WEEK TWO, LECTURE TWO : <u>Literary Design</u>

I. <u>The Script and the Writer</u>

    A. **The script** (also called "screenplay" or "scenario") is usually the first thing in place; that which gets the production started.

    B. **Original vs. Adaptation**

        1. Original – written directly for the screen

        2. Adaptations – sourced from a previously written work - a book, play, article, etc.

            a. Loose adaptations (i.e. *Forbidden Planet* based on *The Tempest; Easy A* based on *The Scarlet Letter; Clueless* based on *Emma*)

            b. Faithful adaptations (i.e. *Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter* films, *Watchmen* theatrical cut, *Little Women*)

            c. Strict adaptations (i.e. Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet, Watchmen* director's cut)

        3. Continuum of adaptation fidelity

            a. As with all formal elements, it is preferable to describe precisely what the film at hand does, rather than simply put it in a category; the specificity of details gives you a better understanding. For this class, what matters most is the quality of your explanation/argument, rather than simply putting individual works into a pre-determined category.

    C. **Stages of a script**

        1. The Writer's Script

            a. A springboard from which everything flows; the blueprint for the rest of the production process

            b. There are four elements in the writer's script:

i. Characters

   ii. Dialogue

   iii. Action

   iv. Setting (where and when)

c. It is not a literary piece, but rather a visual/verbal/aural framework for the film.

2. The Shooting/Director's Script

   a. An annotated script with added shots, angles, camera movements, lighting, blocking, music, etc.

3. The Text/Film Itself

   a. The actual finished film; what you see on screen

4. The Published Script

   a. Most often transcribed from the finished film rather than the original writer's script.

D. **The Authorship Dilemma - Who is the author of a film?**

1. You can't call the writer the sole "author" of a film; even in the writing stage the script goes through development, rewrites, script doctoring, etc.

   a. There are too many determinants that change the work between the writer's script and the film text to consider the author of the script the main author of the finished film.

2. There are also too many determinations on a film script to begin with – genre conventions and myths, culture, actors, directors, producers, audience previews, legal considerations, censorship, production codes, and motion picture ratings regimes in the US and in global markets, and a wide variety of collaborators.

E. **The Function of the Film Writer**

    1.   Most writers leave the production after delivering the script.

        a.   Writers with clout might get to stick around and consult on the production. This varies depending on the success of their last film and their standing within the studio.

    2.   The disesteem of the writer

        a.   Producers and directors have the power in Hollywood filmmaking, and everyone thinks they can write (assumption that it's not skilled labor) so the work of the writer is not always valued to the extent that it should be

        b.   Writers were kept out of power to keep them under control; labor organization in Hollywood is a thorny issue, and many writers were blacklisted during the 40s and 50s for labor advocacy.

        c.   Many writers came from New York (stage) with the coming of sound, where the writer is held in very high regard.

II. Literary Determinations (what the writer brings to the text)

    A. **The Title**

        1.   Tells us about the film; the first instance of creating meaning.

    B. **Subject and Theme**

        1.   Subject – what the film is about

        2.   Theme – the idea behind or attitude toward the subject

    C. **Life/Story/Plot/Narrative**

        1.   Life – non- sequiturs and unconnected events; chaotic and unorganized

            a. a variety of subjectivities, each experiencing the world in their own way

        2.   Story – a sequence of connected events with details, causes and effects, settings, etc.

    a. It discriminates and selects to organize and make sense of life events

    b. It is a reflection, a memory – always after the fact

    c. Stories are everywhere – literature, news, conversations, etc.

3. Plot – a history of events that transpire in a work

    a. A further stylization of story structured for a particular medium.

    b. Aristotelian Plots have the following:

        i. A causality of events

        ii. Connection - a relationship between events

            i. temporal continuity – links in time

            ii. spatial contiguity - links in space

            iii. A goal-oriented protagonist in an environment/setting

              i. Protagonist is literally the "first character,"

                motivated by a goal, dream, or need.

        iv. Actions - progressions toward the goal and regressions (conflicts)

        v. Antagonist – an opposing force, often causes the regressions

        vi. A hierarchy of conflicts – get greater and greater

        vii. Peripeteia – the moment you know whether the character will succeed or not

        viii. Suspense – actions are selected and arranged to create suspense

        ix. Unity – coherence; nothing too extraneous to the plot/action

        x. An ending/closure

4. Protagonist motivation in Hollywood film

    a. Heterosexual coupling

    b. A genre dictated goal that comes from the generic myths

   c. Individual motivation specific to the film/character

  5. Narrative – the way the plot unfolds; how the story is told

   a. Narrative includes dramatic structure (linear/episodic, etc.) and
narrative configuration (chronology, framing, lines of action, etc.)

D. **Dramatic Structures** (as with most matters in humanities classes, these are points
on a continuum; a particular film might draw elements from multiple categories)

  1. Aristotle –

   a. Wrote about Classical Greek theater from 150 years earlier, saw
    recurring patterns in its structures that he made explicit (as covered
    above)

  2. Linear/Classical/Aristotelian/Traditional Structure

   a. Three-act structure – beginning (set up characters), middle
    (progressions and regressions), end (climax and resolution)

   b. Continuity, causality, chronology

   c. The six major elements of plot (see above) – if it has most of these,
    it's classical

  3. Episodic Structure

   a. Gaps in space/time; sometimes not as strict on continuity and
    causality

   b. May be organized around a specific time, space, concept, or more
    than one character.

   c. Examples – *Four Rooms*, *Coffee and Cigarettes*

  4. Thematic/Contextual Structure

   a. No spatial or temporal links, but rather thematic – jumps

   b. *The Hours* or *Two for the Road* are examples

   c. Meaning comes from the structure

E. **Configuration/Arrangement**

   1. Every film has a plot structure and a narrative configuration

   2. Elements of configuration

      a. Chronological or achronological

      b. Lines of action – singular, two lines, parallel

      c. Conscious or unconscious (objective vs. subjective)

F. **Characters**

   1. Character is revealed by what characters say and do and what others say about and do with and to them (action and dialogue)

   2. Formal elements can also reveal character: camera, music, lighting, editing, physicality, reaction, silence, costume, tone, environment

G. **Setting (four elements)**

   1. Temporal Setting

      a. Era/period

      b. Duration (of the plot)

      c. Season

   2. Spatial Setting – place/location

H. **Point-of-View**

   1. POV – Who is telling the story; through whom is the story being revealed?

   2. Omniscient Point-of-View

      a. The most common (especially in Classical cinema)

      b. The audience knows everything they need to know when they need to, rather than only knowing what the protagonist knows; the audience knows quite a bit more than individual characters.

      c. A God-like vantage point

   3. First Person Point-of-View

a. First Person Inside – literally inside the head of the narrator; you don't see them but rather see with their eyes.

   i. This is not very common; often only for a scene, or even part of one. A few films use it throughout, as a statement – *Enter the Void, Hardcore Henry*, and *Maniac* are some examples. This is also quite similar to the first person perspective you encounter in FPS games.

b. First Person Outside - first person narration, in voice-over; we experience the story from their perspective but not from inside their visual pov.

   i. The narrator appears on screen and is a character in the story.

4. Third Person Point-of-View

   a. The film largely follows one individual, but we are not in their head either visually (through first-person point-of-view shots) or aurally (through voice-over narration)

   b. We only know what the character knows, and they become our perspective throughout the film. In most scenes, the film follows this character.

   c. This is equivalent to literary third person limited, e.g. *Harry Potter.* Our attention is directed and our perspective is limited, and even though we're in the third person, we usually know as much as the characters we are following.

5. Multiple Points-of-View

   a. More than one first- or third- person points-of-view included in the same film; this is the case for most films.

   b. Can be the same story from multiple points-of-view, e.g. *Citizen Kane* or *Rashomon*.

I. **Motifs, Symbols, Allusions, Metaphors**

1. Motif – The repetition of something

   a. Used to emphasize and connect, structured to create meaning.

2. Metaphor – an implied comparison; something stands for something else.

3. Symbol – Stands for both itself *and* something more than itself.

4. Allusion – Referencing something outside the work to create meaning.