MOVIE GENRES

WITH JIM SOTO

GENRES IN FILM

In film theory, genre refers to the method based on similarities in the narrative elements from which films are constructed. Most models of film genre are borrowed from literature. Genre plays a large role in film marketing.
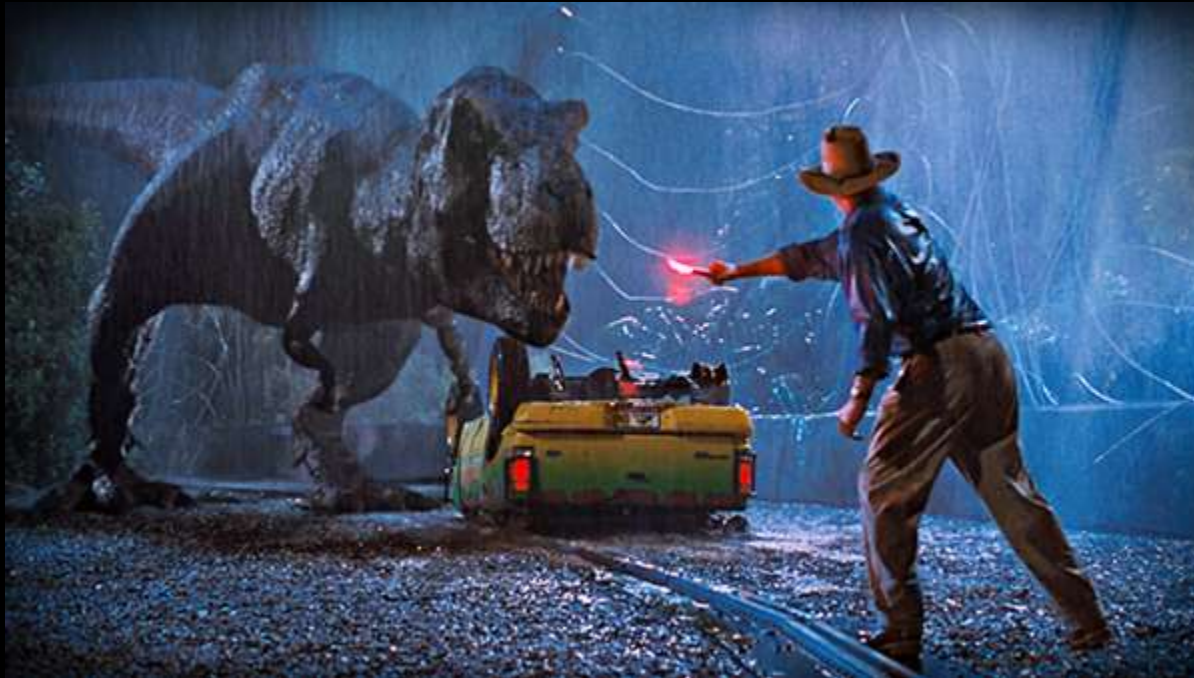
- Filmmakers use it to minimize the economic risk of making a film.

- Film distributers use it effectively to market the movies to the public.

- Audiences use it to develop an expectation about how pleasurable the viewing experience will be.

GENRE ELEMENTS

1. The setting is the milieu or environment where the story and action takes place.

2. The theme or topic refers to the issues or concepts that the film revolves around.

3. The mood is the emotional tone of the film.

4. **Format** refers to the way the film was shot (e.g., anamorphic widescreen) or the manner of presentation (e.g.: 35 mm, 16 mm or 8 mm).

5. Film genres often branch out into subgenres, as in the case of the courtroom and trial-focused subgenre of drama known as the legal drama.

6. They can be combined to form hybrid genres, such as the melding of horror and comedy in the *Evil Dead* films.

CATEGORIZING FILMS

The editors of *filmsite.org* argue that animation, children's films, and so on are non-genre-based film categories. Their non-genre based categories list includes children's films, family films, documentary films, adult films, and silent films. Following are some of the main fiction genres (and sub-genres) that are used today.

Action

Similar to Adventure, but the hero usually takes a risky turn, which leads to desperate situations (explosions, fight scenes, escapes, etc.). Action and Adventure are usually categorized jointly since they have much in common. Many films fall under both genres simultaneously (for instance, the James Bond series can be classified as both).

Action sub-genres

- Die Hard Scenario: Takes place in limited location (e.g. a single building or vessel) which is seized by the enemy, but are opposed by a single hero who fights using stealth and cunning to attempt to defeat them.

- Spy fiction: Features a specialized asset sent on a high risk mission. Usually equipped with special gadgets that prove useful during the mission. Typical training includes martial arts and/or computer skills.

- Military: Feature wars or battles that can either be historical or fictional. It usually follows the events a certain warrior goes through during the battle's events.

- Martial Arts: Films whose centerpiece is martial combat.

- Western fiction: A story talking place in the American Old West. Westerns commonly feature gunfighters and/or cowboys.

Adventure

A story about someone who journeys to epic or distant places to accomplish something. It can have many other genre elements included within it, because it is one of the most open genres.
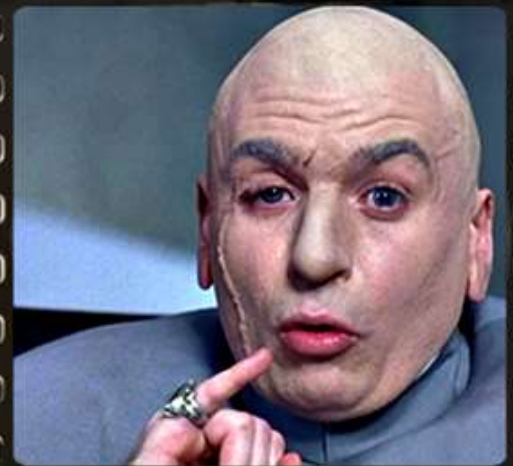
Comedy

Films portraying a series of funny or comical events, intended to make audiences laugh. It is a very open genre, and thus crosses over with many other genres frequently.

- Comedy of Manners: Satirizes the manners and affectations of elites, often represented by stock characters and putting great importance on the witty **dialogue. Think: Breakfast at Tiffany's or** Mean Girls.

Comedy sub-genres

- Slapstick: It involves exaggerated physical violence and activities which exceed the boundaries of common sense. These over the top depictions can be found in kid's media, and light comedies aimed at youngsters. (e.g. The 3 Stooges or Jackie Chan films.)

- Parody: Mock or satirize other genres, people, characters or works. They employ sarcasm, stereotyping, mockery, symbols or lines from other works.

- Romantic comedy: Mixes romance with comedy, focusing on those dealing with romantic attractions. The typical plot line follows the "boy-gets-girl", "boy-loses-girl", "boy gets girl back again" formula. There are many variants to this plot and much of the humor lies in the social dynamics and sexual tension between characters.

- Black comedy: A parody or satire based on normally tragic or taboo subjects, including death, murder, suicide, illicit drugs and war.

Crime

Presents stories about the commission of crimes and the people that either commit them or must solve them. It can also be an account of a criminal's life. It often overlaps with the Action or Drama genres.

Crime sub-genres

- Murder mystery: Usually, there are one or more victims, and the detective must find the killer. They may or may not find themselves or loved ones in danger because of the case; and it features elements of the thriller.

- Whodunnit: Is a complex, plot-driven detective story with puzzling elements. The audience is provided with clues from which the identity of the perpetrator before the solution is revealed at the end of the film.

- Hardboiled: Is most commonly associated with detective stories, distinguished by the unsentimental portrayal of violence and sex. **Think in Frank Miller's** *Sin City*.

- Gangster: Feature members of criminal organizations associated with Prohibition or the Mafia. *The Godfather* is its best example.

Drama

They feature settings or life situations portraying realistic characters in conflict with either themselves, others, or forces of nature. Dramatic films show human beings at their best, their worst, and everything in-between. Dramas are the broadest film genre because they include a broad spectrum of films. Dramatic themes often include current issues, societal ills, concerns and injustices, such as racial prejudice, religious intolerance, substance abuse, political unrest, the corruption of power, class divisions, mental illness, violence toward minorities or other explosive issues of the times.

Drama sub-genres

These films have successfully drawn attention to **the issues by taking advantage of people's** interest in the huge variety of subjects.

- Melodramas: This sub-type is characterized by appeals to the heightened emotions of the audience. Melodrama, a combination of drama and *melos* (music), literally means "play with music." The themes of dramas are exaggerated in melodramas, and the liberal use of music enhanced their emotional plots.

- Biopics: The term combines the words "biography" and "pictures." These films dramatize the life of a relevant person (or group) from the past or present. Sometimes, historical biopics stretch the truth and present a life with varying degrees of accuracy.

- Epics: Takes a historical or imagined event, mythic, legendary, or heroic figure, and add an extravagant setting and lavish costumes, accompanied by grandeur and spectacle and a sweeping musical score. These films often cover a large expanse of time set against a vast, panoramic backdrop. They are expensive to produce since they require elaborate and large settings, on-location filming, authentic period costumes, action on a massive scale and large cast. Biopics are often less lavish versions of the epic film.

- Romance: Are love stories that center on the affectionate involvement of the protagonists, and the journey their love takes through courtship or marriage. Oftentimes, lovers face obstacles and the hazards of life that threaten to break their union. As in all relationships, tensions of day-to-day life, temptations and incompatibility enter into the plot.

- Courtroom drama/Legal thriller: Conflict between parties make for interesting stories. Legal dramas focus on situations where there is an clear injustice or in which either the plaintiff or defendant is compelling and unusual.

Fantasy

Films featuring extraordinary and fantastical elements, rather than technology are referred to as fantasy. Impossible situations and creatures populate these imaginative tales. Magic is typically the rationalization behind it all.

Fantasy sub-genres

- High fantasy : It is defined as fantasy fiction set in an alternative, entirely fictional ("Secondary") world, rather than the real ("Primary") world. The secondary world will normally be internally consistent but its rules are in some way different from those of the primary world.
- Low fantasy: By contrast, low fantasy is characterized by being set in the primary world (earth), with the inclusion of magical elements.

Super Hero fiction: Features costumed crime fighters possessing fantastic powers such as: flight, invulnerability, super-strength, invisibility, energy manipulation, and many others. Very much in vogue today.

- Science Fantasy: Has mystical elements that are scientifically explainable, or which combines science fiction elements with fantasy elements, like in Star Wars.

- Sword & Sorcery: A blend of heroic fantasy, adventure, and horror in which a mighty hero is pitted against human and/or supernatural foes. Think in Conan, The Witcher, or Solomon Kane, etc.

- Wuxia: A distinct quasi-fantasy sub-genre of the martial arts genre. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and 47 Ronin are good examples.

Horror

A film created to deliberately repulse or frighten the audience, through suspense, violence, or shock. Atmosphere is all important in this genre.

Horror sub-genres

- Folk horror: It uses elements of folklore such as rural settings and themes of isolation, religion, the power of nature, and the potential darkness of rural landscapes to invoke fear. Famous films include: The Blair Witch Project, and more recently Midsommar.

- Monster: Include creatures of folklore such as Vampires, Werewolves, etc. Some stories are about giant monsters wreaking havoc, a genre **known as "kaiju" in Japan. Godzilla and** Cloverfield are good examples.

- Slasher: A film that has an antagonist, who is a serial killer or simply insane. The "slasher" stereotypically kills victims by slowly creeping up to them, and quickly killing them with a sharp object, such as a Chef's knife. Think in the Halloween franchise.

- Survival horror: A protagonist is put in risky, life threatening situations and must endure, often as a result of things such as zombies or plagues, and the rest of the plot is how the characters overcome this.

- Supernatural: Deals the intrusion of spirits of the dead or demons, demonic possession, dark witchcraft, evil sorcerers, and figures like the Antichrist. The nature of such stories presupposes the existence of the side of Good to be opposed to the forces of Evil. Some would include films such as: Stanley Kubrick's The Shining , the Paranormal **Activity series, and James Wan's ' The Conjuring franchise.**

Musicals

Genre in **which characters' songs** are interwoven into the narrative, sometimes with dancing. The songs usually advance the plot or develop the film's characters, though on occasions they serve merely as breaks **in the storyline, often as elaborate "production numbers".**

The musical film was a natural development of the stage musical after the emergence of sound film technology. Typically, the biggest difference between film and stage musicals is the use of lavish background scenery and locations that would be impractical in a theater. Musicals have elements reminiscent of theater; performers often treat their song and dance numbers as if there is a live audience watching.

The first musical short films were made by Lee De Forest in 1923-24. A shortly after musicals ruled Hollywood as they became its most profitable genre; dominating the industry from the early 1930s through the late 1950s.
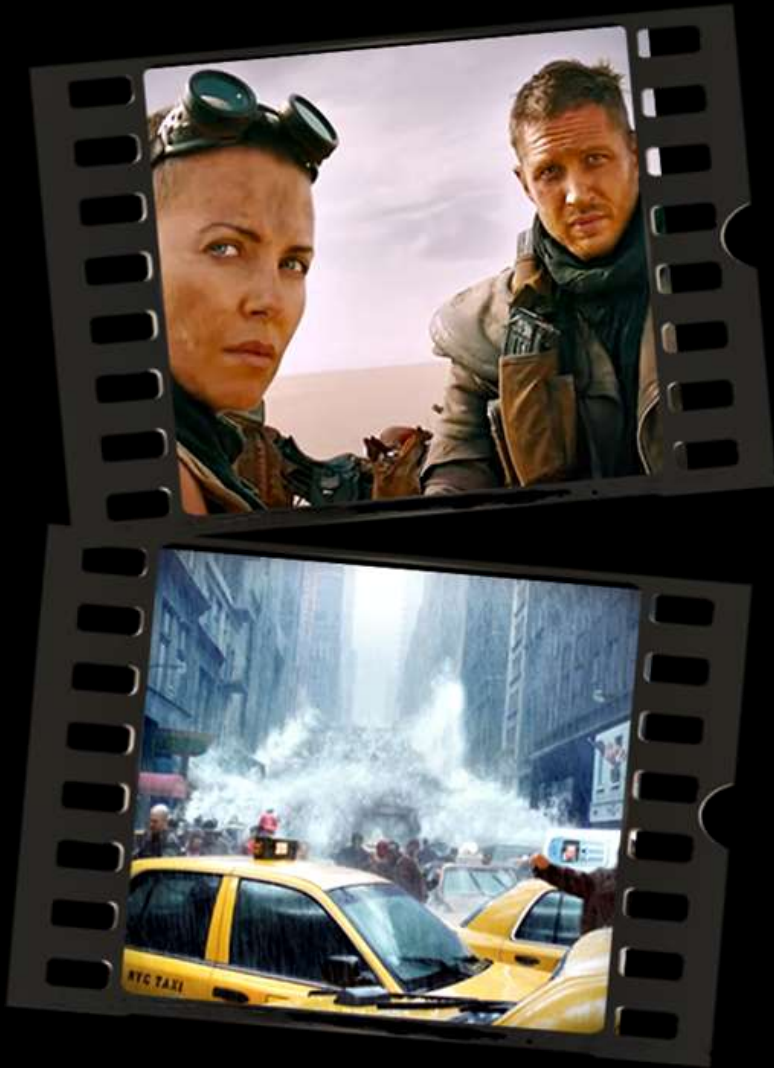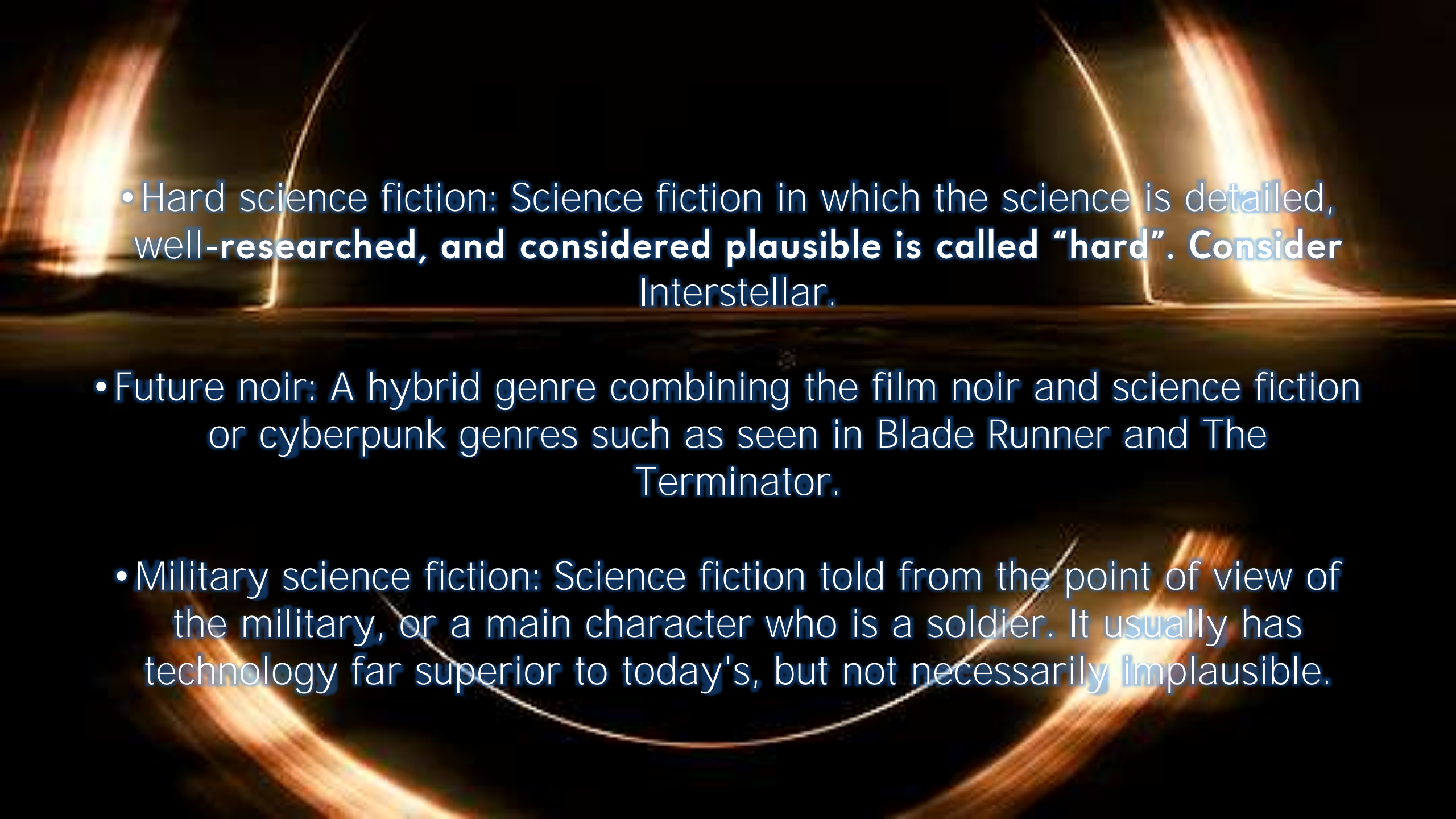
Science Fiction
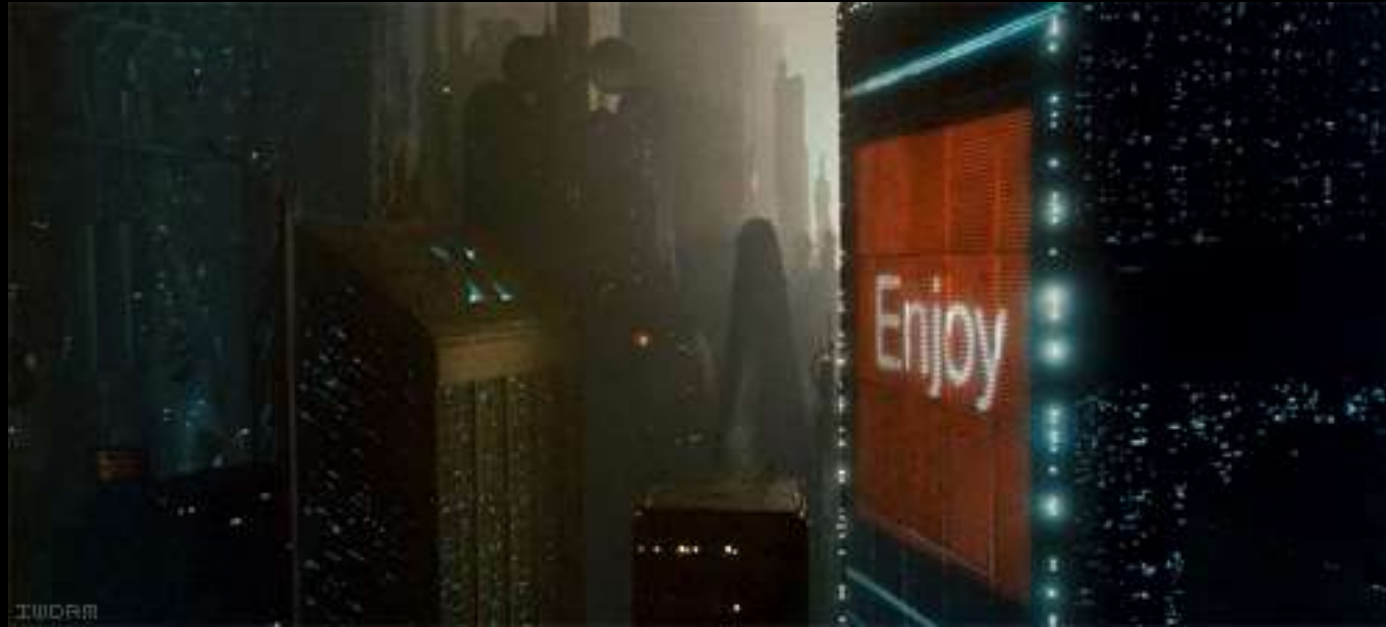
Films that use scientific explanations for their unique narratives. It's usually centered on the presumed ramifications of technology; space or time travel, alternate universes; alien life-forms; genetic engineering; or other such issues. The genre became mainstreamed in the 1970s.

Sci-fi sub-genres

The wide breadth of the genre allows for elements from other genres, such as action, comedy, horror or fantasy to be mixed in. Sub-genres include:

• Apocalyptic / post-apocalyptic: Deals with the end of civilization either through man-made or natural disasters; or is set in a world after such an event. It can focus on the challenges of survivors, or much later, often including the theme of the existence of pre-catastrophe civilization has been long forgotten.

- Hard science fiction: Science fiction in which the science is detailed, well-**researched, and considered plausible is called "hard". Consider** Interstellar.

- Future noir: A hybrid genre combining the film noir and science fiction or cyberpunk genres such as seen in Blade Runner and The Terminator.

- Military science fiction: Science fiction told from the point of view of the military, or a main character who is a soldier. It usually has technology far superior to today's, but not necessarily implausible.

- Space opera: Films characterized by a space faring lifestyle and distinguished by the amount of time that protagonists spend in space. Star Trek, The Fifth Element and Star Wars can be, in varying degrees, categorized as such.

- Cyberpunk: Futuristic storylines dealing with people who have been physically or mentally enhanced with cutting-edge cybernetics, often featuring cyborgs as a major theme, and generally somewhat cynical or dystopian. The Matrix is the best example.

Thriller

Usually mixes fear and excitement. It is also called suspense genre and often mixed well with the action and mystery genres, but the level of terror makes it borderline horror at times as well. Plot has many twists and turns. It generally has a serious theme, making it similar to drama.

Thriller sub-genres

- Psychological thriller: Emphasizes the **mental condition that hinder the hero's** progress, rather than his actions. Most include complicated stories that try to confuse the audience, often by showing them only the same confusing or seemingly nonsensical information that the hero gains.

- Disaster-thriller: Thrillers about mass peril, where the hero's job is to survive, and save many others from a grim fate, often a natural disaster of some sort.

- Crime thriller: A suspense-filled film that revolves around the life of detectives, mobs, or other groups associated with criminal events and law enforcement.

- Techno-thriller: Films whose theme center in technology, or the danger behind the technology people use, including the threat of cyber-terrorism and WMDs.

- Erotic-thriller: Yep. You got the idea.

ARE DOCUMENTARIES A FILM GENRE?

Documentaries constitute a broad category of nonfictional films intended to document an aspect of reality, mainly for the purposes of instruction or maintaining a historical record. "Documentary" can be described as a "*filmmaking practice, a cinematic tradition, and mode of audience reception*" that continually evolves and is without clear boundaries. Some argue they lack elements such as: setting, theme, and mood; however many insist it is a genre.

1. How does genre play a role in marketing a film?
2. What are hybrid film formats and what advantages or disadvantages do you think they offer?
3. How rigid or flexible do you consider the idea of genre to be?
4. Which genre attracts your interest more? Why?
5. Which genre would need a bigger budget to produce? Why?
6. Which genre would be cheaper to produce? Why?

Write a one page essay answering the following questions:

If you were making a movie, what film genre would you use to explore:

- your deepest fears?
- your biggest hopes?
- and the things that baffle (confound) me?

For 20 pts., essay is due tomorrow and will go in your portfolio.

Next:

MOVIES 101

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