*THE***script**lab

Encyclopedia of Screenwriting

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The Script Lab's

Encyclopedia of Screenwriting

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First Edition

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To everyone who sees things different,
and isn't afraid to share it with the world.

#writenow

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Action

Action, refers to the basic unit of screenwriting: descriptions of what happens in the scene, including physical and psychological movement. When combined with a character's dialogue, action helps to tell the story and are what comprise the bulk of the screenplay, conveying character, sound, and visual details about the world to the audience (or reader).

EXAMPLES:

Screenplays require *action* to propel the story and need the use of *action lines* to apply it. Because of this, there are as many different ways of using action to tell the story as there have been screenplays.

Each individual *action* of a script often has deeper resonances with the character who attempts the action or endures the action happening to them, so that the action itself gives the audience a glimpse into the character's attitude, their change, or gives insight into the character's core. For instance, Alex DeLarge (Malcom McDowell) from *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) imposes his will upon his victims through the acts of rape and violence; these choices of actions telegraph Alex's attitude to the audience. Alternatively, in *Braveheart* (1995)*,* William Wallace (Mel Gibson) undergoes a *character change* when an English Commander publicly executes his bride (Catherine McCormack); provoking William to abandon his life as a family man and sends him down a warrior's path. Action demonstrates a character's core in the case of Luke (Paul Newman) in *Cool Hand Luke* (1967); showing the audience that no amount of physical, emotional or psychological action performed against Luke will break his rebellious foundation.

Action lines in screenplays differ in their execution as well. For instance; *Se7en* (1995) describes a gritty, thrilling chase scene when Mills (Brad Pitt) and Somerset (Morgan Freeman) encounter Jon Doe (Kevin Spacey) inside Doe's apartment complex. The ensuing chase is written beat-for-beat in the script—making for a suspenseful read that accurately mirrors the film. Bye contrast, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) written by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens & Peter Jackson, describes the Fellowship escaping the Balrog's wrath by descending a long, perilous staircase. In the film, this scene clocks out at more than two minutes long; yet the script is curiously nondescript—the sequence written simply as, "The FELLOWSHIP race down the stairway."

Aftermath

Aftermath, *is an event that is a direct result or consequence from a prior event, decision or action. Usually, the aftermath has a negative influence on the characters; an unexpected obstacle that must be overcome. Occasionally, aftermath is the implied conclusion of the film—what things will be like for the characters when the story is over. In contrast, sometimes the whole of the film is the aftermath of an event that took place at the beginning of the movie.*

EXAMPLES:

The Aftermath is everything that happens *after* Pandora's Box is opened. The aftermath is either the price the characters have to pay, or the characters reward for their actions.

Fargo (1996) is an example of *the aftermath* being the majority of the film's story; the event which causes the aftermath taking place at the beginning when Jerry Lundegaard (William H. Macy) hires Carl Showalter (Steve Buscemi) and Gaear Grimsrud (Peter Stormare) to kidnap his wife. The rest of the film demonstrates how Jerry's wife is kidnapped, and what happens to the characters in consequence.

The Game (1997) exemplifies *the aftermath* taking place *after* the protagonist reaches his main culmination and ends the second act. It's the aftermath that propels the story into the third act, showing us how Nicholas Van Orton (Michael Douglas) picks up the scattered pieces of his life and attempts to put them back together long enough to seek revenge from the makers of "The Game".

The Matrix Revolutions (2003) demonstrates how *the aftermath* can bring the story to a close and leave the audience on a parting-note of how life will be like for the characters once the credits roll. Once Neo (Keanu Reeves) saves Zion from invasion by sacrificing himself to eradicate the threat of Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving), The Architect (Helmut Bakaitis) and The Oracle (Mary Alice) discuss the future of The Matrix itself and what will happen next.

Allegorical Characters

Allegorical Characters, *are characters who symbolically represent something more than just their own individuality, allowing the audience to observe the character's as a figurative example of whatever the character is meant to*

represent. Because they are meant to embody an external model (either literal or abstract), an allegorical character sometimes demonstrates a less clearly-defined arc because of the character's archetypal essence.

EXAMPLES:

There are a number of different ways films create *allegorical characters*; one way is to make the character symbolize an idea or an abstract notion. Yet another way is to make the character symbolize a specific person without being a completely recognizable copy of the model. In either case, the allegorical character represents the model's traits unbendingly, although in allegory there tends to be a focus on the feeling or mood of the character taking priority over factual correctness.

Instances where characters in a film are meant to represent an idea or an intangible thing would include Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) from *There Will Be Blood* (2007); who represents capitalist business in the age of industry. Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) from *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) would symbolize the value of hope and freedom as weapons against despair and imprisonment.

Instances where characters in a film symbolize real people would be Charlie Chaplin's famous film, *The Great Dictator* (1940) and his character of Hynkel – Dictator of Tomania; a character who resembles the personae of Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler. Another famous instance of allegorical character in film would be Orson Welles caricature of newspaper tycoon William Randolf Hearst in his film *Citizen Kane* (1941). And yet another interesting case of literal allegory for character would be the film *I'm Not There* (2007), where the personality of folk/ rock musician Bob Dylan are eclectically displayed through the acting talents of Cate Blanchett, Ben Whishaw, Christian Bale, Richard Gere, Marcus Carl Franklin & Heath Ledger.

Antagonist

*The **Antagonist** is a character (or characters) in direct opposition to the protagonist and acts as the hero's adversary; the physical representation of the heroes dilemma. It's always important to remember that in the antagonist's mind, he or she isn't the antagonist of the film, but rather, they see themselves as the*

ANTAGONIST (CONT'D)

protagonist, thus justifying the lengths he or she are willing to go to thwart the film's proper protagonist.

EXAMPLES:

Antagonists are designed to be foils for their protagonist counterparts; being strong in areas where the hero is weak in order to exploit the protagonist's flaws which must be overcome before the hero can achieve their resolution. So, the strength of the antagonist is frequently determined by the strength of the protagonist: the stronger the hero, the stronger the villain. However, sometimes the hero can be an underdog compared to the mighty and powerful antagonist; the suspense rooted in the hero's almost-certain defeat who gains credibility through their resiliency and determination against a domineering antagonist. Yet rarely do you see the opposite; a strong and powerful protagonist matched against an underdog antagonist.

An example of a powerful antagonist matched up against an underdog protagonist would be the case of the titular Alien in *Alien* (1979) versus Ripley (Signourney Weaver); a mysterious being that's evolved into a perfect killing machine set up against a human on a failing ship and teamed with a crew that's in way over their heads. Yet Ripley holds her own with room to spare; enough to power three whole sequels after *Alien*'s initial success.

An example of an antagonist and protagonist who are equally matched is demonstrated in *The Exorcist* (1973); the antagonist demon Pazuzu going toe to toe with the wise and stoic Father Merrin (Max von Sydow); the result of their contest will lead to both of their eventual departures from this world.

Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism, *is ascribing human characteristics to non-human things, such as animals, objects, god or gods, etc. Anthropomorphic characters still adhere to character, arcs, attitudes and cores, and may or may not include allegory.*

EXAMPLES:

Anthropomorphism is a popular form of allegory; superimposing human emotions and tendencies onto things that are not human in order to establish the

connection with the audience that many of our personal issues are universally shared. Animated films that have talking animals, such as *The Lion King* (1994) are the most immediately recognizable examples of anthropomorphism, as many films have been made using this technique to tell a story.

Death itself is often anthropomorphized in film to give it human qualities, enabling human characters to interact with death—though sometimes the character dynamics between death and who it's come to claim can vary greatly. For instance, Death (Bengt Ekerot) in *The Seventh Seal* (1957) is mysterious and emotionless. In contrast, Death, a.k.a. "Joe Black" (Brad Pitt) in *Meet Joe Black* (1998), is curious and childishly innocent. In yet another instance, the Grim Reaper (William Sadler) is competitive and 'one of the guys' in *Bill & Ted's Bogus Adventure* (1991).

Toy Story (1995) is an obvious example of when objects are anthropomorphized, but another instance of classic anthropomorphic characterization would be the case of HAL 9000 from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) who, despite being assembled from many individual inanimate parts the same way any computer would be, is capable of 'mimicking' human behavior; so well that it could be argued that HAL exemplifies more human tendencies than 'his' definitively human co-stars.

Archetypal Characters

Archetypal Characters, like some allegorical characters, are characters made to embody a specific idea. However, unlike allegorical characters who are meant to represent either abstract ideas or individual people, archetypal characters tend to be symbolic of specific human emotions, virtues, or flaws. This reduces the essence of the character to a single common-denominator; a go-to human condition that sums the character up in their entirety.

**EXAMPLES*:*
There are as many examples of archetypal characters as there are labels people use to describe other people. On any given day you may encounter a *child*, a *rebel*, a *protector*, a *lover,* a *jester*, or a *martyr;* to name a few: single-word attributions that sum a person up simply and concisely. As many different simple, one-word descriptions you can come up with to describe a specific type of person, there is an equal character example in film.

ARCHETYPAL CHARACTERS (CONT'D)

Sometimes a character can be a specific archetype when you wouldn't normally expect them to fulfill that archetypal role. For instance, as an archetype example for The Child you might imagine Haley Joel Osment from *The Sixth Sense* (1999), though Robin Williams' performance as *Jack* (1996) demonstrates a child who is stuck in a man's body. It's easy to imagine James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) as an example of a Rebel archetype, though Michael Douglas in *Falling Down* (1993) would also be an adequate example of a Rebel. Yet sometimes there are clear-cut archetypal roles; Jet Li is the Hero in the film *Hero* (2002), Romeo and Juliet as Lovers in *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), or Kevin Costner as a Protector in *The Bodyguard* (1992).

Audience

*The **Audience** is anyone who reads the screenplay or watches the film. Every decision relating to the work is made with the audience's total enjoyment of the finished product in mind.*

EXAMPLE:

The relationship that exists between the film itself and its audience is the reason why the film industry and filmmaking exist at all. As a filmmaker, the director is the film's first audience member. As a screenwriter, the writer is the scripts first audience member. The decisions a filmmaker or a screenwriter make to direct the film/script depends on what they enjoy as an audience member, and aspire to capture what excites them about film in order to inform the writing and filmmaking process for every audience member to watch/read the film afterward.

Audience Awareness

Audience Awareness, is the degree to which the film informs the audience concerning specific details that surround the characters' journey through the film; whether it be information the audience knows that the characters do not, vice-versa, or taking care to keep the audience as informed and informed at the same time as the characters.

EXAMPLES:

The times at which the filmmaker and the screenwriter decide to make the audience aware of certain key details has drastic implications on the audience's ultimate enjoyment of the film. These decisions also dictate the level of mystery and suspense the audience experiences while watching a film. Yet for all the nuances afforded to the filmmaker in dictating tone, mood, and suspense, essentially there are three major ways the audience is given information.

The audience is sometimes made aware of details *before* the characters in the film are aware of them. This is used to build suspense; as in the prototypical example of the shower scene in *Psycho* (1960). As the audience becomes aware that Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) isn't alone in her motel bathroom, we also know that whoever is there with her has a knife and is advancing. Yet, as we are being shown this as an audience, Marion is oblivious. This creates suspense—the sensation of seeing an approaching event, but being unable to prevent it from happening.

The audience is oftentimes made aware of details *at the same time* as the characters in the film, learning new information *with* the characters. In the case of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) we are told that Darth Vader (David Prowse/James Earl Jones) is Luke Skywalker's (Mark Hamill) father at the same time Luke is told. This allows us as the audience to experience the shock of this sudden realization as Luke experiences it.

The audience can be made aware of details after the characters in the film are aware of them. In the case of *The Big Lebowski* (1998), we don't know the truth behind Jeffrey "The Big" Lebowski's plan to rid himself of his troublesome trophy-wife Bunny (Tara Reid) until "The Dude" (Jeff Bridges) realizes it himself; which isn't until the end of the film. Even though The Dude solves 'the case' while spending time with his 'lady-friend' Maude Lebowski (Julianne Moore), we don't hear it from The Dude's mouth until he makes his way to The Big Lebowski's home in order to have a face-to-face confrontation about it.

Sometimes the audience is made aware of details that none of the characters in the film are aware of. For instance, throughout the entirety of *Citizen Kane* (1941), every character of the film is asked their opinion about the significance of Charles Foster Kane's (Orson Welles) final words: rose bud, though no one knows with any certainty. It isn't until the end, when all the characters have played their parts, that the audience is shown the infamous sled upon which is painted "Rosebud".

Audience Expectations

Audience Expectations, *are the audience's preconceived idea of how events will transpire based off the information telegraphed to them from the story and its characters. The filmmaker and/or screenwriter work in leading the audience to reach certain conclusions that will either oppose or conform to how the events will ultimately unfold.*

EXAMPLES:

The purpose of building the audience's expectations is to either support the audience's preconceived theory of what will happen, or exploit the expectation in order to surprise the audience. Though the prior can be affirming, the latter can prove to be the most dramatic and exciting to watch.

Throughout the entire duration of *Match Point* (2005), there is nothing that leads the audience to believe that this will eventually become a tale of murder, even if the audience's intuition tells them that things will not end well. What begins as a romance quickly turns into an affair and ends in bloodshed, thus leading the audience down two roads of expectation. When we realize that Chris Wilton's (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) intentions are to provoke an affair with Nola Rice (Scarlett Johansson) behind his wife's back, the audience's expectation is that no good can come from it. And they're right; the audience's expectation is affirmed. However, after Chris murders Nola once she gets pregnant and demands he leave his wife permanently, Chris Wilton is interviewed by the detectives. It seems absolutely certain that he will be caught. *However*, through inexplicable chance, Chris gets away with murder and thus going *against* what the audience had been led to believe would be Chris' ultimate fate.

Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) is an instance where the screenwriter, Paul Schrader, and the filmmaker place their bets on the audience's preconceived notion of how the story of Jesus is meant to transpire. This expectation adds to the audience's delirium when they are shown Jesus (Willem Dafoe) literally coming down from the cross and pursuing the life of a common man. Anyone who knows the story of Jesus immediately recognizes this act as being directly opposed to their preconceived idea of how the story would end. The audience is treated to Jesus' life after rescuing himself from crucifixion, until finally our initial expectation is affirmed when Jesus dies on the cross at the end.

Groundhog Day (1993) uses repetition to lull the audience into an expectation that each and every single one of Phil Connors' (Bill Murray) days will happen

exactly how it had the previous "day". This repetition is used so unflinchingly that when the expectation is finally broken, our sense of elation matches Phil's own happiness at breaking the cycle, and thus magnifying the overall moral or theme of the story. Both Phil's and the audience's expectations were exploited at the same exact time.

b.g.

b.g. (an abbreviation for 'background'), is ascribed to any action or dialogue that takes place in the rear-plane of the foreground image and is traditionally written in lower-case initials. Its intention is to discriminate activities as they appear visually on the screen between what is in the forefront and what is happening in the background. b.g. activity usually relates to what is happening in the foreground, either metaphorically or literally, even if the activity in the foreground is unaware of the b.g. activity.

EXAMPLES:

In the case of *Hurt Locker* (2008), when the three main characters attempt to disarm a car bomb in the middle of a densely populated public area, the impending sense of being watched gives a startling degree of urgency to the scene by way of showing multiple different anonymous figures looming in the background of the image, looking down upon the characters. Are the background characters innocent, curious bystanders, or are they in some way related to the car bomb the protagonists attempt to deactivate? The audience is forced to experience this dilemma along with the characters; resulting in an instance where the background directly influences the tension within a scene.

Not all background descriptions need to be suspenseful in nature as background activity is oftentimes the province of sight-gags in comedy films, as in the *Naked Gun* films where there is usually always some subtle (or not-so-subtle) joke being executed somewhere behind the main characters.

Backstory

Backstory, is the historical context to explain a character's past, prior events that led up to the story, and/or to provide exposition for the audience's benefit. When properly applied, as subtly and unobtrusively as possible, backstory can increase

BACKSTORY (CONT'D)

an audience's appreciation for the story's events and add greater dramatic weight to a character's dilemma.

EXAMPLES:

At the onset, Capt. Willard's (Martin Sheen) mission in *Apocalypse Now* (1979) appears essentially simple even if it is inconceivable: a mission commanding Willard to assassinate one of Vietnam's best and brightest commanders, Col. Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando). Upon receiving his mission, Willard is given a brief history of Kurtz, though as the film continues and Willard reviews the mission's dossier, more details of Kurtz's backstory come to light, thus increasing Willard's disparity with assassinating not only a superior officer, but a fellow American for doing *too* good of a job fighting the war. This demonstrates how backstory can be revealed slowly, bit-by-bit, over the duration of the entire film.

Adversely, in the case of all the *Star Wars* films, all of the individual film's pertinent exposition is explained overtly via scrolling text within the first few minutes. This quickly outlines all the relevant backstory about the world in which the tale will be set and the primary characters involved, all before the first word of dialogue is spoken.

Beat

Beat, *is the writer's way of illustrating to the reader when a character takes a brief pause between delivering parts of dialogue. The (beat) is written as a parenthetical, separates different segments of a character's dialogue, and is written in lower-case.*

EXAMPLES:

In the film *Adaptation* (2002), written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze, John Laroche (Chris Cooper) recounts a non-sequitur from his life to journalist Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep). Upon listening to John's anecdote about his sudden dismissal of his long-time passion for tropical fish; explaining how quickly he is capable of switching from obsession to apathy for any given subject, Susan becomes puzzled. The writer calls attention to her pause and suggests that Susan would take a *(beat)* in order to process John's statement before coming up with a response.

Block Page

Block page, refers to a page in a script that is predominantly action-heavy, giving the page a dense, bulky appearance with very little white space remaining. This makes the page 'word-heavy'; which, in turn, makes the page take a lot longer to read—disrupting the flow of the movie for the reader's mind. In principle, screenwriters try to avoid writing these types of pages by alternating between action and dialogue to make the pages look more spaced and 'airy'.

EXAMPLES:

When you watch a film that has long segments without dialogue, you can bet that there was at least one block page in the screenplay. Anyone who has ever seen *2001*: *A Space Odyssey* (1968) might suppose that the vast majority of the script is written with block pages, resembling a novel more than a screenplay.

However, even films that are more dialogue driven than *2001* is can still sometimes have lengthy action sequences that block up the page, as is the case in *Children of Men* (2006) when Theo (Clive Owen) takes a trip to visit a relative; the scene is drawn out in action lines, without any dialogue, in order to subliminally force the audience to pay attention to the visuals as Theo guides us through his decrepit world.

Camera Narrator

Camera Narrator, refers to the elements of direction specifically controlled by the camera scope and movement. The camera is the audience's 'eye' into a story. However, the audience doesn't control what that 'eye' looks at—that's the province of the director. The camera is directing your vision at all times, dramatizing the story through the motion (or stillness) of the camera. Sometimes the director is very overt in their decisions for camera placement and movement, though sometimes the director is more subtle—but either way, the story itself always dictates the camera's, and the audience's, perspective.

EXAMPLES:

Enter the Void (2009) is a glaring example of the camera acting as a surrogate narrator for the audience; the main protagonist, Oscar (Nathaniel Brown), literally 'becomes' the point of view of the camera, and we watch the entire film from that 3rd person perspective as Oscar experiences it.

CAMERA NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Yet another instance would be *12 Angry Men* (1957), which chronicles a jury's debate over the guilt of one young man that would send him to death row. The jurors file in, confident that their verdict will be swift and definite, and the camera reciprocates their certainty almost as if even the camera man isn't planning on staying long. This results in wide, airy views of the room and long, deliberate takes. However, when it's discovered that Juror #8 (Henry Fonda) isn't so eager to proclaim the young man's guilt, the camera begins its constant, methodical advance, until by the end of the film, we find ourselves in the jurors faces as they ferociously (and stubbornly) debate the case.

CARD:

CARD:, is used when the writer needs to give a written cue on-screen to the audience in order to inform them of a specific location, time, date, or era of the narrative. A card is text printed on the screen – either over black or superimposed over an image – that is needed to indicate location, time, date, or era. CARD: is written in all CAPS followed by the colon and typed at the same left margin as for character names. Underneath CARD:, the location, era, and date is written at character dialogue margins set off by quotes.

EXAMPLES:

You see instances where the CARD: screenwriting function is employed all the time in film, often right at the onset, alerting the audience to the when—if not where—the movie is set; sometimes even the who is introduced in this manner as well. In *There Will Be Blood* (2007), we are first introduced to Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) on a windy day in 1898. Similarly, within the first five minutes we are taken to Dog Green Sector, Omaha Beach where a major battle will take place at the onset of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). In another instance, *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) introduces each of the major characters after the epilogue is concluded; listing off each member of the family, and acquaintance of the family, as formally as if it were a face-to-face introduction.

Character

*1. **Character**, is any individual in a script/movie who demonstrates personality by their innate behavior and may or may not have spoken dialogue to articulate their personality. Characters in film range from minute to massive. Characters are sometimes a portrayal of an individual who the audience can easily and readily identify with, or an individual who the audience does not wish to emulate. Any given character, no matter how small, 'thinks' they are the main [protagonist] of the story; each character is 'real' enough to be capable of leading the film at any point. Therefore, characters must have a solid foundation; they must have needs and wants, and they must have goals to achieve, just as people do in life. Since characters are a reflection of real people in the imaginary world of narrative film, the more closely and accurately a character exemplifies the nuanced behaviors of real individuals, the more people will be compelled by the character's journey throughout the film.*

*2. **Character**, is a screenwriting term used to describe who is speaking the written dialogue at any given time; the character's name written in all capitals and centered at the top of the dialogue.*

EXAMPLES:

With the exception of some experimental art films, it's theoretically impossible to write a narrative film without character. Characters are what make films relatable, enjoyable, and informative for an audience. Because of this, there are literally millions of examples of character in film. Some examples of fictitious characters include Rufus T. Firefly (Groucho Marx) from *Duck Soup* (1933), John McClane (Bruce Willis) from *Die Hard* (1988), Jackie Brown (Pam Grier) from *Jackie Brown* (1997), Sean Thornton (John Wayne) from *The Quiet Man* (1952), Lolita Haze (Sue Lyon) from *Lolita* (1962); the list goes on and on.

Obviously, not all characters are fictitious. Many real-world figures from history and from our modern times have been portrayed on the big screen, with varying degrees of accuracy but always with the intent on entertaining and enlightening audiences by exemplifying the figure's *character*. Some examples are Robert E.

Lee (Martin Sheen) from *Gettysburg* (1993), Howard Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio) from *The Aviator* (2004), Aileen Wuornos (Charlize Theron) in *Monster* (2003), Queen Elizabeth I (Cate Blanchett) in *Elizabeth* (1998)*,* and

CHARACTER (CONT'D)

Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007), or Harvey Pekar (Paul Giamatti) from *American Splendor* (2003), to name a few.

Character Arc

Character arc, is the overall journey any individual character goes through as the events of the story progress, allowing the audience the benefit of watching a character's progress (or retrogression) unfold. In order to do this, when a character is introduced their characteristics are made known to the audience so that, by the end of the film, we can see how any specific character's life, behavior and/or attitude changes. The greater the change, the greater the potential for drama in the film.

EXAMPLES:

In *Scent of a Woman* (1992), Lieutenant Colonel Frank Slade (Al Pacino) is a blind, bitter, confrontational man who seeks to indulge in all of life's simple pleasures before committing suicide—confident that his 'caregiver' Charlie Simms (Chris O'Donnell) will be a pushover. Charlie does manage to surprise both himself and Frank with how resilient he is capable of being—and the two forge a friendship that allows them both to grow into better, more fully enriched individuals by the end of the film.

Barry Egan (Adam Sandler) is the owner and operator of a small business selling plungers in the film *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), who also is seemingly incapable of having a normal, confident conversation with anybody. Yet when Barry falls in love with a woman who could be the love of his life as well as being confronted by a mattress man who threatens to ruin Barry's life and newfound happiness, Barry discovers a firm and deliberate side of himself that knows exactly what he wants in life and how to get it.

Character Attitudes

Character Attitudes, are related to character arc in that, when we are introduced to a character, we are also being introduced to their general attitude: their opinions, beliefs, perspectives and overall philosophy about the world, before the

character is caught up in the story that will test their attitude. What makes for an impressive character arc within a story is watching a character's attitude slowly change and adapt with the events of the story until their world view is either confirmed, or denied.

EXAMPLES:

In the best cases, *character attitude* will always dictate what the character's struggle or obstacle they must overcome within the story will be; the character's overall demeanor is also indicative of the problem they will be faced to confront in the story.

John Nash (Russell Crowe) from *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) demonstrates character attitude when we are first introduced to him in the film. Nash is a socially awkward man, stifled as much by his own brilliance as by his schizophrenia. However, at the onset, Nash is reluctant to attribute his social ineptitude as something that is *his* problem; choosing instead to blame those around him, thus alienating him further from the world. There is also a sense of Nash's latent egotism in his own genius; he is confident in his abilities as a mathematician, which later fuels the fire of his delusions.

 Napoleon Dynamite (Jon Heder), the titular character of *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004) is a peculiar young man to say the least—however, its Napoleon's unique character attitude that keeps the audience watching as we follow him through an assortment of mini adventures with friends and family that eventually culminate in a climactic dance-sequence. It's because of Napoleon's attitude that we are compelled to watch, and it's because of Napoleon's attitude that we find humor in his exploits.

Character Change

Character Change, *refers to a specific instance within the character arc when the character's previous attitude and/or core is replaced with a new set of values or opinions. This internal metamorphosis is often provoked by an external event that forces the character to reevaluate their own essence. Oftentimes, it's this character change that is the key to overcoming the character's obstacle.*

EXAMPLES:

In *The Truman Show* (1998), Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey) is a man who not only is ignorant of how passionately he is adored by millions of television

CHARACTER CHANGE (CONT'D)

viewers across the globe for being the main character of a reality television show about his life, but is also a man absolutely terrified of water. This fear falls within the realm of irony on multiple levels since Truman is, by nature, an adventurous spirit—yet incapable of adventuring over any major body of water. Yet even more ironic is the fact that Truman's adventurous spirit is trapped within a world that Christof (Ed Harris), the creator of The Truman Show, believes Truman cannot and will not ever escape. However, Truman's *character change* proves Christof wrong. Not only is Truman able to overcome his fear of water, he also takes command of his desire to explore the world—all while challenging his suspicion that "God" (Christof) is personally challenging Truman himself to escape his cage, all before the eyes of millions of viewers.

In *I Heart Huckabees* (2004), four characters; Albert (Jason Schwartzman), Brad (Jude Law), Tommy (Mark Wahlberg) and Dawn (Naomi Watts) are all on an existential collision course; their lives bumping randomly/rhythmically into one another until the characters descend into madness before re-emerging with a sense of purpose and clarity. Albert's life was turned upside down by the rich, handsome and successful Brad, who was everything Albert was not. However, when it's reveled that Brad himself is still a flawed, frail individual despite his money, good looks or popularity, Albert is set free from being controlled by his jealousy of Brad and becomes bonded with him because of their mutual pain. This change propels Albert to 'see the light, allowing him to come to a sense of fulfillment; justifying the means he endured to achieve this particular end.

Character Core

Character Core, refers to the character's rudimentary essence. Where the character attitude is a behavior that the character has a choice in, the character core is the character's unavoidable nature; something that refers to what the character is more than who the character is. Establishing the character's core helps define the character in concrete terms for the audience.

EXAMPLE:

Ed Wood (1994) was an enthusiastic filmmaker, even if he wasn't a very good one. However, no amount of enthusiasm would ever help Ed to overcome his own limitations as a film director or screenwriter. Each and every film Ed makes confounds not only the audience's expectations, but also the expectations of

Edward's own cast and crew. Yet, the opposite could be said of Edward as well: that no amount of critical or commercial evidence stacked against Edward could ever convince him to be anything other than a film director ("like Orson Welles"), or rattle his enthusiasm. Inherently, Ed Wood was passionate about making movies—so much so that it becomes his core, something unshakeable and unavoidable.

Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem) is the sociopathic, single-minded, cold-blooded murderer who dominates the suspense in *No Country for Old Men* (2007). At no point in the film is Chigurh not enmeshed in the search, the preparation, or execution of murder. Seemingly no amount of coercion or debate will change Anton's mind once he's decided on a target; or rather, if the flip of a coin should chance to come up tails if his victim calls 'heads'. This is Anton Chigurh's core; an unapologetic, methodical killer. No amount of reasoning can understand it, even if it takes less than half a minute with the character to realize its complete truth.

Character Description

Character Description, is the audiences introduction to the character and is articulated by the physical, visual and behavioral attributes the writer ascribes to any given character. The intention is to briefly summarize the character's core by describing their physical appearance in a way that's immediately compelling to the reader. The writer does this by blending general observations about of the character, while also illustrating key details that give insight into the character's psychology; all before the character begins their first line of dialogue.

EXAMPLES:

The intention behind writing good character descriptions is to compel the audience to continue reading/watching the character–to describe a personality so unique and fascinating that, even upon being introduced to this new character, the audience has no choice but to follow throughout the action of the film. The better the character's description, the more interesting the character will seem on their surface, leading to potentially unforgettable characters.

Writers describe their characters in different ways. In Paul Schrader's *Taxi Driver* (1976), he begins the script by describing the films protagonist Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) at great length; painting a portrait of Travis for the reader that includes the character's physical condition, his emotional state, his psyche, while

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION (CONT'D)

hinting at his back story subtly. Schrader also takes care to describe Travis' costume, pointing out the characters beige army jacket all the way down to the patch stitched upon it that reads "King Kong Company 1968-70". The writer believes something about this detail is pivotal to the reader's personal understanding of the character; therefore, it is included, right at the beginning.

Yet sometimes the writer's description is revealed slowly over the course of the script as in the case of M. Night Shyamalan's *Unbreakable* (2000) with his description of David Dunn (Bruce Willis). We are only given brief, slight nuances of David's behavior while we observe him sitting in the train's car; his attire and his comfort while wearing it, his reaction to being stared at by a child, his demure reaction to the beautiful woman who sits next to him, and the insight we are shown when David slips off his wedding band before she can see it. These details inspire the audience's curiosity which will provoke their continued reading of the script, where more of David's physical condition, emotional state, psyche and back story will be revealed.

Character Development

Character Development, is the writer's work in the literal creation of the written character; including (but not limited to) investigation into a character's back story, intimate understanding of a character's personality, the character's psychology and what the character needs. Essentially; character development describes the writer's relationship with the character and the process of making the character believable and compelling. This process begins with the writers impetus, or idea for a story and the characters who should populate it, and ends with the finished product–the screenplay itself, containing a fully developed, entirely believable and unavoidably interesting character the audience relates to and wants to watch.

EXAMPLES:

Character development requires hours of research, careful consideration and attention to detail before the character is compelling and believable. Sometimes, a writer's initial idea for a character changes completely by the time the screenplay is completed, as in the case of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954).

> *"Akira Kurosawa's original idea for the film was to make it about a day in the life of a samurai, beginning with him rising from bed and ending with him making some mistake that required him to kill himself to save face. Despite a good deal of research, he did not feel he had enough solid factual information to make the movie, but came across an anecdote about a village hiring samurai to protect them and decided to use that idea. Kurosawa wrote a complete dossier for each character with a speaking role. In it were details about what they wore, their favorite foods, their past history, their speaking habits and every other detail he could think of about them. No other Japanese director had ever done this before."* - imdb.com, Seven Samurai (1954) - TRIVIA

Sometimes, the writer's development of character for a script is a grueling task, as was the case for Francis Ford Coppola while writing *Apocalypse Now* (1979), as exemplified in the documentary about the making of Apocalypse Now, *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (1991). In Hearts of Darkness, we see how Coppola slowly unravels as he approaches the time when he is to film the movie's scenes that showcase Col. Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando) himself; the character that acts as the films ultimate destination. However, Coppola was incapable of imagining a satisfactory ending to the film, which fueled his paranoia that the film would be a colossal failure. Yet, it could be argued that it was fear itself that provoked what became the ultimate ending of the film; an ending for Kurtz, Willard (Martin Sheen), and Coppola himself born from desperation and total immersion in the film's subject matter, as stated by Coppola himself: "My film is not a movie. My film is not about Vietnam. It is Vietnam. It's what it was really like; it was crazy. And the way we made it was very much like the way the Americans were in Vietnam: we were in the jungle, there were too many of us, we had access to too much money, too much equipment, and little by little we went insane." This is an example of the ends justifying the means.

Character Identification

Character Identification, occurs when the audience personally relates to the trials experienced by the protagonist, thus causing the audience to emotionally connect with the protagonist him/herself. This is achieved through the writer's hard work at character development, ensuring that the character and the character arc is believable and has a deep emotional resonance with the

CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION (CONT'D)

audience. The audience can sometimes be effected by watching the protagonist endure an obstacle that the audience has personally experienced themselves. Though not always, as sometimes the audience can still relate to a protagonist's journey while overcoming larger-than-life obstacles; so long as what the character feels is genuine.

EXAMPLES:

The audience goes to movies to vicariously live through the film's protagonist; to experience the journey and undergo a change along with the movie's main character. In order to achieve this, the writer needs to know who his audience is, what they relate to emotionally, and embody the audience's hopes and fears into a complex and flawed character that the audience can project themselves onto. That character can either experience everyday activities that the audience understands in a direct way, or can experience grandiose circumstances that dictate an emotional reaction in the protagonist that we understand in an indirect way based on our emotional connection to the main character. Either way, the protagonist is our emotional guide through a film. If we relate to the protagonist, we will follow him or her anywhere.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004) could be considered an example of the audience developing a direct identification with the film's main character on the basis that most everyone experiences the heartbreak of losing the love of our life. Furthermore, everyone understands what it means to dream, and the mysterious sensation of deja-vu. Combine these two elements that every audience member can understand–heartbreak and memory–and the writer has crafted a story that everyone can empathize with on a personal level. Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) is the audience's guide not only through the fantastic process of 'memory erasing', but also through the painfully mundane aspects of losing and remembering a loved one. By the end of the film, each audience member has lived through their own past relationships just as Joel has, in hopes that healing from past mistakes stems from remembering what has been forgotten.

In the movie *Fearless* (1993), Max Klein (Jeff Bridges) undergoes an abrupt and drastic change in perspective when he miraculously survives a devastating plane crash. Though a vast majority of audience members aren't capable of sympathizing directly with what it means to survive a plane crash, audiences can relate to wanting to live life to the fullest. Audiences can relate to the fear of death. Audiences can relate to wanting to overcome your worst fears. Audiences

can relate to wanting to save loved ones who we see struggling in our daily lives. This makes the audience's relationship to Max Klein an example of indirect character identification; even if we don't personally know what it's like to be in a plane crash, we understand his behaviors and share his feelings of joy and elation at being alive and appreciating life's simple pleasures after surviving one.

Character Paradox

Character Paradox, describes a character who undergoes some detrimental catharsis that is somehow contradictory but unavoidably true, and the character must either justify or overcome this logical conflict. Adding character paradox to your script can greatly increase the audience's interest in your character by making him or her multi-faceted, conflicted, complex and unpredictable. The right character combined with the right paradox can give your script an unforgettable resonance with the reader.

EXAMPLES:

The use of paradox in film as a motivational tool for characters can take shape in a myriad of ways. Character paradox can either dictate the film's plot, used to examine the morality of the film's characters, and/or raise thematic, cathartic questions for the audience.

Sometimes, the paradox itself is the plot, as is the case in *Back To The Future* (1985). After being sent to the past in Dr. Emmett "Doc" Brown's (Christopher Lloyd) specially modified DeLorean, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) is suddenly face-to-face with his awkward, socially inept teenage Father (Crispen Glover) and his coquettish Mother (Lea Thompson) who is out to turn Marty into a 1950's Oedipus. His teenage Mother's infatuation with Marty is the source of Marty's paradox, as exemplified in a photograph Marty keeps of him and his siblings. As Marty inadvertently effects the certainty of his parents' coupling, he and his siblings are slowly 'erased' not only from the photograph, but from reality itself. As Marty is charged with the task of playing matchmaker for his parents, the younger Doc undergoes the scientific conundrum of getting Marty to literally return to the future despite the huge gap in technology between 1955 and 1985. Here; the character's paradox equals plot.

The character's paradox can sometimes have more to do with the moral and ethical composition of a character than it has any direct impact upon its plot. In

CHARACTER PARADOX (CONT'D)

Eastern Promises (2007), Nikolai (Viggo Mortenson) is a chauffeur and foot soldier for the Russian mob in London, England. He is often charged with the task of cleaning up after the mob's bloody messes and slowly, over the course of the film, Nikolai's professionalism and endurance for violence puts him in a position to ascend the ranks of the mob all the way to becoming its figurehead. Yet, Nikolai's catharsis and the paradox of the film is that in addition to being a professional criminal, Nikolai is also an undercover government agent. Is it morally acceptable that a paid, government informant take an active part in the mob's doings, even to the point of becoming the mob's leader? We get a sense of melancholy from Nikolai himself as he strives to understand whether or not being the mob boss and perpetuating the mob's evil in order to accumulate evidence against professional criminals is a 'necessary evil'.

A Clockwork Orange (1971) uses Alex DeLarge's (Malcolm McDowell) character paradox to guide the film's plot by analyzing the causes-and-effects of government implemented brain conditioning. It also examines Alex's character behavior as we watch his wants for rape and violence at odds with his need to not become physically ill from indulging in them. However, the primary focus of the film is to meditate thematically on the paradox of what role *choice* plays in the relationship of good and evil, if any. The heart of the film lies in forcing the audience to ask if is it good enough that our actions be 'good', or does real good only exist in altruistic, individual motivations for wanting to be 'good'. Alex's character paradox performs all of these functions within the film; fueling plot, character motivation, *and* theme.

Character Psychology

Character Psychology, alludes to the character's mental state throughout the course of the film. Whether or not specific details are overtly stated in the script's dialogue, the writer must understand their character's perception of past and current events, where their focus lies as individuals, their emotional constitution, what motivates their behaviors, and how all of these elements effect their relationships with other characters in the film. These aspects of your character's conscious and subconscious mind are the building blocks that make the character psychologically satisfying for the audience to watch and identify with.

EXAMPLES:

In *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), we watch as Dr. William 'Bill' Harford (Tom Cruise) digs himself into a realm of sexual ambiguity that reels from near-misses to near-deaths. Bill is provoked by his wife Alice's (Nicole Kidman) admission of a long-dormant fantasy that would have made a cuckold of Bill; a fantasy that could have easily become a reality, but did not. After learning this, each episode Bill endeavors varies in shades of surrealism and danger, even if none of Bill's flirtatious encounters are ever totally innocent or completely debaucherous. What inspires Bill to undertake this driven but cathartically deprived odyssey? When Alice relates her fantasy to Bill, it effects his understanding of past events, thus changing what he thought he knew about his current relationship with his wife. Bill's behavioral focus is the need to prove his sexual adequacy once his masculinity is spoiled. Bill is an emotionally distant man, not only from his wife, but from friends like Victor Ziegler (Sidney Pollack), giving Bill an innaproachable, off-putting air; further exemplified by his habitual need to introduce himself as a doctor to nearly everyone he meets, as if it explains something essential to Bill. The jealousy that arises in Bill after his wife's confession dictates much of his motivation, but with jealousy also comes a sense that Bill can use it as an excuse to get away with doing something drastic, if he is capable. Yet, it cannot be understated that while Bill's attempts to procure a sexual encounter with seemingly anyone is desperate, it's also interesting to note when–and why–Bill turns each opportunity aside. The 'dream-like' nature of the film also suggests insight to Bill's psychological state; if he is incapable of indulging in any sexual encounter while within a fantasy, how could he possible indulge in them when awake, with his wife or with anybody?

In *The Informant!* (2009), Mark Whitacre (Matt Damon) is the eyes and ears for the FBI's investigation into a corrupt international business conspiracy that Mark himself blew the whistle on in order to save himself from serving prison time. Yet, what the FBI ultimately discovers through Mark's 'cooperation' is that Mark himself is a habitually compulsive liar; not only to the company he works for and not only to the FBI who has sought to protect him, but to his family and to himself as well. Even as the audience believes they are watching a movie about a corrupt, multi-billion dollar company's fraudulent activity, the screenwriter is really *informing* us of the particular character idiosyncrasies that make Mark Whitacre a fraud. When this information finally becomes clear, we not only understand *why* Mark lies so unabashedly, but can also appreciate how Mark justifies the lies to himself–how it's possible that Mark could consider himself at

CHARACTER PSYCHOLOGY (CONT'D)

his most honest while telling the most lies; thus making Mark symbolically representative of the big corporation he sought to destroy.

Character Relationships

Character Relationships, *refers to the writer's work in establishing interpersonal connections between two characters. These collected exchanges add up to two or more characters having a shared history with one another, resulting in the cultivation of a personal relationship between the two– a connection that can either productive or destructive to their lives, depending on the character's psychology.*

EXAMPLES:

Character relationships are essential to demonstrating individual characters to the audience. Who people are is based off of their behavior around other individuals. In a screenplay, the audience can more readily understand who any given character is depending on their similarities and differences to other characters. Defined character relationships give meaning and weight to specific choices other characters make, especially when others are effected by those choices.

In *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), Ben Sanderson, an alcoholic dead-set on drinking himself to death, makes the acquaintance of the captivating Sera, a professional Las Vegas escort. The two have an immediate intimacy that transcends sex into the realm of love and adoration for one another–yet, given the push-me/pull-me nature of their personalities, Ben's alcoholism and Sera's profession are ultimately what propels the others destruction. Ben is the character who pays the ultimate price of their tug of war love affair, leaving Sera left alone to try and understand what the loss of her friend and lover says about herself.

Memento (2000) is a film that not only increases in complexity as the film progresses, but manages to increase in complexity with each subsequent viewing. Because of the nature of Leonard Shelby's (Guy Pearce) short-term memory condition, his relationship with anyone within the film can be anything at any time. In particular, his relationship with Natalie (Carrie-Anne Moss) can be maliciously manipulative one minute, and lovingly protective the next. In the case of Lenny's acquaintance Teddy Gammell (Joe Pantoliano), their relationship (in order of appearance) shifts from revenge to suspicion, from suspicion to

friendship, from friendship to the realization that the revenge we had previously seen was actually an unavoidable tragedy for both Teddy and ultimately Leonard himself.

Despite the majority of *Cast Away* (2000) featuring no one other than Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks) and a volley ball named 'Wilson', the audience's understanding of Chuck's relationship with his long-time girlfriend Kelly Frears (Helen Hunt) is still front-and-center because of his behavior because of his behavior while stranded on a desert island. Regardless of the fact that Kelly doesn't appear throughout the whole mid-section of the film, she fuels so many of Chuck's pivotal decisions–specifically, the ultimate determination that will get Chuck off the island which leads to his eventual rescue. The bond between Chuck and Kelly is so strong and believable given the circumstances that we feel their mutual sensation of regret at what has been taken from them while also sharing in Chuck's exciting new life, having finally been rescued–literally and metaphorically.

Characterization

Characterization, *is the writer's work to describe the superficial details about a character to help inform the audience about who the character is; the 'person' the character is to the outside world. Typically, the characterization is the first-layer observations we can make about any given character; obvious and self-evident.*

EXAMPLES:
One of the first things we notice about Barry Egan in *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002) is his striking, royal-blue suit, further accentuated by his bright crimson tie. It's characterization to the point of nearly becoming caricature. We then come to a general opinion about who Barry is; professional, sure, but also that he's trying really *hard* to be professional. Something about the suit is peculiar; be it the shade or how it seems to fit like a cardboard box over Barry's stiff, rigid posture, the suit is an immediate tip of the hat to the audience, letting them know that Barry is the focus. There's no way he can blend in comfortably, no way he can just fade unnoticed into the background where his seven sisters won't call out and belittle his insecurities. His suit is simply too noticeable to allow it, and it's there for the audience's benefit. It's there so we can keep our eyes on him as he wanders through bright-white grocery store isles on his search for pudding, or

CHARACTERIZATION (CONT'D)

even when he's fighting against a soap dispenser alone in a restaurant's restroom. He won't escape our scrutinizing attention to his awkwardness, at least not until he can overcome it.

In the case of *The Wrestler* (2008), the opening title sequence introduces us to who Randy "The Ram" is; a professional wrestling sensation who was a crowd favorite for decades. This introduction to Randy juxtaposes our initial point of view of him; turned away from us, downcast, facing the corner of the locker room. Without looking at his face, without hearing a word from him, we can clearly see he's tired–and not just physically. The physical body language of Randy illustrates a characterization of his character core and is enough to inform the audience not only where Randy has been, but immediately sums up all his prior history to tell us where he is now; in this moment.

The very first time we see Tyler Durden, the audience might not be aware that they saw him at all. And I don't even mean the subliminal inserts of him that flash upon the screen when "Jack" goes to the doctor to get help for his insomnia, or when "Jack" trades therapy group nights with Marla. The first time we see Tyler is when we first see "Jack" himself, with a gun in his mouth; though we aren't prepared for it. One of the big surprises in *Fight Club* (1999) is when we find that Tyler Durden is "Jack's" own split personality; and to look at "Jack" at the beginning of the film, we immediately understand Tyler's function for him as soon as we're introduced to Tyler on the airplane. Where "Jack" is materialistic, Tyler is free. What "Jack" seeks superficially, Tyler regards with reckless abandon. What "Jack" desperately wishes to be orderly, Tyler enthusiastically hurls into chaos. The time that we spend with "Jack" at the beginning of the film makes us understand who and what Tyler represents when we first see him: trouble–even if we don't fully understand *why* we know it yet. It's the writer telegraphing Tyler's (and "Jack's") characterization to us, without calling special attention to it whatsoever.

Climax

Climax (also known as the Main Culmination), refers to the point of highest dramatic tension for the protagonist and his or her effort to attain their goal or objective. Usually the climax culminates at the end of the second act and is used as a catalyst to propel a new goal or objective for the protagonist during the

third act. The emotional resonance of the climax is typically in opposition to the midpoint and ending. If the protagonist has a personal victory at the midpoint, usually they attain their goal at the end; yet the climax would be their 'darkest hour' of the film. Adversely, if at the midpoint of the film the protagonist fails or is at a low, then usually the protagonist would lose at the end of the film as well; yet the climax between the second and third acts would allow the protagonist some satisfying, though fleeting, feeling of success.

EXAMPLES:

The *climax* is the moment that makes or breaks the protagonist. Everything about the character: attitude, core and psychology, is put on the line at the climax of a film. The climax itself is the psychological and/or physical test that demands the protagonist to commit themselves totally to their goal or objective. Whether or not the protagonist passes or fails that test is up to the writer.

After a confrontation with Sal (Danny Aiello) that leads to the cops' murdering of Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), Mookie (Spike Lee) makes the decision to throw a sidewalk trash can through the window of Sal's pizza place in front of a crowd of angry neighborhood urbanites, provoking a riot that eventually leads to the utter destruction of Sal's long-time business. Here, the climax is a reflection of the title of the movie: *Do The Right Thing* (1989). Was Mookie's initiating action of throwing the trash can through Sal's window the 'right thing' to do?

In *Hamlet* (1996), the climax comes down to the duel between Laertes (Michael Maloney) and Prince Hamlet (Kenneth Branagh). Despite that everyone involved pretends it to be a 'friendly' duel, all major players–including King Claudius (Derek Jacobi)–have murderous intents. Hamlet desires to kill his Unlce/King in revenge for murdering his Father, King Hamlet (Brian Blessed). Claudius desires to kill Hamlet for fear of losing his crown, and Laertes blames Hamlet for the death of his sister Ophelia (Kate Winslet). The duel plays out as if it were a contest; yet, Laertes' sword tip is anointed with a noxious poison. A classic example of a climax; Shakespeare's masterpiece *Hamlet* demonstrates how liberating it can be for a character to finally achieve his objective, even as he lays dying.

Jarhead (2005) is a film about Marine snipers, the training they endure, and the hardships they suffer through; not only in the deserts of Iraq, but within their souls. Swofford (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Troy (Peter Sarsgaard) are sent on a covert mission to do what they have been trained to do: assassinate a high ranking enemy officer. Uncounted days of trudging through desert sand, hot oil and the horrors of war lead them to the moment when Swofford has his finger on the

CLIMAX (CONT'D)

trigger and a target in the cross-hairs of his scope. Swofford is more than ready; his whole life has led inexorably to this moment. Right before he pulls the trigger, he is interrupted by Major Lincoln (Dennis Haysbert) who decides to bomb the enemy outpost rather than allow the snipers the satisfaction of "the pink mist".

Collective Unconscious

Collective Unconscious, is a psychological term, coined by psychiatrist Carl Jung, describing the notion that an entire species of living organisms can communally possess latent memories underneath the conscious, separate awareness of individuals. It explains that our existence at this point in human history is informed by subconscious memories passed down to us from previous generations that go all the way back into our collective human history, if not farther.

EXAMPLES:

If Carl Jung's ideas of the collective unconscious are to be believed, then it would explain how audiences are capable of empathizing with characters in movies that exist far back into the past. Why? Because despite being separated by time, humans can still empathize with real and fictitious characters from the past because we unconsciously understand what it was like to exist in a different point in our collective human history. Not only do we empathize, but we sympathize as well–since no matter how much time passes, human beings are essentially still feeling the same emotions: love, hate, passion, anger, happiness and sorrow. Not only do these emotions happen to us, as people, everyday, but they happen to everyone, everyday. And have happened to everyone, everyday, as far back into human history as you can go–which means there is still an emotional connection between us and anyone who has ever lived; making the past an infinite resource for movie-material.

A scene in the midpoint of the 1988 animated film *AKIRA*, the characters Kaneda (Mitsuo Iwata) and Kei (Mami Koyama) literally have a conversation about the physical nature of the main character, Akira. The characters go so far as to, in essence, discuss Jung's theory of the collective unconscious in regards to all human existence; that memories can be inherited generation to generation, and

that life itself is a continual process that has been ongoing from the very first single-celled organism.

In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), the audience is introduced to a tribe of nomadic, cave-dwelling ape-men who symbolically represent mankind's distant ancestors. At the onset of the film, this tribe of early sapiens are upon the verge of extinction–they are starving, thirsting, and are a leopard's target for an easy-meal. Despite that this tribe of foragers aren't human, it is still easily understood that they represent us because they are what eventually will become human. Therefore, as an audience, a part of ourselves is anthropomorphized into these characters and we relate to their desperation to find food and gain intelligence. This leads to our understanding of two things when they learn to use bones as weapons: that necessity is the mother of invention, and that death and war have always been a precursor to our growth and knowledge as a people.

Concept

Concept, refers to the idea a writer has that will be used to apply the story the writer wishes to tell; the concept acting as the means by which the story will be applied. This allows the writer to take a well-known story and 'reinvent' it in a different light or given a different context.

EXAMPLES:

Concept films sometimes take the form of 'what if' scenarios. For instance, *Inception* (2010) asks; 'what if you could go inside someone's dream to give them an idea without them knowing it?' And yet, given the 'what if' scenario, what the movie ends up being is a sort of reverse-heist movie; where instead of the con-men trying to steal something from a secure location, they are trying to implant something into a secure location. So in this case, *Inception* is a concept film that takes a relatively mundane, common story element (the heist), puts a twist on it, and reapplies it within the framework of the script's *concept*; the 'what if' scenario.

Again, in the case of *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), the concept film combines a story the audience already knows (Pinocchio) with a 'what if' scenario ('what if a robot could act and behave just like a real child?'), resulting in a retelling that places the story within a new context. Almost beat-for-beat, the audience is treated to the tale of Pinocchio, only instead of being a 'wooden' boy, David (Haley Hoel Osment) is a highly sophisticated robot with equally

CONCEPT (CONT'D)

sophisticated artificial intelligence. This parallel is made to make the audience question the nature of human emotions, while also forcing us to draw conclusions between inhumane acts and the humans who perform them.

Conflict

Conflict, is the physical and/or emotional struggle of the protagonist against either internal or external obstacles. Without conflict, there is no drama, and without drama there is no story; ergo, conflict is an absolute necessity for any film. The end result of conflict in a story is to force the protagonist to take decisive action and attempt to overcome it.

EXAMPLES:

Conflict arises in a myriad of different ways in film. Sometimes it's the protagonist's conflict with him/herself that acts as his or her major obstacle to overcome; the hero being their own worst enemy. Conflict can sometimes stem from a physical external antagonist; a character who's primary objective is to thwart the protagonist's attempts at achieving their goal or desire. Sometimes conflict arises from the very loved ones the protagonist is seeking to aid or help. The purpose is to find a believable, realistic portrayal of conflict for the main character that mirrors the conflicts that everyone must deal with on a day-to-day basis; allowing for the audience to develop character identification by watching the hero attempt to overcome their conflict, whatever shape it might take.

In *Synecdoche, New York*, Caden Cotard (Phillip Seymour Hoffman) is unavoidably hyperconscious of his own mortality, and absolutely everything he does throughout the course of the film is dictated by his constant, conscious acknowledgement that he not only will die someday, but even in life he is in a state of perpetual degradation toward death; actively dying his entire life. *"I will be dying. And so will you. And so will everyone here. And that's what I want to explore. We're all hurling towards death. Yet here we are, for the moment, alive. Each of us knowing we're going to die, each of us secretly believing we wont."* Needless to say, this causes Caden no small amount of stress and frustration, and is an example of a character's internalized conflict: one that he spends the whole movie seeking to understand and overcome.

Elements of *Into The Wild* (2007) deal with Chris McCandless' (Emile Hirsch) attempts to be at peace with the natural world. At one point he says *"I also know how important it is in life not necessarily to be strong but to feel strong. To measure yourself at least once. To find yourself at least once in the most ancient of human conditions. Facing the blind death stone alone, with nothing to help you but your hands and your own head."* While much of Chris' conflict comes from himself, from the society he wishes to escape, and ultimately from his tumultuous relationship with his parents, a great deal of Chris' conflict comes from the wildlife Chris seeks to immerse himself within; 'to measure himself' against it.

In *House of Sand and Fog* (2003), the conflict of the story is like watching what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. After Kathy (Jennifer Connelly) is illegally evicted, her house is auctioned to Behrani (Ben Kingsley). When he and his family are informed that the house should rightfully still belong to Kathy, he refuses to leave. This prompts Kathy to take action to try and 'motivate' Behrani to leave; from begging and pleading to outright physical threats. Therefore, in this case Behrani is Kathy's obstacle, and vice-versa; each causing the other's conflict until their own stubbornness spirals out of control. Both of them push their chips all-in without fully understanding the price they will be asked to pay.

Context

Context, refers to the surrounding world of the story and how it influences the characters actions and choices. If the character is realistic and believable, they will behave differently in varying situations, locations, and people depending on what, where and who they are. Context will dictate any individual character's approach to any situation.

EXAMPLES:
You wouldn't need to look any farther to see how context can change every facet of a film than when comparing *Yojimbo* (1961) and *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964). Despite the fact that both films are about a lone, wandering mercenary who stumbles across a village embroiled in a bitter gang feud, both films have a distinct visual and emotional style separate from the other. While *Yojimbo* is a black and white Japanese film about a crafty samurai ronin, *Fistful of Dollars* is a gritty-colored Spanish film about a clever gunslinger. The story is exactly the

CONTEXT (CONT'D)

same in both cases, but it's the change in each films *context* that forces you to see them as two very distinctly different movies.

Barry Lyndon (1975) is very much a film about a time, and about a place. In this case, the time is the 18th century, and the place is England's high society. Everything that motivates the titular character (Ryan O'Neal) comes from what the *time* and the *place* required of him if he is to become a person of property, wealth and pedigree. What may be seen as a slow, methodical film by some is an earnest meditation on the sheer physical and emotional effort that is required in order for Barry to gain an elevated status within this cordial, though still dog-eat-dog, society. Barry's struggle is dictated by the time and the place in which the film is set, which is the *context* of the story. If Barry's story was set instead upon a pirate ship in the middle of the Atlantic, his tale would be very different, indeed.

CONTINUOUS

CONTINUOUS, is a script note that explains the uninterrupted relationship between two slug lines for the reader. If the action that takes place over the course of multiple slug lines is without cessation, in lieu of writing "DAY", "NIGHT", etc., the writer will instead opt for "CONTINUOUS" (all capital letters), illustrating that it takes place in real-time, in addition to whatever the prior actions were.

EXAMPLES:

Even within the first few pages of *Requiem For A Dream* (2000) the writer uses CONTINUOUS to explain the continuation in action after the title card for the name of the film is written. This *continues* the action prior to the title card, connecting the events of Harry talking to his mother Sara behind a locked door and Harry wheeling the stolen television out of his mother's apartment toward Tyrone.

In *The Departed* (2006), CONTINUOUS is used to connect two different locations and four different characters; Queenan & Dignam in a Surveillance Office, and Costello & Billy in Costello's condominium. Queenan & Dignam are listening to Billy & Costello's conversation via the microphone that Billy is wearing, so in order to get Queenan & Dignam's reactions to what's being said

on the other end, the writer needs to cut back and forth between the two locations–using a slug-line each time. To prevent confusion as to the sequence of these events, the writer simply writes CONTINUOUS to let the reader know that these events are happening simultaneously.

Contrast

Contrast, is the comparison drawn between two or more characters that illustrates not only what makes any given individual different from another, but also underlines intrinsic similarities as well. It's always compelling for an audience to be shown two contrasting characters who seem totally at odds with one another, but who are revealed to be two sides of the same coin–a realization that demonstrates that two characters aren't as different as one might have originally thought. Likewise, the adverse can also be true; when two characters are shown to be similar, but who we discover are to be at odds with one another; resulting in conflict.

EXAMPLES:

At the onset of *Se7en* (1995), Detective Somerset (Morgan Freeman) and Detective Mills (Brad Pitt) seem as though they have been cut from very different cloth. At almost every stage of their investigation into interconnecting murders, Mills and Somerset encounter something that exposes their glaring differences–be it in their attitude towards their job, or towards society en masse. However, the one thing that does unite them is the desire to solve the riddle; to catch John Doe, and to see where this investigation will lead both men. In *The Dark Knight*, Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) is seeking to give up the caped-crusader lifestyle in hopes that Gotham City's District Attourney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart) would be the hero that Gotham needs; one that doesn't wear a mask, and one that works in accordance with the law. And at every turn, it seems that Harvey Dent and Batman adhere to the same moral and ethical code, though in drastically different ways, though both achieving results. That is until a terrible accident kills Harvey's fiancee Rachel Dawes (Maggie Gyllenhaal) and leaves him permanently disfigured. This event turns two like-minded characters into extreme opposites; exposing Batman and Two-Face's contrasts.

Costume

Costume, alludes to specific articles of clothing worn by a character in a screenplay only when and if it is important for the reader to know what any given character is wearing. However, if it is written in the script, it must be integral to the story or the character in some pivotal way.

EXAMPLES:

In *The Addams Family* (1991), each member of the family– Gomez (Raul Julia), Morticia (Anjelica Huston), Wednesday (Christina Ricci) and Pugsley (Jimmy Workman) are unique in their own macabre way. So unique that their individual costumes define them. The debonaire Gomez is sharp but gloomy in his suit– looking more like an undertaker than a father. Morticia's long, black dress makes mourning the dead sexy. These specific details telegraph information about the characters to the audience without any character having to say a thing. The writer knows this–and exploits this fact by describing specific details about the characters' costumes in the script for the audience's benefit.

When Edward Bloom (Ewan McGregor) encounters Karl the Giant (Matthew McGrory) in *Big Fish* (2003), the writer decides to articulate the physical condition of the Giant. Feral, dirty and in rags; these details illustrate to the audience how the Giant has been living up to this point, the payoff being when Karl undergoes a make-over and is seen in a whole new light once his hair is cut, beard shaved, and wearing a brand-new specially tailored suit. This difference helps the audience sympathize with Karl, making him a victim of circumstance more than painting a portrait of him as a 'bad person' for his prior misdeeds.

Culmination

Culmination, combines elements of climax and character arc into a single phrase. Similarly to climax, culmination alludes to the point of highest dramatic tension within a film. Like character arc, it describes the progression, or degradation, of the protagonist over the course of the film. However, the difference is that while climax refers to the specific emotional pitch of a scene, and character arc refers to a single individual journey, culmination refers to how that climax and character arc resonate within the framework of the whole film. Like a pot of slowly boiling water, from the very first scene of a film each moment builds the tension and the stakes for the protagonist until the climax is reached.

As each scene passes, the protagonist's journey toward the climax becomes stronger and more urgent. This accumulating tension from scene-to-scene to the climax is what's known as culmination; the writer's ability to culminate all aspects of theme, plot and character into a single climactic moment that lives up to the audience's expectations and makes for a satisfying emotional journey.

EXAMPLES:

In *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), the very first scene describes, in detail, the feelings of claustrophobic paranoia that descends upon the victim who takes the mysterious and highly addictive drug: Substance D. As the specifics surrounding a typical 'trip' are demonstrated to the audience, we then become familiar with the disjointed confusion Bob Arctor (Keanu Reeves) must feel. Not only must Bob be an undercover investigator into the drug's urban distribution, but must be a supplier and regular user of the substance itself in order to be convincing. The line between undercover detective and drug dealer becomes blurred beyond recognition until Bob Arctor is a full-on schizophrenic junkie; a process that evolves slowly over the course of the entire film, each scene of paranoia building upon the last. However methodical this character development may be in it's manifestation, it is one that the audience understands is fated to unfold from the beginning; resulting in a feeling of *culmination* that the writer constructs one page at a time.

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb (1964) is a good example of culmination. The climax of the film is obvious; when the thing that everyone but General Jack D. Ripper (Sterling Hayden) and Major 'King' Kong (Slim Pickens) try to prevent from happening finally happens: when the atom bomb is dropped, thus beginning what will become an unavoidable global nuclear holocaust. While General Ripper and Major Kong seek to achieve their goal and initiate nuclear war, every other character (except, arguably, Dr. Strangelove (Peter Sellers) himself), seeks to thwart this act from occurring. This creates tension, and conflict for each character throughout the entire film, until finally Ripper and Kong win out. This is *culmination* at work; how each scene in the film builds towards a single, pivotal moment that defines the struggle of each individual player within the framework of the whole.

CUT TO:

CUT TO:, is a note within a screenplay that tells the reader the transitional effect between scenes; in this case, it tells the reader that the editorial transition between scenes is a simple cut, or an abrupt shift from one time, place and/or character to another time, place and/or character.

EXAMPLES:

In *Doubt* (2008), CUT TO: is used to transition between two different shots. One shot is in front of the church school where lines of students are led into school by their nun teachers. Then we CUT from this shot to a shot of the church school's inner courtyard in order to see an encounter between Sister James (Amy Adams) and Father Flynn (Phillip Seymour Hoffman) before class begins.

In *Death to Smoochy* (2002), CUT TO: is applied to segue from a scene between Sheldon Mopes (Edward Norton) and Nora Wells (Catherine Keener) and a montage sequence that suits Sheldon up into a new Smoochy costume. The CUT TO is employed so that the reader can shift-gears and be ready for new information.

Delay

Delay, is the "calm before the storm" moment that occurs in order to build suspense and dramatic tension for the audience. It occurs when the audience expectation prepares the viewer for a certain action or series of actions to ensue, only to resist delivering the promised action when and how the audience expects to receive it. This becomes a timing issue; deliver too quickly and there's no sense of tension–deliver too late and the audience becomes impatient and frustrated. Effectively, the writer wishes to 'tease' the audience with coming events in order to entice the viewer's interest and attention without alienating them.

EXAMPLES:

Delay's can be used in multiple different ways. A delay may occur within a single scene–where a specific element is set up early in a scene that doesn't pay off until later in the same scene, *or* where an impending event looms upon the horizon from the onset of a film that doesn't culminate until late in the film.

An example of a delay within a single scene would be in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) after Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) and Vincent (John Travolta) execute Brett (Frank Whaley). We are shown the scene again from the point of view of a fourth man (Alexis Arquette) inside a bathroom with a gigantic revolver, listening in nervously as Jules recites Ezekiel 25:17. As we are introduced to this character we are immediately taken away from his point of view, going back into the main room with Jules, Vincent and Brett; although this time the audience is *aware* of the fourth man in the bathroom. Once the execution happens, the audience knows that loaded revolver is still waiting, but still the gunshots are delayed. Finally, right when Jules and Vincent least expect it, the fourth man bursts out and empties his rounds at Jules and Vincent who, miraculously (or coincidentally), remain unharmed. This delay, however brief, is an example of audience expectation and audience awareness being used to exploit suspense by delaying an expected action from occurring *just* long enough to make the audience alert and engaged in the scene.

Sometimes delay is used to build suspense over the course of an entire film. In the case of *Zulu* (1964), an impending battle between the British Military and the Zulu Nation accumulates slowly and methodically so that each passing minute has the weight of hours on the audience's expectations. The threat of the battle itself propels much of the conflict between Lieutenant John Chard (Stanley Baker) and Lieutenant Gonville Bromhead (Michael Caine), further increasing tension because of their different approach to what will be coming. When finally the battle begins, it is like the bursting of a dam; yet the true success of the film is forcing the audience to endure the suspense of what it feels like before hell breaks loose.

Descending Action

Descending Action, describes the falling tension in a film after the climax peaks at the end of the second act, thus beginning the new tension of the third act. If the main culmination describes the protagonist's highest achievement or darkest hour of despair, then the descending action describes the protagonist's fall from grace or re-emergence, and ultimately is what propels the protagonist to the final conclusion of a film.

DESCENDING ACTION (CONT'D)

EXAMPLES:

The main culmination in *Gangs of New York* (2002), Amsterdam Vallon (Leonardo DiCaprio) fails in his attempt to assassinate Bill "The Butcher" Cutting (Daniel Day-Lewis). His punishment for the attempt is public humiliation at The Butcher's own hand and permanent facial scarification. This closes the main action of the film–Amsterdam's attempt to revenge his Father's murder by assassinating Bill. However, it also propels a new action for the third act: to rebuild the long-exiled gang of The Dead Rabbits to challenge Bill's rival gang publicly in all-out war. The descending action of the film details how Amsterdam uses his main culmination failure as motivation to move his desire to revenge his Father's death in a new direction.

The entire story of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) is propelled by the characters' journey to find Private Ryan (Matt Damon) amid the chaos of a war-ravaged European landscape. When the main culmination of the film is finally achieved and the search party finally manages to locate Private Ryan, he is determined to stay with his unit to protect a pivotal bridge in the effort to stop a German Military advance. This effectively ends the main tension of the film, but begins a new tension when the search party decides to stay and assist in the protection of the bridge against an oncoming German attack to claim it. The ensuing battle that takes place between the unified American units and the German battalion fuels the descending action of the film, and leads the audience to the ultimate conclusion of the film.

Details

Details describe the specific, individual features of a scene and, ultimately, of a film. It's important for a writer to find specific and interesting details about a story to bring to the readers attention in order to successfully immerse the reader into the world of the story. Impressive, captivating details about character or locations can often be the catalyst for the reader's captivation with the story. Though finding a few details to fully flesh out the reality of the story, it is important to remember that less is more; as bombarding the reader with every specific detail can quickly become overwhelming and distract the reader from more fundamentally important aspects of the script.

EXAMPLES:

Specific details can give the audience insight into character or locations without forcing expositional babel into dialogue. This allows the audience to put together pieces of information they absorb *visually* to reach specific conclusions about the story, without feeling as if the same information is being forced upon them. This allows the audience a sense of satisfaction while actively engaging them within the world of the film.

Details can say a lot about character. In *Cape Fear* (1991), the tattoo's that cover Max Cady's (Robert De Niro) body instantly communicate Cady's obsession with The Bible and justice–even if it's clear that Cady's perspective on both are askew to the point of perversion. For instance, Cady's full-back tattoo is of a wooden cross: nailed onto each arm of the cross are two scales; one that weighs a Bible, another that weighs a knife. Beneath the bible reads "TRUTH"; and beneath the knife reads "JUSTICE". This tattoo is the very first physical feature we see of Cady's, and tells the audience everything they need to know about him without Cady saying a single word. This is an example of how powerful specific details about a character can be in subtly informing the audience.

Details can also say a lot about a film's locale. In the case of *The Shining* (1980), location has a massive, direct influence on the behavior of the characters; specifically the character of Jack Torrence (Jack Nicholson). The Overlook Hotel is wide, spacious and desolate–yet the irony is that amid all that vast space the characters are still capable of feeling cramped and claustrophobic. Every nuance of the hotel looms over the heads of the characters; while each detail defines specific, threatening characteristics about the hotel itself that make it nearly as menacing as the character of Jack Torrence himself. Here, we see how details can inform a location, which in turn has a huge effect upon the characters of a film and their behaviors.

Directing on the Page

Directing on the Page, refers to the writer ascribing specific directorial instructions within the script. It often takes the form of suggesting camera positions such as ZOOM, PAN, ANGLE-ON, CLOSE UP, etc. though sometimes directing on the page can occur as parenthetical suggestions of dialogue delivery; prompting the actor to deliver any given line in a particular way. The impulse to include these directions stems from the writer wanting to be clear, though can sometimes come off as domineering. Directing on the page can

DIRECTING ON THE PAGE (CONT'D)

sometimes have the undesirable effect of the writer's will being imposed upon the reader, and may alienate potential directors who see the scene or characters evolving in a slightly different way than the writer did. Because of this, it is beneficial to keep page directions to an absolute minimum, if used at all.

EXAMPLES:

Sometimes directing on the page occurs when the writer *is* the director, as in the case with *The Godfather* (1972), who's director, Francis Ford Coppola, co-wrote the screenplay with the source-material's novelist, Mario Puzo. Because it was a script that Coppola himself would go on to direct, his modest use of page direction can be justified, and usually only takes the form of implying frame composition and camera movement. As a writer/director, adding these notes can be beneficial during the writing process in order to remember specific visual ideas the director had while he/she was writing the script, ensuring that these ideas can be applied on set later; though they are not rules that the director is in any way required to obey. Having written the script, the director has the option to take his own advice, or not, depending on the production.

This is also the case with Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003). As writer/director, Tarantino has carte blanche authority in the content of his screenplays; deciding when, and how, to use page direction to dictate specific ideas, camera movements, and tonality for the reader. Upon the very opening of the film, Tarantino imposes his visual style upon the reader's imagination, explaining that the sequence in question is shot in black and white–is, in fact, *so* black and white that The Bride's blood appears black in contrast to her skin. Tarantino also goes to great lengths describing the sort of man Bill is; comparing him to conquers of the past, and poetically pointing out that in today's society, such men are regarded as 'corrupters'. This is atypical character description, but Tarantino allows himself this indulgent insight, since Bill will be a mysteriously absent figure that is a heavy motivation for The Bride character throughout not only the duration of this film, but throughout the duration of it's sequel, *Kill Bill: Vol. 2* (2004) as well.

The King of Comedy (1983) is another example of directing on the page, though differs from *The Godfather* and *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* in that *The King of Comedy* wasn't written by the films director, Martin Scorsese. The scripts writer, Paul D. Zimmerman, takes great care in describing the nuanced subtleties in how specific bits of dialogue should be delivered by the actors. It isn't hard to understand why

the writer felt it necessary to do so, as *The King of Comedy* is a peculiar sort of comedic film; neither slapstick or especially dark, it's a situational comedy that exploits what makes the film's protagonist, Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro), so embarrassing and unashamedly pathetic; the humor comes from how uncomfortable we are while watching Rupert Pupkin's subtle behaviors. Since the film's breed of comedy is so nuanced, the delivery of the comedy needs to be clearly articulated to the director and the performers. The writer does this by adding parenthetical cues for the actor to adhere to when delivering dialogue.

DISSOLVE TO:

DISSOLVE TO:, is a transition between scenes or shots where two images overlap one another, appearing on the screen at the same time. This effect connects the two images in varying ways. If the overlapping images are locations, then the locations become linked in some pivotal way. If the overlapping images are characters, then the characters are somehow connected. The same can be said if the overlapping images are two objects, or combinations of locations, characters or objects. In addition to being an aesthetic choice for the writer and/or editor to employ, dissolves can also visually telegraph specific key bits of information to the audience; overlapping a character's image over an object can communicate a connection between the two for the audience, without being told there's a connection. This can make a dissolve effect a powerful tool for efficient storytelling when properly applied.

EXAMPLES:

The first four minutes of *Apocalypse Now* (1978) play out like a long dissolve montage. Rather than transitioning one shot to another by using cuts, the sequence is edited together using a series of progressive dissolves that show combinations of images transposed together, including character (Captain Willard (Martin Sheen)), objects (helicopters, photographs, bottles, cigarettes, dossiers), and locations (burning Vietnamese landscapes, the deep jungle, Willard's hotel room). This dissolve sequence shows us these images in succession and allows the audience to enter a state of mind similar to that of Willard himself. The psychological and emotional effect the dissolves lull the audience into isn't fully realized until Coppola makes the film's first traditional cut: a close-up shot of Willard's face, to the ceiling fan spinning above his bed. This cut shocks the audience out of their dream-like state, and ignites the story's beginning.

DISSOLVE TO: (CONT'D)

The audience is shown a blizzard-washed, horizonless void. In fact, the white abyss we are shown is so endless that it isn't immediately apparent that it is a location–perhaps we are seeing just a plain white title card upon which the names of the film's actors are written. However, the outline of a small, fluttering bird emerges out of the torrential snowstorm; and not without an air of grace and beauty. The image of this slight bird then dissolves over a wide shot of an empty, snow-paved highway, with two oncoming headlights approaching in the distance. The two images remain on the screen together at the same time until the bird disappears. Finally, the car fills the camera's frame as it passes–and we are shown the films title: *Fargo* (1996). Here, the use of the dissolve shows how two separate images can create a psychological and an emotional feeling within the audience, all without having introduced a single character or before a single word of dialogue is spoken.

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic Irony is articulating the opposite of what would normally be expected; be it either within a character's dialogue (verbal irony), or within a scenario (situational irony). When irony is placed within the framework of a structured story, it is referred to as dramatic irony. It occurs when the writer puts forward information for the audience that one or more characters in the film are unaware of, creating a sense of urgency and suspense on the audience's behalf–knowing what's coming while being powerless to avert it. Dramatic irony also occurs when the opposite of an expected outcome is achieved, thus surprising the audience. Usually, a degree of poetic justice is involved; the unexpected outcome is sometimes injected with a degree of satire for the audience's benefit.

EXAMPLES:

In *Titus* (1999), the titular character Titus Andronicus (Anthony Hopkins) begins to extract revenge upon Tamora, Queen of the Goths (Jessica Lange) by starting with her two sons Chiron (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) and Demetrius (Matthew Rhys), who Tamora had ordered to rape and mutilate Titus' daughter Lavinia (Laura Fraser). Titus explains how Chiron and Demetrius' deaths are only the first step in his ultimate revenge against Tamora by telling them outright,

> *'I will grind your bones to dust, and with your blood and it I'll make a paste, and of the paste a coffin I will rear, and make two pasties of your shameful heads, and bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam, like to the earth, swallower her own increase,'*

This is only another way of saying that Titus will bake the brothers into a pie and feed the pie to their mother. The dramatic irony isn't lost on the audience when Titus begins to slice and serve offspring-pie to Tamora, who eats it; oblivious to its ingredients. When finally she is told it's contents, Tamora is promptly murdered by Titus–who then of course is murdered by the Emperor, Saturninus (Alan Cumming), who is, in turn, murdered by Lucius (Angus Macfadyen); resulting in a torrential blood-bath that only Shakespeare could have crafted.

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003); the final film among a trilogy chronicling the mirroring quests of Aragorn (Viggo Mortenson), the lost King of Middle Earth who must overcome the swelling armies of The Dark Lord Sauron, and Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood), a humble Hobbit entrusted with the task of destroying a powerful ring that possesses most of Sauron's power. The ongoing catharsis of the trilogy is whether or not small, meager, innocent Frodo would be capable of withstanding the formidable, evil power of the ring long enough to endure the darkness of the land of Mordor, secretly enter the heart of the land without being discovered by the millions of evil creatures that inhabit it, and stave off the rings ability to corrupt it's keeper long enough to willfully destroy it forever. Yet, ironically, it's Frodo's size, humility and innocence that actually enable Frodo to succeed–turning these supposed 'flaws' into the virtues that make the rings destruction possible. This is *dramatic irony* at work; how the audience is led to expect one result based off of logic and reason, only to be treated with an unexpected alternative.

Dramaturgy

Dramaturgy, is the theory and practice of dramatic composition; the philosophy of storytelling. Dramaturgy involves the analysis, understanding, and communication of each element of drama to heighten the audience's overall enjoyment of a story. This process of storytelling initially begins with the storytellers impetus to tell a story, or an event that inspired the story. From there, it is structured into a tale that will be interesting and entertaining for an audience, which becomes the way in which a story is told. Dramaturgy is a practice and a craft, separate but equal to writing and directing. Though

DRAMTURGY (CONT'D)

dramaturgy is different from writing or directing, none of these are mutually exclusive of one another; it simply means that a good writer needs to have an intimate understanding of dramaturgy, just as a director should. The more you understand drama, and how it effects an audience, the better writer you will become.

EXAMPLES:

Syd Field, writer of *Screenplay*–one of the prototypical books on the craft of writing film scripts– was arguably the first to consolidate storytelling into what is now commonly acknowledged as the *three act structure* in regards to film. The three act structure focuses on a protagonist encountering a number of *plot points* that change or alter the course of the story as the character progresses toward their goal or objective. Although storytelling has done this naturally for thousands of years, Syd Field was among the first in Hollywood to acknowledge the structure as a means to tell literally *any* conceivable story in the form of a screenplay. His methods have since become a tried-and-true technique that satisfies the creative desires of the writer while also supplying the audience with the essential elements of drama and entertainment that they came for.

Robert McKee is one of the most renowned speakers on the craft of screenwriting in the world. The title of his book says it all: *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* which is, in essence, an analysis of the dramatic structure behind all storytelling; an examination of *dramaturgy*. McKee's focus isn't on *plot* or *dialogue*, but rather, with the overall narrative conceit of a script, and how to improve its resonance with the audience. McKee is so respected in the field that he is personified in the film *Adaptation* (2002), by actor Brian Cox , who encourages *Adaptation*'s writer, Charlie Kaufman (played by Nicolas Cage) on how to successfully adapt a book about flowers.

Empathy

Empathy, is the audience's ability to relate, understand and identify with the experiences and attitudes of any character in a film or script. If the audience doesn't care about the characters or, more importantly, if the audience isn't emotionally invested in seeing the hero live, die, win or lose, then the work is a failure. The audience watches to a film to vicariously experience life through the

compelling, nuanced personalities of its characters and how those characters behave when they have a clearly defined goal or objective that they are struggling to achieve despite whatever opposition tries to deny it to them. If a scripts characters don't provoke an emotional response from the audience and inspire them to continue watching to the end of the film, then the audience will quickly lose interest. However, if the writer creates dynamic characters within a provocative story, the audience will be captivated and incapable of looking away.

EXAMPLES:

Building *empathy* between characters and the audience hinges upon the writers ability to recognize *who* the film's audience is, and create characters that mirror the audience's world views, making the films characters relatable. Because of this, characters in film tend to reflect the feelings and attitudes that are popular of the times in which the film was made and/or script was written.

We are told that *Forrest Gump* (1994), played by Tom Hanks, is "stupid", yet Forrest never *does* anything stupid. Forrest's never-give-up personality, combined with his uncanny ability to be at the exact right place at the exact right time, makes it possible for the audience to observe Forrest meet three presidents, fight in one major war, become a professional international ping pong athlete, grace the covers of multiple syndicated magazines, become a multi-million dollar businessman, meet multiple famous and influential celebrities, all while making friends and falling in love along the way. The total sum of Forrest's life events symbolize a torrential and pivotal time in American history–ranging from the 1950's all the way up to the film's present day (1990's). We re-experience the highs and lows of almost 40 years over the course of a two hour movie, all through the eyes of a supposedly "stupid" man who has blown like a feather upon a gust of wind through an amazingly eventful life. This makes Forrest one of the most memorable characters in modern film, and allows the audience to easily empathize with his humorous and insightful wanderings.

In *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Clarice Starling is a smart, dedicated and brave student, training to become an FBI detective. She's also an exceptional student of the behavioral and psychological tendencies of serial killers. Yet, despite all of these things, she's still warm and feeling. In contrast, Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn), an FBI veteran who takes Starling on as a sort of apprentice, is also smart, dedicated and resilient–though his personality cold and stony. Starling's combined characteristics are what make her so endearing for audiences to follow upon her journey into the psyche of Dr. Hannibal 'The Cannibal' Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), and into the crazed, depraved murders committed by

EMPATHY (CONT'D)

"Buffalo Bill" (Ted Levine), the serial killer who is known for skinning his accumulating female victims. Despite the horrors of Bill's murders, and the intensity of Hannibal Lecter's questioning, the audience is comfortable in Clarice's company; we empathize with her vulnerabilities in a male-dominated world that seeks to objectify women, as well as understand her hopes to overcome her troubled past.

Environment

Environment is any setting in which the writer places the characters. The environment is usually in some way symbolic of either the films characters, the conflict the characters must overcome, or of the films themes. Environment also establishes context for the action of an event. If the event is a bank robbery, describing whether or not the bank is open for business or closed for the night would necessitate two very different types of bank robbery. Since environment is so essential to the action of the story, it dictates the characters behaviors, their actions and ultimately the course of the film itself.

EXAMPLES:

In the case of *Moon* (2009), the title of the film *is* the surrounding environment. Astronaut Sam Bell (Sam Rockwell) has been working on a moon base for three years, busily collecting Helium-3 and shipping it to earth where it is used to solve the planet's increasing energy crisis. However, Sam–who has only himself and GERTY (Kevin Spacey) an A.I. robot, for company–is plagued with stifling loneliness and home-sickness, in particular a deep longing for his wife Tess (Dominique McElligott) and their newborn baby girl back home. These themes make the moon not only Sam's place of residence and employment, but also symbolically represents Sam's suffocating loneliness: barren, empty, and cold. Throughout the course of the film, we also come to find that the moon serves as a stark, chalky backdrop for a unique psychological mystery that unfolds when we come to learn that even if the moon is Sam's prison, something else is Sam's prisoner.

The Evil Dead (1981), a horror-hybrid that mashes together demonic possessions, zombies and a haunted-house premise, and follows the exploits of five friends who vacation to a wood cabin deep into a mountain wilderness. Though at first the cabin seems ordinary, it soon becomes the location of a full-scale

confrontation between Ash (Bruce Campbell) and a veritable legion of hellish demons who have come to possess the living bodies of his friends and girlfriend. The cabin, and the vast, dark forest outside it, becomes Ash's environment– beyond it's walls, Ash faces certain death; though the relative safety inside it leaves him locked in with the reanimated corpses of the Evil Dead. Experience

Experience

Experience, refers to the writer 'writing what they know'; drawing from their individual experiences to inform the storythey are writing, and to gain insight into the emotional pitch of the characters who exist within the story. The writer's personal knowledge of people in their own lives will help influence the behaviors and idiosyncrasies of the characters they create, adding to their depth and believability. This will also help the audience empathize and relate to your characters and the story, if they are genuine and are based upon real-life. The audience can immediately recognize this and respond with empathy, especially if the characters reflect shades of the audience's own personality, remind them of someone they know themselves, or are embroiled in a situation that they can personally relate to.

EXAMPLES:

There are plenty of examples of characters who are inspired by real people in real events, just as there are instances of entire films being inspired by an event that occurred to a writer in real-life. It should be mentioned that, because life does not always follow the structural integrity of a three-act format, some aspects of the writer's life, when written for the screen, become embellished. Thus, whenever a film is 'based on a true story', this fact should be taken grain of salt. However, it cannot be argued that, when done correctly, semi-autobiographical films can still be among the most powerful movies audiences have ever seen.

Frederico Fellini had made 6 feature-length films, two short (½) films, and another 'half-picture' (his first, co-directed with Alberto Lattuada) for a total of 7 ½ films. Then came his film titled *8 ½* (1963); a movie about the often-stifling art of filmmaking, in addition to the mentally taxing process of coming up with the idea for a film when fame and popularity magnifies your every decision. As famous director Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni) is asked by his friends and confidants to come up with a new idea for a film, he probes deeper and deeper into his personal memories of past events in his life searching for an idea.

EXPERIENCE (CONT'D)

These include his memories surrounding the many women he has loved in his life, their ranging personalities, and the varying natures of his relationship with them. *8 ½* is an introspective, personal film from a master filmmaker; an examination into what goes into any creative work of art, and the personal histories and memories of the man who makes it.

Almost Famous (2000) is told from the perspective of William Miller (Patrick Fugit), a 15 year old high-school student who, amazingly, is hired by Rolling Stone magazine to write a featured article covering Stillwater; an up-and-coming rock band that is quickly gaining fame and notoriety. The concept sounds amazing; but what's more amazing is that it is based upon a true story–and more amazing *still* is that it's a true story that happened to the films writer and director, Cameron Crowe. Though the band Stillwater is fictitious, it is supposedly based off a well-known classic rock band of the time that Crowe toured with while writing his article for Rolling Stone. There are many details in the film surrounding what it's like to be a touring rock band in the 70's that could have only been informed by some level of personal experience, and in *Almost Famous*'s case, the film's writer and director was there with the specific intention of writing, and capturing the moment. This injects a degree of reality into the film that fascinates audiences and keeps them compelled throughout the entirety of the film; making *Almost Famous* a viable and unique movie experience that will endure for years to come, if for no other reason than because of its focused authenticity.

Exposition

Exposition, is the manner in which this backstory is revealed to the audience, and how this information is made relevant to the film's plot. Exposition is always important for an audience to know as it provides context for the characters and their obstacles, while also providing more depth and believability to the overall feel of the film. Yet, even though exposition is important, it's equally important for the writer to take care in how exposition is presented to the audience. Exposition can easily feel forced and artificial, and is always at its best when its revelation is sparked by the natural behaviors fo the characters based on their immediate circumstances.

EXAMPLES:

Few films have more exposition than The Lord of the Rings trilogy; in particular, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) (the extended edition). The first seven and a half minutes are narrated exposition from the character Galadriel (Cate Blanchett) about the history of Middle-Earth, and the backstory of Sauron's and the One Ring. Then, we move on to Bilbo Baggins' (Ian Holm) narration, 'concerning Hobbits', which gives exposition on what, and who, Hobbits are. This goes on for another three minutes. And although the story begins to pick up at this point, the rest of the film is still packed full of exposition at certain key points in the story, mostly falling upon the shoulders of Gandalf (Ian McKellan) and Elrond (Hugo Weaving) to deliver. This is done once more in the exact middle of the film during the "Council of Elrond" segment; a scene that lasts another seven minutes. Why so much exposition? The fact that this film sets up two sequels is one answer. Another is that the film is based off a series of novels beloved by fans who were expecting certain key bits of information to be included. But the true wonder of the film is the writers and the filmmakers ability to get all of this exposition out to the audience with relative ease and efficiency. Otherwise, audiences would have walked out within minutes of the opening frame, and possibly could have doomed the entire franchise.

The Great Gatsby (1974) is another film based off a very popular book, and investigates the tale of Nick Carraway (Sam Waterson) who falls into an acquaintance with the mystifying figure of Jay Gatsby (Robert Redford). As Nick and Jay get to know each other, some of Jay's backstory is slowly revealed, as his fascinating past with Daisy Buchanan (Mia Farrow), a married woman who Gatsby attempts to win back, is imparted to Nick and the audience. It's the writers prerogative to feed the audience this information at key moments to fuel our interest in the characters, and allow the audience to become adequately invested in the films plot. The trick is to give exposition in a way that the audience can believe and intensify their immersion into the story without distracting them.

EXT.

EXT., an abbreviation of 'exterior', is a description written at the beginning of a slug line that alerts the reader that the activity of any given scene in a script will take place outside, as opposed to whenever INT. is written at the beginning of a slug line, which signifies a scene will take place upon the interior of a location.

EXT. (CONT'D)

When a continuous scene follows the action from an INT. location to an EXT. one, or vice-versa, the slug line will alert the reader that the scene will be I./E., or E./I..

EXAMPLES:

Toward the end of *Into The Wild* (2007), Christopher McCandless (Emile Hirsch) stands on the *exterior* (*EXT.*) of the bus he has transformed into his place of residence amid the wilderness of Alaska, emaciated to the point of his rib cage jutting shockingly from his skin, clearly starving to death. There is a moment when he is encountered by a large, meandering bear as it scours for nourishment. Though the bear is foraging for food, he barely considers Christopher as a source of nutrition, naturally estimating Christopher's physical health and condition at that moment considering how close to death Christopher is in that moment. Thematically, much of *Into The Wild* is about mans relationship with nature in tandem with mans relationship with himself; and thus, many scenes in this film take place outside, or in exterior locations.

JAWS (1975) is another good example of a film that deals with man's struggle against nature– in this case, nature takes the form of a freakishly large, and very hungry, great white shark that lurks about the shore of a sleepy New England town, eating everything (and everyone) that happens to cross its path. The writer introduces us to the shark in the very first segment of the film that showcases two lovers playfully chasing each other down the length of a moonlit beach. The man quickly becomes exhausted and rests on the sand as the girl swims out into the current, only to have a deadly encounter with the shark. Since this all happens at the beach, obviously the entire scene takes place outside; thus, *EXT.* is written in the scenes slug line to alert the audience where all of the action will take place.

FADE TO:

FADE TO:, is written when a script refers to an editing technique that transitions one scene to the next. In the case of the FADE OUT, it is typical for the image on the screen to literally fade from the audience's view to a solid black background (though it can be white, or another color). Adversely, a FADE IN direction suggests that an image on the screen should fade from a view of solid black background to whatever image comprises the next scene's first shot.

EXAMPLES:

The very first shot of *The Green Mile* (1999) is a slow *FADE IN* from black to an open meadow. Men with guns and pitch-forks walk in slow-motion from the right side of the screen to the left, searching. For who or for what? We don't yet know. But the *FADE IN* is a classic way a writer, director and/or editor can choose to bring the audience into the world of the narrative, or to segue between different emotional beats of a film, which would typically occur between act breaks. The use of the *FADE IN* here, and the effect it has on the audience, is made especially poignant when, less than a minute and half later, the film *CUTS TO* an extreme close up of Old Paul Edgecomb (Dabbs Greer); which, in contrast to the slow-motion *FADE IN* from before, is a startling introduction to the nursing home Paul lives in years after the scene which takes place in the ripe meadow is deeply buried in the past.

In very much the same fashion, a *FADE OUT* can be used as an aesthetically gratifying way to end and give closure to a film. Throughout the entirety of *THX1138* (1971), the titular character (Robert Duvall) is trying to escape the confines of the dystopian society he is trapped within. When finally he does manage to escape, he emerges upon the planet's surface in time to witness the climactic setting of the sun; a gargantuan event that dominates a large portion of the screens composition, enough to dwarf THX1138's minuscule figure in comparison. He and the audience watch the sun set together while the credits roll. Not only does the shot itself dramatically reflect the emotional pitch of the film's ending, but the transitional effect of *FADING OUT* when the credits have reached their conclusion is also an example of popular symbolism: as the sun sets, darkness descends, and another day has come and gone amid the infinite passing of all time. *FADE OUT*.

Failure

*Every character in a film needs goals to motivate their continuous effort to confront and overcome their obstacle; the characters needs are what creates drama and thus, makes audiences want to see if the character ultimately succeeds or fails. If there's no risk of **failure**, there will be no tension, so the writer must tread a fine line with the audience, keeping them constantly guessing as to whether or not the film's protagonist will achieve their desired outcome or not. Whether the character wins or loses in the end is a decision that falls upon the writer, who must consider who his character is, understand the full weight*

FAILURE (CONT'D)

and context of the story they exist within, compare their protagonist against the antagonist and/or obstacle, and consider the implications of the desired outcome and how the audience will respond, before deciding whether or not the character will fail. If the character loses at the end, why? And what does the loss imply for the audience?

EXAMPLES:

In the case of *JFK* (1991), New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner) takes Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones) to court, accusing him of conspiring in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The film is based on real-life events (with varying degrees of truth, controversially), and ultimately, Garrison lost that case. So here, the film *JFK* follows Garrison on his quest to seek justice for President Kennedy, before he fails in his attempt. However, the journey towards seeking that justice is what draws the audience to continue watching–to see if Garrison succeeds or fails. Even though Clay Shaw was found not guilty, there is still an element of victory for Garrison, albeit faint; even if injustice often goes unpunished, the pursuit of justice is still its own reward and is sometimes mankind's only weapon against darkness and despair.

While *JFK* is a film based on a true story of a character who ultimately fails to achieve their goal, *Broken Flowers* (2005) is a film that was created within the imagination of the writer. The film follows Don Johnston (Bill Murray) as he seeks to uncover the identity of a woman who wrote him an anonymous letter that informs him that he has a son. Johnston begins an investigation into his own past with the intention of finding which woman wrote him the letter, and to learn the identity of his estranged son. We follow Don for 106 minutes, leading us to the very last shot of the film that shows Don standing at a literal crossroad, searching for a runaway young man who Don thinks could possibly be his son; though our last image of Don is of him standing alone. His questions about the identity of his hypothetical son's mother go unanswered; yet Don's questions about himself, his past, and the implications surrounding his choices as a younger man rise to the surface with each woman Don reconnects with. Though Don's quest is a failure, the audience is left to wonder if Don doesn't indeed have enough supplemental information from the experience he undertook to lead him toward eventual fulfilment, after the credits roll.

Fantasy Characters

Fantasy Characters, allude to the characters who populate fantasy films, or fantastical hallucinations in non-fantasy films. Fantasy characters can still exhibit all other character traits; they have character arcs, attitudes, exhibit change and have an essential core, and in some cases these characters can even be anthropomorphic in nature. However, when dealing with fantasy, there comes a certain expectation for the characters of this caliber to have a fantastical essence to them; a magical element that qualifies them to be in a fantasy film. There are many ways a writer can choose to do this, as 'fantasy' comes with it an invitation to let the imagination run wild.

EXAMPLES:

Once Sarah (Jennifer Connelly)_enters the world of the *Labyrinth* (1986), absolutely every character she encounters on her quest to rescue her baby brother Toby (Toby Froud) is entirely fantastical. There's the ethically conflicted dwarf Hoggle (Shari Weiser/Brian Henson), the loveable Ludo (Rom Mueck/Rob Mills) and even the mystical Goblin King Jareth (David Bowie) himself. Because of the nature of the Labyrinth, Sarah is the proverbial Alice in Wonderland; in way over her head and trying as hard as she can just to keep up with the unbelievable world that surrounds her.

Spirited Away (2001) is a film that transcends the limitations of live-action and allows fantasy the limitless possibilities of expression through animation. The film falls into the category of fairy tale as Chihiro (Rumi Hiiragi) and her family are swept into the magical realm of ghosts and demons, where Chihiro's parents are transformed into beastly, gluttonous pigs before her eyes. In order to save them, Chihiro is recruited to work in the ghost's world as a bath house attendant, where she slowly gains the esteem of her colleagues and puts her into a position to save herself, her parents, and also the life of a mysterious boy named Haku (Miyu Irino). The film itself is a spectacular example of how powerful imagination can be–each character we encounter is more amazing than the last, and as we're introduced to them, we feel more than a little like Chihiro ourselves; overwhelmed by the flood of fantasy that *Spirited Away* provides us.

Fear

Fear is a huge motivating emotion for both the film's protagonist and for the audience as well, especially if it's a matter of life or death. Fear signifies that a character is concerned for their own well being in any given situation and, if the writer does their job, the audience will be concerned for the character's best interests as well. The character's fear can be directed toward an obstacle that seeks to do the protagonist physical, mental, or emotional harm; if not all three. Because the audience empathizes with the protagonist, harm done onto the characters is harm done onto the audience. Fear motivates a character to escape the plight which will cause them harm. It's the writers job to chart the lengths to which a character will go to escape what they are afraid of–which is always sure to be an incredible journey, as you will never know how far someone will go when properly motivated by their fears.

EXAMPLES:

28 Days Later (2002) wakes us up in a hospital bed. We are introduced to Jim (Cillian Murphy), who wakes up from a coma in this hospital, only to find it utterly desolate; not one doctor, nurse, or patient in sight. This wandering sequence shifts from surreal to disturbing as Jim emerges from the hospital to find that all of London is as empty and abandoned as the hospital. He wanders highways, overpasses, bridges and streets as if he were strolling in a vacant park. No one. Yet, if this slow and steady realization of abandonment isn't chilling enough, when finally we encounter another "living" soul, we find them to be a crazed half-dead man who single-mindedly desires only to viciously attack anything and anyone. Jim must then hurriedly try to escape every infected carrier of this 'rage disease' he encounters throughout the movie–even if they were people who he had come to be friends with. Jim's fear of being horrifically murdered by zombie-equivalents motivates his desire of self-preservation, for himself and his loved ones. Jim's fear motivates our fear, thus making *28 Days Later* an unforgettable horror film.

Not all examples of fear in film need to be of the horrific variety. In the comedy *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), Everett Ulysses McGill (George Clooney), Pete Hogwallop (John Tuturro) and Delmar O'Donnell (Tim Blake Nelson) have just come to the final stage of their long journey together, alive and well in addition to being pardoned of all their previous wrong-doings and missteps with the law. Yet, ironically–despite being pardoned by the Governor of Mississippi, Pappy O'Daniel (Charles Durning), himself– Sheriff Cooley (Daniel von

Bargen), the man who has tried to bring the three heroes to justice throughout the whole film, is the last to hear about it. The Sheriff finally catches up to them with graves already dug and nooses already tied and ready to hang. In this moment, the reality of the three boys' fate slowly descends upon their conscience, and ours. We realize that, despite all the trials and tribulations, our heroes face death now more urgently than ever, *just* when things were starting to look up. When the heroes fear for their lives, so do we; thus raising the stakes and increasing the audience's immersion in the moment.

Fidelian Sequence

Fidelian Sequence, is a term coined by Syd Field, author of Screenplay, which refers to a series of scenes which are "connected by one single idea, with a definite beginning and end." This suggests that each segment of a script, independent of the whole of the screenplay, needs to have its own separate beginning, middle, and end–or it's own three-act structure. This way of examining scenes and sequences, which–together, comprise the entirety of a film– is a way to ensure that each and every scene tells a complete story; independently revealing new things about your character, story and plot so that a film builds upon itself with the addition of each new scene. A Fidelian Sequence suggests that any particular segment of a film could be a short film in and of itself, separate from the rest of the movie, and be dramatically satisfying for an audience.

EXAMPLES:

We open on a man shaving himself with a straight-edge razor, before he intentionally cuts his cheek and hands the bloodied blade of the razor to a small boy who attempts to wipe the blood away, though he I stopped before he can. The Father tells the boy to never wipe the blood clean. Father and Son discuss a medallion the boy wears that bears the image of Saint Michael the Archangel, and how he expelled Satan from Paradise. With that, we are led through a labyrinthine underground tunnel that introduces us to many dirty, old-world faces. They are busy preparing for something, arming themselves, girding their loins, making ready for battle. The Father leads his Son through the tunnels until they stand at a door. The Father is stopped by a man who is recruited to fight upon the behalf of this amassing army for a sum of money; ten dollars 'per notch'. After this, the gang ventures out into the cold winter street where they

FIDELIAN SEQUENCE (CONT'D)

encounter a rival gang and their one-eyed leader. The rules of the battle are intoned aloud for all to hear before war is officially waged. The battle is brutal and bloody without a clear winner; that is until the Father falls under the knife of his one-eyed rival, bringing the battle to an end. The Son runs to his Father's fallen body, where he will stay until he is forcibly pulled away. The one-eyed man spares the boy, who tears himself free and runs back down into the tunnels from which he and his Father had emerged from. He buries the straight razor that bares his Father's blood before he is found and taken to an orphanage. This is the Five Points section of New York City, 1846; this is the opening sequence of *Gangs of New York* (2002), a sequence that, by itself, could be viewed as a short film, and qualifies as a *Fidelian Sequence* by having a clearly defined beginning, middle and end.

The camera flies through the morning sky of New York City toward an open penthouse window. We enter the home of a young man, asleep in bed; his alarm clock repeats the soft, encouraging voice of a woman who tells the man, "open your eyes." He does, and begins his day. He gets in his car and begins his drive through alarmingly void New York streets until he arrives at Times Square; the one place in the world that is guaranteed to be perpetually busy, especially on an early morning weekday. Yet, the man finds the epicenter of New York City barren. The lights are on, the gigantic television screens that surround him are operating, broadcasting advertisements, NEWS updates and stock quotes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, but he's the only man there to see them. He stops his car, gets out, and begins to walk down the street. His walk turns into a jog. His jog bursts into a frantic sprint. Finally, there is nothing left to do but stand amid the emptiness and scream. He wakes up suddenly to the sound of a woman, different from the first, who recorded her voice on his alarm clock. She tells him to open his eyes. He begins his day. When finally he gets into his car and pulls up to the first stop light, he is encouraged to see that he isn't the only one on the road today–and that it was all just a dream. This is the opening of the film *Vanilla Sky* (2001), and serves as another example of how a series of separate scenes can be added together to tell an entire story with a beginning, middle and end that is separate from the whole film; again, exemplifying the purpose of a *Fidelian Sequence*.

First Culmination

*The **First Culmination** tends to occur around the exact midpoint of a film; thus why the first culmination is sometimes referred to as the midpoint. Its storytelling function is to confront the protagonist with his or her greatest obstacle on their path towards the goal thus far. This moment also is meant to act as a mirror for the film's end; a reflection of things to come. Therefore, if the film's ending is tragic, the first culmination is usually a low-point for the protagonist. Adversely, if the film has a happy ending, the first culmination shows the protagonist gain a personal victory. This allows the Main Culmination to oppose the emotional pitch of the first culmination, giving the audience the 'roller coaster' feel while watching a character's arc and the drama of the film progress.*

EXAMPLES:

In *Chinatown* (1974), J.J. 'Jake' Gittes (Jack Nicholson) is a private investigator with a penchant for divulging the secret affairs of married couples who suddenly and unexpectedly becomes embroiled in a multi-million dollar conspiracy to control Los Angeles' water supply. During Gittes' investigation, the man he was hired to follow, Hollis Mulwray (Darrel Zwerling), is found dead. At this point, Gittes is confronted by two hired thugs while Jake is looking around the Water Department's reservoir for clues into Mulwray's death. Gittes' punishment for 'nosing' around involves a knife, Gittes' nostril, and a warning to stop his snooping around. This is a low-point for Gittes; one that will reflect the ultimate, melancholy tone of *Chinatown*'s ending, and demonstrates Gittes first real encounter with an obstacle that could prevent him from doing his job.

Toy Story (1995) is the tale of two toys vying for the title as their owner's "favorite toy". Woody (Tom Hanks) and Buzz Lightyear (Tim Allen) compete for Andy's (John Morris) attention until they both end up stranded and at risk of never seeing Andy again. The film's midpoint, and *first culmination* occurs when Buzz and Woody fall into the clutches of the insidious Sid (Erik von Detten). Woody and Buzz must now work together if they're going to escape the boy's sadistic compulsion to dismantle and destroy toys. However, Buzz undergoes a character paradox when he witnesses a toy commercial that features an exact replica of him. The reality of his existence falls upon him like a ton of bricks. It falls upon Woody to be the one to inspire Buzz. Woody tells him to take pride in his role and status as a toy–which, for Woody, is a very privileged position. This increases the bond between the two former rivals and motivates them both to find a way to get back to Andy.

Flashback

*B**lashback,** is a method of delivering exposition to the audience by way of transitioning the chronological flow of the narrative to an event that happened to one or more of the characters at some point in the past. It usually takes the form of a character's sudden, vivid memory that imparts vital information for the audience and justifies the interruption of chronological storytelling, though flashbacks can occur within a dream at times. These flashbacks can be used to demonstrate a contrast between what a character was like before an event occurred that changed them, enabling the audience to better understand who the character was before-and-after; especially if the event was traumatic.*

EXAMPLES:

In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), the film begins upon a tempestuous, drug-induced drive through the Nevada desert, en-route to Las Vegas. We are introduced to the characters of Raul Duke (Johnny Depp) and Dr. Gonzo (Benicio Del Toro) in the midst of cocaine-induced, acid-influenced, alcohol-fueled madness that starts the film. It isn't until a few scenes later when the audience is clued in as to how this chaotic 'trip' to Las Vegas came to be via a *flashback* exposition sequence that explains Raul Duke's purpose for being in Las Vegas (to cover a motorcycle derby event as a sports journalist), and how the drugs and the convertible are accumulated.

Memento (2000) is a peculiar example for *flashback* in that it's a film that demonstrates how, instead of using *flashbacks* to tell bits of extra information to the audience, it's possible to tell an entire story using the *flashback* motif. We learn the rules of how this works quickly once the second scene plays out, bringing us to the beginning of the scene we saw *prior* to the second one, and so on and so forth, the backtracking nature of the narrative broken up by the insertion of black and white snippets that, in and of themselves, are the earliest *flashback* of the movie that each scene works back to. In effect, *flashbacks* are what provide the entire structural framework of *Memento* in a way that telegraphs the film's protagonist, Leonard Shelby's (Guy Pierce), condition–and helps the audience empathize with Lenny because we are experiencing the film in a similar way to how he experiences life.

Freeze Frame

Freeze Frame, *is a visual effect which gives the impression that the image upon the screen has stopped moving and is 'frozen' in time. This gives the feeling that, for the characters in the film, time has stopped entirely for a brief moment, as if to give weight to a particular choice or action that is occurring or about to occur. It forces the audience to pause and to really look at the image they're being shown, and give special attention to it in particular.*

EXAMPLES:

Goodfellas (1990) uses the freeze frame technique multiple times at specific key moments in the film, although one of the first instances occurs after young Henry Hill (Christopher Serrone) is just beginning his apprenticeship in the mob world by breaking the windows of parked cars, pouring gasoline inside them and lighting them on fire. He runs away from the cars, only seconds away from exploding. When they do, the picture *freezes frame*; the young man becomes silhouetted by the flames of crime. We look at this image as if it were a photograph, letting it fill our eyes and our imaginations as the older Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) narrates an anecdote about what it means to be a wise-guy. The image of Henry running from flaming cars, an action which he caused, shown alongside Henry's tale, magnifies the moment for the audience, making it an unforgettable entry into a life of crime for both Henry and the audience.

Funny Games (2007) is an aptly titled film; if by 'funny' one means 'unusual' or 'unexpected'; though it would be hard to suggest that the film didn't also have it's own breed of heightened, sick humor, whether you laugh at it or not. Even though the film is about Peter (Brady Corbet) and Paul (Michael Pitt) who undergo the cruel and senseless torture of an uptight, pretentious upper-middle-class family, the film suggests that in actuality it is the audience who is torturing the characters; the logic being that the audience could turn off the film and stop the family's suffering at any time. This doesn't stop the family from fighting back against their aggressors. At one point, Ann (Naomi Watts) yields control over a double-barrel shotgun and puts an end to Peter by shooting him directly in the chest. Though this might seem like a victory for the victims, it actually turns into a sick joke when Paul finds the family's remote control, 'pauses' the movie (*freeze frame*), then 'rewinds' the film to a few moments before the shotgun goes off, all before the audience's eyes. When Ann attempts to grab the shotgun again, Paul is ready. So in *Funny Games'* case, the freeze frame is used as a stylistic storytelling device to drive home the theme of the film; that ultimately, the

FREEZE FRAME (CONT'D)

audience is the one who is in control. Like how Paul can rewind the course of events in the film, the audience is capable of stopping it entirely.

Future

Future, can be a huge motivating factor for the characters in a film. Is the future something the characters fear approaching? Is the future something the characters look forward to with hope? Or is the future unknowable, neither good or bad? Even within the same film, no two characters necessarily feel the same way about the future or where the events of the film are heading. For the writer, and the audience, the answer to these questions depends on the story and on the characters attitude's of the major characters at play.

EXAMPLES:

In *The Terminator* (1984), a technologically superior battle-robot known as *Terminator* (Arnold Schwarzenegger) travels back in time from a dark and distant future world in order to assassinate Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), the woman who will some day give birth to a boy who, in the future, will compromise the totality of the robots' dominance over humans. In the world of *The Terminator*, the future is apocalyptic in its implications–a world run by overbearing machines who, with superior weaponry and highly sophisticated war tactics, keep humanity imprisoned and upon the verge of extinction. Yet, cathartically, Sarah Connor must knowingly bring her son into the same cataclysmic future he may someday hope to salvage. This causes conflict, which fuels the drama for a total of four Terminator films.

The Road (2009) is a film where the future is always heavily weighing upon the consciences of the characters, even if they try their best to avoid or ignore its oncoming threat. A Father (Viggo Mortenson) guides his Son (Kodi Smit-McPhee) through a post-apocalyptic, grayscale world where nothing will grow and civilization is crumbling. As the Father guides his Son, he also tries to prepare the boy for when he will no longer be there for him. The gun the Father carries is an important element that demonstrates the man's view on the future; there are scenes in which he demonstrates for the boy how to kill himself by pulling the trigger, should he ever decide the future is too grim to endure. Yet, in contrast, the Father also instills within the boy a sense of hope; metaphorically referred to as 'carrying the fire', a hushed code-of-ethics that the 'good guys'

adhere to and what keeps them good. Ultimately, the Son is left on his own to decide where to go and what to do with himself without his Father. The question of altruism and trust is put to the boy when he is confronted by a Man (Guy Pearce) who seeks to recruit him into their family. The future is unknowable, but the boy's decision alludes to the hope of mankind's continued survival; even despite the harshest and grimmest of outlooks.

Genre

Genres, are commonly acknowledged categories of movies that come with their own sets of rules concerning their content, the storytelling techniques used, and their aesthetic styles.

EXAMPLES:

Genres have the benefit of having a built-in, confirmed audience following for each specific category. For instance, there are fans who love any and all *Science Fiction* (Sci-Fi) movies, and pride themselves on having a broad and eclectic taste for the genre that comes with multiple viewings and a vast knowledge of the many films that fall under its domain. This means that films written and made within a specific genre tend to be the easiest to market simply by virtue that the genre itself is what motivates audiences to see it, automatically.

Genres also are capable of containing sub-genres, or genres *within* a genre; which allows for further categorizing of specific types of films that still fall under a major genre. In the case of *Horror* films, there are examples of what is known as the B-Movie Horror film (*My Bloody Valentine* (1981), *The Toxic Avenger*(1984), etc.), Demonic Possession (*The Exorcist* (1973), *The Evil Dead* (1981), etc.), Haunted House or Hauntings (*Poltergeist* (1982), *The Shining* (1980), etc.) and so on. This can be applied within the confines of any genre, but in particular with ones that are incredibly popular and have a wide range of possible expressions.

Then there are ways in which a writer can combine two genres to create a sort of hybrid; as in the case of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) which combines *Animation* with *Film Noir* elements to create a totally unique concept film. Likewise with *Cowboys & Aliens* (2011) which, as the title suggests, brings together the *Western* and *Sci-Fi* genres. This allows the audience to enjoy what makes the two genres so popular individually; recognizing the conceits and cliches of one individual genre and seeing how it sparks when combined with the conceits and cliches of the other individual genre.

High Concept

High concept, is a film that can be described quickly and succinctly, but also is a film that has a striking, unique idea that usually takes the form of a "What if?" scenario, as in the case of the concept film. To be considered high concept, a film must also have a wide audience appeal–a situation or circumstance which can be understood on common ground across vast demographics of people.

EXAMPLES:

What if you could clone ancient dinosaurs using fossilized blood samples? Make a zoo! Except when the animals in this zoo break lose, the zoo keepers become the food. *Jurassic Park* (1993) is a film that has a simple premise that everyone can understand equally and has mass-audience appeal. This translates into big money for the studio; as *Jurassic Park* is still one of the highest-grossing films of all time, domestically and internationally, and possibly *the* highest-grossing film of all time within the Sci-Fi genre.

What would happen if you attempted an assassination on an in-flight commercial airplane using poisonous snakes? This is the concept for the infamous film *Snakes on a Plane* (2006). The premise is simple; giving the audience no room for individual interpretation as to what this film could possibly be about. The title says it all: *Snakes* on a *Plane*, guaranteeing the audience that if they buy the ticket, they will see exactly what the title suggests. No misunderstandings and no mistakes.

Hook

Hook, is the first few pages of a script that act as a gripping introduction to the story which preoccupies the audience's imagination and attention so strongly that they are incapable of putting down the script. This makes the screenplay's first scene critically important; it needs to quickly introduce the world of the film, the interesting characters who populate it, and place those characters in an unforgettable situation. When combined, these integral elements of a script's opening scene, or hook, are meant to provoke the mind of the reader strongly enough to ensure that they continue to read a script all the way to the very last page.

EXAMPLES:

After a brief introduction to Yuri Orlov (Nicolas Cage), standing amid the wreckage of a decimated village, we are taken on a ride from the perspective of a single bullet; a journey that will act as the *hook* as well as the credit sequence for *Lord of War* (2005). The bullet is born in a cold, colorless factory, rolling along conveyor belts and assembly lines until it's dropped into a large crate full of thousands of others just like itself. The lid is hammered on and off it goes. The crate is opened a few times; the stern faces of war professional's leer in. Finally, our bullet is brought to bright, sunny Africa where it's loaded into an automatic machine gun that's pointed at a village that isn't noticeably different from the one Yuri Orlov was standing before only moments ago. Finally, the bullet is fired–the camera follows it on it's flight through the air until it finds it's permanent resting place buried inside the brain of a young boy from of the village. This sequence, known as the *life of a bullet* montage, is a provoking and startling *hook* that compels the viewer to keep watching.

Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) opens upon a docile French milk farm in 1941. Though the setting appears quaint and serene, that mood is quickly stifled with the arrival of a Nazi town car that carries Col. Hans "The Jew Hunter" Landa (Christoph Waltz) who is searching for any remaining Jewish families hiding in France. The scene between Landa and the farmer Perrier LaPadite (Denis Menochet) plays out; at first, smoothly, but with ever-increasing tension as it becomes obvious that LaPadite isn't fooling Landa–who knows, almost instinctually, that Lapadite is hiding a Jewish family literally under their feet. Finally, LaPadite breaks down and confesses–leading to the eradication of the Dreyfus family, except for the young girl Shosanna (Melanie Laurent). This scene, 20 minutes long, sets up the dramatic conceit of the film and establishes the cold-blooded charm and candor of "The Jew Hunter" immediately, making this an example of how the *hook* can firmly establish the world of the film, the unforgettable characters who occupy it by demonstrating those characters behaving in a compelling situation that makes the audience want to continue watching.

Hope

***Hope,** is the emotion an audience has toward the film's protagonist when they have a strong feeling of empathy for them and want the protagonist to achieve their desired goal. As the audience watches a beloved protagonist seek their goal,*

HOPE (CONT'D)

the hope that they might succeed is paired with the fear that they might fail, causing tension and suspense on the audience's behalf. This brings the audience to immerse themselves in the emotional waves of the film. If the main character does win in the end, the audience feels elation that their shared hopes with the protagonist have been affirmed. If the main character fails, the audience can feel defeated and introspective. It is up to the writer to decide what tone the film should take and how the audience should feel at its end.

EXAMPLES:

Babe (1995) is a simple story about a pig who does everything in his power to save himself from succumbing to the fate of becoming pork chops including the art of being a sheep dog; though in Babe's (Christine Cavanaugh) case, he would be a sheep *pig*. Even at the onset of the movie, the threat of Babe's destiny to be a side of morning bacon is ongoing–the audience is reminded of this risk at nearly every turn. Yet, as we see the bond between Babe and Farmer Hoggett (James Cromwell) building, the audience's hope that Babe will be spared endures. This hope is constantly tested nearly to its breaking point on multiple occasions; when Babe is blamed for the death of a sheep named Maa (Miriam Flynn) before his name is cleared, goes on a hunger strike until Farmer Hoggett himself cheers Babe up, then finally when encounters a flock of stubborn sheep that refuse to cooperate with Babe when the stakes are at their highest. Despite all of Babe's trials and tribulations, when finally his efforts are rewarded and Babe can be sure that he will be alive for a long time, the audience is overjoyed and relieved, resulting in an overall positive movie experience, regardless of any of our previous fears.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975) questions authority by demonstrating what happens when a truly rebellious spirit in the character of R.P. McMurphy (Jack Nicholson) encounters his nemesis in the rigidly sadistic Nurse Ratched (Louise Fletcher). The audience relates to McMurphy; we identify with him in the world of the psychiatric ward–he's resolute, free-spirited and insubordinate. As we grow to identify with him, we also find ourselves at odds with Nurse Ratched's methods to keep the patients docile and in control. Every time McMurphy schemes to escape, we hope for his success–even as we watch his plans wilt before our eyes. No thwarted plan of escape is so heartbreaking as at the end– with an unobstructed, open window that leads to freedom within arms distance of McMurphy's sleeping figure. McMurphy is still held prisoner, having sacrificed his freedom to allow fellow inmate Billy Bibbit (Brad Dourif) the thrill

of a woman's touch for one night. However, the audience is confident that even this most recent failure is only a temporary setback, certain that McMurphy has lived to fight again another day. These hopes are quickly put to rest when Chief (Will Sampson) discovers that McMurphy has been tragically lobotomized; forever doomed to be a quasi-conscious shell of his former self. In this moment, hope is lost. However, Chief's decision at this point allows for a glimmer of hope to endure–and even if McMurphy never escapes, it was McMurphy's influence in his life that allowed the Chief to escape.

Horizontal Reading

Horizontal Reading, *refers to the constant left-to-right reading that's required when a script is text-heavy. Similar to block page, horizontal reading occurs when there is too much text on the page and not enough white-space. In both cases, horizontal reading and block pages result in a slow, tedious read for the script's audience, and makes it more likely for them to put it down. The more likely a reader is to put down a script, the less likely it becomes that they'll finish it. This is why it's best to try and avoid horizontal writing as much as possible.*

EXAMPLES:

Even in a film like *Cast Away* (2000), where only a single character dominates the action of the entire second act of the film, the script's writer William Broyles Jr. still finds a way to break up the page so that the screenplay doesn't read like a novel. He does this by inserting dialogue for Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks) to say out loud. Even though Chuck is talking to himself, he's also talking to the audience–informing the audience what's on Chuck's mind while he's stranded on a desert island. On the page, this openness with Chuck is welcome; it allows some variety onto the look of the page and makes the script an easy and enjoyable read for its audience.

Duel (1971) is a film that charts the slow, tedious stalking of Dennis Weaver (David Mann) by a methodically sadistic highway truck driver that turns into a fatal game of cat and mouse. Because the film's protagonist, Dennis, is alone in his car for much of the film, and because the film's antagonist–The Truck Driver (Carey Loftin)–is a looming and silent figure, much of the script is *horizontal reading*; the writer charting the action over many pages by writing them out in action lines without a lot of dialogue to break it up.

Horror

Horror, is a genre that exploits the audience's instinctual fears and anxieties by placing the characters of the film into increasingly dangerous and/or surreal scenarios that test not only the protagonist's ability to overcome horrific obstacles, but also the audience's ability to endure terror. Experiencing this terror gives the audience the thrill of adrenaline and the grueling feeling of mounting suspense, and has become an amazingly popular (and lucrative) genre within the film industry. There are many variants of the horror genre, and can sometimes boarder other genres such as fantasy, science fiction and thriller.

EXAMPLES:

An example of a "straight" horror film, among many, could be *The Blair Witch Project* (1999); a film in which the horror is ongoing, comes from an external (and mysterious) source, and spirals the characters of the film into terror-fueled madness. What makes this film especially horrifying is it's stark, gritty realism–the fact that it's shot with a hand-held camera gives a sense of reality to the film that justifies the characters' mounting fears; in fact, *documents* them, which is the dramatic conceit of the film: a documentary about The Blair Witch. However, as with most genre films, *The Blair Witch Project* can be polarizing–hailed as a masterpiece by some, regarded as trash by others. Regardless, it cannot be denied that *The Blair Witch Project* changed many people's opinions regarding the horror genre, and how filmmakers and writers approached horror films ever since its release.

Pan's Labyrinth (2006) would be an example of a fantasy film with horrific elements, or as a horror film with fantasy elements. The film's action takes place on two fronts: the first, "reality"; the world of Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) and her mother Carmen (Ariadna Gil) as they struggle for happiness in fascist Spain, 1944. The second, "fantasy"; a surreal world populated by fairies and grim creatures who subject Ofelia to three dangerous trials to prove that she is a princess. The look, the feel, and the tone of the film are what implies what is *horror* about this story, though the story falls intrinsically within the paradigm of a fantasy film. However, there are truly horrific moments that confront Ofelia in both the "real" world and her "fantasy" world; so horrific, in fact, that Ofelia's ultimate fate at the end of the film can be seen with equal parts tragedy and victory.

David Cronenberg has made many eerie horror films throughout his filmmaking career, including *Scanners* (1981), *Naked Lunch* (1990), and of course *The Fly* (1986). In *The Fly*'s case, we have a good example of Sci-Fi Horror. Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) is a brilliant scientist who has finally perfected an invention that can transport objects across vast distances instantaneously by breaking down the object to its molecules and then reconstructing them on the other end. Impatient to test the machine himself, he decides to transport himself. When Seth comes out the other side, it is deemed that the experiment and the invention are both a complete success–except for one caveat: a fly entered the transportation chamber with Seth and went along for the ride. This science-fiction scenario allows for a horror story to unfold; the process Seth undergoes as he slowly transforms into a human-fly hybrid, or in other words: Brudle-Fly.

Hard Candy (2005) would be another example of a horror film, though this time through the perspective of a *thriller* genre film. Jeff Kohlver (Patrick Wilson) arranges an online meeting with fourteen year old Hayley Stark (Ellen Page) at a coffee shop. After some flirtatious banter, Hayley suggests they return to his house where, upon arrival, she begins the first stages of her plan to tie Jeff to a table and castrate him. What ensues is a long, grueling game that's played between the two characters, bargaining and accusing, amid mounting tension and Jeff's increasing fear. These characters who come at odds with each other, combined with Hayley's intention, together form a thrilling film experience that takes on horrific undertones.

I-Page

I-Page, *describes the visual appearance of a page within a screenplay that is the direct opposite of a block page; when there is no action lines whatsoever to break up the dialogue. This creates a single column of text in the middle of the page that looks as though a huge "I" is written right down its center. As with block pages, I pages are best avoided whenever possible. It's always better to add some variety to the page by interjecting an action line or two so that the reader doesn't feel bombarded by huge chunks of dialogue without action to give the words context.*

EXAMPLES:
The film version of *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) opens on Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) sitting in his car, drinking and contemplating heavily over a pistol

I-PAGE (CONT'D)

that he calmly and quietly loads full of bullets. This scene is intercut with two others; the first, a courtroom scene where Andy is on trial for murder–the murder of his wife (Renee Blaine) and her lover, golf pro Glenn Quentin (Scott Mann). The second scene that we cut to is the action that occurs continuously between Andy's wife and Glenn Quentin, even as Andy sits with his loaded gun outside their cabin. The film shows these three scenes together; cutting from one to the next to explain Andy Dufresne's backstory quickly and succinctly in a visually compelling way–via editorial cuts. However, the screenplay reads quite differently–we get each three scenes at different times; each playing out their complete duration separately. First, we read the scene of Andy's wife and her lover–start to finish. Second, we read the scene of Andy in his car and loading his gun before he approaches the cabin his wife and her lover occupy. Lastly, we read the scene where the D.A. (Jeffrey DeMunn) questions Andy surrounding the details of his wife's murder–which eventually is the action which gets Dufresne convicted to two life sentences to be served back-to-back inside Shawshank Penitentiary. In the editing process, these three scenes are consolidated and edited together, but on the page they are written separately. And in the scene where the D.A. interrogates Dufresne in court, the two character's dialogue shift back and forth without any interruption whatsoever–resulting in an *I page*; a straight column of uninterrupted dialogue. Despite the fact that the script, which written in this fashion, it clearly was the *less interesting* and *less efficient* cinematic choice that was corrected later in the editing process–a change that could have been made from the beginning, on the page, had the scenes been written as intercut from the onset; making for a more compelling read while also avoiding writing an *I page*.

I/E.

I/E. (an abbreviation for "INTERIOR/EXTERIOR"), begins the slug line when the action of a new scene takes place in both interior and exterior locations; usually switching between the action of the two different areas simultaneously. Scenes that can play out like this might involve action between two characters on either side of a door, one inside and one outside; rather than write a new slug line whenever the action switches between the two characters, the writer simply writes I/E. and continues the scene without further interruption. I/E. might also

be used for a scene that takes place inside of a car; though the characters are on the interior of a vehicle, the vehicle itself is likely to be in an exterior location.

EXAMPLES:

The Matrix Revolutions (2003), the middle-child of an action/sci-fi trilogy, boasts many extravagant fight scenes and action sequences that throws the audience into intense scenarios that pump the adrenaline. One such sequence involves an epic freeway car chase and ongoing fight scenes between three different parties with drastically varying agendas: the humans Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) and Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), the Agents, and the Twins as they all struggle to lay hold on the Keymaker (Randall Duk Kim). This confrontation between these three groups endures through multiple vehicles, countless explosions and crashes, and even falls upon the rooftop of a gigantic 18 wheel semi truck. Because of the action taking place in the script, many scenes are written with the *I/E.* description beginning slug lines to illustrate that the action of any given scene takes place simultaneously *inside* of cars, and *outside* them as well.

In *The French Connection* (1971) is a hard-nosed cops & robbers drama that illustrates the contrast between hardened, uncouth police officers and the savoir faire of charming criminals by comparing the methods of Jimmy 'Popeye' Doyle (Gene Hackman) and Alain Charnier (Fernando Rey) who vie over the fate of a huge shipment of heroin making its way to the New York City streets via the French connection. As 'Popeye' Doyle investigates, he and his partner Det. Buddy Russo (Roy Scheider) sit patiently outside a noisy club waiting to follow the criminals who soon emerge. As the scene plays out, the action cuts between the business happening between Doyle and Russo inside of the vehicle and what occurs outside the club. This warrants the *I/E.* scene location abbreviation in the slug line, informing the audience that the action of the scene takes place in two different locations–each within sight of the other.

Imagination

Imagination, refers to the writer's ability to imagine unique scenarios, characters, or sometimes an entirely new world in which the story takes place and unfolds. Differing somewhat from experience, where a writer allows the events of their own lives to inform the details of characters or story, imagination suggests that a writer must also have an ability to conceive entirely new and exciting variations of story, and how to tell stories. An imaginative writer is

IMAGINATION (CONT'D)

capable of captivating an audience by showing the reader something that they have never seen before; could not have seen before, since it was a detail birthed in the mind of the writer who created it. Being adroit with your imagination ensures that a reader will be incapable of forgetting your screenplay, and will inspire the reader's own imagination as well.

EXAMPLES:

If necessity is the mother of invention, than *imagination* is its father. Every conceit currently in common-practice with screenwriting or filmmaking was born from an individual's imagination. Sometimes, an imaginative idea on how to approach a problem gives way to an entirely new solution that hadn't been used before; and when applied, can lead the audience to an exciting new discovery. Imagination doesn't always have to invent the wheel–sometimes it's simply a matter of *re*-inventing the wheel, or augmenting it slightly to fit a specific purpose. The road to becoming an imaginative writer may lead to many experiments that may or may not work. The trick is not to become frustrated or daunted by failed attempts, but to embrace them as progressions toward a new and innovative idea.

One of the most amazing and innovative moments of film imagination occurred with *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) which reflects the radical shift the story takes once Dorothy (Judy Garland) crash-lands in Oz. While inside the farmhouse, she, Toto, and everything inside it are sepia-washed in shades of tan and khaki. However, when Dorothy opens the door and reveals the land of Oz, both her and the audience are flooded by a tidal wave of vibrant color–no color more prominent than the Yellow Brick Road she is soon to follow. This dramatic shift was an influential and radical way to depict the scene. Consider how the event may have unfolded if the entire film was shot in black and white or sepia, or if the entire movie was shown in color from beginning to end–the impact of Dorothy's arrival in Oz wouldn't have been nearly as significant or memorable. At some stage of the film's production, someone considered the possibility of visually differentiating between the worlds of Kansas and the world of Oz by representing the two by their visual color schemes. At the time, the audience was acclimated to seeing films in black and white on a regular basis–the sudden jump to color must have been breathtaking to suddenly behold. It was *imagination* that bred that magical movie moment, and is one of the many reasons *The Wizard of Oz* is such a memorable milestone in cinema history even today.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) was undoubtedly the first of its kind; in fact, was the very first full length animated film produced in the United States. Initially, upon the film's production, it was deemed that the film would be a colossal failure of epic proportions; mostly because there was simply no quantifiable way to comprehend how an audience might respond to a feature-length animated fantasy film. Was it for children? Would adults enjoy it as well? Would there be a story interesting enough to keep one entertained? The buildup to the release was mysterious in how the film would be received. Obviously, however, the film was an amazing success, and heralded the beginning of an entirely new genre of film–animation, which today is one of the most popular avenues of film medium and has a universally wide audience appeal. Not only was the story of Snow White imaginative, and captured the imagination of audiences, but the *method* by which they made snow white, the process of hand-drawn animation was in and of itself beyond the standards of imagination in the time it was produced. What was then a groundbreaking leap is today absolutely commonplace–but the *imaginations* of the film's producers and animators is what allowed the film to come to be in the first place.

Inciting Incident

Inciting Incident, is the first major plot point that occurs in the story, and is the moment that the character (or characters) of a film become involved in the story. This moment, or incident, is what initiates the characters into the action of the story, yet occurs before the character has made the emotional or physical commitment to the endure the struggle or overcome the obstacle that stands between the protagonist and their goal; a separate event which is otherwise known as the second major plot point of a story; the lock in.

EXAMPLES:
In *Solaris* (2002), psychiatrist Dr. Chris Kelvin (George Clooney) is shown a message made out to him from Kelvin's friend and confidant Dr. Gibarian (Ulrich Tukur), who imparts to Kelvin that a series of mysterious happenings have begun aboard his space station that orbits around the distant planet of Solaris; happenings that neither he or his crew are capable of rationalizing or explaining. Though Gibarian doesn't go into details surrounding what these mysterious happenings are, he does manage to say that he believes Kelvin capable and fully qualified to assist in overcoming this situation which has

INCITING INCIDENT (CONT'D)

occurred. Kelvin is then asked to be transported to this distant space station in order to bring the crew, who have refused to leave, back home again. This moment is *Solaris' inciting incident*–the plot point which occurs that propels the story into action.

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly (1966) begins with an epic introduction to each of the three titular characters–starting with Tuco (Eli Wallach) *The Ugly*, Sentenza "Angel Eyes" (Lee Van Cleef) *The Bad*, and "Blondie" (Clint Eastwood) *The Good*. After the introductions are complete, we watch as the criminal Tuco is turned into the authorities by Blondie for the $2,000.00 reward. Yet, despite turning him in and collecting the reward, Blondie waits until Tuco is seconds away from hanging until he is dead before rescuing him at the last split second–only to take him to the next town for another $2,000.00 reward. This unexpected partnership continues until Blondie figures Tuco will never be worth more than $3,000.00, and abandons Tuco to the wild desert, tied and horseless. This action is what ignites the feud that develops between Tuco and Blondie; a rivalry that will fuel the rest of the film's action, and functions as this film's *inciting incident*.

Indirection

Indirection, occurs when a character makes decisions, usually critical ones, based upon partial or incomplete information–usually sensory though sometimes this incomplete information can be attributed to a misunderstanding between characters, or when one character intentionally and knowingly manipulates another character with fake or augmented information to lead the other to a desired conclusion than what may have been reached if all of the information was given.

EXAMPLES:

An example of sensory indirection would be the tense cat-and-mouse game that's played between Jame "Buffalo Bill" Gumb (Ted Levine) and Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) when Gumb, running away from Starling, escapes into the darkness of one room among many within his labyrinthine basement. Once Starling follows Gumb inside, Gumb hits the lights, enveloping Starling in a pitch and endless blackness inside a foreign environment, thus propelling her to the apex of danger. To further increase the

tension, Gumb is equipped with a pair of night-vision goggles which allows him to see Clarice with green-tinted clarity well enough to watch her clutch vainly in the darkness around her. Gumb is even close enough to pass his hand inches, *centimeters* in front of her unwitting eyes. Given the fact that the film's hero, Starling, is behaving and actively seeking to capture Gumb with only her ears to guide her, she is at a tremendous disadvantage–yet, when Gumb cocks his pistol, Starling identifies Gumb's location *sensory* and fires, resulting in Gumb's death, Clarice's survival, and the end of Buffalo Bill's series of brutal murders. This scene places Starling in an environment where she is acting purely off of partial information, a clear example of how *indirection* can sometimes fuel the tension of a dramatic moment to the point of nearly unendurable suspense.

In *Amadeus* (1984), Vienna Court Composer Antonio Salieri (F. Murray Abraham) disguises himself as a black-cloaked apparition in order to commission a requiem composition from the musical prodigy, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Tom Hulce). In so doing, Salieri is driving Mozart to his own death–manipulating Mozart's fears and emotions into a beauteous musical invention without equal. Salieri, driven by equal parts jealousy and admiration for the genius Mozart, desires to possess at least a fraction of what makes Mozart so unique, to the point of assisting in Mozart's writing of the Requiem. The drafting of this piece pushes Mozart to the physical and emotional extremes of his health. Together, Mozart and Salieri compose the Requiem while also plunging Mozart further into the depths of illness–until, finally, Mozart's final ounce of life is poured into the piece–the Death Requiem. Salieri, guilty of killing God's musical prodigy, will forever be tormented by the knowledge that if it were not for his manipulation, Mozart may still be alive–alive to compose who knows how many countless masterpieces–something that Salieri himself will never be able to equal in any number. This dynamic between Salieri and Mozart–specifically, Salieri's manipulation–is an example of *indirection*. Mozart was composing the Requiem based on information fed to him from the disguised Salieri at the risk of pushing himself beyond human endurance. If Mozart knew Salieri's true intentions, or Salieri's feelings toward him, then perhaps Mozart might not have agreed to write the Requiem–possibly saving himself.

Insert:

INSERT:, is a page direction that signals for the reader to make special note of a specific item, object, character,]location, or happening in the script by calling

INSERT (CONT'D)

particular attention to it on the page. This forces the reader's imagination and the camera's lens to focus on the item/character/location/situation described–and usually takes the form of a close-up or extreme-close-up shot. Though these page directions are best to be avoided whenever possible, occasionally they can help cue the audience to identify important information in a script and keep them engaged. However, when a thing of note needs to be pointed out to the audience, the same effect can be achieved by simply writing the detail in all capital letters; giving it due attention without directing on the page and limiting potential director's options or imagination.

EXAMPLES:

Malcolm X (1992) (Denzel Washington) follows the life journey of the mystifying social activist from humble beginnings to his assassination. In the case of the script–co-written by the film's director, Spike Lee–an INSERT is used to call special attention to a vivid 'fantasy' of Malcolm's as he serves a guest a slice of pie in a train car. Malcolm imagines himself shoving the pie slice directly into the guest's smug face, though of course refrains in acting this fantasy out. The INSERT is used to direct the reader's attention away from the chronological, real-time action of the scene and force the audience to indulge in Malcolm's fantasy for a split second–all while seeing Malcolm's calm outer smile.

Magnolia (1999) is a film of titanic proportions which interweaves the lives of a half-dozen individuals in Los Angeles and how, in one way, shape or form, they all hinge upon a single man: Earl Partridge (Jason Robards), who lies upon his death bed. To introduce us to the mood of the film, the script's writer and director Paul Thomas Anderson gives us a series of what *could* be considered coincidences, but in fact might be the intricate ebbs and flows of fate. This prologue delivers coincidence after coincidence in a jumpy, jaunty style–and the script follows suit by giving the reader every shot, angle, whip, cut and zoom, while also calling special attention to hotel events board with a deliberate INSERT; which directs the reader's attention to the board and also what the board says–information that the writer feels is necessary to the scene; necessary enough to give it valuable page space and force the audience to read it–if only for a moment. This information does pay off later, once we learn the nuanced details surrounding the coincidence involving Sydney Barringer, his "unsuccessful suicide and successful homicide."

INT.

INT., (an abbreviate of 'interior') is one of three possible ways to begin a slug line at the heading of any scene in a screenplay; the other two being EXT. (exterior) and I/E. (interior & exterior). INT. is used when a scene takes place inside a location.

EXAMPLES:

To find an example of INT., one needs to look no further than the first page of *L.A. Confidential* (1997) where we're introduced to the Mayor (Gregory White) inside the Hancock Park Mansion's ballroom where he unveils the plans for a new Los Angeles freeway system before an expecting crowd of socialites. The scene takes place inside, and so, the slug line reflects this fact by stating it overtly, in the first few letters: INT.

For Wladyslaw Szpilman, his whole existence is has been reduced to survival based solely upon staying indoors and out of sight. In *The Pianist* (2002) Wladyslaw (Adrien Brody) goes to the most basic, primitive instincts of survival in order to escape Nazi occupied Poland. As a jew, Wladyslaw is in constant danger of being discovered and faces either immediate death by gunshot or eventual death by being sent to a concentration camp. Because of these fears, much of the action in *The Pianist* is indoors; thus, many scenes are written with INT. at the beginning of their slug-line.

INTO FRAME

INTO FRAME or INTO VIEW, suggests that an object or character is entering from beyond the camera's vision into the frame and the audience's view. This also suggests that the camera is static and motionless, and that the person or object entering the frame is in motion, however, this isn't always the case. Sometimes a camera will PULL BACK in order to reveal a motionless item or person that had previously been out of frame. Simply by virtue of the filmmaking medium, the audience is entirely dependent upon the images shown to them within the confines of the frame–anything outside it's vision is outside the audience's awareness. Again, INTO FRAME & INTO VIEW are considered directing on the page and are storytelling techniques that should be used sparingly, if at all, when the writer is not the film's director.

INTO FRAME (CONT'D)

EXAMPLES:

In *Rocky* (1979), in the final moments of the climactic title bout between the champion Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers) and the challenger Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), Rocy's girlfriend Adrian Pennino (Talia Shire) desperately tries to weave through the massive, swelling crowd about the ring to get close to Rocky. As she peers over the heads and between the bodies of the crowd, Rocky falls in and out of her view. The screenplay signifies this by writing, specifically, that Rocky continues to weave in and out of Adrian's point of view. This signifies to the reader what point of view the characters have in relation to each other, calling attention to their character relationship and juxtaposes their emotional connection while visually showing them physically separate. This is important when, despite their separation, they still acknowledge their close emotional link together when Rocky calls out, "Yo Adrian, I did it!" In this case, trying to connect page direction to emotional character dynamics is an important element in the script—a point that even technical page directions can still at least aspire to reveal details about character and story.

INTO VIEW

See INTO FRAME

Investigation

Investigation, describes a motivation, or an activity, performed by a character within a scene when they are seeking to gain information about a past event, their surroundings, or of another character. Investigative scenes can transpire in a number of different ways, especially if the character doesn't want to make it known what they're investigating, or that they are investigating at all. This can create a tension between two characters, resulting in a push-me-pull-you/tug of war game that can be thrilling and exciting to watch. Investigation scenes can also have the tendency to clarify information for the audience. When a character learns something new about the story through investigation, the audience learns it as well–and keeping the audience engaged, informed and entertained is always the key to a successful script.

EXAMPLES:

In *The Departed* (2006), there is always the question of who is investigating who; because throughout the duration of the film, everyone becomes someone else's suspect. In one particular scene between undercover agent Billy Costigan (Leonardo Dicaprio) and mob kingpin Frank Costello (Jack Nicholson), the two figures go toe-to-toe as Frank attempts to investigate the identity of the known 'rat' within his crew. Frank suspects that Billy could be the rat; if for no other reason than because Frank suspects *everyone* of possibly being the rat. The two sit in Costello's bar and discuss a number of topics; what it means to be Frank, if Billy could do what Frank does, Billy's work with the mob as well as the prospect of Billy being the rat, and Billy's subsequent defense against this accusation. However, even though all of these subjects are discussed, there is a constant undercurrent of unspoken subtext in the scene happening between the two characters. Certainly, Billy *is* the rat, and is attempting to convince Frank that he is not. Yet, it's never fully known what precisely Frank is thinking in this moment–or if Billy convinces him or not. This is an investigation scene that puts the characters intentions front-and-center for the audience to observe and understand, even if what conclusions the characters reach is slightly more ambiguous.

In *Little Children* (2006), a dinner scene occurs when Brad and Kathy Adamson (Patrick Wilson and Jennifer Connelly) invite Sarah and Richard Pierce (Kate Winslet and gregg Edelman) over for dinner. What transpires is a quaint dinner with pleasant conversation from both parties; they compliment each other on the quality of the meal, and share small town gossip. However, a pivotal moment,

INVESTIGATION (CONT'D)

almost insignificant, occurs when just the slightest phrase suggests more than just a casual familiarity between Kathy's husband and Richard's wife–and though the dinner wasn't originally intended to serve as a means to investigate anyone, suddenly Kathy is struck with the suspicion that Brad and Sarah have become intimate; convinced that they have become engaged in an extramarital affair. Of course, she is absolutely correct in her sudden suspicion, though she has no idea why she thinks it's true or what specifically sparked its realization. So the scene which wasn't supposed to be an investigation suddenly becomes an investigation. In that moment, Kathy decides to check and see if there's any foot-games being played between the two under the table. She drops a fork, but sees nothing. However, this does nothing to sway her fears that she is losing her husband to Sarah. So in this scene we have a case of one character's subtle investigation which happens unbeknownst to anyone else in the scene.

Irony

Irony, occurs when a character uses words, pursues actions or follows intentions which mean one thing to them, yet mean something entirely different to the audience and/or other characters in the film. Though sometimes a character within a story can be intentionally (and unintentionally) ironic, sometimes the entire conceit of a story has an ironic edge to it–where the characters are all engrossed within an ironic situation, which is known as dramatic irony. Irony can be a powerful way for a writer to articulate contrary themes and emotions within characters that the audience can pick up on and relate to in an off-hand way; a manner of tone the writer strikes when he/she says one thing to an audience–and means another.

EXAMPLES:

In Spike Lee's controversial satire *Bamboozled* (2000), we are shown the impetus behind what television writer Pierre Delacroix (Damon Wayans) *intended* to be a sarcastic commentary on how popular culture exploits African Americans for entertainment, and was *received* by the network executives, and home viewers, as a genuine source of comedy. The show? Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show! Black actors in black-face who portray two African American slaves who work on a watermelon plantation in the deep south. As a result of this conceit, the film is biting and challenging; made further difficult because the resulting *irony* that such an outrageous caper of overt racism becomes such a popular source of entertainment within the world of the film. In *Bamboozled*, irony is used as a powerful tool that forces the audience to question the nature of an avenue of entertainment we are confronted with every day.

Matchstick Men (2003) is a movie that investigates the life of a professional con artist. The film slowly and methodically exposes Roy Waller's (Nicolas Cage) vulnerabilities, not the least of which hinge upon the recent reconciliation with his estranged teenage daughter Angela (Alison Lohman). However, in Roy's case, the shoe soon finds itself on the other foot when he finds himself the subject of a long and elaborate con that leaves him alone and destitute. Here, the irony is that even a masterful con artist such as Roy is capable of being conned–in fact, *anyone* is capable of being conned.

JUMP CUT TO:

JUMP CUT TO:, is an editing technique used to show subtle passages of time in an abrupt and jarring way. A jump cut takes two sequential shots from the same camera set-up and angle, but the subject of the shot has moved slightly, causing the subject to appear "jumpy" when edited together.

EXAMPLES:

A scene from *Capote* (2005) involves the titular character, Truman Capote (Phillip Seymour Hoffman) pacing back and forth in his kitchen, discussing the subject matter of a novel he aspires to write with someone on the phone. As the conversation progresses, the action lines signify that Capote's phone conversation is cut up with 'jumps', leaping past the parts of the conversation where Truman is waiting for a response by cutting to the part of the conversation that we, the audience can listen in on—Truman's half. By so doing, the writer keeps the audience engaged and interested not only in the topic of the phone conversation, but also in what manner the conversation is delivered.

Location

Location, is where a scene, or a film, takes place, and has a direct influence on the direction the action takes and the pervasive mood of the characters. The effect environment has on a character is critical; an individual will behave differently given different surroundings. Location and environment set the mood and the tone of the scene; and sometimes can be a formidable force or obstacle that can keep the protagonist from achieving their goals.

EXAMPLES:

In *The Hurt Locker* (2008), location predicates everything about the character. Where does the film take place? War-torn Baghdad. Because we're following a small bomb disposal unit in a foreign environment disarming improvised explosion devices, the action of the film can unfold. In fact, we wouldn't normally meet the characters of the film anywhere else, especially not the film's main protagonist Sergeant First Class William James (Jeremy Renner), who not only loves his job, but seems hard-wired and tailor-made for it. Upon his return to the states, acclimating himself once more to the trappings of family life–shopping with his wife, caring for their baby–he is noticeably uncomfortable.

LOCATION (CONT'D)

Stifled. Fidgety. The new location reveals something new about his character. Yet, while confronted with a dangerous explosive, he is calm, cool and collected. These conflicting behaviors give the audience a full range on James' individuality; behaviors we observe by watching his mental state shift as his environment changes. *The Hurt Locker* then becomes an excellent example of how an environment sets the tone for the characters who populate it.

Sergio Leone's *Once Upon A Time In The West* (1968) is a film that is arguably just as much about the characters' surrounding environment as it is about the characters themselves. In every scene, within every frame of the film, the characters are framed by their surroundings–magnified and made mythical by the locations they stand amid. If one were to walk into the desert in the film and lift any one rock in the dirt, you could imagine finding a scorpion shading itself from the sun underneath it. In much the same way, with every saloon, watering station, train car, and rickety shack of the film comes it's own particular breed of human life. Leone was a master in this regard; it seems that location *always* predicates the characters who exist there–and it makes sense. We get the impression that the setting breeds the people who live within its ecosystem, and that the individuals who live there shape the environment to their liking.

In *The Shining* (1980), the film's location is arguably one of the film's antagonists. The Overlook Hotel, upon our introduction to it, is spacious, luxurious, scenic and pastoral–seemingly the perfect place to hold up for a long winter's stay and write a novel. At least, this is what Jack Torrence (Jack Nicholson) believes–along with the distinct feeling of "deja-vu"; a feeling that he has been here before. Jack becomes instantly enamored with the hotel–to an obsessive degree, and slowly begins to spend more time with "it" than he does with his own wife Wendy (Shelley Duvall) and son Danny (Danny Lloyd). The Overlook Hotel acts as the location in which these pent up characters collide against one another, and also serves as the vessel which contains the personages of the friendly bartender Lloyd (Joe Turkel) and the helpful, but grim, Delbert Grady (Phillip Stone). In the end, The Overlook Hotel takes possession of Jack– both literally and figuratively–even unto the final shot of the film, a long push through the vacant hallways of the hotel and onto an old photograph upon one of its many walls that features Jack Torrence standing before a throng of New Years Eve celebrants, 1921.

Lock In

Lock In, is the second major plot point of a film–occurring after the inciting incident and before the story's first culmination (or midpoint). The lock-in also signals the end of act one, and the beginning of act two. As a driver would buckle their safety-belt before driving a car, locking themselves into the vehicle, the main character of a film must commit themselves to the journey the film is forcing him or her to undertake. The lock-in is the protagonist's dedication to the story–the moment where the main character invests a certain amount of risk to achieve their goal.

EXAMPLES:

The lock-in moment for Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) in *Taxi Driver* (1976) occurs when Travis picks up presidential candidate Senator Charles Palantine (Leonard Harris) in his cab; the candidate that Betsy (Cybill Shepherd) has been campaigning for. Travis and the Senator have a brief discussion over the condition of the country–or more specifically, Travis' feelings over the condition of New York City. This discussion is perhaps Travis' inspiration for the lengths he eventually goes to clean up the scum of the city that disgusts him.

In *The Hangover* (2009), the lock-in occurs 'the next day' when the characters begin to wake up after what proves to be a chaotic bachelor party romp through Las Vegas the night before, which they have no recollection of. As the details of their drunken misadventures slowly come into focus with each passing moment, it is also clear that one key member of their party is missing: the groom. Now, the characters must commit themselves to following the trail of breadcrumbs left from the wake of last night's party in order to find the man who is due to walk down the isle in 24 hours.

Good Will Hunting (1997)'s lock-in occurs after Will Hunting (Matt Damon) is released from jail by mathematics professor Gerald Lambeau (Stellan Skarsgard) upon the condition that Will study math with him one day a week, and also maintain regular sessions with a therapist. This forces Will to commit to his own emotional rehabilitation by practicing his innate skills in mathematics while also forces him to duel with a series of psychologists that eventually leads Will to a chair sitting opposite Sean Maguire (Robin Williams).

Logline

Logline, is a simple, succinct, one-sentence long summary of the film–usually focusing on the emotional tone of the movie or the physical struggle which the characters face. Intended to be broad and general, the log line's purpose is to appeal to as many people as possible, a hook that will make audience's want to see the film.

EXAMPLES:

"Many of his fellow officers considered him the most dangerous man alive – an honest cop." –*Serpico* (1973).

"Are You Tired of the Expected?" –*Rubber* (2010)

"She brought a small town to its feet and a huge corporation to its knees." –*Erin Brockovich* (2000)

"The lucky ones die first." –*The Hills Have Eyes* (2006)

"Everything is in its proper place... Except the past." –*Ordinary People* (1980)

Main Culmination

Main Culmination, is the fourth major plot point of a script and/or movie that occurs after the first culmination and before the third act twist. The main culmination also signifies the end of act two and the beginning of act three. It acts as the moment that brings the main plot of the film to a close–whatever journey the character committed to from the lock in is now completed; that goal is either won or lost at this point. Not only does this moment signify the end of the character's major obstacle in the film, it introduces a new one–a new obstacle that the character must overcome that came as a result of the action of the second act. This will lead the character toward the third act twist which puts a new spin on the character's new objective.

EXAMPLES:

In *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), the main story of the film–Edward's attempts to become integrated into 'normal' suburban society–comes to an end when Edward mistakenly cuts Kevin (Robert Oliveri) while attempting to save him from Jim's (Anthony Michael Hall) chaotic driving. This superficial cut is misconstrued by

the community, and it's thought that Edward inflicted this wound intentionally and maliciously. Now a pariah of the community, Edward is ran out of town and chased all the way to the mansion of Edward's late creator, The Inventor (Vincent Price).

Unforgiven (1992) is the tale of a retired wild west gunslinger, criminal and murderer William Munny (Clint Eastwood) who has since abandoned his one-time wicked ways and has become a humble pig farmer, but is once more called upon to violence when a reward goes out to anyone who inflicts revenge upon a group of men who have brutally abused and disfigured the face of a whore. The film's *main culmination* occurs when Ned (Morgan Freeman) parts ways with William when he decides he's not up to the task of killing men. Upon returning home, Ned is captured by the town Sheriff Little Bill Daggett (Gene Hackman), tortured to reveal William's identity, and finally murdered.

The *main culmination* in the film *Raging Bull* (1980) occurs when Jake LaMotta (Robert De Niro) finally become the middleweight champion of the world. His time as the champ is short lived, however, when after alienating himself from his brother Joey (Joe Pesci), the mob who backed his rise to the championship belt, and distancing himself from his wife Vicky (Cathy Moriarty), Jake intentionally subjects himself to an unguarded beating from Sugar Ray Robinson (Johnny Barnes), and thus loses the middleweight title. Despite having lost the belt, Jake is proud to remind Sugar Ray that he never knocked Jake down. (1:41:30)

MATCH CUT TO:

MATCH CUT TO:, is a cut from one specific image/shot to another mirroring, or matching image/shot which translates a relationship or similarity between the two images in some way. This connection between the two shots can be thematic; two objects which share a similar function and/or use within the story, or two objects that look the same or have a congruent shape for an aesthetic connection. A similar effect is MATCH DISSOLVE TO:, though in this case the matching images are cut together, the end of one scene cutting to the beginning of the next, with an abrupt edit rather than the more-subtle dissolve effect. The text is formatted on it's own line, flush right.

MATCH CUT TO: (CONT'D)

EXAMPLES:

One of the most remarkable match cuts in cinema history came with *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Once the obscure, misunderstood and under-valued T.E. Lawrence (Peter O'Toole) is finally given an opportunity to apply his unique talent for the British military by seeking out Prince Feisal (Alec Guiness) in the seemingly infinite landscape of Arabia, he stands at attention before Mr. Dryden (Claude Rains) to learn the details surrounding his mission. As he lights a cigar for Mr. Dryden, he stares with intense focus into the dwindling flame of a match before blowing it out. Even as we hear Lawrence's breath put out the fire, the film *match cuts* to the vast and harsh desert landscape—rolling sand-dunes beneath a sky giving birth to a new sunrise. With the sun comes the unforgiving heat of the desert; the landscape Lawrence now occupies to who knows what end. What makes this *match cut* such a jostling and memorable one is that the image of the tiny matchstick flame is matched with the impending heat of the desert sun —becoming a match cut that hinges more upon the *thematic* or metaphorical implications between the two images than it has to do with the visual similarity between the two objects.

Another amazing match cut in film can be found in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The film begins long before the titular year of 2001, though the "Dawn of Man" opening sequence of the movie has everything to do with mankind's eventual place in the Universe. As we come to know a tribe of dilapidated hominids clinging desperately to a struggling survival but slowly and steadily losing ground in the survival-of-the-fittest battle. That is until they discover the significance of tools. One moment, they see a common, ordinary bone. The next, they have a powerful hunting tool that will allow them to become predators for the first time in their history. However, not only is this item a hunting tool, it quickly becomes a weapon that can be lifted and used against members of rival tribes. When finally the tribe wins their first 'war', the bone is thrown into a vast and limitless blue sky. Then the *match cut* takes us to a shot of a nuclear weapon's satellite, in the year 2001, orbiting the planet earth with an infinite abyss of black Universe stretched out behind it. This match cut, like *Lawrence of Arabia*, carries a symbolic and metaphorical meaning—however, in addition to this, is also a match cut that pairs together two visually similar objects into a fluent progression of images and ideas.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:, is a dissolve effect that pairs together two matching images, similarly to MATCH CUT TO:. This description in a script will illustrate to the reader how a transition between two scenes is made—while focusing on a specific item, or object, that acts as a visual link between two sequential scenes. As in a MATCH CUT:, this match effect can link an object's thematic link to another object, or combine aesthetic, visual similarities between two items. However, sometimes a match effect can link two scenes together by cutting to or dissolving to the same exact object in two different locations and/or times, rather than cutting or dissolving to an entirely different item or object. The text is formatted on it's own line, flush right.

EXAMPLES:

Throughout the opening sequence of *Citizen Kane* (1941)--the somber throbbing of baritone, the series of barren and surreal locations within Xanadu--the audience is slowly brought closer and closer to a single lit window that sits high above the land which surrounds a gigantic mansion. A series of seven dissolves occurs, each one bringing the window more clearly into view, until finally we sit upon the window sill—only to see the light which has guided us to it is turned off! This entire sequence is one match dissolve after another, each dissolve managing to keep the window in the exact same part of the frame, even when seeing the reflection of it ripple in a pool. A brilliant sequence that introduces us to the titanic figure of what Charles Foster Kane had become by the end of his life—a process that the film aspires to investigate.

Metaphor

Metaphor, is when one object is used to represent some other object symbolically, or when something is said to be applied in relation to something else. Metaphor is used to link two different ideas in the mind of the audience so that a connection might be made between them, and often times is a method the writer uses to underline the film's themes. Metaphors will always depend on the circumstances that surround it; which character is communicating the metaphor, which character the metaphor is intended for or directed to (if any), and, of course, what the metaphor itself is. When the writer compares two seemingly unrelated ideas in the guise of simile, it paints a vivid picture in the mind of the

METAPHOR (CONT'D)

audience, allowing them to make comparisons between the material and their own lives, or by seeing something old in a new and exciting way, drawing them into the world of the film.

EXAMPLES:

In the case of *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), the metaphor is the film's title. Consider: a clock—mechanical, emotionless, a tool, constant, unchanging. An orange—organic, juicy, pulpy, sweet when ripe, sour when premature. Yet, the film's title transposes these two separate, *opposite* things into a common point of reference. Enter: Alex DeLarge (Malcolm McDowell); serial rapist, thief, violent criminal and murderer who is brought before the State for reform. By "reform" of course they mean "brainwash" and "condition". Through a process that involves a straight-jacket, a movie screen and some eye-opening headgear, Alex is shown a series of films that exploit the most base and loathsome human tendencies— every vice Alex had previously championed. This process begins a process of hard-wiring a drastic change in Alex's behavior—*forcing* him to become violently, physically ill when confronted with rape, crime or violence, taking away his human choice whether or not to indulge in evil or strive for altruism. Even if the audience doesn't relate to Alex's prior recreational activities, the audience can certainly understand brainwashing through the medium of film— for in very much the same way that Alex was shown propaganda footage to make sex, drugs and violence repulsive to him, the audience has been treated to this film and Alex's previous exploits. So, by this *metaphorical* observation of *a clockwork orange* the audience begins to understand the film's themes, and apply them to themselves.

The Joker (heath Ledger) in *The Dark Knight* (2008) uses many metaphors to explain his past, his present actions, and his future vision for Gotham City, even if those metaphors are contradictory at times. However contradictory some of them might be, the audience still finds insight into The Joker's character because there remains a deeper level of honesty to his metaphors than their inherent truths. Yet, in one particular case, while sitting at the hospital bed of the recently disfigured and permanently scarred Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart) a.k.a. "Two Face", in order to explain himself and his actions which led to the death of Harvey's love, Rachel Dawes (Maggie Gyllenhaal). The Joker compares himself and his actions to that of a dog "chasing cars", illustrating that he "wouldn't know what to do if I caught it". This comparison rings true for the audience who has seen The Joker work his odd, anarchic chaos throughout Gotham and its

inhabitants long enough to know that this metaphor, though comical in its context, is still fundamentally true. So, in this case, the writer uses *metaphor* to help provide the audience with a yard-stick with which to measure The Joker's madness, and helps draw the audience further into The Joker's character by giving us a point of reference that everyone can understand: a dog chasing cars, and the question of what a dog honestly thinks it is achieving in chasing one.

Midpoint

Midpoint, is the third major plot point in a film and, as the name suggests, occurs in the relative middle of a film. This plot point is also known as the first culmination, and takes place after the lock in, but before the main culmination. It's structural function is to display the major protagonist encountering his or her first significant obstacle in achieving their goal. Also, it's important to be mindful of the protagonist's prevailing character arc throughout the entire piece, as knowing whether the main character will win or lose at the end will dictate the emotional pitch of the script's midpoint, which normally mirrors the film's ultimate conclusion. If the protagonist achieves their desire at the end, the protagonist should gain some victory in the script's midpoint. If the protagonist is defeated at the end, then he or she should likewise suffer a significant blow here at the first culmination, which will foreshadow the main character's fate by the end of the film.

EXAMPLES:

The first culmination, or *midpoint*, in *Annie Hall* (1977) occurs after Annie (Diane Keaton) discovers Alvy (Woody Allen) following her on her afternoon about New York City. Frustrated, angry and confused by this apparent betrayal, she leaves Alvy on the sidewalk by slipping into a cab and driving away. Alvy, equally frustrated and confused, indignantly begins to strike up conversations with the commuters on the subject of relationships in a desperate attempt to make sense of a mad human phenomenon, and gets a myriad of responses. He asks a middle-aged woman who says that love fades. He asks an older man who reveals details about he and his wife's 'vibrating egg'. A young couple admits that their mutual attraction is that they are both equally uninteresting. Alvy even goes to the lengths of confiding in his childhood preference toward the wicked witch over Snow White to a horse. This scene, coupled with the mounting frustrations

MIDPOINT (CONT'D)

between Annie and Alvy, signal to the audience how their calamitous romance may end.

In *Casablanca* (1942), the *midpoint* takes place at The Blue Parrot, a rival club to Rick's Café Américain, where Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) and Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) have gone to procure traveling visas for their departure from Casablanca. They are told by Signor Ferrari (Sydney Greenstreet), the club's owner and operator, that it is impossible to get the both of them visas, and that it would be a 'miracle' for them both to leave Casablanca. It is decided between Laszlo and Ilsa that they are only interested in two visas. Ferrari then drops the hint that Rick has possession of Ugarte's (Peter Lorre) transit papers.

Midpoint Contrast

Midpoint Contrast, *is the practice of ensuring a difference in a script's emotional tone between the midpoint (or first culmination) and the main culmination (or end of act two). This contrast is used by the writer in order to take the protagonist, and the audience on a fully satisfying journey, complete with highs-and-lows, so that the character experiences a dramatic arc and undergoes active change within the story. If the protagonist is at an emotional high-point at the film's first culmination, then he or she must be at their darkest hour when the main culmination occurs. At this point, depending on whether the protagonist wins or loses their struggle by the end of the film, the high-or-low of the main character will dictate whether, by the end, they will be utterly defeated, or on top of the world; which effectively becomes the midpoint mirror.*

EXAMPLES:

In *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), the *midpoint* involves the Unit stumbling across an occupied German bunker, and it's decided that the Unit is obligated to attempt an attack upon the enemy though it may be deemed a risk. The caution was warranted when their T-5 medic Irwin Wade (Giovanni Ribisi) is killed in the attempt. At this low-point things get even worse when a German soldier, who they have taken alive, is beaten and abused at the hands of the American soldiers. Finally, Captain John H. Miller (Tom Hanks) decides to let the German soldier go as they continue their journey to find Private James Francis Ryan (Matt Damon). In *contrast*, when they do find Private Ryan, there is a natural high at the realization that they have finally accomplished their mission; a total *opposite* to

the emotional pitch of the *midpoint* when the Unit lost Wade. To further contrast these two segments of the film, there was a sense of relief when Captain Miller released the German soldier without murdering or subjecting him to further torture—though at the *main culmination*, there is a sense of grim foreboding for all the characters when it's decided that they are to stay with Ryan's Unit and assist in the defense of the bridge Ryan's Unit has maintained, as it is strategically significant to winning the war. In this case we have a functional example of how the *midpoint* and the *main culmination* should be in contrast to each other in their emotional significance for the characters within the story, and the observing audience.

In *Se7en* (1995), the *midpoint contrast* illustrates the emotional difference which occurs between the events of Detective Mills' (Brad Pitt) pursuit of John Doe (Kevin Spacey) (the *first culmination*) and the moment Doe turns himself in (*main culmination*). The *midpoint* is a defeat for Detective Somerset (Morgan Freeman) and especially for Mills, who was hit with a tire-iron and held at gunpoint by Doe, as they came so close to catching Doe but failed to do so. Yet, the *main culmination*, despite being a high-point for the detectives when Doe turns himself in and the mystery that consumed these men's lives and minds for the past week can come to an end, is still ambiguously eerie. Why would Doe turn himself in? What does he have to gain? And even more than that, even though it's good that a serial murderer turned himself in to the law, this act *robbed* any satisfaction of catching Doe from Somerset and Mills. This midpoint contrast calls attention to the detectives' abilities to catch this elusive and sickly brilliant murderer—foreshadowing the question of who is actually in control of the entire investigation: the detectives, or the murderer?

Midpoint Mirror

Midpoint Mirror, is a structuring device used that alludes to a script's midpoint matching the emotional tone of the script's conclusion, and the emotional and mental state of a protagonist at the end of the film. Framing the story in this manner will allow for the audience to experience a maximum range of feeling, when the midpoint mirror is combined with the midpoint contrast, which brings the emotional dynamic to extreme highs and lows, taking the script's characters, and the audience, on an exhilarating roller coaster of emotion.

MIDPOINT MIRROR (CONT'D)

EXAMPLES:

At the midpoint of *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006), Harold Crick (Will Farrell) turns a new leaf in his life. A man we had come to know as obsessive, neurotic, a slave to routine and boring begins to develop his interest in the guitar, takes a vacation from his monotonous job as an IRS auditor, stops counting his toothbrush strokes, moves in with a friend and is upon the precipice of pursuing a love affair with Ana Pascal (Maggie Gyllenhaal). This moment, which is a true high-point in the life of Harold Crick, is a *mirror* of the high-point that Harold will achieve by the end of the film; the midpoint then *mirrors* the emotional pitch and resonance of the film's ultimate ending. Here, a victory for Harold Crick at the midpoint means a victory for Harold at the end of the film.

The midpoint can also be a sign of troubling times to come for the protagonist, as is the case with Jake LaMotta (Robert De Niro) in *Raging Bull* (1980). Jake and Vickie (Cathy Moriarty) are married, and it seems their lives alternate between Jake's success in the ring and their happy home lives together. However, seeds of jealously are sewn over time along with frustrations when Jake finally lets Tommy Como help him get a shot at the title. In exchange, Jake agrees to take a dive in his next match. Against his own good conscience, Jake throws the fight, and in so doing, sells himself to the mob. This is a mirror of Jake's ultimate fate by the end of the film—where we find him quoting *On The Waterfront* with significance; "...what do I get? A one-way ticket to Palooka-ville! You was my brother, Charley, you shoulda looked out for me a little bit. You should have taken care of me just a little bit so I wouldn't have to take them dives for the short-end money. It was you, Charlie. It was you."

Monologue

Monologue, *a monologue is a character who gives a speech to another character or group of characters. A monologue can serve any number of storytelling functions—clearly, it can be used to divulge character information; how a character speaks, and the content of their speech, will display character. Monologues can also be used to articulate exposition for the audience, reveal back story and intone key elements of the story and plot. Monologues can also catch the audience up with the action so far before moving on. They can also serve as a heightened emotional moment for the characters—the character who*

delivers a monologue preaching or lecturing to others when the conflict has reached its apex.

EXAMPLES:

In *Network* (1976), a movie full of monologues, gives examples of the multiple different personalities that exist within the framework of a television network system—both on and off camera. However, there are two monologues in the film that go above and beyond all the others in terms of how they stick in the memories and the imaginations of the audience, the first being the monologue given by news anchor Howard Beale (Peter Finch), "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!", or Arthur Jensen's (Ned Beatty) monologue, "Because you're on television, dummy." Both stand out as among some of the greatest written, and best delivered, monologues in cinema.

Col. Nathan R. Jessep (Jack Nicholson) from *A Few Good Men* (1992) delivers a powerful monologue, explaining to Lt. Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise) what responsibility he holds to the Marines and to American freedom, by saying "we live in a world that has walls, and those walls have to be guarded by men with guns." The famous "You can't handle the truth" monologue establishes the character of Col. Jessep as a man with a single-minded focus on his job, and his duties, and that everything falls second to the obligation he holds to his status in the United States military.

General George S. Patton Jr. (George C. Scott) opens the film *Patton* (1970) with one of the most memorable monologues in cinema. With a proud and gargantuan flag of stars-and-bars behind him, Patton addresses an unseen throng of troops with a pep-talk to inspire in them the desire to win at all costs, to annihilate the enemy, "to spill *his* guts". This monologue sets up the titanic figure of the film's central character; the general himself, introducing us to his determination, his goals, and his passion—war.

Montage

Montage, is a series of images from different sources that are edited together to give the audience information about the story without the use of dialogue. Montages can be used to demonstrate the passage of time, to cover two or more separate events that are happening simultaneously, and/or to summarize the actions and activities of multiple characters at their current places in the story.

Montages are visual in nature, so their use is primarily to telegraph visual cues to the audience about the story.

EXAMPLES:

It's common for a film to add a musical score, theme or a song to heighten the mood of a montage. In the case of *Team America: World Police* (2004), the song that plays during the film's montage is *about* montages, and explains: "*Show a lot of things happening at once, Remind everyone of what's going on (what's going on?), And with every shot you show a little improvement, To show it all would take too long. That's called a montage (montage), Oh we want a montage (montage)*". This montage allows the audience to understand that a character who at first is inept and untrained quickly becomes a seasoned professional at the trade of policing the world, a sequence that alerts the audience that an appropriate amount of effort has been put in on the part of the protagonist to ensure they are capable of meeting the obstacle that confronts them without taking up many multiple pages of screen time in order to exemplify the process, scene-by-scene.

In *Teen Wolf* (1985), Scott Howard (Michael J. Fox) is one of the best athletes on his high school's basketball team. In a climactic game that puts everything on the line, we're shown how The Beavers basketball team slowly edges their way back into the game in a come-from-behind sequence that takes place over the course of a long montage sequence that brings us to within a point and puts Scott in a position to win the game with a few free throws. This montage takes us through the highlights of the game and builds suspense for the audience in whether or not the team is going to pull through in the end.

Mood

Mood, *is the attitude and atmosphere of a scene, sequence, and act of a script—as well as the prevailing tone of the script overall. Mood is about finding a state of mind for your characters by revealing their character attitude and allowing them to behave naturally in the confines and circumstances that arise within the world of the film. In addition to character, the writer's own voice in their descriptions of actions, objects and events within a screenplay's action lines also articulates a mood for the reader.*

EXAMPLES:

Brick (2005) is a hard-nosed mystery thriller taken out of the styling of noir pictures of the 30's and 40's and set in a modern high-school world. Because of this, the *mood* reflects the mood felt in those earlier noir films, but under a new guise—the high-school drama. In this case, Brendan (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is investigating the death of his ex girlfriend Emily (Emilie de Ravin) by tracing her footsteps back to the mysterious and elusive figure known only as The Pin (Lukas Haas). Dark and brooding with fast-talking, quick-thinking sleuths and thugs, *Brick* has a mood and a style all it's own by taking different genres and transposing them together into something new and exciting.

A comedy's prerogative is to entice its audience to laugh, and as with *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (2004), the mood is light and airy, full of jokes, good times and good people. You like all of the characters at play, here, even if they don't necessarily like each other, as is the case with Ron Burgundy (Will Ferrell) and Veronica Corningstone (Christina Applegate); though we delight in their antics to get under each others skin. Even as the film turns the corner and finds Ron down on his luck and desperate for work, the tone of the film never descends too deep or becomes too centered on Burgundy's despair; for even in Ron's misery there is comedy (tragically enough). Though not all comedies are required to be this upbeat, Anchorman is a good example of how audience's oftentimes seek out films with an upbeat point of view for good laughs and fun times.

Motif

Motif, is the use of metaphor, symbolism, repetition and mood in order to articulate a script's theme to the reader without having to state it overtly. By establishing a metaphor and discovering moments to return to the metaphor, a writer begins to make an ambiguous statement about the story which the audience recognizes and focuses upon. The conservative use of a motif can add style and tone to a script, though it can be an easy thing to over-use. When not subtly applied, motifs can exhaust an audience, and rather than being a major element within a screenplay, should only accent themes inherent to the story; the telling of which should always be a writer's first priority, along with character.

MOTIF (CONT'D)

EXAMPLES:

Reoccurring camera angles sometimes intone a silent motif to the audience, as in the case of *The Third Man* (1949), where the constant use of dutch angles, or camera angles where the framing is caddywompus or uneven with the floor, give the viewer a sense that things are unusual—that the characters, or even the audience themselves, aren't on equal-footing with each other. This *motif* can be used to instill a sense of helplessness in the audience in relation to the protagonist dealing with or coming to terms with the events within a story. The director or writer can do this in order to call attention to a visual representation of the emotions a character is undergoing and interpreting through a camera angle.

Mirrors can be a powerful motif in film, and with *Black Swan* (2010), Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman) is oftentimes being confronted by her own image via reflection in a mirror. The mirror motif can say many different things about the individual who's image is being reflected—how does the character see themselves? How does the audience see them? Does the mirror reflect how a character has changed, or what the character has gone through? Does the mirror allude to what changes need to be made? Does the mirror suggest that the character is narcissistic, or imply that something vital is missing? Sometimes even more powerful than the character's own reflection is what *else* is being reflected. What is the character's environment? What is going on in the background of a reflected image? The mirror itself also acts as a metaphor for the process of movie-watching as well—we are watching reflections of ourselves on the screen in very much the same way that the character on the screen is watching their own reflection in a mirror. In *Black Swan*, mirrors are everywhere —all about the character, forcing Nina to confront her own nature; done so repeatedly that the motif is hard to ignore, just as one's own reflection in one can be hard to ignore.

Mystery

Mystery, is the use of placing your protagonist, antagonist, or other supporting characters into scenarios where they are investigating parts of the story they don't know or don't understand, and/or is what occurs when characters are making choices based off indirection. Elements of audience awareness also come into play when dealing with mystery; how much information does the audience have? Is it more or less information than the characters in the story have? When

does the audience learn vital details of the story—before, after, or alongside the characters? Mystery is also a genre of film; one where the characters are searching to uncover a particular curiosity that surrounds an unexplained or unknown event.

EXAMPLES:

Watchmen (2009) is a film that brings together action and comic book genre films into the realm of mystery. We watch as characters such as Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley) and Nite Owl (Patrick Wilson) investigate not only their past lives and careers as *Watchmen*, a group of superheroes that saved the world from destruction, while also investigating the murder of their one-time comrade The Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan). The ins-and-outs of the story are revealed little by little, with methodical patience, until even the main characters are unsure of the meaning behind events, shrouding both themselves and the audience into a realm of mistaken identities and mounting suspense. Ultimately, the thrill of watching *Watchmen* comes from it's captivating detective story—an investigation into the present by meditating upon the past.

The beauty of *The Sixth Sense* (1999) is that, at the onset, we aren't aware that what we're watching is a mystery film. It would seem that, to a first-time audience member, the story that plays out before their eyes is a drama-horror story about Cole Sear (Haley Joel Osment), a little boy who is tortured by his curse to see ghosts, and a child psychologist, Dr. Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) who attempts to reach out to the troubled boy and understand his affliction. Yet, we come to find that in actuality, Cole is attempting to lead Malcolm upon a path that will lead to the man's own self-discovery; a mystery that teases both Malcolm and the audience along the path of the story in equal disillusionment and slowly-dawning realization. Though the film is, in large part, a story about a man and a boy understanding their own behaviors, it proves that Crowe's spirit is more mysterious than it might at first appear. The amazing feature of a well-crafted mystery tale is the elation that an audience can feel when the mystery is finally solved; an impending sense of shock and insight can bring a reader and a viewer back to a story over and over again, even if they can never have the pleasure of re-living a mystery for the first time.

Mythic Characters

Mythic Characters, *like archetypal and allegorical characters, are usually characters who are symbolically intended to represent an idea, an emotion, a vice or a virtue common to the overall human condition. However, to suggest that a character is mythic intones that they are in some way legendary, or worthy of legendary renown. This inflates the character to a larger-than-life status; an individual who transcends menial limitations and operates on a higher physical or mental level than normal people. However, as with most characters, despite whatever warrants a mythic character's legend, the individual themselves must be flawed in some way, and also possess characteristics that the audience can empathize with. These character requirements ensure that the reader becomes emotionally invested in the character enough to be interested in their character arc, and to continue reading a script to its final page.*

EXAMPLES:

In Desmond Davis' *Clash of the Titans* (1981), the viewer is treated to an epic tale of mythic proportions that brings us face-to-face with a multitude of mythical characters and creatures, including the hero Perseus (Harry Hamlin), Zeus (Laurence Olivier), Medusa, Pegasus, and Calibos (Neil McCarthy). Since the film takes place in an ancient time, and tells the story of an ancient hero of ancient Greece, the tale is intrinsically fluent with dynamic characters and amazing happenings, each one challenging or aiding Perseus in a unique way specific to their character and what their character represents symbolically.

Sometimes entirely factual, historical figures can be reinterpreted into mythical manifestations in film, such as The Man With No Name trilogy, starting with *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964).''Joe'', a wayward gunslinger romanticizes the iconic figure of the wild west vigilante to a mythic proportion—making him impossibly adroit with a pistol and incredibly wily. Taking an approach to relatively recent historical periods and elevating them to an epically mythic status inflates the effects such characters have in the imaginations and fantasies of the audience's mind, giving the character a personae of gigantic magnitude—powerful enough to fuel two sequels, *For A Few Dollars More* (1965), and *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966), along with even more films of the same stature from director Sergio Leone, mythic in his own rite.

Nonhuman Characters

Nonhuman Characters, *are anthropomorphic characters; characters who are literally anything other than human beings. These characters can manifest in a number of different ways—varying from fantastical characters like fairies, gnomes, goblins (etc.), animalistic characters such as lions, dogs, fish (etc.), mythical beasts like unicorns, griffins, dragons (etc.), supernatural creatures such as ghosts, phantoms, zombies (etc.), normally inanimate objects like rocks, shoes, toasters (etc.); or anything a writer's imagination can possibly conceive. The value of creating nonhuman characters is ascribing human-like characteristics to creatures or objects that don't, and to imagine how a specific thing might behave if it were given a human voice and human emotions.*

EXAMPLES:

The NeverEnding Story(1984) features a myriad of nonhuman characters, including Falkor (Alan Oppenheimer), the magical flying dragon that Atreyu (Noah Hathaway) rides, Rockbiter (also Alan Oppenheimer), Cairon (Moses Gunn), Teeny Weeny (Deep Roy) and Engywook (Sydney Bromley)--in fact, the whole world of Fantasia is teeming with life that lies outside the realm of human-species, though most all of these creatures exhibit human-*like* behaviors and personalities in varying degrees. Nonhuman characters, therefore, sometime represent different kinds of people allegorically, being a kind of non-human manifestation of certain types of common people, shown in a different light or in a drastically fantasy context, which can sometimes allow for a fresh and unexpected perspective on old, typical characters.

The fact that the characters in the film *Beauty and the Beast* are non-human is what drives the plot of the film; for characters such as Lumiere the Candle Holder (Jerry Orbach), Cogsworth the Clock (David Ogden Stiers), Mrs. Potts the Teapot (Angela Lansbury), and the Beast (Robby Benson) himself, were all once human beings but have been mystically transformed into a beast and various articles of housewares. The entertaining value to the film is in the clever ways the individual characters are personified by their non-human manifestations; for instance, Lumiere is illuminating and enlightening in a way a candle might be. Cogsworth is rigid and unbending, like time—or a well timed clock—would be. Even Chip (Bradley Pierce), Mrs. Potts' boy, is named Chip and speaks with a whistle that suggests he has a chip in his tooth. However, it is the chance the characters have to return to their human forms, combined with the limited amount of time to do so, is what heightens the stakes for all the characters who

NONHUMAN CHARACTERS (CONT'D)

desire to break the spell—and also what motivates their attention to Belle (Paige O'Hara), a young girl who is held captive among them.

O.S.

O.S. (an abbreviation for Off Screen), is a page direction that signifies that a character's dialogue is delivered from somewhere outside the camera's frame. Oftentimes, if it is beyond the audience's view, it is beyond the other character's view as well. This direction separates the characters in a scene with regards to their physical proximity to one another, but links them together through the off-screen character's voice. In teleplays this is often referred to as O.C. (an abbreviation for Off Camera)

EXAMPLES:

In *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), in a scene where gumshoe Eddie Valiant (Bob Hoskins) is interrogating cartoon producer R.K. Maroon (Alan Tilvern), a gun appears through the drapes and puts a hole in the back of Maroon before he can sing any delicate details to Valiant that someone would rather remain unsaid. Though the gun itself appears on camera, the the hand, and who it belongs to, remains ambiguously anonymous, shrouded behind the drapes and the window blinds, giving an air of mystery to who is pulling the strings in the story. This is an example of how information can be kept outside the field of vision of the screen, the camera, and the audience—thus making this a scenario where *O.C.* is used to keep the mystery going a little bit longer.

The scene between Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem) and Carla Jean Moss (Kelly Macdonald) takes place when the film is almost at an end. Anton Chgirh has gained his goal, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell's (Tommy Lee Jones) goal eluded him, and Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) lost his entirely. However, there is still unfinished business between Anton and Carla Jean—though they have never met in life before the moment she sees him in her bedroom. They discuss the prospect of her death—that Chigurh has promised to kill her if certain conditions weren't meant and he is here to make good on his promise and to keep his word—an odd moral and ethical stance to take, but we have come to understand this about the character since early on. As the scene plays out, Carla Jean tries to rationalize with Chigurh, who agrees to only give her one chance to live—to correctly call the flip of a coin in his pocket. She doesn't understand the significance and asks

how the coin can be allowed to decide Chigurh's actions. He tells her that he got to this place in time the same way that the coin did. Immediately afterward, Chigurh leaves the house. We don't know positively whether the coin came up heads, tails, or was even flipped at all—but we know that Chigurh checks his boots as he leaves the house, and that we never see or hear from Carla Jean again. Whatever happened between them occurred *off screen*, or O.S.; out of the viewers frame of reference. This is an invitation on the filmmaker's and the writer's behalf for the audience to come to their own conclusions about how events played out for these two characters.

O.C.

O.S. *(an abbreviation for Off Camera) is a page direction that signifies that a character's dialogue is delivered from somewhere outside the camera's field of view. Most commonly used in writing for television, or teleplays. .*

EXAMPLES:
See O.S.

Objective

Objective, *is any character's goal, or incentive for undertaking the opposition's challenge. The objective is what motivates a character to begin, and to continue, the journey, An objective is also another way of asking what the character wants or needs; what the character thinks he or she is accomplishing by pursuing their goal. An objective isn't limited to only the protagonist or heroes of the film, as a strong, interesting antagonist or villain must have an objective as well. For that matter, every character should have their own agenda in order to ensure that they are unique and interesting. The more enticing the objective, the more motivated the character will become. The more motivated the character is, the harder the opposition must work to prevent the character from achieving it. The harder the opposition works increases the level of tension, fueling higher levels of drama and thus provoking your audience's involvement in the story.*

OBJECTIVE (CONT'D)

EXAMPLES:

In *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* (1987), Neal Page (Steve Martin) has only one desire: to get home to his family for Thanksgiving, even if it seems as though *everything else* wants only to keep him from doing it. It Throughout the entire course of the film, Neal is struggling against obstacles ranging from canceled airplane flights to rental cars engulfed in flames on his trek back home, all while accompanied with Del Griffith (John Candy), a man who is determined to be with his new best friend Neal every step of the way on Neal's way back home. Neal's obstacles, which prevent his only want, combined with Del's personality, are enough to push Neal to the most extreme of circumstances. The dynamics of this film are made possible because the protagonist's objective is so clearly defined, because it is a specific objective, and because there are literally millions of ways the writer can come up with to prevent Neal from easily achieving it; thus creating both comedy, and drama.

In *Harvey* (1950), Elwood P. Dowd (James Stewart) is an otherwise charming man who anyone would delight the company of—if it weren't for the undeniable fact that Elwood is single-mindedly *convinced* that he has an invisible, 6-foot tall, walking-talking "Pooka" a.k.a.: rabbit. Despite however content Elwood himself is with his 'friend', everyone else in Elwood's life, including his family, friends and caregivers, are distressed to no end by his fantastical, schizophrenic delusions. Therefore, it becomes the objective of everyone who *isn't* Elwood to cure him of his hallucination. The dramatic irony of the film is also slowly alluded to as Elwood's supposed 'friends' work to cure him—the lengths they go to save Elwood from himself are sometimes more insane than the allegedly psychotic behaviors of the man who is suffering from the delusions.

Obligatory Scene

Obligatory Scene, is a scene that the audience is conditioned to anticipate, either consciously or subconsciously, after certain expectations have already been met. Though an obligatory scene might boarder on cliché, it falls just short of becoming predictable since the audience intuitively expects one scene to follow another—becoming less about predictability and more about cause-and-effect. If scene A is a cause, then the audience logically understands that scene B would be it's effect. Knowing this, the audience anticipates the obligatory scene which would demonstrate what the effects of a cause might be. To not write an

obligatory scene when the audience is set up to expect one would only serve to frustrate the audience by thwarting their expectations.

EXAMPLES:

At the end of *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (2005)*,* after watching an entire movie wondering if Andy (Steve Carell) will break his 40 year long cold-spell, it stands to reason that the audience would be given a scene that shows Andy *after* the deed has been done. To deny the audience any insight into what Andy thought about it now that it's been achieved would be to deny the audience their curiosity as to how Andy liked it. This is what makes the final scene in *40 Year Old Virgin* a unique, pivotal and *obligatory* post-coital scene

In Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), a team of ancient outlaws attempt one final score before the old ways of the wild west disappear forever. They must seize the opportunity, and what transpires is the prototypical requirement to any true western film: the shootout. In a western film, when the situation has reached absolute critical mass, the characters take to the streets with loaded pistols and come out guns blazing, shooting away until only the biggest, baddest hombre remains. *The Wild Bunch*, among a multitude of other western genre films, follow this storytelling conceit stridently—and is perhaps one of the most tried-and-true obligatory scenes in film.

Observation

*One half of writing is **Observation**; the other half is recollection. The process of writing involves the writer observing their own experiences, and recalling those experiences later to inform their writing process. Without observation, there would be nothing to recall; without recollection, the writer would have no context in which to place events in terms of what makes a situation interesting, and what makes it worth being written. A highly observant writer is capable of articulating more well-crafted and interesting details about character, story and actions for the reader to enjoy.*

EXAMPLES:

In *12 Angry Men* (1957), Juror #9 (Joseph Sweeney) notices Juror #4 (E.G. Marshall) rubbing his nose where the juror's glasses agitate the tender area between the eyes and the bridge of the nose. This sparks a memory of one of the witnesses to the murder—a woman who had supposedly seen the actual stabbing

OBSERVATION (CONT'D)

take place. Juror #9 recalls that she had the same little indentations on the bridge of her nose that Juror #4 has—except that she wasn't wearing glasses in the courtroom, perhaps out of vanity. This calls into question her reliability as an eye-witness to the murder. All of the sudden, deciding on a not guilty verdict for the boy who is being charged with murder seems all the more palpable, all because of one juror's keen sense of observation and recollection—having the sense to observe the seemingly mundane activity of Juror #4 massaging the bridge of his nose, and recalling the indentations on the witnesses nose and deducing what they could possibly have meant. By this rationale, if Juror #9 was observant enough to make this connection, the *writer*, therefore, must have been observant enough to have seen this in their own life—using this detailed observation in their writing helped to inform the course of the story, becoming another example as to why (and how) observation can be so vital to the writing process.

Rear Window (1954) is an example of a film where all the main character is capable of doing throughout the whole story is to sit and observe what is happening next door. L.B. 'Jeff' Jeffries (James Stewart) is on the mend in his apartment—recovering from a broken leg. Without much else to do, 'Jeff' grabs a handy pair of binoculars and seeks entertainment from the view his window affords him of his neighbors. What unfolds before Jeff's eyes is a torrid murder mystery—calling into question Jeff's sanity, paranoia, and personal safety. In this case, we have a film where the entire tension of the story revolves around what one character has observed—a character who was literally capable of doing nothing else *other* than observing life happening outside his window. This shows that observation needn't always be an inactive, boring choice to include in your writing—as in this case, it is central to one of the greatest mystery thrillers of all time.

One-String Characters

One-String Characters, *are characters in a script that serve a limited role in the entire framework of the story, and are usually only ascribed small bits of dialogue that oftentimes is meant to inform other characters or the audience of exposition or plot details. Occasionally, one-string characters are comedic, and have one-liners, a brief dialogue exchange, or perhaps even a small monologue*

that serves a purpose other than basic plot; but usually these moments are superficial and only serve to set-up or support other comedic bits.

EXAMPLES:

In *Se7en* (1995), the climactic scene in which Detective Mills (Brad Pitt) and Detective Somerset (Morgan Freeman) take the killer John Doe (Kevin Spacey) out to the middle of nowhere to find the film's final two victims, Wrath and Envy, when suddenly the party is encountered by a lone delivery truck that appears off in the horizon. At this point, Somerset leaves Mills and Doe alone while he goes to check out the delivery truck. While Somerset is gone, Doe divulges some pertinent information about Mills and his wife Tracy (Gwyneth Paltrow). Meanwhile, Somerset encounters the Delivery Man (Richmond Arquette), who is here to deliver a package. Even though the part is small, the character itself is memorable since the contents of the box are fundamental to the film's conclusion. This is why, upon multiple viewings, we anticipate the Delivery Man, and has come to be as integral to the scene as Somerest, Mills, and even Doe himself.

In *The Matrix* (1999), as Neo (Keanu Reeves) is given a crash-course introduction to how the matrix works from Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), Neo becomes distracted by an intoxicating Woman in a red dress (Fiona Johnson). Though she is artificial, her existence proves a fundamental point—that everything that exists within the world of the matrix is designed, fabricated, and artificial. Though her role is brief, she fills a specific function in explaining the reality of the world to the audience.

In *The Big Lebowski* (1998), The Dude (Jeff Bridges) and Walter Sobchak visit the home of Little Larry Sellers (Jesse Flanagan), based upon a suspicion that Larry stole The Dude's car which happened to hold a million dollar ransom. Convinced that Larry has the million dollars, but refuses to cooperate, Walter and Dude play good cop/bad cop until they are convinced that Larry won't fess up. Walter takes the interrogation to the next level by walking outside to a beautiful brand new car he's convinced that Larry bought with the money and begins to bash it in with a crowbar, only to come face-to-face with the true owner of the vehicle moments later—in the form of Larry's next door neighbor. Here, Larry is another example of a one-string character, who serves no other function than to exemplify how inept both The Dude and his sidekick Walter can be at recovering the lost money.

Opposition

Opposition, is the obstacle or antagonist that is acting to prevent the protagonist or protagonists from achieving their desired goal. Without opposition, there is no tension; without tension, there is no drama; without drama, there is no story. Because of this, all movies must have some kind of opposition; something that puts the main character in danger of failing to achieve their objective, and allows for the audience to see what the main character is willing to endure, and what lengths he or she are willing to go, in order to overcome their opposition. What makes a story compelling for the reader, and the audience, is seeing whether or not the main character is capable of overcoming their opposition; the results of this struggle is ultimately what makes a film comedic and/or tragic.

EXAMPLES:

In *WALL-E* (2008), the opposition to WALL-E (Ben Burtt) and EVE's (Elissa Knight) prerogative—to return the human race to recolonize earth—is opposed by the Ship's Computer (Sigourney Weaver), who desires only to continue running the ship and the lives of all humanity on board. However hard WALL-E and EVE struggle to bring civilization back to the surface of earth, the Ship struggles harder to prevent them from doing so, which continues to increase the stakes higher and higher until finally, everything culminates. In the case of most all films, the protagonist must confront the *opposition* while the *opposition* is at it's highest strength and fury—stacking the odds heavily against the main character, thus creating drama. Only when the drama is at it's highest is the protagonist's character truly tested; making the battle between the protagonist and the obstacle truly a matter of 'when the going gets tough, let the tough get going.'

Gladiator (2000) is a film in which the *opposition* is constantly testing the strength and the will of Maximus Decimus Meridius (Russel Crowe), who must fight as a Gladiator in the Roman Colosseum before the Roman people and their treacherous, murderous Emperor, Commodus Aurelius. As Maximus proves himself a stout and adroit warrior, handily winning each and every opponent placed against him—be they either tigers, or former, undefeated Gladiators of titanic stature—he is forever being promised that his freedom is getting closer and closer with every victory. That is until Maximus is paired against the one opponent he is least likely to defeat—the Emperor himself; and not because the Emperor is so mighty with a sword, but because the Emperor has the power to get a few unguarded attacks in on Maximus, behind closed doors and before the match officially begins. Maximus is then faced with his greatest opposition yet;

wounded nearly to death and battling against the most powerful man in all of Rome. *Gladiator* then becomes an example of a film that uses opposition to constantly check the protagonist's mettle, even unto the film's very ending.

P.O.V.

P.O.V., (an abbreviation for 'point-of-view'), traditionally refers to a camera position that is shown from a particular character's viewpoint, making the camera, the lens, or the screen the characters 'eyes'. This puts the audience directly in the physical positioning of the character. However, the p.o.v. may also refer to who's viewpoint, or outlook, the story is being told from. As there are, typically, many multiple characters in a film, it would theoretically be possible to tell the story from any one of their points of view—however, the writer makes a choice in deciding which character, or characters, will be the protagonists, or the character who's point of view the audience interprets the story through.

EXAMPLES:

In *Being John Malkovich* (1999), much of the story centers around the fact that, at a certain time, and at a certain place, anybody can literally be John Malkovich (John Malkovich), "...an actor. He's one of the great American actors of the 20th century," as Craig Schwartz (John Cusack) says to Maxine Lund (Catherine Keener). As the characters travel through this 'portal', they become fixed into the brain of John Malkovich, and see the world through his point of view (POV). Eventually, they even come to be able to control his body and even learn to permanently occupy his body. This makes *Being John Malkovich* an example of how the camera can literally become the point of view of a character—or in this case, *characters*—to demonstrate to the audience the phenomenon of seeing the world through the point of view of someone else, allowing the audience to vicariously live out the fantasy of the narrative through the perspective of the writer's creation.

The film *Hero* (2002) is a tale about four rebels of an empire that hedge all of their bets onto the back of one man, who the film refers to as *Nameless* (Jet Li), a deadly assassin who is capable of getting within sword-striking distance of the evil King of Qin (Daoming Chen) if he can successfully convince the Empire that he has assassinated the three other rebels and thus would be due to receive their bounties from the King. As the narrative of the film is told in flashbacks during Nameless' audience with the King, the visual look and style of the film changes

P.O.V. (CONT'D)

depending on who's *point of view* of past events Nameless is voicing to the King. The King himself even tells a story of his own about the fallen rebels Nameless has supposedly killed—again, with it's own unique visual style. Therefore, *Hero* becomes an example of how the storytelling within a film can change as it shifts from one character's perspective to another—making this film a visual spectacle from the points of view of each unique character within it.

Pitch

Pitch, refers to the process in which a writer verbally communicates a film idea or television concept to someone else, though pitch implies that the 'someone else' is an individual working within the industry. It's important to paint a picture of the film in the listener's imagination; giving them an intriguing, likable but fundamentally flawed protagonist, a goal or desire for that protagonist to achieve, and present the main character's opposition, while outlining, briefly and succinctly, the film's beginning—middle—and end. Being sure to provide your listener with a cleanly told story full of exciting twists and turns is pivotal to delivering a successful and enlightening pitch. A pitch should make the listener feel as though they have 'seen' the movie, though in only a fraction of the time.

EXAMPLES:

Ed Wood (1994) (Johnny Depp) is a writer, producer, and director of his own motion pictures, and will do anything to get his movies made—even if it includes pitching his movie ideas to production companies notorious for their soft-core exploitation films. It comes to Ed's attention that George Weiss (Mike Starr) is producing a sex-change bio-pic film, and Ed assures him that he is *the* most qualified man in all of Hollywood to get a picture made dealing with that type of subject matter—even offering to write *and* direct the film himself. When Weiss asks Wood what makes him so qualified, Ed confesses that it is because he, in fact, is a cross-dresser, which will give a dimension of realism to the film. Yet, it's not until after Ed promises Weiss the talents of screen legend Bela Lugosi (Martin Landau) is he granted permission to manage the film's production, thus being the beginnings of Ed Wood's picture *Glen or Glenda* (1953). Here, we have an example of how a potential writer and filmmaker adjusts his pitch to make himself seem like the most qualified person in the world to write any given film. In this case, Ed may have been right—he may have in fact been the most

qualified because of his penchant for dressing in woman's clothing—however, the viewer wouldn't put it past Ed to say that he would be the most qualified man in Hollywood to write or direct any film—regardless of it's subject matter.

Barton Fink (1991) (John Tuturro) is a playwright who just struck it big on the big stage with his most recent play that charts the struggles of a family of fish mongers. The play goes over so well that Capitol Pictures wants to put Barton under contract as a screenwriter. Jack Lipnick (Michael Lerner) is the head honcho at Capitol Pictures and charges Barton with the task of coming up with a picture that will "make us laugh, make us cry, make us burst out into song". Lipnick tells Barton that Capitol Pictures has just recently purchased the rights to a boxing story, and that he would like Barton to show him a draft by the end of the week—something that has got that 'Barton Fink touch'. So here we have an example of a pitch being given to the writer, though in broad, elemental strokes that *suggest* story rather than *tell*. Barton is commissioned to write a boxing picture that has a touch of what Lipnick would call, 'the poetry of the streets'; although it's likely that Lipnick has as little of an idea as to what that means as Barton does. In the end, all Barton knows is that he is to write a picture about a boxer and that it has to have his unique voice to it—something that Barton had been struggling with even when his play became a success. Barton struggles to write the script throughout the whole length of the film, until finally he is struck with inspiration at the very end and composes a story that might possibly be his best work—the work that he is the most proud of. Needless to say, Lipnick is sickened by it's psychological trash, saying that he only wanted one or two brushstrokes of Fink's style so that the critics would write good reviews. Among other things, *Barton Fink* is a story about how a pitch went wrong—even if Barton is convinced that his script was right.

Planting & Payoff

Planting & Payoff, refers to two different, carefully planned out tools employed by writer in order to give the audience an enlightening and emotionally satisfying immersion into the world of the film by providing them first with the planting of a story device, be it either a motif, a reoccurring phrase or snippit of dialogue, a character's unique behavioral quirk, costume piece, object or prop, or any combination of these in order to foreshadow an upcoming payoff. The second is the payoff itself; the sudden and unexpected revelation of some misunderstood or previously unknown significance behind whatever reoccurring motif was used.

PLANTING & PAYOFF (CONT'D)

Adding a plant and a payoff in a script can give the audience a eureka moment, or the sense of an epiphany—which is always immediately rewarding for an audience when the work has been done on the writer's part to set up a story element and pay it off correctly.

EXAMPLES:

The first moment we see Dom Cobb's (Leonardo DiCaprio) 'token', a spinning brass top, is when it's placed upon a table before the hunched, frail figure of an old man and told that it was found on Cobb's body as he was washed up onto shore—along with a gun. Cobb is brought before the old Japanese man, and we are told that he once knew a man who possessed a top just like this one. This *plant* pays off in a number of different ways by the end of the film—not only do we revisit this scene later, we come back to it with a better understanding of who Cobb is, how he got there, who the Japanese man is and how he got to this place, and what the significance of the spinning top is. Furthermore, the top has an even greater implications to suggest up to the very last shot of the film, where we watch the top spin—upon the verge of its tipping point—before the film ends. We are unsure of whether or not the top topples, and are left to question the legitimacy of Cobb's 'happy ending'. This allows the top to serve multiple different payoffs, while at the same time being such an inconspicuous object that no audience would immediately suspect that it was capable of carrying such dramatic weight to the story—making it a clever and useful example of how *plants & payoffs* can be simple items with grand implications.

Cinema Paradiso (1988) is a film about a filmmaker's love of the cinema. It follows the life of filmmaker Salvatore 'Toto' Di Vita (Salvatore Cascio, Marco Leonardi, Jacques Perrin) from childhood to adulthood as he frequents his local village movie theater and befriends the projectionist, Alfredo (Philippe Noiret). During one sequence, the village Priest views a film that is to debut that night alone with Alfredo in the projectionist booth. As the scene on the screen plays out before the Priest, the two characters in the movie embrace and kiss. Offended by this carnal excess of lust, the Priest rings a bell—and Alfredo promptly marks that portion of the footage to cut and edit before it can be viewed by the village public later. We see that this is not a new habit of the Priest's, as Alfredo has reams upon reams of celluloid collected over the years—full of movie stars in black and white passionately kissing on screen. Little Salvatore is naturally curious about the mysterious (and taboo) kissing scenes, but will never see them. That is until toward the end of the film, we see a much older and world-weary

Salvatore—successful filmmaker now far away from his little Italian village he called home—sits back to look over some stock film footage that was sent to him, only to find that it is a spliced-together collection of all the kissing scenes that Alfredo had cut out of the movies before. Kiss after kiss, a flood of memories and emotions sweeps over Salvatore as he remembers his distant childhood, and what it was about movies that made him fall in love with them in the first place. This is an example of how the *plant* of watching the Priest edit the film footage *pays off* when we see that footage edited together again once more to inspire Salvatore when he needed inspiration the most.

Plausibility

Plausibility, refers to the setting a of tone of believability within a screenplay. The writer treads a fine line when taking his audience through what is impossible and what is predictable. An audience can become turned off by a movie that asks them to take too many leaps in their imagination to go along with the story—if an audience member can't believe that a story is possible, they are less likely to respond. Likewise, if a story is too easy to believe, the audience can become bored by a film's predictability—a story that is neither exciting or enlightening and offers the audience no sense of escapism. Therefore, a writer must be sure to keep their screenplay within the realm of plausibility—to make sure that the story is neither unbelievable or predictable. The events of a story must be possible, but unlikely—the possibility of the events within a film happening make the audience empathize with the characters from personal experience, while the unlikelihood of the events make the events worthy of being made into a movie, and offer the audience some level of escape, or immersion into the world of the film.

EXAMPLES:

In *Armageddon* (1998), the earth is confronted with an obstacle not seen for 64 million years—an asteroid the size of Texas that is guaranteed to collide against the surface of the earth in approximately 18 days. An asteroid of it's magnitude would obliterate all life on earth, rendering the human race utterly and totally extinct for all time. Already, the film's obstacle is *plausible*—certainly, we know that an asteroid from space destroying a large portion of life on the planet is not only possible, but is *inevitable*—the audience only hopes that such a thing won't happen within their lifetimes. Yet, the film suggests that it will, and the audience is hooked in order to see how life could possibly be saved from such a

catastrophe. The film recommends destroying the asteroid before it strikes the earths surface with a nuclear warhead—blowing it to smithereens and rather than being hit by a single huge asteroid, opting to be hit by many small chunks of asteroids. This still sounds *plausible* to the audience. It is further explained that the warhead needs to be detonated close to the core of the asteroid in order for it to be effective, meaning that the surface of the asteroid needs to be drilled before the warhead can be buried under it's surface. The only person qualified enough to do this, with enough drilling experience to see the job done, is Harry Stamper (Bruce Willis), expert oil driller. Though, initially, the concept may sound unbelievable, the writer takes care to make sure that each step in the story's logic at reaching Harry Stamper as it's only possible hero is made carefully and will be *plausible* in the audience's imagination. This makes Armageddon an exciting roller-coaster of a movie by bringing together a profoundly dangerous obstacle and an unlikely, oil-drilling hero, to make for an unexpected character journey.

One of the story elements that makes the fantastical *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) possible is the conceit of memory erasing, a procedure that will eliminate anything, or anyone, from your past memories if the pain of the memory is too deep to bare. This is where Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) and Clementine Kruczynski (Kate Winslet) come in—Clementine had erased Joel after their torrid and tempestuous love affair came to an end, and not to be outdone, Joel decides to erase Clementine as well. Despite the fact that *literal* memory erasing is probably not *possible,* the writer takes a chance with it anyway hoping that the audience can at least believe in it's *plausibility;* or that it could be a procedure that seems like it could be possible. It's a conceit just close enough to being beyond the realm of believability that it works—the audience buys it, regardless of all it's impossibilities, and runs with it—because the storyteller told it with conviction and honesty (within the world of the film), especially in relation to how the characters react to it—from trying to understand the procedure ("Is there any risk of brain damage?" "Technically speaking the procedure *is* brain damage...") to enduring the procedure ("I want to call it off.") *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is a film that takes an impossible medical procedure and makes it believable by making it seem apparently *plausible* to the audience so that the plot can continue.

Plot

Plot, *refers to the major events that happen within a story, each dependent upon the event that proceeds and succeeds it—also known as the five plot points, which are connected by eight main sequences. Each of these plot points are structured under the frame-work of three acts—colloquially referred to as beginning, middle, and end. The plot is what propels the character into the story, puts him/ her upon a quest or journey of some kind, and challenges them to achieve their end. Without plot, a character would just be simply existing within the world of the film; nothing noteworthy would occur to the character, nothing eventful would incite them to begin a journey that will force them to undergo a character change.*

EXAMPLES:

In *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), seven year old Olive Hoover (Abigail Breslin) gets accepted to compete in the Little Miss Sunshine beauty pageant. Now the whole family, Mother Sheryl (Toni Collette), Father Richard (Greg Kinnear), Brother Dwayne (Paul Dano), Grandpa Edwin (Alan Arkin) and Uncle Frank (Steve Carrell) must all travel together from Albuquerque New Mexico to Redondo Beach, California for Olive to compete. However, the trek there will be an arduous one that will test the unity of this chaotic family individually and as a whole, ranging from overcoming car troubles, to dealing with the death of Grandpa, to sudden realizations that Dwayne is color blind. When finally the family does arrive at the beauty pageant, it becomes self-evident that Olive is certainly cut from a different cloth than some of the other young girls competing, and the family discusses the ethics of allowing Olive to participate, when finally it's decided that Olive will attempt to become the new Little Miss Sunshine, especially since it was the late Grandpa Edwin that helped Olive prepare her talent. In *Little Miss Sunshine*, the plot is the beauty pageant—the story vehicle that propels the characters into a situation they cannot escape from, and must overcome only by accepting the challenge and undergoing personal changes in their character attitudes. Plot is merely the circumstance; the story is the relationship the characters have with the plot.

Quiz Show (1994) – Herbie Stempel (John Tuturro) is the reigning champion of a night-time television quiz show called 'Twenty One'; a *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* type game show where two contestants compete to reach a point total of twenty one by answering trivia questions. However, it quickly becomes obvious that the game is rigged—the winner is decided before the end of the

PLOT (CONT'D)

show. Eventually, it's decided that Herbie Stempel isn't a likeable enough winner for the American audience, so he is replaced by Charles Van Doren (Ralph Fiennes), a university instructor and son of author, poet and Professor Mark Van Doren (Paul Scofield). Ultimately, Herbie agrees to take a dive and Charles agrees to answer questions that he already knows the answers to, for money. This continues, seemingly without a hitch despite the animosities of Herbie who feels slighted and bitter after the fact but is unable to get anyone to pay attention to his claims that the show was a fraud, until Dick Goodwin (Rob Morrow), a Harvard graduate lawyer arrives to dig up some dirt on the situation. What results is a tempestuous fallout of deceit, corporate fraud and greed. Ultimately, it falls upon Charles to confess once the pressure and the guilt of deceiving American viewers, and his family, is too great for him to bare. Charles is the man who receives the greatest criticism for his participation in the scam, but the film begs the question of who, ultimately, was to blame? The corporate millionaires and network presidents? The producers of Twenty One? The contestants? Or even perhaps the American viewers at home. The plot alone—the bare bones of the story that outlines the beginning, middle, and end, allows for the fascinating character dynamics to play out between the triangle set up between Herbie Stempel, Charles Van Doren, and Dick Goodwin.

Plot Points

Plot Points, *are the major events that move the plot and the story forward in a film. Typically, there are five commonly recognized plot points; the inciting incident, which is an event that provokes the main action of the plot; a lock in, the moment that the protagonist accepts and agrees to involve him/herself in achieving their need or goal; the first culmination is the first major challenge or obstacle the protagonist is faced against on their journey; the main culmination is the moment that the protagonist's goal is either won or lost and aims the story in a new direction; and finally the third act twist which is a surprising and unexpected variation that forces the hero to change. Together, these plot points tell an entire story, from beginning—middle—to end, and allows for the audience to experience the main character's change first-hand.*

EXAMPLES:

Up In The Air (2009) has all the pivotal plot points required for a fully developed story. First, you have the inciting incident, Ryan Bingham (George Clooney), a man who travels 275 days a year as a professional in corporate downsizing and is upon the edge of reaching ten million frequent flier miles, is called by his boss Craig Gregory (Jason Bateman) and is told to return home to Omaha at the end of the week for an undisclosed "game changer." This leads to the film's lock-in when Ryan's world is turned upside down when he is 'grounded' by his employers. Pulled off the road and placed instead in front of a computer to fire people via video conference call, Ryan also must come to know the new hire, Natalie Keener (Anna Kendrick). Craig gives Ryan an ultimatum: show Natalie the ropes, or get pulled off the road immediately. The midpoint then occurs when a woman Natalie is firing confesses that she is going to commit suicide. Ryan consoles Natalie, and convinces Natalie that she is capable of doing this job. Simultaneously, Ryan's no-strings affair with fellow traveler Alex (Vera Farmiga) begins to germinate when the three crash a hotel party together. The main culmination then occurs when Ryan bids farewell to Alex at the airport after bringing her as a date to his sister's wedding. He invites her to come and visit him. She remarks on how settled he seems; to which he replies that he is the same guy, just with one address. She tells him to call her when he's lonely. Finally, the third act twist features Ryan, mid-speech at a convention, among a throng of his peers. Ryan suddenly realizes what he's missing in his life. He leaves the convention suddenly and unexpectedly, and takes off to Chicago and finally to Alex's house—only to discover that she is a married woman with children. Just by following each of these plot points, you can see how a complete story is told—from beginning to end—and have a good idea as to the characters and personalities involved in the tale.

Likewise, *Raiders of the Lost Arc* (1981) has a clearly defined outline that adheres to each of the five crucial plot points that comprise a film. The *inciting incident* introduces Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) and colleague Marcus Brody (Denholm Elliott) decipher a cable for two Army officers and learn that the Nazi's have discovered Tanis, an ancient city and possible burial site of the Ark of the Covenant, an old-world relic that holds epic mystical power. The *lock in* demonstrates Indy and Marion Ravenwood (Karen Allen) committing to undergo the quest to find the Ark after her Nepalese saloon "The Raven" burns down to the ground. The *first culmination* occurs when Sallah (John Rhys-Davies) lowers Indy into the underground map room. Indy soon discovers the exact location of the Ark's burial; the Well of the Souls. The main culmination involves an intense

PLOT POINTS (CONT'D)

action sequence that renders Indy shot, wounded, and beaten after trying to hijack a Nazi truck transporting the Ark—but ultimately victorious, having come away with the Ark of the Covenant. However, the story is thrown through a loop in the third act twist when he aims a rocket launcher at the Ark, and threatens to destroy it unless Marion is freed. However, Indy's bluff is called—as he is incapable of destroying a historic relic of the ancient world.

Point of Attack

Point of Attack, is also known as the inciting incident, or the first major plot point in a film. The point of attack is the moment the character is instigated by someone or something, and builds story momentum that will eventually lead the character to the lock in. The point of attack is also an opportunity to show the main character before the change they must undergo begins; thus demonstrating both the qualities that make them likable for the audience, and also exemplifies the protagonist's flaw—or the trait that must be changed if the character is going to achieve their goal (which may or may not yet be known to the audience). All of this is done by confronting the protagonist with an event that sparks the story—or ignites the plot.

EXAMPLES:

With *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), the *point of attack* occurs when Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) meets Walter Donovan (Julian Glover) who reveals that he has assembled a team to find the mystical Holy Grail; the chalice that held the wine at Jesus' last supper. Donovan asks Indy to join their quest since the project's leader has gone missing, along with all his research. Indy is reluctant to help, until it's revealed that the missing project leader is in fact Indy's father, Professor Henry Jones Sr. (Sean Connery). As you can see, this *point of attack*, or *inciting incident*, is what provokes the story into action, even if the protagonist hasn't fully committed to the journey they are being asked to undertake—which, in *The Last Crusade*, is when Indy books a flight to Venice, beginning the quest to find Henry and the Holy Grail.

In *Star Trek* (2009), the point of attack happens when James Tiberius Kirk (Chris Pine) meets Uhura (Zoe Saldana) in a bar in Iowa. Kirk attempts to flirt with her, only to end up in a fistfight with three other Starfleet recruits. This fight is broken up by Senior Officer Captain Christopher Pike (Bruce Greenwood), who sits

down with Kirk to attempt to persuade the young renegade to join Starfleet—an open challenge to Kirk to aspire for more in life than Kirk's martyred father did. Here again, we see how the *point of attack* is provoking the character into the narrative; drawing the hero into the flow of the plot so that the story can continue. It is the first instance when a character is confronted with the story that will perpetuate the action of the film.

Polarity

Polarity, *refers to the sometimes drastic reversal of fortunes for a character throughout the course of a story. From the point the audience is introduced to a character, to the final frame of the film, the protagonist must undergo a significant change both in their character arc as well as in their individual status within the world of the film. This creates a polarity between the characters beginning-point and end-point—turning them 180 degrees in the opposite direction from where they started. If they began the movie happy and content, by the end of the film they should be tragically crushed and defeated. If they began the movie bitter and hateful, then by the end they should be rehabilitated and in love. A vengeful character should learn to forgive; a naive character should mature, etc. This ensures that the audience takes the biggest journey possible alongside the main character. The larger the scope for change, the greater the struggle. The greater the struggle, the more opportunity for drama.*

EXAMPLES:

Taxi Driver (1976) is a film that demonstrates *polarity* in regards to a character's arc, embodied in the personae of Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro). Travis is an ex-Marine and Vietnam War veteran who decides to become a cab driver as a distraction from his sleepless nights spent in his apartment. Though in the beginning of the film he attempts to be productive, a contribution to society, by getting 'organized' and finding a nice girl—who comes in the form of Betsy. He considers himself to have a 'clean conscience' and is sickened by the filth of the streets, saying that 'someday a real rain is gonna come along and wash all the scum off the streets.' Yet, once Travis becomes convinced that this rain will never come, he transforms himself into the scum from the streets—shaving his head into a threatening Mohawk, arming himself to the teeth with knives and handguns, steeling his body to give pain mercilessly and receive pain indiscriminately. Despite this transformation, despite his manic, misanthropic

POLARITY (CONT'D)

theories about society and the world and the people who populate it, Travis uses his new scum-visage as a disguise to go undercover and to rescue a young girl named Iris (Jodie Foster) from the clutches of a seedy neighborhood pimp named Sport (Harvey Keitel). So here, we have the polarity of Travis and his need to assimilate into normal New York life at the beginning of the film, set opposite of who Travis becomes at the end of the torrential bloodbath to save Iris from a life of prostitution—a hardened, murdering psychopath. Despite this transformation —Travis is recognized as a hero. Though Travis' actions are heroic, the audience knows it's a stretch to call Travis a hero by modern standards. He is awkward, unpredictable and eccentric, and possesses an abnormal sense of honor that is hard to understand. Yet the polarity cannot be ignored—Travis transformed himself, only to return to the same Travis Bickle he was when he first met Betsy —who, serendipitously, is his final cab fare of the film.

At the beginning of *As Good as It Gets* (1997), Melvin Udall (Jack Nicholson) is a crotchety, unpleasant old man with unrealistic expectations and attention demanding, especially when in the presence of his favorite restaurant server Carol Connelly (Helen Hunt). A man with idiosyncrasies, he is averse to germs and stepping on cracks in the pavement—compulsively locks the front door of his apartment five times to be sure it is locked. He is a man who lives in his own world, isolated, detached, and lonely. In fact, he is unaware of how ultimately lonely he is until he is forced to take on the responsibility of dog-sitting for his neighbor Simon Bishop (Greg Kinnear), who recently was mugged and robbed in his own apartment to the point of requiring hospitalization. The dog and Melvin bond almost immediately—becoming fast friends, and showing Melvin that even he needs company at least some of the time. By the end of the film, Melvin has begun a loving relationship with Carol, maintains a strong friendship with Simon, and has alleviated many of the quirks which previously controlled his life. This demonstrates a drastic character change for Melvin—as witnessed by the people who come to know him best, and the audience—who watched his growth from the very first frame of the film to the last.

Predictability

Predictability, is what occurs when an audience can accurately foretell, anticipate, and therefore become bored with the events which transpire in a story. Predictability is fatal for a screenwriter—if the audience can predict the outcome

of a story, there is no suspense, and without suspense there is no concern for the wellbeing of the film's protagonist, and no immersion on the audience's behalf into the world of the film. However, in avoiding predictability, the writer is at risk of steering into the realm of pushing the story beyond the audience's believability creating the exact opposite effect of predictability, but allowing for no empathy on the audience's part to the events of the story. Thus, it is important for a writer to try and maintain a story within the realm of plausibility, a story that is both possible but unlikely—thus allowing for an audience to relate to it on a personal level, and stay interested in its unpredictable twists and turns.

EXAMPLES:

In *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), the audience is shown the ending of the film, in a brief flashback, at the very beginning of the movie; the image of a man collapsing to the ground inside a international airport—a woman in a red dress running to his side—all from the perspective of one little boy, who when we're introduced to James Cole (Bruce Willis), we assume is the grown up version of this boy. The fact that Cole continues to have these flashback dreams and memories surrounding the man dying in an airport throughout the whole duration of the film only reinforces the fact that Cole is that boy—and that death he witnessed in the airport did occur. The audience feels secure knowing that this tragic event—whatever it's significance—is buried safely in the past. However, this is a great advantage to the writer—who can now turn the audience's expectations on it's heady by inexplicably pushing James Cole to relive that moment in time, using the film's unique interpretation of time travel to bring Cole back to this mysterious moment of Cole's childhood—only this time, from the opposite perspective. Cole witnesses his own death. Even once we see Cole don the familiar Hawaiian t-shirt, the fake handlebar mustache, the long haired wig, we immediately realize what it means for Cole, even if the realization is only slowly dawning upon him the role he is about to play in his own childhood memories. We understand what is happening—and at that moment, the ultimate ending of the film is predictable—tragically so. This keeps the audience compelled, regardless of the audience's knowledge what is going to happen. The audience is compelled to watch this prophetic moment manifest, to understand why and how it manifests, against all hope that perhaps it might be averted. This is an example of using *predictability* to actually inject a pervasive feeling of suspense to the film throughout the remainder of the third act—keeping the audience actively engaged to the credits.

PREDICTABILITY (CONT'D)

Though *Happy Gilmore* (1996) has it's various twists and turns as required in typical storytelling fashion, it's still a movie that rallies behind the movie's hero, Happy Gilmore (Adam Sandler), too enthusiastically to ignore the impending suspicions of the audience that everything is going to end up alright for Happy, his friends and his family—despite any deeply suppressed anger issues he might have. It's clear early on that the audience is watching a movie where things will turn out well for Happy in the end, even if he has to go through a great ordeal in order for it to happen. And ultimately, this is true—we see happy struggle, nearly fail, only to pull it together and win the golf tournament in the end because of his belief in his friends, family and himself. Regardless of how predictable the story might be, it is important to consider the film's audience, and who the writer is writing the script for. In this case, it could be argued that audience's will prefer a story that is plain and simple—not offering drastic shifts in story or character—in compromise for putting the comedian Adam Sandler in a comedy film to entertain audiences for an hour and a half of laughs. The writer knows this, and delivers—offering a film that features more comedy than drama. It's predictability, therefore, is *relatively* expected—but only because the overall structure of the film places it's strengths in star-power and the intoxicating mixture of comedy, romance and sports.

Preparation

Preparation, can be described as a 'calm before the storm'. Preparation scenes occur before a character is about to confront a dramatic challenge ahead. How any given character prepares to undergo any given obstacle depends entirely on who the character is, and what the obstacle will be. A writer's job is to equip the character with everything the character thinks that they will need to overcome the opposition; however, depending on the character, they may or may not have everything they need. These scenes are usually intimate and insightful examinations of character; an opportunity for the writer to leave the protagonist and the audience alone together, in order to allow the audience the chance to look at the hero, and gather information about their character in how they behave before a certain event is about to transpire.*

EXAMPLES:

In *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), much of the film is spent wondering who the 'rat' among the group is— who, among a team of criminals hired to rob a bank, is an undercover cop; or if not a cop, who tipped off the cops? When the audience comes to understand that Mr. Orange (Tim Roth) is the undercover cop, we are shown his backstory and filled in how this police officer came to be shot in the stomach, dying in this abandoned warehouse in a pool of his own blood. The flashback that ensues is, in fact, Mr. Orange's *preparation* for the moment he is faced with his own death. However, an example *within* an example would be all of the time, effort an energy he puts in to making his 'act' as a streetwise thug believable; even going to the lengths of memorizing an entire fictitious monologue that illustrates an amusing anecdote that is offered only to add further detail to his deceit. The audience learning this information when they do allows even greater sympathy for a character who was already sympathetic—not only does the audience hope for Mr. Orange to be saved from the bullet in his stomach, but they also aspire for his delivery out of the hands of these paranoid crooks and criminals that surround him.

In *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), the story begins on the mythic figure of Jesus (Jim Caviezel) standing in the Garden of Gethsemane—embroiled in a moment of inner doubt and worry. Both he, and the audience (if they're familiar with the story or were aware of the hype surrounding the content of the film), know what is to come—and fear it. Jesus' moment alone, standing in the garden, is his way of *preparing* himself for the brutality he is hours away from enduring —brutality that will ultimately end with him dead and nailed to a cross. Yet, even in this moment of personal preparation, he is confronted by Satan (Rosalinda Celentano) in his most vulenerable moment. This isn't by accident—Jesus is tempted when he is in his deepest moment of doubt, and at a point in the narrative structure of the film when it's important for the audience to understand what's at stake. Therefore, this moment of *preparation* for the character turns into a moment of temptation—suddenly forcing a character who was in doubt only a moment before must now defend himself and his mission to a supreme evil. And this is all before even the first drop of blood is spilled.

Probability

Probability, is the quantifiable odds of certain expected results happening against the odds of unexpected results; or, alternately, when the odds are 50/50.

PROBABILITY (CONT'D)

This helps build suspense; when the audience believes that the protagonist has no chance of success by being shown the probability (or inevitability) of failure, it becomes a foregone conclusion that things will not end well for the main character. Adversely, if it is demonstrated that the protagonist has no chance of failure by demonstrating the probability of success to the audience, the viewers are then left to question how things could possibly go wrong. This sets the audience up for a midpoint contrast--allowing the audience to be shocked out of their expectations when things unexpectedly go right for a character who was doomed to failure, or when things go wrong for a character who was set up for success.

EXAMPLES:

The characters in the film *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) are always weighing the probability of their success. For Frodo (Elijah Wood) and Sam (Sean Astin) successfully destroying Sauron's Ring, the odds are really quite slim. Living to tell the tale of how they did it—practically impossible. Frodo doesn't hold much hope in a return journey home, even if Sam somehow does—but soon, even Sam cannot deny that they have been sent to Mordor to die trying to destroy the ring. Meanwhile, on the other side of the fence (or Black Gate), Aragorn (Viggo Mortenson), Gandalf (Ian McKellen), Legolas (Orlando Bloom), and Gimli (John Rhys-Davies) sit and discuss what their next plan of attack is after inexplicably winning against Sauron's first wave of troops. It is decided that they must march to Mordor and go on the offensive—provoking Sauron to empty his land to allow for Frodo & Sam's easier passage to Mount Doom, where the Ring can be destroyed, even if they aren't sure whether their Hobbit friends are even dead or alive. Gimli sums up the situation best when he says, "Certainty of death, small chance of success...what are we waiting for?" And at this juncture in the story, he's right. Their probability of success is just as slim as Frodo & Sam's odds of success, as far as they know, even if the audience has only the *slightest* suspicion that by performing this plan, they are allowing Frodo & Sam a glimmer of hope, which—in turn—gives a glimmer of hope to the success of Aragorn, Gandalf and company, *if* they all manage to stick to the plan. Therefore, the writer allowing the characters to openly say what is on the audience's mind—that the odds are stacked so heavily against all of the characters from achieving success that they may as well just confront the fact that the probability is against them—it allows the characters, and the audience, to react to the epic fatalism of their own plight and thus increasing suspense.

50/50 (2011) is an aptly titled film that immediately gives an audience an insight into the film's conceit—that life, with all it's uncertainties and improbabilities, still requires those who live it to get up and face the day's challenges, whether they be challenges in dealing with your friends, family or relationships, or whether they are challenges in facing terminal cancer. Either way, your odds of success are 50/50. Adam (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) diagnosed with is recently diagnosed with a rare form of spinal cancer. He leans heavily upon the help of his friend Kyle (Seth Rogen) to help him come to terms with the possibility of his death. Here, we are given an example where the odds aren't known, but the *possibility* of living has equally staggering implications as the possibility of dying. It becomes a 'glass-half-full, glass-half-empty' situation for the characters and for the audience, and in watching Adam and Kyle attempt to understand the predicament, the audience has the opportunity to ask themselves the same questions about themselves and their lives, and to guess at our own life's probabilities of success and failure. An introspective notion that helps the audience internalize the moods of the characters by interpreting our own attitudes toward their plight. It's the question of *probability* that makes this possible, and is heavily featured within the context of the film.

Props

Props, are objects, items, or personal effects that populate and give life to an environment, character, costume, or scene. Props oftentimes go unnoticed and are the unsung heroes of immersing the actors and the audience into the world of the film; when the decor, costumes and personal property of characters are believable, we believe we are watching real people behaving in a naturally existing environment. However, occasionally props can become integral parts of the story—in fact, become an extension of the story if the plot is focused around a particular prop, or a number of props. Because props can be so integral to the level of credibility of a story, and because they are capable of containing an entire story within them, they can be important tools to a writer when crafting their story.

EXAMPLES:

In the fantastical world of *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* the audience follows the main characters through a magical doorway that leads to an unexpected alternate world of Narnia. Much of the success of the

PROPS (CONT'D)

film hinges on the audience believing in the world of the story, and much of that believability hinges on how credible the world appears before the audience, *even* if it's populated with talking animals, fawns, and evil witches. This credibility hinges upon ensuring that even the slightest details that appear before the audience's eyes seem believable—or just another prop on another Hollywood set. This falls upon the writer to be able to clearly imagine the various props, articles of costume and clothing, even the furniture. In the scene that takes place between Lucy Pevensie (Georgie Henley) and Mr. Tumnus (James McAvoy) in his home, they have a cup of tea together before Mr. Tumnus plays her what he calls a "Narnian lullaby". Every particular item used in this scene—from the picture frames to the tea cups, even the flute that Tumnus plays the lullaby on, are all meticulous in their detail—which further works to totally immerse the actors, and the audience, in the reality of the moment. There are many subtle, nuanced ways that would make Mr. Tumnus' flute look out of place—and the audience would know it immediately. However, if Mr. Tumnus' flute looks *just* right for it's environment and context, then the audience won't consciously notice it at all. Good props in movies are like good jazz—the better it is, the less you notice it.

Immortal Beloved (1994) centers around the life and times of Ludwig van Beethoven (Gary Oldman) who, after his death, apparently wrote one final love letter to his nameless beloved. It falls upon the responsibility of Anton Felix Schindler (Jeroen Krabbé), Beethoven's longtime friend and associate, to uncover the identity of Beethoven's immortal beloved so that his estate should go to her—as stated in the late composer's will. The letter, a mere prop, has now become the item at the center of the plot—integral to the story as it provokes the investigation conducted by Schindler to find Beethoven's true love, and gives a final note of reconciliation for the woman he ultimately finds to be Beethoven's admired passion. The prop, therefore, motivates all of the action of the film and becomes as important as any character, simply by virtue of the dramatic weight the letter itself carries in the story.

Protagonist

Protagonist, is the central hero of a script, and typically the movie is told from this character's point of view. Typically, a protagonist is the character who undergoes the greatest change, struggles against the most overwhelming obstacle, and gains or loses the most as result of pursuing his or her goals. The

protagonist is oftentimes matched up against the antagonist, and is frequently the major obstacle standing between the villain and their goals. Protagonists are often associated with positive virtues and heroic traits, such as honor, bravery, justice, truth and altruism—though sometimes it is possible for a script to tell the story from the point of view of a character who one might normally recognize as a villain.

EXAMPLES:

Dr. No (1962) introduced the intrepid and debonaire James Bond (Sean Connery) to movie audiences around the world and set a precedent for the franchise that is still seen today. The iconic film hero Bond became a staple of spy and espionage films ever since—making James Bond one of the most readily identifiable heroes in film history, thus far having appeared in approximately 22 different films (as of 2011). As a protagonist, Bond is smooth, confident and deadly—in addition to being uncannily popular with the ladies, or "Bond Girls" as they have come to be known. James Bond, therefore, is an undeniable example of a successful film protagonist—arguably *the* most successful, as he is the leader of the longest running and second-highest grossing film franchise to date.

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (1986) gives the audience an entirely different breed of protagonist—one that, in most any other film, would serve as a film's *antagonist.* Henry (Michael Rooker) is the titular serial killer who kills his victims, each in a new way, to relieve himself of the monotony of day-to-day life. A pathological murderer, Henry assumes the visage and charm of the average Joe —everyman's next door neighbor, while keeping his dark and insidious hobbies concealed. The film aspires to tell of Henry's killing not from the perspective of his victims—not from the perspective of the righteous detective who is out to catch him before he claims another life—but from the perspective of Henry himself. He is a loner, a drifter—an isolated man who wishes to break up the monotony. Does the audience *identify* with Henry? Probably not. However, when forced to confront the nature of Henry's pass-times from Henry's point of view, the audience is treated to a horror film unlike any other they are ever likely to see. This makes Henry a unique and original candidate for a film protagonist— one that viewers will seldom ever see again.

Lassie Come Home (1943) features the lovable, loyal collie Lassie as the protagonist in her feature film debut. Everyone familiar with Lassie knows this dog is capable of outstanding feats of heroism, placing Lassie into a category of life-action, non-human protagonists. In this instance, Lassie is the proud pet of the Carraclough family, who the audience finds down on their luck. It is Lassie's

PROTAGONIST (CONT'D)

fate to be sold to the Duke of Rudling (Nigel Bruce), a rich and powerful man so that the Carraclough family can just manage to get by. However, after being sold, Lassie is determined to make a long and arduous journey home to reunite with the family that Lassie loves. This began a long career for both the protagonist Lassie as well as Lassie's first actor, Pal, who starred in seven films and the television show *Lassie* (1954-1960).

Quid Pro Quo

Quid Pro Quo, (from latin) means 'what for what', and most often alludes to a generally equal mutual trade between at least two individuals. This is another way of saying "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours". This 'trade' or exchange can often be used to motivate two diametrically opposed characters in a story who each have something that the other character wants—and by bartering with one another, come to a mutual respect and understanding. Sometimes, however, quid pro quo can refer to a misunderstanding made on account of substituting one thing for another.

EXAMPLES:

In *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) has information that Clarice Starling wants regarding details of 'Buffalo Bill's' psychological condition—perhaps even the serial killer's identity. However, Dr. Lecter won't give this information to her without procuring some information from her as well; for she has something that he wants. Dr. Lecter is methodical in his curiosities and exacting in the degree he's willing to go in order to explore them. The Doctor *withholds* information from Clarice until, against her better judgment, she willingly divulges personal details of her life to him. Not only are they personal details—but are, in fact, the most troubling memories of her painful childhood. The Doctor knows this—which explains why he is so set on getting Clarice to divulge them. Clarice knows it too—thus explaining her resistance and hesitation in offering them for the Doctor's examination. However, it ultimately comes to be in her best interest to do so. Not only does the Doctor help her confront these ancient demons of her past and begin toward understanding and overcoming them, but also helps her achieve the one thing she wants most— justification in her field of work, solving the case, and saving another victim

from the knife of 'Buffalo Bill'. All this is achieved by one *quid pro quo* scene where Clarice and Hannibal 'The Cannibal' Lecter have a duel of wits.

The *quid pro quo* moment in *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) arises out of a misunderstanding when Detective John Kimble (Arnold Schwarzenegger) goes undercover as a kindergarten substitute teacher in order to investigate Cullen Crisp, Sr. (Richard Tyson), a notorious and dangerous drug dealer. However, it appears that masquerading as a substitute kindergarten teacher is more difficult than John Kimble than catching a drug lord—and comedy ensues as a result.

Raissoneur

Raissoneur, is a French word that translates into English as 'arguer' or 'thinker'. In screenwriting, a raissoneur is a character in the story who acts as the audience's moral compass throughout the tale, and who—at the script's conclusion—states the theme, philosophy, or moral of the story to ensure that the intended lesson of the story was learned. Typically, this function is attributed to a supporting character either within the narrative of the film, or a Narrator character who is omniscient, though occasionally a story's raissoneur can be the film's protagonist as well. This can be done by the main character breaking the fourth wall—or the metaphorical 'wall' that separates the characters in the story from interacting with or talking directly to the audience—or by simply allowing the hero to simply let their manner of speech and behavior dictate the moral and ethical stand the film, and the writer, are taking in regards to the subject matter. Either way, to some degree the audience wants to have a hint from the writer on how to feel, emotionally, about the events and actions that transpire throughout the course of the film. However, it is equally important not to coddle or pander to an audience, and allow them the freedom to interpret for themselves the meaning of the story.

EXAMPLES:

In *The Princess Bride* (1987), the conceit of the film is that the audience is metaphorically represented by The Grandson (Fred Savage) character, and the story itself is represented by The Grandfather (Peter Falk), who tells the tale of the Princess Bride to his Grandson before bed. Because the narrative of the story is structured in this way, the audience is always looking to the authoritative figure of The Grandfather, who assumes the role of the story's narrator, for moral and emotional cues on how to interpret the tale. Even if *The Princess Bride* itself isn't

RAISSONEUR (CONT'D)

so dark or ambiguous a tale as to require guidance on the writer's part (via the character of The Grandfather) as to how to feel about it's moral or message—still, subconsciously, the audience craves affirmation for their feelings regarding a story and it's implications, a task the writer assigns to The Grandfather character. The Grandfather becomes the film's moral and ethical center-point, the spokesperson for the film's themes and values, and the audience's metaphorical Grandfather.

In *The Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), Tevye (Topol) is not only the central protagonist of the story, but also the story's *raissoneur*; the narrator who tells the tale and is the audience's ambassador into the world of the narrative. At the very onset of the film, we are greeted by Tevye, who begins by giving us (the audience) an insightful look into the world of this Jewish village, making the symbolic metaphor of comparing the Jews to a fiddler who stands precariously perched on a nearby rooftop in order to play a beautiful tune on a humble instrument. This, along with many other insightful anecdotes, populate the audience's confidential time spent alone with Tevye, who takes frequent 'time outs' from the story in order to engage us in a manner similar to a soliloquy. Since Tevye is not only the hero of the film, but also it's *raissoneur*, the audience comes to trust the poetic information he provides, sympathize with his plight (even if he is, to put it gently, 'old fashioned'), and hope for his success—despite the challenges he's confronted with throughout the tale.

Ramifications

Ramifications, are the results, or consequences, of any given characters actions or behaviors in the story. The predicate of ramifications are the choices a character makes in the story, and the implications their decisions have upon the plot. If any character has two choices before them, and they choose one over the other, then the ramifications of that leads the character to a consequence unique to that specific choice, and so on and so forth exponentially until the conclusion of the film. The point being that a character's choices impact what happens to them, and the story, throughout the unfolding of the script's plot—and the ramifications behind any one choice a character makes might have beneficial, or damning, implications on their fate.

EXAMPLES:

In *Labyrinth* (1986), Sarah (Jennifer Connelly) navigates her way around the convoluted Labyrinth for a significant portion of the story. In the Labyrinth location, it is made clear that Sarah's decisions on which way to go—left or right, up or down, through this door or that door—all lead to still more choices, which in turn lead to their own choices, and so on and so forth exponentially to a frustrating, defeating degree that eventually wears on Sarah's nerves. However, this portion of the story is an example of *ramifications*; not just in dealing with the plot of *Labyrinth*, but is also essential to the theme of the film, and the ultimate understanding Sarah realizes as the conclusion of the film—that each choice has ramifications, that every decision holds with it inherent consequences and rewards. Ramifications exist not only for her own decisions on which way to go, either in a labyrinth or in life, but also exist for her choices on who to befriend, and who she can trust.

In *Pi* (1998), Maximillian Cohen (Sean Gullette) is a numbers genius and mathematical prodigy; and in true genius/prodigy form, socially inept and interpersonally stunted. At multiple segments of the film, Max is confronted with choices—either to forget solving the mystery of pi and talk to his nextdoor neighbor Devi (Samia Shoaib)—who is not-so-subtly flirting with him—or to delve further and deeper into the unknown mathematical algorithm to prove that pi is not irrational; a study that Max's aging friend and mentor Sol Robeson (Mark Margolis) warns him may drive Max to the uttermost limit of sanity and safety. Almost every step of Max's journey confronts him with this choice. Each choice holds with it it's own ramifications, and it's own rewards. Throughout the story, Max is mostly confident that solving pi holds greater rewards—so this becomes his pursuit, and because of this there are ramifications to his decision. However, by the end of the film, it would appear as though Max finally comes to understand the significance of normal, person-to-person life outside of numbers and theorems; and perhaps discovers that there are greater, more fulfilling rewards.

Recognition

Recognition*, refers to the moment when a character realizes information that the audience already knew, via audience awareness. This information tends to be vital for the character, and much of the tension and suspense we feel as an audience is rooted in the anticipation of seeing the character make this*

RECOGNITION (CONT'D)

recognition. This is also a good example of how planting and payoff can benefit the writer when properly applied—planting the information the character needs to know in a way that only the audience becomes aware of it, and paying it off when the audience watches the character make the recognition. Deciding on when, where, and how a character learns this information depends upon the writer deciding what would build the greatest level of anticipation and heighten the drama.

EXAMPLES:

To set up how Pre-Crime works in the futuristic world of *Minority Report* (2002), the writer begins with a setup that leads the audience to expect a heinous murder about to unfold. Howard Marks (Arye Gross) prepares to go to work one D.C. morning, a day just like any other. Yet, something does seem peculiar about this day. About how his wife reacts when he considers staying home from work for a day—the look of the man across the street when Howard goes out to fetch the morning paper. This is the setup of what Howard will discover to be an extramarital affair his wife is having behind his back—all foretold by the 'Precogs' at Pre-Crime headquarters; the very first images the audience sees upon the opening of the film are how the murder itself will play out, once Howard finally discovers what his wife is up to. A stabbing. With a pair of scissors. The audience is given these key snippets of information regarding the details of the murder before even the film's main character, Chief John Anderton (Tom Cruise) does—but the audience comes to understand much of the *meaning* behind what they've seen through Anderton's experienced detective work interpreting the Precog's visions of the future. Meanwhile, we watch the present slowly work its way to the future as Howard slowly comes to the realization that the affair is happening behind closed doors once he leaves his home. He goes back, ventures upstairs, and finds himself confronted with his wife and her lover's throes of passion. In a moment, the scissors are in his hand, and the murder is about to transpire—except Anderton arrives just in the nick of time to prevent it from happening, and charges Howard with premeditated murder. This entire setup is an example of *recognition*; how an audience has information that the characters don't immediately have—the tension arises from watching the characters gain the information we already possess for themselves, and whether or not they will be able to make that information useful to *change* the audience's preconceived notion of how the story will progress.

The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993) is a tale that demonstrates how the joy of Christmas can be overwhelming—especially for someone who has never had a Christmas. *Especially* for a character who has only ever had Halloween. Meet Jack Skellington (Chris Sarandon), the Pumpkin King of Halloween Town—the champion and hero of everything ghastly and spooky. Yet, it comes so naturally and so *easily* to Jack that it's hardly a challenge at all—and ultimately, nothing more than a great big scary bore. Yet, Jack wanders into a clearing in the forest—one that offers him a choice between any number of doors—each painted in a trademark insignia of every major holiday in existence, including Jack's own Halloween. Given the choice, there is something about the bright green Christmas tree door that invites Jack's attention and curiosity. Something about the glitter and tinsel—the light and the magic. We, the audience, already *know* the details surrounding Christmas: the traditions, the rituals, the songs and the moral significance of *giving* being a more virtuous act than *receiving*. However, Christmas Town is a totally foreign experience for Jack's Halloween-minded brain to comprehend. It takes Jack the course of an entire movie, and an entire failed plan to take over Christmas for Santa Claus (Edward Ivory), before he has the ultimate realization as to what Christmas really means—something the audience already knows. The audience participate's in Jack's journey to see if he ever does finally decide what the true meaning of Christmas is, and of course when he does finally figure it out, we are reminded ourselves of it's true value.

Resolution

Resolution, occurs when the struggle is concluded, and the protagonist either triumphs or is defeated in their attempt to gain their desired objective. The resolution is necessary, as it gives the audience a sense of closure—being that the resolution typically recaps what has happened, postulates on what is to come, and demonstrates to the audience a new 'status quo' that will permeate as result of the story's conclusion.

EXAMPLES:

Toy Story 3 (2010) is, as the title implies, the third installment in the Toy Story franchise, and apparently it's final chapter as well. The conclusion of *Toy Story 3* brings the entire series to a definite, finite conclusion. The toys' owner, Andy (John Morris) has outgrown the age when he plays with his toys. Woody (Tom Hanks), Buzz (Tim Allen) and the gang have become relics of nostalgia for Andy

RESOLUTION (CONT'D)

—objects that sit passively tucked away in seldom-opened toy chests collecting dust. However, by the end of the film, Andy realizes that his toys inherently need to be played with—need to be loved. So he gives them away to a little girl he knows will love and play with them like he used to—an act of generosity to both the girl and to his old faithful friends Woody and Buzz. This also gives the audience some closure to the series—allowing us the chance to say goodbye to Woody and Buzz too, since—after three films—they have come to be our toys as well, or metaphorically represent our own childhood toys. This gives *Toy Story 3* a sense of completion—an accomplishment that all writers should aspire to encapsulate when considering how to approach the resolution to any script.

The film *Apollo 13* (1995) follows the intrepid journey of three astronauts, Jim Lovell (Tom Hanks), Fred Haise (Bill Paxton) and Jack Swigert (Kevin Bacon) as they attempt to navigate their state-of-the-art moon landing craft 240,000 miles through space with broken parts, a dwindling air supply, and a sick crew member, their hopes for returning home to their families—and their lives—slowly begins to dwindle. Yet, despite the risks, the three astronauts, joined by astronaut Ken Mattingly (Gary Sinise) in NASA headquarters who works around the clock in hopes of finding a solution to the boys' problems, manage to find a way back to earth—and all in one piece. This resolution brings the physical risk of the mission to a close, while reinforcing the importance of the film's themes—belief, friendship and faith in our own human abilities, even when things look their absolute darkest.

Reversal

Reversal, refers to a storytelling conceit that twists the audience's expectation in a surprising way to propel the story in a new and previously unexpected direction. Reversals always occur within a single scene, but their impacts can be felt within that scene alone, throughout the course of a sequence, or effect the entire structure of the film. Despite that reversals are surprising and exciting for audiences to realize, it's important to remember that the best reversals don't occur randomly or accidentally—but by the carefully calculated work put in by the writer to ensure that the twist is explainable, properly motivated and effects the direction of the action, story and character for the overall benefit of the film in its entirety.

EXAMPLES:

Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory (1971) is a film that takes the viewer, and Charlie Bucket (Peter Ostrum) through a tour of Willy Wonka's (Gene Wilder) infamous chocolate factory. However, before Charlie begins the tour, he is approached by a competitor of Wonka's and asked to steal any of Wonka's creations and bring a sample back to him. Charlie hesitantly does this by taking one of the everlasting gobstoppers from the Wonka assembly line—and is what constitutes Charlie's disqualification from receiving a lifetime supply of Wonka chocolate. When Charlie and Grandpa Joe (Jack Albertson) are told this, it's clear that Charlie has lost—the trip was for nothing except a few thrills and amazing sights, but now the journey has come to an end. Finally, Charlie decides to do the right thing by returning the stolen gobstopper to Wonka before leaving. This, however, is the redeeming act for Charlie—the final test to see if Charlie would be worthy of something even more fantastic than a lifetime supply of chocolate. Charlie is given the opportunity to become Willy Wonka's heir; to inherit the Chocolate Factory and take care of all the Oompa Loompa's—even bring his family to live there with him. This *reversal* demonstrates how a moral act of kindness and virtue can change a situation in a heartbeat, reversing Charlie's fortunes from a disqualified contestant to a winner.

In *Shrek* (2001), the audience is led to believe that Shrek (Mike Meyers) is unique—a true one of a kind. He's an ogre and, because of this, is considered hideous, foul and terrifying by the others that populate this fairy-tale kingdom. Only his friend Donkey (Eddie Murphy) stays true to Shrek, that is until Shrek and Donkey rescue the beautiful Princess Fiona (Cameron Diaz) from a castle held hostage by a ferocious dragon. When Fiona is safe and returning back to her kingdom along with her saviors, she takes extra special care to be indoors and out of sight by sundown. As 'hideous' as Shrek might be, Fiona is the definitive example of grace and beauty. However, this belief is what sells the *reversal* when it's finally revealed that Fiona is, in fact, a part-time ogre—or more appropriately—a were-ogre. Every night after sunset, Princess Fiona transforms from the supposed visage of beauty into an ogre, just like Shrek. This changes things significantly in how Shrek sees Fiona, and likewise how Fiona feels about herself, once this information becomes clear. It also paves the way for Fiona and Shrek to fall in love—which will be the relationship that shapes one of the most successful animated feature franchises in movie history with three sequels.

Reverse Angle

Reverse Angle, could be described as a counter-P.O.V.-- shot that reveals a character from the perspective of an item/object, setting/location, or other character. The reverse angle is used to give a relationship between a character and whatever they are looking at or interacting with and is not generally considered to be subtle. The reverse angle can be effective to heighten an already inherently dramatic or comedic moment, as it usually proceeds a traditional P.O.V.; we see an item/object, setting/location or other character from the protagonist's point of view, then see the protagonist from the opposite, or reversed, point of view—revealing their physical or facial reaction to observing the thing.

EXAMPLES:

There's a moment in *The Aviator* (2004) when Howard Hughes—multi-million dollar airplane tycoon and motion picture director—is stopped in his tracks. No amount of money, or power, or fame can free him from his panic-stricken state of paranoia regarding one simple and seemingly innocent looking bathroom door knob. A man who was stricken numb at the prospect of germs, infections, bacteria or illness—Howard Hughes suddenly finds himself challenged by this doorknob. The *camera* shows us Howard's pov of the doorknob as he considers it —guessing at it's sterility—sizing up the threat it poses to him should he dare to touch it. At that moment the audience is treated to a *reverse angle* from the perspective of the doorknob, looking up at Howard as if to say, "I dare you to touch me." Howard reaches his hand out—shaking with anxiety—but to no avail. He cannot bring himself to touch the doorknob. His phobias and eccentricities are simply too deeply imbedded in his psyche to ignore. This use of the *reverse angle* gives the audience an insight into how powerful a modest doorknob can be when it is capable of crippling one of the richest and most powerful men to ever live in the modern world.

The Shining (1980) is a movie that slowly and methodically encroaches upon the protagonist's personal and mental space, and has a vast and spacious luxury hotel to do it in. The audience is left to wonder if the events Jack Torrence (Jack Nicholson), and his son Danny (Danny Lloyd) experience are feigned or fact— whether the hotel is genuinely inhabited by spirits, or if Danny and Jack are both collectively creating the horrors the Torrence family experiences at the Overlook Hotel together. There's a moment that links both father and son together in two separate events. We don't see Danny's trauma that occurs inside room 237, but we

do see Jack's experiences in the 'haunted' room once he's called upon his wife Wendy (Shelley Duvall) to investigate. Unexpectedly, Jack is confronted with an apparition—a siren—emerging from a bath inside room 237. The camera, still, watches the woman emerge from the tub, elegantly and entirely nude. As the audience, we have little idea how to interpret this phenomenon. Clearly, it's unusual. The hotel was supposed to be utterly empty except for the Torrence family. We know that Danny was brutally and violently attacked in this room—is this the culprit? And despite the woman's appearance, there is a thick tension in the room, suggested through atmosphere and the pervasive drone of the soundtrack. Everything about this moment screams suspicion and oncoming dread. Yet, when we are shown the *reverse angle* from the woman's point of view looking at Jack in the doorway—his face reveals a hypnotic, sleepy lust. Jack is either somehow genuinely enticed by this *opportunity*, or is ensnared in a spell that has dulled his wits and sense of danger—for we, the audience, feel the danger oozing all about the character. This *reverse angle* reveals something about Jack's character in that moment—a desire, or a *curiosity* to play along with these phantoms in this hotel—or perhaps a clue that Jack is already a part of the hotel's blood lust.

Rhythm

Rhythm, *refers to how the writer treats tension, action, mood and tone at any given moment; be it in a scene, sequence, plot point, act or throughout the entire narrative. Similarly to the rhythm of a drum beat or percussion, rhythm maintains a speed and a tempo for the film that your audience follows; a regular, repeating pulse the audience can anticipate—without it being predictable. The rhythm of the film is dictated by the writer and his or her attention to specific scenes, their content, their relationship to scenes before and after them, and their relationship to the film at large. Rhythm is a sensation that the audience can sense, or feel, more than they should be consciously aware of it. With rhythm, it's good to be just rhythmic enough to ensure that there is a steady, structured beat to a script, but not so rhythmic that it becomes obvious to an audience, or takes away from whatever is happening in the story or with the characters.*

EXAMPLES:
Pulp Fiction (1994) is a film that has a clearly defined rhythm that introduces characters, scenarios and obstacles to the major protagonists of the story, and the

RHYTHM (CONT'D)

viewing audience, at steady, regular intervals that aren't predictable and fully immerse the audience into the reality of the story. The narrative structure of the film carries the viewers through each of the three major characters, Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson), Vincent Vega (John Travolta) and Butch Coolidge (Bruce Willis) with balance and reserve—each story bleeding into the others in a way that blends all three lives together into a single prevailing narrative that dictates the entire film. Rhythm makes this possible—allowing the audience to feel the beats of the scenes, sequences, acts as they occur that gives the film at large a degree of completion when finally the ending credits roll.

Coffee and Cigarettes (2003) is a film that hinges heavily on finding a prevailing rhythm to dictate the pace, mood, and content of it's narrative. A film that, in and of itself is little more than a collection of scenes—usually between two or three characters—that center around the seemingly mundane activities of drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. Though these scenes have little relevance, in terms of *story,* to the overall structure of the narrative--thematically each of the scenes build upon the last to a rhythmically formulated degree. These scenes, each crafted by writer/director Jim Jarmusch, are edited together in such a way to give the film a close relationship to a three act structure and even five plot points; despite the fact that there isn't a plot outside of combining coffee and cigarettes. This is achieved through the writer's careful attention to rhythm, and understanding that each scene in the film has it's own 'flavor', unique to itself and fundamentally different from the other scenes.

Rising Action

Rising Action, signifies that the tension or the suspense which motivates action is increasing. Rising Action ensures that the audience doesn't become bored with or accustomed to the level of action or drama for too long a period of time in a movie. When the stakes aren't raised—or when a new thread of dramatic tension isn't introduced—the audience can become complacent to the plight of the hero. Rising Action, therefore, is the practice of keeping the protagonist under constant increasing pressure as soon as their journey begins—finding new ways to catch the protagonist unaware, exploring new threats to the protagonist's well-being. This gives your hero many opportunities to win (or lose) the esteem of your audience; gives them many opportunities to either succeed or fail, and also keeps

your audience in constant suspense as to the hero's current, and future, predicament.

EXAMPLES:

The film *Misery* (1990) begins with best-selling novelist Paul Sheldon (James Caan) completing his newest novel, the final installment of a series of novels written about his fictional character *Misery Chastain*. At the onset, everything appears fine. Paul finishes his novel, ritualistically smokes a cigarette and opens a bottle of champagne to celebrate. Later, Paul checks out of the country hotel he frequents while writing and makes his way back to the city where his publishers await. However, Paul and his car are doomed to get caught in a torrential blizzard that sends him over a cliff: dead, if not for Annie Wiles (Kathy Bates). Already the action has risen a great deal—the drama of Paul's near fatal accident fuels tension into the story, tension that the screenwriter refuses to give up, as it is soon apparent that Annie puts the 'fan' in 'fanatic'. She is nearly single-mindedly obsessed with Misery Chastain and her adventures, and as long as Paul is recuperating under her roof, she intends to continue her novels, even if it's only for an audience of one. Again, the action rises—increasing the suspense when we realize that Paul's significant injuries aren't being mended in Annie's care, but rather, the crippled writer is being held prisoner in her house and forced to appease her eccentric needs. Yet the writer doesn't end there—the action rises more as Buster (Richard Farnsworth) takes it upon himself to find Paul when it's clear his body is no longer in the vehicle that crashed off the highway. And when it's clear that Annie won't be capable of keeping Paul, her most prized personal possession forever, she intends to bring the both of them into the afterlife, together. This brings the action to it's pinnacle as Paul struggles to find a way to escape this struggle for survival that takes place not just in the few moments of a car accident—but over the course of months spent in Annie's brutal care. The idea is that the action *continues*, at every stage of the story, to rise to ever greater heights—keeping the audience, and Paul, in a constant state of anxious panic.

The 1967 film *In Cold Blood,* a film based on a 'non-fiction novel' which itself was based on the real-life account of Perry Smith and Dick Hickock's murder of the four members of the Clutter family, is a film that methodically—and patiently—continues to mercilessly raise the action of these brutal murders, including the death sentences of Smith and Hickock themselves. The audience watches as the plan itself is hatched; and though at first the prospect of murdering the Clutter family seems surreal and abstract, eventually we are faced with each one of the Clutters face their own deaths—faced with the killers facing their deaths—and

RISING ACTION (CONT'D)

with such staggering relentlessness that the film becomes a stark focus on tragic brutality. This is the film's lasting and most memorable strength; its uncanny ability to witness all its characters as mutual victims who are caught up in ever-mounting senselessness. This is greatly accredited to the writers' ability to constantly raise the action of the film with each passing moment—with every decision the characters make, the stakes get higher and higher until there's no turning back, and ultimately, it's too late for everyone.

Scenarios

Scenarios, place characters into situations, or circumstances, that challenge them and dare them to overcome obstacles that stand in their way. Scenarios are usually set up in such a way as to exploit their potential for drama to the highest degree; crafting scenarios that challenge characters in ways that are unique to their flaws and confront their fears/desires directly expose their vulnerabilities to the audience. Scenarios need not always challenge a character in an external, physical way—sometimes scenarios can occur which challenges a character's emotional, psychological or philosophical state of mind—making the conflict an internalized one that the audience must watch unfold. Scenarios are a way of giving your character an opportunity to demonstrate how they approach problems, overcome obstacles—despite their own shortcomings or vulnerabilities as an individual.

EXAMPLES:

Antichrist (2009) follows the lives of two grieving parents (Willem Dafoe and Charlotte Gainsbourg) attempting to reconcile their souls and their marriage after the death of their infant child. Distraught, the two seclude themselves in a rural wooden cabin deep in the wilderness; the setting where the story takes place. Yet, at this location, various scenarios unfold. One particular scenario takes place when the two encounter each other in the cabin's tool shed. What begins as an intimate scene between husband and wife quickly turns macabre when She attacks Him viciously, knocking him unconscious. While he's passed out, She drills a hole through his ankle and attaches a heavy iron weight to his foot, making him incapable of easy mobility when finally he does manage to awake. Yet, understandably so, when he does rouse his initial instinct is to escape—but the weight that's been bolted through his body makes it difficult, to say the least.

This is an example of the writer placing the characters in a scenario—one that indicates a clear, unmistakable need for the character (in this case, His need to escape the wrath of his crazed wife) and provides that character with an obstacle that prevents he or she from achieving their need (in this case, a ten pound weight bolted through your ankle).

In *Finding Nemo* (2003), Nemo (Alexander Gould) is a young clownfish who has been stolen away from his home in the ocean and brought to live in a fish tank inside a dentist's office. This provides Nemo with a scenario which must be averted: Nemo wants only to return to his father Marlin (Albert Brooks) and his home under the sea, so it becomes clear that Nemo needs to escape the confines of this fish tank. Nemo has help from the other fish in the tank as they try a number of different ways to get Nemo out of his predicament. This is another example of a character placed in a scenario; when a clear goal is given, and an obstacle that prevents the goal from being met. The tension (and enjoyment) of watching a scenario unfold is rooted in the characters meeting the challenge of reaching their goal; what lengths they will go to overcome the scenario and, ultimately, whether they succeed or fail in their attempts.

Scene

Scene, refers to a separate and distinct interaction between a character interacting within the world of the film, be that either through an exchange with another character or group of characters, interacting within an environment or setting, or exchanging a personal, silent moment regarding a prop or piece of costume. There are many different forms a scene may take; many different ways a writer can express character and story within a scene—though it's not difficult to suggest that the most interesting scenes happen between one or more characters. A scene's primary functions are always to convey character and progress story. Strictly speaking, a scene is limited to being an exchange that takes place in one location and at one time, and plays out it's entire duration in real time.

EXAMPLES:

One of the culminating scenes in *American Beauty* (1999) is when Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) finally manages a moment alone with Angela Hayes (Mena Suvari); a young teenage girl who has inspires Lester's boyish fantasies and lusts. After Lester's recent workout regiment, Lester now finally has the confidence to openly, and unapologetically, flirt with the young Angela—who

SCENE (CONT'D)

had previously come across to everyone as a proverbial vixen. Yet, to Lester's surprise, Angela seems inexplicably at a loss as to how to interpret Lester's come-on, and seems incapable of reciprocating the flirt once Lester initiates it. This scene reveals some vulnerabilities to Angela that neither the audience or Lester were previously aware of, while also demonstrating the full range of Lester's character arc; illustrating how far Lester had come—as an individual—since our first impression of him at the beginning of the film. All of this is achieved in one scene, through one exchange between two characters who we have come to expect certain behaviors from but who, to the audience's surprise, deliver almost diametrically opposite attitudes than what the audience had come to anticipate. This illustrates the power a single scene has in changing the course of the story, and how an audience can view the characters.

John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) starring James Stewart as Ransom Stoddard, attorney at law and John Wayne as Tom Doniphon—an undistinguished man from the town of Shinbone—are both posed with the problem of Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin); a gunman outlaw who terrorizes the small western community. A scene where Tom talks with Ransom about Liberty, he informs Stoddard that his heaps of law books wont do him any good in Shinbone, where a man solves his problems with a gun at his hip. Ransom is beside himself by this prospect—for him, a man of the law, the idea that anyone is capable of resolving problems the way both Liberty and Tom do is unimaginable, and goes so far as to compare Tom— a good man but without prospects—to the outlaw Valance for their mutual adherence to relying on a six-shooter to resolve community disputes. This scene introduces Ransom and Tom's attitudes toward Liberty to the audience.

Scene Heading

Scene Heading, otherwise known as a slug line, is the introductory information required for the reader to understand the context of the scene which precedes it. Scene headings include whether or not the scene takes place on the inside of a structure, otherwise known as INT., or on the outside of a structure, otherwise known as EXT., or both; I/E.. Scene headings also include where the scene takes place, what the location of a scene is; and also what time the scene takes place, be it either day or night. All of this information preps the audience to understand where and when the events of the scene take place.

EXAMPLES:

At the beginning of *American Psycho* (2000), we are introduced to the film's deplorable protagonist Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale) inside a posh upscale restaurant, dining with his like-minded friends, and listening to the listless drone of a waiter spout the nightly specials. The scene heading reads: INT. PASTELS RESTAURANT – NIGHT; thus giving the audience an insight into whether it is an interior or exterior location, what the location itself is, and what general time the scene takes place—all requisite information when supplying the narrative context for the scene.

In *Man on the Moon* (1999), Andy Kaufman—innovative entertainer—finally performs at Carnegie Hall. The scene shifts from one specific location in Carnegie Hall to another; the script reading INT. CARNEGIE HALL, BACKSTAGE – NIGHT before switching to INT. CARNEGIE HALL – NIGHT when referring to events as they play out on-stage. This distinction is important for the reader, who must visualize every action as it is written on the page, and requires information from the writer in order to visualize the correct setting these actions take place. In this case, some actions take place *backstage* while others take place inside *Carnegie Hall* itself.

Script Economy

Script Economy, refers to the writer's ability to maintain page efficiency while also progressing as much story and articulating as many character details as possible, using the least amount of words possible. This becomes a balancing act for the writer, who must ensure that the script's pages are neat, accessible and easy-to-read, yet ensuring that the content of those pages are engaging and exciting, and also taking care that they paint a picture of the film's style.

EXAMPLES:

Beowulf (2007), a film adapted from what is commonly acknowledged as the single most important work of 8th-11th century Anglo-Saxon literature, would be an amazingly daunting task in adapting for any screenwriter. In this case, the writers Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary rely on script economy to translate the dense, epic poem for the screen. In doing this, priorities are established; the writers must interpret what the main story is, how it relates to the main characters, and dedicate to telling that story concisely and efficiently. Otherwise, the writers would be buried in the overwhelming shadow of such a historically

SCRIPT ECONOMY (CONT'D)

significant and culturally vibrant work of literature. Script economy often hinges on the writers experience in recognizing what is essential to story, what audiences will respond to, and how to articulate these thrills in a simple and direct way that's easy for the film's production team to re-imagine on-set.

The African Queen (1951) tells the story of a alcohol-drinking riverboat captain, Charlie Allnut (Humphrey Bogart) who is encouraged to attack an enemy warship that patrol the riverbanks of Africa by Rose Sayer (Katherine Hepburn). A script that has it all; adventure, comedy, romance, drama, and war means there's a lot of ground to cover, story-wise. This translates into a lot of effort on the writers part to ensure that the story is told clearly, concisely so that it can be easily understood by the reader. Paying attention to script economy solves problems that might arise when dealing with a story that has a lot to tell— prioritizing elements of one aspect of the story by balancing them with other important elements of the tale, and doing this efficiently without writing too many block pages.

Sequence

Sequence, refers to a collection of scenes that transpire between plot points, interconnecting these plot points together seamlessly and giving the audience a sense that the story they are viewing/reading is organic and natural; covering the tracks of structure and formula. Any given sequence can typically be ten to fifteen minutes/pages long, and pose their own specific challenges and obstacles to the protagonist; all while bringing the hero closer to the next plot point. Sequences, like scenes or acts, should be considered individual components—complete stories in-and-of themselves—though at the same time, feed and support the structure of the entire arc of the story.

EXAMPLES:

The first sequence of *Despicable Me* (2010) begins by introducing us to the film's protagonist: Gru (Steve Carell), a villain who smashes cars while parallel parking, uses a freeze ray on a line of coffee shop patrons and pops a child's animal balloon. The first sequence also familiarizes the audience with the world of the story: a world populated by villains and supervillains, and a world where technological gadget wonders are commonplace. Likewise, we are also informed of the protagonist's status quo; a supervillain (with Mommy issues) who struggles

to stay in competition with the greatest villains in the world. This introduces the dramatic premise, Gru's pride is hurt when he learns that a major heist took place in the Great Pyramid of Giza, and decides that the one thing that can put him back on top is if he steals the moon. Yet, Gru doesn't have nearly enough money to pull off such a feat—so he consults the Bank of Evil's president Mr. Perkins (Will Arnett), who agrees to the loan *if* Gru obtains the shrink-ray needed to carry out the moon heist plan. This event also acts as the inciting incident, bridging the gap between the beginning of the film and the first major plot point.

The fourth sequence of *The Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003) begins immediately by *raising the stakes*: Captain Barbossa (Geoffrey Rush), captain of The Black Pearl, and his crew suffer from a curse of undead immortality. The moonlight reveals their ghastly skeletal remains. This changes Elizabeth Swann's (Keira Knightley) estimation of her situation as their hostage significantly. This sequence also creates a *new set of second act obstacles* for the characters to overcome: Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp), idiot savant of the pirate world, reveals that they are racing Barbossa to a mysterious island where the curse could be broken after sacrificing Elizabeth, and deems that he and his accomplice Will Turner (Orlando Bloom) will need a pirate ship and a crew if they are going to save Elizabeth. Then an *action block* occurs where the audience is treated to a spectacle involving Jack and Will capturing a naval ship by themselves, and their *obstacle* is solved once they gather a crew at a famous pirate port. This begets new *subplots* and *subplot obstacles* when Will promises their new crew a ship of their own, and learns that Jack and Captain Barbossa have a past, and that Barbossa led a mutiny against Jack when he was captain of the Black Pearl. At this point, Jack tells Will that he knew Will's father; a famous pirate also named Will Turner—this moment is a *payoff* for Will's character and his character arc in the film. This sequence also introduces a *failure* for the characters who are incapable of reaching the mysterious island before Elizabeth and the crew of The Black Pearl does. Another *payoff* is introduced when it's revealed that a coin Elizabeth possesses is capable of breaking the Black Pearl crew's curse. This leads the sequence into the first culmination as the pirates attempt to break the curse—yet it seems that Elizabeth's blood isn't the blood they need to do it. In their confusion, Will takes action and rescues Elizabeth. It's decided that the pirates need Will Turner's blood in order to reverse their curse.

Setting

Setting, describes the arena in which a story unfolds. Similarly, a setting is a location, environment or even world of the story, providing the location of the scenes as they play out for the characters. It also alludes to the time period of the story—when the story takes place as well. The setting has a drastic, direct influence on the events of a story, as stories are oftentimes a reflection of the times and locations in which they take place. Similarly, settings can thematically represent the conceit of a story by it's symbolic value. Setting is crucial to a story, and one depends upon the other in order to immerse the audience in the narrative composition of a story.

EXAMPLES:

Beetlejuice (1988) takes place, almost exclusively, inside the house of the recently deceased Adam and Barbara Maitland (Alec Baldwin and Geena Davis) that has been taken over by a dramatically different family, the Deetz's (Catherine O'Hara, Jeffrey Jones and Winona Ryder). Much of the reason why the setting of Beetlejuice happens predominantly inside Adam and Barbara's usurped home is because a dramatic conceit is introduced that keeps them there: the after-life outside of their home is a veritable wasteland full of fearsome and dangerous sand-worms. They are incapable of leaving. So, given the setting, all of the dramatic tension of the film takes place inside the house—the arena in which the two families—the Deetz's and the Maitland's—meet and do battle for who has control of it. Therefore, the *plot* of Beetlejuice is centered around who controls the setting. Will it be the dead former tenants, the new flashy socialites who have moved in from the city, or will Beetlejuice take over?

Best in Show (2000) is a film that showcases an ensemble of fascinating and hilarious characters who bring their dogs to a national dog show to compete for who's dog is the best in show. Therefore, the setting is the reason *why* the characters have gathered. Again, setting dictates the plot and allows the audience to see the behaviors of the eclectic gathering of individuals and their dogs. Because of the setting, the audience is introduced to these characters who they normally might not have an opportunity to meet in real life—and the resulting comedy that plays out in their competition keeps the audience watching when combined with the drama of who's dog will win the prize.

Slug Line

Slug Line *(See Scene Heading).*

SMASH CUT TO:

SMASH CUT TO:, *refers to an editing technique that edits together two emotionally variant scenes, cut together in order to juxtapose the heightened emotion to drastically demonstrate how quickly attitudes or behaviors can change. For instance, if at the end of one scene, a character is happy and laughing, then the scene is SMASH CUT to another scene of the same character (though not always) crying or in hysterics. Sometimes the SMASH CUT doesn't highlight emotional states of mind at all—but rather, drastic changes in environment. For example, if we see a decrepit, abandoned house at the end of one scene, only to SMASH CUT to the same house splendidly restored the next— this would be another instance of how a SMASH CUT can be used to demonstrate two vastly different images, focusing on their abrupt and sudden change.*

EXAMPLES:

A scene in *Jurassic Park III* (2001) where Doctor Alan Grant (Sam Neill) is called upon to identify the species of dinosaurs in question, he quickly understands the implications behind the notion that veloceraptors might still be populating the island and what that could mean not only for the other animals of the jungle, but also testifies to his thoughts regarding their odds of survival escaping the island. When Grant identifies the dinosaurs, the scene is SMASH CUT against another scene where Grant and his associates are rushing urgently from the evidence of raptors in the area. This underlines the drastic shift in emotion between one scene and another, accentuating the audience's sense of tension and suspense—especially knowing what raptors are capable of, recalling their intelligence from the first *Jurassic Park* (1993).

Split Screen

Split Screen, *is a storytelling conceit used to demonstrate two different images at two different locations, sometimes at two different times simultaneously; each occupying a different section of the screen but split compositionally. Usually, there's a focus on a commonality between the two split scenes—something that unites the two somehow; either through an object, a location, a character or an event; though the circumstances vary. Though the framing can become convoluted if not carefully applied, the split screen can be an engaging and interesting way to introduce surprises to characters in a story, and to an audience as well.*

EXAMPLES:

In *127 Hours* (2010) begins with an exhilarating opening credit sequence that immediately provokes the audience and catches their attention. These dynamic shots are edited together via the split-screen technique, which demonstrates multiple points of view simultaneously by placing them next to each other compositionally on the screen. By creating a fast and dynamic opening credit sequence, the filmmakers are inviting the audience to actively endure a film where the protagonist sits immobile for the majority of the film with his arm wedged under the weight of a boulder in the middle of nowhere. Therefore, a provocative opening title sequence is imperative so that the filmmakers don't lose the audience too early in the story. Here, the split screen is used to actively engage the audience in Aron Ralston's (James Franco) character attitude on the onset; representing it visually with busy, exciting, active shots intercut together and split screened to demonstrate something about the individual the audience will come to know throughout the duration of the film.

There's a pivotal moment in *Jackie Brown* (1997) when bondsman Max Cherry (Robert Forster) drops Jackie Brown (Pam Grier) off at her home once he's bailed her out of jail. When he returns to his home, and after a scene between Jackie and criminal Ordell Robbie (Samuel L. Jackson) plays out, we hear a gun being cocked just as Max makes the realization that his gun is missing. This moment has significant impact and weight *because* they are shown simultaneously, via split-screen—a moment that would have been significantly altered if the two different moments were shown separately. It also serves as a reason for Max to see Jackie again, or rather, an excuse to see her again—as it's clear that, after their first meeting, that there's a hint of an attraction between these two. This is

an example of how a split screen can payoff specific moments for characters and audience members if properly applied

Stakes

Stakes, refer to what a character has to lose if their goals or needs aren't met of if they fail to achieve their desire by the film's end. The higher the stakes, the greater the sense of dramatic urgency and tension. It's the writer's constant effort to always continue to raise the stakes for a character or characters in a film—because if a character has more to lose, the more they will struggle and fight to get what they want. For instance, a character may give up their failed attempts to go to the grocery store if they have a refrigerator full of food at home and if they had just had a filling lunch. However, the character may act entirely differently if they are starving and have had nothing to eat for days, even weeks. This is a basic example of how stakes can motivate the actions and behaviors of characters in a script—and given the proper motivation, a character is be capable of achieving any task.

EXAMPLES:

In Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) takes a trip up to a sleepy coastal California town to deliver a pair of love birds to Mitch Brenner (Rod Taylor), but unexpectedly becomes enmeshed in a flighty horror scenario. A plague of birds descends upon the town, and what at first is nothing more than a superficial, isolated bird attack quickly accelerates into an all-out war between millions upon millions of flying maniacs with an intent to murder and the citizens of the town. At every stage of the game, the stakes steadily increase when it becomes less and less apparent that the protagonists might survive. Finally, a climactic scene that bridges all of the families hopes of survival against the murderous instincts of the birds comes to a head as the Brenner family, along with Miss Daniels, shelter themselves inside the Brenner home across the bay, and fight to fend of the onslaught of beaked psychopaths who attempt to flap, peck and flock into their home and do away with the family once and for all. Hitchcock, the master of suspense, uses *stakes* as a means to increase the action and tension in every single scene of the film until, by the end, the audience is half-mad themselves wondering what the film's final resolution will be—an example of using stakes to increase the thrill for the audience exponentially.

STAKES (CONT'D)

In the film *Children of Men* (2006), we're introduced to Theo (Clive Owen) and his ex wife Julian (Julianne Moore) who works with an anarchic terrorist group that tries to thwart the British government's strict anti-immigration policies. This already introduces the stakes for the audience, but once it's revealed that one immigrant Julian is trying to export to another group called The Human Project named Kee (Claire-Hope Ashitey) is pregnant, the stakes increase exponentially —due in large part by the fact that the audience understands that there hasn't been a single human pregnancy in *years*, making Kee's unexpected pregnancy of the utmost importance to humanity. The stakes increase yet again, however, once Julian—the leader of the group responsible for protecting Kee—is killed in a raid. Now Theo must take over, and the path doesn't get much easier for him as the stakes *continue* to increase when people who the audience and the characters once considered friends and allies turn out to be selfish antagonists who want Kee for their own anti-political reasons. Theo then must save Kee from the very individuals who have sworn to protect her and deliver her and her unborn baby to the mysterious Human Project. The whole movie is an example of how stakes are meant to continually increase for the main characters as the odds are stacked higher and higher against their success. This allows for the audience to remain 'glued to the edge of their seats' in expectation, wondering what will become of a film's main characters.

Status Quo

Status Quo, is the existing state or condition of affairs for the characters in a film. Their day-to-day realities, the banality or variety in their current life situation. The status quo is what the character expects to find for them when they wake up in the morning. Drama and tension occurs when they find something other than the status quo to greet them. The protagonist's status quo is normally introduced early—in the first act—and demonstrates where the character is in his/her life before the journey they must undertake is acknowledged and accepted. Once the character succeeds or fails at the end of the film, a new precedent is set; and depending on the outcome of events, a new status quo takes the place of the old one—leaving the audience to acknowledge the character change that took place, and examine for a moment what the change was, and how it effected the life of the hero; for better or worse. It is also important to imagine in what condition the audience is introduced to the protagonist: is their

status quo at the beginning of the film good for the protagonist, or bad for them? Are they in a positive, point in their lives at risk of being destroyed, or are they in the pit of despair at the beginning and hope to change their lives for the better? These are important questions the writer must answer before he or she can decide what the character wants throughout the course of the film, as the status quo can be a decisively motivating factor for the main character of a film.

EXAMPLES:

In *A History of Violence* (2005)*,* we are introduced to Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen) and his suburban middle-class family. Tom owns and operates a diner and coffee shop in town and is a seemingly normal average-Joe member of the community. His children go to school, and life goes on for the family very like how it has for the past twenty years or so. This introduces the audience to the Stall family's *status quo*; how their lives are *before* the dramatic opposition is introduced: the events which will try to thwart the Stall's comfortable status quo and drive a wedge between members of the family in hopes of breaking them apart. The status quo is important for the audience to know and understand up-front; without it, the audience has no idea who the characters are *before* the conflict arises, and what the characters have at stake to lose if the status quo cannot be maintained.

Big (1988) introduces us to Josh Braskin (David Moscow), a normal twelve year old boy who lives with his average family in a regular town and spends his days doing typical twelve-year-old boy things: playing video games, taking out the trash, riding his bicycle and daydreaming of what life will be like when he's a grown-up and can do whatever he wants. All of this information, which the audience picks up literally within the first two minutes of the film, telegraphs Josh's *status quo*, what the boy's life is like before a series of events unfolds that changes his life forever. We watch as Josh mysteriously and magically undergoes a drastic metamorphosis that turns him into a full grown man literally overnight. This introduces a challenge to Josh's previously established *status quo*; since there's no way he could possibly explain this sudden and unexplainable transformation to his parents, Josh must head out into the world—get himself an apartment, a job, and an adult life with the mental attitude of a pubescent boy. *Big,* therefore, is an examination of how a *status quo* can be turned upside down suddenly and without warning—instigating the entire dramatic premise of the film by simply challenging the character's normal, every-day life.

Stereotypical Character

Stereotypical Character, *refers to a character who has been oversimplified in order to demonstrate certain exploitative traits regarding a larger group that character belongs to, be it their religion, gender, race, nationality, economic class, mental or physical handicaps, etc. The use of stereotypical characters are commonly understood to be false representations of their particular grouping— and are thus seldom used; however, when they are used, it is usually in the manner of comedy, satire, or irony. The writer does well to avoid these stereotypical characters whenever possible, as their use can be controversial and unjustified.*

EXAMPLES:

The entire concept for the film *Bamboozled* (2000) is centered around the reinvention and examination of old racist African American stereotypes. In fact, much of the film focuses on those exaggerated images and simplified notions of race and discrimination by bringing those stereotypes to the foreground so they can be scrutinized and meditated upon. To say that the film is a serious investigation into these stereotypes is misleading—first and foremost, *Bamboozled* is a farce—a satire invented by Spike Lee in order to consider where the modern day African American stands in the world of mass-media American entertainment by juxtaposing their current place in history with the past when these racist stereotypes existed as an unapologetic representation of their culture. For these reasons, *Bamboozled* is a challenging film to approach and appreciate —but by using stereotypical characters, Spike Lee creates an unflinching satire that contemplates the present by examining the past.

South Park: Bigger Longer & Uncut (1999), and the television series *South Park* (1997 -) are creations that have always stood as a comedic examination of many pop culture abnormalities and family irregularities from the perspectives of four grade-schoolers from the sleepy mountain town of South Park, Colorado. The movie takes on many stereotypes, ranging from poverty-stricken America, parental figures, African Americans, celebrities, but also pokes fun at Canadians. In fact, much of the plot revolves around America and Canada's relationship— and how the two cultures are different despite being so close together geographically and economically. The film supposes that all Canadians are hockey-loving, maple-syrup drinking, beer-guzzling, flappy-headed, foul-mouthed heathens: no one more than the infamous comedic duo Terrance Henry Stoot and Phillip Niles Argyle (Matt Stone and Trey Parker, respectively). The

stereotypes investigated in South Park are less intended to be serious examinations of world demographics, but more as a source of comedy—citing common differences while also admitting that, ultimately, they are superficial and meaningless, and that everyone—regardless of race, color or creed—is equally ridiculous in the eyes of creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone.

Stock Footage

Stock Footage, *refers to film or footage that has been previously shot under a different context for an altogether different purpose than to fulfill the storytelling needs of any one specific script or screenplay. Therefore, any footage that wasn't shot for a film is stock-footage, and can sometimes be used by filmmakers to add a specific aesthetic nuance to a film by including some interesting or significant clip of previously shot film. This is done either to enhance the story, or to establish the setting, locale or time period. For instance, if a writer were to be writing a scene that takes place inside a house in the 1960's, they may consider showing stock footage of television news anchor Walter Cronkite, or the first Apollo moon landing, in order to add an element of depth and realism to the setting—allowing for further audience immersion into the believability of the narrative. This is only one example—in order to illustrate how stock footage can be applied to offer a subtle hint to the viewer as to specific details of the story (such as time); but there are a myriad of different ways stock footage could be used to enhance a story.*

EXAMPLES:

Zelig (1983) documents the life of a mysterious public figure who was (fictitiously) active in the roaring 20's—Leonard Zelig (Woody Allen), a man who suffers from a rare psychological disorder that makes him physically and behaviorally personify the identities of whoever happens to immediately surround him. Alongside Zelig is Dr. Eudora Nesbitt Fletcher (Mia Farrow), a psychologist determined to get to the bottom of Leonard's affliction and ultimately cure him of it and who, in the process, develops a loving relationship with her subject. The film itself is made to look like a documentary comprised from stock footage of the fictional Zelig. The stock footage used in the film is a combination of film shot specifically for the movie, and real stock footage

STOCK FOOTAGE (CONT'D)

collected from the 1920's. This gives the film a feeling and style of realism that only serves to heighten the comedic value of it's premise.

Forrest Gump (1997) (Tom Hanks) is a simple man who's life has been caught in a whirlwind of amazing coincidences. The audience sees Forrest happen to find himself at exactly the right place at exactly the right time, *time and time again*. First, the audience is introduced to Forrest's early ancestor, Nathan Bedford Forrest—who was Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan—footage taken from the film *Birth of a Nation*, superimposing actor Tom Hanks' face on one of the KKK riders. The filmmakers also took stock footage of presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon and superimposed Forrest into the frame with them—and interacting with them even to the point of shaking their hands and exchanging words (even showing his buttocks to Johnson, displaying his bullet wound incurred in Vietnam). The use of stock footage gives example to many of Forrest's incredible exploits that seemingly happen to Forrest naturally as some people put on a pair of socks in the morning. It also adds an element of insightful humor and pop-culture commentary to the film that the film would have lacked had the filmmakers not used stock footage to exemplify Forrest's many meetings with famous historical personalities.

Story

Story, is the bi-product of the communion that takes place between the storyteller (writer/director/etc.) and the audience. Story is a narrative work, told by a narrator that relates the occurrences of an event or series of events to a group of listeners or viewers. All stories inherently contain a definite beginning, an identifiable middle point, and a finite ending (aka: three acts). The story's purpose is to inform, entertain and enlighten it's listeners—to articulate a moral through the metaphorical or literal interpretation of a character or group of characters that exist within the world of the narrative and must overcome an obstacle, either successfully or unsuccessfully. If the protagonist was successful in their attempt, why were they successful, and how did they achieve their goal? Likewise, if the protagonist was unsuccessful, why were they unsuccessful, how did they fail, and what could they have done different that might have helped them achieve their goal? These are the primary, elemental concerns of story— though the variations in how stories are told are nearly endless, and ultimately hinges upon the style the storyteller wishes to employ when telling the tale.

EXAMPLES:

The Killing (1956) opens with ex convict Johnny Clay (Sterling Hayden) orchestrating a multi-million dollar race-track robbery. He gathers around him a team to help him pull off the heist, including track cashier George Peatty (Elisha Cook, Jr.), race-track bartender Randy Kenna (Ted de Corsia), and Marvin Unger (Jay C. Filppen). It's possible that the plan could go wrong and send Johnny back to prison, but the prospect of stealing $2 million dollars is too enticing to pass up. The story continues as Johnny formulates, articulates and eventually carries out the plan to steal the money—and as the theft is carried out, it would seem that the plan is running smoothly and the heist is progressing as expected—until a number of variables begin to slowly disrupt the criminals cohesion. Finally, Johnny is the only remaining survivor of the thieves—and he alone is left to spend the entire $2 million on himself and his fiance Fay (Colleen Gray) if he can only manage to get it on the escape plane. *The Killing* is a criminal heist movie, but the story goes beyond *how* these characters pull off a race-track robbery and delves into the lives of the criminals who take part in this thievery; who they are, and how things go so horribly wrong.

V for Vendetta (2006) follows a woman named Evey (Natalie Portman) as she struggles to understand the mysterious background of an even more mysterious masked man who refers to himself simply as "V" (Hugo Weaving); a man who disguises himself as the infamous historical anarchist Guy Fawkes and terrorizes the domineering British government, while also calling England's citizens to rebellion. As Evey uncovers more and more of V's tragic history, she simultaneously uncovers the histories of the individuals who control the British government, and investigates their corrupted political power. Evey then becomes inexplicably embroiled in this plot to overthrow a questionable English Parliament while also developing a strong emotional bond and friendship with the elusive V.

Storyboards

Storyboards, are a tool employed by filmmakers to help visualize the composition, or framing, of any given shot that displays the action-content of a script. Storyboards are used to take the written word upon a screenplay's page and interpret it visually for the first time—usually via pen, pencil or watercolor. It helps the director articulate his vision for any given shot, sequence and scene to the production department—in particular, the director of photography (or

STORYBOARDS (CONT'D)

D.P.) to ensure that everyone is aware of where the camera is at any given time in the script, what the camera is capturing within it's frame and whether the camera will be in motion or not. Planning out the action as it relates to the camera is integral to the page-to-screen adaptation that turns a script into a film.

EXAMPLES:

This storyboard sequence that illustrates a segment of the climactic scene in *Taxi Driver* (1976) was drawn by the film's director Martin Scorsese himself as a way to communicate what he imagined the crucial scene looked like and how it was to be shot on the most basic level. This was done in order to be used as an effective communicative tool when discussing how to shoot the scene with his production crew. In each frame, a single shot is drawn. Along with the drawing of the shot is the shot number, a brief description of the shot itself—usually giving specific technical notes in terms of composition, framing, what millimeter lens to be used in addition to describing the physical action of the shot—and places that drawing of that shot with other shots that take place in the same sequence, in order to give the creators a rough-draft look at how any given storyboarded scene will play out, beginning to end. It gives the creators an idea of what works and what doesn't, what should be changed and what could be made better—and how to improve the visual appeal of the sequence for the audience's benefit when finally the scene is shot and edited together.

The storyboard sequence that illustrates Frodo's major confrontation with a Nazul astride a fell beast in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) is the first instance where film director Peter Jackson is able to direct the visual composition of the sequence and see that part of the film all for the cost of some pencils and paper—effectively acting as a cheap first-pass at the film, in order to make decisions over the best possible way to shoot the film *before* the director, cast, or crew even arrives on set; oftentimes before the set is even selected. Storyboards, therefore, give the director the advantage of knowing, before anyone else, how the film is going to look once it's finally shot and edited together so that it will inform the director's decisions in casting, camera setups and acting decisions for any given scene. Here, in this example, this storyboard sequence gave Peter Jackson an idea of how the confrontation will play out—and what possible coverage of the scene he would need to shoot in order to visually communicate such a pivotal, tense moment in the trilogy.

Style

Style, *is a combination of motifs, mood, genre, dramatic composition, and visual appeal that combine to provide the overall feel of a film. Style is the culmination of all elements of storytelling and how they work together, as a whole, to take the audience through a cinematic experience. A film or screenplay's style is ultimately what makes it so appealing to watch or read—it means telling the story with conviction and confidence to ensure that the audience is compelled and entertained in their journey along with any protagonist. Style also alludes to the writer and/or director's voice; their own personal attitudes regarding the subject matter of the film, and voicing it in an engaging and enlightening way.*

EXAMPLES:

A Single Man (2009) examines the life of George Falconer (Colin Firth) dealing with the grief of his life partner Jim (Matthew Goode), set in 1960's Los Angeles. The film is written, directed, designed and edited with it's style in mind; each shot, every scene, all costume pieces and props, every nuanced detail in every frame is informed by the stylistic choices of the storytellers—and it's not difficult to see that the entire film is overtly stylistic in portraying the thoughts, emotions and crisis of it's central character. *A Single Man*'s style immerses the viewer into the world of the main character and the world of the story by interpreting the story and it's themes in a visually stimulating way—inviting the audience to be arrested and hypnotized by the artistry of the film's cinematography and visual appeal. It's not hard to see that the film's director, Tom Ford, was himself a designer for Gucci since 1990, and became Gucci's Creative Director in 1994 and then later started his own line of menswear in 2006. This background in design and style plays a huge part in Ford's first feature film, as *A Single Man* is a film heavy-handed in it's stylistic impressions of a man attempting to reconcile his sad life with the prospect of his intended suicide.

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind (2002) is a film that is set on two different fronts: both on the set of a game show set before a live, studio audience and broadcast into the homes of millions of television viewers in America, and also in dark, murky Russian alleyways—fighting international communist conspiracies determined to cripple the United States and democratic life completely. Because of this dramatic difference between the two worlds occupied by game show host and CIA hitman Chuck Barris, the film is split into two visually and stylistically altered fashions: the world where Chuck is a television executive and game show personality looks and feels fundamentally different than the world where Chuck

STYLE (CONT'D)

is a CIA agent fighting communism in a cloak-and-dagger danger-zone. The styles of the two worlds combine to ultimately become the style of the overall film; a film that examines the mind of a man who occupies two different worlds, and what ensues when those worlds collide.

Subplot

Subplot, is the story that exists outside of the apparent plot of a film—the underlying drama that exists below the surface of the major narrative. Subplot is meant to reflect the same dramatic themes and motifs of the film at large—but usually tends to have a much more limited scope and influence. This doesn't mean that subplots aren't interesting—in fact, subplots should be just as interesting as the main story. Subplots are a way to relieve the audience from the tension and drama surrounding the primary narrative; giving the audience a chance to catch up and take a breath without fully releasing them from the world of the story. However, it is important that subplot not steal the main storyline's thunder. If the subplot becomes more memorable than the main plot, audience's may wonder why the subplot isn't the story's major narrative—or become frustrated by the story constantly returning to the main narrative. The subplot should also serve some crucial purpose to the main storyline in an unexpected way the audience could not have predicted.

EXAMPLES:

In *Office Space* (1999), the major story of the film is indisputable: the audience follows the misadventures of office worker Peter Gibbons (Ron Livingston) as he attempts to come to terms with his life by reconciling his jaded attitude toward his career. Yet, while Peter is achieving white-collar nirvana, Milton Waddams (Stephen Root) is approaching a point of no return in confronting his frustrations toward his job, his life, and his co-workers. The combining frustrations of cubicle life, being constantly moved all over the office, and his beloved stapler being stolen eventually prove too much for Milton to handle, and he comes through at the end of the film by maniacally deciding to burn down the entire office in a fit of rage. This reoccurring subplot adds another, separate dynamic to the story that, in the end, also serves as a deus ex machina for the story once Peter and his pals have painted themselves into a corner when their plan to steal from the company backfires. It also provides the audience with variety while watching the film—

switching back and forth between the subplot and the main story to keep the story spontaneous, entertaining, and fresh.

Adaptation (2002) follows Charlie Kaufman (Nicolas Cage) as he attempts to adapt the book *Orchid Theif* by Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep) into a successful and poignant Hollywood screenplay. His struggles and challenges dealing with writers block are contrasted by the inspiration that befalls his novice, first-time screenwriter twin brother Donald (Nicolas Cage) who is busily trying to keep up with his muse in order to write what comes to be known as *The 3*, a murder mystery thriller suspense film of epic proportions that adheres stridently to the Hollywood formula that Charlie is so desperately trying to transcend. The irony, however, is that Donald is realizing great success with his script—while Charlie continues to suffer from writers block and is incapable of grasping the story he was hired to tell. Donald's subplot while writing his screenplay is written as a means to further demonstrate Charlie's own frustrations with writing—and eventually, Donald's subplot reconnects with the main story when Charlie humbly enlists his brother Donald to help him finish his script.

Subplot Characters

Subplot Characters, are characters who's primary, story-based function exists within the framework of a story's subplot. These characters usually have motivations and needs that exist outside the motivations and needs of a protagonist, though not always. They exist to give the overall plot of a screenplay a degree of variance to break up any monotony that could possibly occur for an audience; introducing a new, secondary story, and populated with interesting characters. It is important, however, that subplot characters not overshadow your primary characters, but rather, accentuate and influence the main story and characters in a believable, subtle way.

EXAMPLES:

O Brother, Where Art Thou? (2002) is the story of three escaped prisoners in the south who attempt to escape the law and win back their leader's estranged wife before she marries another man. However, alongside this main storyline, the audience is treated to a series of reoccurring characters who, at the onset, have little to nothing to do with Everett (George Clooney), Pete (John Tuturro) or Delmar (Tim Blake Nelson) but who, by the end of the movie, will have a major impact on the fates of the film's three heroes. Pappy O'Daniel (Charles Durning)

SUBPLOT CHARACTERS (CONT'D)

is the grouchy, hard-to-please old-timey Mississippi politician who is campaigning to be re-elected as the state's Governor, but who is falling behind his competitor Homer Stokes (Wayne Duvall) in the polls. Periodically, the audience is given episodic insight into Pappy O'Daniel and his political staff (J.R. Horne and Brian Reddy) headed by his son Junior O'Daniel (Del Pentecost). Throughout the course of the film, we see this hapless team of unhappy political hopefuls who supply a steady undercurrent of humor to the film until they supply a fundamental purpose to the story when they come tot he rescue of the three heroes when it seems they're about to be hauled off to prison once again rendering all their hard work and progress to nothing. This makes Pappy O'Daniel and his team an example of how *subplot characters* can become absolutely pivotal to the major narrative of a film, but who at the onset play only a minor function in its telling.

Boogie Nights (1997) is a huge ensemble film that explores the world of professional pornography throughout the 70's and the 80's and includes an all-star cast that covers many different types of characters. One subplot character is Buck Swope (Don Cheadle), a cowboy-themed porn star who marries co-star Jessie St. Vincent (Melora Walters) and attempts to get out of the adult entertainment business for good when he plans to open up his own stereo equipment store. As the audience watches Dirk Diggler's (Mark Wahlberg) career rise and fall, the audience is also intermittently caught up with Buck's attempts to cash in on his own American dream. When he's denied for a loan from the bank, due in large-part to his past as a porn actor, he is at a loss as to how to manifest his dream of being an independent businessman owning a stereo equipment retailer, until—as chance should have it—Buck is caught in the crossfire of a donut-store hold up that leaves him the only remaining survivor of a cash robbery. Buck takes the money and runs in order to open the store he's always dreamed of having, but when he does ultimately succeed—he finds that owning and operating a business of his own isn't necessarily easy-street. This *subplot character*, and the journey he goes on to achieve his goal, allows the audience temporary relief from the saga of Dirk Diggler and his surrounding entourage of porn-world friends and co-workers, while also adding an element of depth to the story that exists beyond and underneath it's major storyline.

Subtext

Subtext, is what is inferred or insinuated, not by what a character says, but by what a character doesn't say; and is often intoned by use of body language and the manner of their behavior. Oftentimes it seems that in real life, people seldom say anything or everything that crosses their minds—and employ subtle methods that make their points without blatantly issuing their true thoughts or desires. Sometimes in life, people have a tendency to say everything just short of what is truly on their minds—hoping, perhaps, that the second person gets the hint or makes the realization of what is being said in subtext. Characters in a film can behave in precisely the same way, and for many varying reasons—but subtext is always a strong and powerful tool the writer can employ to help draw the audience's attention to the dramatic weight of two (or sometimes more) characters combating in a duel of wits, allowing both the audience—and the other character in the scene—the fun of guessing what any given character might be saying beneath layers of subtext in any given scene.

EXAMPLES:

From the moment Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft) first appears at a party celebrating the achievements of Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) in *The Graduate* (1967), each movement, demand, and bit of dialogue uttered by Mrs. Robinson—though seemingly innocent and benign at face-value—methodically suggests her predator-like attempts to "seduce" young Ben. Though Ben is the first to suggest his suspicion that Mrs. Robinson has anything but wholesome intentions by asking him to drive her home from the party, Mrs. Robinson herself plays her desires close-to-the-chest until, finally, she makes her motives known to Ben—her almost obscene attempts to provoke an affair between them. Ultimately, Mrs. Robinson succeeds—though not in the first act of the film. This 'cat-and-mouse' game played between Benjamin and Mrs. Robinson is a chess game of sorts where both Ben and Mrs. Robinson refrain from saying exactly what is on their minds until Ben becomes the first one to crack, and even then Mrs. Robinson doesn't bat an eye—she maintains her cool and continues to subtly (and not-so-subtly) suggest and provoke Ben using *subtext*; stating her intentions in a way that says *everything but* what exactly it is that she's after. This scene is a classic example of how subtext can add tension, suspense, and even an air of comedy to a scene—pitting what one character *intends* against what another character *imagines* is intended.

SUBTEXT (CONT'D)

In the 1978 film *The Deer Hunter,* Michael (Robert De Niro) seeks out his life-long friend Nick (Christopher Walken) in order to rescue him from an underworld Russian Roulette gambling ring and return the both of them back home to their friends and loved ones waiting in Clariton, Pennsylvania. Yet, when Michael finally locates Nick—it is clear that Nick is only a shell of his former self, totally lost to the world in which he has been submerged, including—but not limited to—heroin abuse. Michael, however, is determined to bring Nick back—to the point of risking his own life in a game of Russian Roulette against Nick in hopes that the match will help jar Nick's memory of the horrors they experienced together while held prisoners in a rural Vietnamese camp. As the Russian Roulette match develops, Michael tries desperately to provoke Nick's memories; and as the subtle nuance of strategy behind the dangerous game of suicide develops, a scene of *subtexts* evolves between the two old friends, witnessed by the audience. When Nick's memory finally returns, the audience is left to wonder not only what it was, exactly, that brought Nick back to reality—a look, an unspoken exchange, something familiar about the physical terror of this suicidal contest—but also what Nick *truly* means when he says "*one shot*". The subtext of this scene then allows the outcome of the scene to mean different things to different audience members, depending upon their own emotional investment that has developed since the beginning of the film, what they believe about Michael and Nick's friendship and also what they understand about the two friends' life waiting for them back home in Pennsylvania. The ambiguity that can be dissected behind two simple words; *"one shot"* proves how subtext can leave an emotional scar on the viewer when properly applied.

Supporting Characters

Supporting Characters, *are characters who have significant interaction with the protagonist, and contribute to the major events of a film, but who aren't the primary focus of the story's narrative. Upon the onset of writing a story, the writer must first decide from who's perspective, or point of view, the events of a story will be told from—this character ultimately will become the film's main character, or protagonist. But the protagonist is often defined by the collection of other characters who surround him or her; and oftentimes, supporting characters can be more memorable or revealing, depending on the nature of the film's hero. Supporting characters offer a different flavor or dimensional element of the story*

that is different from the protagonist's, even if just subtly so. Ensuring that a script has multiple supporting characters, each who offer a unique characteristic and perspective to the overall story, enables the audience to find multiple facets of interest in the characters who populate any given story. The more clearly developed and vast your entire spectrum of characters, the greater the chance of appealing to a wider demographic of audiences.

EXAMPLES:

X-Men (2000) was the first film of the franchise set to adapt the popular super hero comic book characters to the screen—and did so by introducing a lineup of iconic principal characters from the comics including Professor X (Patrick Stewart), Wolverine (Hugh Jackman), Magneto (Ian McKellen), Jean Grey (Famke Janssen), and Cyclops (James Marsden), to name a few. However, in addition to the primary characters—the elemental superheroes of the franchise— the film also brought to life a litany of *supporting characters* such as Sabretooth (Tyler Mane), Senator Robert Kelly (Bruce Davison), Toad (Ray Park), and Mystique (Rebecca Romijn-Stamos); all of whom play a crucial part in the plot, but in more subtle or less obvious ways than the characters who occupy the central focus of the story. These *supporting characters* help influence the audience in believing the world of the story by reinforcing the mythos of mutant-characters, while also keeping the audience compelled by demonstrating how each character imaginatively showcases the many ways mutant powers can manifest in these amazing characters.

Likewise, in the Harry Potter film series—starting, of course, with *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001) introduces audiences to Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe), his wizard mentor Albus Dumbledore (Richard Harris), his friends Ron Weasley (Rupert Grint) and Hermoine Granger (Emma Watson); characters who, upon our introduction to them in this first film, will go on to play significant parts not only in subsequent films, but throughout the entire franchise which spans eight feature-length blockbuster films. However, because of how *many* films comprise this franchise, many reoccurring *supporting characters* were introduced in this first film who reprise their roles later in the series, including Rubeus Hagrid (Robbie Coltrane), Severus Snape (Alan Rickman), Minerva McGonagall (Maggie Smith), among many others. These supporting characters populate Hogwarts and justify the magical atmosphere of the films; their continued presence throughout the series allows even the most non-consequential supporting character an opportunity to develop into a fully realized, nuanced and fascinating individual, separate and distinct from all others.

Surprise

Surprise, alludes to the writer always working to provide a story that is full of exciting twists and turns in the narrative which prevents the audience from becoming lulled to boredom through repetitious storytelling or predictable structure. Sometimes, keeping a protagonist in a state of perpetuating surprise will lead to your audience's surprise at appropriate points in the structure of a story; yet the element of catching the audience by surprise hinges ultimately upon audience awareness and careful planning on the writer's part. If an audience is treated to a thrilling enough surprise, they will seek to relive the event over and over again, going back and watching a film many times even after the effect of the surprise has worn off.

EXAMPLES:

When first we're introduced to Karl Childers (Billy Bob Thornton) in *Sling Blade* (1996) inside a psychiatric hospital in Arkansas and as we listen to Karl tell his story, there is an element of *surprise* on the audience's behalf when Karl's crime is made clear. The brutality of it combined with Karl's unique personality leaves the audience at a loss as to how to feel about this mysterious man—yet, slowly, as the audience gets to know Karl a little better outside the context of the psychiatric hospital, we understand the context which predicated Karl's crime, and accept it for what it is. However, as Karl's new life continues—it becomes increasingly clear that his situation is approaching another crucial point of no return—and the audience, therefore, is surprised once again when Karl decides to risk everything he's gained by his newly acquired freedom in order to save the innocence of his new 12 year old friend Frank Wheatley (Lucas Black) by murdering Frank's Mother's (Natalie Canerday) boyfriend Doyle (Dwight Yoakam) before Frank can be driven to doing it himself; either soon, or in the future. Not only is the audience surprised by Karl's decision to commit murder once again—the audience is also surprised by Karl's intricate understanding of Frank's innocence, and how delicately that innocence is preserved while also acknowledging the danger Frank's conscience is in as he is antagonized by the abusive and loathsome Doyle. This reluctant wisdom displayed by Karl comes as a shock to the audience—despite our coming to know and become friends with Karl, the film's ultimate reward is in the realization that Karl is no senseless, murdering monster—but a sensible, sensitive individual.

Throughout the coarse of *About Schmidt* (2002), the audience is treated to intimate, private examples where Warren Schmidt (Jack Nicholson) demonstrates himself as a selfish, hypocritical, delusional and, ultimately, impossibly sad man approaching the twilight of his life. He confides his secret thoughts to Ndugu Umbo, a Tanzanian child Warren fosters with a monthly check and a letter that gives Ndugu insight into the aging man's life once his wife Helen (June Squibb) suddenly dies from a blood clot in her brain. As Warren narrates his thoughts to Ndugu from his letters, we watch Warren attempt a journey to his daughter's wedding and also a journey into Warren's own understanding of himself and his place in the world; where the audience is treated to episode after episode of Warren behaving selfishly and childishly time and time again. Yet, all of these haphazard moments which demonstrate Warren's shortcomings crescendo into the film's final climactic moment when he receives a response, not from Ndugu, but from a village nun who teaches young Ndugu. The nun tells Warren that Ndugu receives all of his letters, and wishes him happiness; while also enclosing a painting that Ndugu has drawn especially for Warren. The picture shows Ndugu and Warren Schmidt, smiling and holding hands together. This simple moment deflates all of Warren's worries and petty concerns about life, rendering them all moot in the wake of the simple knowledge of gaining the esteem of a little boy, far away, who he will never meet. This moment is so unexpected that it shocks the audience—but not nearly as much as the audience is surprised by Warren's sincere, heartfelt reaction to Ndugu's gift. This moment shows how an entire movie can work toward a single scene's surprising culmination, and that not all surprises need to be suspenseful or alarming in nature in order to have a genuine emotional impact and resonance with the audience.

Suspense

Suspense, *similarly to surprise, is a tool utilized by the writer to provoke the audience's immersion into the story by first creating a sympathetic character, and then exploiting the audience's emotions by placing that character in a situation that threatens their well-being and compromises that character's ability to achieve their needs, desires and goals. The audience fearing for the safety of the protagonist results in suspense: the sensation of fearing the worst and hoping for the best.*

SUSPENSE (CONT'D)

EXAMPLES:

As the story of *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005) develops, the audience isn't left in the dark for long as to *who* killed Melquiades Estrada (Julio Cedillo), and *how* it occurred. But because the audience is let in on this information early, it allows the methodical building of *suspense* to permeate throughout every moment of every scene in the film until finally justice for this unhappy (though accidental as it might be) is served. Yet, the extraction of that justice is what concerns the majority of the film; and whether or not Pete Perkins (Tommy Lee Jones) will get Patrolman Mike Norton (Barry Pepper) to bring Melquiades Estrada's body back to his village deep in rural Mexico is one of the audience's root concerns—along with wondering what Pete Perkins plans to do with Norton once Estrada's body is properly buried. Will Pete kill Norton? Will Norton escape and seek his own revenge upon his prisoner? These questions drive the audience's sense of suspense in the story; and without that suspense, the film itself wouldn't be nearly as potent, or powerful.

The Man Who Wasn't There (2001) brings a complicated, nuanced noir tale of mystery and murder crashing down upon the stony poker face of barber Ed Crane (Billy Bob Thornton); the more complex and delicate the odds of Ed getting away with murder becomes, the more stoically calm Ed becomes. The problems for Ed and his wife Doris (Frances McDormand) begin when Ed murders "Big Dave" Brewster (James Gandolfini), a department store owner who keeps Doris employed in addition to keeping her embroiled in an extramarital affair—presumably behind Ed's back. Yet, one day Ed is assailed by Creighton Tolliver (Jon Polito) who appeals to Ed to invest in his new business venture; something he calls "Dry Cleaning". Ed jumps on board, but in order to get the money he decides to blackmail "Big Dave". It seems to work out, until "Big Dave" wises up to Ed's scam and, enraged, attempts to strangle Ed—who murders "Big Dave" in self-defense. This murder begins a long list of suspenseful moments in the tale beginning with Doris being falsely accused as Dave's killer, all the way to Ed's final moments before being strapped into the electric chair—yet at every stage of the journey the audience wonders what will become of Ed through every twist and turn, questioning whether or not he'll get away with the murder or if his conscience will ever catch up with him. *The Man Who Wasn't There* is an excellent example of how suspense can be drawn out to occupy the mental attention of an audience practically from the start of a film until its closing credits

Symbol

Symbol, is a reoccurring image or motif that, through repetition, becomes a metaphor for a particular character, the story, or the theme. Through a symbols constant use, the item or object that becomes the symbol objectively begins to represent something else to the audience, and sometimes to the characters themselves. Symbols are used to add both clarity and depth to any idea a writer seeks to explore through his or her work—representing one thing by comparing it to another; layers of meaning emerge and parallels are drawn. By presenting this symbol to the audience, the writer hopes to include the audience's active participation in the story, giving them insightful, physical cues that will help guide the audience to understand what the writer aspires to achieve by telling the tale. Symbols help a writer allude to character details and theme within the subtext without having to overtly say, but rather, implying, and leaving the audience to fill in the blanks.

EXAMPLES:

In *The Godfather: Part II* (1974) the metaphorical symbolism associated with the acronym "The Godfather", a name of respect bestowed upon Vito Corleone (Robert De Niro) and then upon Vito's son and heir Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) is a title that carries with it a level of respect and importance: to call a man "The Godfather" is an admission that that man is acting as your surrogate father—and that, to those who refer to Vito or Michael as such—they are to pay homage to their Godfather with respect and fear. If, however, one is to acknowledge either Vito or Michael as their 'Godfather', and fail to respect or fear them, they will swiftly and surely feel the sting of Corleone vengeance and anger, *even* if the Godfather is your own brother, as in the case of Alfredo Corleone (John Cazale). Alongside the metaphorical symbolism associated with the title "The Godfather", the film's poster demonstrates a hand which holds a cross—and upon that cross is tied a number of strings, reminiscent of how a puppeteer manipulates marionette. Likewise, this symbolic metaphor demonstrates how The Godfather manipulates those who are tied to his service—ranging from street hoods and criminals to police officers, judges, and even senators of the United States congress. *The Godfather: Part II*, in addition to the other two Godfather films of the franchise, are hailed as some of the greatest films ever made, and contain within them an endless barrage of metaphors that allow the Crime Genre film transcend menial plot points of violence and power to Shakespearean

SYMBOL (CONT'D)

heights, due in large part because of director Francis Ford Coppola's and writer Mario Puzo's attention to *symbolism*.

National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation (1989) is a classic Christmas film with a National Lampoon's approach—and of course this means making a parody of all the immediately recognizable symbols and traditions associated with the holidays. In fact, adhering to *all* holiday traditions becomes a full-time occupation for the film's hero, Father and Husband extraordinaire Clark Wilhelm Griswold Jr., who obsesses over perfecting each staple of the holidays to the point of nearly ruining Christmas for everyone. However, through investigating and obsessing over each of these traditions, Clark and the Griswold family all come to have a deeper, more personal understanding of the meaning of Christmas, so that the symbols associated with Christmas lose their objective meaning behind the joy of reconnecting with friends, family and loved ones during the holiday season. This moral tale essentially makes *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* an example of how a film can use symbolism associated with the holidays—something everyone can identify with to some degree—in order to tell a story *about* symbols and their impact on the middle-class family.

Symbolic Characters

Symbolic Characters, *similarly to allegorical characters and, to a degree, archetypal characters, are characters that serve a symbolic or metaphorical role in the story. This is done by associating the character with a symbol or metaphor, being a living personification of that symbolic object or item; assuming it's psychological and objective characteristics for the needs of the narrative structure of the film. The audience is then left to make the connection between the characters symbolic meaning as it resonates with theme, in addition to the implications such a symbolic association means for them, as the viewers. This personification of symbolism gives the audience a one-to-one relationship between the character, and what they are meant to symbolize; though sometimes the writer makes this symbolism ambiguous or buries it under subtlety. It is ultimately left to the writers discretion how to approach a symbolic character: to make him or her overtly symbolic, or subtly symbolic—each have different implications with regards to audience awareness, and their relationship to the character.*

EXAMPLES:

In *The Fountain* (2006), the two principal actors; Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz play a series of roles that, individually represent or are symbolic of the other roles they play in different eras, be it either in the past, present, or future, and also embody specific symbolic metaphors pertaining to life, death, and immortality. Chronologically, for instance, Tomas (Hugh Jackman) is a 16th Century Spanish Conquistador in the service of Queen Isabella (Rachel Weisz) who's loyalty and fealty to her is acknowledged and rewarded with a mission to journey to the New Land in search of the Tree of Life. Tomas' journey is intercut with the present-day struggle of Tommy Creo (Hugh Jackman) searching to find a cure for a specific strain of cancer that plagues his dying wife Izzi (Rachel Weisz). Meanwhile, a futuristic astronaut Tom (Hugh Jackman) ascends through the nebula of space in a spherical bubble containing himself, the 'Tree of Life', and also the haunting memory of Izzi. This trinity of characters played by Jackman, in addition to the dual characters played by Weisz, represent life, death, and the pursuit of immortality—and each achieve an (arguably) different end with varying implications, despite the fact that, essentially, all of Jackman's characters and all of Weisz's characters represent the same elemental individual. *The Fountain* is an example of how individual characters can represent different thematic metaphors, and how each character can have a different influence upon the lasting impression the audience takes away from the film experience.

Talk Radio (1988) is a film that, thematically, illustrates the pros and cons of the freedom of speech, with the main character—late night talk radio personality Barry Champlain (Eric Bogosian) –representing how an individual's radical political views paired with their entertainment personae can combine to form a single volatile and controversial individual, especially one who occupies the airways of a large metropolitan city such as Dallas, Texas, where the film takes place. Barry himself symbolically represents the notion of freedom of speech— and as a late night talk radio DJ, Barry voices his unorthodox political and sociological opinions on the air, and encourages his listeners to call in with their own viewpoints as well—however much they may differ with his own. One such caller voices his opinions by threatening to kill Barry and his radio staff with a bomb that he has sent to the studio; and low-and-behold, a suspicious-looking box appears in the studio, one that the characters take to be the explosive that this psychotic caller is referring to. If Barry is allowed to voice his opinion, are his listeners, likewise, allowed to voice theirs? At what point is the line drawn between peaceful voicing of opinions and violent voicing of opinions? If Barry symbolically represents this struggle, then what does his ultimate end at the

SYMBOLIC CHARACTERS (CONT'D)

climax of the film mean for the freedom of speech? These questions were considered during the writing and initial conceptualization of the film by the writer (Eric Bogosian himself) and ultimately the film's director Oliver Stone, thus making *Talk Radio* an exemplification of how a character can symbolically encapsulate the attitudes of sociological notions and/or political ideals.

Sympathy

Sympathy, is a communion shared between audience and character; in particular, with a character who is undergoing a particularly troubling, enigmatic, oppressive, or sorrowful scenario. Sympathy occurs when the audience is capable of empathizing with a character—when the audience cares, hopes and fears for the characters wellbeing, the audience will likewise sympathize with the character when challenging obstacles are encountered. Empathy is required if the audience is going to care at all about the characters in a film—but not so with sympathy; as typically, sympathy is the province of vulnerable or victimized characters, and not all characters need be vulnerable. However, sympathy does allow the audience to see the character in a position of disadvantage, and can deepen the audience's relationship with a character, and heighten the audience's emotional response if the character overcomes their hardships to achieve success or is beaten by the opposition to the point of failure. Either way; taking the audience on an emotional journey with the protagonist as their guide, providing the viewers with dramatic highs and lows, ensures that the audience will be engaged, entertained, and enlightened.

EXAMPLES:

Amélie (2001) is a French romantic comedy that brings to the audience the '*fabulous destiny of Amélie Poulain*', a young French girl who, in life, has been unlucky concerning all things related to love. Despite being young, lovely, imaginative and working in a cafe in Montmarte, Paris—Amélie is nearly paralyzed by shyness; to the point that it seems impossible that she would ever manage to fall in love. However, much to the audience's delight, we watch as a series of events unfold that sets Amélie upon an adventure to finally fall in love. Because the writer takes the time to illustrate to the audience *how* Amélie had previously been unlucky with love, we are given insight into Amélie's misfortunes—and thus, develop a strong sense of *sympathy* for her as she

undertakes these exploits to find love, in addition to giving the audience a sense of urgency as we *hope* for Amélie's luck to change. It's not difficult to see why; as audience's fall in love with Amélie, we aspire for her to find a character within the world of the story to fall in love with her as much as we have. If the writer had not taken care to ensure that the audience *sympathized* with Amélie, her plight—and journey—would never have compelled audiences to care if Amélie succeeds or fails. Thus, *sympathy*, in the case of *Amélie* is essential to what makes the film so memorable and lovable.

The Producers (1968) brings to us the tragedy of Broadway musical producer Max Bialystock (Zero Mostel) who, after his most recent flop, discovers that it is possible to make *more* money with a box office failure than with a hit. Thus is the impetus behind Bialystock's newest musical concept: *Springtime for Hitler: A Gay Romp with Adolf and Eva at Berchtesgaden*—a musical that Bialystock is certain is fated to fail. Because Bialystock is a protagonist who, as the audience observes, is doomed to living a life of bad-luck, the audience *sympathizes* with Bialystock's plight, and *hopes* for his good fortune. We follow his exploits, along with his sidekick accountant Leo Bloom (Gene Wilder) as they attempt to make the biggest musical failure of all time, and the audience *wants* Bialystock to succeed—and yet, can't help ourselves from enjoying the dramatic irony that develops as it becomes clear that his unlikely Broadway musical becomes an unexpected overnight success! So, in a way, the audience's *sympathy* for Max is rewarded—though, in a way we aren't led to expect: in wanting Max to create a failure, we observe Max create a monumental achievement—producing what, in the world of the story, becomes one of the biggest Broadway musicals of all time. The audience's sympathy with Max, therefore, is well-founded—and the audience then comes to find that everything ends up alright for Max and his loyal accomplice Leo Bloom in the end, regardless of their unexpected success/failure.

Telegraphing

Telegraphing, is a technique the writer employs to subtly suggest information to the audience by concealing it within the subtext. Telegraphing allows the writer to suggest certain dramatic cues to the audience that the characters may or may not be aware of. Telegraphing, then, is associated with audience awareness; the writer's conscious effort, moment-by-moment, scene-by-scene, to either provide the audience with information the character doesn't know (which helps build suspense), or to conceal information from the audience that the characters do

TELEGRAPHING (CONT'D)

know (which eventually culminates with a dramatic revelation). Telegraphing is the writer's ability to hint at what could be around the corner at any given moment to the audience; which then empowers the writer to surprise the audience by delivering something contrary to what the audience was telegraphed to expect. When used correctly, telegraphing is a powerful storytelling tool that will keep the audience continually engaged in each and every moment of a script.

EXAMPLES:

300 (2007) is a gritty comic book adaptation that retells the story of how 300 Spartan warriors, led by King Leonidas (Gerard Butler) in 480 B.C. withstood the massive armies of Persian Emperor Xerxes (Rodrigo Santoro) for far longer, and with far greater success, than Xerxes himself could have ever imagined. Yet, finally, it becomes clear toward the end of the film that Leonidas and his remaining Spartan warriors face ultimate defeat after being betrayed by Ephialtes (Andrew Tiernan), a physically disfigured Spartan exile who earlier is denied permission to fight alongside his fellow Spartans. The audience witnesses as the proud King Leonidas must forfeit himself and his armies to Emperor Xerxes in absolute surrender; an inconceivable prospect after baring witness to how ruthlessly proud and rebellious the Spartans can be. Everything the audience has come to know and understand about Spartan way of life is at odds with this moment where Leonidas surrenders to Persia; to the point that the audience cannot believe it as it occurs. Yet, there is something suspicious about Leonidas' mood and attitude as he prostates himself before the foreign lord—something that leads the audience to suspect that something about the surrender isn't entirely all that it seems. This is an example of how a writer *telegraphs* information to the audience; a proverbial wink-of-the-eye, or tip-of-the-hat, alerting the audience that something is up. Of course, all of the audience's suspicions regarding Leonidas' surrender to Xerxes is justified—Leonidas has only allowed himself to *appear* as though he's surrendering in order to allow him one final kill-shot upon the emperor in a final, savage display of rebellion and freedom—totally conforming to what we have come to know of Spartans throughout the duration of *300*.

Juno (2007) (Ellen Page) is a teenage girl, still trudging through High School and hormones, when she is forced to confront the prospect of her own motherhood— more than a couple of years before she would prefer to (if ever). Despite the untimeliness of paternity, Juno decides that the responsible and ethical thing to do would be to endure the pregnancy, withstand the pains of childbirth and allow

her baby to be adopted by two worthy, loving parents. The film follows Juno as she meets and comes to make the acquaintance of Mark and Vanessa Loring (Jason Bateman and Jennifer Garner); a young couple who live in a pristine, luxurious home who—at first glance—appear capable of giving Juno's unborn child everything it will need in life, including two loving parents. Yet, as Juno comes to know the potential parents more, it becomes clear to both her, and the audience, that something isn't right below the surface of this seemingly perfect marriage Mark and Vanessa are attempting. This peculiarity, more palpable than definitive, is the beginnings of *telegraphing* to the audience, and to Juno, that things aren't going to go according to plan, once it's agreed that the Loring's are going to be the recipients of Juno's pregnancy.

Tension

Tension, arises whenever an obstacle separates a character from their desired need or goal. Whenever the audience fears for the protagonist, or doubts whether or not the hero will be capable of achieving their goal, tension begins. Though tension can be any strain, physical or psychological, that prevents a character from succeeding, tension can be further defined if an antagonist is willfully seeking to thwart the protagonist's victory—pitting an unstoppable force against an immovable object. The tension that arises from this conflict between hero and villain further generates suspense and keeps the audience actively engaged in the stakes.

EXAMPLES:

Sin City (2005) is an eclectic tale of how the lives of cops, criminals and their victims intersect in a turbulent and violent city, poetically named after human vice. During one segment of the tale, (known as *The Big Fat Kill*), Dwight (Clive Owen) is confronted with a team of thugs headed by Jackie Boy (Benicio del Toro) who are antagonizing his girlfriend Shellie (Brittany Murphy). Right away, the audience is treated to a hefty dose of tension—how mean and violent is Jackie Boy capable of getting? How mean and violent can Dwight get? We get the impression that these two are tough hombres; but as Dwight follows Jackie Boy to Old Town, a part of Sin City run by a gang of prostitutes who are free to run their trade without the influence of pushy or heavy-handed pimps and mob bosses, Dwight has a growing sense of alarm nagging inside his conscience that there's something more to Jackie Boy than just a tough customer looking for

TENSION (CONT'D)

trouble. Dwight's hesitance increases the audience's sense of tension—when it's suggested that there's something to be afraid of that even Dwight doesn't fully understand, the audience subconsciously doesn't know *what* to expect—and fears the worst. In this case, the audience's, and Dwight's, fears are justified—it turns out that, when Jackie Boy takes things too far and has to be taken 'out of commission', Dwight discovers Jackie Boy's police badge. If wind of this gets to the mob, who owns the police department in Sin City, then things are going to turn very bad for the girls in Old Town. The tension ascends a new level here as it's decided that Jackie Boy's body needs to be hidden. The stakes continue to rise scene by scene, moment by moment after this realization is made—until the resolution of this segment of the film is finally achieved—but not without a great deal of bloodshed, and not without the audience enduring a veritable gold-mine of ever-mounting tension that never lets up.

Ratitouille (2007) relates the tale of Remy (Patton Oswald), a rat in Paris, France, who aspires to become a great and famous chef of gourmet cuisine and, in attempting this endeavor, befriends Alfredo Linguini (Lou Romano), a young man who also has a passion—if not the skill—for fine cooking. The two arrange a uniting of efforts: Remy will conceal himself under Alfredo's cooking hat, thus making it possible for him to live out his passion for cooking, and Alfredo will act as Remy's 'puppet' and, in so doing, learn how to cook, *as well as* make the acquaintance of Colette Tatou (Janeane Garofalo), a like-minded young woman who works in the kitchen along with Alfredo. This sets the stage for the film's *tension* to begin: Remy's and Alfredo's attempts to keep their charade from being discovered—one that, ultimately, leads to their big moment as a team when their combined cuisine will be tested by master food critic Anton Ego (Peter O'Toole). The audience is sitting on proverbial pins and needles during this all-important climax when Remy's and Alfredo's reputation is on the line, *while simultaneously* they are in the greatest danger of being discovered. This propels a sequence of ever-mounting tension that, ultimately, will drive the plot into the film's third act and final conclusion. *Ratitouille* is an example of how well-applied *tension* can lead an audience to the film's resolution, while fully engrossed in the action of the story, without consciously knowing that the film is approaching an end so that —when the end finally does come—the audience, like after a satisfying meal, is left wanting more.

Theme

Theme, refers to the purpose of telling any given story—what the audience stands to gain by watching, and what they risk losing out on if they don't. The themes of a story are the moral insights the audience will realize upon participation in the tale, and give meaning to the story. Oftentimes, theme answers why: Why do the characters undergo the journey, why was the goal important enough to be sought and why the story needed to be told. The theme of a story usually has universal implications that transcend the context of the film or the characters individual dilemma; the theme being a moral lesson that has significance for not only the characters of a film, but for the audience as well. Therefore, films that deal with universal themes that transcend nationality or cultural differences tend to reach a wider range of audience members, due to the reliability of the film's subject matter.

EXAMPLES:

Batman Begins (2005) brings to life a new Batman lineage outside of Tim Burton's original comic book to screen endeavor that echoes some of the original series *themes*, while also introducing some new ones. Although films can have a number of themes that weave in and out of relevance scene-to-scene throughout the course of an entire movie, chief among *Batman Begins*' themes is the moral that failure is not only inevitable, but is actually a perfectly honorable phenomenon, *but only if* it is not a predicate to total surrender. Bruce Wayne's (Christian Bale) father, Thomas Wayne (Linus Roache) says it first as he rescues young Bruce (Gus Lewis) after the boy falls down an empty water well; "*Why do we fall? So we can pick ourselves up.*" This motto is echoed once more by Bruce's loyal butler Alfred (Michael Caine) later when Bruce needs words of encouragement in his darkest hour; suggesting to the young hero once more that at some point, everyone must face defeat—but it should only serve to further strengthen an individual's moral character and to fuel our continued efforts to overcome our obstacles. This *theme* is perhaps paramount to the film that begins this most recent Batman franchise, and is ultimately a theme that is put to the test in the series second installment; *The Dark Knight* (2008)

True Grit (2010) is a film that calls upon common western themes such as revenge, personal (and sociological) reformation, but also justice. Fourteen year old Mattie Ross (Hailee Steinfeld) takes it upon herself to undertake the extraction of justice upon Tom Chaney (Josh Brolin) who murdered her father and escapes the full weight of the law. This journey to self-sought justice brings

THEME (CONT'D)

her to the acquaintance of Rooster Cogburn (Jeff Bridges), an unsavory Deputy U.S. Marshall, but one who is refered to as having "true grit". "True grit", itself is a phrase that carries with it still another theme: a description of one's mental and moral toughness or resiliency; which is something that the film's three major protagonists ultimately possess; Mattie, Rooster and Texas Ranger LaBoeuf (Matt Damon), who also joins the crusade. If the three protagonists can be referred to as possessing "true grit", then it stands to reason that the films vanquished antagonists, alternatively, lack this inner-constitution; thus making the film's title a description of ethical importance.

Third Act Twist

Third Act Twist, *is typically the most memorable twist that transpires throughout the course of a film and is the 'game changing' moment that occurs around the middle of act III. If the purpose of the third act is to introduce a new dramatic tension that will bring the film to a close, the third act twist's function is to turn the newly introduced dramatic tension back onto itself, introducing the incident which will ultimately bring the narrative to a conclusion.*

EXAMPLES:

Shutter Island (2010) treats audiences to a sudden and abrupt *third act twist* when it's revealed that, the film's hero, U.S. Marshal Edward 'Teddy' Daniels, is in fact a patient of the Ashecliffe Psychiatric Hospital suffering from schizophrenia named Andrew Laeddis; a man who was diagnosed clinically insane after murdering his wife (Michelle Williams). Though this twist is subliminally and subtly hinted at periodically throughout the narrative progression of the film, when finally Teddy/Andrew is made aware of his insanity, it hits him like a ton of bricks—in very much the same surprising way the audience learns it; out of nowhere, and desperately wanting to believe that it isn't true. The film is, in fact, so good at arousing doubt and suspicion in the audience's mind that, even unto the final shot of the film, viewers are still asking themselves if Teddy is being held prisoner by the asylum, or if he is mentally insane. This makes *Shutter Island* an excellent example of how a third act twist can leave the audience asking questions about their personal interpretation of the events portrayed in a film, and provoke multiple viewings time and time again, in order to either

confirm or change an individual's interpretation of the film long after an audience member's first viewing of the movie.

Director M. Night Shyamalan had already become notorious for his use of the *third act twist* even before audiences were treated to his film *The Village* (2004). Yet, in *The Village*'s case, there are multiple twists that—even if the audience is expecting one, finds themselves surprised by the next. The third act twists in this film demonstrate a hoax set atop another hoax—the 'creatures' who the villagers refer to as "those we don't speak of" are revealed to be nothing more than elaborately costumed village elders who intentionally scare the villagers in order to keep the unsuspecting townsfolk out of the forest. Yet, the greater hoax (twist) is revealed upon understanding *why* the elders wouldn't want their families and neighbors venturing too far into the woods. Though Ivy Elizabeth Walker (Bryce Dallas Howard) ventures over the fence in search for medicine to cure her fiance Lucius Hunt (Joaquin Phoenix) of his stab wound inflicted upon him by her brother Noah Percy (Adrien Brody), her literal blindness makes her incapable of fully understanding what life outside the boarders of the village's surrounding forest implies for the village's citizens—all of whom are nothing more than unknowing members of a society stuck unnecessarily in a time period long discarded by the world outside their village, and forced to endure a life without modern conveniences. The fact that the one person who could bring to light the truth of their village's hoax is a girl who's blindness renders her incapable of understanding the world beyond their boarders provides the audience with a sense of awareness which, after the double-whammy of third-act-twists the audience was just treated to, is also an instance of dramatic irony.

Tone

Tone, concerns themood of a story and the emotional reaction the writer intends to provoke from his or her audience. Tone can be used to allude to a film's themes and also provides shades of the writer's individual voice throughout the script; what subject matter does the film concern, how does the script approach the subject matter, how do the characters respond to the subject matter, and how should the audience respond? All these questions are answered by how the writer handles the story's tone—the emotional or dramatic pitch of the story and stances of the characters who exist within that story. Problems arise when the writer provokes an emotional response from the audience he or she wasn't originally intending; for instance, if the writer was intending a scene to be dramatic, and

TONE (CONT'D)

the audience's impulsive reaction is to laugh instead, the writer clearly attempted to provide a tone that the audience wasn't instinctively ready to respond with.

EXAMPLES:

The difference between films like *Fail-Safe* (1964) and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) can be summed up by their *tone*. Where *Fail-Safe* is a film about the horrors surrounding possible nuclear annihilation, striking a dramatic tone, *Dr. Strangelove* adversely explores the absurdities surrounding possible nuclear annihilation, striking a comedic tone. It's this difference that made *Dr. Strangelove* simultaneously a more controversial film, but also makes it a more memorable film.

Harold and Maude (1971) is another film that hits a very unique *tone* simply by virtue of it's approach toward the themes and subject-matter. The film follows the exploits of Harold Chasen (Bud Cort); a young man who obsesses with the existential implications surrounding death. Perhaps it is this fascination with death that eventually leads him to fall in love with the approaching-80 Dame Majorie "Maude" Chardin (Ruth Gordon), who herself is approaching death on account of her age. Paradoxically, however, it's his love affair with Maude that provokes Harold's embracing of life; yet cathartically, that re-evaluation of life's values hinges upon a relationship with a woman who is quickly approaching her death. Quirky, odd and dark would describe the comedic content of *Harold and Maude*; words that owe their allegiance to the writer's and filmmaker's decision on what *tone* to strike while making this film

Twist

Twist, *is any moment in a script that redirects the course of a story's events. Though the third act twist is one of the most crucial twists in the film—a twist can occur at any time, and usually acts as a pivot-point that poses new challenges and throws unexpected scenarios at the characters, who then must overcome the obstacles or face the ramifications should they fail. Most plot points could easily be considered twists, and exemplify cause-and-effect: twists instigate causes, which therefore motivates effects that typically play out as actions that further the characters journey throughout the plot of a film.*

EXAMPLES:

A pivotal twist in the telling of *Donnie Darko* (2001) is, arguably, an innocuous event which causes most all of Donnie's dilemma's throughout the course of the film, yet also is the mysterious key to solving those same dilemmas: the inexplicable jet engine crash that falls out of the sky and lands directly in Donnie's bedroom in the middle of the night. Yet, amazingly, Donnie just happened to not be in his bed at the time—having recently developed a habit of sleepwalking out of the house late at night. In this instance, it saves his life—though later on, this event proves to be the solution to all of Donnie's problems.

The defining twist to the film *Primal Fear* (1996) occurs at the end when Aaron Stampler (Edward Norton) reveals to his attourney Martin Vail (Richard Gere) that his supposed 'split-personality disorder' that allowed him to get away with murder under the guise of criminal insanity was nothing more than an elaborate act put on from the very beginning in order to fool everyone into believing that Stampler suffered from schizophrenia. This moment is also the film's shocking third-act twist, in addition to being one of the many twists and turns that the story makes on it's coarse from beginning to end.

Unity

Unity, is the structural and thematic 'oneness' of a story—and that, despite the fact that a story is comprised by multiple acts, plot points and sequences, the whole is still greater than the sum of its parts. The writer must compose the individual components of story almost as if each scene is a short film in-and-of-itself, with its own individual beginning, middle and end, revealing specific details about character, plot and story separate from the structural integrity of the whole film, while still ensuring that each scene builds upon the last—that each act realizes its function—and that every contribution to the script is written to serve the overarching drama of the entire piece. Act to act, point by point, sequence by sequence, scene by scene, line by line and action by action, each and every word should be applied to benefit the cohesive unity of the story. Anything else is unnecessary, and should be removed or made to serve the story's unity.

EXAMPLES:

Robert Altman's dramatic ensemble piece *Short Cuts* (1993) is an example of how a film requires *unity* in order to clearly articulate the full weight of a film's intended theme to an audience. Though the film showcases the lives of a dozen

UNITY (CONT'D)

principal characters, there is a sense of total unity throughout the narrative—which is kept clean and efficient from beginning to end—demonstrating how the writer had to undertake a delicate juggling act in order to tell each character's story totally and completely, without becoming boring, repetitive, melodramatic, or long-winded. Indeed; *Short Cuts* is a remarkable accomplishment in efficient and thorough screenwriting discipline; giving attention to each primary character without underplaying any of the others, and without overwhelming the audience. *Unity*, in this case, describes not only the themes and character exchanges within the world of the story, but also describes the methodical construction of the story the writer used to structure the screenplay itself.

Though *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is a film that, by Quentin Tarantino's own definition, is comprised of dull, shapeless matter before even the first word of spoken dialogue occurs, demonstrates how Tarantino the screenwriter practices *unity* by balancing not only the characters and events that take place within the film, but also balancing each deplorable act with virtuous and affirmative decisions, as in the case of Butch's (Bruce Willis') admirable decision to risk his own personal safety and freedom in order to rescue Marcellus Wallace (Ving Rhames), the gang lord who wants him dead, from becoming a sex slave to two despicable pawn shoppe enthusiasts. Horror balanced by positive values. Likewise, Vincent Vega's (John Travolta's) adherence to a life of crime and drugs leads to his ultimate death at Butch's hands, while Jules Winnfield's (Samuel L. Jackson's) acknowledgment of 'divine intervention' provoked him to 'leave the life' of crime and thus, presumably, avoiding the same fate that Vince suffers. Death balanced by new life. This sense of unity can be seen across the board, scene-by-scene, plot-point-by-plot-point, throughout the entirety of the film, and exemplified through each and every character that enters the narrative structure of the movie. This makes *Pulp Fiction*, a film presumably comprised of *pulpy, shapeless* storytelling—into a mish-mash-masterpiece put together through Tarantino's careful attention to unity and balance.

V.O.

V.O. (an abbreviation of "Voice Over"), is typically written in parentheses after a character's name and before dialogue is spoken, suggesting that whatever any given character says is spoken outside of the scene's immediate context, and often-time serves the purpose of providing the audience with narration. Though

voice-over can sometimes be a simple and efficient way to articulate important information to the audience, it is generally considered to be a method of telling the audience rather than the more-desirable method of showing the audience.

EXAMPLES:

In this scene of *Elephant Man* (1980) illustrates the use of *voice over* to transition between scenes using an auditory cue spoken by a character—in this case, John Merrick (John Hurt) reciting a prayer that Doctor Frederick Treves (Anthony Hopkins) has taught to him. The writer providing the (V.O.) description to the side of Merrick's dialogue makes it clear to the reader that these spoken words are intended to be heard, despite Merrick's physical presence being wholly, or at least partially, absent from the screen. To a degree, this is considered a way of directing on the page, but is relatively common and accepted as an appropriate method the writer can employ to visually tell the story to the reader.

The use of (V.O.) in this example taken from *Blow* (2001) doesn't necessarily describe how real-time dialogue is incorporated into the scene as much as it provides for the storytelling method of *narration* given to the audience from the perspective of a single character within the story, though commenting upon the events of a story from outside the reality of the moment being described. In this case, that narration is provided by *Blow*'s main character; George Jung (Johnny Depp).

Adaptation (2002) gives a comical insight into the use of voice over as Charlie Kaufman (Nicolas Cage) attends a seminar hosted by Robert McKee (Brian Cox). As the screenwriting seminar montage plays out, the thoughts of Charlie Kaufman are narrated via voice-over, describing how Kaufman scolds himself for lacking the discipline necessary for successful screenwriting outside McKee's 'short-cut' solutions, before Kaufman's voice-over is abruptly interrupted by McKee himself, who warns:

> *"...and God help you if you use voice-over in your work, my friends. God help you. That's flaccid, sloppy writing. Any idiot can write a voice-over narration to explain the thoughts of a character."*

Thus, giving the audience a comical wink, acknowledging the absurdity of voice-over in film after, only a moment before, using voice-over in full-force.

Vertical Reading

Vertical Reading, insinuates the exact opposite of horizontal reading by providing the reader with efficiently written screenplay pages that are quick and easy to read; forcing the eye to move vertically down the page from top to bottom, thus rendering a script a literal 'page-turner'. The desired goal of the writer is to guide the reader to the very last page; and to get the reader there as quickly and efficiently as possible. Vertical reading ensures that the reader will get to THE END with the least amount of interruption, and doing so while also offering an entertaining experience along the way.

EXAMPLES:

This page taken from the screenplay *Face/Off* (1997) showcases how simple and succinct (but descriptive) action lines in a script are visually appealing and conducive to efficient screenwriting while simultaneously providing the reader with a fluid and easy-to-read story. A shorthand way of describing efficiently written screenplay pages is by referring to the process of reading them as *vertical reading*; signifying that the eye naturally moves from the top of the page to the bottom, easily and without interruption, as opposed to *horizontal reading* which forces the eye to endlessly loop to the left and to the right of the page again and again and again.

Here again, this example taken from *Ferris Beueller's Day Off* (1986) demonstrates how quickly and easily a scene can progress—action, dialogue, action, dialogue—seamless and, seemingly effortless on the writers behalf, allowing filmmakers upon every stage of production to efficiently deduce *what* the action and dialogue content of the scene consists of, and provide a comprehensive blueprint to every scene of the film without needless clutter.

Visuals

Visuals, refer to the writer's effort to provide the audience with details of the story divulged through visual cues rather than providing this information audibly: in other words; to show the audience rather than telling them. Also, the writer's ability to employ detailed descriptions of the story's visual elements give insight to certain subtle dramatic cues and motifs that can be a benefit to the reader when considering nuances in character and understanding some of the story's themes. The writer should always aspire to think visually—to imagine new

and creative ways to tell an entire story visually and use as little dialogue to convey story as possible. This way of telling stories visually guides the audience through the narrative of a script and makes the audience an active participant in the story's progression and the various revelations of the characters involved.

EXAMPLES:

The Fifth Element (1997), science fiction favorite directed by Luc Besson, is a film that—from the very beginning—offers to its audience stunning visuals that compel the viewer to immerse themselves in the story. Much of the film's appeal lies in it's interpretation of the future; the events of the story taking place in the twenty-third century, where most of human civilization is shown in varying shades of collective good and evil. The design of the film is meticulous and breathtaking—everything from the cityscapes to the design of alien life forms and advanced weaponry is carefully thought out and visually compelling. Here, the visual design of the film acts as the viewers guide into the world of the story, grabbing the audience's attention and focus on the striking images displayed on the screen, and drawing the audience slowly into the story after fully immersing them into this highly conceptualized and stylized vision of the future.

Kung Fu Hustle (2004) can be praised, in equal parts, for it's stunning visual interpretation and re-imagining of the Kung Fu Genre film and also for it's incredible comic genius. Because the film is a comic interpretation of Kung Fu films, and by virtue that Kung Fu is, in and of itself, a visual way to demonstrate fast action in film, the movie from start to finish is provocative and striking. Roger Ebert once wrote of *Kung Fu Hustle*; "Jackie Chan and Buster Keaton meet Quentin Tarantino and Bugs Bunny." The manner in which this action comedy plays out, when compared to these (seemingly) diametrically opposed cinema styles, comes to life in this Hong Kong masterpiece.

White Space

White Space, is the writer's conservative use of page-space while writing a screenplay. To ease the reader into the framework of the story, the writer must ensure to not only build compelling, interesting characters and place them in a scenario that challenges and confronts their unique character flaws, but must do so in a way that is as easy to read as possible. This means avoiding block text and horizontal reading while baring page efficiency, vertical reading and maintaining white space constantly in mind. White space, in particular, refers to

WHITE SPACE (CONT'D)

the amount of blank page that is available on any given page of a script. Not only is it more visually welcoming, but it also helps serve a fundamental purpose in film production—the more white space available leaves more room for directors, producers, actors, etc. to write notes about the material to themselves for consideration. Even though white space is always desirable, avoid I Pages whenever possible.

EXAMPLES:

The Ghost and the Darkness (1996) takes place in Kenya, Africa in 1898 where a team of railroad workers are prevented from constructing a cross-country railroad track when they become plagued by two murderous lions who become known as the Ghost and the Darkness due to their mysterious and horrifying means of hunting the railroad workers. In the script's case, many of its pages are full of open, white space—thus rendering it a visually attractive script that is 'easy on the eyes' while reading, and doesn't clutter itself with huge, bulky blocks of text. This makes *The Ghost and the Darkness* an efficiently written screenplay, in addition to being a well-written one as well.

Gran Torino (2008) is a film directed by Clint Eastwood and written by Nick Schenk; a story about Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood) who befriends a family of Koreans next door and protects them from a vicious and violent Korean gang that plagues them. Many of the scripts pages are clean, direct and efficient—wasting little page-space on needless actions or expounding upon endlessly wordy dialogue. This is what makes the script smooth and flowing, offering many pages that offer plentiful helpings of white space for the reader's benefit.

World of the Story

World of the Story*, refers to the reality of the world which the film's characters occupy; a world that, though it mirrors the reality the audience wakes up to and faces every day, can be different in any conceivable way from real life as long as it serves to help tell the story. The world of the story can range from incredibly realistic—the characters occupying the same reality that the audience does—or be a world that is fundamentally different from reality in any way the writer desires. One of the primary reasons audiences undertake any movie experience is to immerse themselves in a world, environment, or situation that offers them a temporary escape from their own reality—or gives insight into a world that*

differs from their own in entertaining and enlightening ways; so the writer's choice in investigating a world which is too similar to the audience's reality offers no thrill or excitement, thus running the risk of boring an audience to tears. Adversely, setting the world of the story too far removed from the audience's perception of reality and they can become lost or confused trying to navigate the rules of the world the story aspires to tell. The writer must be both deliberate and bold in their choices in deciding what world serves the purposes of the story best, and aspire to offer the audience an experience into a world unlike anything they could ever imagine, while still making the narrative's themes applicable to the audience's daily reality.

EXAMPLES:

3:10 to Yuma (2007) puts the audience into the province of the late 19th century American west, a common era to both filmmakers and audiences throughout the history of cinema. The writers and filmmakers thus create a *world of the story* that adheres to the romanticism of the "wild west" common in western genre films. The world of western films generally come with expected amenities, such as: gun fights, horse riding, saloon brawls and an endless, ongoing struggle between law and order and outright lawlessness, to name a few. Guiding the audience through the *world of the story* gives the storyteller the opportunity to offer a unique and specific insight to the audience for undertaking the journey of the narrative; allowing for the audience to explore what has made the western world so exciting in movies for decades.

Bruce Almighty (2003) presents the audience with a world that allows them to vicariously live through the experiences of the film's titular character, Bruce Nolan (Jim Carrey), who is suddenly and inexplicably given all the divine powers of the Almighty; aka, God (Morgan Freeman) to do with them whatever he desires. In the world of the story, Bruce becomes God, and allows the audience to witness (and partially experience) what life could be like if they had divine powers. Presenting the audience with these types of high concept scenarios can often lead to successful screenplays; investigating a world that the audience would never have the opportunity to explore in life, while grounding it through the perspective of a relatable, realistic character (Bruce).