Film Production Design :
DESIGN METAPHORS

A production design metaphor takes an idea
and translates it visually to communicate or
comment upon the themes of the story.

An object or an image is transformed from its common meaning
and stands in for or symbolizes an aspect of the narrative,
and thus adds poetic complexity to the story.

Atmospheric Qualities of Production Design

The design of a film can create a sense of place.

The atmospheric qualities of the sets, locations,
and environments are essential in establishing a mood
and projecting an emotional feeling
about the world surrounding the film.

The director of photography can bring atmosphere to a set
by applying color gels, through choice of lenses, lighting,
and with smoke and diffusion,

but the production design must provide the physical elements.
The architecture, use of space, color,
and texture are the physicality of the design.

The contributions of the production designer
and the director of photography can work together
to impart an emotionally evocative sense of atmosphere.

The Psychological Nature of Production Design

Design is not only a physical representation.
Environments can have a metaphysical impact
on how the audience perceives the story and the characters.

Do you want the viewer to feel claustrophobic?
Do you want the viewer to experience a sense of massive space?
Do you want the viewer to feel frightened?
Comfortable?
Uneasy or enveloped in dread or doom?

Translating the Narrative into Visual Ideas

- Authenticity
- Emotional truth of the story and the characters, through their environment
- Interpreting the director's intent
- Defining space
- Details and details within details

Interpreting the Characters Visually

The production designer must create a breakdown of the characters,
in the spirit of the screenwriter who created them,
and focus on how the following aspects are translated visually:

- How old are they?
- What is their ethnic and social background?
- What social class do they belong to?
- What is their role in the story?
- What is their personal style?
- What is their physicality?

Establishing an Environment for Cinematic Storytelling

An environment surrounds and embraces the characters. There is a direct relationship between the environment and the characters.

Are the environments hostile?
Confining?
Comforting?
Chaotic?
Claustrophobic?
Vast?
Warm or cold?

Visualization Exercises

Look for visual metaphors in the production design of
the films you see, list them.
Analyze their purpose and impact on the narrative and the characters.

Nathan Crowley (1966-Present)

Filmograpy (Production Designer)

- Sweety Barrett (1998)
- Falling for a Dancer (1998)
- An Everlasting Piece (2000)
- Mission: Impossible II (2000)
- Behind Enemy Lines (2001)
- Insomnia (2002)
- Veronica Guerin (2003)
- Batman Begins (2005)
- The Lake House (2006)
- The Prestige (2006)
- The Dark Knight (2008)
- Public Enemies (2009)
- John Carter (2012)
- The Dark Knight Rises (2012)
- Interstellar (2014)