Film GENRE : CODES & CONVENTIONS

- Codes are systems of signs, which create meaning. Codes can be divided into two categories – technical and symbolic.
- Technical codes are all the ways in which equipment is used to tell the story in a media text, for example the camera work in a film.
- Symbolic codes show what is beneath the surface of what we see. For example, a character's actions show you how the character is feeling.
- Some codes fit both categories – music for example, is both technical and symbolic.

CODES

- Conventions are the generally accepted ways of doing something.
- There are general conventions in any medium, such as the use of interviewee quotes in a print article, but conventions are also genre specific.
- All genres of film have certain conventions which the audience will expect to see.

CONVENTIONS

- Codes and conventions are used together in any study of genre – it is not enough to discuss a technical code used such as camera work, without saying how it is conventionally used in a genre.
- For example, the technical code of lighting is used in some way in all film genres. It is a convention of the horror genre that side and back lighting is used to create mystery and suspense – an integral part of any horror movie.

CODES & CONVENTIONS

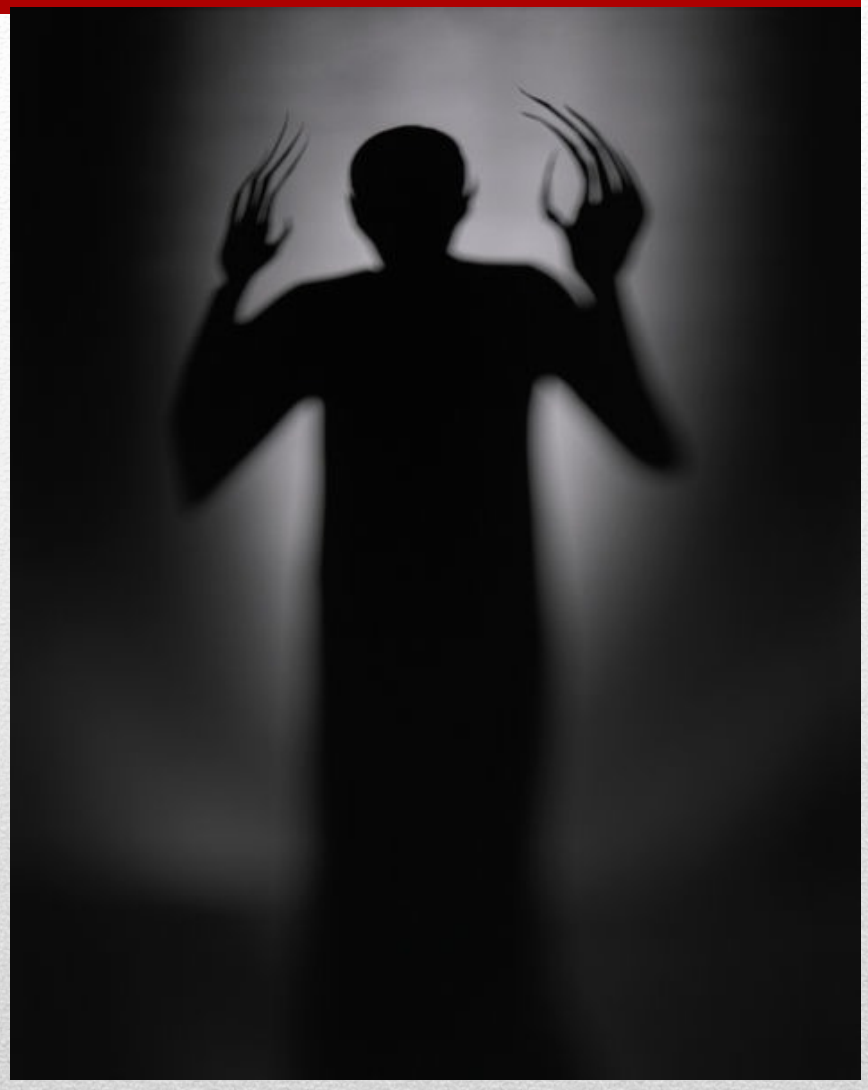
Horror Film Codes and Conventions

SOURCE : JC Clapp, North Seattle College (p5-12)

Narrative Structure

- Standard Chronological Structure with beginning, middle, end (Conflict, Struggle, Realization)
- Often there is heavy foreshadowing to build tension
- The problem the protagonist faces is caused or exacerbated by being isolated, unprepared, or naive
- The narrative is built to cause tension, anxiety, and fear in the audience
- Story plays on standard human fears: the dark, strangers, isolation, death, violence, insanity, creepy monsters

- Good vs. Evil
- Religion and the Supernatural or Beyond Death
- Nightmares, Madness, Insanity, Suicide
- Childhood Fears and Issues
- Revenge
- Science gone bad
- Murder, Death, Hate
- Darkness, Demons, Satanic Ritual



Themes

- Hospitals, Insane Asylums, Mental Institutions or Hotels (long hallways and lots of rooms)
- Graveyard or Cemetery
- Churches or Convents
- Isolated communities or remote locations (cabin, abandoned mansion, haunted house, ghost town, farm field, dark woods, tunnels) – deserted places
- Basements, Attics, Science Labs

Setting

- Hero (protagonist – usually lives) – fights villain
- Victims (protagonists – usually die) often are immoral teenagers, stupid beautiful young women
- Villain (antagonist – evil force – aliens, vampires, creepy children, monsters, ghosts, demons, zombies, clowns, possessed toys, scary creatures)
- Police or “Helpful” authorities – may be good or evil

Characters

- Dark colored clothes, costumes, settings
- Weapons (rarely guns – usually a stabbing or cutting weapon like knives, scythes, axes, chainsaws)
- Religious or Demonic Symbolism
- Blood. Lots of blood.
- Monsters (vampires, evil scientist, werewolves, zombies, possessed people, mass murderer)
- Lots of black and red
- Mirrors, masks, peepholes, stalking, chasing
- Running and then tripping and falling (being chased)

Iconography and Props

- Unnatural camera angles – very high, very low, canted (to show dominance and innocence and power relations)
- Extreme Close-Ups on victim's face to show fear
- Long take with a sudden jump cut to frighten viewer
- Point of View (POV) shots from the view of the villain
- Handheld camera adds terror
- Shallow depth of field – makes whatever is behind the protagonist blurry to build suspense

Cinematography and Editing

- Ambient Diegetic sounds (footsteps, chainsaw, breathing)
- Orchestral (violin)
- Silence used to build tension

Sound and Music

CASE STUDY

NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

- Standard Chronological Structure with beginning, middle, end (Conflict, Struggle, Realization)
- Often there is heavy foreshadowing to build tension
- The problem the protagonist faces is caused or exacerbated by being isolated, unprepared, or naive
- The narrative is built to cause tension, anxiety, and fear in the audience
- Story plays on standard human fears: nightmares , isolation, death, violence , murderer and creepy monsters

Narrative Structure

- Nightmares
- Childhood Fears and Issues
- Revenge

Themes

- Houses , School , Hospital , Church

Setting

OUT

- Hero– fights villain
- Victims often are immoral teenagers, stupid beautiful young women
- Villain (antagonist –Freddy Krueger - Evil dead murderer)

Characters

- Dark colored clothes, costumes, settings
- Weapons -CLAWS
- Religious or Demonic Symbolism
- Blood. Lots of blood.
- Monsters (murderer)
- Lots of black and red
- Mirrors, masks, peepholes, stalking, chasing
- Running and then tripping and falling (being chased)

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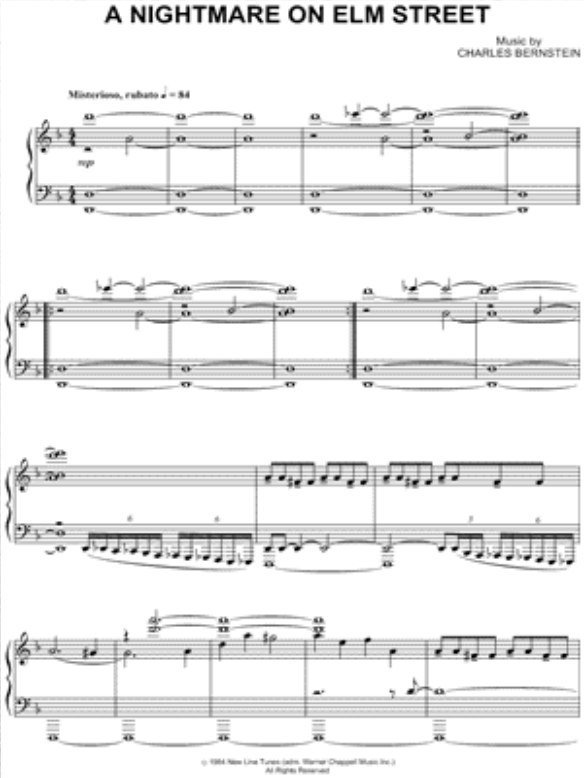
Cinematography and Editing



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Sound and Music

Let’s watch the clips

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRQwxpM1Y10

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv9VSGvduXo

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLy4JO4xuak

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEF9GiwHTdc

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsbhwxGSxjQ

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