Communication, Creativity and Consilience in Cinema

A comparative study of the Top 20 Return-on-Investment (RoI) Movies and the Doxa of Screenwriting

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The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository**, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

**Unless an Embargo has been approved for a determined period.

Name: Joseph Tesla Velikovsky
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PREFACE

Twenty years of immersion in the domains and fields of movie screenwriting led me to the research questions in this thesis. Studying for a Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Screenwriting major) at the University of Newcastle from 1991 to 1993 resulted in a professional screenwriting job in television in 1993 while doing a Professional Placement subject for my undergraduate degree. I then worked as a Technical Officer in the Film & Video Department at the University of Newcastle in 1994. My grounding in Screenwriting and Production from UoN and subsequent work in film, television, videogames and theatre led to studying Screenwriting and Screen Production at AFTRS in 1995-6. While studying at AFTRS, as a personal side project I summarized all the books on screenwriting I could find on the AFTRS library shelves - thus becoming very familiar with the 808.23 (screenwriting) Dewey decimal system section; a literature survey published as *The Feature Film Screenwriters' Workbook* (Velikovsky 1995, 4th Edn 2011). I discovered that the act of summarizing and comparing the various screenwriting manuals in 1995 led me to wonder about the guidelines in the orthodoxy of screenwriting, raising many questions which - over the next 20 years while working as a screenwriter, story analyst (screen reader), film crew member, actor, filmmaker, script editor, script doctor, and judge for the Australian Writers Guild and Australian Directors Guild - became deeper questions about the subdomains of movie creation. As the National Videogames Market Analyst for Australia in 1999-2000 I became involved in statistical qualitative and quantitative analysis, which may also partly explain the approach of this PhD research project in comparing movie success to failure. It is possible that comparing the extreme tail-ends of any parameter of any biocultural artifacts as a whole set (whether in movies, novels, songs, games, poems, or indeed any media) can reveal illuminating results. The work in this dissertation is thus a result of around 20 years of seeking answers to those various questions about: the movie domain, creativity, communication, story, screenwriting - and how it all works.

Ideally this research provides some satisfactory new answers to some of these questions, and new research findings which hopefully may be of benefit to screenwriters, screenwriting instructors, teachers, filmmakers, casts and crews - and the movie audiences for their creative works. In short, this thesis is dedicated to: The 99%. 
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ABSTRACT

Within the discipline of Communication - and the domain of movie-creation, including movie screenwriting - this study explores aspects of the problem-situation around accurate guidelines for movie success. Movie performance research reveals that 70% of movies do not ‘break even’ or recoup their production budget in cinema release (Vogel 1990, 2014) and that 98% of screenplays presented to producers go unmade (Macdonald 2004, 2013). Successful (thus, creative) screenplays and movies are rare.

In order to illuminate this problem-situation in ways that may be useful to both screenwriters and screenwriting instructors, this study examines fifteen key guidelines of the screenwriting orthodoxy, derived from a set of four contemporary screenwriting manuals: guidelines which partly-comprise the current ‘doxa’ or how screenwriting is often taught. In this study these movie story-creation guidelines are then compared to the relevant observed story traits of the 20 highest, and also to the 20 lowest Return-on-Investment movies (with RoI defined as: ‘audience-reach / production-budget’) in order to test these fifteen (15) guidelines of the current screenwriting orthodoxy.

The Theoretical Perspective of the study is Evolutionary Systems Theory, including the Systems Model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2014) and Bourdieu’s practice theory (Bourdieu 1977-1996) to examine, understand and explain key aspects of movie-creation by screen storytellers, and movie-reception by audiences. The research perspective also draws on David Bordwell’s neo-formalist film poetics (1997-2013), Macdonald’s screenwriting poetics (2004, 2013) and scholarship in the domain of Evocriticism (Boyd 2009, 2010, Carroll 1995, Gottschall 2012) and Evolutionary Psychology (Buss 2012), influenced by E. O. Wilson’s (1998) vision of consilience.

As a result of this comparative analysis of ‘the screenwriting orthodoxy versus movie RoI’ it is demonstrated that certain of the screenwriting-manual guidelines are contradicted by the empirical evidence, and thus some revised and additional screenplay guidelines are presented, also noting suggested areas for further research.

[300 words]
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

The work in this thesis has generated the following publications:

**Book chapters**


Conference papers (refereed)


Articles


Velikovsky, J. T. (2012-2016), StoryAlity PhD research weblog, (130 weblog posts; 170,000 site visits as at October 2016), Storyality.wordpress.com, Sydney. (https://storyality.wordpress.com/)

For the URLs of these publications see Appendix section 10.24 –Abstracts of Research Outputs.
“[The] script constitutes the single most important aspect of cinematic success.” (Simonton in Kaufman & Simonton, 2014, p. 4)

*The Social Science of Cinema (2014)*

“Story is the most essential and important, and therefore the most powerful creative asset in the motion picture industry. It is more powerful than money.” (J. J. Lee & Gillen, 2011, p. 18)

*The Producer's Business Handbook (2011)*

“Hard-headed science puts the creative process at the very center of the motion picture universe… There is no reason for management to get in the way of the creative process. Character, creativity and good storytelling trump everything else.” (De Vany 2004, p. 6)

1 INTRODUCTION

One broad question of this research study is: Are there formulae for movie success? Shakespeare in *Hamlet* suggested “the play’s the thing” and a century after the emergence of movies, this thesis suggests that “the screenplay’s the thing”; namely a movie’s story - thus screenplay - is paramount for a movie’s success. While *creative* movie stories attract audiences, *uncreative* movie stories are in Hamlet’s words “stale, flat, and unprofitable”.

Formulae for movie success have existed since at least 2004 via professional movie story consultants such as Epagogix,2 Worldwide Motion Picture Group3 and C4.4 These companies employ the computer science techniques of data-mining and neural networks with deep-learning algorithms and typically charge around USD$20,000 to analyze a screenplay’s story elements, ranging from 150 story elements for C4 to over 30 million story elements for Epagogix, and thus predict a movie’s Return-on-Investment (Acuna & Lubin, 2013, online; Dormehl, 2014a, pp. 167-168). Ayres (2007) writes that “Epagogix has been working behind the scenes because most of its clients don’t want the world to know what it’s doing” (Ayres, 2007, p. 158). Movie audiences may react negatively to discovering that Big Data and computer algorithms are employed to make creative decisions about the movie stories they enjoy. Such algorithms and formulae are closely-guarded commercial secrets utilized by Hollywood movie studios that can afford such story consulting services and therefore are unlikely to appear in academic or scholarly publications anytime soon. However one real-world problem is that most screenwriters are unlikely to be able to afford around USD$20,000 to discover the commercial prospects of their own movie screenplay’s story.

Crucially, extant scientific research on movie performance since 1983 reveals that the *narrative* in a movie is the key determinant of movie contagion that drives movie audience-reach totals in cinemas (De Silva, 1998, p. 144; De Vany, 2004, pp. 3-6; J. J. Lee & Gillen, 2011, p. 18; Litman, 1983, p. 159; Simonton, 2011, pp. 75-76; 2014b, pp. 3-4).
The story (and thus the screenplay) being the primary cause of movie success or failure with audiences in cinemas explains how companies like Epagogix, Worldwide Motion Picture Group, C4 and others are able to predict movie success - examined here as Return-on-Investment - by analysing the story elements in the screenplay of a proposed movie. Thus with screenwriters, movie-makers and screenwriting pedagogy in mind this research study aims to compare fifteen (15) key guidelines of the current dominant screenwriting doxa - or the story-creation screenwriting guidelines of the screenwriting orthodoxy - to 40 movie-story case-studies of extreme success and failure. Namely the study examines the 20 highest RoI (Return-on-Investment, or Relative-Audience-Reach) movies and by contrast the 20 lowest-RoI (biggest money-losing, or least Relative-Audience-Reach) movies (see Figure 1-1, below).

![Figure 1-1 - Examining (A) the Top 20 RoI; and (B) the Bottom 20 RoI Movies](image)

The aim of the enquiry is to test fifteen (15) key elements of the screenwriting doxa (current movie story-creation guidelines) against the story, and thus screenplay, and movie (narrative style, content and form) in these two bipolar datasets of movies via a direct content analysis. The goal of the investigation is to determine empirically the truth-value of the various recommendations found in screenwriting manuals, using movie return-on-investment (thus relative-audience-reach) as the criterion of success. The study thus aims to provide answers to the following five (5) Research Questions:
RQ1 - What is the current orthodoxy (or doxa) of movie screenwriting?

RQ2 - What evidence do we have that the doxa influences the movie screenwriting process?

RQ3 - What are the formal and structural characteristics of the top 20 RoI and by comparison, of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories?

RQ4 - Which movie story characteristics are common to, and conversely which are unique to, the top 20 and the bottom 20 RoI movies?

RQ5 - In light of the evidence are there any revised screenwriting heuristics that emerge from the above enquiry?

If, as the extant research studies suggest (De Vany, 2004; Kaufman & Simonton, 2014; McKenzie, 2009, 2012; Simonton, 2011) and also the existence of companies such as Epagogix and C4 reveals, we can assume that the movie story is the key causal factor in a movie’s success, then by implication the above five Research Questions of this thesis are asking: What does the doxa in the screenwriting ‘how to’ manuals suggest about how to create a good movie story - thus, screenplay - and thus movie? Therefore, What specific characteristics should that screen idea - thus story, thus screenplay, thus movie - have? Furthermore: How do the characteristics of the extremes of empirical global audience movie response (the top and bottom 20 RoI movies) compare with the dominant screenwriting-manual ‘how-to’ doxa? And finally What does all of that mean for movie screenwriters? This study finds about half of the doxa guidelines are correct.

D. K. Simonton’s Empirical Studies of the Arts journal article ‘Is Bad Art The Opposite Of Good Art? Positive Versus Negative Cinematic Assessments Of 877 Feature Films’ (Simonton, 2007) compares Oscar winners (for Best Picture) to Golden Raspberry Award winners (for Worst Picture) and is one key influence on this research. In this light, the key question of the current study may be viewed as: “Is bad mass communication the opposite of good mass communication? Positive versus negative global cinematic assessments of two sets of 20 movies”. Movie screenwriting is herein viewed as successful mass communication when it works; namely when it is creative. In this study four contemporary highly-cited and popular screenwriting manuals (Field, [1979] 2005; McKee, 1997; B. Snyder, 2005; Truby, 2007) are examined via close

5 See Chapter 2 - Operational Definitions below for the definition of a ‘creative’ movie as used herein.
reading to determine their prescriptions for “good” screenwriting. Fifteen of the key movie story-creation guidelines of the doxa are then compared to each other across these four manuals, seeking a consensus. These fifteen movie screenwriting guidelines are then tested against a direct content analysis of: (A) the set of 20 highest-RoI, and (B) the set of the 20 lowest-RoI movies, to determine the correlations (or otherwise) of the two movie datasets to the fifteen current screenwriting doxa guidelines.

Certain new findings also emerge from this analysis of these two sets of 20 movies at the highest and the lowest extremes of movie RoI. The results of the study have potential implications for movie screenwriters, for movie-story creation (screenwriting) pedagogy and for potential further research directions. Additionally, the findings present challenges to the contemporary dominant movie screenwriting orthodoxy.6

1.1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

New contributions to knowledge of this research study include:

(1) A novel method of direct content data analysis, in comparing the top 20 and bottom 20 RoI movie narratives - both individually, and as whole sets;

(2) A critical analysis of the orthodoxy (doxa) of the current guidelines for successful movie screenwriting;

(3) Certain patterns newly identified in the emergence of top and bottom 20 RoI movies from the international movie system;7

(4) A new set of (27) heuristics for movie story (thus screenplay) creation, based on the Findings of the above comparative analysis of the top and bottom 20 RoI movie narratives, a set of screenwriting heuristics herein referred to as the StoryAlity Theory;8

(5) The book chapters and articles in the List of Publications above (pp. xvi-xvii).

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6 This thesis may be considered exploratory research as it arrives at some tentative conclusions that are worthy of further investigation within the Social Sciences using more sophisticated statistical techniques.

7 Findings such as: the average frequency of highest and lowest RoI movie emergence as cultural artifacts from the movie system; see for example Section 7.2.1 in the Results and Discussion chapter below.

8 For details see the tables in the Appendix section below: 10.20 – StoryAlity Theory - Heuristics.
1.2 THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter Two, Operational Definitions provides the key definitions used in this dissertation for: creative; creativity; the systems (or `sociocultural') model of creativity; the screenwriting doxa; movies; story; `canon’ vs. `archive’ in culture; and human nature. Some of these terms can have different meanings across and even within various academic disciplines outside the discipline of Communication.


Chapter Four, Literature Review reviews the key relevant literature in the domains of: (1) creativity; (2) the use of Systems Theory, Systems Philosophy, and Systems Science

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\(^9\) In How To Get A PhD, Phillips and Pugh (4th edn, 2005) recommend the use of: a background theory, a focal theory, a data theory, and contribution to knowledge (Phillips & Pugh, 2005, pp. 57-60).

\(^{10}\) BVSR is an acronym for the Blind-Variation and Selective-Retention process in both creativity and Evolutionary Epistemology research and is examined in more detail in the Literature Review below.


\(^{12}\) See also: The Creative System in Action: Understanding Cultural Production and Practice (P. McIntyre, Fulton, & Paton, 2016).
in examining bioculture; (3) the movie screenwriting doxa; (4) studies of movie performance; and (5) consilience, including Evocriticism and Evolutionary Psychology. The Literature Review summary at the conclusion of Chapter Four aims to demonstrate how the research is positioned in the intersection of these five knowledge domains.

Section 4.3 - Screenwriting Doxa in Chapter Four is designed to answer Research Question 1: “What is the current orthodoxy (or doxa) of movie screenwriting?”

By way of theoretical background: in Screenwriting Poetics and the Screen Idea, Macdonald (2013) presents the following diagram integrating the DPFi (Domain, Person, Field, interaction) systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2015) with elements of Bourdieu’s practice theory (1977-1996), including the concept of the *doxa*:

![Figure 1-2](image)

*Figure 1-2 – The creative process of screenwriting, after Sawyer (2006, p. 123) in (Macdonald 2013, p. 115), or: the Domain, Individual, Field interaction (DIFi) systems model of creativity.*

In Figure 1-2 above, the biocultural domain of movie screenwriting includes the *doxa* (orthodoxy) of screenwriting. Using Bourdieu’s (1996) understanding of doxa, Macdonald (2013) states:
Doxa is used to mean ‘received wisdom’, or everything the field says is the right (or wrong) way to do things. The screenwriting orthodoxy (what has been previously termed the screenwriting convention) is extracted from the doxa, and is codified in manuals and ‘how-to’ books. The orthodoxy deals almost entirely with the mainstream, and can become doctrine, or the way things ‘must’ be done. A heterodox view across the doxa gives us broader options and possibilities including some alternatives (Macdonald, 2013, p. 10).

The current thesis therefore adopts a heterodox view. One finding of the current study is that the guidelines of the current dominant movie screenwriting doxa - movie storytelling heuristics, as codified in various influential screenwriting manuals - have not been arrived at via empirical, scientific or statistical methods of enquiry. Instead the dominant screenwriting discourse 13 - as shaped by popular screenwriting manuals such as Syd Field (1979/2005), Robert McKee (1997), Blake Snyder (2005) and popular or mainstream screenwriting teachers in general - are influenced by earlier theorists of drama, including a traditional Aristotelian ‘proof by example’ methodology as used in The Poetics (Aristotle, c335 BCE). 14

The focal theory 15 of Consilience as used herein suggests some reasons that the extant doxa to date has not used empirical, scientific or statistical methods of enquiry; namely that a `Two Cultures’ problem of “science versus the arts” (Snow, 1959, 1969) appears evident in the dominant contemporary screenwriting discourse. Thus a more consilient approach such as that outlined by E. O. Wilson in Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge (1998) and undertaken by scholars in the domain of Evocriticism (1995-2016) 16 may bear fruitful results for aspiring screenwriters and scholars of creativity in movie screenwriting in general, primarily with regard to an emerging model of Human Nature in the domains of Evolutionary Psychology, Cognitive Science and Evocriticism. 17 One

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13 In the introduction to Discourse and Creativity (R. H. Jones, 2012) Jones identifies “‘big C Creativity’, the ‘world-changing’ aspect of creativity through which new ‘big D Discourses’ are formed and transformed” (Jones, 2012, p. 10). The dominant screenwriting orthodoxy (doxa) would constitute such “big D” Discourse in the biocultural domain of movies.


15 See (Phillips & Pugh 2005, p. 58) for the understanding of research focal theory as used here.

16 The Literature Review chapter contains a review of Evocriticism literature from 1995 to the present.

17 The Literature Review chapter also examines this emerging model of Human Nature.
key assumption of this thesis is that movie stories - as a communication medium, as drama, and as entertainment - aim to explore, illuminate and depict Human Nature. Additional background theory is drawn from film scholar David Bordwell (Bordwell, 1997, 2008) on creative ‘problem/solution’ models in filmmaking and also from evocritic Brian Boyd (B. Boyd, 2009, 2010) on ‘artistic cost/benefit ratios’ for both artists and audiences. Certain findings from the research in Great Flicks: Scientific Studies of Cinematic Creativity and Aesthetics (Simonton, 2011) on extant empirical studies of cinematic creativity and success are also drawn upon in order to illuminate various results and findings revealed by this study.

Once the movies in the 20 highest and also the 20 lowest extremes of cinema RoI datasets - and by contrast the contemporary screenwriting doxa guidelines - are critically examined and compared to one another it emerges that certain accepted widely-held beliefs in the screenwriting doxa are less than accurate. These findings have implications for professional screen readers and also for movie financiers who use the dominant movie screenwriting doxa as guidelines for decisions made under uncertainty when selecting or deselecting movie screenplays for production and cinema release.

1.2.1 The Economics of Movies - and Career Sustainability for Screenwriters

One movie-domain statistic that has remained consistent over the past 20 years is that: 70 percent of movies lose money (De Vany, 2004, p. 12; Vogel, 1990, p. 70; 2014, p. 83). This means that 70% of movies do not reach their intended audience-numbers in cinemas and thus achieve a financial break-even point. Complicating this issue is that ‘break-even’ in financial terms is not as simple as a movie literally making its production budget back via cinema box-office takings. On average movies need to make around two to three times their production budget in cinema release to reach break-even.
Typical audience-behaviour patterns also mean that on average, movies tend to subsequently make around the same value of their theatrical cinema revenue in ancillary media - on BluRay, DVD, television, cable release, airlines, and so on (Vogel 2011, pp. 95, 97). However De Vany (2004) notes there is really no such thing as a “typical” movie as movies are unique - not least due to their specific and idiosyncratic narrative - and movie performance can be unpredictable because audiences do not know what they want or like until after they have seen it (De Vany 2004, pp. 8-12).

Importantly for movie creatives and particularly for screenwriters who aim to communicate their movie story and its messages (themes) to a mass audience the specific differences in the form, style and content of the movies in these two movie-RoI datasets also suggest potential insights into achieving better creative and artistic ‘cost / benefit ratios’ for both the creative movie-storytelling artists and also better cost/benefit ratios for movie audiences who pay the admission price to see the movie in a cinema.

**On Movie Success and Failure**

Movie ‘success’ and ‘failure’ can be defined and measured in different ways including: critical success; awards; financial success; domain impact; wider cultural influence, and other parameters. Since 98% of screenplays presented to producers go unmade (Field, [1979] 2005, p. 8; Macdonald, 2003, p. 31; 2004b, p. 190; 2013, p. 67; Price, 2010, pp. 132-133; Stoddard, 1911, p. 1), any movie that is actually *produced* is indeed successful in at least one sense. However once released, the mass audience - reflecting Human Nature *en masse* - decides if it is worth experiencing the movie story in cinemas.

Movie-story success in *financial* terms can be measured in at least two main ways: via *box-office gross revenue* (cinema-audience-attendance figures) and via *Return-on-Investment* (RoI). However for the purposes of this research project and its focus on the movie-story’s *relative-audience-reach* (or RoI) aspect - namely movie-story creators’ and audiences’ cost/benefit ratios - it is firstly worth citing sociologist Victoria Alexander’s (2003) points on career sustainability in the movie industry. This is to

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20 Vogel (2011) notes: “The traditional estimate is that the box-office gross must be two or three times the negative cost to reach breakeven. However, for major-event pictures, this ratio might actually be nearer to two times” (Vogel, 2011, p. 233). See also (Follows, 2016, online).

21 Syd Field (1979/2005) notes: “A Hollywood production has to gross at least two and a half times its negative cost to break into profit. So, if a film cost $60 million to produce, it has to gross more than $150 million to just to break even. Not many films gross $150 million” (Field 2005, pp. 301-2).
recognize that the professional creative domain of cinema is extremely competitive both for individual creative artists and for their creative works. In *Sociology of the Arts: Exploring Fine and Popular Forms* Alexander (2003) surveys prior studies of movie careers in Hollywood and also the British movie industry, stating:

The riskiness, high stakes and uncertainty in the film industry set the stage for careers there, epitomized by the industry saying “you’re only as good as your last credit”… Thus, any type of failure on the part of individuals can be catastrophic for their personal careers, as there are many people waiting in the wings to take their place… Failures, however, are treated harshly, and a single failure can end the careers of those seen as responsible. The majority of producers and directors, for instance, make only one film in their lives (Faulkner and Anderson, p. 894-5). As Faulkner and Anderson put it, “money ‘seeks’ money and avoids low earners in this system of contracting… Performance ‘seeks’ performance. Those with low performance revenues appear to be avoided (or passed over) by those with high cumulative earnings.” (p. 901). (Alexander, 2003, pp. 153-154).

*Screen Australia* (2012) research on the Australian movie industry reveals the same problem-situation for movie creatives as movie directors are likely to only direct one movie in their career (Groves, 2012, online); often the key problem is that the movie story in question fails to reach a sufficiently wide audience in cinemas to break even, consequently ending that movie career.22

If, as the extant research demonstrates, the movie story - thus the creative choices made by a screenwriter23 in a screenplay - has crucial consequences for movie success or failure then the dominant screenwriting doxa guidelines about creating successful movie stories (and thus screenplays) might be examined for their accuracy against the empirical data of movie performance with audiences.

Another key assumption underpinning this study is that movie storytellers aim to communicate their story - and thus the message/s (theme/s) in that specific movie - to the widest audience possible and aim to achieve this goal for the least creative and artistic composition costs (Boyd 2009, pp. 207-8, 218-9, 230, 253; 2010, p. 438). This

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22 It is noted that screenwriters will make an RoI if they sell a screenplay to a production company; but ‘the ten-year rule’ in creativity (Hayes 1989; see also Iglesias 2001) applies, namely screenwriters often take around ten years to master the craft of writing a creative screenplay, i.e. a screen idea judged by the field as worth producing as a movie. Around 100 spec scripts are sold to Hollywood per year (Screencraft, 2015, online) and around 50,000 scripts are registered with the WGA each year; these are odds of 500:1 even after ten years of study and work - see also: (UnknownScreenwriter, 2011, online).

23 Or a Screen Idea Work Group (SIWG). The concept of the ‘Screen Idea Work Group’ is defined in (Macdonald 2004b, p. 10) and examined in the Literature Review chapter below.
obviously also includes the economic capital (production finance) required to create that movie story onscreen.\textsuperscript{24}

Popular movie storytelling constantly changes over time in both form and content due to the evolutionary phenomenon of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995, online; Parkinson, 2012). Average shot lengths (ASLs) in popular movies have become shorter over time (Bordwell, 2006a, online; Cutting, DeLong, & Nothelfer, 2010; Salt, 1974). If Human Nature itself is also evolving and adapting over time then some aspects of the stories and storytelling tropes that Human Nature responds to \textit{en masse} in global cinemas are changing over time, while certain canonical movie story traits currently remain stable across the top 20 RoI movies since 1968.


Distinct and different tangible (bio)cultural artifacts emerge during various potential stages of the evolution of a `screen idea’ (\textit{sensu} Macdonald 2004b, 2010b, 2013). This is to note that: a movie logline; a verbal movie `elevator pitch’; a three-page movie-story outline; a prose movie treatment; a movie screenplay; the various `rough’ and `fine’ cuts of an edited movie, and the final screenwork (movie) that is released in

\textsuperscript{24} The cost of a movie story includes the time, energy and money involved in the writer’s training in screenwriting, also the time taken to write the actual screenplay, and the movie’s production cost.

\textsuperscript{25} See the Literature Review for details on an emerging model of Human Nature, in the knowledge domain of Evolutionary Psychology.
cinemas are each distinct textual artifacts - although all of these may refer to the one (developing) story. Scholars who have examined the evolutionary process of a `screen idea’ or movie story - which may rematerialize as any or all of these specific emergent cultural artifacts mentioned above - include (Azlant, 1980; Carrière, 1994; Maras, 2009, 2011; Millard, 2014; Nelmes, 2011; Price, 2010, 2013; Talvio, 2013). However the understanding adopted herein of how a movie story concept most typically develops from initial screen idea through to completed screenwork (a movie viewed in cinemas by paying mass audiences) is that conception described and examined by Macdonald, as derived from (Philip Parker, 1998), and elucidated in the concept of the Screen Idea Work Group (Macdonald, 2004b, 2010b, 2013), a process that is also explicated in The Screenplay Business: Managing Creativity in the Film Industry (Bloore, 2013).

The key understanding implicit in the screenwriting `how-to’ manuals - and thus the doxa of the dominant mainstream screenwriting convention - is that the movie story, including its story Premise, Characters, Plot, Genre, Themes, Structure, Dialogue, Settings, Style, Pacing and Tone is the primary information that is communicated to others in the screenplay form for screen readers, cast, crew and production financiers; and is ultimately a plan for the story - and its storytelling - in the screenwork (movie) form of the screen idea for a cinema-going audience.

Screenplays are not movies – thus the traditional understanding of a screenplay (via the doxa from the manuals) is that the story is presented as a set of specific narrative details on paper (a screenplay) for the movie cast and crew to realize or interpret, collaborate on and co-create in front of a camera and in the film edit. Paraphrased, the manuals assume that the screenplay contains the story specifics that will ideally and ultimately become a movie narrative in cinemas. In Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice (Maras, 2009), Maras convincingly argues that the “conception” (so-called writing) and the “execution” (so-called filmmaking) should not be considered as separate phases of the creation of any given screenwork. Macdonald (2013, p. 10) notes that the ’how-to’ manuals codify various traditional screen idea (movie story and thus screenplay)

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26 This is to note that the various drafts of the screen idea (including movie screenplay drafts) and the completed screenwork (finished movie) are each distinct and different tangible cultural artifacts.
27 or in short: the movie visuals, sounds and onscreen text
heuristic “do’s” and “don’t’s” as that story is developed. While a screen idea (movie story) passes through various stages of evolution and development - with a doxa often guiding and impacting its development - this study aims to compare some of these dominant screenwriting doxa heuristics to the empirical data of extremes of theatrical cinema movie RoI.

In the PhD dissertation *The Presentation of the Screen Idea in Narrative Film-making* Macdonald (2004) concludes that the dominant screenwriting doxa appears difficult to challenge (2004, pp. 111, 284). However one key contribution of this study to knowledge in the screenwriting domain is that: the herein observed differences in the screenwriting doxa to the examined extremes of movie RoI would appear to present one possible challenge the dominant doxa by suggesting a new set of movie storytelling (screenwriting) heuristics. The resulting theory - of determinants of both high and low movie-story RoI – may be further empirically tested and investigated as “possible winning strategies” by other researchers in the domain of movie story creation or screenwriting creativity.29

One of the key observations about theory that emerges from this research is that Evolutionary Theory - including the Systems model of creativity, and knowledge from Evolutionary Psychology - appear to provide valuable insights into understanding the phenomenon of creativity in movies, and also insights into Human Nature via the reported large-scale statistical behaviour of the international cinema going public. In the article ‘Toward a Consilient Study of Literature’ evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker (2007) suggests that popular culture is worthy of investigation from the consilient evolutionary perspective:

> The seldom-analyzed difference between high culture on the one hand and low and middlebrow culture is something of an embarrassment for research in the psychology of the arts… though Darwinian literary critics aspire to invoke human universals to explain the arts, their professional standards and their personal tastes may lead them to study forms of art that appeal to 1% of the population (people like themselves) and to ignore the forms that appeal to 99% (Pinker, 2007, p. 176).

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28 In the paper *Stories, Conferences and Manuals: The normative function of screenwriting manuals in their historical context*, (Tieber, 2012) Claus Tieber also notes how manuals shape the doxa, and astutely questions how the screenwriting manuals should be read, treated, and contextualized.

29 And indeed by practising movie screenwriters if they should choose to test the Findings detailed herein with movie audiences.
Thus on the one hand, this research study is focussed on both mainstream and also independent (‘alternative’) international cinema-release movies - a major communication and popular culture entertainment medium - and aims to place such cinema bioculture under an Evolutionary lens.

These various Evolutionary lenses include:

(a) using Evolutionary Psychology to suggest why some movies are liked en masse, and other movies conversely disliked, ignored, or avoided;

(b) the Anna Karenina Principle from evolutionary theory (Bornmann & Marx, 2012; Diamond, 1997; Simonton, 2011) to understand various key traits of movie story success and also failure; and

(c) the evolutionary, Systems (aka ‘sociocultural’) model of creativity to explain the status of both “canonical” or “selected” movies (i.e., the top 20 RoI movies) and also the “archive” (non-canonical) or mass-audience “deselected” (i.e., the bottom 20 RoI) movies. This view correlates with De Vany’s model of the cinema environment as “evolutionary survival tournaments” (2004, pp. 14, 18).

On the other hand, this study examines the dominant screenwriting doxa on how to conceive, develop, and thus create a “good” movie story - and thereby write a “good” screenplay as the key contributing element in the complex systems process of creating a successful movie – namely, a movie that may have a greater probability of reaching its target audience based on its story and storytelling characteristics.

In the cultural domain of theatrical-cinema-release narrative-fiction feature films (movies) extant research shows that the primary cause of audience-reach or “social contagion” (and thus RoI) for a movie is “positive word-of-mouth” or “information cascades” (De Vany 2004, passim; Simonton 2011, pp. 75-6). Movie performance researchers have converged on the conclusion that the movie story is the key determinant of movie success and conversely of failure.\(^3\) While the primary cause of positive word-of-mouth for a specific movie is thus its story, potential causes of

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\(^3\) See: (De Vany 2004, p. 6; Simonton in Kaufman, James C. & Simonton 2014, pp. 3-4; Lee & Gillen 2011, p. 18).
negative word-of-mouth about a movie are not merely the movie story but can be many and varied. 31

As a synthesis of the Literature Review - and as consilient research enquiry into cultural artifacts implies (B. Boyd, 2013; Gottschall, 2008a, p. 13; 2013) - a hypothesis is herein advanced, and also tested. This is specifically a Theory of the story elements and characteristics expected to be found in future top 20 RoI movies, and conversely the elements and characteristics unlikely to be found in them given the past empirical data and the emergent patterns. This new Theory of high-cost/benefit ratio movie story is referred to as the StoryAlity Theory. The component criteria of the theory are retrospectively tested against a subsequent top 20 RoI movie that emerged in 2012, in order to assess the StoryAlity Theory’s predictive power.32

Chapter Five of the dissertation Methodology describes and defends the methodology and mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) research approach employed in the study including: an examination of the relevant problem-situation; the scope of the study; and certain obvious key strengths and limitations of the study.

The data theory33 employed in this study is a “post-positivist critical realist” or a broadly Popperian approach (Popper, 1999, [1972] 1979). This can be seen as a middle ground between what The Foundations of Research (Grix 2007, p.78) describes as the extremes of the positivist versus the interpretivist research paradigms, each respectively aimed primarily at explanation (in positivist) or understanding (in interpretivist) research paradigms.

Influenced by a study of twelve (variously) UK and American screenwriting manuals in the PhD dissertation The Presentation of the Screen Idea in Narrative Film-making (Macdonald 2004) this study method involved firstly the collation of statistics on screenwriting manuals to determine their influence and impact on the screenwriting

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31 As with Tolstoy’s “happy” and conversely “unhappy” families in the novel Anna Karenina (Tolstoy, [1878] 1960, p. 1) it appears that in terms of attracting and maintaining mass audience attention there are many more ways to fail than there are to succeed with any specific movie narrative. See chapter 4.4.2, on The Anna Karenina Principle applied to movie success and failure.
32 The StoryAlity Theory is a set of movie-story heuristics, as outlined in the concluding section of the Theoretical Perspective chapter and presented in more detail in the Appendix section 10-20 – ‘StoryAlity Theory – Heuristics’.
33 Again, see (Phillips & Pugh 2005, p. 58) for the understanding of data theory as used here.
doxa, and an examination of various screen reader texts that are used to train professional screen readers (movie story analysts) to determine those manuals regarded as the most influential in shaping the dominant doxa on movie story. Various ‘how-to’ texts which shape this doxa are authored by screenwriting instructors who typically present at international screenwriting festivals and seminars, namely mainstream screenwriting manuals by authors such as Syd Field, Robert McKee, Linda Seger, John Truby, Blake Snyder, Michael Hauge, Chris Phillips & Melanie Anne Phillips, and Christopher Vogler among others. From the works of these authors a reasonably-representative sample of four manuals namely Syd Field (1979/2005); McKee (1997); Snyder (2005); and Truby (2007) was chosen for detailed analysis. The collation and interpretation of specific guidelines from this set of four contemporary screenwriting manuals was then undertaken in order to determine the consensus among these manuals on 15 key elements of their prescriptions for movie story creation in a screenplay.

The screenwriting manuals themselves suggest various key categories for examination due to the structural organization of their chapters, such as movie story: Premise, Structure, Plot, Genre, Character, Theme, Setting and Dialogue. The document headings in professional story analyst script reports (example screenplay ‘coverage’) from screen reader instructional texts such as in Reading For A Living: How to be a Professional Story Analyst for Film and Television (Katahn, 1990, p. 66) also suggest similar component elements of a movie story (thus screenplay) as assessed by industry “gatekeepers” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2015, p. 53) aka “intermediaries” (Sawyer, 2006, p. 124) in the field of movie production.

When the four contemporary manuals were examined the key components of the doxa that were focussed on and coded for include the fifteen categories of movie story:


34 The scope of the current study did not allow for detailed analysis of all of the manuals by all of the major authors identified as highly-influential screenwriting instructors; thus the aforementioned ‘reasonably-representative’ sample of four popular screenwriting manuals.

35 An additional 35 other aspects of the doxa were coded for in the manuals, however while these aspects appear in the Data-Tables of the attached Appendix there is not scope to examine them in detail in a
A comparison of these same fifteen key movie-story doxa guidelines to the observed content in the two sets of twenty (i.e., 40 total) movies was then undertaken, namely a comparison of these 15 doxa guidelines to the top 20 and bottom 20 Return-on-Investment movies. Movie RoI data was sourced online from cinema industry market research service The Numbers LLC (Nash Information Services, 2012, online).36

In the purposive selection of these two RoI movie datasets there was thus no preference given in advance to any particular movie type, style, genre, production methodology, production budget or nation of movie origin. Assuming that the global statistical figures are reasonably accurate, the international box-office audience-attendance figures and production budgets of these movies “are what they are” and thus the global cinema audience’s viewing decisions as a whole have determined these two highest and lowest RoI datasets. The datasets examined therefore include any type of standard theatrical movie, including both non-Hollywood and Hollywood movies alike.

Viewed from a Western-world perspective37 the data collated thus includes both ‘foreign’ and foreign-language as well as independent and Eastern (non-Western-world) movies. The researcher’s personal preferences have no influence on the selection of the individual movies of the two movie datasets; the 20 highest and 20 lowest RoI movies were decided empirically by the extant global cinema box-office audience statistics, namely the wider movie field. However since 40 movies out of an estimated 500,000 movies in existence38 is a miniscule data sample, the main facet reflected by these two extremes of movie RoI are the extremes of audience “social contagion” for the 20 highest RoI movies and conversely audience avoidance for the 20 lowest RoI movies.

The countries of origin of the various movies of the two datasets (sourced from IMDb.com) are presented in Tables 1-1 and 1-2 below. The titles in these two datasets considered to be classical mainstream ‘Hollywood’ in terms of their conception, finance and production are indicated below, in bold text. Box office figures (cinema ticket

dissertation of this size without all becoming unduly compressed. Also these aspects are of secondary importance to the 15 primary component-elements of movie story examined in the study as listed here.  
36 See: http://web.archive.org/web/20131015111141/http://www.thenumbers.com/movies/records/budgets.php (i.e., Wayback Machine web archive page, as at 15th Oct 2013). Note that, the movies older than 70 years which appear in the top 20 RoI list are excluded from the dataset; see the ’Data Collation’ section in the Methodology chapter below, for a detailed explanation.  
37 In this specific researcher’s case: an Australian perspective.  
38 It is estimated there are approximately 500,000 movies in existence (Vogel 2011, p. 102).
sales) have been converted to an *Estimated Global Audience Reach*, namely an estimate of the number of individual people who experienced that movie story in cinemas.\(^{39}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>PRODUCTION BUDGET</th>
<th>ESTIMATED GLOBAL AUDIENCE REACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$15,000,000</td>
<td>26,224,221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>$200,000,000</td>
<td>37,081,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$600,000,000</td>
<td>48,877,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>$7,000,000</td>
<td>492,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$114,000,000</td>
<td>22,900,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$1,000,000,000</td>
<td>105,633,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$325,000,000</td>
<td>29,914,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$777,000,000</td>
<td>79,096,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$27,000,000</td>
<td>931,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>$150,000,000</td>
<td>2,900,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$400,000,000</td>
<td>7,430,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$500,000,000</td>
<td>9,140,461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$550,000,000</td>
<td>22,213,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$1,200,000,000</td>
<td>16,601,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$7,000,000</td>
<td>91,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$375,000,000</td>
<td>10,575,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$10,500,000,000</td>
<td>269,697,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>55,969,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$11,000,000,000</td>
<td>357,802,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>60,912,220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1-1 – The Top 20 RoI Movies – Year / Country of Origin & Production / Production Budget / Estimated Audience Reach*

As Table 1-1 (above) indicates, the top 20 RoI movies as a dataset are dominated by movies originating from the USA (16/20 movies) although only eight of that sixteen are considered to be ‘classical Hollywood movies’; the remaining eight movies (of the 16/20) from the USA were independently written, financed and produced movies which achieved a cinema release.

By contrast the table below lists the international Bottom 20 RoI movies, again with Hollywood movies indicated in **bold**. Box-office in the table below is again converted

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\(^{39}\) *Estimated Global Audience Reach* is here determined by dividing the total ticket-sales figure by the average ticket price in that year, to determine a very approximate estimate of the number of audience-members for that specific movie story in the cinema; although some ticket purchases may well be ‘repeat customers’. For average cinema-ticket price estimates by year, see: [http://www.boxofficemojo.com/about/adjuster.htm](http://www.boxofficemojo.com/about/adjuster.htm)
to an *Estimated Global Audience Reach* namely the approximate number of people who experienced the movie story in cinemas.\(^{40}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>PRODUCTION BUDGET</th>
<th>ESTIMATED GLOBAL AUDIENCE REACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen's Men</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Germany/Austria/USA</td>
<td>$15,000,000</td>
<td>3,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>2,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>1,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$7,000,000</td>
<td>5,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$5,500,000</td>
<td>9,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$9,500,000</td>
<td>15,798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Germany/UK</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>13,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$2,000,000</td>
<td>6,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>France/Germany/USA</td>
<td>$17,000,000</td>
<td>52,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>36,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>USA/Germany/France</td>
<td>$50,000,000</td>
<td>166,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>China/Hong Kong</td>
<td>$12,000,000</td>
<td>39,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>USA/Germany/Belgium</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>46,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>39,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>39,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$20,000,000</td>
<td>81,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>17,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>USA/Germany</td>
<td>$55,000,000</td>
<td>311,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Netherlands/Hungary/UK</td>
<td>$3,000,000</td>
<td>20,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come with the Rain</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>France/Hong Kong/Ireland/UK/Spain</td>
<td>$18,000,000</td>
<td>79,521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1-2 – Bottom 20 RoI Movies (Biggest Loss on Investment) - Year / Country of Origin & Production / Production Budget / Estimated Audience Reach*

The bottom 20 RoI movie list as a dataset thus proportionally contains many more Hollywood movies (17/20 movies) than does the top 20 dataset and these (*Table 1-2 above*) are movies which ultimately proved flops with the international theatrical cinema-going public. If ‘benefit’ is considered as movie *audience-reach* and ‘cost’ is considered as *movie-story creation budget* then in the above two extremes of success and failure, Hollywood fails more frequently than it succeeds in creating movie stories that reach a wide enough audience to achieve a positive benefit-to-cost ratio - or a positive *audience-reach to storytelling-cost* ratio.

To recapitulate the data selection process, the top 20 RoI movies were decided globally via the reported statistics of the international audience’s movie-going behaviour and conversely the bottom 20 RoI movies were decided by the international audience’s movie-going avoidance behaviour. Thus no matter who investigates the top 20 and also

\(^{40}\) See the previous Footnote on the calculation undertaken to arrive at *Estimated Global Audience Reach*. \(\)
the bottom 20 RoI movies (as recorded at the year 2012) they will inevitably arrive at the same dataset of these two lists of 20 (40 in total) specific movies above, regardless of the individual personal movie preferences and tastes of the human researcher. Viewed from the creative perspective of their screenwriters, casts and crews, the movies of these datasets are thus empirically the 20 highest and the 20 lowest movie storytelling artistic and creative ‘benefit/cost ratio’ movies. Since the movie story and its creation as a screenwork are considered as paramount in this comparison of ‘movie story performance to the screenwriting doxa guidelines’, the highest performing 20 and lowest performing 20 movie stories are herein compared.

The key reason for selecting and studying the extreme top and bottom 20 RoI movies is to discover what were the most (and also least) effective - and thus ‘creative’ - movie stories overall as judged by global audiences (Human Nature en masse) and thus, what lessons might be learned for movie storytellers: primarily for screenwriters, but also movie production creatives (casts and crews) and the movie field in general.

The point of view adopted in this thesis is examining a key problem-situation for screenwriters and filmmakers as storytellers, and thus as mass media communicators. Namely one goal of a storyteller in any medium is to maximize the benefit - or the spread (communication or transmission) - of a specific story in bioculture among audience members, in comparison to the story’s composition costs (the costs in time, effort and money in creating that specific story), and thus screenplay, and thus subsequent onscreen movie story.

One key question thus becomes: What are the common characteristics of those stories that (in comparison to their story-creation costs) have spread the furthest in bioculture?

As examined in the Literature Review on Studies of Movie Performance (below), in their summaries of the extant research on movie performance, other scholars41 demonstrate that elements that have been shown not to be causally linked or correlated to a movie’s spread in bioculture42 include: the size of overall marketing budgets; the casting of movie ‘stars’; the size of production budgets; the size of the advertising budget; the number of screens; positive critical reviews; awards; specific genres; marquee-name (i.e., famous) directors; and MPAA ratings. Marketing for example

42 namely its audience-attendance statistics
clearly does not change the audience appeal of a specific movie story (De Vany 2004, p. 4); neither do the other non-movie-narrative-related factors listed above. The three key quotations cited below reflect the primacy of movie story for a movie’s ultimate audience-reach in cinemas, and thus the transmission of that movie story, and thus the communication of its various messages (themes) to an audience:

- Story is the most essential and important, and therefore the most powerful creative asset in the motion picture industry. It is more powerful than money (J. J. Lee & Gillen, 2011, p. 18).
- …when moviegoers are surveyed about what sends them to the movie theater, they will often point to the story as a critical determinant of preference (De Silva 1998)… [the] script constitutes the single most important aspect of cinematic success (Simonton in Kaufman & Simonton, 2014, pp. 3-4).
- Hard-headed science puts the creative process at the very center of the motion picture universe… There is no reason for management to get in the way of the creative process. Character, creativity and good storytelling trump everything else (De Vany 2004, p. 6).

In short the extant research shows that causes of movie success - or the spread of a movie story among cinema audiences, and thus in the wider culture - is due to the movie story itself; other factors have been eliminated in the extant research. Thus once other suspected causes besides the story have all been eliminated, the extremely-successful movie stories can be examined for their `story-power’ - and the extremely-unsuccessful movies for their lack of such story-power. If we examine the top 20 and bottom 20 RoI movies in light of movie story audience-reach / creation-cost then such story-power can be expressed numerically as their mathematical movie-story `benefit/cost ratio’ namely the benefit to cinema audiences of that movie story versus the cost of creating (telling) that movie story.

Table 1-3 (below) demonstrates this concept.

---

43 Remarkably, most laypersons (members of the movie-going public) and even some film scholars appear convinced that these non-narrative elements of a movie contribute significantly to its success despite all the extant studies to the contrary. It is for this reason that - at the risk of repetition - the three opening quotations of this thesis are repeated here, in the hope of avoiding any invalid criticisms.
In this view the production budget of each movie-story is considered to be one unit. Thus the movie story of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) reached 71 times its cinema audience compared to its movie story creation cost, with a story-power ratio of 71:1. *Star Wars* (1977) reached 73 times its audience compared to its cost, or has a story-power of 73:1. By contrast *Mad Max* (1980) is 499:1, and *Paranormal Activity*’s story-power is over 13,000:1. This story-power phenomenon is what this research refers to as the primary 'benefit/cost' ratio for movie storytellers and their audience. The movie-story audience in each case does not appear to care what the movie budget was, the marketing-spend, or even who is acting in the movie - as long as that movie story itself is rewarding and thus becomes socially contagious via word-of-mouth.

The doxa of screenwriting in the 'how-to' manuals aims to instruct on effective movie story creation techniques. This research thesis suggests that the most effective movie stories are those with the greatest 'benefit/cost ratio' for their story artists and creators.

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44 If movie 'budget' or 'marketing spend' was indeed causal in resultant movie story success, the movie budget figures in the Table above would be in a simple ascending order, based on the Marketing Budget figures in each case. It is also noted that, on average, a movie’s marketing spend is around equivalent to the movie story production budget (Vogler 2011, p. 143). See also the attached digital *Appendix* (XLS file) for approximate Marketing Spends for the movies in the dataset, where these figures were available.

45 (namely its viewing benefits outweigh its cinema admission cost)
and their audience. As evocritic Brian Boyd suggests in *Evolution, Literature and Film: A Reader* (2010): 46

> Artists of any kind will seek to minimize composition effort - by operating within existing artistic modes and traditions, by recombining available models, by adopting readymade subjects - as much as is compatible with maximizing the attention and status a work can earn. Like artists, audiences too seek a favourable cost/benefit ratio (B. Boyd, 2010, p. 438).

This ‘benefit/cost ratio’ is therefore not primarily a financial consideration; it is instead a consideration of why creatives might choose to tell specific movie stories. The key assumption here is that movie storytellers - especially screenwriters - aim to reach the widest audience possible with their specific movie story. While researchers have found the movie narrative itself is the most important causal factor in success, 47 ironically in the research literature it remains one of the least-investigated elements of movies. This is not surprising however once the inherent complexity and the high information content of most movie stories is appreciated (Simonton 2011, pp. 108-9). 48

Movie stories contain a large amount of information; in examining movie screenplays Robert Watson’s (2010) Masters thesis research finds that on average individual movie plots (in screenplay form) typically contain around 2,000 actions (‘story events’ or ‘plot beats’) (Watson, 2010, pp. 13, 44). Moreover this figure of 2,000 story events in a typical movie does not even include all of the specific details of character, dialogue, themes, music and sound effects, or movie *mise en scène*. Recall also that movie story analysis company C4 49 examines 150 elements in movie stories across all genres (Bruzzese, 2016, online) while Epagogix reportedly examines over 30 million story elements in a movie screenplay in order to predict its RoI as a movie (Dormehl, 2014a, pp. 167-168). Individual movies are information-rich, thus comparative direct-content-analysis studies of movies are time and energy intensive.

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46 It should be noted that Boyd’s (2009, 2010) term “cost/benefit ratio” and the term “benefit/cost ratio” as used in this thesis are understood to be the same concept, but are merely expressed in a different order here, namely, to reflect: “audience-reach / story composition cost”.
48 Simonton’s (2011) extensive review of the literature notes only two noteworthy direct content analyses of movie story elements, namely, one on protagonists (Beckwith 2009) and one on storyline (Eliashberg et al, 2007) (Simonton 2011, pp. 108-9).
49 This figure of 150 story elements examined is from the main page of the C4 company website: http://c4-rd.com/ (accessed 20th January 2016).
As another comparison of ‘benefit versus cost’ we might briefly examine the top ten overall widest-audience-reach movies in cinemas in terms of their story-power:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PRODUCTION BUDGET</th>
<th>GLOBAL TICKET SALES</th>
<th>'STORY POWER'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Avatar</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$425,000,000</td>
<td>$2,783,918,982</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Titanic</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>$200,000,000</td>
<td>$2,185,672,302</td>
<td>11:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Marvel's The Avengers</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$225,000,000</td>
<td>$1,514,279,547</td>
<td>7:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part II</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$125,000,000</td>
<td>$1,328,111,219</td>
<td>11:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>$94,000,000</td>
<td>$1,141,408,667</td>
<td>12:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Transformers: Dark of the Moon</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$195,000,000</td>
<td>$1,123,794,076</td>
<td>6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Skyfall</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$200,000,000</td>
<td>$1,108,894,081</td>
<td>6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Dark Knight Rises</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$250,000,000</td>
<td>$1,079,343,943</td>
<td>4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Toy Story 3</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$200,000,000</td>
<td>$1,063,759,456</td>
<td>5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>$225,000,000</td>
<td>$1,060,615,812</td>
<td>5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average 'Story Power'*:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1-4 – The Widest Audience-Reach movies – and, their 'Story-Power' (Benefit/Cost) ratio

Table 1-4 above demonstrates that where movie RoI (storytelling 'benefit/cost ratio') is considered, the top ten widest audience-reach movies to date (as of this writing) merely average a 'story-power' of 7:1. By contrast the top 20 RoI movies all had a story-power that is at least ten times greater than this, at over 71:1, and sometimes almost two hundred times higher than the so-called 'Hollywood blockbuster movie’ ratio of 7:1.

Crucially however, the high production budgets of the ten movies listed above (Table 1-4) are well out of the practical reach of around 99% of screenwriters since movie investors are risk-averse;\(^{50}\) whereas such low movie-story creation budgets of USD $7,000 or USD$14,000 (or more broadly, less than USD$1.8M which is the average budget the top 20 RoI movies) are much more accessible to early- or mid-career filmmakers, as opposed to the $100M+ movie-story creation budgets of the Hollywood movie stories in Table 1-4.\(^{51}\) The above ten (expensive) movies were also not

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\(^{50}\) See: ‘Are They All Crazy, or Just Risk-Averse?’ (Ravid, 2004) and ‘Investing in Movies’ (Ferrari & Rudd, 2006).

\(^{51}\) At the 2016 ANZCA conference, Professor Stuart Cunningham (quite rightly) noted that this study of top and bottom 20 RoI movies is skewed towards lower-budget movies. This was intentional so that the findings could be of more benefit to more filmmakers - including early and mid-career filmmakers, and filmmaking students. Arguably late-career filmmakers do not need much help. For ANZCA2016, see: [https://storyality.wordpress.com/2016/07/13/storyality134-anzca2016-conference/](https://storyality.wordpress.com/2016/07/13/storyality134-anzca2016-conference/)
speculative ("spec") screenplays - but were conceived, written and developed either by long-established and already-successful filmmakers, and often also by writer-directors such as James Cameron or Peter Jackson - or else were created by studios hiring successive screenwriters to adapt licensed story franchises. Given the "ten-year rule" in creativity (Hayes, 1989, p. 139; Simonton, 2011, p. 119; Weisberg, 2006, pp. 173, 213-174, 222), new recruits to the field of movie screenwriting are not going to be invited (or hired) to adapt best-selling novels such as Harry Potter, James Bond, Twilight or Lord of the Rings franchises.

One key finding herein is therefore that the screenwriting manuals which influence the doxa are - for the most part - examining the wrong movie datasets and thus the wrong screenplays - if effective movie-story creation and thus effective movie-storytelling pedagogy, screenwriting-career viability and sustainability is their primary aim.

52 Regarding the "ten-year rule", in 'Inching our way up Mount Olympus: The evolving-systems approach to creative thinking' which includes a study of Charles Darwin's "big-C" Creativity, the authors note: "creative work takes a long time" (Gruber & Davis, 1988, p. 265). For the "four-c" model of creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009, 2013), see also the subsequent Literature Review section on Creativity.
By way of further comparison we can also examine the lack of story-power (or the absence of audience “social contagion”) of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories, as in Table 1-5 below.\(^{53}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PRODUCTION BUDGET</th>
<th>GLOBAL TICKET SALES</th>
<th>’STORY POWER’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen's Men</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$15,000,000</td>
<td>$22,723</td>
<td>1:660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$19,176</td>
<td>1:507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>$9,871</td>
<td>1:355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$7,000,000</td>
<td>$46,488</td>
<td>1:151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$56,653</td>
<td>1:97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$9,500,000</td>
<td>$118,482</td>
<td>1:80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$83,556</td>
<td>1:60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>$2,000,000</td>
<td>$37,227</td>
<td>1:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>$17,000,000</td>
<td>$364,007</td>
<td>1:47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$241,719</td>
<td>1:41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$50,000,000</td>
<td>$1,250,617</td>
<td>1:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$12,000,000</td>
<td>$310,946</td>
<td>1:39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$290,875</td>
<td>1:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$295,750</td>
<td>1:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$312,857</td>
<td>1:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$20,000,000</td>
<td>$645,024</td>
<td>1:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>$113,783</td>
<td>1:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$55,000,000</td>
<td>$1,807,990</td>
<td>1:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$3,000,000</td>
<td>$101,713</td>
<td>1:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come with the Rain</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$18,000,000</td>
<td>$627,422</td>
<td>1:29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(\text{Table 1-5 – The Bottom 20 RoI Movies and their absence of ‘Story-Power’}\)

In Table 1-5 (above) the Bottom 20 RoI movie figures are instead negative (fractional) ratios - rather than being a positive story-power (relative audience-reach) ratio of say 71:1 or greater as with the top 20 RoI movies where each story-unit (i.e., each movie) reaches 71 times or greater its own creation-value with audiences -.

Thus for example in story-power terms, for every dollar of its story creation cost \textit{All The Queen’s Men} (2002) returned less than one cent for each dollar. More importantly for a screenwriter, it only reached \(1/660^{th}\) of the assumed target audience for that specific movie story.\(^{54}\) The key argument of this thesis thus rests upon the idea that ‘story-

\(^{53}\) It should be noted - as is examined in more detail later in this dissertation (chapter 4.4.2) - that the individual causes of movie-story failure can also be multiple, as movie stories tend to operate in a complex configurational manner.

\(^{54}\) even if break-even point is 1:1 once the movie story’s audience-reach is divided by its composition-cost
power’ is clearly most evident in the top 20 RoI movies and is conversely most lacking in the bottom 20 RoI movies.\textsuperscript{55}

In terms of the key ‘problem-situation’ for movie-story creation - thus screenwriters, with regard to the doxa about storytelling - as evocritic Brian Boyd (2010) suggests:

I suggest that we redefine artists’ primary problem not as expressing themselves or their times, or as trying to convey meanings, but as creating works to maximize audience attention and response - and hence their own status - within the current economy of attention, given their position within this art mode (Boyd in Boyd, Carroll and Gottschall, 2010, p. 438).

The work On The History Of Film Style (Bordwell 1997, pp. 149-58) also devotes eight pages to ‘Problems and Solutions’ in cinema, covering issues of creativity, agency and structure, cultural evolution, the anti-consilient problems of post-structuralist “Grand Theory” and ‘cost/benefit ratios’ - all of which are salient to the broad line of argument in this thesis. Bordwell (1997) also discusses the change over time of movie ‘schemas’ and movie screen language (1997, pp. 61-8) in an evolutionary manner that can be seen to apply to both biology and bioculture. Just as genes within a gene pool can undergo replication, revision, synthesis and also rejection (thus: deselection), so too memes\textsuperscript{56} (such as movie ‘schemas’, including cinematic storytelling stylistic techniques) in the ‘meme pool’ (i.e., in bioculture) undergo a similar evolutionary process, as revealed by their differential selective-retention (or conversely rejection) by the movie field, including ultimately by the wider international movie-going audience.

Importantly, this research process of examining the polar extremes of movie RoI in comparison to the screenwriting doxa is - ironically - not primarily driven by issues of financial profitability. The focus of this research enquiry is instead on movie story-creation (screenwriting), and on the subsequent spread of those same movie stories in

\textsuperscript{55} However many different problems of movie storytelling appear evident in the bottom 20 RoI dataset of movie stories, as examined later in this thesis with specific regard to the Anna Karenina principle.

\textsuperscript{56} “Meme” is the term for the unit of culture (or, “unit of cultural transmission”), as coined by Richard Dawkins in (Dawkins, [1976] 2006, p. 196). See also: Evolutionary Psychology: An Introduction on memes (Workman & Reader, 2008, pp. 409-416). In creativity research, Csikszentmihalyi refers to cultural artifacts (such as movies, and stories - or ideas, processes, and products) as “memes” (Butler-Bowdon, 2007, p. 70; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996b, pp. 7, 8, 41, 318, 319, 321, 372). See also: 'The Holon/Parton Theory of the Unit of Culture (or the Meme, and Narreme): In Science, Media, Entertainment and the Arts’ (Velikovsky, 2016) for more detail on movies, and movie stories as memes - or as units of bioculture.
bioculture - thus the aim is to extract and reverse-engineer more effective 'benefit/cost ratio' movie-narrative screenwriting heuristics that can be of use to screenwriters, using the top and bottom 20 RoI movie stories as case studies.

Since the movie screenwriting doxa does not in general use statistical or rigorous comparative analytical methods in arriving at its key subjects of study (i.e., screenplays and movies), the current screenwriting doxa - in terms of the 15 key doxa guidelines of story creation examined herein - is unlikely to match closely with such (new) heuristics, as is revealed by this analysis of the top and bottom 20 RoI movie stories.

Chapter Six of the dissertation, Data Analysis analyses the data collected for the study, comparing fifteen key story creation guidelines of the doxa - extracted from a cross-textual analysis of the four selected screenwriting manuals (Field 1979/2005; McKee 1997; Snyder 2005; Truby 2007) - to a direct content analysis of the movie data in the two extremes of movie-story RoI.

Examples of both these Data Analyses, i.e.: (1) The Doxa as derived from the Four Manuals, and also (2) A Data Analysis of the 40 Movies in the Dataset are presented below so as to indicate the methodological approach undertaken in this research.
Example DATA ANALYSIS (1):

'Movie Duration / Screenplay Length’ - (The doxa derived from the four manuals)

A summary of the four manuals examined on: Movie Duration / Screenplay Length.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>SCREENWRITING DOXA PRESCRIPTION / GUIDELINE</th>
<th>REFERENCE/S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movie Duration / Screenplay Length</td>
<td>Syd Field suggests: 120 mins/pages</td>
<td>Field 1979/2005 (pp. 12, 22, 91, 142-3, 159, 247, 272)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McKee suggests: 120 mins/pages</td>
<td>McKee 1997 (p. 219)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Snyder: 110 mins/pages [also 90-130 p]</td>
<td>Snyder 2005 (pp. 71, 78) [143]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Truby: 120 mins/pages</td>
<td>Truby 2007 (p. 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSENSUS</strong></td>
<td>110-120 mins/pages</td>
<td>Range is: from 90, to 130 minutes / pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1-6 - Example of Data Analysis (Doxa, on: Screenplay Length / Movie Duration)

The table above reveals a general consensus in the examined doxa, of around 110 to 120 screenplay pages / movie minutes.

Below are the selected key quotes from each of the four modern-era screenwriting manuals which best exemplify their prescriptions for movie story and thus, screenplay length. In Screenplay, Syd Field (1979/2005) notes the “one page-per-minute” rule of thumb:

> Since one page of screenplay equals approximately one minute of screen time, most dialogue scenes need be no longer than two or three pages. That's two or three minutes of screen time, and believe it or not, that's an enormous amount of screen time (Field 2005, p. 166).


The latter point of Field’s is interesting given that by contrast, this study reveals that the top 20 RoI movie Primer (2004) is only 77 minutes in length. However Primer is also
an independent movie and was not a Hollywood spec script or a Hollywood movie production, as an independent movie made in Dallas, Texas (Allen 2007, online).

McKee (1997) also prescribes 120 pages/minutes as typical screenplay/movie length.

Meanwhile Snyder (2005) suggests 110 pages, though subsequently also includes a range of “90 to 130” pages.

Despite making no specific page-count prescriptions, while harshly and sarcastically critiquing so-called ‘3-Act’ structure Truby (2007) indirectly suggests 120 pages for screenplay length (i.e., 30 + 60 + 30 pages).

In summary, the doxa consensus from the four manuals above prescribes 110 to 120 pages for ideal screenplay length - implying a movie duration of 110 to 120 minutes.

However while such a screenplay length may well be a current ‘convention’ these heuristics do not incorporate “benefit/cost ratio” thinking since if the same movie story can be told in 90 minutes rather than in 120 it is also less costly to create that story as a movie.
Example DATA ANALYSIS (2):

'Movie Duration/Screenplay Length’ of the 40 Movies in the dataset

Below is an analysis of the duration - and by interpolation also the approximate screenplay-length (in pages) - of the 40 movies in the two extremes of RoI datasets.57

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>MOVIE DURATION (MINUTES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1-7 – Movie Duration – Top 20 RoI

From the collated data in the table above, the average top 20 RoI movie is 93 minutes or screenplay pages in duration/length.

If we also average out the median (88 mins) and the mean duration (93 mins) to give a more realistic measure of central tendency, this figure comes out at 90 minutes, suggesting an ideal high RoI movie story length of: around 90 screenplay pages.

As an example, the screenplay of Top 20 RoI movie Napoleon Dynamite is 90 pages.

57 Movie duration data sourced from IMDb.com, and cross-checked via a direct content analysis in this study (see the Excel data sheets of Top and Bottom 20 RoI in the attached digital Appendix on CD-ROM).
Bottom 20 RoI movies by contrast average 102 minutes/pages, but likewise if we average the median (99) and the mean duration (102) this measure of central tendency or ‘averaged’ figure comes out at 101 minutes.58

In summary the average bottom 20 RoI movie is around 10 minutes/screenplay pages longer than the average top 20 RoI movie. The empirical evidence of high and low RoI movies above implies that the screenwriting doxa would be better recommending 90 (or else 93) screenplay pages as an ideal screenplay/movie length, instead of the currently prescribed 110-120 pages if a high RoI movie is the goal, whether for a spec screenplay or not.

58 More detailed Data-Tables are included in the digital Appendix of the thesis (see Excel spreadsheet on attached CD-ROM).
As an overview, **Chapter Six** of this dissertation (**Data Analysis**) aims to answer Research Questions #2 and #3, namely:

**RQ2** - What evidence do we have that the doxa influences the movie screenwriting process?

**RQ3** - What are the formal and structural characteristics of the top 20 RoI and by comparison, of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories?

**Chapter Seven**, the **Results and Discussion** section of this dissertation presents the results of this `screenwriting doxa versus movie-RoI’ comparative analysis, structured around the examined fifteen key categories of movie story: **Premise, Theme/s, Genre, Setting (Spatial), Setting (Temporal), Plot, Character, Character Arcs, Structure, Dialogue, Movie Duration / Screenplay Length, Number of Scenes, Dramatic Principles, Creativity and Human Nature.**

Chapter Seven is thus designed to answer Research Questions #4 and #5:

**RQ4** - Which movie story characteristics are common to, and conversely, which are unique to, the top 20 and the bottom 20 RoI movies?

**RQ5** - In light of the evidence are there any revised screenwriting heuristics that emerge from the above enquiry?

Similarly an example of the **Results and Discussion** section of the study are presented below so as to clearly indicate the Methodological approach undertaken.
Example RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On Movie Duration / Screenplay Length

These results show that while four of the manuals that shape the screenwriting doxa recommend 110-120 minutes as an ideal movie length, the average duration of the top 20 RoI movie is only 93 minutes, and that the shortest top 20 RoI movie is 77 minutes, i.e., Primer (2004).

A movie story that is 90 minutes generally costs less than a 120 minute version of the same story, however the doxa does not appear to address the additional production-cost of a proposed longer movie story with reference to its screenplay duration. This is however an important consideration for screenwriters aiming to create a positive ‘benefit/cost ratio’ movie.

When charted and once a line-of-best-fit is added for Number of Scenes and for Movie Duration (Minutes) of the Top 20 RoI: as movie RoI increases there is a general trend towards 90 minutes, and 90 scenes, i.e., towards the left of the chart presented below.

![MOVIE ROI vs. # of SCENES & # of MINUTES](image)

Figure 1-3 – Trendlines of High Movie RoI vs. Duration (in Mins), and Number of Scenes

In these charts (Figures 1-3 above, and 1-4 below), Return-on-Investment or ‘benefit / cost ratio’ (‘audience-reach/movie-story-creation-cost’ ratio) increases to the left of the chart; namely, Paranormal Activity (2009) as the #1 RoI movie is thus on the far-left of the chart while the #20 RoI movie My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002) is on the far-right.
Figure 1-4 – Extrapolated Trendlines of Movie RoI vs. Duration (Mins) and Number of Scenes

Note also in the chart above (Fig. 1-4) that once extended, the two linear trend-lines (# of Minutes, and # of Scenes) converge to the left, and thus when extrapolated in this way these values intersect at the values of: 90 minutes, and also 90 movie scenes.

Given these evident current trends in RoI Movie Duration and Number of Scenes it is inferred that 90 screenplay pages (or 90 movie minutes) and also 90 scenes are ideal high-RoI movie specifications. Thus as a potential high-RoI movie-story guideline for screenwriters this also implies an average movie scene-length of one minute per scene (or one scene per screenplay page) in a 90-minute movie / screenplay.

As an example, the screenplay of the top 20 RoI movie Napoleon Dynamite (Hess & Hess, 2003, draft dated 25th April 2003) is 90 pages in length and thus exemplifies the “average” or typical top 20 RoI movie in terms of ideal high-RoI screenplay length (90 pages) and ideal high-RoI movie duration (90 minutes).

While many of the RoI dataset screenplays (where available) were examined in the study, aspects of the specific creative processes and the evolution of a screen idea from initial idea (or motivation) through story-development to completed screenwork (a

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59 Please see the digital Appendix on the attached CD-ROM, for a PDF copy of the Napoleon Dynamite screenplay.

60 Noting the movie industry “one page of screenplay equals one minute of movie screen time” rule-of-thumb (Bordwell, 2010, online; Kaufman & Simonton, 2014, p. 4).
movie released in cinemas) for all 40 of the movies in the examined dataset could easily fill several dissertations.\textsuperscript{61} Instead, the key enquiry in this study was to examine the results of that screenplay - namely the completed screenwork (movie) - and how global audiences received those specific movie stories.

The second section of \textit{Chapter Seven - Results and Discussion} further elaborates the results of this study and presents correlations to other relevant research studies. Also explored are some additional key issues of the contemporary screenwriting convention that emerge from the study, and various potential implications for movie story creators and thus screenwriters are discussed.

Finally, \textit{Chapter Eight - Conclusions} provides summative and concluding remarks in relation to the five key Research Questions of the study and a recapitulation of the key argument of the thesis.

\textbf{1.2.2 Preliminary Summary of the Key Argument of this Thesis}

A preliminary summary of the key argument of this thesis is that:

\begin{quote}
The current dominant screenwriting doxa does not appear to use a consilient or a scientific method, most likely due to the “Two Cultures” problem. Furthermore since 70\% of movies lose money (Vogel 1990, 2014) and the primary cause of movie success is the movie \textit{story}, then possibly more accurate and effective guidelines for screenwriting - and thus movie storytelling - might be advanced if empirical datasets such as the top and bottom RoI movies were used to derive the screenwriting guidelines of the movie story-creation doxa. If, as the doxa suggests, the key aim and currency of movie stories - as “drama” - is to illuminate, depict and explore Human Nature, then extant consilient knowledge from the domains of Evocriticism and Evolutionary Psychology on Human Nature might also be fruitfully integrated into the screenwriting doxa.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{61} Such further investigation and research would imply a detailed examination of the top and bottom 20 RoI movies, and, their creative: \textit{persons and potential; process, product, place, and persuasion.}
Chapter Eight - Conclusions also includes some Suggestions for Further Research based on additional questions and implications raised by the study.

Chapter Nine - References includes the References cited and the Filmography.

Chapter Ten - Appendix contains various of the study Data Tables and additional relevant information.

The following chapter details the Operational Definitions used in this thesis.
2 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

The key terms and concepts used in this thesis are as defined below:

2.1 Creativity – The article ‘The Standard Definition of Creativity’ (Runco & Jaeger, 2012) shows that in the domains of Psychology and Social Psychology the standard definition of creativity is “original and useful”. A cultural artifact such as a new movie – or indeed any idea, process, or product (i.e., meme, or unit of culture) 62 – may be judged both original and useful by a consensus of the audience, namely the wider field of a specific domain in culture.

In defining the term “creative” for movies in Great Flicks: Scientific Studies of Cinematic Creativity and Aesthetics Simonton (2011) states:

A film is deemed “creative” if it claims both novelty and impact. It’s new and it works (Simonton 2011, p. viii).

A movie story that ‘works’ is here defined as: a movie story that reaches a wide enough portion of its target audience in cinemas, so that it breaks even or better. 63

With regard to the activity of creativity as a systems process McIntyre (2012) writes:

…creativity is an activity where some process or product, one that is considered to be unique and valuable in at least one social setting, comes about from a set of antecedent conditions through the located actions of a creative agent. Each factor belongs to a system in operation and creativity emerges from that system in operation (Phillip McIntyre, 2012, p. 204).

In these terms a theatrical cinema movie as a cultural artifact, and also retrospectively, its creative process is deemed to have been “creative” only once judged as such by the bio-psycho-socio-cultural behaviour of the audience – and reflected by that movie story’s audience-contagion in cinemas. 64

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63 Recall that break-even in cinemas requires (on average) for a movie to reach a wide enough audience in terms of cinema box-office attendance that it makes around two to three times its production cost.

64 Martindale (1989) states: ‘Ultimately, all creative products have this quality: old ideas or elements are combined in new ways. This is the case for all domains of creativity.’ (Martindale, 1989, p. 212).
2.2 System - After reviewing various extant definitions of ‘system’, in *General Systems Theory: Problems, Perspectives, Practice*, Skyttner (2005, 2nd edn) suggests the following definition, adopted herein:

SYSTEM, an organized whole in which parts are related together, which generates emergent properties and has some purpose (Skyttner 2005, p. 58).


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65 For details of this research on creativity in Communication, see: (Fulton & McIntyre, 2013).
This Systems Model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2015) is also known as the ‘sociocultural’ model of creativity. In the first official textbook on creativity, *Explaining Creativity*, Sawyer (2006, 2012) explains the DPFi (or Domain, Individual/Person, Field interaction) model, and it is worth citing an extract from it here at length:

Like Amabile, Csikszentmihalyi realized that creativity is not only a property of individuals, but can also be considered to be a property of societies, cultures, and historical periods (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988b, 1990a, 1996, 1999). During the 1980s and 1990s, creativity researchers refined the insights of Amabile and Csikszentmihalyi to develop the sociocultural model of creativity [*Figure 2.2, below*]. The sociocultural model contains three components: the person, domain, and field. The person is the source of innovation; a person begins the process by developing a created product. But that alone cannot be called creative, because the product might not be novel, and it might not be appropriate. How can we judge a product’s novelty and appropriateness? Like Amabile, creativity researchers today agree that researchers shouldn’t decide that themselves; rather, they should look to the consensus of people that are experts in that creative domain: the field. The field determines whether a product is novel and appropriate. If the field decides that the product meets these criteria, the product enters the domain, where it’s preserved and disseminated to other members of the field. Works that are rejected by the field do not enter the domain, and are often forgotten or destroyed (Sawyer, 2006, pp. 122-123).

Works that are *selected* to enter the domain (such as the domain of movies) are here considered “canon” by a consensus in the field, and the *deselected* (ignored or rejected) works are here considered to be “archive”. Sawyer (2006) includes a diagram:
The DPFi Systems (or ‘sociocultural’) Model of creativity is underpinned by evolutionary Systems Thinking, wherein creativity is seen as a special case of evolution (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000, p. 83; Csikszentmihalyi in Sternberg, 1999, p. 316).

In ‘Creativity Through the Life Span from An Evolutionary Systems Perspective’, (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 2006) specifically mention movies:

> According to this systems model, creativity is coconstituted by an individual who introduces a novelty that is selected, preserved, and transmitted over time by a field of experts, or in the case of items of mass culture such as… movies, by the market as a whole. (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe 2000) (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2006, p. 245).

2.4 **Doxa** – Macdonald (2013, p. 10) notes “Doxa is used to mean ‘received wisdom’, or everything the field says is the right (or wrong) way to do things”. In *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1996) anthropologist and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu notes that the attitude towards such orthodoxy derives from manuals and textbooks (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 194).

2.5 **Habitus** - A “feel for the game” as developed by an individual over one’s lifetime and/or their career in a specific domain and its related subdomains:

> …the habitus is sometimes described as a ‘feel for the game’ - a ‘practical sense’ (sens pratique) that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules. Rather, it is a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions (Johnson, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, in Bourdieu 1993, p. 5).

Where the movie story screenwriter is also a *writer-hyphenate* (e.g. a writer-director, writer-actor, writer-producer, and so on) multiple sub-domains of movie-storytelling also require mastery. As noted above, on average this process may take ten years.

2.6 **Movies** – The units of bioculture examined herein are: theatrical-cinema-release narrative fiction feature films of over 60 minutes in duration. Other descriptors for “movie” include “motion picture” and “film”, within the biocultural domain known as cinema. This study is focussed on movies (as business) rather than films (as art).
2.7 Movie Story – Is defined herein as being composed of many component elements; in a screenplay this movie story emerges from these parts, namely: the story premise, genre/s, the characters, their characterisation, the plot and subplots, the settings, narrative structure, the theme/s, and dialogue of the screenplay. In the completed screenwork the movie story also includes the actors (as these become the representations of the movie story characters onscreen), music and sound effects, and also the camera, editing, and special effects techniques which tell that movie story, and even the style of opening titles and end credits. Thus one manifestation of the movie story is a screenplay draft; another manifestation emerges when the story (“screen idea”) in the screenplay is converted to a completed screenwork, i.e., a movie.

2.8 Negative cost – This term refers to the cost of creating the movie ‘negative’ or of getting the film “in the can” and arriving at a version (a “print”) of the movie that can be shown to intermediaries, such as movie acquisitions personnel or film buyers and can be screened in a theatrical cinema. Additionally, movie studios or distributors may later add further production investment and thus enable more production work on the movie prior to its wider cinema release. Negative cost for the creation of a movie story (a screenwork) in this sense thus does not here include ‘P&A’ (Prints and Advertising), i.e., the marketing and distribution costs of a wide cinema release.

2.8 Canon – The term ‘canon’ has different meanings in different contexts, as in “the Western canon” (in literature); “film canon” (in cinema); and canonical “screenwriting manuals” and can be contrasted to “canonical characters” in stories, such as Sherlock Holmes, or Star Wars, or Harry Potter “story universe” canon. However a simple distinction around ‘canon’ as used herein is as Moretti (2000) delineates, specifically the two mutually-exclusive categories of `canon’ versus `archive’. Canonical works are retained by the bio-cultural field as original and valuable - including those widely regarded as masterworks - whereas those which are largely forgotten or ignored are most widely considered `archive’. This meaning of canon as movies judged to be creative by the movie field correlates with Csikszentmihalyi’s

67 This may initially mean exhibition only in film festivals.
68 For more detail on “story universe” canon, see: (Kerrigan & Velikovsky, 2015).
(1988) use of the term as stated in the seminal article `Society, Culture, and Person: A Systems View of Creativity’:

It has been said that 99% of all new ideas are garbage, regardless of the domain or the status of the thinker. It is the task of the “field” to select promising variations and to incorporate them into the domain… once preserved, the work becomes part of the canon and will filter through, as one item of information in the domain, so that following generations of artists can be inspired to imitate it or reject it (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p. 330).

The list of works retained by a field’s consensus as domain `canon’ can - and does - change over time, an example being that in 2012 the movie Vertigo (1958) replaced Citizen Kane (1941) atop the list of Sight & Sound’s critics’ poll of the greatest movies after fifty years with Citizen Kane in the top position (Kemp, 2012, online).

Two distinct definitions of ‘canonical’ are used herein, one for movies and one for screenplay manuals:

2.8.1 **Canonical movies** – Herein means: *movies judged creative by the international cinema audience* in contrast to ‘archive’ which are those movies that were avoided, ignored, or rejected (or otherwise *not selected en masse*) by the international cinema audience.

2.8.2 **Canonical screenplay manuals** – Herein means: screenplay manuals frequently used in screenwriting pedagogy in film and screenwriting courses and widely known and sold (i.e. ‘best-sellers’) and are thus retained and circulated (re-transmitted), and/or are held in high regard by a significant consensus in the screenwriting and movie fields. The *most* canonical screenplay manuals in these terms would be those written by what are often referred to in the screenwriting field as screenwriting “gurus” such as Syd Field, Robert McKee and various other influential screenwriting manual authors.

2.9 **Consilience** - The *Oxford English Dictionary* currently defines consilience as “agreement between the approaches to a topic of different academic subjects, especially science and the humanities” (OED, 2014, online). The origin of the term *consilience* is attributed to the British polymath William Whewell (1794–1866) also credited with coining the terms ‘scientist’ and ‘physicist’ (L. J. Snyder, 2012, online). Whewell’s famous phrase “a consilience of inductions” from *The Philosophy of the Inductive*
Sciences, Founded Upon Their History (Whewell, 1840) refers to the convergence of evidence from different disciplines on the same conclusion. One example of such a consilience of inductions is Charles Darwin’s theory of Evolution, supported by evidence from biology, geology, paleontology, biogeography, comparative anatomy, and subsequently other domains of knowledge such as genetics and epigenetics. In Whewell’s (1840) sense, consilience can be seen as a methodological approach to research.

More recently however in 1998 the biologist Edward O. Wilson, one of the 91 eminent creatives studied in Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996b) published Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge in which he outlined possible ways to solve the “Two Cultures” problem (Snow, 1959). Wilson suggests ways in which the Sciences and the Arts/Humanities might work together to test and synthesize extant knowledge, and thus to create new knowledge that is consistent across knowledge domains (Wilson 1998). Evocriticism\(^{69}\) is one domain of knowledge which has been inspired and guided by Wilson’s ontological redefinition of consilience (B. Boyd, 2009, 2012; Carroll, 1995, 2011; Cooke & Turner, 1999; Gottschall, 2008a, 2012, 2013) and by film scholars such as David Bordwell, Joseph Anderson and Murray Smith in the Evocriticism anthology Evolution, Literature and Film: A Reader (B. Boyd, Carroll, & Gottschall, 2010). For these reasons two distinct meanings of consilience are used in this thesis:

2.9.1 **Ontological and Epistemological consilience** – E. O. Wilson’s (1998) sense of the term consilience, whereby the “two cultures” of ‘the Arts / Humanities’ and ‘the Sciences’ aim to unify their knowledge by testing hypotheses and knowledge from either domain. This implies that an emerging model of Human Nature illuminated by the Arts and their interpretation would correlate with, complement and contribute detail to - rather than contradict - the emerging model of Human Nature within Evolutionary and Cognitive Psychology, Evolutionary Sociology, and Evolutionary Anthropology.

2.9.2 **Methodological consilience** – refers to Whewell’s (1840) sense of the term namely the agreement, correlation, and convergence of evidence drawn

\(^{69}\) Also known as Literary Darwinism or Biopoetics.
from different sources, domains of knowledge or disciplines that support a singular conclusion.

2.10 The Anna Karenina Principle - A partial antidote to the “single-cause fallacy” of success or of failure and here applied to understand both success and failure in the domain of movie stories (completed screenworks) due to their complexity. Evolutionary anthropologist Jared Diamond (1997) notes:

We tend to seek easy, single-factor explanations of success. For most important things, though, success actually requires avoiding many separate possible causes of failure (Diamond, 1997, p. 157).

Others who note this same principle, albeit without the Tolstoy allusion, include Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* (c335 BCE), and Richard Dawkins (1986) on biology as cited in *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, stating the same core principle:

However many ways there are of being alive, it is certain that there are vastly more ways of being dead, or rather not alive (Dawkins 1986, p. 9).

This Anna Karenina Principle and the ‘complexity’ view reveals that there are more ways of a movie story (a movie) becoming archive than canon in bioculture.


The elements of human nature are the learning rules, emotional reinforcers, and hormonal feedback loops that guide the development of social behaviour into certain channels as opposed to others… Human nature is, moreover, a hodgepodge of special genetic adaptations to an environment largely vanished, the world of the Ice-Age hunter-gatherer (Edward O. Wilson, 1978, p. 196).

The above description serves as a summary definition of Human Nature.

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70 Aristotle avers in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 2, Ch. 6), “It is possible to fail in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited), while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason one is easy and the other difficult - to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult)... For men are good in but one way, but bad in many.” (Aristotle, [c335 BCE] 1952b, p. 352).

71 (Dennett 1995, p. 104).


73 As noted in the subsequent *Literature Review* the domains of Evolutionary Psychology and Evocriticism are elaborating a complex model of Human Nature, as developed in (B. Boyd, 2009; B.
3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* Crotty (1998) defines a researcher’s theoretical perspective as “the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The philosophical stance adopted herein is the consilient biocultural view which includes the Evolutionary view, Systems Philosophy, and Complexity when examining creativity in movies.^[74]


In the domain of screenwriting the *Journal of Screenwriting* (JoS)^[75] founded in 2009 is currently the only international academic peer-reviewed journal dedicated solely to screenwriting. The JoS article ‘Some Attitudes and Trajectories in Screenwriting Research’ (Maras, 2011) is an edited extract from a keynote address for the 2011 *Screenwriting Research Network* conference ‘Screenwriting Research: History, Theory and Practice’^[76] and identifies seven broad trajectories in extant screenwriting research (Maras 2011, pp. 278-80). These are:

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^[74] As noted in the prior Definitions chapter, the Systems Model of creativity is an explicitly evolutionary bio-psycho-socio-cultural model (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 316; Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2006, p. 245; Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000, pp. 83-84). See also the ‘Creativity’ section of the subsequent Literature Review chapter for relevant excerpts.

^[75] by co-editors Ian W. Macdonald and Jill Nelmes

(1) **formalist** - focussed on the nature, purposes and uses of the screenplay, e.g., research by Kuleshov, Vertov and Brik;

(2) **narratological** - on story-related practices of genre, plotting and structure, including adaptation studies, e.g., Aristotle (c335 BCE), Sargent (1914), Syd Field (1979) and the script ‘gurus’, also Bordwell (1985), Thompson (1999);

(3) **stylistic** - on stylistic language effects in screenwriting and evolving script format requirements, e.g., Corliss (1972), Millard (2006, 2010), Price (2010), Nelmes (2011);


(5) **industrial / institutional** - on the script as a ‘blueprint’; labour divisions in the studio; theory/funding, pedagogy/curriculum; and on film schools, e.g., Staiger (1985), Macdonald (2001), Geuens (2000);

(6) **conceptual** - on the trajectory of screen ideas through development and production, collaboration, and forms of composition and expression, e.g., Azlant (1980), Macdonald (2004, 2010), Carrière (1995), Millard (2010); and,


Maras (2011) also notes that adaptation, feminist and postcolonial approaches might well have their own categories in such a proposed taxonomy; although he states that as approaches they could also equally apply to all of the other seven research categories.

Four key ‘attitudes’ in screenwriting research are also noted in Maras (2011, pp. 276-7):

(1) **restorative**, e.g., correcting the ‘authorship’ of a screenwork from director to writer;\(^\text{77}\)

(2) **exemplification**, e.g., using the screenplay as an example of a ‘postmodern’ or multiple-author or multiple-version, text;

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\(^{77}\) This could be referred to as “Writeur Theory” as contrasted to “Auteur Theory”.
(3) *evangelical*, e.g., advocating for a conversion in theory and/or practice, such as Maras’ (2009) own pluralistic approach; and

(4) *descriptivist/nominalist*, e.g., focussed on details of writer-director relationships or on collaborative processes.

Maras (2011) also argues that increased research attention might be paid to the *industrial / institutional* research trajectory while noting Macdonald’s (2004, 2009, 2010) application of Bourdieuan theory to understanding screenwriting practice (Maras 2011, p. 282) and Maras concludes with the observation:

> While I value all of the trajectories of research discussed above, clearly the narratological approach is in ascendance. Yet the industrial/institutional trajectory has an important role to play in providing a more nuanced, material and institutionally aware account of screenwriting research that connects it to wider screen culture, rather than treating it as a separate area. This in turn will influence how screenwriting research takes on the task of situating itself on the wider stage of the humanities and social sciences (Maras 2011, p. 282).

The point above also highlights a solution to the “Two Cultures” problem. In the light of Maras’s (2011) observation that “the narratological approach is in ascendance” the current research is primarily narratological as it focusses on movie story but also adopts an evolutionary/systems theoretical perspective that aims to integrate certain extant knowledge in the arts/humanities, social sciences, and sciences. This is thus a consilient approach, and is explained further as a *Theoretical Perspective* below.

Ironically the current research also aims to present a fresh challenge to the extant dominant doxa of movie screenwriting by critically examining just how accurate the key doxa prescriptions or the dominant narratological discourse were in the first instance, in the light of the extremes of movie-story RoI evidence.

With regard to the *attitude* of the current research - in Maras’ (2011) terms - all four attitudes are applicable in varying degrees, namely:

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78 Possibly this thesis (or argument) might even be viewed as a surprise attack on the doxa, given *The Feature Film Screenwriters Workbook* (Velikovsky 1995-2011) which summarizes, and even champions key elements of the dominant screenwriting doxa examined, over the period 1995-2011, and is also currently used in various international tertiary-level screenwriting courses. Alternately, the thesis could be viewed as heterodoxy (or, a heresy) in Bourdieu’s (1977) schema of: doxa, orthodoxy, and heterodoxy (see: Bourdieu 1977, p. 169).
(1) **restorative** – since a prevalence of writer-hyphenates\(^79\) features as one finding in the two RoI movie datasets examined, although ‘Auteur theory’ is herein also viewed as a regrettable and ideally forgettable discourse given group creativity in moviemaking,\(^80\)

(2) **exemplification** – it is suggested that the highest and lowest twenty RoI movies are examples worth studying as a dataset due to their extreme success and failure, although two of the top 20 RoI movies did not have screenplays.\(^81\) In the consilient view ‘postmodernism’ is seen as problematic Continental Philosophy (Carroll 1995, pp. 1-11, 411-35) which in general appears to misunderstand or else ignore all of the extant scientific research on creativity,\(^82\) and moreover ‘postmodernist’ approaches wrongly view science as “just another discourse”,\(^83\)

(3) **evangelical** – in advocating for a conversion - both in theory and in practice - to a more consilient, evolutionary, Systems approach to understanding movie creativity as a method of mass communication; and also,

(4) **descriptivist/nominalist** – as there is some focus on collaborative processes in the movie-making of the movies in the RoI datasets under study.

In short this original research contains some elements from many of the above-outlined extant seven key screenwriting research trajectories and four research attitudes. This study can also be seen as combining certain selected ontologies, philosophies, theories and methods of the approaches used in the works: *Screenwriting Poetics and the Screen Idea* (Macdonald 2013), `A Systems View of Film-making as a Creative Practice’

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79 Namely a writer-director, writer-actor, or writer-producer - or combinations thereof
80 It should be noted that Auteur Theory is an understandable invention as film critics could benefit from having something controversial - and also potentially unfalsifiable - to argue and/or ‘theorize’ about, in their articles. While the origins of Auteur Theory can be dated to Francois Truffaut’s 1954 essay *Une certaine tendance du cinéma français / A certain tendency in French cinema* in *Cahiers du Cinema* (Truffaut, 1954), and continued by Andrew Sarris and other film critics, in the light of group creativity in moviemaking, Auteur Theory is viewed here as a mistake, one which misunderstands the complex creative processes of a Screen Idea Work Group (Macdonald 2004, 2013), and also of movie casts and crews. See also (Bloore 2013, pp. 73-4). Petrie in (Petrie, 1991, p. 16) likewise finds Sarris’ Auteur Theory arguments to be absurd. The top 20 RoI movies suggest that a new conception, namely “Writeur Theory” may be a more advisable approach, namely becoming a writer-hyphenate (a writer-director, writer-producer, or writer-actor, or two or more of these). It is here noted that ‘Writeur’ is an outrageously semi-French new word - herein coined by combining two old words to create a new one.
82 Such as is summarized in (Bloore 2013).
83 Evolutionary Philosopher Daniel C. Dennett (1998) rightly regards science as “an objective, progressive, best-ever technology for getting at the truth” (Blume, 1998, online).
(Redvall 2012), and in ‘The Three-act Structure: Myth or Magical Formula?’ (Brütsch, 2015).\textsuperscript{84}
3.1 CONSILIENCE, COMPLEXITY, EVOLUTION AND CREATIVITY

The view adopted herein is that: consilience, complexity, evolution and creativity are component parts of a single unified view, namely a consistent Evolutionary lens through which to view the phenomenon of biocultural production in the domain of cinema.

In 1998 biologist E. O. Wilson published *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (Edward O. Wilson, 1998) which proposes a potential solution to the “disciplinary isolation” problem that C. P. Snow (1959) famously identified: the problem of “the Two Cultures” whereby the Arts/Humanities and the Sciences are viewed as isolated and incommensurate domains of knowledge. Wilson (1998) proposed that the Arts and Humanities - including the interpretation of artistic works - can be used to test and to expand knowledge both in the Sciences and the Arts. Communication Studies research often covers a middle ground between these two cultures, with the scholarly discipline generally being considered part of the Social Sciences and being inherently multidisciplinary in nature. Consilience currently also appears ascendant in Film Studies in general, as film theorist David Bordwell concludes a 2012 article titled ‘The Viewer’s Share: Models of Mind in Explaining Film’ by mentioning the merits of the consilient approach:

> Academics praise interdisciplinarity, of the cooperation of the humanities and the sciences. Too often, though, that cooperation involves only interpretations. Humanists join with social scientists in producing readings but not *explanations*. The engagement of film studies with empirical psychology and cognitive science over the last three decades has come closer to providing the sort of “consilience” that Edward O. Wilson proposed: unified explanations that bring art, humanistic inquiry, and scientific inquiry together (Wilson 1998). Film researchers invoke naturalistic models and findings from psychology in order to understand more fully how cinema works, and works with our minds (Bordwell, 2012, online).

The Theoretical Perspective of the current research is strongly influenced by the Wilson (1998) view and also more generally by Bordwell’s neo-formalist film poetics since 1996, including Bordwell’s two reprinted chapters in the Evocriticism anthology *Evolution, Literature and Film: A Reader* (B. Boyd, et al., 2010) which adopt the evolutionary consilient view. Since individual movies are complex, information-rich

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85 For example, Dr Susan Kerrigan’s (2011) PhD thesis on documentary filmmaking practice and creativity in Communication involved the domains of “psychology, sociology, cultural production, communication and documentary studies” (Kerrigan, 2010, p. 1; 2011).
biocultural artifacts, a consilient, complexity, evolutionary, systems view appears to cast light on different aspects of the creation, form, function and differential performance of specific movies.\(^86\)

The 'Complexity' view is broadly outlined in the postscript to *Approaches To Social Enquiry*, titled 'The Complexity Turn' (Blaikie 2007, pp. 206-14). Complexity is described by Blaikie (2007) as an approach to social research which emerged in the 1990s (2007, p. 207) and differs from other traditional research approaches, being scientific in approach instead of postmodernist (p. 211). The approach also makes extensive use of Systems Thinking (p. 206), Complexity theory (p. 207-8) and General Systems Theory (p. 213).\(^87\)

In the work *General Systems Theory: Problems, Perspectives, Practice* (Skyttner 2005), the author states that the science of Complexity is a discipline wherein:

…biological organization, computer mathematics, physics, parallel network computing, nonlinear system dynamics, chaos theory, neural networks and connectionism were brought together. In practice, complexity science is the study of the behaviour of large collections of simple units which have the potential to evolve (Skyttner 2005, p. 44).

Cybernetics is also a subset of Systems Theory; in the article 'Systems Approach' in the *Encyclopedia of Creativity* (2011, 2\(^\text{nd}\) Edn), complexity is defined as:

…a measure of how hard it is to put something together starting from elementary parts. Complexity has also been described as a recognition of complex causality, where complexity entails a shift in our description of phenomena, which at minimum recognizes the cybernetic dimension of mutual, recursive, and circular causality (Montuori, 2011, p. 415).

Complexity in this view can be seen to apply not merely to movie creativity but also to individual movie stories themselves since when they are perceived and interpreted by audiences, these stories can be seen to be composed of often interacting, intersecting and overlapping filmic components including story: premise, plot, structure, dialogue, theme/s realised through visual, sound (music, dialogue, sound effects and atmosphere), textual and graphical elements. On this view it might also broadly be considered a

\(^86\) See also the evolutionary view of movie success in *Hollywood Economics* (DeVany 2004).

\(^87\) However Systems and thus Complexity approaches in Communication research also pre-date the 1990s as they were examined in *The Nature of Complex Communication Systems* (Fisher, Glover, & Ellis, 1977).
complex task to create a movie that reaches its target audience\textsuperscript{88} given that \textit{less than one percent} of extant screenplays on average have managed to do so as theatrical cinema release movies.\textsuperscript{89}

The Complexity approach - including Systems Theory - aims to be consilient (\textit{sensu} Wilson 1998) in using science to examine the arts, and also in enabling arts and communication research to contribute to (and ideally complement) extant scientific knowledge for example in the domains of Evolutionary: Biology, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology and Culturology (Barkow, 2006; Carroll, McAdams, & Wilson, 2016; Jablonka, Lamb, & Zeligowski, 2014; Lopreato & Crippen, 1999).

One core Systems View assumption underpinning this study is therefore that individual movies - as discrete biocultural artifacts - are the \textit{outputs} of a complex geo-bio-psycho-socio-cultural-economic meta-system; and in turn that these artifacts as individual movies often recursively become \textit{inputs} for many of those same component systems.

This is to note that in the Systems Model of Creativity, creative persons first internalize this complex creative domain by watching, making, reading, and learning about movies and movie-making processes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995, online; 1996b, pp. 47-50) over many years before creating a movie artifact that may be judged creative by the field, namely the wider cinema audience. This phenomenon of “internalizing the domain” is also known in creativity research as the “ten-year rule” in creativity (Hayes, 1989, p. 139; Simonton, 2011, p. 119; Weisberg, 2006, pp. 173, 213-174, 222).\textsuperscript{90}

Movies themselves are thus both \textit{outputs}, and recursively can become \textit{inputs} of the international movie system, where the cinema system is comprised of: the \textit{domain} of cinema and a \textit{field} of individual persons. In this complex systems process certain screen ideas (screenplays and movies) are selected, while others are deselected by segments of the movie field, a field that includes individual screenwriters, screen readers, and the audience. R. Keith Sawyer (2006) presents a diagram of ’nested audiences’ in which the field includes: \textit{intermediaries}, \textit{connoisseurs}, \textit{amateurs}, and finally the broader \textit{public}.

\textsuperscript{88} i.e., breaks even financially at the cinema box-office

\textsuperscript{89} This ’Less Than 1% Problem’ emerges from combining Macdonald (2004, 2013) with Vogel (2011, 2014; De Vany 2004), namely that: (1) 98\% of screenplays presented to producers go unmade (Macdonald 2014), and that (2) 30\% of movies break even (De Vany 2004, Vogel 2014). See also the subsequent section, for more detailed references and citations on these statistics.

\textsuperscript{90} See also: \textit{The 101 Habits of Highly Successful Screenwriters: Insider Secrets from Hollywood's Top Writers} (Iglesias, 2001, pp. 211-220), for additional evidence in support of “the ten-year rule” in the domain of movie screenwriting.
In *Explaining Creativity* (Sawyer 2006) also notes that:

Every year, investors spend millions of dollars creating movies and Broadway plays that fail to connect with an audience, even though the gatekeepers in the field had selected them over hundreds of other ideas… The intermediaries in the field play a critical role in evaluating creative works, but after they’ve made their choices, the ultimate test for a creative work is whether or not it’s accepted by a broad audience… Works selected by these intermediaries then pass outward, to connoisseurs, amateurs, and the broad public (Sawyer 2006, pp. 126-7).

This systems process is thus a (natural selection) Evolutionary Systems view of biocultural artifacts, informed by the Systems (socio-cultural) Model of Creativity. The *environment* for movies - namely the field including the mass cinema-going audience - ultimately does this final selecting of individual movies as either canon, or else deselects them as archive.

When viewed as a whole, 2% or less of screen ideas (screenplays) submitted are selected by movie industry intermediaries (professional screen readers, and also movie producers) and “greenlit” and thus financed and produced as movies (Field, [1979] 2005, p. 8; Macdonald, 2003, p. 31; 2004b, p. 190; 2013, p. 67; Price, 2010, pp. 132-
133; Stoddard, 1911, p. 1). Subsequently, only 30% of movies created, break even (De Vany, 2004, p. 12; Vogel, 1990, p. 70; 2014, p. 83).

If indeed only around 30 percent - of the selected one-percent - of screen ideas (movie screenplays) realized as movies actually reach their intended audience - and thus break even in cinemas - overall this could be termed a “Less Than 1% Problem” in the domain of movie screenwriting, and thus presents clear real-world problems for the 99% of screen ideas (and their screenwriters) that are thus deselected. It is again noted that the screenplay, or the “hook” in Bloore’s (2013, p. 15) terms, should not be conflated with the movie, but that the screen idea in both the script - and in the resultant movie - is: the movie story, or narrative.

This overall process of the selection of screen ideas can be viewed as “Blind Variation, and Selective Retention” (or BVSR) namely the Darwinian model of creativity as per (Simonton, 1999, 2010, 2012a). While some screen ideas (as screenplays) might be obvious candidates for de-selection (rejection) at the ‘intermediary’ stage due to major flaws, subsequently seven out of ten of those selected screenplays that appear as if they may well work as a movie do not manage to do so, if ’working’ means breaking even, or reaching their intended cinema audience.

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91 By comparison there is also a similar “Less Than 1% Problem” in novels, in that 99% of novels become archive rather than canon (Moretti, 2000, p. 207). In the domain of movies, likewise see (Price 2010, pp. 132-3) on Dore Schary’s remarks on screenplay rejection rates in the 1940s, and see also (Curran 2015, pp. 90, 114, 284-6) on Wright (1912), Dutton (1939), Bowser (1990) and Moving Picture World (1910), regarding this ‘only Two Percent of screenplays are selected’, or around 98% deselection rate problem. It is more than an interesting (Evolutionary Systems Theory) coincidence, that around 1% of movie screenplays (and novels) succeed in becoming canonical (and are thus: selectively-retained) and also that around 99% of lifeforms over the Earth’s history have gone extinct (Mayr, 2002, p. 155). In other words this suggests the evolutionary algorithm and natural selection operating in both biological and in bio-socio-cultural ecosystems.

92 In A Philosophy of the Screenplay, Nannicelli (2013) notes Maras’s (2009) framing of “the object problem”, or the ontology of the screenplay, but suggests that Ian W. Macdonald, Steven Price and Claudia Sternberg have described the object. Nannicelli cites Macdonald’s description of the screenplay as an object which is “intended to convey (or at least record) the screen idea” and that screenplays are clearly cultural artifacts (Nannicelli, 2013, pp. 4-5). This recalls Popper (1978) on ontology: “…what is real or what exists is whatever may, directly or indirectly, have a causal effect upon physical things, and especially upon those primitive physical things that can be easily handled” (Popper, 1978b, p. 153). In this view both the screen idea (the movie story) and all tangible versions of the screenplay - as biocultural artifacts - are real objects and furthermore demonstrates how “memes” (i.e., units of bioculture) can evolve from ideas, via processes, to products, within the systems or “sociocultural” model of creativity. See also (Velikovsky, 2016).
Although they have survived the selection process at the intermediary (gatekeeper) stage, the information - the movie narrative - in the deselected, or archive\textsuperscript{93} movies was not effectively communicated to a wide audience as intended by their story creators, while conversely the information (including the story and theme/s) in the selected (in this case the top 20 RoI) movies was communicated and spread comparatively far and wide in international bioculture.\textsuperscript{94}

The current research thus involves certain of the subject-matters of at least three of the seven Communication research traditions famously identified by Robert T. Craig in 1999,\textsuperscript{95} namely: cybernetic, sociopsychological and sociocultural (Eadie and Goret in Cobley & Schulz, 2013, p. 31).

In the chapter *Explanation, Understanding and Beyond* (Sullivan 2005) the Complexity approach is summarized as follows:

> Within science, complexity is a watchword for a new way of thinking about the collective behaviour of many basic but interacting units, be they atoms, molecules, neurons, or bits in a computer. To be more precise, our definition is that complexity is the study of the behaviour of macroscopic collections of such units that are endowed with the potential to evolve in time. Their interactions lead to coherent collective phenomena, so-called emergent properties that can be described only at higher levels than those of the individual units. In a sense, the whole is more than the sum of its components, just as a van Gogh painting is so much more than a collection of bold brushstrokes. This is as true for a human society as it is for a raging sea or the electrochemical firing patterns of neurons in a human brain (G. Sullivan, 2005, pp. 105-106).

It is also important that in *Theories and Models of Communication* (2013), each of the seven major research traditions in Communication described by Craig (1999) sees ‘reality’ differently. Whether the cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological or critical - each of these research traditions:

> …combines ontology and epistemology differently (Anderson and Baym 2004), making communication theory truly a “big tent” encompassing social sciences, humanities, and arts (Eadie and Goret in Cobley & Schulz, 2013, p. 31).

\textsuperscript{93} (in this study, the bottom 20 RoI)

\textsuperscript{94} It should once again be noted that this natural-selection, Systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2014) is also termed the “sociocultural” model of creativity (see: Sawyer 2006, pp. 122-5).

\textsuperscript{95} The original article is: ‘Communication Theory as a Field’ (Craig, 1999).
In short the consilient research undertaken herein is examining the complex phenomenon of movie stories - and also the dominant doxa about how to create them - within a complex broader ‘problem-situation’ context namely: the “Less Than 1% Problem” in the domain of Movies. However the Theoretical Perspective adopted in the thesis aims for consilience in that extant consilient knowledge from the domains of Evolutionary Psychology and Evocriticism points towards some fruitful solutions and research directions. The key guiding principle of this view is that Evolutionary Systems Theory provides a useful and powerful lens via which to examine these problems - and the phenomenon of creativity - and thus mass communication in the domain of cinema.

As a further consideration, if it is assumed that movies - much like literature - are able to depict, explore, illustrate, illuminate and even to celebrate Human Nature (while providing mass entertainment), Dilthey (1985) asserted that cultural artifacts are important in understanding Human Nature (Dilthey & Mueller-Vollmer, 1985). Crotty (1998, p. 67) notes that Dilthey contrasts verstehen (understanding), a primary aim of the social sciences with erklären (explaining), a primary aim of the natural sciences. Likewise in *Approaches to Social Enquiry* in examining the roots of Interpretivism Blaikie (2007) notes that Dilthey saw “understanding” in the social sciences and causal “explaining” in the natural sciences as two very different and separate domains of enquiry, rejecting the methods of the natural sciences (Blaikie, 2007, p. 119). Herbert A Simon (1969) similarly suggests that the methods of the natural sciences are not appropriate for the study of what he terms the ‘artificial’ sciences, namely the study of cultural products (Simon, [1969] 1996).

Thus in broad view, a Popperian *post-positivist critical realist* approach such as that employed herein means that a mixed-methods study can be used to empirically (using statistics) discover which movies were liked *en masse* (i.e., top 20 RoI movies) and conversely disliked (the bottom 20 RoI movies). It then aims to understand why they were liked - or disliked - in such large numbers, in terms of the natural selection of units of bioculture (movies) seeking understanding - and ideally finding satisfactory answers from knowledge domains such as Evolutionary Psychology and Cognitive Science.

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96 It is not considered possible to single-handedly solve many of the deeper and multifaceted problems involved, within a study of this scope.
This approach would suggest that employing both of the two versions of consilience, namely Whewell’s (1840) convergence of evidence from different domains (i.e., movie box-office / budget statistics and an examination of the filmic textual artifacts); and also Wilson’s (1998) consilient convergence of evidence from the Arts / Humanities / Communication and the Sciences, or mathematics, physics, chemistry, geology, evolutionary biology, and evolutionary psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Recall also that there is no need to place the word “evolutionary” before the world “biology”, as Evolution is the standard scientific paradigm in the biological sciences. In the wider Evolutionary Systems worldview there is no need to place “evolutionary” in front of the domain names of: mathematics, physics, chemistry, geology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, or culturology - as both biology and bioculture evolve. If the evolutionary algorithm, of:

1. *selection* – of units, from an available `pool` of units,
2. *variation* - via combination of elements of these units into a new unit, and
3. *transmission* - of the new resulting unit back into the “pool”

is understood, then all creation of new artifacts is merely this same *evolutionary algorithm* in action - whether the ‘units’ examined in a system are biological (e.g., plants or animals) or biocultural (e.g., stories, screenplays, movies - or even knowledge in the Science and the Arts in general). The wider environment provides selection pressure on the units of the pool, meaning that units can be falsified (deselected), or can become “dead”. The ‘living’ units may thus be regarded as canon and the ‘dead’ ones as archive.

Complexity Theory, Systems Theory and its *holon* theory\(^7\) suggests that the “rules” change at various system levels. A human being - considered as a unit - is one level of system, and the *evolutionary algorithm* of creativity (*selection, variation-or-
combination, and transmission) also works as a bigger system on a bio-psycho-socio-cultural scale.\textsuperscript{98}

The simplest observation would note that top 20 RoI movies were widely liked, or are judged to be "good" movies and that the bottom 20 RoI were widely not liked, or judged as "bad", but the causes of a movie story being 'good' or 'bad' become complex, and thus the application of the Anna Karenina Principle herein as a proposed tool of both analysis and synthesis, to aid in both an understanding and explanation of how creativity in movies works.

One further major influence on the Theoretical Perspective is the evolutionary philosopher Daniel C. Dennett’s points on philosophy, science, and systems which aligns with E. O. Wilson’s (1998) view of consilience:

Much of what is said about science as an objective, progressive, best-ever technology for getting at the truth I simply think is right, and I believe people who think otherwise are deeply mistaken… minds, selves, intentions - have an unproblematic but not reduced place in the material world. If you can begin to see what, to take a deliberately extreme example, your thermostat and your mind have in common, and that there's a perspective from which they seem to be instances of an intentional system, then you can see that the whole process of natural selection is also an intentional system… (Dennett in Blume, 1998, online).

In this view the top 20 RoI movies are selected by the wider field (cinema audience) or Human Nature on a grand scale - via the evolutionary algorithm - as a form of natural selection working within the systems model of creativity; meanwhile the bottom 20 RoI movies were deselected by Human Nature. In broader view, 70% of movies are not selected by a wide enough audience to make a Return-on-Investment meaning that their benefit/cost ratio as stories (for their story creators) is suboptimal. It is suggested that possibly for these reasons the dominant screenwriting doxa may need close critical examination, revision and updating.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{98} It is also noted that both systems and their interactions are often extremely complex and that simple linear cause-and-effect for inputs and subsequent outputs should not be expected to apply.

\textsuperscript{99} It is also possible that only around 1% of people in cultural domains are creative in which case the 'Less Than 1% Problem' in culture is not really a problem at all but is simply a feature of the system. The deeper problem then shifts to: 'How Do We Make People More Creative?' While this problem is beyond the scope of this PhD, Csikszentmihalyi (1996, pp.343-372) and Sawyer (2006, pp. 295-314) both contain various general suggestions on how individual persons can become more creative.
The question can be asked: *What are the criteria that the movie industry uses to decide on a ‘creative’ screen idea, so that a system of industrial machinery works on that product with such unjustified faith in the product, before it is released to the public?*

It would appear that for the most part the dominant screenwriting doxa guides such movie industry decisions. However the screenwriting orthodoxy does not explicitly place an emphasis on the story ‘benefit/cost ratio’ (RoI) of movies; possibly this is partly because it does not explicitly incorporate the Systems view of creativity (including the use of Bourdieu’s practice theory).\(^\text{100}\)

In the light of Bourdieu’s “field” theory in cultural production it should be noted that another key theory that implicitly underpins the current study is a synthesis of Bourdieu’s practice theory (aka “field” theory) and Csikszentmihalyi’s evolutionary systems model of creativity (1988-2014).\(^\text{101}\) A two-dimensional static diagram of this theory-synthesis appears below, from (Velikovsky, 2014d).\(^\text{102}\)

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\(^{100}\) Maras (2011) also notes: “In terms of developments in the area of industrial/institutional perspectives, see Macdonald’s engagement with Bourdieu, especially his use of Bourdieu to talk about doxa, the common understanding of how ‘it’ is supposed to work (or not) (Macdonald 2004b, 2009, 2010). The relevance of Bourdieu’s work to screenwriting research, and the limitations of his field theory, especially in respect to the autonomy of the field (Bourdieu 2005), is still being determined” (Maras 2011, p. 282).

\(^{101}\) These two models have previously been synthesized in varying degrees of detail by various scholars including (McIntyre, 2006, Kupferberg, 2006, McIntyre, 2008, McIntyre, 2012, p. 197, Burnard, 2012, p. 223) and scholars in the Newcastle School of creativity (see: Fulton & McIntyre, 2013) as these two models of cultural production, i.e., Bourdieu’s *practice theory* (1977-1993) and Csikszentmihalyi’s (evolutionary) *systems model of creativity* both complement and also correlate with one another.

\(^{102}\) A static two-dimensional diagram (*Figure 3-2*) does not provide as cogent an explanation of the theory demonstrating its various successive stages and components as does a 2.5 dimensional animated gif model *over time*, which is viewable online at ‘Creative Practice Theory (A Synthesis)’: [https://storyality.wordpress.com/creative-practice-theory/](https://storyality.wordpress.com/creative-practice-theory/). Space requirements here do not allow a detailed examination of how the synthesized model (summary-diagram below) offers a model of the stages and components in the creativity of the top 20 RoI writer-hyphenates.
In *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind*, Buss (2012) notes that human Evolutionary Psychology (and cognition) can be seen as a set of 'IF > THEN’ algorithms:

![Evolved Psychological Mechanisms](image)

*Figure 3-3 – Evolved Psychological Mechanisms (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 49)*
In simplest terms, for an individual in the system this would translate to:

**IF** the movie story is [good / creative] *THEN* recommend it other people,

AND / OR,

**IF** the movie story is [bad / uncreative] *THEN* warn other people about it.

In terms of cause-and-effect, this kind of algorithm operating within the system ultimately would result in the overall bio-psycho-socio-cultural (cinema) system in operation, outputting the global top 20 and also the bottom 20 RoI movies - and also every other movie story - which falls somewhere in between these two RoI extremes.

In summary the Theoretical Perspective adopted herein is a consilient biocultural view, which includes the evolutionary view (Systems Philosophy or Complexity) when examining creativity in movies. The Systems (‘sociocultural’) Model of creativity is here combined with Bourdieuan practice theory as one way to understand how movie stories are created and then may become canon (such as top 20 RoI movies) or else become archive (such as bottom 20 RoI movies). The consilient biocultural view is used to understand and explain how movies as creative cultural artifacts both reflect and interact with Human Nature. In turn, Human Nature and the emerging model thereof is herein understood in terms of Evolutionary and Cognitive Psychology.

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103 It should also be noted, in comparison to Evolutionary Psychology, Human Behavioural Ecology further complexifies such algorithms: “human behavioral ecologists often interpret human behavior as the result of conditional strategies, behavioral strategies of the form ‘In environmental conditions A, do x; in conditions B, do y; in conditions C, do z’ (Smith et al. 2001, 128)” (Buller in Hull & Ruse, 2007, pp. 266-267).
4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter reviews the literature on: (1) creativity; (2) the use of Systems Theory in analysing bio-culture; (3) the screenwriting doxa; (4) studies of movie performance; and (5) consilience. This research aims to position itself at the intersection of these five domains of knowledge.

4.1 CREATIVITY

In 2006, R. Keith Sawyer published the first official textbook on creativity, Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation (Sawyer, 2006) with a second edition published in 2012 (Sawyer, 2012). Sawyer surveys the state of the art of creativity research in various disciplines including psychology, sociology, anthropology and history, observing that the modern era of creativity study dates from the 1950s (Sawyer, 2012, p. 4). The modern study of the phenomenon of creativity is widely viewed as having been instigated by J. P. Guilford’s presidential speech to the American Psychological Association in 1950 in which he called for the need for Psychologists to study creativity (Guilford, 1950; Sawyer, 2012, p. 16; Smith & Smith, 2010, p. 252).104

The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity (2010) also includes a brief history of the modern era (i.e., post-1950s) of creativity research (Runco & Albert, 2010, pp. 3-19). In that volume Kozbelt, Beghetto & Runco summarize ten major extant categories of theories of creativity which include: (1) Developmental, (2) Psychometric, (3) Economic, (4) Stage and Componential Process, (5) Cognitive, (6) Problem-Solving and Expertise-based, (7) Problem-Finding, (8) Evolutionary, (9) Typological, and (10) Systems (Runco, Kozbelt, & Beghetto, 2010, pp. 20-47). Instead of being competing theories however, each of the ten major categories above is focused on a different perspective from which to examine the phenomenon of creativity. The two major creativity theories of most interest in the current project of study are the “Systems” and the “Evolutionary” models of creativity.105 Problem-Finding and Problem-Solving

104 With regard to the key Applied Evolutionary Epistemology (the systems/sociocultural model of creativity) argument and theory underpinning this research study and thesis, an equally important and influential annual presidential address to the American Psychological Association was in 1975, namely D. T. Campbell’s speech ‘On the Conflicts Between Biological and Social Evolution and Between Psychology and Moral Tradition’ (D. T. Campbell, 1975). For the full list of annual APA Presidential Address speeches see: http://www.apa.org/about/governance/president/address.aspx

105 Both the Systems and the Evolutionary models of creativity can be conflated, as the process of evolution only occurs within: systems. Namely, Evolutionary Systems theory explains the actual process of evolution. These two models of creativity are describing the same phenomenon but in different terms.
models are also effective tools for examining movie-story creation, as demonstrated in Bordwell (1997, 2008) and Redvall (2012, 2016). Evocritic Brian Boyd makes extensive use of the (Popperian) ‘problem/solution’ approach and of D. K. Simonton’s (Darwinian or BVSR) Evolutionary model of creativity in examining case studies of biocultural creativity in On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, Fiction (Boyd 2009). These ‘problem / solution’ and BVSR models of creativity are both applied herein to understanding movie story creation in general.

Prior to the current-day era of creativity research, the investigation of creativity can be traced at least back to Plato (c360 BCE). In ‘Book X’ of The Republic Plato has Socrates convince Glaucon\textsuperscript{106} that poets including the likes of Homer should be banished from the hypothetical ideal Republic, as poets and artists in general (such as painters) are ‘imitators’ - employing mimesis and thus preventing the depiction of truth - and, Plato argues, are therefore dangerous (Plato & Reeve, 2012, pp. 545-573).

In the Poetics (c 335 BCE) however Aristotle refutes Plato’s arguments against poets and artists, pointing out the social function and the ethical utility of art. Aristotle examines fiction and historical writing in the creation of ancient Greek tragedy plays such as Oedipus Rex, also The Odyssey and The Iliad of Homer arguing for the importance of what Plato has criticized as ‘mimesis’ or imitation:

\begin{quote}
The poet being an imitator just like the painter or other maker of likenesses, he must necessarily in all instances represent things in one or other of three aspects, either as they were or are, or as they are said or thought to be or to have been, or as they ought to be (Aristotle, 2004, p. 25).
\end{quote}

It is however unclear from various extant translated texts of The Poetics (1952; 1996; 1997; 2004; 2012) whether Aristotle employed any kind of empirical or consilient methodology in the selection process of the specific works he criticizes, such as the most- and least-popular - or even critically well-regarded – Ancient Greek plays circa 335 BCE - but rather assertions from Aristotle’s own personal authority on the principles of “good” and “bad” narrative are deployed. This same style of rhetoric is evident in various contemporary screenwriting manuals\textsuperscript{107} however in The Art Instinct (Dutton, 2010) the art evocritic Dennis Dutton is (rightly) dismissive of this approach:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{106} in a didactic dialogue employing syllogisms  \\
\textsuperscript{107} See the “Screenwriting Doxa” Literature Review section below for specific details.
\end{flushright}
Philosophers of art naturally tend to begin theorizing from their own aesthetic predilections, their own sharpest aesthetic responses, however strange or limited these may be... General accounts extrapolated from limited personal enthusiasm may persuade us so long as we concentrate on the examples the theorist provides; often they fail when applied to a broader range of art (Dutton 2010, p. 49).

The ‘proof by example’ method of cultural critique (and thus doxa ‘creation’) is also harshly (and rightly) criticized by creativity researcher Colin Martindale in the consilient study The Clockwork Muse: The Predictability of Artistic Change (1990, p. 23). The period of creativity research prior to the 1950s can be seen to be problematic due to the influence of certain still-pervasive Romantic myths of creativity. Sawyer (2006, 2012) examines ten common beliefs about creativity and reveals the common falsehoods behind them (Sawyer 2012, pp. 406-9, 417). However one salient rational model of creativity from the pre-1950s period of research emerges from The Art of Thought (Wallas, 1926) in which Wallas identified four key stages in the creative process, namely: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. In Intuition: How We Think and Act (1982) Bastick collapses the first three stages of Wallas’s four-stage creative process into one, resulting in a two-stage creative process: (1) intuition and (2) verification (Bastick, 1982, pp. 310-311). In Creativity (1996) Csikszentmihalyi adds a fifth stage to Wallas’s (1926) model, resulting in the stages of: preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation and elaboration (Csikszentmihalyi, M 1996, pp. 79-80).108

Creativity and Cultural Production: Issues for Media Practice (McIntyre 2012) provides a brief overview of the history and key debates on creativity, also citing (Paton, 2008) on the Romantic view of creativity. Paton (2008) notes Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Rossetti all commemorated the English poet-suicide Thomas Chatterton as a symbol of the misunderstood genius (Phillip McIntyre, 2012, p. 16). Creativity researcher Margaret Boden in The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms is also direct in her criticism of the past myths of creativity, rightly stating that “Romanticism provides no understand of creativity” (Boden, 2004, p. 15).

108 Although Sawyer (2006, pp 70-2) finds ‘stage’ models of creativity to be problematic as they can gloss over the iterative and recursive nature of mini-insights, and various overlapping processes across stages.
In summary the rational and scientific study of creativity offers more useful insights into creativity as a phenomenon than do any of the alternate, outdated approaches.

4.1.1 Descriptions of Creativity

As is noted in the online *Dictionary of Creativity*, there currently exists a broad consensus in the creativity research field on the concept of creativity, namely “novelty and value” (Gorny, 2007, online). In a 2012 article ‘The Standard Definition of Creativity’ in *Creativity Research Journal* Runco & Jaeger (2012) examine the history of the standard definition of creativity concluding that:

> Although there were hints that creativity requires originality and usefulness in publications before 1900, it seems to us that Barron (1955), and especially Stein (1953), should be cited whenever the standard definition is used (Runco & Jaeger, 2012, p. 95).

The article also notes that Simonton also proposes a third criterion, namely “surprise”. It is possible that the proposed criterion for the standard definition of creativity in time may indeed become: “novelty, utility, and surprise” as per (Simonton, 2012c). These three criterion certainly can be seen to apply specifically to creativity in movies as judged by the field (the mass cinema-going audience); namely that a “good” movie story should be new (or should feel like an original idea), should also work for the audience (should be judged ‘appropriate’ as a movie) and that the story and/or storytelling should be surprising (or at the very least should not be predictable). Boden (2004) has likewise suggested the tripartite criterion for creativity involving ‘surprise’:

> Creativity is the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are new, surprising and valuable. 'Ideas' here include concepts, poems, musical compositions, scientific theories, cookery recipes, choreography, jokes - and so on. 'Artefacts' include paintings, sculptures, steam engines, vacuum cleaners, pottery, origami, penny whistles – and many other things you can name (Boden, 2004, p. 1).

Boden (2004) also distinguishes between psychological creativity (“P-creativity”) and historical creativity (“H-creativity”). In P-creativity, a new, surprising and valuable idea is new to the person who came up with it and may also be seen as “everyday” creativity, whereas H-creativity is judged as new for the first time in human history by the wider field (Boden, 2004, p. 2).\(^\text{109}\)

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\(^{109}\) In these terms P-creativity could be any new movie made by any filmmaker whereas H-creativity movies would include: the first short films, the first feature film (*The Story of the Kelly Gang*, Tait 1906),
Simonton (2013) in 'What is a creative idea? Little-c versus Big-C creativity' refers to H-creativity as “big-C” Creativity (Simonton, 2013b) and likewise Csikszentmihalyi (1996) also refers to “creativity with a capital C, the kind that changes some aspect of the culture” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 27). Boden (2004) further distinguishes between three major types of creativity namely: Combinatorial, combing two or more ideas; Exploratory, within an existing conceptual space such as creating a new limerick; and, Transformational creativity which revolutionizes and changes a conceptual space such as Einstein’s or Darwin’s major theories (Boden, 2004, pp. 3-10).\textsuperscript{110}

Another definition that correlates with the above “creativity” definitions comes partly from psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, wherein Csikszentmihalyi and Wolfe state that: “Creativity can be defined as an idea or product that is original, valued and implemented” (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000, p. 81).

In the domain of movies, although Maras (2009) rightly argues against the separation of the ‘conception’ and ‘execution’ of screen ideas, the distinction between the tangible cultural artifacts of the screenplay and the movie should be revisited here. This is to note that a screenplay that is judged creative by intermediaries or gatekeepers (such as professional screen readers) is first judged by a different subset of the field than is the movie when it is later judged by the general public in cinemas.

In view of this tripartite definition of creativity, a new movie that is: (a) not seen as ‘too derivative’ and is thus judged “original”; and is (b) worth spending both the time and the price of admission on, and is thus “valued” and also (c) is appearing now in cinemas and thus is “implemented”, would fit the criterion of effectively being judged creative by the wider field (mass cinema-going audience). However what professional movie critics see as creative and what the mass market finds appealing – (“new and useful”) - may often differ widely (Simonton 2011).\textsuperscript{111} For this reason certain distinctions of the

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\textsuperscript{110} Again, for example many of Chaplin’s, Kubrick’s, James Cameron’s, Hitchcock’s, Welles’s, Fellini’s, and Godard’s films - being highly influential on the field and domain of cinema - would be regarded as ‘big-C’ or ‘transformative’ creativity in these terms. See also the list of influential filmmakers in (Simonton 2011, p. 114).

\textsuperscript{111} Recall that D. K. Simonton (2011) rightly focuses on critically-acclaimed and award-winning movies as “great flicks”, or ‘films as art’ acknowledging that they are a very different set of movies (or, canon) to the set of ‘movies as business’ (Simonton, 2011, pp. 74, 81, 102-103, 112-103).
“4-C” model of creativity also become important in examining the judgements of movie stories by viewers on large social scales.

4.1.2 Models of Creativity

In the 4-C model of creativity, creativity is viewed as a continuum\(^\text{112}\) ranging from “everyday” creativity through “little-c” and “pro-c” (professional creativity) to “big-C” creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009, 2013). A very popular movie that is highly influential on both the cinema field and domain would be regarded as “big-C” Creative, correlating with Boden’s historical “H-creativity”, as would a popular or widely-accepted scientific theory for example Charles Darwin’s theory of Evolution.

In *The Annual Review of Psychology* (2010) Hennessey and Amabile published a literature review of the recent study of creativity. They examined 400 books, chapters and journal articles on the study of creativity that had been published over the ten years from 1998 to 2008 and concluded that:

![Figure 4-1 – All-encompassing systems lens on creativity (Henessey & Amabile 2010, p.571)](image)

Only by using multiple lenses simultaneously, looking across levels, and thinking about creativity systematically, will we be able to unlock and use its secrets. What we need now are all encompassing systems theories of creativity designed to tie together and make sense of the diversity of perspectives found in the literature - from the innermost neurological level to the outermost cultural level (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010, p. 590).

\(^{112}\) (in fact a spectrum)
One such Systems Theory of creativity is that first proposed by (Csikszentmihalyi 1988). In 2006 Csikszentmihalyi described this same Systems Model of creativity in the following terms:

An outline of the Systems Model - This environment has two salient aspects: a cultural, or symbolic, aspect which here is called the domain; and a social aspect called the field. Creativity is a process that can be observed only at the intersection where individuals, domains, and fields interact… For creativity to occur, a set of rules and practices must be transmitted from the domain to the individual. The individual must then produce a novel variation in the content of the domain. The variation then must be selected by the field for inclusion in the domain. Creativity occurs when a person makes a change in a domain, a change that will be transmitted through time (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 3).

Innovations in movie storytelling and movie-making such as those referred to by Bordwell (1997, 2008) as problem-solution “schemas” would certainly be such changes transmitted through time. Additionally, movie stories that enter the canon and are regarded as exemplary are transmitted through time, and are thus retained in the canon or in other words within the domain of works judged creative in cinema.

Csikszentmihalyi has also repeatedly noted that the systems model of creativity is an explicitly evolutionary model of culture. Two quotes illustrate this evolutionary concept, the first quotation from 1999:

The systems model is analogous to the model that scholars have used to describe the process of evolution… creativity can be seen as a special case of evolution; specifically, it is to cultural evolution as the mutation, selection, and transmission of genetic variation is to biological evolution... The same considerations apply to creativity when the latter is seen as the form that evolution takes at the cultural level: To be creative, a variation has to be adapted to its social environment, and has to be capable of being passed on through time (Csikszentmihalyi in Sternberg, 1999, p. 316).

In this view bottom 20 RoI movies are not well adapted to their environment, and are deselected by that environment (the minds of the movie audience) and become archive; top 20 RoI movies by contrast are extremely well adapted to their environment (that is to the minds of those in the field, or mass cinema audience) and thus become retained as canon. These movies are therefore transmitted through time via ongoing viewings by both existing and also new audiences.

The second Csikszentmihalyi quote (below) is from the year 2000 - noting the slight changes in phrasing to the above, although the argument is identical - namely that the
Systems Model of creativity is an *evolutionary* model of natural selection involving the evolutionary algorithm of *selection, variation* and *transmission* operating on (bio)culture rather than merely on biology:

The systems model of creativity is formally analogous to the model of evolution based on natural selection. The variation which occurs at the individual level of biological evolution corresponds to the contribution that the person makes to creativity; the selection is the contribution of the field, and the transmission is the contribution of the domain to the creative process (cf. Simonton 1988; Martindale 1989)… creativity can be seen as a special case of evolution. Creativity is to cultural evolution as the mutation, selection, and transmission of genetic variation is to biological evolution (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000, pp. 83-84).

Taking the broader view of bioculture instead of merely examining the domain of movies, this evolutionary natural selection view of “how bioculture works” correlates with Sir Karl Popper’s (1963, 1999) and D. T. Campbell’s Evolutionary Epistemology (D. T. Campbell, 1974b) and thus applies in a profound sense to how *all* socio-cultural domain-knowledge (retained information) in *any* biocultural domain works. The wider culture (knowledge) and the field (people) is the ‘environment’ and the current field does the *selecting* and *retaining* of new cultural artifacts (units of culture, or “memes”) such as the valued: movies, books, essays, songs, paintings, scientific ideas, words and so on. This retained information (biocultural artifacts) become canon over time while the discarded (deselected) knowledge (cultural artifacts or memes) thus become ‘archive’ in Moretti’s (2000) terms. An analogy in biology is that all the currently-living organisms and their contents are the ‘selected’ canon, as opposed to the fossils of extinct (‘deselected’) organisms namely the ‘archive’.

Screen media researcher Eva Novrup Redvall (2012) also uses the Systems Model of creativity in analysing screenwriting and movie-making in the article ‘A Systems View of Film-making as a Creative Practice’ in which she applies the Systems Model to the creation of the Danish movie *The Woman Who Dreamed of a Man* (2010) co-written by Per Fly and Dorthe Warnø Høgh. Redvall’s analysis includes the creative-problem-finding (CPF) and creative-problem-solving (CPS) models of creativity, influenced by Csikszentmihalyi’s art and science research and also David Bordwell’s film research (Redvall, 2012). Likewise in ‘Collaborative Problem Finding and Problem Solving:

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Understanding Screenwriting as a Creative Process’ (Redvall, 2009) the CPF and CPS approaches are used to understand the process of development of a screen idea, with both The Creative Vision: A Longitudinal Study of Problem Finding in Art (Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 1976) and the ‘problem/solution’ model as used in On The History of Film Style (Bordwell, 1997) being cited as influences for Redvall’s Systems approach to understanding creativity in screen media.

The Systems Model of creativity was also used to analyze the role of social networks within the field in shaping individual creativity in the article ‘A Core/Periphery Perspective on Individual Creative Performance: Social Networks and Cinematic Achievements in the Hollywood Film Industry’ (Cattani & Ferriani, 2008). In their study of movie success in the Hollywood motion picture industry from 1992-2003 Cattani and Ferriani (2008) show that an intermediate position between the core and periphery of a social system such as the movie industry (i.e., within the field of the movie domain) is likely an ideal position for an individual filmmaker to be located in order to achieve more creative results (Cattani & Ferriani 2008, p. 824). The (2008) study findings suggest that it pays to be neither an “insider” (industry establishment) nor a clear “outsider” (maverick) but instead to adopt a middle position between these two extremes in order to maximize potential biocultural creativity in creating successful movie stories.

A similar framework to the Systems Model of creativity in bioculture is Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the field of cultural production - also known as ‘practice theory’ (Postill, 2010). As a broad overview of Bourdieu’s practice theory, French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) developed a sociology of bioculture first presented in An Outline of a Theory of Practice (Bourdieu & Nice 1977) and subsequently in (Bourdieu, 1986, 1996; Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). Key concepts in Bourdieu’s practice theory of cultural production include: agency and structure; subject and object; four forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic); habitus; agents; and the field. Bourdieu is also known for

114 As noted previously, other scholars and researchers of creativity in cultural production who note the similarities in the schemas of the systems model of creativity and Bourdieu’s practice theory include (Burnard, 2012, p. 223; Kupferberg, 2006; Phillip McIntyre, 2006b, 2008b; 2012, p. 197) and various scholars in the Newcastle School of creativity (see: Fulton & McIntyre, 2013).
115 Also known as structure-agency theory, or “structuration” in (Giddens, 1984) and (Archer, 1995, 2002).
his interest in *reflexivity* as seen in his analysis of how the novelist Gustave Flaubert inserted personal details in the novel *Sentimental Education* (1869) thus creating a loose autobiography of his own social position in the field (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 145-60; 1996, p. 3). Bourdieu’s work is characterised by a blending of theory with empirical research; statistics, charts, graphs, diagrams and conceptual maps appear frequently in Bourdieu’s work.

As noted earlier in *Operational Definitions* Bourdieu defined *habitus* as “a feel for the game”, a “practical sense” that is gained through experience (Bourdieu & Johnson 1993, p. 5). Successful filmmakers (for example creators of extremely socially-contagious or of award-winning movies) have developed an effective *habitus* which has enabled them to play a part in creating such movies. The paths for navigating the constraints and possibilities of “the game” - or indeed of *not-unsuccessful* movie-making - are not presented anywhere in the domain as strict “rules” but rather as “possible winning strategies” (Bourdieu & Johnson 1993, p. 184). For this reason there is certainly not simply one ‘ideal and most-probable’ way to achieve one’s own idiosyncratic goals for success as a screen storyteller (whatever those might be); there are instead, in theory, potentially-infinite “possible winning strategies”.116

Bourdieu regards “agents” as individuals in any cultural field whose agency is both enabled and constrained by their individual position within the structure of that field namely an *agency-structure* duality (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p. 6). Bourdieu examined various fields including the arts, law, politics, economy, and education, and all are a series of overlapping fields (Bourdieu & Johnson 1993, p. 6).

Bourdieu’s (1993) concept of *field* appears largely isomorphic to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of *field* (1996). Regarding many of the various fields as examined by Bourdieu, sociologist Niklas Luhmann ([1984] 1995) in *Social Systems* also finds various fields (as systems) to be functionally differentiated including the legal, political, educational, scientific, art and economic ‘fields’ or systems (Luhmann, 1995).

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116 One’s own idiosyncratic goals in filmmaking may change over time and may also variously depend on one’s current dispositions and position in the field of filmmaking (see also: Bourdieu 1993, p. 61). Some movie-makers and/or screenwriters may also potentially have certain advantages over others, such as being born to movie-making parents and thus being immersed in a specific cultural domain more deeply and/or for longer, whether or not they were consciously aware of their level of immersion in the movie domain and field.
The current thesis thus examines part of the biocultural domain and biocultural field of *narrative fiction feature films*, which includes: movie audiences, critics, screenwriters, filmmakers, academics, film screenwriting teachers and screenwriting and filmmaking students. Biocultural domains (knowledge) and fields (people) overlap with other related domains and fields; namely communication (or cultural practice) in narrative screen media, and these can include the domains of: movies, short films, television, television commercials, videogames, Webseries and other narrative screen media.\(^\text{117}\)

Bourdieu also defined *doxa* as that which is taken for granted in any specific society; the experience by which “the natural and social world appears as self-evident” (Bourdieu 1976, p. 118; 1993, p. 160). Bourdieu notes that textbooks and manuals emanate from the *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 194), as does Macdonald (2004, 2013) in examining the domain of movie screenwriting. Bourdieu initially proposed three types of capital used by agents, namely *economic*, *cultural* and *social* capital, to which he later added a fourth type - *symbolic* capital, or resources available to the agent on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243).

In these terms movie-makers and screenwriters\(^\text{118}\) often must use their *social* capital such as professional reputation and social relationships in creating movies; their *cultural* capital or their expertise and knowledge of movie storytelling and also of the subjects or topics they are telling a story about; and may use their *symbolic* capital such as awards, titles, guild memberships and honours as equity (and/or leverage) to trade with (and/or persuade) owners of economic capital such as movie producers and investors in order to finance the development, production and distribution of their screen idea as a movie.

Conversely in independent movie story production - as was the case with many of the top 20 RoI movies - many of these requirements (or problems) of navigating the field and acquiring economic capital (such as high movie production budgets) can also be avoided. Notably *sexual* capital is not explicitly included in Bourdieu’s four key forms of capital but could be viewed as a subset of social capital and might also be employed

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\(^{117}\) It is important to note that all these different media forms compete with movies for human attention.

\(^{118}\) It should be noted that just as not all screenwriters are filmmakers or actively involved in film production, not all filmmakers are screenwriters. However some individuals may be *writer-hyphenates*, namely a writer-director, writer-producer, writer-actor, or two or three of these hyphenates at once. This point will become important in the later *Findings* section of this study.
as a resource or a ‘possible winning strategy’ for actors in the movie industry in the phenomenon commonly known as “the casting couch”.\textsuperscript{119}

There are also some clear links between Bourdieu’s and Csikszentmihalyi’s major theories of creativity and cultural production, as they have been outlined above. In \textit{Creativity} (1996) Csikszentmihalyi explicitly mentions one of Bourdieu’s key concepts namely \textit{cultural capital}:

…contributions that require a lifetime of struggle are impossible without curiosity and love for the subject. A person also needs access to a domain… The ownership of what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls “cultural capital” is a great resource. Those who have it provide their children with the advantage of an environment full of interesting books, stimulating conversation, expectations of educational advancement, role models, tutors, useful connections, and so on. But here too, luck is not everything. Some children fight their way to the right schools while their peers stay behind (Csikszentmihalyi, M 1996, pp. 53-4).

The connection regarding \textit{cultural capital} cited above is therefore one clear link from Bourdieu’s work in the sociology of creativity and cultural production to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975-2015) work in the psychology and socio-cultural aspects of creativity and cultural production. Additionally various other elements of the theories overlap or intersect, such as “habitus” (Bourdieu) and “internalizing the domain” (Csikszentmihalyi). This becomes clearer once we recognize that if the domain of movies involves verbal communication (such as ‘story-pitching’ skills) and that telling stories is something that most people do soon after learning speech; a “feel’ for the ‘game’ of telling engaging movie stories is thus “habitus” as well as “internalizing the domain” although movie stories have many other ‘rules of the game’ in terms of the doxa.

In addition to the Systems Model of creativity, Dean Keith Simonton’s (1984-2012) “Darwinian” or BVSR (Blind Variation and Selective Retention), aka Evolutionary theory of creativity is another important consideration in this study. As noted above, in the \textit{Cambridge Handbook of Creativity} (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010) the authors

\textsuperscript{119} Buss notes: “Short-term mating may have beneficial effects that are different from the original function. For example, “securing a part as an actor or actress in a movie” may be a beneficial effect of short-term mating, but could not have been an original function of such mating. Motion pictures are a modern invention and are not part of the selective environment in which humans evolved. Of course, this does not preclude “exchange sex for position or privilege” as a more abstract function of short-term mating.” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 176).
summarize the ten major extant categories of theories of creativity (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010, p. 21). Specifically regarding `Evolutionary Theories’ of creativity the authors state:

...a strong candidate for the most comprehensive theory of creativity – generally speaking – is the Darwinian (formerly “chance configuration”) model of Dean Keith Simonton (1984, 1988, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2004)… The basis of Simonton’s Darwinian model is a two-stage mental process, involving the blind generation and selective retention and elaboration of ideas (D T Campbell 1960)… In general, it is probably fair to say that the model’s highly quantitative basis gives it a rigor that is unsurpassed by any other major theory of creativity (Kozbelt, et al., 2010, pp. 35-37). The authors also note that Simonton’s Evolutionary or BVSR (Darwinian) model of creativity also covers the “six P’s” of creativity research namely the creative: person, and their creative potential, their creative process, creative product, their place (or geographical location), and persuasion which refers to social dynamics or the social verdicts on the creativity (i.e., novelty and utility) of the specific creative artifact (idea, process, or product) (Kozbelt, et al., 2010, p. 24). The creative product in this case is: a new movie that also becomes canon due to its social contagion.

Accepting the systems (or “sociocultural”) model of creativity as a larger framework, this study of ‘screenwriting doxa versus movie RoI’ adopts Simonton’s (1984-2014) Darwinian or Evolutionary BVSR (Blind-Variation and Selective-Retention) view - or essentially the evolutionary algorithm of selection, variation and transmission-with-heredity model - as the best extant general model to explain how screenwriters and/or movie-makers create - or combine, select, elaborate, and present ideas to the field – namely screen ideas (movie stories), both as screenplays in the first instance and in some cases later as completed screenworks (movies).

This thesis also accepts that Csikszentmihalyi’s Systems Theory of creativity (1988-2015) complements Simonton’s Evolutionary theory of creativity (1984-2014) and also D. T. Campbell & Karl Popper’s Evolutionary Epistemology (1963-1999)120 with regard to movies. Recalling also that Laszlo (1972b) showed that Systems Theory is a crucial component of understanding the workings of evolution - and that evolution is itself a systems process (Laszlo 1972b, pp. 88-87, 176-80) - it appears logical to use

both Systems and Evolutionary theory at once, as this appears to be a close approximation of the mechanics of: How movie stories are created; How screenplays are written; How movies are made and then viewed; and are thus ultimately judged as creative (or not) by mass cinema-going audiences.

In summary, evolutionary processes including the Systems and the BVSR models in creativity may explain where movie ideas come from, how story ideas develop for screenwriters, and likewise Evolutionary processes on larger social scales also explain how the socio-cultural (i.e., Systems) model of creativity works, resulting in movies becoming regarded by consensus as either canon or as archive. The canonical movies such as the top 20 RoI movies - as extreme examples - were those that are better adapted to both survive and also to spread socially (or be “replicated”) in their environment. Part of the systems environment of movies is in the minds (the memory) of those in the field, namely global cinema audiences.\textsuperscript{121}

In ‘Creative Thought as Blind-Variation and Selective-Retention: Combinatorial Models of Exceptional Creativity’ (Simonton 2010), Simonton also notes the accepted standard definition of creativity, and suggests that creativity effectively works the same way in the arts and sciences - and that it thus includes movies (or “motion pictures”):

Creative thought is defined as the process or set of processes that generate ideas that are both (a) original, novel, or surprising and (b) useful or adaptive (Runco 2004). Finally, it is necessary to distinguish ordinary creativity from exceptional creativity... Where the former refers to everyday problem solving, the latter is confined to creativity that yields products that contribute to a particular discipline, whether in the arts or sciences. Examples include journal articles, patents, computer programs, paintings, poems, novels, musical compositions, motion pictures, video games, and architectural designs. The more extensive and enduring the contribution, the more exceptional is the creativity... It should be apparent that the definition of creative thought closely parallels Campbell’s [1960] concept of blind-variation and selective-retention. The blind-variation generates the originality of an idea whereas the selective-retention determines the idea’s utility (Simonton, 2010, p. 159).

\textsuperscript{121} It is noted that (Dennett 1995) and (Blackmore, 1999, 2006, 2007) use Meme Theory to explain the same concept of the spread of units of culture (“memes”) and in this case: movies, as units of culture. However until a consensus is reached on the structure of the unit of culture, Memetics (1976-2014) as a domain of knowledge is for the most part deliberately avoided here. However as one proposed suggestion for the structure of the meme, the unit of culture, see: ‘The Holon/Parton Theory of the Unit of Culture (or the Meme, and Narreme) in Science, Media, Entertainment and the Arts’ (2016), in A. Connor & S. Marks (Eds.), Creative Technologies for Multidisciplinary Applications. New York: IGI Global (Velikovsky, 2016). In these terms a movie (or a screenplay) is a unit of culture and is a holon/parton.
In the above terms *(bio)cultural creativity* is certainly one common element linking the Arts and the Sciences, effectively removing any major perceived “Two Cultures” barrier. This is note that the underlying Systems model and Evolutionary processes of creativity in the arts and sciences are the same although the specific biocultural domains may differ. In this same article Simonton (2010) also reviews the development of the idea of Campbell’s (1960) BVSR (blind variation and selective retention) in creativity, integrating the DIFi (aka DPFi) systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988) for examining disciplinary contexts.

In terms of extant literature on movie (and thus movie screenwriting) creativity, the most important and relevant work for this study overall is *Great Flicks: Scientific Studies of Cinematic Creativity and Aesthetics* (Simonton, 2011). In this comprehensive and exhaustive work Simonton examines over 200 prior papers, articles and book chapters that were scientific in their methodology:

> Most of the research in film studies originates in the humanities. The contributions consist of insightful essays that examine a diversity of questions. Far less common are investigations that can be considered scientific, in a strict sense. By “scientific” I mean a study that is abstract, systematic, objective, and quantitative (Simonton 2011, pp. 5-6).

Although scientific study has previously been used to analyze movie box-office success among certain of the 200 prior research publications that Simonton reviews, the results of those researches have (a) not yet been widely used in practice due to their being related to such broad factors as *genre, stars, and release-timing*, and/or, (b) have not been widely applied in industry as: seven in ten movies still currently lose money (Vogel, 2014, p. 83). Simonton (2011) suggests that the specific areas of direct content analysis of story and the story’s component elements are under-researched, finding only two prior story-related studies: one study on the values of protagonists in movies (Beckwith, 2009) and one on how storyline determines RoI in movies (Eliashberg, Hui, & Zhang, 2007). This suggests a gap in the research literature on ‘movie story and RoI’ which this current study aims to address.

In the chapter ‘Writing for Success: Screenplays and Cinematic Impact’ in *The Social Science of Cinema* (Kaufman & Simonton 2014, pp. 3-23) Simonton finds the nature of

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122 rather than a specific narrative-related nature of their findings,
extant research on movie screenplays has been so general as to be of limited utility in practice:

Attributes – Not surprisingly, scientific research on screenplays has concentrated on their more obvious distinguishing features. These are (a) the film’s running time, (b) the film’s genre or broad story type, (c) the rating the picture received from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), (d) the type and intensity of “mature content” depicted in the film, (e) whether the film is a sequel to or a remake of a previous film, (f) whether the film is based on a true story about a person or event, (g) whether the film is based on an original script or an adaptation, and in the latter case, the source of the adaptation. Where appropriate, these attributes are defined with respect to the final theatrical release rather than with either the preproduction script or the later video/DVD version (Simonton in Kaufman & Simonton, 2014, p. 4).

This general approach to movie study to date appears logical as the above-mentioned attributes are relatively easy to collate and analyze statistically - however a detailed, specific and particular examination of story is obviously more time-consuming and requires additional resources and expertise if focus-groups or empirical studies of audience effects are undertaken.123 There thus appear to be certain gaps in the research literature on the elements of story (and thus, screenplay) that contribute to movie success.124

As noted in the above summary of Novrup Redvall’s (2009, 2012, 2016) papers, in On The History of Film Style Bordwell (1997) proposes the `problem/solution’ model and `cost/benefit’ ratios as a way of understanding movie history; Bordwell also rightly criticizes “Grand Theorists” or the “SLAB” (`Saussurian semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, and Barthesian textual’)125 “grand” theories of movie analysis:

During the 1970s Grand Theorists took individual agency out of film history; since then they have been struggling to put it back. The problem/solution model faces no such difficulty... Once films are supposed to tell stories, filmmakers must try out ways to tell them clearly. How do you ensure that viewers recognize the main characters

123 But see the exemplary `The Pleistocene Protagonist: An Evolutionary Framework for the Analysis of Film Protagonists’. Journal of Screenwriting (Pelican, in press).
https://bangor.academia.edu/KiraAnnePelican

124 Some of these issues are also noted in section 4-4 - Studies of Movie Performance below.

125 For one of Bordwell’s more detailed critiques of “SLAB” theory see Bordwell’s introduction to Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996) and also: ‘The Insider: David Bordwell Blows the Whistle on Film Studies’ (Quart, 2000).
on each appearance? How do you delineate cause and effect in unambiguous ways? How do you portray psychological states that propel the action? …Later solutions to the problem of clarity, such as cutting in to a closer view, will yield different benefits (as well as different costs) (Bordwell 1997, pp. 150-1).

Apart from the obvious inclusion of considerations of the choices of creative agents (screenwriters, cast and crew) Bordwell notes there are different costs and benefits inherent in each choice made by creative practitioners.

With Boyd’s (2009, 2010) ‘cost/benefit ratios’ for artists and audiences in mind and specifically for a movie screenwriter, one universal problem-situation thus might be: “How do I make my movie-story reach the widest audience, for the least production budget?” while for audiences a key ‘cost/benefit ratio’ might well be motivational questions such as: “Which movie/s should I/we choose to go and see - and, should I/we go see one, at all?”

It is for such reasons of cost/benefit ratios - for both artists and audiences that the extremes of high and low movie RoI are examined in this study - and are compared to the doxa of the screenwriting convention. A screen idea that is told for the least production budget and yet has the widest audience-reach therefore has: a smaller story-composition cost yet a greater benefit for its (larger) audiences.

Creativity researcher R. Keith Sawyer (2012) also examines creativity in movies including a discussion of the top 20 RoI movie Star Wars (1977). Noting again that Sawyer uses the term ‘sociocultural’ model to mean the Systems Model of creativity:

From the sociocultural perspective, Star Wars has to be considered creative because it’s been judged creative by the field. It made it through all of the usual filters by first getting funded and distributed by a major studio, and then by facing the test of the movie-going audience. Although some influential critics hated the movie, on balance the field has determined that it was creative. And since 1977,

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126 As noted earlier evocritic Boyd (2010) examines ‘cost/benefit ratios’ as they are crucial in shaping not only biological but also biocultural evolution: ‘Artists of any kind will seek to minimize composition effort - by operating within existing artistic modes and traditions, by recombining available models, by adopting readymade subjects - as much as is compatible with maximizing the attention and status a work can earn. Like artists, audiences too seek a favourable cost/benefit ratio’ (B. Boyd, 2010, p. 238).

127 Recall that the key assumption underpinning this premise is thus that storytellers in any communication medium - but particularly in movies as an expensive storytelling medium - aim to reach the widest audience possible, for the least cost in terms of the types of resources (forms of capital) involved. In fact the movie story-and-storytelling itself - or the screenwriter’s compositional choices - dictate to a large extent what types of resources are required to be involved.
the ways that it changed the domain are increasingly clear (Sawyer, 2012, pp. 313-314).

Group creativity - or Macdonald’s Screen Idea Work Group (SIWG) - is often clearly in evidence in movie-story creation as Sawyer (2012) also notes the production-line style of story- and thus script-development that occurs on big-budget Hollywood movies: “The 1998 asteroid thriller Armageddon had eight different writers contributing to various portions of the script” (Sawyer 2012, pp. 327-8). The two Sawyer (2012) quotes above both highlight what Macdonald (2004) terms the Screen Idea Work Group (SIWG) and that individual creatives such as screenwriters in movie production are parts of larger systems; not merely physical, psychological and socio-cultural, but also primarily, economic systems.

4.1.3 Summation – Review of Creativity Literature

In summation the above review of some of the key relevant literature on creativity aims to explain how some movies are ultimately selected by the field en masse (with the environment of each movie being the cinema audience) and thus become canon in culture - whilst others are deselected or ignored or avoided en masse and thus become archive. In such terms the top 20 RoI movies are canon and the Bottom 20 are archive. Simonton’s Great Flicks: Scientific Studies of Cinematic Creativity and Aesthetics (2011) was also reviewed noting that it is focussed on cinema “classics” as voted by critics, movie-guide reviewers and other intermediaries in the cinema field - but also emphasizing that while high-RoI movies are a very different subset of movie canon as selected by the field there are indeed some overlaps, namely certain high-RoI movies are also widely regarded as “great flicks” or modern classics in their genres: top 20 RoI movies such as Star Wars (1977), and E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982).

The view of this thesis is that the evolutionary DPFi Systems (or sociocultural) model of creativity - combined with Simonton’s evolutionary model of creativity and Bourdieu’s practice theory - are an effective way to understand movie creativity, and broadly explains why there exist movies that are high-RoI and others which are low-RoI. These extremes of movie performance and their canonical (creative) or archival (uncreative) status over time can be seen to be explained by evolutionary systems in action. It should again be noted that the outputs of certain subsystems are movie screenplays while outputs of a different subsequent system are completed movies; however the “screen idea” or movie story is common to both these discrete cultural
artifacts that emerge from these various systems. It is to a review of Systems Theory with a focus on how it relates to creativity that we now turn.

4.2 SYSTEMS THEORY

As noted above, prior research that has specifically analyzed movies or parts of the movie industry using the DPFi\textsuperscript{128} systems view of creativity include: Csikszentmihalyi (1995), Cattani & Ferriani (2008), Novrup Redvall (2009, 2012, 2016), and Simonton (2011, 2014). As this thesis aims to use the Systems view to understand and analyze the systems interaction of domain, field and person,\textsuperscript{129} a brief summary of relevant literature on Systems Theory is presented below.


4.2.1 Uses of Systems Theory to analyze Culture

In *Systems Theory as an Approach to the Study of Literature: Origins and Functions of Literature* (1999) Sadowski primarily uses Mazur’s formulations of systems theory to present the following (simplest) formulation of a system and its environment, observing that there is both *input* and *output* for any system and that systems are self-regulated by feedback sensors.

\textsuperscript{128} or DIFi (Domain, Individual, Field interaction)

\textsuperscript{129} (or Bourdieu’s “agent”)
The system in this view (Fig. 4-2) is merely a “black box” however inside the black box of the system itself are the following parts - which are also wholes:\textsuperscript{130}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4-2.png}
\caption{A system and its environment (after Sadowski, 1999, p. 19)}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4-3.png}
\caption{The Autonomous System (Sadowski 1999, p. 76)}
\end{figure}

The above parts of the system in this diagram include: (1) a Correlator for storing and retrieving information; (2) an Accumulator for storing and retrieving energy, and; (3) a Homeostat which makes decisions on what to do with the system’s available energy and information, based on the positive or negative feedback (stimulus) about the environment that the homeostat receives from the Receptor and Alimentator. The result is the response, or reaction to (output into) the environment via the Effector. If inputs

\textsuperscript{130} Or in other words, holon/partons. See (Velikovsky, 2016) and see also: https://storyality.wordpress.com/2013/12/12/storyality-100-the-holonic-structure-of-the-meme-the-unit-of-culture/
and outputs are equal, a given system is in equilibrium. Sadowski also notes that systems `run on’ or use energy, information, and matter (Sadowski 1999, passim). Sadowski (1999) includes a diagram of the input/output (and positive and negative feedback) relationship between sub-systems with regard to literature:

![Diagram of the input/output relationship](image)

*Figure 4-4 - Relations between Author, Text, Reader and Environment* (Sadowski 1999, p. 34)

Such a holistic systems view privileges neither the author, text, nor “reader” (movie audience member) but regards all these elements as components of one whole system. A more detailed version of such a system is also explicated in *Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning* (Carroll et al 2012):

![Diagram of the social ethos](image)

*Figure 4-5 - Circulatory system for a social ethos* (Carroll et al, 2012, p. 53)
The authors of this consilient evolutionary study of canonical nineteenth-century British novels note that:

On the average, the features that distinguish “good” and “bad” characters, and especially the features that distinguish protagonists and antagonists, reflect the positive and negative values that authors have invested in their characters and anticipate their [audiences] will share. In general, good characters, and especially protagonists, reflect the normative values of the novels - values shared by authors and their [audiences]. Bad characters reflect the inverse of normative values. Normative values provide a common frame of reference for authors and their [audiences] (Carroll et al 2012, p. 52).\(^{131}\)

It should again be noted that the screenplay and the movie cannot be viewed as synonymous as both are outputs of different systems; at the same time the same screen idea (movie story) can be identified in both the screenplay and the movie. Moreover as Maras (2009) rightly notes, the conception and execution stages of a screen idea as a movie should not be viewed as separate, although quite clearly multiple systems are at work. Moving to a finer level of detail for one component of the systems model when applied to bioculture, Sadowski (1999) also proposes a model of the human psyche\(^{132}\) as a system - a model which can be applied to understanding both individual authors (or movie creators/screenwriters/filmmakers) as well as professional screen readers and individual movie audience members:

\(^{131}\) In this quotation as cited here, the term ‘audiences’ has been exchanged for the original ‘readers’.

\(^{132}\) It should be noted this model is not Freudian despite the names of the three components listed above as Sadowski makes clear his position - influenced by Joseph Carroll (1995) – also reminiscent of Bordwell’s (1996) dismissal of “SLAB” theory in Film Studies (see: Sadowski 1999, p. 3).
If instances of creativity in bioculture are examined as systems processes - as Csikszentmihalyi (1988), Simonton (2004, 2011), Redvall (2012, 2016) and others have demonstrated with the DPFi systems model of creativity - then one important systems concept in the screenwriting and movie domains, fields, and biocultural artifacts is emergence, or, as Aristotle suggested: the whole is more than the sum of the parts.\(^{133}\) By way of a general summary of Systems Thinking, Sadowski (1999) also recounts a brief history of Systems Theory (Sadowski, 1999, pp. 7-8).

In 2014 Capra and Luisi published *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (Capra & Luisi, 2014) which examines and integrates the four “separate” domains of biology, cognition, sociology and ecology using the systems view. Capra & Luisi (2014) aims to integrate the various domains examined, although the linguistics section of the work appears problematic as the conceptual systems integration in the work is based primarily on the systems work of Maturana and Varela; Maturana appears to take a narrow view of consciousness and language, stating that communication is not *transmission of information*, but is instead: *coordination of behaviour*.

Cybernetics, a subdomain of General Systems Theory, is customarily dated to *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Wiener, 1948). Heylighen (2014) reviews various definitions of the term ‘cybernetics’ (Heylighen, 2014). This thesis uses the term ‘cybernetics’ as it applies to *system cybernetics* whether they be physical, chemical, biological, psychological, societal or biocultural systems and whether natural or ‘artificial’ (human-made) systems. Since at least 1948 cybernetics has spread to various domains including biology, ecology, computer science, engineering, mathematics, psychology, sociology,\(^{134}\) education, management, memetics and the arts. In the 1970s “new cybernetics” or “second-order cybernetics” as distinct from Wiener’s original cybernetics framework emerged in biology in such works as *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Maturana & Varela, 1979). The latter work includes the first articulation of the concept of “autopoiesis” or self-organizing systems (Capra & Luisi, 2014, pp. 129-130).

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\(^{133}\) The phrase ‘the whole is more than the sum of the parts’ does not literally appear in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* but rather the (translated) phrase is ‘In the case of all things which have several parts and in which the totality is not, as it were, a mere heap, but the whole is something besides the parts, there is a cause’ (Book VII, Ch 6, Aristotle, [c335 BCE] 1952a, p. 569).

\(^{134}\) (including both Laszlo’s 1972, and also Luhmann’s 1995 versions of “sociocybernetics”)
In ‘Principles of Systems and Cybernetics: An Evolutionary Perspective’ (Heylighen, 1992) Heylighen outlines an evolutionary view of system cybernetics. Another historical overview of Systems Thinking and Systems Theory appears in General Systems Theory (Skyttner, 2005) wherein various key systems concepts are defined and explained and includes a key point from Downing Bowler (1951) which is crucial for Systems Philosophy in terms of ontology, namely that: “Everything that exists, whether formal, existential, or psychological, is an organized system of energy, matter and information” (Skyttner 2005, p. 52). In his chapter four Skyttner (2005) also explains key systems concepts in Communication Theory including Weaver (1946, 1949) (Skyttner 2005, pp. 207-13) and Shannon (1948) (Skyttner 2005, pp. 219-223) including Shannon’s classical “communication process” diagram (p. 222).

In Handbook of Research on Creativity (K. Thomas & Chan, 2013) creativity researcher Phillip McIntyre’s chapter ‘Creativity as a System in Action’ clarifies details of the systems model of creativity in cultural production, reviewing General Systems Theory as per von Bertalanffy (1968); also examining Laszlo (1972) and Koestler (1975) on holons; and tracing the historical development of Systems Thinking in creativity research from Plato’s “muses” and “divine inspiration” through additional problematic Romantic conceptions of creativity, to R. K. Sawyer (2006, 2012) and the modern era of creativity research (i.e., post-1950s), examining (Skyttner 2005) on General Systems Theory and explicating the systems view of creativity beginning with Csikszentmihalyi (1988) (Phillip McIntyre, 2013).

The learning process itself can also be seen as a systems-cybernetic process. Lovelock (1995) states:

> The attainment of any skill, whether it be in cooking, painting, writing, talking or playing tennis, is all a matter of cybernetics. We aim at doing our best and making as few mistakes as possible; we compare our efforts with this goal and learn by experience; and we polish and refine our performance by constant endeavour until we are satisfied that we are as near to optimum achievement as we can ever reach. This process is well called learning by trial and error (Lovelock 1995, p. 47).

This understanding can be applied to integrating tacit knowledge and also habitus into learning successful screenwriting. This “learning by trial-and-error” is also equivalent to

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135 Screenwriting, and the various techniques of filmmaking and screen storytelling can and should be added to this list of `example skills`. 
The scientific method, or the process of: (1) theory (expectation), (2) trial (experiment), and then, (3) if required: error-correction. In this Popperian view, all of life (i.e., all biological matter) is not merely problem-solving (see: Popper 1999) but also all of life - as an experience, including the tasks of writing a screenplay and making a movie - is also, informally: “doing science”.  

For research on how and why some screenplays/movies emerge as creative artifacts in the domain of movies and then succeed in propagating by spreading widely and contagiously among audiences (the field) to be not merely descriptive (i.e., what happens) but also explanatory (why it happens) it becomes clear that cybernetics, Systems Theory and systems control theory are involved in all domains relevant to screenwriting and movie-making - and primarily the DP Fi (evolutionary) systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2006, 2014; Simonton 2004, 2011). Furthermore if Laszlo (1972) is correct then Systems Theory and Cybernetics appear integral across all related domains from physics, to chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, culturology and also to geology, astrophysics and cosmology.

4.2.2 Conclusion – A Review of Systems Theory Literature

This section has aimed to briefly survey the key literature in Systems Theory, including the Systems Model of creativity. The Field, Person and Domain are considered as individual systems, and taken together are also a DP Fi meta-system, wherein each of these elements are also holons (a part which is also a whole) within a system of systems. Systems are thus herein seen as a crucial and all-pervasive feature of creativity and communication, screenwriting, and movie-making. Story creation (screenwriting) is also here seen as a subdomain of the story execution (the creation of the movie).

136 In the essay ‘The Method of Scientific Investigation’ (Huxley & Snell, 1909) Huxley noted that the scientific method is merely a formalized version of everyday thinking, namely: expectation and then testing the expectation. Likewise Einstein noted ‘The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking.’ (Einstein, [1936] 1950, p. 59). Science is thus hardly ‘just another discourse’ as the Postmodernists suggest but instead appears to be the best available method for getting at the truth, as Dennett (1998) also rightly notes.

137 See (Velikovsky, 2016, p. 211) for more details.

138 At the conclusion of this Literature Review chapter are included several Systems Process diagrams detailing the workings of certain systems aspects of the screenwriting/movie domain and field; see the diagrams in section 4.5.3 - A Synthesis of Certain Concepts in the Literature Review.
4.3 SCREENWRITING DOXA

The following section reviews key works in screenwriting scholarship and literature that partly comprise the dominant screenwriting doxa, namely the dominant discourse on the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to do things in narrative movie story creation - thus movie screenwriting. Chapter section (4.3) is designed to answer Research Question #1: What is the current orthodoxy (doxa) of movie screenwriting?

4.3.1 A Review of the Literature on Movie Screenwriting – 1909-1960’s


In *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (2009) Maras primarily focuses on screenwriting between the 1910s and 1940s and finds that:

> Before 1926, at least to judge by official credits, there were no screenwriters. The expression per se scarcely existed. Indeed the particular expression ‘screenwriter’ is not a common one until the late 1930s, although… other terms were in existence (Maras 2009, p. 29).

Maras finds that the first motion picture ‘scenario’ was by Salmi Morse, written in 1880 and picked up by film producers in the late 1890s (Maras 2009, p. 30). Also examined are biases in the screenwriting convention (doxa) including assumptions that Aristotelian notions of drama apply to present-day cinema (p. 171).

*The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (Price, 2010) examines more recent scholarship on the screenplay stating also that the ‘auteur’ theory has passed out of favour in light of the concept of multiple authorship, particularly in view of:

...a Hollywood in which the writer is almost invariably a worker for hire, contractually obligated to relinquish control over the text on submission to the studio, which customarily subjects a ‘final draft’ to ongoing revisions from many different writers (Price 2010, p. x).

Price (2010) discusses the instability and resultant invisibility of the screenplay in scholarship, examining the various stages that screen ideas can pass through as screenplays. A case study of the co-written screenplay for Hunter and Hitchcock’s movie *The Birds* (1963) notes recurrent problem-situations in that screen idea’s development and details of various attempted solutions; also discussed are uses of aspects of literary and film theory that can illuminate screenplay scholarship.

*A History of the Screenplay* (Price 2013) is a rigorous scholarly examination of the history of the screenplay from its silent-film American and European origins to modern-day Hollywood reviewing solutions to the problem of screenplay form in various cultures including Russian and German cinema, also examining such luminaries as Carl Mayer, Ingmar Bergman and William Goldman. Price discusses early copyright law, continuity scripts and sound screenplays (post-1927) through the “New Hollywood” era, to the contemporary screenplay form and modern screenplay manuals.

The first published instructional article on movie screenwriting appeared in 1909 (Bordwell, 1985, p. 126) thus there is now a tradition of over one hundred years of analysing movie screenplays in order to determine narrative elements that are prescribed for screen storytellers to use as practical writing tools while writing in the commerce-driven environment of the movie industry.

As the above key historiographies and an examination of primary source texts in the form of early screenwriting manuals indicates, over time the industry jargon for movie screenplays has evolved and has variously included: moving picture “play”, “scenario”, “continuity”, “photoplay”, “script” and “screenplay”. As the modern-era popular screenplay manuals begin in 1979 with Syd Field’s *Screenplay*, the manuals prior to 1979 are herein not critically analyzed in detail as they do not appear to now be currently frequently cited, marketed or sold. Cinema style and form has evolved since

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140 Lajos Egri’s *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (Egri, 1946) is also often cited in the ‘how-to’ screenwriting literature although it instructs on writing theatrical plays and not specifically movie screenplays. Interestingly in *The Art of Creative Writing* Egri notes: “The universal man is really the average man… If you truly know one - you know all” (Egri, 1965, p. 13) suggesting playwrights (and, by implication, screenwriters) consider human universals in human nature.

141 *The Screenwriter’s Handbook* (Nash & Oakey, 1978) was not popular (best-selling), as discussed in the section below, 4.3.3- The Modern-Era (Post-1970s) Screenplay Manuals.
1906 as Bordwell (1997, 2008) demonstrates, thus the pre-1979 screenwriting manuals do not significantly comprise much of the domain knowledge within the current screenwriting convention.¹⁴²

### 4.3.2 The First Screenwriting Manuals

In 1911 the first traditionally-published ‘how to’ manual for cinema screenwriting appeared: *The Photo-Play: A book of Valuable Information for Those Who Would Enter a Field of Unlimited Endeavour* (Stoddard, 1911). The work prescribes key guidelines for aspiring writers for the cinema screen, advising on scenario construction; number of scenes; and ideal photo-play length.¹⁴³

In 1912 Epes Winthrop Sargent published *Technique of the Photoplay* (1912) the text of which is now in the public domain.¹⁴⁴ As with (Stoddard 1911) an examination of (Sargent, 1912) reveals how the domain of movie-making has changed in the past hundred years; prior to sync sound in cinema in 1927, movies were silent and used inter-titles; were much shorter in duration as a “one-reeler” was 10 minutes and a “three-reeler” was 30 minutes; and screenwriting terms such as “bust” (meaning “close-up”) are no longer widely in use in the current doxa.¹⁴⁵ Such anachronistic linguistic details are evidence that these manuals are no longer popular. We can however infer that they have contributed in some ways to the conventional wisdom or doxa on screenwriting, including in terms of the authoritative writing style and effusive rhetoric often employed in them which also typifies much screenwriting discourse in the so-called ‘scenario fever’ era of the 1910s.¹⁴⁶

In 1913 William Lewis Gordon published *How to Write Moving Picture Plays* in which he outlines how to write silent film “plays” including the advice:

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¹⁴² Although certain traces of many of the artistic “schemas” articulated in them are still evident within the contemporary screenwriting convention, for example classic dramatic principles such as agonistic structure and conflict.

¹⁴³ A more detailed coding analysis of this specific manual (Stoddard 1911) also appears in the digital Appendix of this thesis.

¹⁴⁴ As is the case with many of the early screenwriting (‘photoplay’) manuals.

¹⁴⁵ Curran (2015) clarifies the meaning and uses of the term “bust” versus “close up” in photoplay scenarios in some early influential (1910-1922) screenwriting manuals (see: Curran, 2015, p. 253-5).

¹⁴⁶ By contrast to the early manuals, Price (2013) rightly recalls Bordwell’s astute observations that modern-era screenplay manuals (i.e., post-Oakey and Nash, 1978) emphasize: (1) ‘three act’ structure; (2) prescriptions of a protagonist character ‘arc’ to overcome a character flaw; and (3) Campbellian (monomythic) story structure (Price 2013, pp. 204-5).
REMEMBER THAT A PLAY EASILY PRODUCED IS FAR MORE LIABLE TO BE ACCEPTED THAN ONE REQUIRING THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS TO STAGE (Gordon, 1913, p. 21, upper case in the original).

Also in 1913 Eustace Hale Ball published *The Art of the Photoplay* (Ball, 1913) and likewise in the year 1913 J Berg Esenwein and Arthur Leeds published *Writing The Photoplay* (Esenwein & Leeds, 1913). In 1914 A. W. Thomas published *How to Write a Photoplay* (A. W. Thomas, 1914) including advice on: story, the theme and its material, the division into scenes, the action, unity, sequence, suspense, unexpectedness, crisis and climax. Such terms and concepts are all still in current use in the doxa to varying degrees, although the term “surprise” has replaced “unexpectedness” in common usage.

For the purposes of additional historical context, in *Great Flicks: Scientific Studies of Cinematic Creativity and Aesthetics* (2011) Simonton provides a historical overview of the early literature on film poetics and aesthetics finding that by 1936 “Film had become the “seventh art” after painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance and poetry” 147 (Simonton 2011, p. 3). Simonton cites (Münsterberg, 1916) and Arnheim:

…in 1916 Hugo Munsterberg published *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, and in the 1930’s Rudolf Arnheim began a series of articles that were later compiled into the volume *Film As Art*. The former book is often considered the first attempt at film theory, and the latter is considered a classic in the field of cinema aesthetics. In due course the informed judgement of cinema connoisseurs led to the promulgation of various enumerations of the all-time masterworks in the form. A case in point is the American Film Institute’s list of the “top 100 American movies of the last 100 Years”… all masterpieces in a specific mode of creativity (Simonton 2011, pp. 3-4).

In 1920 John Emerson and Anita Loos published *How To Write Photoplays* (Emerson & Loos, 1920) and by 1925 playwright, novelist and screenwriter Loos had achieved fame as one of the most successful early Hollywood women screenwriters (Norman, 2007, pp. 35-39). Also in 1920 Frances Taylor Patterson published *Cinema Craftsmanship: a Book for Photoplaywrights* (Patterson, 1920). In 1922 Palmer and Howard published the *Photoplay Plot Encyclopedia: An Analysis of the Use in Photoplays of the Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations and Their Subdivisions* (Palmer & Howard, 1920) a work derived...

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147 This term relates to *The Seven Lively Arts* (Seldes 1924). See also Henry Jenkins’ writings on videogames as a ‘lively art’ in the *First Person* anthology (Jenkins, 2004) and in *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture* (Jenkins, 2007).
from Georges Polti’s *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* (Polti, 1894). In 1924 Frederick Palmer published *Technique of the Photoplay* (Palmer, 1924). In 1928 Frances Taylor Patterson published *Scenario and Screen* (Patterson, 1928). Subsequently in 1929 Frances Taylor Patterson also published *Motion Picture Continuities* (Patterson, 1929). In 1936 Tamar Lane published *The New Technique of Screen Writing: A Practical Guide to the Writing and Marketing of Photoplays* (Lane, 1936). Also in 1936 John Howard Lawson published *Theory and Technique of Playwriting* later expanded and republished as *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting* (Lawson, 1949). In 1937 Norman Lee published the unsubtly-titled *Money For Film Stories* (N. Lee, 1937). Also in 1937 Marion and Sherwood published *How To Write and Sell Film Stories: with a Complete Shooting Script for Marco Polo* (Marion & Sherwood, 1937). As the “golden age” of studio-era Hollywood movies emerged in the 1940s and 50s the publication of new screenwriting manuals appears to have dropped in frequency as the studio-contracted-screenwriter system meant that “breaking in” as a novice freelance (“spec” screenwriter) was not as likely as it had been in the early development of cinema during the prior ‘scenario fever’ era.

As Price (2013, p. 201) notes the modern or current-day era of screenwriting manuals was inaugurated in 1979 by Field’s *Screenplay*, the era to which we now turn.

### 4.3.3 The Modern-Era (Post-1970s) Screenplay Manuals

In 1978 the lesser-known *The Screenwriter's Handbook: Writing for the Movies - What To Write, How To Write It, Where To Sell It* (Nash & Oakey, 1978) was published. The work cites among others *Chinatown* (1974), *The Sound of Music* (1965), and *The Godfather* (1972) as exemplary screenplays but interestingly also features top 20 RoI movie *American Graffiti* (1973). The book includes interviews with film industry personnel such as Ernest Lehmann, Robert Evans and Gene Wilder, also emphasizing the importance of three act structure (pp. 3, 20-1) and states “Your script can be

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148 Polti’s ’36 dramatic situations’ are listed in *The Feature Screenwriters Workbook* (Velikovsky, 2011, 4th Edn., pp. 51-52). Evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker notes: “Most of the thirty-six plots in Georges Polti’s catalog are defined by love or sex or a threat to the safety of a protagonist or his kin (for example “Mistaken Jealousy”, “Vengeance taken for kindred upon kindred” and “Discovery of the dishonour of a loved one”)” (Pinker, 2010, p. 133). *Story Structure Architect* (Schmidt, 2005) also analyses these situations from a specifically female perspective; see Schmidt (2005) later in this Literature Review.
anywhere from 100 to 150 pages long, though *120 pages is the preferred length*” (p. 21).\(^\text{149}\)

In 1979 former screen reader and screenwriter Syd Field published *Screenplay: The Basics of Film Writing* (Field 1979) in which he also outlined the “three-act structure”, namely “the setup, confrontation, and resolution” which Field claims good movie screenplays follow. Field (1979) presents the following diagram:

![Figure 4-7 – Field’s ’paradigm’ (Field 1979, p. 18)](image)

This structure correlates with ‘Freytag’s triangle’ (‘pyramid’) although Freytag lists five structural stages of certain five-act plays: (1) exposition, (2) rising action, (3) climax, (4) falling action and (5) denouement/ catastrophe/ resolution (Freytag, 1863, p. 100). An updated version of the Syd Field ‘paradigm’ is presented by Huntley in a paper titled ‘A Comparison of Seven Story Paradigms’ (Huntley, 2007).

![Figure 4-8 - Syd Field's syntagm - termed a “paradigm” by Field - (Huntley 2007)](image)

\(^{149}\) By contrast the more recent screenwriting manuals suggest that a script over 120 pages is too long.
Field (1979) refers to this structural framework as a “paradigm”, although it is instead a syntagm if we use the relevant term from de Saussure’s linguistics\(^\text{150}\) whereby a syntagm is the complement of the paradigmatic axis in a narrative.

As a ‘how-to’ manual Screenplay (Field 1979) in its various editions since 1979 has reportedly sold over one million copies (C. Jones, 2013) and thus - as evidently the highest-selling screenwriting manual to date - has strongly influenced the contemporary screenwriting convention. Syd Field’s official website\(^\text{151}\) stated the following in 2013:\(^\text{152}\)

For over twenty-five years Syd Field has taught and guided thousands of professional screenwriters, many of whom have gone on to become the biggest names in Hollywood. His teachings have resulted in five best-selling books on writing, selling and analyzing screenplays. His internationally acclaimed best-selling books Screenplay, The Screenwriter's Workbook, and The Screenwriter's Problem Solver have established themselves as the "bibles" of the film industry. They are used in more than 395 colleges and universities and have been translated into 19 languages. Syd Field's Screenwriting Workshop, produced in association with Final Draft, was designed to aid those unable to attend Field's Master Class in person. Responses to the series have been so overwhelming that the DVD is now sold out! (Field, 2013, online).

The word-processing screenplay-formatting computer application Final Draft® is reportedly “the number-one selling” screenwriting software program (Madnick, 2014, online); within Final Draft® is an interactive story problem-solving tool called ‘Ask The Expert’ on the application’s menu-bar. When this window is opened text files of advice from three writing experts can be accessed: Syd Field on movie screenplays, Jonathan Dorf on stageplays, and Larry Brody on teleplays. The information on Field’s company website also states “over 395 colleges and universities and have been translated into 19 languages” and similarly the information in the ‘Ask The Expert’ (Version 1.0.6) section of Final Draft® states Field’s work is in: “20 languages and more than 400 colleges and universities”. The Final Draft documentation also notes that CNN news described Field as “the guru of all screenwriters” (Madnick, 2010).\(^\text{153}\)

Field’s other six published books on screenwriting include: The Screenwriter's Workbook (Field, 1984); Selling a Screenplay: The Screenwriter's Guide to Hollywood (Field, 1989); Four Screenplays: Studies in the American Screenplay (Field, 1994); The

\(^{150}\) See: (de Saussure, Bally, Riedlinger, & Sechehaye, 1916, p. 123).

\(^{151}\) Syd Field’s official screenwriting website: http://sydfield.com/

\(^{152}\) Regrettably, Syd Field died in 2013 (THRStaff, 2013, online).

\(^{153}\) As does http://sydfield.com/ as of October 2016.
Screenwriter's Problem Solver: How To Recognize, Identify, and Define Screenwriting Problems (Field, 1998); Going to the Movies: A Personal Journey Through Four Decades of Modern Film (Field, 2001); and The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting (Field, 2003).

In 1987 Linda Seger (a former student of Syd Field’s) published Making a Good Script Great (Seger, 1987). Seger’s story system is similar to Field’s but also includes the explicit addition of a ‘B story’ subplot:

In 1988 Michael Hauge published Writing Screenplays That Sell (Hauge, 1988) however almost none of the screenplays studied in the book were actually speculative but instead were commissioned - sometimes as best-selling novel adaptations - and were then developed from stories into screenplays by production companies or movie studios. The work also largely ignores the requisite creative process of ‘internalizing the domain’ as it does not make mention of how many screenplays each of the screenwriters under study had produced, prior to the screenplays and movies discussed. This approach also ignores the “ten-year rule” in creativity and may therefore be misleading for aspiring screenwriters in general, given Bourdieu (1993, 1996) on career trajectories, and navigating the field in a domain of biocultural production.

Subsequently in 2003 Hauge prescribed the “Six-Stage Plot” screenplay structure shown below.

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154 The methodology of this work (Hauge, 1988) thus possibly does not match well with the book’s title.
This screenplay structure (above) is derived from the hero’s journey ‘monomyth’ structure (J. Campbell, 1949)\textsuperscript{155} which former Disney story executive Christopher Vogler prescribed for movies and novels in \textit{The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Screenwriters and Storytellers} (Vogler, 1992).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{inner_journey_diagram.png}
\caption{Hauge’s ‘Six-Stage Plot Structure’ (Hauge 2003) (Huntley, 2007, p. 17)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{155} As is well documented Joseph Campbell’s study of narrative structure and character archetypes in myths, fairy and folk tales in \textit{The Hero With A Thousand Faces} (1949) follows in the research tradition of \textit{The Morphology of the Folk Tale} (Propp, [1928] 1958) and bears obvious similarities to archetypes in Jungian psychology (Jung, Franz, & Freeman, 1964). A significant history of such formal and structural analyses of narrative outside the realm of cinema is acknowledged - but is not examined or reviewed in detail here. It is noted however that the monomyth sequence may owe much to the philosophy of biology; see: (Velikovsky 2014) ‘The Hero’s Journey - It’s Not What You Think’, chapter in \textit{Miller’s Compendium of Timeless Tools for the Modern Writer} (G. Miller, 2015); also online at: https://storyality.wordpress.com/2013/08/23/storyality-73-the-heros-journey-its-not-what-you-think/ See also (d'Huy, 2016): http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/scientists-trace-society-s-myths-to-primordial-origins/
Figure 4-11 – Vogler’s ‘Hero’s Journey’ monomyth structure (Vogler, 2000)

The summary history of Vogler’s “hero’s journey” method and (1992) book is that while Vogler was employed as a story consultant for Walt Disney Pictures in the mid-1980s he wrote and circulated a memo titled ‘A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces’ (Vogler 1985) having discovered the work of mythologist Joseph Campbell a few years earlier while studying cinema at the University of Southern California (Vogler, 2000, online).

Figure 4-12 - Vogler’s ‘Hero’s Journey’ structure (Huntley, 2007, p. 16)
However many movies that appear to contain the hero’s journey monomyth structure have also failed at the box office, with movies *Willow* (1988), *Outlander* (2008) and *John Carter* (2012) being three examples. The proliferation of monomyth stories due to the spread of the monomyth ‘meme’ in the movie doxa may ironically mean increased competition among screenplays derived from that story-formula results in greater selection pressure, yet with less unique stories emerging as a consequence.

In 1993 David Trottier published *The Screenwriter's Bible: A Complete Guide to Writing, Formatting, and Selling Your Spec Script* (Trottier, 1993). Currently in its 5th edition the book has reportedly sold over 150,000 copies and is presented in six parts: *Book I: How to Write a Screenplay - A Primer; Book II: 7 Steps to a Stunning Script - A Workbook; Book III: Proper Formatting Technique - A Style Guide; Book IV: Writing & Revising Your Breakthrough - A Script Consultant's View; Book V: How to Sell Your Script - A Marketing Plan; and Book VI: Resources and General Index*. As an overview of the major components of screenwriting the work is comprehensive, and as with most of the ‘how-to’ manuals is clearly a useful resource for many novice screenwriters.

In 1994 Melanie Anne Phillips and Chris Huntley released *Dramatica®* screenwriting and story creation software. In 2007 Huntley published a paper online ‘A Comparison of Seven Story Paradigms: *Dramatica®, Syd Field, Michael Hauge, Robert McKee, Linda Seger, John Truby, Christopher Vogler*’ (Huntley, 2007) comparing *Dramatica®* to these six other dominant doxa movie-story formulas. The (Huntley 2007) paper finds *Dramatica* to be the best system, although like most manuals that comprise the dominant doxa, *Dramatica*’s dataset is also not an empirically-selected list of successful movies.

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156 A plot analysis of these three movies demonstrates that they correlate with the twelve steps of Vogler’s summary of the monomyth (1992); see also (Vogler, 2000).

157 The Anna Karenina Principle applies to these ‘hero’s journey’ movie “flops”. Merely having a well-executed monomyth story structure - if that element is indeed selected by the SIWG as a plot structure device - is one of many factors that needs *not to fail*, in order for a movie to succeed.

158 For this “150,000 copies sold” reference, see: [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Screenwriters-Bible-Complete-Writing-Formatting/dp/1935247026](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Screenwriters-Bible-Complete-Writing-Formatting/dp/1935247026) (accessed 22nd July, 2013), although it is difficult to accurately cross-check or independently verify this reported statistic.
The Dramatica® story system is one of the more involved screenplay “systems” to learn, utilizing a detailed system of story elements and also involving a lengthy questionnaire that the writer first completes regarding the characters and story events. As with all screenplay manuals’ “story systems” the marketing material for this work features testimonials from successful Hollywood screenwriters but avoids mentioning the movie failures; this is an instance of selective bias albeit for very logical reasons.

In 1997 Robert McKee published *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (McKee 1997) which outlines his “dramatic principles” and presents his “10 commandments”; Macdonald (2004) rightly notes that the views of manual authors in the doxa are sometimes presented “almost as commandments” (Macdonald 2004, p. 112). McKee prescribes two story types, the “central plot” and the “quest”:

**Figure 4-13 – The Dramatica® story syntagm (Huntley 2007, p. 17)**

**Figure 4-14 – McKee’s ‘Central Plot’ story diagram (Huntley 2007, p. 14)**
To his credit McKee declares a complete absence of systematic methodology in his research up front, in the opening ‘Notes On The Text’ section of *Story* (1997/1999):

> The hundreds of examples in *Story* are drawn from a century of film writing and filmmaking around the world. Whenever possible I offer more than one title of the most recently and widely seen works I know. Because it’s impossible to select films everyone has seen and remembers in detail, I’ve leaned towards those readily available on video. But first and foremost, each film has been chosen because it is a clear illustration of the point made in the text (McKee, 1999, Notes on the Text).

McKee (1997) like Aristotle explicitly selectively chooses his movie/screenplay/story examples to illustrate his key points regardless of whether the movies examined were successful in terms of their artistic and creative ’benefit/cost ratio’. In general the doxa uses examples of “exemplary” or “classic” movies and studies their screenplays with works such as *Chinatown* (1974) and *Casablanca* (1942) being cited frequently in the doxa by Nash & Oakey, McKee, Field, Truby and other popular manual authors. However *Chinatown* (1974) was written by a very experienced and credited movie screenwriter (Robert Towne) on commission, after pitching it as a screen idea to producer Robert Evans instead of taking the writing job of adapting Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby*.\(^{159}\) Meanwhile *Casablanca* (1942) was a producer-driven screen idea written on commission by experienced contracted studio writers including the Epstein twins and was also largely inspired by the movie *Algiers* (1938) combined with the

\(^{159}\) See: DVD Extras Interview (*Chinatown* Retrospective), in (Towne, Polanski, & Evans, 2007)
adaptation of the unproduced play *Everybody Comes To Rick’s* (1940) (Harmetz, 1993). Such classic movies as *Casablanca* (1942) and *Chinatown* (1974) thus have unique trajectories from screen idea to movie that is not at all typical for screen ideas created by most novice or mid-career screenwriters and also ignores the accrued social, cultural and symbolic capital - and the achieved position within the screenwriting field - of Robert Towne, the Epstein twins, and the other relevant screenwriters. As such while the screenplays of such classic movies may well be viewed as exemplary, such works - if presented as spec screenplays - seem unlikely to be selected in a contemporary movie industry context. The Writer’s Guild of America (West) website notes that in the 1980s when a screenplay of *Casablanca* (1942) with the title and character names changed was submitted to movie studios most of them rejected it (WGA-West, 2016, online). Thus as Dennett (2001) notes: culture evolves. Similarly Simonton (2004) notes that disciplinary zeitgeist evolves (Simonton, 2004, pp. 91-92).

In 2002 Richard Stefanik published *The Megahit Movies* (Stefanik, 2002) a study of common story-structure elements in movies that had U.S. domestic box-office grosses of $250 million or more. This is one of the few extant screenwriting manuals with a clearly-defined data-set, namely it actually uses a pre-defined list of movies based on empirical characteristics of the movie’s performance in the wider field with audiences; in this case movies with international box-office grosses of over USD$250M. However as with the orthodox “exemplary” works of *Casablanca* (1942) and *Chinatown* (1974) given that only experienced and credited screenwriters tend to write what become produced movies with the (high) production budgets of these movies, since these production budgets of the movies examined in *The Megahit Movies* are all over USD$10M - and sometimes well over USD$100M - this work is also not practically-applicable for the majority of screenwriters in the field since such high-budget-range movies are extremely unlikely to be financed for early- or mid-career

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160 The WGA (West) webpage notes: “In the 1980s, this film's script was sent to readers at a number of major studios and production companies under its original title *Everybody Comes To Rick's*. Some readers recognized the script but most did not. Many complained that the script was "not good enough" to make a decent movie” (WGA-West, 2016, online).
161 For these reasons 'classic' (medium and high-budget) screenplays may be generally less useful for screenwriting novices to study for potential clues to movie success than are: low-budget/high-RoI movies created by early-career or novice screenwriters, and that were selected by cinema mass audiences.
screenwriters as spec scripts. Many of the movies examined in (Stefanik 2002) are also adaptations of best-selling novels which are also not typically adapted by early- or mid-career screenwriters but instead by experienced, credited expert screenwriters. This approach thus likewise ignores important elements of how the movie industry and movie financing works in practice and therefore is not expected to be of great assistance for novices aiming to “break in”. On the other hand given the “ten-year rule” in creativity (Hayes 1989, Simonton 2011) aspiring screenwriters may well indeed benefit from practising and learning via trial and error - by writing high-budget spec Hollywood scripts - although this is also not appropriate or relevant preparation for low-budget movie screenwriting.

In 2005 successful Hollywood screenwriter Blake Snyder published Save The Cat!: The Last Book On Screenwriting You'll Ever Need (B. Snyder, 2005) in which he presents twelve plot steps that he suggests are present in various selected movie stories.

![Figure 4-16 - Snyder’s ‘Save The Cat!’ movie story structure diagram (Holmes, 2007, online)](Holmes,h2007)

162 This inverse-relationship of the size of the production budget to the probability of the screen idea (considering: a screenplay written by an unproduced screenwriter) being produced as a movie recalls William Lewis Gordon’s 1913 advice to aspiring Photoplay authors: “REMEMBER THAT A PLAY EASILY PRODUCED IS FAR MORE LIABLE TO BE ACCEPTED THAN ONE REQUIRING THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS TO STAGE.” (Gordon, 1913, p. 21 – upper case in original).
Snyder’s story type classifications in *Save The Cat! Goes To the Movies: The Screenwriter's Guide to Every Story Ever Told* (B. Snyder, 2007) are a valuable contribution to screenwriting literature and certainly one alternate way to view “story type”. These specific classifications include: *Monster In The House, Rites of Passage, Buddy Love, Fool Triumphant, Golden Fleece, Dude With a Problem* and others.164

Also in 2005 Victoria Lynn Schmidt published *Story Structure Architect* (Schmidt, 2005) which extrapolates Polti’s thirty-six dramatic situations to fifty-five but with a specifically feminine perspective. This work is also certainly most useful but like most screenplay story systems its methodology is not consilient; it also does not employ an empirical data set but instead like most manuals uses selective and illustrative examples.


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Figure 4-17 - Truby’s 22-step story structure (Huntley 2007, p. 15)

Truby finds “3-Act structure” deeply problematic in ’Why Three-Act Will Kill Your Writing’ (Truby, 2009, online) and also in *The Anatomy of Story* (Truby 2007): “…three-act structure, albeit a lot easier to understand than Aristotle, is hopelessly simplistic and in many ways just plain wrong” (Truby 2007, p. 4). Yet as Huntley notes above (Fig. 4-17) Truby’s (2007) own story system may be regarded as a “three act”

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163 (Snyder terms them “genres”)
164 In 2011, *Save the Cat!® Story Structure Software* (version 1.0) was published (B. Snyder, 2011). In 2016 the software is published in version 3.
structure. In *Journal of Screenwriting* Matthias Brütsch (2015) published an article ‘The Three-Act Structure: Myth or Magical Formula?’ which convincingly demonstrates there is little consensus among screenplay manuals on what “three act” structure in screenplays or movies is - and how or when it occurs in the movies they analyze - when the same movies are analyzed by different screenwriting manual authors (Brütsch, 2015).

While Truby implies the importance of comparing successful (creative) to unsuccessful (uncreative) screenplays and movies (Truby 2007, p. 73) once again a key problem is that the movie data under study in Truby (2007) are also illustrative and selective examples instead of a predefined empirically-determined data set.

In 2008 NYU teacher and writing coach Marilyn Horowitz published *How to Write a Screenplay in 10 Weeks* (Horowitz, 2008). Horowitz’s system also uses three acts (though in fact: four) with twelve sequences and poses four key questions: “ACT I - Magic Question 1: What is the main character’s dream? ACT II, Part 1 Magic Question 2: What is the main character’s worst nightmare? ACT II, Part 2 Magic Question 3: Who or what would they “die” for? ACT III Magic Question 4: What is the resolution of the dream or a new dream?” These story questions may indeed be useful heuristics for beginning screenwriters yet many unsuccessful movies also use this same syntagm; moreover the rhetorical use of the term “magic” appears to possibly imply certain Romantic assumptions about creativity instead of the rational, scientific view.

In 2011 Todd Klick published *Something Startling Happens* (Klick, 2011b) a “minute-by-minute” analysis of key story events (of 120 total movie-minutes) in forty-three well-known but also non-empirical (“author-selected”) movies - including however two of the Top 20 RoI movies *Star Wars* (1977) and *Halloween* (1978). Yet this method or story “system” is also problematic as Klick alters his story theory on an *ad hoc* basis when certain movie stories in his study do not adhere to it. Klick notes early in the text:

> You need to understand that the terms used in this book (like Hero, Ally, Bad Guy, Enemy) are flexible and interchangeable from page to page. Sometimes the enemy becomes the hero for a page…; or the ally becomes the enemy…; or the hero can become the bad guy… Sometimes the ally can be an inanimate object…, or the hero’s conscience can become the bad guy… You must be flexible with these terms or the beats won't work for you. I also use words like explosion, damage, warning, or threat. Most times an “explosion” will be a literal explosion, or the explosion could be more figurative, like an explosion of emotion… The dramatic level of these words can change from page
to page, or story to story. But what's important to realize is that they are there. These beats should be represented on every page, grand or small, or your screenplay may fall short. The reader or audience expects these patterns subconsciously. If you neglect to include them, they may feel gypped (Klick, 2011b) [Kindle version] p. 13%).

This approach is as vague as that of the Aristotelians with three “acts” as (Brütsch, 2015) has shown. While Klick’s aims are admirable in aiming to identify common story elements - albeit in a cherry-picked or ‘illustrative’ dataset of movies - the approach of changing the theory on the fly in order to adapt it to obvious counter-examples is a non-scientific methodology. This general strategy was rightly criticized by Popper (1990):

Whenever the ‘classical’ system of the day is threatened by the results of new experiments which might be interpreted as falsifications according to my point of view, the system will appear unshaken to the conventionalist. He will explain away the inconsistencies which may have arisen, perhaps by blaming our inadequate mastery of the system. Or he will eliminate them by suggesting ad hoc the adoption of certain auxiliary hypotheses, or perhaps of certain corrections to our measuring instruments (Popper 1990, p. 80).

Klick (2011) also reifies the existing orthodoxy by recommending the standard mainstream dominant screenwriting doxa including Aristotelian doctrine for novice screenwriters:

NOTE: This is an advanced screenwriting book. Before you begin it, I’d recommend that you know story basics first, like character arc, theme, sequences, Inciting Incidents, beats, etc. You need to understand these foundational elements before you start writing to these minute-by-minute rhythms. If you lack storytelling basics, you’ll get frustrated pretty quickly while writing. I highly recommend Lajos Egri’s The Art of Dramatic Writing, Save The Cat! by Blake Snyder, Essentials of Screenwriting by Richard Walter, and Aristotle’s Poetics for Screenwriters by Michael Tierno. These books will get you quickly up to speed (Klick, 2011a, online).

As an example of how the contemporary discourse is dominated by the traditional screenwriting convention doxa, for example on “Character Arcs” in movie stories, a

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165 This (Klick, 2011b) page reference is “13%” as some Amazon Kindle books do not use page numbers but rather, percentage values; as of this writing, the book is currently only available in Kindle format.

combined book-review and interview-article in *The Independent* about the book *Do Story: How To Tell Your Story So The World Listens* (Buster, 2012) notes that:

Bobette Buster - a master of the craft - tells Tim Walker why creating a hit movie is no guessing game… Cinema, says Buster, is "the medium of transformation", and every story must include a character who "changes 180 degrees". Paraphrasing Anne Rice and F Scott Fitzgerald, she suggests there are only two genuine cinematic stories: re-invention or redemption (Walker, 2012, online).

The latter suggestion on there only being “two genuine cinematic stories” appears to be an oversimplification of a deeply-complex subject matter. The rhetoric of famous screenwriting experts tends to create, influence and reinforce the doxa and usually without reference to the empirical evidence of movie success and failure.

In 2013 Linda Venis and various UCLA Extension Writers’ program lecturers published *Cut to the Chase: Writing Feature Films with the Pros at UCLA Extension Writers’ Program* (Venis, 2013). While the chapters by various seasoned film industry professionals certainly provide useful practical advice for aspiring screenwriters overall the book makes the same methodological mistakes that most of the prior “guru” manuals also make; namely no empirical datasets or formal study of ‘success versus failure’ but instead cherry-picked case studies which ignore counterexamples.

### 4.3.4 Summary - Review of the Movie Screenwriting Literature

When the dominant story and screenplay “systems” are compared they are broadly in consensus on their screenwriting guidelines yet problematically almost none are based on empirical evidence and evidently were not arrived at by using any kind of scientific method, probability or statistics. We might therefore ask: *How likely are they to be correct?* It would appear that Taleb’s (2001) caution about being `fooled by randomness’ applies as do insights from Evolutionary Psychology about fallacies of judgement and causality, including: single-cause fallacies, base-rate fallacies, conjunction fallacies and other cognitive biases as detailed in the Evolutionary Psychology work, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Kahneman, 2011).

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167 Note also, as Bordwell (2010) states: “Field’s [Screenplay, 1979] metric proved very influential, with script readers, producers, and writers all striving to find plot points at twenty-five minutes and ninety minutes” (Bordwell, 2010, online).

As a broad criticism: all of the above-reviewed screenwriting and story manual books use folk psychology instead of findings from the extant scientific studies in Evolutionary Psychology and extant scientific studies of creativity.\(^{169}\) Many of the manuals also use Freudian psychoanalysis which has been shown to be superseded (Easterlin, 2010; Sugiyama, 2010). Many of the manuals also rely on quotes from authority\(^ {170}\) rather than Popperian-style critical rationalism, falsifiability, empirical methodology in data selection, and the scientific method.\(^ {171}\) Many of these manuals also appear to support a Romantic conception of creativity instead of the rational or scientific view.

On the other hand these works should not wholesale be committed to the flames \textit{a la} Hume’s Fork; many of them in fact do contain many true statements yet it requires careful and considered critical examination of each of the specific claims made in each work and comparison to the available evidence.\(^ {172}\) In short it appears likely that many useful insights can be gained from this corpus of literature on screenwriting and might be integrated where appropriate into a new and more consilient – ideally, more reliable - screenwriting doxa in order to allow more movie creatives to communicate their intended messages to international audiences.

### 4.3.5 A review of Movie Screenplay Assessment Literature

There exist numerous texts on screenplay assessment or story analysis as are used to train professional story analysts.\(^ {173}\) Key works include \textit{Reading For A Living: How to be a Professional Story Analyst for Film and Television} (Katahn, 1990); \textit{Screenplay Story Analysis: the Art and Business} (Garfinkel, 2007); \textit{Reading Screenplays: How to Analyse and Evaluate Film Scripts} (Scher, 2011); and \textit{Getting Past Me: A Writer’s Guide to Production Company Readers} (White, 2011).

\(^{169}\) Alternately as one Examiner of this thesis rightly noted: folk psychology also produced the classic works of Shakespeare, Homer, Austen and others. Yet we might also wonder how many more classics may have been produced if authors were better educated on the scientific principles of Human Nature; with movies being one of the most expensive communication forms, failure to connect with the target audience and thus achieve break-even can evidently be costly for the careers of the creatives involved.\(^ {170}\) (usually: the manual author’s own authority)

\(^{171}\) By contrast see for example (B. Boyd, et al., 2010; Carroll, Gottschall, Johnson, & Kruger, 2012; Gottschall, 2008a, 2013).

\(^{172}\) in empirical datasets such as the top 20 RoI and bottom 20 RoI movies.

\(^{173}\) Or ‘screen readers’.
Although these texts share a general consensus on how screenplays are analyzed by screen readers in terms of such elements as: characterisation, dialogue, story line, setting / production, structure, theme and writing ability in a screenplay,\(^{174}\) as with the ‘how to’ screenwriting manuals none use a consilient or empirical method in order to present reliable criteria by which professional script analysts should evaluate a movie story’s commercial or critical potential; this is largely left to the story analyst’s own taste and habitus. In terms of the Systems Model of creativity this indicates how the gatekeepers\(^{175}\) in the domain of movies tend to analyze and evaluate screenplays: namely when judging movie story audience-reach potential, screen readers appear to draw upon essentially the same screenwriting doxa as do script writers.

The book *The Screenplay Business: Managing Creativity in the Film Industry* (Bloore 2013) is a result of a PhD by prior publication (Bloore, 2014). As reviewed in *Journal of Screenwriting* (Velikovsky, 2014b), Bloore (2013) presents an excellent scholarly work which provides the first framing of the screenplay development process in terms of the extant scientific research on creativity as both a business and an art form. The work examines the process of movie creation from concept through screenplay development to movie production, framed within the existing scientific literature on creativity including Csikszentmihalyi’s Systems Model\(^{176}\) and extensive creativity research by Boden, Sternberg, Runco and others. Bloore (2013) is however not a screenwriting manual; instead it is an examination of best practices for managing creativity in the screenplay development process, primarily within the UK and to a lesser degree Hollywood and international independent and studio movie sectors. Bloore (2013) delineates the stages in the value chain of movie creation namely Development, Financing and Pre-sales, Production (Shoot and Post), International Sales and Licensing, Exhibition and Exploitation, Consumption and Marketing (Bloore 2013, p. 34). In this process over time there can be seen to be multiple sub-systems at work and multiple individuals composing the Screen Idea Work Group of any specific movie.\(^{177}\)

\(^{174}\)(e.g., Katahn 1990, p. 66)
\(^{175}\)(or ‘intermediaries’)
\(^{176}\)aka the ‘sociocultural’ model of creativity
\(^{177}\)Bloore’s ‘creative triangle’ of writer, script editor, producer (and director) includes many of the key personnel in a typical Screen Idea Work Group (2013, p. 116).
In summary the screenwriting doxa informs and influences the screenplay writing process, as well as the story analysis and screenplay assessment – thus, movie story selection process - as undertaken by the industry gatekeepers of the movie field.

**4.3.6 Manuals and Academic Scholarly Literature on: Alternatives to the screenplay convention**

Various distinguished publications also exist on alternatives to the screenplay convention as shaped by the popular and dominant screenplay books; these include *Alternative Scriptwriting: Writing Beyond the Rules* (Dancyger & Rush, 1991); *Fast, Cheap, and Under Control: Lessons from the Greatest Low-Budget Movies* (Gaspard, 2006); the scholarly academic analysis of independent movie stories *Me and You and Memento and Fargo: How Independent Screenplays Work* (Murphy, 2007); *Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice* (Maras 2009); *Screenwriting in a Digital Era* (Millard, 2014); and *Analysing The Screenplay* (Nelmes, 2011). These works provide valuable contributions to the literature on movie screenwriting and scholarship, moreover some are central to this study as the majority of the top 20 RoI movies are independent productions. Thus for example Murphy’s (2007) observation on the lack of character arcs in independent movies is salient. Murphy shows that the dominant screenwriting doxa (McKee, Seger, Walter) suggest the “best” movies have character arcs (Murphy 2007, p. 19) but also points out that many of the successful independent movies examined in Murphy (2007) violate this character arc principle:

*Willie does not really change in Stranger Than Paradise. Neither do Jerry and Marge in Fargo, nor Carol in Safe, nor Leonard Shelby in Memento, nor any of the characters in Elephant, Gummo, or Slacker* (Murphy, 2007, pp. 19-20).

Murphy (2007, pp. 4-5) also points out while the definition of “independent” film remains blurry and problematic, the financing of a movie by a major or mini-major movie studio serves as one potential demarcation criteria - for example herein when examining and comparing movie story `benefit/cost ratio’ (RoI).

**4.3.7 The Academic Screenwriting Field**

Although various scholars have been studying movies and screenwriting since their inception over a century ago, the Screenwriting Research Network was only recently
founded in 2006\textsuperscript{178} with the first annual international SRN conference in Leeds in 2008 (Macdonald, 2012, online).\textsuperscript{179} The *Journal of Screenwriting*\textsuperscript{180} was founded in 2009 by SRN members as the first peer-reviewed academic journal solely devoted to the art and craft of screenwriting (Macdonald, 2010a, p. 7).\textsuperscript{181} Among other research interests academic scholars in the SRN are increasingly turning their attention to the function and purpose of the various extant screenwriting manuals.\textsuperscript{182}

The doctoral dissertation 'The Presentation of the Screen Idea in Narrative Film-making' (Macdonald 2004) is a Bourdieuian analysis of the movie and television screen industries using the methodology of a triangulated Bourdieuian practice theory field survey and an analysis of twelve texts in the literature on screenwriting that forms and dominates the screenwriting convention (Macdonald, 2004b, pp. 18-19). In this study Macdonald also delineates the concept of the Screen Idea Work Group (or SIWG):

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“a flexible work group clustered around the development of the screen idea… which strives to create and re-create the idea in the light of beliefs about common goals.” (Macdonald 2004, p. 10).
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This same Work Group may include the writer/s, story development executives, producers, directors, actors, movie crew and also their family, friends and colleagues. Macdonald (2004) identifies many key problematics in the domain of movies and screenwriting including that less than 2\% of screenplays submitted to movie (economic) capital controllers are produced\textsuperscript{183} (Macdonald 2004, p. 190) and also that the dominant discourse of the screenwriting convention arises from the popular and academically-cited screenwriting manuals and seminars - and is based on quasi-Aristotelian ideas of drama - and that this may be problematic for movie-making practice (Macdonald 2004, p. 284).

\begin{footnotes}
\item[178] The Screenwriting Research Network (SRN) official website: \url{http://screenwritingresearch.com/}.
\item[179] The 5\textsuperscript{th} annual SRN conference was held in Sydney Australia, which the current author attended as a delegate and reported on in 2012 'Words & Images’ SRN Academic Screenwriting Conference: \url{http://on-writing.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/2012-words-images-srn-academic.html} (Velikovsky 2012a).
\item[180] The *Journal of Screenwriting*: \url{http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-Journal,id=182/}.
\item[181] This formal academic screenwriting field - in both a Bourdieuian (1977-1996) also and a Systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2014) sense is relatively new in comparison to some disciplines when it is also noted that the first international academic Mathematics Congress took place over 100 years ago in 1897 (ICM, 2006, online) - as opposed to the year 2008 for the SRN.
\item[182] The Call For Papers for the 9th annual Screenwriting Research Network (SRN) International Conference, in Stockholm, Sweden in September 2016, includes as a topic papers on: “The history and functions of manuals” (Lindbom, 2016), see: \url{http://screenwritingresearch.com/category/conferences/}.
\item[183] This is also a problem for film financiers as it means that 98\% of screen ideas they spend time reviewing are rejected; given 98\% waste, this is not an efficient system.
\end{footnotes}
4.3.8 The use of the Systems Model to analyze the Movie Field


Another SRN scholar who uses Csikszentmihalyi’s Systems Model of creativity to analyze creativity in movies184 is Eva Novrup Redvall in the 2012 article 'A Systems View of Film-making as a Creative Practice' (Novrup Redvall, E. 2012). The article provides an exemplary systems framework for analysing movie creativity as does Novrup Redvall’s article ‘Collaborative Problem Finding and Problem Solving: Understanding Screenwriting as a Creative Process’ (Redvall, 2009) and the book chapter ‘Film and Media Production as a Screen Idea System’ (Redvall, 2016).

In the earlier Theoretical Perspective section a synthesis of both Novrup Redvall’s and Macdonald’s approaches - namely Csikszentmihalyi’s theory synthesized with key elements of Bourdieu’s practice theory, herein termed Creative Practice Theory - was outlined.185 When this same model is integrated with Boyd’s (2009, 2010) Evolutionary theory of the artistic and creative cost/benefit ratio and the creative problem-solution model in Bordwell’s film poetics (1997, 2008) it appears to describe the emergence, and key component story-elements of highest- and lowest-RoI movies within a unifying biocultural evolutionary systems theory framework and aims to be simultaneously descriptive and explanatory.

184 (and elsewhere in television)
185 See: Figure 3.2 – ‘Creative Practice Theory – synthesizing Bourdieu (1977-93) and Csikszentmihalyi (1988-2006) in (Velikovsky 2012 online; Velikovsky 2014, p. 112)’ in the above Chapter 3 - Theoretical Perspective.
4.3.9 Conclusions: The Screenwriting Doxa

The extant ‘how-to’ screenwriting literature\(^{186}\) has emerged primarily from industry practitioners rather than academia and does not display a scholarly rigour or consilient research methodologies. This explains why there are so many\(^{187}\) extant ‘how-to’ screenwriting manuals, since something of an “anything goes” philosophy has predominated to date, following the method of Aristotle’s selective examples of “good” stories in *The Poetics* instead of an integration of the extant scientific research on creativity since J. P. Guilford’s watershed 1950 American Psychological Association address on the need to study and understand creativity.

However with the 2006 formation of the Screenwriting Research Network and the 2009 inception of *Journal of Screenwriting*, consilient PhD dissertations such as Macdonald (2004); consilient research such as Bordwell’s (1996-2014) and Novrup Redvall’s; screenwriting history studies such as Maras (2009) and Price (2010, 2013); and in particular with Bloore’s (2013) integration of creativity research into the screenwriting domain, more reliable and testable methods for examining story, screenplay and movie creativity are now emergent.

To recapitulate, one of the aims of the consilience movement is to generate more rigorous knowledge that may integrate with research in the sciences such as Evolutionary Psychology and Cognitive Science in order to illuminate and demystify Human Nature: the core subject matter of most narrative, drama, and cinema.\(^{188}\)

Given collaborative group creativity, as Maras (2009) notes, screenwriting or “conception” and movie-making or “execution” should not always be viewed as separate entities. A screen idea typically evolves into a screen story which may evolve into a screenplay, and may finally emerge as a movie during an extended creative process. The screenwriting doxa also evolves over time due to the blind-variation and selective-retention (or BVS\(^R\)) of creative ideas, processes and products including new screenwriting manuals and new movies. A comparison of the first screenwriting manual (Stoddard 1911) to the current manuals demonstrates this evolution, such as popular

\(^{186}\) including the popular screenwriting texts and manuals since 1909

\(^{187}\) It is here estimated there are approximately between 800 and 2,500 screenwriting manuals. For details of the origins and history of screenwriting manuals, see: (Curran, 2015).

\(^{188}\) It is no coincidence that the first produced movie of Charlie Kaufman, whom many (including the current researcher) consider to be the greatest living screenwriter, was: *Human Nature* (2001).
films evolving from typically around 10 or 15 minutes in runtime in 1911 (Stoddard 1911, p. 11) to a duration of approximately around 90 to 120 minutes in present-day movies. Yet over the course of its evolution the current screenwriting doxa does not appear to have integrated much of the extant research on movie performance; it is to a review of this extant research literature on movie performance we will soon turn.

In conclusion this Literature Review (section 4-3) aims to answer: RQ1 - What is the current orthodoxy (doxa) of movie screenwriting? In this study the four screenwriting manuals chosen for analysis of the doxa - as a reasonably-representative sample of the contemporary screenwriting orthodoxy - are: Field (1979/2005), McKee (1997), Snyder (2005), and Truby (2007). These manuals are foundational and popular 'how to' screenwriting texts; they also appear in screenwriting course syllabi;\(^\text{189}\) and are recent enough to still be influential in shaping the dominant screenwriting doxa.

\(^{189}\) See the Film School and University Screenwriting Course Reading Lists in the attached digital Appendix which include works by authors of the dominant screenwriting doxa.
4.4 STUDIES OF MOVIE PERFORMANCE

As the “seventh lively art” (Seldes, 1924, 2001) there is now a considerable body of literature on movies and each of their component creative subdomains including: screenwriting, directing, acting, crew production roles, special effects, marketing, distribution, and exhibition. Recalling Alexander (2003) on career sustainability in the movie industry a literature search was conducted on the studies of movie performance. The section below provides a summary of this Literature Review including firstly an overview of the scope of the international movie domain.

4.4.1 An Overview of the Scope of the Movie Domain

It is estimated that there are now approximately 500,000 movies (narrative fiction feature-length films) in existence (Vogel 2011, p. 102). The first ‘feature-length’ movie is customarily dated to the 1906 Australian film The Story Of The Kelly Gang (Jackson & Shirley, 2006; Tait, 1906).

Approximately 600 to 800 new movies are released in US cinemas every year (MPAA, 2011, p. 16; 2012, p. 20; Vogel, 2011, p. 123). Analysis provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2014) indicate that India produces the highest number of new movies with 1,255 movies per annum while by comparison Australia typically creates around 40-50 theatrical cinema movies per year (UNESCO/Chartsbin, 2015, online). Importantly, not all movies created manage to obtain a theatrical cinema release. A 2010 NYU study ‘Analyzing the RoI of Independently Financed Films: Are there many more “Slumdogs” than “Millionaires”?’ observes that:

For the period analyzed, release dates from January 2000 to October 2009, there were 5,276 movies released in the US of which 38% were also distributed internationally. Furthermore, from the American Film Market (AFM) film catalogue, it is evident that another 2,858 movies were trying to get sold for release during this period and more than 90% of them never did, ending up in straight-to-DVD distribution. The latter are all categorized as independently financed (Lucini, 2010, pp. 8-9).

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190 As noted in the earlier Introduction chapter here - in Sociology of the Arts (Alexander 2003) it is observed that most directors only make one film in their career, as film failure can be terminal to careers due to the highly competitive nature of the movie industry (Alexander 2003, pp. 153-4).
191 Feature films are here understood as movies over an hour in length; The Story of the Kelly Gang (1906) was 70 minutes in duration.
Deniz and Hasbrouck (2012) note that over 120,000 movies were shown in U.S. movie theatres in 2010; thus new movies also compete with some existing canonical movies (Deniz & Hasbrouck, 2012, p. 447).192

The above statistical overview has aimed to provide a very brief overview of the scope of the movie domain.

4.4.2 General Overview – Studies of Movie Performance

In terms of general empirical and statistical analysis, a major reference work on movie economics for both industry and academia is Entertainment Industry Economics - A Guide For Financial Analysis (Vogel, 2011). In its 9th edition in 2014 it was first published in 1986 and every three to four years hence (i.e., 1990, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2011, 2014). The book contains detailed industry studies on the financial aspects of various major sectors of the entertainment industry including movies, television, music, advertising, sports, gaming and wagering (i.e.: gambling), the performing arts, amusement and theme parks and includes extensive bibliographic references and data. Key points of note are that in general movies have a “prints and advertising” spend that is approximately equal to the movie’s negative cost, thus from 1980-2009 for example if a movie cost $50M to create then as a rule of thumb another $50M will be spent by the distributor on P&A (Vogel 2011, p. 143).193

In 2012 McKenzie published a comprehensive literature review of movie economics The Economics of Movies - A Literature Survey (McKenzie 2012). McKenzie’s survey includes categories on The Role of Stars, The Role of Critics and Reviews, The Role of Awards and Award Nominations, and The Role of Ratings and Genre, also observing certain gaps and flaws in the extant research.194 Crucially in the ‘Concluding Comments and Directions for New Research’ section McKenzie (2012) notes:

> It has become well understood that motion pictures are an inherently uncertain product. Given the industry's obsession with reporting national sales figures, and the range of film specific variables which are either directly or subjectively quantifiable, it will remain an endeavour of economists to attempt to explain causal factors of films’

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192 Movies clearly also compete with other media for the finite resource of human attention.
193 For most early- and mid-career screenwriters, movie production budgets will not be this high. Recall that Marketing Spend and movie success (audience-reach, thus RoI) are not correlated (De Vany 2004).
194 Due to its primary focus on economic analysis rather than narrative and its effect on RoI, the review omits the two Wharton School papers (2007 and 2010) specifically regarding ‘Story and RoI’ in movies.
performance with respect to variables such as production budgets, advertising, screens, stars, reviews, awards, genres, ratings etc. (McKenzie 2012, p. 64).

The above observation makes clear that the examination of potential causal factors of movie success other than the story have not been particularly fruitful and that movie story is complex due to its many component elements and their complex interaction. While McKenzie’s literature review is extensive and admirable, correlating with De Vany (2004) this thesis suggests that due to Complexity as measured in isolation none of those abovementioned factors can be seen as causal in any major or meaningful way in practice despite small correlations noted in extant studies of movie success.

One suggestion for a Complexity view of movie success and failure is suggested in the Appendix chapter below namely a diagram of the Anna Karenina Principle as a decision-table, influenced by evolutionary game theory (Maynard Smith, 1982). As noted above, this Anna Karenina (evolutionary) principle implies that success can mean not only achieving certain requirements in many areas all at once but also avoiding causes of failure in any one of those single areas; namely that movie story success with audiences is multifactorial, but that failure can be monofactorial.

As also noted earlier, the movie research reviewed in McKenzie (2012), Simonton (2011) and De Vany (2004) reveals that the ultimate audience-reach (social contagion) and thus the commercial success of a movie is not caused by such elements as: movie stars, production budgets, advertising budget, number of screens, positive critical reviews, awards, specific genres, or MPAA ratings. Fortunately this simplifies analyses of movie success; namely the research focus shifts to analysing, comparing and contrasting the successful and unsuccessful movie stories themselves.

Albeit counterintuitively De Vany and Walls (2004) have demonstrated that stars tend to make a movie lose money in their article 'Motion Picture Profit, the Stable Paretian Hypothesis, and the Curse of the Superstar' (De Vany & Walls, 2004). That research shows that the success of a star’s new movie does not correlate with their previous movie or movies. Equally counter-intuitively De Vany in the book Hollywood Economics: How Extreme Uncertainty Shapes The Film Industry (De Vany 2004)

195 (including that the emergent whole of a movie is: more than the sum of the parts)
196 Motion Picture Association of America: http://www.mpaa.org/
demonstrates that Marketing Spend is also not causal in a movie’s success, summarizing the findings on marketing as follows:

The frightening thing about trying to manage this [movie] business is that there are no tangible means to reliably change the odds that a movie will succeed or fail. Marketing can’t change the odds. There is no evidence to show that marketing has much to do with a film’s success. Marketing is mostly defensive anyway; a studio has to market its films draw attention in a field where everyone is shouting. If you don’t shout too, you will be drowned out and may not be noticed (De Vany 2004, p. 4).

This thesis contends however that there may indeed be a “tangible means to change the odds” that a specific movie might succeed or fail - and it is primarily to do with the characteristics, design and execution of the movie story. However the determinants are still merely odds and are certainly not a probability of ‘1’ as the outputs of any system always are to some degree dependent on its inputs and also additional influences in a complex chain of cause-and-effect during the entire movie creation process.197

*Hollywood Economics* (De Vany 2004) is an examination of movie economics based on fifteen prior published academic peer-reviewed papers by economist Arthur De Vany and other co-authors, using sophisticated mathematical models to analyze and test various aspects which were conjectured to be causal in movie success. In the early sections of the book entitled ’Evolutionary Survival Tournaments’ and ’Empirical Survivor Functions’ the researchers conclude that movies compete with one another in cinemas, identifying the evolutionary conditions of selection pressure and also that “word-of-mouth” and “information cascades” are what cause movie audience-reach or box-office success - and conversely that negative word-of-mouth appears to cause their failure (De Vany 2004, pp. 14-28). This also points in the direction of story contagion for enquiring: *Why do some movies or screen ideas spread ‘virally’198 and not others?* Most importantly for this thesis, as noted earlier De Vany (2004) also concludes:

197 This is to note a screenwriter may know all of the elements required for movie success but their own personal taste – or degree of talent - or lack of an effective habitus – or even sheer bad luck (unfortunate timing, due to historical events) - may result in their movie failing to reach its target audience.

198 In *Being Human: Psychological and Philosophical Perspectives* (Gross 2012) defines “viral memes” as “memes that succeed by using various tricks to persuade people to copy them” (R. D. Gross, 2012, p. 298). Copying in this case (with regard to movies) merely means transmitting or word-of-mouth social contagion. The movie story itself thus uses what Dennett might term “Good Tricks” (1995, pp. 77, 307, 351) for a unit of culture (i.e. a meme) in evolutionary Design Space or within its adaptive environmental landscape. For a movie story, attracting and maintaining audience attention is one such “Good Trick”.
Hard-headed science puts the creative process at the very center of the motion picture universe… There is no reason for management to get in the way of the creative process. Character, creativity and good storytelling trump everything else (De Vany 2004, p. 6).

It thus appears that the movie story (the screen idea) is the primary cause of movie success in terms of reaching a wide audience or successful mass communication of that specific story in cinemas.

In terms of extant literature the most important and relevant work on creativity in movie performance for this doctoral study is *Great Flicks: Scientific Studies of Cinematic Creativity and Aesthetics* (Simonton 2011). Simonton (2011) examines over 200 prior papers (articles, books and chapters) that were scientific in their methodology, namely that were “…a study that is abstract, systematic, objective, and quantitative” (Simonton 2011, p. 6). In *Great Flicks* Simonton (2011) also notes the Anna Karenina Principle in movies:

Tolstoy opened his novel *Anna Karenina* with the provocative observation “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way”. In a similar fashion, it is conceivable that there are more ways to make a bad film than to make a good film.

While a five-star and much-awarded film cannot contain any serious flaws, each bomb may contain its own distinctive collection of deficiencies (Simonton 2011, p. 178).

As noted in the Definitions section, the Anna Karenina Principle is the principle whereby failure (falsification) of a unit of culture in a domain may be caused by an inadequacy in any number of the unit’s / agent’s / individual’s component-elements and/or skills while success in that domain requires each and all of those same possible inadequacies to be avoided. In this study the Anna Karenina Principle may also be seen to apply to the success and also to failure of stories - and thus movies - and their component parts as contagious units of culture, and to the creative problem-solving skills of screenwriters and movie-makers who co-create these individual movie stories (units of narrative) as bioculture.

Simonton notes two prior major studies using direct content analysis: on protagonists’ values (Beckwith, 2009), and on storyline (Eliashberg, Hui, and Zhang 2007; 2010) (Simonton, 2011, pp. 108-109). However Simonton also notes that no detailed scientific studies have been done on content analysis of story elements regarding: “themes, ideas, concepts, events, persons, conflicts, and so on” (Simonton 2011, p. 104) and that ideally to obtain accurate predictive models relating to such movie content the study sample
size should be at least 1,000 movies (Simonton, 2011, pp. 107-108). Simonton in *Great Flicks* (2011) does not focus on movie RoI (‘movies as business’) but examines what might be regarded as “masterworks” of cinema (‘films as art’) in the same way that a canon of classics exists of the greatest plays, novels, paintings and operas while acknowledging that movies can be mass entertainment.

In summary, to date there has been surprisingly little academic research conducted on movie story elements and their correlation with - or causation of - movie performance.

### 4.4.3 Extant Research on Movie Story / Screenplay Elements and RoI

While Hunter *et al* in ’Predicting Box Office from the Screenplay: A Text Analytical Approach’ (S. D. Hunter, Smith, & Singh, 2015, pp. 6-11) provide a literature review of research on box office forecasting since (Litman, 1983), in the literature search conducted for this research project only three prior academic papers were located that specifically enquire whether a movie’s *story* (narrative screenplay elements) have any significant effect on a movie’s audience-reach relative to its economic production capital (i.e.: the movie’s negative cost). These three studies (2007, 2010, 2014) were conducted by the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Marketing: ’From Story Line to Box Office: A New Approach for Green-Lighting Movie Scripts’ (Eliashberg, et al., 2007), ’Green-lighting Movie Scripts: Revenue Forecasting and Risk Management’ (Eliashberg, Hui, & Zhang, 2010), and ’Assessing Box Office Performance Using Movie Scripts: A Kernel-based Approach’ (Eliashberg, Hui, & Zhang, 2014). These studies, conducted within the academic discipline of Marketing, appear problematic in their research design and methodology and moreover the data analysis was primarily done by computer algorithm rather than by human researchers in (2007, 2010). As a primary data source the (2007, 2010) studies used movie story synopses (“spoilers”) that were sourced from random general-public audience members and the studies examined various criteria in the thus-abstracted story of the movies, but based on certain pre-existing and non-empirical screenplay “paradigms” from the doxa. This methodology appears to result in a recursive loop (a circular argument); there are

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199 The current research study includes only 40 movies - and certainly not 1,000 of them - but the content analysis herein appears to reveal possibly useful patterns given the extreme tail-ends of RoI, namely the Top and Bottom 20 RoI movies. Companies such as Epagogix and C4 have vastly larger datasets.
also certain unexamined presuppositions, assumptions and speculations in these two Wharton School studies.

In the (2014) study by contrast 300 movie “shooting” screenplays were assessed (p. 4) by two independent readers trained in Film Studies who read and answered a questionnaire on each script (p. 6) however this method seems dubious as internet script sites rarely provide shooting scripts but instead “reader’s scripts”. Ironically reader’s scripts are what should be analyzed as a shooting script usually assumes the movies are already greenlit for production. Another problem is that Film Studies students are unlikely to have the habitus and tacit knowledge of trained professional screen readers; while Bordwell (1996) noted the SLAB-related problems of Film Studies two decades ago, most Film Studies departments are also unfortunately still rife with Continental Philosophy and Postmodernism studies instead of a consilient approach.200 The (2014) Wharton School paper also states:

While most movie experts believe that a movie’s story line is highly predictive of its ultimate financial performance [Blacker 1998, Field 1994, Field 1998, Hauge 1991, Monaco 2000], it is unclear how “similarity” between movies scripts should be measured. For instance, should one focus on the overall theme, the actual words/language used, or the structure of the scenes and dialogues? (Eliashberg, et al., 2014, p. 4).

Numerous problems emerge here; firstly as this thesis aims to demonstrate, the first three authors cited above as “experts” in the domain of screenwriting ’[Blacker 1998, Field 1994, Field 1998, Hauge 1991, Monaco 2000]’ are screenwriting instructors whose manuals and screenwriting theories are not consilient201 but instead prescribe doxa on their own authority while (Monaco & Lindroth, 2000) is a Film Studies textbook with no analytical information on story or screenplay elements in movies.

Secondly the elements being analyzed appear problematic; for example what do the authors mean by “theme”? 202 The authors state: “The genre of a script summarizes the overall theme of a movie and helps identify its target audience” (p. 5), a line of thinking which appears to conflate Plot with Theme; no matter the interpretation of the term “theme” a movie’s Genre hardly summarizes its Theme as any story can be told in any

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200 See also, for example (Redfern, 2014) for more on such problems of Film Studies in general.
201 Namely they do not use statistical methods or the scientific method
202 Noting also just how indeterminate and mercurial the term “theme” is - see for example section 6.1.2 on ‘Theme’ in the doxa; and see also Bordwell on the many ambiguous meanings of ‘theme’ (Bordwell 2008, p. 18).
genre, and any story can have any number of themes. Rather than the elements examined it is suggested in such studies as Wharton School’s (2007, 2010, 2014) that the Anna Karenina Principle be applied to analysing each movie story.203

In summary the 2007, 2010 and 2014 Wharton Marketing School studies initially assume that the story principles and criteria that certain screenplay manuals assert are determining factors which make for good movie stories are accurate. However if as the current thesis and study suggests the screenwriting manuals are problematic in their methodology in the first instance then it follows that possibly so are the Wharton School movie RoI study findings.

As was noted in the Introduction chapter of this dissertation, outside the field of academic and scholarly research it is again important to acknowledge the existence of companies such as Epagogix.204 As reported in the New Yorker (Gladwell, 2006, online) Epagogix is a successful UK company formed in 2003 which charges movie studios to predict a movie’s RoI based on the screenplay of the proposed movie and using computer science deep-learning algorithms and data mining to analyze over 30 million elements of a proposed movie story via the screenplay; this number of variables again also clearly emphasizes the complexity of a movie story. Epagogix’s process in predicting the expected box office returns was also examined in the book The Formula: How Algorithms Solve All Our Problems... and Create More (Dormehl, 2014a, pp. 174-180) and also in Super Crunchers: Why Thinking-By-Numbers Is The New Way To Be Smart (Ayres, 2007). The company’s continued existence would appear to suggest that their algorithms tend to work.

4.4.4 Summation – A Gap in the Academic Literature on Movie Story and RoI

Since the only three extant detailed academic studies on Movie Story and RoI (The Wharton School, 2007; 2010; 2014) appear to be problematic, a gap therefore exists in the published research literature on an analysis of movie stories that empirically had the

203 For details see: the Appendix section 10.19 – On the Anna Karenina Principle, below; and also Table 10-32 - The Anna Karenina Principle - applied to Movie Story.
204 Epagogix website: http://www.epagogix.com/
205 According to Dormehl (2014), the precise number of movie story elements analyzed by Epagogix is 30, 073, 680 (Dormehl, 2014b, online).
206 i.e., 30 million within each screenplay
207 (or RoI where the budget is known)
greatest story-power\textsuperscript{208} and particularly examining movie creation in a way that is both meaningful and practically-useful to screenwriters, movie-makers, and the wider movie industry considered as a whole DPFi (Domain, Person, Field interaction) creative system.

The 2007 Wharton School paper also acknowledges the gap in the literature, noting that most extant research aims to predict the box office of a specific movie only \textit{after} that movie is produced (Eliashberg, Hui & Zhang 2007, p. 883).\textsuperscript{209} However since 98\% of screenplays are deselected before being produced it may also be that many potentially-viral movie stories are eliminated too early due to errors of judgement by the gatekeepers in the field which does the selecting.

Given this gap in the research literature certain interesting questions emerge: \textit{Why are some movie stories empirically more socially-contagious than others via word-of-mouth?} Is their story and screenplay form and thus movie content different to the others? What story elements might be significant factors in a movie being selected by the field (the gatekeepers/intermediaries; the audience; the critics) in the movie industry for the domain of movies judged `creative’ and to then become socially-contagious once they are screened in cinemas?

In asking such questions this thesis thus aims to understand and address these issues in the light of the “Less Than One-Percent Problem” in the domain of movies. Thus since Simonton (2011) there is still evidently a gap in the academic literature on commercial creativity (story contagion) in the domain of movies specifically from the perspective of experienced screenwriters, script assessors, and professional story analysts. However rather than use a reductionist approach and examine merely one aspect of movie success, a multi-factor analysis using the categories included in the study is seen as a more holistic approach. This again is due to the adopted view that the Anna Karenina Principle applies to movie success (Simonton 2011, p. 178).\textsuperscript{210}

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\textsuperscript{208} namely, had the highest RoI.
\textsuperscript{209} The 2014 Wharton School paper claims to be the first study of its type to analyze “actual screenplays” rather than synopses (2014, p. 5).
\textsuperscript{210} Namely that causes of movie story success are multifactorial but causes of movie story failure can be monofactorial.
4.5 CONSILIENCE

One theoretical lens that informs this communication research is E. O. Wilson’s notion of consilience as outlined in *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (Wilson 1998) and in particular ‘Chapter 10 - The Arts and Their Interpretation’ which suggests how the study and interpretation of the arts can be used to test, complement and build on scientific knowledge in order to bridge a ‘two cultures’ (‘science’ vs. ‘the arts’) gap (pp. 229-59).

Multiple sources in creativity research converge on the notion that creativity can occur whenever a unitary combination - whether it be ideas, processes, or products - proves “new and useful” or “novel and appropriate” in its environment. Plants and animals are thus also biocultural ‘products’ in this view given that in Evolutionary Epistemology, animals and plants also have “knowledge” (Laszlo 1972, Popper 1963, 1999, DT Campbell 1974) and knowledge is “culture”. Citing historical examples, in *Creativity* Csikszentmihalyi (1996) shows that applying an idea that worked well in another domain in culture to one’s own cultural domain can also prove to be creative (pp. 88-9). Wilson’s proposed combination and integration of Science and the Arts may also prove one such creative idea - and one of the resulting products could be seen to be the knowledge domain of Evocriticism.211

In a similar combinatorial creativity or “bisociation”212 light we can also view as creative (or new-and-useful) Professor Joseph Carroll’s combination of Evolutionary theory and the study of literature, to formally found the domain of knowledge now known as Literary Darwinism formulated in *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Carroll 1995).213 Professor Brian Boyd has likewise combined Evolutionary theory and “arts, literature and media analysis” in the Evocriticism work *On The Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, Fiction* (Boyd 2009). Jonathan Gottschall also used an Evolutionary lens in *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (Gottschall

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211 As noted in Chapter Two Definitions, E. O. Wilson is one of the 91 eminent creatives studied and interviewed in the creativity research that resulted in the book *Creativity* (Csikszentmihalyi 1996).

212 In *The Act of Creation* Koestler (1964) terms “bisociation” when two matrices of thought are creatively combined (Koestler, [1964] 1989, p. 35). In *Being Human* this is termed “promiscuous combination of ideas” (Gross, 2012, p. 295) and is isomorphic to “conceptual blending” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

213 Hogan (2011) notes: “Research in creative cognition shows that creative problem solving and insight are most likely to result from the interaction of diverse domains of expertise (Martindale 1995). This is precisely what one would hope for in the scientific study of literature” (Hogan, 2011, p. 171).
These three influential biocultural evolutionary scholars also co-edited an anthology of the best writing of the previous decade of work in the field titled *Evolution, Literature and Film: A Reader* (Boyd, Carroll, Gottschall 2010) which includes two chapters by David Bordwell on cinema. *Creating Consilience: Integrating the Sciences and the Humanities* (Slingerland & Collard, 2012) is a collection of papers from a 2008 workshop at University of British Columbia addressing the “Two Cultures” problem, with chapters on Evolutionary Psychology, Evolutionary Anthropology, and case studies on Culture, Religion, and Morality by scholars such as Steven Pinker, Joseph Carroll, Michelle Scalise Sugiyama, David Sloan Wilson and other scholars of note in the field of consilience.

In light of this brief overview of some key works the general consilience project, below is a more detailed review of two subdomains of consilient literature: Evocriticism and Evolutionary Psychology.

### 4.5.1 Evocriticism


A literature survey reveals over one hundred PhD dissertations and MA theses with an evolutionary / bio-cultural slant were extant in 2014. Among these is Jonathan Gottschall’s PhD dissertation ‘The Rape of Troy: A neo-Darwinian perspective on conflict in the “Iliad”’ (Gottschall, 2000) also published with revisions as a book *The Rape of Troy: Evolution, Violence, and the World of Homer* (Gottschall, 2008b).

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examining the adaptationist bio-cultural perspective in the *Iliad* as its various protagonists struggle to compete for material resources, social dominance and highly-desirable mates. Mathias Clasen’s unpublished PhD dissertation *Monsters and Horror Stories: A Biocultural Approach* (Clasen, 2012) is a collection of eight prior published journal articles which specifically examine Horror genre movies, novels and short stories from a consilient Evocriticism perspective.215

Literary Darwinism216 was inaugurated via Professor Joseph Carroll’s 1995 publication of *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Carroll 1995) in which Carroll comprehensively outlined a theory of literature now known as Literary Darwinism, also variously known as “biopoetics” (Cooke & Turner, 1999), “evocriticism” (Boyd 2009) and as “bioculturalism” in general. Evocriticism integrates evolutionary theory *a la* Charles Darwin, the Modern Evolutionary Synthesis, Richard Dawkins, Daniel C Dennett *et al*, with relevant and useful217 components of traditional literary theory. Carroll has stated that: “Adaptationist literary theorists argue that literature is produced by human nature, is shaped by human nature, and takes human nature as its primary subject” (Carroll, 2005, p. 940). Clearly the same applies with cinema: movies (as business) and films (as art).

In the journal article ‘Critical Discussion: Toward a Consilient Study of Literature’ (Pinker, 2007) Harvard evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker reviewed the anthology *The Literary Animal* (Gottschall & Wilson, 2005) critiquing Scalise Sugiyama (2005) who suggests storytelling is an evolutionary human adaptation218 noting that Sugiyama

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215 Clasen (2013) finds the term ‘evocriticism’ dissonant and prefers the term ‘evolutionary literary study’ (Clasen 2013, p. 12). This is an instance of selection on an individual scale in language; regardless Clasen’s PhD dissertation is exemplary. The term ‘Evocriticism’ is preferred here as it can include other ‘non-literary’ mass communication media such as movies, television, games, graphic novels and so on.  
216 Literary Darwinism as synopsized by Joseph Carroll: “Literary Darwinists integrate literary concepts with a modern evolutionary understanding of the evolved and adapted characteristics of human nature. They aim not just at being one more “school” or movement in literary theory. They aim at fundamentally transforming the framework for all literary study. They think that all knowledge about human behavior, including the products of the human imagination, can and should be subsumed within the evolutionary perspective” (DiSalvo, 2009).  
217 ‘Useful’ here means: aspects from literary theory which can result in empirical findings and thus can in theory become reliable practical tools for writers/creators interested in both the subjective and objective nature of the arts (films, novels, poetry, videogames, songs, etc). As Johnson in (Bourdieu 1993) notes that to understand both agency and structure Bourdieu suggests it is necessary to study both the *subjective* and *objective* in the arts at the same time (Bourdieu 1993, p. 9).  
finds that stories instruct while Pinker finds they are a by-product. However Pinker also notes that these categories are not mutually exclusive and that stories can in fact do both at once. This thesis also accepts the position that both narrative functions apply: movie stories can both delight and instruct. As to the origin and evolution of stories as a biocultural form (and thus: meme), stories may well be both a by-product and an adaptation at once even if for example “delight” is not precisely an accurate word for the experience of Horror or ‘Terror’ genre movies. The instructional aspect of many Horror genre movies would include both cases Pinker identifies namely that instructions or problem-solutions may be conveyed by the information in stories whether it be using case-based reasoning or via narrative fiction thought experiments.

Another function of some stories - including movie narratives - is Narrative Transportation Theory (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000, 2002; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Green & Carpenter, 2011; Green, Chatham, & Sestir, 2012; Oatley, 1999; R. Thompson & Haddock, 2012; Van Laer, De Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzel, 2014) whereby certain stories place the viewer in the ‘flow’ state. Indeed this is one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of successful versus unsuccessful movies from an Anna Karenina Principle perspective. Movie stories that place and keep the viewer in the ‘flow’ state - and thus achieve and maintain Narrative Transportation - are those that succeed. Movie stories can be both “virtual reality” and “emotion engines” at the same time allowing for intellectually- and emotionally-stimulating

219 In Applied Evolutionary Psychology (Roberts 2012), Grabe states: “…as Pinker (1997, p. 29) puts it, “Even in a lifelong couch potato, the visual system never ‘learns’ that television is a pane of glowing phosphor dots.” This explains why humans have an automatic response to threatening mediated messages as if they represent bona fide danger - a scenario which media producers eagerly take advantage of… Thus during the initial seconds of exposure to a negatively-compelling media message, the brain treats it as real and prepares the body for an approach or avoidance response - even when higher-order cognitive processes are at work discounting the message as representational in nature.” (Grabe, 2012, p. 362).

220 Pinker (2010) also notes: “When the illusions work, there is no mystery to the question “Why do people enjoy fiction?” It is identical to the question “Why do people enjoy life?” When we are absorbed in a book or a movie, we get to see breathtaking landscapes, hobnob with important people, fall in love with ravishing men and women, protect loved ones, attain impossible goals, and defeat wicked enemies. Not a bad deal for seven dollars and fifty cents!” (Pinker in B. Boyd, et al., 2010, pp. 130-131).

221 For more detail on ‘flow’ theory, see: (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 2004; Velikovsky, 2014a) and also https://storyality.wordpress.com/2012/12/06/storyality-6b-flow-theory-creativity-and-happiness/

222 Daniel Kahneman’s ‘peak-end’ rules of memory and perception (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Kahneman, 2011, pp. 383-388) no doubt impact on the audience enjoyment and thus word-of-mouth of movies however the ‘flow’ state and Narrative Transportation appears a more widely applicable determinant of movie success and failure with regard to the top and bottom 20 Rof movies.

223 Green et al. (2012) note: “Frijda (1989; 1986) distinguishes between two kinds of emotions that may be evoked by perceiving art: those generated by the fate of the character, and those generated by the
dramatized answers to various questions asked (whether consciously or otherwise) by viewers of movies such as “What would I do - or, how would I solve that specific problem - given those circumstances if I were that character, or, if they were someone I knew?” and simultaneously - albeit sometimes unconsciously - “What would I like to see happen to the villain/s in such circumstances given evolutionary psychology, human behavioural ecology, and my own personality and values?” 224 It is unlikely that these specific questions are ever experienced consciously by most movie viewers. Indeed if the viewer is sufficiently “transported” by (i.e., absorbed in) a fictional narrative then given ‘flow’ theory, consciousness and a sense of one’s own identity recedes and is subsumed by those of the character/s onscreen. An important factor is Bordwell’s observation in ’Common Sense + Film Theory = Common-Sense Film Theory?’ (2011, online) on the cognitive behaviour of mirror neurons in the brain. Bordwell notes that viewers who observe an onscreen narrative have been found to experience the same activity in their brains as if they were enacting the physical actions of the onscreen characters themselves yet without their limbs responding to these cognitive signals.

The consilient movement in the humanities and arts can be regarded as a Kuhnian paradigm shift225 if we consider Film Studies previously having been dominated by Continental philosophy, French psychoanalysis and “Grand Theory” in general as Bordwell and (Noël) Carroll assert in the introduction to their co-edited anthology of articles Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996). The anthology of essays in Post-Theory (1996) is organized into four sections: (1) State of the Art, (2) Film Theory and Aesthetics, (3) Psychology of Film, and (4) History and Analysis. When taken as a whole the chapters demonstrate226 that the “Grand Theory” approaches in cinema studies have been supplanted by a more fruitful consilient, evolutionary and cognitive bio-cultural approach.

In 2010 co-editors Joseph Carroll, Brian Boyd and Jonathan Gottschall published Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader (Boyd, Carroll & Gottschall 2010) a

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224 In Scientific Study of Literature journal, Oatley notes: “When people learn to fly planes, its useful for them to gain experience in simulators, to learn how to deal with important contingencies. Fiction is the mind’s flight simulator for the social world (Oatley 2008)” (Oatley, 2011, p. 156).


226 as Bordwell rightly suggests in the book’s Introduction.
collection of 39 of the best essays and papers in the domain of Evocriticism to 2008. The introduction provides a summary of Evocriticism’s aims, including Frequently Asked Questions, also noting “the Sociobiology controversy” of the 1970s, Wilson’s (1998) call for consilience and the many benefits of adopting the evolutionary view. Also addressed are frequent misunderstandings of or else invalid criticisms most often levelled at Evocriticism (pp. 4-5). Chapters on movies in the volume include Murray Smith’s *Darwin and the Directors: Film, Emotion and the Face in the Age of Evolution* (2003), Joseph Anderson’s *The Reality of Illusion* (1996) and *Character in Citizen Kane* (1996); two essays by Bordwell on movies are included namely *What Snakes, Eagles and Rhesus Macaques Can Teach Us* (2008) and *Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision* (1996/2008).\(^{227}\) In the latter essay reprinted from *Poetics of Cinema* (2008) Bordwell advances the integrated evolutionary bio-socio-cultural view stating:

> If we consider culture to be an elaboration of evolutionary processes, there’s no inherent gulf between ‘biology’ and ‘society’ in this explanatory framework …a great deal of what is conveyed in a movie is conveyed naturally - through those perceptual-cognitive-affective universals that are part of our biological inheritance (Bordwell, 2008, p. 79).


In 2012 (Joseph) Carroll *et al.* published *Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning* (Carroll et al. 2012) which used an extensive online survey\(^{228}\) to examine an evolutionary model of universal human nature and adopts scientific methods of research, explaining the organization of characters in nineteenth-century British novels and ultimately, effectively demonstrating how evolutionary thinking can help to solve various domain problems in literary theory.\(^{229}\)

In the monumental *On The Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, Fiction* (2009) Professor Brian Boyd applies the evolutionary lens to fiction and art proposing the theory that all art is “cognitive play with pattern” (Boyd 2009, p. 15) also soundly

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\(^{227}\) Bordwell’s work in these chapters also correlates with his remarks on E. O. Wilson’s vision of consilience at the conclusion of (Bordwell 2012, online).

\(^{228}\) Carroll *et al* (2012) note of the survey that was undertaken: ‘Approximately 519 respondents completed a total of 1,470 questionnaires on 435 characters from 134 novels.’ (Carroll et al 2012, p. 17)

\(^{229}\) Many evolutionary memes (themes and motifs) discussed and analyzed in *Graphing Jane Austen* (2012) also apply to the Top 20 RoI Films; see the later *Results* chapter here.
arguing that both art and fiction in general are biological adaptations. Homer’s *Odyssey* and Dr Seuss’s *Horton Hears A Who!* are closely examined from an evolutionary perspective and finally this comprehensive evolutionary bio-cultural perspective is summarized. Overall the view proposed provides an exemplary framework for an evolutionary approach to criticism, analysis and interpretation of artworks with three main aspects emphasized:

Apart from standard concerns - author, work, audience, context; intention, effect, meaning; interpretation, evaluation, explanation - we will follow three main lines: (1) a problem-solution model that links the long term of evolution to the short term of an author making choices about this or that detail; (2) earning attention as prior to generating meaning in the problems an author faces; and (3) a multileveled system of explanation (B. Boyd, 2009, p. 322).

Boyd’s five-part multileveled system includes: the *universal* or human nature; *local* or cultural, social, historical, economic, intellectual, technological, or artistic contexts; the *individual* author, critic or reader dispositions and experience; and the *particular* problem-situations of the author - or of a reader - of the story. Boyd (2009) includes an astute analysis of creativity citing Simonton’s BVSR evolutionary creativity model from *Origins of Genius: Darwinian Perspectives on Creativity* (Simonton 1999) in examining first, second, and third-order “Darwin Machines”. Darwin Machines include: (1) life itself, (2) systems inside organisms (e.g., the immune system; the nervous system and brain) and (3) creative artifacts (Boyd 2009, pp. 351-7).  

Boyd (2009) concisely summarizes narrative pattern (story) as “goal, action, obstacle, outcome” (p. 253). It is noted herein that this narrative structure (goal, action, obstacle, outcome) applies to a movie scene (as a movie *part*) and also to *sequences* of scenes (as larger parts) - as well as the movie story as a *whole*. It is herein also observed that this narrative structure (goal, action, obstacle, outcome) in movies is fractal (self-similar on different scales) because movies are structured in holon/partons as ‘units of culture’.  

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231 For details see the online book chapter: ‘The Holon/Parton Theory of the Unit of Culture (or the Meme, and Narreme) in Science, Media, Entertainment and the Arts’ (Velikovsky, 2016) available free online at: [https://storyality.wordpress.com/2016/04/06/storyality132-the-holon-parton-structure-of-the-meme-the-unit-of-culture/](https://storyality.wordpress.com/2016/04/06/storyality132-the-holon-parton-structure-of-the-meme-the-unit-of-culture/)
In *The Art Instinct* (Dutton 2010) Dennis Dutton also adopts a Darwinian evolutionary theory perspective in understanding and explaining art: namely the problematic question of “what Art is” and why some works are critically, aesthetically and commercially more creative - or popular and/or critically well regarded. Dutton (2010) includes a list of twelve characteristic features (‘cluster criteria’) of art which can be seen to apply directly to movies: *direct pleasure, skill and virtuosity, style, novelty and creativity, criticism, representation, special focus, expressive individuality, emotional saturation, intellectual challenge, art traditions and institutions, and imaginative experience* (Dutton 2010, pp. 51-61). Dutton identifies key issues around the question “What does it mean to be human?” or innate features of the human mind and psychology and thus *Human Nature* (Dutton 2010, pp. 43-4), elements also examined herein as common themes in the Top 20 RoI movies. Dutton also briefly refers specifically to movies, correlating with what has emerged as one central finding of this research study:  

In cinema today, it is still the story told that makes the greatest films. In this respect, little has changed since our ancestors sat around a fire listening to a storyteller. Hollywood is engaged in a special-effects arms race; every movie has to have bigger explosions, uglier villains, more frenzied, realistic violence, ear-splitting noises and ever-expanding battle scenes… Such effects can give pleasure to many, but they do not replace the fundamental attraction of a rational, coherent story well told… Good stories compel our attention (Dutton 2010, pp. 133-4).

In 2012 Jonathan Gottschall published *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make us Human* (Gottschall, 2012) analysing why humans tell stories and drawing on the domains of biology, psychology and neuroscience to examine narrative across different media including novels, movies, television, videogames, poetry and rap music. The *Style* journal article ‘Applied Evolutionary Criticism’ (Cooke & Machann, 2012) is a general review of literature in the domain of Evocriticism, including recent journal articles, and serves as a useful introduction for those new to this domain of knowledge. Other journals which contain key Evocriticism articles include *Philosophy and Literature, Evolution and Human Behavior, Evolutionary Psychology, Human Nature*,

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233 See also: (Dissanayake, 2000, 2008).

234 See the *Results and Discussion* chapter: The *Results* section of this thesis aims to demonstrate why the same crucial story (including: plot) aspect outweighs special effects/visual spectacle considerations in the movie stories that go “viral” - such as top 20 RoI movies in comparison to bottom 20 RoI movies.

235 In this work Gottschall formulates the structure of all story as: “Character + Problem (or, Predicament) + Attempted Extrication” (Gottschall 2012, pp. 52, 186).
The key contribution of Evocriticism to this study is that it provides a consilient biocultural worldview which, once the Evolutionary Systems view of cultural production is incorporated, appears more holistic than many alternate available worldviews. Biocultural artifacts such as movies, novels and songs are shaped by human Evolutionary Psychology which in turn is shaped by human evolutionary biology and psychology and their interaction with their environments.

Evocriticism’s focus on human universals\textsuperscript{237} while also acknowledging human and cultural differences\textsuperscript{238} on balance also appears to be a more positive worldview than one focussed primarily on differences.\textsuperscript{239} Since the Systems (socio-cultural) Model of creativity is an analogue of biological natural selection, evolutionary theory has great explanatory power in understanding the complex units, levels and mechanisms of both biological and (bio)cultural creativity.\textsuperscript{240} Since movies frequently depict Human Nature Evocriticism provides a valuable method to further illuminate Human Nature and unravel its mysteries as it evolves. As a domain of knowledge Evocriticism provides a pathway to consilient answers to questions such as: Why do significant numbers of people like some movies and dislike others? As noted in Evolution, Literature and Film: A Reader (2010):

Biologist David Sloan Wilson observes that because of the unique importance of culture in humans ‘we have not escaped evolution, as so commonly assumed. We experience evolution in hyperdrive’ (Boyd \textit{et al} 2010, p. 5).

\textsuperscript{236} In 2016 a new Evocriticism journal was also launched: Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture. See: http://www.academicstudiespress.com/journals/esic/

\textsuperscript{237} The classic work on human universals is (Brown 1991): “After studying a large number of cultures Brown discovered that there are over 200 characteristics common to all cultures, including characteristics as diverse as burial rituals, logical operators, sex role differentiation, incest taboos, rituals surrounding food, dance, metaphorical speech, tool making, wariness of snakes, classification of colour and thumb-sucking” (Workman & Reader, 2008, p. 403). In On Human Nature, (Wilson 1978) also notes that (Murdock, 1945) found 66 human universals (Wilson, 1978, pp. 21-22).

\textsuperscript{238} Whereas Evolutionary Psychology focusses on human universals, Human Behavioural Ecology focusses more on cultural differences, as adaptive evolutionary strategies (Buller in Hull & Ruse, 2007, pp. 266-267).

\textsuperscript{239} As Giora (2011) notes in Scientific Study of Literature journal: “We are all a lot more similar than different” (Giora, 2011, p. 104).

\textsuperscript{240} Understanding the units, levels and mechanisms of selection in bioculture (and biology) is one of the goals of the discipline of Applied Evolutionary Epistemology; see: (Gontier, 2012).
The Evolutionary view of creativity is thus assumed in this thesis, adopting key theories in Simonton (1984-2014), Csikszentmihalyi (1988-2014), D. T. Campbell (1950-1974), Karl Popper (1963-1999) and Boyd (2009, 2010) all of which assume the evolutionary view of bioculture. Likewise herein the selection, variation, and transmission-with-heredity model of knowledge - of “memes” (or ideas, processes or products as biocultural units) - is adopted in both Science and the Arts and by extension also language and religions or indeed any form of extrasomatic human cultural symbolic knowledge. At the core of Evocriticism is the knowledge domain of Evolutionary Psychology to which we now turn.

4.5.2 Evolutionary Psychology

Journals of or related to Evolutionary Psychology include Human Nature; Journal of Evolutionary Psychology; Evolution and Human Behaviour; Behavioural and Brain Sciences; and Journal of Social, Evolutionary and Cultural Psychology.

As the first major edited volume on Evolutionary Psychology and culture The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture (Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992) is a canonical and foundational work in Evolutionary Psychology including chapters by Steven Pinker, David Buss, Margo Wilson and Martin Daly, and Tooby and Cosmides. Given Bordwell’s problem-solution model and Popper’s All Life is Problem Solving (1999) all living organisms are problem-solvers which may explain why stories (which are examples of problem-solutions) are so attractive to Human Nature. Tooby and Cosmides (1992) list over thirty major problems that must be solved by an individual in order to survive and reproduce; many of these problems also recur in most stories (Tooby and Cosmides in Barkow, Tooby and Cosmides 1992, p. 110).

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241 or more broadly, Darwinian
242 See also: (Velikovsky, 2016) for more detail.
243 In Applied Evolutionary Psychology (Roberts 2012), De Backer notes: “…because the cost/benefit ratio is so positive for acquisition of second-hand information, storytelling was probably very popular among our ancestors: ‘A hunter-gatherer band might contain scores or even hundreds of lifetimes’ worth of experience whose summary can be tapped into if it can be communicated. So vicarious experience of especially interesting events, communicated from others, should be aesthetically rewarding’ (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, p. 23)” (De Backer, 2012, pp. 352-353). This represents one “benefit” of movie stories for audiences; the “cost” for the audience member includes: the cinema-ticket price, the time, possibly car-parking and babysitting costs and the opportunity-cost of the audience member’s next preferred alternative activity to going to the cinema to see a movie.
It appears that problem-solving abilities are selected-for, and as Gottschall (2012) notes the algorithm underlying any story is “character + problem + attempted extrication”. DiCarlo (2010) also notes that there are not merely practical benefits but also neurochemical payloads, namely the release of endorphins and other pleasurable drugs in the brain when a problem appears to be solved (DiCarlo, 2010) which partially explains the audience appeal of movie stories that ‘work’. In this view any story where a plot problem is solved, or the protagonist’s goal is achieved - or indeed any kind of mystery explained - should be rewarding on various levels not just cognitively but also chemically and thus also emotionally.

Popper (1999) notes that all life is doing science and that science begins with problems. Thus even witnessing a failure to solve a problem - for example when the heroes in a story are eaten by the monster - is satisfying even on a morbid curiosity level in the sense that we are now aware of a demonstrated solution that is suboptimal. Such ‘tragic’ stories are equally as valuable as formal scientific hypotheses that are falsified by experiment as we may now eliminate that hypothesis as ineffective. Since so many stories coexist they also must compete for human attention; that is to say there must logically be selection pressure on stories in any medium whether in novels, movies, anecdotes, or songs with a narrative and so on. There exist more novels than can be read in a single human lifetime and the extant 500,000 movies (Vogel 2011, 2014) are also too numerous to watch in a single human lifetime. Thus some selection pressure on new movies also logically must exist.

In the textbook *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind* (Buss 2012) Buss provides a broad overview of the domain of Evolutionary Psychology noting its rejection of the Standard Social Science Model (SSSM) which denies Human Nature; its focus on solutions to adaptive problems of survival, mating, parenting, kinship and group living (Buss 2012, p. xiv); and summarizing key works by Darwin, Lorenz, Hamilton, Williams, Trivers, E. O. Wilson, Tooby, Cosmides and other researchers.

*The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (D. M. Buss, 2005) contains 34 articles divided into the seven major categories of *Foundations of Evolutionary Psychology*,

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244 Buss (2012) notes “Attention… is a scarce resource, and must be allocated judiciously” (p. 330).

Survival, Mating, Parenting And Kinship, Group Living, Evolutionizing Traditional Disciplines of Psychology, and Applications of Evolutionary Psychology To Other Disciplines.\textsuperscript{246} As Buss (2005) notes in the preamble to the first chapter of the book “The original theoretical papers of Tooby and Cosmides over the past 18 years have informed virtually all work being conducted in the field of evolutionary psychology” (Buss 2005, p. 1). It is for this reason a separate section is devoted to Tooby and Cosmides (2005) below.

In the ‘Conceptual Foundations of Evolutionary Psychology’ chapter of Buss (2005) Tooby and Cosmides detail the core tenets of Evolutionary Psychology as developed since 1992\textsuperscript{247} stipulating that:

> The long-term scientific goal towards which evolutionary psychologists are working is the mapping of our universal human nature (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005, p. 5).

It is for this reason that Evolutionary Psychology is clearly relevant to movie storytelling since as the screenwriting doxa suggests, movie storytelling aims to depict and illuminate Human Nature. In the doxa Snyder (2005) repeatedly emphasizes the need for ‘primal’ elements in successful movie stories, and thus screenplays. With such ‘primal’ elements in mind, Tooby and Cosmides (2005) define the EEA\textsuperscript{248} as follows:

> The environment of evolutionary adaptedness (EEA) refers jointly to the problems hunter-gatherers had to solve and the conditions under which they solved them (including their developmental environment) (Tooby and Cosmides in Buss 2005, p. 22).

The authors note that a behavior can be simultaneously: cultural, learned and evolved (pp. 30-1). Regarding “universal architectural design versus genetic differences” Tooby and Cosmides note there is a universal species-typical design in almost all individuals as per Gray’s Anatomy (1918); the authors also present a detailed argument, a summary of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{246} The second edition of Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology was published in 2015 in two volumes, namely (D. Buss, 2015a, 2015b). Joseph Carroll’s chapter ‘Evolutionary Literary Study’ (Carroll, 2015b) updates the first edition of the Handbook’s (Buss 2005) summary of research in evocriticism. In chapter 30 of The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology Volume 2 - Integrations, ‘Cultural Evolution’ (Chudek, Muthukrishna, & Henrich, 2015), the authors examine cultural evolution but do not examine the evolutionary creativity research such as Simonton (1984-2014), Csikszentmihalyi (1988-2014), Sawyer (2006, 2012). It appears that this extant scientific research on creativity could fruitfully be integrated.
\item \textsuperscript{247} For an extensive list of Evolutionary Psychology publications by two of its key founders, Tooby and Cosmides, see: \url{http://www.cep.ucsb.edu/publist.htm}
\item \textsuperscript{248} The EEA as a shaper of Human Nature in the Pleistocene era also correlates with Wilson’s observation that “Human nature is, moreover, a hodgepodge of special genetic adaptations to an environment largely vanished, the world of the Ice-Age hunter-gatherer” (Edward O. Wilson, 1978, p. 196).
\end{itemize}
which is that: with humans - as indeed with all animals - there is a universal human

design but genetic variation and environmental influences result in differences in

personality, structure, temperament, and appearance (pp. 38-40).

With regard to why certain movies attract and maintain more attention than others

Tooby and Cosmides (2005) note that evolutionary psychologists view attention not

merely as a single mechanism but as a whole collection of mechanisms designed to

select information from a scene for various different processing purposes, namely

“massive modularity” theory (p. 42). Popular movies clearly capture and maintain an

audience’s attention but what exactly might be attracting and maintaining attention can

vary for individuals as movies are information-rich.249

Tooby and Cosmides (2005) also note the scientific paradigm change that Evolutionary

Psychology represents:

Biology is not split into evolutionary biology and non-evolutionary

biology. At some point, all psychology will be evolutionary

psychology, simply because it will make no sense to wall off the study

of humans from the rest of the natural world (Tooby and Cosmides in

Buss 2005, p. 44-5).

The categories of human knowledge and brain modules listed by Tooby and Cosmides

(2005) also go toward illuminating, via science - rather than speculative philosophy -

“What it means to be human” and also help to explain the tendency towards a fallacious

belief in separatist human exceptionalism. Due to the accelerated progress of human

biocultural evolution as the human population increases - despite the universal

commonalities of life as systems - humans clearly exhibit many unique behaviours

when compared and contrasted to rest of the entire animal and plant kingdom on Earth


Wilson, 1978, pp. 21-22).250 However this thesis asserts that humans are indeed still

animals despite highly-evolved levels of consciousness (Dennett 1993, 1995) and are


249 Additionally individuals predominantly have Visual; Aural; Read/Write; or Kinaesthetic ‘mode’
preferences for absorbing new information (or indeed may be multi-modal); see: http://vark
learn.com/

250 Gross (2012) suggests the term “Humaniqueness”, or “Hauser’s (2009) term for the key ingredients of
the human mind which together distinguish us from all species. The four major ingredients are: generative
computation, promiscuous combination of ideas, mental symbols and abstract thought” (p. 291).
still systems which are ultimately if not proximally dependent on their environment of polysystems including biological ecosystems, as do all other lifeforms.\textsuperscript{251}

Evolutionary Psychology as a domain of knowledge examines the many complex adaptive problems of survival and reproduction in the EEA over deep evolutionary time and to the cognitive mechanisms they have resulted in.\textsuperscript{252} This may also help to explain why so many (over 50\%) of the Top 20 RoI movies can be classified in the ‘Survival’ genre. These movies include: \textit{Paranormal Activity, Mad Max, The Blair Witch Project, El Mariachi, Night of the Living Dead, Halloween, Open Water, Friday the 13\textsuperscript{th}, Saw, The Evil Dead, ET: The Extra-Terrestrial} - recalling that ET will die, if he stays on Earth, and also \textit{Star Wars}, recalling that the rebellion is viewed as a terrorist organization by The Empire. To a lesser degree other Top 20 RoI movies also directly concerned with survival and also reproduction include \textit{Rocky, Primer} and \textit{The Full Monty}. In this view it seems likely that these Top 20 RoI movies capture attention and thus memory in a wide range of human individuals all of whom in general evidently share the same universal human psychological architecture, mechanisms and general preferences yet of course with variations in each individual. These canonical movie stories appear designed - whether intentionally or even by accidental by-product - to appeal to elements within universal Human Nature. In summary, knowledge from the domain of Evolutionary Psychology may be one useful method for more movie creators to better achieve their storytelling aims rather than via folk psychology.\textsuperscript{253}

Although individual audience-member emotional reactions or emotional journeys while experiencing a movie may well differ on a normal-curve\textsuperscript{254} and in particular if Narrative

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{251} This view is also a recapitulation of the Systems View as outlined in Laszlo (1972) and Capra & Luisi (2014).
\textsuperscript{252} Buss (2012) notes: “Differential reproduction is the “bottom line” of the evolutionary process, the engine that drives natural selection… Living poses a number of problems. Although our current style of living protects us a great deal, everyone has at some point encountered forces that endanger survival. Darwin called these the “hostile forces of nature” and they include climate, weather, food shortages, toxins, diseases, parasites, predators, and hostile conspecifics (members of the same species).” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 72). Such hostile forces often provide obvious (‘primai’) antagonists in fiction.
\textsuperscript{253} Again it should be noted it has rightly been pointed out (by at least one Examiner of this thesis) that folk psychology has also resulted in works by Shakespeare, Homer, Austen and many other classics to date; however this thesis adopts the view that due to the intense competition most movie screenwriters may need all the assistance and shortcuts they can obtain in understanding universal Human Nature.
\textsuperscript{254} Clearly not everyone finds every allegedly-terrifying horror-genre movie ‘scary’ nor every ‘rom-com’, both romantic and funny. In fact as a very broad folk psychology generalization males appear to prefer Horror, Science Fiction and Action genre movies in general, while females may tend to prefer Rom-Coms and thus the pejorative gender-terms “chick-flick”, and “bromance”. Yet some movie stories manage to
\end{footnotesize}
Transportation Theory is true, emotions are clearly a crucial part of movie experiences. Tooby & Cosmides in *The Adapted Mind* (1992) and also in (2005) write extensively on emotions but there is not scope to summarize that complex domain of knowledge here, other than the Evolutionary hypothesis that emotions serve as short-cuts for thinking. If movies are viewed as intellectual, emotional and/or aesthetic stimulation then the Evolutionary and Cognitive Psychology view of emotion also helps to explain why in general terms audiences experience the emotions they do when viewing movies.255

Since at least 1996 David Bordwell (1996; 2008; 2010; 2012) has made significant contributions to such evolutionary and consilient research and theorizing in his neoformalist film poetics. In the essay ´What Snakes, Eagles and Rhesus Macaques Can Teach Us´ in *Poetics of Cinema* (Bordwell 2008)256 Bordwell provides a model of a movie spectator’s activities as the information in a movie is perceived, comprehended and appropriated in their mind. Likewise in the online essay ´The Viewer’s Share: Models of Mind in Explaining Film´ Bordwell (2012) reviews past popular models of movie comprehension including folk psychology, montage theory, semiology, and Freudian theory ultimately suggesting E. O. Wilson’s (1998) consilience as a promising model (Bordwell, 2012, online).257

Carroll (2005) also includes a diagram of an emerging model of Human Nature as derived from Evolutionary Psychology including the “field behaviour systems” of the

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255 As one Examiner of this thesis has rightly noted, certain of Tooby and Cosmides’ conceptions of Evolutionary Psychology and Cognitive Science as filtered via Buss (2012) - had been superseded even as this research project was commenced (in 2012); see (Heyes, 2012). In (Hull & Ruse, 2007) it is noted that in Evolutionary Psychology evolutionary principles are applied from the vantage point of Human Nature in our Pleistocene Past; whereas in *Human Behavioural Ecology* the viewpoint is Human Nature in the Present (p. 269). However many core Evolutionary Psychology principles may well still apply underneath large-scale present-day behavioural patterns in humans. This is to suggest that Blake Snyder’s emphasis in the screenwriting doxa on ‘primal’ behaviour - or ‘primal’ story stakes appealing widely to movie audiences may apply underneath more sophisticated human behaviour and cognition. This line of thinking is along similar lines to Maclean’s (1960, 1990) ‘triune brain’ theory (namely considering older reptilian and limbic systems versus the more recently emergent human neocortex). In some cases the older, more ‘primal’ brains may influence and override the newer ‘higher’ and more complex parts and functions of the human brain (Koestler, [1967] 1989). As per Maslow’s hierarchy of needs ‘survival and reproduction’ are baseline requirements or key values for all life - not just human life - and are thus more ‘universal’ and more widely resonant with audiences than the higher and more complex goals on Maslow’s hierarchy - and thus in movie stories. See also: Chapter 2 ‘The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs vs. Maclean’s Triune Brain’ in *The Consilient Brain* (Cory, 2004, pp. 7-14).

256 also reprinted in *Evolution, Literature and Film: A Reader* (Boyd et al, 2010)

257 and with Bordwell once again rightly refuting the Postmodernists’ often deliberately anti-consilient and anti-realist “Grand Theory”.
various: survival, technology, mating, parenting, kin, social and cognitive fields (Carroll in Buss 2005, p. 941).

*Empirical Studies of the Arts,* the official Journal of the International Association of Empirical Aesthetics is a twice-yearly academic peer-reviewed social sciences research journal which began in 1983. According to the website the journal is:

The interdisciplinary forum for theoretical and empirical studies of aesthetics, creativity, and all of the arts. Anthropological, psychological, semiotic, and sociological studies of the creation, perception, and appreciation of literary, musical, and visual art forms (Sage, 2016, online).

In a 2005 article in the journal D K Simonton published 'Film As Art Versus Film As Business: Differential Correlates Of Screenplay Characteristics' a study determining whether certain screenplay features differentiate movies aimed towards artistic expression from those aimed at financial profit:

The sample consisted of 1436 English-language, narrative films released between 1968 and 2002. The variables included 4 economic indicators, 5 movie award assessments, 2 composite critical evaluations, and 24 screenplay characteristics (Simonton, 2005, p. 93).

The findings in the article above also correlate with those in the study of cinematic and aesthetic creativity which Simonton conducted and published in *Great Flicks* (2011).

*Scientific Study of Literature* (SSOL) journal was first published in 2011 and is the official journal of the International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature (IGEL). Green and Carpenter (2011) note:

This is an exciting time for the scientific study of literature. Although individuals have been studying literature empirically for years, as illustrated by over two decades of research presented at conferences of International Society of the Empirical Study of Literature (IGEL), this approach has gained momentum in recent years (Green & Carpenter, 2011, p. 113).

The journal features various articles on the Narrative Transportation theory of audience immersion which is derived from Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘flow’ theory. In ‘How Do

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259 Simonton also published the article ‘Is Bad Art The Opposite Of Good Art? Positive Versus Negative Cinematic Assessments of 877 Feature Films’ (Simonton, 2007) in *Empirical Studies of the Arts* journal, which has also been influential for the design of this study.

260 *Scientific Study of Literature* journal: [https://benjamins.com/#catalog/journals/ssol/main](https://benjamins.com/#catalog/journals/ssol/main)

261 (Green & Carpenter, 2011; Green, et al., 2012)
We Entertain Ourselves With Literary Texts?” Vorderer and Roth (2011) note that “theories of psychological exposure to films, music and TV programs include: Selective-Exposure Theory, Mood-Management Theory, Affective-Disposition Theory, and Excitation-Transfer Theory” (Vorderer & Roth, 2011, p. 137). An individual audience-member’s cinema attendance behaviour with regard to specific movies may be explained by any, some and/or all of these theories on why we seek out certain stories. In 2013 for SSOL volume 3:1 leading ecocritics Professors Brian Boyd, Jonathan Gottschall and Joseph Carroll were invited to contribute their three manifestoes for evolutionary literary study namely: 'What's Your Problem? And How Might We Deepen It?’ (B. Boyd, 2013); 'Toward consilience, not literary Darwinism’ (Gottschall, 2013); and ‘A Rationale for Evolutionary Studies of Literature’ (Carroll, 2013). Gottschall (2013) states that in his own view, in contrast to Carroll’s, not all consilient literary investigation need necessarily always be tied back to the Evolutionary level of causation but should use the methods of science wherever possible (Gottschall 2013, p. 16).

The Scientific Study of Literature journal article ‘Ways To Engage Readers: Relevance in the scientific study of literature’ (Hakemulder, 2011) enquires whether scientifically investigating how stories entertain might result in useful guidelines for professional creatives in writing bestseller novels and blockbuster movie screenplays thus potentially lending wider relevance to such findings (Hakemulder, 2011, p. 144).263

In summary the knowledge domain of Evolutionary Psychology contributes to this study since it aims to understand how the characteristics, form, and functioning of canonical and archive movies can shed light on Human Nature. As will be seen in the analysis of the Top 20 RoI movies various key principles of Human Nature apply in these movie stories. The universal architectural design of those 20 movies is essentially the same and the differences between them are minor variations. However the differences in the top and bottom 20 RoI movies when each is taken as whole sets also appear to explain their differential function and performance as socially contagious - or,

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262 (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).
263 This doctoral research investigates such a question though with regard to movie-story contagion, rather than specifically “blockbusters”. Some - but certainly not all - of the top 20 RoI could indeed be considered “blockbusters” as they are defined in (Block & Wilson, 2010), namely Star Wars and E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial.
conversely, as socially non-contagious for the bottom 20 RoI - movies namely as “memes” - and narremes, or “units of story” - in bioculture.

4.5.3 A Synthesis of Certain Concepts in the Literature Review

As noted in the literature review above, Sadowski (1999, pp. 32-3) identifies self-coupled systems. In the diagram below, the Movie Field is comprised of (1) individuals, and (2) outputs (both movies, and also knowledge as creative artifacts, which are memes and holons). These movies (and Domain knowledge) recursively becomes new input for the field as individuals in the cinema field view new (and also older) movies and absorb and select (and also reject/deselect) information or knowledge. Some of the knowledge that is selectively retained by the field becomes doxa.

![Diagram of the Movie Field and the Movie Domain as self-coupled systems](image)

*Figure 4-18 - The Movie Field and the Movie Domain - as self-coupled systems*

This evolutionary spiral in the domain of movies is isomorphic to Koestler’s (1967) adaptation of Garstang’s (1922) evolutionary spiral for ideas, processes and products. Indeed also the trial-and-error process of filmmakers that Bordwell (1997, 2008) notes correlates with Campbell (1960) and Simonton (1984-2012) on BVSР and also Popper and Campbell’s Evolutionary Epistemology (1974).

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264 For example: books on movies and filmmaking, movie-making courses, movie websites, word-of-mouth wisdom, and gossip about movies.

265 See: Macdonald’s adaptation of Sawyer’s model of the systems model, i.e., *Figure 1-2 - The creative process of screenwriting - after Sawyer (2006, p. 123) in (Macdonald 2013, p. 115)* in the earlier *Introduction* chapter.

266 See the diagram in (Koestler, [1967] 1989, p. 168).
Additionally there is also a *screenplay* field, and domain. Screenwriters create screenplays and the field determines by consensus which of these are creative and thus become canonical and which do not. The screenwriting field likewise reads those canonical screenplays and is inspired to either imitate or reject aspects of them.

![Diagram of Screenplay Field and Domain](image)

*Figure 4-19 - The Screenplay Field and the Screenplay Domain - as self-coupled systems*

Finally a diagram is presented (4-20 below) of a reasonably-typical process of movie-making for an individual (person) inside many and various systems, a diagram which aims to synthesize and illustrate many of the above Evolutionary concepts.

When examined as a linear chain of multiple co-causal events over time for an individual movie screenwriter in the field, certain major emergent stages in the DPFi (nonlinear dynamical) systems model process of creativity in movies - when also correlated and synthesized with aspects of Bourdieu’s practice theory of cultural production (Bourdieu 1977-1996) - may in simplified terms be examined as a linear ‘process-stage’ or ‘step’ model over time as is depicted below:
Figure 4-20 - The DPFi (Domain, Person, Field interaction) systems model of creativity in Movies as an algorithmic, iterative, recursive, confluence systems-process for an Individual, over time.

By contrast Csikszentmihalyi’s (2014) diagram of the DPFi systems model\(^{267}\) presents an objective or a ‘universal’ perspective of this iterative and recursive confluence systems process (see also: earlier Figure 1.2 - Macdonald’s 2013 adaptation of Sawyer, 2006), while the present author (in Fig 4-20 above) aims to simultaneously present an

\(^{267}\) See: Figure 2-1 - The DPFi (Domain, Person, Field, interaction) systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi in Simonton, 2014a, p. 538) in the earlier Operational Definitions chapter.
objective and subjective view of an individual (person or agent) inside these same various systems processes over time.268

4.5.4 The StoryAlity Theory

Further to the (above) Literature Review synthesis of: (1) creativity theory; (2) the use of Systems Theory to examine culture; (3) the current dominant screenwriting doxa; (4) studies of movie performance; and (5) consilience in terms of Evocriticism and Evolutionary Psychology, the following StoryAlity Theory of both movie success and failure is here advanced. One of the aims of scientific research is to enable control and prediction of future outcomes; in this instance such a Theory may be of potential benefit to screenwriters and movie creators.269

If we thus examine key characteristics - the form, structure, content, and story elements of the top 20 RoI movies - and compare those to the same key characteristics of the Bottom 20 RoI movies we should be able to arrive at a list of key characteristics of a hypothetical “archetypal top 20 RoI” movie. Namely we should be able to advance a prediction of any subsequent new top 20 RoI movie’s key characteristics as derived from characteristics of the extant top 20 RoI movies list. When a new top 20 RoI movie actually emerges we can compare its characteristics with that of this new Theory to test (i.e., attempt to falsify) the Theory’s various predictions. Likewise by compiling the common key traits of the bottom 20 RoI movies this same Theory may also thus provide heuristics of “traits to be avoided” - assuming that movie ‘social contagion’ or a high RoI (or a high ‘artistic and creative benefit/cost ratio’) is a goal for screen storytellers.

The Anna Karenina Principle also complicates this proposed new Theory. Not only does success as a high-RoI (high story-power) movie imply achieving certain goals (of premise, plot, character, dialogue, narrative transportation and so on) but also failure in any of the singular component parts is to be avoided. This is to say that while successful movies may not appear to contain any major or obvious flaws for a mass audience by contrast unsuccessful (lowest RoI) movies may only require one single

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268 In Laszlo’s Systems Philosophy (1972), as adopted herein, “subject” and “object” are in fact one: “Hence in this metaphysics there is no gap between the subject and object - these terms refer to arbitrarily abstracted entities” (E. Laszlo, 1972b, pp. 292-293).

269 It should again be noted the UK-based company Epagix uses analysis of over 30 million proposed movie story elements to predict the success of a movie screenplay (Dormehl 2014, pp. 167-8); this however is a small-scale study.
flaw that subsequently can cause them to fail. Thus while the archetypal Bottom 20 RoI movie’s traits might be identified, and its failure or rejection by the field might be due to a single flawed component meanwhile a Top 20 RoI movie may also share certain of these traits all except for the flawed trait or traits.

The complex configurational operation of the component parts of a movie story is thus a further complication; it would be over-reaching to infer that simply having all of the cluster-components of a top 20 RoI movie - or conversely having all the archetypal traits of a bottom 20 RoI movie - would mean that the movie either succeeds or fails. A movie may well have some traits (in both form and content) of both high and low RoI clusters and yet may perform in an unexpected way even given these sets of heuristics.

The StoryAlity Theory is presented in more detail in the latter section of Chapter Seven - Results and Discussion. However in brief the Theory aims to predict various key characteristics of high RoI movies of key relevance to story creators and thus screenwriters, and also suggests 17 ‘dos’, and 10 ‘don’ts’ as potential revisions to the current dominant screenwriting and movie creation (filmmaking) orthodoxy in order to increase the probability or likelihood of thus creating a high-RoI movie story.\(^{270}\)

Interestingly a new movie also entered the top 20 RoI list in 2012 (The Devil Inside). In the Appendix (See: 10-17 – Testing out the StoryAlity Theory) this new movie is examined against the StoryAlity Theory in order to test the guidelines and predictions of the StoryAlity hypothesis.

If the story is ultimately the key to movie success then the key question remains: Does the dominant screenwriting doxa suggest How to create a successful movie or merely How to create: a movie-?\(^{271}\)

It is also assumed that Evolutionary Psychology principles could well be present in the movie stories of both the canon (i.e., top 20 RoI) and also the archive (Bottom 20 RoI) movies. This is to note that it does not seem a useful hypothesis to assume that movies that fail to become canon all do not have “primal” themes, namely of survival (“life and death” stakes), reproduction (family, community), and revenge (retributive justice) in

\(^{270}\) As an interesting historical side note the conclusion section of the early screenwriting manual Photoplay Scenarios: How to Write and Sell Them (Ball, 1915) includes a list of cautions described in the table of contents as ‘A Collection of Important “Don’ts’” (Ball, 1915, pp. 175-180).

\(^{271}\) It is again noted that 98% of movie stories are deselected at the “greenlight” or production-financing stage and thus those many and varied 98% of screen ideas did not even become movies and are thus an “invisible silent population” in the data.
them as it seems likely that if such Human Nature themes from Evolutionary Psychology were not present in a screen idea then such a screen idea might well get deselected even before the movie creation stage.

Many of the Bottom 20 RoI movies do indeed have “primal” Human Nature or classic Evolutionary Psychology themes not merely evident but in fact prevalent in them; however it is also noted that merely having those attention-getting themes (survival, reproduction, revenge) in the movie story is not enough; the execution or the storytelling of the entire narrative appears equally important. Examining the two extremes of RoI suggests that classic high-stakes Human Nature themes (survival, reproduction, revenge) may well be necessary but are clearly not sufficient for movie success.272

Ironically also the complex configurational operation of the various movie story elements can confound expectations of the components of successful movies as some of the top 20 RoI movies have less of the classic Human Nature elements than might otherwise be expected. In short another question becomes: Should we expect the more canonical (popular) movies to reveal more about what Human Nature is like than do archive (unpopular) ones? However a more nuanced approach is that canonical movies appear to exploit certain biases in human nature in terms of attracting and maintaining human attention. This is certainly not as simple as sex and violence, notwithstanding UCLA screenwriting instructor Lew Hunter’s advice in the ‘how-to’ manual Screenwriting 434: “As a screenwriter, you have two primary emotional colours: sex and violence” (L. Hunter, 2004, p. 22).273

In summary there are certain common traits in high RoI movies - and others in low-RoI movies - but both the Anna Karenina Principle and the complex configurational operation of story elements means that movie success and failure is far from simple. In this view it is not surprising therefore that 98% of screen ideas are rejected and that of the 2% that are made into movies only 3 in every 10 of those movies ’breaks even’ in cinemas. In The Journal of Cultural and Evolutionary Psychology Robin Dunbar

272 An analogy might be: having all the right ingredients to bake a delicious cake but following the wrong recipe and burning it.
273 Although in the chapter ’Television Programming and the Audience’ in Applied Evolutionary Psychology (Roberts, 2012), De Backer notes “…sex and crime are still by far the most popular topics in prime time television (Hetsroni 2007 a, b)” (De Backer, 2012, p. 349).
addresses the same issue in the article ‘Why Are Good Writers So Rare? An Evolutionary Perspective on Literature’ (Dunbar, 2005) convincingly arguing that:

…to be successful, story-tellers have to work at cognitive levels beyond the norm for adult humans, and this may explain why good story-tellers are rare even though the ability to appreciate stories is universal (Dunbar 2005, p. 7).

On this view writing and then making a successful movie is a complex task.

4.6 THE LITERATURE REVIEW – SUMMATION

The above Literature Review aimed to review five key areas with the research located at the intersection of those five knowledge domains, namely: (1) creativity; (2) uses of Systems Theory in examining bioculture; (3) screenwriting doxa; (4) studies of movie performance and (5) consilience including Evocriticism and Evolutionary Psychology.

In the Creativity section of the above Literature Review Csikszentmihalyi and Wolfe’s (2000) definition was that “Creativity can be defined as an idea or product that is original, valued and implemented” (Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly & Wolfe 2000, p. 81). Combining this with the notion of a creative artifact (idea, process or product) as “novel and appropriate” it is clear that certain filmmaking ideas, processes and products - Csikszentmihalyi (1996) calls them “memes” 274 - spread in culture (become socially contagious) while others do not. This can be seen to apply to the top 20 (canon) and also bottom 20 (archive) Rol movies (thus their movie-stories) given the Systems or ‘sociocultural’ model of creativity. The Evolutionary Systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2014) may be the best currently-available model for describing, explaining and understanding creativity in biocultural production within the movie domain or more specifically understanding What creativity is in movies - and why, how, and where its extremes appear to occur most often.

In the Systems section of the Literature Review systems in general were examined, suggesting that people (thus screenwriters, movie-makers and movie audience members) can be viewed as bio-psycho-socio-cultural systems. Systems Theory raises issues of Gestalt Theory and “emergence” when a movie is viewed, namely that a movie image (or a scene) can be more than the sum of its parts and also that holon theory can

274 As noted earlier, Dawkins (1976/2006) coined the term ‘meme’ for the unit of culture. See also: ‘The Holon/Parton Theory of the Unit of Culture (or the Meme, and Narreme): In Science, Media, Entertainment and the Arts’ (Velikovsky 2016) for more detail.
be applied to systems\textsuperscript{275} when examining a biocultural domain such as movies: movie-story creation, movie screenwriting, and movies.

In the \textit{Screenwriting Doxa} review above the key literature on screenwriting was examined reviewing the dominant screenwriting doxa in the light of Macdonald’s (2004, 2013) Bourdieuan approach to understanding the movie ‘screenwriting convention’.

In the \textit{Studies of Movie Performance} literature review it was noted that extant research converges on the view that movie performance is \textit{not} caused by marketing, movie stars, budget or other factors beside the \textit{story} - as the primary cause for the success of a movie namely its spread among audiences is “word-of-mouth”; and that a gap exists in the academic research on: movie story and its correlation with movie RoI.

Finally in the \textit{Consilience: Evocricism and Evolutionary Psychology} literature review section it was suggested that the biocultural approach is useful for examining facets of cinema creativity if Human Nature is what movie stories depict, and noting that Human Nature is also the main subject of enquiry for Evolutionary and Cognitive Psychology.

In terms of Evocricism (a.k.a. Biopoetics or Literary Darwinism) using the Evolutionary Systems model, cinematic “problem-solutions” can be viewed as adaptations of the form and content of movies to fit the adaptive landscape of evolved human perceptive preferences and predispositions.\textsuperscript{276}

In summary if screenwriters, movie-makers and screen storytellers in general aim to understand creativity, then such a framework as the Systems Model of creativity and indeed Evolutionary theory in general may also possibly assist them in achieving some of their goals in the domain of cinema. Examining and comparing the extant screenwriting doxa (manuals) to what are the most and also least creative movies to date may reveal useful information for other aspiring movie creatives.

In summation, the above \textit{Literature Review} has contributed to the formulation of the five key research questions of this thesis, as follows.

\textsuperscript{275} (for example the Systems Model of creativity)

\textsuperscript{276} It is possible movies might also operate as a form of gene-meme, or, biocultural coevolution. This idea is explored in \textit{Genes, Mind, And Culture: The Coevolutionary Process} (Edward O Wilson & Lumsden, 1981) and \textit{Culture and the Evolutionary Process} (R. Boyd & Richerson, 1985) but there is not scope to expand on Dual Inheritance Theory here.
A review of the dominant (popular, highly cited) screenwriting manuals allows the formulation of the question: *RQ1 - What is the current orthodoxy (doxa) of movie screenwriting?* A survey of scholarly research (Journal of Screenwriting articles and Masters and PhD dissertations) into how the manuals influence screenwriting practice allows the formulation of *RQ2 - What evidence do we have that the doxa influences the movie screenwriting process?* An examination of scientific and empirical studies of movies in addition to screen reader training manuals allows formulation of *RQ3 - What are the formal and structural characteristics of the top 20 RoI and by comparison, of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories?* A review of movie performance literature reveals a gap in research on highest and lowest RoI movies, suggesting the formulation of *RQ4 - Which movie story characteristics are common to, and conversely which are unique to, the top 20 and the bottom 20 RoI movies?* Finally a consilient (scientifically, empirically and statistically informed) approach suggests: *RQ5 - In light of the evidence are there any revised screenwriting heuristics that emerge from the above enquiry?*

The following chapter presents the Methodology of the research study.
5 METHODOLOGY

This comparative study of selected elements of the screenwriting doxa compared to a pre-defined set of 20 canonical and also 20 archival movie narratives is situated inside the discipline of Communication - or Mass Communication research, aka Media Sociology (Dennis, 1989, p. 146).

Halloran states that Mass Communication research is generally considered a branch of social science and is often multi-disciplinary incorporating the other major social sciences including “psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics and political science” (Halloran, 1998, p. 12). The introduction to Theories and Models of Communication (2013) suggests:

Communication study seems inherently multi-disciplinary, drawing theory and sharing concepts from psychology, sociology, political science and other social sciences (William F. Eadie & Goret, 2013, p. 17).

The study thus adopts a multi-disciplinary approach in aiming to examine, understand and explain the complex phenomenon of cultural canon including popular screenwriting manuals and also highest-RoI (canonical) and lowest-RoI (archival) movies.277 It is also noted that two of these highest-RoI movies did not even have a formal written screenplay.278 What is being examined in both the doxa and the movies is effective movie-story creation principles and how well the doxa and these various movie stories match. In short the doxa and the movies examined are two distinct yet related objects of study.

The study includes aspects of Film Theory (Bordwell’s Neoformalist film poetics), also aspects of Media Studies, Narrative Studies, Creativity Studies and Evolutionary and also Complexity (Systems) Theory as cinema involves multiple complex biological, psychological, sociological, cultural, economic, political, technical and professional factors and systems.

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277 It should once again be noted that while an iteration of the screen idea or movie narrative appears in both the screenplay and in the completed movie, the various screenplay drafts and the completed movie as discrete cultural textual artifacts should not be conflated.

278 Unsurprisingly the two “found-footage” Horror genre movies in the top 20 RoI did not have formal screenplays: Paranormal Activity (2009) was improvised by the actors from a story outline (C. Campbell & Rosenberg, 2009; P. Hall, 2009; Turek, 2008) while the dialogue of The Blair Witch Project (1999) was improvised on set from a 35-page story outline (Klein, 1999).
This study thus uses a mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) approach. Rather than being ideographic or a thorough examination of a particular case or cases the study is nomothetic in design in aiming to find partial explanation(s) for a class or category of cases (De Vaus, 1995, p. 32) as does most sociological research in general (Zolberg, 1990, p. 109). Halloran also notes the value of a holistic or ‘blended methods’ research approach:

Quantitative and qualitative approaches are both valid – one should complement the other – and the hierarchical distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ data is not a valid one (Halloran 1998, p. 18).

In describing and explaining social research Crotty (1998, pp. 6-9) recommends the sequence of: methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and finally epistemology and ontology. However Grix’s (2004) suggested organizational structure of “ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods, sources” (Grix, 2004, p. 65) is adopted herein with the aims of the adopted structural organization being systematic and replicable in order to aim for reliability, generalizability and validity of the study results and findings.279

5.1 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

In simplest terms (as stated in the Introduction chapter above) the research’s aims and objectives are to find answers to the following specific research questions:

RQ1 - What is the current orthodoxy (doxa) of movie screenwriting?

RQ2 - What evidence do we have that the doxa influences the movie screenwriting process?

RQ3 - What are the formal and structural characteristics of the top 20 RoI and by comparison, of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories?

RQ4 - Which movie story characteristics are common to, and conversely which are unique to, the top 20 and the bottom 20 RoI movies?

RQ5 - In light of the evidence are there any revised screenwriting heuristics that emerge from the above enquiry?

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279 It is again noted this is an exploratory study which could be deepened and further tested by Social Science researchers using more advanced statistical and analytical methods.
The above tasks required a discourse analysis of the screenwriting manuals and a coding of certain elements therein as well as a quantitative coding of certain characteristics of the 20 highest- and 20 lowest-RoI movies. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2001), states “studies that combine discourse analysis and quantitative coding are in fact a common methodological hybrid (e.g. Tracy and Eisenberg 1990/1; Villaume et al. 1997)” (Tracy, 2001, p. 732).

### 5.2 THEORETICAL POSITION / RESEARCH PARADIGM

Grix (2004, p. 78) notes three broad research paradigms namely *positivism* which aims at explanations; *interpretivism* which aims at understandings; and a middle ground of *post-positivism* in the same continuum. The figure below adapts a diagram from Grix (2004) to indicate that the current research study is here understood as *post-positivist critical realist* (see the ellipse in Fig. 5-1 below) and is positioned between the two extremes of this continuum or these two so-called “opposed” research paradigms. Grix views the so-called dichotomy as complementary rather than opposing strategies (Grix 2004, p. 1). This study thus strategically employs certain selected mixed methods in order to achieve its aims and objectives.

*Figure 5-1 - The key research paradigms – adapted from Grix (2004, p.78)*

*The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide To Methods* (1993) states “Philosophical influences behind hypothetico-deductive research are: empiricism… positivism… rationalism” (Kellehear, 1993, p. 26) which applies here provided that the term “positivism” in this context is not conflated with ‘Logical Positivism’ and is understood as Popperian *post-positivist critical realism*. In broadest terms the goal of this research is simultaneous objective knowledge and subjective interpretation. Fiske (2011) notes that the “process” school (the *quantitative / objective*) and the “meanings” school
(qualitative / subjective) of thought can ideally be combined in communication research (Fiske, 2011, pp. 2-4).

The quantitative nature of the high- and low-RoI movie datasets - as determined by global box-office statistics - is thus one empirical or objective aspect of the study whereas the subjective interpretation of various of the story characteristics of those movies - compared to the doxa from the manuals - is for the most part qualitative\(^{280}\) except in cases where the doxa recommends duration of movies or by implication ideal length of screenplays (in pages) and also an ideal number of movie scenes. Bourdieu (1993) asserts that in the study of (1) the field, (2) agents (i.e., individuals or persons), and (3) cultural artifacts it is equally important to examine both the objective and also the subjective at the same time (Bourdieu & Johnson 1993, p. 9).

In the chapter 'Mapping The Territory (Seven Traditions in the Field of Communication Theory)', Griffin places the seven major communication research traditions\(^{281}\) on a spectrum from positivism ("objectivism") through to interpretivism in the order: socio-psychological, cybernetic, rhetorical, semiotic, socio-cultural, critical and phenomenological, noting that hybrids are also possible (Griffin & McClish, 2000, pp. 46-47).

Halloran (1998) also likens methodological choice in social science research - when navigating between the extreme poles of positivism or, "absolutism", and interpretivism including rampant "perspectivalism" (where: "anything goes") - to navigating between Scylla and Charybdis in the hope of reaching a safe destination (Halloran, 1998, p. 31). Writing in 2003 in Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches (2nd edn) Creswell also states that most Social Science research lies somewhere in between qualitative and quantitative research on a continuum (p. 4) and further asserts:

Mixed methods research has come of age. To include only quantitative and qualitative methods falls short of the major approaches being used today in the social and human sciences (Creswell, 2003, p. 4).

\(^{280}\) Although with regard to movie story plot events, as Bordwell (2010) notes: "Wishing that Thelma and Louise don’t die won’t make it so" (Bordwell, [2008] 2010, p. 275). The death of a protagonist (or any character) in a movie narrative is in this sense both a qualitative and quantifiable story or plot event. This is to note that the number of movies in the observed datasets in which the protagonists die can be counted.

\(^{281}\) As outlined in 'Communication Theory as a Field' (Craig 1999).
Similarly in *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, Punch explains mixed methods research approaches (2005, pp. 234-58) and notes:

> If the aim of (all) science is to build explanatory theory about its data, then the aim of social science is to build explanatory theory about people and their behaviour. This theory about human behaviour is to be based on, and is to be tested against, real-world data (Punch, 2005, p. 8).

For these reasons a mixed methods approach was adopted herein in order to test certain guidelines of the screenwriting doxa against the content of the highest-RoI and lowest-RoI movies.

Quantitative data is also available on screenwriting manuals including citation counts, library holdings and sales figure, and appear to reveal the canonical status of certain of the manuals to a reasonable degree. The content of certain of these manuals in terms of movie screenwriting guidelines or story creation heuristics are then collated herein and are compared to the real-world empirical evidence of the specific movies that international cinema audience actually gravitated towards and conversely ignored or avoided.

### 5.3 ONTOLOGY & EPISTEMOLOGY

In *Introduction to Systems Philosophy: Toward a New Paradigm of Contemporary Thought* Laszlo (1972) delineates a systems ontology (pp. 143-64) and a systems epistemology (pp. 197-232). These are herein assumed by the researcher and align (and do not clash with nor contradict) *post-positivist critical realism*, Evolutionary Epistemology and the Systems Model of creativity. Skyttner (2005) notes of General Systems Theory (GST): “As an applied science, GST [General Systems Theory] became Systems Science, a *metadiscipline* with a content capable of being transferred from discipline to discipline” (Skyttner 2005, p. 41). The goal of synthesis-integration across domains of knowledge including the Sciences and Arts is also a goal of consilience as described in *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (Wilson 1998).

In *The Foundations of Research* (2007) Grix defines ontology citing Blaikie:

> Ontology is a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature of being... Ontological claims are `claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it

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282 See the subsequent: Table 5-1 - Collated statistics of selected canonical screenplay manuals (2012).
looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other (Blakie 2008, p. 8)” (Grix, 2007, p. 171).

The post-positivist critical realist ontological position adopted herein is summarized by Popper in his ‘Three Worlds’ lectures (1978, 1999):

…what is real or what exists is whatever may, directly or indirectly, have a causal effect upon physical things, and especially upon those primitive physical things that can be easily handled (Popper, 1978b, p. 153).

In these terms it is assumed herein that individuals and groups comprise cinema audiences and that they communicate with each other through a range of mediums, both recommending certain movies and ignoring or advising against others. The existence (reality) of this so-called “word of mouth” phenomenon can be verified both in the extant literature on movie success (Simonton 2011, De Vany 2004, McKenzie 2012) and also via one’s own personal experience if one has ever recommended a “good” or rewarding, worthwhile or enjoyable movie to anyone - or conversely has ever complained about or harshly criticized a “bad” or unrewarding or ‘non-worthwhile’ theatrical cinema movie. Likewise it is assumed herein that certain screenwriting manuals have become popular or canonical in screenwriting pedagogy and in the movie industry (or field) due to word-of-mouth phenomena in social communication.

As noted in the above Literature Review, in (Laszlo 1972) Systems Theory is shown to be a crucial component of Evolution as it is demonstrated that Evolution itself is a systems process (Laszlo 1972, pp. 88-87, 176-80). Thus it is both logical and consistent to use both Systems Theory and Evolutionary Theory at once as the former - namely Systems Theory including Cybernetics - appears to explain processes of the latter, namely Evolution. In the Systems View: the universe is a system; people are systems of systems; and, systems in an environment can evolve over time whenever certain conditions are present, namely: selection pressure/s, differential reproduction, heritability, mutations and also random copying errors (Dennett, 1995, p. 343). Given the BVSR model of creativity (Simonton 1984-2012), the DPFi Systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2014) and also Bloore (2013, 2014) on creativity in screenwriting and movie-making, Systems Theory thus underpins Evolutionary
Epistemology or the DPFi systems model and also the BVSR model of creativity in bioculture. 283

On this view the biocultural environment itself - namely the field and domain of movie screenwriting (individual movie story creators) and also the field of movies (the global cinema audience) - does the selecting and also de-selecting of which artifacts (screenwriting manuals, screenplays and movies) are - and conversely are not - in the canon. Thus the extreme outliers of this creative output (for example extremely high- and also, low-RoI movies) might fruitfully be studied in such a research enquiry.

The research also aims to achieve an original use of consilience as a methodological practice in drawing on multiple datasets namely a comparative analysis of the screenwriting doxa and of the 20 highest- and also 20 lowest-RoI movies.

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283 As Dennett (1995) notes of the same evolutionary mechanisms operating in biology and culture: “If this is right, then all the achievements of human culture - language, art, religion, ethics, science itself - are themselves artifacts (of artifacts of artifacts ...) of the same fundamental process that developed the bacteria, the mammals, and Homo sapiens. There is no Special Creation of language, and neither art nor religion has a literally divine inspiration. If there are no skyhooks needed to make a skylark, there are also no skyhooks needed to make an ode to a nightingale. No meme is an island.” (Dennett 1995, p. 144). For further explication see (Velikovsky 2016) in the attached Appendix or online at: https://storyality.wordpress.com/2016/04/06/storyality132-the-holon-parton-structure-of-the-meme-the-unit-of-culture/.
5.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In *The Foundations of Social Research*, Crotty (1998) defines a research methodology as:

…the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

In *The Foundations of Research* (Grix 2004, p. 66) the research process is outlined as follows:

![Figure 4.2 The interrelationship between the building blocks of research](image)

*Figure 5.2 – The interrelationship between the building blocks of research* (Grix 2004, p. 66)

Both Grix (2004, p. 67) and Crotty (1998, pp. 12-14) agree that in practice research may start at either end of Grix’s research-sequence algorithm (*Fig. 5.2* above). This is to suggest that research may begin with ‘Sources’ and may then return to the Research Question/s and then subsequently proceed from “Ontology” in the expected sequential order as indicated in the diagram above. In this instance, the two key data sources are:

(A) Collated empirical data on screenwriting manuals, namely: sales figures, library holdings, and citation counts; and also,

(A1) Four screenwriting manuals themselves and also;

(B) Movie-RoI statistics - and thus
(B2) The individual top 20 RoI and also bottom 20 RoI movies as textual artifacts.284

The data sources of:

(A1) influential screenplay manuals and texts - may be derived from empirical research (citation counts; number of libraries holding copies; and course outlines from various film school and university screenwriting courses)285 and,

(B1) the top 20, and (B2) the bottom 20 RoI movies - are readily identifiable and available for study as sources.286

In this way some of the doxa may be observed from these canonical screenwriting manuals and the story characteristics of both positive and negative creative ‘benefit/cost ratio’ movies may be analyzed and the two sets of data (A) and (B) may be interpreted and compared for their observed similarities and differences.

In summary the research methodology in this instance has proceeded as follows:

1. **Sources:** Selected canonical screenplay manuals and also movie-RoI data – and then, returning to:
2. **Research Question:** How do various key prescriptions of the screenwriting doxa compare to the 20 highest and also 20 lowest RoI movies?
3. **Ontology:** Systems Ontology and Popperian post-positivist critical realism.
4. **Epistemology:** Evolutionary Epistemology, i.e., Evolutionary Systems Theory.
5. **Methodology:** Extant document (i.e., screenwriting manual) and textual (i.e., movie as “text”) qualitative and quantitative analysis.
6. **Methods:** Purposive sampling (manuals and RoI movies), data collation, discourse analysis, RoI movie direct content analysis and comparative multiple content and discourse analysis (i.e., RoI movies vs. doxa)
7. **Sources:** See, step (1) above as per Grix (2004, p. 67) and Crotty (1998, pp. 12-14) where research may begin at either end of the above: *Figure-2 – The interrelationship between the building blocks of research* (Grix 2004, p. 66).

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284 DVD copies of the theatrical versions of the RoI movies were analyzed in this study.
285 See the CD-ROM digital *Appendix*, for copies of these screenwriting course Reading Lists.
286 The resulting Data Tables of the study can be found in the CD-ROM digital *Appendix* of this thesis.
5.5 METHODS

A summary of the specific methods employed in the study is presented below. The study was designed to enable a retrospective comparative analysis of elements of the screenwriting doxa to movie-RoI.

(1) The purposive sampling of a “reasonably representative” data set, namely:

   (A) five [5] canonical and influential screenwriting manuals and
   (B) forty [40] movies. The forty movies comprise two sets of twenty movies each, namely: (B1) the all-time top 20 RoI movies; and (B2) the all-time bottom 20 RoI movies - each measured as at 2012.

(2) Data collation for these discrete sets of five manuals and forty movies;

(3) A discourse analysis of the five selected canonical screenplay manuals;

(4) A direct content analysis of the forty selected movies: the 20 top RoI movies and the 20 bottom RoI movies;

(5) A comparative multiple content analysis of doxa vs. RoI: namely comparing the doxa in the four contemporary screenwriting manuals to 15 story elements in the sets of (B1) 20 successful (canon) and also (B2) the 20 unsuccessful (archive) movies.

Each of these specific methods is explained in further detail below in order to enable potential future replication and verification of the Results and Findings of this study.

5.5.1 Purposive Sampling & Data Collation

As noted in the above Literature Review it is estimated that there are currently between 800 to 2,500 extant screenwriting manuals. The doxa of the screenwriting convention

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287 A “reasonably representative” sample is understood here to mean: “a sample which is not skewed or biased by the personal preferences or hunches of the researcher, by the desire to prove a particular preconceived point, or by insufficient knowledge of the media and their social context” (Hansen, 1998, p. 103).

288 Although only four contemporary manuals were compared to the RoI movie datasets, the fifth (i.e., ‘historical’) screenwriting manual (Stoddard 1911) was examined for the purpose of examining the evolution of the screenwriting doxa over time.

289 The primary data source for box office statistics (thus movie RoI) was The-Numbers.com (http://the-numbers.com/movie/budgets, 2012), but see also: https://storyality.wordpress.com/2013/11/15/storyality-76-the-new-film-roi-numbers-at-the-numbers-com/ as the mathematical formula used by The Numbers for calculating RoI changed in 2013. The earlier (pre-2013) method of calculating movie RoI is more useful for screenwriters and movie creatives interested in story virality, whereas the latter formula is more useful for movie studios and not as relevant to creatives – namely movie story creators and screenwriters.
is assumed to be dominated by the concepts contained in common, popular, and highly-cited screenwriting manuals (Macdonald 2004, pp. 6-7, 69-115; Price 2013, p. 201).

The task of identifying a representative sample of the most influential (canonical) manuals was approached by examining: (1) academic citations sourced from the online Google Scholar citations database; (2) library holdings from the Trove/National Library of Australia online database; (3) screenwriting Course reading lists and also (4) sales figures (where available) - then making a judgement as to which are the key canonical screenwriting manuals in light of weighing all of the above factors.

An example of these collated screenwriting manual statistics is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>CITED BY #</th>
<th>LIBRARY #</th>
<th># of Ed’ns</th>
<th>FIRST YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert McKee</td>
<td>Story</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Vogler</td>
<td>The Writer’s Journey</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syd Field</td>
<td>Screenplay</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Seger</td>
<td>Making a Good Script Great</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Hauge</td>
<td>Writing Screenplays That Sell</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips &amp; Huntley</td>
<td>Dramatica</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake Snyder</td>
<td>Save the Cat!</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Truby</td>
<td>Anatomy of Story</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-1 - Collated statistics of selected canonical screenplay manuals (2012)

The year of first publication and number of editions (right-hand columns in Table 5-1 above) were seen as important considerations as the longer that a popular manual - and thus the concepts, the “theory” and the dramatic (movie story) prescriptions contained

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290 It is also noted that on the website Amazon.com (accessed 17th January 2016), over 4,500 titles appear under the search term ‘screenwriting’ within the ‘Books’ category: http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=sr_st_relevancerank?keywords=screenwriting&qid=1425068455&rh=n%3A283155%2Ck%3Ascreenwriting&sort=relevancerank (accessed 28th February 2015), however not all these results are relevant; also some are duplicates due to successive years of publication.

291 See the Appendix CD-ROM, for the data sample of Screenwriting Course Syllabus Reading Lists references.

therein - has been in circulation in the movie field, the more likely it is to be influential and “paradigm-shaping” in the doxa - and thus also in the domain of movie screenwriting pedagogy. Namely the more popular the manual, the greater the selection and retention of its key concepts within the doxa by the field of the movie screenwriting domain including both in academia and the wider movie industry.\(^{293}\) An online search of tertiary-level (i.e., college, film school and university) screenwriting syllabus course Reading Lists demonstrates that certain screenwriting manuals by screenwriting instructors including Syd Field, Robert McKee, John Truby \textit{et al.}, are used as instructional texts in tertiary-level education screenwriting pedagogy: (Harvard, 2007, online; MacquarieU, 2015, online; NYU, 2015, online; UCLA, 2015, online).\(^{294}\)

An example of the doxa - in this case specifically regarding \textit{Screenplay Length} - is as follows, excerpted here from the later \textit{Chapter 6 - Data Analysis}:

\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
A script in terms of page count should be about as long as a good jockey weighs. 110. Though some dramas run longer, the proportions are the same. \textit{(Snyder 2005, p. 71)}

| On screenplay length: Snyder (2005) specifically recommends 110 pages (pp. 71, 78)

| In a 110 page screenplay, it happens no later than 25. \textit{(p. 78)}

| Snyder (2005) again suggests 110 pages (p. 78)

| You've followed my advice, you've done the prep, you've hit your marks like a pro, and you've finally written THE END. And whether you've got 90 pages or 130, you've accomplished what you set out to do: You've written a draft of a movie. \textit{(p. 143)}

| Snyder (2005) here suggests, \textit{between 90-130 pages for screenplay length} (p. 143), although this refers to a First Draft, rather than a completed screenplay.

\textit{(Movie-Roi Comparison: Although the top 20 Roi movies range from 77 to 121 minutes, and therefore screenplay pages), 93 pages / 93 minutes is the average top 20 Roi duration; The average Bottom 20 Roi movie is considerably longer, at 102 minutes / pages.}

\hline
\end{tabular}

\textit{Table 5-2 – A summary of Snyder (2005) on screenplay page-length / movie duration}

\(^{293}\) Curran (2015) in his (unpublished) PhD study of five influential early (1910-1922) screenwriting manual authors uses an astute set of criteria for identifying domain impact in shaping the doxa, namely, authors who had: “1. Achieved significant writing credits; 2. Worked as scenario editors; 3. Written extensively for the fan or trade press; 4. Written more than one manual or written a manual that was published in more than one edition; 5. Had considerable industry connections” (Curran, 2015, pp. 113-6), a method and model which also correlates with a synthesis of Bourdieuan ‘field’ or practice theory (1977-1996) and the Systems or ‘sociocultural’ model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2014) - namely “Creative Practice Theory” (see earlier \textit{Chapter Three – Theoretical Perspective}). See also: https://storyality.wordpress.com/creative-practice-theory/

\(^{294}\) Please see the attached digital \textit{Appendix} (on the CD-ROM) for copies of these tertiary Screenwriting Course Syllabus Recommended (or Required) Reading lists, which include various of the screenwriting manuals examined in this study as evidence that they shape the screenwriting orthodoxy (doxa).
The Screenwriting Manual Data Set Under Study

With the above data-selection and data analysis process in mind the primary dataset of instructional screenwork texts examined and coded in this study was specifically:

3. Snyder, B (2005), Save The Cat!: The Last Book On Screenwriting You'll Ever Need, Michael Wiese Productions, Studio City, CA.

For the purpose of a historical comparison of the evolution of the screenwriting doxa over time the additional earliest available screenwriting manual also coded was:


Although the median editions of each of these works may have more influence on the screenwriting doxa over time, in general the earliest edition rather than the most recent editions of each of the works were preferred.

Subsequent editions of these texts typically include examples of more-recent movies but do not significantly change the underlying “theory” or principles contained in each manual, suggesting that Bayes’ theorem (Chalmers, 2000, p. 175) namely the updating or correcting of a theory based on new data is not applied to the “theories” and the successful movie screenwriting prescriptions contained therein.

5.5.2 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is defined in The Handbook of Discourse Analysis (2001) as follows:

For communication researchers, then, discourse analysis is the close study of talk (or text) in context, a method that is to be distinguished from ethnographic field approaches (informant interviewing and participant observation) on the one hand, and laboratory and field-based coding studies on the other... It is: (1) empirical work, to be
distinguished from philosophical essays about discourse; and (2) social scientific in world view and hence distinguishable from humanistic approaches to textual analysis (e.g. rhetorical criticism studies that analyze language and argument strategies in political speeches) (Tracy in Schiffirin, Tannen & Hamilton 2001, p. 734).

The discourse in the five selected manuals was examined by searching for instances of specific heuristics; for example, prescriptions of “three-act structure” and of “character arcs” and so on. The above set of five canonical screenwriting manuals were thus subject to a close reading and a discourse analysis by the researcher for their definitions of terms and concepts and also for their qualitative and quantitative prescriptions offered on screenwriting practice.

Qualitative elements of story examined in the manuals thus includes the parameters of movie story: Premise; Theme; Genre; Temporal Setting; Spatial Setting; Plot; Character prescriptions; whether Character Arcs were prescribed; Structure; Dialogue prescriptions; Dramatic Principles; advice on Creativity; and references to Human Nature.

The screenplays (movie examples) used and the explicit and/or implicit methodology of each manual was examined primarily from the manual’s Filmography and Index sections and from the screenplay / movie story examples provided in the text. The manual Indexes were also examined for references to ‘creativity’ including whether the manual’s perspective employed a Romantic and/or inspirationist or instead a scientific, rational concept of creativity. Also a search in the manuals for citations from any literature on the scientific study of creativity was conducted.

Quantitative elements of movie story prescriptions include the morphological (form, including structure) and also content elements of screenwriting including any doxa recommendations for: Screenplay / Movie Length and Number of movie Scenes.

5.5.3 Rationale for the Methods Employed

The rationale for the choice of a purposive sampling of the top 20 RoI and bottom 20 RoI movies is six-fold and includes the following considerations:

(1) Artistic and creative ‘cost/benefit ratios’ for both artists and their audiences in the arts/media (see: Boyd 2009, 2010);

(2) Movies as business (see: Simonton 2011);
(3) Considerations of career commencement and sustainability for movie creatives (see: Alexander 2003);


(5) The assumption that story is the reason for (root cause of) a movie’s relative-audience-reach (De Vany 2004; Simonton 2011); and also

(6) That the doxa in the manuals tends not to reference statistics, scientific or empirical studies or box-office records as a basis to inform the analysis of movies that succeed and conversely those that fail.

Each of the six considerations are explained in further detail below.

‘Artistic and creative cost/benefit ratios in the arts/media’ above refers to Boyd’s (2009, 2010) evolutionary concept of cost/benefit ratios for artists or in this case movie story creatives and movie audiences. This consideration is relevant as it is assumed that artists and storytellers aim to reach the widest possible audience for their story with the least creation and composition effort (Berger, 1995, p. 147; B. Boyd, 2009, 2010) whether they are consciously aware of this or not, and also that audiences desire a satisfying movie story for the price of a cinema ticket and the time invested viewing a specific movie.295 The contrapositional view also seems implausible, namely that any movie storyteller’s goals would ever include a goal to reach the smallest audience for their story and for the highest budget as happened with the bottom 20 RoI movies.296

Regarding “movies as business” one key distinction is noted between “movies as art” (namely critical success and award-winners) versus movies as commercial entertainment (Simonton 2011, pp. 51-63, 70-1, 4-7, 190). This study is focussed on

295 Noting also the opportunity-cost of their next-preferred activity that is sacrificed by going to the cinema.
296 Unless as depicted in the satirical Mel Brooks comedy The Producers (1968, 2005) the aim was making a movie as a tax write-down or even as a money-laundering exercise although such cases may be viewed as the exception rather than the rule. However in terms of a tax write-down the 10B(A) scheme of the 1980s in Australia is salient (Stratton, 1990) and resulted in many more movies being made per annum in Australia, which overall also resulted in (numerically) more creative movies. This is BVSR and the Systems model in action: namely the more movies that are made the more likely it becomes (not least due to random chance) that more creative movies will also emerge in the system.
movies with the smallest production budget and yet also the widest audience-reach relative to that production budget. The majority of the high-RoI movies dataset are independently-produced low-budget movies, suggesting one potential model for early-career screen storytellers. Conversely as Simonton (2011) notes, significant awards and critical acclaim rarely go to early-career movie-makers due to the “ten-year rule” in creativity (Simonton 2011, pp. 119, 28).297

Recall that due to intense professional competition and since movie investors are risk-averse298 - movie creatives are perceived as “only as good as their last credit” thus a single failure can end a career; most producers and directors only ever make a single movie; therefore track-record is essential to movie career sustainability (Alexander 2003, pp. 153-4). With this consideration in mind this research is purposively-directed towards finding heuristics to enable screen storytellers to avoid potentially career-terminating problems and pitfalls – namely heuristics on how to survive for around ten years of movie-making in the industry, after which awards and critical acclaim may well possibly ensue. It is also noted that fatal movie-career mistakes can be made at any point in that ten-year period; within biological evolution there are more ways to fail (or “become dead”) than there are to succeed or to stay alive (Dawkins 1986, p. 9).299

Mutatis mutandis biocultural evolution is herein viewed to work essentially the same way as biological evolution in terms of the natural selection Systems model of creativity.

Regarding the artistic and creative problem-situation model; drawing on Bordwell (1997, 2006, 2008) and Boyd (2009, 2010) this view assumes that each artist (cinema storyteller) is addressing a general problem-situation - one which is also specific to them - including: (1) How to maximize the audience-attention that their specific screen story might obtain (Boyd 2009; 2010) and (2) How to also avoid the movie story losing money thus meaning that any subsequent movie story - whatever it may be - is then more difficult to finance given that all movie investors are risk-averse (Ravid 2004).

297 In this view studying Oscar-winning movies and screenplays for example is not as useful to most screenwriters as is studying high-RoI movies; only two of the top 20 RoI movies won Oscars; Rocky for Best Picture and Once for best song.
298 See: ‘Are They All Crazy or Just Risk Averse?’ (Ravid, 2004).
299 As noted earlier, Dawkins (1986) is likewise cited in Darwin’s Dangerous Idea (Dennett 1995, p. 104) with: ‘However many ways there are of being alive, it is certain that there are vastly more ways of being dead, or rather not alive.’
The following diagram indicates these axes of comparison and the logic behind this purposive sample - namely the maximization of audience-reach for the minimization of production budget of realizing the movie story (i.e., right-hand side of Fig. 5-3) and also its converse (on the left):

![Diagram of Movie Typology Based on Cost-Benefit Ratio](image)

**Figure 5-3 - Typology of movies based on ‘cost/benefit ratio’ for creatives and audiences: (1) high-RoI movies (far-right) and (2) negative-RoI (far-left) movies.**

The research approach assumes both that the *story* is the root cause of movie success (De Vany 2004; Lee & Gillen 2011; Simonton 2011) and that high (USD $10M+) and also medium-budget (USD $3M+) movies are made by experienced - instead of early-career - filmmakers and therefore that movie story RoI is more relevant to the majority of screenwriters and movie-makers than is audience-reach alone. The latter measure (*audience-reach* alone) ignores a movie story’s production budget and thus also ignores its artistic and creative benefit/cost ratio (story RoI or `story-power`).

The data analysis reveals the average movie production budget of a top 20 RoI movie is USD $1.8M and some are as low as USD $7,000. By nature of the low average budgets these high-RoI movies generally do not rely on complex special visual and aural effects, expensive casts (stars) or “style over substance” but instead *substance despite style* in their story and storytelling content. It appears that the problems of the parsimony of their production means is overcome by leveraging story creativity. For this reason the
primary dataset of the top 20 RoI movies is deemed an interesting phenomenon and suggests a study of the common story elements therein compared to the extreme negative-RoI movies.

It is also crucial to note that the screenwriting doxa tends not to cite statistics of movie success and failure and also that an apparent assumption underpinning the prescribed “dramatic principles” of the canonical manuals depends on their idiosyncratic definitions of “good” and “bad” drama, often derived from Aristotle. However, Aristotle’s analyses of Ancient Greek drama were not statistical in nature (see: Grix 2004, p. 22) and Aristotle also obviously preceded the invention of cinema as a communication medium by over two millennia. Thus although basic Human Nature may not have altered or evolved much in two millennia, Ancient Greek plays are clearly not the same storytelling art form as movies.300

In summary the key reasons for the basis for the rationale of the purposive data selection of movies are: (1) creative “benefit/cost ratios”; (2) movies as business; (3) career sustainability; (4) artistic and creative problem-situations; (5) story as the key reason for movie success; and that (6) the doxa in the manuals is not consilient and does not use scientific, statistical or empirical methods - and might be improved in the accuracy and reliability of its prescriptions if these six issues were addressed.

5.5.4 Data collation

Readily-available data sources previously cited in the academic literature for theatrical movie box-office data includes information available at: The-Numbers.com, IMDb.com,301 and BoxOfficeMojo.com.302 To compare these three potential data sources for general reliability and consistency, the data from these three available sources was examined from 2006 to 2012 and it was judged that The Numbers LLC303 provided the most reliable and consistent data source.

300 Notwithstanding that as Csikszentmihalyi (1995) notes, the domain of movies „is related to other artistic domains that existed for a long time, such as the theater, literature, and photography. These already existing domains were combined to make the first movies.’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995, online).
301 http://www.imdb.com/
302 http://www.boxofficemojo.com/
As a caveat it is also noted that all of the box-office figures are only estimates - yet they also remain the best available estimates we have. The assumed accuracy of this specific data is one key limitation of this study; these figures may be inaccurate to some or even a great degree yet comparison reveals that IMDb.com and Box Office Mojo report similar figures to The Numbers.

On the Exclusion of Four Movies from the core dataset

After consideration of the data, four movies in the top 20 RoI list that were older than 70 years (dated retrospectively from 2012) were excluded from the study for four primary reasons:

(1) Prior to 1948 and the Paramount Antitrust case, the U.S. movie industry was vertically integrated so that movie distributors and studios were locked to certain cinema chains (Vogel, 2011, p. 74). This phenomenon potentially affected and thus has skewed the RoI figures during that period.304

(2) The global mediascape changed after the introduction of television as a popular mass medium in the 1950s. The pre-television-era movie RoIs are thus not considered to be directly comparable with post-television movie RoIs (Dunnett, 1990, p. 43; Simonton, 2011, pp. 57-58).

(3) The technical style and form of canonical movies in general has changed over time due to advances in science and technology, and canonical cinematic storytelling also changes over time (Bordwell 1997). One such measure of this change over time is Average Shot Lengths (ASL); older movies are in general slower-paced (Bordwell, 2006b, pp. 121-124). Thus including such older movies (i.e., pre-1960s) in the top 20 RoI dataset would likely skew the overall contemporary averages unrealistically in terms of movie duration, ASLs (average shot lengths), average scene lengths and number of scenes. Simonton (2004) refers to such “disciplinary zeitgeist” in a cultural domain and this can be contrasted to “cultural zeitgeist” (Simonton 2004, p. 169-71).305

304 However Reagan’s US policies in the 1980’s meant that in the USA, “vertical integration” of studios and cinema chains returned to the movie sector an extent although this was not as overt and widespread as prior to 1948.

305 Cultural zeitgeist in these terms should not be conflated with cultural reflectionism which is here assumed to be a fallacy; see (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 30-31) and (Martindale, 1990, p. 23).
(4) One of the movies in the original top 20 RoI list is an X-rated 3-D pornography movie, namely *The Stewardesses* (1969). However it is assumed that the 3-D X-rated pornography movie genre typically includes non-mainstream cinema elements and content in its onscreen “plot” which may well cause it to become viral with certain audiences (the movie made over 300 times its production budget).³⁰⁶ For this reason this specific movie was also excluded from the primary high-RoI movie dataset.

The four specific movies which are older than 70 years and thus excluded from the primary dataset of the Top 20 RoI movies under study are: *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *The Big Parade* (1925), *Gone With The Wind* (1939), and *The Stewardesses* (1969).³⁰⁷

The next four highest RoI movies on the highest-RoI movie list that make up the tally of the full twenty movies of the dataset are therefore: *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *The Full Monty* (1998), *Star Wars* (1977), and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002).

The four excluded movies (older than 70 years) also reflect evolutionary changes in popular and influential storytelling modes over time - and via different media forms - namely such changes as from epics to prose since Homer’s time, to novels since the 1600s, to films since the 1900s and the emergence of videogames as a mass market communication and entertainment form in the 1980s. Popular media forms have changed over time from sentimental to melodrama, to thrillers and mysteries, and to procedural police television dramas among others. Screenwriters aiming to create a high RoI movie in 2017 or beyond may indeed benefit from using the older memes and schemas (units of culture) however the modes and medians of more contemporary high RoI movies (as compared to those of the bottom 20 RoI) are more informative as they appear to have remained relatively stable since the emergence of the first (oldest) top 20 RoI movie in 1968. It is suggested that the two extremes of movie RoI (their formal

³⁰⁶ See: http://web.archive.org/web/20131015111141/http://www.thenumbers.com/movies/records/budgets.php (The-Numbers, LLC, 2013). Evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker notes: “Pornography is another pleasure technology… I will suggest that the arts are a third” (Pinker in Boyd, Carroll & Gottschall 2010, pp. 128-9).

³⁰⁷ The four excluded movies also adhere to many of the same story principles as do the primary data set of top 20 RoI movies (since: 1968). Another key reason for excluding them from the study is their Duration as the extant data shows that high-RoI movies have evolved over time to be shorter on average and with shorter Average Shot Lengths (Bordwell 2006, pp. 121-4). Including the four movies noted above in the dataset would skew the overall Data and Results (i.e., the Means, Medians, and Modes) for high-RoI Screenplay Length / Movie Duration. This would thus not be useful for screenwriters or filmmakers. In short conditions, norms and modes of film production have changed since the 1950s.
characteristics and specifications such as duration and number of scenes) are like ‘basins of attraction’; movies that share more characteristics of the highest RoI movies appear likely to perform better with audiences whereas those that feature more characteristics of the bottom 20 RoI appear likely to perform worse.
5.5.4.1 Movie Data Set [B1] – The Top 20 RoI Movies

The primary dataset of the top twenty highest-audience-reach for the lowest production-budget (thus highest RoI) is therefore as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PRODUCTION BUDGET</th>
<th>THEATRAL BOX OFFICE</th>
<th>ROI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$196,681,656</td>
<td>1,311,211 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>$997,300,000</td>
<td>49,875 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$600,000</td>
<td>$248,300,000</td>
<td>41.383 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td>$2,041,928</td>
<td>29.170 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>$114,000</td>
<td>$30,000,000</td>
<td>26.316 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$225,000,000</td>
<td>22.500 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>$325,000</td>
<td>$70,000,000</td>
<td>21.538 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>$777,000</td>
<td>$140,000,000</td>
<td>18.018 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>$27,000</td>
<td>$3,894,240</td>
<td>14.423 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$18,997,174</td>
<td>12.665 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$46,149,936</td>
<td>11.535 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
<td>$55,116,982</td>
<td>11.023 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$550,000</td>
<td>$59,754,601</td>
<td>10.864 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
<td>$103,096,345</td>
<td>8.591 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td>$565,846</td>
<td>8.084 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>$375,000</td>
<td>$29,400,000</td>
<td>7.840 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>$10,500,000</td>
<td>$792,910,554</td>
<td>7.552 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>$256,900,000</td>
<td>7.340 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>$11,000,000</td>
<td>$797,900,000</td>
<td>7.254 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$3,000,000</td>
<td>$353,900,000</td>
<td>7.078 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-3 – The Top 20 RoI Movies (1968-2011): Budget, Box Office and % RoI

The RoI (%) figure in the right-hand column in the table above has been calculated by dividing the reported cinema box-office figure by the reported movie budget figure and then multiplying by 100, and expressing this resulting figure as a percentage.

Marketing (P&A) budget is not included in this movie negative-cost figure as the research enquiry here is the audience-reach (story benefit) compared to the movie story creation budget (story cost) since Marketing does not significantly change the success of a movie story.309

308 The archived webpage of The Numbers LLC (archived, 2013) used as the primary data source for the budget and box office figures above can be viewed at:

309 “Marketing can’t change the odds. There is no evidence to show that marketing has much to do with a film’s success” (De Vany 2004, p. 4).
5.5.5 Content Analysis (Movies)

The book *Mass Communication Research Methods* (1998) provides formal guidelines for the content analysis of media (such as movies) in social science enquiry (Hansen 1998, pp. 91-129) including mixed-methods approaches. With these guidelines in mind the original theatrical-release versions of the movies were viewed repeatedly on DVD format via what may be termed “repeated close viewing”, with scene timecodes logged in an Excel spreadsheet, and were then analysed for the same key set of fifteen (15) story characteristics as derived from the screenwriting manuals in the study.

An Excel spreadsheet of the observed and collated movie story data was then compiled. Standard statistical methods were then used to obtain the means, medians, modes, maximums and minimums of various of the above movie story traits including: the number of main characters; the number of locations; number of scenes; and scene lengths.

5.5.6 Comparison of Elements of the Screenwriting Doxa to the Movies

The compiled guidelines of the current screenwriting doxa as derived from the manuals (dataset A) were then sorted in light of the key headings in screen reader reports (“coverage”) when screenplays are assessed. These key headings were collated partly from an examination of the texts of: *Reading For A Living: How to be a Professional Story Analyst for Film and Television* (Katahn 1990); *Screenplay Story Analysis: the Art and Business* (Garfinkel 2007); *Reading Screenplays: How to Analyse and Evaluate Film Scripts* (Scher 2011); and *Getting Past Me: A Writer's Guide to Production Company Readers* (White, 2011). The primary recurring categories in screen reader reports include: *Premise, Plot, Character, Structure, Theme and Dialogue*. Additional screen reader report categories can include: *Pacing, Writing Ability*, and others.

The key (15) story guidelines of the screenwriting doxa were then collated and compared to the second set of movies analyzed (dataset B, or 20 lowest RoI) noting similarities and differences.

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310 Please see attached digital Appendix on CD-ROM.
311 Additional screen reader report categories can include: *Pacing, Writing Ability*, and others.
5.5.7 Triangulation

As noted in the earlier Definitions chapter, Whewell (1840) notes a “consilience of inductions” or convergence of evidence occurs when multiple domains of evidence drawn from multiple different disciplines converge on the same conclusions. With this in mind triangulation of the research was undertaken in three main ways:

(1) Data triangulation was obtained by comparing the movie RoI figures from three different sources (i.e., The-Numbers; IMDb.com; and Box Office Mojo);

(2) Interpretations of the plot events of the individual movie stories were checked against the IMDb.com movie synopses and movie critic aggregate websites;312 and also

(3) Triangulation of the results of the initial comparative study of “screenwriting doxa versus movie RoI extremes” was attempted by collating the StoryAlity Theory - namely a list of the expected traits of high-RoI movies - and then testing (attempted falsification) of the hypothesis, theory, or expectation.313

Creswell (2003) notes one of the key assumptions of post-positivist research are:

That knowledge is conjectural (and anti-foundational) - absolute truth can never be found. Thus, evidence established in research is always imperfect and fallible. It is for this reason that researchers do not prove hypotheses and instead indicate a failure to reject (Creswell, 2003, p. 7).

In the post-positivist critical realism (Popperian) view all theories in science are tentative, as new evidence may always subsequently come to light - and also new and more imaginative tests (created by subsequent researchers and critics) may well falsify any scientific theory at any time.314

312 Such as Metacritic.com reviews and Rotten Tomatoes.com
313 The test of whether the StoryAlity Theory predicts the story characteristics (the form and content) of the new (2012) movie entry to the top 20 RoI list (i.e., the movie The Devil Inside, 2012) appears to correlate with the StoryAlity Theory rather than refuting it.
314 In the Systems View or the systems model of creativity (Evolutionary Epistemology) this is how paradigm-change occurs as memes (ideas, processes, products) spread through the minds of those in a field whether in science, media or the arts (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, 2014; Simonton 2012b). See also:(Kuhn & Hacking, [Kuhn 1962] 2012), (Feyerabend, 1984), (Lakatos, 1978), and (Chalmers, 2000).
5.5.8 Key Underlying Assumptions

Some of the major explicit underlying assumptions of the perspective adopted are as follows.

The first assumption is that an ahistorical (“transhistorical”) view of cultural creativity sensu (Bordwell, 1997, 2008; B. Boyd, 2009; Gombrich & Woodfield, 1987, pp. 206-207; Martindale, 1990; Popper, 1957) is adopted, namely that specific movies do not become canonical because they reflect contemporary culture as that view ignores counter-examples (Bordwell 2008, pp. 30-2) but rather in the present view the causes of movie success are neither single or simple and thus the adoption of Evolution, Complexity and Systems Theory as lenses and models.

A second assumption is that Evolutionary and Cognitive Psychology and Evolutionary Sociology - instead of say folk psychology or Freudian psychoanalysis - more accurately explains Human Nature, namely why the cinema field en masse like (are attracted to) and thus select some movies, and also dislike (are not attracted to or actively repelled by) and thus de-select other movies in significantly large numbers.315

A third assumption is that the Anna Karenina Principle (Diamond 1997; Simonton 2011) appears to apply to “the silent initial population” (Taleb 2004, p. 248) of unmade screenplays.316 Likewise many potentially worthy or creative (novel and appropriate) screen ideas may also be de-selected before production for any number of reasons including that the cinema field’s gatekeepers including professional screen readers were unable to recognize its potential and made any number of possible errors of judgement or prediction regarding the potential of a de-selected screenplay/screen idea.317 At the same time once again the screenplay and the movie should not be conflated although the same core screen idea or the same movie story appears in both.

315 It is also noted that in the BVSR model of creativity the creator or “writer” of the screen idea is of course the first audience for the screenplay or the movie story as they select (retain) and deselect (discard) ideas based on their own habitus, taste, and personal preferences. A Screen Idea Work Group further complexifies this same selection/deselection process.

316 That is to say a sub-standard script may also be de-selected for production and thus a mass cinema-going audience cannot ever judge it in cinemas as it is never realized as a completed screened movie. Produced-but-unreleased movies are also a consideration; as part of the ‘silent initial population’, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Unreleased_films and see also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Unproduced_screenplays

317 “In the domains of movies or popular music, which are much more accessible to the general public, the specialized field is notoriously unable to enforce a decision as to which works will be creative.” (Csikszentmihalyi 2001, p. 10).
Fourthly certain key findings from the scientific study of creativity from the domains of Psychology and Sociology are also assumed to be reasonably accurate (see: Bloore 2013; Kaufman & Sternberg 2010) including “the ten-year rule” (Hayes 1989, Simonton 2011) and also the Systems model explanation of how creative artifacts become canon.  

Fifthly it is assumed that in general screen storytellers (writers, directors, actors, producers and movie crew) aim to reach the widest possible audience for their movie story.

Another key assumption of the study is that positive word-of-mouth is what causes a movie to become a high-RoI movie (De Vany 2004, p. 6) and that this word-of-mouth results from the audience’s experience of the story from their viewing of the movie. Yet importantly, a movie’s genre can also act as a limiting filter (evolutionary bottleneck) on its specific audience (thus audience-reach) as movie genre can also be a matter of specific personal preference or aversion for individuals and groups (Simonton 2011, p. 82);

It is also assumed that the movie story namely its components and their configuration (a movie’s conception and execution) that primarily causes a movie to succeed or fail in becoming canon as per the DPFi systems model. In other words:

…when moviegoers are surveyed about what sends them to the movie theater, they will often point to the story as a critical determinant of preference (De Silva 1998)… the script constitutes the single most important aspect of cinematic success (Simonton in Kaufman & Simonton 2014, pp. 3-4).

Movie stories are polysemic (open to many different interpretations by individual viewers); thus different researchers may well interpret various aspects of movie story analyzed herein quite differently.  Likewise it is assumed that the reasons that

318 Namely that the artifacts (screen ideas, screenplays, movies) are judged by the specialized field of the cinema domain in effect using the standard definition of creativity (see Runco & Jaeger 2012) - whether the standard definition of creativity is actually used consciously by audiences or otherwise. It can also be seen that “novel and appropriate” merely means “new and well-adapted to its environment”.

319 As Boyd (2009) notes: “Attention provides the selective mechanism of art. If a work of art fails to earn attention, it dies. If it succeeds, it can last even for millennia” (Boyd 2009, p. 121).

320 As noted in Operational Definitions, the term “story” as applied to movies herein not only includes the movie’s plot but also: its premise, character, themes, structure, dialogue and other elements in a complex configuration where the emergent whole (movie story) is more than the sum of all of these parts.

321 Again with regard to plot events, as Bordwell notes: “Wishing that Thelma and Louise don’t die won’t make it so” (Bordwell in Boyd, Carroll & Gottschall 2010, p. 275). Thus when the protagonists die in a
different audiences go to the cinema - both as individuals and as groups - are many and varied and also multiply-congruent, and can also depend on many variables including: personal and/or social needs and/or goals (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005, pp. 40-41; Chamorro-Premuzic, Kallias, & Hsu, 2014; Fiske, 1990, p. 20), mood management (Green, Chatham & Sestir 2012); desire of the ‘flow’ state or Narrative Transportation Theory (Csikszentmihalyi & Massimini, 1985; Green, et al., 2012) and even peer-pressure, among other reasons. Regardless, attending the cinema is an optional activity for most; survival and reproduction do not generally depend on it yet may in some cases be improved by doing it (Oatley, 2011, p. 156).

While the global empirical box-office data may reflect certain general public or Human Nature attitudes, beliefs, opinions and behaviour the multiple and different specific reasons for individuals liking and/or disliking a specific movie may differ vastly including the intentions, meanings and significances for both creators and consumers of movies. However on large global scales the consensus reflected in the empirical box-office data indicates that value judgements by the field determine the canonical status of individual movie artifacts.

Finally, both individual and group psychology and decision-making is assumed and thus it is also appreciated that individual and group behaviour functions differently (Fisher, et al., 1977) namely “influence cannot be confined to disembodied attitudes, for it also operates at cultural and societal levels” (Halloran 1998, p. 17). For this reason a multi-level selection\(^{322}\) theory of culture operating on cultural artifact units - with regard to movies in Applied Evolutionary Epistemology (Gontier, 2012),\(^{323}\) and holon/parton theory (Koestler, [1967] 1989; Phillip McIntyre, 2013; Velikovsky, 2016) - is assumed in examining complex multi-level systems and ‘movies as artifacts’ emerging from and

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\(^{322}\) Regarding the selection of specific movies by audiences and the influence of media on audiences: “People select from what is provided, and these selections reflect, among other things, non-media experiences as well as the deep social divisions with regard to experience, opportunity, ability and so on which exist in many societies. Nevertheless, one can only select from what is offered.” (Halloran 1998, p. 18)

\(^{323}\) In *The Cambridge Companion to the Philosophy of Biology* (2007), Lloyd notes that: “Susan Oyama, Paul Griffiths, and Russell Gray have been leading thinkers in formulating a radical alternative to the interactor/replicator dichotomy known as Developmental Systems Theory (Oyama 1985; Griffiths and Gray 1994, 1997; Oyama, Griffiths, and Gray 2001). Here the evolving unit is understood to be the developing system as a whole, privileging neither the replicator nor the interactor.” (Lloyd in Hull & Ruse, 2007, p. 50). This is to note that the Systems View is in ascendance in both biology and culture.
also comprising elements of these units as *outputs* and also recursive *inputs* of many overlapping and interconnected complex systems.

### 5.5.9 The Uses of Communication Theory in the research

Since the publication of *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) the early history of the discipline of Mass Communication Research primarily focussed on issues of media effects, media importance and media power including ownership, law and policy (Dennis, 1989, pp. 143-159) and since the 1980s, on journalism and speech (William F. Eadie, 2011). This research study of movie creativity and its examination of ‘theory/environment fit’ (movie story doxa compared to movie RoI) addresses some key questions posed in *The Communication Theory Reader* (1996) namely the key questions of:

How are messages created? How are messages transmitted? How are messages constituted? How are messages received? Why is this the case? Is it because of factors outside the message? Or is it because of factors inside the message? (Cobley, 1996, p. 1).

The last two questions are of key importance as they are herein viewed as Evolutionary issues, namely: Are some movies better-adapted to their environment namely the biopsychology and sociology of the international cinema audience; and can the shared form, structure and content of these better-adapted movies be identified, understood, described, and explained?

This media content analysis aims to examine not only how species-typical human biopsychosocio-cultural values and behaviour (Human Nature) are reflected by entertainment media (Hansen 1998, p. 92) but examining how Human Nature itself (the cinema audience as a field) systemically selects units of culture (in this case movies) for the canon, drawing on the theory in the article ‘On The Psychological Selection Of Bio-Cultural Information’ (Csikszentmihalyi & Massimini 1985). In this view movie audiences desire the ‘flow’ experience (Narrative Transportation) and a “good” movie story can elicit this response.

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324 In *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2001), Tracy contends that the discipline of Communication can be traced to American English departments in 1900 (Tracy 2001, pp. 725-6). If Rhetoric as a domain is included in this way, its formal study may clearly be traced back to Aristotle (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005, p. 38). Since movies often include characters in giving speeches (including soliloquys) and characters in dialog, verbal communication - including via Shannon and Weaver’s 1949 mathematical model - is clearly applicable to movie story study.
The underlying Communication Theory models assumed herein include the mathematical communication model (Fiske 1990, p. 7; Shannon & Weaver 1949) wherein the communication channels of cinema - like television - include both vision and sound (Fiske 1990, p. 20) while accepting also that the story is also initially communicated to the creative filmmaking group (Screen Idea Work Group) in the print channel via the screenplay, storyboards and other communication media.\textsuperscript{325}

Communication itself can be defined as “the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response” (Griffin, 2012, p. 6) or the classical ’5-W’ communication model of “Who, says What, in Which channel, to Whom, with What effect?” (Lasswell, 1948, p. 117). Although Lasswell’s is a simple model of a complex phenomenon when applied to movies, it is also used as the key organizing principle in Theories and Models of Communication (Cobley & Schulz, 2013, p. 12) and correlates with Systems Theory’s inputs and outputs of systems (Sadowski 1999, p. 19) while clearly reflecting the influence of Information Theory in the discipline of Communication (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1998, pp. 43-46).

In this view movies as cultural artifacts are more like fossils than living organisms. A movie in its original theatrical cinema-release run is like an organism in the wild which has a limited lifespan (a finite timespan on cinema screens) and finite fecundity (has resulted in a finite - albeit estimated - number of cinema tickets) within that time span. In this view it is possible to later examine that same media “fossil” as an artifact when the movie is viewed again on BluRay, DVD, TV or computer “in the lab” as it were by a researcher to ascertain elements of its composition. Unfortunately we cannot accurately reconstruct and thus personally re-experience the temporally-specific social event of its viewing in a cinema and most certainly not in all of the various cinemas that it ever screened in. However the fact that some published reviews of any given movie are similar, thus enabling sites such as MetaCritic.com, Rotten Tomatoes.com and IMDb.com to produce aggregate critic’s scores and that these reviews and ratings also correlate with some or even many of our own viewing experiences of the same movie story as researchers suggests that approximations of the average, median and mode

\textsuperscript{325} If we also consider the word-of-mouth and click-of-mouse that proximately causes a specific theatrical movie to become popular (Simonton 2011, pp. 75-6) many other channels of communication are also included in this process of how movies and screenplay manuals become canon; channels such as electronic social media, print media, radio, television and other possible communication channels.
audience experiences of the movie story may be inferred. These may also be considered as conjectures about what specifically was liked or disliked about certain movie stories.

**Research strategies** - The various strategies employed in order to answer the research questions include: actively inductive, hypothetico-deductive and also retroductive. Citing Ragin (1994) *The Foundations of Research* advises that research should move between all three of these strategies (Grix 2004, p. 114).

*Approaches To Social Enquiry* (Blaikie 2007) suggests that inductive research begins with data collection, proceeds to data analysis and then derives generalizations (Blaikie 2007, p. 9). While this strategy may seem an adequate description of the first component of the research process undertaken herein - namely examining the screenplay manuals for their prescriptions, and examining selected movies for their common story elements - (Popper, 1972) and (Darwin, 1859) both noted that all research involves a theory or expectation/s - or assumptions or hypothesis/es otherwise we can have no *a priori* idea or heuristics of what specifically to look for and conversely which data to ignore as irrelevant in the first instance (Popper 1972, p. 259) (see also: Grix 2004, p. 103).326

One key problem in social research - the *agency-structure* problem - is addressed herein by adopting the Systems view and is ameliorated by examining and analysing movies and manuals for their content as discrete cultural artifacts, thus avoiding many of the specific agency-structure problems raised by conducting ethnographic research; yet certain agency-structure issues remain. In Systems Theory, agents (and thus human individuals) are systems within their nested hierarchy of system environments and make and act on their choices to solve their problems (obstacles to their wants, needs or goals) based on individual preferences, aims, and desires while the nested hierarchies of physical, chemical, geological, biological, psychological, social and cultural systems all act as enabling constraints (Laszlo 1972).

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326 The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* also notes that despite their differences and criticisms of each other’s work “Hanson [1958], Popper [1959, 1963], Kuhn [1962], and Feyerabend [1962] agreed that all observation is theory-laden, so that there is no theory-neutral observational language” (Niiniluoto, 2011, online).
5.6 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY AND METHODS EMPLOYED

Strengths of the methodology and methods employed include that it aims to answer the call for consilience - or the unity of knowledge (Wilson 1998; Gottschall 2008, 2013; Carroll 2013; Boyd 2013; Bordwell 2012, online) - and that it takes a new approach to examining movie success and failure. A review of the extant literature reveals these two specific movie datasets have not previously been examined in this way, nor in light of Evolutionary Theory in general, and not via the Systems Model of creativity.

With regard to limitations, Hansen (1998) outlines numerous problems with media content analysis including the contested meanings, interpretations and judgements of significance of the units analysed (Hansen 1998, pp. 94-8) which in this case involves the four screenwriting manuals and the 40 movies under study.

Other limitations of the study include issues of statistical uncertainty regarding both the sources of the box-office figures and screenwriting manual sales-figures; also that one researcher is obviously not as objective as a group of researchers (data-coders) in a direct content analysis empirical study. The exemplary study ‘The Pleistocene Protagonist: An Evolutionary Framework for the Analysis of Film Protagonists’ (Pelican, in press) for example involves a sample size of n=110 movies and while the current study only has n=40 movies, Simonton (2011) notes that the ideal scientific study involving a direct content analysis of movies would include a sample-size of one thousand movies (n=1,000) ranging from successful through to unsuccessful movies and at least two independent raters (coders). This would mean at least four thousand hours of scoring time, not counting data collation and data analysis time. As would be expected a study of such large scope does not currently appear extant in the literature (Simonton 2011, pp. 107-8).327

Another limitation is that due to the research design of using historical box office statistics as sources, the research approach assumes the Shannon & Weaver (1949) transmission model of communication focussed on the story content of the movie as a message328 and adopts Laswell’s (1949) classical ‘5-W’ model of communication, but

327 A more ideal or comprehensive study of movie RoI would therefore involve two or more independent raters, examining all of the movie story characteristics examined herein for increased objectivity and therefore reliability and validity of the study findings and conclusions.
328 And furthermore a movie story also contains many more messages within it.
of necessity due to time constraints this study is forced to ignore the “meaning-based model” of communication of Frey, Botan & Kreps (1999) as outlined in Media Audiences: Effects, Users, Institutions, and Power (J. L. Sullivan, 2013, p. 3). The different meanings of each individual movie under study for each single audience member is currently unknown. Since the top 20 RoI movies under study date from 1968, research on the different interpretations of meaning/s for those audiences is currently difficult to access and assess. As a result the assumption is that audiences select movies primarily due to the story (see: Simonton 2014, p. 3) and recommend them on the basis of Narrative Transportation Theory. So too the individual uses and gratifications of cinema by audiences-as-agents (Chamorro-Premuzic, et al., 2014; J. L. Sullivan, 2013, pp. 107-132) for each and all of these different movies is unknown (and possibly even unknowable); it is therefore assumed that the top 20 RoI movies were ultimately perceived as ‘worth seeing’ by certain international audiences.

Another limitation of the study is the problem of Complexity itself, namely that movies and the various biological, psychological social, cultural, industrial and economic systems from which they emerge are all complex systems - and therefore it is difficult to test and control for all of the complex and counterintuitive confounding variables that may well be involved. This limitation is addressed by initially disregarding the specific and individual reasons that each of the high- and low-RoI movies under examination were “liked” or “disliked” by audience members; the box-office statistics imply that they were. Their story characteristics are then compared to the extant screenwriting doxa to see how empirical reality fits with that extant screenwriting doxa.

Another limitation of the approach is that group creativity (Negus & Pickering, 2004, p. 59; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003; Sawyer, 2003, 2007; Shand & Wellington, 1988) was not specifically investigated, primarily since the story is herein the key independent characteristic viewed as root-causal in success (De Vany 2006 p. 6; Lee & Gillen 2011, p. 18; Simonton 2014, pp. 3-4) when success is judged as movie RoI. However all movies - whether successful or not - require intensely collaborative group creativity including all of the creative, performance, production, and financing elements of a

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329 See for example (Dixon & Bortolussi, 2011, p. 61) on the different perceptions and interpretations of “themes” in literature.

330 The Conclusion chapter (below) suggests Further Research involving a more detailed study of the creative: person, process, product, place and persuasion; forty more-detailed case studies (involving all forty RoI movies) exceeds the scope of the current PhD study given time and resource constraints.
movie (Berger, 1995, pp. 145-147) therefore the factors and variables involved in the
group creativity of any movie are viewed as a necessary-but-not-sufficient requirement
for movie success. Instead the story is considered herein as the primary cause of movie
success (RoI) and its execution\textsuperscript{331} as a screen idea is initially and primarily the
responsibility of the screenwriter. Regarding audience-reach, correlating with
Csikszentmihalyi’s “internalizing the domain” (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, p. 47) and
Bourdieu’s habitus (“feel for the game”)\textsuperscript{332} Berger (1995) notes:

Most texts in the media… involve writers, who, according to the
information theorists discussed in earlier chapters, encode material
that is to be decoded by audiences. Writers must have a sense of who
makes up their audiences - what those people are like and what they
like - if they are to reach those people, to create texts that large
numbers of people will like, listen to, read or watch (Berger, 1995, p.
147).

Specifically regarding \textit{group creativity} in movies when examining movie critical and
awards success\textsuperscript{333} Simonton (2011) asks if individuals in various crew disciplines such
as cinematographers, production designers, visual effects supervisors, sound editors and
mixers, composers, songwriters are “hired guns”?\textsuperscript{334}

These abovementioned technical creative movie crew-members may indeed be `hired
guns’; thus the key considerations are that: (1) the group creativity is usually only
assembled to make a specific movie story \textit{after} that story exists - and usually as a
screenplay, and (2) that same story might hypothetically be executed or filmed
successfully by any number of potential alternate competent technical creative crew,
including also different casts\textsuperscript{335} but more importantly for this specific study that (3) the
majority of early-career movie-makers do not have access to such top-flight cast and
crew or “buckets of money” to throw at them. However what they do have\textsuperscript{336} is \textit{story}
creativity - including conceptual (story-premise) creativity. Recall that the average
budget of a top 20 RoI movie is only USD$1.8M but some are as low as USD$7,000
and yet all top 20 RoI movies still reached over seventy-one times their production

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{331} If not always its \textit{conception}, as some movie projects (screen ideas) are ’producer-led’ where the
producer provides the brief, inspiration, or material for adaptation as opposed to ’writer-led’ screen ideas.
\textsuperscript{332} (Johnson in Bourdieu & Johnson 1993, p. 5)
\textsuperscript{333} (as opposed to commercial or “viral” movie story success)
\textsuperscript{334} (Simonton 2011, pp. 53-4).
\textsuperscript{335} Epagogix CEO Nick Meaney notes that: “When you put no score in the actors column, assuming the
people you replace them with are reasonably competent, nine times out of 10 it has no bearing on the box
office figure” (Rowley, 2014, online).
\textsuperscript{336} or rather are forced to resort to, due to their creative problem-situation
}
budget in ticket-sales (relative-audience-reach) - whereas the average of the most successful Hollywood big-budget 'blockbusters' is only seven times their production budgets, in these same relative-audience-reach (artistic cost/benefit ratio) terms.\(^{337}\)

*High-RoI / low-budget* movies are thus more creative in their narrative conception and execution than are lower-RoI/high-budget movies. Phrased another way, the movies under study were evidently over *ten times* more effective in attracting a wider audience relative to their movie creation cost. Moreover the story and screenplay are here seen as the primary cause of group creativity in movies, as without a story (a script) there is usually no planned movie to assemble a group to make.

The importance of the screen idea\(^{338}\) also clearly puts 'Auteur Theory' – or the notion that a director is the key “author” of a movie - in perspective; a specific director is a necessary-but-not-sufficient criteria for movie success. In examining creativity in the British movie industry Petrie (1991) also rightly notes that Auteur Theory (*a la* Truffaut, Sarris, Wood *et al*) has roots in problematic Romantic conceptions of creativity and ignores group creativity (Petrie 1991, pp. 15-7); attention is also drawn to Nowell-Smith’s observation that, “it would be better to talk of the author, rather than the text, as system” (Petrie 1991, p. 19). The findings of the current study suggest that a new conception called “Writeur Theory”\(^{339}\) may be a better approach.

Additional limitations of the study include those of much mixed-methods research, namely the ever-present possibilities of various of the potentially undetected researcher’s own cognitive biases – including, potentially: sampling bias, anthropic bias, confirmation bias, projection bias, false consensus bias, selective perception, status-quo bias, hindsight bias, pareidolia, survivorship bias, anchoring effects, and the Dunning-Kruger effect. There also exist risks of various fallacies in thinking, including: the single-cause fallacy, the Intentionality fallacy, the Gambler’s fallacy, the Ludic fallacy and the Texas Sharpshooter fallacy to name just a few of the perils of cognition.

\(^{337}\) See: Table 1-3 – The Top 20 RoI Movies - and their “Story-Power” (or, Benefit / Cost ratio) and Table 1-4 – The Widest Audience-Reach movies – and, their “Story-Power” (Benefit/Cost).

\(^{338}\) Again as Simonton (2011, 2014) states: ’It should come as no surprise, then, that the script constitutes the single most important component of cinematic success (Simonton 2011).’ (Simonton in Kaufman & Simonton 2014, pp. 3-4).

\(^{339}\) The herein coined term “Writeur Theory” as derived from an examination of the top 20 RoI movies would recommend being a *writer-hyphenate*: a writer-director, writer-producer, writer-actor - or even adopting two or three of these multiple movie co-creation roles. It is again noted that the outrageously-French-sounding word “Writeur” is a new word that the author of this study created by combining the word ‘Writer’ with ‘Auteur’. See: Martindale (1989) on combining old elements in new ways.
due to human Evolutionary Psychology entailed in any detailed research project. Such biases are due to ecological rationality, or our evolved if not entirely optimal way of looking at and making sense of the world inherited from our Pleistocene Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness (Todd & Gigerenzer, 2012).

In summary the strength of this research approach is that the movie datasets and the screenwriting doxa dataset can certainly be compared against and contrasted to one another. The fact that movie stories and thus movie screenplays (thus movies) are related but are not congruent means that a consilient mixed-methods approach is the most appropriate method for this particular study. Moreover methodologically Macdonald (2004) and Redvall (2009; 2012) provide the basis for a combination of two major theories of creativity and cultural production - namely the Systems (socio-cultural) model of creativity and Bourdieu’s practice theory.

Regarding a general justification (or defense) of the theoretical perspective, ontology, epistemology and theories adopted - namely Systems Theory in biology, society and culture; Evolutionary Epistemology; and the Systems Model of creativity - it is noted that various scholars (see: Fulton & McIntyre 2013) have convincingly demonstrated that the Systems Model of Creativity theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2014) accurately describes and explains the phenomenon of creativity in biocultural domains.

**On the Issue of Using Controls to Study Movie Success and Failure**

It could be argued that two additional sets of controls - for both of the RoI datasets examined here - should also be comparatively studied; namely movies that were released at the same time and under the same circumstances; that were produced by the same studios; and that had the same quality cast and crew as the top and bottom 20 RoI. However since as Simonton (2011) notes, movies work with audiences in a complex configurational manner such a “control” methodology seems problematic. It is more revealing to compare the key story characteristics of extremely-high ‘benefit/cost ratio’ movies with the extremely low ones and then attempt to infer guidelines from common

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343 Namely the emergent movie story experience is a complex combination of: the story premise, plot, character, structure, *mise en scène*, cinematography, lighting, sound design, music and so on.
patterns across the top 20 RoI movies - or the suggested “Do’s” - and also ‘cautions’ or suggested “Don’ts” from common patterns across the bottom 20 RoI movies.

In selecting this specific RoI dual-dataset - and thus comparing characteristics of the top and bottom 20 RoI movies - it was also assumed that “cultural reflectionism” in movie success is a fallacy as Martindale (1990) suggests:

The evolutionary theory involves the assertion that the main forces of aesthetic evolution are intra-artistic, that art does not reflect society to any appreciable extent (Martindale 1990, pp. 72-3).

In practice this means that we should not expect the story subject-matters, or the content, or even the form of the top 20 nor the bottom RoI movies to reflect society or the cultural zeitgeist any more - nor less - than any other movies that could be selected at random in the same year of release. Bordwell is likewise unconvinced that movies reflect “social anxieties, economic crises, and cultural tensions” (Bordwell 2008, pp. 30-1). If we adopt this ahistorical view of movie success it means that the timing - namely the year, decade or century - of a movie’s release relative to any “topical” subject matter is irrelevant. While the above “biggest movie-audience worldwide” dataset might be compared and contrasted in a study to the Top 20 RoI movies, it is here seen as more fruitful and revealing to note the key differences in the Bottom 20 RoI Movies compared with the Top 20 RoI Movies, particularly since so many of the top 20 RoI are low-budget movies and it is the story and not the movie budget that results in their extreme success. This research approach also makes the study findings more relevant to early and mid-career screenwriters who also usually do not have easy access to high budgets or non-risk-averse movie financiers prepared to risk high economic stakes on unproven screenwriters without extensive track records.

There is an important distinction to be made between sociocultural zeitgeist - which appears largely irrelevant to movie success - and the disciplinary zeitgeist of a biocultural domain (such as cinema) as it develops new ideas, processes, and products. This means identifying to where the state of the art of moviemaking canon has currently evolved. This view emphasizes the importance of the most recent and also

344 We might consider the success of the movie Titanic (1997) about a ship which sank in 1912; the view that the ‘timing’ of a movie relative to society’s current concerns in general (cultural zeitgeist) would be inferring the single-cause fallacy of success.

345 See: Table 1-4 – The Widest Audience-Reach movies – and their ‘Story-Power’ (Benefit / Cost).

346 See: Simonton 2004, p. 169-71 on ‘disciplinary zeitgeist’, which applies to any discipline whether in the sciences or the arts.
longterm popular evolutions of style in movies rather than their story content (see: Bordwell 1997).

**On “The Initial Silent Population” in Screenplay and Movie Performance**

In the article ‘The Roots of Unfairness: the Black Swan in Arts and Literature’ Nassim Taleb (2004) notes that the initial silent population of artifacts is important when studying a statistical phenomenon where differential fitness or performance measures are involved, namely that traits of both success and failure should be compared (Taleb, 2004, p. 248). While a movie story and thus a screenplay submitted to producers is more than the sum of its parts (has emergent properties) problems in of some or many of the parts can result in failure (deselection of that unit of bioculture) resulting in that screenplay’s ongoing membership in ‘the initial silent population’. Regarding this initial silent population Simonton (2011) also notes:

I believe that it’s just a matter of time before the potential of a script can be adequately predicted for all of the diverse cinematic criteria of success… The script, however critical, remains just one part of the whole picture. The term “screenplay” notwithstanding, scripts are not made to be read as standalone works of literature. Their contents must be fleshed out by the cast in front of the camera and the crew behind the camera. Certainly even the best script cannot survive terrible acting. And the inferior acting may not even be the actor’s fault. We’ll probably never know how many potentially great scripts were sunk by horrid miscasting or by interpretational conflicts with the director (Simonton, 2011, pp. 107-109).

Despite not having access to all deselected screenplays, the methods and the datasets examined herein allows us to compare the empirical data of highest and lowest RoI movies with various of the prior and sometimes counterintuitive findings of De Vany (2004), Simonton (2011), McKenzie (2012) and other scholars of movie performance.

### 5.7 RATIONALE FOR THE SELECTED RESEARCH APPROACH

In *Approaches to Social Enquiry* (2007) Blaikie encourages readers to “choose an approach which suits their purpose, prejudices and personality” (Blaikie 2007, p. x). The mixed method approach adopted here takes Systems Philosophy as a starting point and thus also Evolutionary Epistemology; importantly the Evolutionary (BVSR) theory of creativity and the (DPFi) Systems Model of Creativity are all compatible with this Systems view. Evolutionary theory is also the dominant scientific paradigm in the “hard” or natural sciences and consilience is viewed herein as a desirable research
programme and aim in the domains of Arts / Humanities and Communication research or what Herbert Simon (1996) might term ‘the sciences of the artificial’.

Alternate available approaches could include: Contemporary Hermeneutics, Critical Theory, Ethnomethodology, Social Realism, Structuration Theory, Feminism, or Postmodernism among others. In Mass Communication Research, Halloran notes:

We also need to recognize the humanistic affinity of social science (this is particularly true in mass communications), and its overlap with philosophy, law, geography and literary criticism. Several perspectives (for example, critical, theoretical, empirical and humanistic) may be detected in social science (Inkeles, 1966). (Halloran 1998, p. 12)

The analysis and interpretation of the creative artifacts of (a) screenwriting manuals and (b) movies (and their component elements) is a necessary part of this research enquiry. These aspects are also often dealt with in literary criticism and in Hermeneutics, or the interpretation of texts or media; and also of the author’s and audience’s situation; also Structuration Theory (the agency-structure duality); and Social Realism or causal mechanisms such as Evolution underneath social phenomena; thus all of these analytical elements implicitly apply to some degree in the adopted approach. Alternately a specifically Feminist perspective might emphasize that only three of the top 20 RoI movies feature women screenwriters\(^{347}\) noting this very clear gender inequality; whereas perhaps a Critical Theory (\emph{a la} a Marxist and/or a Habermasian) approach might emphasize the “false consciousness” that the top 20 RoI movies promote in uncritically depicting and thus by default promoting the late-capitalist systems within which all of the movie stories are historically and culturally situated. A Cultural Studies perspective might emphasize social conflicts, social meanings and social struggles, avoiding the social scientific or even so-called “scientistic” approach altogether (Halloran 1998, p. 13). A Post-Colonial Theory approach might emphasize the absence of evidence of colonized indigenous cultures in all of the movies in the dataset. The chapter Changing Global Media Landscape, Unchanging Theories? International Communication Research and Paradigm Testing (Chang, 2010) proposes that the research paradigm or theory of “American Cultural Imperialism” might be empirically tested against “Globalization” (p. 22) and cites an earlier study (Hong & Chang, 2008) on the consumption of US movies in the UK and South Korea using four alternative explanatory models to “American Cultural Imperialism”: cultural discount, cultural

\(^{347}\) Namely the top 20 RoI movies \textit{Halloween}, \textit{Napoleon Dynamite}, and \textit{My Big Fat Greek Wedding}.\)
proximity, diffusion, and globalization (Chang, 2010, p. 23). Sixteen of the top 20 RoI movies are American, the other four are Mexican, Irish, UK and Australian and 19 are English-language movies. A different researcher might well use this dataset to present the “American Cultural Imperialism” or alternately the “globalization of culture” model as 19 of the bottom 20 RoI movies are American and one of them is Chinese.

While all of the above are certainly equally-valid research perspectives the goal of this research is less ambitious and less politically emancipatory than any of these potential agendas as its aim is instead to critically examine aspects of the current screenwriting doxa, and compare it to the empirical movie data in the light of extant Creativity and Evolutionary theory - and thus Evolutionary Systems Theory. In these terms the current research merely aims to provide testable heuristics for theatrical cinema movies as effective mass communication tools for individual creative screenwriters and other movie story creators.

5.7.1 Summary of the Research Methodology

In summary the research methodology in this instance has proceeded as follows:

1. **Sources:** Selected canonical screenplay manuals and movie-RoI data - then returning to:

2. **Research Question/s:** How do various key prescriptions of the screenwriting doxa compare to the 20 highest and also the 20 lowest RoI movies?

3. **Ontology:** Systems Ontology and, Popperian *post-positivist critical realism*.

4. **Epistemology:** Evolutionary Epistemology, i.e., Evolutionary Systems Theory.

5. **Methodology:** Qualitative and quantitative document (i.e., screenwriting manual) and textual (i.e., movie as ’text’) analysis.

6. **Methods:** Purposive sampling, data collation, discourse analysis (of the doxa), movie direct content analysis, and comparative multiple content and discourse analysis (i.e., RoI movies vs. doxa)

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348 With the possible exception of Postmodernism (*a la* Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida and so on) as it does not aim to create objective knowledge and is anti-science (Blaikie 2007, p. 51) and is therefore anti-consilience. Crotty also notes Postmodernism’s contrarian “deconstruction, de-centering, disappearance, dissemination… discontinuity, *differance*, dispersion” (Crotty 1998, p. 192). It does not solve problems but instead creates many more. See also: (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996; Carroll, 1995).
6 DATA ANALYSIS

The following chapter presents and analyzes a summary of the relevant data gathered from Dataset (A) the examined screenwriting manuals and subsequently Dataset (B) the 40 movies of the study.

A Summary Table is presented below as an overview of the study findings (*Table 6-1 - Summary of the Doxa on the 15 Categories Examined.*) \(^{349}\)

The four contemporary (1970s-present) screenwriting manual texts examined were:


Additionally for the purpose of a historical comparison in terms of the evolution of the doxa the earliest available screenwriting manual also coded was:


As the feature-length narrative cinema form \(^{350}\) was not yet widespread as popular entertainment in 1911 the doxa elements from the (Stoddard 1911) manual are not here

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\(^{349}\) A similar Summary Table appears in the Appendix below (*Table 10-1 - Commonalities and Differences in Top and Bottom 20 RoI Movies Compared to the Doxa*).

\(^{350}\) (i.e., over 60 minutes in duration)
directly compared with the narrative form and content of the top and bottom 20 RoI movies as the RoI movie datasets under study date from 1968 to 2012.

The fifteen elements coded for in the analysis of the screenplay manual texts were:

1. Story Premise
2. Theme
3. Genre
4. Setting (Spatial)
5. Setting (Temporal)
6. Plot
7. Character
8. Character Arcs
9. Structure
10. Dialogue
11. Movie Duration / Screenplay Length
12. Number of Scenes
13. Dramatic Principles
14. Creativity
15. Human Nature

Presented below are the results of the data coding and data analysis, evidence from the screenwriting manuals aiming to show how the four authors of these contemporary-era texts present the doxa for each of the fifteen (15) elements of movie story.

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351 Please see also the digital Appendix section (on attached CD-ROM) for the detailed screenwriting manual Coding Datasheets.
6.1 SCREENWRITING MANUAL PRESCRIPTIONS (DOXA)

The Summary Table (6.1) below presents - in overview - a collated summary of derived prescriptions from the screenwriting doxa\textsuperscript{352} as interpreted by the researcher via close reading of the four contemporary screenwriting manuals in the dataset, and the historical manual examined (Stoddard 1911). ‘N/A’ (i.e., ‘Not Applicable’) in the table below means that the manual examined does not explicitly address that specific issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>PRESCRIPTION / GUIDELINE CONSENSUS</th>
<th>REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Story Premise | The consensus of the four manuals can be seen to be: A character(s) in a problem-situation, i.e., A character(s) facing obstacles (antagonist(s)) to a clear goal. | Stoddard 1911 (N/A)  
Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 23-4, 32, 40, 83, 90-2, 126, 136)  
McKee 1997 (pp. 31, 35, 48-9, 96, 206-9, 210-1, 213, 318)  
Snyder 2005 (pp. 31-2, 63, 111, 117, 188)  
Truby 2007 (pp 6-7, 8, 16-8, 43-4) |
| Theme       | [No clear consensus from the modern era manuals... see Results and Discussion sections]          | Stoddard 1911 (the term is used, but not defined) (pp. 4, 6)  
Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 49-50, 60-1, 153, 191, 238)  
McKee 1997 (pp. 97-8, 114-7, 119-20)  
Snyder 2005 (pp. 26, 39, 73-4, 192)  
Truby 2007 (pp. 9, 35-6, 71-2, 108-36, 142-3) |
| Genre       | [No clear consensus from the modern era manuals... see Results and Discussion sections]          | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 3, 8, 13)  
Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 187, 281-2, 291)  
McKee 1997 (pp. 25, 36, 74, 76, 79-95, 213)  
Snyder 2005 (pp. 5, 19, 25-44 [Snyder creates his own Genre taxonomy]; 33, 65, 91, |

\textsuperscript{352} (aka, the screenwriting convention)
| Setting (Spatial) | [No clear consensus from the modern era manuals... see Results and Discussion sections] | 168, 186) Truby 2007 (pp. 5, 8, 62-73, 246, 319) Stoddard 1911 (pp. 5-6, 11) Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 55) McKee 1997 (pp. 68-9) Snyder 2005 (N/A) Truby 2007 (pp. 146-81) |
| Setting (Temporal) | [No clear consensus from the modern era manuals... see Results and Discussion sections] | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 5-6) Field (1979) 2005 (N/A) McKee 1997 (pp. 68-9, 181) Snyder 2005 (N/A) Truby 2007 (pp. 184-90) |
| Plot | While there is a consensus that plot is a cause-and-effect chain of events, each modern-era manual prescribes a different plot 'event' template. | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 3-4) Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 39-40, 130-1, 136, 142-3) McKee 1997 (pp. 33-4, 43-7, 100, 107-8) Snyder 2005 (pp. 24-44, 100, 109, 123-4, 129, 133, 141, 147-51, 156-60, 162, 168, 185, 190-1) Truby 2007 (pp. 260, 262-9, 281-2, 305-10, 271-305) |
| Character | [No clear consensus from the modern era manuals... see Results and Discussion sections] | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 6-7) Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 19, 41, 43-4, 46-55, 63, 65-7) McKee 1997 (pp. 100-7, 137, 145-7, 181-2, 375-82) Snyder 2005 (pp. xv, 41, 47, 49, 53, 59, 61, 157) Truby 2007 (pp. 29-30, 57-61) |
| Character 'Arcs' | All the manuals prescribe 'character arcs', or a psychological transformation of the protagonist, although its delineation and detail varies across the manuals. | Stoddard 1911 (N/A) Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 33, 46, 51, 57, 63, 68-9, 155, 180) McKee 1997 (pp. 42-4, 49, 57-8, 104-15, 137) Snyder 2005 (pp. 33-34, 62, 72-3, 75, 77, 90, 95, 135-7, 156, 183, 191) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    | Truby 2007 (pp. 8, 32-5, 50-1, 58, 77-8, 102-3, 374-5)                                                          |
|                    | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 3-6)                                                                                           |
|                    | Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 21-9, 90, 99, 105, 138, 151, 181, 200-2)                                                   |
|                    | McKee 1997 (pp. 33, 51, 181, 189, 200-1, 217-9, 220-4, and broadly, pp. 31-131)                                    |
|                    | Snyder 2005 (pp. 68-70, 76-82, 101-4, 184, 188, 193)                                                              |
|                    | Truby 2007 (pp. 4, 9, 13, 39-40, 88, 191-219, 258)                                                                |
| Dialogue           | [A general consensus exists on 'good' and 'bad' dialogue in the modern era manuals… see also Results and Discussion chapter] |
|                    | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 3, 13-4)                                                                                       |
|                    | Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 39, 64, 72-3, 244-5)                                                                     |
|                    | McKee 1997 (pp. 17-9, 23, 27, 42-4, 68, 121, 252-3, 309-10, 341, 388-94, 415-7)                                |
|                    | Snyder 2005 (pp. 100, 147-8, 153-4, 156-7, 159, 161-2)                                                            |
|                    | Truby 2007 (pp. 138-9, 376-417)                                                                                    |
| Movie Duration / Screenplay Length | In 1911, Stoddard suggests: 15 mins. Field suggests: 120 mins/pages McKee: 120 mins/pages Snyder: 110 mins/pages Truby: 120 mins/pages |
|                    | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 11)                                                                                           |
|                    | Field 1979 / 2005 (pp. 12, 22, 91, 142-3, 159, 247, 272)                                                          |
|                    | McKee 1997 (p. 219)                                                                                              |
|                    | Snyder 2005 (pp. 71, 78, 143)                                                                                     |
|                    | Truby 2007 (p. 4)                                                                                                |
| Number of Scenes   | In 1911, Stoddard suggests: 15-25 scenes (in a 15-minute short film)                                              |
|                    | Field suggests: 56 scenes, for 120 mins (i.e., 14 scenes x per 30 pages of screenplay)                           |
|                    | McKee suggests: 40-60 scenes (for a 120-page script)                                                             |
|                    | Snyder suggests: 40 scenes, for a 110-page screenplay                                                             |
|                    | Truby suggests: 40 to 70 scenes (for a 120-page script)                                                           |
|                    | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 5, 31)                                                                                         |
|                    | Field (1979) 2005 (p. 202)                                                                                        |
|                    | McKee 1997 (p. 35, 210, 415)                                                                                     |
|                    | Snyder 2005 (pp. 102, 103, 109, 112, 113, 115)                                                                  |
|                    | Truby 2007 (pp. 18, 327)                                                                                         |
| ‘Dramatic principles’  | [Apart from ‘conflict’ – i.e., problems for the protagonist, some overlaps in the modern era manuals… see Results and Discussion sections] |
|                    | Stoddard 1911 (pp. 5-7)                                                                                          |
|                    | Field (1979) 2005 (pp. 19-20, 22, 23, 30, 41, 101, 102, 152, 153, 156, 157, 376)                                |
Table 6-1 – Summary of screenwriting manual prescriptions

The analysis of the doxa from these manuals was revealing. While it was possible to arrive at a consensus in the doxa on four of the fifteen examined categories (i.e., Premise, Screenplay Length/Movie Duration, Number of Scenes, and Dialogue) it was not possible to find a consensus on the remaining eleven categories, although there are some overlaps in certain details of the prescribed doxa such as certain Dramatic Principles and some elements regarding Human Nature.
6.1.1 Story Premise (doxa)

The data analysis reveals that in the manuals there is a conceptual consensus in defining movie Story Premise which has been summarized in Table 6-1 as: “A character/s in a problem-situation”. Although it is not stated literally in these terms in the manuals this consensus was derived from the analysis of these four screenwriting texts. Below are selected key quotes from each modern-era screenwriting manual which best exemplify their definitions or prescriptions for movie story Premise.353

In the manual Screenplay Syd Field (1979, 2005) illustrates the concept of movie story Premise (Field calls it “dramatic premise”) using an example from the movie Chinatown (1974):

A few pages later, we are introduced to a certain Mrs. Mulwray (Diane Ladd), who wants to hire Jake Gittes to find out "who my husband is having an affair with." That is the dramatic premise of the film, because the answer to that question is what leads us into the story. The dramatic premise is what the screenplay is about; it provides the dramatic thrust that drives the story to its conclusion (Field 2005, p. 24).

However that specific example does not “drive the story to its conclusion” but instead is an “Inciting Incident”354 that first 'involves' Gittes in the story, and rather the further complications that the protagonist uncovers drive Chinatown (1974) to its conclusion.

Story (McKee 1997) uses different terminology, definitions and meanings for Premise:

PREMISE - Two ideas bracket the creative process: Premise, the idea that inspires the writer's desire to create a story, and Controlling Idea, the story's ultimate meaning expressed through the action and aesthetic emotion of the last act's climax. A Premise, however, unlike a Controlling Idea, is rarely a closed statement. More likely, it's an open-ended question: What would happen if. . . ? What would happen if a shark swam into a beach resort and devoured a vacationer? JAWS. What would happen if a wife walked out on her husband and child? KRAMER VS. KRAMER. Stanislavski called this the "Magic if ... ," the daydreamy hypothetical that floats through the mind, opening the door to the imagination where everything and anything seems possible. But "What would happen if ... " is only one kind of Premise. Writers find inspiration wherever they turn - in a friend's lighthearted confession of a dark desire, the jibe of a legless beggar, a nightmare or

353 For additional, and more detailed quotations from the manuals on each element examined see the data-coded tables in the digital Appendix on the attached CD-ROM.
354 See Macdonald (2004, pp. 100-1) for a more detailed examination of “Inciting Incident” in the wider screenwriting doxa including McKee (1999), Field (1994), Parker (1998) and others.
daydream, a newspaper fact, a child's fantasy. Even the craft itself may inspire. Purely technical exercises, such as linking a smooth transition from one scene to the next or editing dialogue to avoid repetition, may trigger a burst of imagination. Anything may premise the writing, even, for example, a glance out a window (McKee 1997, p. 112).

Complicating the above is that McKee later asserts his conception of “Controlling Idea” is what other authors often mean by “Theme” (see Section 6.1.2 below, for details).

Correlating with McKee (1997)’s “What would happen if…”, Snyder (2005) provides an example of a plot premise or the ‘What if-?’; more clearly, the protagonist’s primary problem-situation:

The amazing Sheldon Bull and I wrote a hilarious comedy in 2004. What if the President's helicopter goes down behind enemy lines? And what if he is forced to capture Osama bin Laden – all by himself? That was our premise. It's about a President who finds his "inner leader." It's "Galaxy Quest with George W. Bush." Great, huh? We even had a great title: Chickenhawk Down (Snyder 2005, p. 56).

In the Glossary section of the Save The Cat! manual Snyder (2005) delineates what he terms the screen idea’s (screenplay’s) Thematic Premise stating:

THEMATIC PREMISE - What is this movie about? Yes, even the silliest monster movie or most spastic comedy has to be "about something." If it's not, it's not a good movie. In essence every good movie is a debate about the pros and the cons of a particular point of view. It is a question raised and answered by the movie. The place to stick that question is up front, loud and clear. It is frequently spoken by a minor character to the hero in the form of a question early on, like on page 5, and sets the debate into motion that will be proven, one way or the other, in the course of the movie. This question and debate is the movie's thematic premise (Snyder 2005, p. 192).

Field (1979, 2005) however calls Theme “the script’s point of view” and suggests this Theme be stated in dialogue on page 3 (Field 2005, p. 123) rather than Snyder's page 5 (Snyder 2005, p. 192) of the screenplay.

In the Glossary of Save The Cat! Snyder (2005) suggests that the logline contain the movie’s story Premise; a description of the protagonist and their problem-situation:

LOGLINE OR ONE-LINE - A logline is the one- or two-sentence description of your movie that tells us what it is. It must contain a type of hero (that means a type of person plus an adjective that describes him), the antagonist (ditto), and the hero's primal goal. It must have irony, and it must bloom in our brains with potential (Snyder 2005, p. 188).
By comparison Truby (2007) more clearly defines and provides several clear examples of how he intends the term *Premise* to be understood by the reader. In this view it becomes clear that the *Premise* and the *Logline* are isomorphic:

**WHAT IS THE PREMISE?** The premise is your story stated in one sentence. It is the simplest combination of character and plot and typically consists of some event that starts the action, some sense of the main character, and some sense of the outcome of the story. Some examples:

- **The Godfather:** The youngest son of a Mafia family takes revenge on the men who shot his father and becomes the new Godfather.
- **Moonstruck:** While her fiancé visits his mother in Italy, a woman falls in love with the man's brother.
- **Casablanca:** A tough American expatriate rediscovers an old flame only to give her up so that he can fight the Nazis.
- **A Streetcar Named Desire:** An aging beauty tries to get a man to marry her while under constant attack from her sister's brutish husband.
- **Star Wars:** When a princess falls into mortal danger, a young man uses his skills as a fighter to save her and defeat the evil forces of a galactic empire (Truby 2007, pp. 16-7).

Truby (2007) states movie producers are looking for “a premise that is a “high concept”’, meaning that the film can be reduced to a catchy one-line description” (Truby 2007, pp. 16-8) and emphasizes two key points:

*KEY POINT: What you choose to write about is far more important than any decision you make about how to write it...*

*KEY POINT: Nine out of ten writers fail at the premise* (Truby 2007, pp. 17-8).

Truby (2007) shares McKee’s (1997) view on the function of story *Premise* namely that it should inspire curiosity in the story creator (screenwriter) themselves and ideally thus also in the potential movie story audience.

In summation the doxa from the four manuals examined above appear to understand movie story (screenplay) *Premise* in slightly different ways. Field (2005) suggests “dramatic premise” is some question which keeps the audience engaged and uses a specific illustrative example from the plot of the movie *Chinatown* (1974). However as a *film noir* genre detective story such a specific question as “find out "who my husband is having an affair with"” is not what that specific movie story is “about” as this
question turns out to be a McGuffin;\textsuperscript{355} namely a dramatic conceit which leads the protagonist detective to variously uncover: (1) a murder, and subsequently (2) a conspiracy to steal water and later (3) an incest scandal. In these terms using a specific genre with unique genre tropes - in this case the \textit{film noir} hardboiled detective genre - may be misleading even for screenwriters who may specifically be writing in the \textit{film noir} hardboiled detective fiction genre.

McKee (1997) distinguishes \textit{Premise} as an idea that inspires the writer in the creation of the narrative or “What would happen if?” and provides examples of characters with problem-situations using the illustrations of \textit{Kramer vs. Kramer} and \textit{Jaws}. In the cases of both Field (2005) and McKee (1997) it can be seen they thus refer to the story “hook” (or the initial problem-situation) which also can possibly be viewed as what is termed an “Inciting Incident” in the screenwriting doxa.\textsuperscript{356}

Snyder (2005) describes three separate concepts of movie story \textit{Premise}. For the explanation of \textit{Premise} Snyder uses an illustrative example of an unproduced comedy screen idea called \textit{Chickenhawk Down} involving two “What if’s” (or two problem-situations) for the hero. For the “Thematic Premise” Snyder prescribes a question and debate that is also spoken in dialogue on page five of the screenplay, which the movie story should ultimately answer with its resolution. For the movie story Logline\textsuperscript{357} Snyder prescribes a description of the hero, their antagonist and the hero’s (primal) goal.

Truby (2007) is clearest of these four manuals in defining \textit{Premise} as: the story in one sentence stating the protagonist character, plot, inciting incident and suggesting the outcome of the story. Truby provides various examples from canonical, popular, or classic movies (\textit{Casablanca, The Godfather, Star Wars} and others). Truby’s definition, description, and examples of \textit{Premise} coincide conceptually with Snyder’s prescription for a Logline. Both authors also suggest the \textit{Premise} should pique viewer interest (attract attention, or “hook” an audience) with Snyder suggesting it should “bloom in our brains with potential” and Truby suggesting that it should be “high-concept”.\textsuperscript{358}

\textsuperscript{355} (or a red herring)
\textsuperscript{356} (see: Macdonald 2004, p. 100-1) for more on the “Inciting Incident”.
\textsuperscript{357} (which can be seen to be isomorphic to the movie story \textit{Premise})
\textsuperscript{358} Snyder’s suggestion that the Logline should also have irony is problematic as “irony” is not clearly defined - and the popular American understanding of “irony” does not correlate with UK or Australian popular understandings.
Overall the consensus of the four manuals on movie story *Premise* can be distilled conceptually to: “A character/s in a problem-situation - or a character/s facing obstacles and/or antagonist/s to a clear goal.”

### 6.1.2 Theme (doxa)

*Theme* is a problematic issue in narratological analysis and unsurprisingly is also a problematic term as used in the screenwriting manuals, thus requires some initial explanatory discussion.

While the (online) *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term “theme” as “an idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature” (OED, 2015a, online) in Poetics of Cinema film theorist David Bordwell (2008) notes different definitions of “theme” including: unique particulars, “deep structures”, the Soviet suggestion that a theme is a pattern that a theorist invents after the fact to give a work cohesiveness; political ideas; and Nöel Carroll’s definition of themes as “illustrated homilies” (Bordwell, 2008, p. 18).

Complicating the issues around “theme” is that according to the OED the term “trope” can (thus, recursively) mean: “A significant or recurrent theme; a motif” (OED, 2015b, online). In turn “tropes” can also refer to themes as well as: motifs, patterns, configurations, complexes, ideas, beliefs, values, rules, principles, symbols, and concepts. Despite that there appears to be no single agreed-upon precise definition of the concept of “theme” individual manifestations of themes in movies can all be seen as recurring ideas - and also therefore as “memes” (i.e., units of culture).

Despite the above problems around defining the concept of “theme”, below are selected key quotes from each of the four modern-era screenwriting manuals in the study which best exemplifies their definitions and prescriptions for movie story “theme”. Not least

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359 As noted in *Scientific Study of Literature* journal (2011): “One of the most difficult topics in literary studies is the notion of themes; what constitutes a theme, and how are themes identified? Important pioneering work in this area was conducted by Whitten and Graesser (2001) and Louwerse and van Peer (2002). An important insight that emerged from these studies is that themes are only partly in the text and partly in the reader. The identification of themes requires complex inferencing operations, the application of world knowledge, and the formation of coherent mental models, which are operations that can vary across readers” (Dixon & Bortolussi, 2011, p. 61).

360 For more on ideas, concepts, tropes, motifs and so on as ‘memes’ (units of culture) see, also: (Chick, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996b; Dawkins, 1976, [1976] 2006; Daniel Clement Dennett, 1995; Velikovsky, 2016). Rhemes, or component parts of Themes are also addressed in (Li & Kellogg, 2012, p. 125) but there is not space to examine them here.
for the reasons discussed above, what each author appears to mean can sometimes be
vague and imprecise and in some cases does not logically match the example provided:

Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* deals with the themes of
reconciliation and forgiveness, revealing how parents' actions shape
and influence their children. (Ibsen's great play *Ghosts* deals with the
same themes, with how the sins of the father are passed on to the son.)
(Field 1979, 2005, pp. 49-50).

McKee (1997) appears to alter his view partway through *Story* (1997) about what a
“theme” is, at first noting:

The finest writers are not only visionary, they create classics. Each
genre involves crucial human values: love/hate, peace/war,
justice/injustice, achievement/failure, good/evil, and the like. Each of
these values is an ageless theme that has inspired great writing since
the dawn of story. From year to year these values must be reworked to
keep them alive and meaningful for the contemporary audience. Yet
the greatest stories are always contemporary. They are classics
(McKee 1997, p. 97).

However shortly thereafter McKee appears to extend the view that a “value” can be “an
ageless theme” (as stated above) to the following definition of a “true” theme:

CONTROLLING IDEA - *Theme* has become a rather vague term in
the writer's vocabulary. "Poverty," "war," and "love," for example, are
not themes; they relate to setting or genre. A true theme is not a word
but a sentence - one clear, coherent sentence that expresses a story's
irreducible meaning. I prefer the phrase *Controlling Idea*, for like
theme, it names a story's root or central idea, but it also implies
function: The Controlling Idea shapes the writer's strategic choices. It's
yet another *Creative Discipline* to guide your aesthetic choices toward
what is appropriate or inappropriate in your story, toward what is
expressive of your Controlling Idea and may be kept versus what is
irrelevant to it and must be cut. The Controlling Idea of a completed
story must be expressible in a single sentence. After the Premise is
first imagined and the work is evolving, explore everything and
anything that comes to mind. Ultimately, however, the film must be
molded around one idea. This is not to say that a story can be reduced
to a rubric...

*A CONTROLLING IDEA may be expressed in a single sentence
describing how and why life undergoes change from one condition of
existence at the beginning to another at the end* (McKee 1997, pp.
114-5).

From a close reading of the text McKee’s (1997) use of the term “theme” possibly
exacerbates the problem of *Theme* being “a rather vague term in the writer's
vocabulary”. However McKee (1997) does provide numerous examples of his preferred
term for “theme” namely “controlling idea”: 
"Evil triumphs because it's part of human nature": CHINATOWN...

"The courage and genius of humanity will prevail over the hostility of Nature." Survival Films... THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE, JAWS, QUEST FOR FIRE, ARACHNOPHOBIA, FITZCARRALDO, FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX, ALIVE (McKee 1997, pp. 123-5).

Truby (2007) is in general the least ambiguous and terminologically-imprecise screenwriting manual in the study dataset and elaborates on his own assumed definition of the term “theme” as follows:

Theme may be the most misunderstood of all major aspects of storytelling.

Most people think of theme as subject matter, in categories such as the moral, psychological, and social, citing examples such as death, good versus evil, redemption, class, corruption, responsibility, and love. I don't refer to theme as subject matter. Theme is the author's view of how to act in the world. It is your moral vision (Truby 2007, p. 108).

Interestingly Truby invokes systems theory concepts when he notes how theme, character and plot are all integrated parts of a whole movie story:

Let's return to the body metaphor for story. A good story is a "living" system in which the parts work together to make an integrated whole. These parts are themselves systems, each like character, plot, and theme hanging together as a unit but also connecting in myriad ways to each of the other subsystems of the story body (Truby 2007, pp. 108-9).

It is assumed that Truby (above) only uses the concepts “system” and “body” as a metaphor; it is unclear how well Truby understands General Systems Theory or Systems Science. Truby (2007) also provides many examples of themes or “moral arguments” in specific movies in his Chapter 5 and includes a detailed analysis of the moral argument (or “theme”) of the movie Casablanca (1942) (Truby 2007, pp. 142-4).

Snyder (2005) is reasonably clear in specifying a meaning of the term “theme”:

Somewhere in the first five minutes of a well-structured screenplay, someone (usually not the main character) will pose a question or make a statement (usually to the main character) that is the theme of the movie (Snyder 2005, p. 73).

In summary across the four contemporary manuals examined there are some problems in the doxa of terminological or conceptual differences in the use of the word “theme”. Macdonald (2004) also notes such problems of “terminological inexactitude” in the twelve canonical screenwriting manuals examined in his study and similarly Brütsch (2015) finds disagreement on the conception of “three act” structure in examining
certain manuals that shape the screenwriting doxa. As noted above, Bordwell (2008) suggests at least five different interpretations of the term “theme”. The term *theme* is thus currently problematic in the doxa due to its ambiguity and the multiplicity of different uses of the term. There does not appear to be a consensus on *theme* in the doxa of these four manuals; more broadly there is little consensus on it anywhere to be found.

### 6.1.3 Genre (doxa)

Turning now to the definitions for movie story *Genre* we first examine Syd Field (1979, 2005). Field astutely avoids the muddy conceptual waters around the term *Genre* as it is not defined in this manual although some examples of genres are listed:

> Verbalize the story line in a few sentences. Create a subject of the screenplay, the action and the characters. Then break it down into genres: What kind of story are you writing? An action-adventure? Thriller? Love story? Drama? Romantic comedy? The first thing you have to be clear on is what kind of a story you're writing (Field 1979, 2005, p. 281).

Without overtly stating it Snyder (2005) appears to suggest that *Genre* in the biocultural evolution of movie stories is something like species in biological evolution, noting the concepts of “lineage”, “begat” and “line of succession” below:

> And your knowledge of a few movies you like is not enough. It is also not enough to know all the movies of the past five years. You have to go back, see the lineage of many types of movies, know what movie begat what in the line of succession, and how the art was advanced by each.

> Which leads me to the subject of genre.

> You are about to embark on the next step of writing a successful screenplay and that is the categorizing of your movie idea. But no! you think. My movie is new! It's like nothing ever seen before! I will not be put into a category! Sorry. Too late.

> You can't tell me any idea that isn't like one, or dozens, found in the movie canon. Trust me, your movie falls into a category. And that category has rules that you need to know. Because to explode the clichés, to give us *the same thing... only different*, you have to know what genre your movie is part of, and how to invent the twists that avoid pat elements. If you can do that, you have a better chance to sell. And, by the way, everyone, and I mean *everyone* in Hollywood, already does this. So why not know what they know? (Snyder 2005, p. 22-3).
With the term “the same thing, only different” Snyder is here using creativity theory without using the terms ‘creative’ or ‘novel and appropriate’ and is also in effect suggesting “internalizing the domain” by suggesting writers trace the lineage of a specific movie category.\footnote{This “the same thing, only different” conception of creativity in the screenwriting doxa (Snyder, 2005) is no different to Phillips (1922), since as Curran notes: “Phillips [1922] also admits that originality is ‘doing an old thing in a new way’ and that we must ‘invent new ways to reveal truth […] – that is originality.’” (Curran 2015, pp. 196-7).} As noted in the earlier Literature Review chapter Snyder (2005) also presents a taxonomy of ten movie story types (which he dubs “genres”) for example ‘Monster in the House’, ‘Dude With A Problem’ and so on:

The topic of genre dictates the categorizing of movies. But instead of typical categories such as Romantic Comedy or Heist Movie, we've created 10 new ones that define story types (Snyder 2005, p. 43). McKee (1997) on the other hand lists twenty-five extant conventional movie story genres (1997, pp. 70-86) and offers a very brief review of some prior genre taxonomies drawing from Aristotle, Goethe, Schiller, Polti, Metz and the ‘neo-Aristotelian critic Norman Friedman’ (McKee 1997, pp. 79-80). McKee defines genre conventions as “specific settings, roles, events, and values that define individual genres and their subgenres” (McKee 1997, p. 87). However on page 80 McKee also rightly adds “subject” to this list of genre characteristics.\footnote{I suggest “rightly” here as, the story subject (such as: an American Wild-West cowboy versus Indians; an astronaut versus aliens; a detective versus a serial killer) inherently suggests, or implies, a story Genre.} McKee thus lists twenty-five genres with examples (1997, pp. 70-86) including: #1. Love Story, noting its subgenre, ‘Buddy Salvation’, and the genres of Horror, Modern Epic, War on through to #25, Art Film. Interestingly also for this project of enquiry McKee explicitly suggests an evolutionary process operating on movie and music genres. McKee identifies how genres are like evolving systems:\footnote{Though McKee’s use of the word “system” is not quite the same understanding as used in this thesis.}

Below is the genre and subgenre system used by screenwriters - a system that’s evolved from practice, not theory, and that turns on differences of subject, setting, role, event, and values (McKee 1997, p. 80).

If the systems model of creativity and the inherent Evolutionary theory is accurate then the process of creativity is: the evolutionary algorithm of selecting and then combining things - for example story ideas, and/or genres - and then transmitting these back into the environment and discovering whether the result works and then also spreads (is
contagious or replicated) in its environment; namely in the minds of the field for that cultural domain (movies) and in the wider culture. McKee also writes of the cultural evolution of story *Genres* over time:

Although this slate is reasonably comprehensive, no list can ever be definitive or exhaustive because the lines between genres often overlap as they influence and merge with one another. Genres are not static or rigid, but evolving and flexible, yet firm and stable enough to be identified and worked with, much as a composer plays with the malleable movements of musical genres. Each writer's homework is first to identify his genre, then research its governing practices. And there's no escaping these tasks. We're all genre writers (McKee 1997, p. 86).

McKee later clearly recapitulates this evolutionary explanation of creativity when he defines “reinventing genre”:

For the genre conventions are not carved in stone; they evolve, grow, adapt, modify, and break apace with the changes in society… Below are three examples of genre evolution (McKee 1997, p. 93).

McKee cites many hybrid-genre movie examples within the Western, Psycho-Drama and Love Story genres (McKee 1997, pp. 93-8).

Truby suggests that specific *Genres* share “predetermined plot beats” and “character, theme, story world, and symbol” (p. 265) and like McKee - although in contrast to Snyder’s advice to stay within one clear genre (Snyder 2005, p. 186) - Truby points out that *Genres* can also be hybridized:

Most stories in movies, novels, and plays are founded on at least one genre, and are usually a combination of two or three. So it is important that you know what story form, if any, you are using. Each genre has predetermined plot beats that you must include, or your audience will be disappointed. Genres are really story subsystems. Each genre takes the universal steps of story structure, the seven and twenty-two steps, and executes them in a different way (Truby 2007, p. 319).

In summary there is a consensus on what *Genre* actually is, however the above doxa from the four manuals examined does not prescribe any specific movie *Genres* as more,

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364 The article ‘Revoicings and devoicings: Requests, confessions and acts of violence in three “industrial” novels’ (Li & Kellogg, 2012, p. 112) examines the evolution of: Genre; of Authors; of the Characters; and of Utterances - including “phylogenetic evolution” of whole genres over time, “ontogenetic growth” of authors reacting to other authors, “macrogenetic development” of characters (or ‘arcs’); and “microgenetic change” or where the author’s voice leaks into their characters’ voices.

365 Snyder writes: “I suggest one genre per movie, please. Any more and I personally don’t know what it is, or why I go see it” (Snyder 2005, p. 186).
or, less, likely to succeed as movies. An underlying assumption is that each individual aspiring (or practising) screenwriter will have their preferred movie story Genres given their own taste, predispositions, personality and habitus based on preferences revealed by their own past viewing patterns. However, extant scientific research on movie performance shows that the Drama genre is a money-losing Genre (Simonton 2011, p. 82). Possibly therefore the doxa could emphasize this point to save aspiring Drama movie screenwriters some potentially-avoidable problems; solutions might include ways that Drama genre screenplays might provide unique points of difference to increase the probability of their selection by the movie field.

6.1.4 Setting: Spatial (doxa)

Drawing again from Syd Field (1979/2005), below is how Field defines the spatial setting of a movie story:

Film is a visual medium, and the writer's responsibility is to choose an image, or picture, that cinematically dramatizes his or her character. You can create a dialogue scene in a small and stuffy hotel room, or have the scene occur at the beach or under the stars. One is visually closed; the others visually open and dynamic. It's your story, your choice (Field 1979, 2005, p. 55).

McKee likewise offers no specific directives as to any types of locations/spatial settings that are more (or less) likely to result in movie story success with audiences:


In advising screenwriters on creating (selecting) the details of their movie story Snyder again inadvertently uses Evolutionary Psychology guidelines when prescribing that either the hero’s goal or the movie story’s (spatial) setting should be what he refers to as “primal”:

When committing these discoveries to your logline, you must have an adjective to describe the hero, an adjective to describe the bad guy, and a definite and primal goal or setting (Snyder 2005, p. 64).

Truby (2007) by contrast discusses Spatial Setting in some detail (pp. 146-81) and includes distinctions between: Man-Made Spaces, The Terrifying House, Cellar versus
Attic, The Road and the City with variously: City-as-Mountain, City-as-Ocean, City-as-Jungle and City-as-Forest in addition to “Passageways Between Worlds”.

A summary of Truby’s approach of screenwriters using the different meanings and connotations of different Spatial Settings when creating their movie stories - and thus choosing spatial locations as a storytelling tool\(^{366}\) is expressed in the following excerpt:

> To sum up this part of the writing process: you start with a simple story line (the seven steps) and a set of characters. You then create the exterior forms and spaces that express these story elements, and these forms and spaces have the desired effect in the hearts and minds of your audience. The meaning we take from physical forms and spaces seems to be deeper than culture and learning; it seems to be part of the human psyche. This is why it has profound effects on the audience. So the elements of the story world become another set of tools and techniques you can use to tell your story. The process of translating the story line into a physical story world, which then elicits certain emotions in the audience, is a difficult one. That's because you are really speaking two languages - one of words, the other of images - and matching them exactly over the course of the story (Truby 2007, p. 146).

In suggesting (above) that a screenwriter’s selection of movie scene locations or spatial settings for the audience is “deeper than culture and learning; it seems to be part of the human psyche” Truby is employing a folk psychology version of both Evolutionary and Cognitive Psychology.

While Truby encourages the screenwriter’s creative use of Spatial Settings to reveal story and meaning, the doxa of these four manuals neither prescribes nor cautions against any specific types of story settings. There is thus in the doxa little emphasis placed on the economic factors involved in movie story creation namely that including certain types of settings and locations in a screenplay can result in comparatively significant differences in movie story production budget.\(^{367}\)

Likewise there is no doxa advice in these manuals on designing the story so as to deliberately restrict the number of locations in a screenplay, or the classic combination of “high-concept / low-budget” movie story. While there is the general problem that - compared to big-budget Hollywood spectacles - movies with limited locations can feel

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\(^{366}\) or in effect using location as “character”

\(^{367}\) It is important to remember that the higher the movie story production budget, the more likely the screen story is to be deselected on the basis that all movie investors are inherently risk-averse.
more cinematically confined and restricted\textsuperscript{368} it is also noteworthy that the number-one RoI movie is set entirely inside one house (Paranormal Activity). Likewise top 20 RoI movie story Clerks is mainly set inside the convenience store; SAW mostly in a basement; Night of the Living Dead mostly in the farmhouse; and The Evil Dead story is set mostly in the cabin in the woods. Screenwriters considering and incorporating such locational limitations (or creative constraints) from the top 20 RoI movies when designing their movie story’s setting may encourage greater creative problem-solving in other areas of their movie storytelling.\textsuperscript{369}

6.1.5 Setting: Temporal - (doxa)

The screenwriter’s consideration of Temporal Settings when creating a movie story are variously discussed in the four manuals examined - although neither recommendations or cautions are given about choosing particular times (such as the past, present or future) for a movie screenplay’s Temporal Setting in terms of the likelihood of that movie reaching a mass audience.

Field (1979/2005) specifically notes the importance of research on the temporal details of the story setting and their integration into Character and Characterization:\textsuperscript{370}

If you're writing a period piece or a historical piece, you need to gather information about the time and the events that happened during it and then weave your emotional through line into your characters (Field 2005, p. 37).

McKee (1997) mentions the movie story’s time-period setting and the story’s temporal duration:

The first dimension of time is Period. Is the story set in the contemporary world? In history? A hypothetical future? Or is it that rare fantasy, such as ANIMAL FARM or WATERSHIP DOWN, in which location in time is unknowable and irrelevant? PERIOD is a story's place in time. Duration is the second dimension of time. How much time does the story span within the lives of your characters? Decades? Years? Months? Days? Is it that rare work in which storytime equals screentime, such as MY DINNER WITH ANDRE, a

\textsuperscript{368} Namely these movie stories can feel more like a stage-play than “pure cinema”

\textsuperscript{369} Namely in the story conception, development and screenwriting process.

\textsuperscript{370} “Character” here refers to a description of the bio-psycho-socio-cultural details or the specifications of a character in a screenplay and movie story (such as: their name, age, gender, appearance, ethnicity, physical attributes) whereas, “Characterization” refers to how that character’s personality traits and behaviour is demonstrated to the audience in the story via the character’s actions in the plot. This distinction can also be compared with (McKee 1997, pp. 100-1) in Section 6.1.7 Character (doxa) below.
two-hour movie about a two-hour dinner? Or rarer still, LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD, a film that liquefies time into timelessness? (McKee 1997, p. 68).

Snyder (2005) does not explicitly address contemporary versus period (historical) movie settings, simply noting what in his view is required for a good synopsis/logline:

A compelling mental picture. It must bloom in your mind when you hear it. A whole movie must be implied, often including a time frame (Snyder 2005, p. 17).

Like the other three modern-era screenwriting manuals under study Truby (2007) does not specifically address Temporal Settings although certain Temporal concepts are examined such as: Seasons, Holidays and Rituals, The Single Day, The Perfect Day and the Time Endpoint (aka “ticking clock”) (Truby 2007, pp 185-90). Truby notes:

TIME IN THE STORY WORLD - Now that the story world is connected to the hero, we have to look at the different ways the story world itself can develop. Time is the fourth major element - along with natural settings, man-made spaces, and tools - that you use to construct your story world (Truby 2007, p. 184).

In short in this Temporal Setting category of the examined doxa there are no clear prescriptions or prohibitions about the era or period in which the movie story is ideally to be set by screenwriters. However considerations of the movie story production-cost implications of historical period pieces could be emphasized or otherwise addressed in the doxa for any screenwriters consciously aiming to increase the probability of their screen idea being selected for production. A story creator’s decision to tell a specific historical event as a screen story implies various costs, yet limiting story locations and scope can ameliorate such costs. One such comparative example is demonstrated in the production budgets of the #1 RoI and also the #1 LoI (Loss-on-Investment) movies, namely Paranormal Activity (2009) a movie story which is set inside a house with four characters compared to All The Queen’s Men (2010) a World War II period piece with a cast of hundreds and with over one hundred filming locations.371

In defense of the manuals and their doxa, the screen ideas in Hollywood spec scripts – on which the manuals primarily aim to instruct – may well be conceived and written with no consideration for budgetary constraints and thus should compete on the same imaginative level with other spec scripts that do likewise. However the industry reality

371 See the detailed Excel datasheets on the digital Appendix on CD-ROM for an analysis of the locations in the RoI movie datasets.
is that 98% of screenplays are deselected and expensive spec scripts written by newcomers (screenwriting novices) are more likely to be rejected in comparison to others. Due to the existence of for example *The Blacklist* of the “most-liked” unproduced movie scripts circulating in Hollywood\(^{372}\) there exists a queue of unmade spec screenplays by experienced credited screenwriters. While a brilliantly-written spec script by an uncredited writer may well leap ahead in the queue evidently this happens extremely rarely. For this reason alternate strategies such as examining the lessons of the highest- and lowest-RoI movies seems salient as a “possible winning strategy” for newcomers to the movie screenwriting field.

### 6.1.6 Plot (doxa)

The next key element coded from each modern-era screenwriting manual was *Plot*. Field (1979/2005) prescribes his story “paradigm” (with diagrams on pp. 21, 90, 143, 151, 200) and suggests that key “plot points” should occur at certain pages in the screenplay.\(^{373}\)

> When you're in the paradigm, you can't see the paradigm. That's why Plot Points are so important (pp. 142-3).

> If these parts make up the whole, the screenplay, how do you get from Act I, the Set-Up, to Act II, the Confrontation? And how do you get from Act II to Act III, the Resolution. The answer is to create a Plot Point at the end of both Act I and Act II. A Plot Point is defined as any incident, episode, or event that hooks into the action and spins it around in another direction - in this case, Plot Point I moves the action forward into Act II and Plot Point II moves the action into Act III. Plot Point I occurs at the end of Act I, anywhere from pages 20 to 25 or 30… Plot Points serve an essential purpose in the screenplay; they are a major story progression and keep the story line anchored in place (Field 2005, pp. 26-7).

However as Brütsch (2015) in *Journal of Screenwriting* and (Farquhar, 2016, online) in *Script* magazine note ’three act’ structure is currently viewed as controversial and problematic.

Field (1979/2005) discusses “narrative story line” which may be interpreted as *Plot*:

> In a screenplay, the story always moves forward, from beginning to end, whether in a linear or nonlinear fashion. It doesn't matter if it's a

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\(^{372}\) The *Blacklist*, an annual list of best as-yet-unproduced screenplays in Hollywood, as voted on by screen readers and development executives: [https://blcklst.com/lists/](https://blcklst.com/lists/)

\(^{373}\) However this is also: *Structure* (see also *Structure*, in section 6.1.9, below).
story like *Titanic* or *The Hours*; *Lord of the Rings* or *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella); *The Shawshank Redemption* or *Memento* (Christopher Nolan). The way you drive your story forward is by focusing on the actions of the character and the dramatic choices he or she makes during the narrative story line (Field 2005, pp 46-7).

McKee (1997) by comparison distinguishes between movies that feature what he calls an “Archplot” or classical design namely a movie story featuring: linear time, external conflict, a single, active protagonist and a consistent reality; a “Miniplot” or minimalism featuring: an open ending, internal conflict, multi-protagonists and a passive protagonist; and “Antiplot” or anti-structure featuring: coincidence, nonlinear time and inconsistent realities (McKee 1997, pp. 44-7). McKee (1997) prescribes that:

Event choices must be made; the writer chooses either well or ill; the result is plot... Plot, therefore, doesn't mean ham-handed twists and turns, or high-pressure suspense and shocking surprise. Rather, events must be selected and their patterning displayed through time. In this sense of composition or design, all stories are plotted (McKee 1997, pp. 43-4).

Snyder (2005) suggests that plot events must increase in intensity:

The basis of the "Turn, Turn, Turn" rule is: The plot doesn't just move ahead, it spins and intensifies as it goes. It is the difference between velocity (a constant speed) and acceleration (an increasing speed). And the rule is: It's not enough for the plot to go forward, it must go forward faster, and with more complexity, to the climax (Snyder 2005, p. 150).

Truby’s (2007) prescription for Plot is twenty-two “building blocks” which he suggests a writer use. Truby defines Plot as below emphasizing character arc (or change):

Plot is any description of a sequence of events: this happened, then this happened, and then this happened. But a simple sequence of events is not a good plot. It has no purpose, no designing principle that tells you which events to tell and in which order. A good plot is always organic, and this means many things:

- An organic plot shows the actions that lead to the hero's character change or explain why that change is impossible (Truby 2007, pp. 259-60).

Truby (2007) then recommends his specific plot-creation method:

*Creating an Organic Plot*

1. Look again at your designing principle…
2. Reacquaint yourself with the theme line…
3. If you have created a symbol line for the entire story, your plot should generally play out that line as well…
4. Decide whether you wish to use a storyteller…

5. Figure out the structure in detail, using the twenty-two structure steps of every great story (which we'll discuss in a moment)…

6. Decide if you want your story to use one or more genres. If so, you must add the plot beats unique to those genres at the appropriate places and twist them in some way so that your plot is not predictable.

Although you should decide if you want a storyteller before using the twenty-two building blocks to figure out your plot, I am going to explain these powerful and advanced tools in reverse chronology, since this is the easiest way to understand them (Truby 2007, pp. 266-7).

Thus in the doxa examined above there is a consensus on certain elements of Plot, namely a cause-and-effect chain of narrative events; although each manual author examined above recommends their own individual story-event algorithm or “story system”. While Truby’s (2007) 22-step story algorithm may indeed be “the twenty-two structure steps of every great story” it also may be present in very many unsuccessful stories.374

6.1.7 Character (doxa)

Beginning once again with Field (1979/2005), Character is explained as follows:

So what is character? Action is character; a person is what he does, not what he says. Film is behavior. Because we're telling a story with pictures, we must show how the character acts andreacts to the incidents and events that he/she confronts and overcomes (or doesn't overcome) during the story line. If you're writing your script and sense your characters are not as sharp or defined as you think they should be, and feel they should be stronger, more dimensional, and more universal in terms of thoughts, feelings, and emotions, the first thing you must determine is whether they're an active force in the screenplay - whether they cause things to happen, or whether things happen to them (Field 2005, p. 47).

Field implies above that making characters “more universal” is desirable; this will become important when it is later noted herein that Evocriticism (and one knowledge subdomain thereof, Evolutionary Psychology) and human universals appear necessary for effective and ideally successful movie story creation.

McKee makes a distinction between Character and “characterization”:

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374 In other words it may well be necessary but not sufficient for movie storytelling success.
Characterization is the sum of all observable qualities of a human being, everything knowable through careful scrutiny: age and IQ; sex and sexuality; style of speech and gesture; choices of home, car, and dress; education and occupation; personality and nervousness; values and attitudes—all aspects of humanity we could know by taking notes on someone day in and day out. The totality of these traits makes each person unique because each of us is a one-of-a-kind combination of genetic givens and accumulated experience. This singular assemblage of traits is characterization ... but it is not character.

TRUE CHARACTER is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure - the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation, the truer the choice to the character's essential nature.

Beneath the surface of characterization, regardless of appearances, who is this person? At the heart of his humanity, what will we find? Is he loving or cruel? Generous or selfish? Strong or weak? Truthful or a liar? Courageous or cowardly? The only way to know the truth is to witness him make choices under pressure to take one action or another in the pursuit of his desire. As he chooses, he is. Pressure is essential. Choices made when nothing is at risk mean little (McKee 1997, pp. 100-1).

McKee later discusses “Character Dimension” (pp. 377-9), “Cast Design” or character ensembles in movie story (pp. 379-80) and also “The Comic Character” (pp. 381-2).

Snyder’s (2005) three key prescriptions on Character in effective movie stories are as follows. Snyder’s first suggestion is the inclusion of an “introduction of the hero” scene with an event that renders the hero likable:

...liking the person we go on a journey with is the single most important element in drawing us into the story. Which brings us to the title of this book: Save the Cat! Save the what? I call it the "Save the Cat" scene. They don't put it into movies anymore. And it's basic. It's the scene where we meet the hero and the hero does something - like saving a cat - that defines who he is and makes us, the audience, like him (Snyder 2005, p. xv).

Snyder also calls for “archetypal” characters using examples of “magic dwarves and tricksters, sidekicks and talking animals, spinsters and wizards” (Snyder 2005, p.59) noting:

Each one of these archetypes has a story arc we want to see played out again and again. And it's all about matching what we carry in the back of our minds to what we see onscreen. Who deserves to win and why? Who deserves comeuppance and why? And despite the dictates of political correctness, fashion and fad, we still want to see justice meted out for characters we hate and victory granted to those we admire. The stories of these heroes and the mathematical equations that makes their stories work is already sewn into our DNA (Snyder 2005, p. 59).
Snyder’s invocation of ‘our DNA’ above suggests Evolutionary Psychology and Human Behavioural Ecology\textsuperscript{375} understandings of universal Human Nature.

Snyder’s third key prescription advises writers to place their heroes’ age-ranges in the largest demographic that attends cinema movies:

Whenever I find myself drifting into thinking about writing starring roles for Tim Allen, Steve Martin, or Chevy Chase, I catch myself and realize where I am: youth-obsessed Hollywood. Those guys are fine in ensemble, as part of a four-quadrant family pic, great, but as the lead? Never. Okay, rarely. My solution, once I do catch myself and give up on trying to change things, is to make that great character with the existential dilemma a teenager, and make that married couple who’s having a crisis a twenty-something married couple. This is the crowd that shows up for movies. These are the heroes the audience likes to see onscreen at their local Cineplex (Snyder 2005, p. 53).

In contrast to Snyder’s (2005) metaphorically feline-saving and thus probably inherently-empathic heroes Truby contests that being “likable” is a requirement of a movie’s hero character:

\textit{KEY POINT: Always tell a story about your best character.}

"Best" doesn't mean "nicest." It means "the most fascinating, challenging, and complex," even if that character isn't particularly likable. The reason you want to tell a story about your best character is that this is where your interest, and the audience's interest, will inevitably go. You always want this character driving the action (Truby 2007, pp. 29-30).

In the above four manuals of the doxa \textit{Character} (and “Characterization”) is delineated in various ways, stating that “action is character” (Field 1979/2005) and is revealed by “choices under pressure” (McKee 1997); the importance of empathy for the hero (Snyder 2005); the importance of an active protagonist who “drives” the story (Truby 2007); and Snyder also notes the importance of age-ranges of main characters arguing that the largest target audience in cinema are a younger demographic rather than say middle-aged or elderly.\textsuperscript{376}

In terms of common-sense wisdom (‘folk psychology’) on Human Nature, Field notes the importance of human universals in making characters “more universal in terms of thoughts, feelings, and emotions” (p. 47) while Snyder’s “primal” directive also

\textsuperscript{375} See (Buller in Hull & Ruse, 2007, pp. 266-267) on human behavioural ecology.

\textsuperscript{376} In fact the \textit{MPAA Theatrical Market Statistics} (2014) report shows that 25-39 year olds are the most frequent movie-goers in the USA followed closely by 18-24 year olds (MPAA, 2014, p. 12).
resurfaces in his assertion that: “we still want to see justice meted out for characters we hate and victory granted to those we admire” with Snyder suggesting this is “already sewn into our DNA.” (p. 59)

In these terms the screenwriting doxa prescribes classic character archetypes and agonistic structure as is also revealed by the Evocriticism study of readers of long nineteenth century British canonical novels in *Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning* (Carroll, et al., 2012).

Thus while the doxa explains and delineates *Character*, apart from Snyder’s prescriptions of suggested age-ranges for protagonists no clear heuristics are provided in the doxa for creating more- (nor avoiding less-) successful screen stories with regard to dimensions of *Character* such as say wealthy versus working-class characters, or “special” versus “everyman” characters and so on. This study contends that a closer examination of movie RoI can provide clarity around these movie story elements.

### 6.1.8 Character Arcs (doxa)

*Character Arcs* are the eighth coded element of the fifteen analysed in these four modern-era screenwriting manuals. Field (2005) recommends the writing of a character biography as “creative research” (2005, p. 51) also prescribing *Character Arc*:

> You’re building the interior life of your character, the emotional life, on a firm foundation so that your character can move and evolve in a definite character arc through the story, can change and grow through certain emotional stages of the action. It's not very often that characters will be the same at the beginning of a story as they are at the end; their thoughts and feelings will probably change during the emotional through line of the action (Field 2005, p. 51).

Field also describes four essential qualities which he suggests are required - or that comprise “good” character in a movie story - again prescribing *Character Arc* (character change or transformation):

1. the characters have a strong and defined dramatic need;
2. they have an individual point of view;
3. they personify an attitude; and
4. they go through some kind of change, or transformation. Those four elements, those four qualities, make up good character (Field 2005, p. 63).

Field notes that *Character Arcs* are not obligatory (p. 68) but nonetheless then also prescribes them throughout the book (see: pp. 33, 46, 51, 57, 63, 68-9, 145, 155, 180):
Having a character change during the course of the screenplay is not a requirement if it doesn't fit your character. But transformation, change, seems to be an essential aspect of our humanity, especially at this time in our culture (Field 2005, p. 68).

McKee likewise recommends Character Arcs as exemplary of the 'finest' movie screenwriting: “The finest writing not only reveals true character, but arcs or changes that inner nature, for better or worse, over the course of the telling.” (McKee 1997, p. 104).

Similarly Snyder describes a screenwriting “law” he calls “The Covenant of the arc”:

Every single character in your movie must change in the course of your story. The only characters who don't change are the bad guys. But the hero and his friends change a lot. And it's true. Although I hate the term "arc" because it's gotten so overused by development executives and How To Write A Screenplay authors, I do like what it stands for. Arc is a term that means “the change that occurs to any character from the beginning, through the middle, and to the end of each character's 'journey’… But when it's done well, when we can chart the growth and change each character undergoes in the course of a movie, it's a poem. What you are saying in essence is: This story, this experience, is so important, so life-changing for all involved - even you, the audience - it affects every single person that is in its orbit. From time immemorial, all good stories show growth and track change in all its characters (Snyder 2005, pp. 134-5).

Truby likewise asserts that showing character arcs is what movie stories (“films”) do:

The different forms of storytelling frame human change in differing ways:

- Myth tends to show the widest character arc, from birth to death and from animal to divine.
- Plays typically focus on the main character's moment of decision.
- Film (especially American film) shows the small change a character might undergo by seeking a limited goal with great intensity.
- Classic short stories usually track a few events that lead the character to gain a single important insight.
- Serious novels typically depict how a person interacts and changes within an entire society or show the precise mental and emotional processes leading up to his change.
- Television drama shows a number of characters in a minisociety struggling to change simultaneously.

Drama is a code of maturity. The focal point is the moment of change, the impact, when a person breaks free of habits and weaknesses and ghosts from his past and transforms to a richer and fuller self. The dramatic code expresses the idea that human beings can become a
better version of themselves, psychologically and morally. And that's why people love it (Truby 2007, p.8).

Truby also aims to further clarify his understanding of “character change”:

*KEY POINT: True character change involves a challenging and changing of basic beliefs, leading to new moral action by the hero* (Truby 2007, pp. 80).

Truby lists certain specific character changes (arcs) including: Child to Adult, Adult to Leader, Cynic to Participant, Leader to Tyrant, Leader to Visionary and also Metamorphosis “in horror, fantasy, fairy tale films - and certain intense psychological dramas” (Truby 2007, pp. 81-83).

In summary the screenwriting doxa examined very strongly recommends *Character Arcs* (change) for the protagonist over the course of the movie story, so much so that these arcs appear to be seen as obligatory in the doxa. In this view the dominant screenwriting doxa suggests movie stories should be something like animated self-help manuals.377

6.1.9 Structure (doxa)

Below are the selected key quotes from each modern-era screenwriting manual which best exemplifies their definitions for movie story Structure.

As noted earlier in the section on Plot in the doxa Field (1979/2005) prescribes “three act” structure:

Structure is like gravity: It is the glue that holds the story in place; it is the base, the foundation, the spine, the skeleton of the story. And it is this relationship between the parts and the whole that holds the screenplay together. It's what makes it what it is. It is the paradigm of dramatic structure. A paradigm is a model, example, or conceptual scheme. The paradigm of a table, for example, is a top with four legs… If we wanted to take a screenplay and hang it on the wall like a painting, this is what it would look like:

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377 This finding of a consensus on *Character Arc* in the doxa becomes interesting when contrasted to the two extremes of movie story RoI examined later in this study: Most of the top 20 RoI (i.e., 17/20 movies) do not appear to have character arcs while most of the bottom 20 RoI (also 17/20 movies) do.
This is the paradigm of a screenplay (Field 2005, p. 21).

However, as Price (2010, p. 133) also notes with regard to screenwriting manual author Michael Hauge’s popular screenwriting manual (Hauge, 1988) similarly Syd Field’s use of the term “paradigm” is in fact the opposite of a “paradigm” namely it is a “syntagm”. If the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of de Saussure are considered (de Saussure, et al., 1916, p. 123) then “paradigmatic” choices would instead refer to movie writers choosing different characters and events for their plot. This terminological inconsistency indicates a separation between academic literary (and narratology) “Grand Theory” versus how Film Studies relates to movie industry screenwriting doxa and practise, namely a different kind of “Two Cultures” problem which Bordwell, Carroll, et al have aimed to solve starting with the anthology Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996).

In the doxa McKee (1997) however defines Structure in different terms:

STRUCTURE is a selection of events from the characters' life stories that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life (McKee 1997, p. 33).

McKee distinguishes between linear and non-linear structure (p. 51) and like Field recommends “three act” structure also including a structural diagram:

…the three-act story rhythm was the foundation of story art for centuries before Aristotle noted it. But it's only a foundation! not a formula, so I'll begin with it, then delineate some of its infinite variations. The proportions I'll use are the rhythms of the feature film, but in principle they apply equally to the play and novel. Again, I caution that these are approximations, not formulas.
The first act, the opening movement, typically consumes about 25 percent of the telling, the Act One Climax occurring between twenty and thirty minutes into a 120-minute film. The last act wants to be the shortest of all. In the ideal last act we want to give the audience a sense of acceleration, a swiftly rising action to Climax. If the writer tries to stretch out the last act, the pace of acceleration is almost certain to slow in mid-movement. So last acts are generally brief, twenty minutes or less (McKee 1997, pp. 217-8).

Similarly Snyder (2005) also uses the concept of “three act” structure - although it is in fact four acts since “Act Two” is split half:

Row #1 is Act One (pages 1-25); row #2 represents the first half of Act Two up to the midpoint (25-55); row #3 is the midpoint to the Break into Act Three (55-85); and row #4 is Act Three to the movie's final image (85-110) (Snyder 2005, p. 101).

Truby (2007) however harshly criticizes the “three act” structure:

Writers who use the old three-act structure techniques are always complaining about second-act problems. That's because the techniques they use to create plot are fundamentally flawed. The mechanical and simplistic techniques of three-act structure don't give you a precise map showing how to weave a great plot throughout the difficult middle section of the story (Truby 2007, p. 258).

Truby instead implies that popular movies like The Godfather, Tootsie and Chinatown have 'seven key structure steps deep under each story's surface' (2007 p. 39):

A story has a minimum of seven steps in its growth from beginning to end:
1. Weakness and need
2. Desire
3. Opponent
4. Plan
5. Battle
6. Self-revelation
7. New equilibrium
The seven steps are not arbitrarily imposed from without, the way a mechanical story structure such as three-act structure is. They exist in the story. These seven steps are the nucleus, the DNA, of your story and the foundation of your success as a storyteller because they are based on human action. They are the steps that any human being must work through to solve a life problem. And because the seven steps are organic—implied in your premise line—they must be linked properly for the story to have the greatest impact on the audience (Truby 2007, pp. 39-40).

Given the problem-situation model (a la Bordwell 1997, 2008; Boyd 2009, 2010; Popper 1963, 1999) Truby’s point above about solving (life) problems will become important in the later Results and Discussion chapter. In short it appears that Sir Karl Popper’s (1999) dictum that “all life is problem solving” may suggest why story or narrative itself is so compelling in the first instance. Evolutionary Psychology would suggest that stories provide case studies of how to solve (life) problems (Pinker, 2007; Sugiyama, 1996, 2001, 2005). Truby’s 7-step template (story algorithm) above and also the hero’s journey monomyth clearly have parallels in the Philosophy of Biology.

In other words it is possible that such patterns of story stages or ‘steps’ that recur in popular or mythical or “timeless” or canonical stories may have analogues in the way that many lifeforms have solved problems of both survival and of reproduction over deep time - whether consciously or not - and may be why these story patterns or algorithms appear to resonate with mass audiences. However ‘canonical’ storytelling is evidently not as simple as the more serious the problem the better the story, as a typical movie story is complex and involves many factors and parts (characters, plot, themes, dialogue, structure, setting and so on). As per the Anna Karenina Principle while singular causes of success alone are not evident in canonical movie stories, singular and sometimes also multiple causes of failure do appear to be evident in unsuccessful (archive) movies such as those in the bottom 20 RoI movie cluster.

6.1.10 Dialogue (doxa)

Movie Dialogue hardly needs a definition as common sense would suggest it is the spoken words in a movie, and the screenplay text written for the actors playing the movie characters to speak aloud. Rather than an actual definition per se each of the

378 Again noting the basic algorithm of story as “Character + Problem + Attempted Extrication” (Gottschall 2012, p. 52).
modern-era screenwriting manuals examined features various explanations of the many and various purposes and multiple functions of movie dialogue, various heuristics for writing “good” movie dialogue - and conversely certain pitfalls and common obvious flaws of “bad” movie dialogue.

Field (1979/2005) notes that the various skills involved in movie-dialogue writing generally take writers some time to master and that movie dialogue also has numerous functions:

Let's review the purpose of dialogue. Dialogue:
• moves the story forward;
• reveals information about the characters - after all, they do have a history;
• communicates necessary facts and information to the reader;
• establishes character relationships, making them real, natural, and spontaneous;
• gives your characters depth, insight, and purpose;
• reveals the conflicts of the story and characters;
• reveals the emotional states of your characters; and
• comments on the action.

Your first attempts at writing dialogue will probably be unnatural, clichéd, fragmented, and strained. Writing dialogue is like learning to swim: You're going to flounder around at first, but the more you do the easier it gets (Field 2005, pp. 244-5).

Without explicitly stating it Field here is referring to the systems cybernetic process of feedback and the adjustment of action to attain a desired goal, namely writing effective or at least not ineffective movie dialogue.

In presenting screenplay dialogue heuristics McKee’s (1997) draws on Aristotle as Macdonald (2004) notes is common practice in the screenwriting doxa:

First, screen dialogue requires compression and economy… Second, it must have direction… Third, it should have purpose… All this precision, yet it must sound like talk… "Speak as common people do," Aristotle advised, "but think as wise men do." …The aesthetics of film are 80 percent visual, 20 percent auditory… Screen dialogue demands short, simply constructed sentences… (McKee 1997, p. 389).

Snyder (2005, pp. 143-62) in his Chapter 7 'What’s Wrong With This Picture?’ suggests many of the various potential reasons that movie screenplays might be rejected by screen readers and may thus become part of the initial silent population of deselected
screenplays including such reasons as: “on-the-nose” backstory dialogue or “talking the plot”, “one-note” emotional journeys, flat dialogue, and undifferentiated character dialogue as well as other story problems such as generic minor characters and an inactive hero. Snyder (2005) notes:

Good dialogue tells us more about what's going on in its subtext than on its surface. Subtle is better. And talking the plot is like using a sledgehammer. It's overkill. An adjunct to this rule of bad dialogue is "Show, Don't Tell", another of the most frequent mistakes found in newbie screenplays (Snyder 2005, p. 147).

By contrast the summary that Truby (2007) provides on dialogue is cited below but first Truby provides a section on “Moral Argument in Dialogue” (pp. 138-9) including an extensive section covering various dialogue prescriptions (Truby 2007, pp. 378-417). Additionally without explicitly stating it Truby (2007) also advises the classic “Show, Don’t Tell” general heuristic in movie screenwriting namely for a screenwriter to resort to using dialogue only when the onscreen actions cannot effectively reveal the plot:

■ Scenes Without Dialogue

First, try writing the scenes without dialogue. Let the characters' actions tell the story. This gives you the "clay" you can shape and refine in each successive draft (Truby 2007, p. 416).

Truby breaks movie/screenplay dialogue down into components or “tracks” stating: “The three tracks are story dialogue, moral dialogue, and key words or phrases” (2007, p. 377).

■ Writing Dialogue

1. Story Dialogue: Rewrite each scene using only story dialogue (Track 1). Remember, this is dialogue about what the characters are doing in the plot.

2. Moral Dialogue: Rewrite each scene, this time adding moral dialogue (Track 2).

   This is argument about whether those actions are right or wrong or comments about what the characters believe in (their values).

3. Key Words: Rewrite each scene again, highlighting key words, phrases, tagline, and sounds (Track 3). These are objects, images, values, or ideas that are central to the theme of your story. Think of this process for writing the three tracks of dialogue in the same way that you might draw someone's portrait. First you would sketch the

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380 Or, story. The manual authors sometimes conflate story and plot; as per the Definitions chapter ‘story’ is here considered to be composed of many elements including: premise, plot, character, dialogue, mise en scène, opening titles, both diegetic and non-diegetic music, and so on (see: Operational Definitions).
overall shape of the face (story dialogue). Then you would add the major shadings that give depth to the face (moral dialogue). Then you would add the most minute lines and details that make that face a unique individual (key words).

- Unique Voices - Make sure that each character speaks in a unique way (Truby 2007, pp 416-7).

In summary the doxa in the examined manuals notes that movie dialogue has various conventions and “rules” governing its form, style, tone, content, structures and functions. Field (2005) notes the skills and techniques or art and craft of writing “good” dialogue takes time to learn via trial-and-error (and error-correction) or in other words a systems-cybernetic feedback process.\(^{381}\)

In examining why writing “good” or non-bad and thus acceptable movie dialogue is a difficult and time-consuming skill for aspiring screenwriters to learn it seems likely that since speech (spoken language) is one of the oldest cultural tools invented\(^{382}\) mass audiences likely are highly-attuned and sensitive to “bad” movie dialogue. In the chapter ‘Systems and the Human Sciences’ in *Systems: New Paradigms for the Human Sciences* Koch (1998) notes that human language emerged around 100,000 years ago (Koch in Altmann & Koch, 1998, p. 673):


382 Or possibly stumbled-upon and then adapted and spread by humans as a communication channel.
their expectations for the style, form and sound of effective (and indeed: creative) movie dialogue. There thus exist many “rules” and heuristics for creating effective (and non-problematic) movie dialogue as suggested by these manual authors in the doxa.

Ironically, as with good movie editing “good” movie dialogue appears effortless, natural and “invisible” yet crafting it appears to be a skill that on average takes most screenwriters many years to learn. Since dialogue is but one component of the whole of a movie story - along with premise, character, plot, structure, tone, point of view, writer’s voice and so on - it is not surprising that the “ten-year rule” in creativity (Hayes 1989, Simonton 2011) applies to movies as complex creative artifacts which undergo selection pressure at the many and various stages of their creation. One obvious problem is that if one single line of dialogue in the entire 90-minute movie is “unbelievable” or is judged as “bad” or “wrong” it can potentially lose viewers and thus “sink” the whole movie, causing it to be deselected by a mass audience. Thus clearly there are many stages of the creative process where it becomes too late to tweak or otherwise solve problems of dialogue that is not “working” in the context of the movie as a unit of culture, namely a movie story.

6.1.11 Movie Duration / Screenplay Length (doxa)

If a movie screenplay is not written to a standard industry length-range in standard screenplay format it can be deselected as either too short or long. However each of the manuals varies on their Movie Duration / Screenplay Length prescriptions. Field (1979/2005) notes the “page-per-minute” rule of thumb:

Since one page of screenplay equals approximately one minute of screen time, most dialogue scenes need be no longer than two or three pages. That's two or three minutes of screen time, and believe it or not, that's an enormous amount of screen time (Field 2005, p. 166).

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383 Regarding movie dialogue, these stages can include the original screen idea that the writer selects to develop, and the many parts of that screen idea that are selected (and deselected), including: the various written drafts through which the screenplay passes; the industry gatekeeper selection process; the selection, variation and transmission (via the evolutionary algorithm) of dialogue that occurs by the cast and crew during the movie shoot and edit; the selection of movies for cinema distribution; and finally the mass audience selection process of individual movie stories in cinemas.

384 This once again is the Anna Karenina Principle (Diamond 1997, Simonton 2011) in action.

385 Where one screenplay page equals roughly one minute of screen time (Bordwell, 2010, online; Simonton in Kaufman & Simonton, 2014, p. 4)
Field (2005) also repeatedly states that the right (“normal”) length for a movie is 120 pages or 120 minutes of filmed screen time (pp. 12, 22, 91, 142, 143, 155, 272).

The normal Hollywood film is approximately two hours long, or 120 minutes; foreign films tend to be a little shorter, though that's changing as we bridge the language of international film. But in most cases, films are approximately two hours in length, give or take a few minutes. This is a standard length, and today, when a contract is written in Hollywood between the filmmaker and production company, it states that when the movie is delivered, it will be no longer than 2 hours and 8 minutes. That's approximately 128 pages of screenplay (Field 2005, p. 22).

Field also suggests that 80 pages is “too short”:

If you start censoring yourself, you might wind up with an eighty-page screenplay, and that's too short. (Comedies, however, are usually about eighty-five to ninety pages.) (Field 2005, p. 247).

This point of Field’s is interesting given that top 20 RoI movies Primer (2004) is only 77 minutes in length and Open Water (2004) is 79 minutes.386

McKee (1997) assumes 120 minutes (and thus, pages) to be a standard Screenplay Length / Movie Duration:

The first act, the opening movement, typically consumes about 25 percent of the telling, the Act One Climax occurring between twenty and thirty minutes into a 120-minute film (McKee 1997, p. 219).

Snyder (2005) instead suggests 110 pages for screenplay length:

A script in terms of page count should be about as long as a good jockey weighs: 110. Though some dramas run longer, the proportions are the same (p. 71).

Snyder subsequently includes a page-range of “90 to 130” pages though this refers to a first draft screenplay which will undergo revisions and thus alter in length:

You've followed my advice, you've done the prep, you've hit your marks like a pro, and you've finally written THE END. And whether you've got 90 pages or 130, you've accomplished what you set out to do: You've written a draft of a movie (p. 143).

Despite making no specific page-count prescriptions Truby (2007) harshly and sarcastically critiques so-called “3-Act” structure. Truby indirectly suggests 120 pages (i.e., 30 + 60 + 30 pages) in his critique of “three-act” structure:

386 Both are independent movies and were not Hollywood spec scripts; yet they successfully competed with Hollywood movies for audience attention in cinemas and far outperforming them in terms of RoI.
Three-act theory says that every story for the screen has three "acts": the first act is the beginning, the second is the middle, and the third is the end. The first act is about thirty pages long. The third act is also about thirty pages long. And the second act runs to around sixty pages. And this three-act story supposedly has two or three "plot points" (whatever those are). Got that? Great. Now go and write a professional script (Truby 2007, p. 4).

In summary the doxa from these four manuals prescribes both 110 and also 120 pages for ideal screenplay length implying a movie running time of 110 or 120 minutes. While it may be a current convention, such Screenplay Length / Movie Duration prescriptions do not incorporate 'benefit/cost ratio' thinking since if the same movie story can be told in 90 minutes rather than 120 it is also less costly to create.387

6.1.12 Number of Scenes (doxa)

Each modern-era screenwriting manual presents a different recommended Number of Scenes in a typical movie story (screenplay). Field (1979/2005) suggests 14 scenes per 30 pages of screenplay which is a total of approximately 56 scenes for a 120-page screenplay:

Take a pack of 3 x 5 cards. Write the idea of each scene or sequence on a single card, and a few brief words of description (no more than five or six) to aid you while you're writing. You need fourteen cards per thirty pages of screenplay. More than fourteen means you probably have too much material for Act I; less than fourteen means you may be too thin and need to add a few more scenes to fill out the Set-Up (Field 2005, p. 202).

McKee (1997, p. 35, 210, 415) prescribes “40 to 60” scenes and also defines a “scene”:

For a typical film, the writer will choose forty to sixty Story Events or, as they're commonly known, scenes. A novelist may want more than sixty, a playwright rarely as many as forty.

A SCENE is an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character's life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance. Ideally, every scene is a STORY EVENT (McKee 1997, p. 35).

Truby estimates “40 to 70” scenes but if this prescribed range was the result of a formal study then Truby like McKee does not disclose the sample-size (n) nor the time-series (i.e., across how many years?) of the study that resulted in this apparent “average” figure:

387 Again, if a movie story is less expensive it is in general more likely to be financed and produced.
The average feature film has forty to seventy scenes. A novel may have double or triple that number (Truby 2007, p.18).

One obvious potential problem with this heuristic is that the “average feature film” loses money since only 30% of movies break even (Vogel 2011). Truby also notes:

Be aware that the average Hollywood movie has forty to seventy scenes. A novel ordinarily has twice that number and, depending on length and genre, possibly a great many more (Truby 2007, p. 327).

The doxa recommendations for Number of Scenes thus broadly estimates a range between 40 and 70 scenes\(^\text{388}\) however this does not appear to emerge from any kind of empirical statistical enquiry or formal research study but instead appears to be a guesstimate based on the manual authors’ own habitus or “feel for the game”. The authors’ habitus comes through in their works (these popular screenwriting manuals) and in turn affects the habitus development of novice screenwriters.\(^\text{389}\)

### 6.1.13 Dramatic Principles (doxa)

There are many Dramatic Principles espoused across the four modern-era manuals of the dataset possibly numbering in the hundreds if each was isolated. A sample includes: “Show, Don’t Tell” (Snyder 2005, pp. 147-8; McKee 1997, p. 334, 345); “Action is Character” (Field 2005, p. 40); “good” Scene Design requires “Turning Points, Setups / Payoffs, Emotional Dynamics, and Choice” (McKee 1997, p. 233); “structure doesn’t just carry content; it is content” (Truby 2007, p. 119); Do not write action or dialogue “on the nose” so that the subtext is written directly into the text (McKee 1997, p. 253);\(^\text{390}\) recommendation to only use Voice-Over Narration as Counterpoint rather than as “Telling” (McKee 1997, p. 344) and so on.\(^\text{391}\)

The number and the complexity of the various prescribed Dramatic Principles of the doxa aside, below are the selected key quotes from each author on just two of the key

\(^{388}\) By way of historical comparison of the evolution of the screenwriting doxa Curran’s (2015) unpublished PhD dissertation cites the early influential screenwriting manual Hints on Photoplay Writing (Peacocke 1916): “Peacocke admits that scene length can vary from director to director, but does offer some guidelines on the number of scenes in a ‘scenario’; he says that, from experience, ‘dramatic or melodramatic’ stories are usually around 40 scenes and comedy between 50 to 75 scenes” (Curran, 2015, p. 264).

\(^{389}\) This thesis argues however that a more accurate and useful set of such heuristics for screenwriters might be obtained by studying the extremes of movie RoI from a story ‘benefit versus cost’ perspective. although Truby (2007) explicitly disagrees on subtext stating: “The first thing to understand about subtext is that conventional wisdom is wrong: it’s not always the best way to write the scene” (p. 376).

\(^{390}\) See the digital Appendix (Data-Tables on the Appendix CD-ROM) for a more detailed analysis of the many and various Dramatic Principles in the manuals examined in the study.
Dramatic Principles on which there is a clear consensus in the doxa. The Dramatic Principles analysis provided below has thus been limited to the key salient points relating to: (1) “conflict” and also a related Dramatic Principle namely (2) “agonistic structure” (i.e., movie story character-creation and plot dynamics as story protagonists or antagonists or “good guys” and “bad guys”) for each of the manuals under study.

Field (2005) notes the primacy of conflict in movie stories and in fact in ‘all drama’:

> All drama is conflict. Without conflict, you have no action; without action, you have no character; without character, you have no story; and without story, you have no screenplay (Field 2005, p. 25).

Field also recommends the positive resolution of that conflict:

> If you're ever in doubt about how to end your story, think in terms of a positive ending. We're talking Hollywood here, and I think the purpose of art, or entertainment, is to entertain. That doesn't mean that everybody lives happily ever after, but that people walk away from the theater uplifted, fulfilled, spiritually aligned with their own humanity (Field 2005, p. 86).

McKee (1997) notes the necessity for conflict in each plot (or “story”) event:

> A Story Event creates meaningful change in the life situation of a character that is expressed and experienced in terms of a value and ACHIEVED THROUGH CONFLICT (McKee 1997, p. 34).

Additionally McKee asserts that problems, flaws or deficiencies in the agonistic structure of a movie narrative as created by the writer can cause a movie story to fail with audiences:

> In my experience, the principle of antagonism is the most important and least understood precept in story design. Neglect of this fundamental concept is the primary reason screenplays and the films made from them fail.

> THE PRINCIPLE OF ANTAGONISM: A protagonist and his story can only be as intellectually fascinating and emotionally compelling as the forces of antagonism make them (McKee 1997, p. 317).

This dramatic principle of McKee’s correlates with one Truby’s “key points” on story antagonists namely that “The main character is only as good as the person he fights” (Truby 2007, p. 88). Truby (2007) notes that making the desire of the hero for achieving their goal in the story is paramount:

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392 In this thesis Plot is but one component of the entire movie Story; see Operational Definitions.
The desire should be specific - and the more specific, the better. To make sure your desire line is specific enough, ask yourself if there is a specific moment in the story when the audience knows whether your hero has accomplished his goal or not. In *Top Gun*, I know when the hero succeeds or fails in winning the Top Gun award because the head of the flight school hands it to someone else (Truby 2007, p. 87).

Truby (2007) likewise also clearly emphasizes the importance of conflict:

**BUILDING CONFLICT** - Once you set up a hero and an opponent competing for the same goal, you must build the conflict steadily until the final battle. Your purpose is to put constant pressure on your hero, because this is what will force him to change. The way you build conflict and put pressure on your hero depends primarily on how you distribute the attacks on the hero. In average or simple stories, the hero comes into conflict with only one opponent. This standard opposition has the virtue of clarity, but it doesn't let you develop a deep or powerful sequence of conflicts, and it doesn't allow the audience to see a hero acting within a larger society (Truby 2007, p. 94).

This concept becomes important once we examine `Hero versus Villain/Opponent’ scene victories charts for the top 20 RoI movies.³⁹³

Snyder (2005) also states the principle of the greater the villainy the greater the heroism:

…making the bad guy badder automatically makes the hero bigger. It's one of those Immutable Laws of Screenwriting (Snyder 2005, p. 149).

Snyder (2005) emphasizes the importance of conflict within and victory at the end of each scene also suggesting that the scene `goal wins’ should alternate for the hero and the villain/s:³⁹⁴

> < - This symbol represents the conflict in each scene. When the scene starts, who has a goal, who's in the way, who wins? These questions can be boiled down into one neat statement using this symbol to denote who's up against whom. Don't start a scene unless you have figured out who your players are and what they want (Snyder 2005, p. 194).

There are thus potentially hundreds of general heuristics for effective “dramatic” movie storytelling in terms of “do’s” and “don’ts” also governed by many “If / Then” caveats conditional on specifics of Genre, the target audience, and the simultaneous evolution of bioculture in other narrative media and domains. This is to note that when a new movie storytelling “schema” (in Bordwell’s 1997, 2008 terms), new special visual effect or

³⁹³ See Section 6.3.13 - Dramatic Principles in RoI Movies, below.
³⁹⁴ This “scene wins” and “scene losses” dramatic principle (heuristic) is examined with regard to movie RoI datasets below in Section 6.3.13 – Dramatic Principles and Movie RoI.
new storytelling trope (or “meme”) appears in say television advertising commercials, music videos, television, internet webisodes or other screen media it may also then be integrated into movie screen storytelling either as an elegant problem-solution or merely as a need to keep up with the state-of-the-art; namely, an “evolutionary arms race” in bioculture when competing for the finite resource of human attention.395

In short there is (unsurprising) consensus in the doxa on “drama as conflict” and thus the principle of antagonism.396 As Boyd (2010) and Popper (1999) also note problems (and thus values) emerge with life. If indeed “all life is problem-solving” then so too all storytelling is problem-solving, both for the characters in the story and for the movie storytellers whose story has numerous and intense selection pressures operating upon it. Agonistic structure in movies is however also sometimes problematic as it can have many exceptions.397 In many Horror Genre and also many Action Genre movies the antagonist “drives” the story forward instead of the protagonist; see for example Hans Gruber in Die Hard (1988) and the villains in the James Bond, Jason Bourne, Indiana Jones, Star Wars and Lord of the Rings movies; namely the antagonist often takes the first major story action - such as committing a major act of villainy or causing a major problem - and this event drives the story as the hero reacts to each of the subsequent plot events or problems. In this view the villain is actually the story protagonist while the hero is the antagonist. This view goes against some of the current screenwriting convention or dominant doxa.398

As Macdonald (2004) notes the manuals often rely on Aristotelian dramatic principles:

McKee refers to ‘the truths of our art’ stemming from Aristotle (McKee, 1999 p.5) and talks of universal, archetypal quality (McKee, 1999 p.3). Dancyger & Rush refer to ‘fundamental story devices that remain constant regardless of your scriptwriting approach’ (these


396 It is unsurprising because given Gottschall’s (2012) story algorithm, without problems there is no “story” per se.

397 Macdonald (2004) notes: “As Cattrysse demonstrates, varying definitions of the concept of protagonist (however it is termed) by Egri (1960) and Howard & Mabley (1992) as applied to Thelma and Louise (1991) can lead to divergent analytical results, either of which could be ‘right.’” (Macdonald 2004, p. 71).

398 But so does much of the herein proposed StoryAlity Theory resulting from examining extremes of movie story RoI. Section 10-20 in the Appendix below contains more details of the StoryAlity Theory.
being conflict, discovery, reversal and turning point) (2002 p.2). Egri (1960 p.xiv), Field (1994a p.10), Frensham (1996 p.48), Parker (1998 p.27), and Grove (2001 p.24), all refer to Aristotle as the key source of wisdom about drama. There is clearly some belief in an unchanging, fundamental nature of storytelling, including elements that need in some way to be present for stories to be presented through screenwriting. The impression that these elements were ‘discovered’ rather than invented by Aristotle rather obscures the observation that the Aristotelian approach to presentation of story through acting appears to be currently dominating the discourse of screenwriting manuals and textbooks, to the point that few (if any) sources take a different approach (Macdonald 2004, p. 72).

In summation many Aristotelian doctrines about theatre plays may indeed still apply to successful movie writing over 2,000 years after they were prescribed in Poetics (circa 335 BCE) however each of these specific doctrines or Dramatic Principles can also be tested against a successful set of current-era (movie) stories to determine their current-day accuracy in the domain of cinema, as contrasted to theatre or “drama” in general.

6.1.14 On Creativity (doxa)

The terms “creativity” and “creative” are used occasionally in the manuals examined however those terms are not usually defined in the texts and certainly do not reference the extant scientific research on creativity from the domain of Psychology but instead use folk psychology assumptions around creativity. Interestingly many of the concepts of creativity including suggestions on how to solve screenwriting problems within the manuals do indeed have certain parallels in the scientific study of creativity.

Field (1979/2005) offers various creative problem finding and creative problem solving (CPF and CPS) suggestions yet without referencing any prior research on these specific approaches and techniques:

Problems in a screenplay can always be solved. Just know that if you've created the problem, whatever it is, you can solve it. If you get stuck, go back to your characters; go into your character biography and ask him/her what he or she would do in that situation. You'll get an answer. It may take a minute, an hour, a day, several days, a week, but you'll get the answer - probably when you least expect it, and in the most unusual place. Just keep asking yourself the question "What do I need to do to solve this problem?" Run it through your head constantly, especially before you go to sleep. If I have a problem like this I give myself a dream assignment: "Please reveal the answer to the problem during my dream state." It can be a very powerful tool. Give yourself time for the answer to reveal itself to you, but trust in the
process. Writing is the ability to ask yourself questions and get the answers (Field 2005, p. 248).

With regard to the “ten-year rule” in creativity (Hayes 1989, Weisberg 2006, Simonton 2011) or its isomorphic “ten-thousand-hour rule” (Gladwell, 2008) it is interesting that Field (1979/2005) suggests that the craft skills of successful professional movie screenwriting can take “fifteen years” to master while noting also the “natural law” of professional “survival” and “evolution”, suggesting a natural selection process:

Writing is hard work, a day-by-day job, five or six days a week, three or more hours a day. And some days are better than others. A professional writer is someone who sets out to achieve a goal and then does it. Just like life. Writing is a personal responsibility; either you do it or you don't. And then there's the old "natural law" of survival and evolution. There are no "overnight success stories" in Hollywood. Like the saying goes, "The overnight success took fifteen years to happen." Believe it. It's true. Professional success is measured by persistence and determination (Field 2005, p. 308).

Meanwhile correlating with Simonton’s (1984-2004) evolutionary or Darwinian BVSR theory of creativity399 McKee (1997) suggests that “creativity” is about selection or about choices of inclusion and exclusion:

CREATIVE CHOICES - Fine writing is never one to one, never a matter of devising the exact number of events necessary to fill a story, then penciling in dialogue. Creativity is five to one, perhaps ten or twenty to one. The craft demands the invention of far more material than you can possibly use, then the astute selection from this quantity of quality events, moments of originality that are true to character and true to world.

CREATIVITY means creative choices of inclusion and exclusion (McKee 1997, p. 76).

In terms of Evolutionary Philosophy the last line of the above quote namely “choices of inclusion and exclusion” is equivalent to selection and deselection in Popper’s Evolutionary Epistemology and thus also in Simonton’s evolutionary BVSR (Darwinian or Evolutionary) theory of creativity. This mechanism also applies on a much larger (social, cinema audience) scale namely the Systems or “sociocultural” model of creativity where the audience consensus selects movies for inclusion in the canon or

399 See the Creativity section of the Literature Review (4.1.2, Models of Creativity) for details of the Evolutionary, or, Darwinian BVSR (Blind-Variation and Selective-Retention) theory of creativity and cultural production.
deselects and thus ignores, avoids or discards others as non-canon or “archive” in Moretti’s (2000) terms.

In short the doxa appears to hint that Evolutionary creative processes are at work in the cultural production of movies. This thesis suggests these evolutionary processes are indeed present when scientific theories of creativity are applied to the systems operation of: the individual screenwriter; the field (industry and audience) of movies; and the wider domain of cinema.

When asserting what “good” movie story is - instead of examining high RoI movies as exemplars of story creativity - McKee (1997) below emphasises the importance of “fresh insights into human nature” which suggests that knowledge from the domain of Evolutionary Psychology should logically be extremely relevant to “good” screenwriting as Evolutionary Psychology aims to provide insights into Human Nature:

GOOD STORY WELL TOLD - "Good story" means something worth telling that the world wants to hear. Finding this is your lonely task. It begins with talent. You must be born with the creative power to put things together in a way no one has ever dreamed. Then you must bring to the work a vision that's driven by fresh insights into human nature and society, coupled with in-depth knowledge of your characters and your world (McKee 1997, pp. 20-1).

**Human Nature** in the doxa is examined separately below (in section 6.1.15) but the above quote suggests McKee implies that “good story” and “human nature” are related; “good” story in the above would appear to mean “creative” (or novel and appropriate).

Meanwhile Snyder (2005) provides advice on movie story *Premise* creation that can be seen to be close to the standard definition of creativity, namely appropriate and novel:

*Give Me The Same Thing, Only Different!* - To quote the studio executive who first blurted out this rule to me, Sam Goldwyn-like, during a development meeting: "Give me the same thing... only different!" Bless his pointy little head. In every aspect of creation - from the idea, to the way characters speak, to the scenes themselves - putting a fresh spin on it (whatever "it" is) is what we do every day. But to know how to avoid the cliché, to know what tradition you are pushing forward, begins with knowing what that tradition is. A full-fledged knowledge of hundreds of movies, and especially those which your movie is like, is required... Movies are intricately made emotion machines. They are Swiss watches of precise gears and spinning wheels that make them tick. You have to be able to take them apart and put them back together again. In the dark. In your sleep. And your knowledge of a few movies you like is not enough. It is also not enough to know all the movies of the past five years. You have to go
back, see the lineage of many types of movies, know what movie
begat what in the line of succession, and how the art was advanced by
each (Snyder 2005, pp. 21-2).

The above advice also correlates with “internalizing the system” (Csikszentmihalyi
1996, pp. 47-50) or an individual absorbing as much domain knowledge as is possible
including its “rules” and the expectations and standards of the field - including those of
the audience and critics in that domain - before being able to create an artifact that is
judged to be creative by the field in that domain. In the case of movies this would be a
creative screenplay judged worthy of financing and making as a movie and ideally
resulting in a movie that the mass audience also then judged as creative.

There is also evidence of the creative problem-solution model in Snyder’s (2005)
screenwriting manual:

The chief source of "the problem" - a person or thing - must be
dispatched completely for the new world order to exist. And again,
think of all the examples in the movies you've screened of how this is
true. The finale is where a new society is born. It's not enough for the
hero to triumph, he must change the world. The finale is where it
happens. And it must be done in an emotionally satisfying way
(Snyder 2005, p. 90).

This concept could be seen to correlate with how creative people can solve “discovered”
or “presented” problems in a domain of knowledge (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, pp. 83-95).

Truby (2007) highlights the plot-structure doxa via his 22 story steps which he suggests
should not hamper the writer’s creativity but rather suggesting that these 22 constraints
can allow different kinds of creative solutions:

The twenty-two steps are not a formula for writing. Instead they
provide the scaffolding you need to do something really creative and
know that it will work as your story unfolds organically. Similarly,
don't get hung up on the number twenty-two. A story may have more
or fewer than twenty-two steps, depending on its type and length.
Think of a story as an accordion. It is limited only in how much it can
contract. It must have no fewer than the seven steps, because that is
the least number of steps in an organic story (Truby 2007, pp. 268-9).

As noted earlier Truby’s seven (and expanded 22) steps appear to have analogues in the
Philosophy and Science of Biology namely how all life-forms solve problems of
survival and reproduction.400 Thus it is unsurprising if these story structures do indeed

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400 For details, see: 'The Monomyth as Creative-Problem-Solving' (Velikovsky, 2013b):
resonate with humans as they are biological-psychological-socio-cultural units constantly involved in and adapted to problem-solving. Truby (2007) also criticizes an old outdated (Romantic) creative myth about writing:

You should always write first for yourself; write what you care about. But you shouldn’t write only for yourself. One of the biggest mistakes writers make is to fall into the trap of either-or thinking: either I write what I care about, or I write what will sell. This is a false distinction, born of the old romantic notion of writing in a garret and suffering for your art (Truby 2007, p. 36).

In summation the doxa on Creativity in the manuals appears to converge on many findings in the scientific study of creativity in the domains of Psychology and Social Psychology since the 1950s. This is possibly due to sheer force of numbers in the manual authors observing and teaching what tends to work for students of writing. However the broader screenwriting doxa might be more effective if it consciously and more consistently integrated the scientific findings on creativity into the doxa in order to enable screenwriters to maximize their own creativity. As noted in the Literature Review while Peter Bloore’s PhD by prior publication (Bloore, 2014) resulted in Bloore’s (2013) The Screenplay Business which admirably integrates much extant scientific research on creativity into the management of the screenwriting process, (Bloore 2013) is not a screenwriting manual and thus may take considerable time to filter out into and influence the dominant screenwriting doxa.401

6.1.15 On ‘Human Nature’ (doxa)

The earlier Literature Review chapter Section 4.5.2 briefly summarizes Evolutionary Psychology, a scientific domain of knowledge about how the human mind works and the key goal of which since its official foundation as a domain of scientific knowledge in 1992 is to map universal Human Nature.402 A key principle of Evolutionary Psychology is that if biology is evolutionary then the psychology of biological organisms including humans is also evolutionary as was suggested by Charles Darwin on the final page of On The Origin of Species (1859).

401 Assuming also that this rational knowledge on creativity is not resisted by members of the screenwriting field with pervasive Romantic conceptions of creativity as is critiqued in (Sawyer 2012).
402 See the Literature Review Section 4.5.2 for details, but the key quote is “The long-term scientific goal towards which evolutionary psychologists are working is the mapping of our universal human nature” (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005, p. 5).
The screenwriting doxa examined in this study however does not refer to extant knowledge in Evolutionary Psychology on Human Nature instead often using the term “human nature” without defining it and thus appealing to “common sense” or folk psychology assumptions about Human Nature. This is also most likely a symptom of the “Two Cultures” problem (Snow 1959) whereby Science and The Arts are seen as separate domains of knowledge.403

Below is a selected key quote from each modern-era screenwriting manual which uses or implies the terms “human nature” or else the concept of human universals.

In discussing the importance of attracting and maintaining audience attention - and how action illuminates character within the opening sex-and-then-murder scene of the erotic-thriller genre movie Basic Instinct (1992) - Field (1979/2005) suggests that the nature of drama is to illuminate the universals of human nature:

This incident - the murder - and the story of a cop giving in to his temptations epitomize the illumination of character and incident. Remember Henry James: ”What is character but the determination of incident? And what is incident but the illumination of character?” You can't reveal a character dramatically (or comedically) unless you have him/her react to a particular incident; the nature of drama, after all, is to show the universal connection between all humans, regardless of race, color, gender, or cultural differences (Field 2005, p. 129).


McKee (1997) also frequently uses the term “human nature” (pp. 15, 21, 99, 107, 122, 143, 249, 317, 347, 375) and although citing medieval scholarship (as opposed to scientific knowledge from say Evolutionary Psychology) McKee points out that human nature “doesn’t date”:

To discuss psychology, medieval scholarship devised another ingenious conceit: the Mind Worm. Suppose a creature had the power to burrow into the brain and come to know an individual completely - dreams, fears, strength, weakness. Suppose that this Mind Worm also had the power to cause events in the world. It could then create a specific happening geared to the unique nature of that person that would trigger a one-of-a-kind adventure, a quest that would force him to use himself to the limit, to live to his deepest and fullest. Whether a tragedy or fulfilment, this quest would reveal his humanity absolutely.

403 As noted in the Introduction chapter, Wilson’s Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge (1998) and the knowledge domain of Evocriticism aims to solve this ‘two cultures’ problem.
Reading that I had to smile, for the writer is a Mind Worm. We too burrow into a character to discover his aspects, his potential, then create an event geared to his unique nature - the Inciting Incident. For each protagonist it's different - for one perhaps finding a fortune, for another losing a fortune - but we design the event to fit the character, the precise happening needed to send him on a quest that reaches the limits of his being. Like the Mind Worm, we explore the inscape of human nature, expressed in poetic code. For as centuries pass, nothing changes within us. As William Faulkner observed, human nature is the only subject that doesn't date (pp. 374-5).

Knowledge from Evolutionary Psychology would suggest that Human Nature was primarily shaped during the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness (the EEA) over deep evolutionary time and primarily in the Pleistocene Era although evolution constantly continues (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005, p. 22). 404 Thus if Human Nature does indeed date then it appears to do so very slowly.

By comparison Snyder (2005) explicitly uses the term “human nature” when prescribing the doxa of a specific movie Genre he terms the “Whydunit” story type:

Whydunit - We all know that evil lurks in the hearts of men. Greed happens. Murder happens. And unseen evildoers are responsible for it all. But the "who" is never as interesting as the "why." Unlike the Golden Fleece, a good Whydunit isn't about the hero changing, it's about the audience discovering something about human nature they did not think was possible before the "crime" was committed and the "case" began. Like Citizen Kane, a classic Whydunit, the story is about seeking the innermost chamber of the human heart and discovering something unexpected, something dark and often unattractive, and the answer to the question: Why? (Snyder 2005, p. 36).


I have used the term "primal" throughout this book. To me it is my touchstone both in creating a script and fixing it once it's done… Does your plot hinge on primal drives like survival, hunger, sex, protection of loved ones, or fear of death? At the root of anyone's goal in a movie must be something that basic, even if on its surface it seems to be about something else. By making what drives your characters more primal, you'll not only ground everything that happens in principles

404 See also (Lee 2015, online): http://bigthink.com/daylight-atheism/evolution-is-still-happening-beneficial-mutations-in-humans
405 (See: Section 4.5.2 of the Literature Review above)
406 For this caveman comprehension-level question, see also: Snyder (2005, pp. 26, 30, 34, 56, 160, 190).
that connect in a visceral way, you also make it easier to sell your story all over the world (Snyder 2005, p. 158).

Knowledge from the domain of Evolutionary Psychology and from Evocriticism\textsuperscript{407} would suggest Snyder’s intuition is probably right. Snyder goes on to point out the key “primal drives” in various “hit” movie stories:

Here are primal drives in the storylines of a few hit movies:

> The desire to save one's family (Die Hard)
> The desire to protect one's home (Home Alone)
> The desire to find a mate (Sleepless in Seattle)
> The desire to exact revenge (Gladiator)
> The desire to survive (Titanic)

Each of these is about a primal need that might be better seen as a biological need, the prime directive. The desire to win the lottery is, in fact, the desire to have more food, more wives, make more children, to be able to reproduce at will. The desire for revenge is, in fact, the desire to knock off a competing DNA carrier and propel your own DNA forward. The desire to find one's parent or child is the desire to shore up and defend existing DNA and survive. You may think your story is about something more "sophisticated" than this; it's not. At its core it must be about something that resonates at a caveman level. All together now: When in doubt ask, "Is It Primal?" (Snyder 2005, pp. 158-60).

Snyder (2005) also refers to “human nature” on (pp. 36, 88, 158-60, 189-90).

Truby (2007) also implies that illuminating human nature via story is the key problem of screenwriting:

If you want to become a master storyteller, and maybe even get paid to be one, you run up against tremendous obstacles. For one thing, showing the how and why of human life is a monumental job. You have to have a deep and precise understanding of the biggest, most complex subject there is (Truby 2009, p. 3).

Truby (2007) also notes the following about human universals in movie fiction:

Archetypes are fundamental psychological patterns within a person… Because they are basic to all human beings, they cross cultural boundaries and have universal appeal (Truby 2007, p. 67).

A character is a fictional self, created to show simultaneously how each human being is totally unique in an unlimited number of ways but at the same time always and forever human, with features we all share (Truby 2007, p. 78).

\textsuperscript{407} (See: Section 4.5.2 of the above Literature Review chapter)
Truby thus refers to concepts of human nature or human universals on (pp. 3, 6-7, 9, 16, 67, 78, 245, 266, 421).

In summary the four manuals variously refer to “human nature” and human universals or else “primal” human desires, wants and needs. All these concepts are also studied in the domain of Evolutionary Psychology and Human Behavioural Ecology dating from (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992) and it appears that the screenwriting doxa mostly uses folk psychology and thus could benefit by importing and integrating findings from Evolutionary Psychology, Cognitive Science and Evocriticism on Human Nature.408

Other studies of `canonical versus archive` biocultural artifacts such as novels, songs, plays, poems, television, videogames may help to delineate this consilient emerging picture of Human Nature contributing to the unity, reliability and usefulness of what are currently mostly-separate knowledge domains in the Arts and Sciences. Consilient Evocriticism409 appears to suggest some fruitful ways that this unity of knowledge might be achieved, possibly with key benefits for the screenwriting doxa and its accuracy and thus ultimately potentially benefiting movie screenwriters.

### 6.2 SUMMARY OF DOXA DATA ANALYSIS

In overview there were fifteen screenwriting categories which were coded through four contemporary screenwriting manuals (Field 1979/2005; McKee 1997; Snyder 2005; Truby 2007).

The key quotes provided above suggest a consensus on definitions of *Premise*; *Character*; and also *Plot* (as a chain of cause-and-effect events) although each manual prescribes a different plot template; and also various heuristics for “good” and “bad” screenplay/movie *Dialogue*.

All four of the manuals recommend *Character Arcs* for the protagonist; Snyder further suggests that all characters in the movie story should have arcs.

As for *Structure*, three of the manuals prescribe “three acts” as a structural requirement of a movie screenplay although Truby (2007) convincingly dismisses it.

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408 The screenwriting doxa aside, (Bordwell, 2012, online) also rightly suggests that Film Studies has benefitted from E. O. Wilson’s (1998) version of consilience.

409 (Section 4.5.1, in the above Literature Review)
The manuals examined also define, describe and explain the dramatic workings of: *Genre; Story Setting (Spatial);* and *Story Setting (Temporal)* but none offer heuristics on specific characteristics of these story elements that are more (or, less) likely to result in the success of a movie story with that specific trait.

Examination of the four manuals suggests a consensus around *Screenplay Length* and *Number of Scenes* ranging from 90 to 120 pages and from 40 to 70 scenes; though Snyder suggests 110 rather than 120 pages.

The manuals show no overall consensus on the definition of: *Theme; on Creativity; or on Human Nature;* although all either directly discuss or imply these concepts.

In terms of their evident methodologies for arriving at the above prescriptions none of the manuals overtly use empirically-derived datasets or research or statistics on movie performance but instead use illustrative examples and rhetorical argument.

This concludes the analysis of the data from the four screenwriting manuals that comprise part of the doxa (orthodoxy) of screenwriting.

The following section is a *Data Analysis* of the Top and Bottom 20 RoI Movies in light of the 15 key elements coded for in the doxa - namely the categories of movie story: *Premise, Theme, Genre, Setting (Spatial), Setting (Temporal), Plot, Character, Character 'Arcs', Structure, Dialogue, Duration / Length, Number of Scenes, Dramatic principles, Creativity, and, Human Nature.*
6.3 OVERVIEW - TOP AND BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIE CHARACTERISTICS

The top and bottom 20 RoI movie lists are again presented below, followed by an analysis of key characteristics. (The Hollywood movies are again in **bold** text below.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PRODUCTION BUDGET</th>
<th>GLOBAL TICKET SALES</th>
<th><code>STORY POWER</code></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$196,681,656</td>
<td>13.11:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>$99,750,000</td>
<td>49.9:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
<td>$248,300,000</td>
<td>41.4:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td>$2,041,928</td>
<td>292.1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>$114,000</td>
<td>$30,000,000</td>
<td>263:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$225,000,000</td>
<td>225:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>$325,000</td>
<td>$70,000,000</td>
<td>215:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>$777,000</td>
<td>$140,000,000</td>
<td>180:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>$27,000</td>
<td>$3,894,240</td>
<td>144:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$18,997,174</td>
<td>127:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$46,140,956</td>
<td>115:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
<td>$55,116,982</td>
<td>110:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$550,000</td>
<td>$59,754,601</td>
<td>109:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
<td>$10,096,245</td>
<td>86:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td>$565,846</td>
<td>81:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>$375,000</td>
<td>$29,460,000</td>
<td>78:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>$10,500,000</td>
<td>$79,210,554</td>
<td>76:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>$256,900,000</td>
<td>73:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>$11,000,000</td>
<td>$797,900,000</td>
<td>73:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$353,900,000</td>
<td>71:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6-2 – The Top 20 RoI Movies and their `Story-Power’ (or `Benefit / Cost’ ratio)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PRODUCTION BUDGET</th>
<th>GLOBAL TICKET SALES</th>
<th>`STORY POWER’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen's Men</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$15,000,000</td>
<td>$22,723</td>
<td>1:660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$19,716</td>
<td>1:507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>$9,871</td>
<td>1:355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$7,000,000</td>
<td>$46,488</td>
<td>1:151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$5,500,000</td>
<td>$56,653</td>
<td>1:97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$9,500,000</td>
<td>$118,482</td>
<td>1:80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$83,356</td>
<td>1:60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>$2,000,000</td>
<td>$37,227</td>
<td>1:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>$17,000,000</td>
<td>$364,607</td>
<td>1:47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$241,719</td>
<td>1:41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$50,000,000</td>
<td>$1,250,617</td>
<td>1:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$12,000,000</td>
<td>$310,946</td>
<td>1:39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$290,875</td>
<td>1:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$295,750</td>
<td>1:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$10,000,000</td>
<td>$312,857</td>
<td>1:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$20,000,000</td>
<td>$643,024</td>
<td>1:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>$113,783</td>
<td>1:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$55,000,000</td>
<td>$1,807,990</td>
<td>1:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$3,000,000</td>
<td>$101,773</td>
<td>1:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come with the Rain</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$18,000,000</td>
<td>$627,422</td>
<td>1:29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6-3 – The Bottom 20 RoI Movies and their absence of `Story-Power’**
Turning now to the top and bottom 20 RoI movie characteristics, the two tables below represent an overview of the key characteristics derived from a direct content analysis of the top and bottom 20 RoI movies. The research involved a close reading (direct content analysis) of the movies in the study dataset and additional research using extra-textual sources where noted later in the chapter (for example on DVD-Extras).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>TOP 20 ROI MOVIE CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story Premise</td>
<td>&quot;Premise&quot; is also a problematic (terminologically inconsistent) term in the examined doxa. However, unsurprisingly, all top 20 RoI movies feature a protagonist(s) with a problem(s) that is 'resolved' by the end. (‘Resolved’ as used here does not necessarily mean ‘solved’; it may mean death for the protagonist.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>&quot;Theme&quot; is also a problematic (ill-defined) term in the doxa. Yet the movies under study can arguably be seen to feature both Field’s (2005) and Snyder’s (2005) conceptions of it, but at the 14% mark. See also Results and Discussion chapter and Appendix, re: ‘Evolutionary Themes’ in the movies of the dataset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Notably, 8 of the top 20 RoI are Horror genre movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (Spatial)</td>
<td>The settings of the top 20 RoI movies are: the US (75%), Australia (5%), Ireland (Dublin) (5%), the UK (Sheffield) (5%), Mexico (5%), and outer space (5%). Also, 60% (12/20) of the top 20 movies primarily feature urban settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (Temporal)</td>
<td>17 of the top 20 RoI movies are set in the present; one is set 10 years prior, one 'a long time ago', and one in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Arguably 17 top 20 RoI movies are ‘Villain Triumphant’ stories, which means the protagonists do not ‘solve’ their story ‘problem’ at the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>The lead characters in highest RoI movies are notably ‘young’ (in their 20s and 30s), villains are usually ten years older.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character 'Arcs'</td>
<td>Notably, in 6 of the top 20 RoI, all of the protagonists die: Paranormal Activity, The Blair Witch Project, Open Water, Night of the Living Dead, SAW, The Evil Dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI movies can be seen to have ‘3 Acts’, but arguably so do all movies, whether successful or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>19 of the top 20 RoI are English-language movies; one is Spanish (El Mariachi).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration/Length</td>
<td>The duration range of Top 20 RoI movies is from 77 to 121 minutes, but the average length is 93 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Scenes</td>
<td>The average Number of Scenes in a top 20 RoI movie is 119.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Dramatic principles’</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI movies feature ‘conflict’ (protagonists, solving problems) and, agonistic structure (i.e., protagonists vs. antagonists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On creativity</td>
<td>Interestingly, all top 20 RoI involve writer-hyphenates (a writer-director, and/or writer-producer, and/or, writer-actor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On 'human nature'</td>
<td>Arguably all top 20 feature ‘primality’ themes (Snyder 2007), and thus depict ‘human nature’ or human Evolutionary Psychology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6-4 – Observed Top 20 RoI Movie Story Characteristics*
As the table above indicates certain elements of top 20 RoI movies differ from the current screenwriting doxa. These differences are examined in detail below after the bottom 20 RoI movies are also examined for the same 15 key elements in the doxa.

Below then is the summary table of the findings for the bottom 20 RoI movie characteristics in light of the fifteen screenwriting doxa elements coded for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIE CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story Premise</td>
<td>‘Premise’ is also a problematic (terminologically inconsistent) term in the examined doxa. All bottom 20 RoI movies feature a clear premise, or: a protagonist(s) with a problem(s) that is ‘resolved’ by the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Theme’ is also a problematic (ill-defined) term in the doxa, yet the bottom 20 RoI movies can arguably be seen to feature all four screenwriting manuals’ various conceptions of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Notably, 12 of the bottom 20 RoI are ‘Drama’ genre movies, 7/20 are partly or wholly in the ‘Drama-Comedy’ aka the ‘Dramedy’ genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (Spatial)</td>
<td>The geographical settings are 75% USA (15/20); Norway 5% (1/20); China 5% (1/20); USA, Philippines, Hong Kong 5% (1/20), Russia 5% (1/20), Germany/UK 5% (1/20). The setting types are dominated by ‘Urban’ settings (13/20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (Temporal)</td>
<td>14 of the bottom 20 RoI movies are set in the Present Day; 5/20 are set in the past, and one set in the ‘near future’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Arguably none of the bottom 20 RoI movies are ‘Villain Triumphant’ stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>The lead characters in lowest RoI movies are notably ‘middle aged’ (in their 30s and 40s). Three feature younger protagonists (20s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character ‘Arcs’</td>
<td>One of the protagonists dies (the son, in World’s Greatest Dad). All protagonists can be seen to have ‘character arc’ in the bottom 20 RoI movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>All have ‘3 Acts’, but arguably so do all movies, whether unsuccessful or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>19 of the 20 movies are English-language movies; one is in Chinese (A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration/Length</td>
<td>The duration ranges from 82 to 145 minutes, and the average length is 102 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Scenes</td>
<td>The average number of scenes was not determined; however the number-one Loss-on-Investment movie (All The Queen’s Men) has 182 scenes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Dramatic principles’</td>
<td>All feature ‘conflict’ (protagonists, solving problems) and agonistic structure (i.e., protagonists vs. antagonists).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On creativity</td>
<td>Interestingly, 16 of the 20 movies involve writer-hyphenates (a writer-director, and/or writer-producer, and/or, writer-actor).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On ‘human nature’</td>
<td>Arguably all bottom 20 RoI movies feature ‘primal’ story themes (Snyder 2007), and thus depict ‘human nature’ or human Evolutionary Psychology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-5 – Observed Bottom 20 RoI Movie Story Characteristics
Villain Triumphant stories do not dominate the bottom 20 RoI movie stories but instead Hero Triumphant stories (these protagonists do satisfactorily “solve” their key story problem by the story’s end).

A comparison of the above two datasets of top and bottom RoI movies results in a list of Common Elements across both these RoI sets and might merely be considered as “characteristics of movies” whether successful or not. Also specified in a comparative table are: Differences In The Top 20 and Bottom 20 RoI Movie Datasets.

Human Nature at the cinema box-office rejected (deselected) the bottom 20 RoI movies and was attracted to the top 20 RoI in large numbers. In light of the Anna Karenina Principle it would appear that the key reasons for being attracted to or repelled by a movie can also be various and unique. In the case of the movies judged to be “good” (liked) by the audience the parts of the movie story appear to combine in a complex configurational manner resulting in an emergent whole story that is liked by audiences. In the case of movies judged as bad many or even all of the parts may be flawed resulting overall in a mass rejection of or indifference to that movie story at the cinema box-office.

6.3.1 Story Premises (RoI Movies)

The premises of the 40 extremes of RoI movies appear in Appendix sections 10-3 - Story Premises of the Top 20 RoI Movies (IMDb.Com) and in 10-4 - Story Premises of the Bottom 20 RoI Movies (IMDb.Com).

The next two sections present an analysis of these premises in view of the current doxa prescriptions of the four screenwriting manuals. Subsequently, comparisons are made between these top and bottom 20 story Premises (as two whole sets) in the light of Evolutionary Psychology knowledge on Human Nature; namely whether these specific movie story Premises’ subjects, topics and ideas appear to be of greater or lesser value in attracting human attention to cinemas in order to experience that movie story, and

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410 See: Table 10-1 – Commonalities and Differences in Top and Bottom 20 RoI movie datasets, across 15 elements of the screenwriting doxa (in the Appendix, below).
411 To quote from the movie Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969): “What we have here is a failure to communicate.”
412 (as sourced from IMDb.com, accessed 12th December 2015)
413 Clearly there are alternate ways of phrasing a movie story Premise within a Logline; for example Truby’s (2007) Premise (Logline) for Star Wars above - i.e. in Section 6.1.1 Story Premise (Doxa) - is worded differently to the IMDb.com version (see: Section 10-3, in the Appendix for the IMDb version).
maintaining that attention for the movie story duration. This is to emphasize as a general heuristic that a movie story Premise should pique viewer interest in experiencing that movie story and the entire movie narrative that elaborates on that Premise in the screenplay should also appear likely to maintain mass audience attention.

6.3.1.1 Analysis – The Top 20 RoI Movie Premises

The structure, form and content of the top 20 RoI movie premises each adhere in general to the doxa guidelines. Snyder (2005, p. 188) for example observes that classic Premise structure is: [adjective + hero] + [adjective + antagonist] + [hero’s primal goal].

Interestingly three of the top 20 RoI movie premises - at least as they are phrased (sourced from IMDb.com) do not sound particularly interesting, suggesting that they might not necessarily attract viewer-attention; namely those for American Graffiti, Clerks and Primer. These story premises would hardly be considered ‘high-concept’ but instead ‘slice-of-life’ namely they sound like ordinary and even boring movie story situations. The entertaining and engaging comedy tone, mood and atmosphere of both of the movies American Graffiti and Clerks is unduly compressed and thus is absent from their loglines/premises at least as these are stated on IMDb.

Likewise the Premise/Logline of the movie Primer (2004) - perhaps in aiming to avoid a “story spoiler” - omits what is the key high-concept audience “hook” of that story namely that: Two brilliant electronics engineers accidentally invent a time-machine in their garage; a story problem-situation which raises fascinating life-changing and life-threatening ethical and moral issues including: human temporal clones and variations on The Grandfather Paradox in time-travel narratives.

414 See: Section 10-3 in the Appendix below.
415 This algorithm of Snyder’s (2005) correlates conceptually with Gottschall (2012)’s algorithm that Story = [character] + [problem] + [attempted extrication].
416 See Section 10-3 in the Appendix below for these IMDb Loglines.
417 For readers unfamiliar with the narrative problems raised by time-travel stories, explanations of the infamous ‘Grandfather Paradox’ as encountered in science fiction stories include for example (Deutsch & Lockwood, 1994, p. 68); see also: O’Connell, 2016, online). In Primer it is Abe and Aaron’s time-travelling earlier selves (and their doubles) and not their grandfathers who are the issue but this is essentially the same narrative problem for any storyteller of a time-travel story. It is possible that Primer is the most intelligent and realistic time-travel film yet made, noting for example: http://www.sparknotes.com/mindhut/2013/06/20/primer-understanding-the-most-complicated-sci-fi-movie-ever-made and that the film also won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival.
Similarly if the Genres of the movie stories are not also indicated (e.g. “Comedy”) then Premises such as that of the #20 RoI movie My Big Fat Greek Wedding - despite its obvious inherent conflict - also sound unremarkable as phrased on IMDb although the movie title obviously implies its comedic tone. Some story premises/loglines are also phrased as two sentences instead of one in cases where the complexity of the story setup results in a single-sentence logline becoming awkwardly expressed.

As it is expressed on IMDb, the Premise for Halloween frames the villain (a serial killer) as the story protagonist thus being an inversion of the typical [hero], [antagonist], [problem/goal] structural order of a story premise. However Hollywood screenwriter Steven de Souza in Reflections of the Shadow: Creating Memorable Heroes and Villains for Film and TV (Hirschberg 2009) asserts:

…in film, the protagonist is the character who gets the ball rolling. In Jaws, the protagonist is the shark. In Die Hard, it’s Hans Gruber (de Souza in Hirschberg, 2009, p. 158).

In general terms with regard to Human Nature (from Evolutionary Psychology) story subject-matters which should in theory attract human audience-attention are clearly evident in the majority of the Premises of the above top 20 RoI movies. The “survival” issues inherent in the story concepts and plot events of the top 20 RoI premises include: “demonic presence”; “murdered by a motorcycle gang”; “students go missing”; “murderous criminal”; “bloodthirsty zombies”; “psychotic murderer”; “stranded in shark-infested waters”; “stalked and murdered by an unknown assailant”; “serial killer... survive and win the deadly game”; “flesh-possessing demons”, “stranded extra-terrestrial”; and “a planet-destroying Death Star”.419

Human Nature issues of reproduction (mating and family) in the top 20 RoI premises include the story elements of: an engaged couple, Micah and Katie; Mad Max's wife and son (who are also murdered); in The Blair Witch Project, Josh notes his girlfriend will

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418 The IMDb premise: `Halloween (1978)` – A psychotic murderer institutionalized since childhood for the murder of his sister, escapes and stalks a bookish teenage girl and her friends while his doctor chases him through the streets’ (IMDb, 1990-2016g).

419 In Applied Evolutionary Psychology (Roberts 2012), De Backer notes the human negativity bias: “…we are much more drawn to negative than to positive or neutral information (Taylor 1991) and it is more accurately retained (Ito et al 1998)... To explain this ‘negativity bias’, Rozin and Royzman (2001) have argued that humans and animals possess innate predispositions to learn faster how to escape danger than to improve well-being… missing opportunities to learn how to avoid extremely dangerous situations can be extremely costly, even fatal. This explains our extra interest in negative sensational news; one is more likely to be drawn into a [television] programme where violent murder has just been committed compared to one where someone has just been promoted to a function that will improve his quality of life.” (De Backer, 2012, p. 353).
be worried by his absence; *El Mariachi* features a love story between the Mariachi (musician) and Domino; *Night of the Living Dead* includes a married couple and their child in the farmhouse basement; *Rocky* includes a love story with Adrienne; in *Halloween* the teenaged girls discuss ‘boys’ and boyfriends and some have sex; *American Graffiti* also features numerous couples and some traumatic breakups; *Clerks* centres around Dante's formerly sexually-promiscuous girlfriend; *Once* is a (tragic) love story; *Napoleon Dynamite* includes a love story featuring Napoleon and Deb; *Open Water* is about a bickering engaged couple; *Friday the 13th* involves sexually-active young-adult camp counsellors; *SAW* touches on a doctor’s marital problems; *Primer* features the protagonists' romantic partners; *The Evil Dead* likewise includes couples and focusses on Ash's romance with Linda; *E.T.* includes the mother's marital separation issues; *The Full Monty* includes the unemployed men's romantic partners and Gaz is aiming to raise child-support payments; *Star Wars* includes a romance in Luke and Han competition for Leia’s attentions, and the plot of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is centred on issues of mating including problems of mate-selection and child-rearing. In terms of the philosophical and scientific question of “What does it mean to be human?” these canonical movies generally depict human universals in terms of normative Human Nature (as understood via Evolutionary Psychology) and partially explains why they were also selected by Human Nature at the cinema box office.420

The top two RoI premises - namely for *Paranormal Activity* and *Mad Max* - also most clearly bring into relief the Human Nature themes of: survival (life-and-death stakes) reproduction (family) and revenge (retributive justice).

However as we shall see below in examining the Bottom 20 RoI story premises / loglines such obvious Human Nature “themes” or topics are - by themselves - not enough; they may well be necessary-but-not-sufficient because attracting audience attention with an intriguing or startling story *Premise* and then also maintaining it for around two hours within the unfolding movie story itself are two separate though obviously related issues.

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420 In broad terms the common elements in these narratives are the universal human: “problems of mating: selecting, attracting and retaining a mate and performing the needed sexual behaviour required for successful reproduction” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 65). The other part of the broader explanation for these movies’ success is that they adhere to the Anna Karenina principle in both their conception and execution.
In these terms *pace* Maras (2009) movie story concepts and their execution can sometimes fruitfully be regarded as separate because a compelling, original and/or “high” concept can be executed either in the screenplay in a flawed way - or else in the movie in a flawed way (or both); the screenplay for Bottom 20 RoI movie *All Good Things* appeared on the 2007 *Blacklist*. In other words despite being a “most-liked” screenplay by the surveyed Intermediaries (various Hollywood gatekeepers) of the Blacklist, the screen idea for *All Good Things* resulted in a bottom 20 RoI movie once that screenplay was converted to a movie. Thus as per the Anna Karenina Principle - and as with survival in general due to hazards, pitfalls, and selection pressures in both biology and for biocultural artifacts - it appears there are many more ways to fail than there are to succeed.

With the above Anna Karenina Principle in mind, the *Premises* of the bottom 20 RoI movies (biggest money-losing movies) as sourced from IMDb appear in Section 10-4 in the Appendix.

### 6.3.1.2 Analysis – The Bottom 20 RoI Movie Premises

On analysis the bottom 20 RoI movie loglines as sourced from IMDb can obviously be interpreted as story *Premises*. In form, style and content these appear closest to both Truby’s (2007) and Snyder’s (2005) formal descriptions of a movie *Premise*.

On the one hand - as with the top 20 RoI movies - many of these bottom 20 RoI movie story *Premises* contain attention-grabbing subject-matter involving the key evolutionary elements of survival, reproduction and revenge, namely: a dangerous undercover mission in WWII Nazi Germany (*All The Queen’s Men*); a police investigation of a series of bloody murders (*Taxman*); a lost suitcase full of cash pursued by gangsters (*Ca$h*); a suspicious death (*Fascination*); the biggest bank heist in the mafia's history (*This Thing of Ours*); a porn star developing her own reality-TV project (*Southland Tales*); New York City's hellish underworld (*Edmond*); a monstrous alien predator (*Outlander*); a man's scheme to murder his adulterous wife and her lover (*A Woman, A...

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422 See Section 10-4 in the Appendix below.

423 And thus likewise generally adhere to Gottschall’s (2012) algorithm of ‘Story = [character] + [problem] + [attempted extrication]’ (Gottschall 2012, p. 52).
Gun and a Noodle Shop); a forged suicide note (World’s Greatest Dad); a strange man suspected of murdering his wife (All Good Things); rehab-clinic patients being serial murdered (Eye See You) and the mysteriously-missing son of a billionaire (I Come With The Rain). In short there is indeed much to attract human attention here particularly via morbid curiosity and the human ‘negativity bias’ from Evolutionary Psychology.

However yet again with the Anna Karenina Principle squarely in mind we might ask if any patterns emerging in the bottom 20 RoI Premises of these decidedly non-socially-contagious movie stories cluster might also inherently be off-putting for audiences due to their story subject-matter, given knowledge on Human Nature from Evolutionary Psychology.

One pattern that emerges in bottom 20 RoI movies is the prevalence of gangster-related stories including the mafia (i.e., Taxman; Ca$h; Harvard Man; This Thing Of Ours). The aversion of primates to bullies (antagonists who attain social dominance) is well documented in Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior (Boehm, 1999). Despite the canonical success of certain mafia movie stories it appears that in general it is a hard problem to engender audience empathy for members of the mob particularly when they are the protagonists in a story, or unless they meet with some kind of satisfyingly sticky end in the story.

Likewise other potentially depressing and thus off-putting story situations in the Bottom 20 RoI include: suicide (Imaginary Heroes; Welcome to the Rileys; World’s Greatest Dad); problems of addiction (Eye See You; The Gambler); marital infidelity (A Woman, A Gun, and a Noodle Shop; Imaginary Heroes); and the devastating loss of a child (World’s Greatest Dad; Imaginary Heroes; Welcome To The Rileys).

Part of the problem for some of these bottom 20 RoI movie stories appears to be that even conceptually on the level of the individual story Premise many of them inherently

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424 Buss (2012) notes: “A fascinating study of 736 front-page newspaper stories from eight countries over a 300-year time period (1700 to 2001) revealed remarkable uniformity of content (Davis & McLeod, 2003)... The content across time and cultures revealed attention to these key themes: death (accidental or natural), murder or physical assault, robbery, reputation, heroism or altruism, suicide, marital problems such as infidelity, harm or injury to offspring, abandoned or destitute family, taking a stand or fighting back, and rape or sexual assault. The fact that these historically and cross-culturally recurrent themes correspond precisely to the topics covered throughout this textbook provides naturalistic evidence that human attention is specially targeted toward information content of maximal relevance for solving adaptive problems that have occurred for humans over deep time” (D. M. Buss, 2012, pp. 393-394).

425 Such as The Godfather trilogy and various classic “mob” genre movies directed by Martin Scorsese.
tend to sound like the opposite of fun. A problem of grief over family tragedy begins three of the Bottom 20 movies: in *Imaginary Heroes* a family is grieving the suicide of a teenage son and the story also involves depressing issues of domestic violence; in *Welcome To The Rileys* a family grieves their daughter’s death from a car crash; in *Winter Passing* a family grieves the death of the mother; and even in the black-comedy *World’s Greatest Dad* a father grieves the death of his annoying teenaged son in an autoerotic asphyxiation accident.

Many of these bottom 20 RoI movies are thus in the “Drama” genre. Recall Simonton (2011) on the unprofitability problem of the Drama movie genre: “Most moviegoers want light entertainment, not weighty entertainment. Laughs and thrills, not tears and deep sighs.” (Simonton, 2011, p. 82). Likewise both bottom 20 RoI movies *Eye See You* and *I Come With The Rain* feature serial killers but also include protagonists who appear to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder; the tone of such stories is closer to gruelling realism rather than thrilling and entertaining escapism. These can be seen less as problematic issues of (quantitative) story content (or conception) but more of problematic qualitative story type and style (thus narrative execution).

Ironically Jared and Jerusha Hess - as writer-hyphenate team - have one movie in the top 20 and another in the bottom 20 RoI list; namely *Napoleon Dynamite* in the top 20 and *Gentlemen Broncos* in the bottom 20. While *Gentlemen Broncos* can be viewed as a deeply funny and entertaining comedy in much the same style, tone and writers’ voice as *Napoleon Dynamite* in view of the Anna Karenina Principle it is possible that mass audiences do not care sufficiently about the problems of a young fiction-writer having his novel manuscript stolen at a writer’s festival to want to see a movie about it. The same potentially-absent empathy-factor for the hero’s problem-situation may also be at

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426 “Fun” in these terms means an enjoyable movie-story viewing experience or the ‘flow’ state, namely the audience achieving Narrative Transportation. For additional detail on Narrative Transportation Theory see also (Velikovsky, 2014a).

427 In the ‘how-to’ manual *Writing & Selling Drama Screenplays* (2014), Hay rightly notes “…too often, writers will mean the following when pitching their drama: ‘A miserable character leads a miserable life THEN DIES (or worse)!’” (Hay, 2014, p. 22). Unfortunately, this generally describes many plots of many Drama genre stories in the Bottom 20 RoI movie list, and thus, seems unlikely to attract and maintain attention, despite the obvious uses of schadenfreude for some audiences.

428 Vorderer and Roth (2011) refer to: “…Mares and Cantor’s (1992) notion that media users sometimes prefer negative if not even depressing portrayals of other peoples’ life in the media when it allows the viewers to compare themselves with these characters, which eventually leads to a more positive evaluation of their own situation” (Vorderer & Roth, 2011, p. 140). However many of the bottom 20 RoI movies appear to take this too far with the movie *Edmond* (2006) as an extreme case in point.
play in: the problems of a tax collector (*Taxman*); a Harvard basketball player (*Harvard Man*); and even the famous late nineteenth-century Russian novelist Dostoyevsky with a looming deadline for his novel (*The Gambler*). In short in these cases the mass cinema-going audience (*Human Nature en masse*) evidently was not interested.

As various (negative) aggregated movie critics’ review scores on *Metacritic* and *Rotten Tomatoes* also verify problems of story execution and issues in the complex configurational operation of the various elements of a movie story are also evident within many of the bottom 20 RoI movies. *Southland Tales, I Come With The Rain* and *Fascination* have obvious problems of story consistency and coherency, or else overly-complex and thus potentially confusing plots. With regard to these three movies in particular McKee’s (1997) caution applies:

> …the more ideas you try to pack into a story, the more they implode upon themselves, until the film collapses into a rubble of tangential notions, saying nothing (McKee 1997, p. 115).

In the Anna Karenina Principle, a movie only has to fail in *one single area* of the many potential areas where failure *can* occur, including in the story: premise, character, plot, structure, dialogue, themes, pacing, casting - and also in technical movie-making aspects such as the directing, cinematography, editing, sound and music. Added to this are audience Genre-expectation issues for example the problem of a Comedy that is not very funny (*All The Queen’s Men*) or a Thriller that is not very thrilling (*Eye See You*).

Bottom 20 RoI movie *Edmond* is an especially interesting case being written by the award-winning playwright and filmmaker David Mamet; the play and the movie are psychologically dark and occasionally very funny in following one man’s metaphorical descent into hell where he ultimately becomes everything that he fears including a homeless, criminal, homosexual - yet possibly as a story was *too* “dark” and confronting for mainstream cinema audiences. The movie might also cause many viewers to

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429 *Metacritic* ([http://www.metacritic.com](http://www.metacritic.com)) and *Rotten Tomatoes* ([http://www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com)) are well-known movie-review aggregators which compile published critics’ reviews of movies and thus arrive at a percentage score including web links to both the positive and negative reviews of movies. These are thus one way of arriving at an *estimated consensus* of the field - albeit the *movie critics* section of the field for the domain of cinema. As Simonton (2011) notes the critics’ ratings and the commercial performance of a movie show very little correlation; at the same time certain obvious flaws of a movie may become evident if more than one critic notes the same problem or problems with a specific movie.
challenge their own dearly-held beliefs and prejudices thus its lack of social contagion may be potentially due to many other possible flaws.  

In summary from the Evolutionary Psychology point of view given Human Nature en masse an examination of the premises of bottom 20 RoI movie stories might caution against: mafia-related stories; the Drama genre in general; and inherently-depressing or “emotional-downer” story subject-matter aiming for psychological realism.

On the other hand serial-killer stories are of course depressing or “emotional downer” subject-matter however the story creation and design (conception) and movie-making (execution) of such stories thus becomes important. There are four serial-killer movies in the top 20 RoI (The Blair Witch Project; Halloween; Friday the 13th; and SAW) and also two in the bottom 20 RoI (i.e., Eye See You and I Come With The Rain).

Furthermore literary adaptations of plays and novels would appear to be cautioned against for aspiring ‘high audience-reach / low story-cost’ movie-storytellers as there are five adaptations in the bottom 20 RoI movie set (i.e., Edmond; A Woman A Gun And a Noodle Shop; All Good Things; Eye See You and The Gambler) while by contrast there are no adaptations of novels or plays in the top 20 RoI movies.

The bottom 20 RoI movie story A Woman, A Gun, And a Noodle Shop is also an interesting and unusual case being a Chinese historical period-piece slapstick-comedy adaptation of the Coen brothers’ gangster movie Blood Simple (1984). Again this is a caution against movie stories primarily involving gangsters, the mob or hit-men. In short for such gangster movies it appears Human Nature in general prefers to see the “bad guys” lose and retributive justice prevail. It may also be the case that stories with subject-matter primarily involving gangsters as story protagonists (‘heroes’) are generally avoided in favour of other movie story types.

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430 Such as a character being a difficult role for an actor to play, inadequate casting and so on.
431 While Buss (2012) notes: “In all cultures, men are overwhelmingly more often the killers and the majority of their victims are other men” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 302), the female killers in top 20 RoI movies Friday the 13th, Paranormal Activity, The Blair Witch Project may have provided a novel yet appropriate (thus, creative) twist on the general audience’s expectation that the serial killer will be a male.
432 Nia Vardalos had already written a draft of the movie screenplay of My Big Fat Greek Wedding when performing her one-woman stand-up-comedy show which used much of the same comedy material and anecdotes drawn from her own life (Velikovsky, 2015).
433 (a loose ‘remake’)
434 Evolutionary Psychology suggests that primates (including humans) have evolved egalitarian social preferences and morality whereby dominant bullies or despots are preferably deposed or even assassinated by the wider social group (Boehm, 1999; R. Wright, 1995).
6.3.2 Themes (RoI Movies)

As noted in the above Doxa examination of Theme, “theme” is problematic as definitions or interpretations of what a Theme is in a movie story varies across screenplay manual authors including “Controlling Idea”, “Moral Argument” and so on.

As a proposed solution to such problems of conceptual and terminological differences in the use of the word “theme” in the doxa, if we adapt some of the ideas on Theme above and instead search for a thematic line of dialogue, on close viewing, at the 14% mark in duration of each of the top 20 RoI movies we can find a Thematic Trope which can be seen as foreshadowing “the shape of things to come” in the plot. This Thematic Trope that occurs at the 14% mark in screen time foreshadows how the movie story will end using dramatic irony.

In classical dramatic terms - and also in Joseph Campbell’s (1949) monomyth terms - this Thematic Trope can be seen as the “voice” of the Herald character.

Thus despite the lack of consensus and clarity on movie Theme in the doxa, one finding of this study is that the Theme of each of the top 20 RoI movies may be found in a line of dialogue (or a visual symbol) at the 14% mark of the movie - in other words on page / minute 12 of a 90 page/minute screenplay. This finding contrasts with Field’s (2005) prescription to state the Theme in dialogue on page 3 of the screenplay in dialogue, and Snyder’s (2007) prescription for same on page 5 of a screenplay. At the same time this also suggests the multiplicity of potential meanings in - and potential interpretations of - a movie and its specific Themes.

6.3.2.1 On Themes relating to Human Nature in the two RoI Movie datasets

As noted in Section 4.5 of the earlier Literature Review, Arts, Humanities and also Social Sciences research scholars in Evocriticism and its subdomain of Evolutionary

435 See Section 6.1.2 – Theme (doxa).
436 and given the visual nature of cinema - where possible, a symbolic image that also foreshadows the movie’s “moral of the story”
437 Table 10-2 ‘Thematic Trope and Movie RoI’ in the Appendix section below presents the analysis of these Thematic Tropes within each of the top 20 RoI movies.
438 or Vogler’s (1992)
439 This is not to suggest that the top 20 RoI movies are all a monomyth (classic ‘hero’s journey’) story structure and in fact many of them very clearly are not as the protagonists die in six of the top 20 RoI movie stories.
440 In Thematics: Interdisciplinary Studies (Louwerse & Peer, 2002) themes are examined from the various perspectives of discourse psychology, sociology, psychology, linguistics and literary studies; however not from a Film Studies perspective.
Psychology posit that Human Nature includes certain key values. These human values can be seen to focus around core issues of: survival (including avoiding injury or death), reproduction (issues around family, kinship and community) and revenge (issues around retributive justice) (D. Buss, 2015a, 2015b; D. M. Buss, 2005, 2012; Roberts, 2012; Workman & Reader, 2008).

In the screenwriting doxa while Field (1979/2005) refers to Theme more in terms of subject-matter, or else the depiction of cause-and-effect (Field 1979, 2005, pp. 49-50) McKee (1997) and Truby (2007) assert that plot events resulting from protagonist’s actions in a movie story should debate and demonstrate a moral or an ultimate meaning, correlating with how an Aesop’s Fable works.\(^{441}\) Truby (2007) refers to this Theme as a moral argument stating: “I don't refer to theme as subject matter. Theme is the author's view of how to act in the world. It is your moral vision” (Truby 2007, p. 108) and provides examples: “Good Versus Bad (e.g. Crocodile Dundee, Star Wars, The Terminator)” (Truby 2007, p.126).

McKee (1997) prefers to call Theme a “controlling idea”; in suggesting the theme of Survival Genre films McKee notes: “"The courage and genius of humanity will prevail over the hostility of Nature."” (McKee 1997, p. 125). In these terms all the “Survival” movies in both the top and bottom 20 RoI can be seen to have such a Theme or ‘controlling idea’.

In the screenwriting doxa Snyder (2005) repeatedly states the need for “primal” Themes (and story Premises) in successful movie stories. If Themes are taken to be merely recurring ideas then all the top 20 RoI movies have these three common core human Themes from Evolutionary Psychology and which characterize Human Nature or the human condition, namely What It Means To Be Human.\(^{442}\) This is not to suggest that these core Themes of Human Nature are solely what caused these top 20 RoI movies to be so socially contagious but instead demonstrates that many stories feature prominent evolutionary Themes, and also just how dense movie stories can be with potential meaning given the amount of story information in them.\(^{443}\) Many of the bottom 20 RoI

\(^{441}\) i.e. “Slow and steady wins the race”, in the case of the Aesop’s fable of The Hare and The Tortoise.

\(^{442}\) Section 10-5 - ‘Primal’ (or Evolutionary) Themes in the Top 20 RoI Movies in the Appendix provides an analysis of these three core Evolutionary Psychology themes (survival, reproduction and revenge) and how they can be seen to apply in each case for the top 20 RoI movies.

\(^{443}\) In other words since story premise and themes compete for human attention, the absence of Evolutionary Psychology themes may mean that most stories are deselected by writers and movie domain
movies also feature the same recurring Themes (ideas) of survival, reproduction and
revenge as these are clearly core values of Human Nature and thus their inclusion in any
movie story that is selected for production are highly likely but also does not guarantee
that story’s social contagion in bioculture among audiences. In the Anna Karenina
Principle view all the story elements must also succeed - or at the least each must not be
judged a “fail” - by mass audiences.444

6.3.3 Genre/s (RoI Movies)

The doxa from the four contemporary screenwriting manuals examined lists various
movie story Genres445 but doxa does not provide heuristics for which specific movie
story Genres are more - nor less - likely to be successful with cinema audiences.

There are also issues in the doxa around definitions of Genre as although McKee
suggests Genre demarcation rests on differences in: (story) “subject, specific settings,
roles, events, and values” (McKee 1997, p. 80; c.f., McKee 1997, p. 87); meanwhile
Snyder (2005) calls his new typology of ten story types “genres”(‘Monster In the
House’, ‘Golden Fleece’, ‘Dude With A Problem’ and so on). While certain movies
appear to fit obviously into a broad Genre classification (Horror, Comedy, Rom-Com,
Musical and so on) for hybrid-genre movies (e.g., Horror-Comedy) the classification of
the primary, secondary and tertiary Sub-Genres of a movie story can rapidly become
complex. The Horror movie genre has sub-genres “supernatural horror”, “slasher/serial
killer horror”, “psychological-horror”, “survival-horror” and so on. Genre taxonomies
are problematic due to their ongoing rapid evolution and divergence into different story
sub- and meta-types. In Film Art: An Introduction (10th Edn) Bordwell and Thompson
(2013) rightly note that: “Most scholars now agree that no genre can be defined in a
single hard-and-fast way” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013, p. 319). Aristotle in The
Poetics divided stories into “Tragedy” or narratives with a tragic ending and “Comedy”
or narratives with a happy ending.446 However due to the proliferation of stories in
various media (movies, television plays, novels, videogames and so on) and the

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444 For more detail see Appendix chapter 10.19 - The Anna Karenina Principle – Table.
445 See: Section 6.1.3 - Genre (doxa) above.
446 Evocritic Daniel Nettle (2004, 2010) provides a fascinating fourfold classification of story types
namely Tragedy or Heroic, and Love Tragedy or Comedy based on the outcome of either primarily status
or mating contests in the story (Nettle in B. Boyd, et al., 2010, p. 331).
blending of *Genres* in the past two thousand years since *The Poetics* the current-day situation with movies appears vastly more complex not least due to creativity over time where story ideas and genres are combined and then selected by audiences in biocultural evolution - then re-selected again by movie story creators - in an iterative and recursive systems process – namely the evolutionary algorithm in operation on bioculture.

Notwithstanding the above problems of terminological and conceptual differences in the use of the term *Genre* in the doxa the *Genre* classification and also MPAA rating\(^447\) of each movie has been collated from *IMDb*\(^448\) where the MPAA rating was allocated at the time of the movie’s cinema release.

The results of the comparative analysis of *Genre* overall in the top 20 RoI to the bottom 20 RoI movies are that firstly the Horror genre dominates the high-RoI dataset and secondly no exclusively-Drama movies are in the top 20 RoI list. By contrast the majority of the 20 biggest money-losing movies are in the Drama classification with 13 out of the bottom 20, and the Drama classification combined with Comedy (the “Dramedy” hybrid genre) represents 7 out of 20 in the bottom 20 RoI. This suggests that both Comedy and Drama are potentially two of the most difficult genres to achieve success in (or rather *not to fail in*) while “Dramedy” also combines the risks and problems of both.\(^449\)

Although MPAA ratings are not emphasized in the doxa, in these two RoI extremes movie datasets, MPAA “R”-ratings are the most prevalent ratings in both the top (13/20) and also in the bottom (17/20) RoI movies. When we subsume “Unrated”, “X” and “Not Rated” into the “R”-rated category there does not appear to be a strong argument that R-rated movies are either much more - or much less - likely to succeed. In comparison to other ratings such as PG or PG-13 the more edgy and explicit R-rated movies dominate both of these two very high and also very low RoI movie clusters.

The definition or classification of a “Survival” Genre movie is also problematic; while there might be an obvious set of characteristics (e.g., a serial killer on the loose; man-

\(^447\) Note that the MPAA rating system underwent revision in 1990 which altered the prior movie story content classifications such as “Unrated” and the “NC-17” ratings to “R”. See: [http://www.mpaa.org/film-ratings/](http://www.mpaa.org/film-ratings/).

\(^448\) See: Section 10-6 – Genre in the Top and Bottom 20 RoI Movies - in the Appendix below.

\(^449\) Additional likely reasons for the over-representation of the Horror genre in the top 20 RoI cluster and Drama in the bottom 20 RoI cluster are explored further in Chapter 7 - Results and Discussion again drawing on the domain of Evolutionary Psychology.
eating sharks; flesh-eating zombies or a hostile alien) if a “Survival” movie is defined as a story where the main character’s life is overtly and frequently under threat such as in a War or Gangster genre movie or even a Mystery, Thriller or Crime story where a private detective is undertaking a dangerous investigation then clearly many more movies fit the “Survival” movie criteria than their IMDb genres would indicate.

In these more general terms eleven of both the top and also bottom 20 RoI movies are Survival Genre movies; a comparative table appears in Section 10-6. This is an interesting result; namely that an imminent survival threat or clear life-and-death stakes come out equal in both the highest- and the lowest-RoI movie clusters. This might reveal that such Evolutionary survival-related themes result in screen ideas surviving the possible deselection-filter stage of movie financing and production.\(^\text{450}\) While the top 20 RoI movies avoid or else otherwise compensate for any obvious flaws in their story and story execution, story components the bottom 20 RoI movies each individually appear to be problematic but often in different ways.\(^\text{451}\)

6.3.4 Setting: Spatial (RoI Movies)

Section 10-7 - Spatial Setting – RoI Movies\(^\text{452}\) presents the tables of the primary Spatial Setting of each movie story in the top 20 RoI dataset including the Geographical setting and primary type of story Spatial Setting (i.e., Urban, Rural or otherwise).

Analysis of this Spatial Setting RoI data reveals that the USA (75%) clearly dominates the top 20 RoI movie cluster in terms of general geographical location and also movie story country of origin. There are no obvious over-representations between primary Spatial Setting types with primarily ’Urban’ settings occurring in 11/20 (55%) and primarily ’Rural’ settings occurring in the 8/20 (40%) of the top 20 RoI movies.\(^\text{453}\)

Particularly with the lower-budget and independent movies in the top 20 RoI movie list the Spatial Settings or story locations of these movie stories appear to be dictated by considerations of firstly (a) local availability of the setting for the screenwriters and filmmakers and secondly (b) influenced by the “write what you know” maxim - namely

\(^{450}\)Yet the execution of the movie story onscreen also recalls the Anna Karenina Principle and the complex configurational operation of all of a movie’s story components.

\(^{451}\)For example All The Queens Men is an unfunny miscast comedy; Southland Tales and I Come With The Rain have barely-comprehensible plots; the dialog in Eye See You insults the intelligence, and so on. See: Appendix.

\(^{453}\)The top 20 RoI movie Open Water is primarily set in the ocean once the couple are stranded at sea.
the screen idea originators did not set their specific screen stories in other countries, cultures or locales remote to where they were themselves based. For example *Paranormal Activity* was shot inside the writer-director Oren Peli’s own house (C. Campbell & Rosenberg, 2009; P. Hall, 2009; Sacks, 2009); *El Mariachi* was set in a Mexican village near where writer-director Robert Rodriguez lived (Broderick, 1993; Rodriguez, 1995); *Primer* was shot in the writer-director-producer-actor’s hometown of Dallas (Allen, 2007; Olsen, 2013); *Night of the Living Dead* is set in Pennsylvania and was shot near writer-director George Romero’s home town of Pittsburgh (Russo, 1985). *Rocky* was shot in Philadelphia (E. Gross, 2006; Powell & Garrett, 2014; Sanello, 1998). Conversely the highest-budget top 20 RoI “Hollywood” movie *Star Wars* was shot in various international locations (Champlin, 1992; Lucas & Kline, 1999); *E.T.* was set and shot in the USA (Mathison & Sunshine, 2002) and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is set in Chicago but was shot in both Chicago and also in writer-actor Nia Vardalos’ home town of Toronto (Swartz, 2015).

In overview it is surprising that movies from Australia and Mexico managed to outperform so many other American movies on the top 20 RoI list given: (a) the populations of each nation; (b) the number of movies released each year by each nation (800 movies a year in the US compared to 40 in Australia),\(^\text{454}\) and (c) the relative populations and thus scales of movie industry infrastructures and resulting relative size of the professional movie fields in each country.

Section 10-7 - *Spatial Setting – RoI Movies*\(^\text{455}\) also presents the table of the primary *Spatial Setting* of each movie story in the bottom 20 RoI dataset.

Analysis reveals that bottom 20 RoI movie geographical settings are: USA, 15/20 movies (or, 75%); Norway, 1/20 (or 5%); China, 1/20 (or 5%); USA, Philippines, Hong Kong, 1/20 (or 5%); Russia, 1/20 (or 5%) and Germany/UK, 1/20 (or 5%).

Much like the top 20 RoI the bottom 20 RoI movie Spatial Setting types are dominated by primarily ‘Urban’ settings, at 13/20 (or 65%).

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\(^{454}\) See: (UNESCO/Chartsbin, 2015, online). See also the earlier *Section 4.4.1 - An Overview of the Scope of the Movie Domain.*

\(^{455}\) See: *Appendix.*
The number one Bottom 20 RoI movie *All The Queen’s Men*, a historically-set spy-comedy about the Enigma Machine during World War II features both German and also UK 1940s period settings.

### 6.3.5 Setting: Temporal (RoI Movies)

Section 10-8 - Temporal Settings (RoI Movies) presents a data table of the primary Temporal Setting of each movie in the top 20 RoI movie story dataset.

This data reveals that present-day Temporal Settings dominate the top 20 RoI movie story cluster with 17/20 movies (or 85%). There is only one period piece\(^{456}\) namely *American Graffiti* which as a “Nostalgia” Genre movie featuring popular music, cars and “cruising the strip” culture from 1962 was set ten years prior to the movie’s release with the movie tagline “Where were you in ‘62?”. The top 20 RoI science-fiction movie *Mad Max* is set temporally in the post-apocalyptic future; and though by contemporary standards containing futuristic technology, architecture and costume-design, *Star Wars* (1977) claims to be a story that is set “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away…”.

Section 10-8 - Temporal Settings (RoI Movies) presents a data table of the primary Temporal Setting of each movie in the bottom 20 RoI movie story dataset.

Analysis reveals that as with the top 20 RoI movies the majority of the bottom 20 RoI at 14/20 movies (or 70%) are also set in the Present Day. Comparatively there are however numerous period movies (i.e., stories set in the past) in the bottom 20 RoI movies namely 5/20 (or 25%): *All The Queen’s Men* is set during WWII; *Outlander* is set in Iron Age Norway; *A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop* is set in 14\(^{th}\) century China; *The Gambler* in 1866; meanwhile *Southland Tales* is set in a somewhat-bizarre post-apocalyptic very-near-future. These are relatively-expensive Temporal Settings in terms of requisite movie sets, props, costume and production design and *mise en scène* in general.

The average budget of a top 20 RoI movie is USD$1.8M and budgets range from USD$7,000 for *Primer* to USD$11M for *Star Wars* whereas by contrast the average production budget of a bottom 20 RoI movie is USD$13.8M and the budget range of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories is between USD$2M for *This Thing of Ours*, to USD$55M

\(^{456}\) (past historical movie story setting)
for Eye See You. Novice screenwriters and other students of the screenwriting doxa might benefit from considering such factors as the Temporal and also Spatial settings of their movie story when creating it as these are story factors which obviously impact on movie story production budget.

6.3.6 Plot (RoI Movies)

Recall that the screenwriting manual doxa on Plot shows how each manual author examined uses a different schema to describe Plot types: Truby (2007, pp. 260-6) uses for example: “genre plots”, “reveal plots”, “multistrand plots” and so on; McKee (1997, pp. 44-7) uses an “Archplot”, “Miniplot” and “Antiplot” taxonomy and by contrast Snyder (2005, pp. 25-6) uses ten different plot-type descriptors (calling them “genres” for example: `Monster in the House`, `Superhero` `Golden Fleece` and others).

Section 10-9 - Plot Types (see Appendix) features a data-table on the various different Plot types of the top 20 RoI movies according to the plot type taxonomies provided by McKee (1997), Snyder (2005) and Truby (2007).

An analysis of this data reveals that “Archplots” (in McKee’s taxonomy at 19/20 or 85% of the top 20 RoI) or “Genre plots” (in Truby’s taxonomy at 15/20 or 75%) or else “Monster In The House” (in Snyder’s taxonomy at 7/20 or 35%) Plot types dominate the top 20 RoI movie cluster.

Section 10-9 - Plot Types features a data-table on the various different Plot Types of the bottom 20 RoI movies according to these doxa taxonomies. Problematically some movies in both the top 20 RoI and also bottom 20 RoI lists blend various elements of the different listed Plot “types” from the doxa. Thus assuming the Plot Type categories assigned are indeed correct the bottom 20 RoI movies are not obviously dominated by any specific type of Plot given Truby’s (2007) or Snyder’s (2005) plot taxonomies but “Archplots” occur most frequently in the bottom 20 RoI according to McKee’s Plot taxonomy (1997). McKee’s “Archplots” are described as having: classical design; linear time; external conflict; a single protagonist; an active protagonist; and, a consistent reality. In light of this analysis “Archplots” appear about equally as likely to

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457 Section 6.1.6 above.
458 Field’s (1979/2005) “three-act” structure is omitted from the table, as all movies - both successful and unsuccessful - have three acts.
459 See: Appendix.
succeed wildly and thus possibly become a top 20 RoI movie as they do to fail spectacularly with audiences and thus become a bottom 20 RoI movie.\footnote{It should be noted that the comparisons between top and bottom 20 RoI movies here are intrinsically bivariate with no attempt made to look at complex direct, indirect and spurious relations. Moreover in the ‘hard’ Social Sciences a much larger dataset would be required for such an investigation as this. See also (Simonton 2011, pp. 107-8): one thousand movies ($n=1,000$) rather than 40 is an ideal sample size.}

6.3.7 Character (RoI Movies)

The Appendix section 10-10 – Character (Data Table – RoI Movies) features a data-table on the Ages of the lead characters of the movies in the top 20 RoI dataset.

Analysis of the RoI data on Character reveals that as Snyder (2005) suggests younger main characters (as protagonists) dominate the stories of the top 20 RoI movie cluster. Antagonists (villains) in this dataset are typically older by around ten years than the protagonists.\footnote{See: ‘Evil Origins: A Darwinian Genealogy of the Popcultural Villain’ (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2015) for five key characteristics of popular culture villain characters; a useful topic for further research would be to test out if the villains in both the top and bottom 20 RoI sets of movie data correlate with all of the five predictions of the hypothesis advanced therein; and if the villains in bottom 20 RoI movies correlate with less of the five predictions.}

The average number of main characters in a top 20 RoI movie is four and these typically occur as: three protagonists and one major antagonist.

Section 10-10 – Character (Data Tables – RoI Movies)\footnote{See: Appendix.} also features a data-table on the Ages of the lead characters of the movies in the bottom 20 RoI dataset.

This data analysis and comparison reveals that in general protagonists are noticeably older in bottom 20 RoI movies than in top 20 RoI movies however the average number of main characters in bottom 20 RoI movies is also four and as with the top 20 RoI stories there are also sometimes multiple key antagonists (villains).

While the casting of movie actors as the characters in the screen story is a separate issue to creating them in a screenplay the bottom 20 RoI movies feature numerous movie stars including actor Justin Timberlake who appears in two bottom 20 RoI movies, namely The Open Road and Southland Tales; Sarah Michelle Gellar is also in two bottom 20 RoI movies Southland Tales and Harvard Man. Sylvester Stallone is in both a top 20 RoI movie Rocky and also in a bottom 20 RoI movie Eye See You.
Appendix Section 10-10 – Character (Data Tables – RoI Movies) includes a table of Movie Stars in the Bottom 20 RoI Movies. The data in the table indicates that all bottom 20 RoI movies had movie stars\textsuperscript{463} in their onscreen movie stories. By contrast the top 20 RoI movies did not feature any movie stars at the time of their creation and this is one contributing factor towards their having smaller average budgets than bottom 20 RoI movies. As noted earlier, De Vany and Walls (2004) found that casting stars tends to make a movie lose money in `Motion Picture Profit, the stable Paretian hypothesis, and the Curse of the Superstar’ (De Vany & Walls, 2004). This comparison of the top to the bottom 20 RoI movies also supports this finding.

6.3.8 Character Arcs (RoI Movies)

The concept of Character Arc is defined in various different ways in the doxa and is thus lacking a consensus. Many of the top 20 RoI movies do not feature character arcs if we adopt Truby’s prescription about true character change involving “a challenging and changing of basic beliefs, leading to new moral action by the hero.” (Truby 2007, p. 80). Therefore Field’s side note that character arcs are optional (Field 2005, p. 68) appears to apply to the majority of the movies in the top 20 RoI movie cluster.

Appendix section 10-11 - Character Arcs (Data Tables – RoI Movies) includes data on Character Arcs in the top 20 RoI dataset. A data analysis reveals that Character Arcs are only present in three of the top 20 RoI movies and that in six of the top 20 RoI movies the heroes are merely dead at the end.

Appendix section 10-11 - Character Arcs (Data Tables – RoI Movies) includes data on Character Arcs in the bottom 20 RoI dataset. Analysis of this data reveals that the majority of bottom 20 RoI movies (17/20 or 85\%) have clear Character Arcs for the protagonist/s. The Chinese movie in the bottom 20 RoI movie list A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop does not appear to have a Character Arc and could also be considered a Survival movie. “Wang’s wife”\textsuperscript{464} in the climax of the story is forced to shoot the corrupt detective Zhang in order to survive however she was also depicted as being enamoured of firearms and their use in the first scene of the movie story.

\textsuperscript{463} The definition of a “movie star” is subject to change based on the actor’s success. James Ulmer has developed a “Hot List” ranking system of movie stars based on their bankability published in (Ulmer, 2000) and as a searchable online database. See also: \url{http://www.ulmerscale.com/aboutHL.html}

\textsuperscript{464} (who in fact does not appear to have a name in the movie)
Whether the #1 bottom 20 RoI movie *All The Queen’s Men* contains *Character Arcs* for O’Rourke and the other main characters is open to interpretation and thus debatable but evidently the team of macho soldiers O’Rourke, Archie and Johnno become less homophobic (or perhaps slightly-less-phobic) and more accepting about certain Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersexual, Asexual and Pansexual (LGBTIAP) morality and values in general over the course of the movie story apparently due to their cross-dressing and their interaction with Parker the gay transsexual character; though this arc is superficial, one-dimensional, predictably obvious and is primarily played for cringe-worthy laughs.\(^{465}\)

In summary a comparative analysis reveals that there appear to be many more movies with *Character Arcs* in the bottom 20 RoI (17/20 movies or 85%) than are in the top 20 RoI movie dataset (3/20 or 15%). As noted by (Murphy, 2007, pp. 19-20) although *Character Arcs* dominate mainstream screenwriting “classical Hollywood narration” doxa, given the above highest and lowest RoI movie story comparison *Character Arcs* are clearly not necessary for a high ‘benefit/cost ratio’ movie story.

6.3.9 Structure (RoI Movies)

As a summary view of the dominant doxa on movie screenplay structure a Table synthesizing the major (dominant) extant movie story systems reviewed is presented below.

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\(^{465}\) It appears that the story creators were aiming for humour or comedy however this does not appear to work; see also Ebert’s scathing review of how unfunny the movie is and how it fails to work on many different levels in (Ebert, 2007, pp. 5-6). See also the many negative critics’ reviews at: [http://www.metacritic.com/movie/all-the-queens-men](http://www.metacritic.com/movie/all-the-queens-men).
### Table 6-6 - Comparison of 8 major movie `story systems’ or plot structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STORY SYSTEM / &quot;PARADIGM&quot; (SYNTAXM)</th>
<th>(BACK STORY)</th>
<th>&quot;ACT 1&quot; / &quot;BEGINNING&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;ACT 2&quot; / &quot;MIDDLE&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;ACT 3&quot; / &quot;END&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td></td>
<td>Complications ('Tying')</td>
<td>Disaster befalls hero</td>
<td>Denouement ('Untying')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syd Field</td>
<td>Backstory</td>
<td>Setup</td>
<td>Plottopoint 1</td>
<td>First half &amp; Pitch 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Seger</td>
<td>Backstory</td>
<td>Setup</td>
<td>First turning point</td>
<td>B story – plot point 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Vogler</td>
<td>Backstory</td>
<td>The Ordinary World</td>
<td>Refusal of the Call</td>
<td>Meeting the Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Hauge</td>
<td>Backstory</td>
<td>1. Setup</td>
<td>Turn 'Pt 1: Opportunity</td>
<td>New Situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert McKee</td>
<td>Backstory</td>
<td>Setup &amp; Incident</td>
<td>Progressive Complications</td>
<td>Progressive Complications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake Snyder</td>
<td>Backstory</td>
<td>Opening image</td>
<td>Theme Stated</td>
<td>Setup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatica®</td>
<td>Backstory</td>
<td>Setup &amp; Inciting Event</td>
<td>First Act Turn</td>
<td>Compliances &amp; Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle (though contested by Whalley)</td>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>Parole</td>
<td>Episode 1</td>
<td>Stamina 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above comparative Table 6-6 reveals many similarities between major screenplay manual story-structure or “plot-point” templates (story algorithms) particularly in comparison to Aristotle’s prescribed “two parts” from The Poetics, namely before and after the disaster strikes the hero in a Greek tragedy play.

As can be seen in the table above many of the screenwriting manual authors’ doxa plot-templates suggest that the ‘midpoint’ of the movie story structure, i.e., page/minute 60, of a 120 page/minute screenplay/movie is when plot events should be the worst for the hero. In short the Table indicates the orthodoxy in the current screenwriting convention in terms of mainstream cinema movie typical plot structure.

One problem of the above-noted prescriptions in the doxa on movie story Structure namely “three acts” (Field, Snyder, McKee) and also “7 steps” (Truby 2007) is that they can not only be applied to all top 20 RoI movies but can also be applied to unsuccessful movies which means they do not necessarily instruct how to create a movie story that may become a successful movie but merely how to create a movie screenplay, one which subsequently may - or may not - be successful. Indeed Field (2005) notes:

If you don't believe the paradigm, or in the three-act structure first laid down by Aristotle, go check it out. Go to a movie - go see several movies - and see whether they fit the paradigm or not (Field 2005, p. 30).

The above suggestion of Field’s is true because in all likelihood and even if it is an “Art Film” (aka McKee’s “Antiplot” or anti-structure story) most movies in theatrical cinema release at any given time will likely have three such “acts” whether successful or not. Likewise as the table in Appendix section 10-12 – Structure demonstrates Truby’s (2007) seven steps may also thus be applied to the bottom 20 RoI movie All The Queen’s Men. This would appear to mean that even Truby’s (2007) basic schema does not instruct how to create a successful movie but instead just: a movie.

However as Truby also notes (2007, p. 40) this 7-step story schema does illustrate one set of steps involved in solving a life-problem - or indeed any generic problem. While modern human life with its (bio)cultural conventions, economic and social structures, roles and potential goals is vastly more complex than mere ‘survival and reproduction’ it would appear that many elements of canonical stories may have their roots in the

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466 (or the dramatic situation as designed by the story creator)
467 It may also be that in translating story from script to screen, the editing of the movie may result in what could be identified as three “acts”.
philosophy and science of biology, such as in (Arnhart, 1998; Hull & Ruse, 1998; Jablonka, et al., 2014; Koch, 1993; Oyama, 2000).

### 6.3.10 Dialogue (RoI Movies)

As the earlier Section 6.1.10 (Dialogue – Doxa) aims to demonstrate while there is not exactly a clear consensus on the details of the functions and purpose of dialogue in the doxa the manuals’ prescriptions on the writing of “good” and “bad” dialogue does suggest a consensus in the doxa. These various guidelines in the four manuals examined can be seen to all be general heuristics for writing effective movie story dialogue and also heuristics for not creating “bad” (including unnecessary) dialogue and while the manuals use different ways to describe characteristics of “good” and “bad” dialogue these conceptions do not appear to contradict each other. The top 20 RoI movies in general also adhere to these various doxa guidelines on dialogue.

However one point that is not clearly noted by any of the four manuals under study is that movie dialogue should also adhere to certain “IF / THEN” conditions namely IF the genre of the movie is Comedy THEN some or possibly even much of the dialogue should be funny. This is one of the many obvious problems with All The Queen’s Men. Movie critic Roger Ebert included his review in Your Movie Sucks! (Ebert, 2007) a collection of his most scathing reviews of movies noting issues of the dialogue in the movie and also stating:

> The casting is also a problem. Matt LeBlanc does not belong in this movie... He is all wrong for the lead, with no lightness, no humor, no sympathy for his fellow spies, and no comic timing... at this time, with this cast, this movie is hopeless (Ebert 2007, p. 6).

Moreover LA Weekly’s review stated: “Bad in such a bizarre way that it’s almost worth seeing, if only to witness the crazy confluence of purpose and taste”; the Seattle Post noted “Afraid to pitch into farce, yet only half-hearted in its spy mechanics, All The Queen’s Men is finally just one long drag”; The New York Times stated “Rarely has a movie worked so hard to be inconsequential”; the Los Angeles Times review noted “Let’s hope - shall we? - that the “true story” that allegedly “inspired” All The Queen’s Men was a lot funnier and more deftly enacted than what’s been cobbled together here”; while Entertainment Weekly noted “The comedy is non-existent” (aggregated review quotes from Metacritic, 2016, online). These reviews appear to form a consensus in the
field; a direct content analysis also reveals that the movie fails to work, including being a “Comedy” genre story that is not widely regarded as amusing.

Likewise the same IF / THEN dialogue heuristic would apply for most if not all Genres, namely if the movie-story Genre is Horror then at least some of the dialogue should be scary or should co-operate with the various elements of plot, character, acting performance, pacing, story structure, mood, atmosphere and film style (sensu Bordwell 1997) to elicit tension, anxiety, suspense or fear. Likewise the dialogue should be thrilling in a Thriller and should ideally simultaneously be both romantic and comedic in a Rom-Com Genre movie story and so on. Spoken dialogue also has many dimensions in which communication can take place in terms of the expression of emotional states and given Bordwell (Bordwell, 2011, online) on mirror neurons is another tool in the screen storyteller’s toolbox for eliciting a desired audience response to a dramatic situation in the movie story. Likewise the dialogue in Eye See You (a.k.a. D-Tox) is generally pedestrian and flat namely badly-written. Variety’s (2002) review of the movie stated:

“D-Tox” [Eye See You] is almost totally merit-free - sloppily constructed on a storytelling level (unexplained actions, illogical sequences) and without any genuine suspense or interesting characters to disguise the script’s weaknesses. (Dialogue is peppered with lines like, “The real bad things in life can make you stronger.”) (Rehlin, 2002, online).

Once again the Anna Karenina Principle suggests there are many components to a movie story (premise, plot, character, dialogue and so on) and just one of them needs to fail or be seriously flawed in order to essentially sink the whole movie with mass audiences - or in other words to fail to connect with Human Nature on a grand scale.

### 6.3.11 Movie Duration / Screenplay Length (RoI Movies)

Appendix section 10-13 Movie Duration / Screenplay Length (RoI Movies) contains data tables of the Movie Duration (in minutes) and by interpolation also the approximate Screenplay Length (in pages) of the top 20 RoI movies in the dataset.\(^{468}\)

The collated data on top 20 RoI movie runtime reveals that the average top 20 RoI movie is 93 minutes in duration thus ideally would be 93 screenplay pages in length.

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\(^{468}\) Noting again the “one screenplay page equals one minute of movie screen time” rule-of-thumb.
However it is suggested that if we also average out the median figure (88 minutes) and the mean (i.e., average) duration (93 minutes) in order to give a more realistic mean then this more realistic figure comes out at: 90 minutes / 90 screenplay pages.469

![Figure 6-2 – Extrapolated Trendlines of Movie RoI vs. Duration (Mins) and Number of Scenes](image)

In Figure 6-2 above an inferential statistical analysis suggests that as RoI increases (to the left of the chart on the horizontal axis) high-RoI Movie Duration (or Screenplay Length) and the Number of Scenes both converge at 90 minutes/pages and also at 90 scenes. Thus there are two reasons suggesting that 90 pages and 90 movie minutes is likely the ideal length for a high RoI screenplay and movie.

A close examination of top 20 RoI movie screenplays470 reveals that in these terms, at 90 pages Napoleon Dynamite (2003) is thus an archetypal high-RoI screenplay.471

Appendix section 10-13 Movie Duration / Screenplay Length (RoI Movies) contains data tables of the Movie Duration (in minutes) and by interpolation also the approximate Screenplay Length (in pages) of the bottom 20 RoI movies.

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469 An explanatory note for the non-statistically-inclined: as noted in Statistics Without Tears (1991) as a measure of central tendency of a dataset either means or medians can “reasonably represent” a dataset depending on variables such as the skewness of the data sample and also whether there are extreme outliers in the dataset (Rowntree, 1991, p. 50). Thus one way of determining a more useful average is to average the median and the arithmetical mean - namely add these two figures of median and mean together and divide the resulting sum by two.

470 (where available)

471 See the digital Appendix (on attached CD-ROM) for the Napoleon Dynamite (2003) screenplay.
The data table reveals that for bottom 20 RoI movies the average is 102 minutes/pages as opposed to the top 20 RoI average of 93 minutes/pages. As with the top 20 RoI figures (above) in order to attain a more useful practical average, when the median of the bottom 20 RoI (99 minutes) and the mean (102 minutes) are averaged this more representative average figure\textsuperscript{472} for bottom 20 RoI movies comes out at 101 minutes.

In short the comparison reveals that the average bottom 20 RoI movie is ten minutes / ten screenplay pages longer than the average top 20 RoI movie. Given the empirical evidence this implies the doxa in the screenwriting instructional manuals might be better to recommend 90 pages as a more ideal screenplay length instead of 110 (Snyder 2005) or 120 screenplay pages (Field 1979/2005, McKee 1997, Truby 2007)\textsuperscript{473}.

We can infer from the above statistics that the bottom 20 RoI movies are thus not only problematic in terms of their story design and/or flawed story components (such as a specific premise, plot, structure and so forth) and in some cases flawed movie-making (miscasting, odd directorial or editing decisions and so on) but on the whole they also tend to be “big and bloated” with “bad” movie storytelling as well. The bottom 20 RoI movies thus appear to be excellent case-studies in what not to do when creating a screen story and can serve as cautionary tales for screenwriters.

In the 2013 *Sydney Morning Herald* news article titled ‘Lucas and Spielberg Warn of Film Industry ’Implosion’’ top 20 RoI moviemaker Steven Spielberg noted that:

\textquoteinsert{...there's eventually going to be an implosion - or a big meltdown. There's going to be an implosion where three or four or maybe even a half-dozen mega-budget movies are going to go crashing into the ground, and that's going to change the paradigm (AFP, 2013).}

A better paradigm than the current screenwriting doxa might be such an evolutionary ‘benefit/cost ratio’ approach to artistic and mass audience satisfaction, namely to heed the obvious lessons of the top 20 RoI movies and to avoid the many and varied mistakes of the bottom 20 RoI movies. Such a revised paradigm would rely on story creativity rather than such factors as big production budgets, gratuitous spectacle, needlessly-long movie durations and (unnecessary) character arcs to name some of the characteristics

\footnote{472}{See the Footnote on the previous page citing Rowntree (1991) for how this figure is arrived at namely by averaging the Median and the Mode in order to arrive at a more representative Average figure.  
473}{It is again noted that the “one page a minute” guideline is only a rule of thumb as dialogue-heavy scenes tend to take longer while action-heavy scenes can typically take less time than one screenplay page per minute of screen time. It is also again noted that two of the top 20 RoI movies (*Paranormal Activity* and *The Blair Witch Project*) did not have formal screenplays but were improvised from story outlines.}
we might infer are contributing causes of a bottom 20 RoI movie’s failure to spread via word-of-mouth due to their story design and thus screenwriting.

### 6.3.12 Number of Scenes (RoI Movies)

*Appendix Section 10-14 - Number of Scenes (Data tables – RoI Movies)* presents the collated data for the Number of Scenes in each of the movies in the top 20 RoI.\(^{474}\)

Analysis of the data reveals the average *Number of Scenes* for a top 20 RoI movie is 119 and the range is from 71 scenes (the movie *Once*) to 189 scenes (*Star Wars*). As a comparison the number-one Loss-on-Investment movie *All The Queens Men* was likewise quantitatively analyzed for *Number of Scenes* and the data-table appears in *Appendix Section 10-14 - Number of Scenes (Data tables – RoI Movies).*\(^{475}\)

A comparison of the average *Number of Scenes* in a top 20 RoI movie (119 scenes) to the #1 loss on investment movie *All The Queen’s Men* (182 scenes) thus reveals an excess of Scenes in the latter movie and as noted above by various movie critics in the field, what Scenes there are in them are mostly bad. 182 scenes in *All The Queen’s Men* is still less than 189 scenes in *Star Wars* but the number of scenes is irrelevant if the movie story is bad; “quality rather than quantity” being the most obvious lesson. The story problems of *All The Queen’s Men* could easily be the subject of an entire PhD study in itself. As a badly-cast, unfunny war-comedy, with also a rather ludicrous story *Premise* - namely a mismatched team of transvestite spies capturing a Nazi Enigma-machine that it is later revealed that the Allies secretly already had at any rate - the movie is potentially a waste of everyone’s time and money except as an invaluable cautionary tale for screen storytellers aiming to avoid many possible causes of failure of a movie story. As noted earlier the movie also scored a dismal 7% averaged critics review on *Rotten Tomatoes*\(^{476}\) and 19% on *Metacritic*\(^{477}\). Many derisive critics’ reviews aggregated on both sites note the many obvious flaws and deficiencies of the movie and there are so many flaws that there is not sufficient scope to examine them in detail here.

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\(^{474}\) In the study of the movies a change of Scene is defined as: a change of time or a change of location.

\(^{475}\) Due to scope and time restrictions of the study the entire dataset of bottom 20 RoI movies was not examined for the exact *Number of Scenes* in each movie. Also examining the *Number of Scenes* in Bottom 20 RoI movies as a whole dataset may be irrelevant: since they failed as movies and tend to have uninteresting *Premises* the specific *Number of Scenes* in them may be the least of their problems; many of the scenes in bottom 20 RoI movies don’t work regardless of how many of them there are.

\(^{476}\) See: [http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/all_the_queens_men/](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/all_the_queens_men/)

\(^{477}\) See: [http://www.metacritic.com/movie/all-the-queens-men](http://www.metacritic.com/movie/all-the-queens-men)
6.3.13 Dramatic Principles (RoI Movies)

As examined earlier in Section 6.1.13 (Dramatic Principles - Doxa) the principles of movie drama are many and complex and there is not a consensus in the doxa. In light of the doxa prescriptions on (1) conflict and (2) agonistic structure of movie stories the ‘Hero versus Villain’ trajectory in each movie in the dataset was scored: a single point was added for a scene victory, removed for a scene loss, or neither (i.e., score remains static) where the character neither wins nor loses the scene. The data was charted and are presented as graphs below (Figures 6-3 and 6-4). This data thus keeps a cumulative score-tally of “scene wins”.\footnote{478} As an example from Rocky although Rocky loses the fight with world heavyweight boxing champion Apollo Creed merely by going the distance of fifteen rounds Rocky feels that he has ‘won’ in proving both to himself and his community that he is not a “loser” or as he fears “just another bum from the neighbourhood”. In this way altering the specific goals of the protagonist in the story to ‘surviving the fight’ (going the distance) rather than literally ‘winning it’ can result in emotional elation in the audience even despite the obvious circumstances of the story resolution whereby Rocky loses the fight and is beaten to a bloody pulp in the process.

The graphs below chart the ‘Hero vs Villain’ scene score (Figure 6-3) in the top 20 RoI movie stories.

\footnote{478}{Noting for example Snyder’s questions (or directives) in the doxa: ‘When the scene starts, who has a goal, who’s in the way, who wins?’ (Snyder 2005, p. 194).}
Figure 6-3 - ‘Hero vs. Villains’ Scene Score in the Top 20 RoI movies

The red line in the charts above is the Villain’s score whereas the blue is the Hero’s in each movie story. Given that the red lines always finish up on top at the story’s conclusion (i.e., right-hand side of each chart) it would appear from the above data that ‘Villain Triumphant’ instead of Syd Field’s (1979/2005) prescription of an ‘up’ ending is a dominant recurring trope in the top 20 RoI movies.

Interestingly however the resulting chart reveals a similar pattern for the lowest-RoI movie All The Queen’s Men:

Figure 6-4 - ‘Hero vs. Villains’ Scene Score in the lowest RoI movie (All The Queen’s Men)
When scoring the cumulative tally of: “Who wins and who loses each scene?” this analysis demonstrates that despite the ending of lowest RoI movie *All The Queen’s Men* appearing to be a ‘happy’ ending from a direct content analysis of the movie story, oddly the villains (the Nazis) would actually appear triumphant in terms of “scene wins” noting that the red (villains’) dataplot-line in the chart above ends up higher than the blue (i.e., heroes’) line. Obviously, movie storylines are not simply a matter of tallying “scene wins”. Likewise any of the serial-killer “slasher” genre movies in the top 20 RoI where the protagonist survives at the end function in a similar way; the serial-killer villain obviously manages to succeed in at least some of their own story goals by killing some innocent victims along the way. However it can be seen that – counterintuitively - enabling the audience to identify with and root for heroes and then killing them all or having them end up possessed by an evil demon as in the top 20 RoI movies *Paranormal Activity, The Blair Witch Project, Night of the Living Dead, Open Water* and *The Evil Dead* - is another “possible winning strategy” which runs counter to the dominant screenwriting doxa.

### 6.3.14 Creativity (RoI Movies)

In terms of creativity as it is understood in the scientific literature on movie creativity, movies are deeply-complex creative artifacts each involving many acts of individual and also group creativity during their conception and development (screenwriting) (Macdonald 2004, p. 10) and execution (movie production) (Simonton 2011, p. 33) of the screen story. As noted in the earlier Literature Review a holistic, systems and interdisciplinary examination of creativity involves the creative: *person*, their creative *potential*, and also their creative *process, product, place* and *persuasion* (Kozbelt, et al., 2010, p. 24).

In terms of an examination of an element of the creative *process* and also the creative *product* the Appendix section 10.15 - Creativity presents a table of research (*Creative Inspiration For ‘The Product’ i.e., The Movie Story*) identifying where the initial inspirations for the movie story in each case reportedly originated and a similar table for the bottom 20 RoI movie *All The Queen’s Men*. Analysis of the origin of these ideas reveals the majority of top 20 RoI movie storytellers drew on ideas from their own life experience including their (non-movie-related) day jobs in many cases.
The failed war-comedy genre movie *All The Queen’s Men* appears to have been originated as a movie project by a German producer. McKee (1997) states:

> When a society cannot ridicule and criticize its institutions, it cannot laugh. The shortest book ever written would be the history of German humor, a culture that has suffered spells of paralyzing fear of authority. (McKee 1997, p. 360)

In light of the patterns of creative *place* in bottom 20 RoI movies, while none of the top 20 RoI movies appear to have originated from Germany, six of the bottom 20 RoI do have German involvement.

A table in *Appendix Section 10.15 - Creativity* also includes a table with collated data on ‘Creative Place: Country of Origin’ for the Bottom 20 RoI movies and with Germany also indicated in **bold** text. As analysis of the table indicates the USA is either partly or sometimes even wholly responsible for vastly more of the bottom 20 RoI movie “flops” (16/20) but Germany’s frequent involvement in bottom 20 RoI movies (6/20) is also noteworthy.479

### 6.3.14.1 The Creative Person: On Writer-Hyphenates in Movie RoI

When the screenwriters of the top 20 RoI movies are examined using IMDb as the data source it is noted that all top 20 RoI movie writers (20/20 or 100%) including screen idea co-creators awarded an official “Story By” credit on the movie also had another role in the movie’s production - either as a writer-director, writer-producer, or writer-actor and sometimes two or all three of these multiple roles. The table *Writer-hyphenates in the Top 20 RoI Movies* in *Appendix section 10.15 - Creativity* demonstrates this pattern.

By comparison instead of 100% for the top 20 RoI movies only 80% (i.e., 16/20) of the Bottom 20 RoI movies were co-created by writer-hyphenates. These patterns suggest that there is a greater probability of executing the writer’s story vision by being involved in the movie’s production; not merely the various conception but also more of the execution phases of the screen idea. The diagram ’A typology of changing power and approximate creative influence of various players in independent film’ in (Bloore 2013, p. 121) indicates how the screenwriter’s influence and control over the screen

479 In light of the prevalence of Germany’s significant representation in bottom 20 RoI movies Mel Brooks’ comedy movie *To Be or Not To Be* (1983), and also the (fictional) musical ‘Springtime For Hitler’ within the movie *The Producers* (1968, 2005) both seem oddly relevant.
idea (movie story) tends to change during movie production. For *writer-hyphenates* ongoing influence and creative control is generally more stable and consistent which may result in a more singular and coherent vision of the realized movie story in the screenwork. However other factors such as subjective positioning also emerge whereby potentially self-indulgence and a lack of objectivity can undermine the production process of a movie. With this issue in mind the table *Writer-hyphenates in the Top 20 RoI Movies*, in *Appendix section 10.15 - Creativity* (data source: IMDb.com) indicates that in the bottom 20 RoI dataset 16/20 lowest-RoI movies also involved writer-hyphenates.

On the one hand with 20/20 writer-hyphenates involved in the top 20 RoI and 16/20 in the bottom 20 RoI this would suggest that the writer-hyphenate (“Writeur”) attribute is a very poor predictor of movie-story success or failure (RoI). On the other hand if a subsequent (future) movie emerged from the international movie system and then entered the top 20 RoI list and that newly-emergent entry to the top 20 RoI list was not by a writer-hyphenate this would be a surprising result as 100% of those highly-successful movies involve writer-hyphenates - or what are here termed “Writeurs”.

### 6.3.15 Human Nature (RoI Movies)

While the many and complex elements of Human Nature can be identified in most movies, as a test of the doxa prescribed by Snyder (2005) and using Snyder’s (2005, p. 159) example criteria of “primal” drives/desires below is an analysis of whether these are evident as story stakes. Snyder’s “primal” story stakes are coded in the table *Movie RoI and Snyder’s (2005) Primal Story ‘Stakes’* in *Appendix section 10-16 – Human Nature (RoI Movies)* in order to determine the number of movies in which they occur.

The analysis reveals that 8/20 movie stories in the top 20 RoI movies contain *all five* of Snyder’s primal drives/desires while some contain only one of these elements; however the #1 bottom RoI movie *All The Queen’s Men* also contains all five of these same “primal” drives or desires. In these terms the presence of these five “primal” story

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480 Aka ‘Writeurs’.
481 (due to having a story-power or ‘benefit/cost ratio’ of greater than 71:1)
482 (rather than “Auteurs”. See also earlier *Theoretical Perspective* chapter for more on Writeur Theory).
elements in both top and bottom 20 RoI movies reveals the importance of not just the story content in each movie’s case but also the story’s form, style, and execution.483

While the subject-matter of any War genre movie story would most likely inherently involve all five of Snyder’s example story stakes - or “primal” drives and desires and with particular emphasis on survival (urgent life-and-death threats) - one obvious problem is that by its very nature a War-Genre Comedy by default due to the comedic tone often negates or makes light of those very same key Evolutionary Psychology “primal” drives or stakes which might otherwise appeal to Human Nature (a mass cinema audience) by literally not taking these life-and-death stakes seriously.

6.4 SUMMARY OF DATA ANALYSIS – TWO EXTREMES OF MOVIE ROI

Comparisons of the fifteen (15) doxa screenplay-element guidelines to the evidence of the 20 highest and 20 lowest-RoI movies reveals that most of the extant screenwriting doxa guidelines in the four manuals examined can be seen to apply to both the top 20 (canonical) and also the bottom 20 (archival) sets of movies and in fact some of the doxa guidelines apply more to the archive (bottom 20 RoI) movies, for example Character Arcs and Movie Duration / Screenplay Length.484

The following section summarizes the findings of the comparative analysis of each of the fifteen doxa elements to the top 20 and bottom 20 extremes of movie RoI.

6.4.1 Story Premise (doxa vs. movie RoI)

The doxa consensus from the manuals examined is that a screen idea - and thus a story presented as a movie screenplay - requires a story Premise which may be expressed as: “A character/s in a problem-situation”. In these terms the top 20 and the bottom 20 RoI movies all do have story Premises as their loglines demonstrate (see: Section 6.3.1, above); and indeed without these they would not be a story.485 However not all of the top 20 RoI Story Premises are inherently compelling, for example Clerks, Primer and Napoleon Dynamite.486 Many of the bottom 20 story premises are depressing due to

483 In other words Snyder’s ‘five primal drives’ may be necessary but not sufficient for story success.
484 For a detailed comparative analysis data-table of the top 20 and bottom 20 RoI movies see: Table 10-1 – Commonalities and Differences in top and bottom 20 RoI movie datasets across 15 elements of the screenwriting doxa in the Appendix section 10-1.
485 Again noting Gottschall’s basic algorithm for story (Gottschall 2012, p. 52).
486 The story premise of Clerks may well appeal to an audience who like Slacker-genre movies not least as Clerks was partly inspired by the movie Slacker (1991). The premise of Primer as stated on IMDb
their subject-matter or else sound uninteresting or “low concept” and with many of them being Drama genre stories.

This raises the issue that the specific details of a story *Premise* also imply a *Genre*; recall that Dramas are notoriously unprofitable (Simonton 2011) and that the doxa in the manuals does not appear to address this issue. The manuals could indeed caution that since the Drama movie genre is difficult to succeed in, early-career screenwriters may possibly wish to either deliberately avoid it in order to lower the risk of spending time creating a potentially career-ending movie or else the extant research on the details of why Dramas are so difficult might be summarized in the manuals so as to warn aspiring Drama movie screenwriters of many of the known pitfalls of that story type in advance.

### 6.4.2 Theme (doxa vs. movie RoI)

As noted earlier there is little consensus on “theme” in the screenwriting doxa but Bordwell (2008) notes *Theme* is a problematic (vague and ambiguous) concept across all narrative and possibly even in all media including novels, poetry, television, videogames, songs, visual, tactile and sonic arts and other communication media. If *Theme* is considered in McKee’s preferred term as a “Controlling Idea” (McKee 1997, pp. 112, 114-25), as Snyder’s “Thematic Premise” (Snyder 2005, p. 192) or as Truby’s “Moral Argument” (Truby 2007, pp. 9, 108-44) then both top and bottom 20 RoI movies also each have these. Interestingly in closely examining the top 20 RoI movie stories as a whole set, a pattern emerged that the story’s “Thematic Trope” (either stated in dialogue or as a symbolic image) can be identified at the 14% mark of the top 20 RoI movies, although as noted this speaks for the density of information in a typical movie and may even just be a coincidence.

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\(^{487}\) Again noting (Alexander 2003, pp. 153-4) on the high probability of movie-career termination based on individual movie performance since 70% of movies lose money.

\(^{488}\) Ambiguity and confusion around the concept of *Theme* is not a new problem of the screenwriting doxa emanating from the manuals as Curran (2015) rightly notes: “Sargent [1912, 1916] appears to treat theme and plot as virtually synonymous, as he never really distinguishes between them” (Curran, 2015, p. 201).

\(^{489}\) For details see the section on ‘Thematic Tropes in the Top 20 RoI Movies’ in the *Appendix* below.
6.4.3 Genre (doxa vs. movie RoI)

The doxa makes note of Genre and of Genre story tropes (settings, character types, objects) though it does not clearly indicate that any particular Genres are more or less successful; thus again Simonton’s (2011) cautionary note about Dramas as unprofitable is missing from the doxa. Dramas tend to win more `Best Picture’ Oscars\(^{490}\) but possibly as the voting members of AMPAS\(^{491}\) may be aware that they are also harder to do well. This is to note that whereas other Genres besides Drama feature tropes of story content that are more engaging for an audience’s attention than are those of everyday life, the plots and problems in Dramas are intended to be realistic and thus any flaws in plot or the realism of the acting performance tend to stand out more.

The top 20 RoI includes a range of Genres and while 6/20 titles are classified partly as `Drama’ in IMDb none of the top 20 RoI are in the Drama genre alone. As noted in Tables 10-4 and 10-6\(^{492}\) Horror dominates the top 20 RoI as a genre (at 8/20).\(^{493}\)

The bottom 20 RoI cluster also has a range of Genres but includes many Dramas (12/20 Drama-hybrids and one single-genre Drama), various `Dramedies’ (8/20 Drama-Comedy hybrids) and 4/20 Gangster (mafia-related) movie stories (This Thing of Ours; Harvard Man; Taxman; I Come With The Rain).\(^{494}\)

6.4.4 Setting: Spatial (doxa vs. movie RoI)

The doxa gives no specific guidelines on the “right” or “wrong” way to do things with creating a movie story Spatial Setting other than to research the historical period of the story’s location and integrate it into the story through-line and character details (Field 1979/2005, pp. 37, 281) and that setting can reveal and deepen story (Truby 2007, pp. 146-81).

\(^{490}\) See, list of `Best Picture’ Oscar Winners on Box Office Mojo: [http://www.boxofficemojo.com/oscar/](http://www.boxofficemojo.com/oscar/)

\(^{491}\) The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

\(^{492}\) See Appendix section 10-6 – Genre for Tables 10-4 through to 10-7.

\(^{493}\) It is noted that 4/20 top 20 RoI movies explicitly feature serial killers as antagonists (The Blair Witch Project, Halloween, Friday the 13th, SAW) and 2/20 of the bottom 20 RoI movies (Eye See You, I Come With The Rain). Buss (2012) notes: “The fact that the most common human phobias across cultures are snakes, spiders, heights, darkness, and strange men, and not, for example, cars or electrical outlets reveals a wealth of information about ancestral survival problems.” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 67). Friday the 13th also has a snake that gets loose in the cabins.

\(^{494}\) Although the “Gangster” movie is not specified in the current Genre taxonomy on IMDb.com. See Genre taxonomy on IMDb.com: [http://www.imdb.com/genre/](http://www.imdb.com/genre/)
As noted in Table 10-9 and 10-10\footnote{See section 10-7 in the Appendix below for Tables 10-9 and 10-10.} an examination of the top 20 RoI movies for Spatial Setting reveals that Urban (at 13/20) instead of Rural settings dominate both datasets and U.S. settings also dominate both datasets (at 75% for both RoI sets).

However possibly the doxa misses the point that less story locations render a movie story cheaper to produce with #1 RoI movie \textit{Paranormal Activity} set entirely inside a house and various “cabin in the woods” movies also in the top 20 RoI (\textit{The Evil Dead, Friday the 13\textsuperscript{th}, Night of the Living Dead}). Ironically there is also a “cabin in the woods” Horror subgenre story of a sort in the bottom 20 RoI namely \textit{Eye See You} set in a remote detox drug rehabilitation facility but the presence of stars (Sylvester Stallone, Tom Berenger, Kris Kristofferson) partly also means the budget of that movie is higher than many “cabin in the woods” movie stories.\footnote{As noted earlier (De Vany \& Walls, 2004) have demonstrated that casting Stars tends to make a movie lose money - which is good news of a sort for struggling actors. As Simkins notes: ‘The statistics are terrifying, with something like 92\% of the [acting] profession out of work at any one time. What the figure doesn't reveal is that the same 8\% tend to work continuously while the same 92\% never get a look-in. The trick therefore is to be in the top 8\%.’ (Simkins, 2009, online). The same philosophy applies in successful screen storytelling and movie-making; the creativity ’trick’ (’possible winning strategy’) is to do more of what the top 20 RoI movies do and less of what the bottom 20 RoI movies do.}

\subsection*{6.4.5 Setting: Temporal (doxa vs. movie RoI)}

The doxa does not provide any clear guidelines for when to ideally set a movie story other than advising that the period should be adequately researched.

Present-Day settings (17/20) dominate the top 20 RoI movies; 14/20 bottom 20 movies are set in their Present Day (at their time of production) but there are more ’period’ or past-set movies in the bottom 20 RoI (namely 5/20) compared to only 2 in the top 20 RoI (\textit{American Graffiti, Star Wars}).\footnote{Again recalling that \textit{Star Wars} (1977) is set ’A long time ago’.} As present-day set movies are cheaper than period movies the doxa could make note of this to increase the overall chances of more movie stories being produced given finite movie economic production capital.

\subsection*{6.4.6 Plot (doxa vs. movie RoI)}

The doxa notes \textit{Plot} is driven by cause-and-effect, that random chance and coincidence are generally problematic in movie story and that problems should increase and deepen as the story progresses; each manual examined prescribes a different \textit{Plot} template; all...
but one of the four manuals (i.e., Truby 2007) prescribe “three-act” structure as part of that Plot template. All top 20 and also bottom 20 RoI movies have three “acts” thus it is not a distinguishing characteristic of movie success.

If the examined doxa categories on Plot Types are used then the Top 20 RoI movies are dominated by “Archplots” (McKee 1997, pp. 44-6) (at 19/20 movies) or by “Genre” plots (Truby 2007, p. 265) (at 15/20 movies) or else by ‘Monster In The House’ stories (Snyder 2007, pp. 26-8) (at 7/20 movies). Bottom 20 RoI movies by contrast are merely dominated by McKee’s “Archplots” (at 18/20 movies) or in other words mainstream classical Hollywood style storytelling. In these terms the varying plot taxonomies of the doxa do not match well with each other as each uses different criteria to classify Plots.

A broad comparison of these 20 canon and 20 archive movies suggests that: depressing story subject-matter and/or plots should be avoided such as suicide or grieving over the loss of a close family member. Interestingly violent and spectacular (‘cinematic’) deaths due to other causes such as serial killers, rogue bikie gangs, sharks or an interplanetary Death Star are certainly present in the top 20 RoI movie cluster.

6.4.7 Character (doxa vs. movie RoI)

One manual of the doxa examined (Snyder 2005) suggests that movie stories with younger main characters as protagonists are more likely to be produced. Correlating with this prescription younger protagonists (aged in their teens, 20s and 30s) dominate the stories of the top 20 RoI movie cluster. Antagonists are typically older than the protagonists. The average number of main characters in a high-RoI movie is four (typically three main protagonists and one major antagonist). Protagonists are also noticeably older in bottom 20 RoI movies than in top 20 RoI and the average number of main characters in bottom 20 RoI movies is likewise four.

6.4.8 Character Arcs (doxa vs. movie RoI)

All the four manuals recommend Character Arcs so these are clearly seen as obligatory in the current doxa. However 17/20 of the top 20 RoI movies do not have Character Arcs and moreover in 6/20 of these canonical movies the protagonists die at the end.498

498 Character death is not here generally considered to be an ‘arc’ or psychological growth, change or transformation of the protagonist. However Obi-Wan does indeed become ‘more powerful than you
Seventeen of the Bottom 20 RoI movies do have Character Arcs for the protagonists and only one of the protagonists dies (i.e., the obnoxious teenaged son in World’s Greatest Dad).

This specific guideline of the doxa on the need for Character Arcs in creating a “good” movie story could thus possibly be revised if ‘good’ means: the movie story reaching a wide enough audience to achieve financial break-even or better - to thus enable that movie story to reach the movie’s target audience. The extant evidence of extremes of movie story RoI reveals that Character Arcs are not as necessary as the current movie doxa prescribes.

6.4.9 Structure (doxa vs. movie RoI)

As noted above in the Plot category “three act” structure applies to most movies whether successful or not.

Both linear and non-linear (e.g. Pulp Fiction, Memento, Rashomon) story structure are recommended in the doxa. As for structure and RoI, nineteen of the top 20 RoI movie stories (i.e., all except the time-travel movie Primer) have a linear story structure. Halloween and Friday the 13th both begin with a scene that is set decades in the past - and thus technically include a Flashback and then cut to the present - indeed the latter top 20 RoI movie was directly inspired by the former (Miller in Bracke, 2006, p. 18). Clerks also includes amusing flashbacks to customers asking comically-stupid and impossibly-vague requests. Thus flashbacks are not seen as problematic for high movie-story RoI.

Two of the bottom 20 RoI movies intercut ‘the-novel-being-written-within-the-story’ into the plot (i.e., Gentlemen Broncos and The Gambler) suggesting that movies about ‘the writing process in general’ are more risky. Two of the bottom 20 RoI movies (Southland Tales and I Come With The Rain) feature flashbacks, memories and time-

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499 See: Appendix section 10.11 - Character Arcs (Top 20 and Bottom 20 RoI Movies), Table 10-19 – Bottom 20 RoI Movies - Character ‘Arcs’.

500 without endangering the careers of the creatives involved - again noting Alexander (2003, pp. 153-4) on career sustainability in the movie industry.
shifts which although intended for deliberate dramatic storytelling and stylistic effect can become confusing as various movie critics have noted.\textsuperscript{501}

The four different Plot structural templates prescribed by the manuals can apply to both top and bottom 20 RoI movies and thus do not offer much in the way of heuristics for movie story success.

\subsection*{6.4.10 Dialogue (doxa vs. movie RoI)}

As noted (in Section 6.1.10) above the doxa in the four manuals provides extensive guidelines on both good and bad movie story dialogue. The top 20 RoI movies adhere to these general guidelines.

The bottom 20 RoI movies also adhere to these general dialogue guidelines however certain dialogue-“fails” appear evident for example as noted in various negative reviews on Metacritic: namely “Comedy” genre movies in the bottom 20 RoI where some or even much of the dialogue is not particularly funny (\textit{All The Queen’s Men}, \textit{World’s Greatest Dad}) and in \textit{Eye See You} where what could be seen as a classic big dumb Hollywood action-movie the dialogue feels pedestrian and either badly-written or dumbed-down slightly too far or both.

In the two non-English language movies in the datasets (\textit{El Mariachi} and \textit{A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop}) the English-language subtitles mean that the dialogue (as on-screen text) is communicated to an English-language audience however the subtitled translations may well be an inaccurate interpretation of such dialogue to varying degrees.

\subsection*{6.4.11 Movie Duration / Screenplay Length (doxa vs. movie RoI)}

As noted in Section 6.1.11 the doxa prescribes either 110 or 120 pages but also with a range of 90 to 130 pages (Snyder 2005, p. 143) suggested for first-draft screenplays.

However the top 20 RoI movies range in runtime from 121 mins (\textit{Star Wars}) to 77 mins (\textit{Primer}) and the average is 93 minutes (or 93 screenplay pages by extrapolation).

\textsuperscript{501} See: \url{http://www.metacritic.com/movie/southland-tales} and \url{https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/i-come-with-the-rain}
Bottom 20 RoI movies by contrast average 102 minutes. Thus the average bottom 20 RoI movie is around 10 minutes longer than is the average top 20 RoI movie. Given the empirical evidence of movie RoI this implies the doxa might be better to recommend 90 pages as an ideal screenplay/movie length instead of 110-120 pages.  

6.4.12 Number of Scenes (doxa vs. movie RoI)

The doxa from the manuals recommends 40-70 scenes. However by comparison the average number of scenes in a top 20 RoI movie is 119 scenes and the #1 Loss on Investment movie (All The Queen’s Men) is 182 scenes. When these trends are plotted for increasing RoI of the top 20 movies the trendlines would appear to indicate that RoI increases towards 90 minutes and 90 scenes.

Further investigation may reveal more about Evolutionary and Cognitive Psychology or evolved general preferences on the pacing and duration of movie stories and their scenes for Human Nature in general. Research by Bordwell (2008) and (Cutting, et al., 2010) also notes that Average Shot Lengths in movies are becoming shorter over time.

6.4.13 Dramatic Principles (doxa vs. movie RoI)

The doxa prescribes many and varied Dramatic Principles often explicitly derived from Aristotle on Ancient Greek plays and cites certain works on playwriting such as The Art of Dramatic Writing (Egri, 1946). While the doxa tends to recommend “happy endings” or ‘the good guys win’, the top 20 RoI are dominated by Villain Triumphant stories and in 6 of the top 20 movies the heroes are also dead at the end. Likewise all bottom 20 RoI are ‘Hero (Protagonist) Triumphant’ stories which runs counter to the dominant screenwriting doxa particularly if ‘happy’ movie story endings are erroneously interpreted as singular causes for movie success. The top 20 and bottom 20 RoI movies are outliers but the top 20 movies are more likely the kind of outliers which

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502 As noted previously this suggests that the Napoleon Dynamite (2003) screenplay at 90 pages is the ideal length high-RoI movie screenplay (see digital Appendix on attached CD-ROM). It is again noted that the “one page per minute” guideline is only a rule of thumb and also noted that two of the top 20 RoI movies (Paranormal Activity and The Blair Witch Project) did not have formal screenplays, but were improvised from a story outline.

503 Being Human (Gross 2012) notes that the ultradian rhythms of human sleep stages are 90-120 minutes. This biological phenomenon might partly explain the natural selection tendency of movies to wobble about this phenotypic mean as a preferred range (R. D. Gross, 2012, p. 298).
screenwriters and movie makers would prefer to emulate in terms of their outstanding performance with audiences and thus their story characteristics. It also seems plausible that ‘Villain Triumphant’ endings may provide some of the novelty and surprise of the top 20 RoI (creative, canonical) movies with regard to their dramatic plots.

Interestingly the Scene Wins: Heroes vs Villains score-plots\(^{504}\) show that villains win more scenes than they tend to lose overall although complicating this is that not all scenes are dramatically speaking, zero-sum games\(^{505}\) for both the protagonists and antagonists. Further complicating the Scene-Wins scoring is that assigning numerical scores for different character actions can become problematic given the complexity of possible actions, strategies and moves by the various characters in the story.\(^{506}\) This would contrast with Snyder’s (2005, pp. 111, 194) citation of McKee that the movie story scene-wins should alternate, from + to – (or a win to a loss) throughout the whole movie story.

### 6.4.14 On Creativity (doxa vs. movie RoI)

The doxa features many and varied folk psychology recommendations on creativity. Remarkably most of these do have close parallels in the scientific study of creativity including: CPF and CPS; the “ten-year” rule; and correlate with Csikszentmihalyi’s “internalizing the domain” (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, p. 47) and Bourdieu’s “habitus (or, “feel for the game”)) (Johnson in Bourdieu & Johnson 1993, p. 5).

Many of the recommendations on creativity in the doxa also can be seen to be questions around the choices that screenwriters make when creating movie stories - which likewise can be seen to correlate with Simonton’s (1984-2004) Evolutionary creativity theory of BVSR,\(^{507}\) or of the Evolutionary algorithm of: the selection of certain

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\(^{504}\) (see Figures 6-3 and 6-4)

\(^{505}\) A zero-sum game is any form of contest in which there is a winner and also a loser rather than “everyone wins”. For more see Game Theory within Evolutionary Theory for example in the work *Evolution and the Theory of Games* (Maynard Smith, 1982).

\(^{506}\) It is also noted that some readers may misinterpret this as meaning that therefore all empirical and quantitative investigation of narrative in bioculture is impossible or that this approach means the gamification of culture and its analysis has gone too far. However Game Theory in evolutionary study has a significant history; see (Dennett 1995) and also (Maynard Smith, 1982). It may also simply be that for further research Scene-Win scores need operationalising in greater and more complex detail.

\(^{507}\) For the BVSR (Blind-Variation and Selective-Retention) Evolutionary or ‘Darwinian’ model of creativity see the earlier Literature Review section, 4.1.2 - Models of Creativity.
(“blindly” generated) ideas, the variation of these ideas \(^{508}\) and then the transmission of these ideas into a story (screenplay) and thus ultimately the movie. Since the 40 movies in the RoI dataset are completed screenworks, the creative problems of their screenwriters during the development of the story are not evident. Instead the final screenwork is presented after it has been through the many selection, variation and transmission processes involved in movie creation - including also editorial changes to drafts of the screenplay and various specific acting, directorial, movie editing, titling and music-scoring choices.

In terms of realizing the story vision onscreen the greater prevalence of writer-hyphenates \(^{509}\) in top 20 RoI (20/20 or 100%) than in bottom 20 RoI (16/20 or 80%) is noteworthy. However screenwriters on larger-budget movies are often allocated or negotiate a “Producer” (or “Associate Producer”) credit and thus their direct involvement in production may be much less likely. A “hands-on involvement” in movie creation (such as via directing or acting) may also be inaccurately indicated and over-emphasized by the simple (16/20) figure of the bottom 20 RoI movies’ writer-hyphenates based on the official credit received. The doxa might be improved by referencing such writer-hyphenate phenomena although this may also be discouraging to some “spec-only” screenwriters who do not wish or are unable to be involved in the execution (filmmaking) process of movie storytelling. \(^{510}\)

### 6.4.15 Human Nature (doxa vs. movie RoI)

The doxa refers to “human nature” and to “human universals” asserting that it is a primary aim of drama to depict, explore, illuminate, and appeal to it; however human nature is referred to in the manuals in terms of folk psychology rather than via knowledge from the domain of Evolutionary Psychology or Cognitive Science. \(^{511}\)

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\(^{508}\) Including via Boden’s (2004) “combinatorial creativity” or Koestler’s (1964) “bisociation” or “conceptual blending” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) which are all the same concept of creativity.

\(^{509}\) Or what are herein termed ‘writeurs’ as opposed to ‘auteurs’.

\(^{510}\) It is also noted that some screenwriters may be considered problematic when present on a movie set, sometimes making the actors, directors and crew nervous that they are wrongly interpreting the authors’ intentions and meanings in the screenplay when converting it to a movie.

\(^{511}\) Buss (2012) notes: “Evolutionary psychology provides some of the most important tools for unlocking the mysteries of where we came from, how we arrived at our current state, and the mechanisms of mind that define what it means to be human” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 429). If one of the timeless philosophical questions this thesis leads to is “What does it mean to be human?” Evolutionary Psychology appears to provide many answers in the application of the elements of Human Nature in the top 20 RoI movies.

“Primal” or human universal themes, motifs, stakes, desires, drives, aims, settings, problems and goals are present to varying degrees in both top and bottom 20 RoI movies. However the problems and problem-situations of characters depicted in the top 20 RoI in general are more attractive than in the bottom 20 RoI movies with the latter more focussed on problems around grief and the death of loved ones. While these are undoubtedly hard problems in real life, possibly movies are not the place or the method by which audiences would choose to address or work through them. Since human universals such as survival (life and death situations or stakes), reproduction (romance and family or kinship), and revenge (retributive justice) are of interest to humans in general, their mere presence in a top or bottom 20 RoI movie is clearly not as important as their precise rendering and situational context in the specific movie story.

Key character traits and values regarded as likeable, admirable or empathetic for protagonists - and conversely their opposites for antagonists - obviously shape agonistic structure in all narrative and not merely in movie stories. In general the top 20 RoI movies feature protagonist characters who represent desirable characteristics of Human Nature and while bottom 20 RoI movies can often do likewise sometimes the bottom 20 RoI appear to fail at this. All The Queen’s Men is a farcical comedy but not quite entertaining enough to work and its characters also do not appear engaging enough regardless of its farcical tone and genre. In short the question of ’human nature’ in terms

512 Regarding movie story issues related to reproduction notably Buss states: “Human beings, wherever we meet them, display an almost obsessional interest in matters of sex and kinship - Edmund Leach, 1966.” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 237). Thus many movies involve such issues, whether canonical or archival.

513 Buss (2012) notes: “Lethal retribution is an ancient and cross-culturally universal recourse for those subjected to abuse” (Daly & Wilson, 1988, p. 226). One of the most robust findings in aggression research is that aggression tends to cause retaliatory aggression (Buss, 1961) ...Aggression is evoked by particular adaptive problems confronted in particular cost-benefit contexts.” (D. M. Buss, 2012, pp. 301-302).

514 As Buss (2012) also notes regarding revenge (retributive justice): “Approximate synonyms for reciprocal altruism include cooperation, reciprocation and social exchange.”” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 269) and from evolutionary game theory in social relationships, “To summarize, “First, do unto others as you wish them to do unto you, but then do unto them as they have just done to you.” (Trivers 1985, p.392).”” (D. M. Buss, 2012, pp. 270-271).
of how characters in movie stories make choices and ultimately which movie stories appeal to human nature at the box-office are complex, subtle and nuanced.\textsuperscript{515}

The detail in Table 10-1 on Commonalities and Differences in top and bottom 20 RoI movie datasets across 15 elements of the screenwriting doxa in the Appendix suggests that: Where the doxa on movie screenwriting can apply to both top 20 RoI (canon) and also the bottom 20 RoI (archive) sets of movies those are the specific instances where the doxa prescribes \textit{how to create a movie story} instead of: \textit{how to create a successful one} and simultaneously \textit{avoid creating an unsuccessful one}. These are the key areas where it appears that the extant doxa and thus the examined screenwriting manuals may require additional or revised heuristics for movie storytellers aiming to reach the widest audience for the least cost with their movie story - and thus with their screenplay.

In summation this Chapter (6) has aimed to provide the data necessary to answer Research Questions Two and Three: \textit{RQ2 - What evidence do we have that the doxa influences the movie screenwriting process?}; and \textit{RQ3 - What are the formal and structural characteristics of the top 20 RoI and by comparison, of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories?}

\textsuperscript{515} Obviously one part of Human Nature is to make mistakes via trial-and-error and to try and learn from them; in these terms the bottom 20 RoI movies are valuable experiments that did not work, or exemplary individual cautionary tales for both screenwriters and filmmakers.
7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the Results of the study and discusses these results drawing on Evocriticism and Evolutionary Psychology. Recalling again that the five research questions of this study are:

- **RQ1** - What is the current orthodoxy (doxa) of movie screenwriting?
- **RQ2** - What evidence do we have that the doxa influences the movie screenwriting process?
- **RQ3** - What are the formal and structural characteristics of the top 20 RoI and by comparison, of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories?
- **RQ4** - Which movie story characteristics are common to, and conversely which are unique to, the top 20 and the bottom 20 RoI movies?
- **RQ5** - In light of the evidence are there any revised screenwriting heuristics that emerge from the above enquiry?

The following two sections (7-1 and 7-2) aim to answer **RQ4** above while section 7-3 aims to answer **RQ5**.

7.1 RESULTS OF THE ‘DOXA VERSUS MOVIE ROI’ COMPARISON

This section summarizes the results of this *doxa versus movie RoI* study for the fifteen categories of movie-story heuristic examined in the current screenwriting doxa.

7.1.1 Story Premise (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

When specifically considering story *Premise* in movies a comparison of the fifteen examined screenwriting doxa prescriptions to the top and also the bottom 20 RoI movies is unsurprising since all the movies in the dataset are narrative fiction feature films; if these movies did not have a story *Premise* they would not be a movie story but would instead be ‘anti-narrative’ and thus would be likely to be considered as *avant-garde* or ‘Arthouse’ or ‘Experimental’ cinema rather than mainstream movies.

However certain key points emerge from this comparison: for example the pattern from the bottom 20 RoI movies that a depressing *Premise* (such as involving the death or suicide of a family member) is off-putting from the point of Evolutionary Psychology and correlates with Simonton’s (2011) note that the Drama genre is generally viewed as unprofitable. Simonton notes:
Researchers have pinpointed the one genre it’s best to avoid if you’re interested in substantial profits: drama. Most moviegoers want light entertainment, not weighty entertainment. Laughs and thrills, not tears and deep sighs (Simonton, 2011, p. 82).

With regard to story Premise at least two interesting points emerge from the Results of this study. Firstly that the premise of the movie Clerks (at least as listed on IMDb) does not appear to fulfil many of the criteria suggested by various of the examined screenwriting manual authors; namely that the story Premise (stated as a Logline) should be compelling and fire the imagination with possibilities or in other words should be deemed ‘high-concept’. As an independent movie Clerks also highlights the difference between the ‘conception’ (or the Premise description) and the ‘execution’ and thus audience experience of a realized screen idea. A Premise that is boring-sounding on paper: “A day in the lives of two convenience clerks named Dante and Randal as they annoy customers, discuss movies, and play hockey on the store roof”⁵¹⁶ - can be executed as a comedy movie with effective casting and amusing performances and can succeed with cinema audiences. This is the Anna Karenina Principle whereby other elements (in this case the Genre, i.e., Comedy) can overcompensate for deficiencies in other areas of the movie story in maximizing audience attention and response in Boyd’s (Boyd in Boyd, Carroll and Gottschall, 2010, p. 438) terms. While the filmmaking techniques in Clerks are amateurish at times (out of focus shots, bad lighting, inconsistent and even wooden acting performances) the story and humour maintained sufficient audience attention to become a top 20 RoI movie, out-performing Star Wars (1977) in terms of story-power or ‘audience-reach / movie-story-cost’.

A second interesting point that emerges is that the Premise of a movie when expressed as a logline can also be worded in many alternate ways, some of which appear much more effective than others in piquing reader and movie audience curiosity and interest.

Another issue that the study also raises is that the definition of `Story’ (let alone story Premise) is clearly problematic in the doxa. While a convention exists around what an audience can generally currently expect from a narrative fiction feature-length movie story, in contrast to definitions of Story in the doxa, one of the most concise and precise functional definitions of Story is from Gottschall (2012) in The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make us Human: `Story = Character + Problem + Attempted Extrication’

⁵¹⁶ This Clerks premise, sourced from (IMDb, 1990-2016i, online).
(Gottschall 2012, p. 52). With an emphasis on attempted extrication this functional definition can be seen to apply more to the top 20 RoI movies than to the Bottom 20 as despite their best attempts many of the top 20 RoI movie story protagonists do not manage to extricate themselves from `the problem’. Examples include the couple left behind by the dive-boat in Open Water who are subsequently eaten by sharks; the student filmmakers in The Blair Witch Project and the engaged couple in Paranormal Activity. This `Villain Triumphant’ story trope is thus largely ignored or only mentioned in passing in the examined screenwriting manuals; possibly many of the movies in the top 20 RoI list may be in that top 20 RoI cluster of stories at least in part due to their subverting general audience expectations (via: surprise) for reasons implied by evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker:

Of course, not all stories have happy endings… There have to be some stories where the murderer does catch up with the heroine in the basement, or we would never feel suspense and relief in the stories in which she escapes. The economist Stephen Landsburg observes that happy endings predominate when no director is willing to sacrifice the popularity of his or her film for the greater good of more suspense in the movies in general (Pinker in B. Boyd, et al., 2010, pp. 130-131).

The lack of a happy ending in many of the top twenty RoI movies is therefore interesting and counterintuitive. These movies may well have been judged more novel - or fresh, new, original and surprising (and thus: creative) by the field of international cinema audiences - in part as a result of their unexpected unhappy endings.

7.1.2 Themes (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

The results of comparing Theme in the doxa to movie RoI are largely inconclusive since Theme is such an ambiguous and ill-defined term in general and not merely within the dominant screenwriting doxa. However as noted one interesting pattern that emerges from an analysis of top 20 RoI movies is that a `Thematic Trope’ can be identified at the 14% mark of the movies in the dataset (see Table 10-3 in Appendix).

As the analysis of Evolutionary Themes in both highest and lowest-RoI movies demonstrates (Section 10-5 in the Appendix) we should expect such Themes (ideas or concepts) around `Human Nature’ (survival, reproduction, revenge) to appear in all movies and in all stories. In the Evolutionary Psychology view we might expect Moral Premises (`Themes’) in popular (canonical) movies to reflect pro-humanistic, pro-social values. However ambiguity remains around the “correct” or the mass cinema-going
audience’s consensus on the, interpretation/s of such Themes. It may be the case that the Theme/s (`Message/s’) of a movie is often in the eye of the beholder.

7.1.3 Genre (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

The results of comparing Genre in the examined doxa to movie RoI are that no clear prescriptions exist - as a consensus in that doxa - regarding Genre except key recommendations that screenwriters be extremely familiar with the Genre they are writing in.517

Importantly the study findings on the prevalence of the Drama genre in the bottom 20 RoI movies correlates with Simonton’s cautionary note about that specific Genre in Great Flicks (2011). Regarding Genre in general as a limiting filter for audiences, Simonton (2011) also notes that movie consumers list Genre (aka `story type’) as the most influential element over their decision to watch a movie story, overriding word-of-mouth. This is to note that no amount of positive word-of-mouth from others will encourage moviegoers who despise Horror genre movies to see a Horror movie (Simonton, 2011, pp. 81-82). While Genre may thus be a limiting filter for audiences Rocky as a Sports-genre movie appealed to both males and females; one does not need to be a fan of the sport of boxing to appreciate the movie as a story; yet those repulsed by physical violence or by boxing as a sport may well be put off by the movie or its trailer.

In the doxa manuals of the study while McKee presents the most comprehensive taxonomy of Genres and with examples. As noted above McKee (1997) also employs an Evolutionary view with regard to creativity in Genre. Macdonald (2004) makes an important point about both Genre and Style in discussing Genette’s taxonomy of narrative genre:

Style and genre can, by using such a system [i.e. Genette 1980], be more clearly analysed, for example and presented more ‘scientifically’. By identifying units with specified properties that act and interact within narrative, it is clearly possible to combine and re-combine them in ways that suit (according to the author) the narration (Macdonald 2004, p. 137).

517 or are blending with other Genres in the case of hybrid-genre movies.
An Evolutionary view of culture would suggest that when they work hybrid-genre movies such as (say) romantic/comedy, sci-fi/western, horror/musical might exhibit ‘hybrid vigour’ or might spread further and faster than movies with one clear main Genre as they satisfy two genre audiences at once. At the same time there are counter-examples in the bottom 20 RoI list such as Outlander (2002) a science-fiction / medieval / horror genre combination which was clearly unsuccessful in terms of RoI.

In the light of extant biocultural PhD studies of the Horror fiction genre (Clasen, 2012; Frome, 2006; Graff, 1995; Hines, 2010) it is likely and possibly even obvious to most that the effectiveness of Horror genre movies - when the movies work for audiences\(^{518}\) - often derives from their exploitation of evolved survival instincts. In the (unpublished) PhD dissertation Monsters and Horror Stories: A Biocultural Approach (Clasen, 2012) the evolved characteristics and sensitivities of the evolved human nervous system are examined as an explanation of how and why the horror genre and specifically monsters are so affective for audiences. Drawing on research from Evolutionary Psychology and the Evolutionary Social Sciences Clasen concludes:

> Life in prehistoric times was dangerous. The environment teemed with potential threat from other organisms: alpha predators, invisible pathogens, hostile conspecifics, and so on. Hence, natural selection has fine-tuned human cognition to deal with such dangers, and horror fiction runs on this mental hardware. It is a cultural technology designed to exploit adaptive danger-management mechanisms, although it can also function as a kind of exploratory play behavior, a way to expand our experiential horizon indefinitely and without substantial risk by letting us vicariously acquire experience of fear and danger (Clasen 2012, p. 177).

In short biological and biocultural evolution leave an Achilles’ Heel in human psychology for creators of Horror fiction to exploit. This view also correlates with Snyder’s (2005) emphasis or screenwriting guidelines suggesting ‘primal’ Themes are likely to reach a wider audience as they connect with a universal Human Nature that is adapted to react strongly to them.

### 7.1.4 Settings: Spatial (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

While the popular manuals are primarily aimed toward a readership aspiring to create a spec Hollywood screenplay, this study indicates that no specific prescriptions are given

\(^{518}\) Again noting also the Anna Karenina Principle for: movies that work.
regarding the types of Settings chosen by the writer for locations, and neither is there emphasis on restricting a movie narrative to fewer locations.

However apart from the five mainstream 'Hollywood'-style movies in the top 20 RoI (Rocky, The Full Monty, Star Wars, E.T. and My Big Fat Greek Wedding) given their low-budget nature in general a number of the other fifteen of the top 20 movies are indeed primarily set around one key location: for example the suburban house in Paranormal Activity; the neighbourhood in Halloween; the summer camp in Friday the 13th; the farmhouse in Night of the Living Dead; the cabin in The Evil Dead; 'the basement room' in SAW and the convenience store in Clerks.

In the examined doxa no recommendations regarding Spatial Settings of story emerge as likely for a higher story RoI other than that certain types of Settings can be chosen to make a story more expressive and 'cinematic'. A useful heuristic for screenwriters is to limit the number of locations thus keeping the production cost lower while maintaining a 'high-concept' story idea.

7.1.5 Settings: Temporal (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

Likewise the manuals under study do not advise against 'Period' (or Historical) movies yet the top 20 RoI are overwhelmingly set in the Present Day at their time of movie production and release (17/20 movies). The economic factors of movie production clearly affect the RoI ('benefit/cost ratio') of any movie; a movie with a budget of USD$15,000 set in the present day and shot inside a house already owned by the director (such as Paranormal Activity) only needs to make USD$1,065,000, to return 71 times its movie story cost (production budget) and thus enter the top 20 RoI movies list. In other words if a cinema ticket costs $8 the movie only needs to attract 133,125 people to the cinema to become a top 20 RoI movie. Remarkably however the movie attracted over 24.5 million people thus returning not just 71 times but well over 10,000 times its story creation cost.

Conversely the number one Bottom 20 RoI movie, a World War II period movie (All The Queen’s Men) which cost USD$15M would require 1.8 million people to recoup that $15M and considering it also likely had a further $15M spent on P&A (marketing), it would need at least double that figure or attract closer to 4 million people to attend the

519 The Full Monty is a British or UK movie rather than an American 'Hollywood' movie.
cinema and pay $8 each in order to approach break-even. The most-expensive production budget in the Bottom 20 RoI Outlander ($50M) is not just a period-piece set in the Viking Age but also a CGI-intensive ‘alien monster’ science-fiction action horror Genre movie and would thus require 12.5 million people to pay $8 each if the marketing (P&A) spend was also $50M.520

The screenwriting advice to ‘avoid writing period movies’ is thus a useful heuristic for aspiring screenwriters aiming to have their screenplays produced as in general the more expensive to produce the less likely the script might be to be financed, all other things being equal in terms of movie financier interest in a script. A second problem is recouping the considerably-larger Marketing budgets that ‘period’ story pieces require as a general rule.

In summation no ‘benefit/cost’ guidelines or prohibitions appear in the examined doxa around story Temporal Settings and there is a notable omission that, in general, period pieces are more expensive since they generally require a higher production budget. However a comparison to movie-RoI reveals the vast majority of highest-RoI movies are set in the Present Day (of their time of production) and accordingly the biggest-loss-on-investment movie is an expensive, historically-set WWII ‘period’ movie.

7.1.6 Plot (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

Each of the manuals under study prescribe their own unique ‘plot event’ template. However such story templates have been criticized as “formulaic” and as restricting creativity for example in the article ‘Save The Movie! The 2005 Screenwriting Book That’s Taken Over Hollywood - And Made Every Movie Feel The Same’ which notes the influence of Snyder’s (2005) Save The Cat! schema on movies (Suderman, 2013, online). Since both high- and low-RoI movies match the doxa story (Plot) templates it seems the doxa thus instructs how to create a movie story rather than a successful one.

However what is interesting from an Evolutionary point of view - as Truby also notes about his seven-step story schema - is that such templates or story formulas all involve typical steps involved in solving a life problem (Truby 2007, pp. 39-40). This leads back to Gottschall’s (2012) functional definition of the formulation of a story and suggests

520 As tends to be the case where as a rule of thumb Marketing Spend on a movie roughly equals movie story production budget (Vogel 2011, 2014).
that humans are fascinated by watching variations on how others solve specific problems. Humans are clearly remarkable problem-solvers, as the founders of the scientific knowledge domain of Evolutionary Psychology Tooby and Cosmides (1992) also note in listing over thirty problems that must be solved by an individual in order to survive and replicate (Tooby and Cosmides in Barkow, et al., 1992, p. 110).

Thus in overview regarding ‘Plot’ each manual examined prescribes their own *Plot* structural template and provides unique taxonomies for *Plot Types*. A comparison of the doxa on *Genre* and *Plot* and *Structure* to movie-RoI reveals that the Horror genre dominates the high-RoI cluster and also that all ‘Archplot’ movies which dominate the bottom 20 RoI all have “three acts” - but so do unsuccessful movies - and this again also suggests that the current dominant doxa indicates merely how to create a movie story instead of specifically a successful one.

### 7.1.7 Character (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

No clear prescriptions appear in the examined manuals for the age or gender of lead characters apart from Snyder’s note that most of the cinema-going audience tend to be a younger (i.e., ‘twenty-something’) demographic and thus such younger movie-story heroes are in general more likely to appeal to a wider cinema audience (Snyder 2005, p.53). The examined movie-RoI data supports this view.

Field’s (2005, p. 47) suggestion of making characters more ‘universal’ where possible would also apply to the more ‘everyman’, working-class or student characters in the movie stories which dominate the top 20 RoI set in contrast to the bottom 20 RoI story protagonists who by contrast tend to be outstanding, special or remarkable characters.

### 7.1.8 Character Arcs (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

All the manuals examined prescribe *Character Arcs* and in fact so do a wider sample of popular screenwriting manuals that shape the screenwriting doxa for example Seger (1994, p. 198), Vogler (1992, p. 160) and Hauge (2007, p. 32); yet the majority of the top 20 RoI movies do not appear to involve such *Character Arcs*. An analysis of these movies reveals that apart from the three classic Hollywood-style movies (*Star Wars*, *E.T.*, and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*) the other seventeen of top 20 RoI movies do not
feature *Character Arcs*;\(^521\) the psyches of the main characters appear the same at the end of these stories as they do at the beginning. Indeed in many cases they are simply dead; and have not changed, grown or developed as a person. Likewise as noted in the Literature Review (Section 4.3.6) Murphy (2007) finds that despite the dominant doxa many successful independent movies do not contain *Character Arcs* (Murphy, 2007, pp. 19-20).

For these reasons - although the doxa (manuals) examined are primarily aimed at speculative Hollywood screenwriters - independent movies appear to operate via different heuristics whereby *Character Arcs* are not obligatory. This is also unsurprising as independent movies often can and do play against or deliberately subvert Hollywood tropes and clichés. Thus regarding *Character Arcs* the consensus from the manuals examined is to include them in a movie story - however the results of this screenwriting doxa vs. movie RoI comparison suggests it is not necessary.\(^522\)

In short the doxa requirement for *Character Arcs* in successful movie stories appears to be contradicted by the majority (17/20) of the top 20 RoI movies.\(^523\)

### 7.1.9 Structure (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

Three of the manuals examined in the study (except for Truby 2007) prescribe a “three act” structure. As the comparative analysis (*Table 6-22 - Comparison of 8 major movie story systems or plot structures*) demonstrates all of eight major screenwriting manual authors’ works may be seen to prescribe “three act” structure within their story screenplay templates and most also refer to Aristotle’s dramatic principles.\(^524\) However Truby in (Truby 2007, p. 4) and the article ’Why 3-Act Will Kill Your Writing’ (Truby, 2009) rightly points out that unsuccessful screenplays and movies also have “three acts” therefore as an analytical and writing tool it is not particularly useful to screen storytellers aiming for a wide audience-reach. While “three act” structure may be a convenient way for critics and commentators to refer broadly to the story structure of movies, in support of Truby’s (2007, 2009) view this study’s ’extremes of movie-story

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521 As noted, it is debatable whether *Rocky* and *The Full Monty* feature character arcs for the protagonists.

522 Subject also to interpretation on exactly what constitutes a *Character Arc*.

523 Character arcs in *The Full Monty* and *Rocky* are debatable.

524 Macdonald (2004) notes five major screenplay manuals which adopt Aristotelian doctrine (Macdonald 2004, p. 73) and also that *eight out of the eleven* major screenplay manuals examined in his PhD study refer to “three act” structure (see: Macdonald 2004, p. 78).
RoI’ analysis appears to suggest that such a plot structure will not necessarily help a movie story reach its intended audience. It is also important to note just how many of the Top 20 RoI scripts do not have a happy ending; this research finds that they are overwhelmingly Villain Triumphant stories.

7.1.10 Dialogue (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

In general terms the doxa in the manuals examined herein appear to generally correlate with the observed evidence of the two extreme clusters of movie RoI examined.

7.1.11 Movie Duration / Screenplay Length (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

While the examined screenwriting manuals (doxa) recommend 110 or 120 minutes as an ideal length the average duration of the top 20 RoI is only 93 minutes and the shortest top 20 RoI movie is 77 minutes (Primer). A movie story that is 90 minutes costs less than the same story as a 120 minute movie and the doxa does not appear to address the realization (production) cost of a movie story in comparison to its duration as a heuristic for screenwriters.

It is also interesting that when charted and a line of best fit is added for Number of Scenes and Movie Duration (in Minutes) there appears to be a general trend as RoI increases towards: 90 minutes and 90 scenes.

*Figure 7-1 – Extrapolated Trendlines of Movie RoI vs. Duration (Mins) and Number of Scenes*
In the chart above, movie story RoI is increasing towards the left - namely Paranormal Activity is the #1 RoI movie (the far-left of the chart) and My Big Fat Greek Wedding is #20 (on the far-right). Thus if the existing patterns of top 20 RoI movies do indicate future probability a future top 20 movie that outperformed the current #1 RoI movie Paranormal Activity would be expected to be: close to 90 minutes in duration and would be expected to have around 90 scenes. This finding could be a useful heuristic for aspiring high-RoI screenwriters and movie makers namely: 90 minutes, 90 scenes and thus an Average Scene Length of one screenplay page (or one movie minute).

7.1.12 Number of Scenes (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

As the data from Section 6.1.12 demonstrates the doxa recommends 40 to 70 scenes for a 120 minute movie yet as noted previously this Number of Scenes figure appears to be a general guesstimate by the manual authors rather than an accurate measurement of the actual Number of Scenes in a clearly-specified dataset of successful movies written by early-career screenwriters. Thus while manuals appear to estimate anywhere from 40 to 70 scenes as a “good” number, a ‘doxa vs. RoI’ comparison shows instead that a considerably-higher figure of 119 Scenes is the average for a highest-RoI movie.525

Implications of the Above Two Findings (Duration and Number of Scenes) for Screenwriters

The Findings of this study on Movie Duration/Screenplay Length and Number of Scenes when combined also have important implications with regard to heuristics for screenwriters in terms of movie pacing and length of movie scenes.526 For example in one of the manuals that shapes the doxa McKee (1997) states:

A typical two-hour feature plays forty to sixty scenes. This means, on average, a scene lasts two and a half minutes… In a properly

525 These movie RoI figures were derived from close viewing of the movies (see the Excel Data Tables in the attached digital Appendix on CD-ROM) whereas the Number of Scenes suggested in a screenplay can also change in the final screenwork as a result of different choices made during a shoot and choices in movie editing. As a comparison Napoleon Dynamite has 189 numbered scenes in the (2003) shooting script while the completed screenwork (movie) only has 130 scenes. An extra (unscripted) scene at the end of the movie was added later.

526 “Pacing” is yet another element that is analyzed by screen readers and sometimes occurs in ‘the grid’ on a screen reader’s report along with the other elements such as Premise, Plot, Character, Dialog, Writing Ability and so on; for example: “We’ll also provide you with a 3-page bullet point summary of our analysis, in addition to our unique Filmscribe Grid assessing the script on its idea, plot, characterization, dialogue, pace and setting; together with an overall evaluation recommending or passing on the script” (Pelican, 2015, online): http://filmscribe.co.uk/about/script-consultancy/.
formatted screenplay a page equals a minute of screen time.… The average scene length of two to three minutes is a reaction to the nature of cinema and the audience's hunger for a stream of expressive moments. (McKee 1997, pp. 291-2)

However instead of McKee’s “two and a half minutes” the current Average Scene Length of a top 20 RoI movie is much shorter at 50 seconds or 7/8ths of a movie screenplay page. This 50 seconds Average Scene Length is likely due to the typical Human Nature attention-spans of Evolutionary Psychology, as McKee hints at above.

7.1.13 Dramatic Principles (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

Dramatic Principles as prescribed in the manuals examined are numerous and vary in detail. However the manuals rightly assert that the key principle of “drama is conflict” and emphasize ’hero versus villain’ (agonistic) structure and these dramatic principles are supported from a close examination of which character wins each scene in the highest-RoI movies. However one interesting point that emerges is that the relative success of the Villain Triumphant story trope appears to go unnoticed in the doxa; this may be due to the apparent lack of empirical datasets informing the various ’how to’ manuals that currently shape the movie screenwriting doxa.

7.1.14 Creativity (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

It appears problematic that none of the manual authors appear aware of the scientific study of creativity which has been in progress in the domain of Psychology since at least J. P. Guilford’s 1950 speech to the American Psychological Association. While many of the authors make recommendations about how screenwriters might increase or aim to maximize their creativity these insights appear to be folk wisdom about creativity instead of recent discoveries or research findings on creativity from the domain of individual Psychology and also Group and Social Psychology.

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527 For various Dramatic Principles see the Doxa Data-Tables in the attached digital Appendix on CD-ROM.
528 In Evolutionary Psychology (2012) Buss notes: “Human conflict is a universal feature of social interaction, and it occurs in many forms” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 329) however Buss also notes: “conflict per se serves no adaptive purpose” (p. 330). Yet if stories (such as in movies) are adaptive as Carroll (2005), Sugiyama (1995, 2007) and other Evocritics argue then “conflict” as a dramatic device has been exapted into an adaptive function using bioculture or narratives in novels, movies, songs and so forth. Strategic interference theory or “blocking the strategies and violating the desires of someone else” (Buss 2012, p. 330) obviously drives the agonistic structure of all narrative in all media (movies, novels, songs, television and so on).
Additionally the manual authors do not examine where the core ideas or “key inspirations” for the movies/screenplays which they examine came from which would also be illuminating for screenwriters. A habitus or “feel for the game” of what might make a successful movie story can take screenwriters some years to develop via trial-and-error-correction in pitching their movie story ideas and gauging the reactions. Revealing the inspirations for specific extant successful movie stories can demystify the creative process for new screenwriters.

In short although the manuals prescribe certain ideas around creativity that correlate with the extant scientific research on creativity, none of the manuals examined cite that scientific research. This finding reveals a gap between the scientific research on creativity and the screenwriting doxa - or a “Two Cultures” (Science versus the Arts) problem. The manuals also do not note the overrepresentation of writer-hyphenates in the highest-RoI movies as they are primarily aimed at a target readership of spec screenwriters and not necessarily at writer-hyphenate filmmakers.529

7.1.15 Human Nature (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

While all four of the manual authors appear to indicate that what they refer to as “human nature” is the core subject-matter of movie screenwriting530 none of the manuals make reference to the domain of knowledge of Evolutionary Psychology and it appears likely that useful insights for the doxa could be gained by examining and integrating that knowledge. In the same way that Evocriticism scholars have examined nineteenth-century canonical novels531 Film Studies research might be undertaken to test theories about Human Nature in canonical and/or popular (and high-RoI) movies and other screen media.532

A doxa vs. RoI comparison of Snyder (2005)’s “primal” themes in particular reveals that Evolutionary concepts and values are indeed prevalent in the highest-RoI movies, however they are also present in many lowest-RoI movies. This again points towards

529 ‘Writer-hyphenates’ here refers to writers who also become involved in creative production of the screen idea, such as acting, producing or directing.
530 See the earlier: Section 6.1.15.
531 For example in the research studies in Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning (Carroll, et al., 2012) and in Literature, Science and a New Humanities (Gottschall 2008).
532 Buss notes: “One analysis of thirty-six common plot lines showed most were defined by one of four themes: love, sex, personal threat, or threat to the protagonist’s kin (Carroll 2005). The patterns of culture that we create and consume, although not adaptations in themselves, reveal human evolutionary psychology” (Buss 2012, p. 428).
the Anna Karenina Principle, namely that despite a story *Premise* or *Plot* with “primal” elements or Evolutionary themes a specific movie story may fail due to elements of both its conception (story) and its execution (movie-making) being flawed.\(^{533}\)

7.1.16 Summation (doxa vs. movie RoI: Results)

In summation the only category of the fifteen major screenwriting elements examined in some of the popular manuals that shape the screenwriting doxa that does not appear to be somehow contradicted, challenged or otherwise problematized by the empirical evidence of these two sets of the 20 highest and 20 lowest RoI movie stories is the category of *Dialogue*.

Each of the other categories examined in this study appear to reveal gaps and sometimes even serious errors in the accuracy of the extant screenwriting doxa namely in the elements of movie story: *Premise*, *Theme*, *Genre*, *Setting (Spatial)*, *Setting (Temporal)*, *Plot*, *Character*, *Character Arcs*, *Structure*, *Movie Duration / Screenplay Length*, *Number of Scenes*, *Dramatic Principles*, *Creativity*, and regarding *Human Nature*.

In short it appears that the doxa informs ‘how to create a movie story’ instead of ‘how to create a successful one’ and also does not adequately instruct on how to avoid creating an unsuccessful movie.

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\(^{533}\) with the lowest-RoI movie, the War-Comedy genre *All The Queen’s Men* being an extreme example as noted in Section 6.3.15.
7.2 ADDITIONAL FINDINGS AND RESULTS FROM EXAMINING THE TWO EXTREMES OF MOVIE ROI

The section below includes Additional Findings and Results obtained from examining the top and bottom 20 RoI movies. These two datasets of movies have not been comparatively examined as whole sets in previous studies, thus leading to new findings.

7.2.1 On The Frequency of Emergence of Top 20 RoI Movies

When the years of release are charted (below) the frequency of emergence of a Top 20 RoI movie from 1968 to 2009 is every 2.05 years on average (where $R^2=96\%$).

![Image of graph showing frequency of Top 20 RoI movies emergence]

*Figure 7-2 - Top 20 RoI Movies – Frequency of emergence*

There is a ten-year gap in any Top 20 RoI movies emerging from the movie system (from 1983 through to 1993) but remarkably this gap of four “missing” movies is also compensated for by what may be seen as a “system correction”$^{534}$ namely the *four* top 20 RoI movies that subsequently all emerged within the same year in 2004.

This relative-consistency in frequency of roughly every 2 years suggests a system in action such as for example the Domain, Person, Field interaction (DPFi) Systems model of creativity operating within the international movie industry.

$^{534}$ (or may also be random chance)
Conversely, bottom 20 RoI movies emerge approximately every 8 months on average.

### 7.2.2 On the Absence of Adaptations and Sequels in the Top 20 RoI Movies

It is noted that there are no sequels in either the top or the bottom 20 RoI lists.

With regard to adaptations of prior literary works it should be noted that despite various of the top 20 RoI movies being influenced by other works or real-life events, the top 20 RoI are not adaptations. While the *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* movie serials influenced *Star Wars* (Lucas in Kline 1999, pp. 32, 44); and Richard Matheson’s novel *I Am Legend* influenced *Night of the Living Dead* (Russo, 1985, pp. 6-7)\(^{535}\) in summary there are no official adaptations of previously-existing novels or plays in the top 20 RoI movies.

By contrast in the Bottom 20 RoI there are five adaptations: *Edmond* was an adaptation of David Mamet’s play of the same name; *All Good Things* was inspired by the real-life story of accused murderer Robert Durst; *Eye See You* was an adaptation of the 1999 novel *Jitter Joint*; and *The Gambler* was an adaptation of Dostoyevsky’s life and the canonical titular classic novel. Given that movie investors are risk-averse and portfolio theory of movie studios\(^{536}\) the major movie studios may be less interested in high-RoI

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\(^{535}\) See Table 10-25 - *Key reported inspirations of the top 20 RoI Movie Story Concepts* for more details.

\(^{536}\) In *portfolio theory* around ten movies are produced by a studio at once in the hope that the profitability of one or more of them at random will offset the losses of the others.
movies than it is in just making enough to stay in business and continue making movies. If so then as with the evolution of systems in general this would be a case of “satisficing” rather than optimizing. Yet for independent movie makers this defensive “portfolio theory” strategy used by movie studios is usually not even a potential option; this is to note that generally independent filmmakers tend to focus primarily on one movie project at a time due to the required focus, time, effort and expense involved in a single movie project and due to a passion for telling screen stories. Bloore (2013) notes that most movies take from two to eight years from their conception through the process of script development to production (Bloore 2013, p. 45).

7.2.3 Awards and Critical Success: Top and Bottom RoI Comparison

As noted in the Literature Review (Section 4.1.2 – Models of Creativity) Bourdieu’s (1977-1996) practice theory considers four forms of capital, namely: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. Symbolic capital refers to honours, titles, recognition and membership of professional guilds and thus also includes prestigious awards bestowed upon a creative artifact (and by association its creators) by the experts in the field.

There are only two Oscar-winning movies in the top 20 RoI, one for Best Picture (Rocky) and one for Best Song (‘Falling Slowly’ from Once).

Unsurprisingly the bottom 20 RoI screenplays and movies have won no Oscars. It is however interesting that the screenplay for All Good Things (2010) was listed on the 2007 Blacklist of ‘most-liked’ unproduced screenplays as judged by a consensus of Intermediaries or gatekeepers (story and script development executives) in Hollywood. However as a bottom 20 RoI, the movie was clearly extremely unsuccessful.

In light of the “ten-year rule” in creativity, namely that domain mastery takes considerable time and practise, very few early- or even mid-career screenwriters win or are even nominated for Oscars. This is highlighted by a review in Journal of

537 Herbert Simon (1991) rightly notes that “natural selection only predicts that survivors will be fit enough, that is, fitter than their losing competitors; it postulates satisficing, not optimizing” (Simon, 1991, p. 166).
540 See the 2007 Black List document, in the digital Appendix on the attached CD-ROM.
Screenwriting of the book And The Oscar Goes To... (Seger 2008), a review which notes:

'The inherent danger proposed by Dr Seger’s titular premise is that something - anything - can be learned from Oscar-winning screenplays. It presupposes that you agree with her choices; that the three screenplays dissected therein - Sideways (2004), Shakespeare in Love (1998) and Crash (2004) - are, in fact, ‘good’ films, and that they contain secrets worth sharing. The concomitant supposition is that winning an Oscar is a foolproof and generally agreed method of measuring the value of a screenplay’ (Maloney 2010, p. 207).

For those screenwriters for whom winning Oscars is of primary interest, as a methodological suggestion it might be more revealing for researchers to do a multi-factor movie-story element analysis on a large dataset of Oscar-winning screenplays versus say Golden Raspberry award-winning screenplays.541

However the problem remains that most screenwriters do not win Oscars and more importantly that Oscar-nominations have also been found to be negatively correlated with movie RoI (Lucini 2010, p. 14). This may suggest that the characteristics of screenplays of Oscar-winning movies should in fact be avoided by screenwriters aiming to communicate to a wide audience with their movie story and its inherent themes and messages as placed there by the screenwriter or the SIWG.542

7.2.4 On Certain Problems of the Screenwriting Doxa

In the PhD dissertation The Presentation of the Screen Idea in Narrative Film-making (2004) Macdonald notes the problem of “terminological inexactitude” in the screenplay manuals (Macdonald, 2004b, p. 73). Also reported is that eight of the eleven screenplay manuals examined in that study refer to “3-Act” structure (Macdonald 2004, p. 78). Macdonald summarizes some of the key issues addressed by the current study in the following quote:

…in suggesting the existence of an underlying screenwriting ‘convention’, I note that the sources surveyed form a fairly self-referential group, influenced by Aristotelian ideas and US practice (Macdonald 2004, p. 85).

541 As noted in the earlier Literature Review, Simonton’s exemplary study Great Flicks (2011) examines not merely Oscar-winners, but movies that also satisfied an additional set of awards and critics’ criteria, and also compares these ‘good’ films to the ‘bad’ films (Simonton 2011, pp. 176–89). More specific research on comparative story-content in this area (Oscars vs. Razzies) would likely be valuable.

542 Screen Idea Work Group.
It may be problematic that the popular screenwriting manuals often rely on Aristotelian doctrine; do not explicitly define what they mean by creativity; and present their prescriptions as universals. Such problems as these around the screenwriting guidelines of the various manual authors under study might be traced to problems of their methodologies, namely using cherry-picked examples of exemplary screenplays and movies; and also the lack of integration into the screenwriting convention of extant knowledge from scientific studies of creativity and of movie performance.

In terms of methodologies used in the extant doxa, an examination of the movie datasets as used in each manual under study reveal that the movies (thus screenplays) used as examples of “good” writing are self-selected by each author in order to illustrate their theory rather than start with a pre-defined dataset criteria and then present the patterns that emerge.

Likewise in the texts themselves and also in the manuals’ indexes there is no citation of researchers in the scientific study of creativity. However by contrast The Screenplay Business: Managing Creativity in the Film Industry (Bloore, 2013) includes many such references to creativity research and if the work is adopted by screenwriting teachers it is anticipated that the doxa might become more effective for aspiring screenwriters and Screen Idea Work Groups in general.

Based on the findings of the current research it appears that more consilient approaches to screenwriting research might also increase the accuracy or reliability and effectiveness of the screenwriting doxa in general. Specifically it is noted that research in the domain of Evocriticism aims to illuminate an emerging model of Human Nature by examining Evolutionary Psychology for insights into how humans perceive and behave in the universe and how this knowledge can in turn illuminate bioculture including movies and literature. One such exemplary Evocriticism study is Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning (Carroll, et al., 2012) in which various theories about Human Nature from Evolutionary Psychology are tested via reader survey against perceived characteristics, such as the character traits of fictional characters in certain canonical nineteenth century British novels. Another is Kira-Anne Pelican’s exemplary article ‘The Pleistocene Protagonist: An Evolutionary Framework for the Analysis of Film Protagonists’ (Pelican, in press). Given (Bordwell
the consilient approach in Screenwriting Studies, Film Studies and Communication is clearly in ascendance and ideally should provide more reliable guidelines for movie creatives.\(^5\)

### 7.3 FINDINGS: 30 THINGS THE TOP 20 ROI MOVIES HAVE IN COMMON

As a result of the above doxa vs. movie RoI analysis some possible answers to Research Question #5 begin to emerge. Namely:

\[
\text{RQ5 - In light of the evidence are there any revised screenwriting heuristics that emerge from the above enquiry?}
\]

In the light of these above results the hypothesis was advanced by the researcher that a more detailed study and analysis of the top 20 RoI movies\(^5\) for additional criteria (common shared characteristics) that recurred as patterns across the high-RoI cluster might also provide additional heuristics for movie story success - thus audience-reach - and thus movie story RoI.

As a caveat it is however again noted that due to Complexity theory it appears that individual movie stories work in a complex configurational manner and that the Anna Karenina Principle also applies to every movie. Thus while a given specific movie may have all the traits and characteristics expected of a high-RoI performance movie, some or more of those story elements might combine in the wrong way and additionally while all high-RoI story elements may also be present in a specific movie, one single element in that movie may be problematic thus leading to a failure of RoI for that movie story in bioculture.

Another additional consideration is that the over-performance of one element in a movie story may well compensate for deficiencies in other areas of the movie story experience. An example is that while a movie like Clerks has certain amateur mistake filmmaking technical issues including out-of-focus shots, its comedy-value including its

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\(^5\) In *Evolutionary Psychology*, Buss (2012) asks: “Why do some movies draw millions of viewers, while others fade into obscurity? A complete theory of culture must explain the contents of cultural products, not just their age and sex distribution” (Buss 2012, p. 427).

\(^5\) See the Excel data table in the *digital Appendix* (on the attached CD-ROM) for the data details.
controversial edginess and perversity may overcompensate for those failures in creating audience contagion among some audiences.\footnote{\textit{``It’s all about the script,''} [Kevin] Smith still believes, \textit{``It has so very little to do with anything else... You know, if my career has done anything, it proves you don’t need a visual style to work in film -- which is ironic, because it’s a visual medium -- as long as you have something worthwhile to say... And if my first film proved anything, it’s that they will forgive you so many things. \textit{Clerks} looked shitty. Some of the performances are downright wooden, you know, and God, for something that takes place in a visual medium, there’s not much visual going on. But the script was there, the script was tight, the dialogue was tight, and people dug it.''} (Gaspard, 2006, p. 181)}

With all of the above in mind the criteria below reveal key elements of the form, style, content and structure of the Top 20 RoI movies and thus suggest themselves as guidelines for a typical Top 20 - or at the least probably not a \textit{low-RoI} movie story.
### 7.3.1 Characteristics of an archetypal Top 20 RoI Movie

The Table below includes the derived archetypal characteristics of a top 20 RoI movie. These traits were arrived at by analysing and then calculating the average of each of the following 30 characteristics of the top 20 RoI movies (see Excel data-tables in the digital Appendix for details). Viewed in another way: When a new top 20 RoI movie story emerges we can expect that its characteristics might be as follows given the past top 20 RoI movie story data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>ARCHETYPAL TOP 20 RoI MOVIE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Probable Movie Story Production Budget</td>
<td>USD $1.8M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Probable Return-on-Investment</td>
<td>81.713% (or a <code>story power</code> of 817:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Most probable Genre</td>
<td>Horror (i.e., 40% chance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Most probable Number of Main Characters</td>
<td>4 (3 protagonists, 1 antagonist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Most probable Occupation of Main Character/s</td>
<td>Working-class, &amp;/or, students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Probability of containing Character Arcs</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Probable number of movie story <code>Acts</code></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Probable movie story structure</td>
<td>StoryAlity syntagm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Most probable movie duration</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Probable Number of Scenes</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Probable average scene lengths</td>
<td>50 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Probable ratio of EXT / INT scenes</td>
<td>44% EXT / 56% INT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Probable number of Locations</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Most probable type of Main Locations</td>
<td>House/Apartment (Domestic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Most probable Temporal Story Setting</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Most probable Story Ending Type</td>
<td>Villain Triumphant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Most probable Themes</td>
<td>Survival, Reproduction, Revenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Probability of Sex Scenes</td>
<td>Sex 40% chance (8/20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Probability of Chase Scenes</td>
<td>85% chance (17/20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Probability of Shootout Scenes</td>
<td>45% chance (9/20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Probability of Fight Scenes</td>
<td>75% chance (15/20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Probability of Montages in the movie story</td>
<td>65% (13/20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Expected Reviews/Critics' Ratings (Metacritic, IMDb)</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in the earlier Table 1-1 (Chapter One: Introduction), the Production Budgets of top 20 RoI movies range from USD $7,000 (Primer and El Mariachi) to $11M (Star Wars) however the average budget across all top 20 RoI movies is: USD $1.8M. Moreover the cost for a story creative (screenwriter, filmmaker) of realizing the story onscreen or getting the movie “in the can” is the primary concern. Pre-sales secured from a movie script aside, if a Distributor considers an independent movie story worth distributing it then decides on the Marketing Budget after seeing the completed movie having decided to distribute it. The same applies for additional movie-spend by a distributor or studio if they decide to change or to polish elements of the soundtrack or other aspects of the movie; for the movie storyteller one primary goal has by then been achieved namely presenting a movie story which has been selected by the intermediaries in the movie field.

As indicated in the table above the Average RoI of a top 20 RoI movie is 81,713% or a story-power of 817:1. When viewed purely financially this means a gross return of $817 for every $1 invested in its creation. The data indicates that the typical (statistical mode or most-frequently-occurring) Genre of a top 20 RoI movie is Horror due to the dominance of the Horror genre in the dataset (8/20 movies).

As the table above also indicates the Number of Main Characters of a top 20 RoI movie is typically four (4) that is usually: three protagonists and one main antagonist.

547 Marketing Spend is not included in the movie story production cost here as Marketing has been demonstrated not to have a causal effect on contagion of a movie/movie story (De Vany 2004). Marketing budgets were researched where possible (see Excel Data Tables in digital Appendix) although these figures are usually commercial-in-confidence for obvious reasons - but regardless do not show any correlation with story-power, i.e., with movie audience-reach.

548 Averaging the story Genres of the top 20 RoI does not seem appropriate as it would be like averaging species of animals to find the most successful ‘average organism’ whereas each species is adapted to a specific ecological niche. Movie story Genre can likewise be considered as a biocultural ecological niche.
Occupations of the main characters in a top 20 RoI movie is most typically: working class or an 'everyman/everywoman' and/or a student at the story beginning. This may also be a function of the younger ages (20s-30s) of main characters in typical highest RoI movies. This indicates a depiction of universal Human Nature rather than if the protagonists were unique, 'special' or of high social status at the story’s beginning.

The data appears to indicate that contrary to the dominant screenwriting doxa Character Arcs for protagonists are typically not present in the top 20 RoI movie stories.

Number of Story Acts can be seen to be ten acts, and the story structure could be seen to be what is here called the StoryAlity syntagm also reflecting the 'golden ratio' or the Fibonacci sequence. (See Excel spreadsheet data in the digital Appendix for details). If the average and the median are averaged the ideal Duration/Length for a top 20 RoI movie is 90 minutes - or 90 screenplay pages if the story is at screenplay stage.

The average Number of Scenes (when mean and the median are averaged) is 105 scenes for a 90 minute movie/90 page screenplay.

The average Ratio of Interior scenes to Exterior Scenes for a top 20 RoI movie is 44% EXT(erior) to 56% INT(erior) or a roughly-equal mix of indoor and outdoor scenes.

The average number of top 20 RoI movie Locations is 28.

The typical primary Location is a house/domestic/apartment setting.

The typical or dominant Temporal Setting of the story is Present Day.

The typical or dominant Story Ending Type is Villain Triumphant and the protagonists die in 6/20 movies; the villain often escapes justice at the end.

Common Themes (despite that Theme is a problematic concept) can be seen to be Evolutionary or Human Nature themes of: survival (life and death), reproduction (family, or kin) and revenge (or retributive justice, though not necessarily at the story ending).

Sex Scenes are not a dominant story-content element in the top 20 RoI movies as only 8/20 (or 40%) have sex scenes in them. Thus if the past phenomena is taken as a predictive guide this would therefore appear to suggest only a 40% chance of a sex

549 See also: https://storyality.wordpress.com/2012/12/23/storyality-50-the-storyality-screenplay-syntagm/
scene being in a new top 20 RoI movie; thus it is not considered very likely and in these terms certainly not considered necessary for a top 20 RoI movie story.\textsuperscript{550}

\textit{Chase Scenes} are in 17/20 (or 85\%) of the top 20 RoI thus these are probably expected as likely in a new top 20 RoI entry; though they are not necessary - as conversely 15\% (3/20) do not have them.

\textit{Shootouts} are in 9/20 of the movies (45\%) and thus not considered ‘likely’ (i.e., with <50\% chance) in a new top 20 RoI movie.

\textit{Fight Scenes} are in 15/20 (75\%) and thus considered likely but again not necessary. Fight scenes are obviously a manifestation of “primal” conflict in some movie stories.

\textit{Montages} are in 13/20 (65\%) of the top 20 RoI and thus are considered likely.

\textit{Expected Reviews/Critics Ratings} - interestingly for the 13 movies of the top 20 RoI where critics ratings and review ratings were available (on \textit{Metacritic} and \textit{IMDb}) the average rating for both \textit{Metacritic} (or the intermediaries in the movie field), and the mass market (or the broader audience of IMDb) was 73\%; but these ranged from a minimum Metacritic rating of 46\% (for \textit{SAW}) to 94\% (for \textit{E.T.}); IMDb ratings ranged from 59\% from a poll of 27,812 users (for \textit{Open Water}) up to 88\% from a poll of 401,762 users (for \textit{Star Wars}).

\textit{Expected Oscar award for Best Picture} is extremely low for a top 20 RoI movie (1 in 20, or 5\% chance) as only one top 20 RoI movie achieved this form of symbolic capital in Bourdieu’s terms namely the movie \textit{Rocky} and the movie \textit{Once} also won the Oscar for Best Original Song. This lack of official awards or symbolic capital in extremely-high RoI movies correlates with Simonton’s (2011) research finding that there are two main types of movies, namely critical/awards successes and commercial successes, and seldom do these two forms of movie canon overlap.

\textit{Expected MPAA Ratings} are predominantly “R” ratings (8/20) or 40\% chance a new top 20 RoI movie would be R-rated. If we include Unrated (3/20) and Not Rated (1/20) in the R category this increases to 12/20 or a 60\% chance of an R rating.

\textsuperscript{550} This finding correlates with the findings in the study: ‘Sex Doesn’t Sell - Nor Impress! Content, Box Office, Critics, and Awards In Mainstream Cinema’ (Cerridwen & Simonton, 2009).
Length of the shoot for the top 20 RoI averages 32 days while the minimum is 7 days (Paranormal Activity) and the maximum is The Evil Dead which took two years in intermittent weekend shoots.

The “Look” (Shoot Gauge) of the movie for a top 20 RoI movie is typically digital-camera format instead of 35mm / 16mm film and in colour rather than black and white.

Writer-hyphenates are involved in all top 20 RoI movies thus it would be expected there is a 100% chance of a new entry to the top 20 RoI list being a writer-hyphenate (a writer-director, writer-actor or writer-producer - or two or all three of these).

Gender of writer-hyphenates is 1/20 (5%) female, specifically Nia Vardalos the writer-star of My Big Fat Greek Wedding and two other co-writers in the top 20 RoI movie list are also female; Debra Hill co-writer of Halloween, and Jerusha Hess co-writer of Napoleon Dynamite.

Drama genre movie stories are not present in the top 20 RoI movies thus at the current stage there is a predicted 100% chance that any new entry to the top 20 RoI list will not be a Drama.

More specific details of this analysis are contained in the Top 20 RoI Movie Summary Results tab of the Excel spreadsheet in the attached digital Appendix on CD-ROM.

In summary the above thirty characteristics represent certain key archetypal qualities of the 20 movies that have had the highest ’benefit/cost ratio’ with global cinema audiences to date (dated to 2011). Any and all of these qualities may evolve and change over time as human bioculture undergoes evolution in a domain/field feedback loop, and as popular tastes, styles and fashions come and go - and also as creativity results in disruptive technology. However many of these traits seem stable in the domain of cinema at least during the period from 1968 to 2011. In other words the above would appear to be the current traits of an ideal ’benefit/cost ratio’ movie for both screen storytellers and for their audiences. However it is again noted that evolution by natural selection “satisfices” rather than optimizes (Simon 1991) so instead of being the

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551 Herbert Simon rightly notes that “natural selection only predicts that survivors will be fit enough, that is, fitter than their losing competitors; it postulates satisfying, not optimizing” (Simon, 1991, p. 166). Buss (2012) likewise notes: “What matters in the eyes of selection is not truth, validity, or logical consistency, but simply what works in the currency of reproductive success” (D. M. Buss, 2012, p. 397).
characteristics of the best possible movie story, the above traits may be the characteristics of the least-worst movie story.

It should also be noted that correlation does not equal causation; a movie also having all of these characteristics may well not even become canonical. Yet for a new movie to enter the top 20 RoI list it would be surprising to note on which precise characteristics it varies widely, due to the complex configurational operation of the parts of whole movie stories.

This StoryAlity hypothesis, namely that the above 30 characteristics would be the likely or most-probable predicted traits of a new top 20 RoI movie can be tested by subsequent observation of any new entries into the top 20 RoI movie list as and when this occurs.

One such test of this hypothesis is examined below in comparing the above predicted or expected movie story criteria with a new movie that entered the top 20 RoI list in the year 2012.
7.3.2 The new entry into the top 20 RoI movie list: *The Devil Inside (2012)*

In 2012 the movie *The Devil Inside (2012)* sold sufficient cinema tickets (USD $99M) compared to its budget (USD $1M) to enter the Top 20 RoI movies list. Having thus made 99 times its production budget (or with a story-power of 99:1) it entered the top 20 RoI list at the Number #14 position as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>BUDGET</th>
<th>WORLDWIDE GROSS</th>
<th>% ROI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$196,681,656</td>
<td>1,311,211 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>$99,750,000</td>
<td>49,875 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>$600,000</td>
<td>$248,300,000</td>
<td>41,383 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td>$2,041,928</td>
<td>29,170 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>$114,000</td>
<td>$30,000,000</td>
<td>26,316 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$225,000,000</td>
<td>22,500 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>$325,000</td>
<td>$70,000,000</td>
<td>21,538 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>$777,000</td>
<td>$140,000,000</td>
<td>18,018 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>$27,000</td>
<td>$3,894,240</td>
<td>14,423 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$18,997,174</td>
<td>12,665 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$46,140,956</td>
<td>11,535 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
<td>$55,116,982</td>
<td>11,023 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>$550,000</td>
<td>$59,754,601</td>
<td>10,864 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Devil Inside (2012)</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$99,661,944</td>
<td>9,966 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Saw</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
<td>$103,096,345</td>
<td>8,591 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td>$565,846</td>
<td>8,084 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>$375,000</td>
<td>$29,400,000</td>
<td>7,840 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>$10,500,000</td>
<td>$792,910,554</td>
<td>7,552 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>$3,500,000</td>
<td>$256,900,000</td>
<td>7,340 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>$11,000,000</td>
<td>$797,900,000</td>
<td>7,254 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$333,900,000</td>
<td>7,078 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-2- In 2012, *The Devil Inside (2012)* entered the Top 20 RoI movies list at #14.\(^{552}\)

It should be noted that this entry of *The Devil Inside* into the top 20 RoI list above shifts the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* down to position #21 in the list.

*Appendix* section 10-17 - ‘Testing out the StoryAlity Theory’ (below) also provides a list of the high-RoI characteristics of the movie *The Devil Inside (2012)* as derived from this study that were predicted (retrodicted) by the results of this study of the 20 highest and 20 lowest RoI movies from 1968-2011. The new entry into the top 20 RoI list thus appears to correlate with the *StoryAlity* theory.

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8 CONCLUSIONS

When we search for answers to the question “Are there formulae for movie success?” it becomes clear that as Simonton (2011, 2014) notes, a predictive science of cinematic success is still in its early days in academia.\(^{553}\)

However researchers in various academic disciplines are making significant advances toward that goal and various consilient multidisciplinary approaches appear promising. This research aims to contribute towards this goal.

The screenplay consultancy companies Epagogix and C4 appear to have had success in predicting box office based on a movie screenplay’s attributes and in some cases for over a decade; it would be advantageous for novice screenwriters and screenwriting teachers to be able to access such information, and for such knowledge to be integrated into the screenwriting doxa.

In various tertiary Film, Screen Media and also Communication courses many educators are employing pedagogy very effectively through the education and training of aspiring screenwriters and/or filmmakers. Research done within the academy including Macdonald’s (2004) Bourdieuan PhD dissertation on movie screenwriting, screenwriting articles on creativity by Redvall (2009, 2012, 2016) and work by scholars in ‘the Newcastle School’ of Creativity in the discipline of Communication (Fulton & McIntyre, 2013; Kerrigan, 2010, 2011; Meany, 2006; Paton, 2008) also confirm that there is still much more to learn from the examination of certain elements of the current screenwriting doxa - including how those key elements compare to movie RoI and what they reveal about creativity and thus about movie story “virality” in bio-socio-cultural ecosystems.

This thesis has adopted a consilient evolutionary systems approach to creativity and has aimed to provide unique and valuable insights into the relationship between the current dominant screenwriting doxa, and how it is manifested into successful movies in practise through an independent and also sometimes industrial movie system.

\(^{553}\) (Simonton 2011, pp. 192-4; 2014, p. 1).
This study has also been able to suggest some potential implications for certain aspects of screenwriting pedagogy and some key issues for those who aspire to begin a filmmaking career. The research questions below illustrate the key aims of this research.

**The Overarching Research Question**

Recalling that the overarching general research question of the study is:

*How do various key prescriptions of the screenwriting doxa compare to the characteristics of extremely high- and also extremely low-RoI movies?*

The key findings of this study suggest that the dominant screenwriting convention, i.e., the screenwriting orthodoxy as reflected in four of the popular and canonical screenwriting manuals and textbooks is in places contradicted by evidence of the 20 highest RoI movies, and counter-intuitively also often correlates with many characteristics of bottom 20 RoI movies or biggest money-losing movies.

In short the doxa in general appears to instruct on “how to create a movie” instead of how to create a *successful* movie – a distinction which becomes important for aspiring professional cultural practitioners such as screenwriters aiming for effective mass media communication of their screen stories and messages. This point becomes even more important once the “ten-year rule” in creativity (Hayes 1989, Weisberg 2006, Simonton 2011) is considered and De Vany (2004), and Alexander (2003) on selection pressure due to the highly-competitive and often unforgiving environment of the movie industry.

One key problem-situation for movie screenwriters becomes that it takes around ten years (as an average) of “internalizing the domain” of movie screenwriting before an aspiring screenwriter masters all of the various complex craft skills to then enable them to create a movie screenplay which will be likely to be produced as a movie. Yet the question emerges: *What if that first produced movie is a flop?* Likewise it takes around ten years of making movies for key movie crew members before a cinematic masterwork is created (Simonton 2011, p. 119). Cinematic “masterworks” in this sense would be the types of movies Simonton examines in *Great Flicks* (2011), namely critically-acclaimed award-winners and classics of the film canon. In this sense continually creating movies that make an RoI would enable ten years of being able to continue practising making movies - whereas a common problem-situation is that
movies that lose money may well end the career of the creatives involved, or at least can make subsequent movies difficult to finance.

The top 20 RoI movies present a mix of big-budget (Hollywood), medium-budget (Hollywood-style) and also low-budget (independent) movies and thus analysis of their characteristics and production methods - including also the ‘writer-hyphenate’ (or “Writeur”) - traits may be useful for aspiring screenwriters to examine more closely.

In summary the key findings of this study on movie doxa versus RoI include that:

(1) The consensual prescriptions on story *Premise* in the dominant movie doxa in general correlate with both high- and also with low-RoI movies; but also that a “high-concept” premise is not necessary for a top 20 RoI movie (e.g., *Clerks, Primer, Napoleon Dynamite*). In these special cases, the screen idea (or movie) story execution (filmmaking) can compensate for certain perceived deficiencies in the screenwork’s conception (screenwriting);

(2) That *Theme* is a terminologically inexact term in the doxa but that “primal” themes (Snyder 2005) are present in both sets of movie RoI extremes;

(3) *Genre* as a concept is generally present in the doxa but no recommendations are made in the doxa around which specific *Genres* appear more (or less) likely to succeed, while both extant research (Simonton 2011) and extremes of movie RoI appear to provide recommendations for Horror and cautions around Drama as *Genres*;

(4) *Spatial Setting* in the doxa is discussed as a tool for dramatization but no specific guidelines are recommended; the RoI extremes examined here would strongly suggest “limited locations” as a useful screenwriting heuristic;

(5) *Temporal Settings* are not specifically recommended in the doxa but the two RoI extremes suggest that “Present Day” settings tend to be more successful;

(6) On *Plot*, each contemporary screenwriting manual of the doxa examined provides differentiated templates or “story systems” although bottom RoI movies also include such plot types and plot structures;

(7) On *Character* the manuals examine many aspects of character but only one manual examined (Snyder 2005) suggests an age-range for lead characters, a prescription which is supported by the examined top 20 high-RoI movies cluster;
(8) On Character Arcs all four of the contemporary manuals examined prescribe Arcs however a direct content analysis of the highest-RoI movies do not support this prescription; also the story protagonists die at the end of six of the 20 highest RoI movies;

(9) On Structure, the screenwriting doxa examined generally prescribes “three-act” structure - with the noted exception of Truby (2007) - although probably all movies (successful or not) can be seen to have this same “three-act” structure;

(10) On Dialogue, general recommendations for “good” and cautions against “bad” dialogue in the doxa are supported by the evidence in both high- and low-RoI movies examined here; it is assumed that many screenplays that are rejected due to perceived “bad” dialogue comprise part of the “silent initial population” of screenplays that do not get past the filters (“evolutionary bottlenecks”) of professional screen readers or “gatekeepers” to the domain;

(11) On Movie Duration/Screenplay Length the manuals form a consensus on screenplay / movie Duration (or movie runtime / screenplay length) with recommendations of around 120 minutes/pages, however the average of the top 20 highest-RoI movies is 93 minutes and the average of the bottom 20 RoI movies is 102 minutes;

(12) On Number of Scenes the manuals suggest 40-70 scenes however by contrast the top 20 RoI movies average 119 scenes;

(13) On Dramatic Principles the manuals propose a range of dramatic principles and a consensus exists in the doxa on the primacy of “conflict” and agonistic structure (or a “good guys versus bad guys” story dynamic); while interestingly a charted score of “scene-wins” reveals the top 20 RoI might all be considered Villain Triumphant in the agonistic structure view;

(14) On Creativity the manuals examined include various conceptions of and prescriptions for increasing (screenwriting) “creativity” although none satisfactorily define ‘creativity’ and do not cite the extant scientific research on creativity since 1950; nor the standard definition of creativity\textsuperscript{554}; and

\textsuperscript{554} i.e., See ‘The Standard Definition of Creativity’ (Runco & Jaeger, 2012), which dates the standard definition of creativity back to Stein (1953) and Barron (1955).
(15) On *Human Nature* all of the manuals emphasize that “good” writing illuminates and explores Human Nature and - while Snyder (2005) also emphasizes the importance of “primal” or essentially Evolutionary Psychology concepts – none of the manuals examined in this study cite the extant research on Human Nature from scientific domains of research such as Evolutionary Psychology, possibly suggesting that a “Two Cultures” problem (or ‘scientific’ versus ‘artistic’ cultures) may be evident in the screenwriting convention.

Underneath the overarching research question there were five specific questions that were answered by this research. In comparing the doxa of screenwriting to “canon” or the top 20, and also “archive” or the bottom 20 extremes of movie RoI this research study has aimed to provide answers to the following questions:

**RQ1 - What is the current orthodoxy (doxa) of movie screenwriting?**

A close examination of the *doxa* (orthodoxy) which is the current “‘received wisdom’, or everything the field says is the right (or wrong) way to do things” (Macdonald 2013, p. 10) was enabled through the close examination of the text of four canonical screenwriting manuals (Field 1979/2005; McKee 1997; Snyder 2005; and Truby 2007). While the doxa emanates from a vast number of screenwriting manuals the canonical and popular screenplay manuals take centre stage in shaping the doxa and this research confirms there are key elements that comprise the movie screenwriting doxa as guidelines for movie production - namely guidelines on movie story: *Premise, Theme, Genre, Setting (Spatial), Setting (Temporal), Plot, Character, Character Arcs, Structure, Dialogue, Screenplay Length/Movie Duration, Number of Scenes, Dramatic Principles*, advice on *Creativity* and also certain folk psychology insights about *Human Nature.*

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555 As noted elsewhere, Evolutionary Psychology being customarily dated to (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992); see (D. M. Buss, 2012).
556 As noted in the Introduction the “Two Cultures” problem (of the arts vs. science) dates from (Snow, 1959, 1969) and see also (Edward O. Wilson, 1998) for a potential resolution of the problem.
557 An estimate is between 800 to possibly over 2,500 published manuals; some are self-published.
RQ2 - What evidence do we have that the doxa influences the movie screenwriting process?

The canonical screenwriting manuals and their authors’ screenwriting seminars codify the doxa and this doxa influences screenwriting pedagogy via tertiary-level educational and training institutions and also influences professional screen readers or movie production company “gatekeepers” in the screen industry in addition to screen production funding bodies (Macdonald, 2004; 2013). A sample of screenwriting course Recommended Reading Lists from various international universities, colleges and film schools\textsuperscript{558} verifies that the popular screenwriting manuals are used to train aspiring screenwriters.

Further evidence that the doxa influences screenwriting practice is derived from various canonical texts as used to train professional screen readers such as Reading For A Living: How to be a Professional Story Analyst for Film and Television (Katahn 1990), Screenplay Story Analysis: the Art and Business (Garfinkel 2007), Reading Screenplays: How to Analyse and Evaluate Film Scripts (Scher 2011) and Getting Past Me: A Writer's Guide to Production Company Readers (White, 2011).

There is also evidence from this research that all of the movies analyzed employ - to varying degrees - all of these key fifteen (15) story elements present in the doxa. This is too great a correlation to be a mere accident. Furthermore there is not evidence to suggest that the top 20 RoI movies contain some “magic ingredient” or mystical “X-factor”; instead the Four-C model of creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto 2009; 2013) applies, namely that creativity is a commonplace occurrence due to the evolutionary algorithm.\textsuperscript{559} However biocultural artifacts (such as movies) that are judged “creative” by a consensus in the field are rare, most likely due to the Anna Karenina Principle but nonetheless do emerge from regular creative processes when creativity is viewed as a system, and as a universal evolutionary phenomenon and process.\textsuperscript{560}

\textsuperscript{558} The sample screenwriting course Reading Lists are: (Harvard, 2007, online; MacquarieU, 2015, online; NYU, 2015, online; UCLA, 2015, online). See the Appendix (CD-ROM) for these documents.

\textsuperscript{559} The evolutionary algorithm being recursive: selection of elements from, then variation (including combination), and transmission of new elements back into an environment - such as the gene pool in biology, or the meme pool in bioculture.

\textsuperscript{560} In short creativity in movies and bioculture in general is no mystery but is rather the result of the evolutionary algorithm in action - on macro scales (the Systems or ‘sociocultural’ model of creativity, i.e.
RQ3 - What are the formal and structural characteristics of the top 20 RoI and by comparison, of the bottom 20 RoI movie stories?

As the Data Analysis chapter (Chapter Six) aimed to demonstrate, the majority of both the top and bottom 20 RoI movies are what (Bordwell, 1985, 2008; Bordwell & Thompson, 2013; K. Thompson & Bordwell, 2010) refer to as “classical Hollywood narration”. Data examined included the movie story: Premise, Themes, Genre, Settings (Spatial), Settings (Temporal), Plot, Character, Character Arcs, Structure, Dialogue, Screenplay Length/Movie Duration, Scenes, Dramatic Principles and their movie story subject matter, including various elements of Human Nature. This analysis was undertaken to discover if any striking differences in these two sets of movies were apparent. Indeed the form and structure of top 20 RoI and bottom 20 RoI movie stories are different in certain key respects (such as typical Genres, Average Duration, Character Arcs, Average Budgets, Adaptations, the involvement of Writeurs\(^{561}\)) and it is noted that both types of movie story appear to wobble around their two separate phenotypic means - much as species exhibit “basins of attraction” within the design space of an adaptive landscape in biological evolution (Daniel Clement Dennett, 1995, p. 204; Sterelny, 2001, p. 157; Weiner, 1994).

RQ4 - Which movie story characteristics are common to, and conversely which are unique to, the top 20 and the bottom 20 RoI movies?

The table below (8-1 - Similarities and Differences – Top and Bottom 20 RoI Movie Characteristics)\(^{562}\) summarizes the common - and conversely the unique - characteristics of each of the 15 key elements observed in the doxa, and as also observed in these two extremes of movie RoI. The elements in bold text below are common elements to both top 20 and bottom 20 RoI data sets (or 9 of the 15 elements). Elements shaded in grey (the other 6 of the 15 elements) are unique to the top 20 RoI movies and are absent from the bottom 20 RoI movies.

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\(^{561}\) ‘Writeurs’ meaning writer-hyphenates: writer-directors, writer-producers and writer-actors.

\(^{562}\) Table 8-1 here is also reproduced as Table 10-1, in the Appendix, below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>DOXA ELEMENT</th>
<th>TOP 20 ROI MOVIE CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIE CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Story Premise</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI movies feature: a protagonist(s) with a problem(s) that is ‘resolved’ by the end. ('Resolved' as used here does not necessarily mean ‘solved’; it may mean death for the protagonist.)</td>
<td>All bottom 20 RoI movies feature a clear premise, or: a protagonist(s) with a problem(s) that is ‘resolved’ by the end. ('Resolved' as used here does not necessarily mean ‘solved’; it may mean death for the protagonist.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>'Theme' is also a problematic (ill-defined) term in the doxa. Yet the movies under study can arguably be seen to feature both Field’s (2005) and Snyder’s (2005) conceptions of it, but at the 14% mark.</td>
<td>'Theme' is also a problematic (ill-defined) term in the doxa. Yet the bottom 20 RoI movies can arguably be seen to feature all four screenwriting manuals’ various conceptions of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Notably, 8 of the top 20 RoI are Horror genre movies. Dramas are absent from the top 20 RoI.</td>
<td>Notably, 12 of the bottom 20 RoI are 'Drama' genre movies, 7/20 are partly or wholly in the 'Drama-Comedy' aka 'Dramedy' genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Setting (Spatial)</td>
<td>The settings of the top 20 RoI movies are: the US (75%), Australia (5%), Ireland (Dublin) (5%), the UK (Sheffield) (5%), Mexico (5%), and outer space (5%). 60% (12/20) of the top 20 movies primarily feature: urban settings.</td>
<td>The geographical settings are 75% USA (15/20); Norway 5% (1/20), China 5% (1/20), USA, Philippines, Hong Kong 5% (1/20), Russia 5% (1/20), Germany/UK 5% (1/20). The setting types are dominated by 'Urban' settings (13/20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Setting (Temporal)</td>
<td>17 of the top 20 RoI movies are set in the present; one is set 10 years prior, one 'a long time ago', and one in the future.</td>
<td>14 of the bottom 20 RoI movies are set in the Present Day; 5 are set in the past, and one set in the 'near future'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>Arguably 17 top 20 RoI movies are 'Villain Triumphant' stories, which means the protagonists do not 'solve' their story 'problem' at the end.</td>
<td>Arguably none of the bottom 20 RoI movies are 'Villain Triumphant' stories, which means the protagonists do satisfactorily 'solve' their key story 'problem' by the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>The lead characters in highest RoI movies are notably 'young' (in their 20s and 30s), villains are usually ten years older.</td>
<td>The lead characters in lowest RoI movies are notably 'middle aged' (in their 30s and 40s). Three feature younger protagonists (20s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Character Arcs</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Notably, in 6 of the top 20 RoI, all of the protagonists die: Paranormal Activity, The Blair Witch Project, Open Water, Night of the Living Dead, SAW, The Evil Dead.</td>
<td>One of the protagonists dies (the son, in World’s Greatest Dad). All protagonists can be seen to have ‘character arcs’ in the bottom 20 RoI movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI movies can be seen to have ‘3 Acts’, but arguably so do all movies, whether successful or not.</td>
<td>All have ‘3 Acts’, but arguably so do all movies, whether unsuccessful or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>19 of the top 20 RoI are English-language movies; one is Spanish (El Mariachi).</td>
<td>19 of the 20 movies are English-language movies; one is in Chinese (A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Duration / Length</td>
<td>The duration range of Top 20 RoI movies is from 77 to 121 minutes, but the average length is 93 minutes.</td>
<td>The duration ranges from 82 to 145 minutes, and the average length is 102 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Number of Scenes</td>
<td>The average number of scenes in a top 20 RoI movie is 119.</td>
<td>The average number of scenes was not determined; however the number-one Loss-on-Investment movie (All The Queen’s Men) has 182 scenes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>‘Dramatic Principles’</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI movies feature ‘conflict’ (protagonists, solving problems) and agonistic structure (i.e., protagonists vs. antagonists).</td>
<td>All feature ‘conflict’ (protagonists, solving problems) and agonistic structure (i.e., protagonists vs. antagonists).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>On creativity</td>
<td>Interestingly, all top 20 RoI involve writer-hyphenates (a writer-director, and/or writer-producer, and/or writer-actor).</td>
<td>Interestingly, 16 of the 20 movies involve writer-hyphenates (a writer-director, and/or writer-producer, and/or writer-actor).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>On ‘Human Nature’</td>
<td>Arguably all top 20 feature ‘primal’ themes (Snyder 2007), and thus depict ‘human nature’ or human evolutionary psychology.</td>
<td>Arguably all bottom 20 RoI movies feature ‘primal’ story themes (Snyder 2007), and thus depict ‘human nature’ or human evolutionary psychology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 8-1 - Top and Bottom 20 RoI Movies Comparison - Across 15 Elements of the Screenwriting Doxa*
As the side-by-side comparison in the table above (Table 8-1 - Top and Bottom 20 RoI Movies Comparison - Across 15 Elements of the Screenwriting Doxa) aims to demonstrate - nine of the fifteen doxa elements examined are broadly common to both top 20 and bottom 20 RoI movie datasets namely story: *Premise, Theme, Setting (Spatial), Setting (Temporal), Structure, Dialogue, Creativity and Human Nature*; while the other six of the 15 elements are radically different in these two sets of movies namely the elements of *Genre, Plot, Character (types), Character Arcs, Duration / Length, and Number of Scenes*.

The key differences in highest and lowest RoI stories, screenplays and thus movies are thus: the Horror *Genre* rather than the Drama *Genre*;\(^{563}\) younger, “every-person” characters rather than older, “special” *Characters*;\(^{564}\) ‘Villain Triumphant’ rather than ‘Hero Triumphant’ *Plots*;\(^{565}\) 93 screenplay pages/movie minutes rather than 102 pages/minutes in *Duration / Length*; and 119 scenes on average, rather than 182 scenes.\(^{566}\) It might thus be speculated that the former specifications for a movie story appeals more in general to universal Human Nature, than do the latter.

Overall these findings also point to the Anna Karenina Principle (Diamond 1997, Simonton 2011) whereby: success means not only achieving success in all key components but also avoiding singular possible causes of failure - or more simply that movie success is multifactorial while failure can be monofactorial.

**RQ5 - In light of the evidence are there any revised screenwriting heuristics that emerge from the above enquiry?**

It appears that the current screenwriting doxa - as derived here from this ‘reasonably representative’ set of manuals - is not consilient, nor does it examine extant statistics or scientific research on movie performance and thus currently does not provide specific

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\(^{563}\) See also: (Clasen, 2012; Ryan, 2008) on reasons for the popularity of the Horror genre. See also (Simonton, 2011) on studies revealing the unprofitability of the Drama genre in movies.


\(^{565}\) See: (Pinker in B. Boyd, et al., 2010, pp. 130-131).

\(^{566}\) See: ‘Attention and the Evolution of Hollywood Film’ (Cutting, et al., 2010), and also ‘Data From A Century of Movies Reveals How Movies Have Evolved’ (G. Miller, 2014, online).
prescriptions for movie success, nor failure. Certain guidelines of the doxa from the four examined manuals often applies equally to top 20 and also to bottom 20 RoI movies, thus the extant doxa instructs: “How to create a movie” rather than a successful one. The general philosophy of the doxa is that success cannot be predicted, namely the outdated “nobody knows anything” aphorism (Goldman 1983, McKee 1997). As De Vany (2004, p. 97) notes, the movie industry decision-makers (movie finance “green-lighters”) tend to assume responsibility for the successes and attribute the “flops” to bad luck.

Comparing some elements of top 20 and bottom 20 RoI movie stories demonstrates that the doxa appears inaccurate for certain key attributes of high-RoI movies, namely:

1. Prescribing a *Screenplay Length* of 110-120 pages while the top 20 RoI average is 93 pages, or 93 minutes;
2. The doxa suggests the *Number of Scenes* as 40-70 when the average top 20 RoI movie has 119;
3. The doxa prescribes *Character Arcs* but these are not present in the majority of top 20 RoI movies and are present in the majority of bottom 20 RoI movies;
4. There are five adaptations in the bottom 20 RoI and none in the top 20 RoI.

These and the other noted differences between the doxa and the high RoI movie story evidence would suggest various additional heuristics for aspiring screen storytellers aiming to achieve a higher “benefit/cost ratio” movie story - or more broadly, aiming to create a movie story more likely to become *canonical* instead of *archive*, and wishing to avoid creative career difficulties in Alexander’s (2003) terms - and thus successfully communicate the messages in their movie stories to mass audiences.

### 8.1 ADDITIONAL RESULTS

Additional results of this “extremes of movie RoI” study also suggest that top 20 RoI movies emerge roughly every two years on average while bottom 20 RoI emerge every eight months on average.

Another unexpected finding of the study of these two extremes of RoI is that “writer-hyphenates” are involved in 100% of top 20 RoI movies while only 16/20 (80%) of the Bottom 20 RoI involve writer-hyphenates, suggesting a ‘hands-on’ approach during not just the “conception” (story and screenplay development) but also the “execution”
(movie production) phases may increase the chance of success of realizing the writer’s vision for the screen idea.

A summary of general findings are that: The screenwriting convention to date has used the unreliable (yet rhetorically persuasive) “proof by example” method of teaching “good” screenwriting ‘principles’. Namely instructors appear to illustrate their “theories” or principles of successful or ‘good’ screenwriting with selected examples but also tend to ignore counterexamples;\(^567\) that the screenwriting convention has not integrated the extant scientific research on creativity; and that ‘benefit/cost ratios’ for both artists and audiences to date have not been foregrounded in selecting the datasets of movies proffered for screenwriting study in the doxa.

This extremes of RoI movie data comparative analysis reveals various patterns in the Top 20 RoI movies which logically might be used as guidelines - or what Pierre Bourdieu (1993) terms “possible winning strategies” - for screenwriters and filmmakers aiming for a sustainable movie career.\(^568\) With regard to the workings of these various story elements for a high-RoI movie, as Simonton states in *Creativity in Science: Chance, Logic, Genius, and Zeitgeist* (2004):

...it is very likely that the attributes that contribute to the impact of any product operate in a complex configurational manner (Simonton 1999c). (Simonton 2004, p. 89).

In other words the creativity in each of the Top 20 RoI movies is an emergent whole and when it works is always more than the sum of the parts; yet each of those parts also needs to be present in order for the whole to emerge which once again suggests the Anna Karenina Principle is in effect with regard to success - and also the vastly more probable absence of it - in movie creativity.

Further complicating the nature of the herein-proposed *StoryAlity* Theory is that the environment - including the assumptions about the initial conditions under which the theory applies - may well evolve and change radically over time; however this appears unlikely as both preferences of Human Nature or the kind of stories and storytelling that

\(^{567}\) Macdonald (2013) rightly notes: “John T. Caldwell lauds the benefits of studying industrial forms of theorization (2009, 170), and screenwriting manuals are ‘especially rich sources for statements that shape the discourse’ (Maras 2009, 13). They can be seen as ‘meta-prescriptive texts’ or ‘low intensity theory’ lying between practice and high theory (Ballester Añón 2001, 493), as a normalizing discourse” (Macdonald, 2013, p. 37).

\(^{568}\) However the *StoryAlity* Theory guidelines should also be tested as rigorously as possible in an attempt to falsify them, as per (Popper 1999).
people en masse tend to both like and dislike - and also the phenomenon of theatrical cinema itself (including its economic, social, psychological and cultural dimensions) - do not appear to change radically over time; if they did then there would be no correlations or common story patterns and traits in story problem-situations, themes, movie durations and other elements to be found across the top 20 and bottom 20 RoI movies over time.

Finally it cannot be denied that the extant screenwriting orthodoxy clearly produces some positive results. Thus while this study may seem highly critical of the extant dominant screenwriting doxa, every screenwriting manual probably has helped at least some screenwriters in their career goals. The dominant doxa appears to be aimed at aspiring “spec” screenwriters hoping to break in to the Hollywood speculative screenplay market. However none of the examined canonical manuals appear to use a predefined exclusive dataset of spec screenplays that did sell to Hollywood (particularly by a previously uncredited or unknown writer) but instead use as examples screenplays and movies which had wildly-different production histories and often were written by highly credited produced screenwriters.

Suggestions for Further Research would include widening the datasets to the top 50 and bottom 50 RoI movies in order to discover more patterns; widening the number of screenwriting manuals in the doxa dataset; a closer study of the creative processes of the top 20 RoI Writer-hyphenates; and the development of an automated ‘top 20 RoI and bottom 20 RoI online movie plot-generator’ in order to demonstrate and demystify movie screenwriting creative processes.569

In conclusion it would appear that an examination of creativity in movies - as creative biocultural artifacts that emerge from a creative system - might benefit from a closer and more consilient examination of the creative: person, potential, process, product, place and persuasion in each case.570 Moreover the Systems model of creativity

569 For online plot generators, see, for example: http://www.plot-generator.org.uk/movie-script/
570 As is suggested in ‘Manuals are not Enough: Relating Screenwriting Practice to Theories’ (MacDonald, 2004a). Similar comparative analysis studies could also be performed - using the “6 P’s of creativity” - of the most-influential, (versus, least-influential), screenwriting manuals using the manuals as the creative product or “text”. The results of such studies may also provide possible winning strategies for future screenwriting manual authors.
(Csikszentmihalyi 1988-2015) and the BVSR (Darwinian or Evolutionary) models of creativity and cultural production (Simonton 1984-2014) - particularly when also combined with Bourdieu’s practice theory (1977-1996) - appear to offer very useful lenses through which to analyze and understand creativity in the movie domain, with specific regard to movie story creation and the communication of that story to a mass audience - namely Human Nature on a grand scale.
9 REFERENCES


Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2002). In the mind’s eye: Imagery and transportation into narrative worlds In M. C. Green, J. J. Strange & T. C. Brock (Eds.), *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations* (pp. 315–341). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.


Quart, A. (2000). The Insider: David Bordwell Blows the Whistle on Film Studies. Lingua Franca, 10(2), 34-43.


Snyder, B. (2011). *Save the Cat!® Story Structure Software 1.0*. Los Angeles: Blake Snyder Enterprises, LLC.


**FILMOGRAPHY**

**Primary Data Sources**

**The top 20 RoI movies:**

*Paranormal Activity* (2009), Wr: Oren Peli, Dir: Oren Peli, Dist: Paramount Pictures, USA, 86 mins.

*Mad Max* (1980), Wrs: George Miller, James McCausland, Byron Kennedy (story), Dir: George Miller, Dist: Filmways, Australia, 88 mins.


*Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Wrs: George Romero, John Russo, Dir: George Romero, Dist: Walter Reade Organisation, USA, 96 mins.


*Halloween* (1978), Wrs: John Carpenter, Debra Hill, Dir: John Carpenter, Dist: Compass International, USA, 91 mins.


*Clerks* (1994), Wr: Kevin Smith, Dir: Kevin Smith, Dist: Miramax, USA, 92 mins.

Napoleon Dynamite (2004), Wrs: Jared Hess, Jerusha Hess, Dir: Jared Hess, Dist: Fox Searchlight, USA, 82 mins.

Open Water (2003), Wr: Chris Kentis, Dir: Chris Kentis, Dist: Lion's Gate, USA, 79 mins.

Friday the 13th (1980), Wrs: Victor Miller, Ron Kurz, Sean S. Cunningham (story), Dir: Sean S. Cunningham, Dist: Paramount Pictures, USA, 95 mins.

SAW (2004), Wrs: Leigh Whannell, James Wan (story), Dir: James Wan, Dist: Lion's Gate, USA, 103 mins.

Primer (2004), Wr: Shane Carruth, Dir: Shane Carruth, Dist: ThinkFilm, USA, 77 mins.

The Evil Dead (1981), Wr: Sam Raimi, Dir: Sam Raimi, Dist: New Line, USA, 85 mins.


Star Wars (1977), Wr: George Lucas, Dir: George Lucas, Dist: 20th Century Fox, USA, 121 mins.

My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002), Wr: Nia Vardalos, Dir: Joel Zwick, Dist: IFC Films, USA, 95 mins.

The bottom 20 RoI movies:

All the Queen's Men (2002), Wrs: David Schneider, Digby Wolfe (story), Joseph Manduke (story), June Roberts (story), Dir: Stefan Ruzowitzky, Dist: Strand, Germany/Austria/USA, 99 mins.

The Open Road (2009), Wr: Michael Meredith, Dir: Michael Meredith, Dist: Anchor Bay, USA, 90 mins.


Harvard Man (2002), Wr: James Toback, Dir: James Toback, Dist: Cowboy, USA, 99 mins.

Gentlemen Broncos (2009), Wrs: Jared Hess, Jerusha Hess, Dir: Jared Hess, Dist: Fox Searchlight, USA, 90 mins.

Fascination (2005), Wr: Klaus Menzel, Daryl Haney (based on a screenplay by) and John L. Jacobs (based on a screenplay by), Dir: Klaus Menzel, Dist: United Artists, Germany/UK, 95 mins.

This Thing of Ours (2003), Wrs: Ted A. Bohus, Danny Provenzano, Dir: Danny Provenzano, Dist: Small Planet, USA, 100 mins.


Edmond (2006), Wr: David Mamet (based on his play), Dir: Stuart Gordon, Dist: First Independent Pictures, USA, 82 mins.

Outlander (2009), Wrs: Dirk Blackman, Howard McCain, Dir: Howard McCain, Dist: Third Rail, USA/Germany/France, 115 mins.

A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop (San qiang pai an jing qi) (2010), Wrs: Jianquan Shi & Jing Shang, Ethan Coen (based on his screenplay for Blood Simple) Joel Coen (based on his screenplay for Blood Simple), Dir: Yimou Zhang, Dist: Sony Classics, China/Hong Kong, 95 mins.

Imaginary Heroes (2004), Wr: Dan Harris, Dir: Dan Harris, Dist: Sony Classics, USA/Germany/Belgium, 111 mins.

World's Greatest Dad (2009), Wr: Bobcat Goldthwait, Dir: Bobcat Goldthwait, Dist: Magnolia, USA, 99 mins.

Welcome to the Rileys (2010), Wr: Ken Hixon, Dir: Jake Scott, Dist: Samuel Goldwyn, UK/USA, 110 mins.

All Good Things (2010), Wrs: Marcus Hinchey, Marc Smerling, Dir: Andrew Jarecki, Dist: Magnolia, USA, 101 mins.

Winter Passing (2006), Wr: Adam Rapp, Dir: Adam Rapp, Dist: Focus Features, USA, 98 mins.
*Eye See You* (2002), Wrs: Ron L. Brinkerhoff, Ron L. Brinkerhoff (screen story), Howard Swindle (novel), Dir: Jim Gillespie, Dist: DEJ Productions, USA/Germany, 96 mins.

*The Gambler* (1999), Wrs: Katharine Ogden (screenplay) & Charles Cohen (screenplay) and Nick Dear (screenplay), Fyodor Dostoevsky (novel), Dir: Károly Makk, Dist: Legacy, Netherlands/Hungary/UK, 97 mins.

*I Come with the Rain* (2010), Wr: Tran Anh Hung, Dir: Tran Anh Hung, Dist: TF1 International, France/Hong Kong/Ireland/UK/Spain, 114 mins.
Additional movies cited:

Vertigo (1958)
Citizen Kane (1941)
Casablanca (1942)
Algiers (1938)
Chinatown (1974)
Avatar (2009)
Titanic (1997)
Marvel's The Avengers (2012)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part II (2011)
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003)
Transformers: Dark of the Moon (2011)
Skyfall (2012)
The Dark Knight Rises (2012)
Toy Story 3 (2010)
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (2006)
The Producers (1968, 2005)

The four movies excluded from the top 20 RoI primary dataset:

The Stewardesses (1969)
The Birth of a Nation (1915)
The Big Parade (1925)
Gone With The Wind (1939)
10 APPENDIX

See the attached CD-ROM for the dissertation’s digital Appendix. This includes detailed data-tables of the five (5) screenwriting manuals examined in the study, namely the four contemporary manuals (Field 1979/2005; McKee 1997; Snyder 2005; Truby 2007) and also one historical screenwriting manual (i.e., Stoddard 1911).

See also the attached Excel data file on the digital Appendix CD-ROM for the detailed data-tables of the top 20 RoI and bottom 20 RoI movies examined in the study.
10.1 COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN TOP AND BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIES, COMPARED TO THE DOXA

The analysis in the Table below compares the fifteen key doxa elements coded for (in the four manuals) to these same elements in the top 20 and bottom 20 RoI movies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENTS</th>
<th>TOP &amp; BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIE CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY:</td>
<td>All feature: a character with a problem, and attempted solution. Many (though not all) are `primal’ goals, or evolutionary premises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Premise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE:</td>
<td>Top 20 – some sound boring, though the actual movies are not. Bottom 20 - some sound boring; and some of the actual movies are. Many of the premises are also depressing (being: Dramas).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Premise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY:</td>
<td>All the movies feature the `evolutionary’ themes of survival, reproduction and revenge in some sense or to some degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE:</td>
<td>No clear differences across datasets emerge in Theme, as Theme is a problematic concept. A `Thematic trope’ can be identified at the 14% mark of the top 20 RoI movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY:</td>
<td>Both top and bottom 20 RoI clusters share: horror, comedy, science-fiction, gangster and musical Genres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE:</td>
<td>Top 20 – the Horror genre dominates (8/20) Bottom 20 – the Drama genre dominates (12/20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY:</td>
<td>Three quarters of both top and bottom 20 RoI are set in the USA. Both Setting types are dominated by `Urban’ settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (Spatial)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE:</td>
<td>Non-shared geographical settings are: Top 20 - Australia, Mexico, Ireland Bottom 20 - Norway, China, Philippines, Hong Kong, Russia, Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (Spatial)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY:</td>
<td>Most of both datasets are set in the Present Day: Top = (17/20) Bottom = (14/20). Both datasets have one movie set in: the near future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (Temporal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE:</td>
<td>2 of the Top 20 are set in the past 5 of the Bottom 20 are set in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting (Temporal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY:</td>
<td>All of the movies (top and bottom 20) follow Bordwell’s `classical Hollywood narration’ form of movie storytelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE:</td>
<td>17 of the top 20 RoI movies are Villain Triumphant. None of the bottom 20 RoI movies are Villain Triumphant stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY:</td>
<td>All the movies feature classical agonistic structure, namely clear protagonists and antagonists; though in some cases the protagonist is the villain (e.g. serial killers: the slasher movies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE:</td>
<td>Lead characters in the top 20 RoI are in their 20s and 30s. Antagonists in these movies tend to be around 10 years older. The lead characters in lowest-RoI movies are middle aged (in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY: Character ‘Arcs’</td>
<td>17/20 of the top 20 RoI movies do not have character arcs. 17/20 of the bottom 20 RoI movies do have character arcs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE: Character ‘Arcs’</td>
<td>Of the top 20 RoI, in 6 movies the protagonists die at the end. In the bottom 20 RoI only one of the protagonists dies (the son in <em>World’s Greatest Dad</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY: Structure</td>
<td>All top and bottom 20 RoI movies can be seen to have ‘3 Acts’ but so do all movies, whether unsuccessful or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE: Structure</td>
<td>The structural pattern of the top 20 RoI movies appear to reveal the Fibonacci structure(^{571}).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY: Dialogue</td>
<td>19 of the top 20, and also 19 of the bottom 20 RoI are English-language movies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY: Movie Duration / Screenplay Length</td>
<td>The range of top 20 RoI movies is from 77 to 121 mins, and the average length is 93 minutes. The duration range of bottom 20 RoI movies is from 82 to 145 mins, and the average length is 102 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE: Movie Duration / Screenplay Length</td>
<td>Bottom 20 RoI are around 10 minutes longer on average.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY: Number of Scenes</td>
<td>The average number of scenes in a top 20 RoI movie is 119.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE: Number of Scenes</td>
<td>The average number of scenes in a bottom 20 RoI movie for all 20 was not determined; however the number-one Loss-on-Investment movie (<em>All The Queen’s Men</em>) has 182 scenes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY: ‘Dramatic principles’</td>
<td>All top and bottom 20 RoI movies feature ‘conflict’ (protagonists, solving problems) and agonistic structure (i.e., protagonists vs. antagonists).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE: ‘Dramatic principles’</td>
<td>In bottom 20 RoI movies the problems of the protagonists are hard to care about or maintain interest in, including due to various different Anna Karenina Principle problems (lack of character empathy, casting problems, depressing story premises, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMONALITY: On creativity</td>
<td>All of the top 20 RoI, and 16 of the bottom 20 RoI involve <em>writer-hyphenates</em> (a writer-director, and/or writer-producer, and/or, writer-actor).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENCE: On creativity</td>
<td>The majority of the top 20 RoI are independent movies; the majority of the Bottom 20 RoI are ‘studio’ movies. Also there are 5 adaptations in the Bottom 20 RoI, none in the top 20 RoI.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMONALITY:  
On `human nature'
All top and bottom 20 RoI movies feature `primal’ story themes (re: Snyder 2007) and thus depict `human nature’ or human evolutionary psychology on some level.

DIFFERENCE:  
On `human nature’
The Bottom 20 RoI in their story premise and plot and subject matter appear to repel Human Nature, given their often depressing subject matters or showing emotionally devastating human problems (grief, depression, addiction, loss, and so on).

Table 10-1 – Commonalities and Differences in top and bottom 20 RoI movie datasets across 15 elements of the screenwriting doxa

In the above terms qualities that are common to both top and also bottom 20 RoI movie datasets can be seen to be traits of movies instead of traits of “good” movies. The doxa within the manuals examined does not make such distinctions as it does not use a comparative analysis methodology.
### 10.2 ‘THEMATIC TROPE’ AND MOVIE ROI

The Table below presents the findings of the ‘Thematic Trope’ in movies of the datasets examined and the specific Thematic Trope. This is to note one interpretation of the movie story’s *Theme* that can be identified at the 14% mark of the story in each case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>THEME ‘STATED’</th>
<th>WHY IT’S THE “THEME”, &amp; ITS DRAMATIC IRONY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>Katie confesses about the demon that has haunted her since she was a teen. The (psychic) ‘Doctor’ states: “So, basically, this thing sticks to you, Katie… It’s not the house, as such…”</td>
<td>A literal metaphor for one’s past coming back to haunt them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>Joking with his wife, Max puts on the “grumpy-mask” (thus the grumpy-mask takes the place of a Thematic Dialogue Line, here)</td>
<td>Max becomes ‘mad’ (angry, vengeful) once his wife and child are killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>The two fishermen at the river tell the 3 young filmmakers the urban legend of the local witch, and one of them notes: “You damn kids never learn!”</td>
<td>Ironically these specific kids also ‘do not learn’ and end up paying for their mistake with their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>The Mariachi (the musician) is hitchhiking by the road… People drive by as he states (in V/O): “That day was much like any other… No love, no luck, no ride… No change.”</td>
<td>This is an understatement given the massacre that ensues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>Barbara screams at the faceless corpse upstairs and screams when Ben appears. 3 ‘ghouls’ (zombies) are approaching, outside the house. The Truck Driver then asks Barbara: “Do you live here?”</td>
<td>No she does not but ironically - as the plot proceeds - they will indeed all die there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Rocky’s boxing gear has been cleared out from his old locker and put on ‘Skid Row’. In the bar, watching Apollo Creed on TV, Rocky says: “Hey, Andy, are you crazy? This man is champion of the world. He took his best shot and become champ. Huh? What shot did you ever take?”</td>
<td>Rocky himself ‘takes a shot’ (at Creed’s title) by the end of the movie story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Laurie drops the key off at the Myers house – as Michael is inside watching her. The boys (teasing Tommy at school) yell: “He’s gonna get you, He’s gonna get you / Boogeyman is coming! / Don’t you know what happens on Halloween? / Boogeyman, boogeyman,</td>
<td>Although the kids are cruelly teasing and joking, Michael Myers does indeed try to get Tommy and in fact, almost everyone present in the neighbourhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>Terry accidentally reverses the car and has a fender-bender as the radio song lyrics ‘state’: “Well, that'll be the day, when you say goodbye – Yes, that'll be the day, when you make me cry – You say you're gonna leave, you know it's a lie – 'Cause that'll be the day when I die.” The Buddy Holly song <em>That'll Be The Day</em> underscores that this is the last day that Curt will spend in Modesto before leaving for college.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Ronnie nags Dante about going back to study at school. Ronnie tells Dante that although she has indeed blown 36 guys she has only slept with three and they were only guys that she loved. When Ronnie tells Dante she only slept with 3 guys (and they were only guys that she loved) ironically - after Silent Bob gives him advice on women - Dante later realizes (too late): that Ronnie does indeed love him and that he also loves her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Girl and Guy play his song together (Falling Slowly) at the music store and begin to fall for each other. “I don’t know you, but I want you, all the more for that... Take this sinking boat and point it home, We’ve still got time. Raise your hopeful voice you have a choice, You’ll make it now” When Guy and Girl sing the words to “Falling Slowly” they are falling for each other and ironically later both make the wrong choice – and finally go back to their old (mismatched) partners.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Napoleon and Kip are advised by Rex the martial arts teacher they need 3 things: a buddy; a disciplined self-image (a good outfit) and self-respect from having an ideal romantic partner (i.e., ‘Starla’ the female bodybuilder in Rex’s case). Ironically Napoleon ends up with: a buddy (Pedro), better clothes (a brown suit bought for the school prom), and a romantic partner, Deb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>Daniel and Susan are attacked by the local wildlife (a mosquito) in their hotel room. On the boat Davis the dive instructor tells them: “You don’t really have to worry about sharks...” Ironically when they are left at sea, sharks become the main thing Daniel and Susan do have to worry about.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Ned, Marcie and Jack joke about sex as Steve uses an ax to remove a tree stump. Marcie: “Sex all you ever think about?” Ned: “No, no. Absolutely not. Sometimes I just think about kissing women.” It is the sexual act which provokes the murders in each case (as Mrs Myers’ revenge for her son’s accident while the camp counsellors were having sex).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 14   | SAW | At the crime scene Paul is dead having crawled through the razor-wire. Jigsaw says: “Hello, Paul. You are a perfectly healthy, sane and middle-class male yet last month you ran a ‘Jigsaw’ actually points out the irony within the dialogue itself; all of the ‘deathtraps’ that ‘Jigsaw’ sets up throughout the story are intended to
| 15 | Primer | The static-charge of the machine works (as the test-confetti floats). Aaron (in V/O): “Abe had taken on the task of quantifying and explaining the device. But as weeks became months… their enthusiasm became a slow realization that they were out of their depth.” | Later they both realize that ethically and not merely technically they are ‘out of their depth’ once Abe and Aaron begin trying to outsmart each other using their accidentally-invented time-machine. |
| 16 | The Evil Dead | The trapdoor to the cellar slams open by itself. They all figure it’s “just a wild animal” in the cellar; they also see a ‘THE HILLS HAVE EYES’ poster in the cellar; and Scotty jokes that the evil face on the dagger resembles Ash’s old girlfriend. | Each of these things ironically come true: Cheryl becomes the ‘wild animal’ in the cellar; the Evil Dead watches them from the hilltops; Ash’s girlfriend Linda becomes a demonically-evil beast. |
| 17 | ET: The Extra-Terrestrial | ET emerges from the shed, eating the trail of Reece’s Pieces, and Elliot says: “I found him, he belongs to me!” | Elliot states “I found him, he belongs to me” but later ironically ‘Keys’ (the FBI agent) feels the same – Keys: “Elliot, he came to me too. I’ve been wishing for this since I was ten years old, I don’t want him to die.” |
| 18 | The Full Monty | Mandy tells Gaz he will lose custody of their son Nathan if he cannot raise $700 in child support. Also when Gerald’s wife finds him chatting with Gaz and Dave, Gerald tells her he’s: “just chatting with some friends from work”… | This is dramatic irony as although none of them are currently employed they are indeed “friends from work” in that they are all in the proposed strip-act dance-troupe together. |
| 19 | Star Wars | Luke is frustrated at being stuck on the farm and very excited to hear C3PO has been involved in the war… R2-D2 plays back part of the SOS message. | It is dramatic irony that Luke is excited to hear that C-3PO has been involved in the war against the Empire since by helping R2-D2 get to Ben Kenobi Luke is now himself also involved in the war effort. |
Ian Miller enters the restaurant, and Toula falls in love with him on sight. It is dramatically ironic that Toula complains that Greeks “breed more Greeks – to be loud, breeding, Greek eaters…” when by the end of the movie Ian and Toula are apparently raising their daughter to be: exactly that (Note: politically-incorrect) ethnic stereotype / cliché.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>THEME 'STATED'</th>
<th>WHY IT’S THE “THEME”, &amp; ITS DRAMATIC IRONY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>Ian Miller enters the restaurant, and Toula falls in love with him on sight.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>Aitken says that O’Rourke has just 4 weeks to teach Johnson, Archie and Parker everything they’ll need to know behind enemy lines.</td>
<td>This could refer to the ‘arc’ of the men in learning about LGBTQ issues (and cross-dressing).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-2 – Thematic Trope and Movie RoI*

As an explanation of the above table: *Paranormal Activity* is 86 minutes in runtime, and at 11 minutes, the Thematic Trope occurs which converts to a screen time percentage of 14%. Meanwhile *Mad Max* is 88 minutes in runtime and the Thematic Trope occurs at the 12 minute mark or 14%. *The Blair Witch Project* is 81 minutes long and the Thematic Trope occurs at the 11 minute mark or 14%; and so on for the movies in the *Table* above.
10.3 THE STORY PREMISES OF THE TOP 20 ROI MOVIES (IMDB.COM)

Below are the story Premises of the top 20 RoI movies as sourced from IMDb.com.\(^{(572)}\)


2. *Mad Max* (1979) – A vengeful Australian policeman sets out to avenge his partner, his wife and his son whom were murdered by a motorcycle gang in retaliation for the death of their leader (IMDb, 1990-2016b).


5. *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) – A group of people hide from bloodthirsty zombies in a farmhouse (IMDb, 1990-2016e).

6. *Rocky* (1976) – A small time boxer gets a once in a lifetime chance to fight the heavyweight champ in a bout in which he strives to go the distance for his self-respect (IMDb, 1990-2016f).

7. *Halloween* (1978) – A psychotic murderer institutionalized since childhood for the murder of his sister, escapes and stalks a bookish teenage girl and her friends while his doctor chases him through the streets (IMDb, 1990-2016g).

8. *American Graffiti* (1973) – A couple of high school grads spend one final night cruising the strip with their buddies before they go off to college (IMDb, 1990-2016h).

9. *Clerks* (1994) – A day in the lives of two convenience clerks named Dante and Randal as they annoy customers, discuss movies, and play hockey on the store roof (IMDb, 1990-2016i).

10. *Once* (2007) – A modern-day musical about a busker and an immigrant and their eventful week in Dublin, as they write, rehearse and record songs that tell their love story (IMDb, 1990-2016j).

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\(^{(572)}\) The IMDb.com website: [http://www.imdb.com/](http://www.imdb.com/)
11. *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004) – A listless and alienated teenager decides to help his new friend win the class presidency in their small western high school, while he must deal with his bizarre family life back home (IMDb, 1990-2016k).


13. *Friday The 13th* (1980) – Camp counselors are stalked and murdered by an unknown assailant while trying to reopen a summer camp that was the site of a child’s drowning (IMDb, 1990-2016m).

14. *SAW* (2004) – With a dead body laying between them, two men wake up in the secure lair of a serial killer who’s been nicknamed “Jigsaw”. The men must follow various rules and objectives if they wish to survive and win the deadly game set for them (IMDb, 1990-2016n).

15. *Primer* (2004) – Four friends/fledgling entrepreneurs, knowing that there’s something bigger and more innovative than the different error-checking devices they’ve built, wrestle over their new invention (IMDb, 1990-2016o).


17. *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) – A meek and alienated little boy finds a stranded extra-terrestrial. He has to find the courage to defy the authorities to help the alien return to its home planet (IMDb, 1990-2016q).


20. *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) – A young Greek woman falls in love with a non-Greek and struggles to get her family to accept him while she comes to terms with her heritage and cultural identity (IMDb, 1990-2016t).
10.4 THE STORY PREMISES OF THE BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIES
(IMDB.COM)

Below are the story Premises of the bottom 20 RoI movies, sourced from IMDb.com.573

1. *All The Queen’s Men* (2002) - A mismatched team of British Special Services agents led by an American must infiltrate, in disguise, a female-run Enigma factory in Berlin and bring back the decoding device that will end the war (IMDb, 1990-2016aa).

2. *The Open Road* (2009) - Movie centers on the adult son of a baseball legend who, together with his girlfriend, embarks on a road trip with his estranged father (IMDb, 1990-2016ab).


4. *Ca$h* (2010) - A man meets up with two "good guys" to recover what is unlawfully his, taking them on his whirlwind ride, doing things they never would have imagined, just to survive (IMDb, 1990-2016ad).


6. *Gentlemen Broncos* (2009) - A teenager attends a fantasy writers' convention where he discovers his idea has been stolen by an established novelist (IMDb, 1990-2016af).

7. *Fascination* (2005) - A few weeks after her husband's mysterious death, Maureen returns from a cruise with handsome Brit Oliver Vance in tow. Her son Scott is mortified…. could they have possibly killed Scott's father? (IMDb, 1990-2016ag).

8. *This Thing Of Ours* (2003) - Using the Internet and global satellites, a group of gangsters pull off the biggest bank heist in the Mafia's history (IMDb, 1990-2016ah).

9. *Southland Tales* (2007) - During a three day heat wave just before a huge 4th of July celebration, an action star stricken with amnesia meets up with a porn star who is developing her own reality TV project, and a policeman who holds the key to a vast conspiracy (IMDb, 1990-2016ai).

___________________________


11. *Outlander* (2009) – During the reign of the Vikings, Kainan, a man from a far-off world, crash lands on Earth, bringing with him an alien predator known as the Moorwen. Though both man and monster are seeking revenge for violence committed against them, Kainan leads the alliance to kill the Moorwen by fusing his advanced technology with the Viking's Iron Age weaponry (IMDb, 1990-2016ak).


13. *Imaginary Heroes* (2004) – The Travis family façade is destroyed by an event incomprehensible to them - an event which will open locked doors and finally reveal the secrets that have haunted them for decades (IMDb, 1990-2016am).

14. *World’s Greatest Dad* (2009) - When his son's body is found in a humiliating accident, a lonely high school teacher inadvertently attracts an overwhelming amount of community and media attention after covering up the truth with a phony suicide note (IMDb, 1990-2016an).


16. *All Good Things* (2010) - Mr. David Marks was suspected but never tried for killing his wife Katie who disappeared in 1982, but the truth is eventually revealed (IMDb, 1990-2016ap).

17. *Winter Passing* (2006) - Actress Reese Holden has been offered a small fortune by a book editor if she can secure for publication the love letters that her father, a reclusive novelist, wrote to her mother, who has since passed away. Returning to Michigan, Reese finds that an ex-grad student and a would-be musician have moved in with her father, who cares more about his new friends than he does about his own health and well-being (IMDb, 1990-2016aq).

18. *Eye See You* (2002) - Stallone plays a cop who comes undone after witnessing a brutal scene on the job. He checks into a rehab clinic that specializes in treating law enforcement officials. Soon, he finds that his fellow patients are being murdered one by one (IMDb, 1990-2016ar).

### 10.5 ’PRIMAL’ (EVOLUTIONARY) THEMES IN THE TOP 20 ROI MOVIES

The table below aims to identify ‘primal’ themes of survival, reproduction and revenge (namely retributive justice) in the stories of the top 20 RoI movies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>LIFE &amp; DEATH STAKES (SURVIVAL)</th>
<th>REPRODUCTION (FAMILY &amp; COMMUNITY)</th>
<th>REVENGE / (RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>Micah and Katie</td>
<td>They are an engaged couple</td>
<td>Micah and Katie attempt to film the demon, the demon terrorizes them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>The gang threatens Max, Goose, and Max’s family</td>
<td>The gang kills Max’s family, and Goose</td>
<td>Toecutter and the Nomads gang seek revenge on the police for Nightrider’s death; Max seeks revenge on the murders of his family and friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>Heather, Mike and Josh are threatened by the witch</td>
<td>Josh notes his girlfriend will be missing him</td>
<td>The witch kills the three for doubting and ridiculing her (i.e.: If the witch is: Mary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>Mariachi and Domino are threatened by El Moco and others</td>
<td>Mariachi and Domino fall in love; Domino has a dog</td>
<td>El Moco seeks revenge for the murder of his henchmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>Ben, Barbra, Helen, Harry, Tom, Judy, and Karen are all threatened by ghouls</td>
<td>All of the group have families; there is a family in the basement</td>
<td>The group seeks to kill the ghouls; the authorities finally kill the ghouls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Rocky may well be killed in the fight</td>
<td>Rocky and Adrian fall in love</td>
<td>Rocky seeks revenge on each boxer (for each blow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Michael wants to kill</td>
<td>Laurie is a babysitter (i.e. ‘family’ themes)</td>
<td>The authorities and Dr Loomis seek to stop / kill Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>Curt, Steve, John, Laurie, Toad must ‘survive’ their coming of age</td>
<td>Family motifs abound</td>
<td>The cops seek revenge for the prank on their car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Dante and Randal must survive their jobs as clerks</td>
<td>Dante’s romantic relationships are a focus</td>
<td>Constant ‘tit-for-tat’ with (the annoying) customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Guy / Girl must survive their relationships</td>
<td>Guy and Girl fall in love; Guy lives &amp; works with his father</td>
<td>Guy sings a ‘revenge’ song about his cheating ex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Napoleon, Pedro, Deb, Kip, Uncle Ricoh are social outcasts/misfits</td>
<td>Napoleon’s family is central to the narrative; he also falls in love with Deb</td>
<td>Napoleon and Pedro get revenge on Summer and the school bullies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>Susan and Daniel are in mortal danger at sea</td>
<td>Susan and Daniel are engaged to be married</td>
<td>Susan and Daniel blame each other for their predicament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><strong>Friday the 13th</strong></td>
<td>Annie, Alice, Bill, Marcie, Jack, Brenda, Steve, and Ned are all in mortal danger</td>
<td>Mrs and Jason Vorhees; also all the couples</td>
<td>Mrs Vorhees seeks revenge on counsellors for her son’s accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><strong>Saw</strong></td>
<td>Adam / Lawrence / Detectives Tapp &amp; Sing are in mortal danger</td>
<td>Dr Lawrence’s family relationship is shown</td>
<td>Jigsaw seeks revenge on non-terminal illness folk who take their lives (or, health) for granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><strong>Primer</strong></td>
<td>Abe and Aaron could die due to their time travel (nosebleeds, etc)</td>
<td>Aaron’s family is shown</td>
<td>Abe and Aaron seek revenge on each other (as do their time-clones)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><strong>The Evil Dead</strong></td>
<td>Ash, Cheryl, Scott, Linda and Shelley are in mortal danger</td>
<td>Note all the (romantic) couples in the movie</td>
<td>Revenge is sought on each of the (possessed) aggressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><strong>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</strong></td>
<td>E.T. will die if he stays on Earth</td>
<td>Elliot’s family is central to the narrative</td>
<td>Elliot and co seek revenge on the FBI; the FBI does likewise to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td><strong>The Full Monty</strong></td>
<td>Gaz loses access to his son Nathan; and they all may starve or be homeless if they remain unemployed</td>
<td>Gaz and Nathan’s relationship is central to the narrative</td>
<td>Gaz and Dave break Gerald’s gnomes and ruin his job interview as revenge for rejecting their offer; ‘success is the best revenge’ in Gaz obtaining his child support funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td><strong>Star Wars</strong></td>
<td>Luke, Han, Chewie, Leia, R2-D2, C-3PO, Ben are all in mortal danger</td>
<td>Luke’s family (Uncle Owen &amp; Aunt Beru) also the Rebellion is like a family</td>
<td>The Rebels and The Empire seek revenge on each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td><strong>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</strong></td>
<td>Toulas and Ian’s lives are empty without love</td>
<td>Toula’s Greek family is central to the narrative</td>
<td>Toula seeks to avenge herself on her meddling family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 10-3 – ‘Primal’ (or Evolutionary) Themes in the Top 20 RoI Movies**

In the doxa Snyder (2005) repeatedly calls for “primal” premises, themes or subject-matters in movie story. Evolutionary Psychology suggests that such Themes - particularly when presented as story stakes (or, what the protagonist stands to lose if they fail to achieve their goals or defeat the antagonist/s in the story) - are more likely to attract and also maintain human attention, or to otherwise appeal to Human Nature in general.
10.6 GENRE IN THE TOP AND BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIES (DATA TABLES)

This section presents a number of Tables examining *Genre* in the top and bottom 20 RoI movies. These include:

*Top 20 Movie RoI - Genre and MPAA Ratings*

*Top 20 Movie RoI – Suggested Actual Genres*

*Bottom 20 Movie RoI - Genre and MPAA Ratings*

*Bottom 20 Movie RoI – Suggested Actual Genres*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>GENRE (ON IMDB)</th>
<th>MPAA RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>Action, Adventure, Sci-Fi</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>Action, Crime, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>Unrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Sport, Drama</td>
<td>PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Horror, Thriller</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>Comedy, Drama</td>
<td>PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Music, Romance, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>Biography, Horror, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Horror, Mystery</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>Horror, Mystery</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>Sci-Fi, Thriller, Drama</td>
<td>PG-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>NC-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>Family, Sci-Fi</td>
<td>PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>Comedy, Music, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>Action, Adventure, Fantasy</td>
<td>PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>Comedy, Romance</td>
<td>PG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-4 – Top 20 Movie RoI - Genre and MPAA Ratings

As the above table shows with regard to MPAA ratings R-rated movie stories dominate the top 20 RoI (13/20 or 65%).

“Drama” as an additional genre tag in the *IMDb* Genre classifications above could well be removed as Drama is essentially the *Genre* that a movie story is left with when it

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574 Given that the MPAA ratings changed in 1990, the former classifications of ‘X’-rated, ‘Unrated’ and ‘NC-17’ are here considered as, and included in, the MPAA ‘R’-rating.
does not have a *Genre*. This is to suggest that a Science Fiction movie or Musical or Comedy or Horror movie is *not also* a “Drama”, for if this is so then logically every movie should also be considered a `Drama` in addition to its primary Genre/s. In that case to become an exclusive *Genre*, the category of “Drama” should be renamed “Realism and with no other Non-Realism Genre tropes such as War, Sci-Fi, Comedy, Horror, etc, present in the story” which becomes absurd.

Thus given the general problem of *Genre* taxonomies the current researcher suggests that the following may possibly be a more accurate and logical *Genre* categorization for screenwriters when examining the story traits and tropes of the top 20 RoI movies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>GENRE (SUGGESTED ACTUAL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>Horror (Supernatural), Mystery, Comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>Action-Adventure, Science-Fiction, Horror, Road Movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>Horror (Supernatural), Mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>El Mariachi</em></td>
<td>Action, Crime, Musical, Comedy, Gangster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>Horror (Survival), Science Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Sport, Romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Horror (Serial Killer, Survival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>Comedy, Coming-of-Age, Romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Comedy (gross-out), Coming-of-Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Musical, Romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Romantic Comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>Horror (Survival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Horror, Mystery, Cabin-in-the-woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>Horror (Survival, Serial Killer), Mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>Science-Fiction, Thriller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>Horror (Survival, Cabin-in-the-woods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>Science-Fiction, Family, Coming-of-age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>Musical Comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>Epic Space Fantasy Action –Adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>Romantic Comedy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-5 – Top 20 Movie RoI – Suggested Actual Genres*

In these terms, the data above highlights the prevalence of the Horror genre in the top 20 RoI (8/20 or 40%). The other genres in the top 20 RoI are Comedy (7/20 or 35%);

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575 However it is noted that “Drama” as a Genre is often viewed as having subgenres, such as: Melodrama, Crime Drama, Historical Drama (or Biopic), Legal (or ‘Courtroom’) Drama, Docudrama, and so on.

576 The *IMDb.com* website has a master list of Genres ([http://www.imdb.com/genre/](http://www.imdb.com/genre/)) but no explanations, definitions, or justifications for their criteria for classifying any specific movie, via these various Genres.
Science Fiction (4/20 or 20%); Musical (3/20 or 15%); and Sport (1/20 or 5%). In *El Mariachi* the protagonist is mistaken for a gangster and is pursued by gangsters; this may mean it is partially in the Gangster genre but not with gangsters as protagonists, rather as antagonists, a point which becomes important when the dataset above is compared to the bottom 20 RoI movies below. The screenwriting doxa in the manuals does not note Horror as a dominant movie story genre; this is a gap in the dominant doxa but is also understandable as a knowledge gap if movie RoI has not previously been examined, as is evident.

By contrast, below is the lowest-RoI or top 20 Loss-on-Investment (LoI) movies with IMDb.com classifications of Genre/s and MPAA ratings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>GENRE (ON IMDB)</th>
<th>MPAA RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>Comedy, War, Action</td>
<td>PG-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>Comedy, Drama</td>
<td>PG-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>Action, Crime, Comedy, Thriller</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>Comedy, Crime, Thriller</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>Comedy, Crime, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>Adventure, Comedy</td>
<td>PG-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>Mystery, Romance, Thriller</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>Crime, Drama</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>Comedy, Drama, Sci-Fi</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>Drama, Thriller</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>Action, Adventure, Sci-Fi</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>Comedy, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>Comedy, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>Comedy, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>Crime, Drama, Mystery</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>Comedy, Drama</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>Crime, Horror, Mystery</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>Biography, Drama, Romance</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come with the Rain</td>
<td>Thriller</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-6 – Bottom 20 Movie RoI - Genre and MPAA Ratings*

R-rated movies also dominate the bottom 20 RoI movies (at 17/20 or 85%).

Once again however the addition of the IMDb.com “Drama” genre tag is not always useful in the above table; there is the Genre known as “Dramedy” or a distinct hybrid of the Drama and Comedy genres.

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577 Although it is possible that *Star Wars* (1977) would be seen by many in its mass audience as Science Fiction - rather than Space Fantasy or Space Opera - if they are not hard-core science-fiction fans.
As with the above problems around Genre the current researcher suggests that the following may possibly be a more accurate and logical Genre categorization for screenwriters when examining the traits of the bottom 20 RoI movies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>GENRE (SUGGESTED ACTUAL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>War-Comedy, Action, Historical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>Dramedy, Road Movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>Action, Crime, Drama, Thriller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>Crime, Thriller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>Crime, Dramedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>Adventure, Comedy, Space Fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>Mystery, Romance, Thriller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>Crime Drama (Gangster)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>Dramedy Sci-Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>Sci-Fi Action-Adventure, Historical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>Dramedy (Gangster)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>Dramedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>Dramedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>Crime, Drama, Mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>Dramedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>Crime, Horror, Mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>Biography, Drama, Romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come with the Rain</td>
<td>Thriller</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.7 – Bottom 20 Movie RoI – Suggested Actual Genres

In these terms the Drama Genre, and Drama-hybrids (e.g. Dramedy) dominate the above bottom 20 RoI movies dataset (13/20 or 65% of these movies).
‘Survival’ Genre Movies comparison - Top 20 vs Bottom 20 RoI Movies

The comparative Table below has the “Survival” genre movies bolded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE TOP 20 ROI MOVIES</th>
<th>THE BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>I Come with the Rain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-8 – ‘Survival’ Movies comparison - top 20 vs bottom 20 RoI Movies

In the above analysis both top and bottom 20 RoI movies each feature 11/20 “Survival” Genre stories.
10.7 SPATIAL SETTING – ROI MOVIES (DATA TABLES)

The Table below presents the primary Spatial Setting of each movie story in the top 20 RoI dataset namely the Geographical and primary type of Spatial Setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING</th>
<th>SPATIAL SETTING (PRIMARY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Coastal/Ocean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>Outer space</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-9 – Top 20 RoI Movies - Spatial Setting*
The table below presents the primary *Spatial Setting* of each movie story in the bottom 20 RoI dataset namely the Geographical location and primary type of *Spatial Setting* in the story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING</th>
<th>SPATIAL SETTING (PRIMARY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>Germany, UK</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Coastal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Urban/Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come With The Rain</td>
<td>USA, Philippines, Hong Kong</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-10 – Bottom 20 RoI Movies - Spatial Setting*
10.8 TEMPORAL SETTING – ROI MOVIES (DATA TABLES)

Below is an analysis of the primary Temporal Settings of each movie in the top 20 RoI movie story dataset. The term “Present Day” implies the narrative takes place in the present for when the movie was made and/or released.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR RELEASED</th>
<th>TEMPORAL SETTING (PRIMARY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>The Near Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>A long time ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-11 – Top 20 RoI - and Temporal Setting

Night of the Living Dead (1968) was shot and the movie screened in black and white, whereas all the other movies in the top 20 RoI list are in colour. Black and white can imply an older movie production although as Thompson and Bordwell note “By the early 1920s, 80% of films were colored in one way or another” (K. Thompson & Bordwell, 2009, online). In 1968 most theatrical movies were in colour yet black and white 35mm stock was chosen for Night of the Living Dead due to budgetary limitations; however this became an aesthetic advantage (Russo, 1985, p. 53).
By contrast to the top 20 RoI movie stories the Table below presents an analysis of the primary Temporal Settings of each movie in the bottom 20 RoI movie story dataset.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Year Released</th>
<th>Primary Temporal Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2008 (‘Near Future’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Iron Age (500 BCE?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World’s Greatest Dad</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come With The Rain</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-12 – Bottom 20 RoI - and Temporal Setting

Five of the bottom 20 RoI movies are thus `period pieces’, set in the past.
10.9 PLOT TYPES (DATA TABLE – ROI MOVIES CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO DOXA)

Below are the apparent classifications of the movie plots in the top 20 RoI movie dataset as per the various different doxa Plot categories in the manuals examined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PLOT TYPE (TRUBY 2007)</th>
<th>PLOT TYPE (MCKEE 1997)</th>
<th>PLOT TYPE (SNYDER 2005)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Superhero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Reveals plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Golden Fleece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Multistrand Plot</td>
<td>Miniplot</td>
<td>Rites of Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Three Unities Plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Fool Triumphant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Rites of Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Fool Triumphant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Buddy Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Multistrand Plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Golden Fleece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Journey plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Golden Fleece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Buddy Love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-13 – Top 20 RoI Moves - Plot Types (McKee, Truby, Snyder)*

Syd Field (1979/2005) does not classify movie story Plots in such a way as McKee (1997), Snyder (2005) or Truby (2007). This is to note that Field’s (1979/2005) “three-act” structure is omitted from the table above - as all movies (whether successful or not) have three acts.
By contrast to the top 20 RoI, below are the bottom 20 RoI Plot-type classifications according to the various *Plot* taxonomies presented in the doxa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PLOT TYPE (TRUBY)</th>
<th>PLOT TYPE (MCKEE)</th>
<th>PLOT TYPE (SNYDER)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Journey plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Golden Fleece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Journey plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Golden Fleece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Reveals plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Reveals plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Journey plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Rites of Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Reveals plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Multistrand Plot</td>
<td>Miniplot</td>
<td>Golden Fleece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Journey plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Reveals plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Rites of Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World’s Greatest Dad</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Reveals plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Journey plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Rites of Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Reveals plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Rites of Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Genre plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Monster in the House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Multistrand Plot</td>
<td>Archplot</td>
<td>Dude With A Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come With The Rain</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Journey plot</td>
<td>Miniplot</td>
<td>Golden Fleece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-14 – Bottom 20 RoI Moves - Plot Types (McKee, Truby, Snyder)*
### 10.10 CHARACTER (DATA TABLE – ROI MOVIES)

Below is a table of the lead characters of the movies in the top 20 RoI dataset. This includes the characters’ stated (or where necessary, estimated) ages in the movie stories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th># OF MAJOR CHAR’S</th>
<th>MAIN CHAR’S</th>
<th>AGE/S</th>
<th>MAIN ANTAGONIST/S</th>
<th>AGE/S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Micah, Katie</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>The Demon</td>
<td>Ancient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Max, Jessie, Goose</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Nightrider, Toecutter</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Heather, Mike, Josh</td>
<td>Late Teens / Early 20s</td>
<td>The Witch</td>
<td>60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mariachi, Domino</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>El Moco</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ben, Barbra, Helen, Harry, Tom, Judy, Karen, Rocky, Adrian, Paulie</td>
<td>30s-40s, 9</td>
<td>Ghoul (or, ‘zombies’)</td>
<td>20s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Curt, Steve, John, Laurie, Toad</td>
<td>18, 30s</td>
<td>The Pharaohs, the police</td>
<td>20s-30s 40-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Laurie, Annie, Dr Loomis</td>
<td>18, 18, 50s</td>
<td>Michael Myers</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Curt, Steve, John, Laurie, Toad</td>
<td>18, 30s</td>
<td>The Pharaohs, the police</td>
<td>20s-30s 40-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dante, Randal</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>20s-30s 40-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Guy, Girl</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Their partners</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Napoleon, Pedro, Deb, Kip, Uncle Rico</td>
<td>17, 17 20s, 17, 40s</td>
<td>Summer Wheatley, the jocks</td>
<td>17, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Susan, Daniel</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Sharks</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Annie, Alice, Bill, Marcie, Jack, Brenda, Steve, Ned</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Mrs Voorhees</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adam, Lawrence, Detectives Tapp &amp; Sing</td>
<td>30s, 40s</td>
<td>Jigsaw</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Abe, Aaron</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Themselves</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ash, Cheryl, Scott, Linda, Shelley</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>The Demons</td>
<td>Ancient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Elliot, E.T., Mary, Michael, Gertie</td>
<td>10, ?, 30s, 15, 6</td>
<td>‘Keys’</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gaz, Dave, Nathan, Lomper, Gerald, Horse, Guy</td>
<td>30s, 40s, 50s</td>
<td>Mandy (Gaz’s ex-wife) and her partner Barry, Al the Club Owner, and, themselves</td>
<td>30s, 40s, 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movie Character and the Top 20 RoI Movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Luke, Han, Chewie, Leia, R2-D2, C-3PO, Ben</td>
<td>18, 30s, 60s</td>
<td>Darth Vader, Tarkin, the Empire</td>
<td>40s, 60s, all ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Toula, Ian</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Gus, Maria</td>
<td>60s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-15 – Movie Character and the Top 20 RoI Movies*
By contrast below is an analysis of the lead characters of the movies in the bottom 20 RoI dataset and also the characters’ stated (or where necessary, estimated) ages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th># OF MAJOR CHAR’S</th>
<th>MAIN CHAR’S</th>
<th>AGE/S</th>
<th>MAIN ANTAGONIST/S</th>
<th>AGE/S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>O’Rourke, Parker, Johnno, Archie, Romy</td>
<td>30s, 40s</td>
<td>Ernst, (and the SS)</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Carlton, Lucy, Katherine</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Al, Joseph, Nadia, Andre, Peyton</td>
<td>40s, 60s</td>
<td>Topolev Utisov</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sam Leslie</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Pyke Kubic</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alan Cindy, Chesney</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Teddy Carter Kelly Morgan Andrew</td>
<td>30s, 40s, 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Benjamin Judith Tabatha</td>
<td>18, 40s, 18</td>
<td>Dr Chevalier Lonnie</td>
<td>40s, 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Scott, Maureen</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Oliver, Kelly</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nicky, Johnny</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Boxer/Jericho, Krysta, Pvt Taverner, Ofcr Taverner,</td>
<td>40s, 30s, 30s, 30s</td>
<td>Nana Mae Frost, Baron Westphalen</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kainen</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Cellmate</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kainen</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Wang Zhang</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wang’s wife, Li</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Wang Zhang</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tim, Sandy</td>
<td>17, 40s</td>
<td>Matt Ben</td>
<td>20s, 40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lance, Claire</td>
<td>40s, 30s</td>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Ryleys</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Doug, Mallory</td>
<td>50s, 20s</td>
<td>Lois</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Katie, Seymour</td>
<td>20s, 50s</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reese, Corbit</td>
<td>30s, 40s</td>
<td>Don Shelly</td>
<td>60s, 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jake Malloy, Peter, Willie, Jaworski, Lopez, McKenzie</td>
<td>40s, 50s</td>
<td>Slater</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dostoyevsky, Anna, Pollina</td>
<td>60s, 30s, 30s</td>
<td>Stellovsky</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come With The Rain</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Alexei The General Grandmother</td>
<td>30s 50s 70s</td>
<td>Su Dongpo Hasford</td>
<td>40s 40s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-16 – Movie Character - and the Bottom 20 RoI Movies*
### 10.10.1 Movie stars in the bottom 20 RoI movies

Movie stars identified in the bottom 20 RoI movies are listed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>CHARACTER</th>
<th>STAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>O’Rourke</td>
<td>Matt LeBlanc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>Carlton</td>
<td>Justin Timberlake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Jeff Bridges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>Al</td>
<td>Joe Pantoliano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>Sam Pyke</td>
<td>Chris Hemsworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah Michelle Gellar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Sarah Michelle Gellar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>Chevalier</td>
<td>Jemaine Clement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>Maureen</td>
<td>Jacqueline Bisset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>James Caan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>Boxer/Jericho</td>
<td>Dwayne Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Krysta</td>
<td>Sarah Michelle Gellar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pvt Taverner</td>
<td>Seann William Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ofcr Taverner</td>
<td>Seann William Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>William H Macy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Glenna</td>
<td>Julia Stiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whore</td>
<td>Mena Suvari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B-Girl</td>
<td>Denise Richards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>Kainen</td>
<td>Jim Caviezel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>John Hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gunnar</td>
<td>Ron Perlman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>Zhang</td>
<td>Honglei Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>Sandy Ben Penny</td>
<td>Sigourney Weaver Jeff Daniels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Michelle Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>Lance</td>
<td>Robin Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>Mallory Doug</td>
<td>Kristen Stewart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>James Gandolfini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>David Katie</td>
<td>Ryan Gosling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kirsten Dunst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>Don Reese Corbit</td>
<td>Ed Harris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zooey Deschanel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Will Ferrell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>Jake Malloy</td>
<td>Sylvester Stallone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>Dostoyevsky Grandmother</td>
<td>Michael Gambon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luise Rainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come With The Rain</td>
<td>Kline</td>
<td>Josh Hartnett</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-17 - Movie Stars in the Bottom 20 RoI Movies*
### 10.11 CHARACTER ARCS (Top 20 and Bottom 20 RoI Movies)

Below is an analysis of the Character Arcs of the protagonists of the movie stories in the top 20 RoI dataset.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>MAIN CHARACTERS</th>
<th>AT START OF MOVIE</th>
<th>AT END OF MOVIE</th>
<th>ARC (?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>Micah / Katie</td>
<td>Skeptical of the supernatural / A believer</td>
<td>Dead / Possessed</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>An angry cop</td>
<td>A widowed angry cop</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>Heather, Mike, Josh</td>
<td>Skeptical of the supernatural</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>Mariachi / Domino</td>
<td>Single &amp; homeless / a gangster’s moll</td>
<td>Single &amp; homeless, missing a hand / Dead</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>Ben, Barbra, Helen, Harry, Tom, Judy, Karen</td>
<td>Terrified</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>A self-identified ‘loser’, a ‘bum’</td>
<td>A loser – albeit now with a girlfriend</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Laurie</td>
<td>Smart, shy about boys</td>
<td>Smart, still shy about boys</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>Curt, Steve, John, Laurie, Toad</td>
<td>Young, angsty, fun-loving</td>
<td>Young, angsty, fun-loving</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Dante / Randal</td>
<td>Cynical about women / realistic</td>
<td>Cynical about women / realistic</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Guy / Girl</td>
<td>In broken relationships</td>
<td>Reconciled with their unappreciative/ ill-suited partners</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Napoleon, Pedro, Deb, Kip, Uncle Ricoh</td>
<td>A group of socially awkward super-nerds</td>
<td>A group of socially awkward super-nerds (though Pedro is now President)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>Susan, Daniel</td>
<td>Unhappy in their tense relationship and stressful lives</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Annie, Alice, Bill, Marcie, Jack, Brenda, Steve, Ned</td>
<td>Carefree, fun-loving</td>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>Adam / Lawrence / Detectives Tapp &amp; Sing</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>Dead / Lawrence is likely dead from blood loss / Tapp &amp; Sing are older</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>Abe, Aaron</td>
<td>Geniuses – but</td>
<td>Geniuses – but</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movie</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Morally Bankrupt</td>
<td>Result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>Ash, Cheryl, Scott, Linda, Shelley</td>
<td>Carefree, fun-loving</td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>Elliot, E.T., Mary, Michael, Gertie</td>
<td>Regular privileged white folk</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>Gaz, Dave, Nathan, Lomper, Gerald, Horse, Guy</td>
<td>Unemployed, low self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>Luke, Han, Chewie, Leia, R2-D2, C-3PO, Ben</td>
<td>Ace pilot (in a T-16 back home)/Mercenaries/Rebel terrorists</td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>Toula / Ian</td>
<td>Single plain virginal woman, oppressed by Greek family</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y (?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-18 – Top 20 RoI Movies - Character ‘Arcs’

The ‘(?)’ in the table above indicates that character arcs for the main characters in these movies are debatable.
By contrast to the top 20 RoI movies, below is an analysis of Character Arcs of protagonists in the bottom 20 RoI movie stories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>MAIN CHARACTERS</th>
<th>AT START OF MOVIE</th>
<th>AT END OF MOVIE</th>
<th>ARC (?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>O’Rourke, Parker, Johnno, Archie, Romy</td>
<td>O’Rourke, Parker and Johnno appear macho and homophobic</td>
<td>The men appear to have bonded with Parker, and accepted cross-dressing</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>Carlton, Lucy, Katherine</td>
<td>Carlton is estranged from his father</td>
<td>Carlton and his father are united</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>Al, Joseph, Nadia, Andre, Peyton</td>
<td>Al hates tax cheats</td>
<td>Al is saddened, but still hates tax cheats</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>Sam Leslie</td>
<td>Sam and Leslie need money</td>
<td>Sam and Leslie have money</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>Alan Cindy Chesney</td>
<td>Alan is directionless</td>
<td>Alan finds direction</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>Benjamin, Judith, Tabatha</td>
<td>Ben idolizes Chevalier</td>
<td>Ben realizes Chevalier is a fraud</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>Scott Maureen</td>
<td>Scott is suspicious</td>
<td>Scott no longer suspicious; just confused</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>Nicky Johnny</td>
<td>Nicky wants into the mob</td>
<td>Nicky wants out of the mob</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>Boxer/Jericho, Krysta, Pvt Taverner, Ofcr Taverner</td>
<td>Boxer has amnesia</td>
<td>Boxer has amnesia, and a screenplay</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>Edmond is loveless and has fears (is racist, homophobic, hates criminals)</td>
<td>Edmond becomes all he fears, but finds love</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>Kainen</td>
<td>Kainen is stranded on Earth</td>
<td>Kainen decides to stay</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>Wang’s wife, Li</td>
<td>Wang’s wife is cheating on Wang</td>
<td>Wang’s wife is widowed</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>Sandy, Tim</td>
<td>Tim feels guilty about letting his abusive brother commit suicide</td>
<td>Tim accepts his brother was a jerk, and no longer feels guilty</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>Lance, Claire</td>
<td>Lance lies about his son</td>
<td>Lance comes clean</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Riley's</td>
<td>Doug, Mallory</td>
<td>Doug needs to grieve and heal</td>
<td>Doug has healed</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>Katie, Seymour</td>
<td>Katie wonders about David</td>
<td>Katie knows about David</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>Reese, Corbit</td>
<td>Reese is estranged from her father</td>
<td>Reese is at peace with her father</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>Jake Malloy, Peter</td>
<td>Malloy is traumatized and</td>
<td>Malloy is clean after rehab</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movie</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>Note</td>
<td>Result</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>Dostoyevsky, Anna, Alexei, The General, Grandmother</td>
<td>Anna wonders if the novel story is based in reality</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come With The Rain</td>
<td>Kline, Shitao, Meng Zi</td>
<td>Kline has unresolved issues with Hasford</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-19 – Bottom 20 RoI Movies - Character ‘Arcs’*
10.12 STRUCTURE

The table below aims to demonstrate how Truby’s (2007) seven plot steps may be applied to the bottom 20 RoI movie *All The Queen’s Men* (2002):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRUBY’S SEVEN STEPS</th>
<th>ALL THE QUEEN’S MEN (2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Weakness and Need</td>
<td>O’Rourke and the other men are homophobic and/or leery of cross-dressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Desire</td>
<td>The Allies need to capture an Enigma Machine, O’Rourke appears to need a girlfriend / romantic ‘love’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Opponent</td>
<td>The SS, and the enemy ‘Axis’ forces in WWII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Plan</td>
<td>To parachute into Germany, and cross-dress, and thus go undercover to steal the Enigma Machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Battle</td>
<td>Infiltrating the all-female German ‘Enigma Machine’ factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-revelation</td>
<td>O’Rourke and the other men are now less homophobic due to spending time with Parker (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. New equilibrium</td>
<td>It is revealed that the Allies already had an Enigma Machine all along; but O’Rourke now has a girlfriend (Romy), and appears not to abhor (the gay, cross-dressing) Parker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-20 – Truby’s Seven Story (Plot) Steps - and ‘All The Queen’s Men’ (2002)*
### 10.13 Movie Duration / Screenplay Length

The table below indicates the *Movie Duration* (in minutes) and by interpolation the approximate *Screenplay Length* (in pages) of the top 20 RoI movies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Movie Duration (Minutes / Pages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>El Mariachi</em></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><em>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</em></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>AVERAGE</strong></td>
<td><strong>93 minutes / pages</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-21 – Movie Duration – Top 20 RoI Movies*
In contrast to the top 20 RoI movies below is an analysis of the *Movie Duration* and by interpolation also the approximate *Screenplay Length* in pages of the bottom 20 RoI movies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>MOVIE DURATION (MINUTES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World’s Greatest Dad</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come with the Rain</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AVERAGE 102 minutes / pages**

*Table 10-22 – Movie Duration – Bottom 20 RoI Movies*
10.14 NUMBER OF SCENES – ROI MOVIES (DATA TABLES)

Below is an analysis of the Number of Scenes in each of the movies in the top 20 RoI dataset.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SCENES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AVERAGE</td>
<td><strong>119</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RANGE</td>
<td><strong>71 – 189 scenes</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-23 – Number of Scenes – Top 20 RoI

The number-one Loss-on-Investment movie *All The Queens Men* was likewise quantitatively measured via observation for Number of Scenes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SCENES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-24 – *All The Queen’s Men* - Number of Scenes
10.15 CREATIVITY

On the Creative Process and Creative Product: Research on the Creative Inspiration for 'the Product’ (i.e., the Movie Story).

The reported key inspirations for the screen idea (movie story) for each of the Top 20 RoI movies is noted in the Table below detailing some of the key specific story idea influences on the story originators and/or screenwriters (storytellers) of the top 20 RoI screen idea in each case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>KEY INSPIRATION/S (AS REPORTED)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>Writer-Director-Producer Oren Peli and his then-girlfriend heard noises downstairs in their house at night whilst in the upstairs bedroom that was later used in the movie (Sacks, 2009, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>Co-writer James McCausland was inspired by the 1973 oil crisis (McCausland, 2006, online). George Miller was influenced by his experiences as a surgeon for road-trauma victims (Murray &amp; Beilby, 1979, pp. 369-371). The antecedent bike-gang movie <em>Stone</em> (1974) bears many similarities to <em>Mad Max</em> (Buckmaster, 2015, online), as does the post-apocalyptic movie <em>A Boy And His Dog</em> (1975).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>Co-writers &amp; Directors Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick were partly-inspired by the Salem witch trials, the play <em>The Crucible</em> and the Tennessee “Bell Witch” legend (Britton, 2010, online). The story also bears strong similarities to the antecedent movies <em>The Legend of Boggy Creek</em> (1972) and <em>Cannibal Holocaust</em> (1980).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>Writer-Director Robert Rodriguez was inspired by Hitchcock (e.g., mistaken identity, in <em>North By Northwest</em>) and also early Spielberg and Scorsese movies (Broderick, 1993, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>Co-writers George Romero and John Russo took inspiration from Richard Matheson’s novel <em>I Am Legend</em>. (Russo, 1985, pp. 6-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Writer-actor Sylvester Stallone was inspired by his own experiences as an actor and training in gyms, and by the 1975 Muhammad Ali - Chuck Wepner heavyweight bout (Sanello, 1998, p. 63).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Producer Irwin Yablans suggested a screen idea about babysitters being stalked by a psychopath on Halloween night to writer-director John Carpenter (McCarty, 2003, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>Writer-Director George Lucas was inspired by his experiences ‘cruising the strip’ in cars in small-town Modesto as well as his fascination with radio DJ Wolfman Jack who features in the movie (Lucas &amp; Kline, 1999, p. 39).The antecedent movie <em>I, Vitelloni</em> (1953) also bears certain key similarities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Writer-Director Kevin Smith was inspired by seeing the movie <em>Slacker</em> (1991) and his own job as a convenience store clerk in the store that was used (at night) as the main set in the movie (PBS, 2001, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Writer-Director John Carney was inspired by his own...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Co-writer &amp; Director Jared Hess was inspired by his own experiences - and by family and friends - growing up in Preston, Idaho (Epstein, 2004, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>Writer-Director Chris Kentis was inspired by the true story of Tom and Eileen Lonergan who were left at sea by a scuba-diving charter boat in 1998 and also his own scuba-diving experiences with his wife Laura Lau. (Gaspar, 2006, p. 221).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Director and story co-creator Sean S. Cunningham was inspired by <em>Halloween</em> to create a slasher/horror movie and the concept began with the title <em>Friday the 13th</em> (Miller in Bracke, 2006, p. 18). Writer Victor Miller created ‘Jason’ and his mother; the (shock ‘twist’ ending) dream-sequence was inspired by the movie <em>Carrie</em> (1976) (Sellers, 2007, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>Co-writers Wan and Whannell were inspired by <em>The Blair Witch Project</em> and also <em>Pi</em> (two of the top 23 RoI movies). They initially conceived the idea of people trapped (by the character ‘Jigsaw’) inside an elevator due to budget constraints. The idea of the character of ‘Jigsaw’ had occurred to Whannell when he suffered migraines and suspected that he had a brain tumour suggesting the idea of ‘Jigsaw’ as a villain with a terminal illness (Hawkins, 2014, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>Writer-Director-Actor Shane Carruth is has a degree in mathematics and is a former engineer. He was inspired by the time-travel ideas of physicist Richard Feynman and the notion that most ground-breaking scientific discoveries made by scientists occur by accident in unglamorous locations such as garages (Lim, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>Writer-Director Sam Raimi was inspired by drive-in horror movies such as <em>Massacre at Central High</em> and <em>Revenge of the Cheerleaders</em>, also <em>The Necronomicon</em> referenced in various H P Lovecraft short stories and novellas (Encyclopedia, 2015, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>John Sayles wrote a ‘semi-sequel’ to <em>Close Encounters of the Third Kind</em> called ‘Night Skies’ about hostile aliens who terrorize a family barricaded inside a farmhouse. Spielberg abandoned the project but redeveloped a subplot about the relationship between the lone good alien and an autistic boy as “E.T.” (IMDb.com, 2015, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>Producer Uberto Pasolini conceived the idea, then hired writer Simon Beaufoy to write the screenplay and Peter Cattaneo to direct. Controversially New Zealand playwrights Anthony McCarten and Stephen Sinclair filed a £180,000,000 lawsuit against the producers of <em>The Full Monty</em> in 1998 claiming that the movie infringed on their 1987 play ‘Ladies Night’ which toured Britain and New Zealand (BBCNews, 1998, online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>In various interviews writer-director George Lucas notes he was unable to afford the rights to the 1930s film serials of <em>Flash Gordon</em>; in writing <em>Star Wars</em> he was inspired by serials <em>Flash Gordon</em>, <em>Buck Rogers</em>, <em>Dune</em> (the novel by Frank Herbert) and movies <em>The Hidden Fortress</em>, <em>Yojimbo</em>, <em>Metropolis</em>, 633 Squadron, <em>The Dam-Busters</em>, <em>The Wizard of Oz</em> and Joseph Campbell’s...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
anthropological narratology text *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Lucas synopsized the movie as `the Flash Gordon genre; 2001 meets James Bond’ (Lucas & Kline, 1999, pp. passim, 32).

20 My Big Fat Greek Wedding

When unable to get movie acting work playing Greek roles writer-actor Nia Vardalos wrote a one-woman comedy show about her own Greek family experiences and adapted it into a movie screenplay prior to performing her one-woman theatre show (Rea & Vardalos, 2003, online; Velikovsky, 2015).

Table 10-25 - Key reported inspirations of the top 20 RoI Movie Story Concepts

By way of comparison below is the reported source of the various component concepts for the biggest money-losing movie *All The Queen’s Men*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>KEY INSPIRATION/S (AS REPORTED)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>It is unclear from the extant literature what the inspiration for this movie story was - although the concept itself is obvious: a spy team goes under-cover - in drag - to steal an Enigma Machine. Director Stefan Ruzowitzky notes: `This was a misconception from the beginning. After &quot;The Inheritors&quot; had been successful, I, an Austrian director, got this offer from a German producer living in L.A. to make the film with a British screenwriter. Making an American movie with such a crew cannot work. One problem was that Matt Leblanc did a good job but I had not been aware how popular &quot;Friends&quot; was in the States - that I hadn't cast Leblanc but, rather, I had cast Joey. Everybody who sees Joey expects a certain kind of humor. They were disappointed that he was behaving so strangely. That was the typical first attempt to make an American movie’ (Feinstein, 2008).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-26 - Key reported inspirations for the lowest-RoI movie story concept
Creative Place: Country of Origin – Bottom 20 RoI Movies

The table below shows *Country of Origin* for the Bottom 20 RoI movies, with Germany also indicated in **bold**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen's Men</td>
<td>Germany/Austria/USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>Germany/UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>France/Germany/USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>USA/Germany/France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>China/Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>USA/Germany/Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>UK/USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>USA/Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Gambler</td>
<td>Netherlands/Hungary/UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I Come with the Rain</td>
<td>France/Hong Kong/Ireland/UK/Spain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-27 – Bottom 20 RoI Movies (Biggest Loss on Investment) - Germany*

The table reveals that the USA was involved in (16/20) of the bottom 20 RoI movies and Germany was involved in (6/20) movies.
Creative Person: Writer-hyphenates in the top 20 RoI Movies.

The table below presents data on the writer-hyphenates of the top 20 RoI Movies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>WRITER/S</th>
<th>PRODUCTION ROLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>Oren Peli</td>
<td>Writer-Director-Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>George Miller, James McCAusland Byron Kennedy (story)</td>
<td>George Miller: Writer-Director-Executive Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sánchez</td>
<td>Both: Writer-Director-Producers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>Robert Rodriguez</td>
<td>Writer-Director-Producer-Camera Operator-DOP-Sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>George Romero, John Russo</td>
<td>Romero: Writer-Director-DOP/Camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Sylvester Stallone</td>
<td>Writer-Actor (lead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>John Carpenter, Debra Hill</td>
<td>John Carpenter: Writer-Director-Music Composer-Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>George Lucas, Gloria Katz, Willard Huyck</td>
<td>George Lucas: Writer-Director-Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Kevin Smith</td>
<td>Kevin Smith: Writer-Director-Producer-Editor-Actor ('Silent Bob')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>John Carney</td>
<td>John Carney: Writer-Director-Camera Operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Jared Hess, Jerusha Hess</td>
<td>Jared Hess: Writer-Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>Chris Kentis</td>
<td>Writer-Director-Camera-Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Victor Miller, Ron Kurz, also Sean S Cunningham (story)</td>
<td>Sean S Cunningham: Director-Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>James Wan (story), Leigh Whannell</td>
<td>Wan: Story &amp; Director Whannell: Writer-Actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>Shane Carruth</td>
<td>Writer-Director-Producer-Production Designer, Music Composer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>Sam Raimi</td>
<td>Writer-Director-Producer-Special Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>Melissa Mathison</td>
<td>Writer-Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>Uberto Pasolini (story), Simon Beaufoy</td>
<td>Uberto Pasolini: Story by &amp; Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>George Lucas</td>
<td>Writer-Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>Nia Vardalos</td>
<td>Writer-Actor (lead)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-28 - Writer-hyphenates of the Top 20 RoI Movies*
(Un)Creative Person: Writer-hyphenates in the bottom 20 RoI Movies.

The table below presents data on the writer-hyphenates of the bottom 20 RoI Movies with writer-hyphenates (and the relevant movies) in each case indicated in **bold**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>WRITER/S</th>
<th>PRODUCTION ROLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen's Men</td>
<td>Digby Wolfe (story)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Joseph Manduke (story)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June Roberts (story)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>David Schneider (screenplay)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Open Road</td>
<td>Michael Meredith</td>
<td><strong>Writer-Director</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taxman</td>
<td>Avi Nesher</td>
<td><strong>Avi Nesher:</strong> Co-Writer, Director, Co-Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Roger H. Berger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ca$h</td>
<td>Stephen Milburn Anderson</td>
<td><strong>Stephen Milburn Anderson:</strong> Co-writer, Director and Co-Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Harvard Man</td>
<td>James Toback</td>
<td><strong>James Toback:</strong> Writer-Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gentlemen Broncos</td>
<td>Jared Hess</td>
<td><strong>Jared &amp; Jerusha Hess:</strong> Writer-Producers Jared Hess: Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jerusha Hess</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fascination</td>
<td>Daryl Haney (based on a screenplay by)</td>
<td><strong>Klaus Menzel:</strong> Writer-Director, Co-Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>John L. Jacobs (based on a screenplay by)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Klaus Menzel (written by)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Thing of Ours</td>
<td>Ted A. Bohus</td>
<td><strong>Danny Provenzano:</strong> Writer-Director-Actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Danny Provenzano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Southland Tales</td>
<td>Richard Kelly</td>
<td><strong>Richard Kelly:</strong> Writer-Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Edmond</td>
<td>David Mamet (screenplay)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>David Mamet (play)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Outlander</td>
<td>Dirk Blackman</td>
<td><strong>Howard McCain:</strong> Writer-Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Howard McCain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop</td>
<td>Jianquan Shi (screenplay) &amp; Jing Shang (screenplay) &amp; Ethan Coen (based on his screenplay for &quot;Blood Simple&quot;) &amp; Joel Coen (based on his screenplay for &quot;Blood Simple&quot;)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Imaginary Heroes</td>
<td>Dan Harris</td>
<td><strong>Dan Harris:</strong> Writer-Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>World's Greatest Dad</td>
<td>Bobcat Goldthwait</td>
<td><strong>Bobcat Goldthwait:</strong> Writer-Director-Actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Welcome to the Rileys</td>
<td>Ken Hixon</td>
<td><strong>Ken Hixon:</strong> Writer-Actor-Producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>All Good Things</td>
<td>Marcus Hinchey</td>
<td><strong>Marcus Hinchey &amp; Marc Smerling:</strong> Writer-Producers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marc Smerling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Winter Passing</td>
<td>Adam Rapp</td>
<td><strong>Adam Rapp:</strong> Writer-Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Eye See You</td>
<td>Howard Swindle (novel)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ron L. Brinkerhoff (screen story)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ron L. Brinkerhoff (screenplay)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|19 | The Gambler | Fyodor Dostoevsky (novel)  
Katharine Ogden (screenplay)  
&  
Charles Cohen (screenplay)  
and  
Nick Dear (screenplay) | Charles Cohen:  
Writer-Producer |
|20 | I Come with the Rain | Tran Anh Hung | Tran Anh Hung:  
Writer-Director |

*Table 10-29 - Writer-hyphenates of the Bottom 20 RoI Movies*

In summary 16/20 of the bottom 20 RoI movies were co-created by writer-hyphenates.
### 10.16 HUMAN NATURE (ROI MOVIES)

The definitions of the five story stakes and the numeric code used in the column titled ‘Snyder’s Primal Drives’ are: (1) saving one’s family; (2) protecting one’s home; (3) finding (or retaining/protecting) a mate; (4) exacting revenge; and (5) survival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI #</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>PRIMARY STORY ‘STAKES’</th>
<th>SNYDER’S ‘PRIMAL’ DRIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>Katie and Micah’s house – and, their lives (previously, the demon that is stalking Katie burned her house down while trying to kill her)</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>Max and his family’s (and Goose’s) health, and lives</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>The 3 students’ lives and health, and also: the documentary film, and the 16mm camera-equipment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>Mariachi’s and Domino’s lives (and health, i.e. Mariachi’s hand), Mariachi’s guitar</td>
<td>3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>The lives of the 6 main characters, and all humans</td>
<td>1,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Rocky’s health (and possibly, his life)</td>
<td>3,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>The lives of anyone/everyone engaging in sexual activity in Michael’s old neighbourhood</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>Steve’s car, Curt and Steve’s future job prospects and economic lives (if they stay in Modesto, like John) – also John’s life (in: the drag-race)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Dante and Ronnie’s future romantic happiness, Dante’s health (he is exhausted), their planned hockey game</td>
<td>3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Guy and Girl’s (potential) future romantic happiness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>Napoleon, Deb, Kip, LeFawndah and Pedro’s romantic happiness, and social acceptance/popularity</td>
<td>3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>Daniel and Susan’s lives, relationship, health - and, the jobs of the dive-boat supervisors</td>
<td>3,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Steve Christy’s and all the camp counsellors’ lives</td>
<td>3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SAW</td>
<td>Adam and Dr Lawrence’s lives, and, health</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>Abe and Aaron’s lives, sanity, and physical and psychological health (also, that of their ‘doubles’)</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>The five friends’ lives, and, souls</td>
<td>3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ET: The Extra-Terrestrial</td>
<td>ET’s life, and also ET’s, Elliot’s and Mike’s freedom (ET may be captured, and forced to share his advanced alien knowledge with the human race – also, the boys may be</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOI #</td>
<td>MOVIE</td>
<td>PRIMARY STORY <code>STAKES</code></td>
<td>SNYDER’S `PRIMAL’ DRIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All The Queen’s Men</td>
<td>The Allies winning the war, countless lives</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>Gaz’s joint custody of his son Nathan (and also, the $700 alimony payment, to Mandy)</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>The lives of the Rebel Alliance, and the citizens of Alderaan (a moon of Yavin)</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>Toula and Ian’s (potential) future romantic happiness.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-30 - Movie RoI and Snyder’s (2005) Primal Story `Stakes`*
10.17 TESTING OUT THE STORYALITY THEORY

Below is a brief analysis of the new entry to the top 20 RoI movie list *The Devil Inside* (2012) in light of the various predictions of the StoryAlity Theory as derived from an analysis of the top and bottom 20 RoI movies. This comparison is intended as a test of the StoryAlity Theory, namely a StoryAlity Theory retrodiction. This is to say that once a movie emerges in the top 20 RoI list we can test its characteristics against the predictions of the StoryAlity Theory.

In consilient research enquiry, the formulation of a hypothesis and the testing of that hypothesis by examining biocultural artifacts and empirical evidence is encouraged (see: Boyd 2009; Carroll 1995; Gottschall 2008, 2013; E. O. Wilson 1998).

Since in 2012 a new movie entered the top 20 RoI list, namely *The Devil Inside* (2012), a comparison of the characteristics of that movie to the theory’s predictions is as follows:
Comparison of *The Devil Inside* (2012) to the *StoryAlity* Theory Predictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>$1.8m</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1M</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>RoI</td>
<td>81,713%</td>
<td></td>
<td>99,662%</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Number of Main Characters</td>
<td>4 (3 protagonists, and 1 major antagonist)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (3 protagonists, and 1 major antagonist)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Occupations of Main Character/s</td>
<td>Working class / students/ ’everypeople’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working class / students/ ’everypeople’</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Character Arc/s</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Number of Movie Story Acts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Story Structure</td>
<td>The <em>StoryAlity</em> syntagm</td>
<td></td>
<td>The <em>StoryAlity</em> syntagm</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Screenplay / Film Length</td>
<td>90 screenplay pages / 90 minutes</td>
<td></td>
<td>72 mins</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td># of Scenes</td>
<td>105 scenes</td>
<td></td>
<td>153 scenes</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Average Scene Lengths</td>
<td>49 seconds, or, 7/8ths script page</td>
<td></td>
<td>28 seconds (half a page)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ratio of EXT/INT scenes</td>
<td>44% Exterior / 56% Interior</td>
<td></td>
<td>19% Ext / 81% Int</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Number of Locations</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>156</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Types of Main Locations/Settings</td>
<td>House / Apartment (Domestic setting)</td>
<td></td>
<td>House / Apartment (Domestic setting)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Temporal Setting</td>
<td>Present Day</td>
<td></td>
<td>Present Day</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Story Ending Type</td>
<td>Villain Triumphant</td>
<td></td>
<td>Villain Triumphant</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Survival, Reproduction, Revenge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Survival, Reproduction, Revenge</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sex scenes</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Chase scenes</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Shootouts</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Fist-Fights</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montage/s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Expected Reviews/Critics Ratings? (Metacritic)</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Expected Oscars</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Expected MPAA Rating</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Length of Shoot</td>
<td>30 days</td>
<td>30 days</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>“Look” of the film</td>
<td>Color &amp; digital</td>
<td>Color &amp; digital</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>By a writer-hyphenate</td>
<td>19/20 of the top 20 RoI writer-hyphenates are male</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>Male writer hyphenate</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>By a female writer-hyphenate?</td>
<td>1.5 of the top 20 RoI movie writers are female</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>In the Drama genre?</td>
<td>None of the top 20 RoI are a `Drama’ genre movie</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Not a Drama</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-31 – Comparing ‘The Devil Inside’ (2012) to the archetypal Top 20 RoI Movie

In summary the main areas where the movie departs from predictions are in the length (The Devil Inside is a short movie at 72 mins) and pacing (including the average duration of scenes at 28 seconds); it is a fast-paced movie, even for a `found-footage horror’ genre movie.
A further analysis of various key components of The Devil Inside (2012) to examine how it correlates with the StoryAlity Theory of high-RoI movie stories is as follows:

1. A new top 20 RoI movie should emerge on average every 2.05 years. *(This correlates with the Theory’s prediction).* The emergence of movies into the top 20 RoI set appears to be Poisson-distributed rather than being a regular ‘clockwork’ occurrence.  

2. A ’Two-Part’ story Structure (i.e., ‘before’ and ‘after’ the tragedy strikes) – *(Correlates with the Theory’s prediction).* In the movie, everything is going well enough for the protagonist Isabella, until the 37% mark of the story (page 28 of the screenplay / minute 28 of the movie). After that events get progressively worse for Isabella.

3. A Villain Protagonist – *(Correlates)* In the story, the demon (in fact multiple demons) possess Maria Rossi. The *Plot* in the story is thus “the antagonists” (Maria, Michael, Ben, David) reacting to the actions that the demons (protagonists) take.

4. Villain Triumphant – *(Correlates)* The demons win in the end, and the “good guys” lose. They in fact, all lose their lives.

5. No ‘Character Arcs’ – *(Correlates)* Isabella and Michael, Fathers Ben and David (and even Maria Rossi for that matter) do not change, grow, or transform psychologically in the story; in fact they all die and in this view, Character Arcs are absent for them in the story as “protagonists.”

6. The Three Primal (i.e., evolutionary) Themes – *(Correlates.)* The movie contains these thematic elements, as per StoryAlity Theory. i.e. a) Life & Death, b) Family & Community, and c) Justice (i.e., Revenge).

7. Set in the Present Day – *(Correlates. i.e. set in 2009).* Although the movie was released in 2012 it is still essentially “The Present Day”, i.e.: This movie is not a ’period piece’ movie, say set 10 or more years prior to the Present Day of its release.

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579 It may be the case that Character Arcs are generally for “Drama” Genre films and may indulge the cinematic fantasy that people can change their personalities. Recall that there are no Dramas in the Top 20 RoI movies and there are 7 of them in the Bottom 20 RoI, i.e. in the Biggest Money-Losing Movies.
8. Temporally Linear – *(Correlates.)* The movie does not use a non-linear structure (such as say, *Pulp Fiction*, *Rashomon* or *Memento*), even though Super-8 and digital footage is shown of “the past” in the movie.

9. Family/Kin Themes – *(Correlates.)* Isabella aims to connect with her estranged mother Maria. There is also a Romance subplot of sorts - although being a Horror *Genre* movie, this plot is quite ‘dark’ and also involves a secret pregnancy termination.

10. A Writer-hyphenate – *(Correlates.)* A *Writer-Director*: William Brent Bell was the Co-Writer and Director of *The Devil Inside* (2012). The *StoryAlity Theory* suggests that all the Top 20 RoI movies are by writer-hyphenates, thus this finding also correlates with the expectations, or Theory.

It should certainly be noted that *The Devil Inside* (2012) was not well received critically;\(^{580}\) it is likely that over time it will become ‘archive’ rather than remain ‘canon’ *(sensu* Moretti 2000).*

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Summary of the *StoryAlity* Theory retrodiction

As the above analysis aims to demonstrate the movie *The Devil Inside* (2012) is largely retrodicted (retrospectively predicted) by the *StoryAlity* Theory. This analysis of characteristics and story ‘memes’ - including various story and genre tropes of the Top 20 RoI movies (from 1968 to the end of 2011) - examines those top 20 movies and their observed common characteristics largely predict those same characteristics of the Top 20 RoI movie *The Devil Inside* (2012).

In this view the current theory is not disconfirmed however in the *post-positivist critical realism*\(^{581}\) view a new top 20 RoI movie may well indeed emerge into the top 20 RoI movie list by making over 71 times its production budget and may thus falsify the *StoryAlity* Theory at any time.

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\(^{581}\) Or Popperian, as in Sir Karl Popper (Popper 1999).
### 10.18 TOP AND BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIES – COMPARISON OF THE 15 DOXA ELEMENTS

The following table compares the top and bottom 20 RoI movies across the fifteen key characteristics examined in the screenwriting doxa.

The elements in **bold text** are common elements to both top 20 and bottom 20 RoI data sets - or 9 of the 15 elements.

Elements shaded in **grey** (or the other 6 of the 15 elements) are unique to the top 20 RoI movies - or are absent from the bottom 20 RoI movies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>DOXA ELEMENT</th>
<th>TOP 20 ROI MOVIE CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>BOTTOM 20 ROI MOVIE CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Story Premise</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI movies feature: a protagonist(s) with a problem(s) that is ‘resolved’ by the end. (‘Resolved’ as used here does not necessarily mean ‘solved’; it may mean death for the protagonist.)</td>
<td>All bottom 20 RoI movies feature a clear premise, or: a protagonist(s) with a problem(s) that is ‘resolved’ by the end. (‘Resolved’ as used here does not necessarily mean ‘solved’; it may mean death for the protagonist.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>‘Theme’ is also a problematic (ill-defined) term in the doxa. Yet the movies under study can be seen to feature both Field’s (2005) and Snyder’s (2005) conceptions of it, but at the 14% mark.</td>
<td>‘Theme’ is also a problematic (ill-defined) term in the doxa. Yet the bottom 20 RoI movies can be seen to feature all four screenwriting manuals’ various conceptions of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>8 of the top 20 RoI are Horror genre movies. Dramas are absent from the top 20 RoI.</td>
<td>12 of the bottom 20 RoI are ‘Drama’ genre movies, 7/20 are partly or wholly in the ’Drama-Comedy’ aka ‘Dramedy’ genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Setting (Spatial)</td>
<td>The settings of the top 20 RoI movies are: the US (75%), Australia (5%), Ireland (Dublin) (5%), the UK (Sheffield) (5%), Mexico (5%), and outer space (5%). 60% (12/20) of the top 20 movies primarily feature: urban settings.</td>
<td>The geographical settings are 75% USA (15/20); Norway 5% (1/20), China 5% (1/20), USA, Philippines, Hong Kong 5% (1/20), Russia 5% (1/20), Germany/UK 5% (1/20). The setting types are dominated by ‘Urban’ settings (13/20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Setting (Temporal)</td>
<td>17 of the top 20 RoI movies are set in the present; one is set 10 years prior, one ‘a long time ago’, and one in the future.</td>
<td>14 of the bottom 20 RoI movies are set in the Present Day; 5 are set in the past, and one set in the ‘near future’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>17 top 20 RoI movies are ‘Villain Triumphant’ stories, which means the protagonists do not ‘solve’ their story ‘problem’ at the end.</td>
<td>None of the bottom 20 RoI movies are ‘Villain Triumphant’ stories, which means the protagonists do satisfactorily ‘solve’ their key story ‘problem’ by the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>The lead characters in highest RoI movies are ‘younger’ (in their 20s and 30s), villains are usually ten years older.</td>
<td>The lead characters in lowest RoI movies are ‘middle aged’ (in their 30s and 40s). Three feature younger protagonists (20s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Character ‘Arcs’</td>
<td>In 6 of the top 20 RoI, all of the protagonists die: Paranormal Activity, The Blair Witch Project, Open Water, Night of the Living Dead, SAW, The Evil Dead.</td>
<td>One of the protagonists dies (the son, in World’s Greatest Dad). 17/20 protagonists can be seen to have ‘character arcs’ in the bottom 20 RoI movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI movies can be seen to have ‘3 Acts’, but so do all movies, whether successful or not.</td>
<td>All have ‘3 Acts’, but so do all movies, whether unsuccessful or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>19 of the top 20 RoI are English-language movies; one is Spanish (El Mariachi).</td>
<td>19 of the 20 movies are English-language movies; one is in Chinese (A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Duration / Length</td>
<td>The duration range of Top 20 RoI movies is from 77 to 121 minutes, but the average length is 93 minutes.</td>
<td>The duration ranges from 82 to 145 minutes, and the average length is 102 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Number of Scenes</td>
<td>The average number of scenes in a top 20 RoI movie is 119.</td>
<td>The average number of scenes was not determined; however the number-one Loss-on-Investment movie (All The Queen’s Men) has 182 scenes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>‘Dramatic Principles’</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI movies feature ‘conflict’ (protagonists, solving problems) and agonistic structure (i.e., protagonists vs. antagonists).</td>
<td>All feature ‘conflict’ (protagonists, solving problems) and agonistic structure (i.e., protagonists vs. antagonists).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>On creativity</td>
<td>All top 20 RoI involve writer-hyphenates (a writer-director, and/or writer-producer, and/or, writer-actor)</td>
<td>16 of the bottom 20 movies involve writer-hyphenates (a writer-director, and/or writer-producer, and/or, writer-actor).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>On ‘Human Nature’</td>
<td>All top 20 feature ‘primal’ themes (Snyder 2007), and thus depict ‘human nature’ or human evolutionary psychology.</td>
<td>All bottom 20 RoI movies feature ‘primal’ story themes (Snyder 2007), and thus depict ‘human nature’ or human evolutionary psychology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-32 - Top and Bottom 20 RoI Movies Comparison - across 15 Elements of the Screenwriting Doxa*
10.19 **THE ANNA KARENINA PRINCIPLE** - Table

The table below presents a formulation of the Anna Karenina Principle as applied herein to understanding the success and also failure of movie stories with mass audiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ANNA KARENINA PRINCIPLE MOVIE-STORY ELEMENT</strong></th>
<th><strong>'SUCCEED'</strong></th>
<th><strong>'FAIL'</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STORY PREMISE</td>
<td>The premise is interesting</td>
<td>Premise is not interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Premise is stupid (AND, is not intended to be: a 'Stupid'-Genre Comedy)(^{582})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME/S</td>
<td>Themes are interesting</td>
<td>Themes are uninteresting or repulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENRE/S</td>
<td>The Genre is liked</td>
<td>The Genre/s is disliked (Some abhor the Horror Genre; others abhor the Rom-Com Genre; or Westerns, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The story adheres to some of the Genre’s tropes. Or, if not, the story transcends or defies them, in a way that works/is satisfying.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>IF</em> the movie combines Genres: These genres are not disliked.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Story adheres <em>too closely</em> to many or all of the classic Genre tropes, and is thus, too predictable / clichéd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETTING SPATIAL</td>
<td>The Spatial Setting is visually and conceptually appealing</td>
<td>The Spatial Setting is visually or conceptually unappealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETTING TEMPORAL</td>
<td>The Temporal Setting is appropriate</td>
<td>The Temporal Setting is boring or confusing or inappropriate, or is disliked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLOT</td>
<td>The Plot is interesting and not too ‘predictable’, and is not confusing</td>
<td>The Plot is too predictable, and/or confusing, or, judged silly or dumb or annoying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARACTER</td>
<td>The Characters are interesting and/or likeable UNLESS: It is an ‘antihero’ story, where the Character/s uninteresting and/or unlikeable</td>
<td>UNLESS: Is an ‘antihero’ and the antihero is <em>liked</em>, in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{582}\) Film critic Roger Ebert disliked top 20 Roi movie *Napoleon Dynamite* intensely, noting it was ‘a kind of studied stupidity that passes as humor’ (Ebert, 2004, online). See: [http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/napoleon-dynamite-2004](http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/napoleon-dynamite-2004). The ‘Stupid-Comedy’ Genre may include most Adam Sandler and Rob Schneider comedies, and the movie *Dumb and Dumber* (1994).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characterization</th>
<th>The Characters are believable and consistent</th>
<th>The Characters are unbelievable and/or inconsistent at any stage of the story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>The structure is satisfying and comprehensible</td>
<td>The structure is unsatisfying and/or incomprehensible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>The dialogue is believable, and possibly even memorable</td>
<td>The dialogue is unbelievable, and/or amateurish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie Duration</td>
<td>The movie is not too short or too long</td>
<td>The movie is too short or too long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Principles</td>
<td>The story is engaging; attracts and maintains audience attention</td>
<td>The story is not engaging; fails to attract and/or maintains audience attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Transportation</td>
<td>Movie story puts and keeps the viewer in the ‘flow’ state, (i.e., Narrative Transportation Theory).</td>
<td>Movie story does not put, and/or keep the viewer in the ‘flow’ state, or, in Narrative Transportation, i.e., absorbed in the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 'Look'</td>
<td>The look (visual style) is engaging</td>
<td>The look (visual style) is not engaging or repulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Movie Elements</td>
<td>The Writing, Directing, Acting, Editing and Sound is all acceptable</td>
<td>Any of the: Writing, Directing, Acting, Editing and Sound are unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onscreen Content</td>
<td>The violence, sex, language, or ‘adult concepts’ is not too explicit, challenging, or offensive</td>
<td>Any of the violence, sex, language or ‘adult concepts’ is too explicit, challenging, or offensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Story is creative if it is ‘new, and it works’ (Simonton 2011)</td>
<td>Story is either not new (i.e. is unoriginal), and/or it ‘does not work’ - due to flaws in any Story elements (see above), or, due to flaws in the movie-making technical elements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-33 - The Anna Karenina Principle - applied to Movie Story
Movie story elements can be judged by a viewer on a spectrum ranging from “Excellent” through to “Abysmal”, however the table above presents a simplified version namely either “Succeed” or “Fail”. The “Succeed” column in the table suggests some general reasons as to why a movie story may succeed with an individual audience-member and the “Fail” column indicates possible causes of failure. It should be noted that there are also vastly more possible reasons for both “Succeed” and for “Fail” and also many more IF / THEN clauses than the ones indicated in the Anna Karenina Principle table above.

In the screenplay all of these key elements which comprise the movie story must be judged a “Succeed” and none must be judged a “Fail” by consensus in the field - both as a screenplay and also in the completed screenwork as a movie story - and additionally any of the technical movie elements (Directing, Acting, Editing, Sound and so on) also cannot be a “fail”.

The Anna Karenina Principle for movies is thus made up of at least the categories listed above where each category also has the ability to interact with any and in theory all of other categories in a complex configurational manner.
10.19.1 On the Anna Karenina Principle and Complexity, in Movie Story Success

When examining why some movie stories are selected by the mass audience as creative (novel and appropriate) and others are not, a biocultural approach suggests that there are at least three levels of selection: biological, cultural and in the overlap, biocultural selection. In the article ‘On The Psychological Selection Of Bio-Cultural Information’ (1985) Csikszentmihalyi and Massimini note that the “flow” experience is selected for (Csikszentmihalyi & Massimini, 1985, p. 127).

As noted in the Literature Review in the study of movie narrative success and failure, ‘flow’ theory as developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990-1996) has been adapted to Narrative Transportation Theory (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000, 2002; Green & Carpenter, 2011; Green, et al., 2012; Van Laer, et al., 2014), and it appears that a movie story that does not keep a majority of the audience narratively “transported” (or in the flow state, namely engaged with or enjoying that movie story experience) would be extremely unlikely to succeed in attaining an RoI at all, let alone a high one. Failure in one area of the many components that comprise a movie story can result in that story being deselected by mass audiences due to lack of Narrative Transportation (or ‘flow’ state).

The characteristics under study here in both the top and bottom 20 RoI movies appear to be important elements of successful movie stories and resemble the key categories used by professional screen readers to assess screen ideas as noted by Macdonald (2004) and as derived from screen reader training manuals such as Katahn (1990). This is to note that screenplays are analyzed by screen readers in terms of such elements as: story line, characterisation, dialogue, setting / production, structure, theme and writing ability in a screenplay (Katahn 1990, p. 66) and are typically judged, and represented in a “grid” on professional screen reader’s reports (script ‘coverage’) on a scale of ‘EXCELLENT’.

583 ‘Culture’ here refers to information stored extrasomatically (e.g. image and sound information stored on a movie DVD, or, text in an unread book, and so on). ‘Biocultural’ refers to when that information is stored in memory inside the mind (brain) of a biological organism such as a human. Namely: when someone goes to see a movie for the first time, for them, the information has been transmitted (copied), from the cultural to the biocultural. During this transmission of story information (the movie experience) they may well enter the ‘flow’ state, i.e., experience Narrative Transportation (sensu Gerrig 1993).

584 In the article ‘Transportation, need for cognition, and affective disposition as factors in enjoyment of film narratives’, (Owen & Riggs, 2012) examine the differential enjoyment of the movie Memento, as released in cinemas, versus, cut into chronological order. The findings suggest that “viewers cannot enjoy satisfying their need for cognition without being transported; and neither does liking the main character result in enjoyment without transportation” (p. 146).
‘GOOD’, ‘FAIR’ to ‘POOR’, the latter judgement being a “fail” in that specific category. For this reason it is also suggested the Anna Karenina Principle might similarly be a useful way to understand movie story success and failure.

The Anna Karenina Principle in movies also goes some way towards indicating the level of complexity contained in any given movie story.

It is also noted that a movie story’s possible Themes - which may also be different recurring patterns of ideas or concepts as well as Truby’s “Moral Premise” and McKee’s “Controlling Idea” - may well be interpreted differently by different people depending on their own interests, perceptions and predispositions.585 It also appears there may be no one universal answer to the question “What is being communicated in any given movie?” The screenwriter’s intentions when compared with the audience’s perceptions and interpretations of the experienced movie story may vary.

Each of these concepts of the Anna Karenina Principle as applied to movies - where examined in the doxa and these highest and lowest RoI movies - is discussed below beginning with ‘Premise’.

In the doxa Truby asserts that “Nine out of ten writers fail at the premise” (Truby 2007, p. 18). This is understood to mean that such Premises do not cause readers or audiences to be interested in experiencing the movie story. Truby (2007) also is stating the Anna Karenina Principle (albeit not by name) when he notes: “You may be terrific at character, a master at plot, or a genius at dialogue. But if your premise is weak, there is nothing you can do to save the story” (Truby 2007, pp. 17-8) namely that unappealing, or badly-written characters, plot, or dialogue can each individually sink a specific story.

In terms of Genre the Anna Karenina Principle means that the story should satisfy the Genre expectations raised by the Genre although complicating this is that Genre conventions can also be cleverly creatively586 subverted and various Genres can be blended. The difficulty of the Drama genre becomes more obvious when it is considered

585 See also David Bordwell’s ‘schematic model of the spectator’s activities’ (Bordwell in B. Boyd, et al., 2010, p. 274). Different spectators may perceive different things in a movie, let alone, ascribe different meanings to what is actually perceived.
586 (i.e., originally and appropriately)
that Drama implies realism namely potentially depressingly real-life problems (Simonton, 2011, p. 82) and that a key purpose of many movies by nature is: escapist entertainment.

This research suggests that Dramas provide difficulties in marketing due to an inherent absence of appeal while Horror, Science Fiction, Musical and Romantic Comedies have many shared Genre tropes within their genre conventions. These tropes can provide an attraction such as new monsters, spaceships or aliens; new songs; new relationship chemistries; and the added value of comedy in a rom-com. Lacking such tropes, Drama features stories about real-life problems and situations.

Regarding Plot in the above Anna Karenina Principle additional ways for a story to fail can include its pacing, namely a plot that is slow or predictable thus allowing the audience to fall out of the flow state or a state of Narrative Transportation since they are able to guess what happens next in the movie story.

Structure can likewise result in many instances of failure if the selected parts of the story/screenplay as chosen by a writer (or SIWG) are incorrectly selected or confusing when assembled in either the screenplay or movie.

It is unclear whether Theme alone - mainly due to its often mercurial and multiply-defined nature - can be a singular cause of failure; in the examined doxa Theme varies from “subject matter” to “controlling idea” to “moral argument” depending on the view adopted by each screenwriting manual author. Since Theme can also depend on the interpretation of patterns, motifs or meanings identified in a work it is unclear how many audience members understand all of the Theme/s that the authors intended.

Dialogue that is poorly written can clearly be a cause for a script to be deselected, ignored, or otherwise not endorsed for further development and production; the doxa

__________________________

587 assuming they were in it
indeed confirms there are numerous frequently occurring problems with dialogue in screenplays.

The category Setting in the above includes both Spatial and Temporal. Certain times and spatial settings may also mean a project is rejected by screen readers or producers for various reasons. For example they may not be interested in making historical movies or they may not want to shoot in - or find matching locations for - certain specific locales/countries known to be problematic or expensive for movie production.

However as noted by various research scholars of screenplay and practitioners, words on the page do not always effectively convey certain important elements of the medium of cinema (see: Novrup Redvall 2012) and even movie field experts (screen readers) are not always able to judge the merits of a screen story from the words on the page.

Adding yet another layer to the complexity of movie creativity: once the screen idea is created as a movie the above elements should all be effective and probably none of the following elements (in the movie) can be a fail, either: Casting, Acting Performances, Production Design, Cinematography and Lighting, Editing and Sound Design.588

However there are even more points to be noted when all of these elements are combined. For example additional problems can occur around Premise and Plot for a completed screenwork; namely that a movie with a very similar Premise or Plot might appear shortly before the movie is released meaning the later-released movie is no longer seen as ‘novel / new / original / surprising’ even though it may indeed be otherwise appropriate - that is it may well “work” as a movie but is mistakenly viewed as derivative.

Books in the screenwriting doxa that address many other common potential causes of failure that can occur in screenwriting include: Your Screenplay Sucks!: 100 Ways To Make It Great (Akers, 2008); How Not To Write A Screenplay: 101 Common Mistakes Most Screenwriters Make (Flinn, 1999); 500 Ways To Beat The Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend (Lerch, 1999); and The Screenwriter's Problem Solver: How to Recognize, Identify, and Define Screenwriting Problems (Field, 1998).

588 This is covered generally by the movie “Technical Elements” category in the Anna Karenina Principle table above.
Even further complicating matters in the *Anna Karenina* Principle view of movie success and failure is that: some of the individual parts (premise, plot, characters, structure, dialogue, theme/s and so on) may well be a “fail” and yet overall the movie may still succeed with audiences due to various elements working in complex configurational manner. For example comedy that works can outweigh serious deficiencies in other areas; a case in point is top 20 RoI movie *Clerks* as noted in *Fast, Cheap, and Under Control: Lessons from the Greatest Low-Budget Movies* (Gaspard 2006, p. 181).

Thus there appear to be many variables in the *Anna Karenina* elements of a movie including but not limited to *Genre, Premise, Plot, Character, Structure, and Dialogue*. Each individual movie may solve or avoid different problems in very different and unique ways.
10.20 **STORYALITY THEORY – HEURISTICS**

Based on characteristics of the top and bottom 20 RoI movies, below are seventeen suggested ‘Do’ guidelines: twelve of which relate to screenwriting and five to the movie-making.\(^{589}\) Conversely there are also ten suggested ‘Don’t’ guidelines. These 27 heuristics as presented below are collectively referred to here as: The *StoryAlity Theory*.

### HEURISTICS FOR CREATING A HIGH ’BENEFIT/COST RATIO’ MOVIE

**ON THE SCREENWRITING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>HEURISTIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>THE STORY</td>
<td>The extant research shows the key determinant for movie success is: <em>the movie story</em>. To achieve a high degree of movie story <em>social-contagion</em> or high-RoI (<em>audience-size / story-creation cost</em>) namely a high ’benefit/cost ratio’, counterintuitively, movies do not require: big budgets, or movie stars, or comparatively-high marketing budgets, spectacular visual effects, or sex scenes. Rather they require a great story in both the conception and execution. The top 20 RoI movies are examples of such stories, whereas the bottom 20 RoI are counter-examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ON GENRE</td>
<td>While Genre can clearly preclude some audiences, the Horror Genre appears to be the least-risky Genre for exceptionally-high RoI (i.e. 45% of the top 20 RoI movies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CHARACTER</td>
<td>’Everyman’, or working-class or student characters appear to appeal more widely in terms of universal Human Nature rather than do special or privileged characters. A ’Villain Triumphant’ story is recommended and obviously also suggests potential sequels. It is suggested to aim to restrict the number of characters to four main characters: 3 protagonists and one major antagonist is seen as ideal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
<td>Screenwriters should make linear stories rather than a non-linear story structure (e.g. such as <em>Rashomon</em> or <em>Pulp Fiction</em>). It is also clearly possible to begin with a Flashback and then continue the story in the present day (e.g. as do both <em>Halloween</em> and <em>Friday the 13th</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>THEME</td>
<td>Evolutionary or ’primal’ Themes(^{590}) of survival, reproduction and revenge should ideally be present in the story. Evolutionary Psychology suggests that Themes of (1) Life and Death (survival), (2) Family/Community (reproduction) and (3) Retributive Justice (including revenge) are of great appeal to evolved universal Human</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{589}\) Although elsewhere following Maras (2009) I have argued strongly against the separation of ’Conception’ (Screenwriting) and ’Execution’ (Filmmaking) here it is neater to split them into two; this is not intended in any way to suggest that ’writing’ is necessarily separate to ’filmmaking’.

\(^{590}\) Or what Snyder (2005) refers to as ’primal’ themes, concepts, stakes or settings.
Nature. By the same token it is strongly advised to avoid depressing Themes, plot events or story premises, such as suicide or family grief over the death of loved ones; knowledge from Evolutionary Psychology suggests such themes are off-putting to Human Nature. It is partly for this reason that the Drama genre is problematic for movie RoI.

**LOCATIONS**

'Urban’ and ‘Domestic’ locations appear most frequently in top 20 RoI movies although ‘Rural’ locations are also prevalent. 28 locations is an ideal as this the average number of locations in the top 20 RoI movies. Of course there is wide variation: *Paranormal Activity* uses one single suburban house as the story location, while *Star Wars* (1977) has over 70 different locations.

**TEMPORAL SETTING**

It is strongly advised to set the movie story in the Present Day (as do 85% of the top 20 RoI movies) not least as it is less expensive to depict in a movie. By the same token avoid ‘period’ movies, and especially those set more than 10 years in the past as these also tend to be more expensive.

**NUMBER OF SCENES**

Screenwriters are suggested to ideally have around 119 scenes, and with an Average Scene Length (across the whole screenplay / movie) of 50 to 60 seconds (i.e. from 6/8ths of a screenplay-page to 1 page) each.

**SCREENPLAY LENGTH / MOVIE DURATION**

Given the average of the top 20 RoI movies the screenplay should ideally be 90 pages - and the resulting movie, 90 minutes in duration.

**VOICE-OVER**

Despite warnings in the screenwriting orthodoxy (popular screenwriting manuals) about the use of voice-over by all means use voice-over if desired as two of the Top 20 RoI movies use this technique, namely *El Mariachi* and *Primer*.

**AUTHENTICITY**

As per classic fiction-writing advice, movie screenwriters are advised to “Write what you know” as the authenticity and tacit knowledge is subtly reflected in the work. Writing (or at least drawing) from ‘lived experience’ often works well. While George Lucas did not live in “A galaxy far, far away” as in *Star Wars*, his first top 20 RoI movie *American Graffiti* (1973) was inspired by various events, situations and characters from his own youth.

**PRACTICE…**

Given the ’ten-year rule’ in creativity (Hayes 1989; Simonton 2011) screenwriters are advised to read many screenplays, watch many movies and write many screenplays; many screenwriters wrote around ten movie screenplays before one was creative enough to produce. Writer-Filmmakers are also advised to make many short

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591 McKee (1997) asserts in the doxa that screenwriters should only ever use Voice-Over Narration as Counterpoint, and that ‘the trend toward using telling narration throughout a film threatens the future of our art.’ (McKee 1997, p. 344). However, two of the top 20 RoI movies use it, and made a remarkable RoI, thus it is entirely possible to use it.

592 Also even after Lucas had a top 20 RoI movie (*American Graffiti*), *Star Wars* (1977) was rejected as a screen idea by all the major film studios except Fox Studios.
films and learn from the successes and in particular from all of the mistakes. Ten years of practice in both writing and in filmmaking helps filmmakers learn to be more creative, via expectation, trial-and-error (and error-correction) namely, the scientific method.

*Table 10-34 – 12 Movie Story Heuristics of StoryAlity Theory*
ON MOVIE CREATION

The five key guidelines of *StoryAlity Theory* on movie creation are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>HEURISTIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BE A WRITER-HYPHENATE (i.e., a 'WRITEUR')</td>
<td>It is advised, if possible, to be a <em>Writer-hypenate</em> namely a Writer-Director or a Writer-Actor or a Writer–Producer, or two or all three of these roles. Staying involved in the execution (production) stage of the screen story implies that there is less chance of the creative story vision being misinterpreted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BUDGET</td>
<td>It is advised to keep the movie’s budget under USD$1.8M as that is the average budget of a top 20 RoI movie. Some of the top 20 RoI movies are as low as USD $7,000 yet all reached over 71 times their story-creation budget in box-office. Furthermore it is recommended to keep the budget under USD$2M, as once the budget exceeds USD$2M the movie story is less likely to be high-RoI; all the Bottom 20 RoI movies are: USD$2M budget or greater.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>SHOOT DURATION</td>
<td>If possible aim to restrict the number of Shooting Days to between 7 and 34 days. This is the minimum (7) and the average (34) of top 20 RoI movie shoot durations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>TIGHT CREW</td>
<td>Aim to restrict the number of Crew for the movie production; the larger the film crew, in general the more expensive the movie is to create.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MULTI-TASK THE KEY CREATIVE ROLES</td>
<td>Aim to do many creative roles on the movie yourself as this teaches you about production realities which means your subsequent screenwriting is more informed. Top 20 RoI examples of such multitasking include Shane Carruth (<em>Primer</em>), Robert Rodriguez (<em>El Mariachi</em>) and John Carpenter (<em>Halloween</em>).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10-35 – 5 Movie Creation Heuristics of StoryAlity Theory*
TEN PRECAUTIONS FOR LOW-ROI MOVIES

To avoid the many pitfalls of the Anna Karenina Principle movie storytellers can also benefit from the following precautions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>HEURISTIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AVOID: THE DRAMA, DRAMEDY (DRAMA-COMEDY) &amp; GANGSTER GENRES</td>
<td>These <em>Genres</em> appear to be the riskiest. The evidence would suggest that the <em>Drama</em> Genre in particular is the hardest to: write, finance, make well, and finally to market to audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AVOID CASTING STARS</td>
<td>None of the Top 20 RoI movies had `stars' in the cast. De Vany &amp; Walls (2004) demonstrated that stars tend to make a movie lose money. Stars are also usually well out of the budget-ranges of the majority of early-career filmmakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>AVOID ANIMATIONS (OF ANY KIND: 2D, 3D)</td>
<td>A live-action movie is recommended; none of the Top 20 RoI movies are animated movies and are certainly not totally CGI-animated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AVOID BASING THE MOVIE ON EXISTING LITERARY / LICENSED MATERIAL (E.G., A NOVEL, A PLAY, A SHORT STORY)</td>
<td>All Top 20 RoI movies are original story / screenplay / screen idea rather than adapted works. After filmmakers acquire credits, typically they work their way up to adaptations, and may well win awards - however the majority of first-time or early-career filmmakers also have a very low probability of winning prestigious and highly-competitive movie awards. It is recommended to aim first to have a sustainable movie career and that awards (or, <em>symbolic capital</em> in Bourdieu’s terms) may possibly then follow with an increasing probability, the longer that career is sustained (see: Simonton 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>AVOID USING EXISTING POPULAR SONGS</td>
<td>Popular songs are usually expensive to license unless they can be obtained inexpensively; this situation is however highly unusual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AVOID A STORY WITH: HIT-MEN, GANGSTERS, OR THE MAFIA</td>
<td>Many of the Bottom 20 RoI movies involve these elements. This is not to suggest or imply that any movie with these story elements will <em>always</em> fail, merely that this subject-matter (and character-type) appears unpopular and possibly for reasons of Evolutionary Psychology such as human 'cheater-detection' modules and aversion to 'social dominance' via bullying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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593 Unless the play was your own, possibly. Yet even David Mamet’s `Edmond’ was a flop (see: The Bottom 20 RoI Films).

594 *The Godfather* (1972) is a wonderful movie and an important part of the canon but for that one great mafia/hit-man film, we may note how many thousands of ‘bad’ ones exist.

595 See also *Hierarchy In The Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behaviour* (Boehm, 1999) and *Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning* (Carroll, et al., 2012)
<p>| | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>AVOID MODELLING YOUR EARLY CAREER (AND/OR YOUR SCREENPLAY/MOVIE) ON, A MOVIE THAT WAS NOT BY A FIRST-TIME FEATURE WRITER, OR DIRECTOR</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|   | If aspiring or early-career filmmakers model themselves on a famous successful filmmaker then a close study of their first produced movie is recommended.  
(Suggested questions include: *How did they break in; Exactly what Genre was their first film; and was it (as tends to be likely) a low-budget Horror movie?*) |
| **8** | **REMEMBER: PLOT EVENTS HAVE BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS ATTACHED** |
|   | If the plot event can be conceived less expensively or can be substituted for a more inexpensively-obtainable plot event, this also lowers the overall production budget. |
| **9** | **AVOID: CAR-CHASES, SHOOTOUTS OR EXPLOSIONS IF POSSIBLE** |
|   | These elements tend to be expensive; the lower the movie budget the less audience is required to make an RoI and thus break even. |
| **10** | **AVOID EXPENSIVE STORY ELEMENTS** |
|   | Special Effects, Animals, Stories set on the Water, or Children in Major Roles and having Many Scenes Set Outdoors at Night are all relatively-expensive movie story elements; avoid them where possible. |

**Table 10-36 – 10 Movie Creation Precautions of StoryAlity Theory**

*This concludes both the key general recommendations and precautions of the StoryAlity Theory for potentially increasing the probability of creating a movie story that reaches its intended audience and thus, ideally makes a Return-on-Investment. The Theory is derived from emergent patterns in the top 20 and conversely the bottom 20 RoI movies.*

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10.21 IMDB GENRE CATEGORIES

The following is a list of IMDb.com movie ‘Genre’ and ‘Subgenre’ categories or ‘tags’ as used to classify movies on the IMDb website (http://www.imdb.com/genre/).

IMDb GENRES

**Action** » Comedy | Crime | Thriller

**Adventure** » Biography | Thriller | War

**Animation** » Adventure | Comedy | Family | Fantasy

**Biography** » Crime | Mystery | Sport

**Comedy** » Action | Horror | Romance

**Crime** » Drama | Mystery | Romance

**Documentary** » Biography | Comedy | Crime | History

**Drama** » Romance | Film-Noir | Musical | War

**Family** » Adventure | Comedy | Fantasy | Romance

**Fantasy** » Adventure | Comedy | Drama | Romance

**Film-Noir** » Crime | Mystery | Romance | Thriller

**History** » Adventure | Biography | Drama | War

**Horror** » Comedy | Drama | Sci-Fi

**Music** » Biography | Documentary | Drama

**Musical** » Comedy | History | Romance

**Mystery** » Adventure | Comedy | Thriller

**Romance** » Comedy | Crime | History | Thriller

**Sci-Fi** » Animation | Comedy | Family | Horror

**Sport** » Biography | Comedy | Documentary

**Thriller** » Comedy | Crime | Horror | Mystery

**War** » Action | Biography | Comedy | Documentary

**Western** » Action | Adventure | Comedy
IMDb Popular Subgenres

Alien Invasion, Cult Classics, Disaster, Heist, High School, Mockumentary, Quirky Indie, Steampunk, Vampire, Whimsical, Zombie

IMDb User's Subgenre Lists

Campy, Clever, Controversial, Feel-Good, Inspirational, Suspenseful

EXPLORE BY KEYWORD

Discover movies tagged with popular keywords.


Source: http://www.imdb.com/genre/ (IMDb 2016)

Both the “Popular Subgenres” and “Popular Keywords” lists above would appear to indicate movie story-topics of above-average interest to Human Nature in terms of Evolutionary Psychology (story “subject-matter”) that in Boyd’s (2010) terms is likely eminent in attracting and maintaining human attention.
10.22 AN AGENT-BASED MODEL OF THE MOVIE SYSTEM

An Agent-Based Model of the Screenwriting and Movie Systems in Action

Using various statistics - including that 98% of screenplays go unmade (Macdonald 2004, 2013) and that 70% of movies lose money (Vogel 1990, 2011, 2014) - an Agent-Based Model of the movie system was constructed as a research tool in order to aid the visualization and explanation of the international movie industry as a system in action. This agent-based model also incorporates the key synthesized elements of Csikszentmihalyi’s systems model of creativity including the “ten-year rule” (Hayes 1989, Simonton 2011) and elements of Bourdieu’s practice theory - or their synthesis in: Creative Practice Theory. By the online user adjusting the inputs of the model to match known real-world movie industry statistics the outputs of this online agent-based model can be made to simulate the approximate real-world numbers of screenplays presented to producers and also movies made from the ‘selected’ screenplays, that as produced movies, then are judged by the field and enter the domain of works judged creative - or that become canon while many more others become archive.

Figure 10-1 – An agent-based model of the movie system - integrating Creative Practice Theory (Velikovsky 2013)

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The online Agent-Based Model (above) is intended to provide a simplified representation of the various multiple systems in operation that result in a top 20 RoI emerging every two years (on average) and also bottom 20 RoI movies emerging every eight months (on average) in addition to all of the various other screenplays and movies that also emerge from the system in between these two polar extremes of movie creativity.\(^{599}\)

Overall this view - and the agent-based systems model (above) - accords with ‘model-dependent realism’ as an ontology and epistemology (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010).

\(^{599}\) In order to explain and demonstrate Creative Practice Theory from the perspective of an individual (or ‘agent’) inside the systems, a game demo (a mod of KUDOS, Positech Games 2006) was also created. See: [http://storyality.wordpress.com/2012/12/21/storyality-43Creative-Practice-Theo](http://storyality.wordpress.com/2012/12/21/storyality-43Creative-Practice-Theo)
10.23 Sequels vs. Transmedia

The table below indicates the top 20 RoI movies that had sequels. None of the bottom 20 RoI movies had sequels for obvious reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>HERO/S IN SEQUEL/S?</th>
<th>VILLAIN IN SEQUEL/S?</th>
<th># of SEQUELS</th>
<th>TOTAL FILMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paranormal Activity</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mad Max</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Blair Witch Project</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>El Mariachi</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Night of the Living Dead</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y (‘ghoul’)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y and N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Y and N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Graffiti</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Napoleon Dynamite</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Open Water</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y (sharks)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Friday the 13th</td>
<td>Y and N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Devil Inside</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Saw</td>
<td>Y and N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Primer</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The Evil Dead</td>
<td>Y and N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>ET</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Full Monty</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-37 – Top 20 RoI Movies - Sequels Analysis

The movies indicated in grey in the table above, to date, have not had sequels.600 Regarding Transmedia,601 *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *The Devil Inside* (2012) were transmedia on launch. Subsequently three top 20 RoI movies have produced transmedia, as opposed to adaptations (*Star Wars, The Evil Dead, Napoleon Dynamite*).


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600 As of this writing, *Star Wars VII: The Force Awakens* (2015) has been released, episodes VIII and IX are planned for release in 2017 and 2019. Various *Star Wars* (‘non-saga’) spin-off movies also exist.

10.24 ABSTRACTS OF RESEARCH OUTPUTS

Below are the Abstracts of the articles and chapters published from this research.

BOOK CHAPTERS


Abstract

A universal problem in the disciplines of communication, creativity, philosophy, biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, history, linguistics, information science, cultural studies, literature, media and other domains of knowledge in both the arts and sciences has been the definition of ‘culture’ (see Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Baldwin et al., 2006), including the specification of ‘the unit of culture’, and, mechanisms of culture. This chapter proposes a theory of the unit of culture, or, the ‘meme’ (Dawkins, 1976; Dennett, 1995; Blackmore, 1999), a unit which is also the narreme (Barthes, 1966), or ‘unit of story’, or ‘unit of narrative’. The holon/parton theory of the unit of culture (Velikovsky, 2014) is a consilient (Wilson, 1998) synthesis of (Koestler, 1964, 1967, 1978) and Feynman (1975, 2005) and also the Evolutionary Systems Theory model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988-2014; Simonton, 1984-2014). This theory of the unit of culture potentially has applications across all creative cultural domains and disciplines in the sciences, arts and communication media.

See: http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-holonparton-theory-of-the-unit-of-culture-or-the-meme-and-narreme/148570

602 For the full book chapter (PDF), see: https://storyality.wordpress.com/2016/04/06/storyality132-the-holon-parton-structure-of-the-meme-the-unit-of-culture/

Abstract

A comparative analysis of the transmedia strategies of two of the top 20 RoI (Return on Investment) narrative fiction feature films: The Blair Witch Project (1999) and The Devil Inside (2012). On average, 7 in 10 feature films lose money; to ‘break even’, the average feature film needs to make a 373% return on investment (RoI). Yet The Blair Witch Project (1999) and The Devil Inside (2012) not only ‘broke even’ (>373% return), they made a 41,383% and 9,966% RoI respectively. In theatrical cinema release, The Blair Witch Project made $248,300,000 (413 times its production budget), and The Devil Inside made $99,661,944 (99 times its production budget). Of the Top 20 Return on Investment feature films of the past 70 years, these two films are the most notable for their transmedia launch components. But how much did their transmedia elements contribute to their success in finding such a wide audience, and therefore, to their record-setting box office attendance? The only other film in the top 20 RoI films list now classified as a transmedia property is Star Wars (1977) however at the time the Star Wars phenomenon was not due to transmedia; instead, franchising and transmedia properties were subsequently developed from Star Wars. So, what exactly makes a successful transmedia property? Using the interdisciplinary critical approach and analytical method of Creative Practice Theory Narratology, these 3 films are examined, and reasons for their success explored and articulated. Creative Practice Theory Narratology is an interdisciplinary synthesis of: sociology/practice theory (Bourdieu 1993), psychology/the systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988, 1996, 2006), memetics (Dawkins 1976), philosophy/holons (Koestler 1967) and communications/narratology (selected pattern-recognition methods used by various significant narratologists since Plato). Creative Practice Theory Narratology aims to empirically and scientifically explain: Why are some media dramatically more successful than others?


[No abstract available] 604


[No abstract available] 605


[No abstract available]


CONFERECE PAPERS (REFEREED)


Abstract
In this paper videogames and transmedia are examined from the perspectives of both creation (game design) and audience reception (gameplay experience), in light of the theories of the DPFi (Domain, Person Field interaction) systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988, 1996, 2006, 2014); its herein contended theoretical equivalent, evolutionary epistemology (Popper 1963, DT Campbell 1974, Simonton 2010) and the inherent biocultural evolutionary creative algorithm of selection, variation and transmission-with-heredity; ‘flow’ theory in creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990, 1996) as a determinant of ‘fun factor’ in games; ‘narrative transportation’ theory in fiction (Gerrig 1993, Green & Brock 2000, Van Laer et al 2014) as an additional (necessary but not sufficient) determinant of ‘fun-factor’ in ‘story’ videogames; and Boyd’s (2009) general theory of creativity in the arts as ‘cognitive play with pattern’ - ultimately arguing that game play of any kind may potentially enhance animal intelligence, and therefore that videogames as an art form may potentially enhance human intelligence.

See: http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2677770

Velikovsky, JT (2014), 'Database Documentary, Narrative, and `The StoryAlity Theory’ K-Film', paper presented at 2014 ASPERA Conference, University of Newcastle, NSW.

Abstract

Korsakow films (or K-films) are: ‘an opensource application for creating web docs and other kinds of nonlinear, interactive narratives’ (Thalhofer 2013). This paper presents an analysis of the author’s production of a K-film i-doc (interactive documentary) StoryAlity Theory: Episode 1 (Velikovsky 2013) a 30-minute multi-linear online interactive database documentary.607 The paper examines how such i-doc K-films potentially change the way content producers and educators can access support, reach audiences and distribute content. K-films are generally free or inexpensive to produce; are viewable online; and allow for different forms of audience engagement to traditional linear media. A multi-linear documentary is also a useful way to explain a theory as it allows the audience to actively follow its own interests rather than passively absorb information in a predetermined linear mode. As Kinder (2008) noted about modular online videos such as on YouTube, the two-minute SNU’s (Single Narrative Units, or clips) in the Korsakow film system are “brief, modular and remixable” (Kinder in Lovink & Niederer 2008, p. 53); the viewer does this mixing (and/or remixing) in real time, as they view the K-Film. Miles (2008) notes ‘These systems allow us to revisit and reconsider the role of editing’ (Miles in Lovink & Niederer 2008, p. 226) thus this multi-linear database narrative film model ‘implicitly requires, and accepts, that the network and computer are no longer merely tools of production and distribution, but are integral to the possibility of being able to create and use video online’(Miles in Lovink & Niederer 2008, p. 228). O’Flynn also identifies how i-docs integrate with transmedia (O’Flynn 2012). What does all this imply for i-doc design - such as an online instructional / educational K-Film? Moreover, when the viewer also becomes the documentary editor in real-time, does the viewer/user/editor ‘know best’?


607 See: https://storyality.wordpress.com/2013/03/16/storyality-65-the-storyality-k-film-online-interactive-documentary-part-1/

[see Abstract for the published conference proceedings book chapter, above]

ARTICLES

No abstracts available but see URLs below

https://theconversation.com/how-to-pick-a-box-office-winner-22349

http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-Article,id=17253/

Velikovsky, JT, (2013) 'Writing the High-RoI Film': Parts 1 to 12, Segers, K., (Ed.), *The Story Department*, TheStoryDept.com, Sydney.
https://storyality.wordpress.com/2013/12/12/storyality-99-12-x-guest-blog-posts-on-storyality-theory-the-story-dept/

Velikovsky, JT (2012-2016), *StoryAlity* PhD research weblog, (135 weblog posts; 170,000 site visits, as at October 2016), *Storyality.wordpress.com*, Sydney.
See: https://storyality.wordpress.com/
10.25 ATTACHED CD-ROM (DIGITAL APPENDIX)

The attached CD-ROM digital Appendix contains the following files:

1. An Excel file containing the collated data resulting from the examination of characteristics of the top and bottom 20 RoI movies.

2. Screenwriting manual coded data files (as MS Word documents):
   a. Stoddard (1911)
   b. Field (1979/2005)
   c. McKee (1997)
   d. Snyder (2005) and
   e. Truby (2007).

3. Screenwriting Syllabus Course Reading Lists demonstrating how the screenwriting manuals contribute to the doxa of screenwriting in tertiary education level pedagogy.

4. Various Top 20 RoI movie screenplays (where available).

5. Copies of research output articles derived from this PhD research study (Abstracts provided above where available).


For the PhD research weblog see: https://storyality.wordpress.com/

See also, PhD Dissertation Addendum: