

Codes and conventions of genres and Narrative.

▲ genre is a particular type of commodity . It has characteristic features that are known to and recognised by the audiences because the same formula is reproduced many times.

Genre is a French word meaning that refers to types or categories of media products. Soap operas, situation comedies, police series, quiz shows and news programmes are just some of the genres to be found in television. Genres are identified by the particular conventions they use which are recognised through regular contact. Conventions are any elements which are repeated in such a way that they become familiar, predictable and associated in their use with a particular genre.

Conventions include:

- Character
- Plot
- Setting
- Costumes and props
- Music
- Lighting
- Themes
- Dialogue
- Visual style

The codes and conventions of genre, which are, incidentally, in a state of constant adaptation, tell us a great deal about the beliefs and values, at a particular time, of the society that produces them. For the example of the news broadcast it could be suggested that our society tends to put more faith in the word of a smartly dressed 'well-educated', middle-aged man or woman standing four or five feet away, looking us in the eye, rather than an unconventionally dressed teenager with a strong regional accent within one or two feet of us- a distance that normally signifies intimacy or aggression. Genres then, reflect the dominant values of society. Like these values, however, they are not fixed or uncontested. Consequently genres change, sub genres evolve and new genres emerge along with society, what may seem 'normal', 'acceptable' and 'conventional' one year may be clichéd, outdated and unacceptable several years later. Black or female newsreaders, for example, have been appearing more frequently in recent years therefore representing equality in society. However if generic conventions are simply repeated over and over the films made could be dull and too predictable. The filmmaker relies upon conventions but also mixes them with his or her own version and ideas in order to produce a successfully constructed form of genre.

Nearly all stories in any genre are about situations which are disrupted by a problem for e.g., a peaceful village is wrecked by robbers and one of the children is taken hostage, the villagers find try to find ways of getting the child back the 'good guy' is used to help the narrative along and therefore resolves the problem. The purpose of the story provides tension for the audience, as on the other hand the audience wish the problem to be solved but on the other hand the audience want the story to continue in order to maintain the pleasure. Narratives have to operate strategies for both moving towards a solution and yet simultaneously putting it off by complaints.

Genres are popular because they deal with universal dilemmas and appeal to universal needs. For example, the dilemmas could be the hero or heroine fighting to clear his or her name; good finally overcoming evil. Genres are entertaining in their own ways aided with codes and conventions.

Western Genre.

Much genre theory has been based on the Westerns. Westerns are historical films which portray a world which disappeared in the early 1900s. Many Westerns concerned the opening up of the border to white European settlers. Concepts included the ideological transformation of a desert into a garden. Tension is increased and is focussed on legal struggles over poverty and possessions. The western 'world' are presented by filmmakers with great locations. Western is a great 'location' genre. In this environment the cowboy, white civilised American, will meet his rival, the Indian or savage, there is instantly a noticeable difference between culture and beliefs. The result is a clash between white civilisation and primitive, ancient Indian over the issue of Indian land.

Science fiction

Science fiction has been popular since the early days of cinema. Throughout a century of film making audiences have continued to show an interest in the genre, from the earliest sci-fi films which lacked in special effects to blockbuster extravaganzas, Independence day, Alien (1979) , Star Wars.

Science fiction films often have strong ideological messages and representations that reflect the concerns of the society at the time of their production and usually centre around some perception of conflict

between 'us' and 'them' and the positive or negative aspects of science and the future.

Many of the science fiction films made in America during the 1950's – 'It came from Beneath the Sea' (1955), 'The invasion of the Body Snatchers' (1956) featured invasion by aliens. The portrayal enabled people of those eras to construct more modern and futuristic views to the world.

The films set standards for the iconography of the 1980s and 1990s science fiction films with its emphasis on the new technology of spacecrafts, dangerous computers with minds of their own and the use of music and image to create a sense of space and magnificence.

Many of these conventions were used in 'Star Wars' films (1977) which were seen by many writers as the traditional western relocated to outer space with special effects added. In the late 1990s the science fiction genre became more popular again with films like 'Independence Day'

Quiz or Game Shows

Quiz or game shows are a particular genre of radio and television, and their common components are likely to include:

- A personality who hosts the show, often an ex-comedian
- Prizes
- Women as decoration or assistants
- Live audiences
- People/ members of the general public as competitors
- Excitement
- Glamour
- Catch phrases, questions and music

Without these codes or conventions this type of genre would not be easily recognisable to the world.

Situation Comedy

A situation comedy describes a narrative series comedy that is generally between 25 and 30 minutes long with regular characters and settings. Like soap opera, situation comedy has a very secular world, the surroundings and environments are usually the unchanged and their daily routine are very regular in terms of environment.

There is canned laughter encouraging the audience at home to find the comedy amusing, it can be an indication of when to laugh.

Situation comedies have a clearly defined beginning, middle and end. The situation, the humorous development of the week is usually based around a problem and its resolutions within the half hour episode. Again Todorov's theory of the equilibrium theory is inserted. Situation comedies involve very positive and upbeat characters to make the comedy amusing.

Horror

The codes and conventions of a horror/thriller would be, a threatening figure that threatens a person or society in general. Innocent victims living in fear.

At the beginning a horror film, the problem is established, the problem is then dealt with and is finally resolved. The victim then lives fear free after his/her traumatic events they have gone through.

Horror films would include very tensed non diegetic music to increase the amount of sound and anxiety for the viewer, the lighting at the most of times would be very dim and dull to signify a sense of a foreboding, threatening and an intimidating atmosphere.

The 'bad guy' is revealed at the end of the film, it is usually the unsuspected character.

Romantic Genre

At the beginning of the film the two character meet. They usually do not warm to each other, the couples aren't attracted to each other or if they are they can't admit their feelings at first.

The couples then have trouble beginning a relationship, they battle many problems and finally at the end they fall in love leading a idyllic way of life.

The colours that are mainly present in romantic comedies are quite bright and cheerful to signify bliss and romance. The music used can be quite lively and vibrant indicating love and affection.

Soap Opera

The term 'soap opera' was first used in the US Depression of the 1930s to describe radio serials sponsored by soap powder manufacturers Proctor and Gable.

Soap opera is an international phenomenon. Almost every country with a television station has its own soap opera, because they are cheap to produce and are popular with large audiences.

Soaps begin with a 'hook' in which the threads of the storyline from the previous episode are taken up, but they also end with a cliff-hanger, in which one or more dramatic situations are left in suspense, encouraging us to view the next episode to see what happens. These cliff hangers vary in intensity and importance.

The use of the cliff hanger is balanced by moments of temporary resolution in the serial, these occur for example, at Christmas or at communal occasions such as weddings or funerals.

Soaps cover issues that arise in the society that we are living in, this will make the soap more successful in terms of viewers because the audiences can then therefore relate to these issues. The issues could be, relationships, health issues, teenage problems, underage pregnancy, crime, domestic violence, drugs, alcohol etc.