sometime even to them). Referential signs are thus descriptive, and may refer to places, times, people, sensations and so on. "Berlin is a beautiful city", "Franz Kafka was born in 1883", "It's summertime, and the living is easy"… these are all referential messages. In this case, too, we have excellent examples from the realm of AV soundtrack music: we may think of the way music can set the right historical or geographic parameters. If the AVT is set, say, in the past, as in the case of costume dramas, music can describe the epoch in question by bearing its characteristics: a ragtime piece can immediately connote the first decades of the twentieth century in America (as Scott Joplin's music does for the movie *The Sting*), a Gregorian chant may connote European Middle Ages, and so forth.

The fifth type of communication function is the metalinguistic. In this case, the smile is metalinguistic because it refers to other signs as occurs in playing, deception, or several forms of ritualized communication. In playing, particularly, the adoption of metalinguistic signs is crucial: we have described the multimodal combination of smile and fighting pose when we play mock-fight with children. What we can add now is that in this the smile case is metalinguistic because it refers to the other sign (the fighting pose), as if to say: "Look, this other sign is not serious: I am only kidding". This may seem like a less common function to find in AVTs, at least in our example of soundtracks, but this is very common as well. For example, some texts use non-original music to create a parallel with the original contents of that music. Quentin Tarantino's movie *Django Unchained* adopts plenty of themes already written and used in old spaghetti westerns from the 1970s, including the original *Django* (with music written by Luis Bacalov) and various tracks written by Ennio Morricone, unanimously regarded as the "king" of spaghetti western soundtracks, having delivered legendary themes such as the one from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. Clearly, Tarantino's intention was that of creating a visible connection between his movie, conceived in spaghetti western style, and some of those old productions that were so inspiring to him.

Finally, we have also an aesthetic function for communication, which occurs when the main focus is the message in itself, in its form and appearance, rather than its contents, which remain important but not so prominent as we would expect them to be. Aesthetic signs are usually employed with an idea of adding beauty, fascination and also a bit of pleasant ambiguity to communication—and that is very common in all kinds of art. When we replace a sentence like "I think I am dying" with a sentence like "I feel like I'm knockin' on heaven's door" (as Bob Dylan does in one of his most famous songs) we are using communication in an aesthetic fashion. Keeping up with our example, to say that soundtracks aspire first and foremost to beauty is a bit of a truism, and so we do not really need to provide examples.

Great soundtrack composers such as Ennio Morricone, John Williams, Bernard Hermann, Vangelis and all the others have been known not only for their ability to write compositions that are extremely pertinent to the texts they accompany, but also for their intrinsic grace and charm. It is no coincidence that their music gets to be performed *without* the AV texts, in contexts such as concerts and recitals, or as background in public places—the kind of music that "stands alone", and has artistic merits of its own.

2.1.5 Case Study: Pitching Story and Characters in the First Episode of the Borgias

One of the biggest AV phenomena of this first part of the twenty first century, TV series have undergone two major revolutions in the last 30 years or so (as of 2019, at the time of writing). The first, in chronological order, is what we may call an "artistic emancipation". Until the late 1980s, the majority of the series was produced with the attitude that they were something less ambitious artistically than movies, as if the size of the screen they were meant for had to reflect also the extent of their creative pretentions. For this reason, they were usually produced with lower budgets and mostly aimed at capturing different types of audience for different times of the day: a soap opera would be placed during late morning for the enjoyment of elderly people, whereas a kids' series would be scheduled during late afternoon, after school and before going to bed. Then again, an all-family series would be placed in early evening to be enjoyed during dinner, and so forth. There were significant exceptions: the Italian national broadcasting company RAI, for example, engaged to produce highly cinematic series such as *Sandokan* or *Pinocchio*, entrusted to excellent film directors such as Sergio Sollima and Luigi Comencini respectively. However, the trend was that a series had to be "something else" than the movies we went to see in cinema theatres. In nearly all cases the axiom was that a TV series could not afford the "unsteady narration" approach, so that all stories tended to be linear, solid, with few or no concession to surrealism, non-sequiturs or suspended finales.

Then, quite suddenly in 1990, something happened: *Twin Peaks*! David Lynch's legendary series had a completely different approach that seemed to defy nearly all the unwritten golden rules we have just mentioned: it had no specific audience target, it was an "unsteady narration" program, it was filled with unexplainable surreal and supernatural elements and storylines, it had strong horror and thriller components, and it was much closer to film aesthetics than to TV aesthetics. In short, it had all the premises to be disliked by the TV public, and such—indeed—was the prediction of TV critics, as the pilot episode was aired. However, and surprisingly (or maybe not), the show was a roaring success, and changed the rules of the game forever (at least until now, but—as of 2019—there are really no indications that the format may revert to the old paradigm). We can explain this in several ways, but this is a topic for another book. Briefly, we could say that the audience was "ready" for a change like this: TV had acquired enough centrality, in daily life, to afford to be treated like a "home-cinema", therefore deserving adequate products. Also, the audience, albeit unconsciously, must have felt rather tired of being treated like naïve individuals, exposed only to relatively innocent programs. Moreover, Lynch's victory was also the victory of AV art as such: it proved that good quality and artistic excellence is no hindrance to commercial success, and that, so to speak, *you do not have to please the crowd in order to please the crowd*.
The majority of the series after *Twin Peaks* openly treasured Lynch's lesson, initiating a new era for TV series, which is still going strong (in fact stronger and stronger) nowadays. To an extent, the reason why this book can use so many examples from TV series is a testimony to the artistic dignity that they have achieved in the last 30 years.

The second important epochal revolution is the impact of web platforms on the way series can be enjoyed. Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO… before them, the approach to watching a TV series was that of the one hour-long weekly appointment with a single episode on the given TV channel. Part of the enjoyment consisted of the sense of anticipation for the next episode, the long conversations on "what is going to happen next" or "how to explain that" with friends and colleagues fans of the same series, and the feeling of togetherness in the family for having to make sure that everybody was in front of the TV set at the same time and day. However, at the same time, these were also sources of frustration: why do we have to wait *one whole week* before the next episode? Could they not show 3–4 episodes together? What if I am busy on that particular day and time and cannot watch the series with my family?

The coming of digital platforms turned this logic upside down, and created new forms of appropriation and enjoyment. Spectators could now choose both the time and the amount of episodes to watch at once, including the whole series (an event that is usually an opportunity for partying with friends: the so-called "marathon"). This has increased the demand, and the channels we have mentioned are now literally *packed* with dozens and dozens of series, constantly updating the catalogues and even producing their own series. The conversations among series enthusiasts still occur, but they are now slightly different in contents: "What series are you on?" "Have you reached the 5th season?", "Please, no spoiler! I haven't watched that episode yet"…

Also, and back to the "artistic dignity" that the likes of *Twin Peaks* have achieved, it should be no surprise to my teacher colleagues to learn that, by now, I have found that my chances to successfully explain any given concept in AVCC to my students are significantly higher if I draw examples from *Breaking Bad* or *Game of Thrones*, rather than Bergman or Kurosawa.

What remains fatally the same across every series, in every epoch, of every quality and on every platform, are two features: the need to leave the story suspended episode after episode (so that the audience is adamant to see the next one, whether that happens in one week or by simply pressing the "Play next episode" button on Netflix), and the fundamental necessity to assemble the first few episodes (or the one before the first, the so-called "pilot") in such a way that they create immediate interest and hint on the many (if not all) of the various storylines and characterizations that the audience will be exposed to throughout the various seasons. Netflix published a survey where they showed that the 76% of their shows "hooked" the audience within a maximum of four episodes. Unsurprisingly, the communicative potential of the first episodes must be very high, and that is certainly a feature that defines this particular taxonomical group of AVTs, making it an interesting case study for us.

The text I would like to propose for our analysis is the very first episode (specifically, the first 22 min) of Neil Jordan's *The Borgias*, a series aired between 2011 and 2013 in various channels all over the world. In accordance with the real,

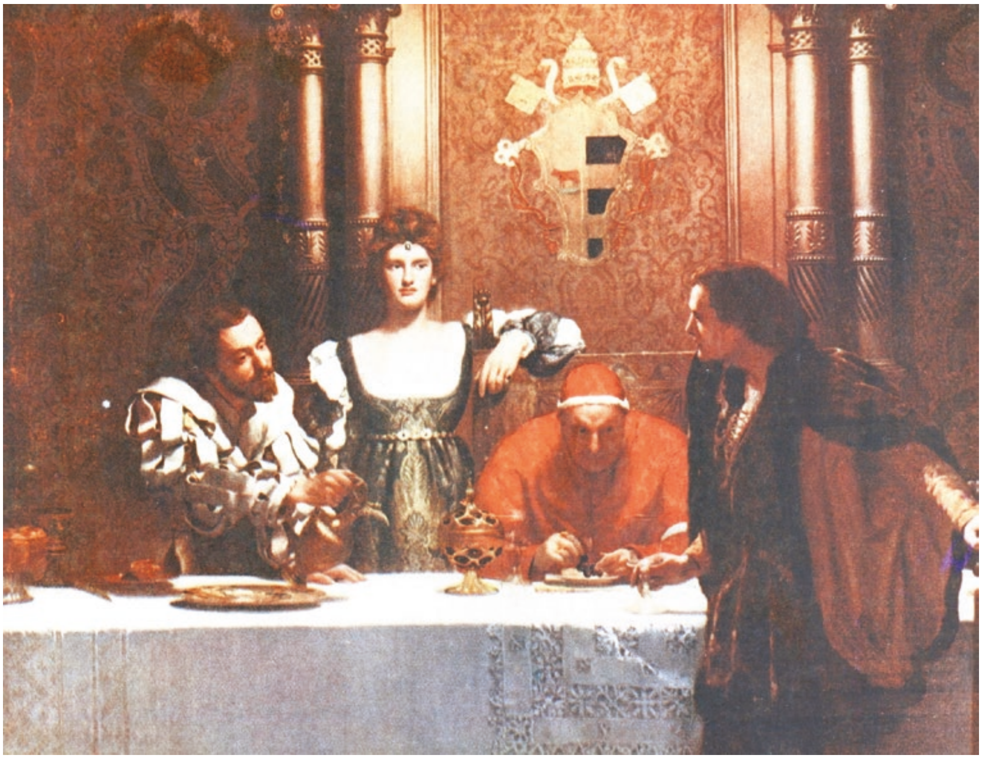


Fig. 2.7 The painting "A Glass of Wine with Caesar Borgia" by John Collier (1850–1934). From left to right, it shows Cesare Borgia, Lucrezia Borgia, pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia) and a young man holding an empty glass., [Image of public domain]

controversial, ambition-fuelled and allegedly-murderous story of the Spanish family, and the ever-ambiguous and intrigue-filled history of the Catholic Church in general, the series mostly addresses themes such as power, sex, murder, conspiracy, and all the other ingredients that can be found in almost every series, and particularly costume dramas of this sort (Fig. 2.7).

Among other things, the series is notable for featuring the Academy Award winner Jeremy Irons—another proof that, by now, TV series are thought of so highly by the film industry that actors of the calibre of Irons agree to participate. Other examples include the likes of Winona Ryder in *Stranger Things*, Martin Freeman in *Sherlock*, Ewan McGregor in *Fargo*, Anthony Hopkins in *Westworld*, and others. The show's three seasons cover the rise of the Borgia family to lead the Roman Catholic Church and their struggles to maintain power over internal and external threats. The first episode, which will be our focus here, depicts the election of Rodrigo Borgia (Jeremy Irons) to the papacy under the name of Alexander VI, with the help of his sons, Cesare (François Arnaud) and Juan (David Oakes), who ruthlessly employ bribery and simony in pursuit of their cause. Between Cesare and Juan there is a clear rivalry: Cesare, cunning and smart both politically and militarily, would like to lead the Vatican's army, but Rodrigo assigns this role to the inept and impulsive Juan, retaining the former as his right arm and counsellor. This makes Cesare resentful and jealous towards Juan who is, in turn, tortured by the inferiority complex he feels towards the brother, and in fact towards the whole world. Rodrigo's main opponent in the elections, Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere (Colm Feore), is his main enemy and throughout the series he attempts to depose or kill Rodrigo (who will be pope under the name Alexander VI) by various stratagems. Joining the first plan to eliminate Rodrigo is another losing candidate to the election, Cardinal Orsino Orsini, one of several fictional characters introduced in the series who actually had no correspondence in the real historical vicissitude of the Borgias: he is however killed during the attempt. Rodrigo's election becomes possible also thanks to the mediation of cardinal Ascanio Sforza (Peter Sullivan), who realizes he cannot win the election by himself, so that he offers Rodrigo his support and his votes on condition that he is appointed vice-chancellor.

Another important character is Rodrigo's daughter, Lucrezia (Holliday Grainger), perhaps the most "mythicized" historical figure in the whole family, allegations having been made about her *femme fatale* reputation, her incestuous inclinations, and even murderous behavior. Between Cesare and Lucrezia, in particular, there is a morbid intimacy that (spoiler alert!) will finally develop into actual incest in Season 3. In the background, we discern the figure of Vannozza Catteneo (Joanne Whalley), one of Rodrigo's courtesans and the mother of his children, here presented as a quiet victim of the various events, aware that Rodrigo will never have a special consideration for her.

There will be other significant characters appearing in the series, but for our purpose these are the ones introduced in the 22 min we are analyzing. In narratological terms, they form the "pre-narrateme", the stage 0 of the story, where the initial situation is introduced (we shall talk about this in ▶ Sect. 3.4.1.). The actual plot of the series is about Rodrigo Borgia's papacy: this pre-narrateme focuses on how he gets there. But the main reason why we want to focus on these first minutes, here, is the same as why the first 30 s of a song aimed at commercial success are crucial to determine whether or not we will continue to listen to that song on the radio or on Spotify. An unwritten rule of the pop music business states that a commercial song must have something very catchy happening within the first 30 s, otherwise the audience may lose interest and either change radio station or skip to the next CD track, etc. Most of time, a "catchy" even is either the beginning of the vocal part or the appearance of a recognizable riff (think about "Satisfaction" or "Smoke on the Water"). If a song intended to be a single is not structured in this way, but perhaps has a long instrumental intro in Pink Floyd style, then a common practice is to make a so-called radio-edit, i.e. a shortened version that makes sure that the catchy item appears within those 30 s. Pink Floyd is a good example due to the "Progressive rock" (i.e., complex and extended) nature of their music. In fact, they were never keen to release singles, but relied exclusively on sales of their albums. The few times they allowed a single release, however, strong editing work on the beginning of the given song was always needed.

In the same spirit, *The Borgias* was designed to display the most relevant narrative material and the most significant characters in the first 30 min of the first episode, ensuring that "catchy" component that must have made spectators interested to the whole series. Let us see what happens, step by step. Please, also note the precision of the timing for nearly each step, suggesting a very careful planning of the pace and exposition of the story.

1. 00:00–01:30—Opening theme.

Written by the Canadian composer, Trevor Morris, the opening theme of the series involves a number of standard practices usually associated with the various topics of this type of series. In particular:

What we hear	What it communicates
Use of acoustic and orchestral instruments and a choir	"Costume drama" component (*The Borgias* is obviously located between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries)
A typical Gregorian chant-meets-*Carmina Burana* cross-over in the choir arrangement	"Catholic church", but also Gothic-obscurantist, component
Ostinato-melody performed by strings and later guitar	Thrilling-murderous component

The visual part of the theme is fully consistent with what the music does:

What we see	What it communicates
Alternation of Renaissance paintings (including some that represented the Borgias themselves and some of their contemporaries and associates, such as Rodrigo Borgia's most famous mistress, Giulia Farnese) with fragments from the series itself	Both paintings and segments are carefully selected among scenes representing power (e.g., the pope's hand being kissed), murder and sex
These images are interpolated with animations of dripping red blood and black ink (with occasional juxtaposition of the two colors) and with Craquelure patterns	Murder (blood), intrigue (ink), conspiracy (blood + ink, as if murders are commissioned with letters by powerful people), historical context of the series but also thematic "cracks", such as the fragility of power, the corrupted church, etc. (Craquelure)

Predictably, the opening theme gives us the main bulk of themes and topics that will be addressed in the series. To put it mildly, the spectator who may have approached this series not knowing what to expect exactly will now understand that this is neither *Friends* nor *Star Trek*.

2. 01:30–02:00—Establishing shot.

An aerial shot of (digital technology-manipulated) late 15th century Rome accompanies some captions that give us a short but crucial historical background to the story, but also to the topicality of the narrative:

What we read	What it communicates
Rome 1492	Time and place: we, the spectators, locate the series
The centre of the Christian world	We are informed of the central context of the series (Christianity, church) and of its importance in the historical framework (the "centre")
The seat of the Papacy The Pope had the power to crown and un-crown kings To change the course of empires	We are informed that "power" is the central theme of the series, and that apparently there was a lot of it to be pursued in the "centre of the Christian world"
The Church was mired in corruption	We are informed of the centrality of "corruption", and all that goes with it. Certainly, now we know that they do not exercise power in either a transparent or peaceful way
Pope Innocent VIII was dying, and the papal throne was the prize desired by all	We are informed of the very point where the action starts (the pope's death bed), and that the race to power will be crowded and (given the previous captions) ruthless

3. 02:00–04:20—Innocent VIII, on his death bed, addresses the candidates to his succession.

The pope is seen lying on his bed, very weak, and receiving the Last Rites. We understand that the race to his succession will soon commence. This sequence is of extreme importance because it introduces three key characters (plus one, Orsini, whose relevance will be restricted to the first episode only): the protagonist Rodrigo Borgia, his main rival Della Rovere and the mediator Sforza. Each movement, posture and word is planned with extreme care.

What we see/hear	What it communicates
After the Last Rites, the members of the conclave are invited to pay their respects to the dying pope. The room is accessible from both sides of the bed, so we see the cardinals appearing from both the left and the right side	The two access sides symbolize what Rodrigo will have to face. On his side, situations and characters he can handle easily (Orsini, as we shall see), on the other, situations and characters he will have to fight or persuade (Della Rovere and Sforza, respectively)

What we see/hear	What it communicates
Rodrigo, who is now vice-chancellor, is the first to appear	Rodrigo is the most important character in the series
Rodrigo also comes in a moment before Innocent VIII invites everybody in the room: he quietly leans into check if the time is right, but also to make sure that he is the first	Sneaking into the room first and uninvited proves his ambition, and also his inclination not to play by the rules
After the pope openly invites everybody, Rodrigo nods towards the other cardinals, giving them permission to join	Rodrigo shows his leadership attitude and desire to be in charge
The sentence Innocent VIII employs to invite the cardinals is "You are afraid to enter, but you must!"	By having already entered before such words, Rodrigo proves us that he is not "afraid"
After Rodrigo, from the same side of the room, we see Orsini. While Rodrigo's facial expression looks cautious but not fearful, Orsini looks intimidated	This is the first indication of Orsini's weakness. He comes from the same side of Rodrigo, but, indeed from "behind his back", and he is visibly shorter and older: it is a proof that he is Borgia's enemy, but also that he is not as strong as the latter. Moreover, his entrance is shown for less than three seconds: an evidence of his secondary importance in the story
The third to appear is Cardinal Sforza, the one who will become Borgia's ally and future vice-chancellor	He enters from the other side of the room, symbolizing the fact that Borgia has not yet won his support (at this point Sforza is a strong candidate for the succession of Innocent). His entrance lasts more than 3 s, showing a more relevant role in the story
As everybody else joins in (there will be 14 cardinals in the room), the dying pope calls them by name. When Sforza is named, we see him again, and he is alone in the frame. As Orsini is named, we see him behind Borgia, and not entirely in focus. Both bow towards the pope	The difference in framing is again a statement of the gap in relevance between the two
As Borgia is called, he is the only one who also speaks to the pope ("Your holiness!")	We have seen Sforza as more relevant than Orsini, but now we see Borgia as more relevant than the two of them together
The fourth name the pope calls is that of Della Rovere: we had not seen him entering, but as he, too, bows, he is already in the room and the camera stays on him for no less than six seconds. Needless to say, he is on the opposite side of the room than Borgia. Of these four characters, thus, Borgia is shown first, Orsini second but shortly, Sforza third but longer, and Della Rovere last	Della Rovere is very important and he is going to be Rodrigo's main enemy. Cognition studies tell us that the first and the last items of any list are the most likely to be remembered. For example, if we are trying to convince an audience of something, we should make sure that the most important points are placed at the beginning and at the end of a speech. Equally, when we must criticize a colleague or an employee, the best strategy is to place the criticism in the middle of two positive comments, so that our interlocutor will not get the feeling that he was really criticized. Something like: "Thank you for such a careful job (positive comment), there are this and this things that should be fixed (criticism), but I must say you exceeded expectations (positive comment again)". Thus, by placing Borgia first and Della Rovere last, the series makes an open statement that these two will be *the* rivals in the succession to the papal throne. Sforza, as we said, gets his third place in importance by being shown more extensively and more on focus than Orsini
Immediately after his bow, Della Rovere looks up to meet the stare of his enemy Borgia: he has a slightly timorous face, but also a challenging one. The montage then switches to Borgia, who returns the challenging gaze, but with greater self-confidence	We understand here that Borgia is the more evil of the two, and while Della Rovere might have some genuine motif behind his desire to ascend to the papal throne, Borgia has in mind only power and ambition
After the two exchange hostile eye contact, we have a third close-up—on Sforza, of course. He is not challenging anybody, but looking at both sides. We see his eyes rolling on his right, towards Della Rovere, and then on his left, towards Borgia	Sforza looks like he is in the process of deciding which side he should support, probably aware that he will not be able to win the election himself
The three close-ups are shown while the dying pope says these prophetic words: "You will fight like cats and dogs over this corpse I leave, for this throne of St. Peter!"	As the pope makes that statement, the actual *cats and dogs* of his warning are shown

What we see/hear	What it communicates
The pope continues: "But it [the papal throne] was pure once! We have all sullied it with our greed and lechery [Borgia and, right after, a concerned Della Rovere are shown, as "greed and lechery" are mentioned]"	The correspondence between the pope's words and the two rivals' faces show that the race to power will be ruthless and with no holds barred
Factually expressing his last wish, the pope concludes: "Which of you will wash it clean?" At this point, we see Della Rovere breathing in anticipation and quickly gathering his thoughts to advance his candidature as the one who will purify the church. As he is opening his mouth to speak, Borgia cuts in, in perfectly calm "political old fox" mode: "It shall be cleansed, Your Holiness, with the tears we shed for you—I swear before the living God!" Another quick look at a surprised Della Rovere shows that he has suffered a blow from Borgia's comment: 1-0 to the Spanish vice-chancellor	Rodrigo wins this first round, which tells us that he is more cold-hearted and more agile than his enemy. Being a period drama, the series does not need to conceal the fact that Borgia, indeed, will become pope (we know it from history, already). Therefore, there is no intention to create uncertainty in this rivalry, but rather to show its dynamics, explain why Borgia will win the election, and why Della Rovere will be his fiercest enemy throughout the whole series
In a strategic move Della Rovere remains silent, knowing that this is just the beginning of a long war. Orsini, on the contrary, reacts in anger: "You swear thus? A Spanish murrano? A white Moor?" Borgia cuts in with "As vice chancellor, I swear before the living God!" to which other cardinals quickly follow ("and so do I, Your Holiness!")	Once again, Orsini demonstrates his psychological subordination to his enemy. This accusation is not only inadequate in a context like that (there is a pope passing away, after all), but it also gives Borgia an opportunity to score another point with his response. And indeed the other cardinals follow him, realizing that this is the right thing to do in front of a dying pope. In other words, if Della Rovere has only lost a battle (and he knows it), Orsini shows that he has already lost the war
While all the cardinals jump on Borgia's bandwagon, promising to clean up the church, Della Rovere falls to his knees, gently grabs the pope's hand and pronounces a less diplomatic and more heartfelt "The glory of our Holy Mother Church will be restored in my lifetime". Borgia's face is now shown as more preoccupied	Della Rovere feels that he now has to say something to stand out from the crowd as at least a worthy competitor for his Spanish enemy. Rodrigo's facial expression shows that he realizes that Della Rovere will be the tough cookie

4. 04:20–06:45—Lucrezia catches Cesare sleeping with a woman, and then the two siblings have a conversation.

After the introduction of four important characters, and such themes like power and ambition, two more equally relevant characters, and the themes of sex, incest and intrigues, follow.

What we see/hear	What it communicates
The scene of the dying pope concludes with the camera zooming out in high angle position from the point of view of the archway of the room. The roundish shape of the arc is symbolically cross-faded with another circular shape, that of one bedroom window of the Borgias' palace, where Rodrigo's son Cesare is having sex with an unknown woman	The cross fading is obviously meant to show the connected destiny of the Borgias' family, but also the common themes of sex and power (which will characterize both Rodrigo and Cesare—and in fact Lucrezia too)
Spying from the outside of the window can be seen Rodrigo's daughter and Cesare's younger sister Lucrezia	Lucrezia's curiosity seems to indicate that she wants to learn "how these things work", but is also an indication of her not-exactly-sisterly attraction to her brother
Cesare and the woman are shown in intimacy for more than 20 s	This is a quite extended segment, by usual standards, and it aims at proving that erotism is going to play an important role in the story, which is not to say that it doesn't in the majority of the contemporary series. However, we all know there is a difference between showing erotically charged sequences as simple narrative expedients, and showing them as actual themes within the story
Cesare and her lover have terminated the coitus and he tells her "there is a door behind… leads to the street". During this and the previous sequence we hardly get to see the girl's face	There is no doubt this was a one-night stand, and that the girl is just "one of many" in Cesare's life. The young lover is quickly dismissed and the girl must disappear discreetly via the back door
While Cesare gets dressed, the girl notices his cassock, and finally understands that he is actually a cleric. Cesare replies that at night he gets to be what he wants to be, while during the day he is committed to his clerical role	The fact that the girl had not understood Cesare's occupation at the time of their meeting shows that the latter often goes around *incognito*

What we see/hear	What it communicates
As she steps down from her spying spot, Lucrezia makes a noise that prompts Cesare to immediately leave the room (forgetting his lover at once) and jokingly chase his beloved sister through the yard of the palace. He shouts "Sister!" and she laughingly replies, "I spy a lady… another one!"	For the few of us who have not yet understood, Lucrezia is here introduced as Cesare's sister, and therefore Rodrigo's daughter Then, by pronouncing her own line, Lucrezia informs us once again of Cesare's "womanizing" inclination. The "catch me if you can" game shows that their relationship is very close and playful, but also that they seek for opportunities for physical contact. The fact that Cesare completely forgets about the girl in his room shows that there is no doubt in his mind on who is the absolute priority in his attentions
Cesare finally catches Lucrezia; they hug and cheerfully fall together on the courtyard's flowerbed. They lie very close to each other, in a position that bears an uncanny resemblance to sexual intercourse	The dynamics of this interaction, from this point on, particularly the interpersonal distance, suggests very clearly that the two of them have much more than a brother-sister feeling going on. The way they look at each other is of a clear romantic nature: faces are close, they constantly look up and down to each other's eyes and lips, as if they could kiss at any moment, they caress each other, their conversation has often double-entendre tones ("Don't you love God, Cesare?"—she asks; "More than I love you?"—he replies). Expectations for an incestuous relationship are set from the very start, and will be a leitmotif throughout the whole series
While Lucrezia and Cesare talk, we learn that the latter does not really have any "calling" for the clerical occupation, that he has to do so only to please his father, and that this situation will get even worse should he get elected to papacy	We realize, here as well as in other points of the first episode (some of which we shall mention), that some dialogues are not really, or at least not only, meant to develop the story as such, but mostly to give us the opportunity to learn more about its background. Obviously Cesare and Lucrezia know already what they are telling each other: their repetition is mostly meant to inform us
During the conversation, and through her gazes, Lucrezia appears rather naïve, but already there is a hint of the "naughty girl"	We have a feeling that she is much more intelligent and cunning than she likes to appear. We will soon receive a confirmation of this
The conversation ends with Cesare saying that the chances for their father to be elected are in the hands of God, but when Lucrezia expresses her hopes that he wins in order to be able to wear "a beautiful white veil crowned with pearls" for his coronation, Cesare concludes "God may need some help, then"	We understand that Cesare will be a key player in bribing the cardinals into voting for his father

5. 06:45–08:25—The pope dies. Rodrigo and Cesare meet.

The pope is dead and the cardinals are paying their respects to his body. Cesare quickly joins his father to go through a plan to bribe the cardinals into voting for Rodrigo.

What we see/hear	What it communicates
Cesare arrives at the Apostolic Palace in a hurry. The news of the dying pope has reached him: it is time to plan Rodrigo's election	Cesare's zeal shows his loyalty and sense of duty towards his father. He may be a womanizer and may have a weakness for his sister, as we have seen previously, but we now learn that this is no hindrance to his skills, determination and commitment
Rodrigo pays homage to the dead pope by specifically kissing his ring. Next, Della Rovere simply bows	Once more: it is only material wealth and power that Rodrigo is after. Della Rovere's greed is much less extrovert, and his intentions apparently purer
After performing his duty, Rodrigo quickly joins his son and starts plotting. They walk rapidly down the palace corridor: Rodrigo has a hand on Cesare's shoulder and walks slightly behind him	The posture and the contact symbolizes Cesare's subordination to his father. That hand on the shoulder reminds us of a dog leash, or a hand controlling a marionette. By walking slightly behind Cesare, Rodrigo shows that he is the mastermind of the plan, while Cesare is "sent on the frontline". The fast pace of their walk means of course that there is no time to waste
Rodrigo repeats somewhat pedantically the various steps of the plan to Cesare, who is visibly annoyed, as he knows them all too well	Rodrigo is anxious and will not tolerate any mistake. He wants to be 100% sure that everything is planned to perfection

What we see/hear	What it communicates
Cesare interrupts the conversation by saying "I know what to do!" and tries to leave, but Rodrigo, quite energetically, grabs him by a shoulder and pins him to the corridor wall	Cesare knows what he is doing and does not like to feel patronized. Rodrigo still has the power and reestablishes the hierarchy
Rodrigo whispers "I have waited a lifetime for this moment! We will go over it again". The full description of the plan follows: Rodrigo does most of the talking, but Cesare often completes his sentences, showing once more that he knows everything up to the tiniest bit	Like the conversation between Cesare and Lucrezia, this one, too, is meant to give us more background. Now we know in detail what Rodrigo and Cesare will do in order to ensure the former's victory
As details of the bribery plan become clear Cesare challenges Rodrigo, with quiet sarcasm: "They call it simony, father!". Rodrigo moves the right arm as one does to chase away a fly from his face, and says "God will forgive us!"	Once more, we are reminded of Rodrigo's ruthless ambition and complete lack of spirituality. Dismissing his sins as he would the annoying insect implies that he does not really believe in God's punishment, and besides, he couldn't care less. Cesare's challenge, too, has nothing to do with spirituality: we can see that he will have no problem doing what his father asks
Rodrigo continues to stare pointedly at Cesare: "But I will not forgive failure, from you or your brother!" Cesare lowers his sight, in an attempt to escape the reproach, but Rodrigo grabs him again and straightens his head towards him: "Am I understood?" A resentful but clearly intimidated Cesare replies, "We will not fail you, father!" Rodrigo looks at him suspiciously, as if to ponder his sincerity, then nods in approval and kisses him: "Go now!" Cesare quickly leaves	Rodrigo's determination and intimidating power over Cesare is reaffirmed time and again. Cesare is his own man, which will be proved repeatedly during the series, although he clearly has a complex towards his father. When reproached he cannot hold his father's gaze and looks away Rodrigo fuels his insecurities by staring him, as if to assess whether he can trust him or not (he knows he can, of course), and it is only when he dismisses him ("Go now!") that Cesare is allowed to leave. Just a minute earlier, he had said "I know what to do!"

6. 08:25–10:45—Juan and Vannozza are introduced.

The last characters of this pre-narrateme are introduced, and with them some additional themes: the rivalry between Juan and Cesare, and in general the inner frustrations they both experience in their respective roles; the "life in the shadow" condition of Vannozza and the young kids. Another theme, the "outsiderness" of the Borgias as a Spanish family aspiring to papacy, is reaffirmed with more efficacy after Orsini had quickly introduced it, with his earlier resentful comment to Rodrigo.

What we see/hear	What it communicates
Out in the streets, Juan enters the scene from right to left of the screen, and is brutally pushed by a gang of three Romans who tell him to go back to Spain, and also insult him in various ways Juan reacts, and the quarrel degenerates into a duel	All the other characters had an "entrance in style" (Rodrigo as an ambitious man, Cesare as a womanizer, Lucrezia as a curious girl, etc.), but Juan makes his debut by cutting a poor figure. From his first appearance we can see that he is going to be the tragic figure of the series, a younger brother of Cesare, who is also a "lesser" brother. The movement from right to left is symbolically "backwards": this is the man who will be more a problem than a solution The theme of intolerance towards the Borgias as foreigners is reintroduced after Orsini had name called Rodrigo at the beginning of the episode. Now we learn that the problem is deeper, extended to the Borgia family, and that one factor animating their determination and thirst for success is a desire for redemption and acceptance
Juan fights, but not well enough, and is soon outnumbered by the gang and quickly finds himself in grave danger	Juan is a good fighter, although not outstanding fighter. Later, we will learn that Rodrigo, but not upstanding charge of the papal army, but it is apparent that he is not cut out for the job. Moreover, engaging in a duel with three armed men is foolhardy and shows that he is hot-tempered and fails to calculate risks
Cesare intervenes, showing better skills with the sword, but also avoiding the fight. He apologies to the three Romans on the behalf of his brother	Cesare is clearly a better fighter than his younger brother, and we understand that he would be the better army commander. More importantly, his decision to apologize with the Romans, while knowing that Juan was openly insulted, shows his greater rationality and practical sense
While leaving the scene, an annoyed Cesare says, "I should have let them do it!"	We understand that Cesare had defended his brother out of family duty only: more than by the Romans' insults, he is annoyed by the fact that Juan constantly gets himself into trouble
Juan replies, "Kill me? Your younger brother? Our father would never have forgiven you!"	Just like Cesare had called Lucrezia "sister!" for our benefit, Juan introduces himself as Cesare's "younger brother". The way he formulates his reply, moreover, suggests the dynamics of the family relationship. Juan knows that he is the black sheep of the family, but that he is also Rodrigo's pet. Cesare's subordination to his father also implies that he has the duty to rescue Juan on more than one occasion, but that he lacks real affection for his brother
They both go home: Cesare walks faster, a few meters before his brother who follows him	This shows both Cesare's leadership and lack of desire to communicate with his brother

What we see/hear	What it communicates
At home, Vannozza, Lucrezia and the youngest kid Goffredo are playing cards, seemingly unaffected by the pope's death and the possibility that Rodrigo may be the new one. As Cesare and Juan join, Vannozza quietly expresses her concern that, should he become pope, Rodrigo will not care for his family anymore. Cesare hints that, without corruption, he will not be able to win, and Vannozza appears to believe (or rather to hope) that the election is in the hands of God	The role of Vannozza as simple caretaker of her and Rodrigo's kids is here defined Vannozza's calm attitude suggests she knows her place, and is not intending to fight for more consideration. She is, however, worried about being abandoned, should Rodrigo be elected pope. As a cardinal, he is officially distanced from his family—as a pope, however, he may completely disappear We understand that Vannozza loves Rodrigo, but that she has no hope of being loved in return by this very ambitious man who, among other things (as we shall find out later in the series), is as much a womanizer as Cesare Finally, by stating that the election is in the hands of God, she shows her estrangement to any plot and scheme that instead the rest of the family (at least the adult members) is involved in Speaking in terms of aesthetic conventions in AVCC, Vannozza also has the features of the modest, unassuming woman—the opposite of the *femme fatale*
Cesare helps Goffredo to choose the right card. Incidentally, the latter is shown as much younger than Lucrezia: in reality, the two are separated by just one year	Cesare shows care for his family, and probably acts as a surrogate father for Goffredo, due to Rodrigo's absence By the very little exposure received by Goffredo, in terms of filming and close-ups in particular, we understand that he is not bound to play any relevant role in the story, at least for a while

7. 10:45–12:10—A tense conversation between Rodrigo and Della Rovere.

The confrontation between the two rivals is verbalized for the first time. Della Rovere practically "declares war" to Rodrigo, but the latter is not intimidated.

What we see/hear	What it communicates
Rodrigo is walking in the corridor of the Apostolic Palace. Della Rovere, sitting on the side, greets him. Rodrigo answers politely, but as he is proceeding further Della Rovere tells him that were he a different man he would have voted for him. Rodrigo stops to listen: while the corridor is well lit by the sunlight, they both stand in shadow spots	Della Rovere wants to make his hostility to Rodrigo explicit. The fact that they both stand in the shadow, despite most of the corridor is sunfilled is symbolical of two men who do not deserve, nor really aiming at, God's light. While Della Rovere wants to be the "good guy" in the fight, this sequence makes it clear that both men are far removed from spirituality and morality
Della Rovere acknowledges Rodrigo's political and organizational abilities, but he also tells him that the Church has other needs. Rodrigo sits down few meters away from his rival and asks "and they would be…", Della Rovere says: "Honesty. [short pause] Probity. [longer pause] Goodness."	Della Rovere shows to have perfectly understood Rodrigo, picturing him exactly the way he is pictured to us by the series: a formidable, yet ruthless and immoral, "politician" Della Rovere, as we said, wants to appear as the "good one", the one who can provide what he has defined as "the other needs" of the Church Significantly, as he mentions those other needs Rodrigo asks him to elaborate, since—it appears—he genuinely ignores what else, besides political and organizational skills, is required from a pope No need to explain that the fact that they sit well apart from each other is a metaphor of their rivalry
"You find me lacking in those qualities?"—asks Rodrigo. "Yes!—Della Rovere replies without hesitation—And so I shall fight you. To the end and beyond that, if need be, with any means at my disposal"	This is the official declaration of war from Della Rovere to Rodrigo. In his alleged fight for morality, Della Rovere announces that he is also ready to be immoral ("with any means at my disposal") and that he will not give up ("To the end, and beyond that"). Evidently, this is an alert for us as well: we are bound to see Della Rovere for a long time in the series, and the fight will be blood sport
Rodrigo, calmly absorbing the blow, replies, "I do tend to win whatever battles I fight". He then stands up and adds: "But what talk we of fighting? It is all in God's hands!". He crosses himself while looking at his enemy in contempt, wishes him a good night and leaves. Della Rovere looks worried	Knowing he has to come back to his enemy with equal strength and without showing intimidation, Rodrigo chooses two strategies. First, he announces that he is a winner by nature (implying also that the means at *his* disposal are stronger and wealthier); and second he delivers another consummate politician statement, diplomatically pretending (not without a hint of irony) that the election is in God's hands Incidentally, by using Vannozza's same expression, he emphasizes the great difference between him and her: Vannozza *meant* what she said—Rodrigo just uses the expression for ironic purposes As Rodrigo walks on, Della Rovere's worried look hints that he is aware to have lost this second confrontation as well

8. 12:10–19:10—First three rounds of the election and consequent events.

The first round of the election produces no winner. Rodrigo has few votes and must intensify his efforts at bribery.

The second round goes better for him, but still no one has the necessary majority. More bribery follows. After the third round in which Rodrigo improves though not enough to win, he makes a pact with Sforza which earns him support and votes.

What we see/hear	What it communicates
The votes of the first round are announced: Rodrigo has only four votes, Sforza has eight, Della Rovere seven and Orsini six. There is no winner because a candidate requires more than 50% of the overall vote Rodrigo looks disappointed, but his expression hints more at "there is a lot to do, still!" rather than "I am going to lose" Della Rovere, meanwhile, looks satisfied	Rodrigo realizes how much bribery is needed Him aside, the results hints at three conclusions: – Della Rovere is strong, but not overwhelmingly so, – Orsini poses no threat, – Sforza, the winner of this first round, has enough of a following to tip the scale in either direction
Rodrigo begins bribing the cardinals. During lunch he sits by an old cardinal who complains about the food served inside the palace during the conclave, and who had to fight, in a past election, for the right to order tastier dishes from outside. By offering his own soup and a taste of a fine wine produced in his Spanish vineyards, Rodrigo quickly wins the sympathies of his senior colleague. He now knows that this is one cardinal who can be easily corrupted	The sequence shows that the bribery will be executed in many ways, and that there will be cardinals easy to buy and others more "expensive" We also learn that some food will arrive from outside
Rodrigo gathers information on what meals the various cardinals have ordered from outside. His plan is to ask Cesare and Juan to intercept those dishes and add written messages with offers of gold and properties for three targeted cardinals, including the one he shared his meal with, of course He sends a messenger dove to Cesare with all the instructions Cesare and Juan execute the order and hide the messages where the cardinals can find them while eating their dinners: inside a baked pig's mouth, in a rabbit broth, etc.	The sequence shows how elaborate a plan Rodrigo has devised, and how carefully he and his sons execute it
The cardinals find the messages, and the reaction on their faces show that the bribery was successful	The cardinals' reactions to the messages reinforce the image of the Church has a corrupt environment, where very little is left to spirituality and morality At a more symbolic level, it is interesting to remark that these messages are placed inside opulent meat dishes: the Church represented in this series has clearly nothing Franciscan about itself
The second round of vote still has no winner. Rodrigo has now garnered eight votes, but Della Rovere has now reached ten (clearly he has been performing a similar job as his rival). The real loser of this round (given that Orsini is now not even mentioned—but we had no doubt about it) is Sforza, who now has only five votes Rodrigo is again disappointed, but far from defeated: he quickly stands up, ready to take more action Who looks defeated, instead, is Sforza, of whom this time we see the reaction (in the same frame as Rodrigo): his look hints that he has realized he is not powerful enough to compete with the other two Note: this sequence is rather symmetric to that of the first round of votes, including the exact same length (25 s)	The dynamics of this election are now quite evident: the struggle is between Della Rovere and Borgia. They both earn more votes than the first round, but Rodrigo has four more, and Della Rovere only three. While the latter still leads, it is clear that Rodrigo has the better chance of corrupting his colleagues Once more, Rodrigo's reaction has more to do with his preoccupation of what needs to be done next, rather than his fear of losing Sforza, meanwhile, understands that he cannot win: the look on his face tells us that he realizes he needs to change strategy, and that he must profit as much as he can from his position as the third force
Rodrigo sends another dove to his sons, announcing that they are "in sight of the goal", but they need to double their efforts. He sends Juan to his cleric properties outside Roma, instructing him to strip them bare of any gold, ornament and precious objects	We understand that Rodrigo has more shots in his locker, but also (due to the vandalistic nature of his request) that he is fast running out of options This election means everything to him, and he seems to be ready to put all he has in it
Juan happily obliges and we see him returning with mules laden with bags	Again, Juan confirms his petty nature when he delights in ransacking the properties. The Borgias are not exactly examples of moral rectitude, but Juan in particular seems to be the lowest of them all
Lucrezia sees Cesare in the act of sending back the dove and asks him why. Cesare wittingly replies that the dove is both a symbol of uncorrupted soul and a messenger of corruption Lucrezia realizes immediately that the corruption her brother is talking about relates to buying the votes for his father's election Cesare says that she is "criminally well-informed", but he also hopes that her soul is still pure Lucrezia wants to know more, but Cesare refuses to reply on accounts that she knows too much already "You're wrong. I know too little!"—says a much less naïve-looking Lucrezia	This sequence is meant to show that Lucrezia is much more than the naughty but innocent girl who spies on her brother and plays "catch me if you can" with him We now understand that she is very intelligent, and by complaining that she knows too little, she is claiming her place in the family schemes We have already seen Cesare as being morbidly attached to his sister and very protective towards his family: he now wants to preserve Lucrezia from "the dark side" he and Juan share with their father

What we see/hear	What it communicates
The third round happens faster than the previous two. We discover that Borgia now has ten votes (two more cardinals were successfully bribed) and that Sforza has four. We don't know how many Della Rovere has at this point, but we know that no one as yet has the majority	The pattern is now clear; any more details are superfluous to the plot We know that Rodrigo is slowly climbing the steps that Sforza is no longer a threat and that Della Rovere is the main opponent, regardless of the votes he might have garnered at this point
In a subtle, rhetorically rich private conversation, Rodrigo and Sforza agree to form an alliance. Pretending to talk impersonally, Sforza hints that he could give Rodrigo his votes at the condition that he makes him vice-chancellor. Rodrigo in turn, still talking impersonally, wants to make sure that Sforza will be a loyal vice-chancellor. He receives the necessary reassurance from his colleague and concludes: "I would say we have an understanding!"	As both characters show off their remarkable rhetoric and diplomatic skills, we understand how like-minded they are, and how productive the alliance will be

9. 19:10–22:25—Fourth round of the election: this time Rodrigo wins.

After the fourth round, the legendary white smoke can be seen issuing from the palace chimney: Borgia has indeed won. The legitimacy of his victory is soon questioned, but dismissed by the new pope in a brilliant oration. The hilarious *testes ET pendentes* check is required.

What we see/hear	What it communicates
The results of the fourth round are announced: Della Rovere has seven votes, and Borgia fourteen. The chairman announces that Borgia "has the required majority". Rodrigo has hardly the time to realize what has just happened that Della Rovere immediately comments: "Correction! Borgia has *bought* the required majority!"	Rodrigo wins, but his enemies do not intend to acknowledge the victory. We understand that the conflict with Della Rovere has just begun, and that it will continue after this election
Rodrigo remains calm and rebuts the accusations—first with authority and then with irony. As the ever-emotional Orsini remarks how shameful it is that the papal throne was bought by a Spaniard, Borgia replies "You would prefer it had been bought by an Italian?"	Rodrigo is in control of the situation. He knows that there is very little his enemies can do at this point, so he can afford to play "cat and mouse"
Increasingly annoyed—or rather bored—by the hopeless accusations he is receiving, Rodrigo decides to land two fatal knockout punches (especially against Orsini and Della Rovere) to bring an end to the matter and show who is boss He begins by saying that, given these suspicions, his first act as a pope will be "to institute an inquiry into the elective process"—knowing far too well that he will be the ultimate, untouchable judge of the investigation and that everybody had done his fair share of corruption, so they would be easily found guilty. We see Orsini taking a deep breath, showing us that he had certainly not been immune to the practice Then, he promises that his second act will be to appoint a vice-chancellor, with "the greatest office and the greatest income" (a close-up to Sforza, who has been already promised the position, is seen at this point), adding that—while the obvious choices for the job would Della Rovere or Orsini—he cannot possibly appoint someone who questions his right to be pope. Defeated on all accounts, Della Rovere and Orsini apologize. "That was never my intention!" the former says coldly; "nor was it mine", adds the latter with a nervous grin Triumphant, Rodrigo vigorously kisses the two enemies on their lips (in the dynamics of kissing this reminds us of the Judah-Jesus episode rather than any form of affection), and concludes, "Shall we proceed, then?"	The events depicted so far help us to appreciate just how clever and cunning Rodrigo is in his quest to *achieve* power, and this sequence shows us how clever and cunning he will be in *maintaining* such power from thenceforth. He is calm, cynical, and sarcastic and most of all is perfectly aware of the written and unwritten rules of the game He knows that everybody else did what he did, and he uses that to his advantage. He knows that, despite their claims of purity and honesty, also their rivals had equally-greedy motives behind their actions, and the simple threat of not granting any of them the high salary of a vice-chancellor is enough to put them in their place Nevertheless, it is clear by their reactions that neither Orsini nor Della Rovere is about to give up, and accept defeat. We can also imagine that they will be even angrier when the post of vice-chancellor is granted to Sforza. As usual, Della Rovere's cold and Orsini's heated reactions show without a shadow of doubt who will be the real threat for the Borgias With this sequence we realize that Rodrigo has all the skills to hold his throne, and that he has many enemies; the battle is joined

What we see/hear	What it communicates
One last procedure is needed before the newly elected pope can claim the full right to sit at the throne: the so-called *testes et pendentes* examination. Put simply, both of his testicles and his penis need to be seen in order to verify that the pope is a full male A hyper-confident and—as we know already—sexually active Rodrigo "is happy to comply" In the midst of goliardic and of course bitter jokes from the other cardinals, Rodrigo ironically exhorts the assistant to hurry up with the test ("Go on… the suspense is killing them!"). The assistant palpates Rodrigo's intimate parts and confirms that, yes, the new pope *habet duos testiculos et bene pendentes*. There follows loud applause, accompanied by remarks from the ever-sarcastic Borgia Needless to say, this is the most amusing sequence of the entire episode, and arguably of the series. If ever proof was needed, Jeremy Irons stands out as an actor capable of performing pretty much any mood and genre	We can definitely interpret this sequence as "comic relief". By semi-mocking an admittedly risible item of papal bureaucracy, we are exposed to numerous hilarious situations: the cardinals' gossiping around Rodrigo's virility, the self-assured humor by which Rodrigo goes through the check, the intrinsic absurdity of the whole procedure, and so forth The tension builds over 20 min, assisted by the tight pace of narration, giving this humorous sequence a "chill-out" post-cathartic value It is ironic that the procedure investigates the only thing that cannot possibly be in doubt about Rodrigo: he is male alright, and the very organ being now checked is one that he exercises on a very regular basis, despite the obvious contradiction with his priestly role. Not only has he sired numerous offspring, but—as we shall discover in the course of the series—he will bed a succession of obliging females Somehow—the message seems to be here—the Church keeps itself busy with the most irrelevant questions, and systematically fails to establish effective measures against serious issues, such as dishonesty, corruption and greed
As per millennial tradition, white smoke is diffused from the palace chimney. The crowd gathered in St. Peter's square exults and celebrate	The white smoke, besides picturing the conventional announcement that a pope has finally been elected, serves also the purpose of "marker" of the story. With this sign, we understand that "stage 0" of the Proppian process is terminated. We have now been fully exposed to the "initial situation" and the actual story (Rodrigo's tenure as pope) may commence

2.2 The M.A.P. Model

As already mentioned in the introduction, in the course of this book you will be exposed to a hybrid form of dissemination style, somewhere in between the scientific monograph and the course textbook. The reason for this is the intention to shape my theoretical reflections on the topic of audiovisuality in a way that would be consistent in structure and—most of all—crystal clear in formulation. When one has similar tasks at hand, it is vital that the entire work is consolidated in an overarching model that provides internal coherence to all the assembled information and material, avoiding that lost-in-space (and definitely not teaching-friendly) kind of feeling generated by a compilation of patchwork-like disarticulated concepts.

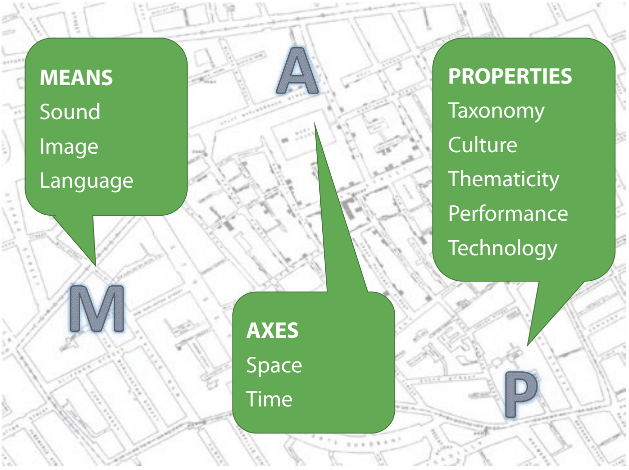
Moreover, and I mean this seriously, the model must also be harmonic in the aesthetic sense. I have a fond recollection of a conversation with a mathematician several years ago. I was writing a research article and had reached a point where I needed to summarize my theory in a graphic scheme that would also imply a mathematical formula. Since my relationship with mathematics is as peaceful as Henry VIII's relation with marriage, I turned to this mathematician for advice. I explained what I wanted to do, and asked if there was a way to frame those ideas in a formula. The next day she came up with two possible solutions, and told me that both were fine. I asked her which one she would pick if she were me, and without hesitation she pointed to the second one. I inquired why, and surprisingly she replied, "because it's more beautiful to look at!" That formula was indeed shorter in length and looked more symmetric in the signs employed, so it was beautiful in a Pythagorean kind of way. I could hardly believe that a mathematician would actually care about aesthetic beauty in a formula, but her emphatic "Of course I care!" left no doubt that she meant what she said.

That episode was a revelation for me, and since then I have always followed that philosophy: if it works for a mathematician, it should definitely work for a humanist/art researcher as well. In time I also developed the conviction that some theoretical models are difficult because they are ugly, but I have to admit this is a bit of a stretch.

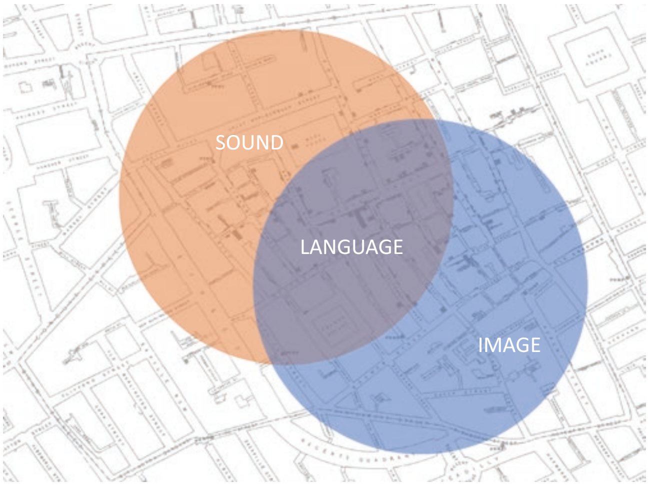
Anyway, my point is that the present section will introduce the very model that frames all the notions and analytical hints that follow from now on, and that I have done my best to craft it in a way that is both good-looking and good sounding, starting with its name. I shall therefore use the acronym "M.A.P." in reference to the idea of "mapping" AV communication and to give a sense of direction to the various notions assembled. The initials stand for Means, Axes and Properties (see also ◘ Fig. 2.8).

The basic premise is that we can understand AVCC through three main criteria:

1. **Means**: the "tools" of AV communication, that is, **images**, **sounds** and **language**—what we hear/listen to and what we see/read. The category of sounds



◘ **Fig. 2.8** The M.A.P. model



◘ **Fig. 2.9** AV means and their relation: language is situated in the middle of the Venn diagram, as it has both a sonic (spoken language) and visual (written language) dimension

includes any type of music, the noises that are audible in the text and the so-called **soundscape** (the totality of sounds that are naturally or artificially produced in a given environment). The category of images includes anything that is visible, from characters to inanimate objects, from landscapes to abstract representations. The category of language is situated in the middle, as it has both an audible component (the words that are spoken) and the visible (the words that are written). In principle, thus, the AV means can be represented as a Venn diagram (as you can see from ◘ Fig. 2.9). One important characteristic, here, is that none of them is a compulsory presence in an AVT. There can be sequences with no sound (see silent movies), or with no image such as several beginnings and several endings of AVTs, where the screen in blank and one can only hear sounds, or with no language such as some music videos.

Means will be illustrated in depth in ▶ Chap. 4 of this book.

2. **Axes**: the "dimensions" of AV communication, that is, **time** and **space**. They ideally represent the vertical and horizontal "axes" (hence, the name) of an AVT. As we shall see later the axis of time mostly coincides with the crucial concept of narration, which is indeed an action that is extended in time units, horizontally, while the axis of space mainly overlaps with the equally crucial concept of montage, the editing process of the AV material, which is (albeit more metaphorically) an action that regulates the space of the text in a vertical manner. For example, the editing of a sequence's images implies very much a choice among possible views: a close-up, as opposed to a long shot, means to look at something from near and not from far, and means also a selection of "places" to show: less on the close-up, more on the long shot. Unlike the "means", axes must be always present, as indeed a management of the space and of the time at one's disposal is an unavoidable condition. Even the texts that look like having no montage at all *do* have a montage; and even the ones that look completely alien to any storytelling, do in fact have elements of this.

Axes will be illustrated in depth in ▶ Chap. 3 of this book (*before* means, as you may notice: we shall see why).

3. **Properties**: the way AVTs can operate to convey meanings. When talking about communication in general, we mentioned that within a communication act senders and readers take "roles", and in this respect we made the example of the teacher-student communication, and its possible variation into friend-friend in a bar. In this case, "properties" is the name we give to the possible roles played by the text itself. In this book, we shall identify five main properties: **taxonomy**, **culture**, **thematicity**, **performance** and **technology.**

By "taxonomy" we mean the various typologies of AVT that can be created in relation to the media involved (e.g. a fiction meant for TV as distinguished from one meant for cinema), format (e.g., a newscast as distinguished from a talk-show) and genre (e.g., an action-thriller as distinguished from a costume drama). There are numerous do's and don'ts in the communication strategies that are specific of each taxonomical group and that do not apply to others: issues of length, language employed, structure, purpose, operativity, etc. For example, a series broken down in seasons and episodes require a certain degree of narrative openness that makes audience long for the next episode, while a text meant as a standalone will opt for some kind of closure, even if it is an ambiguous/ambivalent one, as in certain thrillers or more artsy movies.

By "culture", we mean the entire social, ideological, moral, political and indeed cultural choices that characterize the contents of a text. For example, whether the same message may be conveyed in a sympathetic or in a hostile manner has a lot to do with how a given culture, at a given historical period, and in a given place, would respond to that message. Native Americans in Hollywood cinema have always been visually and narratively represented as villains for the first half of the twentieth century, and then—as the revisionist wave kicked in—we started having movies like *Soldier Blue*, *Dances With Wolves*, *Little Big Man* and the likes, where the "Indians" received a much more favorable portrayal.

By "thematicity" we mean the way objects, places, characters, and else, are identified as "topics", that is, elements with a thematic value. For example, locations, either real or reproduced in studios, are an essential component in constructing sense, and very often bear the main responsibility for the credibility of a text. Choosing a given place instead of another for locating a given text is not just the result of an aesthetic assessment, but it usually implies the assignment of a specific significance and meaningfulness in the overall communicative context.

By "performance" we mean *the way* contents are delivered: acting, direction, editing… The exact same message may be delivered in a totally different way, depending on who is delivering it.

By "technology", finally, we mean any property connected to the media and the devices by which the text is produced and delivered. Black and white, color, 2D, 3D, analogical effects, digital effects, high resolution, low resolution, animation, stop-motion, smart TV, valve television set, cinema screen, stereo sound, 5.1 Dolby surround, and so on and so forth.

It is important to note that properties are not classifiable in any objective sense, but they are simply "anything that an author deems fit to employ in a given text". Performances are highly subjective; cultures vary depending on place, social context, period and several other factors; technologies are of different types and get constantly upgraded time after time, and so forth. For this reason, when we will devote a specific section of the book to this topic (▶ Chap. 5), we will simply define general criteria to recognize and assess properties, and we will rather rely on case studies for an actual illustration of (some of) them *in action*.

An effective AVCC can only occur when all these criteria play a more or less relevant part. Another French expression you may want to learn is ***mise en scène***, which belongs to theatre jargon and roughly stands for "staging," or "putting into a scene". The expression, which is also part of film theory, refers to the sum of all the features/elements that a production team places before a camera and within a frame, in order to have a successful representation of what the team has in mind in terms of contents, aesthetics, mood, and so forth. Before *mise en scène* there is the whole process of creating, writing, preparing, and after that there is also post-production, which is normally the process where more things are added, particularly in the areas of montage, technologies, sound, etc. When we combine the before, the during (*mise en scène*) and the after of making an AVT we have full AVCC: we have what we see, what we hear, what is spoken, what is written (criterion 1 of our list); we have time and space (criterion 2); and we have and all the elements pertaining to format, genre, culture, thematicity, performance and technology (criterion 3).

To understand more concretely how the M.A.P. works, let us imagine that an author needs to convey a message like "happiness" through a particular sequence of a particular AVT. How does that work? To begin with, we have three means to pass the message. Acoustically, we may try with the sound of a laughter and/or a cheerful soundtrack; visually, we could opt for the close-up of a person smiling or the image of a sportsperson exulting after winning a game; linguistically, we may have a character saying "I am so happy!" or "what a beautiful day!" or the caption "…and they lived happily ever after". These can be used together or separately, so we could have *at the same time* the smiling face with the cheerful soundtrack and the line "what a beautiful day!" pronounced by the character.

Means are displayed through the axes of time and space, and that needs to be taken care of as well. Time-wise, we may put the happiness in a narrative context, by showing the progress of the character from having a serious problem to actually solving it, and therefore being happy about it. A previous sequence may show the character fearing to die of some disease, and then medical analyses show that the character is out of danger, hence the smile, the soundtrack and all the rest. Space-wise, we may occupy the scene with edited images of happiness-inspiring items: the camera may show in alternation the character's smile, the doctor giving the good news, the sunny day outside, some children playing in the yard… all images that multimodally reinforce the idea of happiness.

Finally, means and axes are assigned some properties that do not modify their roles but certainly provide diversity in how the message is actually conveyed. At taxonomy level, the text may actually say "happiness" in a direct way within a text like a documentary or a talk-show (e.g., someone says specifically "I am very happy!") or it may say it in a more metaphorical-connotative way, if we are in a more fictional text, "What a beautiful day!" This does not straightaway inform us of the character's happiness, but implies it by drawing attention to something a sad person may not care for, and by creating a significant parallelism between the sunny day and the character's "sunny" mood. Or, specifically at genre level: the tough guy of some western or action movie, may simply convey his happiness with a quick assertive look, while the protagonist of a romantic drama may need to be more sentimental about it.

At the cultural level, the happiness conveyed by the character in, say, a Scandinavian AVT will differ significantly from the character in, say, a Latin-American one, in terms of body language, facial expressions and proxemics.

At the thematic level, we have mentioned the filling of the space with happiness-inspiring elements: so, where are we, who is in the scene, what is the surrounding environment, what colors and shapes do we see, etc.?

Contextualizing the "happy character" within a sunny day, in the vicinity of children playing, wearing perhaps clothes of a warm color, and so forth, are all potentially thematic properties. In a word: what *idea* of happiness is here meant to be represented?

As for performance: how is the scene directed? How is it filmed? How is it acted? How was the soundtrack written? The scene is constructed differently, depending on who is performing it. Let us take actors, for example: let us imagine that the happy character is Jim Carrey: from him, we certainly expect a very "extrovert" and "exuberant" form of happiness, composed of theatrical facial expressions, jumps and gestures in abundance. This is certainly a type of Jim Carrey performance that conveys the message "happiness": anything less than this would make us suspect that the character he portrays is not so happy after all. Let us now imagine that the protagonist of this AVT is Maggie Smith, someone whose very British self-control is the trademark of her acting style regardless of the emotion she is asked to convey: from her, the most we can expect is the polite hint of a smile. Anything more from the likes of Maggie Smith will raise the suspicion that her character might be taking chemical stimulants, instead of simply being happy.

Finally, technology can offer numerous tricks to help convey the message, or, in the subtlest cases, it can also convey it all by itself. One trick could be to filter the image with a grey or similarly depressing color at the time when the character fears for their death, and to apply instead a yellow filter when the good news is delivered. Woody Allen uses this device in *Annie Hall* to mark the difference between the scenes taking place in New York and those in Los Angeles. Alternatively, the image may switch in focus from a more blurred appearance, which mirrors the character's sense of fear and apprehension, to a neater one that mirrors the fact that events acquired a positive "clarity". And so forth.

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3

Axes: Time and Space

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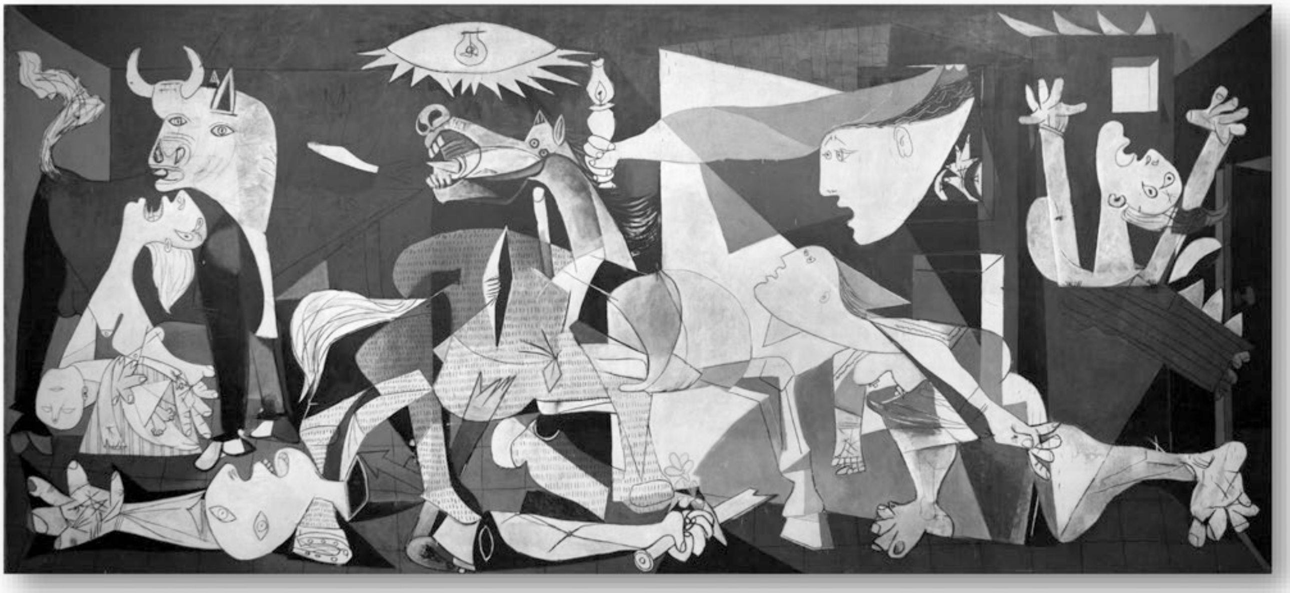
The orders of letters in the acronym M.A.P. suggests that we start from the letter “M” (the “means” of sound, image and language), however I prefer to start with the letter “A” (“axes” of time and space). Having a better awareness of this part when we approach the other two letters of the model is strategically more effective than the other way round.

When we measure the extension of an AVT we usually employ time as a unit. We think of such texts in terms of their length, from about 3–4 min of a music video, to the ca. 45–50 min of a TV series episode, from the few seconds of a commercial to about two hours of a movie. We apply this “time measurement” also with, say, music, but not with a painting or a photograph, which are rather measured in space units. Photos do not have a “length”, but rather a “size”, from the 10 × 15 cm of a standard printed photo, to the monumental size of some advertising poster that covers the whole façade of a building.

All this may of course sound pretty obvious, and yet, if we think less superficially, we realize that time and space are ever-present features in every work of art, without distinction. When we look at a painting, for example, we are not just witnessing a “still” scene, even if it may seem so. A painting is also a story, and as such it moves by time units as well. Let us consider Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* (◘ Fig. 3.1). You may already be aware of the genesis of this masterpiece: Picasso painted it after the Basque town of Guernica was bombed by the German Nazis, the Italian Fascists and the Spanish army of the dictator Franco during the Spanish Civil War in 1937. Shocked by the tragedy, Picasso painted a canvas of the size of a mural (3.49 × 7.76 m) full of explicit and symbolic references to the bombing. In it, we see innocent people (mostly women and children) and also non-human animals (a bull and a horse, two very meaningful species within Spanish traditions) suffering and dying in terror, we see fire, smoke, a light bulb and (as a symbol of hope) a flame-lit lamp. The whole painting is in black and white, an unusual decision that Picasso took in order to give a more realistic tone to the work (making it look rather like photographs, which, in those days, were black and white), but also for conveying the feelings of pain, desperation and fear that more vivid colors would have not suggested so powerfully. All the bodies in the pictures are packed in the limited space and arranged in such a way as to convey the chaos and confusion caused by the explosions.

All of these and many other elements in this beautifully dramatic painting are concentrated in such a way to give us an account of the tragedy and the author’s feelings. In other words, they constitute a **narration**: they “tell us a story”, and like all stories, this one too is developed in time units: there is a civil war, then there is a reaction from authoritative-fascist régimes, then there is an airplane attack with bombs. These bombs hit the town of Guernica and its inhabitants, people suffer and die, and an artist is profoundly upset about this and creates a painting about it. This painting does not only give an account of the events but also communicates through symbols and emotions, and so forth. To observe Picasso’s *Guernica* only by employing visual-spatial elements, such as size, colors or figures, without understanding “what they do”, is to miss a huge part of the meaning of this artwork.

Just as much as images have their own aspects of temporality, AVTs, too, have aspects of spatiality. An obvious aspect consists of the fact that, usually, AVTs portray various places, real or fictional: we can see rooms, houses, cities, countries, planets, and we can also see journeys that go from one place to another without sticking to one only. But this is far from being the end of it. Space in audiovisuality also means that, thanks to the moving image, we have the



◘ **Fig. 3.1** Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*. *[Photo by Laura Estefania Lopez, CC BY-SA 4.0]* opportunity to "map" the items contained in the story in such a way that they make sense, not only for what they do "as time passes", but also for what they are, how they appear, in relation to what, from what perspective, through what point of view, etc.

To understand this concept let us imagine a very simple narration, lasting 20 s or less. Let us say: a student who is late for a lecture enters the classroom, sits down at her desk and then follows the ongoing lecture. Now let us film this sequence. If we were interested only in the "time management", what we would do with our camera is to follow the student for the whole 20 s, from the moment she opens the classroom door to the moment she sits down and listens to the teacher. The camera would probably be on her only, and we would simply "follow her", so to speak.

Let us now make something more interesting: let us not only manage time, but let us manage space too. In other words: let us regard this situation more as a "picture" or a "photograph". What else is there? There is not only the protagonist student: there is a classroom, there is a teacher, there are other students, there is a surrounding environment, objects in it, other things that happen… all these items would not change the sequence of events we set out to describe, but they would give us the opportunity to add much more meaning. Let us say that, among the other students, there is one who is a very good friend of our protagonist, and perhaps another one who does not like her; let us say the teacher is annoyed that the student is late; let us say the classroom is very old and falling apart; and let us say that it is placed in a building at the very center of a big city. Here we have five additional "units of meaning" that are in the same place of the protagonist, but which we were not aware of, previously, when we were only concerned with the time management of the story. These elements have their own "spaces", too. If at this point we film the sequence, we have at least six elements to consider, not just one, and we shall shoot several takes of the story: in one we follow the protagonist, in another we follow her friendly classmate, in another we follow the hostile classmate (or maybe we film the two together), in another we follow the teacher, and so on. Then we need to cleverly edit these takes in order to have a final AVT that takes into account all the meanings: we put the student entering the classroom; then we put the teacher pointing annoyed at his watch as if to tell her "you're late!" then we put the student saying "Sorry!" and quickly heading to her desk; then we put her friendly classmate smiling at her along with the not-so-friendly one who is grimacing; then we put the protagonist while she takes an attentive posture and follows the lecture; then we put a shot of the ceiling of the classroom, revealing numerous crevices and stains of humidity; then finally we add a distinctive noise of cars in a traffic jam throughout the whole sequence (to show that we are indeed in a big city).

What we have just done goes by the name of **montage**—a French word that stands for "putting together". Montage is the single most distinctive action of audiovisuality as a form of art, because, all considered, it is the only practice that is not borrowed from other arts. If we think about it AVTs are a sort of combination of different existing arts: we have acting performance coming from theatre, dialogues coming from literature, soundtrack coming from music, images coming from photography, and so forth. The possibility to select all the meaningful units from different sources and to assemble them in the right order in a special privilege of audiovisuality, one that makes it a form of art of its own, and not just a sum of different arts. We shall specif-

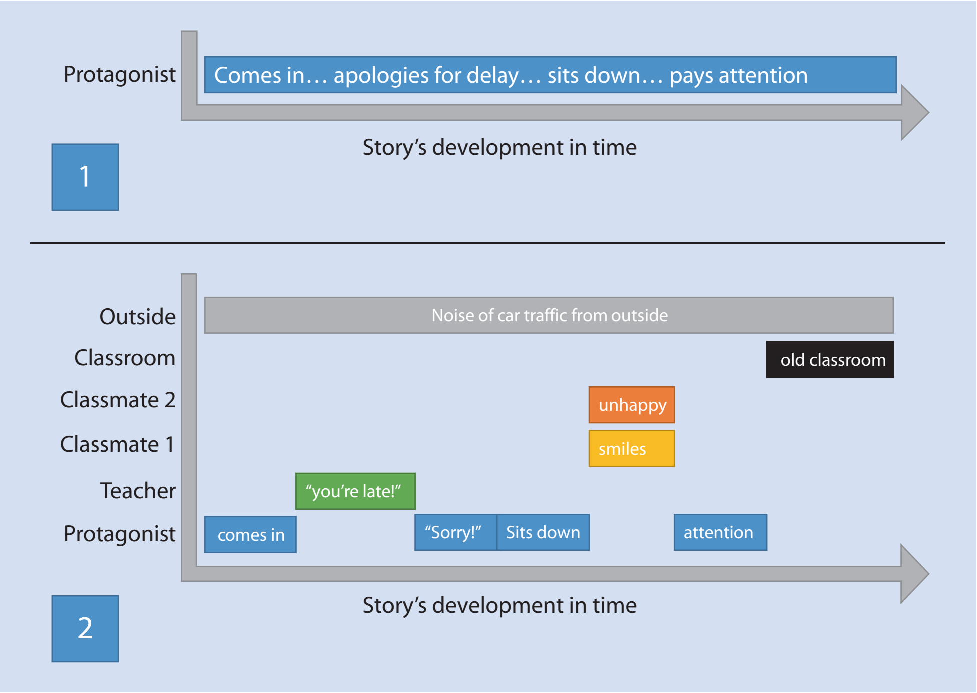

Protagonist
Comes in… apologies for delay… sits down… pays attention
Story's development in time
1
Outside
Classroom
Classmate 2
Classmate 1
Teacher
Protagonist
Noise of car traffic from outside
old classroom
unhappy
smiles
"you're late!"
comes in
"Sorry!"
Sits down
attention
Story's development in time
2

Fig. 3.2 An example of how montage enriches narration: the image 1 (on top) represents the essential story of a student coming late for class, without any additional unit of meaning, while in the image 2 we have altogether six meaningful units that are suitably edited and sequenced in order to give a much richer picture of the story

ically discuss montage in ▶ Sect. 3.5, but you will notice that the concept will pop up numerous times in various points of this book.

Back to our example. What we did was to consider the whole "space" of the story, not just the portion concerning the protagonist. In that space there were classmates, a teacher, a room, an outside environment… these are all meaningful units and a simple description of what the protagonist does, albeit enough to create a narration, does not make for a very interesting one. In ◘ Fig. 3.2 I have tried to summarize this idea.

Narration and montage are the two most prominent forms of management of time and space in an AVT, although not the only ones. Occasionally there may be a certain tension between the two (a montage may be too rich and varied, ending up making the narration more ambiguous and less intelligible), and there are also remarkable cases of AVTs where the author decides to go almost completely for one or the other (e.g., Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* for narration or Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* for montage), but those are instances with a specific artistic purpose, and their value lies exactly in that.

At any rate, the main point is that, generally speaking, the author of a given AVT seeks for balance and cooperation between the dimensions of space and time, making sure that one completes the other, and provides information that the other one does not necessarily provide. They are both powerful weapons of AVCC, and therefore they get to be thoroughly exploited. For this reason, we shall treat these two axes in an organic fashion, presenting topics that, while they may show a tendency to be more concerned with one axis instead of another, are in fact always relevant to both. Not by chance shall we start with the dichotomy between diegesis and non-diegesis, a crucial distinction that affects both space (primarily) and time.

Before we proceed I would like to recommend a few texts that deal with the topics of this chapter of the book. Once more, the choice is very wide, but the following texts certainly stand out: Barba (2009), Bordwell (1985), Bruner (1986), Carroll (2016), Dancyger (2010), Deleuze (1986) and (1989), Fulton et al. (2005), Genette (1972), Searle (1975), and, for a less academic but probably more inspiring reading, Tarkovsky (1987). Plus, of course, all the various texts we shall mention throughout the next paragraphs.

3.1 Diegesis Versus Non-diegesis

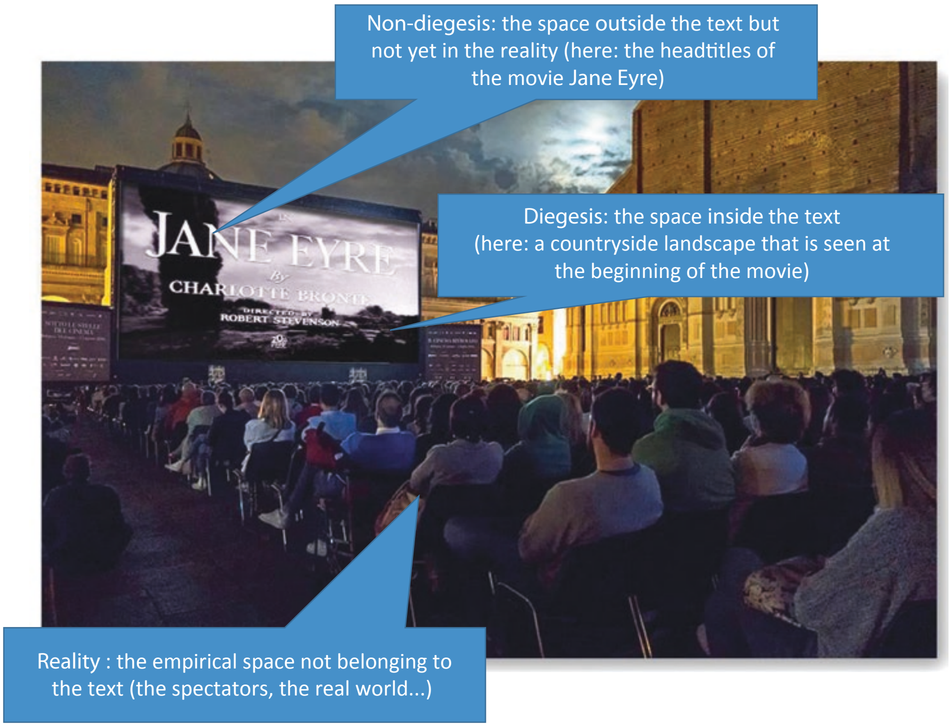
Let us picture ourselves sitting in a movie theatre, or in front of a TV watching a series—say: *Breaking Bad*. On one side of this picture we can be seen sitting in our armchair, munching on whichever snack we prepared and drink we prefer. We are, quite simply, the "real thing", the empirical reality, and the people who exist, live and breathe. Therefore, we do not *count* as AVT, but its spectators, the users: the *space* that we inhabit is a real one.

On the other side, there is a *space* offered to us in this TV series. There is this Walter White guy who sets up a risky crystal meth business, there is his wife Skyler, his partner in crime Jesse Pinkman, his policeman brother-in-law Hank Schrader and all the others; there is of course a place (Albuquerque, New Mexico) and a time (early twenty-first century) that are not necessarily the same as the *real* place and time that we spectators inhabit (we may live anywhere, and also watch the series many years after its release), there are things that happen to these people, and so forth. All of these things *look* pretty real, but we know they are not. They happen in the story, they happen in the imaginary, **conceptual space/time** *inside* the TV, so to speak. We call this "conceptual space/time" **diegesis**—a word that comes from the Ancient Greek "diēgéomai" (to describe, to narrate). Anything that we find specifically *inside* the story is a diegetic element: characters, places, words, and sounds…

But that is not all, for there is another "conceptual space/time", more difficult to define, but very easy to understand once we provide some examples. This area is kind of neutral, in-between us (the reality) and the diegesis (the fiction): it is *not anymore* inside the story, and *not yet* in the reality. This area is called **non-diegesis**, and it covers all those elements that *support* the story, rather than being part of it. The most obvious example is film music. When we hear music in a movie, we basically hear two types: one type is produced inside the story—let us say, there is a character who is a musician and starts playing; or another one who turns on the radio and finds a song; or another one who goes to a disco club and there is music; and so on and so forth. All these types of music are, so to speak, "experienced directly" by the characters in the movie: they are part of the story, and therefore they are diegetic.

However, and we know it very well, there is another fundamental type of music in a movie, and that is the **soundtrack**. This is the music that maestros such as John Williams, Vangelis, Nino Rota and many others write or have written. We see two characters kissing, and the soft strains of violin music playing *somewhere*, we see a terrified girl walking alone in the night who is about to be slaughtered by some serial killer, and we hear some ominous dissonant tune, etc. This music is *not* heard by the character, but it is still heard by us. Could you imagine the terrified girl actually *hearing* that creepy music, while she is walking alone in the night? That would be really too much, poor thing! She is already terrified, and here is the scary music too. The whole movie would turn from horror to comedy, she would turn to the filming crew and go: "Could you please turn off the damn music? I am already scared witless!"

Jokes aside, *where* is the soundtrack? The characters in the story do not hear it, so obviously it is not in the diegetic area. As spectators we hear it but there is no orchestra in our room playing that music, or no John Williams sitting by our armchair. That music is, indeed, somewhere in-between, in a kind of neutral space that could be metaphorically located


Non-diegesis: the space outside the text but not yet in the reality (here: the headtitles of the movie Jane Eyre)
Diegesis: the space inside the text (here: a countryside landscape that is seen at the beginning of the movie)
Reality : the empirical space not belonging to the text (the spectators, the real world...)
JANE EYRE
By
CHARLOTTE BRONTË
DIRECTED BY
ROBERT STEVENSON

◘ **Fig. 3.3** There is a real space on one side ("us", the spectators in the picture) and a conceptual space/time on the other (the AVT—the movie in the picture). The conceptual space/time displays two dimensions: the diegesis (the countryside landscape we see in the picture, which is the beginning of the movie, and represents the actual story), and the non-diegesis (in this case, the headtitles with the movie title, the director, the writer of the original novel, etc.—this is *not* a part of the story, but it supports it, offering additional information to us). [*Fair use—Images personally assembled and edited for illustrative purposes*]

on the screen: the screen is the "veil" between reality and diegesis, the big black hole that allows us to access the fantasy world of a romantic drama or a horror movie, or else. This is the conceptual space/time of non-diegesis: as we said, it is something that is not anymore in the story and not yet in the reality—it stands in the middle.

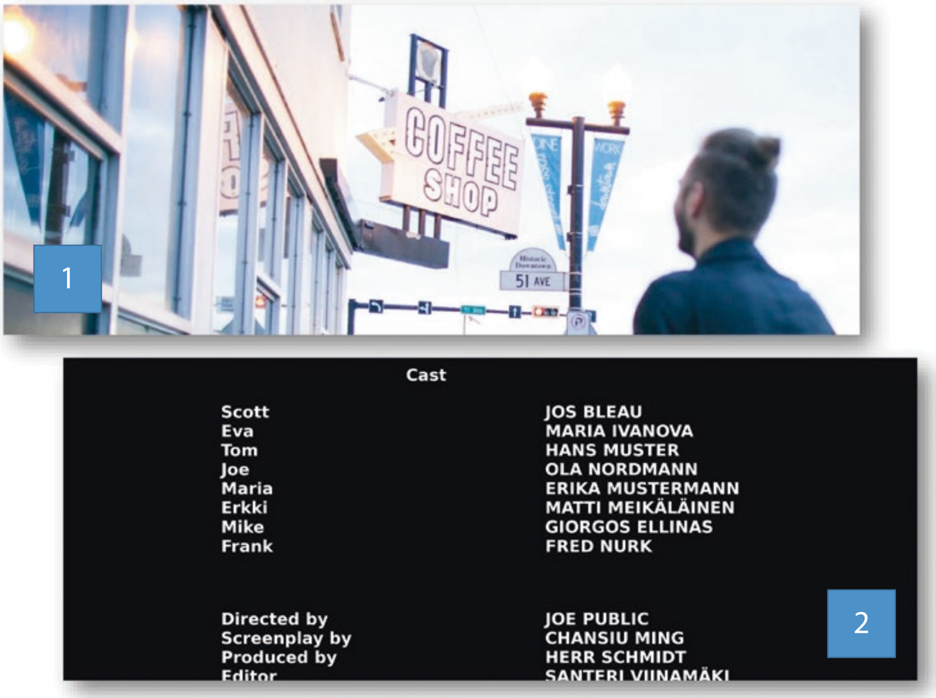
If we understand this we have the key to many other concepts. Audiovisuality is, quite simply, *based* on the duality diegesis/non-diegesis (see ◘ Fig. 3.3 for a visual recapitulation)—not by chance the two concepts often overlap, and they also have many other nuances (as we anticipated at the beginning of this section). We shall see them later.

Another important question is: to what elements of an AVT can this distinction apply? We have seen that music can be both diegetic and non-diegetic: does this idea apply to anything else? The simple answer is: everything. This distinction is so crucial that it applies to every single thing that appears or may appear in a text.

Let us provide some examples such as written language. Some character inside the AVT writes a letter, or we see some shop signboard, or a street sign with the name of a city… all these inscriptions are diegetic, of course: they happen *within* the story. On the other hand, let us consider all the headtitles, endtitles, intertitles, subtitles that may appear in an AVT: the inscription "The End"; the credits for acting, direction, costumes, etc.; the written translation of the dialogues in another language… all these things are *not seen* by the characters of the story, they are obviously outside it, and therefore are non-diegetic (see ◘ Fig. 3.4).

Another example is that of camera shots. When an AVT is filmed, it is quite customary that the cameras take the action from various angles: we see close-ups, we see low angles, we see crane shots, etc. Now, of all these shots, some are meant to be "part of the story" (diegetic) and some are not (non-diegetic). Let us compare the images 1 and 2 in ◘ Fig. 3.5. They are both stills from videos about cars: what we see in image 1 is an example of so-called "POV shot" (where POV stands for "point of view"): we see the road and the inside of the car from the "point of view" of the driver, i.e., from the point of view of someone who is clearly inside the story. In this case the POV shot is clearly "diegetic". In image 2, we see a view taken from a very high point, probably a helicopter. This shot is called "aerial shot", and it is usually non-diegetic, because it presents a point of view that is *not* in the story—unless there is an actual helicopter in it, like in certain action movies. But if there is no flying object or animal in the diegetic space, then this particular shot comes from a point of view that is outside the text (and that is often the case, with aerial shots), and therefore we understand that it is a non-diegetic shot.

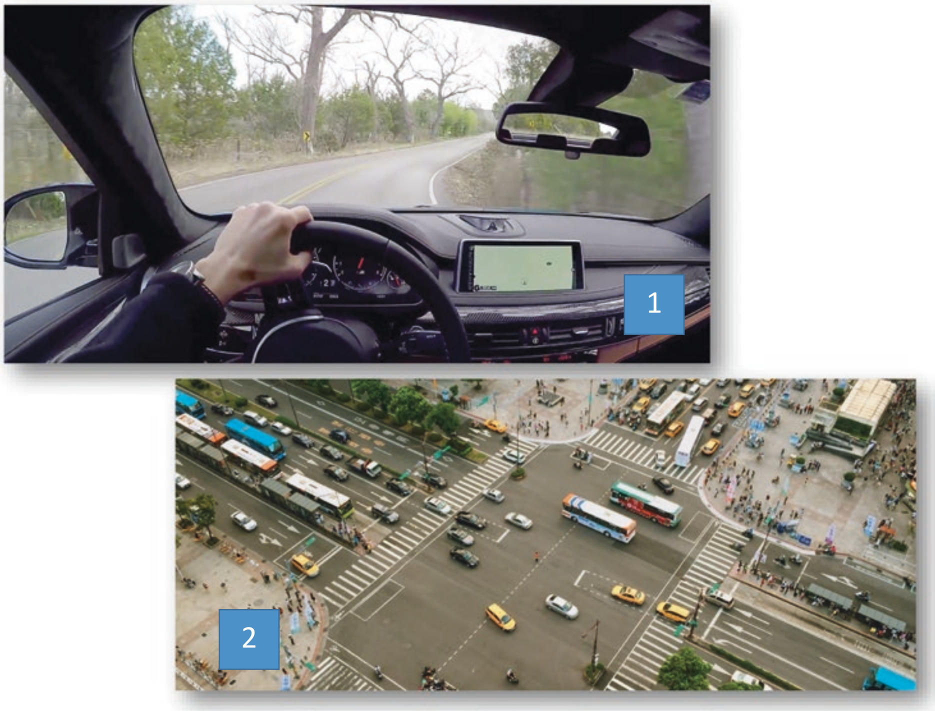
And so on: we could give hundreds of examples. As we said, every single element in an AVT can be diegetic or non-diegetic, or even both at the same time. One of the most typical ways of making diegesis and non-diegesis happen at the same time is the so-called "breaking of the **fourth wall**". "Fourth wall" is a conventional expression that describes the ideal separation between audience and actors (basically, the separation between real and conceptual space/time we have been talking about: between us and the AVT there is an imaginary line of distinction). It is "fourth" because you have to keep in mind a theatre stage: when you see the scenography in a play you have usually a room (or another environment) which has one background and two sides: three "walls" altogether. The fourth is where the curtain is, and as long as the curtain is closed we have an actual wall (or anyway, an actual separation). Then the curtain opens



Cast

Scott	JOS BLEAU
Eva	MARIA IVANOVA
Tom	HANS MUSTER
Joe	OLA NORDMANN
Maria	ERIKA MUSTERMANN
Erkki	MATTI MEIKÄLÄINEN
Mike	GIORGOS ELLINAS
Frank	FRED NURK
Directed by	JOE PUBLIC
Screenplay by	CHANSIU MING
Produced by	HERR SCHMIDT
Editor	SANTERI VIINAMÄKI

◘ **Fig. 3.4** A diegetic and a non-diegetic form of written language: the image 1 (on top) represents a shop signboard for a coffee shop, while image 2 is an example of endtitles in a movie. *[Fair use—Images personally assembled and edited for illustrative purposes]*



◘ **Fig. 3.5** A diegetic and a non-diegetic form of camera shot: the image 1 (on top) shows the car and the road from the point of view of the driver (diegetic), while the image 2 is taken non-diegetically from a flying device (probably a helicopter or a drone) that is not present in the text (non-diegetic). *[Fair use—Images personally assembled and edited for illustrative purposes]*

and the fourth wall remains as a metaphor: on one side us, on the other side the fiction. Not by chance (and we have seen that in our chapter about history), the first movies (like the early Lumière's) were all shot from one point: exactly where hypothetically the audience would be and therefore making the screen the "official" fourth wall. That was because the general idea was that audiovisuality was a sort of aesthetic continuation of theatre: if a play is enjoyed from the side of the fourth wall opposite to the stage, so should it be with AVTs. A schematic summary of the concept is displayed in ◘ Fig. 3.6.

Now. Most of the times these two sides do not mix, so the fourth wall maintains its "separating" function. However, there are situations when a contact, an interaction between the two sides occurs: for example, at theatre, there are often plays where the actors go among the audience and address

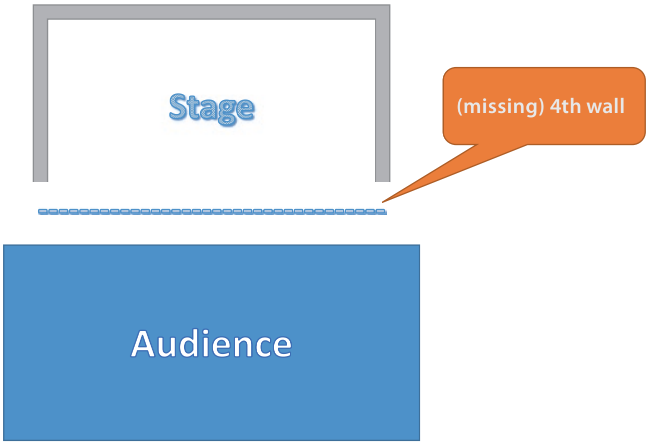


Fig. 3.6 A schematic representation of the "fourth wall", the imaginary separation between stage and audience

them in some form. When that happens, the fourth wall is "broken", and reality and fiction mix. However, as largely specified already, this book discusses creative communication in "screen-mediated" audiovisuality—so, how do we "break the fourth wall" in AVTs of this kind? A classic way of doing it is when a character is performing a normal "diegetic" action (let us say: they are talking to another character), and then, all of a sudden, they turn "to us" (meaning, that they look at the camera) and say something directly to the audience. This is when the fiction seems to disappear, and that metaphorical separation is violated. If you are a fan of the *House of Cards* series, you may remember its protagonists doing that very often.

Figure 3.7 illustrates in a simple sequence the process of breaking the fourth wall.

Excurse 2. The unberable lightness of the fourth wall

Remember *Annie Hall* by Woody Allen? It is one of his most famous movies, and certainly one of his best. There are several moments in which the character Alvy Singer (Woody Allen himself) breaks the fourth wall in the way we just described, but probably the most memorable occurs in a scene where none other than Prof. Marshall McLuhan (one of the gurus of media studies) makes a cameo appearance. In that scene, Alvy is queuing in a movie theatre with his girlfriend Annie Hall (Diane Keaton), and he overhears a guy behind him chatting about topics like cinema, TV, Federico Fellini, and indeed McLuhan. Alvy thinks that this gentleman is pretty much talking rubbish on these subjects and he does not fail to voice his disagreement loud enough to be heard by this man. The man goes: "Wait a minute, why can't I give my opinion? It's a free country!" Alvy says: "Yes, but do you have to give it so loud? I mean, aren't you ashamed to pontificate like that? And the funny part of it is… Marshall McLuhan… you don't know anything about Marshall McLuhan!" "Oh, really?—the guy replies—Well, it just so happens I teach a class at Columbia called *TV, Media and Culture*. So I think my insights into Mr. McLuhan, well, have a great deal of validity!" "Oh, do you? Well, that's funny, because I happen to have Mr. McLuhan right here, so, so, yeah, just let me…" The camera moves on the right and Alvy pulls out the real McLuhan from behind a movie poster. Alvy encourages McLuhan to speak: "Come over here for a second… tell him!" McLuhan goes "I heard what you were saying! You know nothing of my work! You mean my whole fallacy is wrong. How you got to teach a course in anything is totally amazing!" At this point, Alvy breaks the fourth wall: he turns to the camera, and speaks to the audience (to us): "Boy, if life were only like this!"

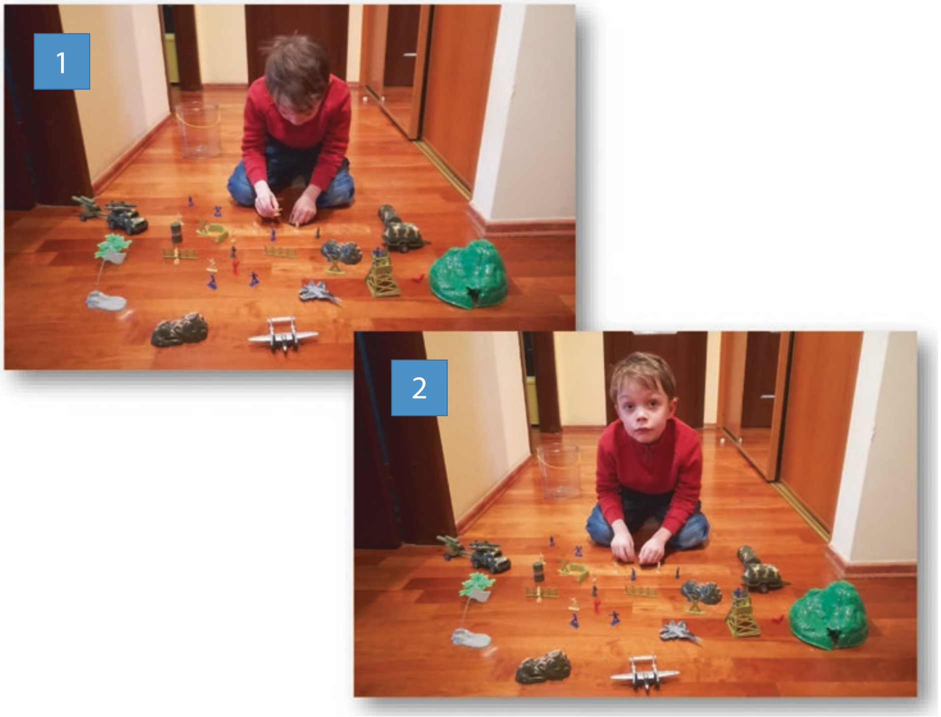


Fig. 3.7 This beautiful young boy is playing with his toy soldiers: in image 1, we see him taken by his game and inhabiting his own world of fantasy. As spectators, we follow his actions, his "story", as diegetic. In image 2, the boy breaks the fourth wall: he looks at the camera, therefore at "us", and by doing that he violates that separation between reality and representation that we were experiencing beforehand. The two dimensions are now connected. *[Photos by Lina Navickaitė-Martinelli]*

There are also more extreme cases than this, in which an author actually makes their characters address *directly* the question of the fourth wall, or in general of the diegesis. One amusing example derives from graphic novels, not audiovisuality, but we can mention it to give the idea. It is a conversation between Captain Andreyasn and Doctor Bunnigus, two characters from the comic saga *Schlock Mercenary*, by Howard Tayler. In the sixth installment, called *Resident Mad Scientist*, the two have the following conversation:

"Do me a favor, doc?"

"Anything, *Captain*."

"Stop italicizing the word 'Captain' when you say it."

"Go easy on the fourth wall there, sir."

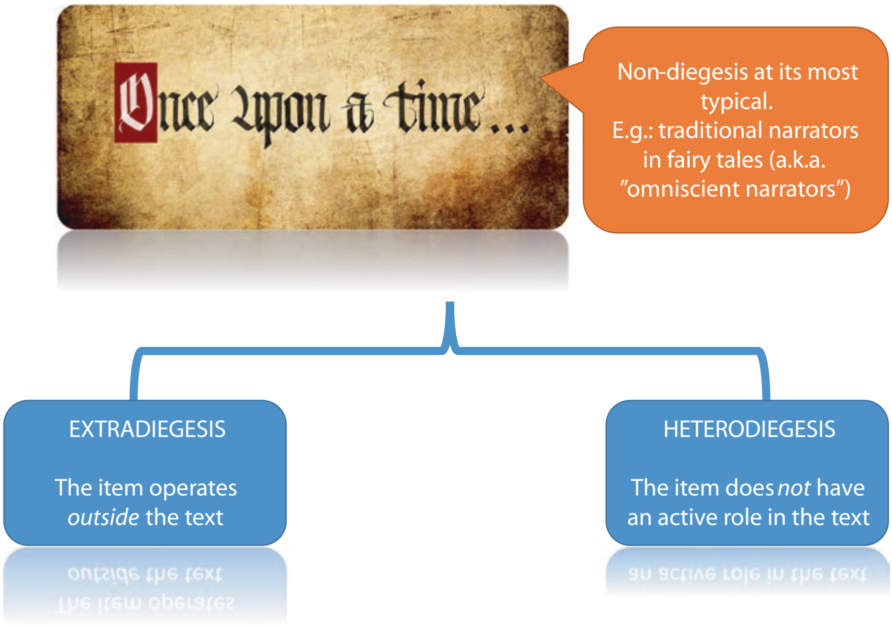
3.1.1 Typologies of Conceptual Space/Time

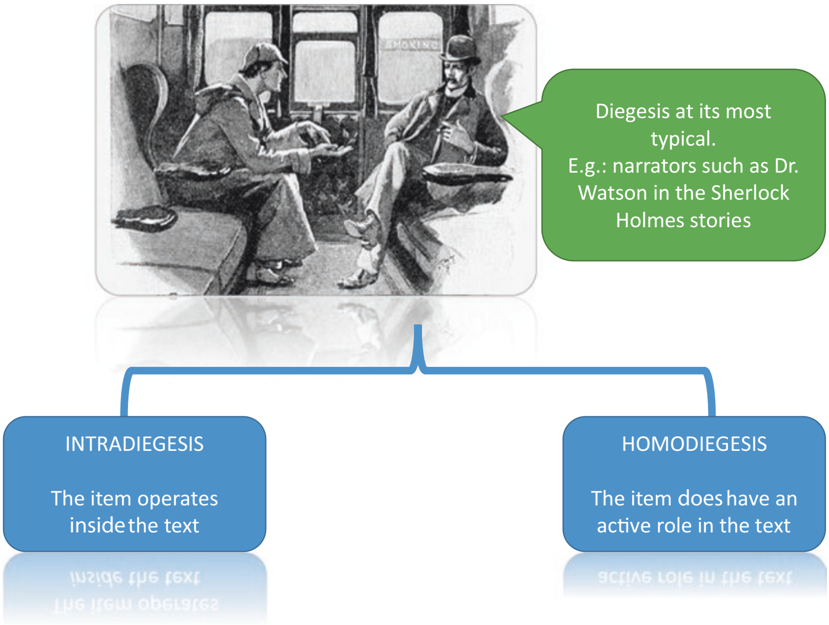
Now that we are familiar with the concepts of diegesis and non-diegesis, let us complicate things a bit. As we have already mentioned, we often try to classify some important notions into dichotomies, to make the understanding easier and natural. However, we also said that things are more complex than this, and that little by little we shall give account of this complexity as well. In the case of "diegesis", the concept is so important that we should add at least five more terms: **Extradiegesis**, **Intradiegesis**; **Heterodiegesis** and **Homodiegesis**, plus a special case called **Metadiegesis**. These are not terms that mean "something else", as compared to diegesis and non-diegesis, but rather they "specify important details" of the two main concepts. To explain them, we shall use another element of AVTs (and in fact any text) that we have not yet discussed: the narrator—the one who tells the story. This is of course an important figure in any text, and we get acquainted with it already at an early age, when we are told a fairy tale.

By extradiegesis, we mean specifically the space outside fiction, but not inside reality. An extradiegetic narrator, for instance, is somebody outside the story. By intradiegesis, we mean the space inside fiction. An intradiegetic narrator is a character inside the story. By heterodiegesis we mean the passive space inside the fiction. The heterodiegetic narrator does not take part in the action. And finally homodiegesis stands for the active space. The homodiegetic narrator takes part in the action. As you can see, the four terms can be grouped into two dichotomies: Extradiegetic versus Intradiegetic and Heterodiegetic versus Homodiegetic, which means that they can be arranged into four combinations:

When "extradiegesis" is combined with "heterodiegesis" we have a very classic non-diegetic context (see also Fig. 3.8). To keep up with our example, the narrator is at the same time outside the story and, predictably, they do not take part in it. Can we think of a narrator of this type? Of course, this is a very typical situation we experienced as kids: most fairy tales we were read by our parents and grandparents would start with the same incipit: "Once upon a time…Who was that person who said "Once upon a time? Were they a character in the story?" Not really: they seemed to be pretty alien to it—they were just this voice (impersonated by the adult who was reading the tale for us) who would describe the event, and who seemed to know everything about everyone in the story (a common definition is also an **omniscient narrator**—a narrator "who knows everything"). Also, they were in no way taking part to the events: they were external and inactive in the story—extra- and heterodiegetic indeed. A situation like this (extra- + heterodiegesis) is the quintessential non-diegesis.

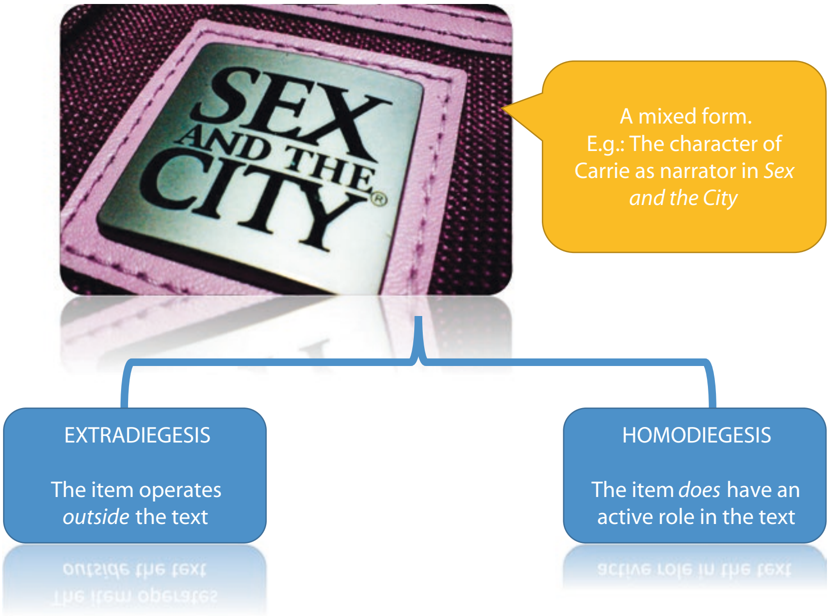
Fig. 3.8 The combination of extradiegesis and heterodiegesis produces the most typical form of non-diegesis


Once upon a time…
Non-diegesis at its most typical.
E.g.: traditional narrators in fairy tales (a.k.a. "omniscient narrators")
EXTRADIEGESIS
The item operates *outside* the text
HETERODIEGESIS
The item does *not* have an active role in the text



Diegesis at its most typical.
E.g.: narrators such as Dr. Watson in the Sherlock Holmes stories
INTRADIEGESIS
The item operates inside the text
HOMODIEGESIS
The item does have an active role in the text

Fig. 3.9 The combination of intradiegesis and homodiegesis produces the most typical form of diegesis



A mixed form.
E.g.: The character of Carrie as narrator in *Sex and the City*
SEX AND THE CITY
EXTRADIEGESIS
The item operates *outside* the text
HOMODIEGESIS
The item *does* have an active role in the text

Fig. 3.10 The combination of extradiegesis and homodiegesis produces a mixed form in which the item may exist outside the text, while paradoxically being active in it

On the other hand, when "intradiegesis" is combined with "homodiegesis" we have the most typical situation of diegesis (see also Fig. 3.9). In our example the narrator is both inside the story and taking part in it. Probably the most famous of such narrators is Dr. Watson from Sherlock Holmes. For those of you who have read Arthur Conan Doyle's books, you may recall that it is Watson who tells us the stories of Sherlock Holmes. He uses a first person narration, and as Holmes's assistant he is basically the second most important character in the whole saga.

Things get more interesting when we try the other two combinations. For example, when extradiegesis crosses with homodiegesis, we have the seemingly peculiar situation of an element that is outside the story and yet active in it (see also Fig. 3.10). How is that possible? Again, let us use the example of narrators. Do you remember Carrie Bradshaw (the actress Sarah Jessica Parker) in the TV series *Sex and the City*? She is not only one of the four leading characters of the series (four women friends living and working in Manhattan), but she is also a columnist for a newspaper called *New York Star*, where she writes about her adventures with her friends. As you may know, the series is based on a real column for the *New York Observer* written by a journalist called Candace Bushnell, who was loosely the model for the character of Carrie. Now: Carrie has two roles at the same time. We of course see her in action, interacting with her friends, her lovers and so forth, and in this sense her character is homodiegetic. However, we also hear her narrating the story from a clearly extradiegetic perspective: she is the off-screen voice we still hear when the action takes

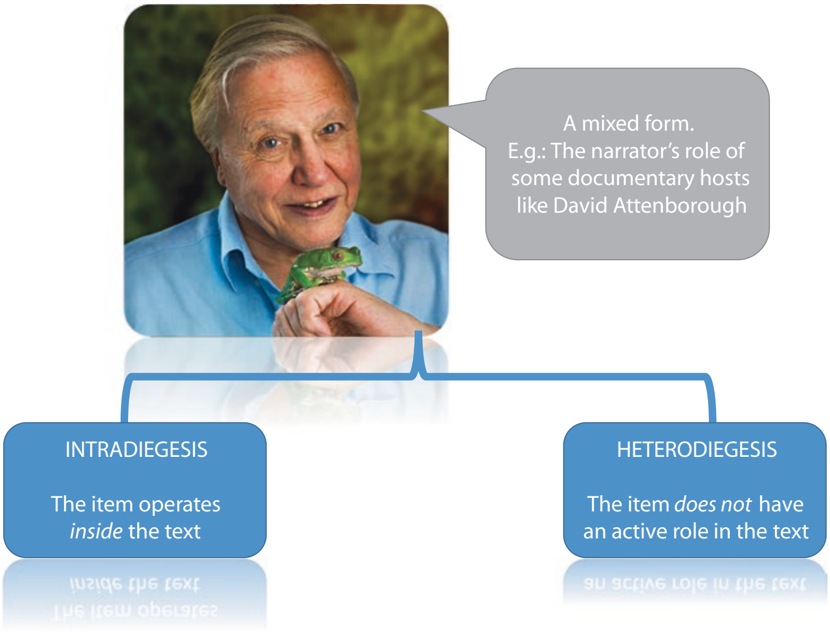

A mixed form.
E.g.: The narrator's role of some documentary hosts like David Attenborough
INTRADIEGESIS
The item operates *inside* the text
HETERODIEGESIS
The item *does not* have an active role in the text

Fig. 3.11 The combination of intradiegesis and heterodiegesis produces another mixed form in which the item is at the same time operating within the text, but not actively

place somewhere else and does not concern her, she is the one who connects all the parallel lives of the four friends ("Meanwhile, Miranda…", "Back in Manhattan…"), and she uses the past tense ("There it was…", "Samantha stood there…"), making us understand that all these stories have happened already, and this journalist is recollecting them for her column.

We can also have the opposite combination: an intradiegetic element that is also heterodiegetic (see also Fig. 3.11). That is: an element inside the story that is not an active part in it. In our example, we would need a narrator who is actually a character, but has somehow a passive, neutral role in the action—not or hardly perceivable by the other characters. It seems rather strange, admittedly, but once again we have such cases. We actually see it quite often in documentaries, especially those of naturalistic or archeological type. The BBC produced various nature documentaries with the legendary Sir David Attenborough, particularly the *Life* series at BBC. If you watch any installment of these fascinating programs, you will not see Attenborough only talking from a TV studio and launching the footage (as typical in these cases): you will also see him *there*, in whatever forest, desert or ocean the given documentary is located. He takes an interesting narrator's position: he stands where the action takes place, and often we see him *searching* for some particular action (say, a den where a given mammal is sleeping, a branch where a given bird is singing…), but most of the times he does it in a very discreet manner, sometimes even whispering, and he just *shows* the action to us, without participating in it. This is what an intra- and hetero-diegetic narrator can do.

Finally, we mentioned a special case, called metadiegesis (see also Fig. 3.12). We can start describing it by mentioning another type of intra- and hetero-diegetic narrator, dissimilar from Sir David Attenborough's documentaries, but equally relevant in that category: the storyteller in the so-called **frame narratives**, or **frame stories**. A frame narrative is a technique where a main story is structured in order to contain a set of shorter stories, which are—therefore—stories within a story. This kind of setting, among other things, offers the possibility of connecting seemingly unrelated tales into one single work, having exactly the "frame" as red line. For example, the frame story may be that of a person remembering various events of their past: the events may be unrelated, but the fact that there is the same person remembering them connects all the dots, and give the impression of one single story. This is a technique that has been widely used in literature and which has become a real style in storytelling. Probably, the three best-

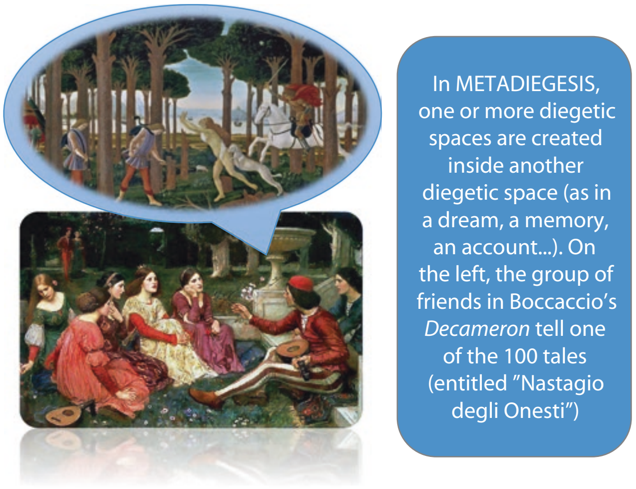

In METADIEGESIS, one or more diegetic spaces are created inside another diegetic space (as in a dream, a memory, an account…). On the left, the group of friends in Boccaccio's *Decameron* tell one of the 100 tales (entitled "Nastagio degli Onesti")

Fig. 3.12 Metadiegesis creates situations of diegeses within diegeses, such as in dreams, memories, flashbacks, flashforwards, hopes and so forth

known frame stories are *One Thousand and One Nights*, the *Decameron*, and the *Canterbury Tales*. In *One Thousand and One Nights*, a traditional series of fairy tales from the Middle East (you may have heard some stories when you were kids), we have several stories being narrated by the character Scheherazade, who is forced to entertain her husband the king in order to save her life and the lives of others in the kingdom. So, we have a general story narrated by an unknown (extra- and heterodiegetic) narrator, and *inside* we have Scheherazade narrating the stories-within-the-story. The *Decameron* was written by the Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio sometime between 1850 and 1853. The frame story opens with seven young women and three young men escaping from Florence to avoid contagion of the "Black Death" (the Bubonic Plague), and finding shelter in a villa outside the city walls. To pass the time, each member of the group tells one story in the evening, generating one hundred stories in ten days. Once more, characters who are inside the story (the ten men and women) become "inactive" as their story is told. *The Canterbury Tales*, written by the English writer Geoffrey Chaucer a few years later (1387), is very similar to the *Decameron* (and very likely inspired by it, since Chaucer was in Italy in 1372, and certainly must have gotten a hold of a copy of Boccaccio's book). The frame story, here, is that 29 pilgrims (including Chaucer himself) meet on the way to Canterbury, and decide to share stories to pass the time on their long journey. Once again, every time a character starts narrating, he becomes inactive in the story.

All three are—we may agree—situations of intra-yet heterodiegetic narration. However, there is something else that associates them. They are all stories within which other stories were opened, like bubbles, or smaller Matryoshka dolls inside a bigger one. When such a bubble is created, we basically have created a diegetic space inside another diegetic space, and this process is called meta-diegesis. "Meta" is a Greek word that stands for "over, across", so metadiegesis is a form of diegesis that goes "across" another one. Significantly, this does not concern only the types of intra/heterodiegetic processes we have just described. It can happen in many ways: the most typical are the **flashback** and the **flashforward** (when in an AVT we get a glimpse into the past or into the future), the dream (or other forms of imagination: hope, plan, nightmare…), and of course the memory (which often generates a flashback, but not only). All these are "bubbles", and they can also come in greater amounts, producing more metadiegeses. We may picture a case of a movie in which we see a flashback (first metadiegesis), then in this flashback we see a person sleeping and we see what they dream (meta-metadiegesis), and in this dream we see another person remembering their childhood (meta-meta-metadiegesis). And so forth, ad infinitum.

3.1.2 Case Study: Multiple Forms of Space/Time in the Truman Show

Since we mentioned Matryoshka dolls, an AVT that could wrap up all the various instances of conceptual space/time we have discussed here is Peter Weir's movie *The Truman Show* (1998), featuring the celebrated comedian Jim Carrey, who, for the first time showed the world that he could also excel in dramatic roles. We all remember the story of the film protagonist Truman Burbank (Carrey), which is something that we are moving closer towards (disturbingly so) in view of reality shows and the general decay of privacy as a value in society. Truman is, since his birth, the unwitting star of a TV reality show in which the entirety of Seahaven and a community are built around him, with hundreds of actors, accurately constructed locations and a solid routine of events that entraps Truman into a series of predictable and controllable actions. Indeed, in order for this fictional community to be credible in Truman's eyes, it is crucial that he is subject to regular habits, movements and relations: he must meet the same people, listen to the same radio, watch the same TV programs, have the same working schedule, and so forth. Most of all: he cannot leave Seahaven. Those of us who have seen the movie, know that Truman will become increasingly suspicious about his life, and will finally discover the truth, managing (in a dramatic climax that we shall return to later in this book) to escape this Orwellian situation and access real life.

What interests us in this movie and in relation to the topic we are now discussing, is the fact that this AVT (a movie) is about *another* AVT (a TV show), and therefore brings us immediately into a context of meta-diegesis where all the elements of a normal relation between real space/time (us, the audience) and conceptual space/time (the AVT, with its diegetic and non-diegetic areas) must be reproduced. In detail:

1. There is *us*. Real people in a real world who watch a *movie* called *The Truman Show*, that is, an AVT meant for cinema;
2. This *movie* has its own diegetic and non-diegetic elements. The non-diegetic elements include the credits at the end (not at the beginning, as we shall see); soundtrack episodes such as Philip Glass's "Opening" used in the last sequence, after Truman leaves Seahaven; the camera shots portraying the spectators and the producers of the TV program, and so on. The diegetic elements include everything that is *in the story*, but this now opens up for several metadiegetic "bubbles".
3. The diegetic area of the movie is the "TV show" (not the movie) called *The Truman Show*. And, being a reproduction of an AVT with its diegesis, but also its audience and its production, this TV show will display a meta-represention of the whole process of conceptual space/time.
4. There is first of all a *meta-reality*: we see several people watching the show—the clients of a cafeteria, a man watching while having a bath, two guardians in a garage, etc. We also see the production crew of the show, working in their studio and being again *real people*.
5. Next comes a *meta-non-diegesis*: the TV show has its own non-diegetic elements, just like the film. When we see the opening credits, we do not see those of the movie, but we see those of the show. In other words, we do not read "Starring Jim Carrey as Truman Burbank": we read "Starring Truman Burbank as himself". When we hear non-diegetic music, we need to pay attention to whether such music

comes from the non-diegetic area of the movie, or that of the show.

I mentioned Glass's "Opening" (at the end of the movie), because that piece is set to a part of the movie and is "outside the control" of the TV show: excited and exulting spectators, the character of Sylvia (Natascha McElhone) quickly grabbing a coat and leaving her apartment to meet her beloved Truman, the show producer Christof (Ed Harris) in desperation, and so forth. In this case, we know for sure that the music is non-diegetic in respect to the movie. However, any time we are exposed to the show as such and we hear music, there is always the perception that this could be "meta-non-diegetic", that is, in actual fact, diegetic music of the movie placed to sound like non-diegetic music of the show. The same applies to the camera work: when we see a crane shot (which is a traditionally non-diegetic shot, as we shall see later in the book), does that crane belong to the movie or to the show? Is it a non-diegetic shot in absolute, or simply "meta-non-diegetic"?

One particular sequence reveals this ambivalence. About one hour from the start of the movie, at a point in which the increasingly suspicious Truman makes his first real attempt to escape from Seahaven, we see that Christof has the idea of re-introducing Truman's father in the show. Truman had seen him dying before his very eyes, when he was a kid, during a boat excursion. The death was a set-up to implant a strong childhood trauma in Truman's head, so that he would develop thalassophobia and never be tempted to sail anymore. Instead, this would give him a better chance to escape the town—as he indeed will find the courage to do at the end of the movie. The idea of reintroducing this character in the show gives Christof hope that Truman will become less suspicious towards his life, and will recover enough happiness not to be tempted to escape anymore. For a while this works until Truman makes a second, and this time, successful escape attempt. At any rate, the return of the father is shown as a highly emotional moment: at this point we see Christof and his collaborators cleverly manipulating the sequence, taking good care that all the non-diegetic elements are brought together in order to convey a touching climax. Christof asks to regulate the weather ("easy on the fog!"), "directs" in real time the cameras available ("Crane cam!" "Button cam 3!", "…and wide, curb cam 8!", etc.), and finally orders to fade up the music, at which point two keyboard players are shown performing some tender piano music at a gently-increasing volume. In this sequence, there is the whole essence of the "meta-non-diegetic" area of this movie.

6. We then have the actual *meta-diegesis*, that is, the whole pretention of diegetic elements, as appearing within the fictional area of the TV show. Any point where Truman appears is part of that show; when he switches on the car radio and listens to Mozart's *Rondò alla Turca*, we listen to diegetic music from the perspective of the TV show, and so forth. Most interestingly, the (meta)diegetic appearance of many shots is arranged in such a way that we really get the feeling of cameras and micro-cameras placed in the most secret and convenient places: inside a button (Christof himself, we have seen it, calls for a "Button cam 3" in the sequence we have described above), on the collar of a dog, inside the mentioned car radio, and so forth. These shots are particularly effective in emphasizing the condition of big-brotherly control that Truman is subject to: any place in his life, virtually, is visible through a camera.
7. In all this (meta)diegetic area, there are also moments in which the actors break the (meta)fourth wall. As the TV show is full of subliminal advertising and product placement, we often see the characters looking at the camera (therefore looking at the meta-audience, not at us) to celebrate in TV commercial-style the quality of this or that product. The overstated artificiality of such advertising becomes at some point obvious even to Truman himself: as his wife offers to prepare him a hot chocolate by showing a box of the "Mococoa" brand and emphatically praising its taste, Truman bursts into a "What the hell are you talking about? Who are you talking to?"
8. To conclude, the show itself has its fair share of metadiegesis, which—in the overall sum of this game of Chinese boxes—means in fact a meta-metadiegesis. The show displays a number of flashbacks into past episodes, disguising them as memories of Truman himself. Or maybe they *are* Truman's actual memories: one of the recurrent themes in the movie is that, having manipulated him from his very birth, Christof has become quite a connoisseur of Truman's thoughts (something he will try to use as a last resource to keep Truman from leaving Seahaven), so when he sees him caught in a pensive mood, he proposes to the audience the contents of such thoughts in the form of flashbacks to previous episodes of the show.

At about 28 min into the movie we see Truman holding and smelling a red female pullover. That item belonged to Sylvia, a girl who had been acting in the show as a simple extra, but who had disobeyed the script by falling in love with Truman *for real*, while in the show's plan the role of winner of Truman's heart was assigned to Merryl (Laura Linney). As her love is reciprocated by Truman, Sylvia is quickly removed from the show, in a rather improvised action in which Truman is informed that the girl is mentally sick and will soon move to Fiji. Not having quite forgotten her, Truman is left with that pullover as the sole memento of his brief meeting with Sylvia. Now, as we see him holding and smelling that pullover, Christof may guess with good approximation that Truman is thinking about Sylvia, although he does not know exactly the details of such thought. Therefore, to engage in the Peircean terminology we have already introduced, he chooses the *interpretant* of the "Sylvia" sign by launching a flashback of the show episodes where Truman and Sylvia meet and fall in love. This action is also important for the audience of the show, especially those who started watching it at a later stage: not all of them may indeed know who that pullover belonged to and why Truman treasures it so dearly. Launching the flashbacks is thus a strategy to introduce (or remind of) such an essential part of the plot developed throughout the years. At any rate, being "flashbacks", scenes like the one described are metadiegetic in respect to the show, and meta-metadiegetic in respect to the movie.

There we go. *The Truman Show* is an 8-layer "onion" of conceptual space/time, and shows with great wit and accuracy how rich the treatment and arrangement of diegetic and non-diegetic elements can be. This is a truly crucial notion in the understanding of AVCC, and we shall return to it numerous times during this book.

3.2 Steadiness Versus Unsteadiness

"My goodness, it was so obvious! Halfway through, I already knew how it was going to end!"

Or: *"This was a bit too intellectual for my taste! I didn't understand a thing!"*

These are two typical comments we employ to complain about an AVT that we did not particularly like. In the first case, we have seen a text that was so simple, so elementary, that we quickly lost interest in it: everything was too clear, we missed the fun of some mystery and some uncertainty. In the second case we had the opposite problem: the text was too difficult, probably too artsy, too experimental. We ended up not having any clue what was going on. With slight modifications, that also happens to texts of an interactive nature. Very often in videogames our choice whether to keep on playing a given game or not has a lot to do with how much fun we are having while playing it, and that is usually ensured by a level of difficulty that is just the right amount: not too easy, not too complicated.

Among the various dichotomies we are exploring in this book, we certainly could not miss an opposition between texts that are easy to grasp/interpret/operate and texts that are difficult. After all, if the main goal here is to understand AVCC, we certainly cannot escape the basic problem of the complexity of a given text. This question too is germane to both spatial and temporal elements within an AVT, although, unlike the previous case of diegesis and non-diegesis, it probably has more an accent on the temporal dimension, that is, the flowing and the sequencing of the story as such.

Simplifying from the theory of two important film scholars, Francesco Casetti and Federico Di Chio, we can call the "easy" text **steady** (or "strong", in Casetti-Di Chio's formulation), and the "difficult" one **unsteady** (or "weak"). In steady AVCC we have an emphasis on action and development, on "doing": things *happen* and we see them happening with clarity. Usually action can take two directions: *vectorial*, when it goes from A to B, meaning that there is a transformation in the events (we start from a certain situation and we end up in another situation: for instance, in many love stories, with two singles—stage A—falling in love and becoming a couple—stage B); or *cyclic*, when A changes to B but returns to A, meaning that we reestablish the initial order of things (as in many war movies: we start with peace, then we have war, and we finish with victory, that is, peace again). In steady texts, thus, it is "action", "eventfulness", that mark the progress of the text, and in that sense this progress is linear, intelligible: we have clear subjects, clear goals, clear ways to reach those goals. Steady AVCC is a typical condition of classic, mainstream stories (e.g., Hollywood cinema, TV programs for families, animation for children…), and usually has a significant stress on the idea of "entertaining" the audience.

On the contrary, in the unsteady AVCC the emphasis is not "doing" but "being", so that psychology, morality, feelings, and introspection take priority over action. Characters are less dynamic because we need to focus more on what they are, think and feel: the *outside* is less visible because we need to focus on the *inside*, and of course the inside is vaguer and more abstract, less consequential, less linear. Unsteady AVTs can be taken to an extreme and turn into the so-called "**anti-narration**", a condition that practically disintegrates the story, making it very fragmented, almost illogical and inconsistent. The notion of space and time themselves become very flexible and artificial, and we may locate the story in times and places that are more existential than empirical. Typically, we find this condition in the most innovative, *avant-garde* AV schools, such as the French Nouvelle Vague, the Soviet School, the Italian neorealism, etc., plus in specific AV forms like color music, experimental cinema and the likes, not to mention interactive texts that present a high degree of difficulty (complicated rules, reasoning skills required, etc.). The accent is less on the "entertainment" side and more on the "artsy" one. The whole steady-unsteady dichotomy is summarized in ◘ Fig. 3.13.

There may be no need to specify it, but the employment of the terms "steady" and "unsteady" is to be considered totally neutral, and no moral implication should be inferred—in other words: "steady" does not mean "better" or "more pleasant" than "unsteady". These terms are only related to the levels of clarity and ambiguity of the texts.

As we have already stated for the other dichotomies we are presenting, there is no such thing as a clear boundary between steady and unsteady, but rather an ideal axis where we find more or less steady and more or less unsteady AVTs, as well as numerous "mixed" cases that display steady and unsteady elements at the same time. In the case study we will discuss (Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*) we will have exactly this mixed situation.

Now, in order to better understand the concepts, let us take a step back, and reconsider our position as spectators/readers of an AVT. Whenever we decide to sit down in front of a screen to enjoy a film, a series or else, it is safe to say that we make a symbolic (yet very solid) **pact** with the text itself. The pact is: for the duration of the text we accept to *believe* whatever story we are being told. Not "believe" in a strict sense (we obviously do not believe things like the White Walkers from *Game of Thrones* or Michael Jackson becoming a zombie in the "Thriller" video), but we definitely commit to "immerse" ourselves in the story and let it unfold without being constantly judgmental about the many liberties it takes. We accept supernatural creatures of different sorts, we accept time-travelling, we accept unexplored planets… but we also accept more earthly things like a loser who becomes a winner by their own force of will, a detective who solves all their cases, a wish coming true against all odds…

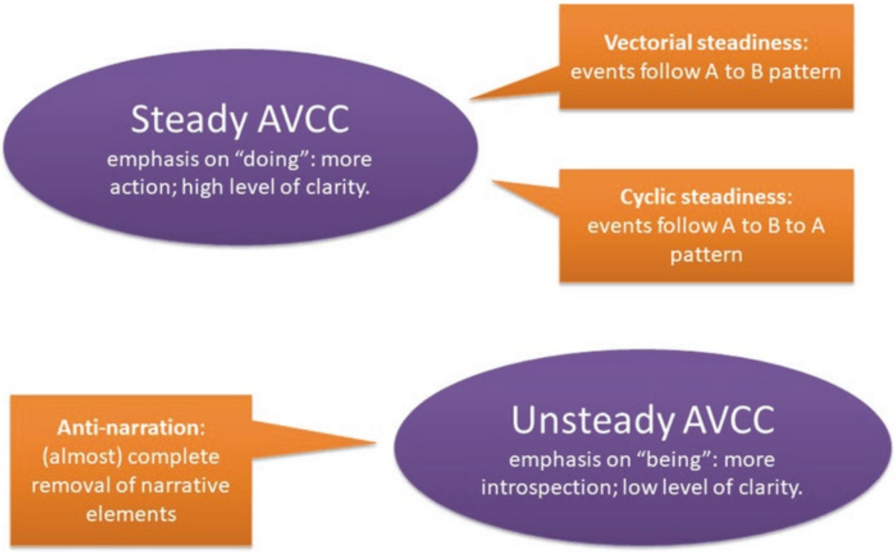

Steady AVCC
emphasis on "doing": more action; high level of clarity.
Vectorial steadiness: events follow A to B pattern
Cyclic steadiness: events follow A to B to A pattern
Unsteady AVCC
emphasis on "being": more introspection; low level of clarity.
Anti-narration: (almost) complete removal of narrative elements

Fig. 3.13 Steady and unsteady AVCC and their special cases. In steady texts we have more action and clarity; in unsteady ones there is more focus on psychological and emotional aspects, and the clarity level is lower

Then we also **cooperate** with the text in another sense: we fill in the blanks of a story, whenever such story leaves a bit of gap that it has no time/room to develop. We see a character going to sleep, and the next second we see him/her waking up in the morning: we fill in the gap of a whole night's sleep that obviously must have occurred, but was not represented in the story, because it was not necessary. We see an event repeated not more than twice, and we understand this is some kind of routine that happens every day. We see Meryl Streep and Clint Eastwood gazing at each other at the end of *The Bridges of Madison County*, and even though they do not say a word, but simply exchange gazes and subtle smiles, we understand at least three important pieces of information: a) that they will love each other forever; b) that she will return to her family duties and stay with her husband; and c) that this is the last time they see each other in their life. And, funnily enough, this understanding is almost unmistakable: there is hardly a way for us to imagine that those gazes mean things like "see you later!" or "call me next time your husband is not home", or "don't worry, I'll get over you quickly and find myself another lover in a couple of days".

Also, central information does not need to be repeated, or in fact it may not need to be addressed at all, if it was somehow hinted at in other ways. If you have seen the TV series *Outlander*, you know that the main character Claire Beauchamp (the Irish actress Caitriona Balfe) travels back in time from 1945 to 1743. All that happens to her, why, where, with whom, and so forth, is something that we experience directly episode after episode. Now: there are various moments, during the series, when Claire decides to tell her seemingly absurd story to some of the closest people she meets in both epochs, despite the risk that she may not be believed. She needs to do that for various reasons, including saving her life, or indeed the lives of these people. Well, there is not a single instance in which we *hear* what Claire says to her interlocutors: we see her talking, we see the emotional reactions of the others, but we do not hear a word of what she is saying. So, for all we know, she may be telling lies, or different versions every time, or else. We "trust" that she is being sincere and that she is delivering exactly the same version every time—once again unmistakably.

How does this happen? How can we be so sure of such deep feelings just by looking at two characters staring at each other, or that a person is saying what we think she is saying, even if we do not hear a word? It happens first of all because a story (not just in AV form) is constructed in such a way that it delivers a certain amount of meanings that go beyond what is openly said or shown, and it does so in many ways (which we will analyze later on in this book); and it also happens because, as we said, we accept to *believe* that story. The whole development of *The Bridges of Madison County* exhibits a feeling between the two protagonists that looks quite distinctively as "true love", not as a casual affair. It also displays that the character of Francesca (Meryl Streep) feels unfulfilled in her life, but the circumstances she finds herself in (parenthood of two kids, sense of guilt towards her husband) make her finally decide to stay with her family, instead of escaping with Robert (Clint Eastwood). Moreover, the movie (which happens for the most part in 1965) opens with a scene from the present (the 1990s): Francesca has just died and her adult son and daughter find out that her final wish is to be cremated and her ashes scattered by the Roseman Covered Bridge (a very significant place in her affair with Robert), instead of being buried besides her husband's grave. This kind of information obviously tells us that Francesca has loved Robert until the very last day of her life.

All of these and other elements in the movie (as well as in the novel it is adapted from) offer us several pieces of an

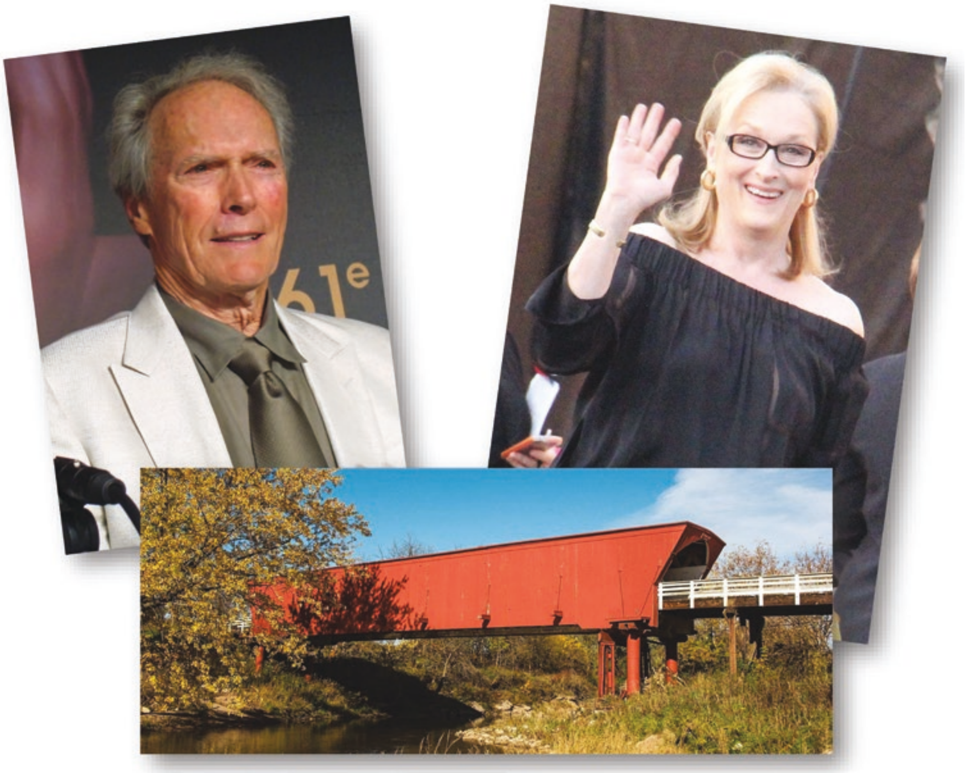


Fig. 3.14 The three protagonists from *The Bridges of Madison County*: Clint Eastwood *[photo by Fanny Bouton, CC BY-SA 1.0]*, Meryl Streep *[photo by Neon Tommy, CC BY-SA 2.0]* and the Roseman Covered Bridge in Winterset, Iowa *[detail from a photo by Teddi Yaeger, CC BY-SA 4.0]*

ideal jigsaw that we assemble in our head: this is how the cooperation occurs. In the *Outlander* Netflix series, we get to know Claire for being a strong and honest person, and one who really cares about the people she chooses to tell her story to. Also, we get to know these other people as caring enough for her to be ready to believe her (*Outlander*, too, like Eastwood's movie, is an AVT where deep, true love plays an enormously important role, so we know that those who love Claire, they love her to their greatest extent); we also have experienced her story directly, and we have not seen reasons why she would develop another version, consciously or unconsciously.

This suggests that our role as spectators/readers of an AVT is all but passive, and that to some extent we are also *inside* the space and time of a story. In the next paragraph, we shall discuss this notion (Fig. 3.14).

3.2.1 Spectators as Collaborators

Umberto Eco, the famous Italian semiotician, said that every text is an "open work" (1962), in that it allows multiple interpretations that are actually mediated by the readers. He also called the reader a "lector in fabula" (1979), a pun with the common Latin expression "lupus in fabula" ("the wolf in the tale", to signify a key presence within a story, like indeed the wolf in tales like *Little Red Riding Hood*): what he meant is that the reader ("lector" in Latin) is actually *inside* the story, in a way, because they contribute enormously in the construction of its meaning.

How does a reader/spectator do that, exactly? First of all, we have to be the *right* readers. When an author (writer, director, composer…) of any work of art starts creating, they normally have in mind an ideal reader of their work: a reader who is capable to understand it in all, or most, of its characteristics. Eco calls this particular reader the "**model reader**". We are not necessarily talking about anyone particularly competent or sophisticated. The model reader can be a general rock fan for a Foo Fighters video, someone with an interest in 1960s culture for the *Mad Men* TV series, a history enthusiast for the game *Forge of Empires*, and so forth. In general, anyone who has a fair amount of cultural affinities with the text can qualify for the role. And, well, it is usually these people who *really* become readers of those particular texts: you may not be madly interested in watching a Foo Fighters video if you do not have any interest in music, or if your musical taste goes more in the direction of—say—Balinese Gamelan music, rather than rock. An author knows that, and therefore they tend to write not only for the readers they *dream/hope* to have, but also for the ones they *expect* to have: rarely do the two categories coincide.

Sometimes, the author *selects* their readers on purpose, creating ad hoc strategies to exclude the ones they do not want and welcome those they do. Since we mentioned Umberto Eco, many of you will be aware of his most famous novel, *The Name of the Rose*. For that particular book, Eco wanted a type of reader who would be more at ease with the slow pace of medieval life, as opposed to the faster life rhythms of nowadays. For this reason, if you have read the book, you will know that the first 100 pages or so are *especially* slow, descriptive and ultimately difficult—some may say simply "boring". Eco did that on purpose to discourage readers who would prefer more and faster action, knowing that the ones he wanted would have survived (and in fact enjoyed) those pages and would have kept on reading the novel. It was a sort of Darwinian selection, if you like.

A second important factor is inferences. An **inference** is that particular tool in communication that allows us to work out the meaning of a message not only by what it literally says, but also by what it implies and/or suggests. Inference is what makes us "read between the lines", as they say. Inference is the reason why, if someone asks "Do you know what is the capital of Germany?" we say "Berlin" instead of "Yes". Technically, indeed, that question would require only a "yes" or "no" reply, but we know, we understand, what the question really wants from us. Inference is also the device that allows us to choose the right option among several that would be equally legitimate. If someone asks us "How did you sleep last night?" theoretically there are at least three possible answers, all quite acceptable: "by laying on the bed", "with pajamas" and "very well, thank you" (or "not really well", or other variants). Still, we gather—*infer*—that our interlocutor is not necessarily interested in what we were wearing or which position we assumed: they rather want to know the quality of our sleeping time, so we usually go for the third option. However, if we have a slight contextual change, we may also choose a different option. If, say, the night has been particularly cold and our interlocutor knows that we like to sleep solely in our underwear, they may want to know if we took some care in ensuring more warmth to our body, so a reply like "with pajamas" may be the right choice.

Now, AVTs are literally packed with representations that require inferences, otherwise they would spend a ridiculous amount of time trying to explain everything. If the text has a certain location in space or time, it will be enough to insert a characteristic element from that epoch or place in order for us to infer when/where we are. If a character arrives in New York and we see skyscrapers that look just like the ones in Chicago, Dallas or Seattle, a quick frame on the Statue of Liberty will clear all the doubts. If, during a war sequence, we see a soldier agonizing in the arms of his best friend while a nurse checks on him, and we see the nurse shaking her head to the friend, we infer that the soldier will die soon, not that—say—the nurse refuses to intervene, or does not know what problem the soldier has.

Creating a network of inferences is of primary importance for an AVT, which—as we shall see—needs to operate "by subtraction", that is, by reducing reality to an essential, meaningful form. As we have said already, AVCC cannot reproduce reality *in toto*: there are selections and choices that one must perform.

The third factor is called by Eco "**intertextual script**". That means that most readers are not first-timers in their activity of watching a movie, reading a book or else. Most probably, they will have read other books, watched other movies, listened to other music, etc. In this respect, they are likely to project on the new text conclusions and interpretations they made in previous ones. When we see two strangers, a man and a woman, looking at each other at the beginning of a movie, we kind of know, or at least expect, that this man and this woman will have some kind of amorous relationship eventually. We know that because we have seen it in so many AVTs already: it is quite a *cliché*. In that sense, we develop a network of narrative solutions (a script, indeed) across the various texts we know (intertextuality, indeed), create some kind of grand narration that gathers different stories under the same umbrella. Once again: the author is aware of this process, so they repeat the *cliché* on purpose in such a way that they do not have to think how to explain a certain situation and may give it for granted (knowing that, indeed, the readers will *cooperate*).

The fourth factor, for lack of better expressions, could be called "**readers' allowance**". It is the mere freedom—"trust", if we like—that the author gives to the reader. An author may also (deliberately or not) leave blank spots in the narration, not specifying certain things, even crucial ones. The readers, however, will integrate the missing parts with their own imagination.

Some of you, especially the more senior readers, will remember the TV series *Columbo*, starring the late Peter Falk. If you remember the series you will also remember that inspector Columbo often mentions his wife in the various episodes: yet the wife never appears in the show, not once in the whole ten seasons. Now, obviously every fan of the show must have pictured that lady somehow, and it is very possible that each of them had a different version of her: was she old? Was she young? Was she blonde? Was she tall? What job did she do? As much as there was a lot of curiosity around this Mrs. Columbo, it was part of the charm of the series that her identity would never be revealed. Actually, this is so true that when the American channel NBC produced a spin-off of the series focused on Mrs. Columbo herself (thereby revealing her identity), the show did not have any success and had to be canceled after only 13 episodes. The audience, after all, preferred not to know what she looked like and to continue their work of imagination, assigning to this lady their own idea of face, their own idea of activities, etc.

Excurse 3. The apple and the cockroach

Sometimes this process of readers' allowance works in such mysterious ways that most people end up imagining the same things, even when no specific clue was given to make them think so. What fruit does Eve pick from the tree, after the snake tempts her? Most of you, perhaps all, will say "Why, an apple of course!". Well, in actual fact there is not a single point in the Bible where it is said that the original sin was embodied by an apple. "Fruit" is all we know—without specifications. And yet, a spontaneous, general consensus exists on the representation of that fruit as an apple. The readers filled in the blanks and even created an interpretive tradition, so we hear priests talking about the apple, we see paintings where Eve is holding an apple, and so forth. Imagine how different (and more amusing) would have been the history of Christianity if the sinful fruit would have been a papaya, instead. Imagine the priest doing his sermon and then mentioning the original sin of the papaya. Imagine medieval paintings with Eve holding one of those giant papayas that you can find in Latin America. It would have been a history-changing moment, no doubt.

Another famous example is Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Kafka never mentioned in his book *what kind of insect* the protagonist Gregor Samsa found himself transformed into, at the very beginning of the novella. And yet, most readers imagine a cockroach. Not an ant, not a beetle, not a bedbug, all equally common insects to be found at home.

Fifth and last factor: the **cooperation between readers and texts, *despite* the author**. An author certainly disseminates their work with a significant amount of meanings, but they are hardly in control of all of those that may emerge in the readers' minds. And that is perfectly normal, and by no means unfair towards the author. We may be inclined to think that any meaning that is not intended by the author is not legitimate (a phenomenon known as "intentional fallacy"), but, really, that is not how we "use" art, and AVTs make no exception. Think about songs and what they mean to us: most of the time we ascribe significances that make sense only within our own personal experience, and most probably not meant by the composers. We fall in love with someone, and all of a sudden many love songs seem to be written for the person we love—however, we know that they are not. Does it matter? Not really: art is great exactly for what it evokes in each of us. This is another important way to interpret Eco's expression "*Open* work".

There is a wonderful sequence in Michael Radford's movie *The Postman*, which is the fictional story of a friendship between the great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (played by the French actor Philippe Noiret) and a young postman called Mario (the Italian Massimo Troisi) who delivers his mail during his exile in Italy in 1950. By interacting daily with Neruda, Mario, a simple man, learns to love poetry and, thanks to poetry, he will conquer the woman of his dreams, Beatrice (a reference to Dante's muse, perhaps?) (Fig. 3.15).

At the point when the following dialogue occurs (exactly one hour into the movie), Mario has fallen deeply in love with Beatrice, and seeing how beautiful and seemingly unachievable she is, he thinks he has no chance, and is frustrated that his life has been turned upside down. In the absence of better solutions, he blames Neruda for having taught him to like poetry, and thus to believe in dreams—

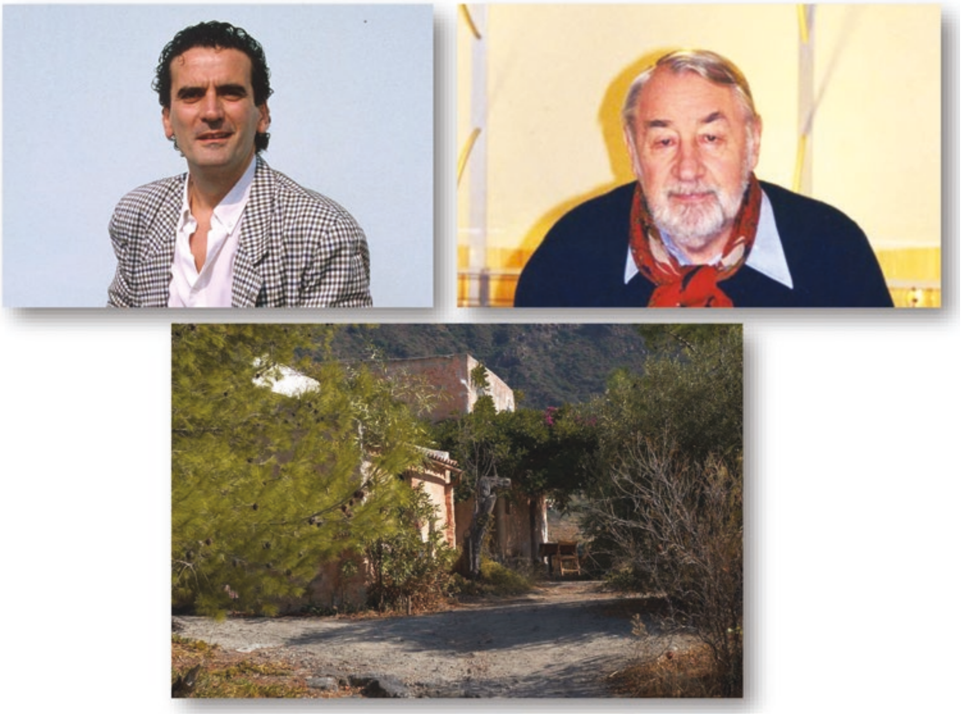


Fig. 3.15 The two protagonists of *The Postman*: Massimo Troisi/Mario *[detail from a photo by Gorup de Besanez, CC BY-SA 4.0]* and Philippe Noiret/Neruda *[photo by Christian D'Aufin, CC BY-SA 3.0]*. On the bottom, the film location for Neruda's villa from the movie, in the island of Salina, Italy *[photo by Tore Urnes, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

particularly "love" dreams (many of Neruda's poems, famously, are declarations of love for his wife Matilde Urrutia). Here is the dialogue:

Mario: "My dear poet and comrade, you got me into this mess, you've got to get me out of it. You gave me books to read, you taught me to use my tongue for more than licking stamps. It's your fault if I'm in love".
Neruda: "No, this has nothing to do with me. I gave you my books but I didn't authorize you to steal my poems. If you think you gave Beatrice the poem I wrote for Matilde…"
Mario: "Poetry doesn't belong to those who write it, but those who need it!"

We can all agree that this sentiment applies to all arts. Paul McCartney wrote the song "Let It Be" after he had had a dream in which his late mother Mary was reassuring him that everything would be fine, and that whatever struggle he was going through, he just would have to "let it be". As we can see, the circumstances in which this song was written were very personal, with even a specific name mentioned ("…Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be…"), and yet we all know "Let It Be" as an anthem with a universal message that everybody can relate to and apply to their own situation. All of us have good reasons to let something be, accept the difficulties in our life and move on. So: we all *need* "Let It Be" at some point, and that is the moment—following Neruda's postman—when "Let It Be" becomes *ours*. I have a dear friend called Paolo Bucciarelli, who is a musician and a producer, and he once told me something I have never forgotten: "The best songs are not the best ones, but the ones that you get to listen to at the right moment". That is a very similar idea to the character of Mario, and in fact it affected my way of recognizing the music that I like: by now, the very moment when I listen to a song, and the state I am in at that particular point, have become my main criterion to assess that song.

It is also important to note that personal experience is not the only reason we assign meanings to a text, regardless of the author. Time, historical time, is also relevant. Many books we read, music we listen to, films we watch, etc., do not belong to our epoch, do not *speak* to it. Reading these texts nowadays, in the light of what our age and our society mean, is a process of re-interpretation in ways the authors could never have imagined.

3.2.2 On the Process of Interpretation

Now that we have understood how a reader becomes "lector in fabula", i.e., an active participant of the text via their work of interpretation, let us elaborate on how interpretation as such works. We have said that an AVT is filled with meanings (some intended by the author, some not), and that these meanings are manifest in various ways: visual, like for example when we spoke about Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep gazing at each other; sonic, like the soundtrack of a horror movie we have mentioned earlier on in the book; and linguistic, like the conversation between Mario and Pablo Neruda we have just mentioned. Basically, anything we hear or see in an AVT is potentially a carrier of meaning (later, we shall talk about sound, image and language as "means" of AVCC, but for now let us stay at this more superficial level). We have already seen that, in linguistics, these carriers of meanings are called "**signifiers**", and the actual meanings are called "**signified**". A meaning, needless to say, is never manifested in itself: it always needs one or more signs (which are determined either naturally or culturally) to "carry" it. The love between Francesca and Robert in that final sequence of *Bridges of Madison County* was not manifested "in itself", so to speak, but needed to be carried by those gazes that the two protagonists exchanged. So: their gazes were the signifier and their love was the signified.

With that in mind, and still following Eco's invaluable work on this matter, interpretation works in three main ways.

1. Signifiers acquire proper meaning only through **contextual interaction**

In the light of the context we (the readers) find that in some respects the signifiers grow progressively more clear, and in other respects more ambiguous in others: we understand a given meaning, but, as this happens, further interpretive options are possible. Also, if one modifies a single element of the context, the others lose importance, too (Eco 1968: 64). To some extent, then, the work of art functions as a hypertext that, once a concept is clarified, brings more doubts, forcing the reader to perform a further decoding task. The key words here are thus *interaction* and *context*. This is one important difference between steady and week AVCC: in the steady type, clarity prevails over ambiguity: once we understand what connection certain signifiers have towards certain signifieds, the circle tends to be closed. The happy ending of the "And they lived happily ever after" type is the quintessential example of a steady AVT, because it gives all what we need to know: the story is over and the two lovers will be together forever. Nothing in the signs delivered by the text makes us think that other options are possible, and that maybe this couple will start fighting on a regular basis and will divorce after a few weeks.

On the contrary, open endings are quintessentially "unsteady", because they do not give us "one" meaning, but they open up to many possible solutions. Many people have watched and enjoyed Christopher Nolan's *Inception*. In this corporate espionage movie, the protagonist Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) is an unusual kind of thief: he steals ideas while the mind is in a vulnerable dream state. In the course of the movie, he becomes a fugitive and, having lost everything, he tries to redeem himself. He has one last job to do: implant-ing an idea into the mind of a CEO. If he can do that, all will be right again. But what actually happens at the end? Things get so out of control in that movie that we are left to wonder where the dream ends and reality begins. Is it reality? Is it a dream? Is it a dream within a dream? On the Internet there are dozens of forums and discussion groups about the actual interpretation of *Inception*: not an easy task, for an ending that is "unsteady", in the sense we mean here.

2. The relationship between **signifier and signified**

Analyzing and understanding the actual relation between signifier and signified is absolutely central in the process of interpretation (Eco 1968: 64). First of all, the *matter* which signifiers are made of seems not to be arbitrary when compared to their meaning and their contextual relation. Second, the familiarity between two signs, in terms of meaning, can be enforced through certain strategies, like, for example, the familiarity of rhymes in poetry. Third, the structure of the sign itself seems to re-propose the evoked sense (like onomatopoeias within the domain of the sign's sound). Fourth and last, the entire set-up of the signifiers, organized according to a given proportion, realizes a sound and visual rhythm that is not arbitrary in comparison with their meaning.

To understand this let us consider Samuel Taylor Coleridge's beautiful poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Published in 1798, the poem is a kind of epic account of the experiences of a sailor who has returned from a long sea voyage. The sailor stops a man on the street (the poor guy is actually on his way to attend a wedding ceremony) and begins telling his story. The street guy is first annoyed by the mariner and then becomes more and more fascinated by the story. Anyway, at some point, the story relates about the ship facing a maze of icebergs. There is a verse that goes "The ice was here, the ice was there, the ice was all around". In it, the parallelism and the redundancy of the words and the structure (the signifiers) go hand in hand with the immense expanse of icebergs that surround the mariners of the poem (the signifieds). In other words, not only are the signifiers "here", "there" and "all around", but so are the icebergs! The message, which in 'normal' (i.e., non-artistic) conditions would not be so redundant, is used now in an eccentric and unusual way, and that is why we, as readers, are somehow led to conceive a relationship between signifiers and signifieds. In addition, "all around" is a longer formulation than "here" or "there": that, too, creates continuity between the representation of an entity (space, in this case) and its empirical nature. "Here" and "there" are limited, pinpointed, spots: "all around" defines a wider area. If we also read the verse with a certain rhythmical emphasis, we feel that component in a very musical way.

So, when we think about it, signifiers and signifieds in this verse share many similarities—they are not alien to each other. On the contrary, when the message is not "artistic" and we are just speaking normal language, it really does not matter whether there are similarities or not. We could tell the same story, but instead of saying this melodic and redundant sentence, we could use something like "We were surrounded by icebergs". Same meaning, but we have lost all the connections we were talking about. In artistic messages, and therefore in any form of AV art, this relation is more important and more recurrent.

3. The message and **levels of reality**

The message can put *various levels of reality* into discussion (Eco 1968: 64). A work of art is characterized by an extraordinary eclecticism, involving several variables, not only those predictably related to its denotation (that, as we have already seen, its literal meaning), but also to the various connotations (the meanings that are associated, for whatever reason). Let us not forget that the message is "ambiguous", and *ambiguity* is the other important key word, here. In other words, we cannot interpret the AVT only on the basis of what the AVT itself expresses: we also need to attach cultural aspects, emotional aspects, political aspects… anything that might provide *additional* meanings. A detailed example discussing this point can be found in **Excurse 4** and also in our case study (*The Birds*).

Excurse 4—A Strauss Odyssey

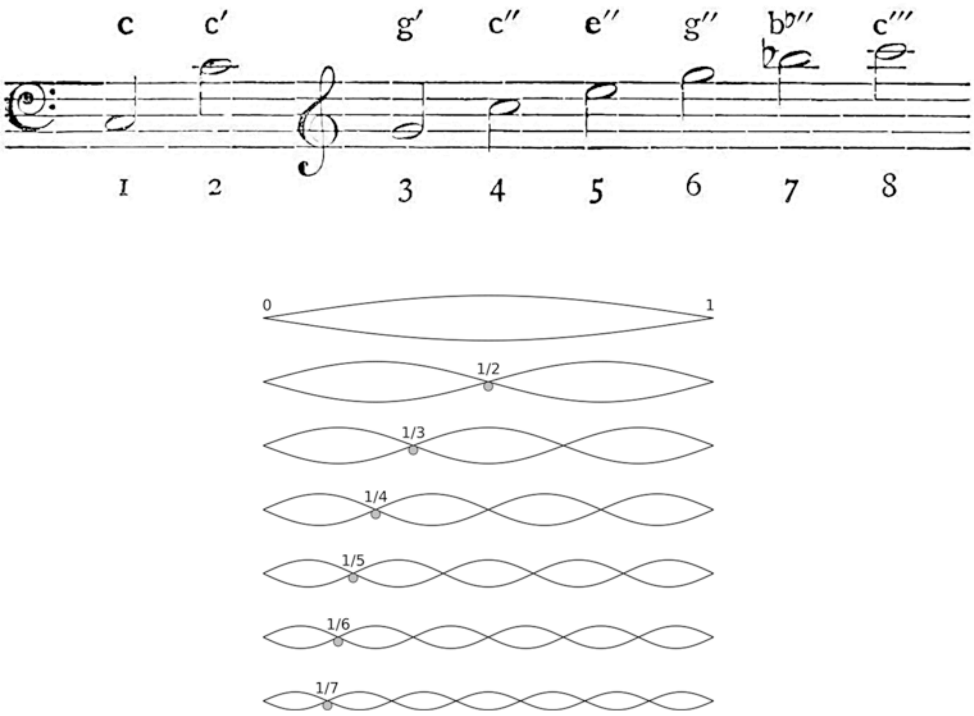
One effective way to understand how complex a network of "reality levels" an AVT may produce, let us take one of Stanley Kubrick's masterpieces, and in particular the use of music in the opening sequence, which is arguably one of the most famous beginnings of a musical work set to one of the most famous beginnings of a film. The music at the beginning of *A Space Odyssey*, as we know, is Richard Strauss's prelude for the symphonic poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra,* and we hear it both at the very beginning over the opening titles, and more importantly after a few minutes, as a soundtrack to the primitive hominid who discovers the use of a bone as weapon to hunt, destroy and gain power, therefore inaugurating "humankind". Apparently, Kubrick chose Strauss's piece because it was grand, epic, and had a recognizable ending (so it could stand alone, without us needing to hear the rest of the symphonic poem). When we analyze the AVT only in its denotation, this is what we notice about this sequence and the music set to it: that it is a big, fat piece of music chosen for a big, fat visual sequence (the birth of humankind).

If we instead choose the path suggested by Umberto Eco, and we catch all the nuances and connotations, more connections appear. First of all, there is a fundamental philosophical basis in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*: the poem is inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical novel of the same title. This is the work where Nietzsche developed his theory of the Übermensch (or "superman"): very briefly, the theory says that human beings are not just seekers of pleasure—they have the potential to be great, but this takes hard work, suffering, humiliation, loneliness, uncertainty, risk and determination. The "superman" accepts all this, and looks somewhat heroically at the challenges (and horrors) of life, embracing them. He lives dangerously in a persistent state of creativity and only death terminates this quest; the concept is very much in antithesis with religious conceptions of "other worlds" and afterlife. In Kubrick's movie, and particularly in that opening sequence, the hominid becomes human in the realization of wanting to be a Übermensch, of wanting to take risks, live dangerously, prevail over others. In this sense, we see, the use of music inspired by a concept that fits perfectly with what the sequence stages is an additional "meaning" for us.

Another connection can be created with the music as such. A prominent feature of Strauss's piece is that it is built on a phenomenon known as "overtone series". Most musical instruments, when played, produce more than just the notes we hear: these extra notes are indeed called "overtones" or "harmonics", and they can barely be heard by our ear (in some instruments more, in some others less, but in general they are hardly audible). When other instruments play higher notes that match the overtones, they produce harmony. When they play different notes, they clash and produce dissonance. Each overtone goes higher in pitch than the previous one (see ▣ Fig. 3.16), and theoretically the series is infinite, except that the higher we go the less audible the sound is.

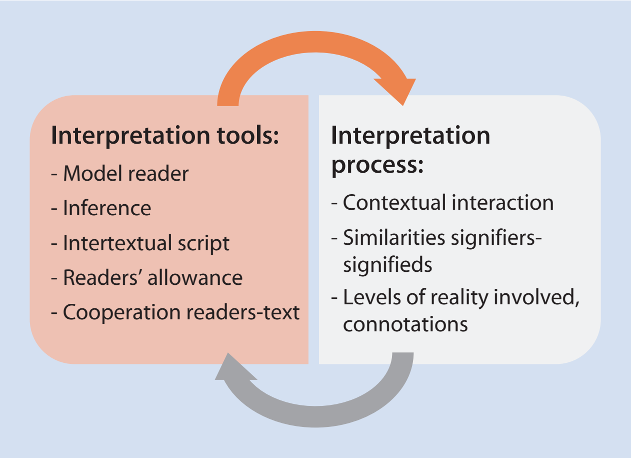
In *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Strauss wanted an exact match of the overtones. After the first note, a C, four trumpets together play C–G–C–E, which are the first four notes of the overtone series for C, making an actual melody from a phenomenon that already happens at physical level. In that sense, the melody is symbolically close to the idea of "natural processes", just like the represented human evolution.

Insisting on the additional meanings provided by the music, the overtone series of the prelude, which has that typical "climbing" effect (because it goes higher and higher) is repeated three times, each time with a different conclusion. The first climb reaches the top E and switches right towards E flat, making a chord of C major, turning instantly to C minor. This way the first series has a "dark" quality that is typical of minor harmonic environments. The second climb does the opposite, going from C minor to C major, by turning E flat into natural E, almost as an acciaccatura. In this sense the series is brighter. The third climb is the most epic and therefore the brightest, with the E going straight to A and the chord changing into F major. This represents a sense of progress and achievement, from darkness to light, from negation to affirmation: this, too, we see in that sequence, as the hominid progressively realizes that the bone it is handling is the key to its accomplishment and power.



▣ Fig. 3.16 The overtones of the C note on a staff and an illustration of the phenomenon at sound wave level. *[Image of public domain]*

A summary of the tools and process of interpretation is in ◘ Fig. 3.17.



◘ Fig. 3.17 The five tools needed for interpretation, and the three ways the process is actualized

3.2.3 Case Study: Steadiness and Unsteadiness in the Birds

Let us now consider *The Birds*, first because Hitchcock is Hitchcock, and his movies exemplify just about any topic in AV analysis, and also because this movie allows us to understand the dynamic relation between steady and unsteady AVCC in action, with features that cover both categories with great clarity.

The Birds was released in 1963 and is loosely based on the short story "The Birds" by Daphne du Maurier (published in 1952). Hitchcock was always inclined to base his movies on not-necessarily-first-rate literary material, ending up, pretty much in all cases, ennobling them. There are many explanations for this choice: on the one hand, he might have wanted to escape comparisons with great works, fearing to lose them, as it so often happens when literature is adapted into film. On the other hand the nature itself of most of his movies (their thrilling atmospheres, surprise endings, tension…) might have made it more convenient to base his movies on plots that were largely unknown. Then again, Hitchcock, at heart, and despite the undisputable greatness of his sense of direction, had always been a storyteller, and he might have simply been fascinated by the possibilities to develop stories that are in general short and artistically incomplete. Instead, if one adapts an all-time classic of literature like, say, *Moby Dick* or *Great Expectations*, there is not much one can develop without damaging a masterpiece: if anything, one tries to subtract and summarize.

At any rate, the plot tells us about a mysterious series of attacks from different species of birds which have invaded the Californian town of Bodega Bay, and which have it in for Mitch Brenner's family and girlfriend. *The Birds* features the first appearance on screen of Tippi Hedren, a typical Hitchcockian "cool blonde" type (as we have seen already), which is characteristic of many of his movies. The co-protagonist, in the role of Brenner, is Rod Taylor, another actor who makes his debut in the Hitchcock cinematography, although, unlike Hedren, he had acted in other movies—and, by the way, he was the voice of Pongo in Disney's *101 Dalmatians*. Cary Grant and Grace Kelly, both regular Hitchcock collaborators, were originally approached for the leading roles, and it was only after their refusal that the director opted for Hedren and Taylor. To some critics, *The Birds* is the director's last instance of a string of masterpieces from his golden era (between the 1950s and the early 1960s): the film was nominated for an Oscar in the "special effects" category, but continuing the infamous tradition of idiosyncrasy between Hitchcock and the Academy, it failed to win this, or any other major recognition. At any rate, the story as such follows a narrative pattern that is deliberately linear and therefore "steady": we are always in control of what happens at the level of specific events, dialogues and actions. That, incidentally, is typical of Hitchcock movies: the narrative dimension of his movies is always steady, even if—of course—it is full of surprises (◘ Fig. 3.18).

The unsteady part occurs when we actually start to analyze and interpret the behavior of these birds, and partly of the human characters. Not *what* they do, but *why* they do it. *The Birds* has been subject to dozens of studies (e.g., see Paglia 1998), and from a stylistic point of view it displays a number of diverse elements that distinguish it from other productions of the same type (that is, within the thriller/horror genre), and which are very useful for our analysis here. To start with, there is a magnificent "unsteady" ending, that is, a total lack of catharsis: nobody dies and there is no real dramatic resolution. The human protagonists silently leave Brenner's house, by now besieged, inside and outside, by the birds, and the latter—quiet and sinister—let them go, possibly content enough to have conquered the territory. There is thus a vague perception of "winners" and "losers", but all kinds of continuations are possible. By far, one of the all-time most remarkable movie endings, and a new path for "scary" movies which now so often make uncertainty and discomfort central narrative solutions. Surprisingly, Hitchcock and his scriptwriter Evan Hunter had actually planned a more explicit finale. In the original project, the protagonists discover that the phenomenon of the birds gone mad is actually not confined to Bodega Bay, but has become a widespread calamity. As a matter fact, during the movie there is not a single indication of what is going on *outside* the town, so the ground for this surprising piece of information was indeed being prepared. In this sense the birds' *victory* is even clearer ("steadier" in narration), and the movie becomes more catastrophic. However, Hitchcock, and all of us film lovers thank him for this, eventually decided to establish a certain vagueness to the events. If it is true that, at the time of the movie's premiere, many spectators had ambivalent feelings about the ending (legend has it that some of them thought that the film reel had been interrupted, due to a technical failure), it is equally true, and more significant, that Hitchcock's choice turned out to be much more original and artistically remarkable, making *The Birds* a by-then unique case within its genre.

The employment of certain novel cinematographic techniques/strategies is also important, and will later turn out to be very influential. Everybody certainly remembers the zoom-in, in three separate steps, on the dead farmer's eyes, still nowadays a great example of how a very simple idea can have a great emotional impact (think about the scary sequence of the girl in *The Ring* coming out from the TV).

Also, the choice of reverting to non-diegetic music is original, at least in the traditional sense, the scariest sequences included, which of course also applies to the farmer's eyes sequence. In a horror movie, where so much relies on the impact of music,

ALFRED
HITCHCOCK'S
"The Birds"
TECHNICOLOR®

Fig. 3.18 Three stills from *The Birds*: the opening titles (top-left), a close-up of a terrified Tippi Hedren during one bird attack (bottom-left) and a publicity image of Alfred Hitchcock in the movie set (right). *[Images of public domain]*

this may seem like a suicidal strategy, and yet Hitchcock must have felt so confident in the visual power of his movie to actually *prefer* silence (with whatever diegetic sound appearing at any particular moment), creating another model for several future horror films and/or thrillers (*The Day of the Jackal, No Country for Old Men*…). As you may or may not know, in his other great horror, *Psycho*, Hitchcock did not want to use any music either: it took the persuasive skills of one of his few trusted collaborators, composer Bernard Herrmann, to convince him that—for instance—a series of angular violin attacks would have fit perfectly with the famous "shower sequence". Herrmann was right, of course, but in *The Birds* Hitchcock must have had the last word on the subject, and instead asked Herrmann to focus particularly on sound effects, rather than music per se. Many of the sounds were created on the Mixtur-Trautonium, an electronic musical instrument developed by Oskar Sala.

Finally, there is that other—very Hitchcockian—idea to break the narrative conventions and create the illusion that the movie is going in a certain direction (romantic drama, or even romantic comedy, in *The Birds*' case), until—towards the middle of the runtime—the spectator is "slapped" by an event that turns the plot and the style into a whole different thing (a horror film, here). As we shall see in the next paragraph, this strategy is curiously called "MacGuffin" (or McGuffin, as it is sometimes spelled). The British-born director had already flirted with this strategy in several of his previous movies. In *The Birds*, nothing really thrilling happens for about 40 min: it seems there is a developing love affair between Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) and Mitch Brenner (Rod Taylor), and all appears to take us down the path of a romantic movie. Then, when finally the spectator surrenders to this idea, Melanie is attacked by the first bird, inaugurating a long series of terrifying events that in the end qualify this movie as one of the most important horror films of all times. The romance part becomes practically irrelevant.

I may have hesitated a little too long on the stylistically innovative aspects of this movie, which in total are not strictly relevant in our analysis of steady and unsteady narration, however I do hope this will make sense, because they have the same purpose as the thematic traits that I am now about to discuss. In short, a sense of eerie ambiguity which, in its most distinctive and symbolic shape, Hitchcock assigns exactly to the various birds. That is: the "unsteady" part of the story.

Who, and what, are these birds, then?

To work that out we need to use the tools mentioned in the previous paragraph. The repeated bird attacks in Bodega Bay are generally presented as not rationally explicable. The protagonists themselves, gathered in a local cafeteria, discuss the very topic and cannot reach a reasonable conclusion. To an extent, this sequence is almost an invitation to the spectators to continue the debate among themselves after the movie is over. An ornithologist happens to be there too, commenting on the blackbirds and crows that have just attacked the local school (which Melanie has described as intentional): "I hardly think that either species would have sufficient intelligence to launch a massed attack. Their brainpans are not big enough to… Birds are not aggressive creatures, Miss. They bring beauty into the world. It is mankind, rather, who insists upon making it difficult for life to exist upon this planet." Here, the bird expert represents the position of "science" on the matter: she maintains that Melanie's hypothesis goes against the scientific knowledge and insists on approaching the matter in a more logical way.

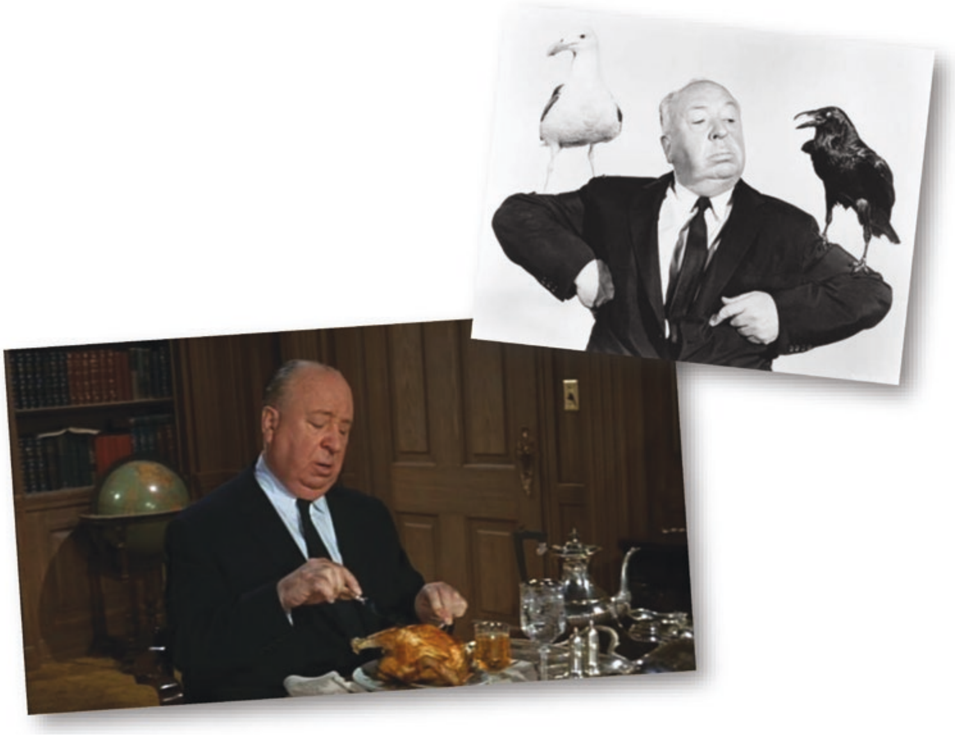
Another customer in the cafeteria voices what we may call the "religious" stand: the attack is a symptom that the end of the world is approaching. Birds, among other things, are often iconographic and mythical symbols of God's messages: there are no doves, here (the most conventional bird divine messenger), but that may also be because the message is far from peaceful and comforting: this is a divine punishment for humanity's sins, an apocalypse. As we have seen, Hitchcock's original idea for the ending was to extend the plague outside Bodega Bay. The ornithologist remarks that a war against all the birds on the planet might be humanly impossible, as—it is estimated—there is something like 100 billion of birds in the world. Earth would descend into total chaos.

At this point of the film the discussion is interrupted by another bird attack. Some of the customers experience the event for the first time, and now they all agree that the phenomenon defies logic. Even the ornithologist is speechless. One woman then approaches a tearful Melanie pointing out that the attacks started just when she arrived in town. This woman is now a voice for superstition and not necessarily religious belief in witchcraft and the supernatural. She asks Melanie who she is *really*, where she is from and ultimately suggests that it is her who has caused all this evil.

Perhaps, at this point, the accusation is not just superstitious, but may imply a slight ecological message between the lines: the movie opens with Melanie purchasing two caged lovebirds from an animal shop, which has an enormous amount of birds on display that, depending on the viewers point of view, are either "imprisoned for no crime committed" or "safely subdued to human beings". From the point of view of an animal advocate (and also from that of the birds), Melanie *is* an evil person and so is Mitch who happens to be in the same shop. Are the birds reacting against their mistreatment by humans?. The attacks start when Melanie brings these lovebirds to Mitch's house, as if to underline that this metaphorical *trade of slaves* is in the end the actual trespassing of the birds' threshold of tolerance towards human arrogance. When releasing the movie Hitchcock made a trailer that seems to indicate this animal rights oriented interpretation (see also ◘ Fig. 3.19). However, we shall see later, Hitchcock never displayed particular inclination to ethical issues of this sort.

One more option: are the birds trying to free the two lovebirds from the cage? In all the chaos that follows Melanie's arrival in Bodega Bay, the lovebirds are always there, in their cage at Mitch's house. Could that be the reason why the birds are particularly aiming at Melanie, Mitch, his dear ones, and the house as such? The lovebirds may in this case represent small, innocent children from the city, which more experienced "countryside" free birds are trying to rescue. For example, that could explain the specific attack at the school: the birds might wish to demonstrate that it is all too easy to abuse "innocent children". Yet, at the end of the movie—as they escape from the house—we see the protagonists taking the caged lovebirds along, instead of giving them freedom: does that mean that humans *will never learn the lesson*? Does this imply that a possible continuation of the movie is now that the enraged birds will follow them until the humans get the point? Or is it a distinction between *good birds* (the caged ones, who deserve to be *with humans*) and *bad* ones?

Whether or not the message has a specific ecological accent, *The Birds*, like many so-called **ecokill** movies (a sub-genre of thrillers and horrors where non-human animals constitute a threat for human beings, such as *Jaws*, *Godzilla* and the likes), invites—or rather, forces—spectators to think about the terrifying implications of a violent clash between humankind and a nature turned mad and brutal. Hitchcock chose to create this confrontation in a civilized environment (Bodega Bay may not be a metropolis, but it is clearly an anthropized place), with the attacks coming *straight home*, so to speak, and from very *common*, *ordinary* birds, as we shall see later. In this case, humans may not be specifically criticized for their cognitive evolution, or whatever brought them into a position of dominance towards other animals, yet they may be warned



◘ **Fig. 3.19** Does *The Birds* have a message of animal advocacy? On the top, a publicity image of Hitchcock posing with a crow and a seagull. On the bottom, a still from the trailer. In this particular sequence, Hitchcock is about to eat a chicken but then loses appetite. *[Images of public domain]* about the ultimate irrelevance of that evolution, when they end up at the mercy of a furious, revengeful nature.

Now, as anticipated, the problem with the last two “ethical” interpretations is that it is difficult to picture someone like Hitchcock exhibiting any particular sensibility towards these topics. His biography does not reveal any hint in that direction, or any other direction of ethical-ideological type, for that matter. Browsing through his filmography, Hitchcock seems to have taken a real stand only in the years of the Second World War, for instance (in *Lifeboat*) by warning Americans that the seed of evil can be planted just about anywhere, not only in Germany, or (in *Rope*) by literally sentencing to death (as happens to the two protagonists) Nietzsche’s superman theories that inspired Hitler. Otherwise, it is not Nanni Moretti or Ken Loach we are talking about, here—two directors, that is, who show a systematic eagerness to launch political messages in their works. We have discussed a similar situation with Walt Disney (and maybe Hitchcock, too, responds to the profile of the middle class conservative), but in that case we have a full body of work that testifies—in one way or another—to a credible interest in environmental issues. With Hitchcock, that part is missing. In addition, during the filming, the treatment itself of the birds, though monitored by the American Humane Association, raised more than one controversy. Several birds were in fact mechanical models, but the real ones, which are also needed of course, were often caught in traps and kept in cages.

Having said that, we are far from finished with interpretations (I was not kidding when I mentioned about their being *dozens* of them). For example, Costanzo (1992) discusses a few psychoanalytic interpretations of Hitchcock’s film that somebody like David Lynch would certainly not mind for his own movies. More or less, they all relate to the Freudian concept of “transfer”. Mitch’s mother, Lydia, is a particularly possessive woman, and Mitch himself seems to be a bit of what in Italy we call “mammone” (a mama’s boy). In this sense, the birds’ attacks could actually represent Lydia’s hostility towards anyone who dares intruding onto the territory she has marked for herself and her son. Or, in similar fashion, the birds are the various women who surround Mitch’s life and compete for his attention: besides Melanie and Lydia, we have also his sister and his ex-girlfriend, and throughout the film it is very clear that they all would like to be more *central* in his life. In the latter case, the choice of the film’s title, *The Birds*, could also be a pun from British slang, where “birds” means “women” or “girls” (as in the American equivalent “chicks”).

Insisting on the psychoanalytical approach, the illogical nature of the attacks may also refer to Melanie’s general emotional crisis in this adventure. Until her meeting with Mitch, she is a rich, self-sufficient, rational and slightly spoiled woman, or so it appears. As she falls for Mitch, she finds herself losing her emotional safety and doing things she would have never dreamed of doing for anybody, such as chasing a man up to his own town, secretly breaking into his house to present him with the lovebirds. In other words, until this point Melanie has lived the illusion that everything can be “planned”, and now, through a most terrifying shock therapy, she discovers that illogicality and unpredictability frequently occur in a person’s life, and often may lead to tragedy. Within this framework the birds are a metaphor of such unpredictability and instability in life, emotions and events. Our very perception of birds as animals makes them suitable for this role: we see them flying, variable, and we are constantly surprised by their movements, rapid changes of direction and seemingly irregular trajectories. Exactly like life, or—at least—the way life turns out to be for Melanie. All things considered, this interpretation may be consistent with Du Maurier’s novel. As Nicholas Haeffner (2005) underlines in his excellent study on Hitchcock, Daphne Du Maurier is a writer “strongly associated with feminine concerns”, who often creates situations of “romance in which a suffering heroine endures emotional torture to emerge victorious in love” (Haeffner 2005: 21). This aspect, for the record, had already emerged in another important Hitchcock production based on Du Maurier, the movie *Rebecca*.

Other interpretations have been offered here and there, but I guess we have by now built a solid case for both steady and unsteady communicative aspects in AVTs. Similar to John Houston’s *Moby Dick* (which, however, relies much more on the greatness of Herman Melville’s novel), but with different contents and symbolism, *The Birds* displays a rich catalogue of psychological, social and anthropological perceptions and projections associated with non-human animals—and birds, in particular. Neither Hitchcock nor any of his collaborators offered an explanation for any of the possible interpretations, so the question remains open. It is possible that each of these aspects was considered, and it is also possible that our morbid wish to dig deeper and deeper into the meaning of this or other works of art, exceed by far the artist’s intentions. However, as we have seen earlier, this does not really matter: “Poetry belongs to those who need it”, said our postman Mario.

One last note concerns the film’s taxonomical choices. In using the species he used, Hitchcock successfully resisted the *cliché* to employ traditionally “villain” birds, such as vultures, owls or hawks. Only crows fall into that category, otherwise what we see is seagulls (which are only occasionally depicted as villains, but usually are employed as metaphors of adventure and freedom), and most of all the ultra innocent sparrows. The common ground, evidently, is not the allegoric association, but rather the intention to use *ordinary* birds, those we see almost on a daily basis. There is no *alien*, *exotic* terror in *The Birds*: the terror is right there to see, in the immediate neighborhood, embodied by entities we had always taken for granted.

3.3 Foreshadowing Versus Sideshadowing

Before we proceed to discuss the most prominent concepts associated with time (narration) and space (montage), we might consider another dichotomy that, once more, is relevant to both the temporal and the spatial dimensions of AVCC. At first glance this may actually appear to be more marginal because it focuses on a specific strategy inside the text that does not characterize it as a whole, but only in some details. However, as we shall soon see, this is the kind of detail that actually may—and often does—define the entire text, in the same way that certain clothing accessories become the main point of attraction for the entire outfit: a pearl necklace, an eccentric hat, a colorful foulard, etc.

Let us consider a well-known recommendation by the great Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, who addresses the need for essentiality in a story, and the semantic role of its components. He repeated this recommendation in various forms, one of the most famous being in a letter: “Remove everything that has no relevance to the story. If you say in the first chapter that a rifle is hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there." Years later, with his usual taste for dark humor, Alfred Hitchcock perfected the sentence by saying that after all there is no need for the rifle to shoot at any cost, as long as at least one attempt is made. Since Chekhov used that example, a common phrasing in any form of storytelling, from literature to audiovisuality, is the expression "**Chekhov's rifle** (or Chekhov's gun)", to underscore the fact that something "not essential" has been introduced in a story.

What does this all mean? How do we understand "essentiality" in an AVT? And why is it important?

Let us take an example from real life and imagine a woman sitting at her desk, working at the computer. She is typing something, she gazes at a book she has at her right side, and she is sipping from a coffee mug at her left side. At some point the phone rings, she picks it up and says "Hello?… Yes, sure, see you later!" She turns off the phone and keeps on working. I think we can all agree that this is an absolutely normal situation, featuring four actions (typing at the computer, reading from a book, drinking coffee and answering the phone) that probably happen to us hundreds of times, especially if we work (or study) in research or education. I made an example like this exactly because there is a high chance that most readers of this book operate within these areas: we can all relate to a situation like this, and nothing strange has happened, has it?

Now. Let us imagine the exact same sequence, this time featured in the beginning of a fictional AVT, such as a movie or a TV series. The woman writes at the computer—fine; she reads from a book—fine; she sips from a cup—fine; she talks at the phone—wait!!! All of a sudden a little bell rings in our mind: what was that call about? Who was she talking to? She said "see you later": what is going to happen "later"? Is she meeting a lover, an accomplice in a robbery? Is she meeting the person who will kill her? A simple and—let us repeat it—extremely normal gesture, when placed in an AVT, has brought us on an alert mode, as if one of the four actions is not so "normal" anymore. Most of all, we now expect something to happen, and that is the very key of the notions we will be now introducing in this paragraph. Creating a set of expectations of different sorts and in different moments is indeed a crucial task for AVCC (and, again, for any form of art), because, at the end of the day, the engaging quality of a story relies very much on expectations that are met and expectations that are disappointed, clues that go somewhere and clues that do not.

We call **foreshadowing** the communicative device in which an expectation is created in the reader's mind and it is satisfied (that is, what eventually happens was indeed anticipated by that particular clue); while we call **sideshadowing** the device that, instead, leads to the disappointment of that expectation (that is, what eventually happens is not connected to that clue, or specifically contradicts that clue). While we are at it, we shall mention a third device, less important in the context of the concepts we are introducing at this stage, but relevant within the framework of these techniques of textual anticipation. We shall just mention it here, and then proceed with the two main topics of this paragraph. It is called **backshadowing**, and it consists of inserting some elements into the present narrative that refer to earlier events. For example, a child living in present day America discovers that they are descended from the Apache people. In order for this story to make sense, we need to know something about American history and Native Americans, because the child's action will have something (or a lot) to do with that discovery and that heritage (e.g., they will show remarkable innate warrior skills). In other words, unlike the two categories that we shall focus on, backshadowing does not employ recognizable, pinpointed "clues", but a general "context" (which, as we have seen, may also exist *outside* the text), and that is a different ballgame altogether.

3.3.1 Symbolic Foreshadowing and Chekhov's Rifles

Strictly speaking, foreshadowing and sideshadowing refer to just *any* clue that gets satisfied or not, without necessarily stirring our attention in the way the woman typing at the computer and receiving a call does. In a most general sense, *all* the actions of that woman can be clues, not only the phone call. In fact, since we spoke about the "lector in fabula", that is, the cooperation between readers and texts, we must say that in cases of "unsteady narration" it is likely that the author will use a marginal clue that did *not* particularly catch our attention. This way, as we have seen already in the previous paragraph, the text creates more ambiguity and requires a more attentive cooperation from the reader. In other words, it would be like saying that, instead of the phone call, the actual clue thrown in the scene of the woman at the computer would be the fact that she is drinking coffee, rather than receiving the call. Usually, the author does that not just because they enjoy making things more complicated (ok, sometimes that may be the case too), but because they intend to provide a symbolic value to that particular instance, something that would refer to a deeper meaning than just the narrative construction. For this reason, the expression **symbolic foreshadowing** is often employed to describe this particular use of the device.

An example of very subtle, symbolic foreshadowing appears for instance in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. After about 27 min we see the main character, the writer Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson), playing with a tennis ball in the lobby of the Overlook Hotel (which he is acting as winter caretaker of, a job he accepted in order to work on his novel in a quiet environment). His son Danny is playing in the same area and we see a couple of toys on the floor: among them, a small black teddy bear with its torso clothed in red. After about 1 h and 45 min, Jack, who has by now gone mad and murderous, brutally kills the character of Mr. Halloran by repeatedly slashing his torso with an axe: his body, red-blooded, falls down and ends up in the same position as the teddy bear. So, the teddy bear was foreshadowing the death of Mr. Halloran, but the clue was extremely subtle, and it took filmologists to notice it. Instead, all of us, the readers, tend to easily accept the idea, once a kid is shown playing, a couple of toys on the floor seems a very normal condition, especially when presented in such a casual manner as Kubrick does in that sequence. The camera, indeed, follows Jack playing with the ball, and Danny's toys are simply part of the environment: there is not such a thing like, say, a close-up on the teddy bear, or anything that would point at that object as particularly relevant.

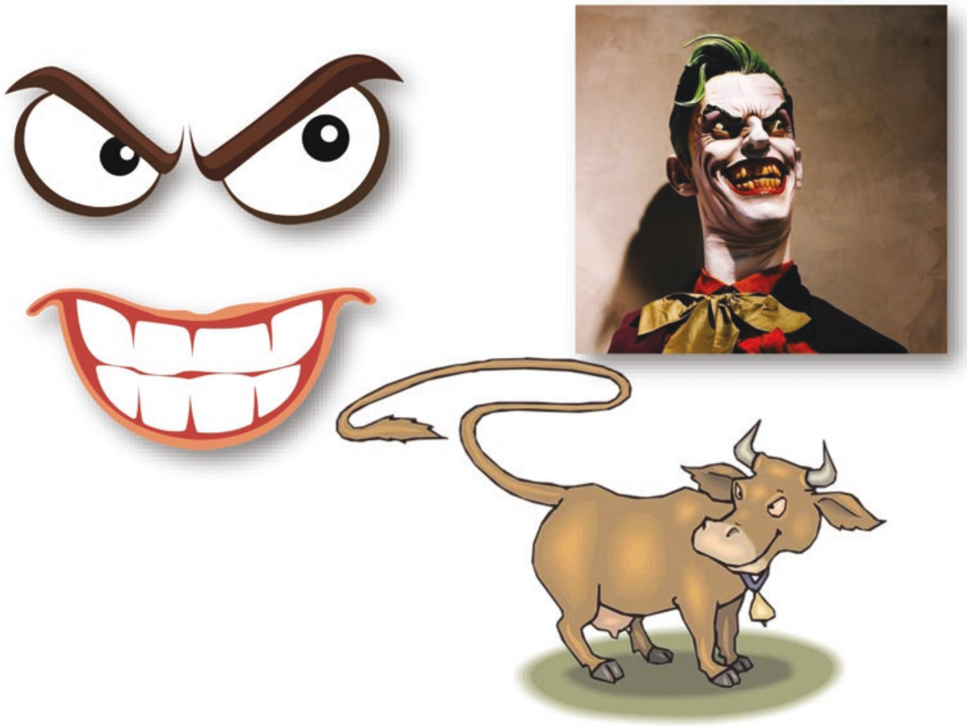
So, in situations like this, an author such as Kubrick is demanding very close cooperation from us. He wants, so to speak, undivided attention: we have to be attentive to practically all of what is happening in a scene, considering each element as potentially meaningful, and of course try to appreciate the symbolic value of a child's toy that predicts someone's death (if you have seen the movie, you will remember that Danny has premonitions and visions of the horrors that will follow). This is more energy-consuming than a situation in which—say—Jack crosses the lobby with his ball, leaves it, and the camera zooms in on the teddy bear and stays on it for a couple of seconds. That would be much more like taking a fluorescent yellow marker and underlining a word for emphasis. At that point, one just cannot miss it.

Having said that, foreshadowing occurs much more often in the manner described by Chekhov: the author, in one way or another, "points the finger" on something, and usually does it in such a way that the emphasis is clear but not trivial, in order not to cheapen their story. We can use our own abilities as a meter: when we recognize a clue without any problem, at the very moment it appears, we are probably watching a very obvious, "too-steady-communication" type of AVT. As an example, we can take some cheap movie, or cartoon for children, where a character reveals himself or herself as the villain, because we see them exhibiting that typical evil grin behind the hero's back (◘ Fig. 3.20). In the metaphor employed by Chekhov, the evil grin would not simply correspond to hang a rifle somewhere in the scenery, but it would also imply that a character in the play said something like "Oh! There is a rifle there, I wonder if someone will shoot!".

We reach a golden middle between the evil grin and Kubrick's teddy bear when we are actually able to create a certain situation of suspicion in the reader, a vague discomfort corresponding to a thought like "Mmm… I wonder what that was for…". Like this, indeed, an "expectation" is created for something to happen, which, as we have seen already, can be met (foreshadowing) or not (sideshadowing).

3.3.2 What Is *Essential* in a Story?

The question, at this point, is: what did Chekhov exactly mean by "essentiality"? What is, and what is not, essential in a story, once we have understood that the concept does *not* overlap with "normality"? To understand this, we first of all need to understand that the normality of the real world is something much larger and much more complex than the normality we see in an AVT (or in other artworks), even when that text is doing its best to meticulously imitate reality. As you may remember, we have seen that already, in the paragraph about realism and fiction.



◘ **Fig. 3.20** The "evil grin" in three different, yet equally effective, incarnations. It is not necessary to look like The Joker (top-right) to appear as a villain. Even an innocent cow (bottom-right) may turn evil by applying that particular facial expression that combines laughter with a malicious gaze. *[Images from Pixabay]*

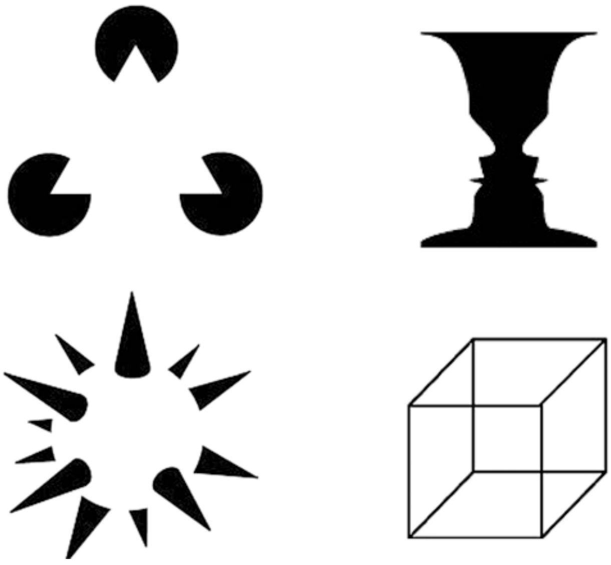
The real normality, that is, the real life, is a "text" full of meaningful variables and virtually unlimited in its events, contexts, etc. Moreover, the signifying potential of these variables is neither unidirectional nor simple. Every single signifier in real life leads to endless signifieds, each changing depending on who reads the sign, to whom, where, when, how… Nothing occurs in relation to a single set of contents. In an AVT we witness the exact opposite. Signifiers are expressively displayed in order to contribute to one or few signifieds, and signifieds have to be planned in advance with the specific purpose to inform the readers of certain particular occurrences, and *not others* (which, instead, in real life would be still possible). In practice, if sense and meaning are in real life a mathematical process of additions and multiplications, in AVTs they are a process of subtraction.

Not only. An AVT operates also in a Gestaltic manner in respect to the management of the available information. "Gestalt" is a school of psychology founded in Austria and Germany in the early twentieth century, which was very influential for the modern study of perception. Psychologists like Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Kohler studied how human beings typically gain meaningful perceptions from chaotic stimuli around them. In order to cope with the chaos and disorder of the surrounding reality, the mind "informs" what the eye sees by making sense of a series of items. This way, certain things end up being more important than others, and form a sort of foreground in our perception, leaving the rest in the background (▪ Fig. 3.21). When we sit at home watching a TV series, at that particular moment the "foreground" is our TV (with all that happens "inside" it, in the diegesis of the AVT), and possibly the snack and the drink we have prepared to better enjoy the show. Our eyes potentially can see everything (the wall behind the TV, the sofa on one side, our body, our smartphone…), but it is like our brain tells the eyes not to worry about all that: what is important is the TV show and the food—full stop. All the rest now is "background": if by any chance—say—we finish our beer, then for a few seconds the fridge will become foreground, in order for us to go and pick another bottle.

Back to what we were saying. The employment of gestaltic perception in life is certainly very important, but it is also important to remember that, while we focus on the TV series and on the food, it is not like the wall, the table, our body and all the rest *cease to exist*. These things are still there, and we can switch the focus at any point, without becoming less "normal". Nowadays, it is more and more typical that we do not manage to keep the focus on one thing for more than a few minutes: after a while, we have this pressing need to check our smartphone, be that a Whatsapp message, a Facebook status update, or else. Even if we do something dumber than that, like staring at the sofa for a minute with no particular reason, nobody gets really "suspicious".

Now: in an AVT, save few exceptions, we just cannot do that. If, say, a man in a movie is watching a TV show and then stares at the sofa, we start wondering why. Why would he do that? What happened on that sofa? Did he sleep with the woman we saw in the previous sequence of the movie? Did he kill someone on that sofa? In sum, a person who has the misfortune to act in an AVT can only do one thing at a time: if they add more activities they have to offer a valid justification to the audience.

And there is more: even that single activity is subject to restrictions. In our example, the man cannot just watch the TV show anyway he likes: that, too, has to be done in a way



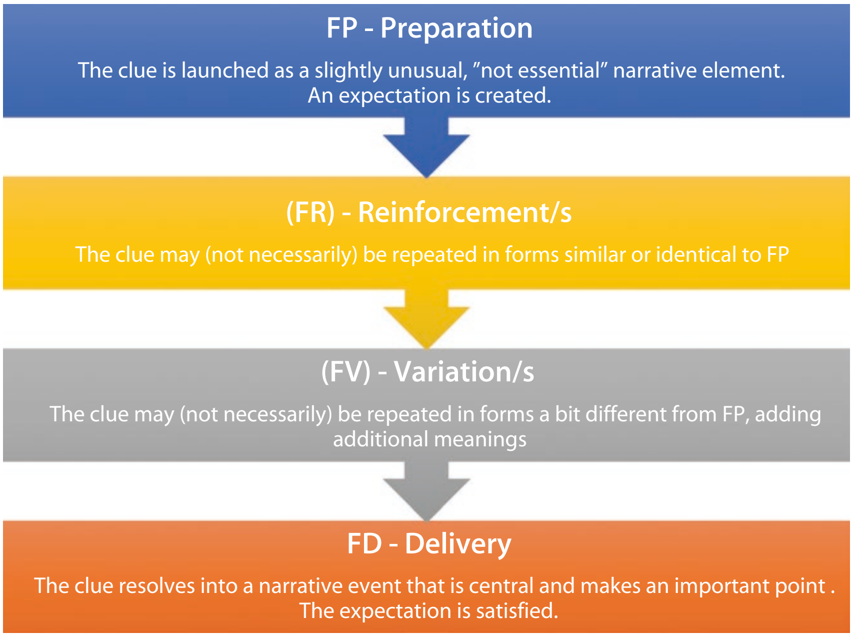
▪ **Fig. 3.21** Some examples of optical illusions based on gestaltic perception. In the images on the left we see white shapes (a triangle and a sphere respectively) even if all that is pictured is black ones, but the way the latter are positioned create a sort of perceptive expectation of those other, bigger shapes as "foreground", so we imagine lines and contours that actually are not there. In the image on the top right we see an alternation of foreground and background depending on how we pay attention: there may be either two profiles or a vase. On the bottom right we see 12 straight lines arranged in such a way that we get the impression of a 3D drawing (a cube) instead of a 2D geometrical figure. *[Images of public domain]* that does not raise suspicion. For example, if a mosquito bit his neck, he cannot really scratch it more than once, otherwise that bite has to mean something in the story. So, unless we are talking about Peter Parker bitten by a spider (or something like that), the poor man has to resist the urge to scratch his neck. If he has not understood a sequence of the program he is watching, he cannot really reel it back to watch it again: that, too, requires a justification. And so on.

To cut a long story short, reality and normality, the way they are constructed audiovisually, have to *limit* the quality, the quantity and the articulation of every event. If they do not do that, it means that *other* events are bound to appear, or have already appeared, around which another set of meanings must be constructed. AV reality, thus, is a type of "minimalistic" reality, and that, indeed, is what Chekhov means by "essentiality". Of course, the *degree* of essentiality may change, and usually the artistic greatness of an AVT can be also measured by a greater degree of essentiality (a topic that, once again, reminds us of how Eco underlines the importance of ambiguity in art). Directors such as Federico Fellini were absolute masters in expanding essentiality to many more elements than one would normally expect (you may think about the richness of moments like the eating out sequence in *Roma*, with so many characters and things happening almost all at once).

3.3.3 From Preparation to Delivery

The other important aspect is that foreshadowing and sideshadowing are "meta-signs", that is signifiers that, besides conveying a signified that appears there and then, are also referring to another signified, somewhere else, later in the text. The meta-sign appears at some point (usually at an early stage of the text) in a configuration signifier-signified that we shall call **preparation** (FP, where F stands for foreshadowing), then it appears again in a different configuration, that we shall call **delivery** (FD). The relation between FP and FD, that is, the sense of anticipation created by the former towards the latter, is suggested by the text and established by the reader, within that kind of cooperation that we have discussed in the previous paragraph on unsteady and steady narration. And finally, unlike FD, which usually appears one time only, FP may be proposed and re-proposed on more than one occasion (which we shall call FR, as in **reinforcements**), also with a slightly different nuance (which we may call FV, **variations**), without however altering its "anticipatory" function (see the scheme in ◘ Fig. 3.22 for a summary).

Let us clarify the whole thing with an example we have already considered, Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*. We already know that, in order to create a routine around Truman, the various actors tend to interact with him in rather redundant manners: there is his best friend who always comes in with a pack of beer cans, there are the two twins who practically nail him on the particular wall where one sponsor appears, there is the newspaper kiosk seller from whom Truman always buys the same magazines, and so forth. Among these regular encounters, there is one that occurs every morning, as soon as Truman comes out from his house to go to work. It is the Afro-American neighbor family, always smiling at the other side of the street. They wish him a good day, and Truman replies: "Oh! In case I don't see you: good afternoon, good evening and good night!", after which he indulges in a hearty laugh, reciprocated by the family. Now. If we are the kind of readers inclined to cooperate with the text we should already go in alert mode: that meeting and that conversation may be normal, but they are definitely not essential: if they are there, there must be a reason. So, quietly, this piece of information is registered by our brain as an anomaly, as a "rifle", and—


FP - Preparation
The clue is launched as a slightly unusual, "not essential" narrative element. An expectation is created.
(FR) - Reinforcement/s
The clue may (not necessarily) be repeated in forms similar or identical to FP
(FV) - Variation/s
The clue may (not necessarily) be repeated in forms a bit different from FP, adding additional meanings
FD - Delivery
The clue resolves into a narrative event that is central and makes an important point . The expectation is satisfied.

◘ **Fig. 3.22** A typical path in foreshadowing: preparation, reinforcement (optional), variation (optional) and most of all delivery along with the other rifles we will encounter during the movie—we will expect things to happen that relate to those anomalies, in one way or another.

The meeting with the neighbor is thus a preparation FP, and we expect delivery FD to occur at some point, and maybe also some reinforcements FR or variations FV. The movie goes on: as we know Truman becomes more and more suspicious that he is victim of a huge conspiracy, and things get to a climax when he tries to escape, gets stopped in ways that look less and less credible to his eyes and finally has a very heated confrontation with his wife, and only the intervention of (who he believes to be) his best friend prevents things from escalating. At that point, the show production team, and particularly the main producer Christof (Ed Harris) try to re-establish a certain peace in Truman's mind, and devise a strategy that, at that point, seems to be the only solution: the reappearance of his father, who had been allegedly killed in a sea storm in front of a terrified young Truman, years before. That death had served the psychological purpose to implant a phobia for water in Truman's mind, but now this unexpected comeback has apparently a sedating effect on Truman, who seems to go back to his old self: the unaware puppet of the big show, who conducts his manipulated life with joyful repetitiveness. One of the routine items that the movie adopts in order for us to see that everything is back to normal is exactly our FP: the meeting with the neighbors is re-proposed as FV, that is, with the same significance as FP, but with some different nuance. We indeed witness an additional and amusing moment, as some Asian fans of the show are seen practicing their English by clumsily repeating "Good afternoon, good evening and good night!". This small variation offers some comic relief but also serves the purpose to show that this morning encounter is so regular that a non-American audience can even use it to practice the language. Plus, remarkably, it gives us a reminder of the importance of the line and on the fact that it seems to be one of the catch phrases of the show.

After a little while, indeed, Truman, who had actually faked his return to serenity in order to loosen the control over him, manages to escape exactly via the sea, on a small sailboat. From this point on, things get really biblical and allegoric. Christof, who had created that whole dystopic "Eden" and very much feels like Truman is his property, tries desperately to stop him by launching one storm after another, like an infuriated god. Truman survives, and when the self-styled god gives up with the violent methods (hoping to play the winning card of persuasion), the "true-man" hits the fences of the TV studio—giant walls with realistic sky-looking trompe l'oeil. Truman starts following the perimeter of the walls, and while doing this he looks like he is walking on the water (which is at the same level as the paving of the studio). He finds stairs that go up (an ascension to the "real world") and a door—the quintessential symbol of transition (transition from fiction/diegesis to reality, among other things). While hesitating to open the door, Truman hears a voice from the sky (the production room is hidden inside the "moon" of the fictional city): it is Christof, of course, who gently tries to convince Truman not to leave the show and remain in the safe "heaven on earth" that he has constructed.

Christof: Truman. You can speak. I can hear you.
Truman: Who are you?
Christof: I am the creator… [small pause] of a television show that gives hope and joy and inspiration to millions.
That little pause after "creator" is pure genius (probably an idea of the screenplay writer Andrew Niccol), and serves as an additional reminder that Christof really thinks he is a god of sorts.
Truman: And who am I?
Christof: You're the star.
Truman: Was nothing real?
Christof: You were real. That's what made you so good to watch. Listen to me, Truman. There's no more truth out there than there is in the world I created for you. Same lies. The same deceit. But in my world, you have nothing to fear. I know you better than you know yourself.
Truman: You never had a camera in my head!
Christof: You're afraid. That's why you can't leave. It's okay, Truman. I understand. I have been watching you your whole life. I was watching when you were born. I was watching when you took your first step. I watched you on your first day of school. [smiles tenderly] The episode when you lost your first tooth [smiles tenderly] … You can't leave, Truman. You belong here… with me.

Having known Truman inside out for all these years, Christof knows very well how to play on his insecurities and weaknesses, and manages to install a doubt in his mind. Truman is now taking some time to think whether after all he should stay or leave, but silence is an intolerable occurrence in the bulimic world of TV shows, and this is where the improvised god makes his fatal mistake: he encourages Truman to talk, first gently, with the same protective, fatherly tone he had used this far, and then with much more irritation:
Christof: Talk to me… Say something… HELL, SAY SOMETHING, GODDAMMIT! You're on television! You're live to the whole world!
This is the final blow for Truman: at this point he has no more doubts on the fact that he means no more than a puppet to Christof (as well as to the whole audience), and he now knows that he will go through that door. Wanting to leave that huge farce in style, our hero recovers his signature line:
Truman: In case I don't see ya, good afternoon, good evening and goodnight. Hahaha! Yep!

He makes an emphatic bow, like an old actor, puts a disgusted grin on his face as he gives the last look towards the source of Christof's voice, turns around and leaves. Here it is: the delivery FD has appeared—the rifle has fired, making a mighty blast, as it provides the emotional catharsis and dramatic apotheosis of the movie. And, as you may have already guessed, it also acquires a high "symbolic" value, therefore qualifying as symbolic foreshadowing as well (albeit a less complicated one than that displayed in *The Shining*).

One final note, before turning to sideshadowing. Besides symbolic foreshadowing and Chekhov's rifle (or gun: please remember that you will find either expressions used in books and essays. They both stand for the same concept), there are a number of other foreshadowing forms which take different and colorful names, like "Dreaming of Things to Come", "Call-Forward", "Foreseeing My Death", "Prophecy", "Flashback", etc., which I however suggest to group into the single definition of **timeshadowing**. This, as the mentioned names will suggest to you already, refers to any form of foreshadowing that has to do with an explanation of the clue provided by time-passing: we may see a movie opening with a sequence from the future, where the clue is launched, and then the movie explains how we get there. Or: we may see a clue in the present, and only some revelation from the past (in the form of flashback, or even prequel) explains that clue. Playing with words, timeshadowing is not so much a rifle that shoots, but rather a revelation of why the rifle was put there in the first place. As you may imagine, if we take a time-travelling AVT as an example, we can easily find instances of timeshadowing: all the installments of the *Back to the Future* saga are packed with them. Wanting to isolate one single example, you may think of the bullying-bullied relationship between the character of Biff Tannen and that of George McFly in the present (1985), and how it is explained when Marty McFly goes back into the past (1955).

3.3.4 Red Herrings, MacGuffins and Shaggy Dogs

Let us now reverse the situation. What happens when the expectation (A) is still created, but there is no delivery (B)—that is, the expectation is disappointed? As we have seen already, this is called sideshadowing, and it is equally needed in stories, in the same way as desire, be that erotic or of any other kind, needs also disappointment and frustration in order to still be active and intense—to still be "desire", in fact. A text that does nothing else than meeting every single one of our expectations soon becomes predictable, and ultimately boring. As readers of an AVT, we actively do *not* want to be always right. We want the thrill, we want the surprise, and we want the ambiguity: this is crucial to keep our interest alive, and to fuel it with additional stimuli. Unanswered questions, loose ends, half-told stories, digressions, and else, can all be forms of sideshadowing.

Not only. Occasionally (particularly in AVTs that aim at being more artsy), the presence of clues that do not deliver should not even be called *side*shadowing, because they do not really intend to deceive us: they are just representing the fact that, in real life, things are much more complex than they appear in fiction, so it is only normal that many things occur without actually having a deep meaning or a finality in a given course of events.

There are three main types of sideshadowing (again, we shall skip more marginal ones), and they all have quite funny names. The most typical case is the **red herring**, which may be considered the exact opposite of Chekhov's rifle. The red herring, indeed, is a clue that works exactly in the way the rifle does (that is, something slightly unusual that triggers our attention and creates an expectation), except that, instead of actually resolving into some significant event, is actually meant to mislead us, distracting our attention from the crucial parts of the text. While this is a very typical case in detective stories, thrillers and the likes (where obviously we need to be exposed to several clues, some meaningful, some not, in order to make the story interesting and worthwhile to be followed until the end), in fact red herrings can be found in other genres as well, just because of their intrinsic ability to make the text more ambiguous and engaging. You may be interested to know that the expression "red herring" comes from the color that herring flesh takes when the poor fish is smoked, producing also a very distinctive and strong odor. In an old account from early nineteenth century, writer William Corbett wrote that he used to employ red herrings in dogs' training, by creating false trails that dogs may choose to follow due to the strong smell. Following that example, the expression came to designate an item that looks like a worthy clue but is not.

An excellent, and witty, example of "red herring" in narration is in Dan Brown's novel (and then film) *The Da Vinci Code*. In it, we find the character of bishop Manuel Aringarosa, who—for most part of the text—attracts our attention as the most likely villain. Except that, well, he is not, and his narrative function was exactly a deceptive one, until, at the end of the story, the real villain, Sir Leigh Teabing, is revealed. What is interesting about this bishop is actually his name: in Italian (Italy being the location of the text), "Aringa rosa" means "Pink herring", while a simple added "s" would create a "Red herring" ("Aringa rossa"). We cannot say if Dan Brown simply made a spelling mistake, or rather did not want to be so explicit about his character: still, the fact remains that he did let us know that the most suspicious character of the whole story was in fact a false clue.

The second type of sideshadowing strategy bears the glorious signature of Alfred Hitchcock and it is called **MacGuffin**. With this Scottish-sounding name, Hitchcock defined a goal or an object pursued by the text's main character/s, whose level of interest actually fades out as the story goes on, for one reason or another. Unlike the red herring, the MacGuffin is not really a "false" clue: it is rather something meaningful for the characters but not meaningful for the story. We have seen in *The Birds* how what really motivates the character of Melanie is her attraction for the character of Mitch, but after some time, and specifically after the first bird attacks, we realize that their affair is far from being the crucial part of the movie, which has by now turned into a horror.

In one of the most celebrated movies of all times, Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), we are exposed to a number of very important themes: from the difficulty to understand a person's life, especially after this person is dead (as in the film's case), to the myth and the contradictions of the so-called American Dream; from the fallacies of memory to the question of loneliness and isolation; from the sense of defeat brought on by ageing to materialism as affective compensation. All these are crucial to the story, and they constitute the very point of the movie. Yet, the characters seem to be preoccupied by one thing: understanding why the last word pronounced by the protagonist Charles Foster Kane (Welles) had been the mysterious "Rosebud". This is the pursuit that the characters engage in, packaging the movie as an "investigation", but we soon realize that whatever that word means (and will be revealed to us that, at the end of the movie, for the record), the real investigation is over the above-mentioned themes.

For the record, Hitchcock was once asked in an interview what a MacGuffin was, and he delivered a hilarious and witty reply:

> *It might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men on a train. One man says, 'What's that package up there in the baggage rack?' And the other answers, 'Oh, that's a MacGuffin'. The first one asks, 'What's a MacGuffin?' 'Well,' the other man says, 'it's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands.' The first man says, 'But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands,' and the other one answers, 'Well then, that's no MacGuffin!' So you see that a MacGuffin is actually nothing at all".*

Thirdly, we may also have a **shaggy dog story**. Mostly employed in texts with strong comic and/or surreal character, a shaggy dog story is a (usually long) narrative that insists on irrelevant element/s, even building a fair amount of pathos around them, only to end up pointlessly, in an often irritating anticlimax.

Legend has it that the expression originated exactly after a practical joke, about—indeed—a shaggy dog. Throughout the entire joke we get to hear how shaggy the dog is, so shaggy that everybody acknowledges his shagginess. He is entered into a city competition for shaggy dogs, and he wins it, then to a regional one, and he wins that too, then to a national one, and he wins that too. When he finally gets to the world championship of shaggy dogs, a jury member who is delegated to assess the shagginess of the competitors, goes "Well, this one is not that shaggy, now, is he?"

Excursus 5—Shaggy monks

The original "shaggy dog" anecdote is not the only joke based on this technique, in fact the trick is often employed in numerous forms of humorous narration. The bigger the pathos is built, the louder (and more infuriating) the anti-climax. So, as a moment of comic relief in this book, let me share the ultimate shaggy dog story:

A man is driving down a road when his car breaks down near a monastery.

He goes to the monastery, knocks on the door, and says, "My car broke down. Could you host me for the night?". The monks welcome him, feed him dinner, and even fix his car. During the night, as he tries to fall asleep, the man hears a very peculiar sound—something he had never heard before. The sound was so strange that he couldn't sleep that night.

The next morning, he asks the monks what the sound was, but they say, "We can't tell you. You're not a monk." The man, disappointed, leaves the monastery, but cannot forget that sound and thinks about it every day.

One day, years later, he decides to go back to the monastery to ask again. He, however, receives the same reply: "We can't tell you. You're not a monk." At this point, burning with curiosity, the man says "If the only way I can find out what is making that sound is to become a monk, then please, make me a monk." The monks reply, "You must travel the earth and tell us how many blades of grass there are and the exact number of grains of sand. When you find these answers, you will have become a monk."

The man leaves immediately. Years after, a gray-haired old person, the man returns to the monastery, and asks to gather all the monks to speak to them:

"In my quest to find what makes that sound, I travelled the lands and the seas, and I have completed my task. By God's will, the world is in a state of perpetual change. Only God knows how many blades of grass and grains of sand may exist in this ever-changing world. All a man can really know is himself, at the condition that he is honest and faithful to God."

The monks enthusiastically applaud, and one of them announces "Congratulations. You have become a monk. We shall now show you the way to the mystery of the sacred sound."

The monks lead the man to a wooden door, where the head monk says, "The sound is beyond that door." The man is given the key, and he opens the door. Behind the wooden door is another door made of stone. The man is given the key to the stone door and he opens it, only to find a door made of ruby. And so on, through doors of emerald, pearl and diamond.

Finally, as he gets to a door made of solid gold, the sound becomes very clear and definite. The monks say, "This is the last key to the last door."

The man cannot believe it: his life's wish is behind that door—his life is making sense.

With trembling hands, he unlocks the door, turns the knob, and slowly pushes the door open. Falling to his knees, he is utterly amazed to discover the source of that haunting and seductive sound…

But, of course, my friends, I can't tell you what it is because you're not monks.

Probably the most charming example would come from Isaac Asimov, the great science fiction writer, who once wrote a shaggy dog story called "Shah Guido G.", a title that, pronounced fast, sounds exactly like "Shaggy dog". However, since we are talking about AVTs, we could take an example like the music video for Robbie Williams's 2001 "A Love Supreme". If you remember that video, it has a distinctive 1970s feel, in line with the song itself, which is constructed to remind us of the more famous disco song "I Will Survive" (the latter's strings solo being also sampled in Williams's song). To achieve that effect, the authors scripted a story set in the 1970s world of Formula 1 races, inventing the character of a young talented driver named Bob Williams (played by Williams himself, of course) who successfully competes with the greats of the time (Jackie Stewart in particular), and they employed several digital techniques to recreate a 1970s filmic quality, mixing the new bits with original footage of F1 races of the time. The video builds increasing memento about the rivalry between Williams and Stewart, adding more and more narrative elements on the way (various races, of course, but also the protagonist's passion for women, his involvement with illegal drugs, some of the events of the time seen through the newspaper headlines…). As we are ready to enjoy the final duel between the two drivers, and see who will win the championship, Bob Williams has a violent stomach ache and goes to the toilet of his caravan, where he gets stuck (his assistant has locked the caravan from outside, thinking nobody is inside). End of the story: Williams does not show up for the race and therefore Jackie Stewart is the champion. There we go: a total anticlimax to the epic narrative that was built that far, a true shaggy dog story.

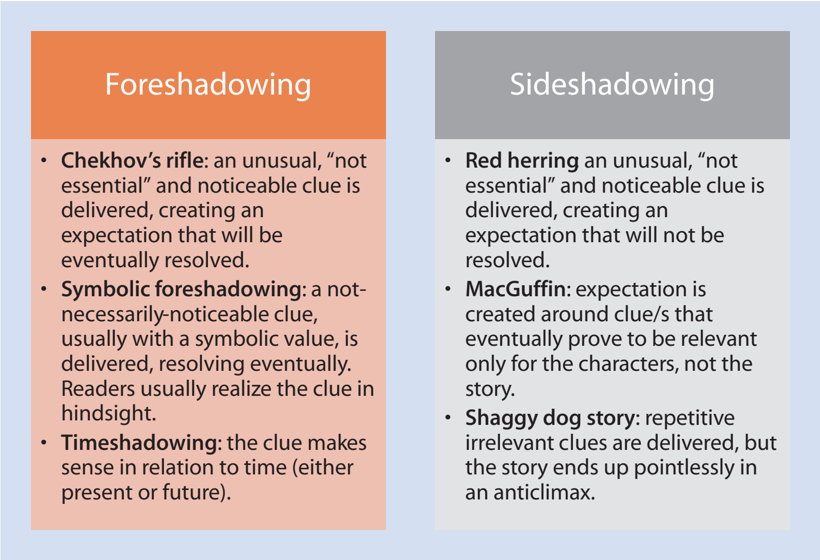
In ◘ Fig. 3.23, we find a summary of the various forms of foreshadowing and sideshadowing we have seen in this paragraph.

3.3.5 Case Study: Foreshadowing in Roberto Benigni's Filmography

A most eccentric comedian, and an Oscar winner as best actor and best foreign movie with *Life Is Beautiful*, the Italian Roberto Benigni is an actor and director who takes foreshadowing very seriously, and enjoys being very creative with it. One could even say that foreshadowing is for Benigni not just a narrative expedient, but a prominent feature of his style and conception of "film", particularly in relation to what is known as "magic realism" (a form of narration—typical of fairy tales—that is realistic in most of its components, but introduces few, or even just one, specific elements of more or less supernatural elements), which is something that we almost always find in his movies.

Benigni's stories are quite diverse and different from each other, but at the end of the day they convey a limited amount of (nice and important) messages: that life is always worthy of being lived, that its training forces are love and poetry (here meant also in its extended sense of the ancient Greek *poiesis*, which stands for creativity and imagination), that one should never give up hope and will to overcome adversities, and that—indeed—reality is "magic" in its own earthly way, and this magic, which is far from being supernatural, can be manifest when we simply learn to appreciate the "here and now" and the little daily joys of our existence. In all this, Benigni employs his typical clumsy, exuberant and surreal mask—a character that carries out the awareness of centuries of history of comedy and theatre, from court buffoons to Charlie Chaplin, from Commedia dell'Arte to Dario Fo. Benigni does not *attack* adversities, wars and prejudices. Much worse: he mocks them, he makes them look ridiculous. The sequence where the *Life Is Beautiful* protagonist makes fun of the dreadful *Race Manifesto* is a formidable example of how irony and satire can disintegrate a concept more effectively than a bomb.

The very other tool Benigni employs to draw his characters is exactly foreshadowing, and particularly (but not only) Chekhov's rifles. In fact, he used so many of them that one is



◘ **Fig. 3.23** A summary of the various types of foreshadowing and sideshadowing in narration

Foreshadowing

- **Chekhov's rifle**: an unusual, "not essential" and noticeable clue is delivered, creating an expectation that will be eventually resolved.
- **Symbolic foreshadowing**: a not-necessarily-noticeable clue, usually with a symbolic value, is delivered, resolving eventually. Readers usually realize the clue in hindsight.
- **Timeshadowing**: the clue makes sense in relation to time (either present or future).

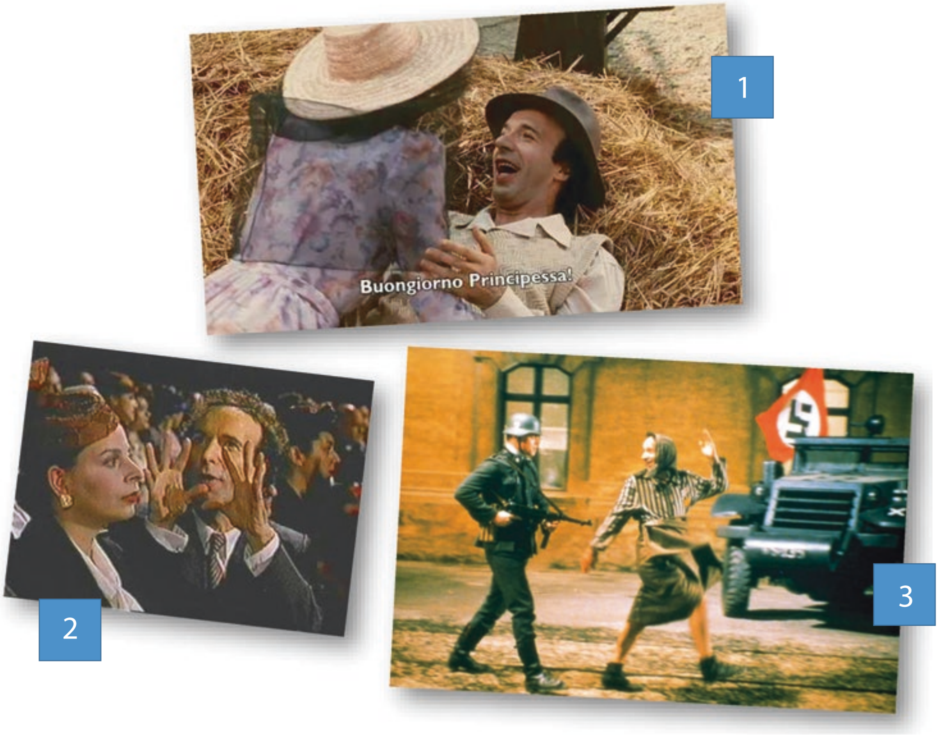
Sideshadowing

- **Red herring** an unusual, "not essential" and noticeable clue is delivered, creating an expectation that will not be resolved.
- **MacGuffin**: expectation is created around clue/s that eventually prove to be relevant only for the characters, not the story.
- **Shaggy dog story**: repetitive irrelevant clues are delivered, but the story ends up pointlessly in an anticlimax.

left wondering how few minutes his movies would last, had he decided to cut them all out from the final montage. If we take *Life Is Beautiful*, his most famous and celebrated work, as an example, we find literally dozens. The movie, released in 1997, is a bittersweet drama set in Italy during the Mussolini era, before and during the racial laws and mass deportations that generated the Shoah, one of the blackest pages in human history. Benigni is Guido Orefice, a clever but ordinary Jewish gentleman who falls in love with a Christian woman named Dora (Benigni's wife and muse Nicoletta Braschi). With creativity and force of will, he manages to win her heart. The first half, which has distinctively comic tones, ends and gives room to a much more dramatic second half—another film altogether. This part opens five years later with a young boy called Giosué, fruit of Guido's and Dora's love. The racial laws have been enacted in Italy as well, and Guido is first harassed by the fascist police, then finally deported to a concentration camp, along with Giosué. Dora, who would normally be spared the horror due to her Christian confession, vigorously demands that she is also put on board the train by the Nazi soldiers, hoping to rejoice with her family. Sent to the female area of the camp, Dora will never have the chance to see her husband again. Guido, in the meanwhile, aware of the imminent tragedy and of the terrible trauma his son is about to experience, devises a monumental farce and tells Giosué that the train is taking them to a grand team contest where the winner's prize is a real military tank (Giosué's favorite toy). Motivated by this perspective, Giosué manages to swallow the horrific conditions of the camp as not real, and in order to gain points in the competition, obeys his father's instructions (which are, in reality, mere actions of survival). Defeated by the allied forces, the Nazis need to quickly evacuate the camp, and start killing the prisoners on sight. Guido manages to safely hide Giosué, but ultimately gets himself killed. As the morning comes and the camp is almost deserted, Giosué comes out from his hideout, in time to see his prize appearing: a huge American tank is indeed exploring the area in search of prisoners to rescue. Giosué is noticed by the soldier, who invites him to jump on the tank and to drive it with him. On the way out of the camp, Giosué sees his mother, who had managed to survive, jumps off the tank and shouts "Mamma, we have won, we have won!", concluding the movie.

In a movie that manages to make us laugh first and cry later with a complete turnover of the narration, as we mentioned, there are plenty of items of foreshadowing, particularly "rifles". It may be useful to mention the functioning of some of the most relevant ones (see also ▣ Fig. 3.24). First and foremost, the comically emphatic march by which Guido reassures his son Giosué when dealing with fascist and Nazi authorities. In its configuration FP, the March is displayed in the not-too-threatening moment when the Italian fascist police take Guido to the police station for the sole fact that he is Jewish: we first see Giosué scared by the brutal manners of the policemen, and then we see him smiling after the father's caricature of military marches. In its configuration FD, the March is performed in the concentration camp, during the movie's climax, when the Nazi soldiers capture Guido and take him to a spot where he will be executed. Giosué, who is hidden in a metal box where he will have to stay the whole night to escape the Nazis, smiles again. Aware of FP (and Giosué's reaction to that situation), the appearance of FD makes us understand that Guido, despite his imminent death, has indeed managed to save his son's life once more—and for good. In this sense, this particular "rifle" takes the first place, as it is the one that characterizes the climax of the movie, much like the "good afternoon-good evening-good night" one from *The Truman Show*.

Secondly, we have one of the many leitmotifs of the dialogues—the famous quotation by Schopenhauer that celebrates the force of one's will, by saying "I am what I want to be". As he is told this quotation the first time (by his buddy Ferruccio), Guido interprets it as a sort of magic formula that one can use to turn any event to his favor, and repeatedly tries to use it. In the first occasion (FP), Guido and Ferruccio are in



▣ **Fig. 3.24** Three of the main Chekhov's rifles in *Life Is Beautiful* caught in three different stages. In 1, the first "Buongiorno Principessa!" (thus, in "preparation" form); in 2, the second appearance of the "Schopenauer trick" (in "variation" form); in 3 the "delivery" of the March-parody clue. *[Fair use—Photos personally assembled and edited for demonstrative purpose]* bed trying to sleep, but they forgot to switch off the light: with hand gestures that mimic illusionists, he "orders" the light to go off, except that of course his patient friend Ferruccio gets up and presses the switch, de facto confirming Guido's expectations. In a configuration FV, Guido is again successful in his magic, by making the woman of his dreams Dora turn towards him one evening at the opera, despite her sitting in a pretty distant spot in the theatre. With this second step we are given a reinforcement, and an unconscious clue that the "magic formula" is not just a gag, but will make sense at some point in a more meaningful manner (FD). And indeed, towards the end, as Giosué is already hiding in the above-mentioned metal box, a Nazi soldier's dog sniffs his presence and starts barking. Guido, who is watching from a distance, hidden himself, and who knows that if the soldier paid attention to his dog, that would mean the end of his son, begins chanting Schopenauer's magic formula, until, quite miraculously, the soldier pulls his dog away and proceeds further. Whispering "good old Ferruccio!" to himself, Guido (and us with him) understands that Giosué will still be safe. Besides being another significant rifle, this particular instance, brought to a symbolic level, is a good illustration of how Benigni interprets the poetics of "magic realism": love, faith, perseverance can act like magic, if we truly believe in them.

The third example is probably the best remembered catch phrase of the whole movie: that "Buongiorno Principessa!" ("Good day, Princess!") that Guido utters repeatedly to Dora, since the first time they meet. It is always employed as an expression of courtship in FP and in the various FR and FV that we witness throughout the first half, but we hear it one more time, in the second dramatic part in a configuration FV, as Guido manages to serve as waiter to a party of German officers in the headquarters of the camp, finds a gramophone in one room and puts Offenbach's barcarolle "Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour" (heard the very night they exchanged eye contact "thanks to" Schopenauer's magic formula), loud enough so it can be heard also outside. He then gets hold of the PA system, grabs the microphone and shouts "Buongiorno Principessa!" knowing that somewhere, in the female area of the camp, Dora will hear and recognize the call. After that, Giosué gets to talk too, and tells his mum that they are playing this game and that he might win a tank at the end. This gives comfort and hope to Dora, reassuring her that both her son and her husband are still alive, and that her son is actually experiencing a less confronting version of the tragedy.

While we are at it, the *barcarolle* itself is a touching example of symbolic foreshadowing. As mentioned, we hear it the first time during the opera sequence, when Guido and Dora look at each other with eyes that show that they are already falling in love. The movie devotes an unusually long time to show what happens on the stage and to make sure that we hear almost the whole piece. So, once more, our brain registers that something meaningful is associated with that sign. When Offenbach's famous duet is heard at the concentration camp, we already know that, even before the "Buongiorno Principessa!" calls, the music will have a special effect on Dora. But in fact we also see other prisoners receiving comfort by that single moment of beauty, within the misery of their situation. In that sense, the *barcarolle*, in both its configurations, becomes a moving metaphor of the power of art, a medium for desire and love first, and for comfort and compassion later. It is not accidental, I believe, that, for this purpose, Benigni chose the music of a German Jewish composer, that is, of someone who represented a most harmonious junction between the two cultures that Nazism had tragically made enemies.

Whoever has seen this movie will also remember many other Chekhov's rifles distributed all over the place: the repeated gag of the stolen hat, the riddles played with the German officer, the guy who shouts "Mary, throw the keys!" to his wife, and so forth.

In all these cases, as we were discussing before, we detect a set of important common characteristics in the rifles: we see that they are all real and concrete events; that they are slightly unusual, but not impossible or illogical; and we also see another important aspect that we had not mentioned before: that they do not create stylistic confusion. If, say, the rifle consists of the appearance of an alien, the author would not just be telling us that the "story" will take a certain direction, but they would also be dictating a turn of the genre altogether. The gag of Schopenauer's quotation, in Benigni's movie, leaves us in no doubt that Guido's "telepathic successes" have actually nothing to do with real telepathy, or any other supernatural power. Quite trivially, Guido is lucky on those occasions, and of course things would have gone exactly the same way even if he had not engaged in the illusionist's pantomime. All the rifles in *Life Is Beautiful* are perfectly possible and concrete, and could belong to any cinematographic genre. At the same time, though, they are bizarre and unusual enough to attract our attention.

Or: are they? Come to think of it, something like "Buongiorno Principessa!" is anything but bizarre. We all have sweet nicknames for our beloved ones: it may be a simple "sweetheart" or it may also be the "chocolate cream soldier" by which Raina calls Bluntschli in George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*. Nothing is madly unusual about such nicknames, however eccentric they may be.

It is Benigni himself who may answer this question. Let us take another examples from his movies, *The Tiger and the Snow* (2005), where we roughly have the same abundance of foreshadowing as in *Life Is Beautiful*.

While the setting is historically different (the American second attack to Iraq in the early twenty-first century), this movie is thematically kindred to *Life Is Beautiful*, sharing the common message of love and hope prevailing over hatred and difficulties. Attilio de Giovanni (Benigni) is a university professor who teaches poetry in Italy. A poet himself and a romantic soul (he mentions that his vocation was inspired by a bird perching on his shoulder during his childhood), Attilio is in love with Vittoria (Nicoletta Braschi, of course), but his love is unrequited. He constantly dreams of marrying her, and a recurrent dream involves Tom Waits (played by himself) singing the song "You Can Never Hold Back Spring", while he and Vittoria get married. As the second Gulf War breaks out, Vittoria travels to Iraq with her friend, Fuad (Jean Reno), a celebrated Iraqi poet, but she is seriously injured by a bomb and falls into a coma. Attilio runs to her side, and assists her every day in the middle of a raging war and all the difficulties related to providing decent medical assistance in times like that. Every time he leaves the hospital, Attilio kisses the sleeping Vittoria on the forehead, and in doing so, a necklace regularly slips out of his shirt, gently touching Vittoria's face (the necklace actually belongs to Vittoria, but Attilio had put it on his neck after an attempted robbery of her possessions). With the usual skills Benigni displays (and promotes) in his movies—love, hope, creativity and perseverance—Attilio manages to heal Vittoria, but, due to a clumsy misunderstanding with the American soldiers, he is arrested before he can reach the hospital, missing the moment when she wakes up from the coma and returns home, unaware of who has saved her life. Weeks later, as they both are safely back in Italy, Attilio visits her, deciding not to reveal the truth.

Vittoria, still convalescent, will however find out as Attilio bends to kiss her on the forehead and once more the necklace slips out from his shirt: Vittoria's brain had registered that regular sensation, and now she is able to recognize it. The movie ends with Vittoria sending a loving and grateful smile to Attilio, while a bird perches on her shoulder.

As you may have already guessed, and just as with *Life Is Beautiful*, the key sequences that bring *The Tiger and the Snow* to both a narrative and conceptual resolution are based on foreshadowing. One, again of a symbolic type, is the moment when the bird perches on Vittoria's shoulder, a FD of the story that Attilio tells at the beginning of the movie, explaining what made him fall in love with poetry during his childhood. The fact that a relatively rare and certainly charming event like that happens to both of them is obviously a sign of the deep connection between them on the micro level, and between poetry and love on the macro level. Needless to say, this is another shining example of Benigni's fondness for magic realism.

The other one, a rifle, is of course Vittoria's necklace worn by Attilio, and it is a rather obvious one for anybody who has an average perception of narration in AVTs. The first kiss to the comatose Vittoria is indeed shown with an unmistakable close-up that makes sure that we just cannot miss the particular movement of the necklace (FP). However, for the few who may still have missed it, the kiss + necklace moment is repeated a few times in exactly the same configuration (so they are FR), while—as the movie approaches its end—we finally see FV: after the necklace once again touches her face, Vittoria finally moves her eyes a fraction, giving us a visible clue that she is about to wake up from the coma (it goes without saying, Benigni, always enamored of fairy tales, makes a clear reference to *The Sleeping Beauty*). The rifle finally shoots during the last sequence of the movie, as Attilio visits the convalescent Vittoria at her house in Italy. Still unaware of her savior, Vittoria needs rest and dismisses Attilio. As she closes her eyes, Attilio kisses her on the forehead, once more touching her face with the necklace. Vittoria opens her eyes and finally understands who had been by her side day and night and brought her back to life.

To some extent, we may object that there are too many reinforcements making the narration (and the clues within it) a bit overstated—too "steady", as we have said. On the other hand, we need to understand that Benigni had a problem of scientific credibility, in this particular case: it is often said that comatose patients register some stimuli, especially when repeated regularly (this is why friends and relatives are often invited to speak to them, regardless of the fact that they may show no reaction at all). Thus, Attilio's repeated kisses serve the function of stimulus *par excellence*, making it credible that Vittoria's brain would actually register *that* one in particular, and not others. If anything, one can find other small defects in this rifle. For example, Attilio's necklace is a rather long one (a feature that is needed in order for the object to reach Vittoria's face when he bends to kiss her), but it is not visible in other scenes of the movie, which means that Attilio keeps it *under* his shirt. In this condition, it is not very realistic that the necklace would manage to slip out every single time: it would rather stay inside the shirt. Still, the main question is another: how "unusual" is this rifle? Are we really in the possible-but-not-so-likely domain? Daily experience tells us that many people wear a necklace, and that many people kiss their beloved one on the forehead, even when they fear that they may not notice (because they are asleep or indeed in a coma). Plus, when the two occurrences happen together, it is not rare (and certainly realistic) that the necklace slips out.

Now, despite being the good director that he is, Benigni is not necessarily one who challenges conventions in filmmaking in the way his predecessors (and models) like Fellini and Antonioni may have done. That means that we have to expect Benigni to work on meanings in a classic way, that is—as we explained—"by subtraction". This brings us finally to the point: it is this subtractive process that prepares fertile soil for foreshadowing (or sideshadowing too, for that matter). Let us go through the moments in *The Tiger and the Snow* that lead to the first configuration A of the necklace episode. The catalyst of the movie is of course Vittoria's journey to Bagdad, where, at the beginning of the American attack on Iraq, a bomb explosion makes her fall into a coma. First step: Attilio rushes to Iraq and finds her in a hospital, already pronounced as virtually dead. Her bed is removed to make place for cases that still seem to bear some hope of recovery. Second step: Attilio, who on the contrary has not lost hope, finds some room under the hospital's staircase, close to the entrance, and thereby he begins his heroic attempt to bring Vittoria back to life. Third step: being close to the hospital's entrance makes Vittoria vulnerable to thieves and acts of looting. A thief breaks in and attempts to steal some of her possessions. Fourth step: Attilio sets the thief on the run, managing to recover Vittoria's necklace, but decides that it is safer if he wears it himself. Now we finally get to the kiss, which—as we have seen—was narratively prepared with extreme care. In a classic filmic representation of a realistic situation, it is more than acceptable that Attilio kisses Vittoria's forehead: after all, he flew to Bagdad to assist her—a kiss is quite permissible. As readers, thus, we do not become suspicious by the kiss as such, but we see two things happening: 1) the kiss is repeated more than once, and, within a régime of "subtraction", repetition in an AVT is always suspicious; and most of all 2) there is that necklace dangling from Attilio's neck, and we see that every time the kiss as such is displayed.

The thing is: in all this setting and preparation, the necklace is simply not necessary. The kiss is not any more explicit or complete without the necklace: Attilio had in fact already kissed Vittoria once before the robbery (that is, *without* the necklace), thus the idea of the kiss (and therefore an attribution of "normality" to it) was already installed, making other kisses not so important. However, if we add something *else*, such as indeed a dangling necklace, then it means that we are adding ambiguity to a scene and that, by consequence that ambiguity must or must not resolve, somehow. In any case, it must have a role within the narration. If we choose resolution it means we have officially created a rifle, that is, we have introduced a sign that was not necessary within the "minimal" (subtractive) representation/expression of a situation, and that is meant to anticipate some contents that shall be revealed afterwards.

This means that, more than unlikely, a rifle is slightly "excessive", in that it is not necessarily something strange, but something more, whose construction in itself is not pertinent to the communication of some contents. In other words, the contents would remain the same even if that sign was absent, just like Attilio's kisses would remain kisses even without a necklace dangling from his neck.

As we said, the choice of Benigni to explain all this is appropriate in that the Italian director has made foreshadowing a central element of his storytelling and directing style altogether. That is so true that, not rarely, his most interesting and charming ideas are generated specifically around the various items of foreshadowing he disseminates in his works. Benigni is a type of director who decided to be a servant of the stories he tells and not the other way round (as other, more daring or more pretentious, directors often do). Given this program, he performs it with extreme competence and creativity. Foreshadowing can be extremely dull if one chooses to simply employ it rhetorically, as mere narrative expedient. For example, how many times in Hollywood comedies do we see rifles used in the most *clichéd of* ways, as in those cases where the protagonist receives a particular life lesson at the beginning of the movie, and then they employ it to their own advantage at the end of it?

Benigni, on the contrary, does not reduce foreshadowing to its purely instrumental function: he puts it in the middle of his way to make films, almost a *raison d'être* of at least some salient moments. We have seen this enough times, probably. But there is more, actually. Benigni loves to make a rather refined and rich (and, again, highly symbolic) use of foreshadowing, one that does not just point the finger at an expected configuration FD, but that actually opens up to more meanings that may even go beyond the story as such. We have seen a little of this already in the example of Offenbach's Barcarolle (in version FD), when we said that Benigni was not just describing a moment of comfort for Dora, but was actually conveying a denser metaphor of the power of art and music.

Another beautiful, and particularly poetic, example of symbolic foreshadowing can be taken from another movie, *The Monster* (1994), perhaps the most mature of Benigni's comedy-only movies, before he engaged in this interesting mixture of comic and dramatic of the two above-mentioned movies. The protagonist, played of course by Benigni himself, is called Loris, and he is erroneously suspected by the police to be a sex maniac serial killer. The police hire agent Jessica (Nicoletta Braschi) to flirt with Loris in order to elicit his erotic obsession and attempt to kill her. A plot like this is rather typical in classic comedy, where misunderstandings and identity mix and are often used as constant source for comic situations. In the movie, police, criminologists and psychologists alike all seem to have no doubt that Loris is indeed the man they are looking for: in that sense, more than misunderstandings, Benigni stages a comedy of prejudices, as all the specialists involved in the case express their opinions on the basis that Loris displays a slightly eccentric personality. In reality, he is a normal person, with his own problems, particularly an ongoing quarrel with the administration of the apartment block where he lives. It is for this reason that, when going out, Loris tries to avoid the doorman at the ground floor by walking crouched down under his desk. Needless to say, when we see that, our brain clicks and launches the "rifle alert". While shown several times performing his escape plan, Loris often bumps into a polite neighbor (played by Massimo Girotti, and whose name is never mentioned) who never fails to greet him. Absolutely not disturbed by Loris's peculiar way of walking, the neighbor has always a kind word or two for Loris and then proceeds on his way. His repeated appearance also smells like foreshadowing, so we are in the peculiar situation of two configurations (which we shall call FP1 and FP2) employed together, thus with the expectation of resolving into FD1 and FD2.

As the story develops, Loris will not only turn out to be innocent, but he will also find love in Jessica, who grows increasingly fond of a person who would not harm a fly, and is also charmed by the many little oddities that he displays. Those of course include the escape strategy from the angry doorman: Jessica learns to crouch down too and silently pass beneath his booth. We have now a configuration FV1. As usual, our polite neighbor appears too, and, after greeting them with his effortless courtesy, he also discreetly inquires about Jessica: "Your lady, I suppose? Pleased to meet you!". We have now also a configuration FV2.

Meanwhile, the real killer is captured and Jessica and Loris have now the freedom to become a couple in all respects. Embarrassed by the presence of some construction workers nearby, they crouch down behind a car in order to—finally—kiss for the first time. FP1, thus, has turned into FD1: what was just a posture to escape the doorman now becomes a metaphor of Loris's and Jessica's love and understanding, a demonstration that they are really made for each other. While this happens, FP2 is also given a chance to resolve and become FD2. The car, indeed, happens to belong to the polite neighbor, who, rather apologetic for showing up at such an intimate moment, gently asks if he can get into his car. Loris and Jessica wave the neighbor off and disappear into the horizon while still walking in that clumsy posture. As he watches them heading out, the neighbor tenderly smiles, sincerely happy that two soul mates who share so much in common have found each other and can feel free to walk in that manner, hand in hand. On this note, the movie ends.

With such a poetic finale, the transformation of FP1 into FD1 and FP2 into FD2 has probably produced the nicest and most meaningful message of the whole movie. The neighbor indeed was not only a colorful note in the comic moments of Loris's escapes from the doorman: he was probably the most important character of the whole movie. He was the only person who, from start to end, had not surrendered to the temptation to "judge" (and negatively, too) Loris for his oddities, despite the fact that he was actually exposed to one of the protagonist's weirdest behaviors. Massimo Girotti's character represents the noblest form of tolerance: he is the person who does not see diversity as evil, and who has chosen a discreet and polite cordiality as a life philosophy. He is the neighbor that we would all love to have, or aspire to be. The ending of the movie shows him not only as a "polite" person, but also as an empathic one, of being happy when he sees other people in their happiness.

3.4 Narration

Narration is the act of telling a story in a particular order (often, but not necessarily, chronological) and according to a particular organization. The abundance and the recurrence of this word in the previous paragraphs (and in the ones that will follow) already gives us a hint of the centrality of this concept in AVCC, as well as in any other form of communication. For the most part, we have already introduced and amply discussed narration, focusing on several important features in this whole section on "Time and Space". What we have not done yet is define narration as such, its main constituents and some significant theoretical approach to it. This shall be the scope of this section.

As we already have done in other cases throughout this book, there are some associated concepts that must be defined and that constitute the body of our discussion here. First of all, if narration is the "act", a **narrative** is the actual unit—*the story*. By the usual process of connotation we are by now familiar with, a narrative can also define a *particular way* of constructing a story, distinguished from others (usually more conventional/traditional) ones. Of course "narrative" is also an adjective, but we do not need to explain that.

When we approach narration in terms of socio-cultural phenomenon, as the activity of telling and sharing stories, in ways that offer explanations and guidance to a community (as in the case of myths and religions—we shall see that in the next paragraph), it is more appropriate to talk about **storytelling**.

A very important distinction is between **fabula** and **syuzhet**—two terms derived from the tradition of Russian formalism (again, see next paragraph). The fabula is the actual content of the narrative, *what the story says*, while the syuzhet is the way the narrative is organized, *how the story is told to us*. In other words, the work of a narrator is most of the times to transform a fabula into a syuzhet. There are various ways in which a story, the events and the characters in it, can be organized and put together. We should consider at least the following:

(1) The events in the syuzhet can be arranged in a sequence that is not necessarily the natural-chronological one of the fabula;
(2) The amount of time the events take in the fabula is not necessarily the same as the amount of time allotted in the syuzhet;
(3) The subjects operating within the fabula are provided in the syuzhet with distinct traits that transform them into actual "characters";
(4) The locations where events occur in the fabula are also given distinct features that transform them into specific places;
(5) The syuzhet adds up more relations between and across events and characters that are not only the natural ones that appear in the fabula. For example, relations can also be provided with symbolic or allegorical dimensions; and
(6) The syuzhet chooses one or more "points of view", from which the story is presented.

Also, there are specific stages that narratives go through, in no particular order. Some text features all of these stages, some others feature only some, but they are all of equal importance and "weight" within the story. It goes without saying, every stage can appear more than once.

They are:

(1) A **strictly narrative** stage, in which we are exposed to the most dynamic parts of the story—the actual *action*;
(2) A **descriptive** stage, where the action is slower, or even still, and we are given information about characters, places, objects, etc.;
(3) A **reflective** stage where thoughts, opinions, reasoning processes of the characters (particularly the main ones) are displayed;
(4) An **expressive** stage, where we have access to characters' emotions and feelings; and
(5) A **dialogical** stage, where the development of the events is conveyed through the characters' direct dialogues and words.

Plus, of course, mixed stages, where two or more of the above appear together in nearly undistinguished fashion.

Having provided these basic definitions we may go a bit deeper into the essence and the significance of storytelling within human communities. There seems to be something ancestral, fundamental about storytelling in our species, or perhaps not only in ours: already Darwin had suggested that there may be something similar in other animal species too. Scholars of different disciplines have made giant steps in studying the dynamics and the functioning of primitive societies, but of course much remains still to be discovered. We can only formulate hypotheses, but I think it would not be too daring to suggest that storytelling was born as a response to a sense of wonder, anxiety and even frustration about the surrounding environment and its inhabitants. Let us imagine the situation: the primitive humans, as their brains developed well enough, began to approximate awareness and self-awareness of everything that was happening to them, without having a clue (that kind of clues that eventually science and reasoning will offer) of what, how and why these things were happening. Light, darkness, warmth, cold, birth, death, an endless variety of life forms, shapes and colors, hunger, sleepiness, sexual drives, snow, rain… as hominids became intelligent enough to actually wonder about these things, they must have felt positively lost. How to make sense of all this? One form of reaction that they must have developed was exactly storytelling: if we cannot figure out what is going on, then, well, we shall *tell it*, we shall put together characters and events in such a way that they make some sense to us. It is rather like what kids do, when they do not know something: they make it up in narrative form (including drawings, of course): it is a popular opinion, in science, that phylogenesis and ontogenesis have several dynamics in common: this is probably one of them.

If those drops of water come from somewhere above—must a primitive human have thought—then maybe there is *someone* there above who is throwing the water on us, and that someone throws the water for a particular reason, that *we* may have caused by our behavior. And perhaps if we behave differently, or we give this someone a gift or two, we may avoid rain and cold. Also: if this someone is causing rain, maybe someone else is causing death, someone else is causing hunger. Maybe those animals we kill to eat are meant to be killed, and they are offering themselves to us; maybe those that attack us are evil and must be killed at sight… and so on and so forth. As you can see, what we are describing here is the birth of myths, religions and morality tales—all tools that even nowadays are meant to "give answers", to both questions we do not know yet and—to some people—even to questions that empirical knowledge and discoveries have answered to in a more reliable way. If stories still give answers today in the hi-tech world we live in, just imagine how many answers they may have given to the primitive human.

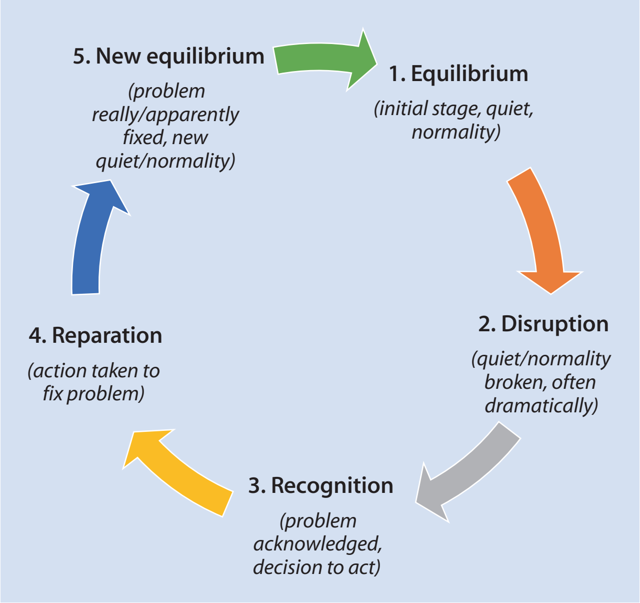
There is something even more intriguing in all of this. Not only did people from different places, in different moments and different stages of their evolution, make up stories to explain the world to themselves, funnily enough they actually told themselves *the same stories*, or roughly so. Sure, they used different names, different gods, different animals to worship or curse, different specific actions, but they were basically the same *type* of characters, events and values attached to them. For example, all human communities produced narrative representations of good and evil: light and darkness, God and Satan, doves and snakes, things to do and things not to do… Human storytelling, in other words, displays universal patterns that show great consistency across individual thinking and social relations. To put it in a slightly corny way, all people want more or less the same things, and have more or less the same feelings: we are the world, we are the children, and all that.

The great French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) attempted to capture the essence of these patterns: he felt that every human culture is composed of hidden rules, or infrastructures, that give it meaning. Such rules are usually revealed by the tension existing between opposites: good and evil, day and night, life and death, inside and outside, man and woman, and so forth. Each item makes sense in relation to its opposite: we can talk about death because we can talk about life, and vice versa. That implies at least three essential points: first, that all cultures develop "concepts" of these oppositions (e.g., every culture has a definition of "light" and "darkness"); second, that all cultures attach *values* to those concepts (e.g., associating "light" to good and "darkness" to evil); and third, that all cultures, indeed, develop stories about these concepts and these values (e.g., a story about "hell" is developed, where hell is evil and is a dark place).

Studying narration as an archetypical and mythical phenomenon has been one of the chief goals of the field of narratology, that is "the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that 'tell a story'" (Bal 1997: 3). The goal is to describe in which way narrative texts are constructed, and eventually constitute a narrative system. In the following paragraph, and in the case study that comes next, we shall describe precisely how narratologists have tackled this archetypical dimension of narration.

3.4.1 Narration and Archetypes

Keeping in mind the existence of universal patterns in storytelling, some scholars went as far as to say that also the actual construction and sequencing of human stories tend to show common patterns and infrastructures. For example, the Bulgarian narratologist Tzvetan Todorov (1977) identified five main stages that, in his opinion, all stories more or less go through, regardless of their specific differences (see ◘ Fig. 3.25).


5. New equilibrium
(problem really/apparently fixed, new quiet/normality)
1. Equilibrium
(initial stage, quiet, normality)
2. Disruption
(quiet/normality broken, often dramatically)
3. Recognition
(problem acknowledged, decision to act)
4. Reparation
(action taken to fix problem)

◘ **Fig. 3.25** The five main stages of narration, according to Todorov

The stages would also proceed in circular fashion, so once finalized stage 5 there is a return to stage 1 (a process that is very typical of TV series, where basically each episode re-proposes the cycle from stage 1 to 5):

(1) **Equilibrium**: The initial stage of a story is a stage of quiet and normality, where things seem to proceed in an ordinary (and usually happy) way;
(2) **Disruption** (of the equilibrium): something happens that disturbs/breaks the equilibrium, not rarely in a dramatic or even tragic way;
(3) **Recognition** (of the disruption): someone (often the hero) understands the reasons or the responsible of the disruption and decides to take action;
(4) **Reparation** (or attempt to reparation): action is taken in order to solve the problem and fix the disruption; and
(5) **New equilibrium**: the problem is solved (or apparently solved, in more ambiguous/sinister stories) and a new equilibrium is achieved (or sometimes a return to the initial equilibrium. Usually, however, in traditional stories stage 5 is more accomplished than stage 1, as in the typical case of the hero getting married at the end).

While Todorov's scheme presents a basic, fundamental flowing of a story, the most famous and influential example of analysis of archetypical aspects of narration remains the work of the Russian linguist Vladimir Propp, and particularly his seminal *Morphology of the Folktale* (originally published in 1928, but referenced here in the 1968 edition), a narratological classic particularly inspired by the schools of formalism and, just like Lévi-Strauss and Greimas, structuralism. In formalist linguistics, sentence structures are broken down to basic meaningful units, called morphemes (e.g., the word "boyishness" has three morphemes: boy + ish + ness). Propp

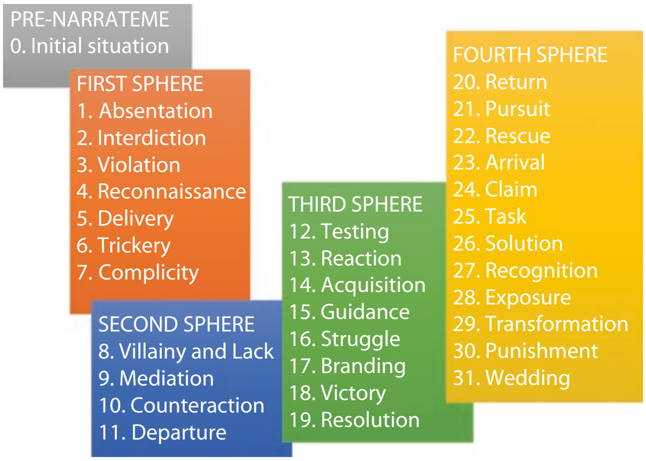


Fig. 3.26 The 31 narratemes in Propp's theory

took 100 Russian fairy tales and did the same: he broke down the tales into their smallest narrative units, calling the latter "narratemes". The goal was to achieve a kind of big narrative structure that would allow us to explain the functioning of single stories. In considering the fairy tales of his research sample, Propp found that there was practically no significant variation in the structure of each tale, and while at superficial level they were all different stories, with different places, characters and events, at a deeper level they were based on the same type of elements: e.g., heroes could look different, be practically engaged in different actions, but they were still heroes and those were similar actions, with similar sequence and similar causes and effects. Altogether, Propp assembled 31 specific narratemes, and he grouped them in four main "spheres" that define the basic phases of the story.

The first sphere, composed of seven narratemes, introduces the initial situation of the story, enabling us to understand the who, the where, the when, the how and the why of the case (see also the summary in Fig. 3.26):

0. **Initial situation**: This is considered a "pre-narrateme" and therefore it is marked with "0", not intervening in the counting of the 31 motives. This is the "once upon a time" moment, the moment in which we get a few indications of the context of the story: usually time, place and (social or other) condition;
1. **Absentation**: At the beginning of the story, we notice that something or someone, in the hero's world, is missing, or is in danger, or anyway provokes apprehension. This is the actual "catalyst" of the story: in classical narration things do not happen if everything is fine. Sometimes it is the hero themself to be the one missing;
2. **Interdiction**: The hero, who would like to rescue the missing thing/person, is warned about their limitations. Usually they are too young, too fragile, too inexperienced or too weak, and therefore they are discouraged from pursuing the task. Very often the hero does not know or think they are a hero: their limitations are important for the story not to be too obvious.

   The hero cannot succeed hands down—so to speak: they have to overcome obstacles and faults;
3. **Violation:** The hero (of course!) ignores the warning and goes ahead. This is usually a mistake, and gives the villain the opportunity to enter the scene. Heroes may not be strong, or tall, or experienced, or else, but they are pretty much always stubborn and determined;
4. **Reconnaissance**: The villain needs something or someone valuable to achieve their ends. Usually, they speak with, or trick, someone who is close to the hero, or the hero themself, in order to obtain the information they need.
5. **Delivery**: The villain manages to get the useful information they need and which they may use against the protagonist;
6. **Trickery**: The villain uses the information to deceive the hero in some way. This is often done in disguise, either by using a different identity, or by simply pretending to be a friend of the hero; and
7. **Complicity**: The hero falls for the trick and unwittingly helps the villain.

Now that the hero has been tricked the "main action" starts: we abandon the first sphere and we enter the second one, composed of four narratemes, which represent the "body" of the story:

8. **Villainy and Lack**: The villain acts like villains do and threatens or harms someone important to the hero (usually the classic "sacrificial" friend or relative, whose death we can predict already from the beginning). Directly or indirectly, that leads to the hero's community (family or else) longing for some missing object (something that is lost, or something that could improve the situation, like a magical object).
9. **Mediation**: The hero finds out about the villainy and/or the lack: they find their community (or elements within it) damaged by the villain, and that usually convinces them for good to take some serious action to solve the problem.
10. **Counteraction**: At this point, the hero decides to personally address the villainy/lack and solve it, despite their weakness and despite the risks. This is the first time the hero behaves like a hero, so it is also a moment of increasing self-awareness.
11. **Departure**: As a consequence the hero leaves on their mission. Sometimes the departure is "solemn", with their community saluting them (a crying spouse, an old man giving wise advice, etc.), sometimes it is secret, in the night, hiding from everyone.

The departure inaugurates the third sphere of the story, often nicknamed "the donor sequence", because it is characterized by some form of assistance that the hero will receive, and that will significantly improve their skills.

12. **Testing**: The hero is challenged in some form, sometimes by the villain in person, sometimes by somebody else, including characters that may eventually be friendly and helpful. This is the moment when the

hero is given the opportunity to prove themselves to be worthy of trust, and when they are informed about a way to improve and become more powerful (usually, they learn that they can acquire some skill or some tool). For this reason, the character that tests themself, whether or not they are friendly, is called "donor".

13. **Reaction**: The hero responds to the test, often successfully, but sometimes unsuccessfully, resulting their taking another route or trying again with more conviction. On this occasion, we learn important features of the hero's character: when the reaction is successful, we understand that they are overcoming their limits and have potential; when the reaction is not successful, we are still given proof that they are not giving up and that they will try again in some other way.
14. **Acquisition**: At this point, the hero receives or acquires that important item we mentioned (which is often "magical"): a potion, a weapon, a competence, or else. The item, as we said, is provided by the donor: this is a very important character that appears at some point (or was always there, but more in the background), and that causes an actual turning point in the story. This is when we feel that the hero can really make it.
15. **Guidance**: The journey continues and the hero travels to the destination where the missing object/person is. The "travel" factor is quite important: classical stories hardly take place in the same location where they started, there has to be some kind of movement. Sometimes it is just an "existential" journey, but most of the times it is an actual, physical one.
16. **Struggle**: The hero confronts the villain. It is not the final battle, but an intermediate one, which may end up in various ways, and may be (momentarily) won by either character. What is important is that now the hero is no longer a weak opponent for the villain, but a worthy one. Regardless of the outcome of this clash (which we know very well is not final), we understand that now the hero is ready to fight the villain and nearly ready to defeat them.
17. **Branding**: During or after the confrontation with the villain, the hero is changed in some form, either physically or psychologically, and either negatively or positively. Something affects them permanently and that will be a life-changing experience, which will either make them stronger, or weaker physically but stronger mentally.
18. **Victory**: A second confrontation with the villain results in a clear victory for the hero. This may provoke the death of the villain, a banishment, a punishment or some other form of defeat. Sometimes, the villain loses dignity and asks for forgiveness, which occasionally the hero grants.
19. **Resolution**: The narrateme 8 (villainy and lack) is now solved. An object may be recovered, a treasure may be found, and a person may be rescued. This completes an important (for some, the most important) part of the story, but more developments are possible.

Many stories, especially the simpler ones (like fairy tales for kids), may end here, however Propp noticed additional narrative possibilities in many of the folk tales he worked on, and indeed many AVTs classically-structured include such developments. We abandon the 3rd sphere, and we enter the 4th and final one, usually known as "The return of the hero".

20. **Return**: The hero leaves the place they went to for their quest and heads back home. While hoping to experience an uneventful journey back, the hero is hardly safe at this point, especially because they are carrying the "rescued item": an important and/or vulnerable person, a treasure, a magic object… all pretty desirable things.
21. **Pursuit**: The hero is chased by some antagonist, who may be the same villain we have dealt with so far (if the latter's life was spared: they may have escaped from prison, recovered their strength, or else), or other villains. The hero, who has already proved themselves to us, may or may not react: they may also be more pragmatic, this time, and realize that it is better to escape or avoid the direct confrontation.
22. **Rescue**: The pursuit ends when some factor intervenes to save the hero (either the hero, or more typically some friends/helpers). During the stage, it is also possible (and often likely) that the hero, intentionally or not, undergoes some transformation, either a physical and evident one or simply an intellectual one (for instance, they "realize" or "become aware of" something). At any rate, that transformation will prove relevant when the hero returns home.
23. **Arrival**: The hero arrives home unrecognized, due to their transformation. This lack of recognition may also be the hero's deliberate choice to keep a low profile, for whatever reason.
24. **Claim**: At this point, a "false hero" appears, before or after the actual hero, and advances some claim, often challenging the real hero who now has to prove themselves again. While usually the false hero is a villain (the same we have discussed so far or another one), it is also noteworthy that on occasions this character may still go under the "good guys" category, although their moral status is not comparable to the main protagonist. Often, the false hero is already visible at an early point in the story, as a jealous friend, as an enemy in disguise, as a cynical anti-hero, and so forth.
25. **Task**: Due to this new challenge, the hero now is again tested in some form.
26. **Solution**: The hero demonstrates once more their morality, skills and else, and passes the test.
27. **Recognition**: The hero is now fully acknowledged for who they are, without any further doubt.
28. **Exposure**: As a consequence, also the false hero is unmasked and recognized for who they really are.
29. **Transformation**: With the acknowledgment of the hero comes also a new appearance after the transformation in narrateme 22. This new appearance is either an "improved" return to the original one, or an entirely new one, with a new role (e.g., the hero was poor and now becomes a prince).

30. **Punishment**: If that had not happened before (in which case this narrateme does not appear), the villain is finally punished for their actions. That is not necessarily the death, but usually death has a cathartic dimension that makes it more likely to happen than not.
31. **Wedding**: Finally, in the best "and they lived happily ever after" tradition, the hero gets married, or gains that type of final achievement/settlement that allows us to put an end to the story, imagining that no further problems will appear.

Out of this scheme, Propp was also able to isolate the seven archetypical characters that seem to regularly recur in these stories. That is:

1. The **hero**, first and foremost. This is the character who sets out on the adventure, fights the villain, resolves whatever problem or whatever lack, and achieves some kind of success (usually marriage, but in modern stories it can also be something else: self-realization, money, etc.).
2. The **villain**. This is the evil character, the one that creates struggles for the hero.
3. The **dispatcher**. This is the character that emphasizes the problem and sends the hero off to their quest. More often than not, this tends to be an elderly, wise figure (the princess's father in many of the tales analyzed by Propp).
4. The **helper**. This is the character that helps the hero in some form (often magical, or anyway "special"), and that proves to be their loyal friend.
5. The **donor**. This is the character that either trains/prepares the hero or gives them some (often magical) tool that will help in their quest. The donor often "tests" the hero before helping them.
6. The **false hero**. This is the character that at some point (usually towards the end of the story) tries to take credit for the hero's actions or to earn their prize (e.g., they try to marry the princess). The false hero is not necessarily a bad guy.
7. The **prize**. Usually represented by the princess, this is the character "earned" by the hero at the end of the story: they will marry the hero, or simply fall in love, or provide happiness/achievement/success in some other form. In modern stories, the prize can also be represented by something other than a person (financial capital, a social position, a job promotion…).

There can be more than one character cast in the same role (there can be more than one villain), and at the same time there can be more roles assigned to the same character (e.g., the donor can also be the helper).

The Lithuanian literary theorist Algirdas Greimas re-elaborated Propp's seven roles and suggested a grammar of narrative which could generate any known narrative structure (Greimas 1983). He identified three types of categories, which he called "narrative syntagms" ("syntagms" are formal units of any sort—linguistic, musical, audiovisual…—that can be placed in sequential relationship with one another. E.g., the syntagms "All", "you", "need", "is" and "love" can be combined into meaningful sequences like "All you need is love" and "love is all you need", as we know from a certain song). They are: **performative syntagms**, that is, the various tasks and struggles; **contractual syntagms**, that is, the establishment or breaking of deals/agreements/contracts; **disjointing syntagms**, that is, departures and arrivals. Being himself a structuralist, Greimas, too, in a similar fashion as Lévi-Strauss, proposed three basic binary oppositions, as underlying structures of all the so-called **actants** (anything that produces contents, "acts", in a story: narrative themes, actions and characters): **subject-object** (equivalent to Propp's hero and the person they look for); **sender-receiver** (Propp's dispatcher and, again, the hero) and **helper-opponent** (Propp's helper and donor on the one hand, and villain and—often—false hero on the other). The hero, thus, is both a subject and a receiver: it is another important reason that explains their centrality in the story.

In the next case study, we shall indeed explore a faithful, "orthodox" Proppian structure, in application to one of the most iconic Hollywood movies. However, it is also worthwhile to mention some important variations introduced by more modern AV texts. Such variations could be read both as a contradiction to the existence of this kind of archetypical narration, or—if we like—a confirmation of it, since they are narrative forms that are anyway introducing variations on the existing material so carefully emphasized by Propp. We shall mention here only three out of many, but hopefully they will be enough to get the point.

First and foremost, and especially from the 1960s onwards, the introduction of "moral ambiguity" as a prominent narrative context in AVCC has often promoted the figure of the **anti-hero** as the actual focus of the story. Genres like spaghetti western, noir, thriller, comedy and many others have been in the frontline in this particular endeavor, and of course characters like the "man with no name" (Clint Eastwood) in Sergio Leone's dollar trilogy, the Corleone family in *The Godfather*'s saga (Al Pacino, Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro and co.), the various "adorable scoundrels" (aka "lovable rogues") portrayed by the likes of Paul Newman (*The Sting*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*…), Jean Paul Belmondo (*Breathless*, *Borsalino*…) and others, have helped to redefine our conception of "protagonist", and have moved our sympathies to characters who do not necessarily do good, although they often have a "heart of gold", or at least they are capable of compassionate actions, every now and again.

This transition is mostly due to the various social and cultural changes that occurred in western society during the 1960s, which seriously challenged traditional moral standards. Events like the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the Arab-Israeli conflict had certainly a big role in this process: they were the first highly-televised and generally media-exposed tragedies, and the first ones that profoundly divided the public, often, and unanimously, perceived as unnecessary and unjust (Vietnam *in primis*, of course). Suddenly, the paradigm of morality that people had inherited from the Second World War was not valid anymore: Americans were no longer the "good guys", to begin with.

Also, these events were occurring during the cultural peaks of new emerging social phenomena, like the youth culture, the hippie generation, feminism, civil rights, pacifism, environmentalism, sexual liberation: all of them were sharing the common denominator of questioning traditional moral values. There were also important eminently intellectual movements, such as post-modernism, western leftist ideologies, post-structuralism, post-colonialism (a lot of post's, as you can see—evidence that people wanted to explore models of knowledge that would get over past paradigms): these, too, were centered around a usually aggressive challenge to moral traditions. Such social and cultural transformations impacted people also at a subjective level: parents were not untouchable authority figures anymore, men were challenged in their masculinity, divorce and abortion received more open-minded treatments from the law, whites began witnessing the progressive disappearance of the various benefits they had been enjoying in times of segregation, dinner tables had more and more vegetarians sitting at them—and so forth. It is only logical that artistic productions of different kind reflected—and often took position towards—this moral crisis.

Within all this framework, it is my conviction that the audience, too, felt more free to admit that, deep down, they kind of always liked "bad guys", or at least the "not-so-good guys", better than the spotless perfection represented by some Snow White or Mickey Mouse. The truth is: most of us have always liked Donald Duck and Cruella De Vil better than any holy soul available in the market, and it is no coincidence that, within the world of superheroes, those with dark sides and troubled souls like Batman have taken over, in popularity, the immaculate likes of Superman. Authors must have realized that the seduction of evil and imperfection may make characters less admirable, but definitely more relatable, encouraging that process of compassion that, since the times of Aristotle, we know to be essential to the success of any narration. Imperfect characters, to begin with, make us also feel better about ourselves and our own imperfections.

As years went by, the figure of the anti-hero became an increasingly regular feature in AVTs, and—particularly from the 1990s onwards—TV caught up to the idea, initiating a string of a successful series based on anti-heroic events and characters: *Twin Peaks*, *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and so on. Videogaming, too, turned from the super-positive likes of Mario to games like *Grand Theft* where the actual purpose is to be as nasty as possible. Finally, music videos started presenting situations where the acts involved do not play anymore "likeable" or "irresistible" parts: take The Verve's "Bittersweet symphony", where singer Richard Ashcroft is portrayed walking in a rather arrogant way, pushing and bumping into various people in the process, or nearly the many Michael Jackson's videos where the singer enjoyed playing criminal or thrilling roles.

At any rate, and back to our focus, the emergence of anti-heroes as the actual leading characters of AV stories has generated some important innovations in many of the classic narratemes, up to actually deconstruct the Proppian model (which—let us remember—is not sacred anyway, and may also be completely ignored in many AVTs). One obvious example is the final narrateme, "Wedding": very often the catharsis is very far from a happy ending, and the anti-hero may die, or escape, or cease their activities, or remain unaccomplished in some form. The anti-hero, as you may have guessed already, can be the villain, the false friend or, less often, the donor: what matters is that we witness a switch of focus from the hero to somebody else.

Talking about donors, the second important variation we may emphasize here concerns their role, which sometimes may become the most relevant of the whole story, turning "the natural order of things" in narration somewhat upside down. Actual or metaphorical wizards, masterminds, mentors, grey cardinals and Cyranos may end up being at the very center of narration, pushing the hero (or, not rarely, heroes—in plural—as we shall see soon) in the background. If we take the example of Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society*, we have the perfect illustration of this case. Prof. Keating (Robin Williams) is the main character of the story, but he is clearly a donor, and the heroes are instead the various kids he is teaching, particularly the characters of Neil Perry (Robert Sean Leonard), Todd Anderson (Ethan Hawke), Knox Overstreet (Josh Charles) and Charlie Dalton (Gale Hansen). Keating offers the "magic potion" of self-confidence, force of will and personal freedom to the kids and that helps them to go after the respective quests (Neil wants to become an actor, Todd wants to overcome his insecurities, Knox wants to win the heart of the girl Chris, and Charlie wants a full realization of his own romantic, libertine self). However, the focus is the act of donating the potion: this is what the movie is about, and this is what makes the donor the central character.

Back to heroes, and to our third example of variation on Propp's scheme. There exists also a certain distinction between the idea of presenting one single, "undisputable" hero, and the idea of presenting more than one, with the consequence, in the latter case, of having to distribute the narratemes in different directions, up to straight away modifying them to adapt to this more complex narrative texture. This distinction is first of all due to the media involved. Starting from the latter, it is clear, for example, that a TV series is more prone to display more than one hero, whether or not one of them is slightly more in the foreground than others. Examples range from the likes of *Sex and the City* (where the character of Carrie Bradshaw is just a tiny bit more important than her three girlfriends, mostly due to the fact that she is also the narrator of their adventures) to the likes of *Fame*, where there is absolutely no hierarchy among at least ten leading characters, all treated with equally adequate care, and put in the spotlight: from the composer Bruno Martelli (Lee Curreri) to the singer Doris Schwartz (Valerie Landsburg), from the actor Danny Amatullo (Carlo Imperato) to the dancer Leroy Johnson (Gene Anthony Ray), and so forth.

Excurse 6—The cold war of the heroes

There are more reasons than the ones we have listed for choosing an individual hero or a collective bunch of them, and they are mostly of political and historical type. From a political point of view, as much of a stretch this may sound, the ideological opinions of the authors, or more generally the socio-cultural context where a given AVT is generated, are not irrelevant. The Hollywood film tradition has for the most part of its history reflected the American general inclination towards the capitalistic way of life. Within the capitalistic context, the centrality of the individual is crucial: capitalism is about personal freedom and personal achievements. The "American Dream" teaches the lesson that anybody can hit the big time, if they are persistent and skilled enough. It is no wonder, thus, that American mainstream movies have a strong tendency to place a single, individual hero at the center of their stories. Conversely, schools like Soviet cinema were based on a Communist ideology, which somehow favors the notion of collectivity over that of individuality. Freedom, justice, and all the other important conditions for a fair society are not achieved via single initiatives, but only if the society is giving everybody a chance to live with dignity. When we watch many of the classics of Soviet cinema, such as *The Battleship Potemkin* or *The Man with a Movie Camera* we realize a specific absence of a single identifiable hero: the "hero" is the community, be that the crew of a battleship or entire cities, as respectively portrayed in the two mentioned works.

On the other hand, historical development within the same society has its role too, and if modern Russian cinema has completely abandoned (in art as in the whole political life) communist ideals, presenting us with stories in perfect Hollywood-style (an example being the celebrated director Nikita Mikhalkov, possibly the most Hollywoodesque of Russian directors), on the other hand Western cinema has developed its own ways of handling stories with multiple heroes. One example is the sub-genre "hyperlink cinema", that is, a type of movie with several parallel stories developed through a common red line (more or less subtle, and usually of thematic, rather than narrative, type), which may or may not take place in the same period and in the same location. While arguably the first example of the sort was an old Jean Renoir French movie called *La Règle du Jeu* (1939), this sub-genre only really took off from the mid-1970s, thanks to works like Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (Italy, 1973), Robert Altman's *Nashville* (USA, 1975), Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (USA, 1994), Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* (Mexico, 2000), Fernando Meirelles' *City of God* (Brazil, 2002) and many others.

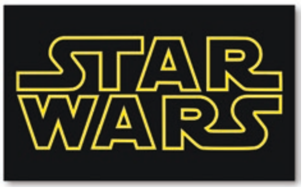
To conclude, before focusing on our case study, we have briefly mentioned videogames. It should come as no surprise that most adventure and action videogames are in fact set on a pretty faithful Proppian structure. Games such as *Tomb Raider*, *Destiny*, *Final Fantasy*, *SuperMario* and dozens of others abound in heroes, villains, donors, helpers, dispatchers and so on. Interestingly, Propp also served as an inspiration for videogame-specific identifications of common patterns. For example, Djaouti et al. (2008) studied no less than 588 different videogames, postulating the existence of ten so-called "Game bricks", that is, recurrent diagrams within the rules of those videogames. The bricks are: *Avoid*, *Manage*, *Random*, *Shoot*, *Create*, *Destroy*, *Match*, *Write*, *Move* and *Select*. *Pac-man* features the bricks MOVE (meaning that the player can move an avatar); AVOID (since the player has to avoid being caught by the ghosts); DESTROY (the player must eat the dots in the maze); and MATCH (the player has to match each dot's spatial position to eat it).

3.4.2 Case Study: Star Wars in 31 Narratemes

Let us now see Propp's model in actual action by taking one of the most famous examples of classic AV narration: George Lucas's *Star Wars—A New Hope* (the fourth installment of the saga, but the first one released, chronologically). We shall do that in a very schematic way, by drawing a table and matching each of the 31 narratemes with specific sequences of the story.

There may be no need to introduce *Star Wars*, for arguably any reader of this book will have at least a vague idea of it, but perhaps a word or two are still worthy to be said. *Star Wars* is a sci-fi saga that has produced an endless amount of installments, spin-offs and adaptations to other media, and most of all it is a phenomenon of popular culture of proportions that arguably no other movie is able to compete with. The first step of such phenomenon was a movie that was actually produced with the intention of paying back its notable production expenses not only (or, in fact, not really) from the revenues from cinema tickets, but on a prediction of the sales provided by merchandising *related to* the movie, from T-shirts to action figures, from comic books to videogames. In other words, the investment went in the direction of creating a whole Star Wars industry, not just a film. Although quite risky, such a business plan proves that the production was quite confident in the fact that this franchise was to become extremely popular, although—I bet—nobody really imagined that Lucas's movie was going to become an actual and enduring pop icon. And not just the movie itself, by the way. Nearly *everything* related to it has an iconic status by now: it is certainly the case with most (if not all) of the characters, with John Williams' soundtrack, with Suzy Rice's logo of the film title (see ◘ Fig. 3.27), and with every costume and gadget visible.

Nowadays, particularly within the framework of DC and Marvel movies, this strategy is rather common, with various entertainment industries feeding off each other (sometimes the movie comes first, sometimes it is a videogame, sometimes a comic book, a TV series… what is sure is that sooner or later, each and every one of these items is on the market, or nearly so). The first movie of the saga was released in 1977 under the



◘ **Fig. 3.27** The legendary Star Wars logo, designed by Suzy Rice direction of George Lucas, and it was called *Star Wars—A New Hope*. In the endless carousel of sequels and prequels that the current film industry has made inevitable by now, *A New Hope* ended up being the fourth instalment of the saga, because three prequels have been released since then, but for many fans the 1977 release (and the two sequels that came to form the first trilogy) is and remains the *real deal*. Maybe it is exactly because of this plan of releasing games and books based on the same story, that the authors decided that the story had to contain an archetypical dimension that everybody, adults and kids, could relate to at the level of the "inner child". With such a goal, nothing could be safer and more appropriate than recurring to Propp's good old 31 narratemes, making sure that every step was followed carefully and explicitly.

Before proceeding, a small disclaimer. As you will notice, not always the order of the narratemes is the same as the order in which events are presented in the movie. However, this is really not the point; the important issue is the actual appearance of the motives, rather than their order.

Narrateme	Star wars
Initial situation	"*It is a period of civil* war", as the famous opening crawl of the movie says. The galaxy is in the midst of a rebellion against the tyranny of the Galactic Empire. The rebels' leader is Princess Leia Organa, who is captured by the Empire army and imprisoned in a big space station called Death Star. Before being detained, the princess manages to load the astromech droid R2D2 with a recorded hologram containing precious information about the rebellion plans and a request for help addressed to the Jedi Knight Obi-Wan. R2D2 is sent on an escape pod to the planet Tattooine, where some Jawa traders catch it and sell it to a family of farmers, where Luke Skywalker, the hero, lives. While cleaning the droid, Luke accidentally finds Leia's message in the form of a hologram
Absentation	The next morning R2D2 goes missing in search of Obi-Wan
Interdiction	Owen, Luke's uncle, warns the boy not to look for the droid, as some areas of the planet are infested by the dangerous Sand People
Violation	Luke ignores the warning and goes searching for R2D2. Once he has found it, he is indeed attacked by the Sand People, but Obi-Wan rescues him. Luke has thus the opportunity to play Leia's message for him
Reconnaissance	Darth Vader, the primary villain, is looking for the missing escape pod where R2D2 had been placed
Delivery	While searching for the escape pod, Darth Vader spots the droids
Trickery	The commanding officer of the Galactic Empire, Grand Moff Tarkin interrogates Princess Leia
Complicity	Leia tries to convince Tarkin that the rebel base is on Dantooine, but Tarkin proceeds to destroy her home planet Alderaan, as a show of force
Villainy and lack	Alderaan is completely destroyed
Mediation	Luke and Obi-Wan discover that Alderaan has been blown up
Counteraction	Luke decides to join Obi-Wan in the rebellion against the Empire
Departure	Luke and Obi-Wan head to Mos Eisley, where they hire the smuggler Han Solo and his starship the Millenium Falcon. Han is a mercenary, almost a "false hero" type, but he will have a crucial role in the positive development of the events
Testing	Obi-Wan tells Luke about his father, a fellow Jedi Knight who had been killed by Darth Vader, and introduces the boy to a powerful weapon, the lightsaber
Reaction	Listening to his father's story and watching Obi-Wan demonstrating the lightsaber, Luke acquires more self-awareness of his role as a hero of the rebellion
Acquisition	Obi-Wan tells Luke about the Force and teaches him to use the lightsaber. These last three narratemes (12–14) occur before the departure to Mos Eisley. As we anticipated, the motives are not necessarily ordered in the same sequence as in Propp's analysis, but, what is really important, they are all present in the movie
Guidance	Luke and his friends head to the Death Star to rescue Leia
Struggle	Luke and Han fight the storm troopers of the Galactic Empire and Obi-Wan fights Darth Vader
Branding	Obi-Wan is killed and that profoundly affects Luke, who is now more determined than ever to fight the Empire
Victory	Luke and Han defeat the storm troopers
Resolution	Leia manages to take possession of some Death Star's documents that reveal the Empire's plans and the weak points of the Death Star
Return	Luke and the others leave the Death Star on the Millenium Falcon to reach Yavin 4, the rebels' military base
Pursuit	On the way the Falcon is pursued by the Imperial TIE fighters, a series of fast Starfighters

Narrateme	Star wars
Rescue	Luke and Han fight back the TIE fighters and succeed. However, using a tracking beacon placed aboard the Falcon, the Imperials follow the starship to Yavin 4
Arrival	The Falcon arrives at Yavin 4
Claim	Han acts like a typical "false hero": he collects his payment and (apparently) leaves
Task	The final task now is to destroy the Death Star, in accordance with the information that Leia managed to acquire (see narrateme 19)
Solution	The Death Star is destroyed, thanks also to Han's timely return in support of Luke (see 28)
Recognition	Darth Vader recognizes Luke through the force, and realizes that the boy is now very powerful
Exposure	Han realizes he has been a coward in leaving and returns to help Luke. His intervention with the Falcon is crucial in the victory
Transformation	Luke and Han are celebrated by Leia, who gives them a medal for their heroism. Luke is looking now different as he gets cleaned up and wears a yellow jacket
Punishment	Darth Vader is sent away into outer space
Wedding	During the ceremony, Luke and Leia happily exchange eye contact for the positive ending of the adventure. We will eventually learn, in the sequel to this movie, that Luke and Leia are actually brother and sister, and that is why the "wedding" part here is so "soft", compared to a more typical romantic kiss, or an actual wedding. Luke and Leia are shown to have an instinctive affection and care about each other, but that never results in anything remotely erotic. In the sequel, we understand why

3.5 Montage

Montage is, quite simply, the chief characteristic that distinguishes a screen-mediated communication from a live one. The word comes from French, and stands for "assembling", "putting together", but the closest equivalent in English is "editing", which is sometimes employed among scholars and critics. However, as part of a specific technical jargon, we should employ the French word without translating it, whatever language we might be speaking, and that is for the same reason why we do not translate "Rock'n'roll" or "Sturm und Drang", from musical and philosophical jargons respectively.

Montage is the act of, indeed, editing, cutting and piecing together a text in such a way that its communicative potential is the most faithful possible to what the authors intended to express, at both an explicit and a more metaphorical-emotional level. Montage employs all the images and the sounds at our disposal as raw material, and puts them together in many different ways, not hesitating to violate both spatial and temporal coordinates (for instance by placing two chronologically distant images one after another, as if happening in sequence). To do that, AVCC can make use of all possible manipulations and parameters available: sequencing images and sounds at will; applying effects; selecting different camera shots and angles; increasing/decreasing volumes, tones, contrasts; juxtaposing, overexposing, enhancing… In sum, montage can be considered the *quintessential* AV action, whose ultimate asset lies in its ability to transform an AVT in a dense network where just every single item can establish a relation with another, not only, say, two adjacent shots or two items of the same mean.

In live AV performances, such as theatre, the communicative material is exposed altogether, in one single (big or small) space: the only vague "editing" work that occurs is from the spectators' part. It is us, as audience, that may execute some kind of selection of the points of interest in a live performance: we tend to look at the actors who are talking at any particular moment, but we may also direct our gaze towards the scenery, towards other actors; we may be momentarily distracted by our phone, or by some other spectator; we may also admire the architecture of the theatre and take a long, explorative look at the place… If it was possible for another person to see through our eyes (in other words, *if we were the screen*), this person would see a form of montage, based on our own choices and focuses.

When AVCC turns to a screen-mediated form, whichever that is (including texts that go on in real time, such as news programs or live sport on TV), our attention as spectators is guided by someone else's choices and focuses (that someone else usually being the producer or the director). For example, when a decision is taken to show a wide view of a beautiful landscape, quickly followed by a very close look at one person's astonished face, we are naturally driven to turn the attention from the landscape to the face, with little or no decisional power on the matter. It is as if the director is pointing the finger to the landscape first and then goes "look at this face now!", and we are somehow bound to follow their indications.

As you may guess, the type of montage that is applicable to an AVT that goes on in real time has some limitations, as opposed to one that is pre-filmed and can be post-produced, like a movie, a videogame, a commercial or else. In these latter cases there is an allowance for a careful setting of the above-mentioned parameters, for trial and error processes, for second thoughts, or even, if necessary, reshooting. In a live program, obviously, the editing performance is more based on improvisation, and tends more easily to rely upon standard procedures. For example, if a goal has been scored in a football game, there is a set of montage actions that are executed in the great majority of the cases: we get a closer look to the scorer celebrating the goal and joined by their teammates, we are exposed to numerous repetitions of the goal, from different angles, and at different speeds, we may be quickly shown the coach, some or many supporters and some disappointed adversary. There are only rare deviations from this norm, and they are normally due to some specific, unusual circumstance occurring during the goal, in which case, simply, there will be *other* standard editing procedures (e.g., when suspicion exists that the goal was scored in off-side, the replays may focus more on the moment the scorer is passed the ball to, rather than when they actually score).

As we mentioned, the great added value of montage lies in its ability to enhance and enrich the communicative potential of an AVT. That occurs because montage is not simply a sum of parts, but is actually able to create new meanings out of such sums. Back to our previous example. If a director shows a landscape and then a face, the result is not only "beautiful landscape + astonished face", but also whatever relation may be established/encouraged through this association. For example, and quite predictably, we may be driven to infer that the beauty of the landscape and the astonishment of the face are in causal relation: we may think that the character is enjoying that view, even enchanted by it. Sergei Eisenstein, whom we shall extensively talk about in the next paragraph and who was a prominent theorist of montage, compared montage to the compounding of characters in Japanese writing. When one combines the character for "dog" to the character for "mouth", he noted, the result is not only "dog's mouth" but also the new concept of "bark": in similar fashion, montage results in more than the sum of its parts. In other words, the nature of montage is "dialectical".

Concluding this introductory part, just like narration is the main embodiment of the axis of time, montage represents the idea of AV space in the most typical way. Montage may be compared to the Tangram game, where simple tiles in the shape of quadrangles and triangles can be arranged and re-arranged in endless combinations that represent recognizable or more abstract figures (Fig. 3.28): those tiles represent the "raw material" of the AVT, as we have called it above, that can be edited "in space" (we move the tiles up, down, left, right…) up to form a more or less recognizable (steady or unsteady) text.

3.5.1 Types and Theories

When montage is mentioned in AV studies, some names pop up more often than others. In chronological order, the first one that gets systematically mentioned is the American director David W. Griffith, and particularly his groundbreaking film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), arguably the first movie to display the full potentials of the montage art to the world. *The Birth of a Nation* is an over-three-hour-long epic on the American Civil War and its aftermath, with a particular attention to the question of racial integration, after the abolition of slavery. The movie, we shall make no mystery of this, is heavily racist, even when put into the historical context of the far less progressive early twentieth century (see also Fig. 3.29): it portrays Afro-American people as uncivilized scoundrels who take their improved condition as an opportunity to spread their beastly manners all over society (implying, thus, that they were better off as slaves, when their savageness could be kept under the wise control

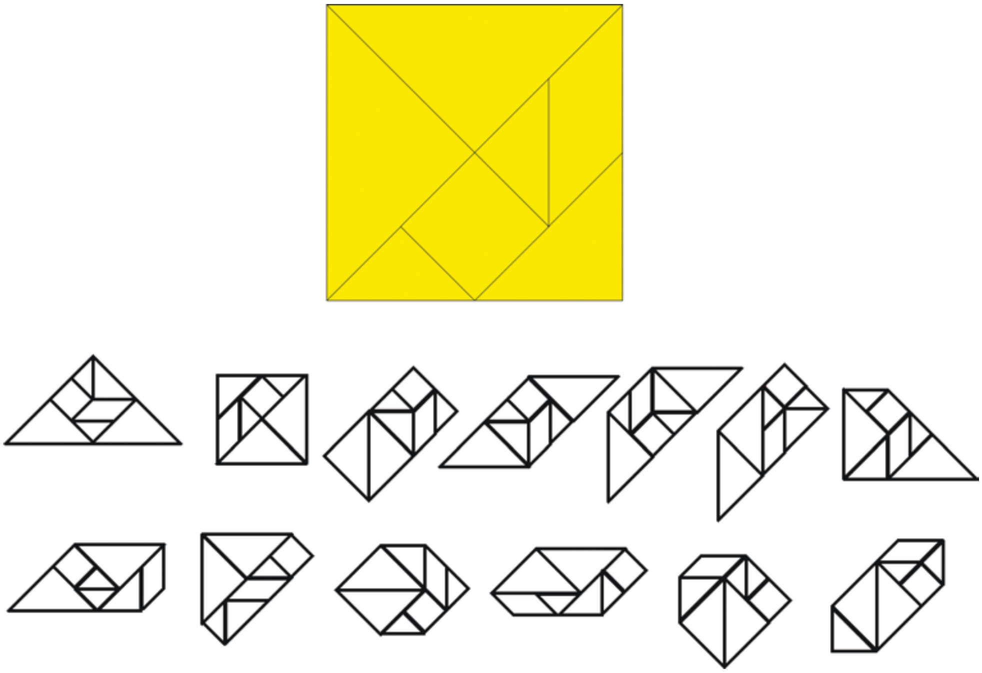
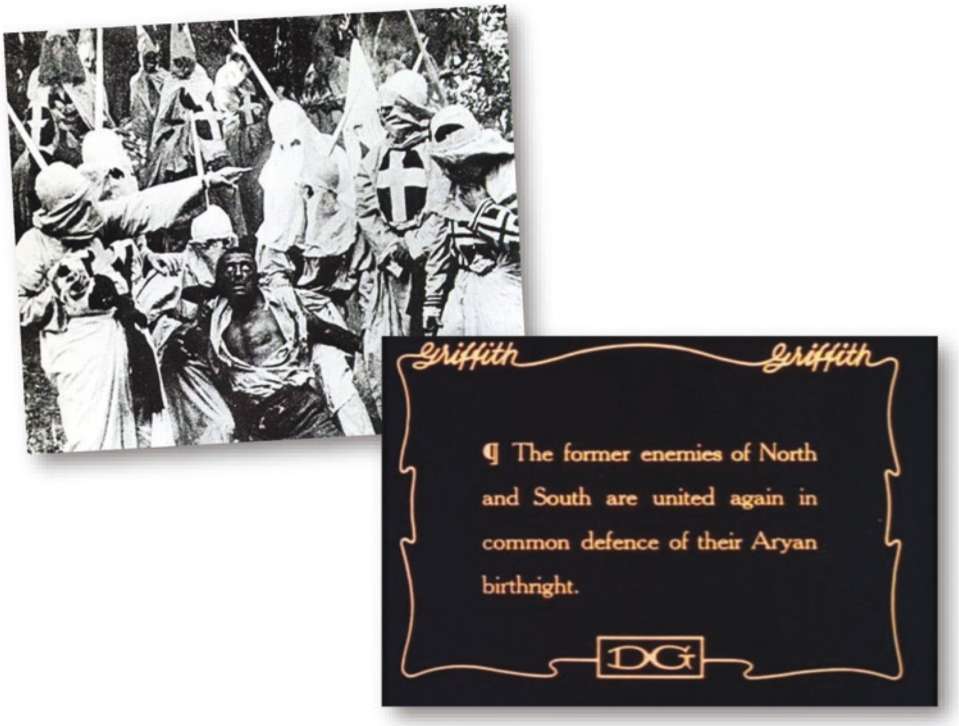


Fig. 3.28 The traditional Chinese puzzle "Tangram". *[Images of public domain]*



¶ The former enemies of North and South are united again in common defence of their Aryan birthright.

Fig. 3.29 Two examples of racist statements in Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*: on the left, the Ku Klux Klan "heroically" catches a black man who was harassing a white woman, and on the right, an intertitle that praises the Aryan race against ethnic contamination—a sinister anticipation of the Nazi rhetoric

of their white owners), and therefore the Ku Klux Klan movement, one of the most disgusting pages in American history, is glorified in this movie as a group of heroes fighting back the perverted blacks, particularly when they harass the stereotypical "innocent white blonde girl" (an archetypical white obsession that we will see staged in *King Kong* as well).

Having said that, and while we try somehow to cope with the "ethics versus art" dilemma (see **Excurse 7**), Griffith, and in particular that film, must be credited as the person who pushed cinema out of its primitive, theatre-derivative, age and turned it into a form of art with its own characteristics. One of his first inventions was the **cut-in**, which he had already employed in a previous production called *The Greaser's Gauntlet* (1908): he would cut from a larger view of a subject to a closer one in order to provide an emotional impact. It is a basic concept nowadays, but it was very innovative at the time. In a similar vein, Griffith continued to experiment by filming the scenes with multiple camera setups, eventually editing them by alternating shot lengths and creating a wide variety of views that would all serve specific communicating purposes. This concept became known as **continuity editing**. The other important idea that Griffith had with montage was the so-called **intercutting** (or **crosscutting**), that is, the bouncing between two different scenes in a parallel action. All these ideas are commonplace nowadays: when we watch a sequence we are accustomed to see the subjects from different angles, we seldom see them going on and on with the same shot (unless the author has a specific intention to do so); when two actions are going on at the same time, we see various forms of intercutting. The fact that these strategies became "standard" tells us how ahead of time and influential Griffith was.

Excurse 7. Artists or jerks?

While the moral contempt for a movie like *The Birth of a Nation* is legitimate and must be stated without hesitation, we could take the opportunity to reflect a bit on how private life and artistry should or should not mix. We know that many artists (perhaps, most of them) have a lot to answer for in terms of their views, values and often actions, just like anybody else—and one should never make the mistake of assuming that an artist is somehow a better person than average, just because they give ideas and beauty to the world. But the question is: should a moral judgement on someone's private life, no matter how severe and how legitimate, affect a reasoned assessment of this person's work and talent?

An example that is particularly poignant for my own views and values is the treatment of non-human animals during an AV production. In America, since the first publication of their guidelines in 1972, the American Humane Association (AHA) has been active in assessing the level of involvement and exploitation of animals in movies, establishing a rating scale from "outstanding" to "unacceptable" (the latter meaning that AHA personnel were present during the filming and directly witnessed forms of mistreatment). There have been several controversial or very controversial cases during the AHA's history: from the bull-fighting sequence in *Talk to Her* (where a bull is actually killed during a staged corrida, with the production team explaining that they had used a bull that was going to be killed anyway for the same purpose), to the cockfighting scene in *Fast and Furious 4* (the film makers shot the sequence in Mexico, where, unlike the USA, the practice is legal, so they could not be fined); from the several abuses of horses and cows in *Heaven's Gate*, to the disturbing scene in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* where live chickens are buried up to their necks and decapitated, etc.

Arguably, however, no other case created as much controversy as Francis Ford Coppola's classic *Apocalypse Now* or Ruggero Deodato's cult-horror *Cannibal Holocaust* (both released in 1980). One of the most accomplished war movies in film history, *Apocalypse* Now is of course mostly a movie about human brutality as such, and often non-human animals are in the way (a cow is air-lifted by a helicopter, a puppy is roughly passed in between two separate boats, etc.). None of these scenes was actually questioned by AHA: it is towards the end of the film that a violent sequence occurs: a water buffalo is cruelly slaughtered by three men armed with machetes, who simultaneously strike at the animal's neck, back and stomach. We then see a close-up of the buffalo falling, rolling onto its side and dying. And it was all-real. The official statement placed upon the film by the AHA is the following: "*Apocalypse Now* was filmed in the Philippines in 1979. According to AHA's research, a water buffalo was hacked to pieces during the making of the film, earning the film an *Unacceptable* rating from the AHA". The situation was particularly tricky, as the production team claimed that the killing of the buffalo was not explicitly arranged for the movie, but the film crew had actually caught on camera a religious ceremony held by the Ifugao people (who had been recruited to play the Montagnards in the movie), and drawn to Coppola's attention by his wife. In that sense (and so it was officially accepted as) the slaughter sequence qualified as "documentary of a religious rite", which implied no legal consequences. Nevertheless, AHA issued a clear statement of contempt, as they still considered non-fiction documentary footage of animal abuse as "exploitation of the animal's suffering for the sake of entertainment".

Incidentally, the question of "cultural differences" (of religious or other type) is often raised when situations of a strong emotional impact (animal cruelty being one, but also other forms of violence, certain sexual practices, etc.) appear in movies produced in a given country and distributed in others where those particular situations are considered too strong or morally unacceptable. A famous example is Kim Ki-duk's *The Isle* (2000), which shows sequences of real frogs and fish being skinned and mutilated. In an interview, Kim mentioned cultural differences as the reason why he included those sequences, stating that they were to him as normal as the slaughtering of cows and pigs for the western audience. For the record, Kim's movie did not suffer particular hostility from the western public.

A whole different case was Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*, over which an active campaign of boycotting was conducted. In the movie, several exotic non-human animals were carefully arranged to be brutally killed and caught on film (including a re-take of one sequence, where a second specimen of squirrel-monkey *Scimiri sciureus* is killed, since the first take was not to the director's satisfaction). The AHA condemned the movie without appeal and invited the public to boycott it. The non-human animals killed on the set were no less than seven (a South-American coati was killed with a knife; a large sea turtle was decapitated and mutilated; a large spider, a snake and the two mentioned squirrel monkeys were killed with a machete; and finally a pig was kicked twice and then shot with a rifle at close range).

More controversy was actually raised when Deodato was suspected to have abused human beings as well (producing what in film jargon would be called a snuff movie): some graphic violence was so realistic that the Italian director had to defend himself in court and prove his innocence on this specific account. Needless to say, *Cannibal Holocaust* soon got the status of "cursed film", censored in no less than 50 different countries, and having almost 20 entire scenes cut from the final editing (only in 1984, after a long legal battle, was Deodato allowed to get his director's cut restored in the movie theatres).

Despite Deodato's eventual remorse for his choices (although his words referred to "being stupid", rather than cruel, in killing non-human animals: not exactly what an animal advocate would like to hear, I guess), some of the critics who instead praised the movie noticed that many other movies which had perpetrated violence on non-human animals had gotten away with the public's contempt, just because they were considered artistically valuable, as opposed to the B-movie status that horrors of this type generally receive. Funnily enough, the most recurrent case employed to exemplify this discrimination was exactly *Apocalypse Now* and the buffalo sequence. Hugely successful, Coppola's movie had received repeated accolades (including two Oscars), and had grossed over 80 million dollars, peaking at number 253 in the list of the highest grossing films of all time. Grossing forty times less and with a much more difficult ethical message to handle (the movie is a harsh criticism of western civilization as such), *Cannibal Holocaust*, claimed its supporters, had no political power, and could be easily exposed to criticism.

So, the question here is: how do we approach situations like these, if we are animal advocates, or in general people with a fair level of compassion? Are Coppola and Deodato insensitive speciesists or great artists? And if they are both, should we separate these two ideas or should we sum them up in a single judgement of the persons? These and plenty of other questions may have popped up in our mind, and in relation to dozens of social issues that we may care about. At the time of writing, the #metoo movement is bringing to the surface hundreds of cases of sexism, harassment and abuse by numerous male directors, actors and producers: many of us are so disappointed by people like Bill Cosby, Woody Allen, Roman Polanski and plenty of others that they are not able to watch their works anymore, even when those works have nothing sexist per se.

It is a complex matter, and everyone should approach it according to their own conscience, keeping in mind that no person is without sin, that there are sins and sins, that we do not all assign the same value to every ethically-sensitive topic. I wrote about animal abuse, which is important to me, but I can bet that many readers will not think that any of the directors listed did anything particularly evil. And finally we should not forget that the judgement of a person must take into account their willingness to make up for their mistakes and earn a second chance. To some people a difference should be drawn between a case like Bill Cosby, whose rape charges were multiple and repeated, proving that the man felt no remorse for his actions, and one like Polanski, who was guilty of one case, and at least made some effort to apologize to the abused girl. Our judgement of that person may remain poor, but one may allow oneself to still admire the artist.

Back to Griffith. His ideas were brought and represented in and through his artistry, while, in fact, as a person, Griffith did not do anything in particular that may have raised controversy about his private life (it may be noted that he was from Kentucky, which was a slave state, and he was the son of a Confederate Army colonel, two facts that may explain his racist views). In cases like this, it may be perhaps a good idea to behave as we did in this book: we make sure to inform the readers that *The Birth of a Nation* was a racist movie in all respects, and we state that we firmly condemn this. Among other things, this movie was also among the factors that contributed to a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in many American areas, so the "it's only a movie" argument does not apply here. After this, however, we can and should proceed to discuss Griffith's talent and his indisputably central role in the development of montage art.

Griffith's lesson was quickly absorbed by his contemporaries, and in particular by the exponents of the so-called **Soviet School**, which went down to history not only for great examples of filmmaking, but also making montage the central feature of them. Like all authoritarian régimes of the twentieth century, the Soviet one, too, understood that cinema had potentials to be a formidable vehicle for political propaganda, having both that "wow effect" that regimes seek in order to display wealth and grandeur, and also that impressive similarity to reality, which made whatever message passed on a screen sound/look credible. It thus happened that cinema quickly became the most prominent Soviet cultural industry, with a generation of extremely talented filmmakers being active already in the first years after the October Revolution: Dziga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov, Esfir Shub, Yuri Zhelyabuzhsky, and numerous others, up to the most important one, Sergei Eisenstein. In 1922, already, Lenin issued the "Directives on the Film Business", which—among the various tasks—had also the function of making sure that every Soviet film had régime-friendly messages, applying heavy censorship on those cases that showed more ambiguity in this respect. Filmmakers quickly learned that if they committed "errors" in their movies (that is, they would represent stories and themes in ways that the Soviet authorities did not like), they could be damaged in various ways: Yuri Ozerov had to wait no less than 20 years before he was allowed to complete *Liberation*, a movie about the Soviet Union during the Second World War. The reason? He had dared to show that Soviet military officers could make mistakes! Needless to say, thus, also when we talk about Soviet cinema we have the same "ethics versus art" dilemma that we discussed in relation to Griffith. What counts more, that Vertov, Eisenstein and the others were phenomenal directors, or that they were servants of a dictatorship that only under Stalin killed some 20 million people?

Soviet directors carefully studied the films of D.W. Griffth to capture the tricks of such effective filmmaking. Interestingly, though, that was not only done for artistic reasons, but also for financial ones. The Soviet Union, notoriously, was not bathing in gold, and the resources to invest in cinema (as well as in any other cultural activity) were pretty scarce. Director Lev Kuleshov discovered that a smart montage would allow him to minimise production costs: he used identical shots of an actor's expressionless face as emotional reactions to three different scenes (a shot of a bowl of soup, a child playing and a dead old woman). The unsuspecting audience believed that the actor was actually delivering three different performances and therefore three different expressions: to them, he looked hungry in the first case, tender in the second and sad in the third. Obviously the spectators were more influenced by the associated shots than by the actor himself, but that proved how powerful montage could be. Psychology, too, began studying the phenomenon, coining the expression "Kuleshov Effect".

Cost-benefit advantages aside, montage quickly became the main artistic focus of Soviet cinema, resulting in some of the most important and paradigmatic employments of the technique, with Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* usually being mentioned as *the* masterpiece of the category. Most of all—as we have seen already—montage turned out to be the defining practice of audiovisuality as a whole, that is, the very thing that distinguishes it from any other form of creative communication.

Generally speaking, one can usually distinguish among three "pure" types of montage: **narrative**, **graphic**, and **ideational**. I say "pure" in quotation marks because in actual fact, these types rarely appear alone, but they are more likely combined in different fashions, resulting most of the time in a rich, multilayered hybrid that is the essence itself of montage.

(1) In the **narrative** type, montage is at the explicit service of the story: the idea is to follow a subject/event from one point to another (in time or in space), by offering multiple points of views and angles, that allow a better understanding of that portion of the story, add more information, and—why not?—prevent the sequence from being too repetitive and monotonous. Narrative montage basically corresponds to that continuity editing that Griffith introduced in the early twentieth century.

(2) In the **graphic** type, shots are juxtaposed not on narrative grounds, but aesthetic ones. Associations can be made by color, sound, shape, or anything that has more a formal value than a specific role in the story. It goes without saying, a role in the story exists anyway, because those associations are not just random, but contribute to the overall meaning and significance of the text.

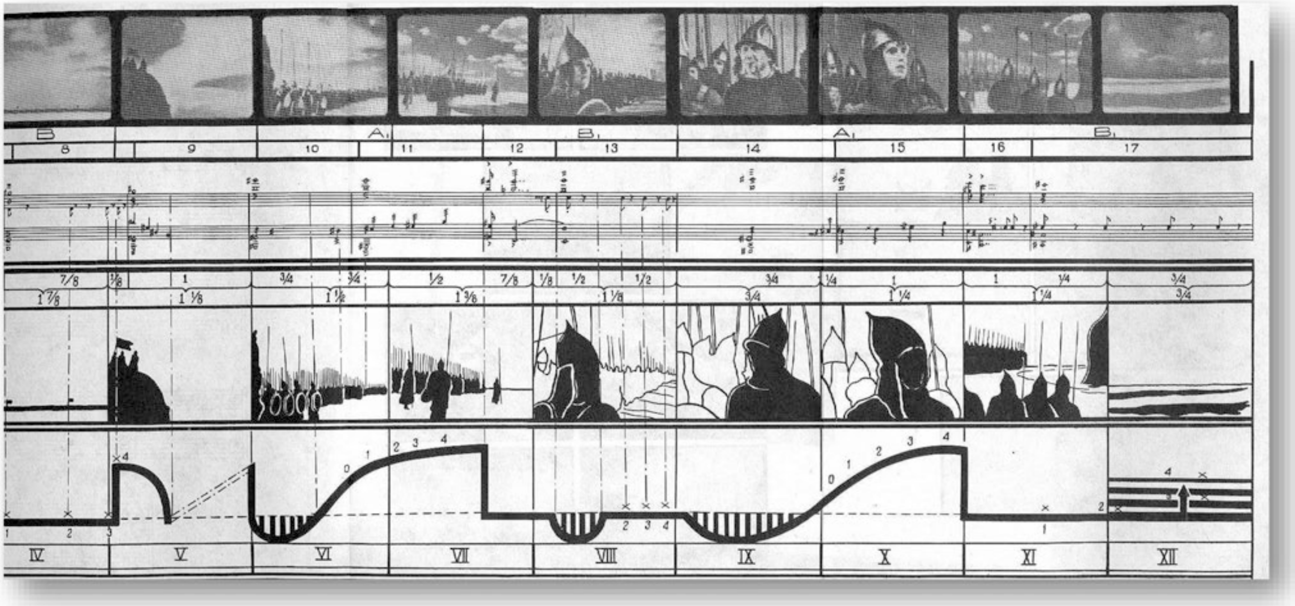
(3) Finally, in the **ideational** type, montage serves that purpose so cleverly described by Eisenstein with his

comparison to Japanese characters: the juxtaposition/sum of two (or more) elements generates a new meaning, an idea, a metaphor, or else.

The repeated mentioning of Eisenstein in these paragraphs should not come as a surprise, since the Soviet director has been not only one of the major exponents of the montage technique, but also one of its main theorists. Not many great artists in recent history have been equally great as art researchers and theorists, but definitely Eisenstein was one of such a kind. Books and essays such as *The Film Sense* and *Film Form* (published in English in 1942 and 1949 respectively) are excellent filmological works that established a true paradigm for montage theory. Eisenstein's theory of montage, as we have seen, is "dialectical": it is characterized by confrontation and conflict between the items involved. Montage can be seen as the creation of a theme from the juxtaposition of specific details. Spectators need also to employ their own experience to interpret the result of such confrontation, and interface it with the "suggestion" of the author. In this way, as we have seen already, the author and the spectator cooperate in creating the text's narrative structure. The strength of montage, in Eisenstein's vision (and by now in everybody's vision), lies in this cooperation that embodies the spectator's emotions and intellect into the actual creative process of the author. The spectator will not only see the represented elements of the finished text, but will also experience the dynamic process of ideation and manufacture of that representation, as experienced by the author themself. In ◘ Fig. 3.30 you can see the original sketch of the montage structure of one sequence of the movie *Alexander Nevsky*.

Eisenstein developed five specific typologies of montage, which still nowadays constitute the core of montage theory. We shall illustrate them, by using his arguably most famous movie, (*The Battleship Potemkin*, 1925) for exemplification. For the few who may not be aware of it, the film is a semi-fictional account of the 1905 mutiny that occurred on the Russian battleship Potemkin, as the crew rebelled against their officers. The event is considered an early Spring of the Soviet Revolution that took place in 1917 and that changed the destiny of Russia forever. The movie starts on board the battleship, as the sailors find out that the meat served in their meal has worms and in general the conditions on the ship are unbearable. The sailors contemplate a rebellion, led by the character of Grigory Vakulinchik. After the ship's doctor declares that the rotten meat is safe to eat, there is unrest and executions are ordered. Vakulinchik and his shipmates rise up against the officers, kill them and liberate the ship, though Vakulinchik is killed during the fight. His body is placed on the docks in the Odessa harbor as an emblem of the riot. The citizens of Odessa rally around his body and join the Potemkin's revolt. The Tsar's soldiers arrive and indiscriminately slaughter the citizens, including women and children, on the steps leading down to the harbor. A fleet of battleships then arrives with the orders to destroy the Potemkin, but the sailors refuse to shoot on their mates, unite and allow the ship to pass unharmed.

Eisenstein gave the movie a very symmetric structure, dividing it in five acts: Act I—Men and Maggots (the conflict between the crew and the officers, as the former complain about the conditions on the ship, and the latter hypocritically declare that everything is fine); Act II—Drama on the Deck (the actual riot); Act III—A Dead Man



◘ **Fig. 3.30** The surgical accuracy of Eisenstein's montage in an original sketch from *Alexander Nevsky*. *[Image of public domain]*

Calls for Justice (the exposition of Vakulinchik's body on Odessa harbor, inspiring the citizens to pacifically joining the revolt); Act IV—The Odessa Steps (the Cossack soldiers shooting on the crowd and repressing the rebellion); and Act V—One Against All (the Tsar's fleet assembling to destroy the Potemkin sailors but in fact joining them in solidarity).

Before proceeding, a small note: in listing Eisenstein's categories of montage, I will use the word "bit" to refer to any item that can be combined into montage, to make sure that we understand that we may be talking about just *any* item involved in the AVT: a shot, a frame, a sequence, a sound, or even a spoken fragment. We should not make the mistake of assuming that montage is only visual and it only concerns single shots (albeit, yes, that is the kind of montage that is more visible): this is a process that involves just any unit of signification available in AVCC. To talk about general "bits" seems to be a good solution to stay vague and all encompassing at once.

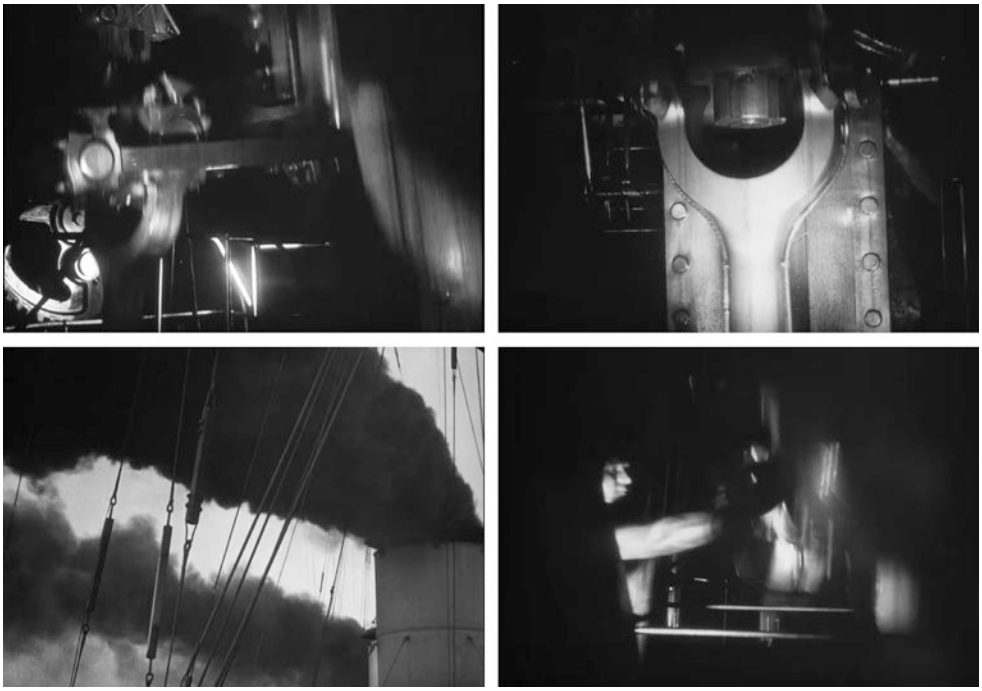
In fact, it was Eisenstein himself, along with his director colleague **Vsevolod Pudovkin**, to refer to the combination of **vertical** and **horizontal montage** that is of sound and image. In a word: the essence of audiovisuality.

Having said that, here are the five typologies:

1. **Metric montage**. This typology is characterized by the juxtaposition of film bits in which the main criterion for construction is the actual length of the various bits. Each bit is joined together relying purely on the physical nature of time, cutting to the next bit no matter what is happening within the image (or the sound). The length of the bits is mathematically calculated according to a metric formula: the lengths as such may vary, but they maintain the original proportions of the formula, obtaining (depending on the case, and therefore on the formula) a wide range of emotions, from serenity to tension, from a slow pace to a frenetic one.

In *The Battleship Potemkin*, this typology is particularly evident in Act V—One Against All. Here, at an increasingly pressing pace, we see the ships' rotating camshafts and plunging pistons intercut with the orders imparted from the bridge, smoke billowing from the ships' stacks and the Potemkin proceeding through the waves. Eisenstein accelerates this cutting rate to a dizzying pitch, increasing the tension as the Potemkin gets closer and closer to the Tsar's fleet (▣ Fig. 3.31).

2. **Rhythmic Montage**. In this typology, the length of the bit is not established by a pre-determined formula, but rather derives from the specifics of the bit itself and the sequence in general. Tension can be achieved by the confrontation between the length of the bit and the movement within it. The legendary car/train chase scene in *The French Connection* is often offered as a paradigmatic example of rhythmic montage, however—staying within Eisenstein's masterpiece, Act IV—The Odessa Steps is mostly based on this type of montage. Here, we have one of the most famous sequences of the movie: the steady rhythm of the soldiers' boots as they descend the stairs, firing their rifles into the crowd, which in total opposition, randomly disperse. The length of each segment, in this sequence, is entirely based on the "rhythmic" principle, each following the necessary pace that is needed to convey their own specific significance (▣ Fig. 3.32).
3. **Tonal Montage**. This typology uses the emotional meaning of the various bits. In this case, we do not just have a manipulation of their temporal length or rhythmical characteristics, but we aim at eliciting a more complex reaction, and therefore the guidelines,


▣ **Fig. 3.31** Shots from Act V of *The Battleship Potemkin* emphasizing metric montage. *[Images of public domain]*

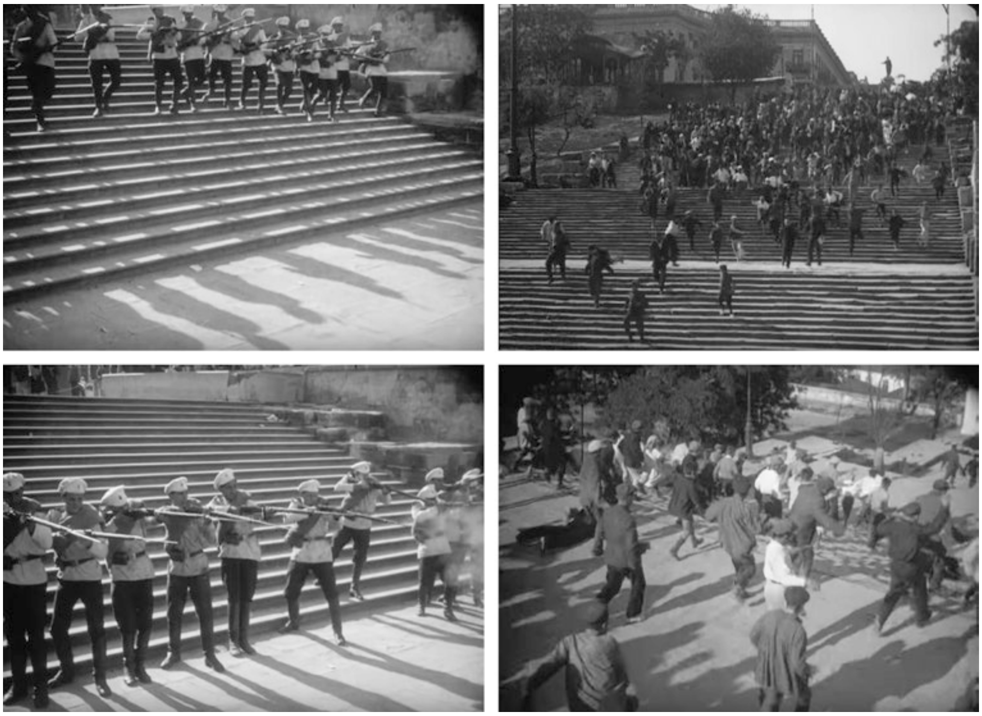


Fig. 3.32 Shots from Act IV of *The Battleship Potemkin* emphasizing rhythmic montage. Compare the orderly setting of the soldiers with the crowd. *[Images of public domain]*

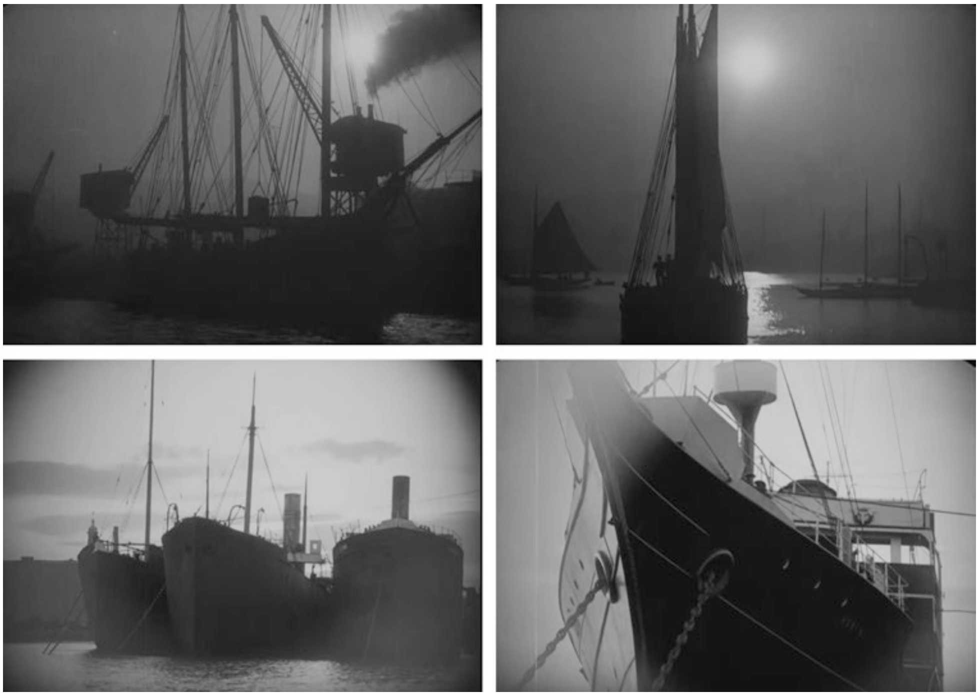


Fig. 3.33 Shots from Act III of *The Battleship Potemkin* emphasizing tonal montage. Note how the images are increasingly luminous, shot after shot. *[Images of public domain]*

here, are tone and mood, rather than time and tempo. As the great Swedish director Ingmar Bergman once said, montage is akin to music: it is the playing of the emotions. Emotions change and so too can the tone of a different scene. At the beginning of Act III—A Dead Man Calls for Justice, we see a sequence with fog, in which the dominant quality of "haze" and "luminosity" of the harbor before daylight (vessels at anchor, dock-side cranes, the tent hosting Vakulinchik's corpse…) grow lighter and lighter as the sun rises and gradually dissipates the fog (Fig. 3.33).

4. **Overtonal Montage**. This typology combines metric, rhythmic, and tonal montages together. Each element from each of the three types derives from each other, aiming at inducing an emotional effect in the audience. Bringing together the various montage methods propels a level of conflict, each method developing from the other. When the audience is caught into a

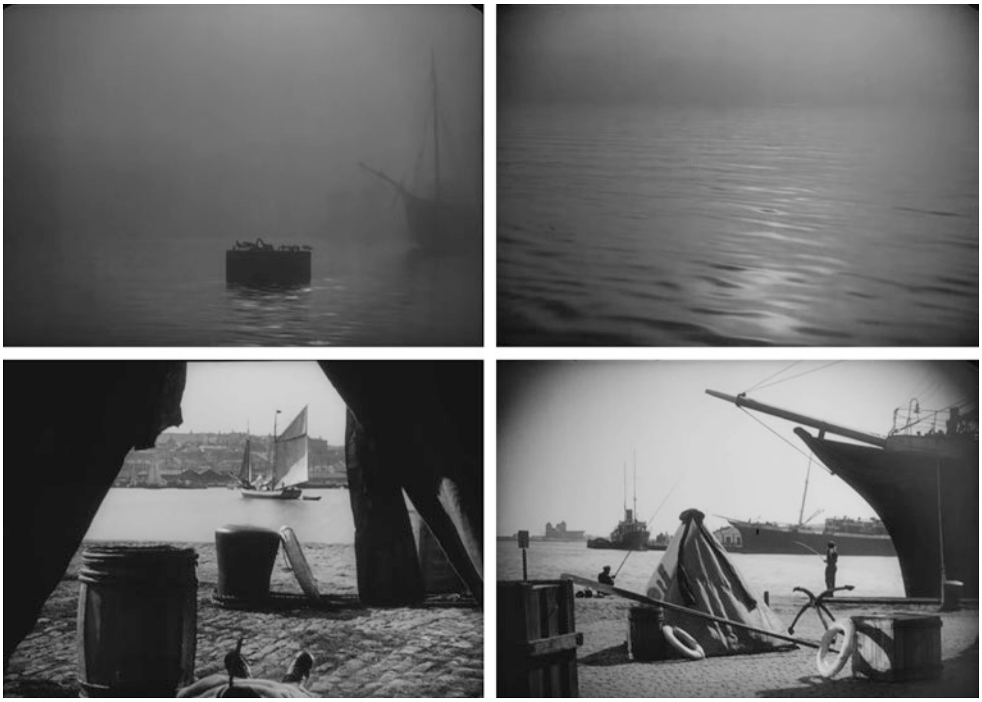


Fig. 3.34 Shots from Act III of *The Battleship Potemkin* emphasizing overtonal montage. The quiet of the morning takes a mystic, somber tone to accompany the arrival of Vakulinchik's corpse to the harbor. *[Images of public domain]*

different range of emotions at the same time that go beyond the "direct" emotion/s created at tonal level, the text will have successfully created an overtonal montage.

If we insist on the same fog sequence mentioned in the previous point, we have seen that the tonal quality would be haze and luminosity. However, as that sequence is accompanying the arrival of Vakulinchik's corpse to Odessa's harbor, there is also a sense of somberness, mystic peace and purity in that progressively dissipating fog and early morning atmosphere. That particular quality qualifies for "overtonal" (Fig. 3.34).

5. **Intellectual Montage**. This fifth and final typology level of montage aims at moving the spectator not physiologically (like the other four), but psychologically. That is usually achieved by rhetorical associations and contrasts like metaphors, symbols and the likes. The emphasis is not upon particular characteristics of the bits as such, but the intellectual process, which they may activate by the way they are assembled, positioned, etc.

Once more, the "Odessa Steps" act may help us, here: at some point, we see the headquarters of the tsarist generals being destroyed by the big turret guns of the Potemkin. Eisenstein adds also three shots of sculptured stone lions, one sleeping, one rising up, and one standing. Seen in sequence, this is clearly a metaphor of the outraged people of Odessa who realize the atrocities committed against them and "awake" against the tsarist régime (Fig. 3.35).

A more recent theorist that is worth mentioning here is the French semiotician Christian Metz. Metz was in fact not just a montage scholar, but his work has encompassed multiple topics in audiovisuality, particularly cinema. So, while he will be mentioned only here in relation to montage, the warm recommendation would be to go through his entire work, in order to receive numerous insights into the topics of this book. Metz (1974) was interested in identifying the most significant formal units of montage: like Greimas, he employed the term "syntagm" for his purposes, identifying eight main syntagms that can be sequenced through montage:

(1) **Autonomous shot** (a shot—or "bit", in our extended sense—that can stand alone, such as an establishing shot or an insert);
(2) **Parallel syntagm** (a montage of motifs/themes);
(3) **Bracket syntagm** (a montage of short bits);
(4) **Descriptive syntagm** (a sequence aiming at describing one specific moment in time);
(5) **Alternating syntagm** (two sequences alternating with each other);
(6) **Scene** (bits that display a recognizable temporal continuity);
(7) **Episodic sequence** (discontinuous bits that are however organized logically and/or narratively);
(8) **Ordinary sequence** (a temporally-linear sequence which contains some summary, shortening or compression).

While studying children's understanding of TV programs, Hodge and Tripp (1986: 20) made an important (and very understandable) implementation to Metz's theory of syntagms, mentioning concepts that could not be more appropriate for this section on "Space and time": **synchronic syntagms** (syntagms occurring in the same time), **diachronic syntagms** (occurring in different times), **syntopic syntagms** (occurring in the same space) and **diatopic**

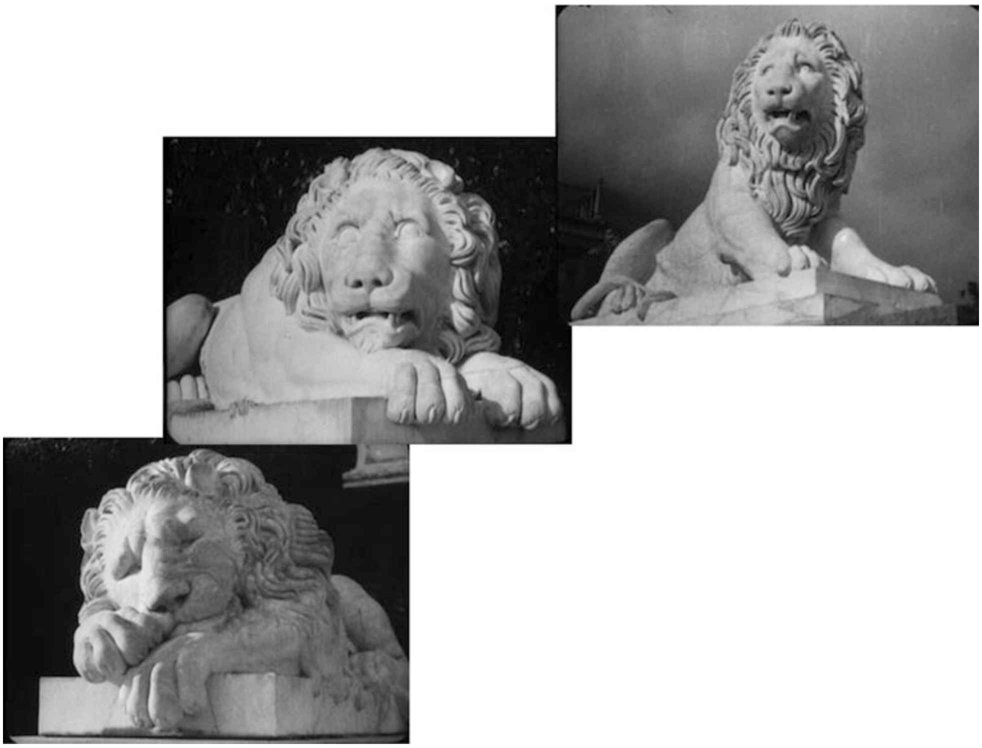


Fig. 3.35 Shots from Act IV of *The Battleship Potemkin* emphasizing intellectual montage. The lion sculptures are metaphors of the people of Odessa uprising against the Tsar. *[Images of public domain]*

syntagms (occurring in different spaces). These can be arranged in four meaningful combinations:

- synchronic/syntopic: the showing of a single space in a single time: usually, that is conveyed by a single shot/bit;
- diachronic/syntopic: the same space displayed over a more or less extended flow of time;
- synchronic/diatopic: different spaces at the same time;
- diachronic/diatopic: different spaces and different times: these bits are usually related thematically.

To conclude, having mentioned rhetoric and having already discussed it previously (we will deepen it as a case study in ► Sect. 4.3.3), it is important to mention that montage is extremely prone to rhetorical employment: editing one item with another is very often a rhetorical affair, especially when it comes to graphic and ideational montage.

3.5.2 Case Study: Soft Power and National Branding Through Montage: The Commercial "Dynamic Korea"

Montage, as we said, is one of the most powerful tools that an author possesses in order to increase the communicative potential of their text. In this case study, we shall see how a whole country has relied on montage in order to present its desired image to the world. I am speaking somewhat hyperbolically of course, but, really, the case we shall be looking at now reveals how a cleverly constructed editing of the images and the sounds can make a huge difference in how richly and how effectively a certain message is conveyed.

Our focus will be a 30-s long commercial entitled "Dynamic Korea", that is part of a campaign that the South Korean government launched in the first decade of the twenty-first century to rebrand the country, in the light of the exceptional economic and industrial development that it had experienced, thanks to the rapid growth of corporations like Samsung, Kia, LG and Hyundai, to mention just a few.

Let us first consider some history. In 2000, the Korean Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy had announced that the main strategy to be globally competitive and to boost exports was to shift from supplying generic products—as they had done that far—to developing their own brands. The first step was to reorganize the "Quality and Design Division" and rename it the "Design and Brand Policy Division", thus putting an accent on the importance of promoting and marketing the "Made in Korea" concept.

In 2002, Korea successfully co-hosted the football World Cup, showing the world their organizational skills, and also (not least) achieving an exceptional result on the pitch, as the Korean national team reached the semifinals and finished in the fourth place. But most of all, the country used this opportunity to connect its positive image to exports, conveying an idea of quality and efficiency of its brands that the world had been overlooking until then (perhaps influenced by the stereotype of the "cheap" Asian products—particularly the "Made in China" image). The Government released its "Vision for Brand Power Korea 2010", which aimed at having 70% of total exports in products of Korean brands and list more than ten of the latter in the world's 100 most recognizable brands by 2010. It was certainly an ambitious plan, and it needed serious promotion. The Korean Government thus encouraged companies in building a "Made in Korea" trademark, with a Brand Management Centre that would deliver professional brand consultations and develop a brand database with numerous services to develop best practices, find out about market trends, and so forth. International brand conferences were held repeatedly in those years, with the most illustrious world experts sharing knowledge and advice.

At a relatively early stage of this process (around 2002), it had become clear that the country did not just need to promote its brands, but to actually promote itself as a whole. People did not just need to trust Samsung or Kia as specific companies: they also had to trust them *because they are Korean*. It had to be a similar process as the one so successfully completed by Germany: when it comes to cars, tools, services and hi-tech accessories, customers trust "German" products in principle, regardless of whether they are called Mercedes, Bosch, DHL or Adidas.

Korea, in other words, needed "country branding", a process whose central idea lies in the combination of marketing techniques with visual and audiovisual communication to promote a country as a whole. As in the branding of commercial goods and services, the positioning of the brand is regulated by specific rules: the way its reputation is built, how customer loyalty is achieved and how their preferences are addressed, how the brand is managed, etc. Country branding helps ensure that whenever there is an opportunity for a country to express itself, the key messages come across with strength and consistency. When country branding is successful, the country increases its level of "soft power", that is, the ability to play an important role in international communication, economy, politics, etc. without using coercion or payments (the "hard" power), but through the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, brands, policies, events, people.

Excurse 8—Welcome to Zurich!

To appreciate a perfect example of "soft power", I suggest you to take a plane to Zurich (I know: not exactly the kind of empirical research you can perform on the spot). When you land and proceed towards the airport exit, at some point, you will be welcomed by a life-size video of none other than Swiss tennis legend, Roger Federer, elegantly dressed, saying, quite simply, "Welcome to Zurich! Enjoy your stay!". That is all. No slogan, no tagline, nothing particularly spectacular. Just one of the most recognizable faces of the twenty-first century, who has done so well in his job to actually become the greatest of all times, and who also stood out as a style icon, due to the innate elegance of his game, his manners and politeness in communicating, and his classy outfit both inside and outside the court (his technical sponsor Nike has always designed for him extremely sober and classic apparel, in contrast with more aggressive looking players such as Rafael Nadal). A person like Federer, single-handedly, can boost the soft power of a whole country (Switzerland, in this case) by his sole appearance, with all the values that we attach to him, and that—by transitive property—we assign to the country he represents. Switzerland had always had great soft power, via things like watches, chocolate, mountains, banks and else, but the arrival of Federer gave the country a most recognizable personification that, all considered, they had never had in their history (considering that William Tell was a mythical figure and that famous Swiss such as Le Corbusier or Jung are more recognizable as names than as people—and still not *that* recognizable). When a country can count on a character like Federer, there is no need to develop any clever marketing strategy to promote a country (or a city, or an airport…): you just hire him to endorse it, and all he has to say is the most banal "Welcome to Zurich! Enjoy your stay!". Federer did for Switzerland what Che Guevara did for Cuba, Bob Marley for Jamaica or Cristiano Ronaldo for Portugal: he gave a whole country "a face".

Now, what was the soft power of Korea, and what kind of soft power were they after? Before Korean brands began inhabiting our daily lives with their successful hi-tech and industrial products, South Korea was mostly known for being the democratic side of the two Koreas, and for their millinery traditions, including the Taekwondo martial art and some delicious dishes. But let us face it, as the superficial western-centric chauvinists most of us secretly are, we could hardly distinguish Korea from China or Japan, could we? In fact, how many of us knew that Taekwondo was specifically a Korean martial art? And do we know how many martial arts actually exist in Korea? And if we are served a Korean traditional dish, would we be able to distinguish it from a Chinese or a Japanese one? Would we be able to tell Ramyeon from Ramen?

Save of course the many exceptions among the readers of this book, it may be fair to say that many of us (myself included) had of Korea a general "Far East" exotic idea, based on breathtaking landscapes, long history, meditating cross-legged hermits who may hit you with a Karate Kid-type of move at any point, and the likes… in sum, the full package. Certainly, we had no clue that this country was about to deliver some of the most successful hi-tech products of this first part of the century.

This, in a nutshell, was the problem of the Korean creatives who were working on rebranding the country. They did not want to erase the "Far East exotic" image, because that remained a formidable attraction for tourists, and certainly (stereotypes aside) something to be proud of. However, they badly needed to tell us that Korea was *also* a hi-tech, rapidly growing, business-advanced country. They needed the charm, the inner peace and the tradition *together with* the progress, the energy and the technology. They wanted the stereotypical East combined with the stereotypical West. They wanted us to feel the peace in our soul and hold the smartphone in our hand. And they wanted these two sides to co-exist and interact.

Within this framework, and while the other countries were solving their own soft power problems with taglines like "Unexpected Luxembourg", "Uruguay natural" or "Incredible India", South Korea created in 2002 the slogan "**Dynamic Korea**" (logo pictured in ◘ Fig. 3.36), choosing of course the World Cup of that year as the most visible platform to launch it.

The 30-s commercial that was broadcast all over the world in that period (and that you can easily find on the web) is a montage of 27 different shots, which I shall analyze one by one. The proximity of number 27 to number 30 already suggests the possibility of dealing with what Eisenstein had called a metric montage. Indeed, save very few quicker and longer shots, each shot lasts exactly one second, giving the montage an extreme regularity. The shorter ones, as we shall see, are simply one-second ideas broken in two parts, and in that sense are more "rhythmic", since they last as long as they need to last in

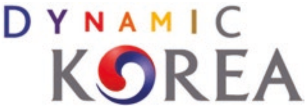


Fig. 3.36 The logo for the "Dynamic Korea" campaign. *[Detail from "Dynamic Korea Logomark",* ▶ https://www.flickr.com/photos/koreanet/4259025378*, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

order to convey their contents and their function. The longer shots are specifically at the beginning and at the end of the commercial, giving it a firmly symmetric structure that we may compare to one of those (dynamic) Luna Park attractions like rollercoasters: you jump into a car, the beginning is slow, then the fun begins at a fast pace, and after all the curves and the loops the car slows down again and then stops. The commercial is indeed a sort of rollercoaster ride that takes us into the dynamic Korea made of long history and fast progress.

There is no spoken dialogue during the ad (except for a non-diegetic voice at the end), but just one musical motif, consisting of a (dynamic) alternation of five main segments: quiet bell sounds, an energetic and pulsating percussive bit performed with a percussion ensemble (with such instruments like the Buk, the Janggu, the Jeolgo and others), a static, ambient-like texture performed with a bamboo flute (probably a Daegeum), again the percussive bit, and again—concluding—the wind instrument bit. Basically, an A-B-C-B-C form. The piece sounds folk, but in a "world music" kind of way, that is, in that not-very-authentic style that aims at pleasing the international audience who may find it hard to absorb some proper folk tune (based on different scales, different harmonies and so forth).

Four written words appear (at the end, accompanied by the voice saying the same thing), and of course they are all pregnant with significance. Two we know already: "dynamic Korea". They appear at the end along with the logo of the campaign (which we shall talk about too). The other two are another slogan (we could say a sub-slogan of the main "dynamic Korea"): "fascinating people", and they appear right before the end (therefore right before the other two words), with the obvious suggestion of connecting the fact that, in this dynamic Korea, you will also find fascinating people. We shall explain what that implies, at communicative level.

Still keeping up with Eisenstein's model, we find several tonal and overtonal elements, which we shall see in detail, shot by shot, but which we can summarize in at least the following emotions and values conveyed: dynamism (of course), charm, tradition and progress, relaxation and energy, eastern and western, maturity and youth. These elements are conveyed through several topics that are represented in the ad. Among them: rituals, religion, music (particularly drumming, but also traditional instruments), dance, business, technology, meditation, football and martial arts. All of them are rhetorically displayed through "synecdoches": religion is displayed through a church bell, football through a penalty kick taken (and scored!) by a player of the Korean national team, technology through an automatized production process and a robot, etc. In the shot-by-shot analysis we shall refer to both tonal and overtonal elements via the single (already familiar for us) word "connotations". Also, intellectual elements will be emphasized as well.

The value/emotion of dynamism, in particular (obviously the key word, here) appears in various disguises: first of all, through the co-existence of oppositions (tradition and innovation, peaceful landscapes and vibrant urban business life, quiet music and energetic percussion sounds…); second, through the camera work, mostly characterized by movements (such as panning and slow motion) and angles (low-angles, trunk shots…); and finally through the logo of the campaign, which combines the red and blue Taeguk symbol appearing at the center of the Korean flag with the three-color (red, blue and yellow) traditional symbol Sam-Taegeuk, which stands for Heaven (Blue), Earth (Red) and Humanity (Yellow). The result is a spinning vortex that, even when appearing on a still image, inspires an idea of rotating movement. But most of all, needless to say, it is montage as such, with its metric structure composed by mostly 1-second shots, to be obviously designed to convey dynamism, rhythm, movement and energy. One second is about the ideal time for a shot to give enough information (so we really understand what is in it), but also to give us the impression that it went by in a flash. Following the template of the music, the succession of images too have a quiet-movement-quiet-movement-quiet structure.

Let us now see how every single shot functions. For copyright reasons, we cannot here show any image from the commercial, but the latter can be easily found on the internet in video platforms such as YouTube.

1.	**00:00–00:02**
Visual elements	A small bell with a hanging wooden fish pends from a roof of a traditional construction (probably a big house), in what appears to be early morning. The camera is still and the shot is static
Sonic elements	The bell resonates once
Linguistic elements	–
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	Early morning: beginning of the day. Construction: tradition, history. Fish: safety, activity
Intellectual elements	Beginning of the day: beginning of the "ride" into dynamic Korea. Fish: a cultural reference to Korean symbology (see "notes")
Notes	In Korean mythology the fish stands for guard and protection, because it is believed that fish never sleep. Many houses and temples sport a hanging fish (even a real, dried one) for that reason. In that sense, the first message is that Korea is a safe country and that it never sleeps (therefore, it is very active and productive)

2.	**00:02:00:03**
Visual elements	A big temple bell is hit with a wooden trunk by a monk. The camera begins moving with a slow panning from left to right, while the monk hits the bell from right to left
Sonic elements	The same bell sound (even though the bell is clearly different) resonates a second time
Linguistic elements	–
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	Temple: religion, tradition. Big bell: grandeur of the Korean civilization. Monk sounding the bell: strength, energy
Intellectual elements	We see the first "fascinating people": when we will see the inscription later on, we will mentally relate to all the different individuals we have seen during the ad
Notes	A second "call" for the beginning of the ride. As the camera starts slowly panning, we get the feeling that our rollercoaster car begins moving
Linguistic elements	–
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	There is still history and tradition, but we are now shown that these are not just mystic and peaceful, but that there is energy and vibrancy in them as well. Plus, the drum hits signal that the ride is now on. The man is dressed in red and blue, like the logo
Intellectual elements	The man is the second "fascinating people". An intellectual connection with the previous shot lies particularly in the fact that both the monk in shot 2 and this percussionist in shots 3 and 4 are making a sound by hitting an object
Notes	–

3. and 4.	**00:03–00:04**
Visual elements	Two different shots of ca. half a second each of the same character: a percussionist man who starts hitting on a buk, a large drum of the folk tradition. We first see a close-up of the man's profile against the rising sun (and wearing a bandana with the "Dynamic Korea" logo), then we get a 3/4 rear shot showing the man from behind and an emphasis on the drum. In this shot, we also notice that the man has a red tank and blue trousers. The man begins to play the drum in the second shot. The drum has the Sam-Taegeuk symbol in the middle (as we have seen, it is one of the sources of the campaign logo)
Sonic elements	Three loud drum sounds
Linguistic elements	–
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	There is still history and tradition, but we are now shown that these are not just mystic and peaceful, but that there is energy and vibrancy in them as well. Plus, the drum hits signal that the ride is now on. The man is dressed in red and blue, like the logo
Intellectual elements	The man is the second "fascinating people". An intellectual connection with the previous shot lies particularly in the fact that both the monk in shot 2 and this percussionist in shots 3 and 4 are making a sound by hitting an object
Notes	–

5. to 7.	**00:04–00:07**
Visual elements	Three one-second shots of a group of seven young dancers (plus the percussionist) performing on the large terrace of a temple (probably the same one where the bell was being sounded, or so we are led to believe). Each shot is taken from a radically different angle, with the camera always panning, left and right and up and down. The dance is of modern type with acrobatic and spectacular elements. The dancers are dressed in casual, youthful clothes
Sonic elements	Rhythmic percussive sounds set on a steady, fast tempo
Linguistic elements	–
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	Dance: the dynamic (and creative) activity by definition. Modern dance + temple: modernity and tradition blend in Korea. Acrobatic moves: skills, ability, and competence
Intellectual elements	More "fascinating people" appearing. As we find out that the dancers are performing outside the temple, we see an intellectual connection with the first shots
Notes	We have seen only men, so far. Is Korean dynamism a solely male affair?

8. to 10.	**00:07–00:10**
Visual elements	Three one-second shots thematically related. A female trio in traditional colorful costumes displaying what seems to be a theatrical or religious performance outside the temple (shot 8); a woman in traditional costume sitting in a not-particularly-identifiable place (but trees are visible through the window) playing the Gayageum, one of the most typical Korean musical instruments (shot 9); a business woman walking in a definitely-urban environment, dressed in office suit, looking at her mobile phone and smiling (shot 10). There is again variety in angles and movements: the camera is constantly panning on the characters, we see low angles and medium shots
Sonic elements	Percussion music continues
Linguistic elements	–
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	Shot 8 and 9 give us once more the sense of a millenary history, which this time involves women as well, and appears to be rich and colorful. But any first impression that women can only perform folk traditions and stay home playing the Gayageum is dissipated in shot 10, where the businesswoman connotes urban and financial success and also happiness (she is smiling, while looking at her phone). The woman in shot 9 is not unhappy, however: while not explicitly smiling, she appears serene and focused. Morale: in Korea women can feel accomplished in both ways
Intellectual elements	"Fascinating people" of female gender appear. Shot 8 relates to shot 7 through the temple setting and the idea of "performance"—at the same time introducing the female gender. Shot 9 relates to shot 8 through another idea of performance (musical, this time) and of course by having another woman displayed. Finally, shot 10 features again a woman, this time in the emancipated, business version
Notes	Women have appeared, and they seem to carry both the values of tradition and innovation. The woman in shot 9 is sitting and the one in shot 10 is walking: this can be seen as a metaphor of female emancipation

11. to 13.	**00:10–00:13**
Visual elements	Another set of three one-second shots, all located in the context of hi-tech production. In shot 11, we see one step of an automatized assembly line; in shot 12, a human being (whose sole hands are visible) activates a robot through a smartphone; in shot 13, that robot is seen operating. Once more, the camera work is very active in all the shots. The white color dominates in all cases
Sonic elements	Percussion music continues
Linguistic elements	In shot 12 the hands select some linguistically written function on the smartphone. The inscriptions are not readable, but they still communicate an idea of "information"
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	The shots play with the idea of human control and automatization, in such a way that the positive elements of both emerge. In shot 11, the assembly line is entirely automatized, replacing the industrial age nightmare of the alienating incessant and repetitive work performed by humans in factories. In shot 12, we see what the human role is: comfortably controlling and planning the process by simply interacting with a smartphone—no physical, dehumanizing labor involved. The symbolic "rest" is done by the most advanced robot machines of shot 13, but mind you: any dystopic fear that the robots will eventually "take over" is dismissed by the fact that the hands in shot 12 were *exactly* giving orders to the robots. Therefore: the latter are only *serving* human beings, who retain the chain of command. It is the cheerful and bright side of technological progress, underlined by the predominance of the white color, which also stands for cleanness and precision
Intellectual elements	The appearance of the businesswoman with the phone in shot 10 has obviously opened the door to technology and modernity, displayed from shot 11 onwards. The successive two shots, as we have seen, are connected through causality (the human hands giving orders to the robot). Besides its overtonal role, the white color also serves the purpose of keeping the three shots together
Notes	Is the robot, too, a "fascinating people"?

14. and 15.	**00:13–00:15**
Visual elements	Two one-second shots of the drum orchestra performing the piece we are listening to outside the temple (the same place where the dancers were performing). We see them frontally and by profile. There are both men and women, young ones. The second shot is in slow motion and displays the *cliché* effect of the water drops bouncing from the drums as they are hit. This time, darker colors dominate. Camera work, as always, is lively

14. and 15.	**00:13–00:15**
Sonic elements	Percussion music continues
Linguistic elements	The inscription "Dynamic Korea" is visible on two drums
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	As both men and women were displayed separately, now we see them together, displaying, with equal vigor, the energy and the dynamism of Korea, through the drum playing. The darker colors of the players' clothes show a more human, noisier, less clean in a nice "authentic" way, side of Korea. Korea is clean and cool, but it also *rocks*
Intellectual elements	These two shots clearly remind of the ones we had seen at the beginning, as the location returns to the temple, and musical/theatrical performances are displayed
Notes	The symmetry of this part with the initial one announces the end of the first part of the commercial, clocking exactly at the half of it. We are now ready for a change

16. to 19.	**00:15–00:19**
Visual elements	Four one-second shots accompanying the quiet atmospheric music bit: a landscape with ancient buildings set against what seems to be a late afternoon sky (shot 16); two people meditating on a rock in front of the sea, as the sun sets (17); three female dancers with veils seen in backlight (18); five female ballet dancers dressed in pink and performing in the same terrace of the temple where the other dancers were performing at the beginning of the ad (19). The camera work is still lively but considerably slower (including actual slow motion moments). Warm, sunset colors dominate
Sonic elements	A folk-ambient bit played with a bamboo flute (probably a Daegeum, as we said) consisting of a single acciaccatura (two legato notes, where the first one quickly crushes on the second one, serving solely as decoration)
Linguistic elements	–
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	As dynamism is not the same as "fast pace", a change in tempo is called for, and this series of shots, set against the quieter music, provides a break from the activeness and the energy of the previous shots. The prevalence of sunset tones also suggests the end of a day. This time we see pure, uncompromising tradition, as none of the four shots display contaminations with modernity. Korea's history stands also on its own, and if you, potential tourist, fear at this point that the purity and the authenticity of this ancient country have disappeared, do not worry, because you will still find plenty of them—meditation and wisdom included
Intellectual elements	Again, more people and more fascination. It is certainly no coincidence that the first of these four shots does not feature any people, the second features two, the third features three and the fourth features five. The number increases shot by shot, giving the impression that something very lively is again going to happen
Notes	–

20. to 24.	**00:19–00:24**
Visual elements	Five shots for five seconds. A slightly less "metric" montage, with n.23 being shorter than one second, and n.24 being longer. Shot 20 portrays the captain of the Korean football national team taking a penalty kick in slow motion; in shot 21 we see the same penalty being scored (the goal is now visible); in shot 22 five kids with a red shirt (the same as the national team) are jubilant at the goal; in shot 23 a large sheet with the Korean flag is waved by a crowd of supporters, and in shot 24 a group of kids in white kimono is training in Taekwondo in the open air. The football game is clearly taking place at nighttime, while the exulting kids, the flag and the Taekwondo training take place in daylight. Red dominates, plus some green and white It goes without saying, the camera work is ever active
Sonic elements	The percussive bit starts again
Linguistic elements	The slogan "Dynamic Korea" is readable through an ad banner in the football pitch (while the Korean captain takes the penalty) and on the red T-shirts of the exulting kids

20. to 24.	**00:19–00:24**
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	These five shots have a strong accent on sports, with all the values associated (competition, struggle for results, focus, fairness, movement…). Korea is seen as successful in a non-traditional, but world-famous sport (football) and as the proud motherland of Taekwondo: the global goes local, and the local goes global. Also, a lot of kids appear showing Korea as a country projected in the future and also taking good care in making its children happy It may be objected that a penalty kick is the least noble of football goals—one would imagine, for example, a bicycle kick or a skillful individual play as more appealing ways to display sport success). However, the penalty kick requires concentration, focus, a lucid mind and precision—all values that hi-tech Korea wants to convey. Also, it is the team captain taking it, creating connotations of leadership, experience, organization and responsibility
Intellectual elements	Once more, the saga of "fascinating people" continues, and also the general number of people increases, and now includes five kids, an entire stadium crowd, a full group of Taekwondo pupils, and two teams on a football pitch. The intellectual connections include the penalty scored with the kids exulting, the kids exulting with the national flag waved by the stadium crowd, and the national flag with the national martial art
Notes	As a football enthusiast, I did my best to understand which game was being portrayed in the commercial (it is clearly not a staged one). The opponents are in white shirt and red shorts, suggesting a team like Poland (a team effectively encountered during the 2002 World Cup, and defeated 2-0): however, during that game there was no penalty awarded. So, I had to dig into less internationally resonating games, possibly among those played *after* the World Cup. That was confirmed by the fact that the ball used was clearly the model Nike Total 90 Aerow (launched in 2004). The captain shown in the ad has the number 6, and in that period, indeed, the captain was the veteran Yoo Sang-chul, who indeed would wear the n.6, and who scored a penalty during a 2004 friendly game against Turkey. Turkey, too, wears a red shirt, but chooses white against teams of the same color. So, there: my best guess is Korea-Turkey, friendly, 2004, score 2-1, penalty taken by Yoo Sang-chul

25.	**00:24–00:26**
Visual elements	A longer shot concluding the live-action part of the commercial: on the same temple terrace seen in different shots, we have the percussionist of shots 3 and 4, the male dancers of shots 5 to 7 and the female ballerinas of shot 18, all brought together for the grand finale, where every dancer jumps high. Different colors, genders and roles are assembled. The perspective is a low angle that gives depth and grandeur. No panning this time, but the final jump is seen in slow motion
Sonic elements	The percussive bit is brought to a conclusion
Linguistic elements	The inscription "Fascinating people" appears at the top of the image, and it is the first non-diegetic linguistic element: all the previous ones had appeared diegetically, as part of the action. A non-diegetic voice begins the sentence "Fascinating people from dynamic Korea". On this shot we get to hear "Fascinating people …"
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	As we head to the conclusion, all the messages and values of the ad are displayed triumphally: we have history and modernity, we have different people bringing different forms of fascination, we have dynamism, we have movement, rhythm, energy and cheerful optimism. Korea wants to appear as a place that can be appealing for all kinds of people
Intellectual elements	The appearance of the inscription "Fascinating people" now gives sense to all the different people we have seen throughout the ad, linking various bits together
Notes	It is important to point out that all the "fascinating people" we have seen throughout the ad do not seem to exceed 30–40 years of age, with an abundance of people in their twenties, as well as children. There is no message to the world that aims at appealing to elderly people: Korea wants tourism and business from Western countries, knowing that these are two activities that will be performed by people under their forties. They are what we have previously called the "model readers". Paraphrasing the Coen Brothers, Korea is "no country for old men"

26. and 27.	**00:26–00:30**
Visual elements	The live-action turns into a simple graphical animation of the slogan “Dynamic Korea”. In shot 26 we are given a hint of the genesis of the logo: we see blue water and red fire spiraling together to form the vortex that becomes the logo as it intersects with the Sam-Taegeuk symbol. At this point the vortex spins and expands and cross fades into shot 27, where the actual inscription “Dynamic Korea”, in its official configuration appears: black background; the word “Dynamic” with sans-serif white double-spaced characters that decrease in size from D to A and then increase again until D and C have the same size; the word “Korea” in gray, bigger, serif characters all of the same size, but with the O replaced by the red and blue logo
Sonic elements	The ambient bit played with the Daegeum starts again
Linguistic elements	As already described above, shot 27 is the point at which we read the slogan of the ad “Dynamic Korea” The non-diegetic voice completes the sentence “Fascinating people from dynamic Korea”. During these two shots we get to hear “… from dynamic Korea”
Connotations (tonal and overtonal elements)	Dynamism, energy and grandeur are brought to a climax with the co-existence of the fire and water elements, their spinning movement and all the other effects. Along with shot 25, these two shots, too, are meant to summarize all the contents of the ad, and deliver an impression of Korea as a place for both an unforgettable touristic experience and a fruitful business venture
Intellectual elements	The shots display the various connections between the ad logo and its sources of inspiration
Notes	–

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Means: Sound, Image and Language

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Having already dealt with the “A” (Axes) of our M.A.P. model, we can now focus on what we have called the “Means” of AVCC: sound, image and language. As you have certainly noticed, plenty of the information we have already shared is pertinent to them: when we introduced the various “dichotomies” (realism-fiction; diegesis-non diegesis; etc.) we have discussed categories of analysis that concern equally any of the means that are now at stake. If we speak about “realism”, for example, there are ways of being realistic through images, through sounds and through language. This is probably self evident, but just for the sake of clarity: if, for example, the AV portrayal is Paris at the times of Napoleon, it is definitely more realistic to visually reconstruct the city in the way it was in the early nineteenth century (no Eiffel tower, to begin with!!!), to use late Classical/early Romantic music as a soundtrack (or at least something played in that style—as opposed to, say, synths and electric guitars), and to have the characters speaking French, rather than other languages.

The goal of this chapter, thus, is mostly that of “filling in the gaps”: implementing the notions of sound, image and language with some information that is more specific to them, and that we did not have the chance to introduce before. As we shall see, however, those gaps still cover quite a lot of ground, as many are the notions that are specifically pertinent to the three means of AVCC.

Before proceeding, as always, I would like to recommend a few texts where you can deepen your knowledge on the notions dealt with in this chapter of the book, and also get to know additional information that I had no chance to discuss here. Among others, you may want to take a look at Bellantoni (2005), Bordwell (2016), Chion (1999), Fludernik (1993), Greene and Kulezic-Wilson (2016), Roberts-Breslin (2017), Vernalis et al. (2013) and Wierzbicki (2012).

4.1 Sound

Sound, banally, is everything we hear in an AVT, including of course spoken language which, however, as amply specified already, will be treated separately. The totality of sounds audible in a given text, or portion of text, is called **soundscape**, and that is a rather important concept that we already mentioned. A soundscape is the acoustic equivalent of a landscape: every place, every situation we find ourselves in is characterized by a certain amount of sounds, some more, some less audible (and some not audible at all); some we pay attention to, some we do not; some we intentionally produce (or cause), some we do not. We have also already discussed the necessity of AVTs to operate “by subtraction”, that is, to employ a minimal significant amount of items that would give a sense of “normality” and not arouse any suspicion that something weird is going on. As you may remember, weirdness in audiovisuality, as compared to reality, can be also suggested by something extremely normal (you may remember the example of the researcher writing at the computer, with the phone ringing: a perfectly normal occurrence, which however, in an AVCC, conveys the suspicion that something unusual is going on). In setting the soundscape for an AVT, too, we usually do not put just *every* sound that is audible within a given context: in particular, sudden and/or loud sounds are imbued with extreme care, in order to make sure that, if we hear them, there is a specific reason. Let us imagine the sound of a traffic jam: engines operating, car horns, brakes are all *possible* sounds, but their management varies greatly depending on what we need to convey. A series of random, background, not particularly loud car horn sounds are part of “normality” in a traffic jam representation: the more we hear them, the more we realize how crowded the street is and how annoyed the drivers are. But if we hear a sudden, louder, and usually longer, car horn sound (which is still a very normal situation in real life), we are alerted that something particular is happening (or is about to happen): somebody is in danger, or is being warned, or something like that—and likely this is an occurrence that concerns some relevant character of the story.

4.1.1 Sound Design

But there is also the other side of the coin. Surprise surprise, we may even *add more* sounds to the soundscape, or simply include sounds that are not the ones that a given item would produce in reality. Soundscapes are not just “reproduced” from whatever real situation they are inspired by. They are also “designed”, and that is sometimes a whole different thing. **Sound design** is the practice of (a) assigning and (b) reproducing a given amount of sounds needed in a given soundscape. Sounds in AVCC are produced in many ways: the most obvious one is to record them in real time, as they are produced during the acting performance. A character is—say—eating dinner, and whatever noise the cutlery does, or their mouth and teeth do, or anything else involved is caught on film. Easy? Not really—for a number of reasons. First, it is not always possible to place microphones where one needs them to record all the sounds required—although this was more a problem in the past when technology was more limited, and perhaps still nowadays in some low budget productions.

Second, not all sounds are in fact audible at the level they should be audible: biting a raw carrot will certainly produce that typical crunchy (and loud enough) sound, but biting a boiled carrot makes almost no sound at all—and that creates a problem of credibility in an AV context. We already deprive this dinner sequence of three senses out of five: we cannot taste the food, we cannot smell it and we cannot touch it. We cannot afford not “hearing” it either: there has to be some kind of sound.

Thirdly, even if the item in question *does* make a sound, it may not be of the level of loudness the authors are hoping for in order to create a balanced soundscape. Think about a Friday night spent in a disco pub with loud music: a group of friends goes there in order to enjoy an exciting, lively atmosphere, but then, when they try to have a conversation, they can barely hear each other. This, as we know, never happens in AVCC: there may be sequences shot in a disco pub because the story requires that, and maybe there is even a point in which we hear the music as loud as it normally is in places like that. Yet, miraculously, as soon as the characters need to talk the music sits nice and quiet in the background, not affecting a single word that is spoken during that conversation.

Fourthly, some sounds are assigned specific functions in the text, and not only must they be heard: they also have to sound in a particular manner, so that the given function is suggested. A typical example is videogames: the programmer needs to inform the player that certain actions/moves are *correct* (e.g., give points) and others are *wrong* (e.g., subtract points). In cases like this, more or less verisimilar sounds are assigned, in such a way that the correct move produces a pleasant, somehow "encouraging" sound (e.g., a bell ring on fairly high frequencies), while the wrong move produces an unpleasant, discouraging sound (e.g., a metallic dissonant cluster).

Finally, most peculiar of all, sometimes, the real sound that an item makes is not a *convincing* type of sound, one that would allow us to guess what is going on if we closed our eyes and did not see it. Imagine sequences like a person climbing a staircase: if you think about it, the sound we hear is always more or less the same. It is *one* type of sound, and it usually resembles those (female or male) shoes with hard sole and heel. In reality we know that there is almost as many types of stair climbing sounds as there are shoes: they can vary in timbre, in tone, in loudness, and in principle they can also not be heard at all (if, for instance, one is wearing those soft gel- or foam-filled sneakers). Moreover, the same shoe may make more than one sound: we may hear the hit of the heel, but also that annoying squeak of the sole. In AVCC, though, you may have noticed that shoes never squeak, save three cases: (1) characters who are portrayed as very poor (and therefore may wear poor quality shoes); (2) characters in Mr. Bean-type of comedies, if the squeaking has some comic effect; and (3) characters in horror/thriller movies when they try to walk as silently as they can in order to escape some danger, but of course the squeak will inform the serial killer that the victim is in the room.

To solve all these problems, there is a job called "sound designer", which—if you want my opinion—is one of the coolest jobs on the market. A sound designer works in a recording studio: they are given an AVT without sound, or with whatever sound was recorded in real time, and their task is to fill in all the spots where proper sounds are needed, for any of the abovementioned reasons. Nowadays, plenty of stuff can be done digitally, and if there is a sequence that requires a regular, and usually continuous, kind of sound, the sound designer will simply open the virtual library of sound samples and place the right one at the right length and level. This is what happens in cases like a train ride: the sequence simply needs the background sound of a train operating, without any specific peak or variation, and so it is possible to place a prefabricated sample. In fact, even in pre-digital days, recording studios were full of tapes with sound effects that were also used in music recordings (if you take an album like Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*, you will find tons of them, from the clocks ticking in the song "Time" to the dropping coins and the cash registers in "Money").

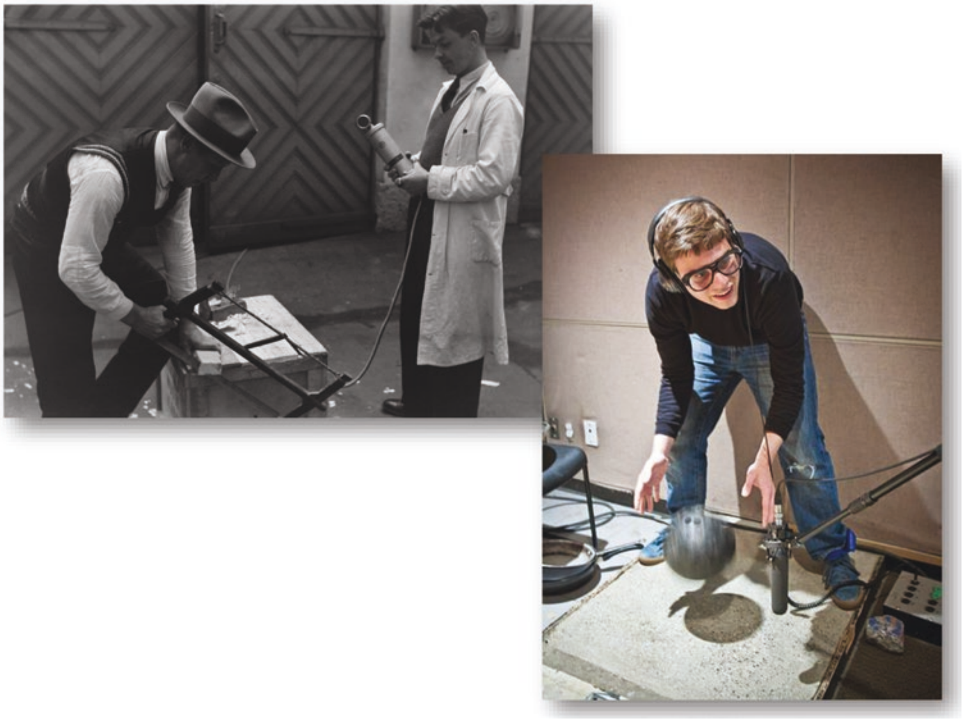


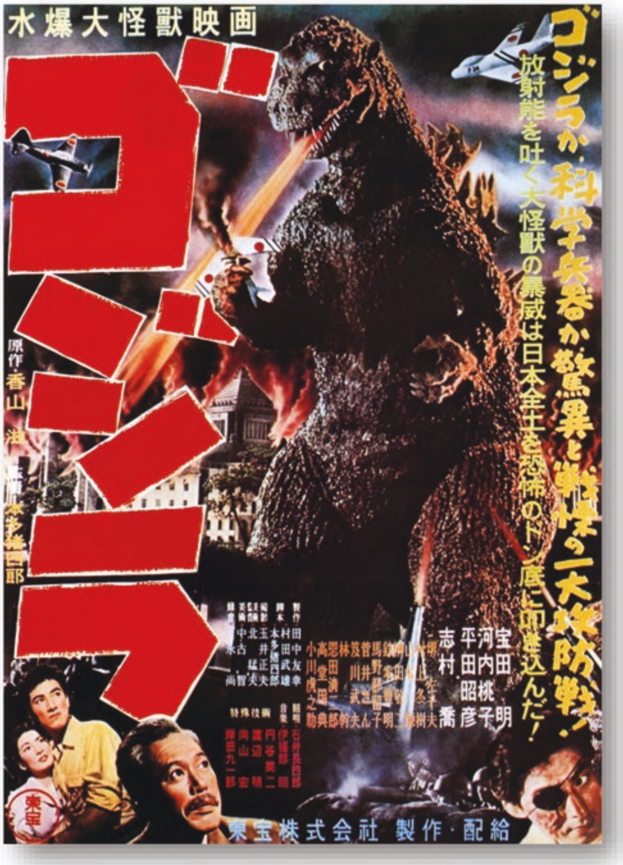
Fig. 4.1 Sound designers (or Foley artists) in action. *[Image of public domain (left) and from Vancouver Film School, CC BY 2.0]*

However, and this happens more often than one may imagine, the sounds needed have a specific pace, length and articulation that makes it very difficult for a sample to be adapted to the very spot: at this point, the sound designer must be more creative. Instead of just selecting a file from their computer, they have to *create* that sound. The studio room, thus, is packed with tools and objects that can be employed to produce credible noises. The sound designer will have the visual sequence running on a screen and will perform all the needed sounds in real time, synchronizing them with the images. This practice is also known as **Foley art**, or simply Foley (after Jack Donovan Foley, one of the earliest and most inventive of sound designers), and you will often see sound designers referred to as "Foley artists" (see ▫ Fig. 4.1).

More often than we may think, those are not the *same* objects that appear in the AVT, also for logistic reasons: if you need to make noises for a truck or a submarine, you cannot really accommodate the real things in a recording studio. So, the slamming of a car door will be usually reproduced by smashing a thick yellow pages book on a table; the water stream produced by a submarine will be reproduced by running an iron chain back and forth in a tub filled with water, and so forth. In some other cases, the items used are "similar" in type and in practice with the real thing: for example, when we see a character walking in the snow, usually the Foley artist is walking in a tray full of sand, and when they need a crunchier sound (which sometimes happen when we step on an icier patch of snow), they will step on a cornstarch bag. Then of course there are plenty of other cases where the same object of the sequence will do the job just fine: when cutlery and plates are employed in a meal sequence, for example, the sound designer will just work with cutlery and plates themself.

Next, as we mentioned, there are often situations when it is better to use *different* noises, that actually do not sound like the real thing but paradoxically are more credible, or even to make up a sound for something that in fact does not have it. We all have seen fist fights in some comedy, western or action movie: those "percussionist-on-amphetamines" kind of sounds are not really what *real* fists sound like, now, are they? And what about computers? Whenever we input data on a computer the only sound we hear is that of the keys being typed. In AVCC, instead, for some strange reason, computers are noisier, and often make a number of small electronic "beep beep" type of sounds, as data appear on the screen. Why is that? Because those sounds say "technology", "future", "automation" and similar concepts, *more* and *better* than the simple typing sounds. They are more credible in the role of representing a hi-tech device, even though the equivalent device, in reality, does *not* make those sounds.

Finally, there are items that are purely fictional, and do not really exist in reality, so one must invent a brand new set of sounds to represent them. Remember Godzilla? This big monster of Japanese creation has one of the most distinctive and recognizable roars: a kind of acute and piercing scream that we instantly recognize even if we keep our eyes closed. This roar appeared for the first time in 1954 (see ▫ Fig. 4.2): the producers of the first Godzilla movie had spent days in trying to find a sound that would fit the terrifying and sinister profile of the monster, mostly browsing the sounds of existing animals, but they had been unsuccessful. Then a composer called Akira Ifukube had a bizarre but perfect idea: he took a leather glove, he coated it in pine resin and he rubbed it against the string of a double bass. One of the most iconic sounds in film history was created and for more than half a century the same sample was used over and over again in any of the successive installments of the Godzilla saga (including non-Japanese productions).


水爆大怪獣映画
ゴジラ
ゴジラか科学兵器か驚異と戦慄の一大攻防戦！
放射能を吐く大怪獣の暴威は日本全土を恐怖のドン底に叩き込んだ！
原作 香山滋
監督 本多猪四郎
宝田明
河内桃子
平田昭彦
志村喬
東宝
東宝株式会社 製作・配給

▫ **Fig. 4.2** The original film poster of the first *Godzilla* movie (1954). *[Image of public domain]*

A soundscape consists of three types of sound: spoken language, music and noises. Leaving spoken language to the apposite section, we must say that the border between music and noises is not always clear, especially when we consider some forms of avant-garde music (e.g., concrete music) which makes an explicit use of unconventional sounds that we normally would not qualify as music, or if we consider some particular sound effects (think about those employed in sci-fi) which have a certain musical quality, in terms of timbres, tones and the likes. These exceptions aside, however, AVTs tend to have a rather traditional idea of music, making it always pretty recognizable—if anything, by providing an adequate context that clearly singles out some given sounds as music. Same with noises, even those with a prominent musical quality. The laser gun of the hero of some sci-fi movie may sound like a riff of a psychedelic song, but we clearly see the hero "shooting", and not "playing", and we assume that shooting is an action that produces noise, not music.

AVTs, however, can add a peculiar category of sounds that real life does not offer: non-diegetic sounds. Those are usually "musical" sounds, the so-called **soundtrack**, but they can also be noises (usually in the form of sound effects of some sort) and spoken words (as in the case of the non-diegetic narrator that we have already mentioned). Therefore, a first important distinction in soundscape is between diegetic and non-diegetic—but we already know that, of course. Within diegetic sounds, there are two additional distinctions: **on-screen** versus **off-screen**, and **outer** versus **inner**. "On-screen" means that we are able to see the source of the sound in question: it is within the frame. "Off-screen" means that we do not see it. For example, we may see two people talking inside an apartment (the conversation then is on-screen: audible *and* visible), while some noise (let us say, an explosion) comes from an outside space that we do not see (the explosion, thus, is off-screen: audible *but not* visible).

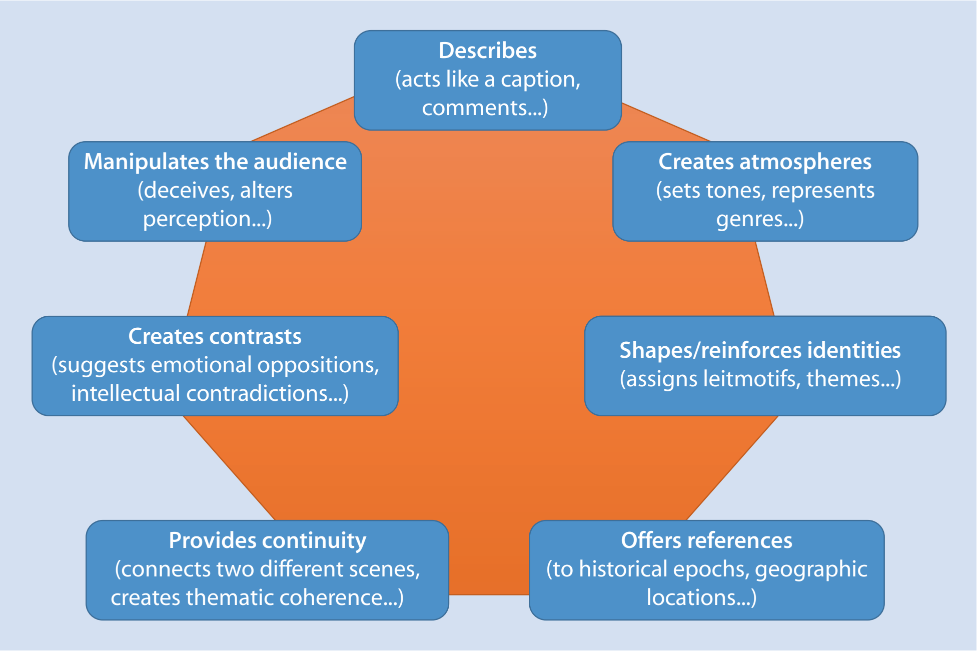
As for the second distinction, "outer" is any sound that is concrete and empirical (words that are spoken, music that is played, etc.), while "inner" is a more abstract typology that refers to any sonic situation that, in the real world, we actually would *not* be able to hear: a memory, a thought, a character or item that should *not* be able to produce sounds… Very often, we might see a character thinking or remembering something, and—magically—we start hearing their voice even if they are not speaking: that is a classic case of "inner" sound.

4.1.2 Soundtrack

Once we have made these basic distinctions, and once we have agreed to discuss the sonic aspects of language in a separate section, we can now say something more specific and detailed about music and (non-diegetic) soundtrack in particular, which is probably the closest association we have when we think about sound in AVTs.

The employment of music in AVCC is naturally of capital importance, and—having already mentioned some historical questions in past chapters—it is no surprise that in some cases music has been a more iconic and successful component than the whole production itself. But music is not there simply "to be remembered". There is a range of important functions that are performed at various points in a text, and for various reasons. Or, as Woody Allen humorously said once: "music in film covers a multitude of sins!". Such functions operate in the multimodal sense we have already described (redundancy with the images, reinforcement, contrast, etc.), but it would be perhaps useful to see them more in detail (see also a summary in ▣ Fig. 4.3).

1. Music has a fundamental **descriptive function**, meaning that it can be like a caption on the images. It can issue some important statements on how we should interpret a given sequence: it tells us that this scene is funny, this character is sad, this particular moment is epic, etc. This "commenting" function has always been a historical one: since the early days of *talkies* (such was the nickname of films with sound), this was what music was mostly doing, and in fact even before sound was introduced, when one or more musicians would play live on the images. Interestingly, we have acquired so much awareness of this function that nowadays directors (and composers) have to pay attention not to overdo with it. By now, some of these "captions" may


Describes
(acts like a caption, comments…)
Manipulates the audience
(deceives, alters perception…)
Creates atmospheres
(sets tones, represents genres…)
Creates contrasts
(suggests emotional oppositions, intellectual contradictions…)
Shapes/reinforces identities
(assigns leitmotifs, themes…)
Provides continuity
(connects two different scenes, creates thematic coherence…)
Offers references
(to historical epochs, geographic locations…)

▣ **Fig. 4.3** The seven main functions of soundtrack in AVCC be redundant and sound quite unnecessary, but this is because it has been a few generations already that audiences have been acquainted with the way emotions are conveyed on an AVT.

When we speak about description, we do not necessarily mean the description of a "real", empirical, mood. Thanks to music we may also create a "caption" for un unreal, dreamy/nightmarishly other-worldly situation. In the same way as we discussed sound design as an activity capable of providing a "voice" to items that do not have one (remember the case of Godzilla?), music, too, can "donate" a soundtrack to events/actions/situations that do not belong to empirical reality. When they do, they do not have such an obvious musical characterization, like indeed dreams (by contrast, cheerfulness can be quite easily conveyed by keeping the harmony in major, by applying a mid-to-fast rhythm, and so forth). In this respect, it may be useful to specify that an "unreal" situation does not only concern genres like sci-fi, horrors or the likes. Other genres, too, have their fair share of musical inventions: just think about animation, particularly cartoons like Mickey Mouse or Tom and Jerry, with all those little musical breaks that accompany amusing moments, like the bluesy cadenza that we often hear when Tom has crashed on the ground after another hopeless attempt to catch Jerry. There is a lovely expression for the various jingles and themes that support the diverse actions in animation: "mickey-mousing". The reference of course is to the early Disney cartoons of Mickey Mouse, when indeed all sorts of movements were underlined by musical sounds (such as a quick descending scale when something falls, heavy double bass notes when some big character is walking, etc.)

2. Music creates **atmospheres**, setting the general tones of a text, also in terms of genre and usually from the beginning. The music we hear in the opening titles, or the main theme, is usually an accurate revelation of the general dramatic setting of the text. All the main AV genres are usually well-revealed by the music that opens and/or characterizes each text: we simply *know* when it is a thriller, when it is a comedy, when it is a western, and so forth: the music kind of tells us already.
3. If we use elements of description and atmosphere in a deceiving sense, we can also use music for **manipulation** of the audience. This can happen in various ways. First, by affecting our general perception of the events displayed. For example, the perception of time: the same exact sequence of—say—20 s can be made to feel very long or very short depending on the type of music that we employ to accompany it.

Second, we may employ music in a kind of propagandist way, by affecting "interpretation" more than "perception" (and indeed propaganda movies of dictatorial regimes of different times and places, relied heavily on music in this particular way). That is: the AVT may display a situation that can be interpreted ambivalently by the audience, such as the killing of a character, and the music tells us if this killing was something morally positive, or sad, or unfair, or necessary, and so forth.

Third, we may also manipulate the psycho-motor reaction of the audience, especially if the text has interactive components, like a videogame. For example, if the game requires a fast pace of action and prompt reflexes, the music may be set to a speedy tempo, usually with repeated patterns and ostinatos that give even more the idea of something that must be done continuously and quickly. And of course, if the pace needs to increase (perhaps because we reached the next level of the game), the music goes accordingly. People of my generation remember very well the sense of urgency and threatening anxiety that the *Tetris* music used to instill in the player.

4. A particular form of manipulation is the creation of **contrasts/contradictions**. Sometimes the music can deliberately go against the evidence of the images (almost like a deceiving caption of the types of René Magritte's famous painting of a pipe with the French inscription for "This is not a pipe!"), suggesting quite the emotional/intellectual opposite. Perhaps we may see a sequence that visually presents a quiet/happy situation, but the music has an eerie, threatening component, that informs us that something not so happy is about to happen. Or: we may have a **parody** situation where, say, a character who appears furious and aggressive is underlined by a comical theme, making us understand that the character is not to be taken seriously. In both cases, interestingly, we trust the music more than we trust the images (which basically means that images are used more often for deception than sounds): this is the classic case of "dominance" that we have described when talking about multimodality.
5. Music contributes in shaping and reinforcing **identities**. Already in opera, the German composer Richard Wagner had established the so-called **leitmotifs**, i.e., musical themes that are associated with specific characters, situations or places, making them recognizable also when they are absent or when their presence is ambiguous. When a certain character (usually an important one, like the hero or the main villain) is assigned a theme and later we hear that theme again in a situation where that character does not seem to be present, we know that in one way or another they are involved, and that the particular sequence we are watching has to do with them in some form (maybe they are about to intervene, maybe we are revealed some important information about them, etc.).

Also, identities can be developed through music, or at least the latter can underline such development. It happens very often that we discover additional information about a character at a later stage in the text: as it often happens in dramas and thrillers, we find out that the character had some past experience that affected their behavior in the present, and that gives us a totally different perspective on the events narrated. In that case, we may have a different type of music associated with the character that emphasizes that particular development.

Finally, identities are also defined in relation to a context, and music can underline that aspect too. That means that characters do not just have an identity in absolute, but also in a relative sense, within a given setting. If you remember Jonathan Swift's novel, *Gulliver's Travels*, you will understand the point perfectly: Lemuel Gulliver, who is averagely tall, finds himself to be a giant on the island of Lilliput, and a minuscule person in the peninsula of Brobdingnag. Should a musical soundtrack be set to Swift's masterpiece we would probably hear the grave sounds of a double bass or a tuba when Gulliver walks in Lilliput, and the tiny notes of a violin or a piccolo flute, when he walks in Brobdingnag. Identities, thus, are not just defined "in themselves", but there is an equally important aspect of "relation" with a context (context meaning other characters as well, of course).

6. Quite predictably, music offers a number of **references**, of historical, social, geographical and cultural type. Music can be excellent in providing us with information about the "heritage" of a given character or context. For example, it can tell us "where" we are, at least to a general extent, by giving us little hints of a certain culture/society: if we are in Italy, we may hear a mandolin in the soundtrack; if we are in Austria, we could hear some famous theme by Mozart (e.g., the opening of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*), or something in Mozart-style; if we are in Brazil we may hear the rhythm of samba or bossa nova, and so forth. To tell the truth, we would have to open a certain discussion regarding the faithfulness of such musical hints to the actual cultures they supposedly represent: most times we do not hear the "authentic" music of such places, but just some exotic "color"—an instrument, a rhythm pattern, a certain scale…—that is however enough to build a meaningful association. It is, so to speak, a "touristic" representation of a place or a time, without going too deep into the whole set of stylistic traits. We have seen this to be the case in the commercial, "Dynamic Korea", which we encountered previously in our book.
7. To conclude, music also has an important function within the montage of an AVT, because it creates **connections and continuity**. Often we witness radical changes in scene, literally from one frame to another: music can be very useful in softening that change, by giving more continuity and conveying the idea that not much has changed after all. The other way round is also possible, with music instead underlining more change than it may appear from the montage.

One general feature that all these functions share in common is the fact that they aim at "unifying" the audience's emotional and intellectual response. If, say, an ambiguous sad-or-happy sequence is commented by music that is happy-sounding, the goal is to make sure that the whole audience thinks of that sequence as happy. In this sense, and once more resuming the terminology adopted by Roman Jakobson, the music set to AVTs has primarily a conative nature, in that it "pushes" the audience to have a certain reaction.

Since we mentioned the conative (thus, persuasive) dimension of communication, another useful way to classify the functions of music within an AVT is of course through rhetoric. We shall not go through the whole list of figures of speech we will present in case study **Sect.** 4.3.3, but we can provide a couple of significant examples to give the idea. Ennio Morricone's legendary musical theme for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* contains an onomatopoeia: the opening two-note repetitions of the theme are designed

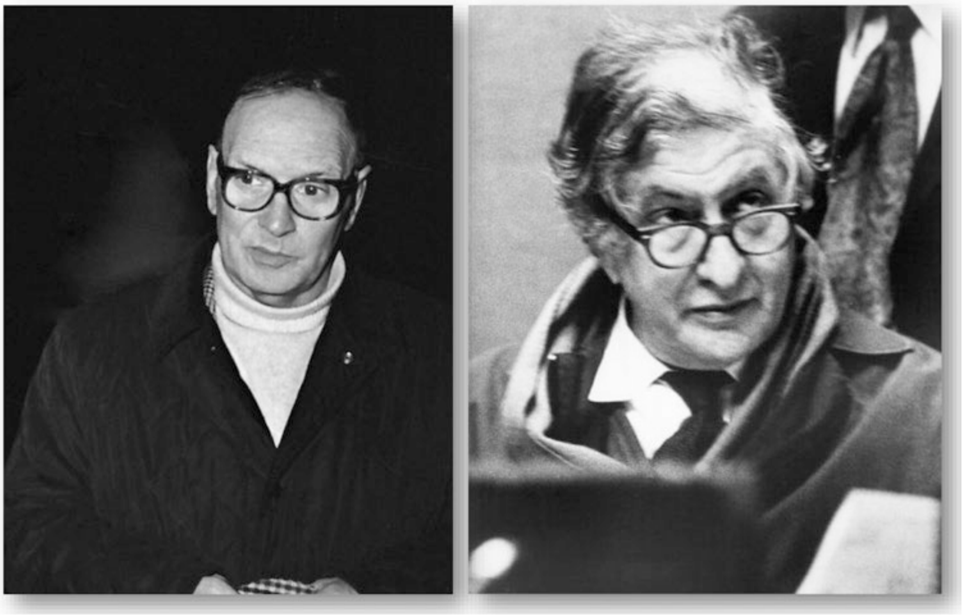


Fig. 4.4 Two of the greatest film composers of all times: Ennio Morricone (left) and Bernard Hermann (right)

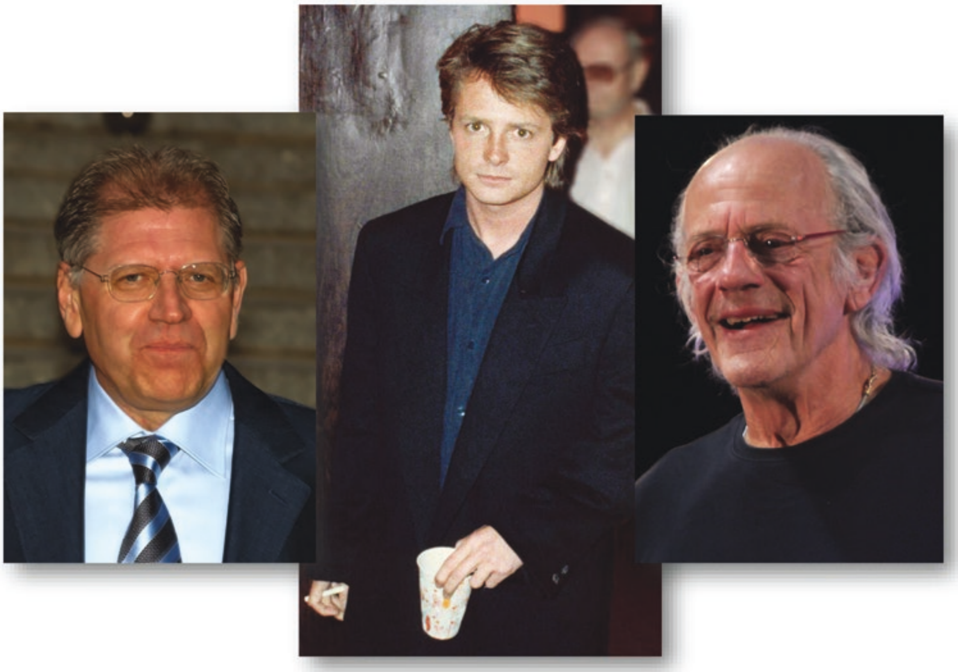
to imitate the sound of the howling of a coyote. The whole soundtrack of Lin Rodhes's experimental film *Dresden Dynamo* is entirely based on cacophonies. The use of brass and timpani for an epic adventurous theme like *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones* is a repeated cliché, while the use of a bluesy saxophone in correspondence of the appearance of an attractive female character can quickly create a *double entendre*. Etcetera: in principle, every single figure of speech may have a musical equivalent (◘ Fig. 4.4).

4.1.3 Case Study: The Functions of Music in *Back to the Future*

One of the most iconic sci-fi/adventure sagas, and certainly one that had an enormous impact on popular culture, the *Back to the Future* trilogy, particularly the first instalment, is also a goldmine for any teacher in film music: rarely, indeed, so many (if not, arguably, all) of the various ways music can be used in AVCC were concentrated into one single text. For this reason, the way we shall approach this movie will be almost surgical, with a "bit by bit" type of analysis in which we will uncover all the uses of music in the corresponding specific points of the text.

Back to the Future, part I, is an American production released in 1985, directed by Robert Zemeckis, and written by the latter with Bob Gale. Running approximately 111 min, it features a cast of actors who somehow defined their careers through this particular performance. That is definitely the case with Michael J. Fox, who became a star after his interpretation of the character of Marty McFly, but also with Christopher Lloyd, since then forever bound to his portrayal of "Doc" Emmett Brown (◘ Fig. 4.5).

The film plot is probably known to everybody, but, just to refresh our memory, we shall mention that the movie is the story of a time travel experience from 1985 to 1955 and back ("back" to the future, indeed). In 1985, in a town called Hill Valley, the eccentric scientist Emmett Brown invents a time machine out of a DeLorean sports car, operated with cylinders of plutonium that he steals from a group of Libyan terrorists. While embarking on the first experiment in time-travel with the assistance of his young friend Marty, Brown is found by the terrorists and killed. In an attempt to save his own life, Marty jumps in the car and escapes, accidentally reaching the needed speed to break through the time barrier. He then finds himself in 1955, where he bumps into his future parents George and Lorraine, compromising with his appearance what was supposed to be the first meeting between the two, and therefore threatening his own future birth. He finds the younger Brown and explains his situation. After initial incredulity, Brown believes him and agrees to help send him back to 1985. The plan is complicated because there is no plutonium available in the 1950s, and it takes the electrical power of a thunderstorm to propel the same reaction and activate time travel. Besides the arrangement of such a difficult circumstance, Marty also has two more problems: first, he would like to warn Brown of the tragic destiny that awaits him in 1985, but Brown refuses to learn any specific information about the future, for fear of compromising the natural course of events. Marty tries to stick a letter in Brown's pocket, but the latter finds it and tears it up. Second, Marty needs to act as matchmaker for his parents, due to his involuntary sabotage of their first meeting: despite the pathological shyness of his father and the complication of his mother not being particularly attracted by him (she instead develops a crush for her future son himself), Marty manages to make the fatal attraction happen, not without some luck, and with the additional challenge of having to confront the local bully gang, led by the hooligan Biff Tannen. George and Lorraine kiss and fall in love at the school ball, where Marty ends up playing the guitar in an iconic scene where he performs Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" and brings his solo a bit too far for the standards of the 1950s. The trip back to 1985 is again very adventurous, but successful: unfortunately, however, Marty is not in time to save Brown from the Libyan terrorists. Marty, devastated, cries by his friend, but Brown suddenly sits up, alive and kicking. He had after all become curious about his future



◘ **Fig. 4.5** From left to right: Robert Zemeckis, Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd. *[Photos by David Shankbone, Alan Light and Gage Skidmore, CC BY 2.0]* and had recomposed Marty's letter of warning. Brown takes Marty home and embarks on a trip into the future (2015, to be exact): Marty remains in 1985, but the day after, to his pleasant surprise, he will find the present significantly improved from how he had left it. After all, he *did* affect the natural course of events, but apparently for the better.

The soundtrack of the film was written by Alan Silvestri, a then-emerging composer very clearly influenced by the master of sci-fi music John Williams, from whom he inherited the same epic and dynamic tones: if you compare the main theme for *Back to the Future* with, say, Williams' main theme for *Indiana Jones*, you will find more than one similarity.

Besides the soundtrack, an important role within the movie is played by pop-rock songs from the 1980s and the 1950s, including two tracks written specifically for the movie by Huey Lewis and The News ("The Power of Love", and "Back in Time"), plus songs like Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode", Eric Clapton's "Heaven Is One Step Away", The Four Aces' "Mr. Sandman" and several others (◘ Fig. 4.6).

All in all, there are 40 musical bits in the movie, 12 of which are diegetic, 24 non-diegetic and 4 containing both diegetic and non-diegetic elements (in ways that we shall of course explain). The piece that we hear more often is obviously the main theme of Silvestri's soundtrack. This is not only the most recurrent, but also the most important musical bit. Its distinctive John Williams-esque flavor materializes in an epic and adventurous theme, a full orchestral arrangement and an emphasis on brass instruments. It has variable dynamics with dramatic changes from piano to forte or even fortissimo. And it features numerous modulations—that is, changes from one tonality to another which can be read as metaphors of the various changes of time-scenarios during the movie.

A theme is often assigned several functions within a movie, and this one is no exception. To begin with, we hear it every single time there is a time-travel scene: even in very quick ones, like the initial experiment that Dr. Brown does with his dog Einstein, a hint of the theme is clearly audible. In addition to that, the theme underlines also the most tense and adventurous of scenes, like, perhaps, Marty's skateboard escape from Biff and his gang. As it often happens, the theme is also offered in alternative arrangements to comment on different emotions and atmospheres. In particular, we also have a "softer" version that is employed in tender or sad scenes (e.g., the moment when Marty writes a letter to Brown to inform him that he will be killed by the terrorists, if he does not take proper precautions).

After the main theme, the musical piece that is probably most important is the song "The Power of Love" by Huey Lewis and The News, a rock band that was in its prime during the 1980s. This song is directly associated with the protagonist of the movie, Marty McFly, a smart and adventurous boy who was initially meant to simply assist Dr. Brown in his time-travel journey, but then—due to the collision with the terrorists—ends up being himself the time traveler. Marty is very much in love with his girlfriend, he is a skilled guitarist and skateboarder, but also comes from a family of unaccomplished gullible parents, and from them he inherits a certain lack of self-confidence and a fear of failure. In the initial sequences of the movie we see him and his band being rejected at an audition for the school ball, leaving him in doubt as to whether he is a worthy musician at all. However, disappointments and family issues aside, he seems to be content to be where he is, and *when* he is.

Now: "The Power of Love" is a song that we hear three times throughout the movie, and always to introduce important features of Marty's life and behavior. On the first occasion we hear it when we learn that Marty is a skillful skater; in the second one, it is performed by Marty himself (along with his band) at the school ball's audition, therefore illustrating Marty's ability as a guitar player and also affection for heavy metal and hard rock (he is rejected exactly on the basis that his band plays "too darn loud"); and finally on the third occasion, we hear the

◘ **Fig. 4.6** Alan Silvestri (left) and Huey Lewis (right), respectively the soundtrack composer and the author of the two main songs in *Back to the Future*. *[Photos by Anthony Skelton, CC BY 2.0 and Xnux, CC BY-SA 3.0]* song right after he kisses his girlfriend, Jennifer. These three features are not only defining characteristics of Marty's life, but they are also key elements in the story. Skateboarding is at the core of the most spectacular chase sequence of the movie, when Marty, now in 1955, is run after by Biff and his gang. Guitar playing is what saves his own (future) life, as he replaces the injured guitarist of the band performing at the 1955 school ball, and by doing so he creates the conditions for his parents to exchange their first kiss and fall in love. Jennifer, finally, is his main anchor to 1985, the main reason why he wants to go back at all costs to his own time (and the saga makes a clear point that she is the love of his life: in the future scenario represented in the second instalment, Marty and Jennifer are married). Moreover, it is exactly during the sequence when the two kiss that Marty will be given a flyer by an old lady from a charity organization which says the exact time a bolt of lightning hit the clock of the municipality building back in 1955, offering the young Dr. Brown the alternative to plutonium to operate the time machine.

Back to the Future, as a saga, is a bit of a celebration of American popular culture. References to pop icons all across the three decades between 1955 and 1985 are countless (including several product placements, of course): from Clint Eastwood to *Star Wars*, from Chuck Berry to Michael Jackson, from Nike to Pepsi… Within this framework, it is no wonder that pop and rock songs play a prominent role in supporting the plot and enriching the scenario. Very often songs are there to offer a better picture of the time we are in, 1985 or 1955: as we shall see, in some cases they are the *first* clue we are given to understand *when we are*. Moreover, and we will see that too, the topical significance that is attributed to the songs goes well beyond the simple "temporal definition" and tells us much more about the social transformations of American society between the two periods.

To conclude, we also have additional non-diegetic bits beyond the main theme. Some of them are in-between actual music and sound effects, and some others are proper musical pieces. Their role is the one we would expect from all non-diegetic music: remarking feelings, creating contrasts, anticipating events, etc.

As previously mentioned we can now take a glimpse at specific musically-underlined sequences of the movie to emphasize the role/s music plays in each instance. We noted that there are 40 such instances, and of course we do not need to comment on each and all of them, because there are cases where the same function/role is repeated. Still, despite this selection, we shall still talk about 20 sequences, the exact half of the total: this is a testimony to the incredible variety of purposes the authors of this movie employed music for. I will preserve the original counting of the musical bits from 1 to 40, so you can have an idea of when exactly those bits are located in relation to each other. I shall use the abbreviation D for diegetic music, ND for non-diegetic, and X for those "mixed" moments that I have previously mentioned. So, when you read "13 ND", it means that we are talking about the 13th musical bit of the movie (out of the whole 40), and that this particular bit is non-diegetic.

1. **1 D: Clocks ticking + news speaker + dog-food machine**.

In this first case, it would probably be more appropriate to talk about simple sound effects than actual music. However, the extended employment and the continuity of these sounds as an actual "background" to the first sequence bears much more the characteristics of musical soundtrack than simple (and usually random) noises. Also, the history of music (particularly popular music) has often offered examples where exactly *these* sounds (ticking clocks, TV/radio news and noisy machines) were used musically. One may think of Pink Floyd's "Time" or Dukes of Stratosphear's "25 o' clock" for the ticking clocks, Simon and Garfunkel's version of "Silent Night" for the news speaker, and the whole genre of industrial music for various machine sounds. For all these reasons, I am more inclined to suggest the denomination of "music" for this opening sequence of the movie. So, what happens here? The movie opens with some head titles, during which we hear various clocks ticking together. To them, more sounds are added when headtitles terminate and we begin seeing the first images of Dr. Brown's lab. Various items are visible (most of which are clues for what will happen later on in the movie) including a TV set, from which we hear the voice of a news speaker announcing, among other things, that some plutonium has been stolen, and a rather bizarre and noisy automatic machine that opens and serves canned food for Brown's dog, Einstein.

This sequence is very important, because it launches several important topics that are crucial in the movie. First and foremost, the fact that this movie is about time. The announcement could have not been made more emphatically: not only do we hear clocks as the very first thing, but we also hear them *before* any image actually appears, as if to prove their undisputed centrality in the story. Second, via the early morning TV news we learn that plutonium was stolen from Libyan terrorists, and that (as we know) is at the same time the source for the actual time-travelling (Marty uses the time machine to escape the terrorists), and for the most dramatic moment of the movie (when Brown is apparently killed by the terrorists). Third, via the funny dog food machine, we learn that this movie is about science and technology, but not exactly in the most institutional, NASA-like, sense: it is a homemade, and nutty enough, type of science, made by an unconventional scientist whose main collaborators are a dog and a teenager.

2. **2 D: A heavy guitar chord blows up the amplifier**.

Marty enters Brown's lab, but he does not find anybody. As he calls both his friend "Doc" and the dog Einstein, he decides to jam with his guitar and a gigantic amplifying system that evidently Brown had built for him. As he turns up and switches on every possible knob and button available (we hear an increasing background noise that conveys very well the idea that something extremely loud is about to be heard), Marty hits a power chord on his guitar only to blow the whole thing up and be hurled against the wall by the huge feedback generated. That power chord (the musical bit) and also the ensuing explosion (this time a proper sound effect) are there to announce that music, too, will have an important role in the movie, that Marty is fascinated by "heavy" sounds (what will be behind some important decisions during the story), and that finally Marty, too, is crazy enough to befriend someone like Brown. However, we have not yet learned how *good* Marty is, as a musician (the single chord he managed to play before the explosion is not really enough to assess his abilities): as we mentioned, the role of announcing Marty's skills is assigned to the song "The Power of Love". We shall see that later.

3. **3 D: The clocks ring all together**.

Again, this is mostly a sound effect, but its employment has more to do with a musical characterization. Indeed, as they announce the first of a series of time-paradoxes, these clocks sound like medieval fanfares played by trumpets to announce the entrance of a king. Ladies and gentlemen, his majesty "time travelling" is entering the scene. Specifically, Brown has arranged (in manners not specified in the movie) that everybody in town is ten minutes late. And therefore, Marty is late as well: he now needs to run to school.

4. **4 X: Marty skates to school—"The Power of Love".**

As Marty realizes he is late he tries to reach his school by skating, and he does so with great mastery of the skateboard. The introduction of one of Marty's skills, as we said, calls for the main song "The Power of Love", and so it is: Marty goes out from Brown's lab, grabs his skateboard and leaves—the song starts. Interestingly, while the track is clearly audible in a non-diegetic way, as "soundtrack", we also see Marty wearing headphones and listening to a "Walkman" cassette player (the ancestor of our Mp3 players and smartphones, and another pop icon of the 1980s).

The suggestion, thus, is that Marty may actually be listening to this very song, providing the latter with a diegetic value as well. The suggestion makes sense also because Marty and his band are about to perform the very song at the school ball's audition, on the same day: it is only reasonable that he would like to go through the song one more time to make sure he remembers all the parts. For this reason, we assign the symbol "X" to this bit: there are both diegetic and non-diegetic elements involved.

5. **5 D: Marty's band plays "The Power of Love".**

Marty and his group are attempting to be among the performers at the annual ball, an event that has a long tradition in Marty's school: it was indeed already running in the 1950s, at the time both Marty's parents were attending the school, and where they kissed for the first time. Marty launches his band into a rendition of Huey Lewis's song that is actually significantly heavier and guitar-driven in sound than the original. After a few seconds, the jury committee of the audition stops the band and informs the musicians that they are "too darn loud" for the purpose and that therefore they are excused, leaving Marty speechless. The film authors at this point insert a rather amusing inside joke: the very committee gentleman who interrupts and rejects the band is Huey Lewis himself, who makes a so-called "cameo" appearance in the movie, in the part of one of the conservative jury members. This is like saying "sorry guys, but *my* version of 'The Power of Love'—the *original* version—was not so loud: how dare you change it like this!". Albeit interrupted after a few seconds on this occasion Marty has the chance to display his excellent musical abilities: we now learn that he is a real heavy metal virtuoso. Like skateboarding, this is an important "skill" of the protagonist: once more, it is "The Power of Love" that underlines that.

6. **7 ND: Marty and Jennifer kiss—"The Power of Love".**

We now skip the musical bit n. 6 and proceed to n.7, when we see Marty and his girlfriend Jennifer talking and then kissing. The two are shown as very fond of each other and, as we know from the second instalment of the saga, their love is deep and will eventually lead to marriage. It is therefore safe to say that this is another important characteristic of Marty, that—once again—calls for Huey Lewis's song. The so-called "**hook**" of the song (the most memorable/attractive part), that is, the very moment when the music stops and Lewis sings "that's the power of love!" is made to coincide with the very kiss exchanged by the couple, as if to, indeed, underline what the power of love is about.

But there is more, as we have already mentioned earlier. While attempting to kiss a first time, the two are interrupted by an old lady who is fundraising to preserve an odd tradition of Hill Valley: 30 years earlier, a lightning bolt had struck the city hall disabling the big clock on the front of the building. The clock has never been repaired since, but the new mayor, apparently, wants to fix that, while instead the old lady leads a preservation society that intends to keep things as they were (that is: with the clock still disabled). For this purpose, she asks Marty and Jennifer for a contribution. Bothered by the interruption and anxious to return to more pleasant activities, Marty offers a coin to the lady and gets a campaign flyer in return: on that flyer there is a short history of the thunder incident with a specific date and time. Jennifer will use the back of the flyer to write a telephone number for Marty, so he stores it in his pocket. This occurrence will be of enormous importance later in the story, when Marty, lost in 1955 and hoping for the younger Dr. Brown to send him back to 1985, is told by the latter that only the strike of a lightning bolt can match the plutonium to generate the needed reaction for time travelling. Thanks to the flier, Marty is able to give Doc the exact circumstances and times when the thunder will hit the city hall, earning a serious chance to succeed.

7. **8 ND: The DeLorean time machine appears, we hear a short "futuristic" bit.**

As we shall also see in the "13 ND" example, sometimes a simple cluster, lick or chord performed with the right sound can enhance the atmosphere/mood of a given situation. In this case, we have the fancy DeLorean sports car making its first appearance in the film, as it comes out of a truck. The scene takes place at the parking area of the local shopping mall. It is late night, so the area is empty and there is enough space for the car to accumulate sufficient speed to activate the needed reaction. Marty, a compulsory latecomer, had fallen asleep in his bed before the appointment, so he woken up by Brown's phone call. Marty's sleeping position is rather peculiar and designed by the authors to be remembered as a Chekhov's rifle: dressed in his clothes, with no blanket on, sleeping on his left side with the hands peculiarly placed behind his back. Please, remember this detail, because we will need it later.

Once on his feet, Marty quickly reaches the mall with his skateboard. Brown is ready to show the DeLorean time machine to his young friend. Such an appearance has to be an "entrance in style", and must therefore be rendered with an epic "sci-fi" tone. For that purpose the authors employ various strategies: first, we see the truck back door opening slowly and automatically, almost like a theatre curtain; second, as the truck opens, we see a pall of white smoke dissipating and slowly revealing the car. Of course, when we think about it, there is absolutely no logical reason why a truck van should be filled with smoke, but—just as obviously—we know that this kind of visual effect produces a very appealing result. Thirdly and importantly for us, we hear a sound performed with an electronic keyboard: my guess would be a Yamaha DX7, a very popular synthesizer in those days, but I am far from sure.

It is a simple and very short bit, but, as it is performed with an electronically produced timbre that has nothing in common with traditional, acoustic instruments, it strongly enhances the "futuristic/hi-tech" atmosphere that was called for by this sequence.

8. **9 ND: The car goes 1 min into the future—short fragment of Silvestri's main theme.**

As we mentioned, every single instance of time travelling is underlined by the soundtrack's main theme. This is the first instance: we see Dr. Brown performing his very first time travelling test, using his dog Einstein in the car, and driving the latter with a remote control. The experiment is only meant to send Einstein one minute into the future, so what we have here is a very short sequence, that is meant to be less adventurous and spectacular than the ones that will follow. And yet, even in these very few seconds, the unmistakable Lydian melody of the theme can be heard.

9. **10 ND**: **Doc is ready to embark on his time travel—“tense” musical background**.

This is a particularly interesting use of music in AVCC. The test with the dog Einstein has been successful, everything seems to be ready for Dr. Brown to travel in time. The moment is solemn: Doc asks Marty to film him with a camera as he announces triumphally his groundbreaking discovery. And yet, the soundtrack is telling us something completely different. No solemnity and no happiness: what we hear is a rather tense and threatening background, of the “something terrible is about to happen” type. As the volume of the music grows (therefore increasing the tension), we also see Einstein barking at something in the distance: it is an additional warning. Doc checks the source of Einstein’s distress and finds out that the Libyan terrorists, to whom he had stolen the plutonium, have found him. Doc and Marty try to escape but the terrorists manage to corner and kill the scientist. Marty, too, is trapped, but one terrorist’s Kalashnikov jams, and he has time to run into the car and escape. A chase will follow, in which the panicking Marty will reach the necessary speed to travel in time (needless to say, the musical bit that we hear at this point is the main theme), beginning his adventure in 1955.

In this moment we witness an open conflict between the visual part, which presents the triumphant Brown ready to embark on his time travel, and the musical part, which warns us about an upcoming danger. What do we trust more? The music, of course: even if we “see” a cheerful situation, we realize, thanks to the music, that we will soon witness something terrible. As we approached AVCC in terms of “multimodality” as well, you may remember that we have also cases of non-redundancy between the stimulus A (the visual part in this case) and the stimulus B (the musical part), in which one outscores the other, producing a result of so-called “dominance”. We see a happy visual part, contrasted with a threatening musical part, but only the threatening part prevails (“dominates”) in our perception.

What is intriguing is that, in the great majority of similar situations, it is always the music that we trust: if someone falls and hurts themself, but the music is comical, we will not feel sorry for that person, but we will laugh. If someone is walking in a sunny country field but the music is sad, we will not concentrate on the beauty of the scenery but on the loneliness of the character. And so forth. Exceptions occur mostly in openly parodic sequences. On the psychological reasons why music seems to be more trustworthy than images, we can make a lot of conjectures, but one thing that seems to be pretty reasonable is that it is much easier to deceive with images than with music. As we already said, as an animal species, human beings have come to base most of their perception (especially in a social and cultural sense) through visual stimuli: visuality, thus, is where we are most specialized and where we are able to catch tiny nuances. With music, unless one is a specialist we cannot afford too many subtleties, so an author has less freedom to manipulate our perception.

10. **13 ND**: **Marty, now in 1955, stops the car where his house was supposed to be and finds nude land—“sci-fi” type of musical bit**.

At this point of the story, Marty, whose escape from the terrorists has thrown him 30 years into the past, is still not quite sure where/when he is, and at this stage he is more inclined to believe that he is dreaming, so he drives towards home, on the outskirts, the residential area of Lyon Estates. What awaits him, however, is an empty land with a simple billboard advertising a big project for a residential settlement. As Marty’s jaw drops before this unexpected landscape, another “sci-fi” bit is audible, in a similar vein as 8 ND. While however, the latter was meant to offer a “wow” effect over a hi-tech item (the DeLorean car) in a positive way, this time the wow effect is more disturbing, almost “apocalyptic”. Marty sees this landscape as a *Star Trek* character would see an unknown and completely desert planet, not knowing yet how safe or dangerous it is. In the eyes of the disoriented Marty, the past is here compared to outer space.

11. **14 X**: **Marty reaches the city center—“Mr. Sandman”**.

This is another particularly significant sequence. As we have seen, when Marty is thrown back to 1955, for the initial part he feels like he is having a terrible, but realistic nightmare: he has been where his house was supposed to be, only to find waste land. It is not until he reaches the town hall square that he is finally convinced that he indeed traveled back in time (having the final confirmation when checking the date on a daily newspaper). The moment when the urban scenery appears before his eyes is ingeniously prepared by the authors, by having Marty turn the corner of a secondary street, and the square opening up like a fantasy land from a fairy tale—another “wow effect”. To my students, I often describe this as a “Baroque” moment. Indeed, it was typical of Baroque architecture to shift from tiny, small spaces to big and grand ones, in order to put even more of an accent to that sense of wonder that those picturesque and richly-decorated buildings were designed to inspire. Now: although the wow effect is already rather effective in the visual sense, it is given a great push by the music chosen for this sequence. It is an old 1950s success called “Mr. Sandman”, a mid-tempo ballad with a soft flavor reminiscent of the Tin Pan Alley tradition of Irving Berlin in particular, and bearing that type of so-called barbershop vocal harmonies that were very typical of those days. Several versions of the song were released around those years, starting from 1954 (when the song was written): the version we hear is by a group called The Four Aces.

The track, I believe, was chosen for two fundamental reasons. The first one is exactly related to this wow effect: the song opens with the voices alone, slowly harmonizing the title: “Mr. Sandman…”. This slow intro literally “opens up” the song before it takes its basic tempo and all the instruments join in, serving as a perfect support to the “opening up” of the scenery, in a perfect image-sound coordination that, still using multimodality terms, creates an effect of “enhancement” of the message.

The second important reason why this song was chosen lies, I believe, in its intrinsic “innocence”. A leitmotif of the whole movie will be the contrast between Marty’s more emancipated and disinhibited personality and the more naïve and provincial mentality of the people of the 1950s. We shall elaborate on this later, because I believe there is also a specific socio-cultural point made by the movie which goes well beyond the literal 30-year gap. However, for the point we are making here, a song like “Mr. Sandman” is perfect to set the tones to that naïvety and fairytalesque component by which the 1950s version of Hill Valley is portrayed: it is simple, unpretentious, catchy and cheerful in a childlike kind of way; and while it plays we see inhabitants of Hill Valley moving around almost like cartoon characters and cars, objects and colors that look like toys.

Finally, as you may have noticed, this example is marked with an X, so it has both non-diegetic and diegetic features. Just like the use of “The Power of Love” in segment 4 X, “Mr. Sandman” too is heard in a very clean and distinct manner that clearly suggests a non-diegetic dimension. Also, the manner in which the song is placed in the montage (with the intro coinciding perfectly with Marty's arrival in the city center, and so on) hints in the direction of a typical non-diegetic employment of the piece. Except that, as the images of the city square unfold, we also see a record shop with an active MPA system and posters advertising new releases (and "Mr. Sandman" *was* back then a new release, as The Four Aces recorded it in late 1954). The assumption, thus, is that the song may ideally be played from the record shop, just like, in 4 X, we may assume that what Marty hears in his headphones is "The Power of Love".

12. **19 D: Marty breaks into George's room and plays Van Halen's "Out the Window"**.

We now skip four more musical segments and we get to n.19. The story has developed a bit, and at this point Marty, who attempts to be a matchmaker between his two future parents, has discovered that his father George is a pathologically introverted nerd who is totally incapable of communicating with women, and seems exclusively interested in science fiction stories. With that in mind, Marty elaborates a bizarre plan to visit George in the night pretending he is an alien who will melt his brain unless he asks Lorraine for a date. Wearing the anti radiation yellow suit that was stored in the time machine car, and giving himself the (not so) fictional name of Darth Vader, Marty breaks into George's room in this disguise. However, to make things more credible and scary, he wakes his father up by playing a loud heavy metal song (Van Halen's "Out the Window") through his Walkman. The trick works: George awakens deafened and terrified and obeys Darth Vader's command. As you may imagine, the interesting thing, here, is that 1980s heavy metal music sounds so distant from 1950s musical standards that Marty can actually use it as an "extraterrestrial" sound and get away with it.

13. **20 X: Music from the cafeteria's jukebox**.

The morning after the extraterrestrial experience, George runs to Marty, explaining that he is now fully convinced that he has to invite Lorraine to the school ball. Lorraine is sitting at a cafeteria with her girlfriends, and George summons up the courage to step in and approach her. The cafeteria, as customary in those days, has a jukebox, and we hear some music coming from it. Unfortunately, as George tries his best to impress Lorraine, the bully Biff and his gang break into the place, immediately calling out their favorite victim. What happens to the jukebox music at this point is rather curious for a diegetic musical bit: the song can be heard being abruptly interrupted as if the jukebox is unplugged, or a power cut is occurring: instead, what seems to happen is that the music itself "got scared" when Biff broke in and grew silent. It is a metaphor of that "the fun is over" feeling that kids have when they are having a good time and suddenly some bully appears.
As we know from the movie, at this point Marty will intervene in defense of his father, and the skateboard chase scene will follow with Alan Silvestri's main theme as soundtrack (21 ND). However, we have already offered an example of this kind, so we can proceed further.

14. **22 ND: Sad version of the theme**.

As we mentioned, the main theme of a soundtrack is often offered in different versions, with the purpose of underlining different modes and different tones. In this sequence, Marty, who has been trying in vain to inform Dr. Brown that a terrible fate is awaiting him in 1985 (Brown, as we have seen, is totally opposed to learn important information about the future, for fear of compromising the natural course of events), attempts now another strategy: he writes a letter where he warns Doc about the terrorists, and seals it in an envelope that reads "Do not open until 1985". Later, he will try to stick the letter into Brown's pocket, hoping that the latter will not find it until at least Marty is back in 1985, avoiding direct confrontation. What we hear while Marty writes the letter is what we may call a "sad version" of the theme: the melody is recognizable, but it is slower in tempo, lower in dynamics, and performed with strings rather than brass instruments—and strings, as we shall also see in the next point, are much more apt to describe "softer" emotions than brass instruments.

15. **29 X: Marty joins The Starlighters to play "Earth Angel"**.

Ironically, after being rejected at the audition for the school ball in 1985, Marty ends up playing for the 1955 edition of the ball, here entitled "Enchantment under the sea". The band on the bill is called "The Starlighters" and it is an Afro-American group led by a person who we will turn out to be Chuck Berry's cousin, Marvin. At this point of the story, Marty elaborates a complicated plan to make his father and mother fall for each other: he will pretend to harass Lorraine, so that George can intervene and prove himself to Lorraine as a strong and courageous man (qualities that, as we know, he had not managed to display). However, the plan is ruined by Biff and his friends, who find Marty first, punch him in the stomach and smash him into a car's trunk, while Biff remains with Lorraine and harass her for real. That car happens to belong to Marvin Berry who, along with his band, is taking a break during their concert at the ball. While trying to open the trunk, Marvin injures his hand, but eventually manages to release Marty who runs back towards Lorraine. The scene appearing before his eyes is the most surprising: George has arrived and, despite finding Biff instead of Marty, has managed to overcome his weakness and knock the bully out, rescuing the terrified Lorraine: we can see from her gaze that for the first time she is *really* impressed by George. An enthusiastic Marty returns now to Marvin Berry, trying to convince him to play the second part of the show, but the injured guitarist is unable to play. Marty offers himself as a replacement, in order to allow the party to continue (he needs that to happen in order for his parents to kiss).
As the second part of the show begins we see Marty on the stage with The Starlighters performing the song "Earth Angel" (a doo-wop hit released by a band called The Penguins in late 1954), while George and Lorraine are tenderly dancing, as their future son had hoped. For the guitar enthusiasts among the readers, we may here mention a slight anachronism: the guitar that Marty plays is a red Gibson ES-355, a model which was actually put on the market only in 1959. The action, as we know, takes place in 1955. It is a tiny detail, of course.

As the song goes on, another intruder tries to interfere with George's and Lorraine's romance, demanding to dance with the girl. George seems again intimidated and for some time does not intervene. During this time, Marty starts feeling sick: if his parents are separated and do not fall in love, his future existence is in doubt. He can hardly stand on his feet and is now unable to play. Musically speaking, such discomfort is captured in a significant manner, that says a lot about the way we perceive music. Logic would demand that if one is about to faint (as Marty appears to be), they would rather *not* play at all, and rest until they feel better. Instead, Marty keeps on playing, or at least he tries to: what comes out is random and unpleasant clusters out of tempo, that he hits in the desperate attempt to play the right chords. The thing is, silence would have been much less effective in representing sickness, than these dissonant sounds, at least in traditional, Western standards (we may assume that within other cultures, or in avant-garde-friendly musical environments such clusters could even be perceived as the quintessence of health). The dissonance of the chords, here, is a direct reference to the "dissonance" of Marty's situation: his future is endangered—he may live or he may not.

Fortunately for him, George regains his recently-discovered courage and gets rid of the intruder. He gently grabs Lorraine and finally kisses her. Immediately, Marty recovers from his collapse and resumes playing correctly. These two events are made to coincide with the climax of the "Earth Angel" song (that is, the last chorus before the coda), and what happens now is more typical of musicals than any other genres, justifying the reason why this musical segment is marked with X rather than D: as the climax is reached, we do not only hear the (diegetic) parts played by The Starlighters (voice, guitar, bass, sax and drums, for the record), but also a (non-diegetic) full string orchestra, which of course gives an extra emphasis to the song, with a special romantic accent (as strings tend to provide, as opposed to—for example—brass instruments or percussions). This strategy, as mentioned, is typical of musicals: we see—say—Gene Kelly dancing in a street during a rainy night and performing "Singin' in the Rain", and his voice is the only diegetic musical part we can "see". Except that there is a full orchestra accompanying him *somewhere* in the magic world of non-diegesis, and we hear that very well, too.

16. **32 D: Marty and The Starlighters play "Johnny B. Goode".**

Despite the short accident in the middle, the performance of "Earth Angel" has been a success: the audience is enthusiastic, and the band is impressed by Marty's playing. Marvin asks Marty to play one more song, something really energetic. Marty chooses Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode", not realizing that (a) the song has not been released yet (it will be in 1958), and incidentally (b) Chuck's cousin is right there next to him. There is no need for many instructions, though: The Starlighters are an Afro-American group, they know very well how to play a blues progression, albeit a bit faster than what they may be accustomed to. The audience seems to appreciate the "kick", but then—as we all know—things get out of hand: Marty, in a state of trance, begins playing and performing in ways that are far too audacious and dissonant for a 1950s audience. The rest of the band stops playing, and the audience stops dancing: Marty leaves the stage in embarrassment. In Excurse 9 we shall see that, in a half-jokingly manner, the authors of the movie may have wanted to use this sequence to symbolize the emancipation of American youth in the rock 'n' roll era.

Excurse 9. Marty "Elvis" McFly

What happens in the bit 32D calls for a serious sociological reflection on the role played by rock 'n' roll in shaping Western society. As the song starts, we see the audience enjoying the song, and cheerfully dancing to it. In fact, while they had been dancing in a rather composed manner until then, "Johnny B. Goode" seems to literally unchain them, and now they are moving with increasing excitement and hints of actual eroticism. It is my conviction that one of the main cultural processes that the movie intentionally portrays is the impact of rock 'n' roll on American middle class white youth. It is late 1955, Hill Valley is a small, provincial town in Northern California, and the dynamics between the white and the Afro-American communities are pretty much discriminatory: black people only appear as "serving" whites (we have The Starlighters themselves playing for an audience that is predominantly white, or we have the cafeteria boy, Goldie Wilson, whom we see cleaning the floor in 1955 and becoming mayor in 1985). At the same time, in the whole of America, rock 'n' roll is taking its very first steps: only in 1954, Elvis Presley has released his first single, which is commonly regarded as the completion of that process of hybridization between Afro-American blues and white country music known indeed as rock 'n' roll. That single bears the blues "That's Alright Mama" as A-side and the country "Blue Moon of Kentucky" as B-side, and—more importantly—they are performed in such a homogeneous way that they really sound as if they belong to the same, new genre, and not to—literally—different cultural universes. Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock", which is usually referred to as the first rock 'n' roll song to be consciously written as rock 'n' roll (unlike, indeed, Elvis's single, which was reusing old songs from other repertoires) also was released in 1954, but it received general attention (and top positions in the charts) only in a re-release dated May 1955. Finally, the real explosion of the RnR fashion occurred in 1956 as all the great acts of the genre (Little Richards, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, the same Chuck Berry and many others) began to dominate the charts and replace other genres in people's musical taste. The consequences of this revolution are countless: for the first time, teenagers became an actual "social class", with their own tastes, their own culture, their own fashion; for the first time, black artists were cool and popular, and often cooler and more popular than whites, setting the bases for racial desegregation; boys and girls started interacting in more disinhibited ways, initiating what later will be known as the sexual revolution; and so on.

Now. The assumption conveyed in *Back to the Future* is that a small town like Hill Valley, in 1955, had not started its own RnR revolution, but was getting ready for it, and that this boy (a teenager!) from a far future serves as catalyst to prepare that community for their immediate future. Marty plays a piece of "mature" RnR, so to speak, a song that was released in 1958 when the genre had already been enjoying its peak of popularity for a couple of years (although, mind you: Chuck Berry wrote "Johnny B. Goode" in 1955, but of course performance, production and post production of the song are all typical of later years). In doing so, he pushes the boundaries of his audience's taste, but—as we can see in the movie—he succeeds in having his little RnR revolution on the spot: the boys and the girls, after initial hesitation start getting into the song and dance in an increasingly audacious way. Marvin Berry runs at the phone to call his cousin Chuck, suggesting that this is the direction his music should take (and, indeed, as we said, "Johnny B. Goode" was actually written in 1955!).

So, is the small town of Hill Valley going to be in the frontline of the American RnR revolution? Well, almost. The problem is that Marty gets carried away a bit too much. While playing his solo he, so to speak, anticipates too much of the future, performing techniques like the "tapping" (whose introduction in rock is commonly attributed to Steve Hackett from Genesis, in 1971) and spectacular acts like kicking the amplifier or playing over the head that were to be seen only in late 1960s, thanks to the likes of Pete Townshend or Jimi Hendrix. To an extent, that solo is a micro history of rock, beginning indeed as a rock and roll solo, then evolving into chronologically successive genres like mod, psychedelia, hard rock and heavy metal. As Marty's playing becomes increasingly dissonant and loud, and his movements more extrovert and theatrical, the audience (and the band!) do not follow him anymore and simply stop to stare at this weirdo crawling on the stage and almost simulating sex with his guitar. As he leaves the stage, Marty delivers to the audience one of the best remembered lines of the movie: "I guess you're not ready for this yet—but your kids're gonna love it!". The sensation, sociomusicologically speaking, is that Marty *prepares the ground* for the RnR revolution in Hill Valley, but it will still take the Elvis phenomenon or releases like "Tutti Frutti" or "Blue Suede Shoes" to make that revolution really happen.

The point, however, is well made: rock 'n' roll may not be the sole reason for the generational gap between a teenager from the mid-1980s and one from the mid-1950s, but it is certainly constructed here as the main factor. The fact that Marty seems to be more self-aware, self-confident and resourceful than his peers from the past do not seem to have a lot to do with more predictable characteristics: not family, for sure, as the beginning of the movie presents his family as literally a bunch of losers; not school, since we are also given the hint that, albeit intelligent, Marty is not madly brilliant or motivated at school. No: Marty seems to be like this mostly due to the fact that he is a kid who has grown up during and *within* the RnR culture.

17. **33–34 ND: A melancholic bit merging into a tense bit**.

We now treat two musical segments in one single body as the two are tied as one, but also because this allows us to underline how music can be extremely effective in turning moods and atmosphere. Marty has just left the stage after his "controversial" performance. He has a chance to say goodbye to his future parents, who by now are a couple in all respects. Lorraine diplomatically labels his rendition of "Johnny B. Goode" as "interesting" (the classic word we use for art that we do not like), but both she and George openly state their gratitude to this strange young man who has managed to turn their lives upside down in just a few days. As the three are parting we hear a soft, tender musical background, as we would expect, but as soon as Marty walks out the exit door, the music turns immediately tense and slightly thrilling. Marty has made an enormous effort to secure a natural course for the future of his family, but this is only half of the job: he now has to physically come back to the future, and after all the vicissitudes and adventures of the last few hours he realizes he is quite late for the appointment with Dr. Brown, who, meanwhile, is preparing the time machine to be hit by the thunder. *Back to the Future* is a movie filled with sudden changes of scenery and action: this is one of those moments—and the music is very effective in dramatically turning a happy/melancholic moment into a "hurry-up" scene.

18. **36 D: "Heaven Is One Step Away" is heard from a portable radio**.

One more travel in time has been performed. We see the car disappearing in a flash in 1955, and the young Dr. Brown celebrating like a footballer who has just scored a goal. The images crossfade into the city hall: did Marty really come back to 1985? It is sounds that tell us. The first that we hear is that of a helicopter, and that feels more like a clue than an assurance: yes, a helicopter flying over civilian areas is a much more frequent occurrence in the 1980s than in the 1950s, but modern helicopters had already been operative since the Second World War, so—albeit unlikely—the possibility that a helicopter is flying over Hill Valley in 1955 is not to be ruled out. What proves without doubt that Marty's return to his age was successful is what we hear right after: a portable transistor radio of a drunken *clochard* who is sleeping on a nearby bench is airing Eric Clapton's "Heaven Is One Step Away". Hardly Clapton's best-known song, what really helps the association between this musical segment and the 1980s is not the familiarity of the tune, but the arrangement and the production—what we usually call "the sound" of a song. Despite being audible through a small portable radio, we hear elements that are unmistakably typical of this decade: the use of a synth, drier acoustics, more compression, etc. Just as "Mr. Sandman" had announced the 1950s, "Heaven Is One Step Away" now declares officially that the protagonist is back in the 1980s.

19. **39 D: "Back in Time" from the alarm-radio**.

At this point of the story, despite Marty's failed attempts to save his scientist friend, we find out that Doc had, after all, read the warning letter and when performing the time travel experiment for the first time he had worn a bulletproof jacket, expecting the terrorists to come. The adventure has ended well and Brown is now ready to embark on what was supposed to happen from the start: *his own* time travelling experience, in the future, this time. It is late night, Marty heads home and the two friends part on Brown's promise that he will take care of his younger friend while in the future. The DeLorean disappears in the sky, headed to 2015, and Marty goes home to sleep.
The morning after we see him sleeping in the very same position I asked you to pay attention to, while describing the musical bit 8 ND: Marty is sleeping with his clothes on, with no blanket, on the side and with his hands behind his back. Everything looks identical and the camera also takes care to frame the shot in exactly the same manner as the other scene. What this Chekhov's rifle is supposed to hint to us is a doubt: the previous time we saw Marty sleeping in that position was right before the incredible adventure he experienced, and now we see him again sleeping: was this all a dream, actually? Did the whole adventure really happen?

Marty is awakened by an alarm radio, playing the other of the two songs that Huey Lewis and The News wrote for the film. This one is called "Back in Time", and curiously was the first track that Lewis submitted to the film producers as a candidate for the main song. The producers were not madly persuaded that "Back in Time" was catchy enough to play such an important role, so they asked Lewis to come up with something else, expecting anyway to use this first submission somewhere in the movie, albeit indeed less prominently. Lewis, as we know, will eventually submit "The Power of Love" and in retrospective we can all agree that the producers were right and this second submission had much more, well, "power" than the first. At any rate, with "The Power of Love" getting the spotlight, "Back in

Time" is still given plenty of attention, being featured in the scene we are now describing and, more importantly, during the end titles of the movie.

The song awakes Marty, shedding—as we said—the suspicion that the whole adventure happened in Marty's dreams (suspicion teased even more by the lyrics of the song: "back in time" indeed!). As we know, however, Marty will get up and find his house and relatives completely changed. The "bunch of losers" that had appeared at the beginning of the movie has now turned into a very successful and good looking family. The house is big and beautifully furnished, his brother wears a suit before going to work (in the beginning of the movie, he was presented as working in a fast food store), his sister is an attractive young woman with many suitors (in the beginning, she was presented as the opposite), and George and Lorraine are a beautiful young-looking couple that is still very much in love (while of course we were given a very depressing picture in the first few minutes of the film).

In the most typical tradition of American mainstream cinema the movie ends thus with what we may call an "extended" happy ending: not only the adventure itself ends positively with Marty's safe return home, but also his interference with the natural course of the events has changed for the better all the circumstances and people surrounding him. As that Tears for Fears song goes, "watching Mother Nature's knees bending, everybody loves a happy ending".

4.2 Image

Just like with sound (and, as we shall see, with language too), most of the information we needed to share concerning the visual aspect of AVCC has been already discussed in the form of general remarks or other more specific sections of this book. In this part, thus, the idea is to present some notions that are quintessential of visuality and that one could hardly apply to anything else.

We have also discussed the particular centrality that visual communication has in the overall context of audiovisuality. No matter how important and how relevant sounds (or language) may be, an AVT will always remain mostly an images affair—also in terms of recognizability. A rather silly but effective verification you can do consists in making two different versions of the same AVT (say, a movie), one without the visual mean (just audio), and the other one without the sound mean (just images). Now ask a few people to tell you what kind of text each version is. It may not be a rule, but you can be sure that the majority of people will still call "a movie" the one with images only, and will probably prefer to call a "radio program" the one with sounds only. Also the jargon we adopt in relation to audiovisuality has much more to do with visual stimuli than with anything else: we say sentences like "to *watch* a movie" or "have you *seen* that program?". A slightly old fashioned way to call a movie is "the pictures" ("I'll take you to the pictures" sang Ian Dury in the 1970s in his song "Funky Disco"). And so forth.

There are two important topics that I would still like to address and that are specific to visuality: the first one is the notion of **landscape**, and the second one is the inevitable **camera work**. Just like soundscape is the totality of sounds featured (audible and not audible) in a given context, landscape is the totality of images (those, too, visible and not visible). The rules of representation are the same as in sounds: with images, too, it is important to offer a "normal", "subtractive" amount of stimuli that will not raise suspicion that something unusual is going on. We have largely seen that when discussing the basic "steps" of AVCC—particularly the notion of "architecture", which has to do with the disposition and the order of items in the time/space at the author's disposal—but perhaps we could say something more specific related to images. In this particular case, the Lithuanian semiologist Algirdas Greimas can be of great help, as he developed an excellent model to interpret the so-called "dimensions" of visual communication. Greimas (1989) distinguished two main dimensions, the topological and the plastic, and each of them in turn featuring two categories (see also the summary in Fig. 4.7):

(1) The **topological dimension** has to do with the arrangement of a given item in the space. In that sense it is divided into the two categories of:
  - **position** (vertical, horizontal, above, below, right, left, high, low, surrounding, enclosed, central, peripheral, etc.)—in practice: where is the item situated?
  - **orientation** (upwards, downwards, forwards, backwards, linear, circular, from, towards, near, far, etc.)—in practice: what direction does the item face or take?

(2) The **plastic dimension** has to do with the appearance of the given item, and it is divided into the two categories of:
  - **eidetics**, that is, the size, the shape and the consistence of the item (curvy, straight, squared, round, edgy, soft, hard, liquid, solid…).
  - **chromatics**, that is, the colors, the contrast and the tones of the item (red, white, green, dark, light, nuanced, transparent, glossy…).

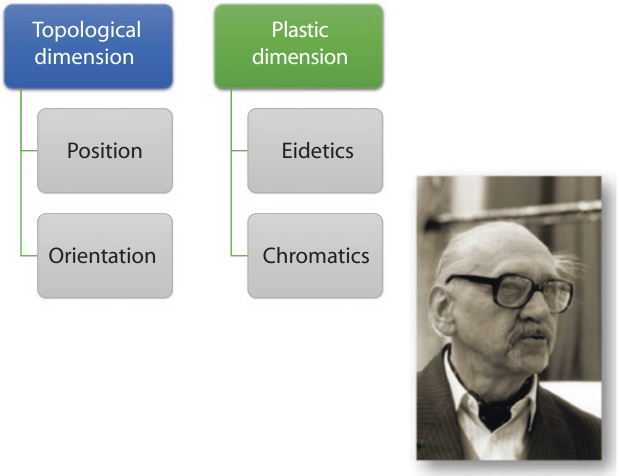


Fig. 4.7 The topological and plastic dimensions of the image, according to Greimas

Now. One of the messages we have tried to convey in this book is that the level of quality, accuracy, effectiveness and—why not?—artistry of an AVT can be measured, at least to some extent, by the degree of care placed in its creation and production. When nearly nothing is left to chance and every single step is designed carefully, we may not always have an absolute masterpiece (for that we also need that extra value we usually call "genius"), but we rarely have a *bad* work of art. Moreover, talking about genius, it is hardly a coincidence that the majority of the greatest AV authors happen (or happened) to be also extremely meticulous, control freak artists: Stanley Kubrick, Luchino Visconti, Alfred Hitchcock, Elia Kazan, Sergio Leone, Andrey Tarkovsky, and dozens of others: they may all have had their own style and their own personality, but one thing they all had in common was the plain obsession for even the most microscopic details.

With that in mind, we should not be surprised that such tiny aspects like the position of one object, its color, its shape and all that we mentioned above, can be (and often are) meaningful sources for an effective AVCC. To illustrate Greimas's model we could take the example of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, which is currently rated as the best movie of all times by the prestigious film studies journal *Sight and Sound*. The movie, released in 1958, tells the story of John "Scottie" Ferguson (the actor James Stewart), a police detective who has to retire due to his acrophobia problem. Scottie is asked by an old college friend, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), to investigate on the odd behavior of his wife Madeleine (the actress Kim Novak, one of the famous "cool blondes" of Hitchcock's filmography). Gavin apparently suspects that Madeleine is possessed by the spirit of her great-grandmother, and now believes her to be a reincarnation. Scottie, a practical and secular man who is hardly ready to believe in such a possibility follows Madeleine and even rescues her from an apparent suicide attempt in the sea of San Francisco Bay. As he gets to know her personally, Scottie falls in love with her, but as his feelings grow, he tragically sees her succeeding in another suicidal attempt, this time jumping from the top of the steeple of an old mission church. Due to his vertigo problem, Scottie is unable to stop her. The trauma of Madeleine's death causes him to suffer a nervous breakdown, and he is hospitalized in a mental institute for a long period. Several months later he meets Judy Barton, a woman who is identical to Madeleine. Scottie gets to know her and, despite her reluctance he tries to remake her into Madeleine's image by getting her to dye her hair and wear the same type of clothes. During this process, Scottie realizes the truth: Judy is not *like* Madeleine—she is the same person. Judy was only playing the part of the real Madeleine Elster, who had been murdered by her husband Gavin. In his complex plan, Gavin hired Judy in order to stage a "new" death for his wife, so that Scottie could become a witness incapable of preventing the suicide (due to his vertigo) and therefore exonerate Gavin from any possible accusation.

The movie, as many of you will know already, ends tragically with a second, this time real, death of Madeleine/Judy.

In a work that mostly enacts several of his personal obsessions and morbidities, Hitchcock decided to pack *Vertigo* with several forms of visual symbolism, both of the topological and plastic type. Acrophobia as such is a disease that concerns those who fear heights, and that is often symbolized (as it is also in this movie) with circular/concentric and spiraled representations. Even in cartoons when we see a character getting dizzy with vertigo, we often see their eyes transformed into two spirals. As the vertigo, in this movie, is also a metaphor of a love obsession, the ideas of dizziness and of falling down (we use the expression "to *fall* in love") is also prominent. In this sense the topological dimension of *Vertigo* is heavily characterized by straight vertical lines on the one hand, and circular lines on the other hand. Both the position and direction categories insist on this. At the level of position we see that most of the time Scottie stands above in comparison to Madeleine. This is not only because he is taller than her (when we see them kissing, for example, it is obvious that, since they are standing, he is above her by a few centimeters), but also, and mostly, because there are various interactions created between the two that emphasize this dynamic: in one sequence, he is *sitting* on the bed, while she is *laying* on it, in another one, he is *standing* while she *sits* by the fire, and so forth. In many cases, that is, he has to *look down* in order to see her face: since he is acrophobic, that can be seen as a metaphor of his dizziness while falling in love with her. At the level of direction, we see several movements from up to down (e.g., all the people who die in this movie, die by falling down from some height), or from down to up (e.g., climbing the staircases of the mission tower), and of course many moments (particularly the most dreamlike ones—a few years after that movie, one would have said "psychedelic") are characterized by spiraled/spinning movements, such as Scottie's nightmare, flashbacks, etc.

When it comes to the plastic dimension, we find even more interesting forms of symbolism. At chromatic level we see that Hitchcock assigned specific colors to all the main characters, and also used such colors as metaphors of the various themes of the movie. The main protagonist, Scottie is represented by the color red: red is some important detail in his clothing, the cherry wood furniture and the door of his apartment; while the object of his desire first, and obsession later, Madeline is represented by the color that stands at the very opposite of red in the color wheel, that is, green. She is dressed in green the first time we see her, she has a green car, and green is also the sea from which Scottie rescues her from her suicide attempt, initiating their relationship. As the two grow closer, we also see the red and green "mixing" in various forms. Consider what happens after Madeline's attempted suicide when Scottie takes her to his red-furnished apartment and wears a green sweater, symbolizing the fact that he is falling in love with her. As she awakens, he also gives her "himself" by handing her a red robe to put on (see ◘ Fig. 4.8).

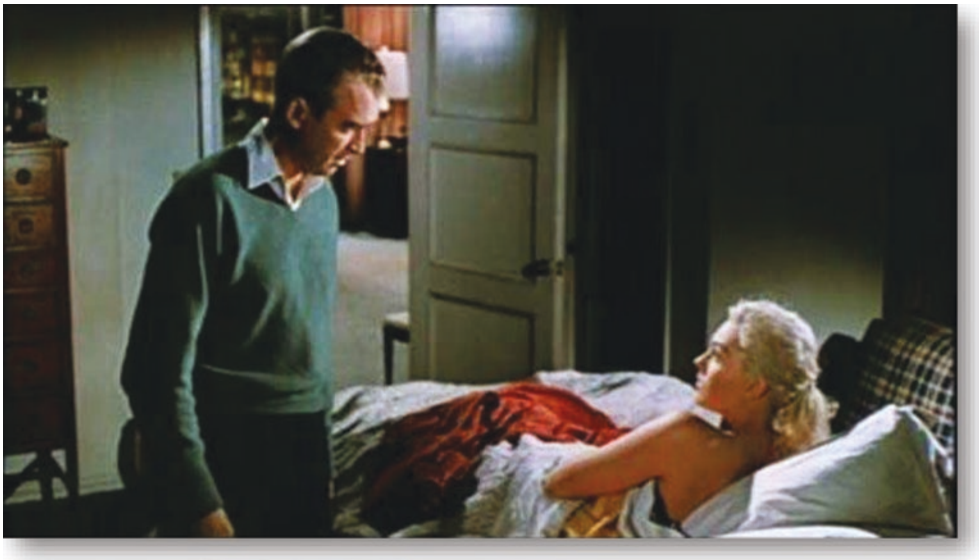


Fig. 4.8 Scottie wears a green sweater (color associated to Madeleine), and Madeleine is given a red robe (color associated to Scottie). The exchange of colors symbolizes the process of falling in love of the two protagonists of *Vertigo*. *[Image of public domain]*

Then there is also Midge Wood, Scottie's ex-girlfriend who is still in love with him: she is associated with yellow, but we also see her wearing red in her hopeless attempt to regain Scottie's sympathies. And finally Gavin, Madeline's husband, is represented by the color gray, which is also meant to symbolize his cold-blooded plan that we will eventually learn about. Additional chromatic symbolism occurs during the famous sequence of Scottie's nightmare, where we see a rather lively and iridescent color palette. But it is still red and green that dominate as metaphors of the two protagonists. The two colors, in combination or separately, appear in various forms anytime Hitchcock needs to relate to the basic themes of the movie: obsession, ill-fated love, fear, confusion, necrophilia.

At eidetic level, there is for example the symbolism of the spiral shape, which of course is connected with the idea itself of the vertigo. There are the famous opening titles with masterful illustrations by Saul Bass, one of the most prominent visual artists of the so-called New York School; there is the bun on Madeleine's hair, there is the pattern of the flowers of the nosegay that Madeleine often sports, there are spiral staircases, and so on: swirly shapes are everywhere in the film. When Madeleine takes her new identity as Judy Barton, there is a sequence where the camera itself swirls around her and Scottie as his mind goes back to his memories of, and obsession for, Madeleine. And spirals, in general, symbolize death and danger, in this movie. Not only are they often associated with the disquieting figure of Madeleine/Judy (the hair, the flowers, etc.), but they also appear in other doomed moments of the movie: there is the policeman who dies trying to save Scottie, and we see him falling to his death with his limbs splayed out in a spiral; and there is of course the spiral staircase at the mission tower, which leads to death both times it is used. As this is a classic *Eros and Thanatos* type of movie (the two Greek words stand for "love" and "death"), the idea of death is here represented *through* Scottie's morbid love for Madeleine, even after her apparent death. And love, well, is often dizzying, scary and confusing like vertigo.

4.2.1 Colors

In fact, since we mentioned the importance of colors, a specific note on the most common connotations of the most common colors is probably useful at this point. Chromatic connotations are really the ABC of fields such as communication studies and psychology, so there is nothing new we are going to mention here. However, it may be perhaps useful to encapsulate some basic notions for both primary colors (more often used in AVCC, in this symbolic sense) and secondary ones (some, like green, employed more often than others):

- **Red**. A primary color, red tends to be associated with passion and drama. It is a color that easily attracts attention, it appears in nature in various significant forms (blood, poisoned fruits…) and it connotes strong emotions like love, violence, and anger. It is also the color commonly employed to convey an idea of danger, courage, strength, sexuality, appetite, power, stimulation, action, aggression, and violence. It is one of the most commonly used colors in AVC for symbolic purposes.
- **Orange** is not a primary color, but the combination of yellow and red. It is less often employed for symbolic purposes, but, when it is, it tends to convey excitement, warmth, extroversion and enthusiasm. For that reason it is not rarely used to connote themes that are stereotypically associated with these feelings: drugs, for example (especially psychedelic ones), but also exuberant sexuality (e.g., transvestitism and homosexuality—always in this stereotypical sense).
- **Yellow**. Another primary color, yellow is also attention grabbing (there are neurological studies that show that, when watching a multicolored object, eyes see yellow first), and it tends to be used to convey optimism, youth, energy, polarity.
- **Pink**. A secondary color produced with a combination of red and white, pink has similar functions as red, but less passionate and more clearly associated with femininity.

As you may already have noticed, AVCC is not necessarily advanced when it comes to emancipations of all sorts. Decades of feminism, LGBT protests, civil rights, and so forth, have not been that successful in reversing long-established stereotypes and common places. There are more open-minded AVTs, of course, which will not necessarily assign "pink" to girls or "blue" to boys (or things like that), but if we talk about "average" texts, we are also talking about "average" audience with an "average" perception of culture and society. For this reason we should not always accuse AVTs of misogyny, homophobia or the likes: sometimes, that is definitely the case, but more often there is just an inclination to follow conventions in order to allow the widest possible outreach of a given piece of information.

- **Brown**. A combination of red and black, brown is close to being a neutral color (like black, white and grey), also in terms of its association. It is the color of the earth and soil, and therefore has something to do with stability, solidity, nature, honesty, simplicity (also in the negative sense of "dullness"). It is, so to speak, the least "urban" of colors, so we often see it associated with the countryside or the wilderness and the people inhabiting it (not by chance it is a very common color worn by cowboys and bandits in Western movies).

These first five colors are considered "warm", both in an emotional and intellectual sense. The next three are considered "cold".

- **Blue**. A primary color, blue is of course the pigment of the sky, the sea, and—again in a stereotypical manner—masculinity. In that sense, recurrent connotations are depth, grandeur, confidence, integrity, responsibility and also, in a more political sense, upper class and conservative attitudes.
- **Green**. A secondary color resulting from a combination of blue and yellow, green is, like brown and in fact even more, strongly associated with nature. In this case, the accent leans more towards life, renewal, peace, ecology, relaxation, prosperity and property (the latter two also in the capitalistic sense: not by chance, in animation particularly, money is often of the color green). On the other hand, a particularly bright/acid green offers totally different connotations, in particular with poison or danger (as we have seen in *Vertigo*) and with other-worldly—usually threatening—contexts (not by chance the lettering of Ridley Scott's *Alien* is in acid green).
- **Violet/Purple**. A combination of red and blue, violet has some important cultural associations with royalty, aristocracy, luxury, religion, spirituality, but also (and by consequence) self-awareness, arrogance and irritability.

Finally, the next three colors are considered "neutral", but as we shall see they are all but "neutral" in terms of their connotations.

- **White**. Sometimes referred to as a non-color, it has on the contrary dozens of important connotations in AVCC: good, peace, tranquility, solarity (particularly in clothes) and cold (particularly in nature: snow and the likes) at the same time, youth, purity, innocence, and sterility.
- **Gray**. A combination of black and white, it is arguably the most "neutral" color of all when it comes to AVCC. It is indeed often employed to convey a general emotional detachment, and to defy attention, rather than seeking

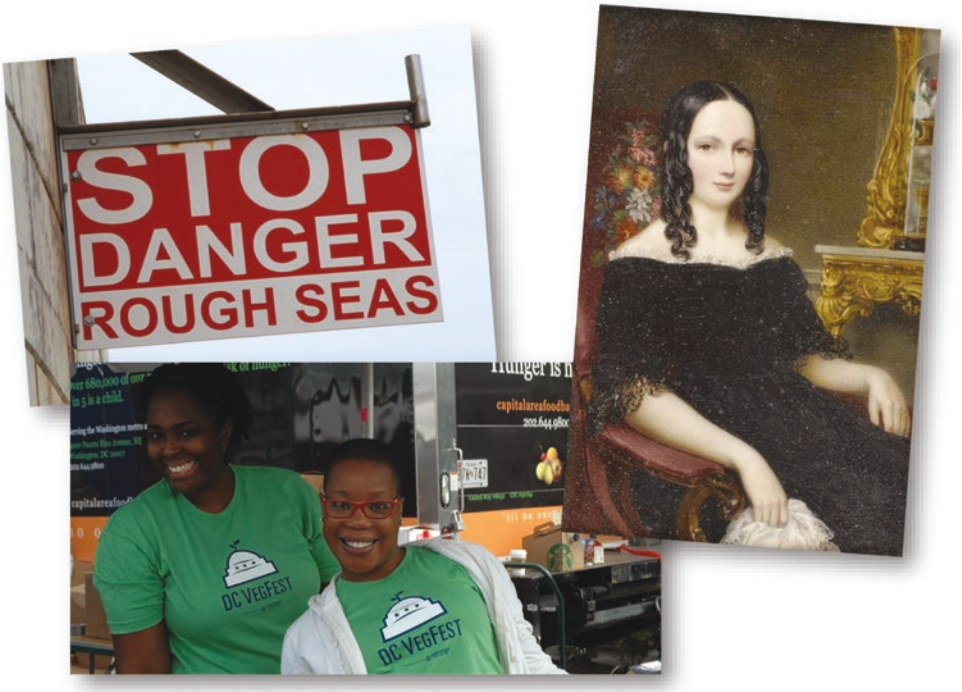


Fig. 4.9 Three typical chromatic connotations: red for danger, green for ecology and black for elegance. *[Fair Use—Images personally assembled and edited for illustrative purposes]*

for it. However, it also may have a more distinctive role when it comes to connoting gloom, depression, and frustration on the one hand, or maturity, senility and also a conservative idea of elegance on the other.

- **Black**. Along with red, black is probably the color with most connotations in the AV realm. To begin with, it is a color that covers and hides, so it applies to an active form of emotional denial, so to speak. It is of course the color of death and evil, but also power and virility (you may have noticed that more and more superheroes are turning from the colorful uniforms of their origins in printed comics to black-oriented ones—see the classic case of Batman); sexuality and eroticism; sophistication, elegance and style; austerity and formality; mystery, fear and anonymity; unhappiness, pessimism and sadness; remorse; wealth; depth.

Also, let us not forget that some cultures have their own connotations associated with colors: for example, in China the color red (unlike what we described) represents luck and prosperity; white may connote marriage in Western cultures and death in Eastern cultures, and so on. So, if we see a given color in an AVT related to a particular country/culture, we may get an indication of the *culture* as such, and not of more familiar connotations.

Summing up this topic, we could say that the golden rule is rather simple: pay attention to everything that appears before your eyes in an AVT: in the ideal world its authors have left nothing to chance. The fact that one particular item is in a particular spot, with a particular shape, oriented or moving towards a particular direction, and sporting a particular color, material or else, may all be actions that were meant for a particular communicative purpose. Those characteristics *tell* us something (▣ Fig. 4.9).

4.2.2 Camera Work

Visual communication also occurs through another important mechanism which addresses not just *what* is being framed in the image, but also *how*. We have already discussed the impossibility of any AVT to be totally realistic, due to the fact that some sort of point of view, what we called a "framing" of the reality represented, is unavoidable. I particularly warned you on the carefully constructed apparent realism of documentaries. Let me tell you a brief story: having researched animal communication and animal sounds during my career, I have often been asked to feature in TV programs about this topic. At the time of writing the last one of such occurrences was a documentary on the human-other animal(s) relationship produced by an Italian channel. A small crew consisting of the director and one cameraperson was sent to Lithuania where I live, to film an interview and a kind of general presentation of how and where I work. The crew could not of course stay for an extensive amount of time, so we decided to compress several of my activities in the two days they stayed in Vilnius. This also meant that, due to my own schedule, they could not necessarily film a sample of all the work I do during a whole week in real time (lectures, writing, reading, meetings, conferences…), so we decided to *stage* some of it—already providing a departure from "reality" as such. For example, I had to ask one of my students to come on purpose at a certain time to "act" an individual seminar, in which I supposedly taught her how to use software for the analysis of animal sounds. Now: while I often do individual seminars and consultations, I have never taught topics such as computer-assisted analysis: I know how to use the software I need, but that is not what I teach. But of course, having a computer monitor showing spectrograms of animal sounds looked more cinematic in that "hi-tech" kind of way than a situation where I would do my regular job as a humanist, that is, teaching *theories* about animal sounds analysis, and simply using software to demonstrate how such theories work.

Then, I was asked to show how I research animal sounds. I do not have a single method, but generally the one I mostly employ first involves some reading of existing research, and then I go in search of the type of sounds that research talks about. I sit down at my desk, I put on my headphones and listen to those sounds from my laptop. Unfortunately, that, too, was not film-sexy enough for the director, who instead asked me to do something I have never done in my life: would I place some speakers in a large empty room, launch the sounds, wander about the room in large circles, acting thoughtful (including some gentle scratching of my chin), and also occasionally stop, as if I had an epiphany, run towards the sound equipment, stop and rewind the last few seconds of that sample to hear it one more time and confirm the great revelation I just had?

My goodness! Never mind how clumsy I felt during the whole process (and I felt *very* clumsy), what is amazing is that this would be an absolutely improper way to conduct research on sounds. You need headphones to begin with, to make sure that you hear the tiniest of sounds, and you certainly do not want a large empty room that adds a lot of reverb to your sample, falsifying its acoustics. You also do not want to walk around, constantly changing the point of reception and interfering with the sample with the sound of your steps. And, as far as great revelations go, I can also assure you that they hardly happen in this sudden, divinely inspired, way. Preparation and hard work are much more common procedures: usually, the revelation is already expected at a particular point. Thomas Edison's rule still applies here: "Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration". Unfortunately, perspiration is less videogenic than inspiration.

So much for my own experience. However, you could say, in a classic wildlife documentary you cannot really ask an eagle to "act" preying upon a rabbit in a particularly spectacular way—and, more than that, you cannot ask the rabbit "Would you mind getting killed for this documentary?": you must film reality as it is, must you not? Certainly the moment of preying is real and filmed faithfully, just as many things in the documentary I was featured in were absolutely real and filmed faithfully (the scenes at my desk were indeed featuring *my* desk, *my* computer; that student was indeed a *real* student in my courses, etc.). However, that makes up for very few seconds, and usually a sequence like that is supposed to be in the spotlight for several minutes, in that documentary: the supposed "realism" of the sequence is in reality prepared in accordance to classic rules of narration and drama. One needs anticipation, suspense, pathos, tension, release, conflict, resolution… The crew has been lucky enough to film the capture and the kill, but there are several moments—before and after that—that must still be shown to the spectators. We usually need a long shot of the innocent rabbit leaping on the wide prairie, unaware of their imminent tragic destiny; we need a close-up of the eagle spotting them; we need a pan shot of the flight to approach the rabbit; we need a full shot of the rabbit lifting their head as if they had a premonition, and so on and so forth. Plenty of moments that cannot be filmed in one single session (not to mention that several of such moments do not necessarily happen: the rabbit may not notice that the eagle is approaching, also they may have no time to run at all…). To solve this problem, thus, the documentary will show us a perfectly-manufactured montage of separately filmed scenes from different moments that, put together, build a credible narrative of the hunt: the rabbit leaping in the prairie may have been filmed on another occasion (maybe it was not even the same rabbit); the close-up on the eagle, placed right after the rabbit, may indicate that the eagle has spotted the prey, but it may just be a shot taken in a different moment, with the eagle simply looking around with no specific target; the shot of the rabbit lifting their head may have been caused by a completely different stimulus (including one artificially provoked by the crew), and so on. Not to mention that also the parts that faithfully captured what really happened get their own share of dramatization and spectacularization (typically: the moment of the catch depicted in slow motion, some thriller-like musical soundtrack…). The result is impeccable and very "realistic", but—as we can see—it is not even close to reality. We have already discussed the "fictionalization of reality" in ► Sect. 1.1.1, but a specific discussion on nature documentaries, if you are interested, can be found in Armbruster 1998.

Hopefully, all of these examples show how the *what is being filmed/shown* issue is not more important than the *how it is filmed/shown* one, and that the latter is an equally crucial communicative engine. As you may have guessed from the way I have just discussed the wildlife documentary case, the primary source for this second type of engine is so-called **camera work** (also spelled "camerawork"), which stands for the totality of actions taken, and techniques/skills employed by the filming crew with their cameras, or how these actions are reproduced or recreated in a digital environment. The camera is of course an "eye" in all respects, because it determines the many points of view that an author wants us to have, while observing the AVT. Some of these points of view have a subjective nature, and those are the diegetic ones, where the camera is placed in ways that represent the perspective of a character, or even an inanimate object. Some others have an objective quality, and those are the non diegetic ones taken in ways that represent a perspective that is outside the story, such as a great height. Just like soundtracks do, camerawork, too, aims at conveying a varying degree of information including ambiguous information, and to affect both our perception and our interpretation of events.

There are literally hundreds of different shots that a camera is able to film, or a software able to recreate: some depend on the position of the camera operators, some on their movements, some are operated mechanically, etc. It is unrealistic to think that we can list, and provide examples for, all of them, so we shall focus on the ones that are more frequently employed, and also on some that are less recurrent, but definitely made the history of this particular job. Having said that, however, there is a certain conventional perception of what proper shots are, and it tends to identify exactly those shots we shall talk about here. While all kinds of variations are possible, there is a "common sense" that qualifies more unusual shots as mostly imperfect or unprofessional (or, to turn the concept positively, experimental).

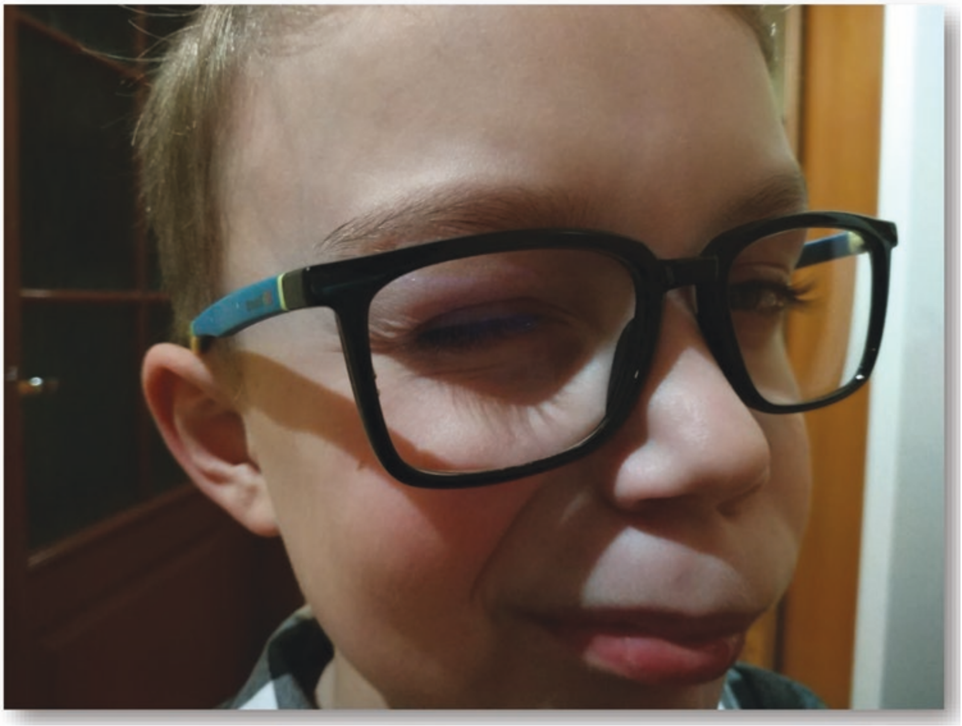
Usually, shots are divided in six qualitatively different categories, which exactly depend on the ways cameras are operated:

By size;
By angle;
By movement;
By equipment;
By focus;
By framing.

Filming **by size** refers to the amount and detail of information we decide to capture in each shot. Please, note that amount and detail are two inversely proportional categories: the more the amount, the less the detail, and vice versa. When we see a subject from several meters afar we have a greater amount of information, because we can see its full body and plenty of the surrounding environment, but of course we miss the tiny details of that body and that environment: is the subject smiling? Are the eyes closed? What kind of fabric is that shirt made of? Are they standing by an iron fence or a wooden one? Is that flying spot a bird? And what bird? Then, on the opposite edge, if we get close enough to their face so that nothing else is visible, we have the advantage of catching any minuscule feature of that face (the shape of the nose, the color of the eyes, the tiniest mole…), without, however, having any glimpse on what surrounds the subject. The size of a shot, thus, varies from the widest possible (and visible) satellite view to the smallest microscopic one, with all that lies in the middle.

The most common shots concern the filming of a single item (typically, a human body) or of a whole (usually outdoor) environment. From the closest to the widest shot we should mention at least:

1. **Extreme close up**: this is the closest reasonable distance that the camera can take from a subject, and more or



◘ **Fig. 4.10** Extreme close up

less corresponds to the shortest distance we may take from an object before our sight becomes unable to focus—that is, very few centimeters. That is more or less equivalent to seeing about 5–15 cm (from up to down) of any given item. It is normally used to emphasize a specific feature of the subject/object. Iconic are the extreme close ups that Sergio Leone made of his characters' eyes during showdowns in movies like *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. That kind of solution proved to be so powerful that it actually became a quintessential shot for westerns, or in fact for any genre that would include a duel or a challenge between two persons (◘ Fig. 4.10).

2. **Close up**: this is a very close shot that, in the case of a human body is able to capture a full face, sometimes a bit less than that, but usually nothing more. Close ups are the shots usually designated to portray the emotional/mental state of a character. You may remember the scary close up of Jack Nicholson's face in *The Shining* as he breaks through the door trying to kill his wife (◘ Fig. 4.11).
3. **Medium close up**: it usually covers ca. 50 cm of height, and in the case of the human body it portrays face and chest, like a typical "bust" sculpture. Exactly the reference to this particular sculpture, which is normally a very formal, "official" one, gives you the idea that MCUs are often used to focus on a subject in an emotionally less involved way, as compared to CUs. You may notice that very often when two characters are filmed in conversation, the MCUs will be frequently used when the conversation is more formal, or job-related, or cynical, or anyway expressing a certain distance between the two subjects, while CUs will come into the scene if the topics become more intimate or heartfelt. Not by chance, MCU is also frequently used on TV for the hosts of a news program (◘ Fig. 4.12).
4. **Medium Shot**: it portrays the subject from the waist up, so that we do not only see them but also a decent part of the surrounding. For this reason it is a very "institutional" shot, often employed to present/announce a whole text. If you open your Netflix page and browse through the titles at your disposal, you will notice that many movies and many series are displayed with a medium shot of the protagonist/s, with a bit of context visible: *Mad Men*, *Sex and the City*, *Double Jeopardy*, *Very British Problems*, *Lost in Translation*, *The Crown*, and dozens of others (◘ Fig. 4.13).
5. **Medium wide shot**: it portrays the subject from the knees up. Commonly known as "Cowboy shot" or "American shot" (from the French "Plan Américain"), it has these nicknames after French film scholars noticed that the shot was widely employed in American western movies (particularly the cheap ones), the reason being that it allows us to see both the face of the character and the bullet belt with the guns, giving us all the essential information we need. Exactly due to this "neat", informative nature, the medium wide shot was not considered a particularly artistic shot, but in time directors such as Howard Hawks (not by chance, a master of western movies) legitimized its use, making it a "classic" (◘ Fig. 4.14).
6. **Wide shot or Full shot**: it portrays the full body and it aims at showing us the basic appearance of a character, especially if physical features need to be emphasized

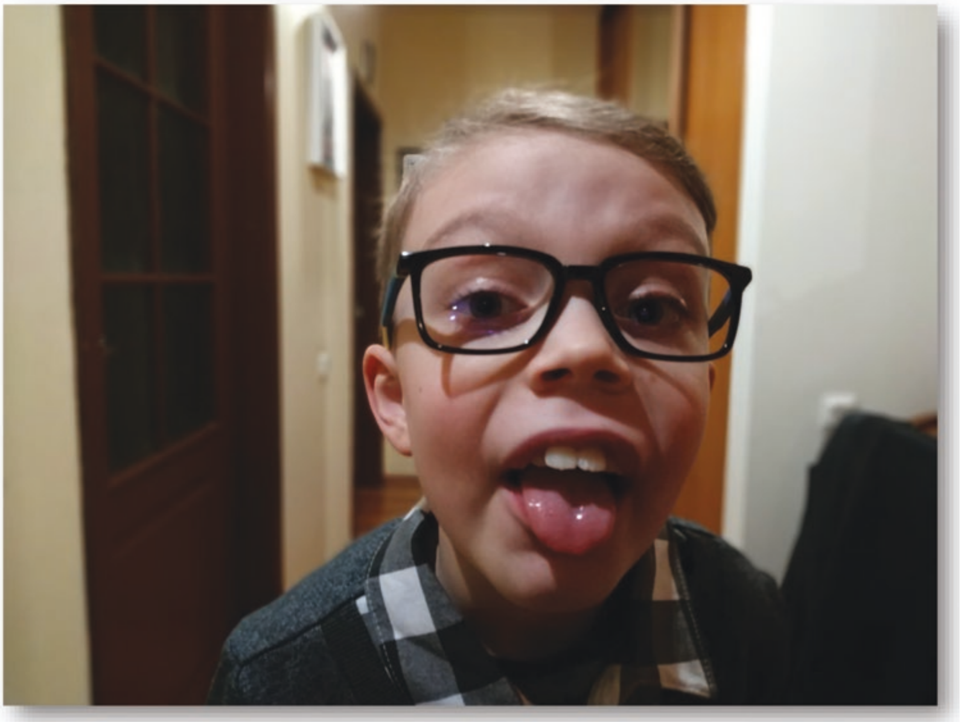


Fig. 4.11 Close up

(which is why we often see it employed in action and superhero movies). It is also important to underline movement, either walking or running: you may remember the famous shot from *The Magnificent Seven* where the seven gunmen are lined up walking, or several battle scenes where we see an army attacking (think about the likes of *Braveheart*) (Fig. 4.15).

7. **Long shot** or **Extreme wide shot**: this shot marks a switch of attention from the subject to the surroundings. The subject is still visible and we still get information about them, but now the point is *where* they are situated and how they relate to that. The long shot is mostly used to represent relatively small spaces, like urban ones, or even a house. For wider spaces (such as landscapes), we have the next shots in this list (Fig. 4.16).
8. **Extreme long shot**: in this case the subject is extremely small, because now the point is to show the vastness of the surrounding environment, which is usually a wide open space, like a mountain landscape, a waste land and the likes. Besides the information about the context as such, both long shot and extreme long shots may convey opposite feelings of freedom and liberation on the one hand, but also loneliness and desolation on the other. A particular case of extreme long shot is the so-called **establishing shot**, which tends to be a standard beginning for AVTs when there is a need to introduce a context. When we see one of those Hollywood lawyer movies we get the usual setting of a big American city, with typically urban premises and places (offices, courts, restaurants…): basically we could be anywhere in the States—New York, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco… it is the establishing shot, usually placed when the headtitles are still running that gives us a clue as to where specifically the action is set: "Oh, that's the Empire State Building—ok, we are in New York", or "Oh, that's the Golden Gate Bridge—we are in San Francisco", and so forth (Fig. 4.17).

If filming **by size** basically has to do with the distance between the camera and the item it is capturing, filming **by angle** refers to the position of the camera in relation to the item (up, down, on the side, in front…). Camera angles can be **horizontal** or **vertical**, depending of course on whether the camera explores different points of view by moving horizontally or vertically.

The main horizontal angles are:

1. **Frontal**: it gives the most clarity about the subject (especially if human), but it tends to flatten its tridimensionality and that of the surrounding environment (Fig. 4.18).
2. **Three-quarter front**: almost as informative as the frontal, this angle shows more depth and volumes than the frontal (Fig. 4.19).
3. **Profile**: it again reduces the tridimensionality, but it can have a great effect in situations of mystery and ambiguity (not by chance the trademark image of Alfred Hitchcock was a profile), and of course it works very well when including two subjects interacting (especially in an affectionate manner) (Fig. 4.20).
4. **Three-quarter rear**: less informative, and therefore even more useful in texts that require ambiguity, tension or else, 3/4 rears are often used in interactions between two subjects (especially when the particular subject is

Fig. 4.12 Medium close up

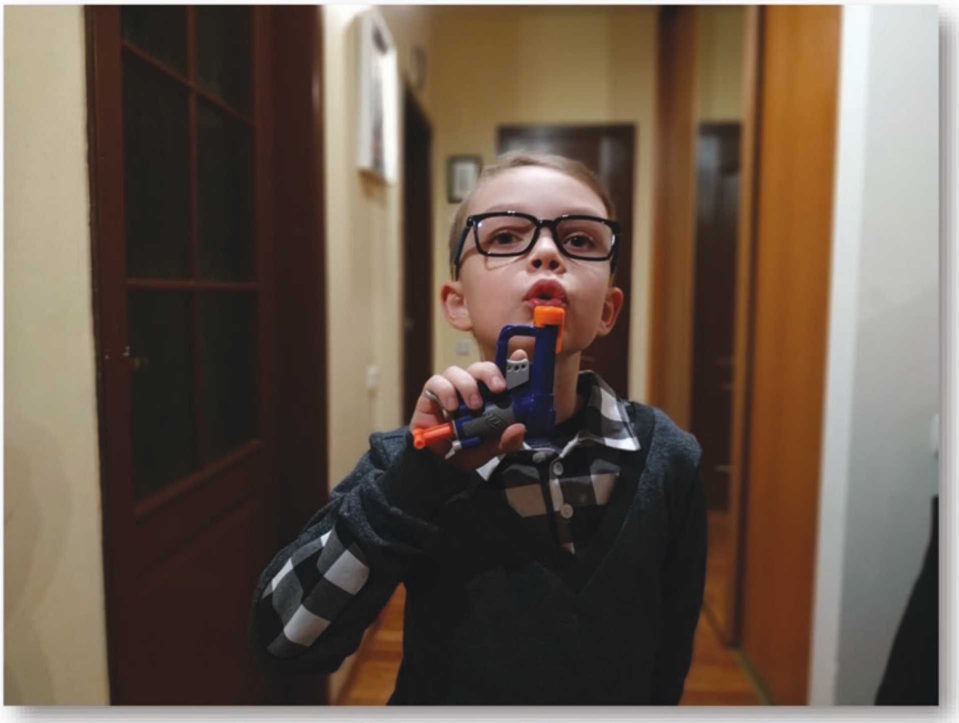
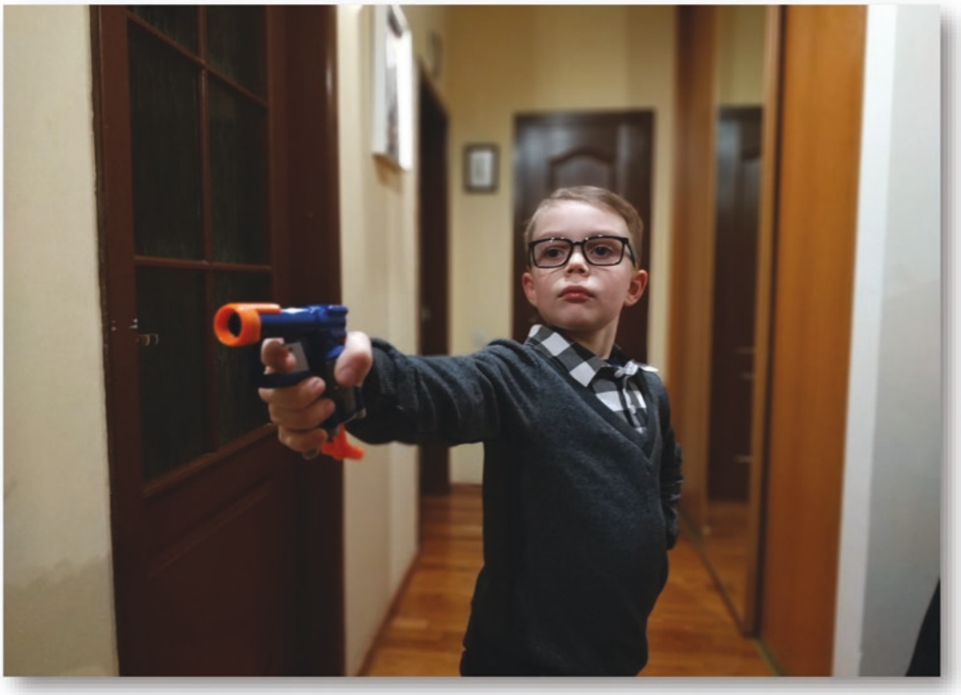


Fig. 4.13 Medium shot



listening, but not only) and in situations of movement, to underline the destination of the subject, more than the subject themself (Fig. 4.21).

5. **Rear**: it is of course the angle that conceals the most and must be used when one deliberately wants to conceal: typical is the situation of surprise, when the subject is first shot in R, and then turns revealing themself in F. Sometimes we also see a rear in the interaction of two people—again, mostly to show who is listening, or to emphasize a difference in size/height (Fig. 4.22).
6. **Eye level angle**: It is the most commonly used. If the subject is at eye level it means they are being seen in a neutral way (neither superior nor inferior). This shot is also closer to how we see people in real life. Not by chance an eye level angle is the angle most often used for the so-called POV (which we shall see later on), the

Fig. 4.14 Medium wide shot

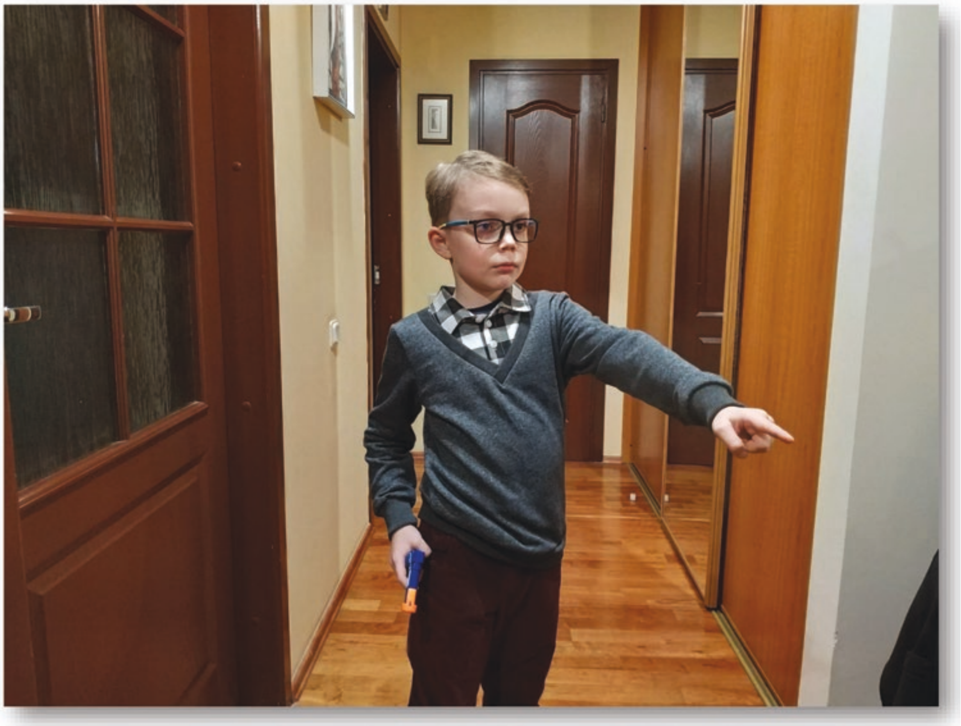
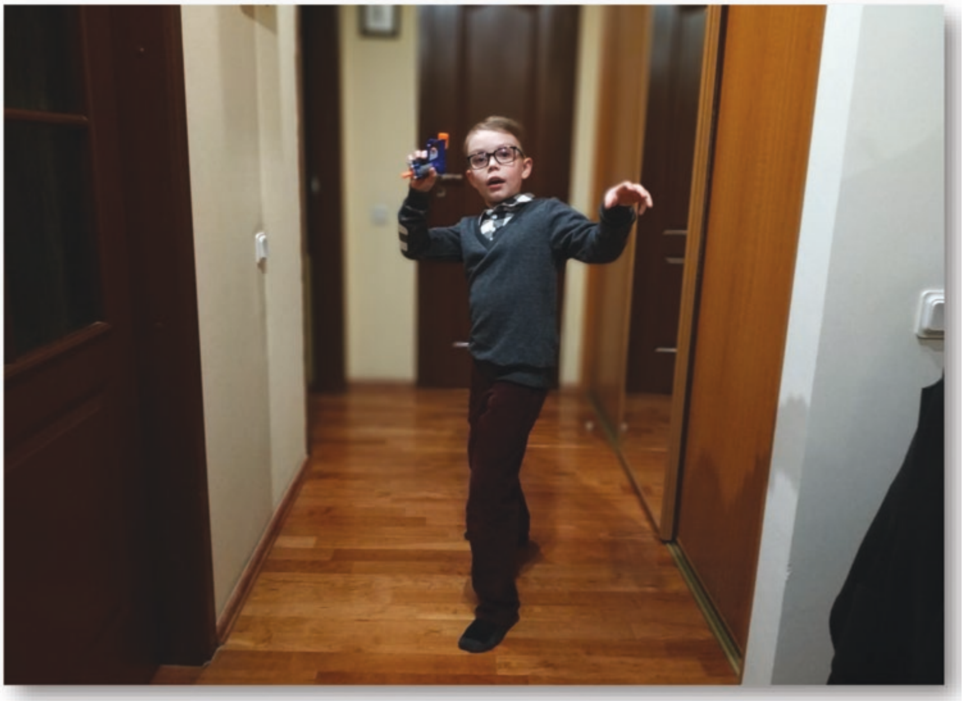


Fig. 4.15 Wide shot



"Point of view" diegetic shot, that aims at showing what a character *inside* the story sees. The camera may also keep a straight look, but not at "eye" level: **shoulder level**, **hip level**, **knee level** and **ground level** angles are also possible and often used. These usually emphasize specific features that occur in that particular area of a subject or item (think of the knee level or the ground level of soldiers marching) (Fig. 4.23).

7. **Low angle**: here, the camera is placed below eye level, looking upward. This often emphasizes power dynamics between subjects: the subject looks bigger, stronger, nobler, taller… Used as a POV, it shows that one character is looking up to another, either out of fear/intimidation, or in admiration/esteem (Fig. 4.24).
8. **Dutch angle**: it is a particular case of low angle, with the camera capturing the image from a low, but also slanted

Fig. 4.16 Long shot

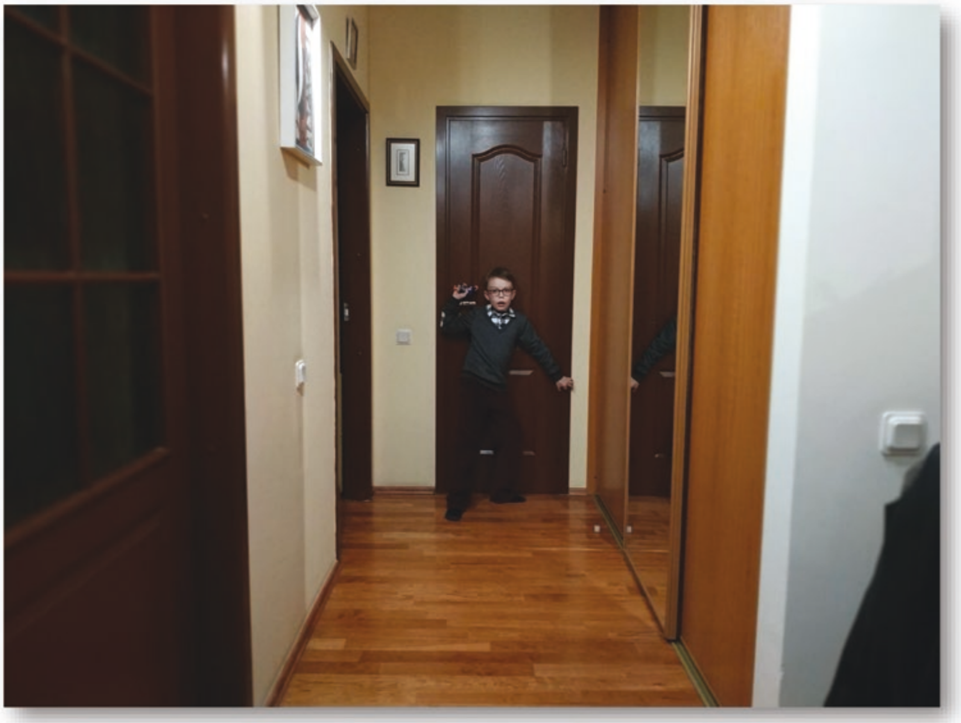
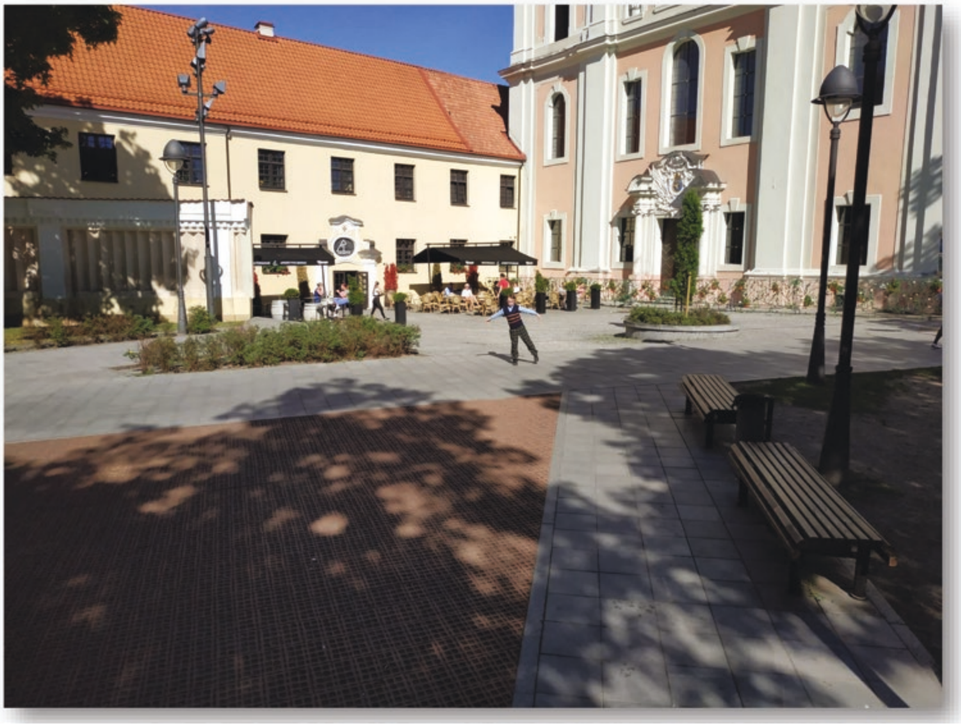


Fig. 4.17 Extreme long shot



position in order to produce a distorted, and often disquieting, perspective. It is typical of genres like thrillers, horrors and sci-fi and we often find it in music videos as well. A curiosity: the reason why it is called "Dutch" has paradoxically nothing to do with the Netherlands, but with Germany! Seeing that this particular shot was widely used in German Expressionist cinema (which indeed abounded in horrors), American film scholars wanted to call it something like "German angle", by using the original German word for "Germany" ("Deutsch"). However, somewhere in the process the word became mangled with "Dutch", creating the current name (Fig. 4.25).

Fig. 4.18 Frontal

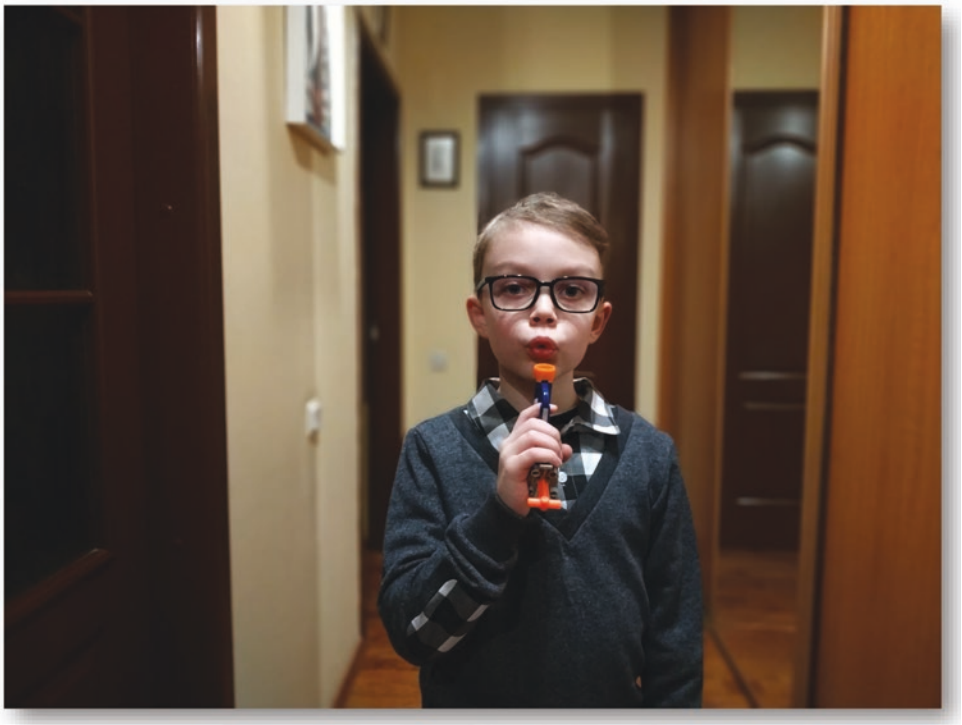
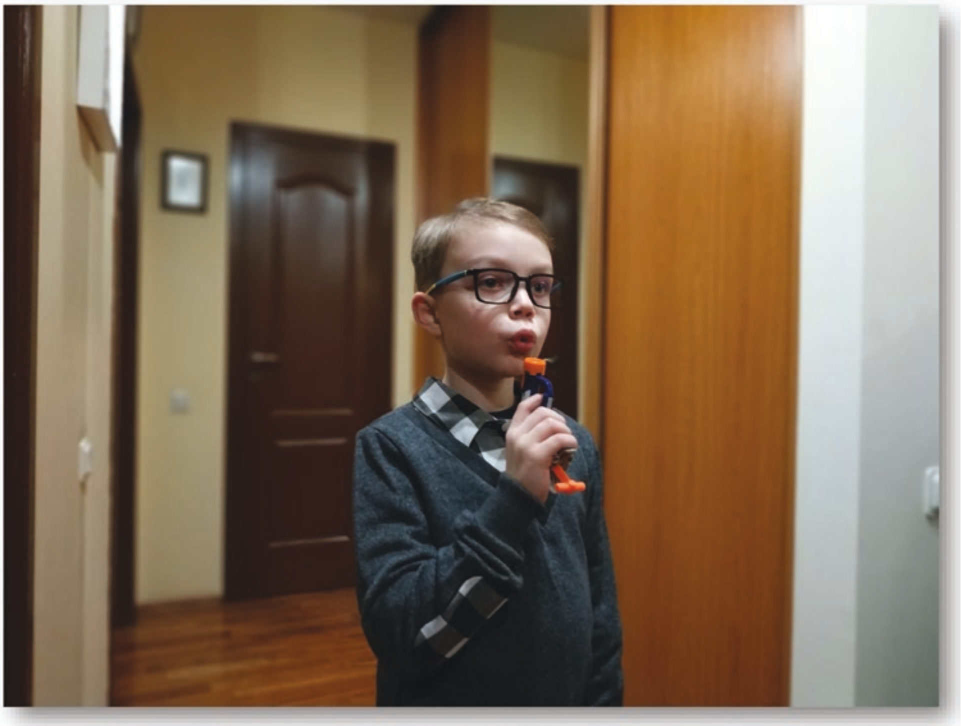


Fig. 4.19 Three-quarter front



9. **High angle**: the camera is placed above eye level, looking downward. It is the exact opposite of the low angle, as it makes a character look smaller, younger, weaker, more intimidated, or more childlike (Fig. 4.26).
10. **Birds eye**: the camera is placed way up higher than the subject, as if, indeed, a bird was looking down on them, and of course catching a good amount of the surrounding scenery in the process. This can contribute to various meanings: magnitude, movement, loneliness, liberation, but also death, fatality and destiny (think about the way the death of Leonidas in ***300***, or of Achilles in *Troy* are seen from above in the final sequences of these movies) (Fig. 4.27).

Fig. 4.20 Profile

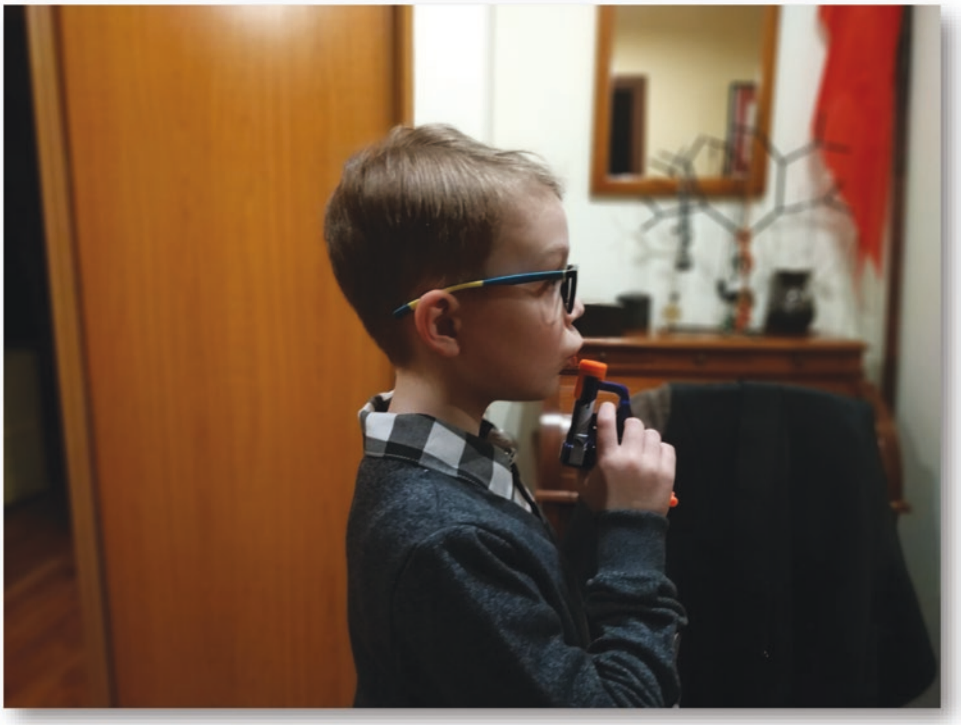
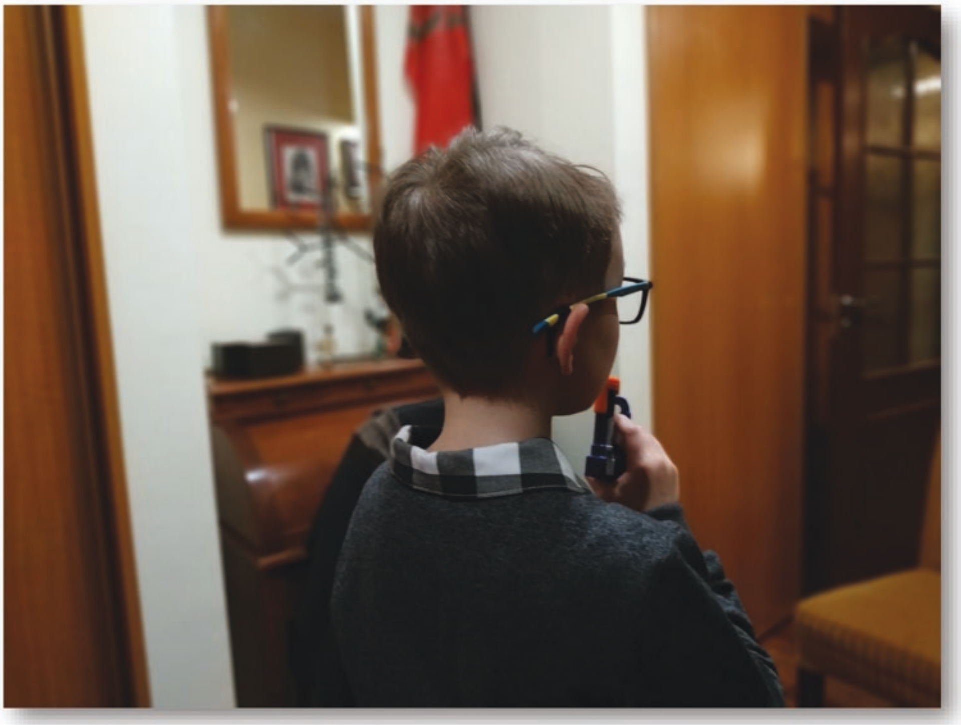


Fig. 4.21 Three-quarter rear



What is very important to underline in both the categories we have discussed so far, is that the camera is not always static, and often transits from one shot to another. A high angle may progressively become a bird's eye, which may progressively turn into an aerial shot, or vice versa—and so forth, with basically any shot available. This is why we also need to account for filming **by movement**, where cameras are not just concentrating on a single perspective. The main movements are:

1. **Zooming in** and **zooming out**: quite simply, the camera either *approaches* the subject (zoom-in) or *withdraws* from them (zoom-out). A zoom-in usually produces a progressive or sudden emphasis on a character, feature or object. A zoom-out usually reveals the context

Fig. 4.22 Rear

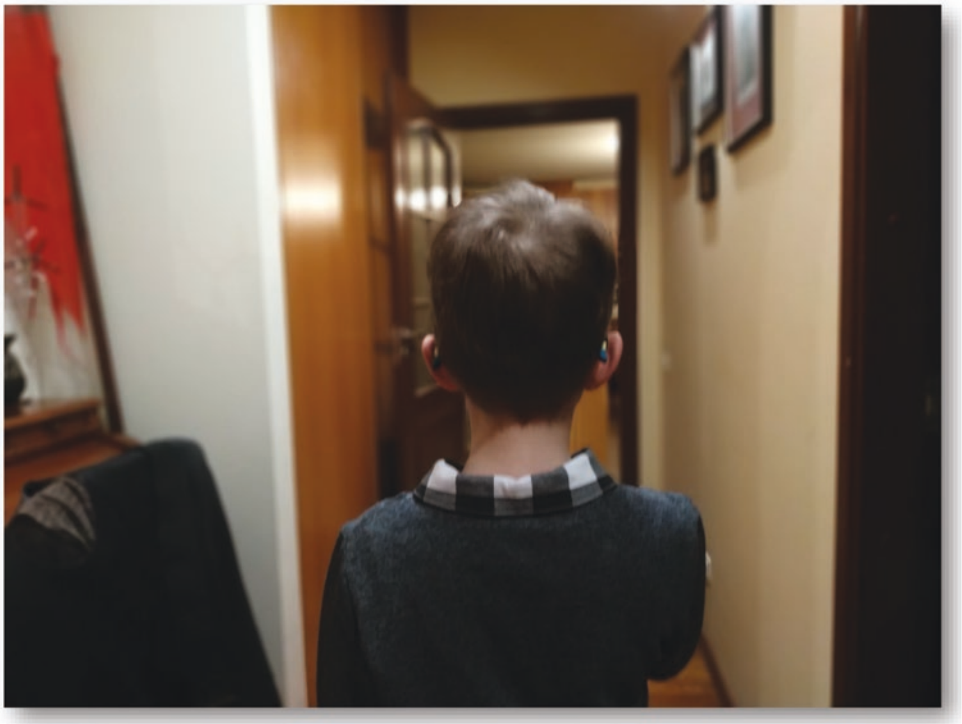
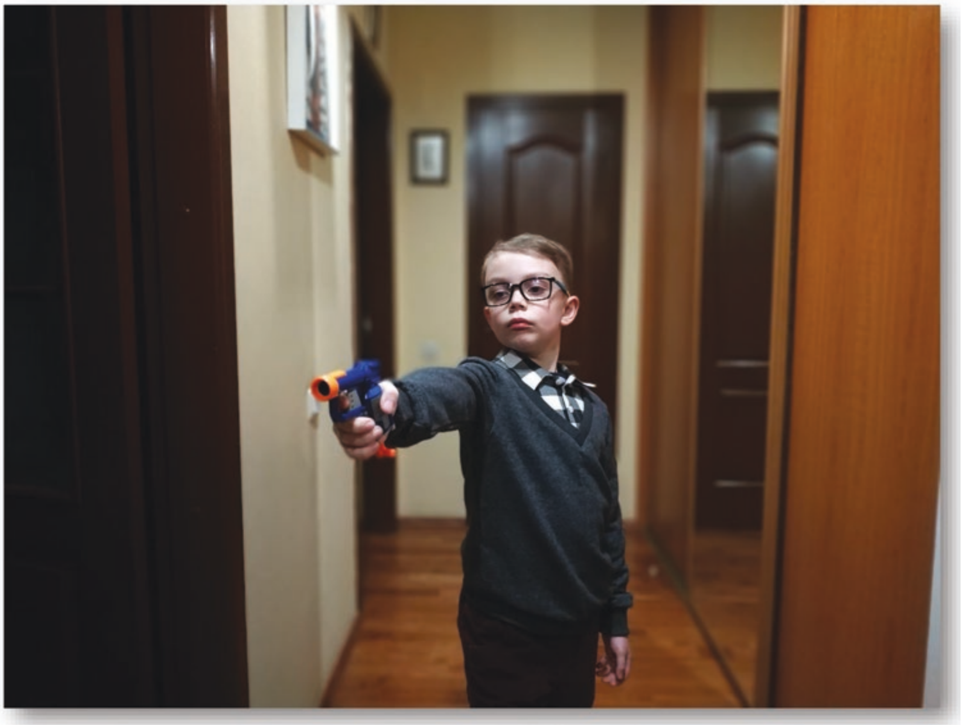


Fig. 4.23 Eye level angle



and/or the subject's relation to it. A great example of zooming in and out in the same text is the music video that Chris Cunningham shot for Madonna's "Love don't live here anymore": a very simple, yet effective revelation of the character's loneliness (we see Madonna alone in a big hall), with a progressive emphasis on her sadness and desperation (zoom-in), then again on loneliness and isolation (zoom-out). A particular, mixed use of zooming occurs in the abovementioned Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, and became known as the "**Vertigo shot**", or "**Dolly zoom**". It is the way Hitchcock represents Scottie's acrophobia at the beginning of the movie, and later when he is climbing the spiral staircase of the mission tower: when he looks down, we see

Fig. 4.24 Low angle

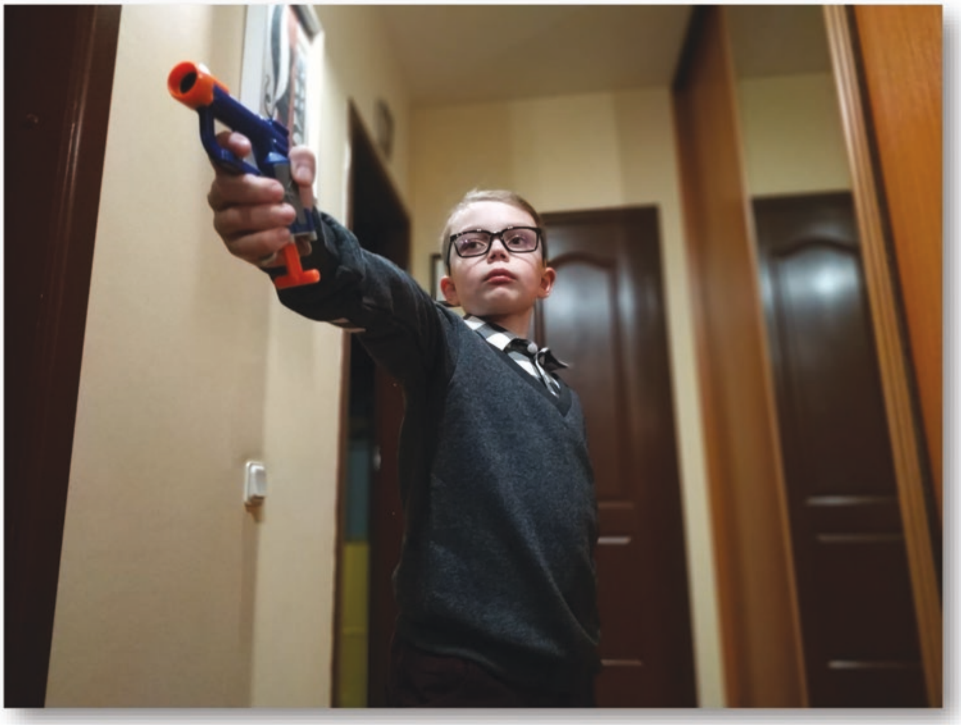
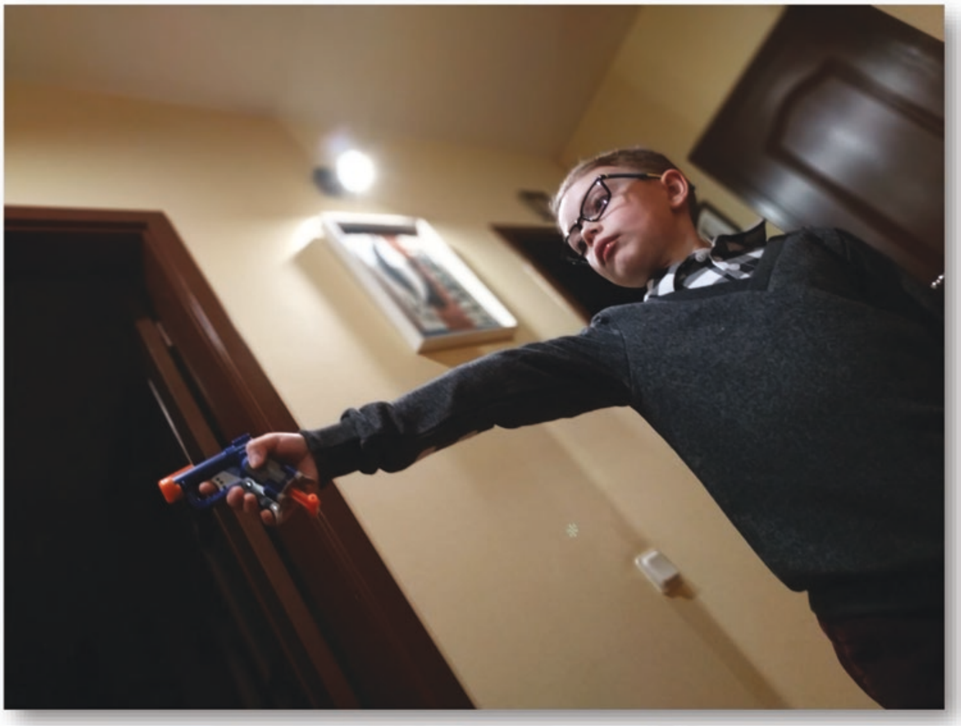


Fig. 4.25 Dutch angle



a sort of distortion of the view, almost like the view is getting bigger and smaller at the same time. To create that effect Hitchcock pioneered a new camera technique: he filmed the object (e.g., the tower's ground, as seen from the top of the staircase), by pulling the camera away from it while zooming in at the same rate. This creates a sense of confusion, mixing distance and closeness to an effect that was historic in terms of the camerawork (Fig. 4.28).

2. **Panning** and **Tilt shot**: in this case, the camera moves horizontally (panning) or vertically (tilt shot) to either reveal something that was initially off-screen or to follow a movement. Sometimes, especially in the case of panning, the movement can circumscribe a complete

Fig. 4.26 High angle

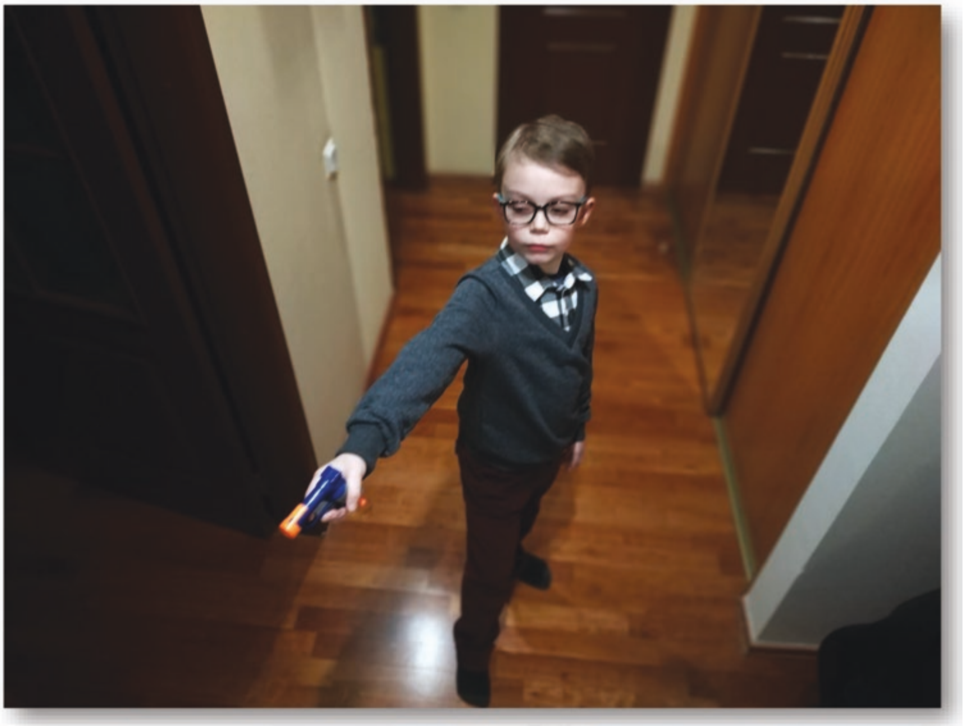
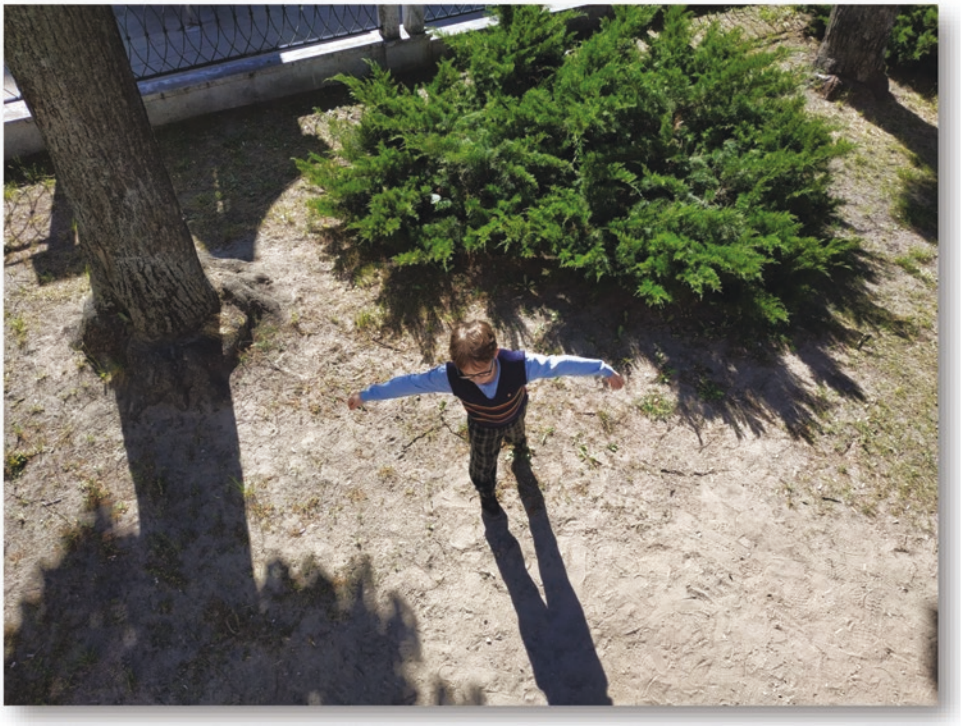


Fig. 4.27 Bird eye



circular turn and offer a full view of a given environment from each possible angle: in this case one speaks about **Arc shot**. Previously, we mentioned a great music video director such as Chris Cunningham, and we can now mention another excellent one, Michel Gondry, who is fond of pannings (including fully circular arc shots), because he likes to fill his videos with things and events to unfold and discover little by little: check Kylie Minogue's "Come into my world", Radiohead's "Knives out" and many others.

If you perform these camera movements very fast, in such a way that generates a motion blur, and you only see clearly the point of departure and the point of arrival of your shot

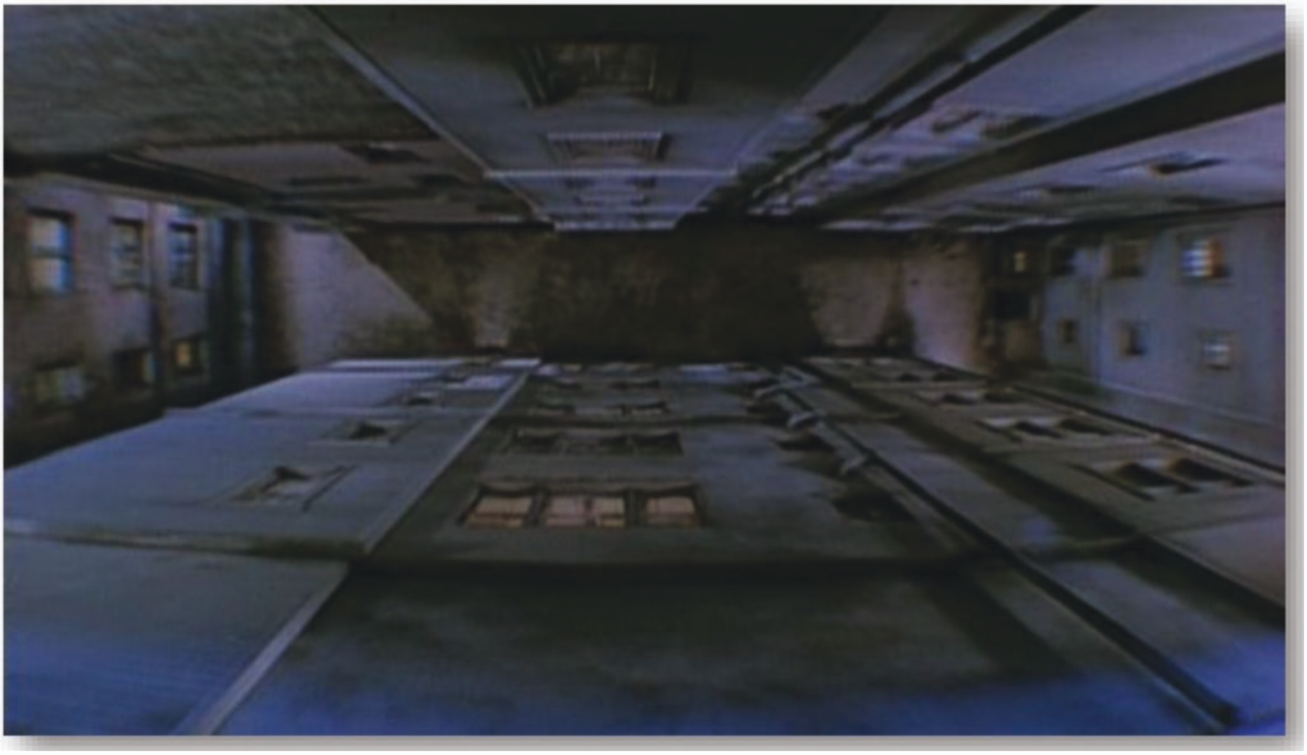


Fig. 4.28 A still from the first "Vertigo shot" in *Vertigo*, at the beginning of the movie. *[Image of public domain]*

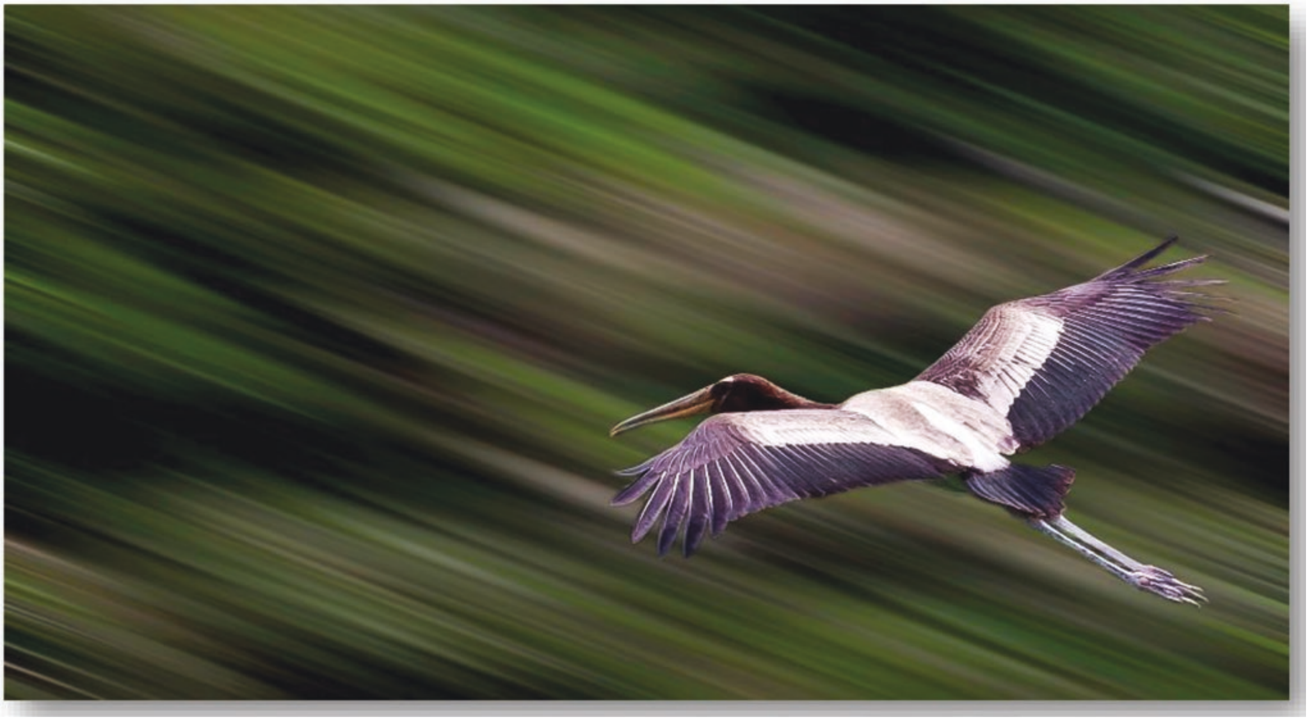
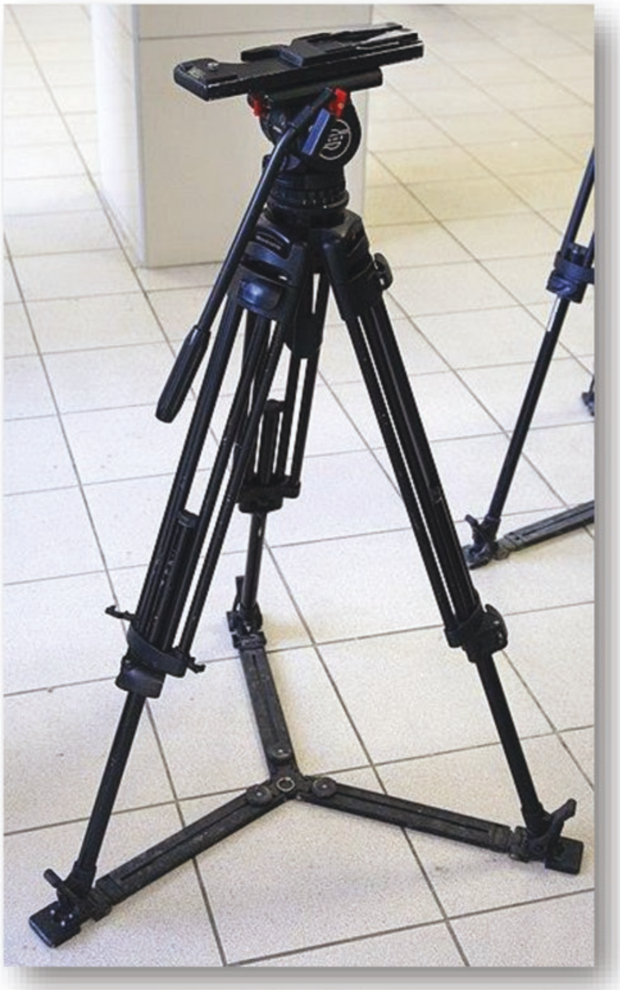


Fig. 4.29 A typical effect generated by the panning shot: the moving subject (a bird in this case) looks well on focus, while the surrounding environment appears blurred. *[Photo by Rajaraman Sanjeevi, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

while the transition is not intelligible, you have made a so-called **Swish pan** or **Swish tilt**. The director Paul Thomas Anderson is particularly fond of this technique (Fig. 4.29).

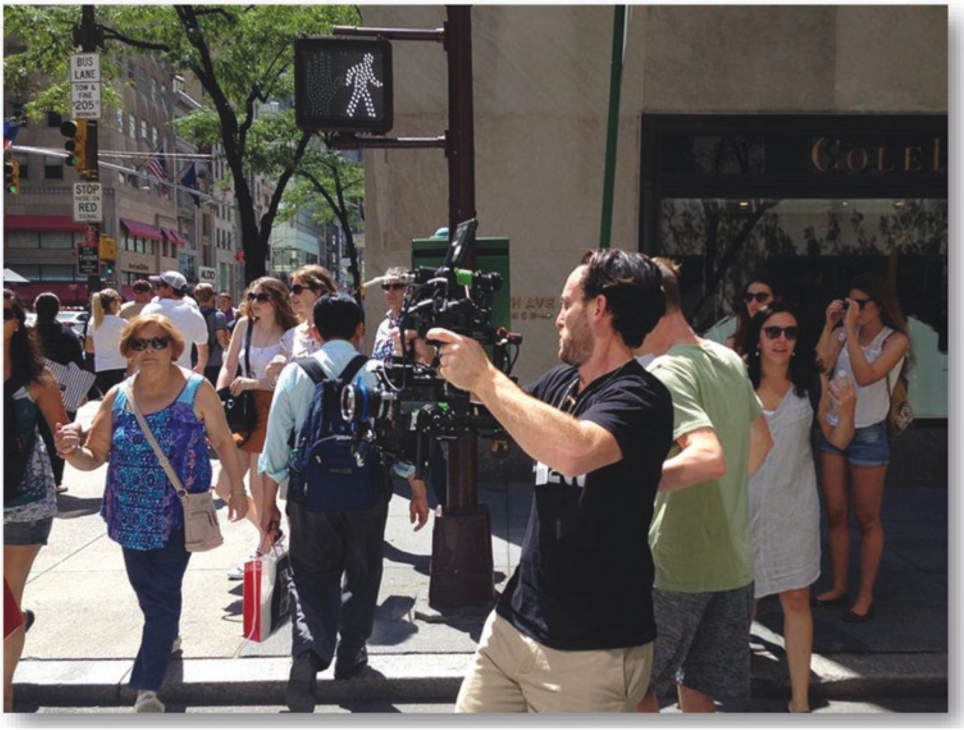
There are other important camera movements, but they require additional tools than just a camera, and this particular characteristic deserves a separate category, which



◘ **Fig. 4.30** A tripod. *[Photo by Runner1616, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

we shall call "filming **by equipment**". Whenever we make a video of a party, as amateur filmmakers, our kids, our pets or else, are in the great majority of cases simply holding our camera (usually a smartphone) in our hands or, more and more often these days, on a selfie stick. Occasionally, some of us may even go as far as to use a small tripod, but that is already a rare occurrence. This is it, more or less. Yet, professional filming makes use of other devices as well, and each device (or lack thereof) relates to some specific way of filming that conveys specific meanings. Here are the main equipment-related shots:

1. **Tripod shot**: the most common equipment used for filming is a camera standing on a tripod. This combination occurs much more often than a simple handheld camera, which in professional environments is employed less often than in amateur ones. The employment of the tripod, needless to say, allows neater and smoother movements in the camera, and firmer static positions (◘ Fig. 4.30).
2. **Handheld shot**: what is the most common way of operating the camera for amateurs is, in professional AVTs, a solution adopted only for specific purposes. Filming with a handheld camera produces unstable and shaky images, and that, in normal conditions, is not very welcome. However, there are situations that require exactly a shaky, irregular quality (maybe a sequence in a boat), and in that case holding a camera with hands only may be a solution. Also, due to its intrinsic amateur flavor, handheld filming can be used to add a sense of realism to the text. A famous example is the horror movie *The Blair Witch Project*, which is filmed entirely with handheld cameras, since the story was a narration of students gone missing, whose amateur footage, revealing what had happened to them, had been found (◘ Fig. 4.31).
3. **Steadicam shot**: a Steadicam is a camera stabilizing device that is applied to the body of the camera operator. It is more stable than a handheld camera and less stable than a tripod, but more importantly, it follows the natural movement of the body. It is perfect for scenes of moving/running characters, on foot, on a horse, on a coach, or somewhere similar. A legendary example of a Steadicam shot is the chase in the snow labyrinth at the end of Stanley Kubrick's, *The Shining*, when the character of Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) tries to kill his son Danny (Danny Lloyd). In that sequence the point of view of the chaser Jack is represented by a Steadicam-equipped operator (◘ Fig. 4.32).
4. **Dolly shot**: one of the best known devices to support filming is the **camera dolly**, a wheeled cart that usually moves on a track, and that allows several camera movements (zooming, panning, tilting…) in a very smooth and precise way, making it particularly suitable for long takes. For example, the zoom-in and zoom-out of the mentioned "Love don't live here anymore" video by Madonna is achieved with a dolly, or, on a very similar vein, Kanye West's "Power". There exists also a small version of the dolly called **slider**, which is a tiny track that one can apply on the tripod, to obtain an effect similar, albeit downscaled, to that of the dolly (◘ Fig. 4.33).
5. **Crane shot**: pretty similar to the machine of the same name used in construction work, the crane used for filming has indeed the function to lift the camera (with or without the camera person: there are also cranes that can be operated with a remote control) and make it move around in various ways. It is a surprisingly old device, and it was widely used in silent movies, especially those of a somewhat epic nature. The crane, indeed, is often employed to underline the extension and/or greatness of given spaces: not by chance crane shots are the most typical expedient to film crowds in rock concerts. Bird's eye shots can be often achieved with a crane. A mini version of the crane is called **jib arm**, or simply jib, and can be applied to a dolly or even only to the tripod (◘ Fig. 4.34).
6. **Aerial shot**: this could easily be featured in the "filming by angle" section, as it is the highest angle reachable in filming. We put it here, because this kind of shot



◘ **Fig. 4.31** A cameraman filming with handheld camera. *[Photo by Z22, CC BY-SA 4.0]*

is taken from a helicopter, a drone, or a cable. It is mostly meant to provide extensive information about a given context. Like the extreme long shot, that we have already seen in the "filming by size" section, an aerial shot, too, can be used as an establishing shot. In fact, very often the difference between these two is rather thin (◘ Fig. 4.35).

Regardless of position, size, angles, movements and so forth, there are two more cross-cutting ways of communicating via the camera, and that is through the focus and the framing of the image. Filming **by focus** is the act of manipulating the focus of the subject/s filmed to achieve particular effects. The main shots of this category are:

1. **Rack focus** or **Focus pull**: it consists of the switch of a focus from foreground to background or vice versa, in order to create two points of attention. A typical example starts with a close-up of a character on focus, and then a switch towards the background occurs as something appears there, and we want to underline that the character is interested in/attracted by it (◘ Fig. 4.36).
2. **Shallow focus**: this is quite simply the situation in which the subject is kept well in focus and the background is particularly out of focus in order to create a clear emphasis on the former (◘ Fig. 4.37).
3. **Deep focus**: here, every single element in the shot is well in focus. The goal is to underline that everything in the image should be paid attention to and has equal importance (◘ Fig. 4.38).
4. **Tilt shift focus**: part of the subject (usually the center) is in focus, and part is not. It is a rarer effect, used mostly to provide the image with a dreamy, slightly unreal, quality (◘ Fig. 4.39).

To conclude, we have filming **by framing**, which is quite similar to the concept of "architecture" that we shall discuss in ▶ Chap. 5. That is: in this case, it is not so much what the camera does, but how we position the subjects/items in the scene. Sure, we may want a close up instead of a medium long shot, a high angle instead of a low angle, but first of all we need to *place* the subject somewhere in the frame, and that choice has a lot to do with what we intend to communicate with that particular shot. Shots by framing usually belong to two main groups:

1. Shots related to the number of items/subjects to frame. The **One shot** addresses the problem of how a single item (character or object) must be placed in the frame—particularly in relation to the context where it/he/she is located. Then we can increase (potentially endlessly) in number, with the **Two shot**, the **Three shot** and so forth. In all of these cases, it is very important to place the items in such a way that relations, roles, importance and other relevant information is given. In a Two shot of people, which of the two subjects is more important? Whose emotions must be underlined? Whose movements? Who should we pay attention to? For what reason (and therefore what body part)? (◘ Fig. 4.40).
2. Shots related to the **point of view** (or POV). POV—as we have mentioned already—is an intrinsically diegetic question. If we introduce a POV in the text, it means that we want to show the events from the perspective

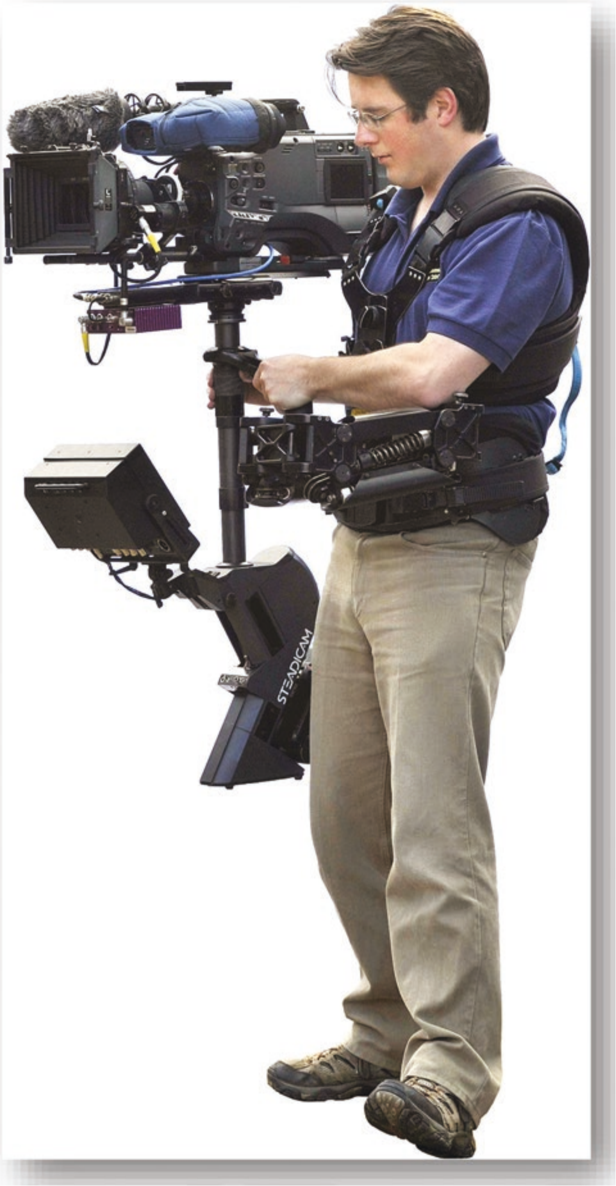


Fig. 4.32 A steadicam operator. *[Image of public domain]*

of somebody (or something) that is *inside* such events. The classic POV is the one representing the perspective of a person: e.g. an eye level angle of one character chatting with another may represent the POV of the latter. Objects, too, can have their POV: a typical example is the so-called **Trunk shot**, a shot that presents the perspective of some kind of object, usually a container (like indeed a car trunk, or a box, a suitcase, a grave, etc.) that gets opened/uncovered/inspected. This way, before seeing the contents of that container, we first get a glimpse of the reaction of the characters who had opened it. You may think about those many movies where a kid opens a present, a pirate opens a treasure shrine, a detective digs out a corpse, and so forth (Fig. 4.41).

4.2.3 Case Study: King Kong and the Visual Human-Animal Hybrids

An effective way to understand the power of visual representation within AVCC is to analyze it as a historical "works in progress", that is, when the same themes and topics, not to mention specific subjects and situations, are visually represented more than once throughout time. This is certainly the case with **remakes** and **sagas**, but it also happens when the same event or character is re-proposed in different occasions and from different perspectives. A good example is the evolution of the filmic character of James Bond, from the first adaptation of Ian Fleming's works, *Dr. No* (1962), to nowadays, has undergone several transformations, from the shift of the star portraying the secret agent (Sean Connery, Roger Moore, Daniel Craig, etc.), to deeper changes related to him as an individual (e.g., his infamous cynicism with women becomes less chauvinistic in the twenty-first century instalments of the saga) and to society surrounding him (e.g., the type of enemies he fights against bear significant relation to the geopolitical situation of the given period). Plenty of such transformations had visual consequences, from the obvious change of faces and bodies of the actors, to a different portrayal of places and objects, in line with technological and aesthetic developments (e.g., the logo, as shown in Fig. 4.42) and—well—sponsor requirements too (e.g., the switch from Rolex to Omega watches from 1995 *Goldeneye* onwards).

The topic of non-human animals, has, in time, been subject to significant cultural, ideological and ethical developments that impacted enormously on its visual representations. The way we see and perceive animals throughout the last decades has been heavily influenced by various scientific discoveries (particularly within ethology), progresses in ethics (e.g., the emergence of animal rights philosophy), and fundamental societal changes (e.g., the growing popularity of vegetarianism and veganism). All of these had a visible impact on how non-human animals have been represented in AVCC, offering us the possibility to reflect on the visual aspects in a rather detailed fashion. In this case study, we will consider three "layers" of questions, from the general to the more specific: we shall start with an overview of the so-called "anthrozoomorphic hybrids", that is, those instances of non-human animals crossed over (in one way or another) with humans; then we shall briefly discuss the case of the character of "Mr. Hyde", in the various adaptations of Stevenson's literary masterpiece; and we will finally devote our attention to the character of King Kong.

Non-human animals and the AV industry constitute an intense relationship in popular culture. When Eadweard Muybridge invented the first prototype of a movie projector in 1878, he chose a galloping horse as the quintessential example of cinematic image and movement (Fig. 4.43). Since then, non-human animals have appeared "(…) in all genres of moving film throughout its history: from wildlife films to Hollywood blockbusters, from scientific films to animation, as well as occurring in surrealist, avant-garde and experimental films, all of which use a multitude of different formats and technologies. Indeed, it is striking how many animals announce film: Pathé's crowing rooster; MGM's lion (…), Metro's parrot (…), and more recently the flying horse of TriStar" (Burt 2002: 18–19).

Non-human animals in AVTs can be antagonists, protagonists or supporting characters, they can represent themselves but also say something about human beings; they can be symbols, projections, stereotypes, allegories, taboos, myths and superstitions. This is already an indication of complexity of the

Fig. 4.33 A camera dolly. *[Photo by Eliot Lash, CC BY 2.5]*

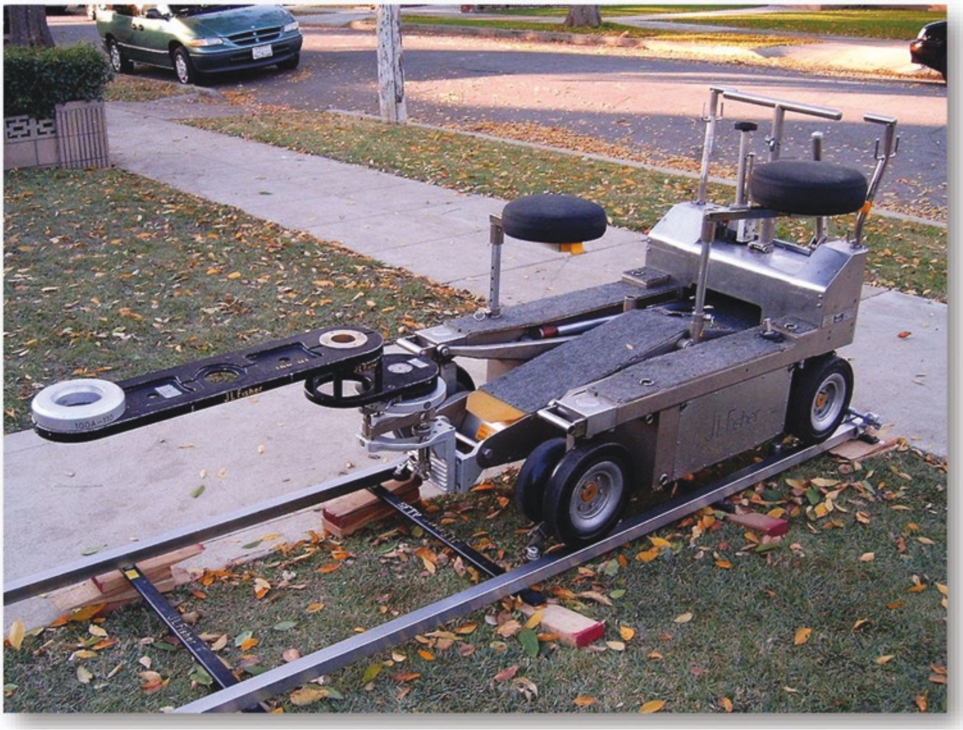
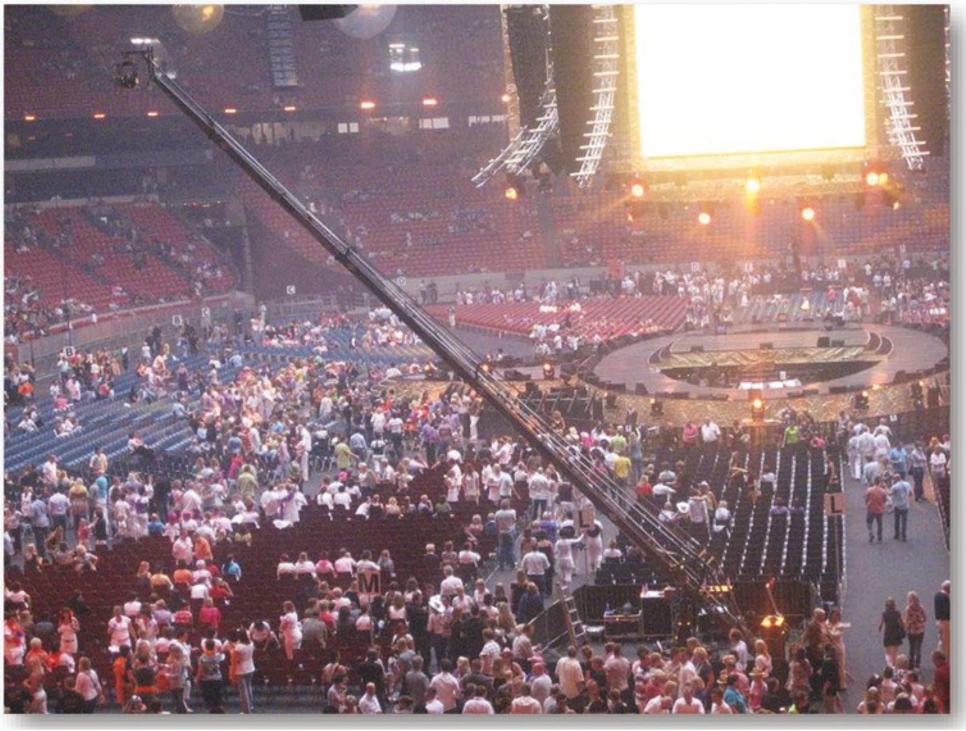


Fig. 4.34 Filming a crowd with a crane. *[Photo by Ken123, CC BY 3.0]*

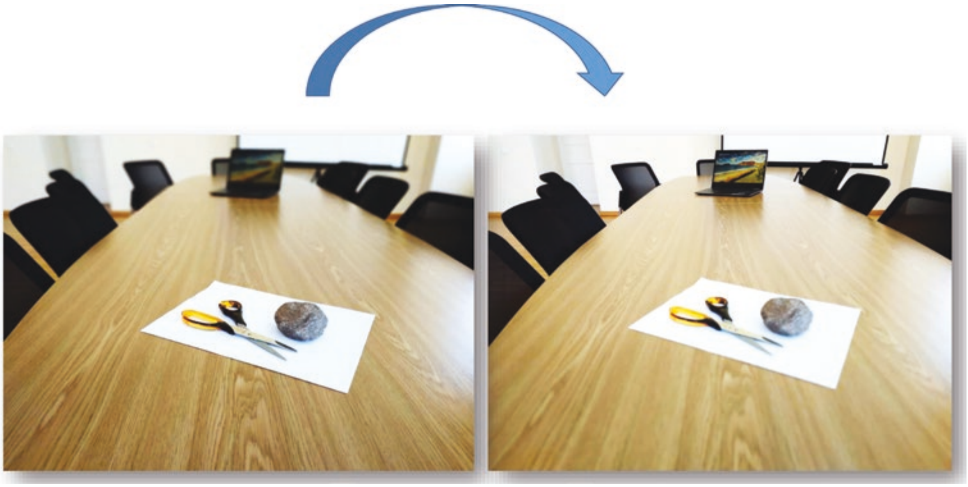


topic and its communicative potential, but there is more. Like myths and fairy tales, human perception of (and consequent impact on) non-human animals received its fair share of influence from cinema. As we have seen already, sociologists in the 1940s began studying the "Bambi syndrome"; films like Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* directly affected overfishing of sharks; the reputation of species like the *Orcinus orca* was pan-potted from hatred to affection, depending on releases like *Orca, the Killer Whale* or *Free Willy*.

Most of the time, the non-human animals we see in AVTs are imaginary creatures: not necessarily in a "unicorn" kind of sense, but also in the possibility that they may have features that are not realistic (they may display facial expressions that are

Fig. 4.35 An aerial shot of the island of Tresco, UK. *[Photo by Tom Corser, CC BY-SA 2.0]*

Fig. 4.36 An example of the rack focus process: in the left picture we see the paper-scissor-stone complex on focus and the laptop blurred. In the right picture the focus has switched and now the attention is on the laptop



more typical of human beings). Moreover, as we have already discussed, even when they are totally "invented", their shaping and characterization is based on existing models: *Godzilla* is clearly an imaginary animal, yet it is not difficult to identify in crocodiles and lizards the points of departure for its physical appearance.

Arguably, we can identify four main types of imaginary animals:

1. Those that are taxonomically real, yet fictional in some or many of their characteristics/actions. Sonic, the Sega videogame character that also became the mascot of the Japanese company is supposedly a hedgehog, yet he speaks human language, has numerous anthropomorphized physical features (starting from the fact that he wears shoes), and does several uncharacteristic things for his species;
2. Those that are taxonomically fictional but verisimilar. The character Scrat from the *Ice Age* saga is a specimen of a fictional species, obtained by combining two existing species (squirrels and rats) in a very *neat* way, so to speak. Besides all the comic, unrealistic, situations he faces, we see him displaying characteristics and behaviours that are recognizable within our empirical experience of squirrels and rats: size, fur, tail, rapid and sudden movements, etc. There is no risk of mistaking him for, say, a turtle or a swordfish;
3. Those that are taxonomically fictional and unlikely, but display empirically recognizable characteristics. Often, particularly in sci-fi, we see unrealistic species who, nevertheless, bear features that we can easily associate with a species from the real world. Many imaginary animals serve a recognizable function of "dogs" (i.e., faithful, brave and smart pets) or "horses" (means of transportation);
4. Those that are fictional and unlikely at all levels. In this case, the final result of the various combinations is something different from the sum of the parts. While seeing the *Alien*

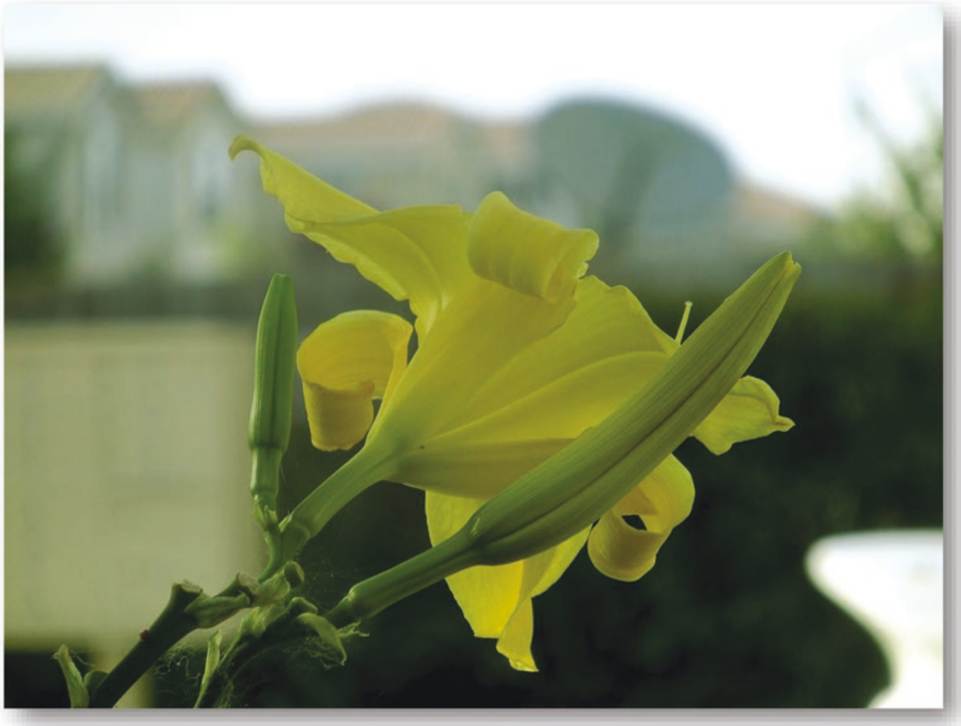


Fig. 4.37 Shallow focus: the flower is very well on focus and the background is particularly blurred. *[Photo by Jeremy Asuncion, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

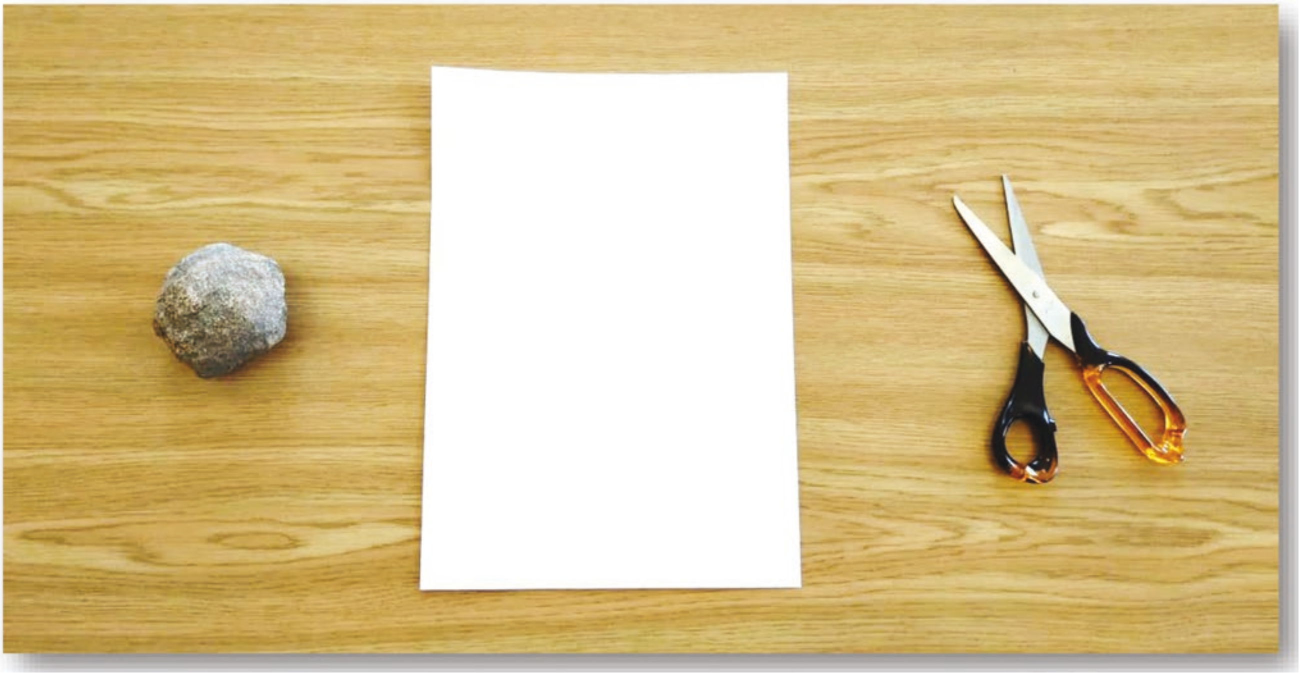


Fig. 4.38 An example of deep focus. The paper, the scissor and the stone receive the same attention by being all equally on focus. *[Photo by Jeremy Asuncion, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

monster we certainly recognize elements from human beings, other mammals, reptiles, fish, insects, but the result is not a tangible combination of all these features, but rather a new species.

A recurrent motif, across all these groups is their confrontation/opposition with the human characters, either fully or simply more human than their counterparts (e.g., Mickey Mouse is a mouse and Pluto is a dog: yet, Mickey is the "human" of the

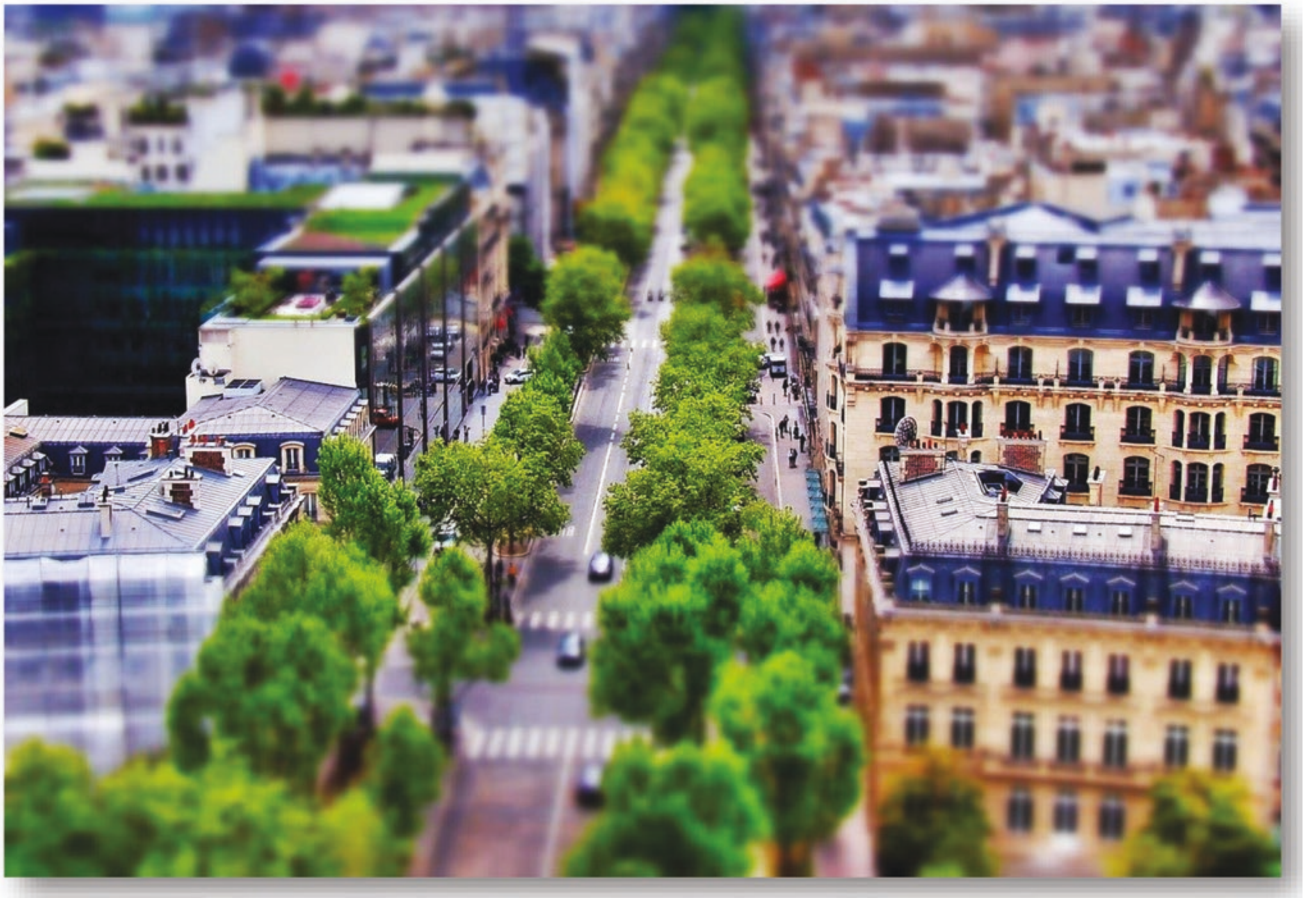
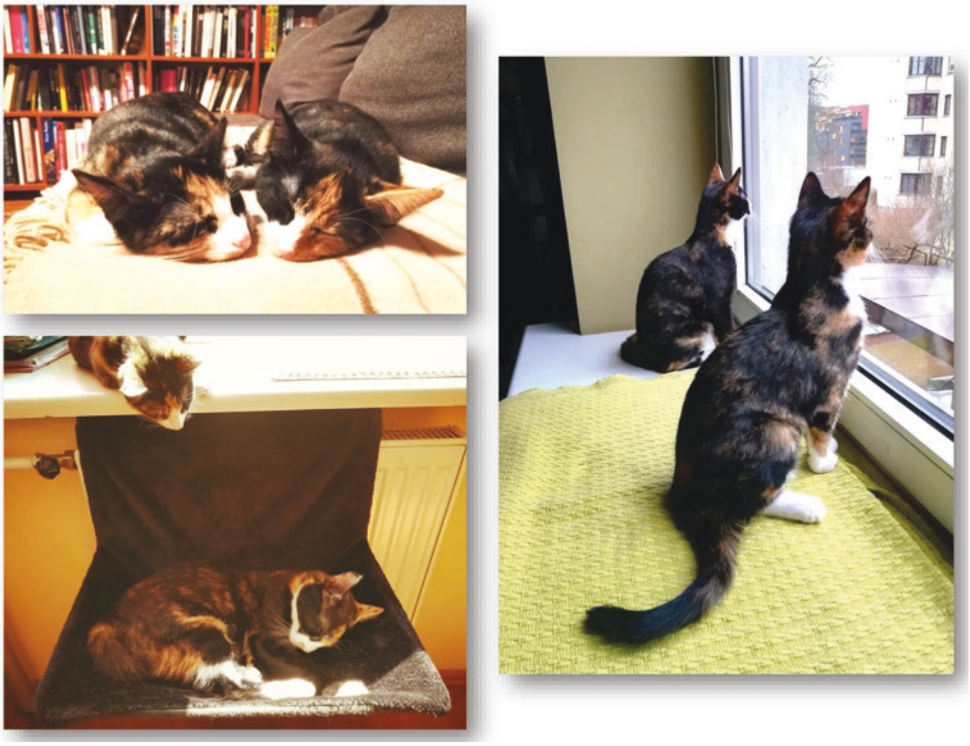


Fig. 4.39 An example of tilt shift focus. Part of the landscape is on focus and part is not. *[Photo by George Otoiu, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

Fig. 4.40 Three examples of "two shot" that emphasize different dynamics in the relation between the two kittens, and between them and the surrounding environment. *[Photos by Lina Navickaitė-Martinelli]*



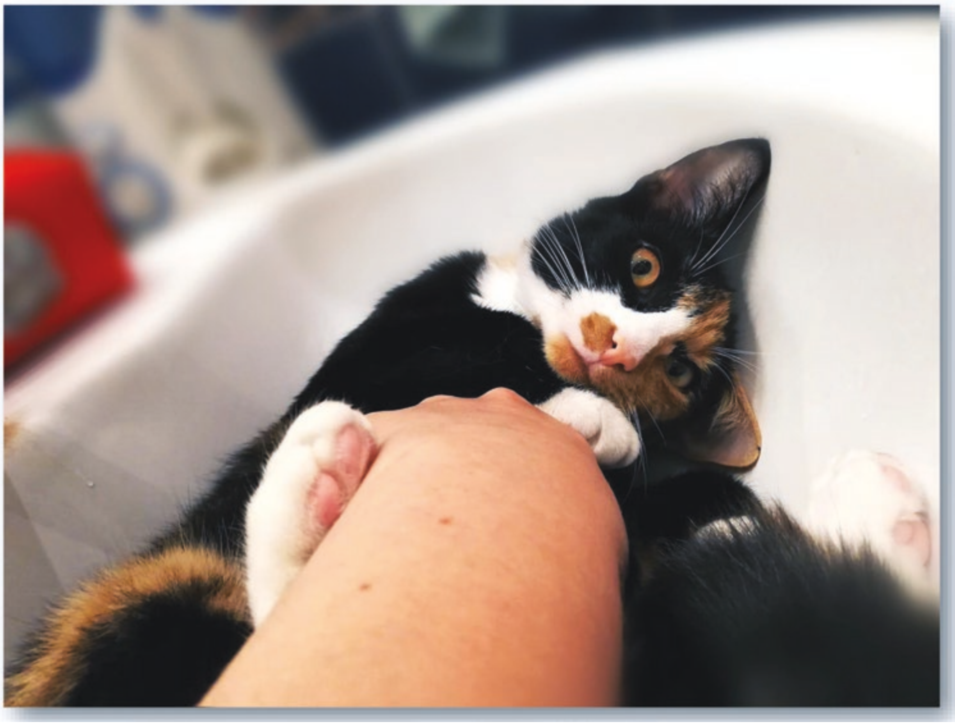


Fig. 4.41 An example of POV. This kitten is clearly "seen" from the perspective of the human being who is petting her, and whose arm is visible. *[Photo by Lina Navickaitė-Martinelli]*

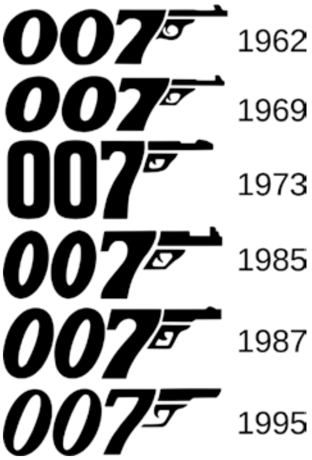


Fig. 4.42 The evolution of the 007 logo during the period 1962–1995. *[Image of public domain]*

situation and Pluto remains unmistakably a dog). Especially when cast in an antagonist/villain position, the imaginary animal is depicted in terms of basic "opposition" or "great difference" to humanity as such. The confrontation establishes boundaries between, e.g., instinct and reason, violence and non-violence, wilderness and civilization. Even the introduction of supernatural features in the imaginary animal can be an excuse to highlight this opposition. When we see the "beast" moving too fast, reappearing out of nowhere, getting bigger, and so on, we are re-evoking our ancestral struggle with nature, when this intelligent, but physically limited species, *Homo sapiens*, had to deal with creatures that were always bigger, faster, stronger. This confrontation is brought to a deeper, existential level when humanity and animality co-exist in a single character, or—to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari's invaluable work (e.g., 1994, or Deleuze-Guattari 2007)—we witness a process of "becoming-animal". We may call these cases "anthrozoomorphic hybrids": transitional characters, partly human partly not, or first human and then not (or vice versa), which represent an important form of AV characterization of human identity (or its loss/achievement). Most of these hybrids appear within animation cinema, and they are "anthropomorphic non-human animals" (like the whole Mickey Mouse universe). Others, less common in animation, are more properly "zoomorphic human beings", and are often visible in dramatic or scary movies. The first example of this sort happens to be the first horror movie in absolute: *Le manoir du diable*, directed in 1896 by Georges Méliès. This short, three-minute long film—as usual in Méliès's productions (we have mentioned that, and we shall see more later)—aims mostly to "amaze" and "amuse", rather than "scare", the audience, through diverse special effects and an ingenious manipulation of the cinematographic medium. The protagonist is a huge bat flying inside a medieval castle and transforming itself into Mephistopheles. Méliès and his contemporaries would very often return to hybrids of this kind, and more generally one can safely affirm that the role played by these creatures in horror movies is possibly the most relevant of the genre, exceeding zombies and aliens (who often look like non-human animals anyway).
To employ non-human animals to scare and arouse our ancestral fears is of course an emotional and psychological archetype that originated as early as when myth and narration originated in human communities (we have seen this extensively in ▶ Sect. 3.4.1). In this sense, the non-human animal is a very flexible character in narration, who can virtually play any role within human emotions.

For this reason, the amount of communication processes occurring is rich, and their nature very articulated: an anthrozoomorphic hybrid can be a special instance of all the four forms of imaginary animals we have mentioned above. A recurrent condition in the hybrid is the "transition", or "transformation" (from non-human to human, or vice versa). The character is

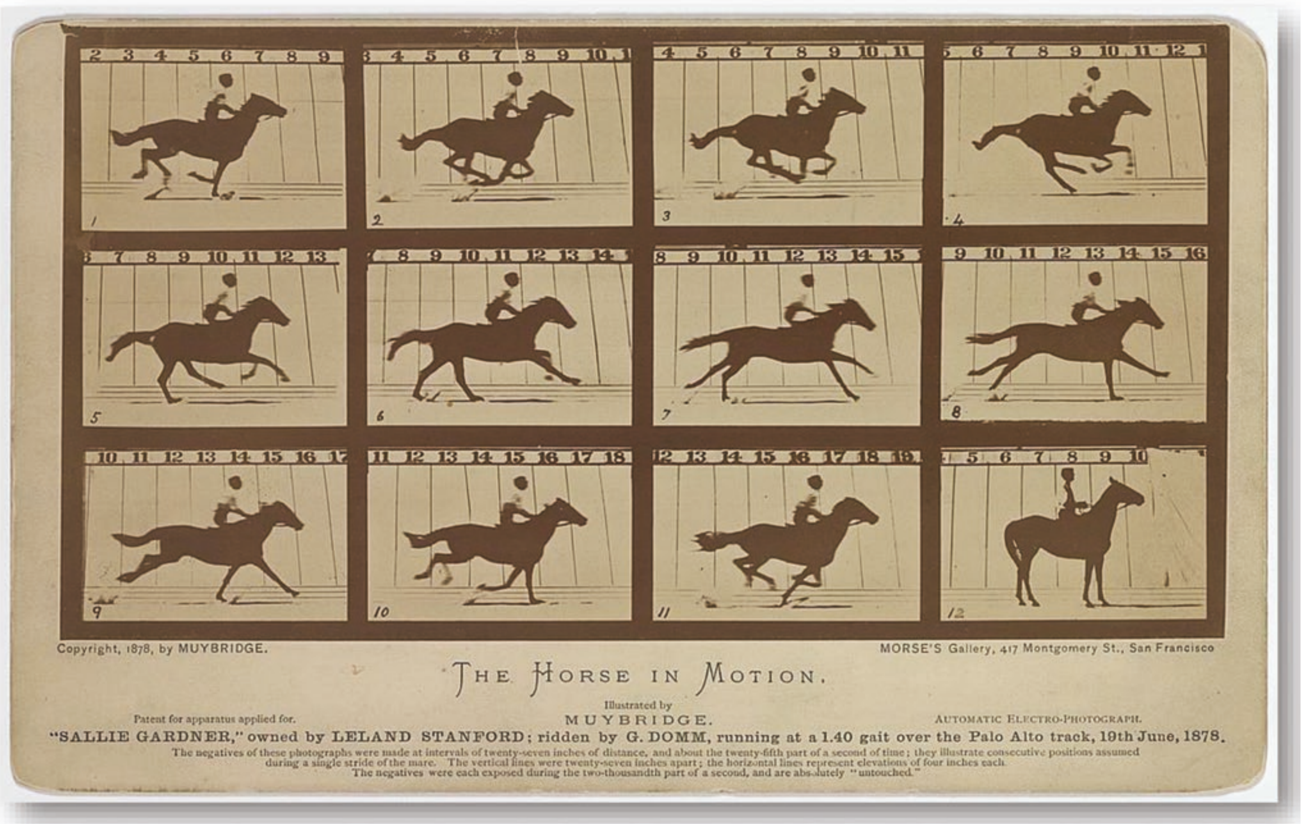

Copyright, 1878, by MUYBRIDGE.
MORSE'S Gallery, 417 Montgomery St., San Francisco
THE HORSE IN MOTION.
Illustrated by
MUYBRIDGE.
Patent for apparatus applied for.
AUTOMATIC ELECTRO-PHOTOGRAPH.
"SALLIE GARDNER," owned by LELAND STANFORD; ridden by G. DOMM, running at a 1.40 gait over the Palo Alto track, 19th June, 1878.
The negatives of these photographs were made at intervals of twenty-seven inches of distance, and about the twenty-fifth part of a second of time; they illustrate consecutive positions assumed during a single stride of the mare. The vertical lines were twenty-seven inches apart; the horizontal lines represent elevations of four inches each.
The negatives were each exposed during the two-thousandth part of a second, and are absolutely "untouched."

Fig. 4.43 Eadweard Muybridge's *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop*. *[Image of public domain]*

not always stable: in most cases, some kind of phenomenon has happened, is happening, or will happen, that cause the hybridization.

On top of any other classification, the transition can be "zoomorphic" (from human being to non-human, or quasi-non-human) or "anthropomorphic" (the opposite path). As a process, the transformation can occur in at least four, not mutually exclusive, ways, all bearing important consequences in the visual representation:

1. Ethological, when the transition involves the behaviour or some particular behavioural patterns;
2. Anatomical, when the transition involves the body or some particular physical parts;
3. Physiological, when the transition involves some or all of the organism functions;
4. Psychological, when the transition involves some or all of the mental activities.

In our case study *King Kong* (particularly the 1933 original and the 1976 and 2005 remakes), we notice that the hybridization happening in the protagonist is definitely zoomorphic in the anatomical and physiological sense, but presents several anthropomorphic features in the psychological and ethological ones, including significant variations across the three versions of the movie.
Not only. Hybridization can also be communicated through temporal coordinates and be:

1. Permanent, when it exists in the same condition throughout the whole story (e.g., *King Kong* itself);
2. Dynamic, when it displays forms/shapes (usually: a human and a non-human version), that can be switched by conscious decision (as in many superheroes) or when particular circumstances occur (as in werewolves during a full moon);
3. Progressive, when it occurs in steps or by degrees, transforming the character from a state A to a state B in a way that is usually final (as in Cronenberg's *The Fly*).

Finally, the transition/transformation of the hybrid may or may not be inherent to the story, meaning that it may be topical to the text or taken for granted (earlier in the book we have used the terms "diegetic" and "non-diegetic" to describe these two conditions). The character interpreted by Michael J. Fox in *Teen Wolf* is an apparently normal boy who discovers, in the course of the movie, that he is a werewolf: in this case the hybridization is "inherent". On the other hand, a cartoon character like Donald Duck is the way he is in principle, and in his stories there is no address to his peculiar condition of a duck that speaks human language and wears human clothes. King Kong, too, belongs to the latter category.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

The most proto- and archetypical instance of anthrozoomorphic hybridism remains *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, for a number of important reasons (not least the intrinsic importance of Stevenson's literary masterpiece). The metaphor of the loss of Super-Ego and the appearance of a "dark side" in personality has most of the times been audiovisually represented as a zoomorphic transition of the protagonist in a way that is certainly more evident than how Stevenson had depicted it; the Mr. Hyde of the novel is much more "human" than the general image we now have of him. In the first AV adaptations of the novel (the very first one, directed in 1908 by Otis Turner is unfortunately lost), we still find a rather "human" Hyde whose brutality is mostly communicated at a moral level and in the specific instances mentioned by Stevenson (the trampling of the young girl and the killing of Danvers Carew). Adaptation after adaptation, Jekyll/Hyde became many different things, with diverse nuances of detachment from the original novella. For the first thirty years or so from the earliest release, we see Hyde varying in degrees of brutality and ugliness. In 1941, the all-star version featuring Spencer Tracy, Lana Turner and Ingrid Bergman introduces the new pronunciation of the name Jekyll (from the /ˈdʒiːkəl/ to the /ˈdʒɛkəl/ we use nowadays). In the 1957 film, *The Daughter of Dr. Jekyll* expanded the family of Dr. Jekyll. In 1960, *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll* adds the spice of sex and drugs to the story, and now Jekyll is an old, unattractive gentleman, while Hyde is a virile and sexy one. In 1963, Jerry Lewis directs *The Nutty Professor*, possibly the best-known parody of the novella. In 1971, *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* presents the most surreal version of the story, with Jekyll being in fact Jack the Ripper, and Hyde being a female disguise for his murders. The same year, in *I, Monster*, Jekyll becomes a Freudian psychotherapist. And of course, where would we be without our fair share of *blaxploitation*, as in 1976's *Dr. Black, Mr. Hyde*? Etcetera.

However, no variant is as recurrent as the solution of turning Mr. Hyde more and more into a "beast" (see the comparison in Fig. 4.44). Usually an ape-like figure, his behaviour, movie after movie, becomes more stereotypically "animalesque", that is, instinctive, violent, aggressive and inarticulate. Some specific components are also turned upside down: e.g. Stevenson's Hyde is physically "smaller" than Jekyll, as a more treacherous, wretched character, and his arms are shorter than a normal human. On the contrary, movies tend to depict a "bigger", more "gorilla-esque" Hyde with longer arms, up to the apotheosis of Stephen Sommers's *Van Helsing* (2004), where the character is twice as big as the average *Homo sapiens*. The result is a transformation of the story's morale from a reflection on the duality of *human* nature and the hypocrisy of Victorian society, into a more banal, Cartesian, mind/body conflict.

King Kong

There is no room here for a specific history of anthrozoomorphic hybrids in audiovisuality, but certainly we have to mention the fundamental role played by German Expressionist cinema in the 1910s and 1920s, particularly by the likes of Murnau and his 1922 *Nosferatu*: from an exquisitely filmic-aesthetic perspective, the representation of hybrids in AV history will always owe a debt to this great school. That applies equally to the American contemporary texts of similar sort (including the growing amount of series on platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime and others), and for the whole posterity, from 1930s and 1940s Universal productions to the horror-specialized companies of the 1950s, such as the UK's Hammer. It is only in the 1960s, perhaps after Hitchcock's masterpiece *Psycho*, that horror movies started developing a new identity: even in those cases, however, the affiliation with the early German masters will not be entirely removed.

Keeping up with fear and suspense, 1933 witnessed the release of one of the most significant hybrids of film history: Cooper and Schoedsack's *King Kong*. First of a long series of remakes, sequels, exploitations and adaptations to other media, *King Kong* is also the first relevant variation on the archetypical theme of the beauty and the beast. The 1933 release was a formidable commercial and critical success, with a remarkable impact that still continues nowadays on popular culture (Fig. 4.45).

Also, *King Kong* is a fully cinematographic character. Although the main credit for his creation goes down to a literature personality, Edgar Wallace, hired by director Merian Cooper to write the script for the character, *King Kong* was never a novel or a tale, but was specifically designed for the cinema, and perhaps that has already something to do with its intrinsic grandeur and terrifying spectacularity. Second, besides the two remakes directed by John Guillermin in 1976 and Peter Jackson in 2005 respectively (these two and the original version being the main focus of our case study) *King Kong* is nowadays still a recurrent, mythical, presence in popular culture, through quotations, parodies, metaphors, iconography and even narrative solutions. One example that embodies all these manifestations is the escape on the Empire State Building, with the climb and the fall, an image and a narrative segment that we find in endless cases, and that is probably due to its archetypical nature that can be read both in a social and anthropological sense.

As for the exploitations of the character, we should at least mention, among the many, *The Son of Kong*, still released in 1933, a quick follow-up directed by Schoedsack himself, meant to milk the cash cow of the original release; two Japanese Kaiju productions, *King Kong versus Godzilla* (1962) and *King Kong Escapes* (1967); and finally the commercially disastrous *King*

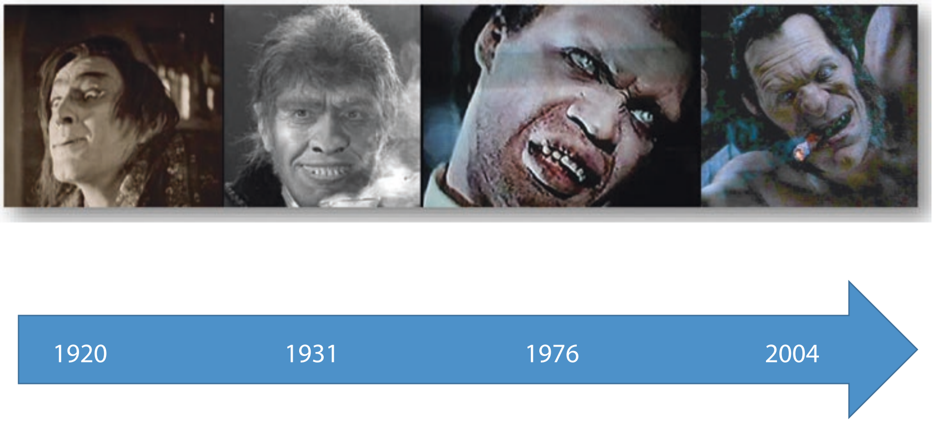
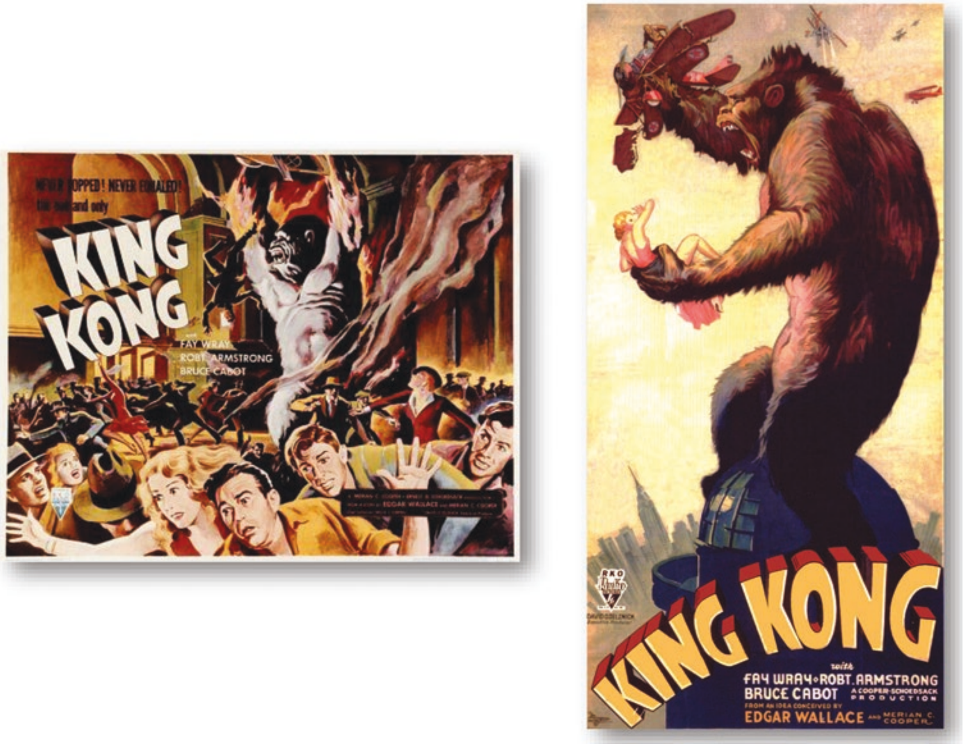


Fig. 4.44 Mr. Hyde gets more and more "beastly". Comparison among different film adaptations: from left to right the 1920, 1931, 1976 and 2004 versions (the latter being just the short appearance in the movie *Van Helsing*). *[Fair use: images personally assembled and edited for demonstrative purpose]*

Fig. 4.45 Two posters of the original 1933 *King Kong*. *[Images of public domain]*


NEVER TOPPED! NEVER EQUALED!
the one and only
KING KONG
with
FAY WRAY
ROBT. ARMSTRONG
BRUCE CABOT
KING KONG
with
FAY WRAY • ROBT. ARMSTRONG
BRUCE CABOT
A COOPER-SCHOEDSACK PRODUCTION
FROM AN IDEA CONCEIVED BY
EDGAR WALLACE and MERIAN C. COOPER

Kong Lives (1986), which is actually a sequel of the 1976 remake. A sort of war bulletin of all these movies might actually help to understand the mythical significance of this giant gorilla. King Kong as such dies in four of the mentioned movies: 1933, 1976, 1986 and 2005, surviving only in the two Japanese productions. The son of Kong, too, dies in the eponymous movie, and it is only in *King Kong Lives* that a bit of hope is spread in that cursed family: a female, called Lady Kong is introduced in the saga, and she, too, gives birth to a son (not the same one as the 1933 film, these versions operating on different narrative universes). While the actual King Kong dies for good (in this sequel, he is kept alive after his famous skyscraper fall with an artificial heart), Lady Kong and the infant survive.

So, first and foremost, King Kong is a tragic figure. When we think of him, our first mental image does not go in the direction of a "monster" or "villain", neither is the film immediately thought of as "horror". More probably we think of a "gentle giant" who is misunderstood because of the way he looks, and who is anyway made captive and removed from his habitat out of pure greed. However—and that is one of the paradoxes, here—the original King Kong was far from being depicted in a sympathetic manner, as instead we see in the remakes. There are only two elements we can relate to as humans: the fact that Kong is captured and made a Broadway attraction (i.e., deprivation of freedom) and his interest (i.e., love) for Ann Darrow (the actress Fay Wray). To make matters worse, his "crush" is hardly represented as something we can sympathize with. The feeling, indeed, is clearly depicted as not mutual: Darrow is scared throughout the whole time she spends with Kong, she does not seem to oppose his capturing, and she takes part in the Broadway show. While dying, Kong picks her up and looks at her, but she is instead kicking and trying to get away from his grip: when he finally dies, she is above all relieved. The scholar Tim Gadd explained this *distance* in the following manner: "Though he is presented (without excessive sentimentality) as a victim of human avarice, Kong is an alien, his otherness exaggerated by his sheer size (…). The interaction between Kong and his female human captive is (…) limited to the unfulfillable desires of the beast himself. His portrayal illuminates the human-animal connection only in a negative sense, betraying a deep cultural anxiety about, and fascination with the animalistic nature of human desire. That Kong belongs on the nether side of the human-animal, culture-nature divide is symbolized by the giant wall that the human natives who live on his island have erected between their world and his prehistoric "kingdom"" (Gadd, in Pollock-Rainwater 2005: 254).

The plot in King Kong's original and in the two remakes is basically the same. In the unknown-to-civilization Skull Island, a great wall divides a human tribe from various giant animals, among which there is a gorilla, Kong, worshipped by the tribe as a god. An arriving group of Americans interrupts a ritual carried out by the natives. After seeing a young blond woman in the group, the natives kidnap her and give her to Kong to be his bride. While trying to rescue her many of the Americans die, but finally manage to both save the woman and capture Kong. The gorilla is taken to New York where he is exhibited for money. Kong manages to break loose and goes looking for the young woman in the streets of New York, causing chaos and destruction along the way. Upon finding her he climbs a tall building, taking her with him. Up there he is killed and the woman rescued.

Plot aside, several individual scenes, too, are similar across all three versions, particularly the crucial and the scary/spectacular ones. Among the main differences: (1) the tribe worships Kong in the first two versions, while lives in fear in the third one; (2) the island is populated by dinosaurs in the first and the third version, while in the second one we find a giant snake; (3) Kong climbs the Empire State Building in 1933 and 2005 and the World Trade Center in 1976; (4) finally, the first and the third versions are set in the 1930s, while the second one is in the 1970s. Generally speaking, thus, Peter Jackson's remake uses only the 1933 version as a point of reference, rejecting the many variations introduced in 1976 (except a very important one, which we are about to discuss). Otherwise, Jackson either introduces entirely new ideas or, as we have seen, restores original elements and scenes from 1933. This is probably due to a typical trend in cinematographic franchises: if there is more than one remake/sequel, sooner or later the filmmakers feel the need to go "authentic", and stay as faithful as possible to the original text. Also, after *Lord of the Rings*, Jackson had made a reputation as a director faithful to his sources. Finally, the mixed critical reception of Guillermin's version, as opposed to the original one, usually hailed as a masterpiece of early cinema, might have been another convincing factor for this decision.

What really connects the 1976 and 2005 versions is their engagement in conveying a sympathetic image of the gorilla, one that is totally lacking in the original version. To start with, in both of the later movies, we are introduced to Kong from his own perspective, seeing the ritual and the wall from up in the mountain and hearing his sounds, even before we see what he looks like. Specific scenes are important too: in the 1933 version, the whole interaction between Kong and Ann is filtered through the constant terror of the latter. In the 1976 version, Kong already shows genuine "care" for the girl (here called Dwan, and interpreted by Jessica Lange) by washing and blowing her dry, in a sequence that has also erotic connotations (which of course pervade all the three versions, but are perhaps more evident in the ever-audacious climate of 1970s cinema). In addition, Dwan also tries to communicate with Kong from the very start, therefore, unlike the Ann of 1933, acknowledging Kong at least as "animal" (if not "person"), rather than "monster". Even more erotically charged is the sequence when Kong strokes Dwan with a finger, trying to take her clothes off: in the corresponding scene of the 1933 version, Kong takes off part of Ann's clothes in a depiction that is deprived of sexual connotations and rather seems to emphasize pure, emotionless, curiosity.

Additional sympathetic interactions occur when Kong is brought to New York and Dwan protests that he should have instead stayed in Skull Island. On that occasion, she also calms Kong down in a moment of fury. Later, she finds herself being mostly forced to take part in the Broadway show, and finally, in the touching scene that concludes the movie, she begs Kong not to put her down, as the helicopters cannot shoot as long as he holds her. Kong, famously, does not want to expose her to any risk and his chivalry costs him his life.

On a similar note goes the third version of *King Kong* despite its intention to conform to the original. Initially, Ann (Naomi Watts) is almost killed by Kong, just as had happened to the many "brides" sacrificed to him by the natives of Skull Island, but in this first instance she actually saves herself with a dancing performance that amuses the gorilla. Kong lets Ann go until he comes to her rescue when she is attacked by three *Vastatosaurus rex* (a fictional dinosaur invented for the film) and, after that, she follows him of her own accord. When the others find her, Ann firmly opposes Kong's capture, and in the Broadway show she actually refuses to be involved. During the final scene, Darrow goes even further than Dwan in trying to prevent Kong from being killed. She shouts at the planes not to kill him, and she is genuinely devastated by his death. The last eye contact exchanged by the two before the gorilla's fall is clearly of a romantic nature.

However, more than any other scene, the one where the two of them are sliding on the ice of a frozen river is of the greatest significance. A clear quotation of a similar scene in *Bambi*, the sequence aims to create a parallel between Kong and the quintessential sympathetic animal, the one that was chiefly responsible for the long tradition of compassionate looks at non-human animals through the so-called "Bambi's syndrome" (we have already discussed this in a specific case study). Kong and Bambi have a lot in common, both being victims of human greed. If that was not presented as a negative issue in 1933, it definitely was in 1976 and 2005.

There may be at least two reasons for this shift. Firstly, by 1976 already the level of ethological knowledge on, and ethical sensibility over, non-human animals, great apes in particular, reached by most societies was far too extended to dismiss any gorilla (regardless of size and circumstances) as a soulless, brutal monster. Not too long after the first *King Kong*, Konrad Lorenz, Karl von Frisch, Nikolas Tinbergen and others, engaged in sophisticated investigations of animal behavior that led to important, sometimes revolutionary, discoveries. During the 1970s, ethology witnessed the birth of branches like sociobiology and, most of all, cognitive ethology, which had an even bigger ethical impact, inspiring important philosophical works on animal rights and liberation. In 1973, three years before the second *King Kong*, Lorenz, Tinbergen and Frisch jointly won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

Also, by 1976, some specific groundbreaking and/or thought-provoking works had been produced. Sociobiologist Desmond Morris raised controversy around his studies on the animal components of human behavior, resulting in his best-known work, *The Naked Ape* (1967). In 1975, the founding text of the animal rights movement, Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, was published. Of certain resonance were also Frederick Wiseman's documentaries, *Primate* and *Meat*, which exposed some of the most explicit and abusive practices of animal testing and meat production.

The *King Kong* producers must have certainly been aware that representing a non-human animal's interaction with human beings and their deprivation of freedom and welfare was a totally different matter than in the 1930s. More specifically within the investigation on primate behavior, the long tradition of training programs in interspecific communication had started with the likes of the chimpanzee Washoe and the gorilla Koko. With great apes now seemingly able to communicate through human language (via gestures, lexigrams or other methods), it would have been very awkward for Guillermin first and Jackson later to assume that a gorilla and a human can hardly communicate at all.

Finally, and just to focus on the most media-resonating cases, there were the so-called "Leakey's angels", a nickname (obviously borrowed from the then fashionable TV series *Charlie's Angels*) given to the three pupils of anthropologist Louis Leakey, who performed research on great apes' behavior: Biruté Galdikas, researcher on orangutans, Jane Goodall, researcher on chimpanzees, and most of all (as far as we are concerned here) Dian Fossey, researcher on gorillas. While working with the rare mountain gorillas of the Rwandan wilderness, Fossey achieved the gorillas' acceptance in their community and developed means of communication with them. Her study interest developed into a passionate commitment for the gorillas' preservation, turning her into a *persona non grata* to Rwandan natives, who extensively hunt gorillas for their skin (sold to rich tourists in the form of various gadgets). By the time of the second version of *King Kong*, Fossey was already a media star with a cover article on *National Geographic*, and having let the world know the brutality of gorilla poaching. Between the second and the third *King Kong*, she had been found murdered in her tent; her autobiography became (and still is) the bestselling book about gorillas (Fossey 1983), and a biopic movie directed by Michael Apted was released (◘ Fig. 4.46).

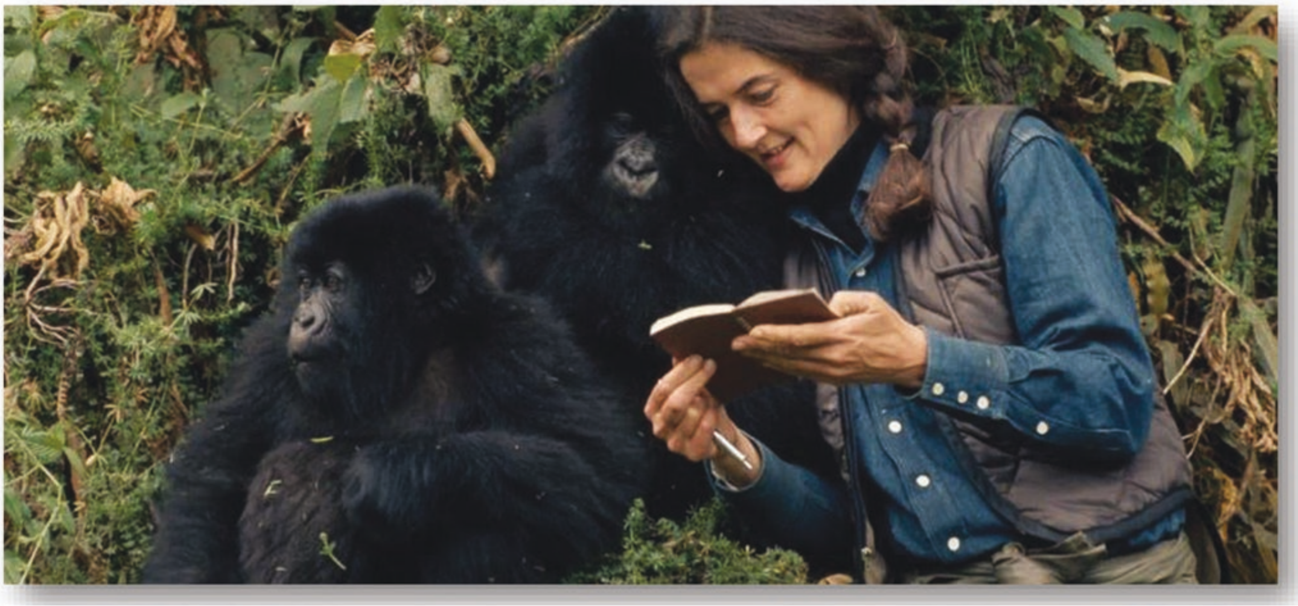
In short, there were far too many historical, cultural and scientific circumstances to prevent Guillermin and Jackson from releasing a generally insensitive and far-too-anthropocentric depiction of a gorilla.

There is also a second reason why we should consider inevitable the shift from the first to the second and third versions of *King Kong*, and that has nothing to do with any question of animal welfare or scientific knowledge. A rather well-known interpretation of the original *King Kong* is provided by Rosen (1975), who sees the movie as one of those multilayered metaphors of American history that so often come from Hollywood. The aspect of race and racism (towards both blacks and Native Americans) is particularly prominent in his analysis:

> » It doesn't require too great an exercise of the imagination to perceive the element of race in KING KONG. Racist conceptions of blacks often depict them as subhuman, ape or monkey-like. (…) Kong is forcibly taken from his jungle home, brought in chains to the United States, where he is put on stage as a freak entertainment attraction. He breaks his chains and goes on a rampage in the metropolis, until finally he is felled by the forces of law and order. The causative factor in his capture and his demise is his fatal attraction to blonde Ann Darrow. As Denham says in the last words of the film, "Oh, no, it wasn't the airplanes. It was Beauty killed the Beast." (…) "Beauty" turns out to be "the white woman." This kind of theme is foreshadowed in the behavior of the "natives" on the island where Kong is captured. When he first sees her, the "Native Chief" offers six of his wives for Ann, and when this is refused, he kidnaps her. Thus the sequence of events leading to Kong's capture is set in motion: the romantic lead/hero of the film, Jack Driscoll and Denham organize a rescue party. This type of plot device is a recurrent element in films of the jungle adventure genre. The white woman comes along on the safari not only to provide romantic interest. She is usually a focus of tension between the white males and the "natives," furnishing an opportunity for some of the former to display their virile heroism against the savages. (Rosen 1975: 7)

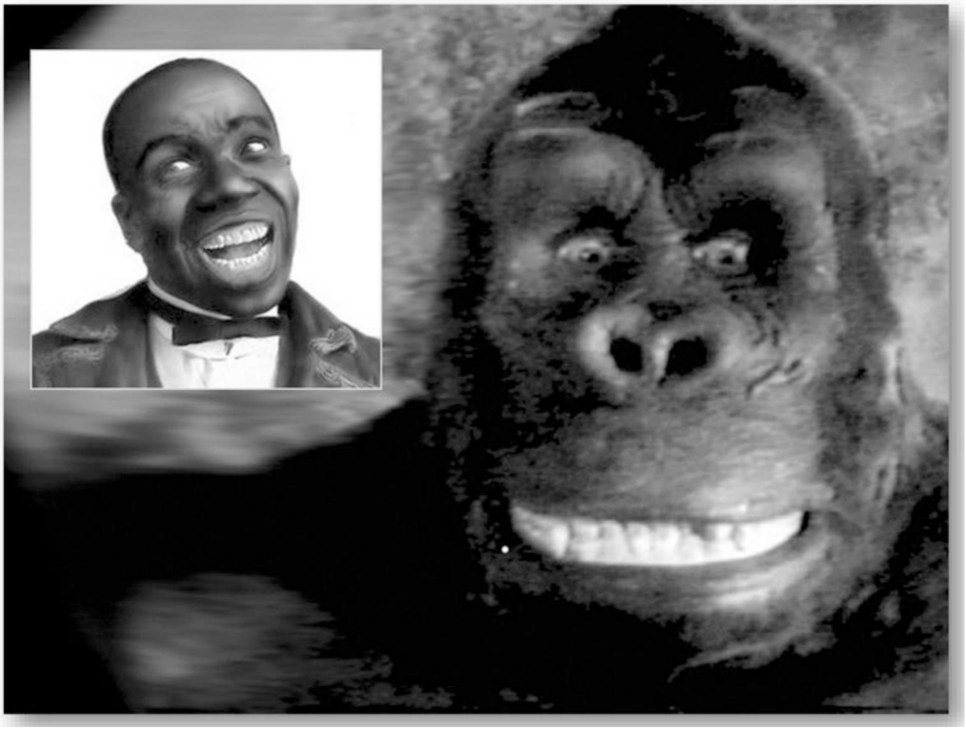
Racist metaphors were quite common in the Hollywood scene of those days. It was not until the 1960s that civil rights would have any significant impact on the filmic representation of black people. Until then, generally speaking, black characters would often be mere variations on the depictions already introduced by minstrelsy, through the "negroes" prototypes of Jim Crow, Mammy, Zip Coon, Buck and the likes.
Visually and behaviorally, King Kong responds to the "Buck" stereotype. More than the "classic" Jim Crow, Buck is the character who psychoanalytically represented the sexual threat (or, arguably, the fear/envy of the white man towards the supposedly better equipped black masculinity): he is big, stout, rude, proud, aggressive and constantly interested in white (possibly blonde) women. Unsurprisingly, the two "masks" (Kong and Buck) are physiognomically similar (same gaze; pronounced mouth, lips and jaw; eyes wide open; dumb/aroused grin… see ◘ Fig. 4.47).

There is more: to film critic Bryan McKay, the racist metaphor is even "understated", because it was far too obvious to the spectators of those days that a huge gorilla would be nothing else than a "negro" in disguise:



◘ Fig. 4.46 With her field research in Rwanda, Dian Fossey has been one of the key figures in creating a more compassionate image of gorillas. *[Image by Hpalaucampos, CC BY-SA 4.0]*

Fig. 4.47 A comparison between King Kong and the minstrel show character of Buck. As easily noticeable, the same racist visual stereotypes are applied in both cases. *[Fair use—Images personally assembled and edited for demonstrative purpose]*



> […] the Black has consistently been represented in popular culture and science as a primitive (and often sexualized) creature: a set of external organs—woolly hair, flat broad nose, thick lips, and especially an oversized penis (…). This representation has often taken the symbolic form of a primate, a symbol chosen presumably for its implications of evolutionary "inferiority" to White Europeans. (McKay 2005)

Back to King Kong's metaphor as black man's "threat", and its visual actualization, it is also interesting to notice that the closer he gets to white civilization, the bigger he becomes, ending up almost three times bigger at the moment when he climbs the skyscraper:

> Kong is 18 feet tall on the island, 24 feet on stage, 50 feet on the Empire State Building. (…) Kong's increase in size directly correlates to the nature of his threat. On his native island, he is imposing, but not nearly as imposing as he becomes when he reaches the American shores. Once he finally escapes and rebels, he reaches his most impressive height, simultaneously signifying his overwhelming danger to American cultural stability (represented by the Empire State Building—then a very current symbol of American industrial progress). (McKay 2005)

By 1976 none of these "fears" seem to be reasonable or socially acceptable: Guillermin first, and Jackson later, were certainly more interested in building a different type of discourse, and their representations operate clearly at a more universal/mythical level. *King Kong* and the general question of anthrozoomorphic hybrids (or the even more general one of the various ways non-human animals are represented in audiovisuality) show us how the visual representation in audiovisuality can efficiently reflect the social and cultural processes underlying a given text: the many connotations, the many metaphors, the many ideas. If this book has a primary scope, that is certainly a plea against superficiality: just as when we meet a person, we have a certain duty not to judge them too quickly or to reduce their personality to few simple characteristics, we equally need to respect the variety and the complexity of AVCC, and make our best effort to go as far as we can to understand it. At a superficial observation, *King Kong* may simply look like a spectacular form of entertainment, but instead we have seen that its significance can be a subject of investigation for anthropology, ethology, psychology and sociology, and that the topics it touches range from archetypes to science, from racism to animal rights. The way King Kong looks and has changed appearance in the various versions of this story is a powerful reflection of this complexity.

4.3 Language

After sound and image, let us now share some reflections on the use of language in AVCC. Obviously, the human species being so much reliant on language when it comes to communication problems, we should not be surprised in learning that, at the end of the day, most of what an average AVT intends to communicate remains primarily a linguistic question. Throughout this whole book we have tried to emphasize the importance of every other aspect, and there is no denial of the relevance of those. However, if we speak of clarity and immediacy of a message, we can set a scene on a romantic sunset, we can use the *Love Story* theme as a soundtrack, we can make a close-up on two characters with eyes closed and dreamy expressions, but nothing will be as effective as a short dialogue ("I love you", "I love you too") to convey the point that these two characters are in love with each other. On the other hand, a text that is exclusively based on linguistic features is not an "audio+visual" text anymore, and more importantly will also miss out a remarkable amount of opportunities to enrich the communication, make it more articulated, complex, ambivalent, multilayered, and ultimately beautiful. Not to mention that the history of audiovisuality has offered numerous examples of language-free and yet very communicative works.

Having said that, it is also important to stress that this section cannot reasonably discuss "contents" as such, as conveyed through language, simply because such an enterprise would be unsustainable: what a single text says (through language, but also via other means), is a case-by-case issue. What we shall do here, instead, is to summarize the various components of language that contribute to communication, and enhance the chances of the specific contents to be understood for what they are. In other words, we are not interested in the meaning of the expression "I love you", here, but in the fact that it may be pronounced while laughing, or stuttering, or whispering, or shouting, at a certain point of the story, by a certain character instead of another, and so forth, generating several nuances that help us to understand *exactly* what that "I love you" stands for and why.

As we already said, language in AVCC is divided into spoken language and written language. Evidently, when language is spoken several communicative issues overlap with sound in general, while, when language is written we have a number of issues shared with image. Both spoken and written language can be diegetic and non-diegetic. Most spoken parts in an AVT tend to be diegetic, but if we hear, for example, an omniscient narrating voice coming, so to say, "from nowhere", that one is usually non-diegetic. On the other hand, most typologies of written language are non-diegetic (from subtitles to endtitles, from intertitles to captions, etc.), but every text usually has countless examples of so-called "inscriptions": a shop sign, a letter, a newspaper… anything written that appears inside the text is of course diegetic.

Let us now see in more detail what spoken and written language can do within AVCC.

4.3.1 Speech

Spoken language is in the great majority of cases a human voice, or a voice talking in human language, having in mind that such voice can also be applied to other living or not living beings, such as non-human animals, robots, aliens and the likes, especially in genres like animation, fantasy and sci-fi. Occasionally, but just occasionally, characters may use sounds classifiable as "language" (meaning, provided with syntax, lexicon, and the likes), but not an identifiable one, like Carl Gottlieb's *The Caveman*, where the primitive men are using a non-existent gibberish, which however resembles words. Other forms of vocal communication (such as the robotic sounds that some cyborgs may produce) are very much on the verge between language and pure noise/music, and they are probably more suitable to be analyzed in the "sound" section.

Each voice goes through those general properties of AVCC that we will discuss in ▶ Chap. 5, particularly the so-called "definition" and "style", so I shall point you to that section for more details. Yet, at this stage, we may anticipate that one of the most important problems that must be addressed while picking the right voice for the right context is the problem of "credibility": a voice must be recognizable for what it intends to be, and must also bear certain characteristics that add nuances and personality. Plus, there are actors, commentators, hosts and other figures with such distinctive voices (styles, indeed), that it is impossible to discern them from the character they play. There is no character that someone like Maggie Smith or Jack Nicholson can give their voice to, without making it unmistakably a Smith-esque or Nicholson-esque character.

Besides that, however, there are other more general problems of definition that mostly concern the whole area of linguistics:

1. **Idiom**. In the majority of the cases, an AVT features the same language of its production team (from the company that invests the money up to the actors performing in it), and that—at least at the level of mainstream productions—stays that way even if the (real or fictional) location is somewhere else. For example, in most American productions there is this miracle (I mean it ironically, of course) that everybody everywhere speaks English, even when the movie is a historical drama set in times preceding modern English, such as *The Borgias* series we have previously discussed as a case study. There are both practical and marketing reasons for such a choice as we can easily guess, but there is also a sense of unity and familiarity involved: if the cultural/linguistic differences are not an important point within the text, having characters speaking different languages may distract the viewers from more relevant stuff. Moreover, viewers need to familiarize themselves with characters and somehow feel a certain emotional proximity with them: having all of them speak the same language, especially when it is the viewer's language too, encourages this sense of familiarity.

So, when locations change the story may first of all display a narrative reason why certain characters who are not supposed to speak the main language of the AVT, end up being proficient in it anyway. We can take the average James Bond movie as an example, which always involves numerous locations, but usually all the characters, everywhere, speak English. In the James Bond saga, characters are often involved in international business/intrigues, and that makes it acceptable that they would speak English, though sometimes with an accent (see point 2 of this list).

Sometimes we may hear a foreign language as "soundscape", but not when it matters. Two foreign characters may speak their own language in irrelevant chats, but when their dialogues become important for the story they eagerly, and again *miraculously*, switch to English.

Next, the character/s in question may indeed speak their own language, and subtitles may be provided. This is of course the level that provides most realism, and we also have explicitly multilingual examples, such as Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*, where each plotline is spoken in a different language.

Finally, a variation on using real foreign languages has exactly to do with that sense of familiarity we were mentioning before: there may be an explicit decision from the authors' part, to leave a foreign language as it is, without any form of translation, not even via subtitles. This creates an immediate sense of emotional distance between the viewer and the characters themselves, and not by chance this may be a good solution to apply to villains in a story. Perhaps you may have noticed that in many thrillers/actions/war movies and the likes, foreign bad guys have numerous lines of dialogue in their own language, without any translation. Typical examples include Nazi officers, Soviet spies, Chinese mafia bosses, Arab terrorists, Colombian drug dealers and so on—all the stereotypical villains, basically! Not knowing what these people say not only increases some mystery and apprehension (who knows what vicious plans they are devising!), but it is mostly constructed in order for us *to dislike them*, as we tend to do with many things/people we do not understand.

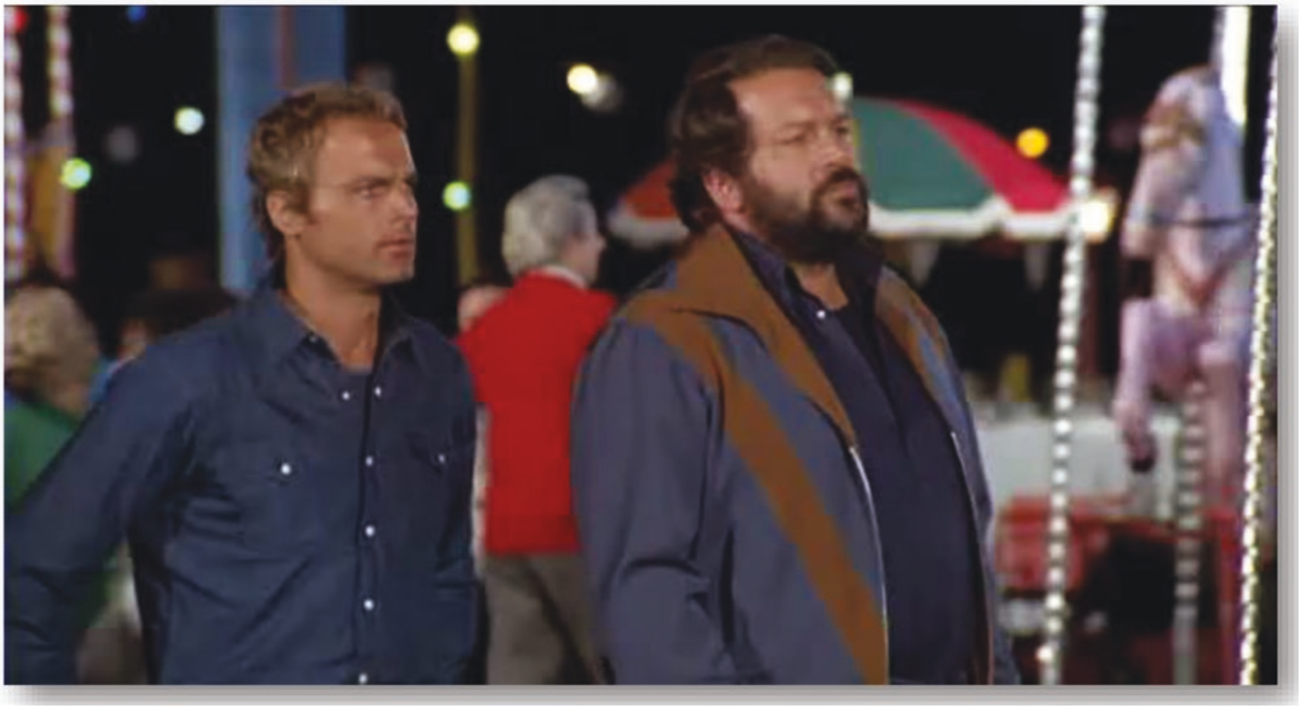
2. **Accent**. When authors intend to remain in one single idiom what would normally be a multilingual situation, a trick often employed is the introduction of exotic accents, in order to give enough of a foreign color—including, when possible, one or two real words from that language (see point 3 of the list). We have all heard, not only in American productions, the "touristic" accents of foreign characters: the French one will take a mellifluous and slightly effeminate inflexion; Germans will speak in a kind of over-pronounced, angry-sounding way; the Russian accent will be particularly sharp and edgy, and so on, up to the legendary "Letz-a-go!" of the videogame Italian-looking character Super Mario.

But accents are not only important in defining a character perceived as "foreign". Regional/urban variations are also important in the process of both recognition and characterization. If the story requires that a given character is from a particular area of one country, it would be important to give them a little bit of an accent, if (and only if) their geographical provenience is relevant to the story itself. John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy*, one of the masterpieces of the so-called American New Wave, is the story of a young Texan, Joe Buck (Jon Voight) moving to the big city (New York) in search of fortune as a male prostitute. There he meets a local con man nicknamed "Ratso" (Dustin Hoffman) who initially tricks him, but then—like the two social outcasts they are—they kind of befriend and become "business" partners (where business means hustling). In a situation like this the story requires an evident Texan accent from Buck, not only to signify the geographical origins of the character, but also to emphasize the "villager goes to the big city" situation. And this is also where characterization comes into play: there are various cultural/social/political associations that are applicable to different places within the same country, and the credibility of a character has a lot to do with those associations. Staying in America, the contrast between a Texan and a New Yorker accent has not only to do with the village versus big city confrontation, but could create other important dynamics: a Texan accent may be more suited to a Republican character, as opposed to the typical New York Democrat; it may better represent a no-nonsense layperson, in opposition to the talkative intellectualism of classic New York figures such as those portrayed by Billy Crystal or Woody Allen; it may better suit an ultra conservative, religious and racist character (while usually New Yorkers get the more open-minded part), and so forth. Each country has its own common places and stereotypes about its various regions and cities, and if we want to challenge such common places, we need to have a specific narrative reason, otherwise we will repeat our mantra once again: it would look "weird" and alert us to something unusual.

3. **Vocabulary**. Back to the use of foreign languages, another way to avoid characters speaking a different idiom altogether, or to have them speaking with an accent, is to introduce some foreign lexicon, here and there. We are all accustomed to the colorful parlances of Italian characters in American productions, with words like "mamma", "cappuccino", "famiglia" or "spaghetti" disseminated more generously than is usual in the lines of dialogue. The same goes for the Hispanic characters with all their "Adios", "Amigo", "Señorita" and so forth.

Not only. Again, just like with accents, there is no need for a multilingual situation to raise vocabulary problems. Genres and roles require literally different words, too. For example, the representation of different social classes required can also be expressed through a different choice of words. Specialized jargon is applied to certain professions, like doctors, scientists, hackers and others, not just to achieve greater accuracy in what they will talk about (surgery, software…), but rather to sound more credible in front of the viewers. In fact, to say it all, especially when it comes to science and information technology, it is kind of useful that we do *not* understand all that the characters are talking about: this will give us a "wow" impression on the complexity of the topics discussed in a given dialogue. AV genres as such, too, may have vocabulary requirements: children's programs are of course simplified in language; genres that specifically relate to certain professions, such as legal, sci-fi, detective, will use more of the appropriate jargon for such professions, including abbreviated forms that would be incomprehensible in other genres (characters in legal movies will use D.A. for "District Attorney", but we will not hear this abbreviation in other genres); typically, genres like action movies or pornography will have a higher than average amount of vulgarity and swearwords, etc. Finally, times and places may also demand attention: here, for example, the costume drama based on a work of nineteenth century literature is usually rich in refined and somewhat archaic words and expressions; the story set in, say, northern England will have more straightforward and rude words than southern England—and so forth.

4. **Other vocal qualities** (tones, timbres, pace of speech, etc.). Also extremely important are the non-verbal aspects of spoken language: how loud does one speak, how fast, how bright, how high… All these vocal qualities can be crucial in defining a character, and, once again, the role of common places and stereotypes is not secondary. The "macho" type of hero is not expected to have a very high/little voice, the neurotic/talkative character is not expected to talk at a slow pace, the self-assured/arrogant villain is not expected to stutter—examples are endless. There are cases in which an actor is perfectly suited to the part from a physical point of view, but not from a vocal one, and that may lead to either choose someone else, or to actually dub the voice (in the same language!). In many mid- and southern European countries, the action-comedy duo Bud Spencer and Terence Hill (stage names for Carlo Pedersoli and Mario Girotti respectively) was extremely popular for about three decades between the end of the 1960s and the late 1990s. Responding to a rather prototypical physical standard that made them perfect for their roles (Bud Spencer being the big, rude man with a heart of gold, and Terence Hill being the athletic "adorable scoundrel" type), the two actors had rather unfortunate voices in comparison. It is not as if they were unable to speak or act, but timbres and tones (and accents too) had nothing to do with that prototype: Spencer's voice was not as baritonal and determined as his character would require (plus, he had an audible Neapolitan accent, which is the last regional inflexion you may want to connect to a "tough guy" in Italy), while Hill's voice had an almost aphonic timbre that was very far from the self-confidence his character would display. Conclusion: both actors have been dubbed throughout most of their career as a duo, and in every language in which their movies were produced including their native Italian tongue (▫ Fig. 4.48).
5. **Technology** and **market**. To conclude, the employment of spoken language in AVCC must also face a number of issues related with the technologies employed (miking, soundscape, acoustic conditions…) and with the market requirements. In terms of technologies we basically have the same problems as with sound in general. For example, conversations in AVTs have a degree of politeness and respect that is far superior than reality. That is: people do not interrupt each other, and do not talk over each other, not even when they are arguing. Obviously, this is due to the fact that, as



▫ **Fig. 4.48** Terence Hill (left) and Bud Spencer (right): perfect for their characters in every detail except the voices, that needed to be dubbed also in their native language. *[Image of public domain]*

> viewers, we need to correctly hear and understand what is being told: the only allowance for "confusion" is when confusion is exactly the signification that the text intends to convey at that particular point.

Instead, when it comes to market things become quite interesting and "specific" about language. An AVT, in the majority of the cases, is produced with an idea of making some profit, and that means that producers must have a certain target audience in mind, crafting the work in such a way that this target is attracted by it. A target audience has numerous characteristics that must be taken into account. First (and once again): geography. Is the text meant for the local market? If yes, there are good chances that it will be produced in the local language; if not, it will probably feature a more international language (typically English, but it could also have a more specific target, and therefore adapt accordingly), or—more probably—it will be subtitled or dubbed. Subtitles will be discussed later as part of "written" language, while for **dubbing** we have at least two options, corresponding to two different "schools" of dubbing. One school is quite popular in countries like Germany, Italy, Spain and others: the original language soundtrack is *entirely* replaced by as many voices as there are in the text, and these voices will speak the needed language. In this case, the dubbers are professional actors who *perform* the lines in a similar manner as the original. The other school, more popular in countries like Lithuania, Poland, Russia and others, consists in a simple **voice-over**, rather than actual dubbing: the original voices can still be heard in the background, while a single actor (sometimes two: one male and one female) will "translate" the lines of each character in a rather neutral style, without any real acting/performing. In several countries, moreover, dubbing is only applied to children's programs, while all the others are shown in the original language with subtitles.

It is also important to emphasize that dubbing and voice-overs may introduce different words, expressions or entire lines in the dialogue, as compared to the original. That may happen (although it occurs less and less often, due to cultural globalization) if a given word/line is culture-specific and makes no sense in the country where the text is being dubbed. Swearwords and insults are probably the best example, here, and forgive me if this is not a particularly dignified passage of the book. Just think of some famous, very nasty ones in English that are widely used in movies, and compare those to your own language: do you have a *faithful* translation, or does your local dubbing normally need to revert to a different type of insult to convey the same idea? Do you have a specific equivalent of "motherf***er" or "as***le", or do you actually hear other words when those are used in the original dialogues? As an Italian person I know very well that there is no specific equivalent of "as***le", and that what I would normally hear, in its place, is either the word "st***zo" or "rottin***o". The former stands not for the hole of the particular anatomical part, but rather its product; while the latter indicates that the specific part of the body is broken, due to overuse. All right: end of dirty passage. Apologies.

A second reason for introducing different words is the age factor. Particularly when it comes to the youngest age ranges there are different language requirements. To begin with programs for small children need to employ easy vocabulary and a slow speech pace. Another issue is the morality of the language: a certain level of vulgarity like the one we have just elaborated on, is considered inappropriate for people under a certain age. Finally, the contents of what is being said, too, may be subject to restrictions (which, admittedly, are less and less, as time goes by and moral standards are renegotiated).

Third: culture. If you remember the point we made about model readers, you will also understand that the linguistic choices of some texts have to do with the expected competences and inclinations of the target audience. Say: a superhero movie can afford to use the term "kryptonite" without having to explain it, because there is an expectation that the audience is familiar with Superman; an action movie can afford to call a gun by its brand ("give me my Colt!", "I have my Smith & Wesson!")… Moreover, and that is particularly true with sequels, prequels and the likes, there is also an expectation that the audience is familiar with specific texts of a similar type of the one they are now being exposed to. It is quite ok, by now, for movies that deal with time travelling, to employ such expressions such as "flux capacitor", once the *Back to the Future* saga made it so popular.

4.3.2 Writing

Written language is often exposed to similar problems as the spoken one, but that does not necessarily mean that similar solutions will be employed. For example, when it comes to geographical requirements for different languages, within the diegetic space, we have seen that spoken language can easily rely on the trick of having all characters speaking the same idiom. That is hardly the case with written language. If, say, the English-speaking character from the American movie goes to Italy and visits a restaurant, there is a chance that the local waiter miraculously speaks perfect English, but there is hardly a chance that the signboard at the entrance reads "Restaurant", instead of the more obvious "Ristorante".

Moreover, and predictably, most of the non-verbal aspects in written language are qualitatively different from those in spoken language. There are no such things as tone, timbre, volume, accent and the likes, but we instead have fonts, colors, size, precision… and those can be just as effective in solving communicative problems. A handwritten calligraphic letter may provide connotations of romance, nostalgia, old times, memory… while the same letter written with uncertain and unappealing handwriting may give totally different connotations, including the possibility that the letter is written by a psychopath. The fonts employed

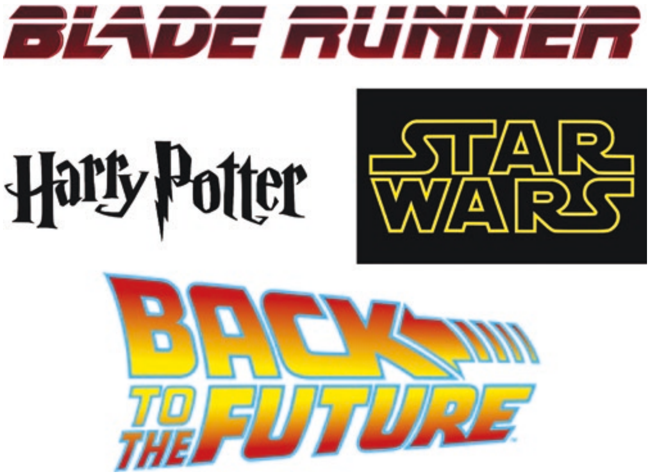


Fig. 4.49 Four film logos whose fame rivals the films themselves. *[Images of public domain]*

in any diegetic or non-diegetic written item may say a lot about the AVT as such: genre, epoch, place… in fact, some fonts have become so iconic that any reutilization of them in other texts creates an immediate connection with the original context: think about the fonts employed in *Star Wars*, *Back to the Future*, *Blade Runner*, *Harry Potter*, *The Wall* and plenty of others. The same goes with the colors employed: chromatic connotations—we have seen it in the section on "image"—and can be extremely rich and varied (Fig. 4.49).

Written language can be classified in five different typologies, the first four being non-diegetic, and the last one being diegetic. They are:

Captions. By this term we mean any non-diegetic written item appearing during the AVT that provides some kind of information we need in order to have a more complete knowledge of the story—or the premises to it: sentences like "5 years later", "Paris, July 1789", "Helsinki Kiasma Museum", are typical examples of captions. Their appearance is often associated with some kind of visual effect, let's say a particular font that emphasizes some contextual aspect of that information: for instance, movies based on relatively recent news may feature a caption of a very specific date and/or place written in typewriter fonts, and perhaps spelled with the typical noise of typewriter keys—as if to underline that the story is real and was reported by journalists (Fig. 4.50).

Head (or opening) titles and **end titles**. Featured either at the very beginning of an AVT (head titles) or at its very end (end titles), with some exception (occasional preambles or codas may appear before head titles or following the end titles), this type of written language has a mostly informative role and it is employed to list most or all of the production crew, from directors and actors down to stunt persons and hairdressers, the sponsors, the locations, the musical tracks and so forth. For this reason they are also referred to as "opening credits" and "end credits". Not rarely, titles are also an opportunity for very inventive visualizations that often set the mood for the type of text that is about to begin (in the case of opening titles) or provide a sort of "encore" for a text that has just finished (end titles). For example, the

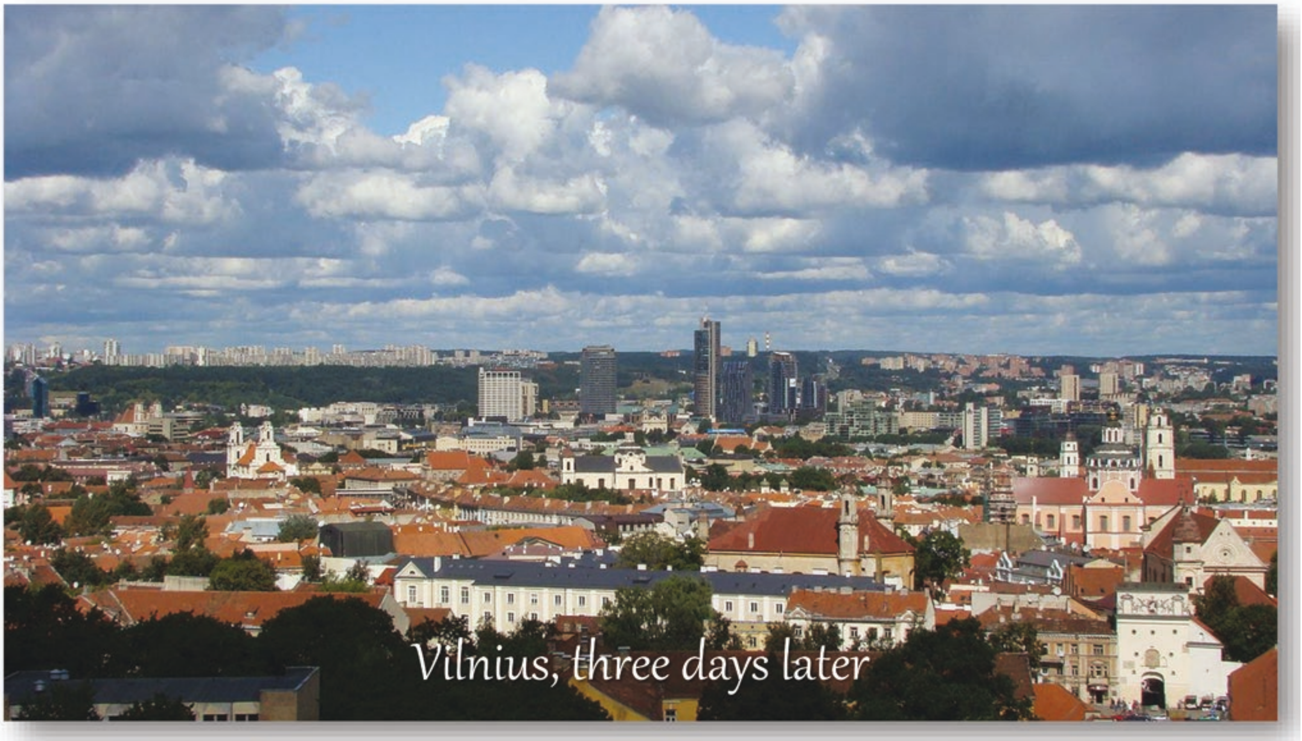
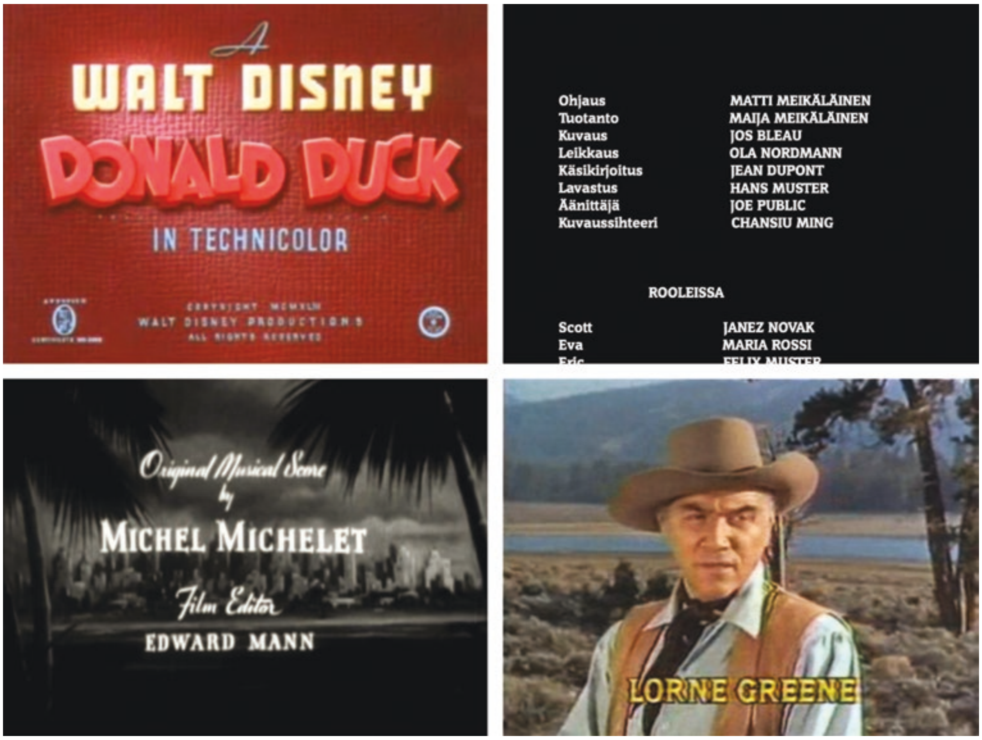


Fig. 4.50 An example of caption, indicating a place ("Vilnius") and a time that suggests a temporal leap in the story ("three days later"). *[Image of public domain]*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Lavastus HANS MUSTER
Äänittäjä JOE PUBLIC
Kuvaussihteeri CHANSIU MING
ROOLEISSA
Scott JANEZ NOVAK
Eva MARIA ROSSI
Original Musical Score
by
MICHEL MICHELET
Film Editor
EDWARD MANN
LORNE GREENE

Fig. 4.51 Four different types of head and end titles. *[Images of public domain]*

opening titles of James Bond movies have become a solid tradition for each instalment of the saga, coupled of course with the theme song, which is often an event in itself being performed by popstars of the period, while recent animation movies like *Finding Nemo*, *Ice Age* or *Bee Movie* have specialized in very long and entertaining end titles (Fig. 4.51).

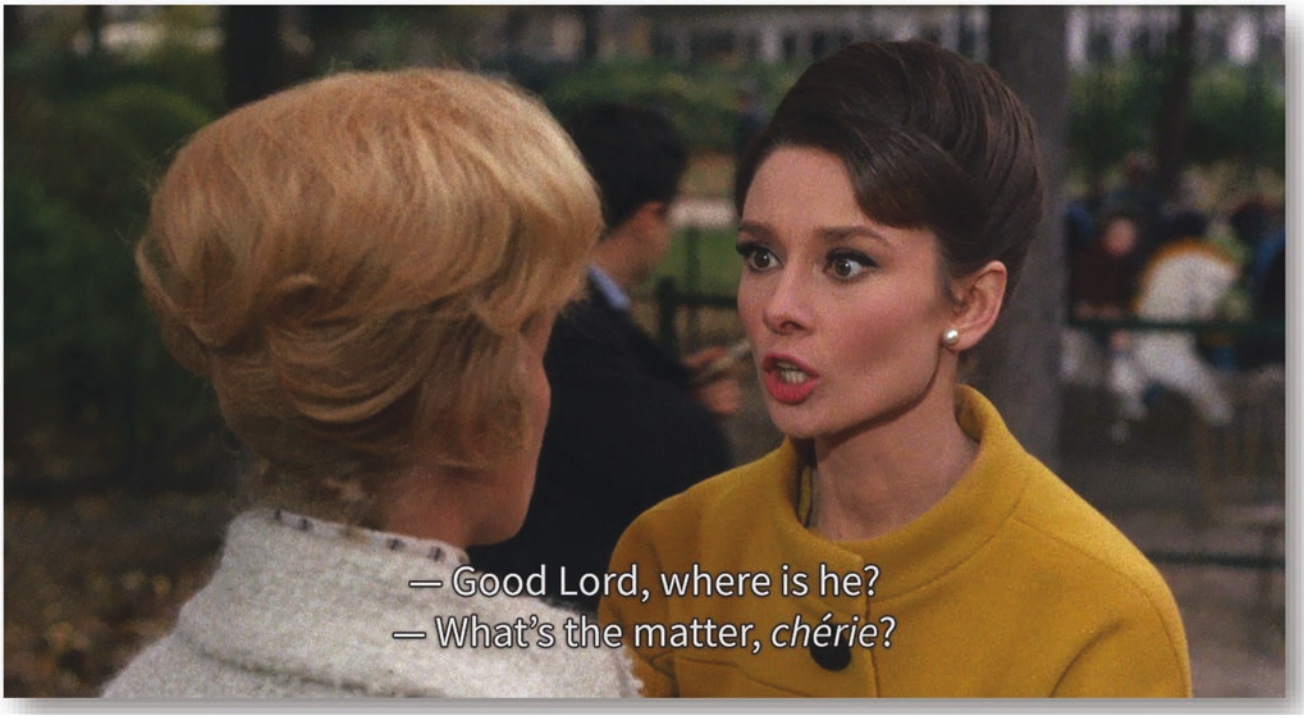
Subtitles. Usually appearing at the lower side of the frame, subtitles are non-diegetic written texts that are mostly used for translation from one language to another. Occasionally they can be used for more inventive (and less realistic) purposes, such as "translation" of thoughts, animal sounds, dreams and others. On occasions they can be used for comical purposes, as improbable and amusing translations/interpretations. For an Italian like myself coming from the Bari area, always memorable will be a scene from the comedy called *Vieni avanti cretino!* ("Step forward, idiot!"), where the main character Pasquale Zagaria (played by actor Lino Banfi) exchanges a conversation in such strict and incomprehensible Bari dialect that subtitles in Arabian sarcastically appear—as if that was actually the language spoken by the characters (Fig. 4.52).

Intertitles. Intertitles were a very important form of non-diegetic written language during the era of the silent movies, when the lack of sound, despite being compensated as much as possible by the bodily mimic of the actors, would still need to verbalize some passages. Intertitles would then intervene in-between sequences to add a key sentence (either a short description or a line of dialogue) that would clarify or specify the situation in question. Nowadays, of course, intertitles have become rarer, and tend to be employed only on particular occasions as a deliberate choice (and not as a need): the more common example are some comedies, where intertitles may still appear with a parodic purpose, or texts with a kind of theatrical structure, where intertitles may appear to announce different parts/episodes as "act I", "act II", etc. (Fig. 4.53).

Inscriptions. Finally, anything that appears diegetically *inside* the text goes under the category of "inscriptions": letters, magazines, books, street signs, shop signs… anything that characters in a story read or may potentially read. While, on a general level, inscriptions are simply a necessary part of a credible landscape within a given sequence, in many cases they also serve primary narrative functions, and not rarely are employed as subtle references or even inside jokes. The progressive path to folly that the character of Jack Torrance experiences during *The Shining* is perfectly illustrated by his repeated typewritten sentence "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", with numerous spelling mistakes at each repetition. Possibly, the most elaborate example of the category is Peter Greenaway's *Drowning by Numbers*, where all numbers from 1 to 100 appear in sequence, in one graphic form or another: on a shirt, on a door, on a piece of paper, etc. (plus a few cases in which the given number is spoken by some character) (Fig. 4.54).

4.3.3 Case Study: Figures of Speech in Dialogues

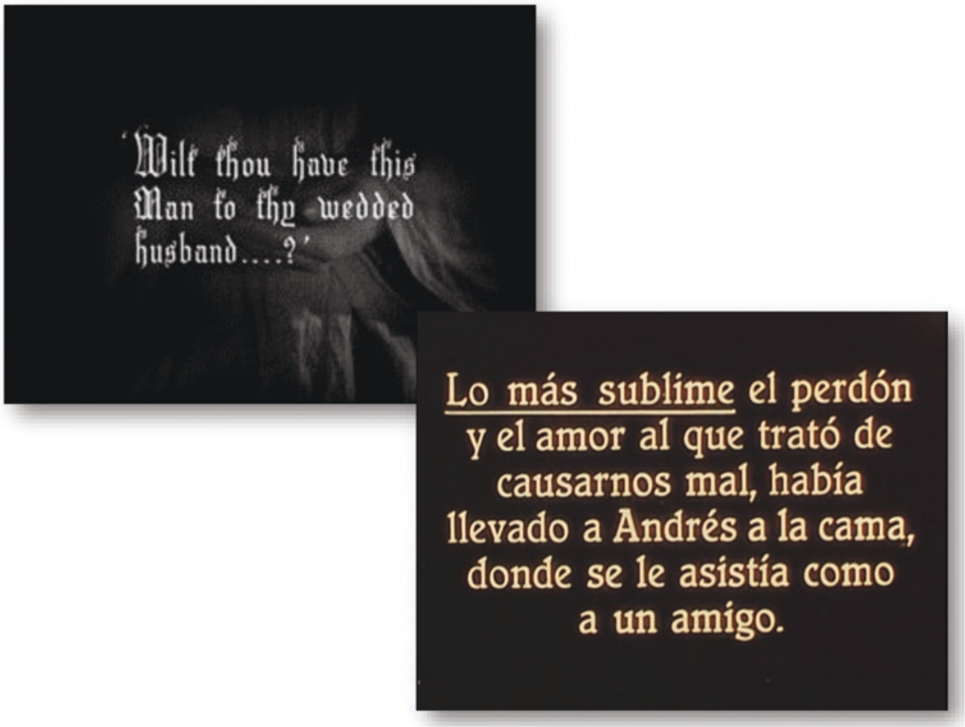
"The art, practice, and study of human communication" (Andrea Lunsford); "the art of speaking well" (Quintilian); "the art of enchanting the soul" (Plato). These are only a few of the many definitions that were given in history to **rhetoric**, and already from these it should be pretty clear how crucial this practice is within any communication process. Rhetoric is at the same time a field of inquiry and the totality of the employments



— Good Lord, where is he?
— What's the matter, *chérie*?

Fig. 4.52 A subtitled sequence from the film *Charade* (1963). *[Image of public domain]*

Fig. 4.53 Two examples of intertitles. *[Image of public domain]*



'Wilt thou have this
Man to thy wedded
husband....?'

Lo más sublime el perdón
y el amor al que trató de
causarnos mal, había
llevado a Andrés a la cama,
donde se le asistía como
a un amigo.

of written, spoken, sonic and visual communication. As a field, it investigates how communication is used to mediate social interactions, convey meanings, establish and maintain identities, regulate behavior and produce effective knowledge and understanding. Some fields, such as politics or advertising, rely significantly on rhetoric strategies of communication, and probably for this reason many people have an idea of rhetoric as either something devious and manipulative (e.g.,

OZÓ
ERDÉLYI
KERESZTES
ÉTTER
METROPOLITAIN

Fig. 4.54 Three examples of inscriptions that appear in the diegetic space. *[Fair use—Images personally assembled and edited for demonstrative purpose]*

how a politician persuades us to vote for them, or how a commercial persuades us to buy a product), or something overly pompous and clichéd (as in "Oh, don't be so rhetorical!", and similar comments). While we cannot deny that rhetoric may *also* have such effects on communication, that represents only the tip of iceberg, and the reality is that communication is *always* rhetorical in its very nature of a persuasive tool of interpersonal interactions (see again the "conative" function of communication in ► Sect. 2.1.4). On occasions, such nature is more visible than in others, but a completely dry, sterile form of communication, devoid of any rhetorical dimension, is more of a theoretical notion than an actual practice.

As you may have already guessed by reading quotes from the likes of Plato and Quintilian, the field of rhetoric is rather ancient, and was created about 2500 years ago, in Ancient Greece, as the investigation on the forms of communication and argumentation needed in public life (politics, law, etc.). Since then, it has evolved into a varied body of research that has interested, among others, philosophers of the caliber of Aristotle, John Locke, Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. Aristotle had already argued that rhetoric is primarily concerned with the modes of persuasion, and that persuasion is "a sort of demonstration, since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated".

AVCC has a lot to "demonstrate" and "persuade" about: stories from the past or from the future; events that did not happen; events that did happen but are presented in a different manner, with different faces and different words; places that do not exist; but also ideas, opinions, values, emotions… Understanding the basics of rhetoric will help us to understand many of the communicative strategies adopted in AVTs.

Aristotle himself had identified three basic modes of rhetorical communication: one depending on the personal character of the speaker [*ethos*]; a second one focused on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind [*pathos*]; and a third one focused on the effects provoked by the chosen words within a speech [*logos*]. Once more, here we are dealing with the basic model of communication: sender-text-reader. The *ethos* provides a focus on the sender, the *pathos* on the reader and the *logos* on the text. In practice, that means that rhetoric can be effective in one or more of the following ways: when the sender expresses themselves in a credible way (for instance, they look sincere); when the reader is made particularly receptive to the message (for example, they are told things that they particularly care about); and when the message is structured in a convincing way such as by the use of particularly catchy expressions.

The Roman philosopher Cicero is credited as the most important scholar of rhetoric in antiquity. In his book *De Inventione*, he created what are now known as the "Five canons of rhetoric", that is the five basic principles by which one can construct successful and effective communication. These are: ***inventio*** (invention), ***dispositio*** (arrangement), ***elocutio*** (style), ***memoria*** (memory) and ***actio*** (delivery). Cicero, at that time, had in mind only public speaking (particularly political speeches), so the canons are more eminently applicable to oral communication, and indeed most of the examples we will provide in this case study come from oral dialogues in AVTs. However, the application of this model to just any kind of communication is relatively easy, with the possible exception of the *Memoria* principle, which, as we shall see, is particularly suitable to orality. In detail:

Inventio is the cognitive process by which we formulate ideas and material for our text. It is, in practice, the act of brainstorming. For instance, an AV author comes up with several thoughts and emotions they want to bring up to their work.

Dispositio is the stage when we decide how to arrange these ideas in the text. For example, the AV author is now writing a "subject" for their work: what comes first, what comes next, how the text ends, etc.

Elocutio is the stage when we choose the actual words for our text. Our AV author, at this point, works on the script with all the dialogues, the captions, and so forth.

Memoria is the action of committing a text to memory, and therefore it is the very stage that is not easily applicable to written or visual communication. In that sense the work of an actor is here more relevant than that of an author. Nevertheless, having a vivid, fluent memory of the text while delivering it (see *actio*) is extremely useful to just any sender, and we may easily compare this stage to simply "having a clear idea of what to do".

Finally, *actio* is the stage in which we present the text to the readers. It is the actual "performance", and as such it concerns equally any individual involved in communication, AVCC included.

As you can see from this model, rhetoric is in principle an all-embracing study of communication. However, in time and with the emergence of more specialized areas like linguistics, semantics, semiotics, philology and so on, rhetoric came to be identified more narrowly in scope, as a field particularly focused on the stages of *Dispositio* and *Elocutio*, and in relation to the specific tools for persuasive communication. The best known and most commonly used of such tools are the so-called "**figures of speech**", a very rich set of strategies that can be employed in any form of communication, including the AV one, in all its manifestations. Rhetoric in AVCC is not only used in the linguistic sense, as we are about to see here, but can be used in the images, in the music, in specific montage sequences, camera shots and so forth. We have seen some examples in previous paragraphs of this book.

Figures of speech are usually divided in **schemes** and **tropes**. A scheme is a change of structure in the particular communication act: we change the position of some signs, we repeat them, we turn them upside down, etc. In a trope, on the other hand, we intervene on the meaning of the sign, stretching it in some different direction, providing connotations, etc. It is beyond our scope here to make a full list of all the figures of speech proposed and developed in history, because they are literally hundreds, and because they also present cultural and historical variations, depending on who theorized them, when and where. However, in the following lines, I intend to emphasize no less than fifty of the most recurrent and—to my mind—important ones. For each of them I shall provide specific linguistic examples from AVTs, usually a quote from a dialogue. However, to underline the fact that figures of speech do not just apply to linguistic communication, we shall not use the terms "words" and "sentences", but rather "signifiers" and "sequences".

Name	Definition	AV example
Alliteration/Assonance/Consonance	Schemes—Repetition of the same sounds in two or more different signifiers. In alliteration we have the repetition of the initial sounds, in assonance we have the repetition of the same vowel, and in consonance the repetition of the same consonants	Several names of cartoon characters are based on alliterations, in order to make them more memorable: Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Duffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, Wonder Woman, Pink Panther… Assonances (e.g., Scooby Doo) and consonances (e.g., Green Lantern) are popular too
Allusion	Trope—Usually, a short reference to famous people, events, places, or artworks, aimed at illustrating a concept	"We're 5000 feet away—5000 feet away on Everest. At those elevations, you might as well be trying to rescue the people in Apollo 13."—David Breashears, in the TV documentary *Everest: Death Mountain*
Ambiguity	Trope—Sequence intentionally designed to have more than one meaning	"I'm having an old friend for dinner—Hannibal Lecter, in *The Silence of the Lambs*
Anadiplosis	Scheme—Repetition of a signifier at the end of one sequence and at the beginning of the next one	"But most importantly, send our army for hope—hope that a king and his men have not been wasted to the pages of history."—Queen Gorgo, in *300*
Anaphora	Scheme—Repetition of the same signifier or set of signifiers in a sequence, at the beginning of each segment	"I come to you as a mother. I come to you as a wife. I come to you as a Spartan woman. I come to you with great humility."—Queen Gorgo, in *300*
Anastrophe	Scheme—Unusual order of signifiers in a sequence	"Through the force, things you will see!"—Yoda, in *Star Wars*
Anesis	Trope—Addition of a concluding sequence that diminishes the effect of what was said previously	"Maybe I didn't go for my father. Maybe what I really wanted was to prove I could do things right, so when I looked in the mirror I'd see someone worthwhile. But I was wrong: I see nothing." Mulan, in *Mulan*
Anticlimax	Trope—A sequence builds up high expectations, but then the conclusion is comparatively disappointing	"He died, like so many young men of his generation, he died before his time. In your wisdom, Lord, you took him, as you took so many bright flowering young men at Khe Sanh, at Langdok, at Hill 364. These young men gave their lives. And so would Donny. Donny, who loved bowling." Walter Shobchak, in *The Big Lebowski*

Name	Definition	AV example
Antiphrasis	Trope—One or more signifiers used ironically	In Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* all the characters' names are ironic variations of real Nazi/fascist personalities: Adenoid Hynkel for Adolf Hitler, Benzino Napaloni for Benito Mussolini, Garbistch for Goebbels, etc.
Antiprosopopoeia	Trope—Representation of human beings or other animals as inanimate or abstract objects	"You are a cliché, you know that?"—Nancy Wheeler, in *Stranger Things*
Antithesis	Trope—Juxtaposition of contrasting signifiers or sequences	"A medium dry martini, lemon peel. Shaken, not stirred."—James Bond, in *Dr. No*
Anthropomorphism	Trope—Ascribing human characteristics to something that is not human, such as an animal or a god	Basically, any word spoken by any non-human animal in AVTs, particularly in animation
Aposiopesis	Scheme—An unexpected interruption of a sequence	"You know… if anyone ever talked to me the way I heard… the way she spoke to you…"—Marion Crane, in *Psycho*
Asyndeton	Scheme—Omission of conjunctions between signifiers in order to give more rhythm	"My quest has taken me through the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional—and back."—John Nash, in *A Beautiful Mind*
Cacophony	Scheme—Use of signifiers with harsh sounds	In Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* the character of Adenoid Hynkel (parody of Hitler) speaks a harsh-sounding gibberish, meant as a parody of a very aggressive German
Catachresis	Trope—Use of one or more signifiers in a context that differs from its proper application	"You're a kite… dancing in a hurricane, Mr. Bond."—Mr. White, in *Spectre*
Cliché	Trope—Quality or characteristic assigned to a signifier (or whole situation) that is repeatedly used, up to become a stereotype	"Fight like a man!"—James Gordon, in *Gotham*
Climax	Trope—A sequence building up in tension and expectations and reaching the highest point	"The final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship, Enterprise. Its 5 year mission, to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before!"– Captain Kirk in *Star Trek*
Commutatio	Scheme—Repetition of signifiers, in successive sequences, in reverse grammatical order	"Those who can't do, teach; and those who can't teach, do."—Carrie Bradshaw, in *Sex and the City*
Conduplicatio	Trope—Repetition of key signifiers in a sequence	"Don't give yourselves to these unnatural men—machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men!"—The Barber, in *The Great Dictator*
Diacope	Scheme—Repetition of one or more signifiers with one or more between, usually to express depth of feeling	"The name's Bond. James Bond!"—James Bond
Double Entendre	Trope—A sequence meant with two meanings, one of which usually being sexy or politically incorrect	"My dear, religion is like a penis. It's a perfectly fine thing for one to have and take pride in, but when one takes it out and waves it in my face we have a problem."—Countess Violet Crawley, in *Downton Abbey*
Enthymeme	Trope—A kind of syllogism, often not logically strict but more metaphorical	"The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long, and you have burned so very, very brightly, Roy."—Dr. Eldon Tyrell, in *Blade Runner*
Enumeratio	Trope—A signifier is provided with details that explain it: e.g., a cause is provided with its effects, an antecedent with its consequents, etc.	"And you are all being royally screwed over by these bureaucrats, with their steak lunches, their hunting and fishing trips, their corporate jets and golden parachutes."—Gordon Gekko, in *Wall Street*
Epistrophe	Scheme—Ending a series of sequences with the same signifier/s	"The kingdom of God is within man—not one man, nor a group of men, but in all men!"—The Barber, in *The Great Dictator*
Epitheton	Trope—Attribution of a quality to a signifier—usually a not-too-obvious one	"And so, a quiet, humble, respectable negro, who has had the unmitigated temerity to feel sorry for a white woman, has had to put his word against two white peoples."—Atticus Finch, in *To Kill a Mockinbird*

Name	Definition	AV example
Epizeuxis	Scheme—Repetition of the same signifier two or more times in succession	“Dear Mrs. Black: On seven prior occasions this company has denied your claim in writing. We now deny it for the eighth and final time. You must be stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid!”—Leo Drummond, in *The Rainmaker*
Euphemism	Trope—Replacing a pejorative or socially-delicate signifier with a softer, more favorable one	“You’re so full of shitake mushrooms!”—Carmen Cortez, in *Spy Kids*
Exemplum	Trope—Brief or extended illustration of a point	“When their enemies were at the gates, the Romans would suspend democracy and appoint one man to protect the city. It wasn’t considered an honor; it was considered a public service.”—Harvey Dent (justifying the importance of Batman), in *The Dark Knight*
Expletive	Trope—One or more signifiers interrupt a sequence for the purpose of adding emphasis	“New roads, agriculture, employment, education, these are just a few of the things we can offer you, and I assure you ladies and gentlemen, that if we do find oil here, and I think there’s a very good chance that we will, this community of yours will not only survive, it will flourish.”—Daniel Plainview, in *There Will Be Blood*
Hyperbole	Trope—Deliberate exaggeration of a concept	“Bigger than bigger”. Apple commercial for iPhone 6
Hypophora	Trope—A question and an answer to it pronounced by the same subject in the same sequence	“You wanna send me to jail? Fine, you go right ahead. I’ve been in jail for 400 years. I can be there for 4 or 5 more.”—Mohammed Ali, in *Ali*
Irony	Trope—A signifier used to mean the opposite of its literal meaning, usually for purposes of mockery or derision	“By all means, move at a glacial pace. You know how that thrills me.”—Miranda Priestly, in *The Devil Wears Prada*
Metaphor	Trope—A signifier is transferred from its literal meaning to stand for something else	“I’m the king of the world!”—Jack Dawson, in *Titanic*
Onomatopoeia	Trope—The signifier imitates the sound of the signified	“Pity about poor Catherine, though. Tick-tock, tick-tock.”—Hannibal Lecter, in *The Silence of the Lambs*
Oxymoron	Trope—Matching of contradictory terms	Numerous AVT titles are oxymorons: *True Lies*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Little Big Man*…
Paradox	Trope—Self-contradictory sequence, which however tends to evoke a truth	“I am big! It’s the pictures that got small.”—Norma Desmond, in *Sunset Boulevard*
Parallelism	Scheme—The use of similar structures in two or more sequences	“We did not seek, nor did we provoke, an assault on our freedoms and our way of life. We did not expect, nor did we invite, a confrontation with evil.”—Josiah Bartlet, in *West Wing*
Parenthesis	Trope—Insertion of one or more explanatory signifiers within a sequence, in order to better illustrate the latter	“The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed—for lack of a better word—is good.”—Gordon Gekko, in *Wall Street*
Personification	Trope—Addressing or describing abstract items or inanimate objects as though they had human qualities or abilities	“Houston, we have a problem!”—Jim Lovell, in *Apollo 13*
Polysyndeton	Scheme—Repeated use of conjunctions in a sequence	“And the Germans will not be able to help themselves from imagining the cruelty their brothers endured at our hands, and our boot heels, and the edge of our knives. And the Germans will be sickened by us, and the Germans will talk about us, and the Germans will fear us.”—Lieutenant Aldo Raine, in *Inglorious Basterds*
Pun	Trope—Combination of similar-sounding signifiers, or identical ones with different meanings	George: “Hey! There’s a Cyclops!” Paul: “Can’t be. It’s got two eyes.” John: “Must be a “bi-cyclops” then.” Ringo: “There’s another one.” John: “A whole “cyclopedia”!” Dialogue from *Yellow Submarine*
Rhetorical question	Trope—A question that is more like a statement, and does not really require an answer	“Snakes. Why did it have to be snakes?” –Indiana Jones, in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*
Sarcasmus	Trope—A bitter type of humor that mostly makes use of mockery	“Does it ever get cold on the moral high ground?”—Countess Violet Crawley, in *Downton Abbey*

Name	Definition	AV example
Schesis Onomaton	Trope—A series of successive, synonymous signifiers/sequences	"He's a silent guardian, a watchful protector, a dark knight!"—James Gordon, in *The Dark Knight*
Sententia	Trope—Use of an aphorism or a proverb to sum up an argument	"But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. Listen. Do you hear it? Carpe. Hear it? Carpe. Carpe Diem. Seize the day boys. Make your lives extraordinary."—Professor John Keating, in *Dead Poets' Society*
Simile	Trope—An explicit comparison	"Mama always said life was like a box of chocolates: You never know what you're gonna get."—Forrest Gump, in *Forrest Gump*
Synecdoche	Trope—A whole is represented by naming one of its parts or vice versa	"The working man and the slum child know they can expect my best efforts in their interests"—Charles Foster Kane, in *Citizen Kane*
Tautology	Trope—Repetitive use of signifiers that have similar meanings	"I know all I wanna know"—Ringo Kid, in *Stagecoach*
Understatement	Trope—A situation is deliberately diminished in its importance, mostly for ironic purposes. A.k.a. "litotes"	"We are trying to keep the locals calm. Burning down the royal palace with their queen still inside might make them slightly peevish."—Octavius, in *Rome*

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Properties: Taxonomy, Culture, Thematicity, Performance, Technology

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Properties, as we have already seen in ► Sect. 2.2, constitute the way AVTs can operate to convey meanings, or—in other words—the role they play within the communicative act. We have identified five main properties: **taxonomy** (media, formats and genres), **culture** (social, ideological, moral, political and indeed cultural processes), **thematicity** (objects, places, characters, and other notions that become "topics"), **performance** (the individual execution of acting, directing, scoring, etc.) and **technology** (tools, techniques and devices employed to produce the text). In that paragraph, and it is important to reinforce the point, we specified that properties are not classifiable or quantifiable objectively, but they are conscious, or sometimes unconscious) designations that any creative force within an AVT selects and applies in order to make the text operate at artistic and communicative level. We do not quantify performance: it is a combination of factors and criteria, and for the most part is activated individually by the specific artist. Thematic and cultural properties are virtually endless, and—what is worse—highly nuanced and dependent on several variables. Anything can be a theme, from huge topics such as love or death to the tiniest like writing a letter or spreading apricot jam on a slice of bread. Technological and taxonomic properties, too, may be slightly smaller in number but still counted by the hundred, although they are constantly updated and upgraded: for example, new technologies pop up on almost a daily basis, while the reproductive ability of a genre to split into sub-genres, sub-sub-genres, sub-sub-sub-genres, not to mention crossovers, is notorious.

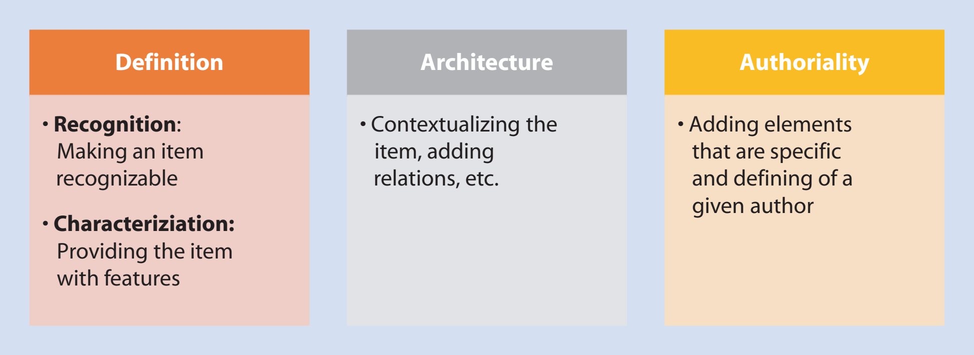
What to do, then? Well, an unwritten rule in research is this (remember you are reading it here for the first time, because no academic will tell you): if you cannot tell *what*, then try at least to explain *how*. Or, more technically: the absence of concrete research results (either theoretical or empirical) usually leads to placing greater emphasis on methodology. Translated for our purposes: there is no point in trying to define the actual properties pertaining to taxonomy, culture, thematicity, performance and technology; however, we may say a thing or two about the general criteria for actualizing them and some specific factors for recognizing them. Plus, of course, we can see the properties "in action", via the five case studies that you will find in the next paragraphs.

Let us start with general criteria. When an artist creates, "puts into a scene", and post-produces, they can use pretty much anything available. Reality, of course, but also an alternative idea of it, an imaginary idea of it, a past condition, a present condition, a (likely or not) future condition, or just feelings, emotions, opinions, mental processes. Whichever is the mean, whatever axis it is operating on, it is very likely that each act of AVCC is developed in stages (three, as we shall suggest): some may be taken for granted, some may result in being less relevant than others, and some may also be unconscious in the artist's mind—nevertheless they are all visible, exactly like an ordinary act of communication—for example, a spoken sentence—may be fully articulated in words, intonation, enunciation, etc., or only partially, but is still provided with understandable sense. It is during the enactment of these three stages that properties appear and give substance to the text.

The film semiotician Francesco Casetti, in my humble opinion, must be credited for having elaborated one of the most effective forms of semiotic analysis for movies, and by extension AVTs. Works like Casetti and Di Chio (1990/2004) or Casetti (1996) have been crucial in the development of my own ideas on AVCC representation, so the scheme that follows here, albeit personally restructured and elaborated, has a lot to do with what they theorized.

Keeping in mind what is communicated (as we said: a portion of reality, an emotion, an imaginary future, etc.), or in other words the actual "signified" (in Saussure's terms) or "object" (in Peirce's terms), AVCC is usually constructed according to the following steps (see also ◘ Fig. 5.1):

1. **Definition**. What is represented and communicated must first of all be recognized as such, and not confused with something else, and then it must also be characterized, given some specific features. This process is called definition and it is divided into **recognition** and **characterization**. Let us say that we have in mind the AV construction of a non-human animal. Could be a cartoon, live action, computer animation or else. When we think about a non-human character, we want them to be acknowledged as a species in particular, in opposition to others, such as in the case of Bambi, where, for instance, certain physical features are placed in order to make sure that the American audience recognizes the familiar white-tailed deer.


Definition
• Recognition: Making an item recognizable
• Characteriziation: Providing the item with features
Architecture
• Contextualizing the item, adding relations, etc.
Authoriality
• Adding elements that are specific and defining of a given author

◘ **Fig. 5.1** Three steps in AVCC: definition, architecture and authoriality

> Or perhaps a specimen, especially if we want them to stand out from other specimens of the same species, e.g., Shaun the Sheep, the protagonist of a clay animation series, who lives with other sheep, is visibly smaller than the rest of the herd, so we can immediately pick him out from the crowd. There is also Moby Dick who is famously white, an uncharacteristic color for a cachalot, so there is no doubt it is him, when he appears, etc. This is "recognition", step one of the communicative process, which is a bit like saying: "Look! This is *this very thing*, and not another one".

Once the item is recognizable we can start assigning some features to it—things that perhaps may give some background to the very item, or also give some context to the whole story, and we also need to assign some specific characteristics that are in turn useful to the development of the story. This is "characterization". In this process, we need first and foremost to make sure that the features we assign are not ambiguous, and do not lead the audience astray. If, say, we have a chair, and we made sure that the "recognition" process was successful (it is not confused with a table), we may not want the audience to think that the chair is out of place in a certain context: if our AVT has a modest house as a location, we want a simple chair that is perhaps made from wood and straw, certainly we do not want a fancy Scandinavian design chair. This correspondence is achieved through rather conventional strategies: the point here is to create a "normality" in the perception, because when that normality is not displayed, the audience starts wondering why (we have seen that). If we again use non-human animals as examples, we may think about the many representations of dogs, particularly in movies and TV series. Any visual representation of dogs is produced in the awareness that, in a kind of Orwellian fashion, "some dogs are more dogs than others", that is, there exists a quintessential component that makes some dog breeds "central examples" of *dogness.* We know from street signs (e.g., those that indicate that dogs are not allowed in a certain area) that a mid-to-large-sized dog with a short coat is more easily interpreted as a "synecdoche" for all dogs, rather than a small breed. When we see a Yorkshire Terrier or a Cocker Spaniel in a sign we tend to think that *only* those breeds are the target of the warning: when we see a German Shepherd or a Labrador, we get more an idea of "dogs in general". Exactly the same occurs at AV level: the antonomasia of dogness is represented by mid-to-large-sized dogs like Strongheart or Rin Tin Tin (in fact, it may even have been their popularity that contributed to this general perception, rather than the other way round): save few exceptions, these are the "flexible" dogs, the ones who can be assigned a variety of roles without ever looking "out of place". Very small, very big, very hairy, very ugly, very peculiarly shaped dogs already become sources of mental associations (the small dog as the "little brat", the big one as the "elephant in the glasshouse", etc.).

However, AVCC is not only about distinguishing a typical chair or dog from a non-typical one. When we characterize, we also need to take more specific actions, to define more complex characteristics. As an Italian, I cannot help noticing how Hollywood has a particular affection for one single type of "American Mafioso": short, fat, dark-haired, semi-bald and—of course—of Italian origin. We see that in the *Sopranos* series, in the characters played by Robert De Niro, Joe Pesci, Danny De Vito… a very clear red line that goes back directly to early popular Italian immigrants, not necessarily associated with the mafia: Al Capone, certainly, but also the likes of the legendary opera singer Enrico Caruso.

Back to our example of non-human animals. We clearly notice a similar principle, although, inevitably, the difference is that the conventionality of characterizations does *not* go through common places or stereotypes that are *inherent* to a given species, but rather opt for an anthropomorphic interface. If the American Mafioso is based on the stereotype that American Mafia itself is mostly composed of Italian immigrants, there are more chances that a non-human villain is *again* based on the stereotype of the American Mafioso or another typical human villain, rather than on a supposedly "mean" specimen of the species in question. This is largely due to the fact that, in most cases, we actually *do not know* what a "mean" non-human animal specifically looks like, so we rather project the solid cinematographic tradition of human villains: e.g., we may portray the villain as uglier than the good guy (see the difference between King Mufasa and his betraying, ambitious brother in the movie *The Lion King*). Some of these features may have certain correspondences with the biological condition of the species involved, but this does not necessarily mean that it is the *same* type of correspondence. For example: speaking generally, a good-looking male in many species is probably a healthy and fit specimen, and if he is, then he may probably be an *alpha*. However: is an *alpha* male a morally good male? There is no direct correspondence between these two characteristics in the real world, in fact, not even in the human world is there such an equation. In the mentioned *Lion King* we see very much an attempt to establish this correspondence: King Mufasa is a handsome specimen, an alpha male and he happens to be "a good king" in that particular capitalistic way that we see so often in movies. His brother is not only less "handsome": he is most of all less "fit", and that explains why he is biologically unsuitable to be an alpha. To that, Disney adds the classic Hollywoodian (and, to an extent, positivist) conclusion: if he is less handsome, he is also less valuable in a moral sense.

On the other hand, if we change example, we see a different picture. Diego, the villain-turned-good Smilodon in the *Ice Age* saga is not the alpha male of his herd: this role is played by Soto, who is clearly (a) the undisputed leader; and (b) a villain from the beginning to end. Diego, instead, is a subordinate specimen, and—during the second half of the first installment of the saga—reveals his good heart by siding with Manny and Sid against his "boss". In fact, the composition itself of the trio is very interesting in this respect: they are all marginalized outcasts of their own herds. Manny detaches himself from other Mammoths after his first family is killed by human hunters; Sid is abandoned by his own family of sloths who considers him a burden: also the ones who join from the second installment onwards (Manny's new love interest, the two possums, Diego's own love interest, etc.) are in the same condition. To an extent, *Ice Age* is a story of "freaks", be they a dysfunctional family, a mixed group of immigrants (please, note that all the mammoths in the saga are voiced by Afro-American actors), or something else, a nice hymn to diversity that shows very clearly the effects of political correctness on children's movies, especially when compared with the controversial pseudo-racist depictions of several Disney characters.

Summing up, if by recognition we distinguish the X item as X and not Y, by characterization we define a full-round "subject", with their own unique characteristics that stand out from all the rest and significantly contribute to the development of a story. As you may imagine, the depth and the refinement of the whole definition process depends on the importance of the item within the AVT itself. Be that a non-human animal, a chair, a Mafioso, or also a word, a musical theme, or anything belonging to any of the three "means", the item's degree of definition will go in accordance with its importance. For instance, this is why we learn so many things about protagonists in an AVT, and so few about secondary characters; or why the main theme of a soundtrack is more memorable and articulated than other musical bits.

2. **Architecture**. Constructing a message, and creating a correspondence between signifiers and signifieds is not just a question of defining the message as such, but it is also a question of contextualizing it, and putting it into relation with the surrounding environment. The message that the chair we mentioned before may carry has not only to do with the contents of that chair itself—as we said: it could be a simple, modest one. Depending on where that chair is placed, the meaning may change entirely. If it is indeed placed inside a simple, modest apartment it may be exactly a piece of the household; but if the very same chair appears in a contemporary art museum, in the middle of an exhibition hall, it may actually be a work of art, acquiring a completely different meaning. This is the "architectural" aspect of AVCC: the placing of an item, the nature of its context, the balance among the various items, between background and foreground, etc. There is tons of additional information that one can detect (and therefore create, within an AVT), that the stage of definition is not actually so effective at conveying, comparatively. Relations, for instance: the relation between two persons or objects is more easily constructed in an architectural sense, rather than in a defining one. For example, when I start giving a new lecture course, at the beginning of the academic year, my class will occupy the space in a certain manner, by sitting on any of the available chairs. By taking a quick glimpse at how my students created their own architecture, I already understand several things without even saying or hearing a word: I can tell who knows who by observing who is sitting together, and who is not; I can tell if I have couples in the room, by observing "how together" they sit; I can tell who is likely to pay more attention during the class, who is not, who is and wants me to notice that s/he is, and so forth. All these are matters of "architecture", and, as you may easily guess, they relate particularly to that "axis of the space" we were mentioning before.

More than definition, architecture may look like a step that only concerns visual aspects of the AVCC, but please make no mistake. "Placing" and "contextualization" are also concepts that easily apply to sound and language. Think about the notion of "soundscape" which we have discussed more specifically in the section on "sound", the equivalent of "landscape", but extended to acoustic signals. We create a soundscape by choosing a number of sounds that we consider typical of a certain space, and that is the step of definition. If the AVT is located in an airplane, we may want to have a subtle constant background of that particular noise that aircrafts make when they are flying; then we may want a certain amount of human voices chatting; then we may want the occasional announcement from the pilot; then some light cutlery/pottery sound produced by the hostesses when serving the meals, and so forth. All these aspects "define" the soundscape of the airplane, but the "placing" of these items, in acoustic terms, is all a question of architecture: how loud, how often, at what point in particular… compare the difference between the aircraft noise and the pilot speaking: the former occurs continuously but at a low volume, the latter will appear once or twice in a much more distinctive and loud manner.

3. **Authoriality**. In conclusion, there are also manners of connecting signifiers and signifieds that are not conventional in a general sense, but that are instead typical of some authors. They are like signatures of the artist, and we need to know a little bit about them in order to grasp these signs in their entirety. For instance, if we want to define (particularly characterize) the female protagonist of a thriller movie, nobody obliges us to have this woman looking pretty cold/formal, middle class, white, blonde and conventionally good looking. She may just as easily be brunette, warm and working class like the characters usually played by Sofia Loren, or loud, Afro-American and perhaps less conventionally good looking, like the characters usually played by Whoopi Goldberg, and so forth. There is nothing that intrinsically says "female protagonist" in those features that I have listed. Yet, if we take the example of Alfred Hitchcock, we know that he had a specific passion (in fact, obsession) for the so-called "cool blonde" stereotype. The great majority of the actresses who played female protagonist roles were cold/formal, middle class, white, blonde and good looking: Tippi Hedren, Ingrid Bergman, Kim Novak, Grace Kelly…

This is "authoriality": a set of traits/features/architectural elements that do not follow the general rules of anthropological or cultural conventions, but rather reveal the personality and the choices of the creators of that particular AVT.

Every creative member of the production team of an AVT has one or more signatures that make the text unmistakably associable to them: directors, composers, screenwriters, actors… Hitchcock is not only noticeable for his "cool blonde" stereotype, but there are dozens of other signatures that make his movies so heavily recognizable as "his" and nobody else's. In Hitchcock's movies we often see stairs and staircases, big monuments and landmarks, brandy as the drink of choice of the characters, that narrative strategy known as MacGuffin (in ► Sect. 3.3.4 we have seen what that is), and so on and so forth, up to his legendary cameo appearances.

Sid Meier, the Canadian IT programmer (best known for the *Civilization* series), has become such a recognizable signature in videogames that already five years after his first production (*Formula 1 Racing*, 1982), his games started featuring his name in the titles (*Sid Meier's Pirates*, *Sid Meier's Civilization*, *Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri*…), as a guarantee of a certain style, a certain complexity and a certain level of engagement.

John Williams, the soundtrack composer, is very recognizable for the epic, adventurous, pompous nature of his themes: *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *Superman*… if you put these themes together you may even be tempted to think they are all parts of the same soundtrack.

Excurse 10—Syllables and soundtracks

With my students I often joke that there is one scientific method to recognize whether a theme was written or not by John Williams: that is, the syllable one uses to sing those themes. If you are using any soft syllable like "La la la" or "Doo doo doo", you can be sure it is not him: try to sing the *Star Wars* or the *Indiana Jones* theme with those, and you will notice it really does not work. However, if your syllable of choice is "Pah, Pah, Paaaah", then it is probably Williams: try to sing the same theme now, and you will see how better it works! This is of course an opportunity to have a laugh with my students, but there is really a scientific basis for such a bizarre statement. There is an area of inquiry called phonosymbolism (e.g., Jakobson-Waugh 2002 or Magnus 2010) that investigates how sounds are assigned a certain symbolic value: the syllable "pah" is associated with brass instruments, fanfare-like sounds, a certain stereotypical masculinity, etc. All these are associations that well match with Williams' themes, which are indeed often performed with full orchestra (having brass parts in the foreground), and are—as we said—epic and pompous. For the same and opposite reason, the refrain for Kylie Minogue's "Can't get you out of my mind" could never have been "Pah Pah Pah, Pa-pa-pa-Pah Pah…". A "Lah" syllable was definitely called for.

Summing up the three steps, in order to make them even more understandable, we can compare this process with the moment we dress up. First of all, we need to "define" ourselves, and that depends on certain roles we choose or we are assigned (gender, age, job, social status, temperature, weather…). We want to be recognizable for those, and characterized in some particular way: if we dress up for an outdoor summer concert, we probably do not want an evening dress, but we'd rather opt for informal T shirt and trousers (recognition). However, even that simple combination will be subject to some specifics (characterization) depending on the type of concert we are attending: everything is possible of course, but we may legitimately doubt that we will find someone with a punk outfit at a rap concert. Architecture then intervenes in how we "place" our clothes: in a basic sense that means to wear them in a conventional way (socks and shoes on the feet, T shirt on the torso, etc.), but that already has its exceptions (think of when you remove the T shirt because it is sunny and hot, and you tie it on your head, to avoid a stroke). In a more articulated sense, we know that each musical genre has also developed its own peculiarities on how clothes should be worn—and therefore positioned: just think about the reverted position of a baseball cap on the heads of the hip-hop fans. Finally, we all have our own personal style, and if we—say—decide to wear a red sock on one foot and a yellow one on the other, that is entirely our choice.

5.1 Taxonomy

As we have mentioned already in the general introduction to the M.A.P. model, "taxonomy" refers to the intrinsic properties within AVCC that enable us to distinguish different types of texts, as related to the medium they are intended for (e.g., something for the internet, as opposed to something for the TV), to the format of the text (e.g., a fictional text, a news program, a music video, a commercial…), and to the genre (e.g., a western, a comedy, a horror…). We have already presented these taxonomic groups earlier in the book, so the purpose of this paragraph is mostly to investigate the systemic criteria by which these groups enact different communicative strategies.

The three mentioned overall conditions determine some structural and operative choices (what indeed we have called "properties" in our M.A.P. model), that are not mutually applicable, and that therefore mark a qualitative distinction across texts. Some of these characteristics may be similar or identical to other taxonomic groups (e.g., a full-length movie meant for cinema present numerous features in common with a single episode of a fictional TV series), but when we sum up all of the characteristics we end up having a paradigm of features and conventions that belong to that group only, and to no other.

As thoroughly discussed in ► Sect. 1.2, the macro groups that may generate communicative properties of taxonomic type are three: **media**, **formats** and **genres**.

To deal with "taxonomical properties" within our M.A.P. model means to investigate those communication strategies that are inherent to one of the three groups we have mentioned. In other words, when a given communicative act is performed *because* the text belongs to one of these groups, and not necessarily for other reasons. Of course, there are cases—and they are the majority—when more than one property is taken into account, but the point here is that taxonomy can be one of the reasons (sometimes the main one) why the communicative choice A is preferred over the choice B. The following are the most relevant criteria for taxonomical choices (see also ◘ Fig. 5.21):

1. **Purpose**: Trivially enough, every AVT is produced with a purpose, from the most general (entertainment, information, education…) to the most specific within the general (e.g., scary entertainment, funny entertainment, moving entertainment…). Purposes often generate taxonomic groups, particularly formats and genres. As we have seen in ► Sect. 1.2, newscasts (as well as infotainers, to a lesser extent) are formats developed for information, and communicative strategies are conceived accordingly.
2. **Relation with reality**: the text may be declaredly fictional, or declaredly non-fictional. I say "declaredly" because once again we need to remember that conceptually no text is entirely fictional or entirely non-fictional. The point here is to mark a difference between those texts that, by media, format or genre, intend to deal with real facts (newscasts, infotainers, documentaries, concert films, live sports…) and those that deal with fictional events (movies, videogames, commercials, music videos, TV fiction…). Tones, contents and techniques of communication vary accordingly, and predictably there are numerous do's and don'ts involved. Although exceptions are possible, a fictional text usually takes more liberties than a non-fictional one, but on the other hand, unless the fictional text is *intentionally* designed to remind of a non-fictional one, the former will not adopt strategies that are typical of the latter. One trivial example: videos of real disasters/calamities are often taken by chance, by some direct witness who was quick enough to capture some seconds of them. But of course, most of the time what we have is amateur footage, with imperfect focus, unsteady filming and the likes. Yet, we find this more than acceptable, when we watch news programs, up to the point that, if the video looks actually *too* professional, we start suspecting that it is a fake or even a conspiracy. Now, more than one fictional AVT (we may mention movies like *Signs* or *The Blair Witch Project*) has adopted this imperfect/amateur aesthetics to give a sense of realism to their movies, especially if (like in the two examples mentioned) they involve supernatural entities like witches and aliens. In fact, the case of *The Blair Witch Project* is paradigmatic because the *whole* movie is shot as if it was amateur footage.
3. **Relation with time**: some texts require a live broadcast/feed and some others do not. This, too, determines important distinctions in the communicative approach. To begin with, a live AVT, while based on a number of predetermined tasks and a set of expectations for the given event, has to mostly rely on improvisation. During a play-by-play of—say—a football match, the commentator does not know in advance who will win (though they may expect the team that is stronger on paper to do so) how many goals will be scored (though they may have an expectation on the basis of the quality of attack and defense of the two teams), by whom, (though they may expect the strikers to do so), and so forth. In pre-recorded texts, unless, of course, they are a simple and faithful rerun of live ones, one has the possibility to intervene, edit, post-produce and so forth.
4. **Originality**: partly related to time, and partly not, there is also the question of the originality of the text, that comes to determine different taxonomic groups and, consequently, communicative properties. Some AVTs, for example the live ones we have just mentioned, have the highest degree of originality since they are mostly improvised and delivered on the spot. Some others are scripted, but anyway based on original ideas, such as fictions with original subjects. Some others are adaptations of pre-existing texts, not necessarily AV ones, e.g., remakes or adaptations. Some others follow pre-established patterns that are repeated with only minor variations, such as certain programs for children, some television fillers, etc. Some others, finally, are replicas and/or collage works of pre-existing AVTs.
5. **Length**: the length of each text may vary individually, but it can also have more or less accurate principles of length regulation, including aesthetic conventions (e.g., movies are seldom shorter than 90 min or longer than 180), supporting text, when present (e.g., a music video, whose length tends to be related to the length of the song), law (e.g., in many countries there is a specific time limit for commercials), target (e.g., programs for children tend not to be too long to meet the attention spans of younger audiences), and so on.
6. **Target audience/model readers**: texts adopt even radically different approaches to communication, depending on who is expected to watch them. We have mentioned children's programs in relation to length, but length is not the only thing that must be taken care of, when one communicates audiovisually with children. Words must be simple, pace must be slow, themes must be psychologically suitable, and so forth. Same goes with all other kinds of audience, including groups determined by age, gender, (professional or other type of) specialization, economic status, geographical area, language, etc.
7. **Budget**: The money at one's disposal for producing an AVT does not just determine differences in quality

> (when it does at all: a higher budget is not necessarily a guarantee of a higher quality), but has in time prompted stylistic nuances that came to define different modes and models of sound, visual and linguistic communication. Studio productions, mainstream AVCC, blockbusters are all texts characterized by communicative strategies that one can usually (and quite easily) distinguish from underground, independent and amateur texts, for the better and for the worse. On several occasions in AV history, the "indie" aesthetics has become a model for the mainstream, and has generated new forms of expression. The example of the "New Hollywood" (or "American New Wave") inaugurated in late 1960s cinema is probably the most famous example of "low budget" AVCC that achieved such cultural impact and popular success to quickly become mainstream and very generously financed.

In addition to this, as it will also be clear in the next paragraphs, taxonomic groups intertwine with the other four properties, culture, thematicity, performance and technology, and may originate from the conditions set by any of them. For example, AV educational animations in planetariums are a specific format in a specific medium, thus falling under the "taxonomy" category. At the same time their specificity is primarily determined by particular technologies (hemispheric screen, 3D animation, laser…).

For additional references about taxonomical questions, please refer to ▶ Sect. 1.2.

5.1.1 Case Study: Western as Genre, Sub-Genres and Cross-Genres

Given the importance of the historical context in the shaping of formats and genres, I suggest, for this case study, to take a so-called "**diachronic**" approach, and analyze a specific genre whose history is rich enough to be taken as a model to illustrate the whole dynamics of genre development and the degree of significance that AV arts have been acquiring in time within cultural processes. The example of westerns, albeit limited to the Hollywood film industry (which is anyway the richest in the world), seems to be such a case. Also, we did not yet have the opportunity to deal with a more historiographically-oriented type of case study, and that is certainly a gap that we need to fill, for this type of analysis is just as useful as more "**synchronic**" ones.

Although more than one spectator has an idea of it as a specifically cinematic genre, western is actually a form of narrative text with roots in literature, theatre and—only on a later stage—AVCC. Generally set in North America (occasionally Mexico) in the late nineteenth century (occasionally later or earlier), the western genre is inhabited by all the characters and events of the period, both daily and extraordinary (natives, civil war, pioneers, bandits, life in villages, transports, economy, military life…), with a prominent focus on the life and actions of the white settlers during that period, in either a realistic or, perhaps more often, mythical way. White settlers were at the same time protagonists of the stories—with very few exceptions, which anyway occurred later—and the target audience of the genre. This is important to mention, because this epoch was perceived as the first "American" historical experience, from the settlers' point of view, becoming therefore a form of epic narration for white Americans, equivalent, say, to Kalevala for Finnish people, or Hellenic myths for the Greeks.

No wonder, thus, that Lévi-Strauss's studies on myth (which we shall see better in the paragraph on "thematicity") and Propp's theories on archetypical narration (which we have seen already) were among the first to be applied by scholars who became interested in western cinema myth since the 1970s. In works like Kitses (1969), Wright (1975) and Bellour (1979) explicit comparisons were made between mythic discourse and westerns, remarking how the latter transmits a set of messages and values to society that "reinforce, rather than challenge, social understanding". It was noticed how westerns, like myth, tend to offer a view of life and people grounded in basic binary oppositions such as Good versus Evil, Strong versus Weak, Wild versus Civilized, Insiders versus Outsiders, Illegal versus Legal, and so forth.

As such, westerns were predominantly presented in the form of a morality tale, with usually two possible narrative lines: restoring order in a (insiders/good/legal, etc.) village threatened by (outsiders/evil/illegal, etc.) bandits; and portraying the conflicts between the good/civilized settlers with the evil/savage natives. Especially after the 1950s, however, several variations were introduced creating a more complex, post-mythical and often anti-mythical, discourse.

From the Origins to the 1940s

The birth of western movies coincided with the birth of cinema itself in the US, in the early 1900s, but in fact western and theatrical performances were already popular, since the 1860s, with mythologized versions of the Wild West era and heroes. Probably, the best known example were the travelling *Wild West Shows* that William Cody "Buffalo Bill" staged from the 1870s onwards: a circus-like performance consisting of different attractions (shootings, mock fights, horse riding, music…) that toured around the world and fueled the Wild West myth. Among the famous western novelists, on the other hand, certainly Owen Wister and Zane Grey deserve a particular mention (◘ Fig. 5.2).

Not surprisingly, as westerns appeared in cinema theatres, they quickly became one of the public's favorites (if not *the favorite*), starting already from what is arguably the first movie of the genre, Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Quickly, some of the most skilled directors of the period tried their hand at this particular style, including Cecil B. DeMille, David W. Griffith, Thomas Ince, and naturally John Ford—arguably the first acknowledged "maestro" of westerns. These and other authors quickly realized that the audience would find it particularly appealing to be repeatedly exposed to the same characters, and would enjoy seeing them undertake different challenges. Recurrent characters of the early period were thus Broncho Billy, Tom Mix and his horse Tony, Buck Jones (and the horse Silver Jones), and Fred Thomson (and the horse Silver King—horses had a very prominent role in western, as trusted friends who would often rescue the heroes from danger). Later, characters who won the audience's sympathies included Hoot Gibson, Ken Maynard, Harry Carey and Tim McCoy (◘ Fig. 5.3).

While the genre was firmly codified as a moral/heroic tale, it was very common to also witness more comedic tones (or moments of comic relief within a traditional western), or straight action movies that were aiming at pure spectacularization of the genre, without any pretention of moral messages.

Fig. 5.2 A photograph of Buffalo Bill and a poster of one of his Wild West Shows *[Images of public domain]*

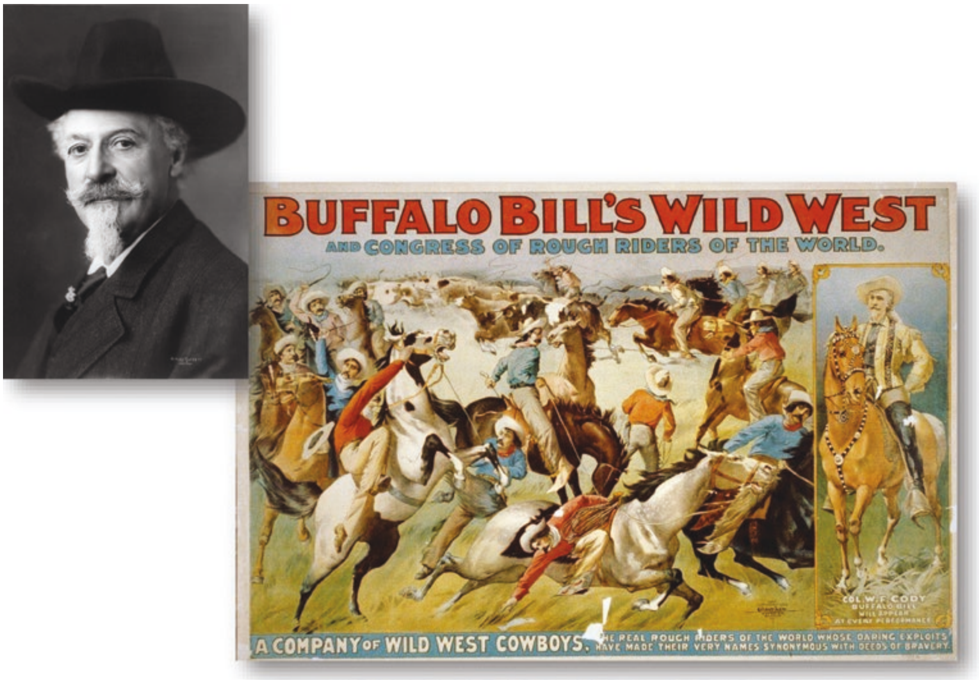
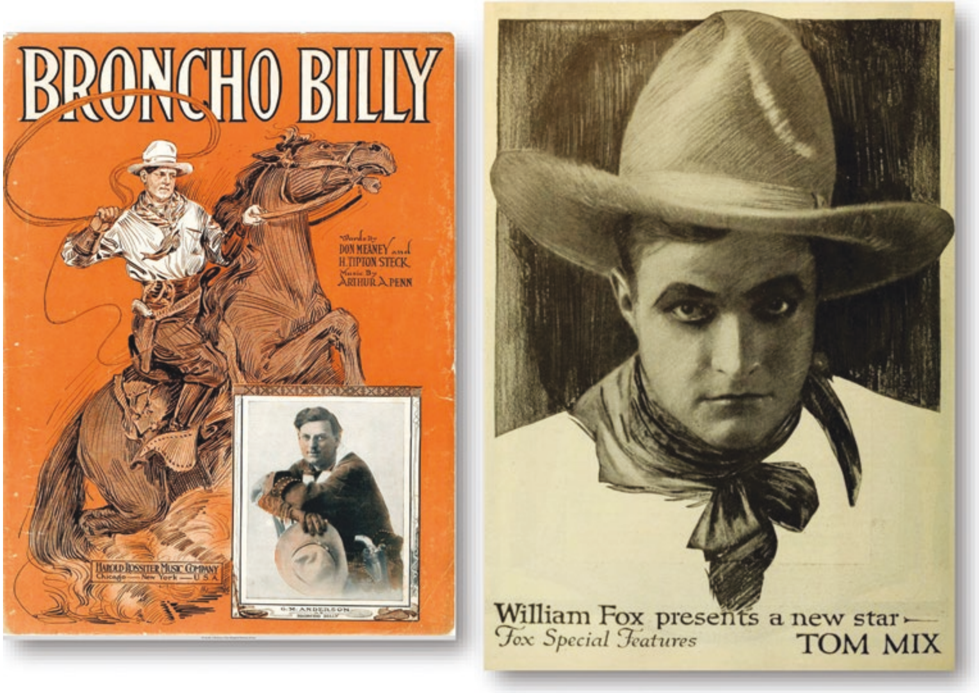

BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST
AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD.
COL. W. F. CODY
BUFFALO BILL
WILL APPEAR
AT EVERY PERFORMANCE
A COMPANY OF WILD WEST COWBOYS.
THE REAL ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD WHOSE DARING EXPLOITS HAVE MADE THEIR VERY NAMES SYNONYMOUS WITH DEEDS OF BRAVERY.

Fig. 5.3 Two early heroes of the western genre: Broncho Billy and Tom Mix *[Images of public domain]*


BRONCHO BILLY
Words by
DON MEANEY and
H. TIPTON STECK
Music By
ARTHUR A. PENN
HAROLD ROSSITER MUSIC COMPANY
Chicago — New York — U.S.A.
G. M. ANDERSON
William Fox presents a new star
Fox Special Features
TOM MIX

Some milestone of the early period includes *The Wind* (1928), the first western to offer a woman's perspective in a traditionally male dominated genre (while we are at it, especially popular actresses were Blanche Sweet and Mary Pickford); *The Vanishing American* (1926) and *Redskin* (1929), the first ones to express vague sympathies towards the Natives (otherwise the absolute villains of early Westerns, as we know). Movies about real figures like Billy the Kid, Buffalo Bill and others, were also, and very often, produced, although their tales, predictably, were highly fictionalized and can hardly be taken as examples of historical accuracy.

The 1930s inaugurated the golden period of westerns, and with that some of its biggest stars: *The Big Trail* (1930) was John Wayne's first leading role, while James Stewart emerged in the 1939 film, *Destry Rides Again*. Very popular during those days was also Errol Flynn, who played his first lead in *Dodge City* (1939). Landmark movies of the decade include Wesley Ruggles's *Cimarron* (1931), for its significant, though stereotyped, anti-racist message. The latter features Native, Afro-American and Jewish characters all portrayed in a likeable manner, and of course John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), commonly acclaimed as the first real masterpiece of the genre,

OVERLA
ACE LINE

Fig. 5.4 Promotional photo for *Stagecoach*, one of the most important westerns of all times *[Image of public domain]*

and in general a highly influential movie for the whole history of cinema (Fig. 5.4).

The golden period continued into the 1940s, with such remarkable productions as *Northwest Passage* and *Brigham Young* (both released in 1940); *The Oxbow Incident* (1943); *Duel in the Sun* (1947); *Fort Apache* (1948); *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and *My Darling Clementine* (1949). While James Stewart made an important career turn from westerns to drama, most notably becoming Alfred Hitchcock's archetypical male hero, John Wayne remained faithful to his western "tough guy" image, with unaltered success. Emerging contestants to his stardom became Henry Fonda and Gary Cooper. The great reception of *Red River* (1948) launched director Howard Hawks as one of the genre's masters.

During this early but extremely successful stage of the development of westerns, *Stagecoach* has to be singled out as the most representative, and arguably best, example. Released in 1939, under the direction of John Ford, as an adaptation of "The Stage to Lordsburg", a 1937 short story by Ernest Haycox, the movie starred, along with the mentioned John Wayne (who began here a long-time cooperation with Ford), period stars such as Claire Trevor and Thomas Mitchell. It tells the story of a group of people, unknown to each other, traveling on a stagecoach through dangerous Apache territory, who find their journey endangered by the threat of Geronimo. During this perilous experience, inevitably provided with a happy ending, they get to learn numerous things about each other.

Hailed as an all-time masterpiece (Orson Welles referred to it as "a textbook on perfect film-making"), *Stagecoach* was also Ford's first sound movie, after he had released a series of silent westerns. In line with its innovative nature, the movie was partly shot on location, at Monument Valley, against the habit of the period to shoot westerns in studios. This, predictably, added to the realism of the action depicted.

Besides inaugurating the fortunate collaboration with Ford, *Stagecoach* was also Wayne's first major performance, after something like eighty so-called "poverty raw" westerns ("poverty raw" being an old fashioned way to call what are nowadays usually referred to as "low budget B-movies"). A seven times Academy Awards nominee, with two wins (supporting actor Thomas Mitchell and music), Ford's masterwork was also subject to a few remakes (particularly, one for cinema in 1966, and one for TV in 1986) and countless homages, parodies and references. All this to give you a vague idea of the enormous impact that this movie had on film history. Specifically within the genre, moreover, *Stagecoach* is said to have set the template for modern westerns, producing a blend of action, drama, humor, and well drawn characters that would be regularly applied in subsequent movies. The characters themselves seem to be representative of the whole "western epic" imagery: we have a sheriff, a fugitive, a prostitute, an alcoholic, a respectable pregnant lady, a banker, a gambler and a salesman, plus of course the evil Indians, and not mentioning the idea itself of the "journey"—a metaphor of the whole wild west adventure.

Also, and again anticipating a topic from the "thematicity" paragraph, the movie displays a particular mythical structure, in perfect pedagogical "textbook like" fashion (as Welles would have it), that would become a prototypical ideological scheme within American AVCC (not just Hollywood) and in fact society in general. That is the crossing between the legal/illegal and moral/immoral binary oppositions, in such a way that one almost contradicts the other. In countless American AVTs, indeed, there is a higher form of justice that transcends human law: what is illegal, consequently, is not always immoral, and what is legal does not always make for justice. Such a scheme is evident from the fact that the stagecoach is filled with "good" and "bad" people who need to build a common front against the Indians' menace. Significantly, John Wayne's character, the fugitive Ringo Kid, ends up being more of a hero than the representative of legality, the sheriff. Also, the fact that Ringo is depicted as "less dangerous" than Indians hints at a sort of "scale of moral priorities" within the western ethics, and in general on the philosophy of "lesser evil", both evidently informed by a racist mentality. The presence, and consequent acceptance of a “higher law” that goes well beyond the human one, is well depicted in the end: as Ringo helps to fight the Indians more bravely than anybody, and falls in love with the prostitute in the process, the sheriff decides not to arrest him, and in the final sequence, sets the two lovebirds free.

The 1950s and the *High Noon/Rio Bravo* Querelle

The end of the 1940s concluded what we may call the “purely mythical” era of westerns, the era in which narrations are sheer epics, structured as morality tales and inhabited by standardized mythical figures. The 1950s consequently served as a transition towards an actual reform of the genre: westerns were still very successful during this decade, yet new themes and ideological/revisionist elements timidly began to appear. *Broken Arrow* (1950), for instance, was a forerunner of “Native revisionism”, by presenting Apache communities in a more sympathetic light, while *The Gunfighter* (1950) portrayed a hero who wants to retire, thus removing the aura of immortality that previous westerns were surrounding their heroes with.

Also, after having embodied American identity as such for over half a century, westerns inaugurated in the 1950s a long (and still lasting) period of contamination with foreign schools and genres. As Japan recovered from the tragic burden of its defeat and nuclear disaster of the Second World War, its cinema gained an increasingly respectable position within the whole industry: Samurai movies, most notably the ones directed by the master Akira Kurosawa, became the Eastern equivalent of westerns (pun intended, of course) and started exercising a strong influence on American productions, up to the point that some of the latter are actually remakes (e.g., John Sturges’s *The Magnificent Seven* with Kurosawa’s *The Seven Samurai*). Stars of the period included Gregory Peck, William Holden, Barbara Stanwyck and still the eternal John Wayne. Among the classics of this decade we should mention, among many others, *Wagon Master*, *Bend of the River*, *Johnny Guitar*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky*, Gun Fight *at O.K. Corral* and *Annie Get Your Gun*.

However, of all the big and small innovations introduced in the 1950s, a distinctive one remained exactly the general demythisation of the “standard” topics, characters and narrative style, which all became less a celebration of some kind of idealized “good old days”, and more an attempt to say something relevant for the present. The best known example, and in general a masterpiece of the genre, was Fred Zinnemann’s *High Noon* (1952), a movie whose significance extends equally at visual, narrative and thematic level. Nicknamed an “existential western”, *High Noon* is the story of a village deputy marshal named Will Kane (Gary Cooper) who gets married to a Quaker (therefore pacifist) young woman named Amy Fowler (Grace Kelly) and decides to retire. As he is leaving the village for good and starting his new life, news arrives that a gang of four outlaws whom Kane had arrested a while back have been released from jail and are coming to town to get their revenge against the retired deputy. Amy wants to escape and avoid the confrontation, but Will wants to stay and fight, out of a sense of duty, but also knowing that, wherever the couple goes, they will be chased by the gang. Amy decides to leave and Will attempts in vain to gather a posse of gunfighters in the village. The villagers are hostile to the deputy for various reasons: some are actually friends with the outlaws; others fear the bad reputation of their village, should a gunfight take place; others still feel that this is Kane’s problem entirely (▣ Fig. 5.5). Disappointed by the villagers’ behavior, abandoned by his wife and afraid that these may be his final hours, Will does what no western hero had done previously: he sits in his office alone and desperate, head in hands. Will works out the courage and faces the four bandits by himself: acting quickly and cleverly, he manages to shoot two of them down, although he is wounded in the process. Hearing the gunshots while she is leaving town, Amy has a change of heart and chooses her husband over her religious beliefs: she returns, grabs a rifle and kills the third outlaw. The remaining one, however, manages to grab the woman as a shield and forces Kane into the open. Amy reacts quickly and claws the face of the bandit, who instinctively pushes her to the ground: that gives a clear shot to Will, who kills the last bandit. As the couple rejoices, the villagers emerge and cluster around. Will looks at them in contempt, tosses his tin star in the dirt, and leaves with his wife.

The movie received a favorable response by both public and critics, except for one illustrious spectator, an actor who was actually approached to play Kane’s role before Cooper, and had a very political motive to refuse and was now pretty unimpressed with the final production: it was none other than John Wayne, who thought that *High Noon* was the “most un-American movie ever made”. He was so outraged that he approached his friend, director Howard Hawks, to join forces and produce a movie that would be an explicit response to Zinnemann’s.

What made John Wayne so angry? He had understood that *High Noon* was far from celebrating the western myth, but was in fact an allegory of the controversial House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). This was a committee of the US House of Representatives in charge from 1938 to 1975, whose goal was to investigate subversive activities (particularly of a communist type) of private citizens, public employees, and organizations. Hollywood soon became a relevant target, due to the comparatively high amount of leftist activists and thinkers among actors, authors and various operators.

A “blacklist” of subversive people in the film industry was constantly compiled and updated, thanks also to colleagues who would testify against them. Notable blacklistees of leftist sympathies included Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles, Richard Attenborough, Luis Buñuel and many others. On the other hand, right wing American patriots became witnesses before the committee, reporting on underground activities and—to use the famous expression of those days—“naming names”, that is testifying against their colleagues. Curiously, notable witnesses included Gary Cooper who actually never “named names”, but also the ex-communist director Elia Kazan (who actively testified against his colleagues, and for this reason was never fully forgiven by the Hollywood community), future US president Ronald Reagan, John Wayne himself of course, and others.

What Wayne had indeed understood was that *High Noon* was an elaborate metaphor for HUAC’s political persecution. Among other things, the film screenwriter Carl Foreman had himself been blacklisted. The outlaws were an allegory of the committee itself (they return to town for “revenge” and “persecution”); the townspeople’s cowardice was an allegory to the cooperative witnesses before HUAC. As we said, Cooper himself was among those, although he never “betrayed” any colleague, and in fact helped Foreman to keep the job for this movie. The marshal obviously represented the “blacklisted”

▣ **Fig. 5.5** Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly in the "existential western" *High Noon*, a masterful allegory to the witch hunts of the House Un-American Activities Committee *[Images of public domain]*

artist, while his wife was a metaphor of the colleague with different beliefs who however, after initial doubts, decides to stand by his persecuted friends. Also, the main song of the movie (the country ballad "Do not forsake me, oh my darling") was an allegory to the witnesses' betrayal.

In addition to all this, *High Noon* was kind of "Un-American" also in a stylistic sense, as it challenged the traditional western genre in many ways—and that, too, was hard to forgive in the conservative view of John Wayne. First, the movie goes on in real time, in the 85 min from 10:35 (Will and Amy's wedding) to the showdown at (high) noon. That was highly unusual, as normally westerns had "epic", wide time spans. Second, "exciting" action occurs only in the final 10 min (the showdown against the four outlaws), thus contrasting with the usual spectacular vein of westerns: the rest—as we mentioned—happens at a much more "existential" level, through the words and the emotions of the characters. Third, some aesthetic tricks (particularly in the camera work, as we have also seen in the paragraph on the "visual means" of AVCC) are designed to emphasize the feelings of loneliness and desolation of the marshal. Finally, and most importantly, the marshal himself was depicted as a very unusual hero, who is aging and about to retire, and who shows a "weak", human side, by actually feeling abandoned and scared.

Wayne's and Hawks's response to Zinnemann's masterpiece was the movie *Rio Bravo*, released in 1959. It was planned as an all-American anti-communist celebration, with the basic ideas of using the same material as *High Noon*, but turning all the "critical" solutions (within the plot, the acting, the aesthetics, etc.) into patriotic, pro-HUAC ones. In *Rio Bravo*, to begin with, the deputy marshal (Wayne himself, it goes without saying), is brave and spotless, and shows no signs of weakness. Second, unlike the hostile villagers in *High Noon*, the ones in *Rio Bravo* all line up to help the marshal, who even ends up refusing some. As the posse is formed, we see an atmosphere of support and comradeship, miles away from the sense of loneliness and desperation conveyed by the isolated Will Kane. The movie is 141 min long, with a plot extended on the much more usual timespan of several days, and packed with spectacular action and gunfights. The main song, "My Rifle, My Pony, and Me", as one can already guess from the title, offers, too, a traditional representation of the western myth, with its postcard images of the cowboy riding on the wide prairie at sunset, rifle on shoulder—and all that.

While perhaps not hailed as an absolute masterpiece like *High Noon*, *Rio Bravo* remains nonetheless a real classic in the genre, proving that ideological tensions may be difficult at a personal level, but can generate great artistic results. Finally, to wrap up our story, and perhaps dissipate the impression that Wayne was ready to engage in a real gunfight with the *High Noon* crew, it must be also mentioned that Wayne and Cooper were very good friends and both HUAC supporters, although, as we have seen, Cooper never implicated any friend, and came to regret his support for the witch hunt. Back in 1953, Wayne was also gracious enough to accept the Academy Award on behalf of an unavailable Cooper, exactly for his performance as Will Kane—the same role Wayne himself had refused. Paying a sincere homage to his friend in the acceptance speech, he also made a tongue-in-cheek remark on not having accepted the role, jokingly implying that he should have been the one receiving the Oscar (▣ Fig. 5.6).

The 1960s and the Reform

The eagerness to reform westerns as displayed in the 1950s, was of course also an indication that the genre was experiencing a certain decrease of interest—a phenomenon that, incidentally, was occurring to several classic genres, particularly noirs and musicals. "Crisis", as you may know, comes from the Greek *krisis*, which actually means "opportunity for change", so we should not be surprised if, at the end of the transitional decade of the 1950s, westerns came out in the 1960s as well ready for a profound stylistic reformation. Such reformation is mostly embodied by two emerging sub-genres: "spaghetti western" and "revisionist western".

Spaghetti westerns, so-called because they stemmed from the creativity of Italian authors like Sergio Leone, provided both an aesthetic reformation, through a significant increase of action and violence, and an ideological one, through an anti-mythical portrayal of events and characters, who now usually appear as driven by personal interests, money, revenge, and other less than noble motives. Revisionist westerns, in turn, aimed at, so to speak, setting the record straight with history, offering a more objective view on what the Wild West era really was, portraying

Fig. 5.6 Ricky Nelson and John Wayne in *Rio Bravo*, a counter allegory to *High Noon*, this time in support of the House Un-American Activities Committee *[Images of public domain]*

Native Americans as victims of white settlers, military acts as much more unnecessary and cruel than just and heroic, etc. While offering a fairer picture of the past, revisionist westerns often took the opportunity to say a thing or two about the present, creating parallels between the genocide of Native nations and the war against Vietnam, and the likes. Of the two, the spaghetti western was the quickest to establish itself and gain prominence: for the most significant examples of revisionist westerns, we will have to wait for the next decade.

Among the most relevant movies of this decade we should mention at least John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven* (a remake of Kurosawa, as we have already seen), Sergio Leone's so-called "Dollar trilogy" (the actual "sacred texts" of spaghetti western: *A Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*), John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (where the lesson of spaghetti western is rather evident), George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid*, and numerous others. Monte Hellman's *The Shooting*, released in 1966, is often indicated as the first so-called "acid western" (a sub-genre we shall talk about later). As the stars of the golden period began to walk the "sunset boulevard", a new generation emerged: James Coburn, Robert Redford, Clint Eastwood, Charles Bronson, etc.

Leaving revisionist westerns to the next sub-paragraph (as mentioned, the 1970s are a more relevant decade for that movement), we shall deepen the topic of "Spaghetti western" through its most representative figure (Sergio Leone) and arguably its most representative movie (*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*). An Italian-born genre (hence the reference to a popular type of pasta), spaghetti western is an expression that quickly became a general name for many productions bearing a similar aesthetic and thematic approach.

Partly stemming from the crisis of values that animated American cinema in the 1960s—and westerns in particular, and partly due to its non-American genesis—spaghetti western showed already from its first appearance (*A Fistful of Dollars*, 1964), a visible detachment from the patriotic/mythical emphasis that can be found in the classic Hollywood western. Instead, it depicted a hyperbolic, expressionist universe dominated by violence, selfishness, cynicism and abuse—all cherry-topped by abundant doses of dark humor.

Often labeled as an ever-productive factory of B-movies, the sub-genre has in retrospect earned praise for its intrinsic cinematic quality and aesthetics, up to becoming one of the most influential Italian contributions to international cinema, and a globalized form of film making associated with directors from all over the world. By now, more than a few spaghetti westerns are considered to be defining masterpieces of the whole western genre. Sticking solely to Italian directors, important figures of this movement are Sergio Corbucci, Sergio Sollima, Damiano Damiani, and—most important of them all—Sergio Leone.

The real pioneer of spaghetti westerns, Leone soon became and still remains one of the best-known Italian directors in the world. After his debut with *Il colosso di Rodi* (1961), a so-called peplum (a particular type of era costume adventure films focused on ancient Rome or Greece), Leone applied his interest to rewriting the western genre. The mentioned "dollar trilogy", released between 1964 and 1966, plus the first two instalments of his second trilogy (the "time trilogy"), namely *Once Upon a Time in the West* and *Duck You Sucker!* (1968 and 1971 respectively) set the paradigm for this new sub-genre, and they remain five unsurpassed examples in the category (Fig. 5.7).

Leone's style was a blend of many elements: picaresque tones, lyricism, morbidity, plus of course great direction skills—some of which (for example, his famous "extreme closeups"), became much imitated stylistic features. While to an extent they paid tribute to the traditional American western, Leone's films were most of all a significant departure from the genre from the points of view of narration, characterization and mood. In traditional westerns, as we have seen, heroes and villains had a rather standard image, their moral differences were extremely neat (often symbolized by the "white hat for the good guy and black hat for the bad guy" distinction), and they all looked clean and handsome. With Leone, in contrast, characters began to look more realistic and complex: unshaved, quite dirty and always morally ambiguous, with a total dismissal of the "good versus evil" *cliché*.

All of these features and more came to a creative peak in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, the third instalment of the dollar trilogy, and our chosen example for this paragraph. Critics have often debated on what could be credited as the all-time best spaghetti western, but one thing is sure: this movie is always in the Top 3. Released in 1966, and starring Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef and Eli Wallach, the movie narrates the story of three men competing in a race to find a fortune in gold buried in a remote cemetery, during the difficult times of the American Civil War.

Fresh from the success of his two previous movies, which were produced with relatively modest resources, Leone was this time given a large budget by the production company United Artists, and that enabled him to afford a more expensive scenography and setting.

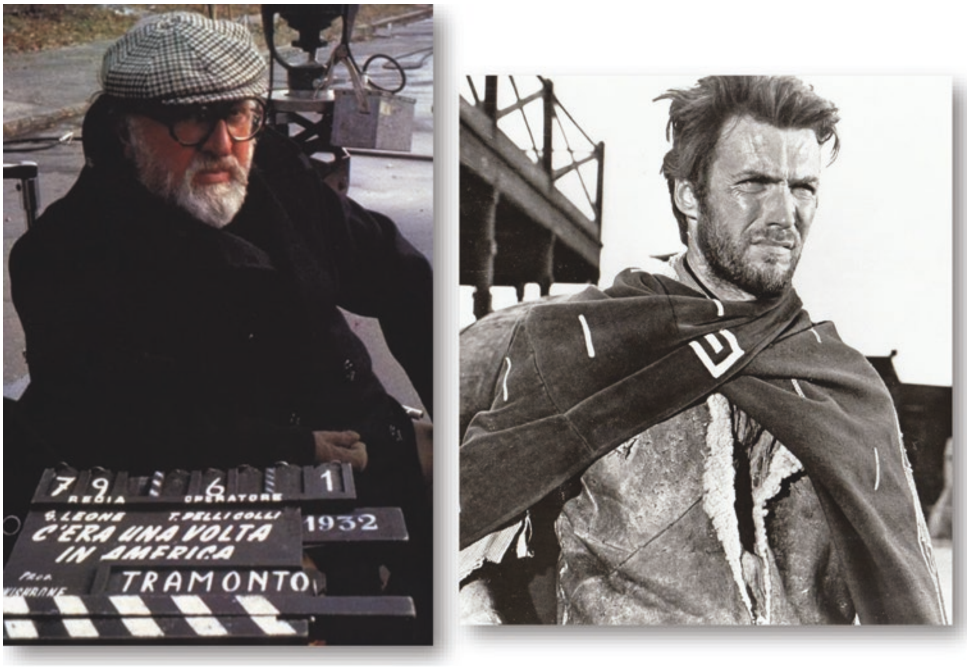
Like with all his other movies, in this one too the music was written and directed by Ennio Morricone, renewing one of the most fruitful and celebrated director-composer partnerships. Music, in Leone's filmography, plays a crucial role in setting the mood and pacing the action, and there is no doubt that the legendary status of this film in particular would have not been as high as it is, without Morricone's musical contribution, and particularly what is arguably the most famous western theme of all.

If *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* officially belongs to the dollar trilogy, it is also true that its epic, morbid and grave tones, makes it closer to the filmic vision of the time trilogy. This is very well illustrated by the intentionally high contrast between the personal stories (and motives) of the three protagonists and the supposedly "capital H" history of the Civil War, used here as a very visible background. This war is presented in a revisionist manner, with a statement on its violence, absurdity and real lack of "good" guys, despite the way history books depict it. Much more than the two previous movies, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* makes a point of the violent and uncomplicated nature of people in the so-called Wild West, in contrast with the morality tale nature of classic westerns.

From an aesthetic point of view, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is the movie of Leone's coming-of-age as director. Throughout the whole production he was very particular on how the scenes had be filmed, much to everybody's annoyance (Eastwood particularly, who decided not to collaborate with Leone anymore). Most of Leone's signature features are present here. Among them:

- the use of a wide image format, in this case the so-called Techniscope, which has the very broad ratio of 2.33:1 (we shall see more about this in the book's last case study, on the notion of screen);
- the Depth of Field shots;
- the extreme close-up shots on faces and eyes (alternated with wide views);
- the expansion of time in the narrative: extended staging of duels, close observation of details, sparse dialogue, etc.;
- the above-mentioned centrality of music in establishing the film's moods and rhythm;
- the use of enhanced sound effects to underline quiet moments in conversations;
- the explicit use of graphical violence, not rarely with slow motion effects.

Fig. 5.7 The most iconic figures of spaghetti western: director Sergio Leone and actor Clint Eastwood *[Images of public domain]*



Very often quoted in different contexts, not only cinematographic ones, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* became the object of imitations, homages and parodies of all sorts. The title itself is now a common saying that is often employed and paraphrased, to stand for two opposites and a third unexpected variable (e.g., one of Damon Albarn's musical projects is called The Good, the Bad and the Queen). Moreover, specific ideas on filmmaking, such as the legendary extreme close-ups on the eyes, the cartoonesque graphics of the headtitles, the explicit and morbid representation of violence, etc., became the template for several movies and directors, including specific imitators such as Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez. A movie like Tarantino's *Django Unchained* is a straight and unashamed homage to Leone's style.

The 1970s and the 1980s Between Revisionism and Experimentation

Pioneered in the 1950s and developed in the 1960s, revisionist westerns literally flourished during the 1970s. It was the golden age of the "New Hollywood", so it is no wonder that also the archetypical genre of American cinema took a fresh and rebellious turn. The decade started with a bang with two of the most important revisionist movies, Ralph Nelson's explicit and very political *Soldier Blue* and Arthur Penn's more introspective and ironic *Little Big Man*. Elliot Silverstein's *A Man Called Horse* followed in 1971. Spaghetti western, too, proliferated, usually in cheap forms, establishing that "B-movie" reputation we were mentioning, and somehow trivializing into quasi-caricatures the careful work of characterization, aesthetics and thematicity that was done in movies like *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* or *Once Upon a Time in the West*. A popular variation of spaghetti western is the type that insists on comic elements, turning them into actual comedies.

In general, however, westerns had lost their centrality within American cinema, and it was clear that directors were less and less eager to produce them in the orthodox, traditional manner. This is why, some of the most notable productions of the period are hybrids: Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* (1974) inaugurated the era of western parodies; *The Man from Snowy River* (1982) was set in 1880s Australia, *Timerider* (1982) was a crossover with sci-fi, etc. On the other hand, a director who tries to revitalize the genre by setting firm roots in the tradition, with the addition of the noblest and deepest elements of spaghetti western, is Clint Eastwood, who made his directing debut in 1973 with *High Plains Drifter*, and made increasing progress through the likes of *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) and *Pale Rider* (1985) up to delivering his Oscar winning masterpiece in 1992—as we shall see in the next part.

At any rate, as we repeatedly mentioned, these were the years of revisionism, and one example that certainly deserves further exploration is Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue*. Before discussing the movie, however, let us take a look at history. After the discovery of gold in Colorado, the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which ensured a confined but safe space for the Natives—the so-called "reserves"—was revised in 1861, giving a much smaller area to the nations of the area. And therefore more ground to gold digging for the settlers. Native factions, particularly the so-called "Dog Soldiers", did not accept this unilateral decision, and kept on camping and hunting in the old territory, causing tensions and clashes with the settlers. Since 1864, the settlers' army, led by Colonel John Chivington and in accordance with Colorado governor, John Evans, chose the hard line, attacking camps without declaring war or selecting their target, as military ethics would demand, provided that such an oxymoron as "military ethics" makes sense anyway. Remissive factions, led by chief Black Kettle, negotiated peace with the US Army in Fort Lyon, and were told to camp in the vicinities with a visible US flag, with the promise to be regarded as "friends".

The culmination of Chivington's attacks occurred on November 29, 1864, when 700 mostly drunk soldiers attacked an unarmed camp of Cheyenne and Arapaho natives close to Fort Lyon, by the Sand Creek River, which was sporting *both* an American *and* a white flag. Most men had gone hunting, so the camp was inhabited by about 800 mostly old people, women and children. Over 100 natives were slaughtered and abused by the soldiers, while the few white casualties were mostly due to friendly fire. The soldiers then returned to the camp after the smoke cleared, to kill the wounded Indians and collect all kinds of souvenirs (scalps or other more intimate body parts). Official investigations from US authorities followed, but without any major consequences for Chivington, who was simply asked to renounce embarking on a political career, as he had planned.

104 years later, the US Army committed a strikingly similar mass murder of about 400–500 Vietnamese unarmed civilians. Occurring on March 16, 1968, the My Lai Massacre became public only in 1969. Conceived as a counter-offensive to Vietcong attacks, the massacre started as the troops landed in the My Lai village (the target) and found nobody except old men, women and children. Possibly following a "Kill 'em all!" type of order from Captain Ernest Medina, the troops, led by Second Lieutenant William Calley, started to shoot indiscriminately at humans and animals, and chasing those who were running away. The massacre was interrupted by a scouting US helicopter, after which the authorities commenced their investigations. Despite cover-ups, "I was just following orders" type of statements, and death threats to the witnesses, the court martial charged 14 US officers with war crimes. Medina was acquitted of all accusations, while Calley—after receiving a life-sentence—was controversially pardoned by Nixon, serving only 3 years.

Calley made a belated public apology in 2009, while the few soldiers who had tried to prevent the killing were honored only in 2008. Only Hugh Thompson, the scouting-helicopter pilot, received immediate honors for his intervention. As the massacre was made public in 1969, Ralph Nelson took immediate action to produce a movie that would make an indirect reference to the Vietnamese events, while also showing historical continuity with America's blood-stained past. Released in 1970 and starring two politically active actors like Candice Bergen and Peter Strauss, *Soldier Blue* was based on the novel *Arrow in the Sun* by Theodore V. Olsen, and inspired by the events of the so-called Sand Creek Massacre. It is the story of Cresta Lee and Honus Gent, the only survivors of a Cheyenne attack who try to reach Fort Reunion. Along the way their differences over the natives' cause emerge: Cresta is sympathetic to the natives, while Honus is the typical white patriot. The Sand Creek Massacre will open his eyes in the most dramatic of ways.

Hailed by the *New York Times* as a movie that "must be numbered among the most significant, the most brutal and liberating, the most honest American film ever made", and heavily censored at the time for its very violent sequences (but also, arguably, because the government had perfectly understood the allegories to the contemporary history), *Soldier Blue* remains an extremely explicit movie by today's standards. It was the revisionist western by definition: a most passionate attack on American history (the Sand Creek Massacre being one of its darkest chapters), which predictably failed to achieve commercial success in the US, but—just as predictably, in a time when Americans were not perceived as "the good guys" anymore—was very well received in numerous other countries.

The story has a "full circle" structure, opening with a Cheyenne attack, and closing with a much bigger, and unfair, settlers' attack. Nelson wanted to show the violence "from both sides" in the cohabitation natives-settlers, but—at the same time—emphasize a difference between the two groups, remarking the basic point that natives were there first, and settlers remained first and foremost aggressors.

More importantly, as we mentioned, and in conformity with the politically minded approach of revisionist westerns, *Soldier Blue* worked on two historical levels: the events depicted and contemporary ones. The Sand Creek massacre was the visible subject of the movie, but the other target was the My Lai Massacre, and to an extent that was an even more important point raised by the authors. *Soldier Blue* pointed the finger at both events with a severe judgment over both old and contemporary American history, and therefore a hint of a sinister continuity. Additionally, in both cases the American army (and people) tried to cover up their aggressions as "acts of justice". Ultimately, Nelson made a point that one century of progress in American civilization did not coincide with progress in morality, humility and compassion.

Significantly, while a few documentaries have been released, no American movie has yet been made that would directly portray the My Lai massacre. *Soldier Blue* remains the closest thing to an American *J'accuse* against those events.

From the Rebirth of the 1990s to Today

As the 1990s began, a couple of Oscar winning productions, including Kevin Costner's revisionist *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and Eastwood's spaghetti western *Unforgiven* (1992), enshrined a rebirth of westerns. The "return to form" was soon confirmed by productions like *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *Tombstone* (1993) and *Maverick* (1994).

The Unforgiven can be taken as a sort of synecdoche for the whole rebirth of westerns, and for a number of reasons. First, because it was directed and interpreted by one of the legends in the genre, and particularly one who had never given up on it, even when it was out of fashion, and who in fact, as we have seen, had worked patiently to develop his skills as director and his vision of westerns as a blend among classical, spaghetti and also a bit of revisionism (particularly in the depiction of war, violence and heroism as hardly "cool" things). Second, because it featured an all star cast, including, besides Eastwood, Gene Hackman and Morgan Freeman, proving that other important figures in the industry had renewed their interest and trust in the genre. Third, because it was both a commercial and critical success, nominated for 9 Academy Awards, and winner of four (movie, director, editing and supporting actor Gene Hackman).

The story of a retired gunslinger who reluctantly takes on one last job with the help of his old partner and a young man, the movie was originally conceived as early as 1976, and established Eastwood's still on-going reputation as a very capable director. The movie, as we said, stands in-between a traditional, a revisionist and a spaghetti western: dark tones, graphical violence, moral ambiguity and an attempt to tell a more realistic story of the Wild West era. It was heavily influenced by Eastwood's mentors Don Siegel (the director of the *Dirty Harry* saga) and of course Sergio Leone (the movie was dedicated to both): it is visible that Eastwood tried to capture some of their stylistic tricks, particularly from an aesthetic point of view. *The Unforgiven* is also a highly metaphorical movie, on two levels: the Western as a genre, and Eastwood's career and persona. Both concepts were conveyed through four main themes: ageing, reputation, courage, heroism, all represented in a dry and direct way, as Eastwood felt both himself and the whole genre should be described.

Going forward in the decade and at the turn of the twenty-first century, westerns became less of a "genre", and more an opportunity for deep, epic and full-round storytelling. In this sense, it recovered the spirit of the origins, but also invested it with more *real* history and less myth. The new century witnessed a continuation of this stylistic/thematic path, with a particular, though not systematic (see Tarantino), accent on historical accuracy. Notable movies include *All the Pretty Horses* (2000), *The Missing* (2003), *Hidalgo* (2004), *Alamo* (2004), *3:10 to Yuma* (2007), *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007), *Appaloosa* (2008), *Australia* (2008), *True Grit* (2010, a Coen Brothers' remake of a 1969 production), *The Revenant* (2015) and Tarantino's Oscar winners *Django Unchained* (2012) and *The Hateful Eight* (2015).

At the same time, whether or not the two events are related, the 1990s also inaugurated a proliferation of various forms of crossover between westerns and other genres. An umbrella term, "weird western", was coined in order to define many of such crossovers. While in the 1970s and 1980s, the need for such hybrids may have been caused by the necessity to find alternative ways to a genre that looked in decline, I dare suggesting that, at the end of the twentieth century, as westerns were experiencing a new spring, authors might have simply been encouraged to experiment on a genre that was not fashionable again.

Examples of weird westerns of the period include *Back to the Future Part III* (1990), *Tremors* (1990), *Grey Knight* (1993), *Oblivion* (1994), *Dead Man* (1995), *Blood Trail* (1997), *Ravenous* (1999), *Wild Wild West* (1999), *Dead Birds* (2004), *Dynamite Warrior* (2006), *Undead or Alive* (2007), *High Plains Invaders* (2009), *The Warrior's Way* (2010), *Cowboys & Aliens* (2011), *The Lone Ranger* (2013) and *Bone Tomahawk* (2015).

Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* can be taken here as an example, due to the complexity of the thematic texture (it is a weird movie alright!), the importance of the people involved (starting from Jarmusch himself of course, and continuing with actors like Johnny Depp, Jared Harris, Billy Bob Thornton and Robert Mitchum and with the great Neil Young writing and performing the soundtrack), and the cult status that this movie has reached within the ever-stimulating world of independent cinema. *Dead Man* is usually referred to as "acid western": a movie with psychedelic/surrealistic tones, and pregnant with symbolism and allegories. Severely wounded, after some misfortunes and murdering a man in defense of a prostitute, accountant William Blake (Depp) encounters a strange native called Nobody, who considers him the reincarnation of the poet Blake, heals him, and, like Virgilio with Dante, prepares him for a journey into the spiritual world. During it, Blake turns from a clumsy, weak hearted man, into a much tougher one. Wanted "dead or alive" for his murder, Blake is shot again, slowly agonizing till his death.

There are several themes addressed by this movie. Certainly, the great English poet William Blake is a prominent presence, for at least four reasons: his rebellious political ideas, the complex symbolism of his poetry, his influence on rock culture (Patti Smith edited a collection of his poems), and of course the fact that the movie is a reflection on life and death. Quotations of Blake's poetry include *Auguries of Innocence*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* ("The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" is a metaphor of the whole movie), and *The Everlasting Gospel*. "Nobody" is the one who quotes him most often. Thel Russell, the prostitute in the movie is a reference to Blake's *The Book of Thel*. Her scenes can be interpreted as a staging of *The Sick Rose*: "O rose, thou art sick!/ The invisible worm/ That flies in the night/ In the howling storm/ Has found out thy bed/ Of crimson joy/ And his dark secret love/ Does thy life destroy."

Jarmusch made a reputation as a director particularly fond of rock music (numerous are the appearances of rock stars in his movies, and in general hints to rock culture), so it is no wonder that we also find here repeated references to rock: from Neil Young's soundtrack (a most unusual one, mostly based on improvisation) to a cameo of Iggy Pop in the part of Sally Jenko; from the character of Jared Harris, Benmont Tench, named after the keyboard's player of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, to the character of Billy Bob Thornton, Big George Drakoulias, named after the producer George Drakoulias (producer of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers themselves, among others); from the name of one of the marshals, Lee Hazlewood, like the country singer to many others.

Dead Man contains revisionist elements in the representation of natives, which is very accurate and remarkably free from stereotypes. Dialogues in Cree and Blackfoot languages were deliberately not translated in order to create a special bond between the movie and those very nations (including the use of jokes). Being a typical post-modern product, *Dead Man* makes several references/quotations to other movies: the character "Nobody" is a reference to Tonino Valerii's spaghetti western *My name is Nobody*; one particular close-up of Blake is made in the style of Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*; the hand-eating scene quotes Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*, etc. Other post-modernist choices include shooting the movie in black and white, and of course the general reality-imagination ambiguity of the story (▪ Fig. 5.8).

How Many Westerns?

In conclusion to this historically grounded type of analysis, and in accordance with our intention to illustrate the notion of "genre", let us make a short summary of the twenty most important sub-genres that western has propagated over the years. As we mentioned in the beginning, choosing this genre for our analysis was strategical in terms of showing the multi-folded, and often unexpected, articulations that a single genre can take stylistically, historically and (as we shall see) geographically, too: the most "American" form of film-making ever, became a global and locally adapted phenomenon at the same time.

(1) **Classical Western**—Needless to say, this is the "original" American western, the one that set the roots and the paradigm of the genre.
(2) **Spaghetti Western**—Originated in Italy through the work of Sergio Leone, it is arguably the most important variation on the classical type. We have extensively discussed it.
(3) **Weird Western**—A general expression for crossovers that mix westerns with other elements. It is often employed as an umbrella term that includes several of the sub-genres we shall discuss later on this list.
(4) **Acid Western**—One of the "weird western" types. As we have seen with *Dead Man*, this is a highly allegorical, surreal and symbolism-filled type of western, set in hallucinated/psychedelic tones.
(5) **Chili Western**—The Mexican way to the genre, with Mexican locations, characters and themes.
(6) **Comedy Western**—A type of western based on comic characters and themes, including specific spoofs and parodies of classical movies.
(7) **Neo-Western**—Another "weird" type, it consists of movies that are "westerns" in the thematic, narrative and aesthetic sense, but are actually set in the contemporary age, so technically not in the "wild west".
(8) **Electric Western**—A crossover between westerns and rock musicals, where rock bands are seen acting and performing in a Wild West setting. Another "weird" type.
(9) **Epic Western**—The type of development of classical western that the Leone's spaghetti western activated, and that movies like Eastwood's or *Dances with Wolves* completed.
(10) **Euro-Western**—As the word says already, these are westerns made in Europe, from the spaghetti ones onwards. While, however, the spaghetti-type deserves a category of its own due to its impact and importance, there are several, more episodic, sub-genres that can be grouped under this label (e.g., the so-called Sauerkraut western from Germany).
(11) **Meat pie Western**—The Australian way to the genre, with Australian locations, characters and themes. Just like "chili" for Mexico, the expression is inspired by "Spaghetti western" as a pun with a traditional local dish.
(12) **Northwestern**—Westerns set in cold places like Alaska or Western Canada.
(13) **Ostern**—Also known as "Red Western", it is the sub-genre developed in Communist Eastern Europe during the Soviet years. In conformity with their ideological background, these were "naturally-revisionist" movies that often portrayed Native Americans in a positive light as oppressed people fighting for their rights.
(14) **Fantasy Western**—A crossover between traditional western and fantasy mythology. Another one that falls under the "weird western" umbrella.
(15) **Horror Western**—The expression says it all. Titles like *Billy the Kid versus Dracula* (1966) perfectly give the idea. Needless to say, this is another "weird" type.
(16) **Curry Western**—Westerns made in India and partly stemming from the Bollywood tradition.
(17) **Wuxia Western**—Another "weird" crossover, this time between westerns and martial arts movies.

▪ **Fig. 5.8** Actor Johnny Depp and director Jim Jarmusch during the presentation of *Dead Man* at Cannes Festival *[Photo by Georges Biard, CC BY-SA 3.0]*

(18) **Pornographic Western**—The name says it all. The perfect illustration of the concept of "exploitation movies". Browsing through the titles of the category can be a rather amusing experience: *Western Nights*, *Sweet Savage*, *Dirty Western*…

(19) **Revisionist Western**—Westerns attempting a more accurate historical approach, particularly in the native-settler relationship. We have extensively discussed this one, too.

(20) **Science fiction Western**—Another "weird western" type and another self-explaining name: it is the crossover between western and sci-fi themes and settings.

5.2 Culture

Culture, we learn from sociologists, is everything that is socially shared and learned by members of a community, including beliefs, art, religion, values, norms, ideas, law, taught, knowledge, customs and other capabilities.

If we remove from Tylor's statement the sexist expression, "man", as representative of all human beings, as well as the anthropocentric assumption that only the human species possess culture (an assumption amply dismissed by decades of ethological research that has instead proved that other animals have their own cultural processes), we may accept these two definitions as the template for the way we shall treat the concept of "culture" in this book. That is: a complex galaxy of the numerous ways individuals inherit, produce and share information socially.

By consequence, a "cultural property" is any communicative item that is introduced in an AVT as a result of any of the mentioned cultural elements: a belief, a religion, a moral value, a law, etc. This usually creates understanding and a sense of "normality" among the spectators who share the same cultural tradition, and it may appear exotic, difficult to understand or even disturbing to spectators who do not. For example, representing a polygamous character in a text is something that will appear normal in countries like Somalia or Indonesia, where polygamy is legally recognized, and unusual in countries like Mexico or New Zealand, where it is not. That unusualness may take different shapes in the audience. Someone will find it charming, someone will consider it immoral, someone will grow to be curious, and so on: all these reactions will be based on a perception of alterity, on the idea that something "different" is being shown. That difference is most of the times a "cultural" difference. In other words, if we see a character who differs from us at individual level, even radically (say: the character is shy, and we are very extrovert), we do not get the same idea of otherness, since individual differences are something we experience every day and we are familiar with. With cultural differences, on the other hand, we get to deal with more profound distinctions that, especially in some cases, we experience rarely, if at all. The emotional and intellectual impact, therefore, is of a stronger nature, and it affects us at a deeper level.

Cultural properties appear both consciously and unconsciously, and not rarely the latter option may generate results that, ethically speaking, are at least questionable. As we already mentioned, while talking about prescription, fiction and in general ideological aspects of AVCC, we all have our opinions and views, and we simply cannot produce an objective, neutral representation of a given event. Everything is fine when such opinions are somehow made explicit, and the spectator is enabled to understand that the x and y elements appear because the authors have the a and b opinion. Trickier, on the other hand, is the situation where such clarity does not exist, and certain opinions are "sold" to us as normality, when in fact they very much are not. For decades, AV arts (as well as other arts) had a tendency to spread the idea that women are weak, emotional and often irrational subjects, and that the world is clearly divided into "manly" and "womanly" things and actions.

Excurse 11—Even a kid can see that

As my son (8 years old at the time I am referring to in these lines) grew increasingly interested in science fiction, and since plenty of modern sci-fi movies and series are a bit too violent for his age, I once proposed that we watch together the original *Star Trek* series, which—by today's standards—is as innocent as his smile. For me, it was a bit of a throwback to my own childhood, and I had not seen those episodes for a very long time. And so, while he became excited in following the adventures of Captain Kirk and his crew, I could not help noticing how much of the 1960s culture, for the better and often for the worse, was embodied in that series. The scenery was full of items that have little or no place nowadays: the idea of "future" that society had back then was characterized by objects and effects that are almost risible today; the spaceship interiors were furnished with sparkling, psychedelic colors (as opposed to the neutral, white/grey aesthetics of most of the spaceships we see in modern series); the crew was wearing velvet sweaters and, in the case of the female members, very tight miniskirts, etc. But what was really outstanding, and that required some careful father-to-son explanation on my part, was the representation of gender relations: women were treated in that series in ways that nowadays would qualify systematically as harassment, and their intrinsic positioning within the events narrated was one of complete and conscious subordination towards the men. And my son noticed! When the character of Janice Rand (actress Grace Lee Whitney) said, in one of the first episodes, "Oh, captain, I couldn't possibly do that: it's not for women" (with Captain Kirk eagerly agreeing), he asked me "But Papà, why can't a woman do that? She is perfectly capable!"

At any rate, certain representations of women (see also Excurse 11) are something increasingly rare in AVCC, and by now authors are certainly mindful of subsequent decades of fruitful feminist struggles and achievements. These representations, these changes and these developments are all *cultural* processes, and while there is no denial (through the eyes of the twenty-first century) that certain texts were inherently sexist, we may also guess that they were not *intentionally* sexist, and that the authors were little more than mere "carriers" of the cultural status quo of those days, without necessarily being ideological promoters of it.

Now. To reiterate on the leitmotif of this chapter of the book, we cannot reasonably compile a list of all the actual cultural properties that may appear in an AVCC, as there are literally millions. We shall therefore try to be of service by identifying the main cultural "factors" that intervene in the formation of such properties. We should mention at least the following (see also ◘ Fig. 5.21):

1. **Subcultures**. That is: the fact that each cultural item can be usually broken in smaller units that present distinctive features from their main root while preserving the basic assumptions. A subculture develops its specific norms, but does not aim at subverting the existing cultural paradigms: rather, it aims at "specializing" them. An example is the so-called "urban tribes", groups of people who form relatively small communities based on common interests, similar lifestyles, similar fashion and usually rivalry with other tribes. The Punks, the Gamers, the Hipsters, the Emos… The appearance of a subcultural property in an AVT, predictably, requires a more specific knowledge of certain dynamics and phenomena, therefore, not rarely, a spectator may feel culturally alienated even if the actual subculture represented easily belongs to their same cultural heritage.
2. **Social status/economy**. A combination of financial, political, historical, ideological and other features, this category is responsible for numerous forms of representation, from gadgets, cars, dresses and the likes, up to specific behaviors, attitudes and of course entire scenarios.
3. **Gender/sex/sexuality**. This refers to both the individual's self-conception as being male, female or else (the so-called "third gender" principle), or to the actual biological sex. In both cases, there is a wide range of cultural attributions in forms of AV representation. The above example of *Star Trek* (related to the sexist image of the remissive/weak woman) is just one of many possibilities, in this respect.
4. **Geography**. Trivially enough, every society expresses its own culture. The measurement of the geographical space is extremely varied and goes from whole continents to the tiniest districts. For example, does anyone know where **Tarzan** lives except for "somewhere in Africa"? All the information we receive from the various novels and movie adaptations lead to a general sense of African-ness with no specific reference to any country or area in particular. Or: in a city like New York a text may trace a profound cultural difference between a district like Manhattan and one like Brooklyn.
5. **History**. As trivially as before, every epoch expresses its cultural dynamics. History, too, may be represented from entire epochs (e.g., the expression of a general sense of "Middle Ages", regardless of specific years or even decades) to rather small temporal segments such as those texts that present the deep cultural transformations of a community in the turning of few days, due to a specific, important event.

For more on the concept of culture, particularly as applied to arts, please consult, among others, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), Williams (1958), Lotman (1990), Grossberg et al. (1991) and Longhurst (2016).

5.2.1 Case Study: Cultural Clichés in the Audiovisual Representation of Vegetarians

Defining and portraying a character in AVCC is always a laborious work that calls into question several tools. Culture, and particularly cultural stereotypes and clichés, often have a prominent role in this task, for the better and for the worse. The presence of cultural clichés becomes more visible when the characters in question are not intended to be represented in their complexity, but mostly as one-sided personalities. That is often the case with secondary character roles that serve specific functions within a story and that are therefore mostly ornamental in it. Secondary characters may be friends of the protagonist, occasional (but not primary) rivals, they may offer a moment of comic relief, they may be very relevant in the limited time/space of the story, and so on. As the length and the extent of their appearance is not exceptional, and as their role is well-defined, it is not convenient that these characters are complex, because they would simply end up distracting the audience from the main story (and main characters), and they may also fail to convey their circumscribed function. As a consequence—although this is not a rule—it may be a good strategy to design such characters in ways that stand out as slightly unusual, even eccentric: this way it is easy for the spectators to spot their main feature (the one that is intended to be portrayed) and not pay attention to anything else. Again: it is not a rule, but it helps to imbue these characters with a rhetorical representation based on the commonplaces established and perceived within a society. This way the representation is hardly fair and respectful of the character (and the anthropological/cultural group they belong to), and hardly politically correct, but it is certainly immediately recognizable. We may think about such *clichés* as the overly effeminate gay man, the dumb blonde girl, the no-nonsense fat old housewife, the nerdy scientist, and so forth.

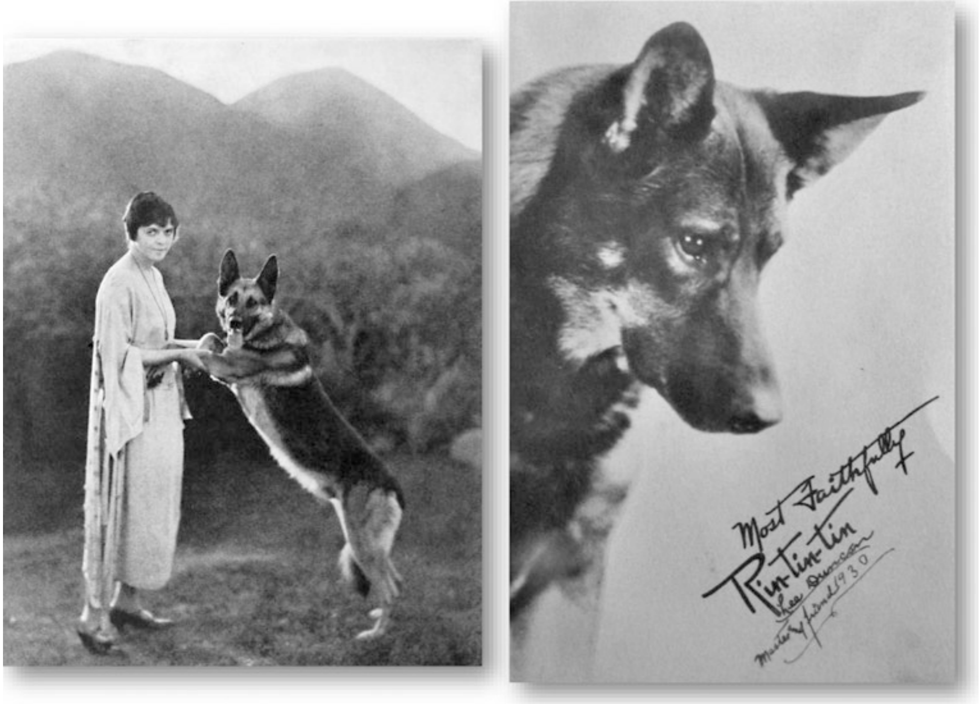
As we have seen earlier in the book (in the paragraph about "foreshadowing and sideshadowing"), AVCC needs to create a sense of "normality" in the represented events and characters, because when that normality is not displayed, the audience gets a bit puzzled and imagines that something is about to happen (we have already made numerous references to this notion of "Chekhov's rifle"). Through cultural stereotypes, as sad as it is to admit the average spectator kind of feels *safer*, and accepts the identity of the given secondary character for what it appears to be. To an extent, this does not just apply to AVCC but to all forms of communication. You may remember that we mentioned the case of a sign that indicates that dogs are not allowed in. That kind of sign tends to represent a mid-to-large-sized dog with a short coat, because that kind of dog strikes us as more typical, more "normal" than others. And, as we also suggested this particular example, in turn, may have something to do with AVCC, when we think of typical dog heroes being often German shepherds or similar breeds: dogs like Strongheart or Rin Tin Tin are "flexible" characters that can be assigned a variety of roles without ever looking "out of place" (for more on animal actors, please check Bartel 1997) (◘ Fig. 5.9).

Back to our case study, among nerdy scientists, dumb blondes and effeminate homosexuals, there are also vegetarians and vegans, a group which has been increasingly present in society from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, but that (at least in mainstream terms) still looks unusual/eccentric to most people. I started investigating this topic in Martinelli (2014: 250–265) and I am happy to resume and update the discussion here. The "normal" vegetarian, in AVCC, tends to be quite a weirdo: sometimes naïve, often crazy—either in the dramatic or in the comic sense, and one who is provided with a number of manias and neuroses. When the vegetarian character is secondary in the story, their weirdness is all we get to know, and is a sufficient condition for framing their actions into a univocal interpretation. When instead the character plays a leading role (or a role that is important enough to require more nuances), their vegetarianism is crucial in adding an element of eccentricity to the wider picture: whether a hero or a villain, we now know that the character is anyway *sui generis*. Let us thus see thirty famous vegetarians from AVCC, and then let us comment on the cultural reasons for this set of *clichés*.

Without following a particular order, we may start from a famous vegetarian from a TV sit-com: Phoebe Buffay-Hannigan (played by Lisa Kudrow) from *Friends*. She is definitely the "weirdo" of the group, with a characterization that mixes naivety and eccentricity, and a rather surreal sense of humor. There is an intriguing episode of the series when Phoebe, at this point pregnant, develops irresistible cravings for meat, and of course she feels enormously guilty for this. Joey Tribbiani, the simpleton of the group, wants to help her and suggests he becomes vegetarian for the entire duration of her pregnancy, so that "no extra animals will die, you'll just eat *my* animals". The proposal is welcome with the typical pre-recorded roar of laughter, because it is meant as a joke uttered by the simpleton (who is simple-minded enough to conceive the proposal) to the weirdo (who is weird enough to accept it) of the group. In fact, funnily enough, we may even add here that Joey's proposal is a very sensible one, and certainly not ridiculous, from the point of view of those who, like Phoebe in the series, are really preoccupied with their personal impact on the life and welfare of farm animals.

Secondly, we may mention the character of Lionel Twain (played by Truman Capote, in one of his rare screen appearances) in Neil Simon's irresistible parody of detective stories *Murder by Death* (directed by Robert Moore). Twain is the owner of the sinister villa where the world's most famous detectives are invited to solve a mystery. He is a fanatic who stages his own assassination in order to make fun of the detectives: among his manias, there is of course vegetarianism.

Thirdly, there is the unnamed barber in *The Great Dictator*, played by Charlie Chaplin whose dietary habits are revealed when a Nazi policeman asks him whether he is Aryan, and he answers (in rhyme) with "actually, I'm vegetarian". Of course, that could just have been Chaplin's idea of a joke, yet he could have chosen among plenty of other words (agrarian, barbarian,



◘ **Fig. 5.9** Strongheart (left) and the first of many Rin Tin Tin's (right). Note the latter's undoubtedly authentic signature on the promotional photo *[Images of public domain]*

Fig. 5.10 Not an Aryan, but a vegetarian: Charlie Chaplin in his masterpiece *The Great Dictator* *[Image of public domain]*

Bavarian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, librarian, libertarian, proletarian, veterinarian, humanitarian…), and, more importantly, his characterization is quite typical of the profile we have mentioned: he is naïve, bizarre, and crazy enough to take the place of **Hitler** and plead for world peace (Fig. 5.10).

Fourthly, there is an on-screen couple: Brontë Mitchell (played by Andie MacDowell) and her boyfriend Phil (Gregg Edelman) in Peter Weir's *Green Card*. They are both vegetarians, environmental activists and uptight neurotics. When Georges (Gérard Depardieu), French, untidy and carnivore, appears, Brontë discovers a softer, more romantic side of herself, falling in love with him. While she becomes more "normal", Phil maintains his cold profile, creating in the audience increasing sympathy for his rival Georges, who ultimately wins Brontë's heart.

The fifth example is the character of Louison (Dominique Pinon), protagonist of *Delicatessen*. He is a clown in that particular poetic, surreal and naïve way clowns are often portrayed in fiction, so of course he has to be vegetarian. He is the "good guy" of the movie, but at the same time the most abnormal character in a movie where normality means evil and cannibalism.

What about Sid, one of the three main characters in the *Ice Age* animated saga? He is a sloth, so he belongs to a species that is basically herbivorous (though, it has been documented, sloths may occasionally indulge in eating worms and insects): in principle, thus, we should not be too surprised that he is portrayed as vegetarian. The point is that he makes a statement about it: many non-human animals, in AVTs, are "naturally" vegetarian, but the issue is not presented as a specific choice nor is it addressed in general. Not to mention characters that would be herbivores in nature can be depicted as meat-eaters in fiction, especially cartoons, such as the elephants in *The Large Family* or the pigs in *Peppa Pig*. In the case of Sid we see him discussing the issue of vegetarianism as a conscious lifestyle: in the third installment of the saga, he adopts three small dinosaurs and "raises them as vegetarians" despite their real mother's efforts to feed them meat. Of course, as everybody who is familiar with *Ice Age* knows (and, I have to say, I am *very* familiar, my son having been a huge fan who has exposed me to *daily* screenings of the saga for several months in the past), Sid happens, once again, to be a total weirdo: somewhere in between a Woody Allen and a Jerry Lewis type, he is a bizarre and goofy character, most of the time turning out to be a real burden for the other two protagonists, Manny and Diego.

Talking about openly vegetarian non-human animals from animation, the sharks of *Finding Nemo* deserve special mention. Obviously carnivores by nature (possibly, the quintessential carnivores of the Animal Kingdom), these eccentric sharks try to give up meat in the same way alcoholics try to give up alcohol: by holding group therapy sessions, in which they try to convince themselves that fish are not prey but friends.

Another famous vegetarian from cartoons is certainly Lisa from *The Simpsons* series. She is by far the cleverest and most sensitive (and, yes, *slightly* neurotic too) member of the family, and she becomes vegetarian in an episode that will cause conflict with the hedonist meat-eater Homer. In the episode she also bumps into the VIP animal advocates Paul and Linda McCartney.

Back to live-action movies, the character of Léon (played by Jean Reno) in Luc Besson's eponymous movie. He is a hired killer, an antisocial character and falls in love with a thirteen-year-old girl, but he has a good heart. His diet is exclusively based on milk.

Not an actual killer, but very much suspected to be so, is Jeffrey Goines (Brad Pitt) in Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*. A former mental hospital patient, Goines exhibits unstable and maniacal traits, and is a leading member of a radical animal rights association of a semi-terroristic type. As you may know, if you have seen the movie, Jeffrey and his friends will turn out to be innocent of the specific crimes investigated in the story, yet, their behavior is unsettling and weird enough for us to consider them as primary suspects throughout the whole movie.

Of course, Spock from the *Star Trek* saga is vegetarian. How could he be not? He is a Vulcan, and Vulcans are nonviolent in principle. Whether or not he can be considered a "weirdo" depends on how we define normality in a sci-fi series. He is certainly an alien and remains famously dispassionate and rationale (■ Fig. 5.11).

Next, we may mention Ian Miller (John Corbett), the male protagonist in the romantic comedy *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. He is handsome and brilliant, and his vegetarianism is mostly a reason for "cultural clashes" with the Greek relatives of the female protagonist Toula Portokalos. He is weird in that particular context where everybody is heavily into meat eating, but normal in all other respects. Memorable is the sequence when Toula informs her mother that Ian is vegetarian: "What do you mean, he don't eat no meat? That's okay, that's okay. I make lamb". If dogs like Labradors and German shepherds are "more dogs" than others in street signs, the vegetarian readers of this book will well recognize that, to some meat-eaters, some meat (particularly pork and beef) is "more meat" than others, and not rarely things like chicken and lamb are deemed "vegetarian enough".

Another openly positive vegetarian character is Brian Burke (David Duchovny), in Susanne Bier's touching *Things We Lost in the Fire*. He is a deceased husband and father, and he appears in the movie through a number of flashbacks evoked by his family members. He is still a peculiar subject, but in another sense. He is just too good, he is a hero, and that is the very quality that causes his premature death: he intervenes to protect a woman from domestic violence and is murdered by her husband. During the flashbacks we learn about his kindness and generosity: when he comments on his vegetarianism he also offers a cultivated quotation from The Smiths, the song "Meat Is Murder", a true anthem for vegetarians.

Jonathan Foer (Elijah Wood) in Liev Schreiber's *Everything Is Illuminated* is another "good guy". Foer, as we know, is a real person—the author of the autobiographical book from which the movie was adapted, so he is vegetarian for real. However, once again he has neurotic inclinations and finds himself in a totally alienating environment when he travels to Ukraine in search of his Jewish roots, assisted by two local villagers, who find it extremely hard to conceive that a normal person may actually not eat meat. Unforgettable is the sequence when the three stop for dinner in a small inn, and all the owner is able to prepare for this strange guest is a single, unadorned, boiled potato.

Since we mentioned "dumb blondes" among the classic stereotypes of audiovisuality, it may be interesting to mention a kind of crossover: Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon), from the *Legally Blonde* saga. She obviously possesses the stereotypical naïvety and eccentricity that "blondes" often display in comedies, but she is also successful in what she does. In accordance with the stereotype that wants frivolous people to have a special interest in astrology, she defines herself as a "Gemini vegetarian". In particular, the second installment of the saga finds her fighting against animal testing.

Keeping up with heroines we have also April Burns (Katie Holmes), protagonist of Peter Hedges's *Pieces of April*. She is a

■ **Fig. 5.11** Alien, emotionless and vegetarian: Mr. Spock (actor Leonard Nimoy) in the original *Star Trek* series *[Image of public domain]* wayward, alternative girl coming from a dysfunctional family: another weirdo, though, in a way, a type of vegetarian that, in real life, is more likely to be found than the set of maniacal weirdos we have been exposed to so far.

Cassie Munro (Joanna Levesque), in Barry Sonnenfeld's *RV*, is another rebellious adolescent, though definitely more on the "spoiled" side as compared to the just mentioned April Burns.

Another difficult teen is Ricky Fitts (Wes Bentley) in Sam Mendes's *American Beauty*: besides being vegetarian, he smokes and pushes drugs.

A more institutional figure is instead Laine Hanson (Joan Allen) in Rod Lurie's *The Contender*. She is a candidate for a US vice-president appointment who refuses to talk about (what seems to be) her libertine, hippie past. In order to save a trace of her counter-culture background, she is characterized as vegetarian.

Continuing on the "counter-culture" theme, we also have Fiona (Toni Collette), the mother of Marcus, the young protagonist of Paul and Chris Weitz's *About a Boy*. She is a hippie, alternative vegetarian with serious problems of depression.

Let us see more characters from cartoons. We have of course Shaggy Rogers, from the Scooby-Doo series. Like Phoebe from *Friends*, Shaggy is the nut-case of the gang. He is also very thin despite the fact that he loves eating, and he is usually a burden for the group, rather than an asset.

Less known is perhaps Sharon, the protagonist of the Canadian animated series *Braceface*. She is another "adorable bungler" type, and her vegetarianism is a poignant feature of her personality, whereas, in most of the other cases we have listed, vegetarianism is just a side-aspect of the overall characters' portrayal. It is worth remarking that Sharon is voiced by the American actress Alicia Silverstone, a vocal vegan and animal advocate.

A spiritual vegetarian from cartoons is Aang from *The Last Airbender*: he belongs to a culture that focuses on meditation and serenity which share similarities with Buddhism.

A couple of vegetarians can also be found among investigators and detectives. Ricardo Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas), co-protagonist in the TV series *Miami Vice*, is possibly among the most popular ones. He is one of the very few vegetarian characters to display the traditional features of the tough, cool and masculine guy.

FOX channel viewers are also familiar with the crime show *Bones*. Its protagonist Dr. Temperance Brennan, a forensic anthropologist, is a devout vegetarian and environmentalist. Like the character of Sharon, Brennan too is played by an actress who is vegan in real life, Emily Deschanel.

Still in the realm of TV series, we find Angela Martin (Angela Kinsey) from *The Office*. Conservative, intolerant and quasi-fascist, she however loves cats and does not eat any meat or fish.

Let us go back to some more neurotic characters. Rachel Berry (Lea Michele) from the musical comedy-drama *Glee* is specifically vegan, and to have an idea of her characterization, I suggest the reader Google the query "Rachel Berry neurotic", and see how many entries are shown.

There is also Lolla (Nadia Carlomagno) from Ettore Scola's *La Cena*. In a choral movie where each character exhibits some kind of neurosis (generally, synecdoches of the whole Italian society, as Scola so often and so masterfully tended to do in his movies), the vegetarian Lolla stands out as the weirdest of them all. She is, to mention only a few of her features, a spoiled, head-in-a-cloud, whimsical and New-Agey *femme fatale* who decides to dine with all of her lovers, *at the same time* and including her husband.

An endless parade of weirdos is *The Road to Wellville*, Alan Parker's not-so-faithful biopic of clean-living advocate John Harvey Kellogg (Anthony Hopkins). From Kellogg himself to several other vegetarian, or vegetarian-inclined characters, the movie is a kaleidoscope of health-obsessed, sexually oppressed neurotics who make the movie look more like a Ken Russell psychedelic delirium than a Parker production.

Dulcis in fundo. We cannot overlook Elizabeth Costello (played by Eileen Atkins), in the TV adaptation of the eponymous masterpiece by Coetzee (2003). Costello is, at the same time, the toughest, most intimidating and sensitive vegetarian of them all. Determined in her beliefs she delivers a passionate series of academic lectures on the subject of animal rights, and engages in heated discussions with both her colleagues and her family.

We can probably stop here, as—I believe—thirty cases are enough to notice a few red lines emerging. The main rhetoric pattern is that, in all cases (though with different degrees of intensity) the vegetarian character is "out of place", for better or for worse: they are an exception within the context they operate in: alternative, problematic, bizarre, even alien in a literary sense (see Spock)… their character is anyway *sui generis*. Some features of this exceptionality are more evident than others: very often, the neurotic trait is the prevailing one, and the character is an obsessive over-polished maniac like Phil in *Green Card*, Jonathan in *Everything Is Illuminated*, most of *The Road to Wellville*'s characters and others. Alternatively, we can have the exact opposite: the neurotic aspect consists in total untidiness and rebelliousness: April in *Pieces of April*, Cassie in *RV*, etc. Another option is the "cute eccentricity" such as Phoebe from *Friends*, Louison in *Delicatessen*…. Vegetarians are rarely "heroic" and normal, and when they are they are either overly idealistic, in a kind of unrealistic way (e.g., *Things We Lost in the Fire*), or end up being "heroes" more out of luck and sympathy, e.g., *Braceface*.

What can we deduce by this? On top of everything, we may echo Lauren Rosewarne's observations, which I feel are a perfect summary of what we have noticed so far:

> » Political research on food tends to restrict analysis to issues of ethical production, food security, marketing and consumption (…) While being a vegetarian is not a media taboo in the same way that cunnilingus and pregnancy termination are, vegetarianism is nonetheless an uncommon dietary choice and normally portrayed as fringe behavior. (…) That vegetarians are apart from mainstream culture is something mirrored on screen, with most film and television examples portraying vegetarians as somehow different. The standard othering and stereotyping – if not outright demonizing – of vegetarian characters highlight that not only is eschewing meat considered unusual, but that it also raises a variety of social and political issues related to gender, patriotism, health and intellect. (Rosewarne 2013: 87)

Rosewarne continues by identifying several typologies of vegetarianism (2013: 90–136), in relation to the way they are perceived and processed within a society. We may summarize this very interesting list, and put each entry in relation to the examples of AV vegetarians we have seen so far:

(1) **Unattainable vegetarianism**—people are not necessarily *against* this lifestyle, but maintain they would not be able to become vegetarians. In several cases, the vegetarian appears "annoyingly superior", so to speak: too correct, too sensible, and too obsessed. This way, the "moral weakness" of the non-vegetarian characters becomes a strong element of identification and sympathy for the audience, and the vegetarian is cast either as "villain" (Twain from *Murder by Death*, Phil from *Green Card*…) or as "too good to be true" (or alive, see *Things We Lost in the Fire*, or terrestrial, see *Star Trek*). Rosewarne then proceeds to distinguish two sub-categories of "Unattainable vegetarianism": we shall see them in the next two points of this list.

(2) **Tempted vegetarians**—the idea that sooner or later a vegetarian is tempted to eat meat again. That, as we have seen, is embodied by Phoebe's pregnancy cravings in *Friends*, or by April's wish to prepare turkey for her parents;

(3) **Vegetarians in a non-vegetarian world**—dynamics of co-existence and/or alienation between vegetarians and omnivores. We see that happening in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Pieces of April*, *Everything is Illuminated* and others. As for the latter, the sequence in which Jonathan has to explain his vegetarianism to his Ukrainian acquaintances (Alex and his grandfather), is of the utmost hilariousness, so perhaps we can quote a passage:

Jonathan: *I'm a vegetarian.*
Alex: *You're a what?*
Jonathan: *I don't eat meat.*
Alex: *How can you not eat meat?*
Jonathan: *I just don't.*
Alex: *[to Grandfather, in Russian] He says he does not eat meat.*
Grandfather: *[to Alex, in Russian] What?*
Alex: *No meat?*
Jonathan: *No meat.*
Alex: *Steak?*
Jonathan: *No…*
Alex: *Chickens!*
Jonathan: *No…*
Alex: *And what about the sausage?*
Jonathan: *No, no sausage, no meat*!
Alex: *[to Grandfather*, in Russian] He says he does not eat any meat.
Grandfather: *[to Alex, in Russian] Not even sausage?*
Alex: *[to Grandfather, in Russian] I know!*
Grandfather: *[to Alex, in Russian] What is wrong with him?*
Alex: *What is wrong with you?*
Jonathan: *Nothing, I just don't eat meat*!

(4) **Hippies and the New Age**—a typical social image of the vegetarian is that of the "alternative" outcast. We see examples in *RV*, *Pieces of April*, *American Beauty*, *The Contender*, etc. Rosewarne then proceeds to distinguish among different types of "vegetarian hippies", but perhaps, for the scope of this case study we can skip the details.

(5) **Sickly vegetarians**—vegetarians are perceived as weak, not fully healthy, and—when they are men—not virile enough. The vegetarians we see in *Green Card* (Phil), *Everything Is Illuminated*, *American Beauty*, *Ice Age*, and others, are hardly a metaphor of strength and fitness. In addition, they always have a meat-eating co-protagonist or antagonist, who—instead—is well-endowed with these qualities.

(6) **Killjoys and sad sacks**—vegetarians are perceived as unhappy and dull people. Once again the character of Phil in *Green Card* is the perfect example. He loses his girlfriend Brontë, exactly on account of his lack of cheerfulness and *joie de vivre*, which instead are the forte of his carnivore rival, George. The character of Fiona in *About a Boy*, too, specifically suffers from clinical depression. Another character I did not mention, because she is not vegetarian, is Rachel Zane from the series *Suits*. What is interesting about her is that Rachel is portrayed by Meghan Markle, now better known as Duchess of Sussex, having married Prince Harry. Markle is a "foodie", an enthusiast of cooking and food culture and has also hosted a blog about these topics. Except that, well, she is reportedly vegan, or anyway strongly oriented towards plant-based food (news have also reported of her conflict with the Royal Family, when she and Harry had suggested their son could be raised as vegan). Now, Rachel, too, is a foodie in the series, but the difference is that every time she displays her passion to the other characters, the dishes mentioned are always meat or fish-based. My suggested morale, here, is that a "vegan foodie" in AVCC is not credible: a vegan cannot enjoy life as much as a meat-eater, and certainly cannot afford developing an actual "passion" for food. Changing topic a bit, an interesting association between vegetarianism and sadness was once delivered by the famous Finnish mezzo-soprano Monica Groop: in an interview she defined "vegetarian playing" a type of flat, uninspired and dull performance.

(7) **Preachy vegetarians**—vegetarians are perceived as constantly and righteously attempting to convert meat-eaters. Elizabeth Costello is certainly the best example, but we can also include the likes of Lisa from *The Simpsons* or Fiona from *About a Boy*.

(8) **Hostile vegetarians**—vegetarians are perceived as voicing their lifestyle in a rather aggressive manner. Very often, but not always, hostile and preachy components are present in the same person. Elizabeth Costello and Lisa are certainly good examples of this coexistence, but one must also add straight hostile types like Jeffrey from *12 Monkeys* or Phil from *Green Card*. The other vegetarian from the latter movie, Brontë, is a significant example: her hostility is tempered and ultimately defeated (i.e., turned into romance) by the meat-eater Georges.

(9) **Circumstantial vegetarians**—people who choose, or are forced, to be vegetarians only in specific occasions/contexts. In our list we have selected only regular vegetarians, but because of them some characters appearing in the same films/series can be "circumstantial vegetarians". We mentioned Joey from *Friends* who becomes vegetarian during Phoebe's pregnancy, to "compensate" for her cravings for meat. There are also cases like Elle's dog in *Legally Blonde* (forced by his owner to become vegetarian), the poor dinosaurs adopted by *Ice Age*'s Sid, and Elizabeth Costello's family.

(10) **Vegetarians for good health**—not all vegetarians are such for ethical reasons, or not *only* for that in many other cases, the choice is due to the wish for a healthier lifestyle. In most of my examples the vegetarian characters are *both* animal advocates and health fanatics, but there are also cases such as Leon from Luc Besson's

movie, Lionel Twain from *Murder by Death*, or Ricardo Tubbs from *Miami Vice*, where good health seems to be the only driving force behind the choice, and no indication is offered that they might have concerns for animal welfare or rights.

(11) **Enlightened vegetarians**—vegetarianism can be perceived as an intellectual/academic lifestyle. Such is definitely the case in *Elizabeth Costello*, *Everything Is Illuminated*, *The Simpsons* (Lisa is by far the intellectual of the family), *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Things We Lost in the Fire*, and others.

(12) **Gender-bound vegetarianism**—the idea that vegetarianism may be more the result of a feminine inclination, as opposed to the stereotype that "real men eat meat". Indeed, with the exception of Ricardo Tubbs and Leon, all the vegetarian "men" in the list are hardly a portrayal of stereotypical masculinity. In one case, *Green Card*, the opposition between the vegetarian Phil and his love rival Georges is played also on this ground: Georges definitely appears as a "real man" in comparison.

(13) **Non-political vegetarians**—vegetarians who do not seem to make a "statement" out of their lifestyle. As already mentioned, Jonathan, in *Everything Is Illuminated*, simply answers, "I just don't eat meat!" to the question "What is wrong with you?" He could have taken the opportunity to say a couple of things about his motivations but he prefers not to engage in political discussions. The same applies to Ricardo Tubbs, Laine Hanson from *The Contender*, the barber from *The Great Dictator*, whose vegetarianism does not affect in any way his later political involvement, as a Hitler look-alike.

Now. As we have seen earlier in the book, the AV representation of a "type" is pursued through various physical and psychological traits. The shaping of a character is not just a problem solved with casting and auditioning (for example, by hiring an actor of Italian origins to play a *Mafioso* part): that character needs also to be "forged" in a credible way. From what we have seen, with the only *real* exceptions of Ricardo Tubbs from *Miami Vice* and Temperance Brennan from *Bones*), 28 out of 30 portrayals of "vegetarians" display characters who, in one way or another, are "out of context". This (strong or vague) lack of social integration can work in both a comic (e.g., Phoebe) and dramatic (e.g., Brian Burke) sense, creating a particular "angle" for the character: their vegetarianism does not normally go unnoticed, but it is depicted as a significant part of their weirdness.

To an extent, additional "unusual" characteristics can be connected with vegetarianism in a causal manner, according to a line of reasoning that would sound like "Well, if they are vegetarian, than they must also be…" Among the most recurrent associations we find "bizarre", "eccentric", "maniacal", "crazy", and "naïve". All in all, the most recurrent social perception of the vegetarian seems to be that of a person who is particularly neurotic, maybe because they pay attention to something—eating—that most people may not want to focus on in such an opinionated way. They may be rather too obsessed with "changing the world", perhaps focusing on a problem, animal killing, that most people do not perceive as a really urgent one. And finally they may be a tad childish and effeminate, possibly using the traditionally masculine equation that an excessive sensitivity is more of a female trait.

It may be too audacious to say so, but we should not exclude that one of the sources of inspiration (perhaps not the dominant one, but "one of them"), for this stereotypization, is the general conviction, in fact challenged by the likes of Berry (2005), that Adolf Hitler was vegetarian. This, it seems, is the most visible historical reference to be found in the idea of a maniac, over-polished, obsessed guy that we find in cases like Angela Martin in *The Office*, Lionel Twain in *Murder by Death* or Phil in *Green Card*. Once again, Peter Weir's movie offers an interesting perspective on the discussion because it contains two uptight, neurotic vegetarians who end up following different paths: one, Phil, remains as he is until the end, alienating the audience's sympathies, while another, Brontë, learns to "take it easy" and "enjoy life" thanks to the politically incorrect, egocentric and meat-eating Georges. In Rosewarne's categories, this is a practical co-existence of the "tempted", "sickly", "sad", "preachy" and "hostile" vegetarian types. The "temptation", here, is offered by the "imperfect but happy humanity" of the meat-eater. The movie does not show a dietary conversion of Brontë, but there are reasons to believe that, now that she has fallen in love with Georges, she may also in the future learn to "take it easy" on that level as well.

Other famous historical vegetarians seem to be relevant sources of characterization. Gandhi provides a significant background for some ethical/ideological vegetarians like Elizabeth Costello or Brian Burks, but when the ethical component meets the alternative, counter-cultural one (Fiona, April Burns, Cassie Munro…), the hippie generation as a whole (which was *also* inspired by Gandhi) seems to be the main point of reference, along with the many vegetarian pop and rock stars, such as Paul McCartney, Morrissey or Bob Marley. It is also noteworthy that the main cinematographic portrayals of Gandhi, starting of course from Richard Attenborough's renowned 1982 production, completely omit any representation of his vegetarianism.

The vegetarian writer Franz Kafka is probably an important source when it comes to depicting vegetarians as social, maladjusted outcasts, such as Ricky Fitts or—to a milder extent—Jonathan Foer. Also, some vegetarian VIP beauties (such as—prototypically—Pamela Anderson) must be behind characterizations like Elle Wood in *Legally Blonde*.

What is significantly missing is two associations:

(1) Vegetarianism + athletic skills, quite predictably. It is however noteworthy that some of the greatest personalities in sport history are/were actually vegetarians. To name just a few among those who have, or have had, great media resonance: Martina Navratilova and Novak Djokovic, two of the greatest tennis player of all times; Edwin Moses, one of the greatest track-and-field athletes (twice Olympic champion); Robert Parish, "The Chief", the NBA player who, along with Larry Bird, marked Boston Celtics' golden age in the 1980s; and of course the 9-time gold medalist legend Carl Lewis. Despite this, the idea that a meat-based diet is indispensable for an athlete seems to be too strong to actually be challenged at cinematographic level. If it is true that characters like Léon or Tubbs are rather fitness-oriented, it is also true that there is not a single sport-movie (at least, not to my knowledge) where the portrayed athletes are vegetarian.

(2) Vegetarianism + "quiet/rational genius", embodied by famous vegetarians such as Albert Einstein, Pythagoras of Samos, Antoni Gaudí and most of all Leonardo da Vinci. AV portrayals of great brains are never really associated with vegetarianism, though, indeed, history seems to prove that a rather high percentage of artists, intellectuals, philosophers and scientists have embraced this lifestyle.

Excurse 12. Not Romantic enough

Although one could be tempted to suggest a certain active boycotting of the "vegetarian genius" characterization, from the part of the meat-eating majority of filmmakers, I actually suggest here another theory. With very few exceptions, the history of cinema (particularly *mainstream* cinema) always displayed an exclusive inclination to follow the myth of the "Romantic genius". The geniuses who inhabit the cinematographic landscape fatally tend to be tormented, instinctive and passionate individuals:

> […] the Romantic genius was a brooding, sensitive loner tormented by doubts and condemned to be misunderstood, and on the other, an inspired poet-prophet whose sublime enthusiasm for *le bel idéal* leads to empowered and impassioned eloquence. (Waller 1992: 224)

In other words, by combining magic and drama, divine and passion, the Romantic myth of the genius gives filmmakers all they need to make a blockbuster. The quietness, rationality, sobriety and, yes, the vegetarianism of the above-mentioned geniuses does not seem to appeal to filmmakers. It is quite outstanding that people like Leonardo or Gaudì were never really subjects of a proper biographical movie: endless documentaries, a few TV portrayals, and of course a lot of references in various productions, but no one so far has had the nerve to create anything remotely comparable to movies like *Amadeus* or *Bird*, where not only the two protagonists, Mozart and Charlie Parker, are given the full Romantic treatment of a troubled and supernaturally-inspired personality, but they are also assisted/rivaled by "quiet" talents (Salieri and Gillespie, of course), whose role, among other things, is that of showing the limits of a rational (that is, ordinary) approach to art.

What we are left with, thus, is a figure that does not have the requisites to be "attractive" and "complex" (plus, "heroic" when the case calls for it) in the way AVCC usually likes to portray prominent characters.

Concluding, as society is rapidly changing its standards, and lifestyles like vegetarianism and veganism are becoming increasingly popular, we may predict that the type of stereotypical representation we have described in this case study will evolve into something more articulate and multifaceted, but for the time being we probably have to accept that the Phoebe-type, the Shaggy-type and the Phil-type constitute the dominant "rhetoric" of vegetarianism in audiovisuality.

5.3 Thematicity

By "thematicity" we mean the process by which objects, places, characters, and else, are assigned a certain value in order to play usually-central roles within a story. A theme is often the sum of two components operating at two levels: a "surface" level and a deeper one, that is, one or more topic/s and one or more significance/s behind them. The former are the tangible, visible and audible, elements appearing in the story, and the latter are the deeper meanings assigned to them, and therefore to the story altogether. Say: an author may decide to use the topic of autumn (falling leaves, gloomy weather, etc.) to convey the message of ageing, mortality and the likes.

To make more specific examples, we know that a biopic is a movie or a series about the life of certain characters (e.g., *The Crown* is about Elizabeth II, *Ray* is about Ray Charles, *Bird* is about Charlie Parker…). This is the surface level, and usually is the one we put forward when somebody asks us what the given text was about. What is *Bird* about? *Bird* is about the life and career of the great jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker. But then we may go deeper into thematicity when we switch from the idea of a mere, tangible subject to what we may call the concept behind it, that is, a more complex elaboration of the text that calls into question less concrete topics: values, sentiments, ideologies, myths. *Bird* is, yes, about Charlie Parker, but on a deeper level, it is also about artistry, racial struggles, addiction, depression, and self-destruction. These are the kinds of themes that we normally mention when, after a question like "what was the movie about?", we have a chance to elaborate and say more.

Not rarely, these more elaborate themes belong to the category of *topos*—or *topoi*, in plural. A word derived from Ancient Greek, a topos is literally a "common place", but not in the sense of "stereotype" or "*cliché*" (although, admittedly, *topoi* often end up like this), but rather in the sense of an idea or sentiment that seems to affect people across different epochs and societies so deeply to be actually addressed repeated times in texts. Love, death, redemption, travelling, good versus evil, rise and fall, identity, otherness…

Summing up both surface and depth, a theme in an AVT can actually be just anything—anything an author may fancy. It is quite like that sequence in Roberto Benigni's *The Tiger and the Snow* (a movie we have discussed in the case study ▶ Sect. 3.3.5), when the poetry teacher Attilio explains to his students the possible subjects of poetry: "Do not write straight away love poems: those are the most difficult ones […] Write about other topics—anything: the sea, the wind, a radiator, a bus that is late… whatever! There is no thing that is more poetic than another. Poetry is not outside: it is inside! […] There is only one thing that is indispensable in order to do poetry: everything!".

Similarly, everything is potentially a theme for an AVT, and most of all, topics do not have to mean the same thing across different texts (or sometimes even within the same text). Very often, meanings are informed by cultural processes and conventions and we have partly seen this already in the previous set of "properties", but all other options are possible as well, including (and notably) individual inclinations and the personality of an author.

Let us take a novel of enormous importance for western literature, which was repeatedly adapted in AV form, most notably in a movie directed by John Houston in 1956. I am of course talking about Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. In a work such as this, which—as we all know—has a highly symbolic dimension, the "deep" theme is the eternal struggle between human beings and nature, and this is represented through the "surface" of an albino cachalot, constantly hunted by whaling ships, and particularly by the furious Captain Ahab, who wants to kill him at all costs in order to vindicate the leg he lost in a previous confrontation with the whale. As a topic, Moby Dick represents nature in many ways: just like nature, he is concrete and abstract at the same time (he is the protagonist of the novel, and yet it appears in only three chapters out of 159, otherwise he exists only through the sailors' narrations and descriptions); and just like nature (and what humans make of it conceptually) he represents an idea of fate, myth, non-human environment, universe, truth and religion. Most of all, Moby Dick is something different for each character of the novel (and of Huston's movie), exactly like human relationship with nature is in turn heterogeneous and complex. Depending on the characters involved, Moby Dick is observed, respected, feared, studied, hunted, and so forth, up to the ancestral and vital hatred that Ahab has for him ("He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it"), a feeling that—according to some of the most authoritative interpretations of the novel—represents the stubborn but vain human effort to compete with God.

That Moby Dick must be taken more as a symbol (an archetype, in fact) than an actual whale, we see it in many ways—for instance, in the way whale hunting is represented. The practice is certainly central in the narration, being the job of all the human characters in the novel, however it is soon clear that it is not under any ethical scrutiny, being neither accused nor encouraged: it is *what these people do*, and killing or not a whale is basically irrelevant to the significance of the story. At the same time, and all things considered, as readers or spectators, we tend to sympathize with the cachalot, who—despite having killed several people—remains the persecuted character of the story, alien to that deep feeling of hatred that instead animates Ahab. Moby Dick is an animal that is desperately trying to survive, and has to do it with several harpoons stuck in his flesh. He is generally forgiven for the final sinking of the Pequod and its crew, because one more time he had been attacked by the obsessed captain, who had been clearly warned (and so were we, therefore) that "Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!" (Starbuck talking, of course). Even Captain Boomer, who also had been mutilated by the whale, is not out for revenge and has accepted the accident with the fatalism of those who are aware of the dangers of the whaling business.

All of this constitutes the "thematicity" of Melville's masterpiece, and it is with this (much more than visual or narrative elements, which—as we shall soon see—could be changed, shortened, mixed or else) that a director like John Houston (or any other who adapted the novel into an AVT) had to deal with, in order to make sure that the movie retained the original "spirit" of the novel (◘ Fig. 5.12).

In the light of this, and although thematicity can be analyzed in various ways, I suggest to emphasize four main groups of "relevance"—that is, meaningful contexts that may generate/suggest themes (see also ◘ Fig. 5.21):

(1) **Universal relevance**: some themes are common and relatable across all human communities, for instance, most *topoi* are. While they may be represented in different ways depending on the authors, the period, etc., they always display values, ideas and sentiments that anybody can relate to. A text about love, whichever way love is portrayed, is something we can all understand, at least up to a certain point.

(2) **Social relevance**: some other themes are typical of a more or less extended community of people, but they are not necessarily relatable by other communities. Of course, the other communities may make, and often do, an effort to decode and generalize this diversity, up to constructing a form of interpretation that is applicable to their own cultures as well. In this case, quite often, there are specific events and circumstances that suggest a given theme. A text about Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile has its own cultural specificity, but of course other communities may relate to it by applying that story to their own political experience: perhaps another dictatorship, or the fear for an authoritarian régime of that kind, or their own country's reaction/measures to Pinochet's régime, etc.

(3) **Stylistic relevance**: some themes are more characteristic of certain genres/styles than others. If an author produces an AVT of, say, science fiction, it is more likely that they will consider approaching themes like dystopia or technocracy, rather than themes such as unemployment or homophobia. Everything is possible, of course, but when we enter the realm of chance and probability, we also have to consider stylistic characteristics as part of the equation.

(4) **Authorial relevance**: individual artists/authors have their own thematic preferences, of course, as a result of their own lives and choices. We mentioned the "cool blonde" theme in Hitchcock's movies along with many other themes, that we indeed see recurring in most of his movies: staircases, brandy drinks, monumental landmarks… In fact all authors have thematic signatures of many sorts: there is Andrey Tarkovsky's passion for forests and water versus fire contrasts; Gabriele Salvatores' obsession for male friendship (nearly all of his movies are ultimately about that); Federico Fellini's fetish for big-breasted women, and so forth.

Fig. 5.12 Gregory Peck as Captain Ahab in John Houston's *Moby Dick [Image of public domain]*

As "thematicity" calls into questions areas as diverse as myths, ideologies, values, authorship and other, any reference we may provide here will only cover part of the relevant notions. Anyway, given this handicap, here are some recommendations: Barthes (1957), Lévi-Strauss (1963), Cohen (1985), Johnson (1994) (particularly Chaps. 3 and 6) Burke (1995) and Meisel (2009).

5.3.1 Case Study: The City as a "Theme" and the Case of Marseille

The case study chosen for this section is one that allows us to address several issues all in one shot. Indeed, when it comes to the notion of "thematicity", few topics are as interesting and varied as a city. Cities in AV serve numerous functions, not only the very obvious one of "geographic location". They can help to characterize the story, the events and people within it, and many of the values we associate with them—be those historical, economic, social or else. Also, at least when it comes to those that enjoy a certain fame, cities are represented according to a set of cultural and mythical *topoi* that more often than not constitute the very essence of that city's image and soft power.

A city like Naples, for instance, offers a perfect example of a geographical place whose cultural and mythical image is profoundly related to music: if we ask a sample of people to associate Naples with the first few things that come to mind, there is a high chance that at least one or two of those things will turn out to be music-related: for example, the song, "O sole mio", an instrument like the mandolin, the singer Enrico Caruso, and so forth.

What happens if that city is Marseille? Why does it make a good case for a book on audiovisuality? To the best of my knowledge a complete list of the AVTs located in the French city has not yet been compiled. However, partly browsing through the web and partly using the very useful Block (2013: 128), there are about 120 titles within mainstream cinema and TV that are worthy of attention, and those shall form the analytical corpus of this case study. There are also cases where the location is not the real Marseille, but a recreation of it (in studios or elsewhere), and of course there are cases where the appearance of the city is not stable for most of the AVT's duration, but simply temporary, as in movies like *The Bourne Identity* or *Love Actually*. The great majority of these titles are movies, while the TV series I could find are only two: *Plus belle la vie* (2004–2009) and *Marseille* (2015) (◘ Fig. 5.13).

It is worth noting the fact that besides an obvious majority of French productions in this bunch, the rest of them tend to be American or Italian, or Franco-Italian, as in the famous case of *Borsalino*, on which we shall discuss more thoroughly later.

Now, if you have seen some movies or TV dramas about Marseille, you may have noticed a certain pattern: more often than not they stage situations of criminality and illegalities of sorts. Indeed, I took those 120 titles, I removed those that were *not* related to these themes, and what remained after this skimming was no more than thirty-odd titles, about one quarter of the total. And the amount could have grown even thinner if I had counted those movies that actually are adaptations and remakes from previous titles or other media, as in the relevant case of Marcel Pagnol's theatre trilogy *Marius*, *Fanny* and *César* (see Prime 2013 for a specific discussion on these particular films), which has been adapted and re-adapted for cinema several times.

Fig. 5.13 A panoramic view of the city of Marseille *[Image of public domain]*

It seems evident, thus, that in the very majority of the cases, when a screenwriter or a director choose to locate their production in Marseille, it is because they intend to stage a story where illegality and/or immorality, crime, violence and similar themes are at least significant, when not central. This, I believe, is what makes Marseille a good case study for us: not only does it display (or, rather, it is represented as displaying) features that are very AV-friendly, but those features are also specific to particular genres in AVCC, so they offer at the same time a varied and a recognizable frame for our analysis.

Whether justified historically or constructed culturally, the intimate, "natural" connection between (representations of) Marseille and criminality is quite undeniable. There is no better way to describe that than the words employed by Olivier Bohler to explain the reason why Jean-Louis Godard's *Breathless* begins in Marseille: "Facing the Vieux-Port, Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo), with his accomplice, a brunette, steals a car. Inside is a revolver, with which he will kill a policeman, sealing his destiny. In what other French city would an anonymous driver casually leave a weapon in his car? If Godard's film began in Paris, no one would have believed it" (Bohler 2013: 49).

Taking a closer and more careful look at the 120 titles examined, this central theme can be articulated in five main topical areas (genres, to an extent), together or separately, which are all pertinent to the idea of "contextualization" we presented in this section. Let us list them in order of recurrence. First and foremost, crime, violence and illegality in a strict, direct, sense: texts *about* crime, rather than simply *featuring* it. These cases form the relative majority of the 120 texts. Gangsters, thieves, organized crime, outlaws of all sorts seem to be the most frequent characters in Marseille stories (a few topical examples are discussed in Bohler 2013).

Secondly, we find what we may call "Harbor/frontier topics". Due to its history and (deserved or not) reputation as a not-too-safe port city, Marseille often serves as the context for stories of adventurers, sailors, desperados and renegades who are often escaping from the law (or—more existentially—from their past), due to their involvement in some illegal activity. A significant example of the blend between the themes of frontier and criminality is Maurice Tourneur's 1935 film *Justin de Marseille*, with its abundance of foreign and travelling characters, often involved in illegal activities: Eastern merchants, Chinese opium dealers, African immigrants, sailors, the Italian gangster Esposito, and so forth. For reasons probably best explained by millennia of discriminatory stereotyping of the gender roles, these characters tend quite invariably to be men, not women. If a woman is "illegal", she is usually a prostitute (we shall return to this later). Exactly the above-mentioned Pagnol's trilogy (and its audiovisual adaptations) can serve as practical illustration of this patriarchal distinction: the character of Marius is a sailor, the character of Fanny sells cockles outside a bar (cockles—I shall add—being the closest metaphor to a "stable home" that sea can offer). The two fall in love, but what eventually separates them is the sea itself, the seduction of adventure that Marius just cannot resist. The significance of Marseille's harbor area as film location is described at length in Lioult (2013).

Thirdly, we have stories involving immigrant characters, North African/Muslim and Italian ones in particular. Marseille is notoriously a multi-ethnic city with a crowded community of people from abroad, particularly from former French colonies, such as the North African area, and of course nearby countries, Italy especially. With that in mind, once more, the roles assigned to many of these characters display little or no compatibility with morality and/or legality. In this case, too, an examination of the ever-too-slow history of human civil progress may help to explain why "black" characters are rarely assigned leading (good or villain) roles. The list of movies involving immigrants in general, and North Africans/Muslims in particular is very long: some of the most important titles were mentioned and discussed in Blanc-Hoang (2013) and include *L'Italien* (Olivier Baroux, 2010), *Mother* and its sequel *588 Rue Paradis* (1991 and 1992, both by Henri Verneuil), *Bella Ciao* (Stéphane Giusti, 2000), *À la place du Coeur* (Robert Guédiguian, 1998), *La ville est tranquille* (Robert Guédiguian, 1998), the *Payoff* and the *Taxi* sagas (directed by different people but all written by Luc Besson), and others.

Fourthly, there are love stories of the "cursed" (and again illegal, one way or another) type. Romance in Marseille is hardly easy or happy, even when it is filtered through lighter tones. Most of the time these love stories have a tragic element and usually happen within the context of crime, betrayal and unaccomplishment. As already mentioned, while the prototypical male character is either an adventurer or a criminal, the recurrent "illegal business" assigned to the woman is prostitution.

Finally, Marseille has also been employed as the setting for war stories, particularly Second World War movies. Though a far rarer occurrence than the other four of the present list, this particular topic opens up to a thematic treatment that, as discussed later, has a certain pertinence also to the other topics: the "good illegality". War movies of this kind, indeed (one may for instance think of Michael Curtiz's 1944 classic *Passage to Marseille*), tend to focus on the underground, clandestine resistance of French partisans against Nazi occupation and interaction with/support for the Anglo-American allies. Thus, while displaying undisputable moral virtue (especially since the enemy is the archetypical villain Hitler), these characters, too, are in their own way "illegal", operating in ways that are clearly distant from "canonic" soldiers fighting in uniform on the battlefield.

These five "genres" can be placed within a few thematic/narrative frameworks that seem to recur more often than others. The theme of the traumatic escape and/or difficult return is one we find particularly often. In numerous works, especially those pertaining to the first four of the abovementioned genres, the main characters are "on the run" to or from (occasionally "through") Marseille, for whatever reason (again: illegal ones occurring most often), and the film documents their problematic relationship with a city that may have rejected/harmed/deceived them. Not rarely, and quite importantly, this relationship is mediated by memory and awareness of the past: in one form or another, indeed, the "past" constitutes another significant element, and quite definitely the most typical "temporal mode" (concretely or symbolically) associated with Marseille.

Also intriguing is the fact that this city is most of the time a "lo-tech" one. Exactly due to this fascination for the past, Marseille is never characterized as a highly technological, innovative or "state of the art" place, unlike, for instance, Tokyo, New York, Hong Kong or London, which are often represented as modern business, political or social environments. When the hero of some action movie breaks through the headquarters of, say, the Chinese mafia or some American corrupt politician, that usually happens at the top of a fully-accessorized and stylish skyscraper. In Marseille, it is more likely that the same type of situation occurs in some bar or harbor warehouse, with the gangster sitting on a simple wooden chair, instead of a designer's office sofa. Cars, weapons, clothes and all the rest tend to follow the same pattern.

Socially speaking, there is also a tendency to represent Marseille as a working class city, for the better and for the worse. With all the due exceptions, of course, a significant percentage of both heroes and villains, as well as main and side characters, belong to the less privileged classes of Marseille society, and operate within a social space that is much more referable to them than to middle or upper class (harbors, bars, brothels, less wealthy districts, small houses, etc.). Crime as such, too, can be driven by need or desire to climb up the social ladder, rather than by greed or power.

Also, crime and illegality very often tend to be "romanticized". Due to some of the characteristics mentioned (fascination for the past, escapism, focus on less privileged social classes), plus others we shall emphasize later, the staging of crime and criminals is very often subject to a sympathetic treatment. Films set in Marseille abound in "adorable scoundrels", "handsome loners", "bad guys with a heart of gold", and so forth.

As a harbor city, but also as a spot (we have seen it) suspended between present and past and between good and evil, Marseille is often represented as a place of instability and transition. Characters hardly "inhabit" or "settle" in this city: rather, they arrive, return, leave (or dream of leaving), and stay temporarily. Also existentially, there is often a feeling of precariousness, fatalism and out-of-timeness. It is perhaps no coincidence that the most popular saga located in Marseille, *Taxi*, with five installments and even an American remake, is exactly centered around a type of vehicle that hosts short and "temporary" journeys, not to mention that this saga, too, comprises stories of criminality, but we should not be surprised anymore, at this point.

Borsalino

Once we have assembled and systematized all the above reflections we can take a single AVT as an example, choosing possibly among those that are best known. In fact, we can actually take *the* best known, because it actually happens to be the one that is most fitting to nearly all the points raised so far. Released in 1970 and directed by Jacques Deray, *Borsalino* is a movie that nearly everybody is familiar with, at least to some extent (as we shall see, that extent often corresponds to the soundtrack theme, which may be even better known than the movie as such). When it comes to Marseille-located films, only William Friedkin's *The French Connection* rivals *Borsalino* in terms of notoriety—unless, of course, one considers more recent and very successful movies, like the mentioned *The Bourne Identity* and *Love Actually*, which however had only few scenes placed in the French city.

The audience rewarded the movie with great commercial success all over the world (except, perhaps, the US market, where *Borsalino* had less impact than the producers had hoped for), and the critics, too, showed appreciation: still to this day it is very common to see the movie featured in guides and suggestions of the "greatest gangster movies of all time" type. Well-known is also the story that Borsalino hats, the ever-present accessory in the two protagonists, experienced a true fashion revival after the film's release (for the record, Borsalino is the oldest Italian company for manufacturing luxury hats, having been founded by Giuseppe Borsalino in 1857).

Borsalino is placed in 1930s Marseille. Two crooks with rather opposite personalities, the cold and meticulous Roch Siffredi (played by Alain Delon—and yes: *that other* Siffredi chose his stage name after this character) and the instinctive and emotional François Capella (Jean-Paul Belmondo), despite an initial antagonistic meeting over a prostitute named Lola, decide to become partners in crime. They start by fixing gambling in boxing matches and horse races, and then expand into the more profitable business of fish and meat markets, entering into conflict with the main bosses of the city, Mr. Poli and Mr. Marello. While the latter two had managed to maintain a non-belligerent equilibrium, sharing business and territory in a reciprocally satisfying way, the ambition of the "new kids in town" Siffredi and Capella turns things upside down, resulting first in the killing of Marello and then of Poli. Having acquired possession of the city, the two partners understand that their time will soon be done as they will now be the targets of younger gangsters. Capella is the first to decide to leave, but an unknown, off-screen, hit man kills him. With his friend dead, Siffredi then makes a decision to leave Marseille, ending thus the movie but leaving an open option for a sequel. Indeed, in 1974 *Borsalino & Co.*, Siffredi will return to Marseille after having found and executed Capella's killer whose identity is revealed only in this sequel (a certain Francesco Volpone, brother of the new big boss of Marseille, Giovanni).

While heavily romanticized (in ways we shall later describe), the story of Siffredi and Capella is actually based on the real life characters of Paul Carbone and François Spirito, two gangsters who dominated Marseille's "milieu" (literally "the underworld": the denomination of organized crime in France) roughly between the 1920s and the 1940s. Among the activities the two were involved in were prostitution, heroin trafficking and most of all membership of the Carlingue, an organization that cooperated with the Gestapo during the Second World War, in exchange for the *laissez-faire* of the German authorities over criminal activities in Marseille. While the film references to Carbone and Spirito have a lot to do with time, place and certain relational dynamics in the partnership, the activities of the two fictional gangsters are morally "softer" than those of the real ones: with the possible exception of animal rights activists, most people would agree that making money with fixing horse races and controlling the meat/fish market are less contemptible crimes than prostitution, hard drug traffic and collaboration with the Nazis (the latter being a crime that film history has always treated with the utmost severity), all directly related to the killing, or at least the exploitation, of human lives (■ Fig. 5.14).

The reason for taking these liberties in the fictionalization of Carbone and Spirito are clear, and have a lot to do with the topics discussed in this case study. On top of everything, of course, there is the abovementioned "romanticization" of crime. While of course the Marseille pictured in Borsalino crawls with bad-bad guys if you know what I mean: the three protagonists, Siffredi, Capella and their "common girlfriend", the prostitute Lola (played by Catherine Rouvel), are at least likeable bad guys, intended to inspire sympathy, charm and humor—all features that would have been awkwardly out of tune with things like heroin traffic or collusion with the Gestapo. Both Delon and Belmondo have of course built their whole career on playing "adorable scoundrels": "Certainly, critics have bracketed Delon and Belmondo together, especially for their work in thrillers (…). Theirs is indeed an image based on criminality" (Vincendeau 2000: 159).

Borsalino was a project that Delon very much wanted to pursue (he was the film producer as well) in order to have the opportunity to star with Belmondo. As the story goes, the collaboration turned out to be a clash of egos (surprise surprise), with Delon arguably setting the movie in such a way that he would look better, as a character than Belmondo; the latter then demanding a contract that would ensure exactly the same amount of close-ups as his colleague (resulting in the production having to cut several sequences involving Delon), and—cherry on top—Belmondo suing Delon after his name appeared under the inscription "An Alain Delon production" in the film credits. What was at stake, evidently, was the predominance over the title of Jean Gabin's heir as "France's biggest divo" (plus, possibly, that of "sex symbol of

■ **Fig. 5.14** The real gangsters who inspired *Borsalino*: Paul Carbone and François Spirito *[Images of public domain]* their generation"), which was by that time contended mostly by the two. What their vanity perhaps overlooked was that France was more than happy to welcome both of them in those roles, particularly in the light of their differences. As Ginette Vincendeau writes, "Delon and Belmondo redefined French stardom and offered parallel yet divergent visions of French masculinity" (Vincendeau 2000: 158), with Belmondo externalizing his masculinity and Delon internalizing it. Borsalino was exactly the movie that celebrated this difference: "The contrast is clear (…) in the scene which brings the two stars together: Belmondo is playing billiards and fooling around when Delon appears as a silhouette through the cafe window. It is as if his beauty and presence were enough to signify his gangster identity as well as his virility. His appearance, his beauty, act as an armour and a spectacle sufficient to inspire awe" (Vincendeau 2000: 180). Or, as Kristiina Hackel puts it, "Delon is impeccable as the unsatisfied and increasingly sophisticated Siffredi; Belmondo is unflappable as the fun loving and savvy, yet ultimately tragic figure of Capella" (Hackel 2013: 42). Also, noteworthy is the fact that most of the times Capella is wearing suits of warm colors like brown and beige, while Siffredi is often in grey or black. Besides these fire-and-ice archetypes of charm, the other obvious tool employed by Borsalino to enhance Delon's and Belmondo's stardom is the representation of their on-screen friendship, which once more is another strong expression of masculinity, as it is a relationship based on camaraderie and virility (let us not forget that their first encounter is a fistfight): "at the heart of the film is the story of their friendship and partnership and, more than any other caper crime, this is what we most want to succeed" (Hackel 2013: 42) (▣ Fig. 5.15).

Driven by the pleasantness of these two characters, plus, let us not forget, Lola and the other prostitutes (mostly characterized according to the "Irma la Douce/Pretty woman" cliché that passes over in silence the darkest and most tragic aspects of prostitution), Borsalino's nostalgic, watercolor-painted take on a 1930s gangster story could not be a better fit for a city like Marseille.

We also mentioned the theme of the difficult escape and/or return, and it is highly symbolic that Borsalino employs both at the two most strategic points of the story, the beginning and the end, assigning one to Delon and one to Belmondo. The movie indeed opens with a rather traumatic return: Siffredi has been released from jail and returns to the city to rejoin his girlfriend Lola, only to find her with a new companion, Capella. Then, at the end of the movie, Capella decides to leave Marseille and announces it to his friend Siffredi with the fatalistic line "La chance, ça n'existe pas" ("chance… it does not exist"), implying that he was meant to leave at some point. However, as we know, he finds a more tragic exit, as he is shot by an unknown hit man outside a villa (as I mentioned already, it will only be the film's sequel, *Borsalino & Co*., to reveal the killer's identity). As he dies in the arms of his friend, he pronounces the same line once more: "La chance, ça n'existe pas", this time implying that after all his destiny was a premature death. With his partner dead, it is now Siffredi who leaves Marseille, and as mentioned his return will be seen in the film's sequel (incidentally, it is another traumatic return, as it coincides with encountering and killing Capella's assassin).

The fatalism that animates Capella's decision well summarizes another important theme related to the characterization of Marseille: instability and transitionality, both in a factual and existential sense. Siffredi's and Capella's progressive ascension to the throne of the city's milieu is unrelenting and seemingly unstoppable, yet they themselves perceive that the very factor that ensured their success—their hunger and ambition—is also the one that will eventually bring them down, as soon as a new hungry and ambitious mob will attempt the same climb. The fact that we do not get to see who kills Capella is precisely meant to underline that "someone new" (someone we do not even know) is now trying to take over possession of the city. To leave Marseille at some point is thus something that has to happen, and, indeed, cannot be attributed to chance: Marseille's destiny is that nothing is forever and all is transitional, just like the harbor that so much typifies its landscape, and that is repeatedly visible in the film, particularly in the sequences of the fish market.

▣ **Fig. 5.15** Fire and ice: Jean-Paul Belmondo and Alain Delon [Images of public domain]

To conclude, while completely bypassing representatives of North African communities, Borsalino puts particular accent on the "Italian connection" within the milieu, as the readers will have already guessed by reading the surnames of the protagonists and the antagonists.

Besides the narrative and visual elements, there is one feature that seems to establish a "match in heaven" between the story and this romanticized image of Marseille, and that is the film soundtrack, written and conducted by the French jazz composer Claude Bolling—which, as we mentioned, is arguably even better known than the movie as a whole. The main theme in particular has become part of the "canon" of both jazz and easy listening repertoires: guitar enthusiasts may remember a formidable version for solo acoustic guitar arranged by the great Chet Atkins. What many people do not know is that this iconic theme was not actually written for the movie, but was simply chosen by the film production (including Delon himself, who was very instrumental in the decision) among several previously written bits that Bolling drew to their attention. The particular one chosen had originally been written for a TV commercial.

So, what did the production find in that theme that was so fitting to the movie? As we said, the soundtrack belongs to that particular olympus of musical works whose level of fame probably exceeds the movies they are meant to accompany, along with themes like Vangelis's for *Chariots of Fire*, Malcolm Arnold's for *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, or songs like Cole Porter's "Night and Day" and Stevie Wonder's "I've just Called to say I Love You", not to mention nearly every single theme/song appearing in movies stylistically similar to *Borsalino*, which we shall later discuss.

By the time *Borsalino* was filmed, Claude Bolling was an accomplished jazz pianist who had played with international giants like Lionel Hampton and Kenny Clarke, and had already composed film scores for some ten years. From the mid 1960s he had engaged in what became known as "traditional jazz revival", a stylistic trend that was attempting to revitalize the early years of jazz before the impetuous changes imposed by the bebop revolution. Bolling's approach to the revival was somewhat philological, as he had inaugurated, in 1966, a series of records meticulously devoted to some of the main genres of the first half of the twentieth century, all marked with the adjective "original": *Original Ragtime* (1966), *Original Boogie Woogie* (1968), *Original Piano Blues* (1969), *Original Jazz Classics* (1970), *Original Piano Greats* (1972).

Borsalino, released in 1970, came therefore in the very middle of this project, and so did the original TV commercial theme which was composed a little earlier: it is thus no surprise that a retro-nostalgic film like *Borsalino* is accompanied by an equally retro and nostalgic soundtrack. Ragtime, manouche, varieté, boogie, blues and tango are among the main stylistic references offered by Bolling's score, proving that he reversed on the film most of the artistic research he was pursuing on his own, via the mentioned recordings. Retro are also some important choices in arrangement, particularly the "easy listening" approach of the orchestra (much more entertainment- than virtuosity-oriented, exactly like jazz tended to be before bebop made it a primarily intellectual experience), and the distinctive sound of honky-tonk piano—the "lo-tech" instrument by definition. For readers less familiar with the expression, "honky-tonk" is a style stemming from the sound of old, cheap and poorly cared for pianos, which had malfunctioning keys and tended to be out of tune. For such reasons, the type of music played on those pianos had more an accent on rhythm than melody or harmony.

Besides the historical placing of the movie and Bolling's personal artistic path, there is a third important reason for the evocative quality of the soundtrack, and that relates to what was going on in the mainstream cinema of those days. *Borsalino*, indeed, was not the only internationally successful movie to present a romanticized view on crime, especially via true or semi-true stories from the past. Worth mentioning, in the same period, are at least John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and *The Sting* (1973), Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) and *Duck, You Sucker!* (1971—although these two have probably more to do with the personal artistic path of Leone than with any general trend), Tonino Valerii's *My Name is Nobody* (1972), and others.

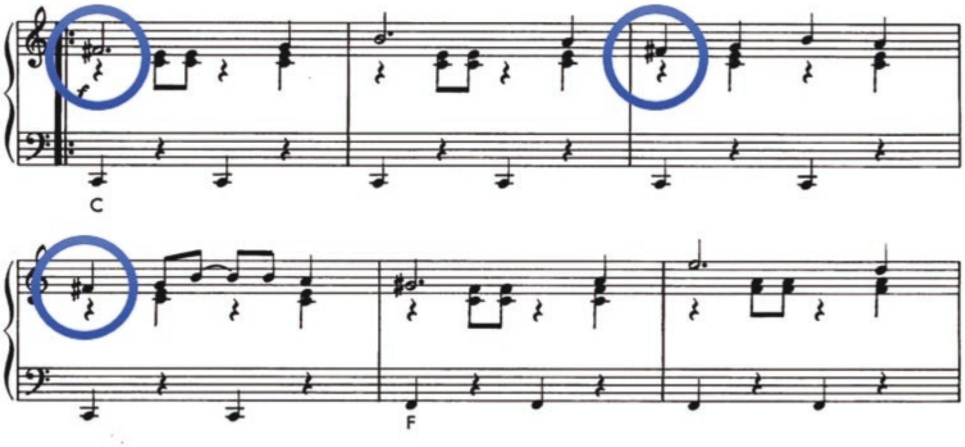
Now, besides presenting us with adorable (and very handsome) scoundrels like Robert Redford, Paul Newman, Terence Hill or Jon Voight, and besides making crime look fun and respectable, these movies sport a similar attitude towards soundtrack, engaging in a series of dewy-eyed scores, themes and songs that—as we said—to this day are arguably more popular than the movies. That is most certainly the case with Burt Bacharach's "Raindrops keep falling on my head" (theme song for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*), Harry Nilsson's "Everybody's talkin'" (theme song for *Midnight Cowboy*), Ennio Morricone's "Scion scion" (theme for *Duck, You Sucker!*), and most of all, in relation to *Borsalino*, the rediscovery of Scott Joplin's ragtime in *The Sting*, a movie that not by chance was nicknamed "the American *Borsalino*" by film critic Hudson (1974), as it replicates Deray's template in many ways: same temporal location, similar plot and themes, friendship story between—well—two male sex symbols, predominance of comedy tones, and so forth—plus indeed music.

On why this type of movie became so popular in that period, we can advance a few hypotheses, and once again we have to refer to the fundamental changes that the 1960s brought to western society in general, and arts in particular. Having to face a crisis of many traditional genres, including western, musical, thriller, historical drama and many others, due in turn to the crisis of numerous traditional values (emergence of youngsters as social category, civil rights, women rights, sexual liberation, drug culture, historical revisionism, anti-moralism and so forth), AV authors, especially from the late 1960s onwards began to explore more possibilities for representation and storytelling. They offered, among others, different views of history; more of character complexity and moral ambiguity; less of "studios" atmosphere and more of real locations; drier, more realistic camera work and a more unsteady type of narration—"unsteady" in the sense of "less intelligible", as we have mentioned earlier on in the book. The whole "American new wave" movement that originated exactly in the second half of the 1960s, was a direct consequence of this reform, with *Midnight Cowboy* possibly being a quintessential example.

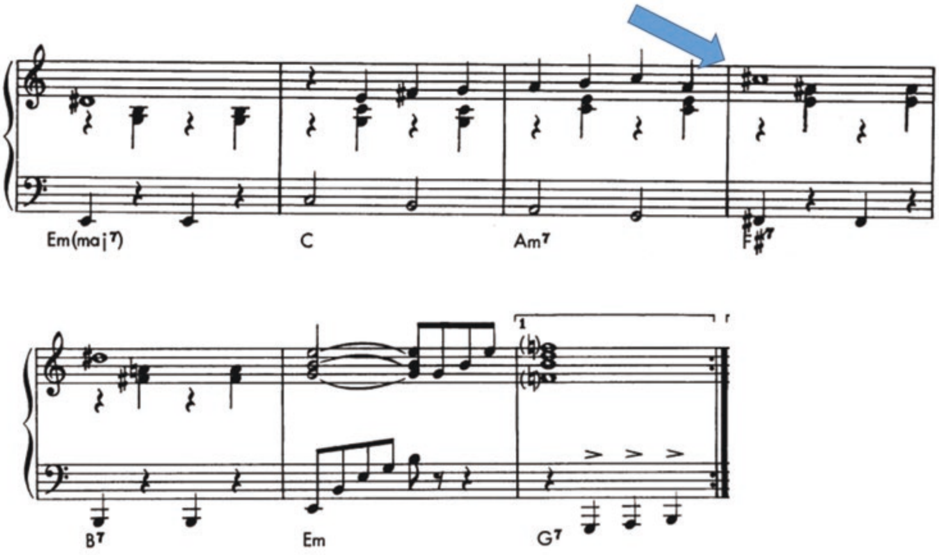
As it often happens, the whole soundtrack of *Borsalino* is centered around the main theme: plenty of the musical moments throughout the movie are simple re-elaborations of it, with few variations that do not threaten the recognizability of the famous melody. More distinctive fragments do exist, of course, but they all operate within the same musical context. The theme, at any rate, remains the most recognizable musical item of the movie, and is also the one that sets the mood and the tones for the material displayed in the story. We need to go a bit technical here, and I hope you will be able to follow, at least in part, the explanation. Of course, the readers acquainted with the basics of music theory will not have any problem. The theme is composed in C major with a more modulating attitude in the B section (which turns to F major, then operates a couple of steps towards E minor, and finally offers a last step in G major to return to the A section) and has an uncharacteristically regular structure A-A-B-A-A-B with no break or asymmetry whatsoever (why being regular is uncharacteristic is something we shall discuss more in detail, later). Interestingly, it is played throughout the movie (and in the various versions) both as non-diegetic and diegetic music—the latter being a less typical occurrence for a soundtrack, and testifying to the historical credibility of such music in a context like the one presented in the movie: the music sounds very much *as if* it was composed in the 1930s.

Once we have discussed the nostalgic/retro character of the composition and its arrangement, we may also focus on other music-movie-context meaningful connections. The issue of "instability/transitionality", for instance, is also a relevant feature. The melody of the theme, indeed, is in C major and is set on a Lydian mode, starting exactly from the note that characterizes the latter (F# instead of a natural F, that would be typical in the diatonic scale of C—see ▣ Fig. 5.16). To do so in a melody means, among other things, to subtract solidity and firmness to it, because it practically corresponds to playing a tune based on a given tonic (C, in our case) but relying on the natural scale of the dominant (G), which is notoriously the "dynamic" harmonic function, the one that gives the necessary tension that is eventually resolved on the tonic (via a cadenza, for instance). If we opt for a Lydian mode, it means we virtually create a co-existence between the tonic and the dominant, much to an "instability" effect.

Since we are talking about tension and resolution, a second element of instability occurs in correspondence of what in jargon is defined as "turn-around", that is, the transitional phrase that allows section B to return to A. It is a deceiving cadenza in four bars (in ▣ Fig. 5.17 it starts where the arrow appears), that first neatly constructs the harmony in order to resolve on the E minor chord (via a rather typical F#7-B7-Em path), then, just as the listener is content with the resolution, it adds an extra bar with a G7 chord that re-establishes tension, and asks instead to go to C major, which is—as we have seen—the tonality of section A.



▣ **Fig. 5.16** The Lydian notes in *Borsalino*'s main theme



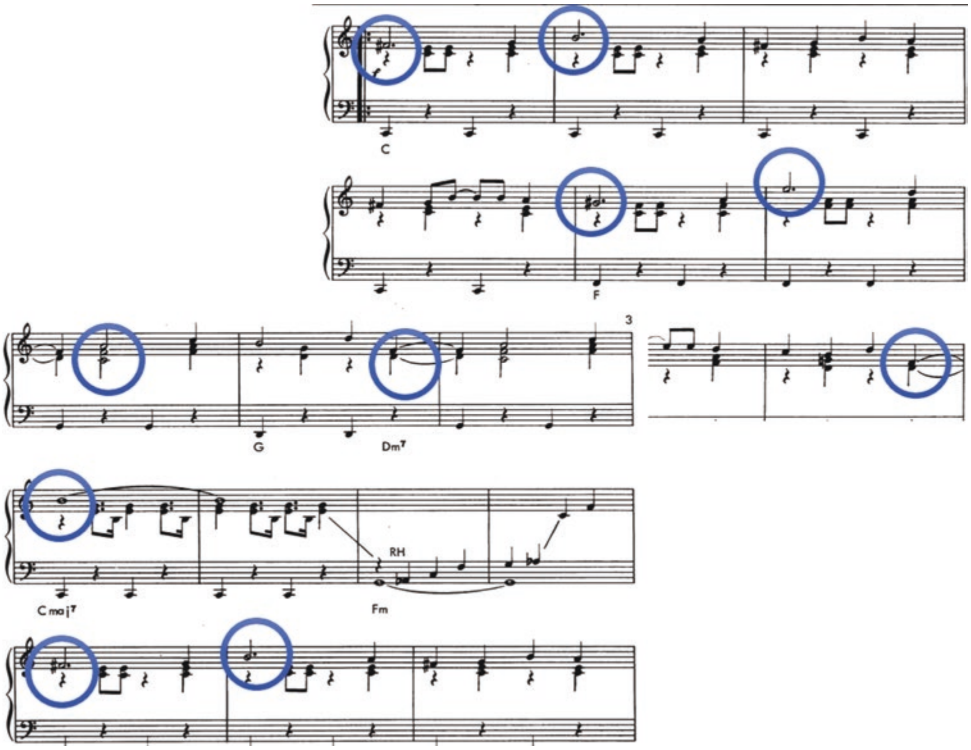
▣ **Fig. 5.17** The deceiving cadenza for the turn-around from section B back to A

This way, besides instability, the sensation one gets is also that of a strong circularity in a melody that—no matter what—*must* alternate A and B ("La chance, ça n'existe pas"), even when it looks that B would "prefer" to go in another direction. A sense of circularity is also given by the melody of section A, which, for lack of more technical expressions, is rather "carousel-like" (anybody familiar with this theme will understand what I mean), while section B, due to both the melodic movement itself and to switch from tonic to dominant (from C to F, that is), displays a brighter and airier feel, more in tune with another important idea conveyed in the film, that of leaving/escaping. "Circular" is also the fact that, as we have mentioned, the structure of the theme is unusually regular: A, A, B, A, A, B. Although readers unfamiliar with music theory will not find anything strange in such tidy regularity, the thing is that structures of this kind are quite rare. There is always an element that breaks the regularity: an extra repetition of A or B, the appearance of a middle-eight, a solo part, a shortened version of one of the sections, a coda, etc. While we ignore the reasons why Bolling chose to be so symmetric, it would not be surprising to learn that this was still part of his "return to traditional jazz" program, as very early jazz, indeed, tended to display more regular structures.

One more note about how the theme blends with the idea of "romanticized crime": we have seen how the issue is addressed in a historically conscious way (with the retro feel of both music and movie), and how that is mostly conveyed by stylistic choices in arrangement and genre. But there is more and that concerns the melody. There is hardly a doubt that the tune as such possesses an instantly memorable and catchy quality, but it would be a mistake to assume that this is due to a certain compositional obviousness and recourse to melodic clichés. On the contrary, Bolling constructed his theme in that particular sophisticated way that only great tunesmiths like Burt Bacharach, Andy Partridge or Paul McCartney can eventually make look "simple". We have already mentioned the employment of a Lydian mode (which already counts as one sophistication), but in reality that extra F# is not the only unusual note in this charming melody. Jazz has of course accustomed us to the idea that a tonality is just a pretest to virtually hit any note one deems fit, but that was hardly Bolling's intent, here. Let us not forget that the French composer a) was after a very traditional idea of jazz (one, in other words, that is not madly keen on alienating concepts like scale and tonality), and b) had originally written this theme for a TV commercial, a task that—like film music and even more—requires attention grabbing musical strategies of the most effective type, and certainly clever clogs melodic obscurity is not among them.

What Bolling did, instead, is to paraphrase Edgar Allan Poe's famous quote, "the best place to hide is in plain sight": he placed all the unusual notes in the most audible spots of the melody (section A in particular), as "grounding notes", that is, notes of a greater length which the melody leans and rests on (see ◘ Fig. 5.18). There, where everybody would have time and opportunity to notice that almost none of them belong to the natural scales of the respective harmonic function (and those that belong should rather create tension, not rest), we get instead the result that no average listener finds them "weird".

Although we can be sure that Delon (and eventually Belmondo) did not go anywhere near a perception of this sort while selecting Bolling's theme, we may argue that these notes are exactly a (involuntary but not less effective) representation of Siffredi and Capella. They are "illegal" within the context of what we would *normatively* expect to hear in a given harmonic context, and yet they define the theme more than anything else in it, proving to be extremely catchy choices. Illegal but catchy, naughty but likeable, these notes are the actual "adorable scoundrels" of the theme, and just like the two French actors, they "star" as protagonists in the melody.



◘ Fig. 5.18 The "adorable scoundrel" notes in the section A of the theme

5.4 Performance

On a general level, a performance is the execution of a task in accordance with a more or less defined plan, and with the application of certain knowledge and skills. In that sense, the meaning is suitable to any task, and therefore to any "performer", within any process of AVCC. However, what usually happens is that performance is associated with acting (in most AVTs) or with playing (when it comes to interactive texts such as videogames or VJing). While acknowledging that these are definitely the most visible levels of AV performance, and therefore also the easiest to exemplify, we should not fall into the trap of limiting the concept to such few roles within the vast territory of audiovisuality. Not only does every creative figure in the process "perform", but the different performances are highly complementary and intertwined. Klevan (2004), for instance, points out how the *performances* of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in their musicals were so tight and harmonious (the expression "perfect chemistry" was often employed to describe the couple), that the *performances* of their directors, in terms of camera work, would go accordingly, preferring wide shots and long takes to closer looks, in order to fully display their skills and interaction as dancers.

Complementary to the notion of performance there is that of performativity, first suggested by Austin in 1962 within language studies, and which roughly consists in the ability of an act (a "performance") to affect society, to some extent. The feminist scholar Butler (1990), for instance, suggested that gender is socially constructed through communicative acts (including nonverbal ones, stereotypes, etc.) that serve to define and maintain identities, and in that sense they are performative.

In trying to identify some parameters/factors that may help us to understand performance in an AVT, I would suggest two categories: **orientation** and **time**. By "orientation", we mean the allocation of certain priorities in preparing and executing a given performance. In this case, we may identify three parameters (see also ◘ Fig. 5.21):

(1) **Text-oriented performance.** This is the type of performance whose goal is the construction of the text as the central entity of the AVCC. In the classic case of acting in a movie, this is the kind of performance where the actor/actress "sticks to the script", that is, do their best to be functional to pre-determined aspects of the text. There is a "plan" as to how the communication should operate, and the performance is functional to that plan.

(2) **Context-oriented performance.** Sometimes, often in certain cases, it is not possible to predetermine the whole communicative program, but there are circumstances, expected and unexpected, that occur and demand a reconfiguration of the priorities. Think about a live program on TV and you can imagine how often any performer involved needs to rethink their work. In a live sport program, for instance, the commentator constantly needs to adapt the narration of the event, on the basis of what is happening: there will be peaks of excitement, moments for more technical analysis, the occasional moral judgement on some unfair play, and so forth. The performance is "in progress" and has much to do with "what happens", as opposed to "what was planned/written/decided".

(3) **Performer-oriented performance.** In this third parameter, the focus is the performer as such, whose performance tends to outscore the text in terms of relevance and visibility. In fact, quite often, the text is constructed

◘ **Fig. 5.19** Two TV celebrities who hosted programs named after them: Ed Sullivan and Johnny Carson *[Images of public domain]* for the performer, in order to display their abilities. This is typical of performers with outstanding skills and personality, or of those who are particularly *en vogue* in a certain period. They are often the main pole of attraction for the audience, and therefore it is more likely that the text will be tailored to their performance, rather than the other way round. This is also the type of performance that more neatly overlaps with the notion of "authoriality": it is indeed on the basis of this "personality factor" that we may be bound to say things like "Let's go and watch De Niro's latest movie!" or "Have you played any of Sid Meier's games?" (as opposed to the specific *movie or game titles—the texts), or why so many TV shows are named after their host: The* Ed Sullivan Show, *Alan Carr's Celebrity Ding Dong*, *The Late Late Show with James Corden*, etc. (◘ Fig. 5.19).

By "time", on the other hand, we mean something a bit more complex. Any performance, not only audiovisual, is a system of practices that is strongly affected by the passing of time, both in a general sense and in the specific span of the life and career of a particular performer. Ageing, and its many implications on the performances and the performers, is obviously the first instance one can think of, but definitely not the only one. We shall categorize all the time related variables in four main groups. There is no need to say that these variables may also occur simultaneously in one single performer, and therefore they are not to be considered mutually exclusive (see also ◘ Fig. 5.21):

(1) **Technology**, i.e., performance sources, devices and facilities. Technological improvements, or simply changes, have an enormous impact not only in the construction of the text itself (which normally achieves a higher degree of clarity, cleanness, etc.), but also in the definition of the performance. The latter, depending on the cases, may exploit, or being inspired by, these changes, reconfiguring several of its aspects, up to the point of redefining its overall aesthetics. The transition from silent to sound cinema, to mention a rather macroscopic instance, has implied performative changes in nearly all key roles in the film industry. Technology has been of course a red line (and still will be, in the specific section that will follow after this) throughout this whole book, so we can only repeat once more how all the analytical categories we are presenting here are flexible and open to interaction with other categories.

(2) **Techniques**, i.e., personal or general competences in performing a given action or set of actions. Not just technology evolves in time, but also the use of it, i.e., the human side. The way of handling a certain tool, for instance (be that a camera, a joystick or else), can be subject to important innovations, which, once again, affect not only the final result of the text, but can be an effective opportunity to upgrade the specific field of performance aesthetics. As an example, we could mention the impact of the Stanislavsky Method on film acting, particularly through actors such as Marlon Brando, Dustin Hoffman or Marilyn Monroe, which turned upside down the overly theatrical approach of the first half of the twentieth century in favor of more interiorized performances where the actors would merge their own personality with that of the character.

(3) **Society, cultures and ideologies**, in relation to the performer/s and/or to a specific period/medium/genre/format. Here, we refer to those extra artistic historical aspects that exercise an influence on the text as such. An example that contains millions of nuances is that of female performances—particularly acting. The role and the dynamics of "being a woman" in society have changed radically in the direction of more activeness, independence, emancipation, and the likes. For instance, and since we already mentioned the gender question in ▶ Sect. 5.2, if in the 1950s the weak, passive, emotional woman who falls prey to a man's charm almost as if under a spell was the kind of role that a female actress would play in order to portray a "normal" woman, nowadays that role is scripted only if there is an explicit intention to portray a "problematic" woman, with pathological inclinations to weakness and intimidation.

(4) **Image and personality**, i.e., the ontogenesis of the individual performer. Quite obviously, performers also follow a personal path of artistic and aesthetic growth (or regression, in quite a few cases), that may or may not interact with the previously mentioned variables, and have much to do with their personal life and choices (and marketing strategies, of course). A classic of the category, for instance (almost a cliché) is the comic actor who develops into a dramatic one, which is a path that is often seen as an artistic achievement. In this book we have mentioned cases like Jim Carrey, Charlie Chaplin and Roberto Benigni.

For more on the notion of performance in audiovisuality, I suggest Baron-Carnicke (2008), Carlson (1996), Klevan (2005) and Phelan (1993).

5.4.1 Case Study: Performative Elements in the Beatles' Promos

A music video (or videoclip, or promo) is a short AVT (usually in film format) whose goal is to offer a visual representation of a piece of music, usually a "song"—that is, a piece of "popular" music: rock, hip hop, disco, RnB, etc.—however, as we have seen in our historical section, there are also other types of music, like jazz, for which a video can be made.

The video—we have seen that too—is a relatively young type of AVT. In its primitive form, we see its ancestors appearing from the late nineteenth century onwards, while the modern video, depending on how we define it, originates sometime between the 1960s and the 1970s.

A music video, quite simply, consists of a conjunction between music and images in such a way that the images "serve" the music, and not vice versa, which is why a video is very different from, for instance, the soundtrack of a movie, where—instead—it is the music that "serves" the images. Often, this conjunction is presented in a coherent manner, but not as a rule. That means that usually the images "represent" the music somehow (for instance, we see the band playing their song, or we see images that describe the lyrics, or they are of the same "mood" of the music, etc.), but there are also cases in which the images are quite unrelated to the music.

The length of a video normally depends on the musical piece. That is: if a song is about 3 min, the MV is about 3 min as well. But, once more, this is not a rule and there are also the so-called video edits, that is, videos that are either shorter or longer than the song, and therefore the song itself is edited accordingly. A famous example is Michael Jackson's "Thriller", whose full-edit video is about 5 times longer than the original song. In this case, we hear extra instrumental parts in the song, repetition of some parts, and even points (like the beginning) when there is no music at all, but just "a film".

When we consider the point of view of musical appropriation, that is, how we perceive and understand music, the main outcome of music videos is that they allow us not only to "listen to", but also to "see" music and musicians, and this is an aspect that is increasingly important in the music business (popular music in particular), which is nowadays mostly based on image, promotion and visual impact in general—one more reason for us to have this particular case study, here.

For this reason, whenever a singer or a band are asked to perform in their own videos, either miming the song "as if they were playing it for real", or getting engaged in other activities and narratives, as is more and more often the case, they are not just "acting the song", so to speak, but they are also contributing to their own image, defining their relationship with their audience and informing about the state of the art of their career/life. A video is often an opportunity for the act to display their beliefs, their looks, their humor, their dramatic skills, and their general identity as public personas.

Videos are also interesting at the performance level, because they are suspended in a nowhere land between reality and fiction. On the one hand, they may appear in the most unrealistic and imaginative way, including the transformation of the musicians into videogame characters (e.g., Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Californication"), into cartoons (e.g., A-Ha's "Take on Me") and so forth. On the other hand, they are always realistic in terms of the clarity of the purpose: they accompany/promote a song, and the spectator never loses track of that even when the musicians are not touching an instrument during the whole video and they look like they are doing a completely different thing than actually singing a song.

Altogether, there seems to be three distinct forms of promotion that may work separately and/or simultaneously, and that can be summarized in a 3P model:

- A promotion of the act as **Product**: the video is primarily created to promote the song. That is the object of promotion in the strictest sense, the commercially valuable item (the song can be downloaded, or purchased in other formats, there is a whole album wherein the song is contained, maybe an upcoming tour…). The video is mostly conceived to give the best possible exposure to the song.
- A promotion of the act as **Professionals**: in this case the attention grabbing features of the video are designed to convey information and create curiosity around the act's playing style, their performance skills, the way the song was recorded (recurrent are for instance videos portraying the act recording the song in a studio), the state of the art of their career (typically, for instance, when an act reaches stardom, their next video tends to be a celebration of that stardom: see the case of U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name", shot in New York, in front of a crowded multitude of adoring fans, right after the Irish band had reached the #1 position in the American charts), and else.
- Finally, as anticipated, a promotion of the act as **Personas**: we have numerous insights on the extra musical world of the act—whether this world is fairly real (e.g., real childhood footage as in Take That's "Never Forget") or totally imaginary (e.g. the act is singing in a jungle as in Katy Perry's "Roar"). Moreover, even the more fictional settings may say a thing or two about the act's feelings, values, beliefs and inclinations (or, at least, how they want us to think of them).

In the historical section of this book, we have mentioned, among other things, the importance of the so-called British Invasion, and The Beatles in particular, in developing more complex and conceptual videos—or "promo-clips", as they were known as back then. Specifically, we have said how the Fab Four should be credited for being a very early case of a mainstream band that realized both the promotional and the artistic potential of the promos.
The goal of this case study, thus, is to analyze three Beatles' videos that best reflect their crucial contribution in giving videos an artistic "dignity", and how the performative dimension was central in this process. For a general history of music videos, you may want to check the informative Austerlitz (2007).

"I Feel Fine".

In the 1960s the world was changing at a fast pace, and TV was playing an important role in it. The audience's request for seeing their favorite singers/bands on TV shows (particularly the so-called talk-shows, which were the main attraction) was growing rapidly. For the first time in the history of popular music, the epicenter of the industry was not America, but England. The stars of the time were The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, The Kinks, The Moody Blues…
This phenomenon became known as the "British Invasion", and has rapidly turned Great Britain into being the second most important and richest market for popular music, often threatening, when not surpassing (like exactly in the 1960s), America's first place.

Exactly because they were the audience's favorites, British rock bands were often touring around the world or recording, and it was rather difficult to find them available for participations in TV programs—especially if they happened to be on the other side of the ocean. Recording companies had thus the idea of replacing live performances with pre-recorded video sequences showing the band playing. Because of this, most often the video would simply show the band in the act of playing their latest song, *as if* they were playing live.

While this idea did not represent (yet) any innovation from the aesthetic point of view, it provided a radical change in terms of function: the music video ceased to be an item of pure entertainment, based on already-popular songs, and soon became a form of marketing, a tool to "promote" new songs. This is why they became known as **promotional clips**, or shortly promos. To some scholars this is the actual beginning of the modern music videos—the way we know them today.

As the most famous bands were at the same time the most requested and the busiest, it is no wonder that they ended up being the initiators of this trend. The early promos were all marked by the unimaginative filming template of the given band miming the song in a concert-like set-up, with rather static "fourth wall view" camera work: basically, nothing new from the style of the Soundies and the Snader telescriptions (two early forms of video we have discussed in the historical part). Something changed in 1964, when The Moody Blues' "Go Now" stood out as what was arguably the first incursion into a more creative territory. A richer use of the camera (with a more careful correspondence between what we see and what is being played) and a more inventive architecture of the elements involved (mostly, the band and a piano, but finally arranged in ways other than a stage performance), made this promo a direct ancestor of The Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" (a video of crucial importance, as we have seen), which no doubt was inspired by the former, visually speaking.

Within this exciting community of very talented British acts, The Beatles were the undisputed leaders: the most successful, and—according to most—the best. The fans reaction to their live appearances had generated a new word, Beatlemania, that aptly described not only the hyper enthusiastic reaction of their admirers (particularly young female teenagers), but also its quasi-pathological component (fans had been observed crying, screaming and even being incontinent, in a sort of hysterical trance). By 1964, they had conquered the world, with a triumphal tour of America that, among many other consequences, propelled five of their songs to take the first five positions in the Billboard chart, establishing a still-unbeaten record. The pace by which the band was releasing records was frenetic and consisted of two albums and four singles per year—keeping in mind that the singles usually featured songs *not* included in the albums, amounting to more than 30 new songs per year, every year. Live concerts, too, were counted by the hundreds, as the band were constantly touring and had the habit of performing two shows per day, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. With all this in mind, it is not surprising that their schedule was extremely tight, and at the same time the demand to appear in TV shows was the highest. By late 1965, finally, a decision was taken to turn down most invitations to appear on TV, even very important venues like the *Ed Sullivan Show*, which was the most popular TV program in America, and one The Beatles themselves had performed on in two famous occasions.

On November 23 that year, under the direction of Joseph McGrath, the band convened in Twickenham Studios, in London, to shoot ten promos for five of their recent hit singles (hence, two promos per song): "I Feel Fine" (originally released in late 1964), "Ticket to Ride" (released in early 1965), "Help!" (released in late Spring 1965) and the upcoming "We Can Work It Out"/"Day Tripper" (released as a double A-side—both songs having been given the same prominence). These became the band's first promos to feature something more than just the ordinary concert-like mimed performance, and turned out to be significant episodes in their relationship with audiovisuality: from that point on, The Beatles took promos much more seriously. The ten promos were distributed more or less equally among the various TV shows requesting the band's participation, except one: the second take on "I Feel Fine", which simply featured the four musicians eating fish and chips. Unsurprisingly, the video (quickly nicknamed "I Feel Fried") was not considered good enough for release.

For this case study, I suggest we take a look at what, to my mind, is the most interesting of the ten videos, albeit matched with the lesser famous of the five songs—if ever the expression "lesser famous" could be applied to any Beatles song: the first version of "I Feel Fine", the one that was deemed worthy of distribution (▣ Fig. 5.20).

▣ **Fig. 5.20** The Beatles in 1964, at the time of the release of "I Feel Fine" *[Image of public domain]*

Since we are anyway talking about ten videos filmed in one single day, we should not be surprised that this promo, despite the more ambitious intentions we are about to discuss, was still very basic and quickly produced. The crucial difference, however, lies here in the presence of some unconventional ideas that intended to go beyond the dull template exhibited up till then. Like The Moody Blues' "Go Now" the year before, "I Feel Fine" showed how the art of music videos was progressing and getting to the imaginative visual aesthetics that would be displayed in particular from the 1980s onwards.

When we watch "I Feel Fine", we notice more than one element that shows such progress. To begin with, the scenery features some gym tools: a few weights, a punch ball and an exercise bike. The presence of such tools has formally no connection with the lyrics of the song, which is a very simple love song, with lyrics such as "I'm so glad that she's my little girl". However, it connects with the idea itself of the title: "I feel fine", as in "I feel healthy", "I feel fit", "I feel in good shape". This slight shift of meaning ended up being a principle applied to hundreds of music videos thereafter. If the title in particular (or maybe some important passage in the song, like the refrain) presents the possibility of developing a visual idea in some interesting direction, it will not matter that this idea is not faithful to the contents of the song: it will work as a "video". Moreover, this diversion is often necessary because most pop songs talk about the same thing—love, heartbreak, flirting…—over and over again, and if music video directors had to stick all the time to those themes, the history of videos would be much more boring and repetitive. To mention other examples, one can take The Queen's "A Kind of Magic" (1986), or The Rolling Stones' "Love Is Strong" (1994). In the first case, the song was written for the movie *Highlander*, which is about an immortal hero, but of course the word "magic" inspired the director to build a story where Freddie Mercury is a magician/illusionist that makes magic for poor people and vagabonds. In the second case, we have a classic sexy love song from the Stones, but the use of the word "strong" in the title inspired the director to make a video where the band and some girls are giants, wandering about in New York. Examples based on the same principle are literally hundreds.

Another little idea that eventually became almost a norm in modern videos, is the following: even if the band is singing and playing, we do not necessarily need to see them *all* performing in the strictly musical sense. In the case of "I Feel Fine", while John Lennon, Paul McCartney and George Harrison are seen playing their guitars and singing, Ringo Starr, the drummer, is not sitting at his drum kit, but is in fact pedaling the exercise bike, with no musical involvement whatsoever. Also, the other three are not entirely equipped for the musical performance, so to speak: for instance, they have no microphone, and we even see George Harrison sarcastically using the punch ball as a sort of mike. As we know, this is very common nowadays, where so often we basically see only the singer performing, while all the other band members are doing other things more functional to the plot of the video. Sometimes, not even the singer is active musically.

The camera work, too, was a bit more elaborate than the soundies/telescriptions/etc. template, and showed indications of what was to happen in the future (thanks also to The Beatles themselves, as we shall soon see). Besides a richer variety of shot types (more close-ups, to begin with), some shots and movements attempt to coordinate the image with the music. In particular, during the break of the song when we hear only the guitars and the drums stop there is a zoom-in on the bike pedals: we see Ringo stopping the pedaling and starting again when the break finishes and the full instrumentation is back in the song. These little things, once more, became a rule in the following years.

In all of this, the band members seem to perform rather spontaneously, offering more than one opportunity to the cameras to catch them doing something funny or anyway camera-sexy. Some of the gags may have been planned (for instance, there may have been an agreement that Ringo would leave the pedals at the point mentioned), but we have more than one reason to think that most of what we see was pure improvisation, and that the cameras were simply following the four as best as they could. I am inclined to think so, because on more than one occasion we see the cameras *missing* what could have been more interesting moments, as if they actually did not know that such moments were about to occur. For example, after the first refrain, we "almost" see John making a funny little pirouette, except that the camera was already panning towards Paul.

But certainly, the "persona" performative aspect that emerges most distinctively is the band's inclination to cheerfulness, irony and mockery. Knowing that they would have performed in playback, the four deliberately decided to sabotage the "fakeness" of the whole thing: we see them giggling their way through the whole song, we see Harrison speaking different words than the song (and at a different speed that clearly underlines they have nothing to do with the lyrics), we see Ringo blinking the eye, Paul bursting into laughter, John delivering an ironically fake smile after he sings the line "I'm so glad", and so forth.

"Penny Lane"/"Strawberry Fields Forever"

As I mentioned, the filming session with Joseph McGrath was an eye-opener for The Beatles in terms of understanding and exploring the artistic potential of videos. While this first incursion into proper promos was delivered in the not-exactly-professional form of ten videos in one day, the promos that followed saw greater care and inventiveness, and—in the case we are going to discuss now—a special attention for avant-garde and underground filmmaking. This occurred not only because The Beatles had always been attentive to experimentation and new forms of artistic expression, but also because, in 1966, they had taken the famous decision to abandon live performances. Exhausted by the frenetic pace of their tours, but also annoyed by the fact that the screaming "Beatlemaniac" audience was not paying attention to the music, but only to them as a "phenomenon", the band decided to quit concerts completely, and focus on studio work, which was becoming for them *the* main place where they could shape their art. To many critics, this inaugurated the most innovative and ultimately the most creative period of their career, starting from the first album produced as a studio-only unit—the legendary *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

As we have seen with the "We Can Work It Out"/"Day Tripper" single, already since 1965, The Beatles had adopted habit of releasing singles where both the A-side and the B-side were of equal importance. As you may know, the principle behind naming the sides of a 45 vinyl A and B is hierarchical. By putting a song on side A, a singer or band is indicating to radio DJs (or who else will play the record) which song they really want to promote, while the B-side may also be ignored. And usually, indeed, a B-side would be occupied by a much less relevant song, a so-called filler. Such was the tradition until The Beatles decided that, in launching a single, they could actually promote two good songs at the same time, and—so to speak—give a better quality-price balance to their audience. In general, among the various acknowledgments one can give to The Beatles, there is also the fact that they were extremely respectful of their fans and always took care to give them "added value" (e.g., they would record every year a special Christmas record that would be distributed for free to their fan club; they would make sure that all the official merchandise was of a good, durable material—T-shirts in quality cotton, sweaters in quality wool, etc.). This was mostly thanks to their manager, Mr. Brian Epstein, arguably one of the last businessmen to believe that profit should be made out of quality and not out of ripping off customers.

Anyway: back to singles, another reason why The Beatles wanted to provide two good songs instead of one was because they knew that, in those days, 45 s were the most widespread musical item among the youngsters. 45 s were the music that would be played at parties, and usually, in a teen-ager's room there would always be a small, inexpensive portable record player, that was able to play only 45 s. However (and again: due to their respectful attitude to the audience), they rarely put album tracks on singles, so there was hardly a repetition of the same songs between a 45 and a 33. If we look at the most famous Beatles songs, we may be surprised to learn that many of them came out only as singles, and only eventually became available on albums, via compilations or re-masterings with bonus tracks (or sometimes in non-UK editions, particularly American ones): "She Loves You", "I Wanna Hold Your Hand", "We Can Work It Out", "Penny Lane", "Strawberry Fields Forever", "Hello Goodbye", "Hey Jude", "Lady Madonna", "Paperback Writer", "Day Tripper", "Revolution", "All You Need Is Love"… all these songs were *just* singles.

With that in mind, the first single to be very strong on both sides was the mentioned "We Can Work It Out"/"Day Tripper" (1965). To underline the equal importance of the two songs, The Beatles did two things: they called both sides of the record "A-side" (inaugurating a tradition of "double A-sides" that will be often imitated in the future), and more importantly they released promos for both songs, in the Twickenham Studios session we have spoken about. These promos (four altogether, as we have seen: each song was given two promos) were marked by the same clothing and setting as if to underline the continuity between the two tracks. In this case, too, the videos were quite basic, showcasing the band performing in playback.

This particular "double A-side" concept was repeated with the next single, "Paperback Writer"/"Rain" (1966), and this time, already, some unusual elements popped up in the promos: the setting was a botanical garden (so, no specific "musical" context), and the band were not only filmed while playing (as weird as playing in a botanical garden can be, but we know that nowadays videos have the most unlikely settings), but also while doing other things: walking in the garden, sitting on a bench or simply posing still as if in a picture.

These promos had also rather daring camera work, with some unusual perspectives, extreme close-ups, low angles, and so forth. This choice was due to two factors, completely different from each other: on the one hand (as we shall soon see), the band was cultivating an increasing interest for the avant-garde and underground filming; on the other hand—wait for it!—Paul McCartney had had an accident and his tooth was broken at the time of filming the promos. For this reason, there was a need to film in such a way that would minimize as much as possible shots that would reveal the missing tooth. After all, Paul was known as "the cute Beatle"! The issue was particularly problematic for the song "Paperback Writer", since Paul had the lead vocals on it.

The role of McCartney, however, was not confined to breaking his teeth. As a matter of fact, he was the most responsible for the band's interest in both musical and visual experimentation. By that time, indeed, he was the only Beatle not to have a family yet and not living in some posh residential area far from the city of London. He had an apartment at walking distance from the famous EMI recording studios (that would later be renamed "Abbey Road Studios", after The Beatles released their famous album in 1969), and—not having a wife or children—he was more at liberty to engage in the social and cultural life of those days. London was then nicknamed "Swinging London", and had practically become the world's cultural capital in the 1960s—so when we say "cultural life", we mean an incessant exposure to all sorts of events. McCartney started attending avant-garde concerts given by Karl-Heinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio and the likes, and also developed a strong interest in cinema, particularly experimental/underground filming and "auteur" cinema: he befriended Michelangelo Antonioni and was even offered the part of Romeo Capuleti in Franco Zeffirelli's upcoming adaptation of Shakespeare's masterpiece (an offer he famously refused).

McCartney brought all these influences into The Beatles' activities, with the other three very quick to welcome these innovations, being similarly spirited. This is one of the reasons why albums like *Rubber Soul* (1965), *Revolver* (1966) and the same *Sgt. Pepper's* (1967) are so full of innovative ideas; but—back to our topic—this is also the main mentality behind their promos. Indeed, if "Paperback Writer/Rain" had shown signs of increasing inventiveness, the next single revealed an authentic explosion of creativity and experimentation, in line with the musical contents, which were also outstanding. "Penny Lane"/"Strawberry Fields Forever", indeed, is considered the Beatles' best single, and—according to several critics—the best single in rock history.

For such a strong "double A-side", The Beatles decided to do a very conceptual double-promo that would achieve many purposes: representing the songs (the "product" P), both in their contents and in their mood; representing the current state of their career and artistic aspiration (the "professional" P); and making clear references to the underground/psychedelic culture they felt part of at that point (the "persona" P).

Penny Lane and Strawberry Fields are two places in Liverpool in the area where The Beatles grew up. Penny Lane was the bus station where they would often meet (particularly McCartney and Lennon, and McCartney and Harrison), while Strawberry Fields was a park that was often visited by the young Lennon. McCartney wrote "Penny Lane", with a very descriptive/narrative attitude, filling the song with places and characters, partly real and partly novelistic. Lennon wrote "Strawberry Fields Forever" with a more psychedelic insight, using the actual place as an excuse to describe a state of mind. The mood of the songs, too, reflected their contents: "Penny Lane" was a brighter, "cleaner" song; "Strawberry Fields" was darker and more ambiguous.

With that in mind, the two videos were constructed in sequence. During "Penny Lane" the four musicians meet in daytime in the Penny Lane bus station, and then head to the Strawberry Fields park, which they reach while the skies are clear. As the sun fades, the song "Strawberry Fields Forever" starts and The Beatles do more bizarre things in the darkness of the park. In "Penny Lane" we see a clear correspondence between lyrical and visual elements. We see the sign of a barbershop when the lyrics go "In Penny Lane there is a barber…", we see a bus with the inscription "Penny Lane" on top, etc. We also see less direct, but still pertinent correspondences, such as for instance a rather bizarre grin from a policeman, just when the lyrics say "very strange!", and things like that.

We also have segments featuring The Beatles themselves, meeting, walking, etc. There is a different expression on their faces as compared to the humorous, ever-laughing attitude that characterizes "I Feel Fine". During "Penny Lane" the mood is certainly positive, but not in an exuberant way. The Beatles still smile, but they now look "older" and more "intellectual", their passion for psychedelic culture (and drugs) being particularly embodied by the sequence in which Lennon puts on a pair of colored specs and looks at the sky, intrigued by the mutated color of the landscape. Still, Lennon is also the protagonist of a walking sequence that is placed in various spots of the montage: there is nothing particularly odd about that walk, but still Lennon looks as if his mind is somewhere else.

During "Strawberry Fields Forever", then, there is no attempt to smile at all: the facial expressions range from serious to absent-minded, from bored to inquisitive, from eerie to spellbound. In a word: stoned.

Back to actions and events, and to the "Penny Lane" video. After the four meet in the vicinity of the bus station, we see them riding horses and heading to the Strawberry Fields park. Upon their arrival (not without difficulties: they prove to be quite poor horse riders), they parade by a stage-looking display of the musical instruments they were using in their concerts (including the famous drum kit with the inscription "The Beatles" with a longer "t"—you may have seen that). This sequence is a metaphor of the band "moving forward" from the live concerts into a new stage of their career. This single was indeed their first record release after they had quit touring: symbolically, none of them stop by to look at the instruments—that "stage" belongs to their past. It is probably no coincidence that their passage proceeds from left to right, which is the "forward" direction in most cultures, including the English one.

After this, the band is served tea on a very posh table by waiters in eighteenth century costumes, but they quickly tire of that luxury and turn the table upside down. This is probably a metaphor of their social origins: none of them was born rich or in some upper class family, and they always made a point of being proud to be working class people. In fact, more than one episode in their career demonstrates this pride, at the sarcastic expense of upper classes: probably most famous of all is John Lennon's public invitation to "rattle the jewelry", instead of clapping, addressed to an audience of aristocrats during The Royal Variety Show, a concert organized by the Royal Family. All these events are wrapped into a rather daring montage, in underground cinema style (with some seemingly-random transitions, timings, etc.).

"Penny Lane" ends while the sun is still up in accordance with the mentioned "brighter" mood of McCartney's song. "Strawberry Fields Forever", as we said, starts as the sun sets, placing the video mostly in the dark, with artificial light.

The Beatles are seen doing much less "ordinary" things: they mess around on a keyboard with several threads, they manipulate light bulbs, they walk and run in rather bizarre ways, they pour paint on the keyboard, and so forth. The film features color filters, a montage even more uneven than the one in "Penny Lane", overexposure, fast-motion, backwards-motion, slow motion, and so forth. The tone is heavily surreal, in perfect harmony with the song, which—as we said—is not really the description of a physical space, but rather a state of mind, mostly induced by psychedelic drugs, where (as the famous line goes) "nothing is real".

And yet, while in a totally different way than "I Feel Fine", The Beatles do not renounce displaying their chief characteristic: humor. The fast-motion and backwards-motion scenes are mostly aimed to achieve a comical effect, reminding us of the old Charlie Chaplin silent comedies, while the whole messing-around with paints and threads is only meant to provoke a playful chaos. The Beatles' flirtation with psychedelia was never presented to the public in an aggressive, threatening or *maudit* form, like The Doors or The Rolling Stones, but always kept a smile on and a sense of childlike wonder, much like one of the literary works that was inspiring them at the time, *Alice in Wonderland*.

Another important feature that characterizes "Penny Lane" and "Strawberry Fields Forever", and that this time marks a difference with "I Feel Fine" and the whole Twickenham Studios promos, is the outfit of the band. Until 1966, The Beatles had presented themselves as a very tight unit ("the four-headed monster", as Mick Jagger once called them), and that was regularly displayed through the choice of dressing in the same clothes (or anyway very similar ones, as we see in "I Feel Fine"), which usually consisted of dark suits, either matched with shirt and tie, or with a turtleneck sweater. In "Penny Lane" and "Strawberry Fields Forever", the "new" Beatles are more motivated to show themselves as individuals, and by now dress rather differently, though with the common pattern of hippie colorful fashion. In fact, during "Strawberry Fields" in particular, they also switch wardrobe even during the same (smartly-edited) sequence. One more performative hint into their "personas" at this point of their lives and careers.

Concluding, from an artistic point of view, all the three videos of this case study (and of course, particularly the last two) contributed significantly to the development of the aesthetics and the conceptuality of videos, by enhancing the continuity image-music, by using montage in a richer way, and by borrowing techniques from avant-garde and underground films. Such richness would not be lost in future, and was to become a regular feature in many videos to follow.

5.5 Technology

The last group of properties left to analyze is that of technology. A vast and articulated topic, it presents challenges already from its very definition. What is indeed technology? Although in different ways and degrees, all branches of audiovisuality entertain a strong dialogue with technological developments and innovations, up to the point of being artistically and socially defined by them. If you again consider the paragraph we have devoted to the history of audiovisuality, you will not fail to notice how crucial a role technological developments have played in defining the aesthetics, the economics and the culture of AVCC as a whole. In addition to this, the more recent impact of digital technologies on society has multiplied the extent of AV discourses by creating new media and new modes and models of communication altogether.

To understand technologies as "properties", as we intend to do here, we need to understand that they are not only what AV artists "employ" to create, direct, perform, produce, etc.: they are also what they "display", "convey", "represent", "get defined by", and so forth. We need to go to the root of the idea itself that we have of "technologies", and particularly their employment in AV processes. To begin with, it is pretty interesting to notice that, while using the word "Technology", most of us tend to refer to a smaller portion of that semantic field, namely the one that includes the latest technologies, the technological innovations, the futuristic-looking technologies, the visually-appealing technological devices, etc. It is a perception that covers the widest range of units (e.g., "technology" in singular form, as the whole process of innovation that a society goes through at a given time in history) as well as the tiniest ones (e.g., if we use an expression such as "technological material", we will probably think about "metal", "plastic", "synthetic fibers"… rather than—say—"paper", "silk" or "wood"). In this sense, talking about audiovisuality we may bet that the word "technology" is particularly prone to trigger associations such as "special effects", "3D movie", "Smart TV" and the likes, while a look at those charming toys like the zoetrope or the phenakistoscope, which we have indeed seen in ▶ Sect. 1.3, are more likely to inspire "nostalgia" and "tenderness", rather than "technology".

All of this occurs despite the fact that, as we open any decent dictionary at the entry "Technology", we find definitions such as the following: *The branch of knowledge that deals with the creation and use of technical means and their interrelation with life, society and the environment, drawing upon such subjects as industrial arts, engineering, applied science, and pure science.*

There is, as we can see, no mention of the fact that a technology should belong to the contemporary age, that it should look in a certain manner, be built with certain materials, and so forth. However, evidently, the discourse we build around technology in audiovisuality is particularly focused on that other connotative level of the concept, up to the point that a discourse about "old" technology becomes a discourse "against" it. This, by all means, is a mistake we need to avoid here. The relevance of a technological property in an AVT is completely unrelated to the technological "state of the art" of any given epoch: it may be something that occurs more often and that is more often meant to catch our attention, but that does not make it any more relevant than a property emerging through a past or even outdated technology.

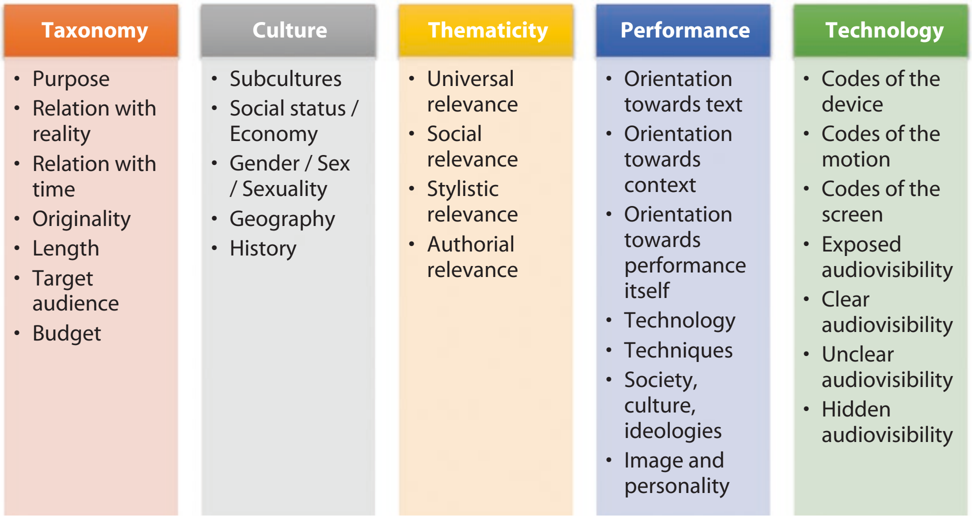
A technological property, let us repeat, is any meaningful unit within a text whose communicative potentials rely on a particular technology. When the protagonist of Steven Soderbergh's *Kafka* enters the mysterious "castle" of a secret organization (a reference to Kafka's novel *The Castle*, of course), the movie turns from black and white to color, as if to underline the transition from Kafka's "grey" life into a surreal and charmingly sinister place. In entrusting such a message to this chromatic shift, Soderbergh has indeed applied a technological property to the visual mean.

As with the other properties, I suggest that we pay attention to those criteria and factors that seem to be most relevant in the various technological choices. This time the key words shall be **codes** and **audiovisibility**.

As for "codes" the reference is to one of the "sacred texts" of film analysis, Casetti and Di Chio (1990/2004), which we have already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The two scholars (1990: 62) refer to a cinematographic "code" as a system of correspondence between signifiers and signifieds; as a range of validated ("codified", indeed) cinematographic solutions and as an operative common ground that authors and audience share. Needless to say, we can easily extend the comparison from cinema alone to the whole audiovisuality, without really having to modify anything in the model.

Among the codes indicated by Casetti and Di Chio, there is a specific group of "basic technological codes" which are very much suited to our analysis. These are codes (correspondences, solutions and common ground, as we have seen) that belong to the cinematic—or generally audiovisual for us—medium *as such*, and that are not just machinery/gear, but also means of expression, or, indeed, *properties*, as they are being defined here. These basic codes are three (see also ◘ Fig. 5.21):

1. **Codes of the device**. These are the properties that derive from specific technological characteristics of the AV medium chosen. Once that choice is made, we have a range of technologies to employ. Casetti and Di Chio (1990/2004: 68) make the example of the film stock, that is, that strip of transparent plastic material with light-sensitive silver halide crystals that is used for recording a movie. Some technological features of the film stock, such as sensibility and format, may play a relevant role in the communicative strategies of the text. A lower and more inexpensive format like the 16 mm is technically more limited and less neat than, say, the 70 mm, yet a director may choose the former not only to spare on costs, but also because the 16 mm



Taxonomy	Culture	Thematicity	Performance	Technology
• Purpose • Relation with reality • Relation with time • Originality • Length • Target audience • Budget	• Subcultures • Social status / Economy • Gender / Sex / Sexuality • Geography • History	• Universal relevance • Social relevance • Stylistic relevance • Authorial relevance	• Orientation towards text • Orientation towards context • Orientation towards performance itself • Technology • Techniques • Society, culture, ideologies • Image and personality	• Codes of the device • Codes of the motion • Codes of the screen • Exposed audiovisibility • Clear audiovisibility • Unclear audiovisibility • Hidden audiovisibility

Fig. 5.21 A full recapitulation of all the characteristics/variables/criteria of each of the five properties we discussed in this chapter of the monograph

gives an almost amateur-esque quality that makes the images look more realistic. A movie like Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (2008), which aimed at a realistic portrayal of the Iraq War, was shot on 16 mm for that reason. On the contrary, Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* (2015) had opposite goals, and aimed at that hyperbolic grandeur that the American director often likes, and for this reason he chose the 70 mm format.

2. **Codes of the motion**. Images and sounds run at a certain speed, in a certain direction, with a certain cadence. These aspects come to form properties that are specific to the "motion". Here, a case in point could be the speed of the images: speeding up a sequence may be employed to add a comical effect on a sequence, and at the same time slow motion is often (too often, if you ask me) applied to the culminating moment of a sport competition.
3. **Codes of the screen**. As the focus of this book is "screen-mediated" AVCC, it goes without saying that the very surface over which an AVT is delivered has an enormous communicative potential. How big the screen is, what shape, how bright, what material… all these, too, are choices that are not just made out of purely technical or logistical variables, but *do mean* something. The case study that will follow after this paragraph is entirely devoted to the notion of the screen, so perhaps there is no need to add much at this point.

To this list, quite naturally, one should add specific visual and sonic technologies, but Casetti and Di Chio, just like we do in this book, prefer to deal with those in the specific sections concerning image and sound.

The second set of criteria, as we have mentioned, is called "audiovisibility". Technological devices and practices are always present at any stage of the AV creative process, yet in some instances they are more manifest than in others, creating (or not), specific cognitive/cultural/ideological associations: this is the moment they turn into actual "properties", in the way we define them in this book. These associations may or may not be intentional, may or may not be culturally bound and—most of all—may or may not be encouraged by the text itself and by its creators. What is important to keep in mind is that the relation between the "display" and the "perception" stages is not always directly proportional. A technological property that is "more audible/visible" does not automatically mean "better seen/heard", and it is not necessarily a more efficient property, although of course there are more chances in this sense. The idea behind "audiovisibility" is to identify the different degrees of display and perception of given technologies, and their effectiveness as "properties". I suggest four such degrees (see also Fig. 5.21):

1. **Exposed audiovisibility**. In this case, there is an explicit effort to make a given technology visible/audible, so that the audience creates a strong association with the specific instance. There is, for example, a vast area of visual representations within most videogames, genres like sci-fi or action, several experimental videos, commercials for hi-tech gadgets, etc., where all the graphic elements, from image to colors, from effects to fonts, are concerted to signify an active presence of the technology as, so to speak, "the main responsible" of the message. When we see a combat scene and the scene "freezes" on a fighter's jump, and we see that increasingly-typical 360° panning digital effect, not only is it clear to all of us that this is, indeed, a special effect, but the film is actually "showing off" that effect, making no mystery that it is something artificial, explicitly meant to underline the aesthetics of that jump and also add an epic tone to it. The degree here is "exposed" because the authors openly want to inform us that this is, indeed, a technological property.
2. **Clear audiovisibility**. In this case, a given technology is visible/audible by anybody and is often associated with the specific instance, although there is no active effort

to overstate the point. While the "exposed" message does not require intense cooperation with the audience, as the latter is given all possible tools not to misinterpret the contents. A *clear* technological property is less of a show-off and more of an honest statement. The viewers are invited to cooperate at a certain level, and add a bit of their own contextualization to the AV experience they are dealing with. Staying within the realm of special effects, this situation of "clarity" may appear in a text that is presenting a situation that is not real, but is made to look verisimilar. When a superhero character is shown as flying, we know—and we have no doubt—that this is a special effect made possible with digital technologies. At the same time, there is no particular element aimed at putting that special effect in the spotlight, as in the case of "exposed audiovisibility". In fact, the superhero's ability of flying needs to be displayed as normal, and not underlined in any way.

3. **Unclear audiovisibility**. In this case, we talk about a situation where technology is hardly visible/audible (if not by experts) and is not associated to the specific AV experience. We have already mentioned the famous sequence in Kubrick's *The Shining* in which the character of Jack Torrance chases his son Danny in the snow labyrinth, and we know that the parts that represent Jack's point of view, as the chaser, were filmed by an operator equipped with a Steadicam. Now, this is the kind of technology that does not allow the benefit of "clarity" to the average viewer. We understand that it is not really Jack who is holding the camera, but the very technological device that allows that realistic POV of the chaser (the Steadicam indeed) is unknown to most.
4. **Hidden audiovisibility**. To conclude, a "hidden audiovisibility" defines a situation where an explicit effort is made in order *not* to make a given technology visible/audible by the audience. This may happen either for technical or ideological reasons: in the first case, revealing the employment of a given technology may be counterproductive, anti-aesthetic or else. In the second case, it may be an explicit choice on the part of the artist to display an image somehow "hostile" to technology (or at least "latest" technologies). An example that embodies both approaches is Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948). Conceived to look like a theatre play, the movie had to give the illusion of real time action, and for that purpose Hitchcock pretended to renounce montage, assembling the images as if it was one single sequence from start to end. Of course, this was not possible, as reels in those days could not film more than 10–12 min in a row: finished those, one had to change the reel, and that inevitably led to some editing of sorts. To disguise that (to "hide", indeed) Hitchcock made sure that every ten minutes or so, the camera would smoothly head towards a dark spot of some kind (a dark blue suit, the inside of a chest…), until the image would totally turn black. At that point Hitchcock would cut, and make sure that the next reel, with an equally smooth movement of the camera, departed exactly from the same spot, thus giving the impression that the action was still continuous, and it had simply, almost accidentally, met a dark spot at some point. The quintessential technology of audiovisuality, montage, was thus hidden in order to provide the theatrical feeling of real time action.

Very informative overviews on the relation between technology and arts, technology and culture and technology and society are, among others, Schiffer (2001), Utterson (2005) and Menon (2011).

5.5.1 Case Study: The Notion of "Screen" in Audiovisuality

The discussion on the technological properties brings us back to three important points we made at the beginning of this book. First, we mentioned at the beginning, and repeated in the last paragraph, that the focus of our analysis is that kind of AVCC that is "mediated by a screen". This, as you may remember, has allowed us to put aside the various real-time and real-world AV interactions, from the eminently creative ones (e.g., a theatre play) to pretty much *any* instance of communication. In that occasion, there was also a promise for a more "philosophical" reflection on the notion of "screen", which is what we shall deliver now. In addition, when we discussed the important notion of "conceptual space/time", we mentioned that the metaphorical location of non-diegesis is actually the screen (be that a huge cinema screen, or that of the smallest smartphone on the market). Finally, as we discussed the dichotomy between realism and fiction, we raised several questions that are pertinent to the role screenplays in mediating between reality and representation. In the light of all this, and of the importance placed on the screen by Casetti and Di Chio's model on technological codes as described in the last paragraph, it seems appropriate that this case study elaborates on the very communicative nature of the screen.

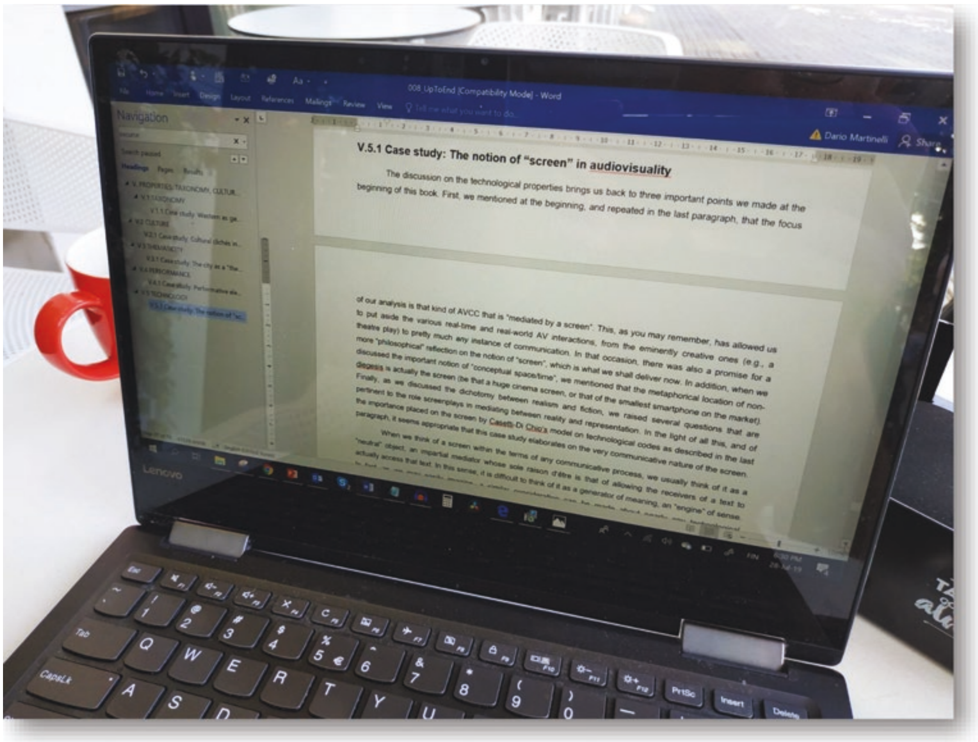
When we think of a screen within the terms of any communicative process, we usually think of it as a "neutral" object, an impartial mediator whose sole raison d'être is that of allowing the receivers of a text to actually access that text. In this sense, it is difficult to think of it as a generator of meaning, an "engine" of sense. In fact, as we may easily imagine, a similar consideration can be made about nearly any technological tool/device employed in the production and the displaying of AVTs. In principle, we may maintain that the only meaningful connection that occurs between the senders and the readers of a text is a "mental" one: two (or more) minds connecting (*through* but not *because of* technology) and sharing meaningful information. All that is left is passive mediation.

The thesis we defend here, instead, is that perhaps things are not so simple. There is a scholarly area called "screen theory", of Marxist philosophical inspiration, which became rather popular from the 1970s onwards (like many Marxist-inspired theories, to say it all). In fact, the expression sounds more relevant to us than it actually is ("screen theory" refers to a general trend in film studies, and not to a specific theory of the screen as such). However, the basic notion of this theory says roughly that it is the spectacle that creates the spectator, and not vice versa. We can take this idea as a point of departure for our discussion. We assume of course that, along with everything else, the screen is "part of the spectacle" too; therefore, it must have some creative-communicative power in itself. Another important school, called "apparatus theory", and still of Marxist inspiration, maintains that the AV representation is ideological and that every single element (including mechanical and technological devices) contributes to that. Such a position, too, is of some relevance for us (▣ Fig. 5.22).

Another preliminary question we need to address is the distinction between screen as device and screen as medium. The screen as device implies a wide, but limited, series of variables of communicative value (that is, they create or help to create sense). Such variables have to do with the material and technical construction of the "object-screen", and define its functionality and effectiveness. Such variables are:

1. **Size**: how big is the screen? How wide? How tall? Is it bi-dimensional? Tridimensional? Etc.
2. **Shape**: that is generally rectangular, but according to which proportions? 4:3? 16:9? Or what else? Plus, does it have to be rectangular at all costs? Can be a square, a hexagon, a sphere, a circle…
3. **Surface**: matt, glossy, smooth, rough, with different textures…
4. **Material** employed: paper, cardboard, plastics, fabric… as a matter of fact, any material, given a few criteria met, can be used to make a screen.
5. **Weather**: the more the light in the surrounding environment (that is, excluding the source of the image), the less neat the screen reflection. Various weather conditions may also affect the perception of the image (in terms of visibility, color, etc.).
6. **Color/light**: depending on the medium, a screen can be of different colors or light power. A cinematographic screen is generally white, since it has to reflect images that are *projected* on it. In a plasma screen, each pixel is a tiny fluorescent lamp switched on or off electronically, and so forth. If colors/light change, there is a general modification of the quality of the image, which usually is perceived as a worsening of it, but which—as we shall see—may also result in unconventional (and not necessarily bad) aesthetic results.
7. **Context**: where is the screen? How is it placed in relation to spectators, to the source of the image, etc.? How do we modify our perception/interpretation of an AVT if we watch it from the first rows of a very comfortable cinema, or on a wooden chair in somebody's home? What happens if the image is projected in an unusual way (upside down, reversed, not fully centered…), and we find it hard to have a complete, accurate perception of the text?
8. **Technology in a strict sense**: the technical/mechanical features of the object-screen. For example, the way it is operated: by switching it on electronically, by unrolling it, if it needs a tripod or some other stand…. Usually, such features are not really pertinent to the production of sense as such, but it may still happen that certain conditions (from the previous seven points) occur that would make these technicalities suddenly relevant. For example, hostile, windy weather conditions during an open-air projection on a roll-up screen may move the screen and provide a shaky, hangover-y image, that would certainly affect the way we perceive and interpret the text being screened. I know this sounds a bit simplistic, but one can never be surprised enough to notice how many little, circumstantial and apparently insignificant details shape our whole interpretation of a text. When we discuss technology in this particular way, we of course also need to consider the combined effects of the various technologies involved in the display of an AVT (e.g., screen *plus* projector *plus* speakers *plus* DVD player, in a home-cinema type of setting). The variables at play, in sum, are many (▣ Fig. 5.23).

We need to pay attention to the fact that there is not necessarily a direct correspondence between the level of "efficiency" of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V.5.1 Case study: The notion of "screen" in audiovisuality

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▣ **Fig. 5.22** A draft of this very paragraph through the screen of my laptop. Couldn't resist the inside joke…

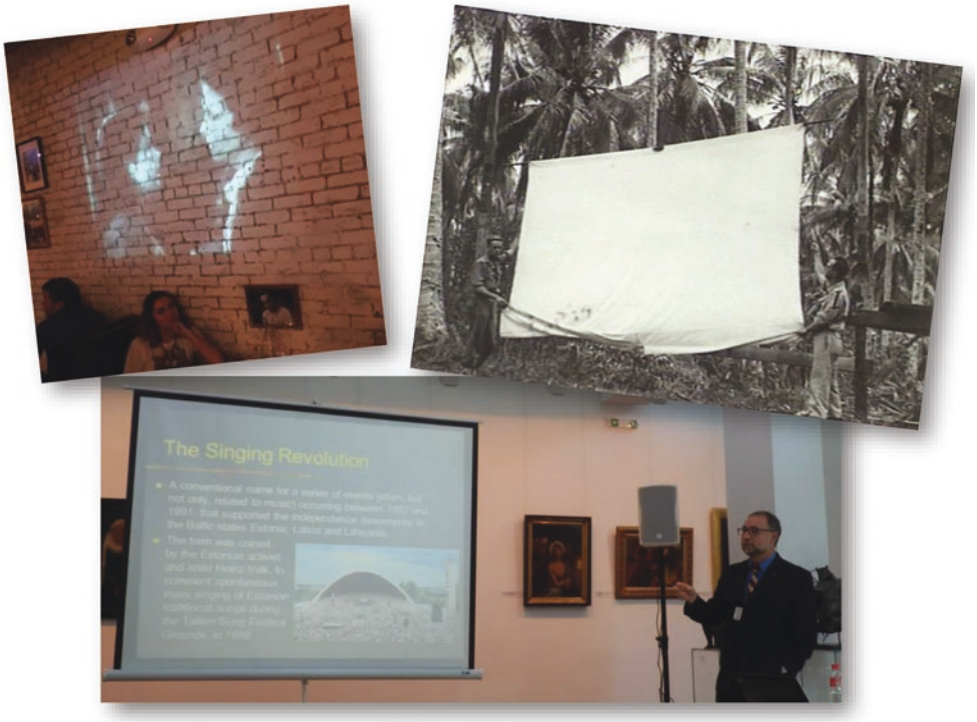


Fig. 5.23 A few common and less common screens: a projection on a brickwall, a screen installed for a mobile cinema in an exotic location, and a power point presentation projected during a conference

the above-listed features and the amount/quality of sense produced. Very often, that is the case, but in some other occurrences it is the opposite, because "imperfection" has proved, throughout the whole history of the various arts, to open up new creative venues and therefore generate novel meanings. Let us for instance take the parameter of "color". For a number of conventional and technological reasons, the ideal color for a cinematographic screen is white—we know that. At the same time, a white screen does not convey *more* meanings than—say—an orange one. As a matter of fact (unless other factors intervene, that are not dependent on color), white and orange are bound to convey pretty much the same amount of sense: what changes is the typology of it. Through white, possibly, we get a *neutral* and *faithful* perception of the text—faithful, that is, to the intentions of the authors (the *senders* of the text). On the other hand, orange, while conveying just about the same amount of sense (we have not cut, edited, or affected the text in any way), may corrupt neutrality and faithfulness, at least on a chromatic level, encouraging us, for instance, to interpret the text as a more visionary, psychedelic production. A practical example is Giuseppe Tornatore's acclaimed 1988 movie *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*. The film opens in the 1980s, with a famous director named Salvatore Di Vita (which in English means literally "life savior"—we shall see why) who learns of the death of his closest friend during childhood. Through a long flashback that constitutes the main body of the movie, the scene moves to the days immediately following the Second World War: the young boy Salvatore grows up in a Sicilian village with his mother, having lost his father in the war. The boy develops a very close, surrogate-father-like relationship with Alfredo, a projectionist at the local cinema (called "Paradiso"—Heaven). Under the fatherly influence of Alfredo, Salvatore falls in love with film making, and the duo spends whole hours discussing cinema, while Alfredo little by little teaches Salvatore the skills that will serve as a basis for the boy to eventually become a director. While following their friendship, the film brings us through the social and aesthetic changes in cinema between the 1940s and the 1980s (and in that sense it can be called a work of meta-cinema, a movie about movies).

One of the dramatic climaxes of the movie occurs when a fire starts in the projectionist's booth with Alfredo stuck inside. This was not a rare event in those days, due to the highly-flammable nitrocellulose material films were made of. The fire occurs during a particularly crowded evening at the cinema, when the scheduled film sells out and not everybody can be accommodated. Feeling sorry for the people left outside, Alfredo and Salvatore decide to surprise them by moving the projector towards the window and screening the movie on the opposite building wall, in the village square outside the cinema. Salvatore joins the excited crowd in the square to enjoy this very peculiar screening. Distracted by the situation, Alfredo does not notice that the film is catching fire. Showing unbelievable courage, Salvatore, who is still just a kid at this point, manages to drag his older friend out of the booth, saving his life ("Salvatore Di Vita"—"Life savior"), although Alfredo sadly loses his eyes in the incident.

Let us focus on this episode, and particularly on the moment when the movie is screened on the unusual surface of a building façade. In a situation like this, at least the following parameters are modified, as compared to the traditional projection on a cinema screen:

- The size of the screen: the building looks visibly bigger than the cinema screen.
- The surface: from the silky-smooth cinema screen, we turned not to the rough and irregular brick wall, including the balcony of a private apartment which the projected image covers.
- The materials: the screen is now made of lime and bricks.
- The light conditions: there is more light on the square, as compared to the dark cinema hall.
- The color: the building wall is of a pale yellow color, not white.

- The context: that is quite obvious, as we moved from a cinema hall into a town square.
- The strict technical features: while the movie is projected by the same projector, the screen as an object is evidently a different one.

In sum, the only element that is virtually unchanged is the shape of the projected image, which remains rectangular. That is because the size of the screen, in the building as well as in the cinema hall, remains bigger than the projected image, so the shape remains the same as the latter, and it is not affected by the former. Now: how do these conditions affect the actual movie that Alfredo and Salvatore show to the village crowd? For the record, that movie is Mario Mattoli's *I pompieri di Viggiù* (1948), a comedy featuring Totò, arguably the most important comic actor in Italian film history. The peculiar screening conditions, as described in the movie, appear to give the audience a different spectatorship experience, both at non-diegetic and diegetic level. Light, size, color, context and strict technology are clearly non-diegetic variables, therefore the impact on the spectator is mostly aesthetic: e.g., the black and white movie becomes, so to speak, a black and yellow one, giving almost that sepia effect that old photographs have. On the other hand, the surface and the materials produce results that are visible at diegetic level, and in that sense they end up having even more of an impact. Both variables, indeed, produce an effect of deformation and bizarre estrangement on the image, and that makes the audience laugh even more than they would normally do at any Totò movie, and—what is more important—laugh for additional reasons than the ones offered in the story and in the performance of the Italian comic master. For instance, the most evident of these additional factors is the moment when the owner of the apartment covered by the screened image, comes out onto the balcony to see what on earth is going on with all these people laughing. As the man becomes visible (and somehow enters the diegetic space of the movie), we hear a roar of laughter from the audience, with numerous people pointing at the guy and commenting about his appearance.

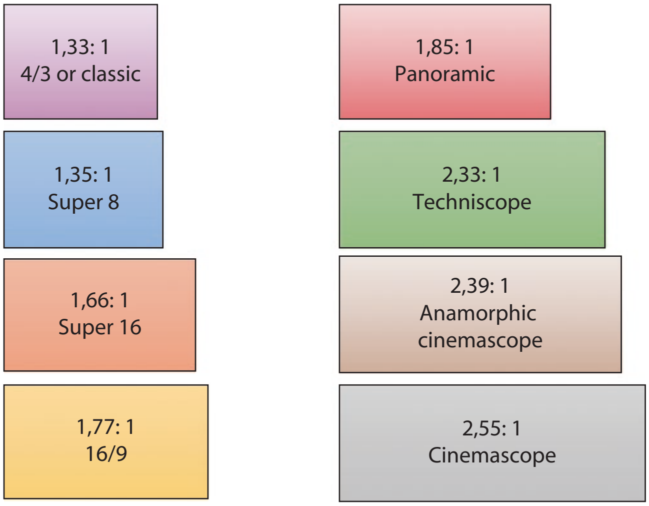
While the analysis of the screen "as device" raises a wide but limited amount of questions, to talk about the screen "as medium" is a much more complex affair. First of all, because we lose the materiality of the object, which now turns into an abstract and subtly nuanced concept. In this sense, we need to go back to square one: what is a screen? Leaving aside its obvious function in the AV screening process, dictionaries give us a lot of definitions that suggest ideas of "defense", "protection" and "separation". The Longobardic word "Skirmjan", from which the word "screen" has very likely derived, meant exactly "to defend". "Screen" is also a word used in some sports' jargon—for instance basketball—to define a defense strategy. During the seventeenth century, we have seen it, Athanasius Kircher invented the "magic lantern", which allowed the projection of images on a surface that came to be called screen. During the nineteenth century, through the various inventions that we have already discussed in the historical section of this book, we get to Edison, Dickson, the Lumières, and the word "screen" acquires its modern usage and application. From that point on, and more and more relevantly in this digital age, the screen is the central form of "mediation of visual signs".

This is a possible history of the screen. Yet, we may propose another, perhaps more charming one, which indeed departs from the concepts of protection, defense and separation into that of "flat surface" (or the likes) as a form of "specialization" of the former concepts, and not a simple association of ideas. We may indeed accept that the idea of protection and separation has not disappeared in the modern meaning: a "screen", after all, *is* a way to separate the territories of empirical reality and represented reality (or straight away fiction). As we said when we discussed the conceptual space/time of AVCC, we referred to the screen as the metaphorical transition between the two areas, the famous "fourth wall". We also discussed how realism is never fully real, even when the text aims at total realism as in a documentary or in a Facebook live stream.

Can the screen be vaguely responsible for this? Well, to begin with, the screen is usually a bi-dimensional object, it mediates mostly at visual level, and—as big as it can be—is always limited in size. The screen, therefore, mediates the represented objects in an incomplete manner, but usually ignoring the third dimension, usually ignoring any other channel except the visual one (of course the acoustic channel is provided by other sources, but not by the screen as such), and always confining the representation to a smaller, limited space.

All this, as we also discussed in the "Realism versus Fiction" section, has its own share of benefits: this condition of reduced communication, for instance, allows us to filter out the information that may not be essential and/or functional, at least from the sender's point of view. And the way itself of organizing this reduction has a lot to do with the "targeted screen" in relation to the targeted medium. The director of a TV program knows that they will have to deal, in most cases, with a 4:3 type of screen, so it makes sense to arrange the information (particularly the "architecture" of it, as we have seen) accordingly. The movie director, on the other hand, may opt for a 16:9, or even wider (see ◘ Fig. 5.24), and thus propose a different arrangement, and so on.

At this point, perhaps, there is one particular item, that is much more ancient than any screen, that may come to mind, and that is the window. On the one hand, indeed, the invention of the window had a strictly functional purpose of reception of, and access to, light and air. On the other hand, though, whoever in antiquity got this great idea (apparently, the first



◘ **Fig. 5.24** Some of the many possible screen formats in cinema. While the 4:3 and the 16:9 have always been the most common, different formats have been used in different periods and in relation to different authors. As we have seen in ► Sect. 5.1.1, Sergio Leone was devoted to the Techniscope for his spaghetti westerns windows appeared in the thirteenth century B.C.) must have also addressed the problem of creating an interface with a portion of the outside space that would be, all at once, an access to, a separation from and a framing of it. And not just *any* portion (not at least if we are in the position to choose): we are usually well aware of placing windows wherever the view is most suggestive (plus, again, *functional* for whatever reason: better light, less noise, etc.). For instance, if there is even a tiny spot in our apartment where the sea is visible, we can be sure that we will do our best to place a window right at that spot (a strategy that, as we know, can increase the price of that apartment by several thousand euros). Sometimes, it is the orientation of entire apartment blocks that is determined by the "nice view" factor.

In this sense, the correspondence window-screen as a mediation of/protection from reality is at its most evident: imagine a ten-storey building in the middle of an industrial, highly-polluted area which however allows those who purchase the highest floors to see a minuscule portion of sea, therefore bringing their prices to a disproportioned amount, considering the area. That portion is certainly *real*, but its marginality within the whole context makes it so that the reality offered by the window is disguising at best. It is a bit like writing the recipe of the Pizza Margherita on a culinary book, and instead of placing the photograph of the whole pizza, we simply show some basil leaves. Sure: the basil is in the recipe, it is *real*, but it is certainly not representative of the whole thing. It is the old story of telling such a partial truth that it basically becomes a lie. If someone asks our opinion on Hitler, and we answer that he built the highway system in Germany and introduced the first affordable people's car on the market, we would not be lying, actually, as these are two economic measures that were taken under his régime, and we may generally agree that—taken alone—these are positive initiatives. However, what would our interlocutor think of us if we reduced the assessment of Nazism to those details, overlooking (or pretending to overlook) the countless dreadful actions performed by Hitler? Does a portrayal of a situation based on a limited amount of true facts correspond to truth, or is it more a deception?

The choice to access the outside world, say, on the southern side rather than the northern, where there is more light, where one can see a forest and not a shopping center, and so on, is a form of representation of that outside world, a representation that generates relaxation and aesthetic beauty, with the window thus acting like a screen, a medium. The screen creates a protective separation between us and that representation, which is indeed a "representation" *because* it is separated from the real world. A somewhat anthropological function of the window is exactly that of allowing us to observe the outside world as an AVT. We look out the window and we see people walking, cars parking, kids playing, and occasionally also filmogenic sequences such as accidents, fights, and engaging street-football games among those kids… Our role is that of the spectators, with all the rights and duties involved. We can "switch off" the screen by closing the window, and at the same time we cannot take part in the action until we are there, making the outside space real, sure, but also alien to our reality.

It is no coincidence that AVTs often use windows metaphorically, precisely in the form of media that allow a transition to a different dimension of the story. We have seen in our study of the first episode of *The Borgias* how the transition from the dying pope to Lucrezia spying on Cesare is made through a window. There is also that beautiful sequence of Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* when the protagonist David Locke (Jack Nicholson) looks outside the ample and open window of a hotel room, activating a flashback of him in the company of the man who will die and whose identity he will replace. Since a flashback, as we have learned, is a form of meta-diegesis, the window here serves as a "screen within the screen" for that "diegesis within the diegesis".

Then again, while "reducing" the information, the screen can almost act the opposite way. It may, that is, show a virtually unlimited amount of images and convey a virtually endless amount of meanings. Exactly due to its nature as medium, the screen exercises no preference on what we intend it to show: it can be an email, then a movie, then an ice-hockey game, then a Word program… the screen does not care. As it appears, at least following technological development, it also happens to be the best tool for such purpose: smartphones, TVs, computers all evolve into increasingly sophisticated models, but one thing they have not yet replaced, and can only try to improve in its function, is the screen.

Finally, the spectator's awareness of observing a representation through a screen creates a certain sense of alienation, in which the reception of the message is affected by some factors (expectations, stereotypes, evaluations…), which modify more or less effectively the interpretation. In this sense, the screen is not only offering "more" or "less" meanings, but also "different" ones. A (represented) world where a guy named James Bond is visible more than other people (therefore limiting the perception) is also a world where Mr. Bond has a different importance than the one he would have in reality. This is the final, and perhaps more relevant, point about being an "engine" of meanings, as we said at the beginning of this case study. It is the act itself of mediating that the screen performs, to fuel the production of different and new meanings. It is not just a technical question: there is another form of mediation that occurs between a spectator and the screen, which implies in the former a number of cognitive and emotional processes. The screen is something on which images will appear, something on which we will witness something. Just like we saw with the reader-text cooperation, we are also ready to cooperate with the screen: we prepare ourselves to a perceptive and interpretive activity that differs from that of real life, and which is eager to "specialize" in some form (is it a movie? An SMS? A website? A music video?…). Every screen has its own specific requirements, within such cognitive-emotional processes, and the *deal* we establish with a TV screen is different from the deal we establish with a laptop monitor, and so on. Yet there *is* a deal, every time—and every time, thus, the communicative potential of an AVT can rely on the particular technological properties of the given screen involved.

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