SCENE

- A SCENE is an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character's life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance. Ideally, every scene is a STORY EVENT.

THE ELEMENTS OF STORY

Robert Mckee

STRUCTURE

- STRUCTURE is a selection of events from the characters' life stories that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life.

EVENT

- A STORY EVENT creates meaningful change in the life situation of a character that is expressed and experienced in terms of a VALUE.

EVENT

- STORY VALUES are the universal qualities of human experience that may shift from positive to negative, or negative to positive, from one moment to the next.

EVENT

- A Story Event creates meaningful change in the life situation of a character that is expressed and experienced in terms of a value and ACHIEVED THROUGH CONFLICT.

SCENE

- A SCENE is an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character's life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance. Ideally, every scene is a STORY EVENT.

BEAT

- A BEAT is an exchange of behavior in action/reaction. Beat by Beat these changing behaviors shape the turning of a scene.

SEQUENCE

- A SEQUENCE is a series of scenes—generally two to five—that culminates with greater impact than any previous scene.

ACT

- An ACT is a series of sequences that peaks in a climactic scene which causes a major reversal of values, more powerful in its impact than any previous sequence or scene.

STORY

- STORY CLIMAX: A story is a series of acts that build to a last act climax or story climax which brings about absolute and irreversible change.

THE STORY TRIANGLE

- To PLOT means to navigate through the dangerous terrain of story and when confronted by a dozen branching possibilities to choose the correct path. Plot is the writer's choice of events and their design in time.

ARCHPLOT, MINIPLOT, ANTIPLOT

- CLASSICAL DESIGN means a story built around an active protagonist who struggles against primarily external forces of antagonism to pursue his or her desire, through continuous time, within a consistent and causally connected fictional reality, to a closed ending of absolute, irreversible change.

CLASSICAL DESIGN
Archplot

Causality
Closed Ending
Linear Time
External Conflict
Single Protagonist
Consistent Reality
Active Protagonist

Open Ending
Internal Conflict
Multi-Protagonists
Passive Protagonist

Coincidence
Nonlinear Time
Inconsistent Realities

MINIMALISM
Miniplot

ANTI-STRUCTURE
Antiplot

FORMAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE STORY TRIANGLE

CLOSED VERSUS OPEN ENDINGS

- A Story Climax of absolute, irreversible change that answers all questions raised by the telling and satisfies all audience emotion is a CLOSED ENDING.

- A Story Climax that leaves a question or two unanswered and some emotion unfulfilled is an OPEN ENDING.

ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE PROTAGONIST

- An ACTIVE PROTAGONIST, in the pursuit of desire, takes action in direct conflict with the people and the world around him.

- A PASSIVE PROTAGONIST is outwardly inactive while pursuing desire inwardly, in conflict with aspects of his or her own nature.

LINEAR VERSUS NONLINEAR TIME

- A story with or without flashbacks and arranged into a temporal order of events that the audience can follow is told in LINEAR TIME.

- A story that either skips helter-skelter through time or so blurs temporal continuity that the audience cannot sort out what happens before and after what is told in NONLINEAR TIME."

CAUSALITY VERSUS COINCIDENCE

- CAUSALITY drives a story in which motivated actions cause effects that in turn become the causes of yet other effects, thereby interlinking the various levels of conflict in a chain reaction of episodes to the Story Climax, expressing the interconnectedness of reality.

- COINCIDENCE drives a fictional world in which unmotivated actions trigger events that do not cause further effects, and therefore fragment the story into divergent episodes and an open ending, expressing the disconnectedness of existence.

CONSISTENT VERSUS INCONSISTENT REALITIES

- **CONSISTENT REALITIES** are fictional settings that establish modes of interaction between characters and their world that are kept consistently throughout the telling to create meaning.

- **INCONSISTENT REALITIES** are settings that mix modes of interaction so that the story's episodes jump inconsistently from one "reality" to another to create a sense of absurdity.
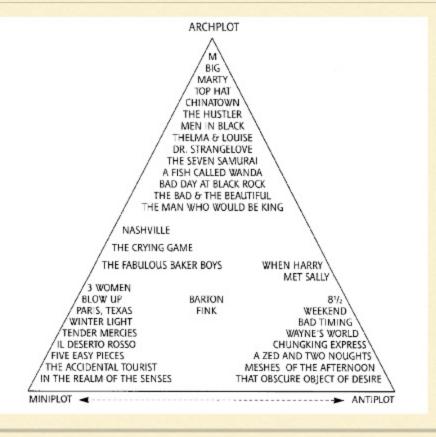
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ARCHPLOT

M
BIG
MARTY
TOP HAT
CHINATOWN
THE HUSTLER
MEN IN BLACK
THELMA & LOUISE
DR. STRANGELOVE
THE SEVEN SAMURAI
A FISH CALLED WANDA
BAD DAY AT BLACK ROCK
THE BAD & THE BEAUTIFUL
THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

NASHVILLE

THE CRYING GAME

THE FABULOUS BAKER BOYS

WHEN HARRY
MET SALLY

3 WOMEN
BLOW UP
PARIS, TEXAS
WINTER LIGHT
TENDER MERCIES
IL DESERTO ROSSO
FIVE EASY PIECES
THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST
IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES

BARTON
FINK

8½
WEEKEND
BAD TIMING
WAYNE'S WORLD
CHUNGKING EXPRESS
A ZED AND TWO NOUGHTS
MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON
THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE

MINIPLOT ◄- -► ANTIPLOT

STRUCTURE AND SETTING

SETTING

- A story's SETTING is four-dimensional—Period, Duration, Location, Level of Conflict.

- DURATION is a story's length through time.

- LOCATION is a story's place in space.

- LEVEL OF CONFLICT is the story's position on the hierarchy of human struggles

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRUCTURE AND SETTING

- A STORY must obey its own internal laws of probability. The event choices of the writer, therefore, are limited to the possibilities and probabilities within the world he creates.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRUCTURE AND GENRE

- **GENRE CONVENTIONS** are specific settings, roles, events, and values that define individual genres and their subgenres.

STRUCTURE AND CHARACTER

CHARACTER VERSUS CHARACTERIZATION

- **TRUE CHARACTER** is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure—the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation, the truer the choice to the character's essential nature.

STRUCTURE AND CHARACTER FUNCTIONS

- The function of STRUCTURE is to provide progressively building pressures that force characters into more and more difficult dilemmas where they must make more and more difficult risk-taking choices and actions, gradually revealing their true natures, even down to the unconscious self.

- The function of CHARACTER is to bring to the story the qualities of characterization necessary to convincingly act out choices. Put simply, a character must be credible: young enough or old enough, strong or weak, worldly or naive, educated or ignorant, generous or selfish, witty or dull, in the right proportions. Each must bring to the story the combination of qualities that allows an audience to believe that the character could and would do what he does.

STRUCTURE AND MEANING

STRUCTURE AS RHETORIC

- STORYTELLING is the creative demonstration of truth. A story is the living proof of an idea, the conversion of idea to action. A story's event structure is the means by which you first express, then prove your idea … without explanation.

CONTROLLING IDEA

- A CONTROLLING IDEA may be expressed in a single sentence describing how and why life undergoes change from one condition of existence at the beginning to another at the end.

IDEA VERSUS COUNTER-IDEA

- PROGRESSIONS build by moving dynamically between the positive and negative charges of the values at stake in the story.

IRONIC CONTROLLING IDEAS

- The positive irony: the compulsive pursuit of contemporary values—success, fortune, fame, sex, power—will destroy you, but if you see this truth in time and throw away your obsession, you can redeem yourself.

- The negative irony: If you cling to your obsession, your ruthless pursuit will achieve your desire, then destroy you.

THE PRINCIPLES OF STORY DESIGN

THE PROTAGONIST

- A PROTAGONIST is a willful character.

- The PROTAGONIST has a conscious desire.

- The PROTAGONIST may also have a self-contradictory unconscious desire.

- The PROTAGONIST has the capacities to pursue the Object of Desire convincingly.

- The PROTAGONIST must have at least a chance to attain his desire.

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- The PROTAGONIST has the will and capacity to pursue the object of his conscious and/or unconscious desire to the end of the line, to the human limit established by setting and genre.

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- A STORY must build to a final action beyond which the audience cannot imagine another.

- The PROTAGONIST must be empathetic; he may or may not be sympathetic.

THE FIRST STEP

- In story, we concentrate on that moment, and only that moment, in which a character takes an action expecting a useful reaction from his world, but instead the effect of his action is to provoke forces of antagonism. The world of the character reacts differently than expected, more powerfully than expected, or both.

THE GAP

- STORY is born in that place where the subjective and objective realms touch.

ON RISK

- The measure of the value of a character's desire is in direct proportion to the risk he's willing to take to achieve it; the greater the value, the greater the risk.

THE INCITING INCIDENT

- The protagonist must react to the Inciting Incident.

THE QUEST

- For better or worse, an event throws a character's life out of balance, arousing in him the conscious and/or unconscious desire for that which he feels will restore balance, launching him on a Quest for his Object of Desire against forces of antagonism (inner, personal, extra-personal). He may or may not achieve it. This is story in a nutshell.

LOCATING THE INCITING INCIDENT

- Bring in the Central Plot's Inciting Incident as soon as possible… but not until the moment is ripe.

POINTS OF NO RETURN

- A story must not retreat to actions of lesser quality or magnitude, but move progressively forward to a final action beyond which the audience cannot imagine another.

ACT DESIGN

- First, the multiplication of act climaxes invites clichés.

- Second, the multiplication of acts reduces the impact of climaxes and results in repetitiousness.

SUBPLOTS AND MULTIPLE PLOTS

- A subplot may be used to contradict the Controlling Idea of the Central Plot and thus enrich the film with irony.

- Subplots may be used to resonate the Controlling Idea of the Central Plot and enrich the film with variations on a theme.

- When the Central Plot's Inciting Incident must be delayed, a setup subplot may be needed to open the storytelling.

- A subplot may be used to complicate the Central Plot.

SCENE DESIGN

THE NATURE OF CHOICE

- The choice between good and evil or between right and wrong is no choice at all.

THE TECHNIQUE OF SCENE ANALYSIS

- Step One: Define Conflict

- Step Two: Note Opening Value

- Step Three: Break the Scene into Beats

- Step Four: Note Closing Value and Compare with Opening Value

- Step Five: Survey Beats and Locate Turning Point

TAKING STORY AND CHARACTER TO THE END OF THE LINE

- A story that progresses to the limit of human experience in depth and breadth of conflict must move through a pattern that includes the Contrary, the Contradictory, and the Negation of the Negation.

SOCIAL PROGRESSION

- Widen the impact of character actions into society.

PERSONAL PROGRESSION

- Drive actions deeply into the intimate relationships and inner lives of the characters.

SYMBOLIC ASCENTION

- Build the symbolic charge of the story's imagery from the particular to the universal, the specific to the archetypal.

IRONIC ASCENTION

- Turn progression on irony. Irony is the subtlest manifestation of story pleasure.

CRISIS, CLIMAX, RESOLUTION

CRISIS

- This dilemma confronts the protagonist who, when face-to-face with the most powerful and focused forces of antagonism in his life, must make a decision to take one action or another in a last effort to achieve his Object of Desire.

PLACEMENT OF THE CRISIS

- The location of the Crisis is determined by the length of the climactic action.

DESIGN OF THE CRISIS

- The Crisis decision must be a deliberately static moment.

CLIMAX

- MEANING: A revolution in values from positive to negative or negative to positive with or without irony—a value swing at maximum charge that's absolute and irreversible. The meaning of that change moves the heart of the audience.

THE WRITER AT WORK

THE PRINCIPLE OF ANTAGONISM

- THE PRINCIPLE OF ANTAGONISM: A protagonist and his story can only be as intellectually fascinating and emotionally compelling as the forces of antagonism make them.

THE USE OF BACKSTORY

- Powerful revelations come from the BACKSTORY—previous significant events in the lives of the characters that the writer can reveal at critical moments to create Turning Points.

FLASHBACKS

- First, dramatize flashbacks.

- Second, do not bring in a flashback until you have created in the audience the need and desire to know.

THE PROBLEM OF COINCIDENCE

- First, bring coincidence in early to allow time to build meaning out of it.

- Second, never use coincidence to turn an ending. This is deus ex machina, the writer's greatest sin.