

Name: Chance Dufty

Student Number: 1803696

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Tutor: Timi O'Neill

Exploring how Graphic Design is used to attract an audience in Film and TV.

A film's form involves more than figuring out where to put the camera and what lens to use before shooting. It means articulating a clear and provocative purpose for telling the tale.

(Rabiger, 2003, P.232)

As Rabiger, discussed there is so much more to consider than just camera angles and lenses. In this essay we will explore how Graphic Design, through the understanding of genre, aesthetic and storytelling, is used to attract an audience in Film and TV and the importance that those graphic elements have to the overall perception of a piece.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, the term **genre** is defined as, “a style or category of art, music, or literature”, alternatively it can also be described as consisting “of four elements or parts: character, story, plot and setting” what we can learn from these definitions is that genre is just a way to categorise information so that it makes sense and that this can be done through an understanding of the four elements. In order to understand why genre is important, we may consider this definition in the article, *What is Genre? Definitions and Types* that claims, “As pattern-seeking humans, our goal is to establish order out of chaos and we can't always have control in our everyday lives, so we seek control in our entertainment and art.” So with this in mind, genre is important because it establishes an order, a set of rules that when met results in a familiarity that we are comfortable with as an audience.

Furthermore, the importance of genre must always be considered when designing for TV and film. With each genre comes certain nuances and styles that people are familiar with and designers must keep this in mind to ensure they are appealing to their desired audience. There are obvious connotations associated with particular genres, for example in horror we often see a prominent use of darker colours, more often than not we see the use of red, as it symbolises blood and gore and the typography choices are usually serif or from the gothic family and others are more decorative, as seen below in figure 2, that depict blood dripping or are more distressed style and are paired with images to make the viewer uncomfortable or instil a sense of foreboding. These things being correct to the genre make a huge difference subconsciously to whether the audience is attracted to engage with content. Designs with the wrong connotations can lead to confusion and a lack of familiarity, given that the logo and title scenes are often the first thing the audience see's, it is crucial that genre plays a role in the design process to maximise engagement.

titles may be the very first thing you see, dropping you right into the narrative, perhaps giving you some backstory,”
 typography and titling can convey a lot about story, brand, and/or feeling
 (Michelle Dougherty 2018, <https://blog.frame.io/2018/06/04/iconic-film-titles/>)



Figure 1: *American Horror Story – Hotel* Title sequence Available at:

<https://www.artofthetitle.com/feature/american-horror-story-7-seasons-of-title/> and Figure 2: *Rocky Horror Picture Show* Title Sequence, Available at: <https://www.artofthetitle.com/title/the-rocky-horror-picture-show/>

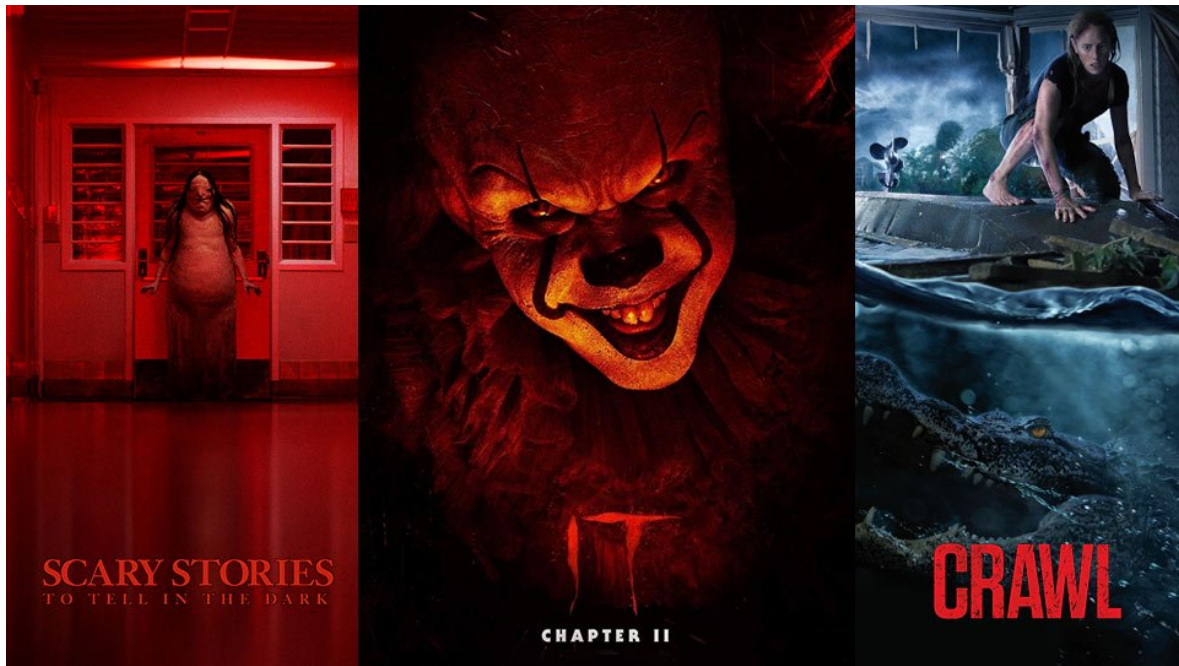


Figure 3 (Above): Left to Right – Scary Stories To Tell In the Dark (2019) IT Chapter 2 (2019) Crawl (2019) Available at: <https://in.bookmyshow.com/entertainment/movies/upcoming/horror-movies-releasing-in-2019/>

Additionally, intensive research is often required to pull together a cohesive feel across all aspects of a project so that it fits into its required genre. During a talk from Harry Ward, from *Sky Creative*, at the Swansea College of Art, during Design Week, 2020, the branding and identity discovery process was discussed. Specifically, in regard to the design process for a new Sky Tv channel, *Sky Crime* (see Figure 5). As the name suggests the channels is dedicated solely to crime content and so the branding was thoughtfully considered to meet the rules of what the crime genre is known for. The blue colour scheme with the yellow tight line, intended to have connotations to police and police tape, was tied into all aspects of the branding, as we see in Figures 5 and 6, described by the creatives behind it at Sky as, “pushing across the screen and resolving in the logo; a bold reminder of a journey through the *whole story*” and playing on people’s desire to ‘play detective’. The typography had a clinical but distressed feeling that glitched in many of the advertising visuals. This is all adds to the eerie and more sinister undertones that are typical of crime shows and elicits an uncomfortable feeling in response from the audience. The statement ‘Question Everything’ as seen in Figure 6, completes the brand, bringing it back to the audience, adding a sense of intrigue that would lure them in.



Figure 4: Sky Crime Logo



Figure 5: Sky Crime advertising example



Figure 6: Sky Crime – Question Everything Grab line and yellow tight line. Available at : <https://www.skycreative.agency/sky-crime/>

By comparison, there are times where film and TV may not adhere to all the rules of just one genre and instead belong in a number of genres,

“Many films currently do not fit into one genre classification. Many films are considered *hybrids* - they straddle several film genres. There are many examples of present-day filmmakers reflecting familiar elements of traditional or classical genres, while putting a unique twist on them”.

(Dirks, N/A, <https://www.filmsite.org/filmgenres.html>)

This can mean more engagement as the content can appeal to a variety of audiences however this can make the job of the designer more difficult as they are tasked with finding a balance that accurately represents all genres whilst still creating a design unique to the particular project.

“Introduced into the philosophical lexicon during the Eighteenth Century, the term ‘aesthetic’ has come to be used to designate, among other things, a kind of object, a kind of judgment, a kind of attitude, a kind of experience, and a kind of value.”

(James, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/>)

Aesthetics play an equally important role when designing for TV and film, having been defined, in a book by author *Lauren Leiss* (2015), as *“A set of principles underlying and guiding the work of a particular artist or artistic movement.”* (Chapter, 11) This definition suggests a similarity between aesthetics and genre, in that they are both terms used to help us categorise information and both are used when referring to the arts. From this definition we can determine that the role aesthetic plays in designing for TV in a Film are very much similar.

However, the oxford dictionary defines the term as *“concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty”* this definition leaves a lot of openness, as beauty is subjective, but from this definition we see how its role in film and Tv and can differ to that of genre. In this instance when referring to aesthetic in terms of beauty in Tv and film we can relate it to how well a designer is able to capture the mood, tone and atmosphere of the piece.

Plantinga (2012) argued that the mood of a film—its “affective character”—is created by combining aesthetic elements “in such a way that they are affectively congruent”. Thus, aesthetic features combine to create a unified mood, which attunes the viewer affectively to the film and facilitates the cueing of emotions with stylistic devices

(Tarvainen, Westman and Oittinen, 2015, P2)

Moreover, when we consider all the things that go into creating the aesthetics of a piece of film or tv, mood atmosphere and tone, we acquire a better understanding of

what makes a particular piece aesthetically pleasing to the audience and how, as argued above by Plantinga amongst others, those aesthetics can provoke an emotional response in the audience.

On the other hand, we must also consider that what may be thought of as pleasing to some audiences may not resonate as well with others and this is determined by the taste of the individual. It is worth noting that there is room for aesthetic beauty in any genre. In this example, we will look at the film *Avatar* (2009), seen in Figures 7, 8 and 9, widely discussed on its release for its' brightly coloured world that immersed viewers in an experience they were reluctant to leave, some articles even, from the likes of *Psychology Today* reporting on the apparent depression amongst those who were disappointed to leave the magical, bioluminescent world created by James Cameron, to re-enter the real world.

Can a movie about a utopian society cause us to question the meaning of life? Sure. But to the extent that we contemplate suicide? Wow.

That, apparently, is the power of "Avatar," the film that allows viewers to experience the world of Pandora almost as if they were there, but not quite.

And that seems to be the problem.

(Sandler, 2010, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/promoting-hope-preventing-suicide/201001/avatar-blues>)



Figure 7: Avatar (2009) Available at: <https://entertainment.time.com/2012/05/17/top-10-movies-of-the-millennium/slide/avatar-2009-u-s/> Figure 8: Avatar (2009) Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0499549/mediaviewer/rm2861991168> Figure 9: Avatar (2009) Available at: <https://www.aestheticsofjoy.com/2010/01/avatar-pandoras-aesthetics-of-joy/>

Whilst this extreme reaction is not typically the norm, it does highlight how important and profound aesthetics can be in TV and Film for stimulating emotions. Another film that is also renowned for its aesthetical beauty, is '*The Grand Budapest Hotel*', (2014) directed by Wes Anderson, similarly to Avatar, it is praised for its otherworldliness and its ability to transport viewers to a different time. This world however was filled with an array of pastel colours and a visual style that lent itself to another era giving the film a vintage mood and atmosphere. These examples may interpret that aesthetic beauty is only achieved through the talents of the directors and the role graphic design plays in this may not be evident. It is interesting to note that designers play a big role in the set and prop designs, ensuring that there is the

required accuracy and detail in their work that allows the audience to get lost in the aesthetics, this as with designing within a genre, requires the designers put in the research. It is more than likely that all research and effort will amount to work that won't make it on screen for more than a few seconds but that does not make their work any less important or any less of a contributing factor to the overall aesthetics.



Figures 10, 11 & 12: Scenes from the *Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) Figure 10:
Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/the-grand-budapest-hotel-is-on-tripadvisor-gets-rave-reviews-a6774171.html> Figure 11:
Available at: https://www.buzzfeed.com/imaansheikh/the-grand-budapest-wallpapers?utm_term=.dgdIPEW6W
Figure 12: Available at: <https://www.uclfilmsociety.co.uk/blog/ten-perfect-shots-from-the-grand-budapest-hotel/>

Those hundreds of names you see in the closing credits are there for a reason—each has a unique skill and expertise. Without each of their contributions and talent, the film would be lesser for it.

(Martin T. Charles, 2019 <https://blog.frame.io/2019/02/07/graphic-design-in-film/>)

Storytelling

noun

1. *the activity of telling or writing stories.*

"the power of cinematic storytelling"

(Oxford Dictionary, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/storytelling>)

Storytelling, defined as *"interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination."*

(National Storytelling Network) The oxford dictionary definition is a primitive example, but then so is the art of storytelling but the second definition, that comes from the National Storytelling Network, allows us to explore the deeper meaning for storytelling and explores the idea that the act of storytelling is only so if you are engaging the audience. The audience is always the priority when it comes to storytelling, but it could be suggested it is even more so when designers are considering it within their work in the Film and TV industry.

I began to see the visual storytelling in it, how they use set design to establish some occurrences, how they color grade frame by frame to evoke particular emotions, how they use visual semiotics

(Larazati, 2020, <https://catalyststrategy.com/blog/how-watching-films-helps-me-to-look-for-inspiration-in-visual-storytelling/15>)

In film and Tv design the logo is where the story starts to be told, from there the title sequence continues the storytelling process, these are essential to establish with the

audience that they are engaging with the right genre and as genre does, gives them the desired comfortability that comes with the predictability. Many title sequences take the viewer through a journey, leading them perfect into what is to come. In the title sequence for '*Spider-Man: Into The Spideverse*' (figures 13,14,15) we see an example of how this can be done effectively. The sequence starts as a live action before glitching into the comic world where the audience gets a run through of the backstory up to the point where the film then starts. What we learn from this is that the title sequences can have power and importance and can always add to the story.



Figures 13, 14 & 15: Title Sequence of Spiderman: Into the Spideverse

Figure 13: Available at: <https://www.devastudios.com/work/titles/spider-man-into-the-spider-verse/>

Figures 14 & 15 : Available at: <https://www.artofthetitle.com/title/spider-man-into-the-spider-verse/>

It may be assumed that at that point the job of storytelling falls to the writers when the title sequence ends, however, the infamous pink Mendls boxes, shown in Figure 16, from '*The Grand Budapest hotel*' are an example of how important graphic design elements are for storytelling within film and Tv and how big an impact that

those seemingly small designs can have on viewers. Designers are tasked with creating realistic and accurate props and pieces of set that convey whatever period in time and place they need to. This particular prop was coveted by many fans of the film, it has seen countless DIY versions and graphics made based upon the original and one of the props selling at auction for £1,400. It is not unheard of for props to sell after production has ended, proving that the presence they had was undeniable, that they did what they needed to do, told the story and often even more than that. As a designer it is not only important to create a convincing scene for the audience's sake but it is also for the benefit of the actors.

We have to create a convincing environment for the actors to work in, so knowing what big and little details will help the audience suspend disbelief and keep the focus where it needs to be: the story being told.

(Robert Bernard, 2019, <https://blog.frame.io/2019/02/07/graphic-design-in-film/>)

Designers who work in film and Tv should always be considerate of the importance of the story and having continuity throughout a project. Continuity, according to Annie Atkins, a senior designer on The Grand Budapest Hotel, “is the most tedious bit of working on a film, but people notice it if you get it wrong” It is not enough to have only one of each prop, multiples need to be made to ensure that if one gets damaged that the story isn't affected by the any minor change that can catch the eye of the audience. That is not to say that this does not ever happen, in fact this happened with the infamous Mendls boxes from the grand Budapest hotel, that spelt the word Patisserie with two 't's' almost making 3,000 unusable. To the benefit of the designer these errors can often be edited out postproduction and so never affects the overall story

.



Figure 16: Mendls Boxes from “The Grand Budapest Hotel” Available at:
https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/d3vxgz/meet-annie-atkins-graphic-designer-of-the-grand-budapest-hotels-empire-of-zubrowka



Figures 17&18: Props designed by Annie Atkins and team for, The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014)
 Both: Available at:
<https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/annie-atkins-grand-budapest-hotel>

In conclusion, it would be appropriate to suggest that there is a great deal that goes into film and Tv that the audience is often completely unaware of but subconsciously it will all have an effect on whether they are attracted to watch or not. As we have discussed in this essay, there are several ways in which a designer can help to attract an audience. Through the understanding of the importance of genre, and the set of rules associated with a particular genre, they are given a guideline for what works and what is expected by the audience. The importance of aesthetics and how

they can be created through the setting of mood and the correct atmosphere in a piece is also important to a designer, ensuring that they are able to stimulate the correct emotional responses from the audience and whilst aesthetic is important so too is storytelling, allowing the audience to become lost in a different place or time, storytelling also highlights the importance of continuity to the audience. With societal changes and changes in what is 'trendy' needing to be considered, Graphic designers will need to adapt and grow, whilst working within their understandings of genre, aesthetic, and storytelling amongst all the design specifics to create appealing Film and TV for all audiences. However, it is clear that no matter how big or small, designers are making a difference to how and why and what we choose to watch.

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