

GENRE STUDIES IN MASS MEDIA

ART SILVERBLATT

Formulaic elements



Structure of presentations

Formulaic elements

**Evolution of
Formula**

Formative Stage

Popular Stage

Mature Stage

Formulaic Premise

- **Formulaic Structure**
- **Formulaic Plot**
- **Conflict**
- **Subplots**
- **Stock Characters**
- **Formulaic Setting**
- **Trappings**



Formulaic elements

premise

structure

characters

plot

trappings

John Cawelti observes, “*Individual works are ephemeral, but the formula lingers on, evolving and changing with time, yet still basically recognizable*”



Success of genre

The success of a genre largely depends upon the audience's ability

- to recognize,
- identify,
- respond to the formula of a genre.



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One of the major challenges facing media communicators **is exploring complex themes and issues within the constraints of the formula**

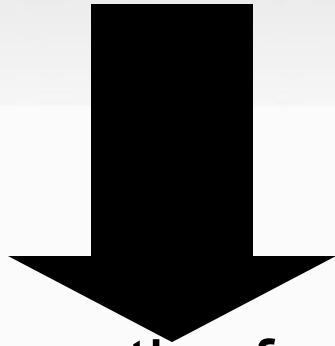


Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind



Evolution of Formula

Every genre is characterized by its own distinctive formula.



For each genre the formulaic elements are constellated in a constant, identifiable fashion.



Formative Stage



Ernie Kovacs, showmen

In the early phase of a genre, the formula and conventions that come to characterize a genre have yet to be clearly defined. As a result, this stage characterized by innovation.



Popular Stage

In this phase, the formula of a genre is established



During Carson's tenure, the standard formula of the evening talk show was established. The program time was reduced from ninety to sixty minutes. Each show featured a blend of comedians, musicians, and movie or television stars.



Mature Stage

At this phase, the genre is well established, with many versions of the genre appearing in the media

Late Show with David Letterman



Jimmy Kimmel Live



Formulaic Premise

A **premise** is defined as the initial circumstance, situation, or assumption that serves as the point of origin for a narrative. This premise furnishes information about what the audience can expect when it comes upon a program belonging to a particular genre.

One way, then, to identify a premise is to begin with this statement:

The x genre presents a world in which. . . .



Formulaic Structure

Popular genres generally operate within a readily identifiable structure. The formulaic structure of a genre reinforces the worldview of the genre. For example, the standard framework found in sitcoms is:

order	chaos	order
The initial order of the story is disrupted almost immediately	The chaotic stage consumes the majority of the program and is the source of much of its interest.	The status quo is finally restored in the conclusion



What does Formulaic Structure for horror?

order	chaos	order
horror films typically begin with a sense of order....	...but then quickly descend into the chaos stage	The characters soon discover that the initial order was only an illusion



Formulaic Plot

A plot is a planned series of events in a narrative, progressing through
a **struggle of opposing forces**



to a climax



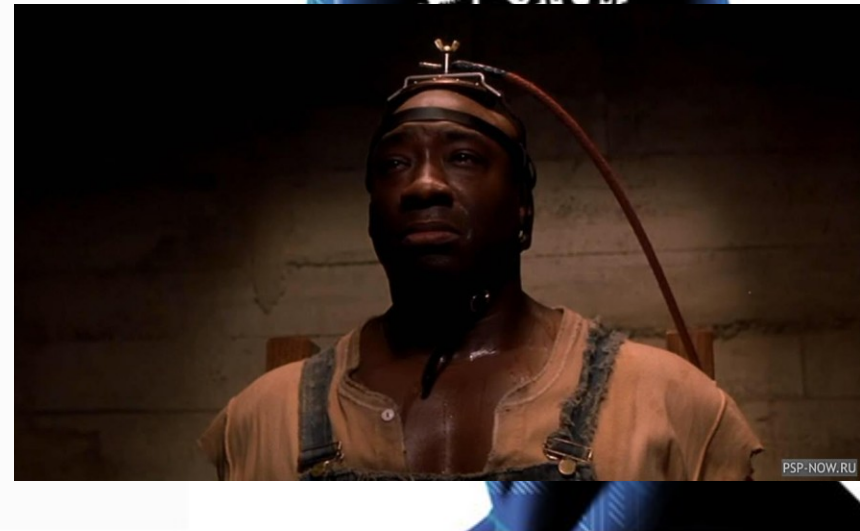
and a conclusion.



Conflict

Conflict is central to any plot. Characters are initially confronted with some sort of dilemma, which must be resolved by the end of the story. As horror film actor/director Wes Craven observes,

“The story begins when the conflict starts and ends when it’s over”



CONFLICT

political talk shows

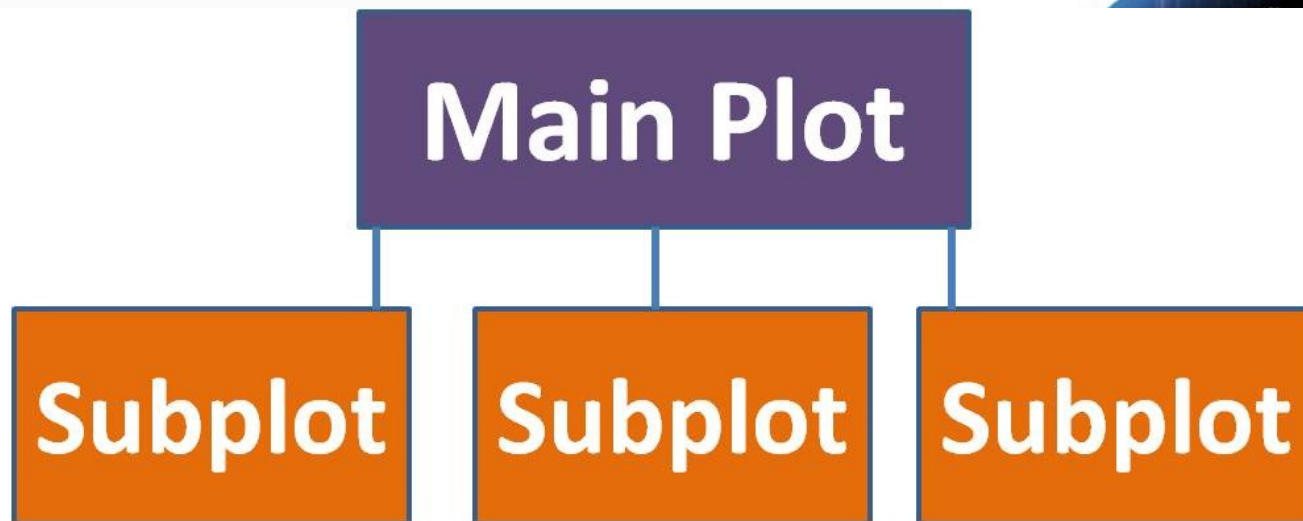
This environment of hostility and back-biting conveys the latent message that conflict is more interesting to watch than cooperation.

In the same vein, conflict has been incorporated into political talk shows (“talking heads”)



Subplots

Subplots may appear to be unrelated; however, because the characters operate within the same worldview, subplots often comment on different aspects of the same thematic concerns. Consequently, identifying thematic connections between subplots can furnish a perspective into the cumulative messages contained in a program.



Jerry Springer Show



Identifying plot conventions can provide insight into the essential appeal of the genre. A prime example can be found in the Jerry Springer Show, which became so popular that in 1998 it surpassed the eleven-year reign of the Oprah Winfrey Show at the top of the ratings.


One of the formulaic plot conventions of the program was The Fight.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqS6f7FrZDA>



Stock Characters

Every genre is characterized by its own set of stock characters. Stock characters appear so frequently in a genre that they are instantly recognizable. The appearance of stock characters enables the audience to become involved in the story immediately.

The Good Girl	The Bitch	The Pot-stirrer (someone who fans the flames of controversy)	The Groovy Guy
			

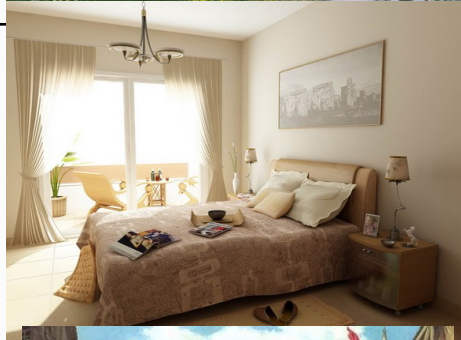
Formulaic Setting

The setting is the physical background against which the action of a narrative takes place. The elements that make up a setting include:

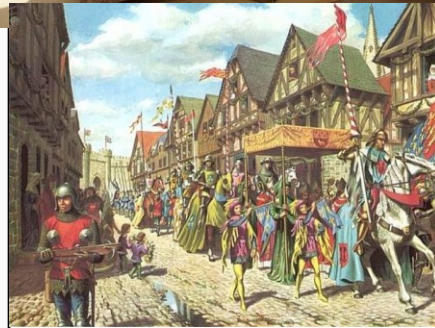
The geographical location



The physical arrangement of the location



The time or period



Trappings

Trappings are artifacts that appear so often that they have become associated with a genre.

What's the genre?



CONCLUSION

Formulaic analysis, which defines the formulaic elements that are characteristic of a genre and examines the messages conveyed by the formula, can involve the following:

Formulaic elements help the audience to quickly identify genre

Formulaic elements help filmmakers and journalists to create successful television programs

Template analysis facilitates the perception of TV product

Using formulaic elements makes the program obviously successful



Thank you for attention!

Your questions, please.

