

STUDY GUIDE BY MOVIE:

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE EVIDENT IN FILM NOIR?

Femme Fatale

Anti Hero or Hero whose value system may be askew.

Low Key lighting.

Movie Example:

"The Maltese Falcon": Film Noir/German Expressionism; John Huston director; originator of the Film Noir genre derivative of German Expressionism.

German expressionism's style arose from the art community.

Expressionism was a visual device of the artist aimed at distorting reality for an emotional response from the viewer.

Artists such as Max Beckmann, and Edvard Munch are associated with the movement. The philosophy questioned whether the growth of national identity and global influence was worth the brutality and destruction caused WWI, and the damage that was caused to the human psyche. Many soldiers suffered from "shell shock" brought on by the constant barrage of viewing the severed limbs and dead bodies of their comrades. Many have called WWI the most brutal war because of the inventions of modern war machines which destroyed "the art of war".

Movies mentioned in class that use this approach: "Dr Caligari"
"Metropolis"

WHAT DOES DYSTOPIAN VISION MEAN AND WHAT MOVIES DID WE WATCH THAT FIT THAT APPROACH?

"Fight Club"

A dystopian (failed utopia) vision for humanity is often present in the films of German Expressionism. The weird angles designed to give us a feeling of disorientation symbolized the disorientation of humanity.

IF "FIGHT CLUB" FALLS UNDER THE CATEGORY OF DYSTOPIAN VISION. EXPLAIN HOW THE DIRECTOR PAYS HOMAGE TO GERMAN EXPRESSIONISTS?

How does that movie convey a sense of weird expressionist values with color?

Green cast to the film. Shot low key. Lots of florescent lighting makes it other-worldly. The world is falling apart by the terrorist "Tyler Durden". He believes that all of the world's banks must be destroyed in order for a new culture to be built.

"Fight Club": favors Chaos to universal values, because Durden feels he has been sold out.

Struggling for purpose and challenging values of American society.

Compare these two phrases in terms of modernism and postmodernism.

"2. THE FIRST SOCIETIES

The most ancient of all societies, and the only one that is natural, is the family: and even so the children remain attached to the father only so long as they need him for their preservation. As soon as this need ceases, the natural bond is dissolved. The children, released from the obedience they owed to the father, and the father, released from the care he owed his children, return equally to independence. If they remain united, they continue so no longer naturally, but voluntarily; and the family itself is then maintained only by convention."

Excerpt from Rousseau's "Social Contract" 1762

Tyler Durden:

"We were raised by television to believe that we'd be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars – but we won't. And we're learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed-off." Excerpt from "Fight Club" 1999

WHAT SYMBOL OF AMERICAN IMPERIALISM WAS USED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FILM "BABEL" IN AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN BRAD PITT AND CATE BLANCHETT?

Coca-cola.

HOW IS THIS SYMBOL USED?

Blanchett's character warns her husband not to mix the Coke with the local ice in Pitt's glass. She actually pours the ice onto the ground showing a superficial distrust for the water which could also symbolize distrusting the local population to be civilized.

DOES THIS MOVIE MORE ACCURATELY REPRESENT POST MODERNIST OR MODERNIST THOUGHT? EXPLAIN?

"Babel":

Shakey Cam/ Neo-Italian realism.

Universal values. Modernist ideal

The only truth we know is we don't know the truth: Post Modernism

"The Third Man": HUAC (Extreme screen angles -German expressionism-Film Noir)

WHO IS THE VILLAIN IN THE "THE THIRD MAN" AND WHY DID HE FLEE THE US IN THE LATE 1940S?

Orson Welles fled the US for fear of having to testify before the House Committee on Un-American activities which was instrumental in "blacklisting" artists?

WHAT DOES "BLACKLISTING" MEAN?

People placed on black lists were unable to work.

WHAT MOVIE WAS HE BEST NOTED FOR? Citizen Kane

WHAT QUOTE IS MEMORABLE FROM THE MOVIE?

"In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed—but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock."

"RUN LOLA RUN":

Time sequencing, relativity color as a precursor or foreshadowing for action.

Music as it relates to creating a mood.

Alfred Hitchcock Homage which is one of the elements of French New Wave.

WHAT ACTRESS DID DIRECTOR TOM TWYKER HAVE PAINTED FOR THE CASINO SCENE AND WHAT TYPE OF MOVIE STYLE DOES THIS REPRESENT?

Kim Novak from "Vertigo, French New Wave. Director of "Vertigo": Alfred Hitchcock father of the slasher movie. Created the movie "Psycho" among others.

Famous quote:

"Blondes make the best victims. They're like virgin snow that shows up the bloody footprints."

"CHARADE": COLD WAR CAPER, SCREWBALL COMEDY IN THE STYLE OF HITCHCOCK (AGAIN)

"MEMENTO"

Non linear plot forces audience to focus attention on a disjointed story line with a plot device which reinforces characters and plotlines by repetition.

It utilizes a camera technique, which was first introduced by "The Wizard of Oz" where

Black and White sequences (what is real and what is imagined?) inter-mingle with color sequences.

WHY WAS THIS TECHNIQUE NECESSARY?

Black and white sequences represent the truth as in the phrase, "It's all there in black and white", as when one refers to something being factual. They were also the sequences which went forward in time, while the colored pieces were non-linear.

The movie leaves you wondering whether the protagonist is really suffering from any "real" psychological malady.

"The Big Lebowski":

The Narrator:

WHAT DOES THE COWBOY NARRATOR REPRESENT?

The dysfunctional state of American values and the role of the American hero in film.

The movie: IS IT A COMEDY? IS IT A WESTERN? IS IT FILM NOIR?

It could be all. Film Noirs were done primarily in the War years, as a symbiotic release for the dark and violent world we lived in. "The Big Lebowski" vaguely references and pays homage in its name to the film noir classic "The Big Sleep", shot in December of 1944 around the time of the Battle of the Bulge in WWII.

The director of the "The Big Sleep" was Howard Hawks. The plot lines are very similar. Rich women. Kidnapping. Disjointed plot lines. The author of the script: William Faulkner

The author of the book "The Big Sleep" Raymond Chandler.

"The Big Lebowski" represents vacuous nihilism. It references the Gulf War, as the "Big Sleep" references WWII but in a way that defies purpose. Nihilism which destroys the constructs which define the social order is the underlying theme of the movie. The movie itself destroys the order and purpose of film genres. It places a man with no skills or ambition in a situation where he is relied upon to "save" a damsel in distress...even if she is really not in distress. Who in fact does not even know she is in distress. It is absurd to the extreme.

The Dude's "seed" is pursued by an artist who is alternately portrayed as a Valkyrie (Valkyries are women who choose which Norse warriors will be slain in battle) played by Julianne Moore for no other reason than he's there. Albert Camus: Allegory-Myth of Sisyphus/Bowling and Lebowski.

Camus has argued that the absurd hero sees life as a constant struggle, without hope. Any attempt to deny or avoid the struggle and the hopelessness that define our lives is an attempt to escape from this absurd contradiction. Camus's single requirement for the absurd man is that he live with full awareness of the absurdity of his position.

One could connect the dots and argue that The Dude is Sisyphus. Constantly bowling, or in Sisyphus' case rolling a rock up the hill, realizing the futility of life and the eternity of struggle by saying. "The Dude Abides."

"This article asserts that The Big Lebowski is in fact a modern adaptation of Albert Camus' The Stranger and an illustration of the philosophy of Absurdism, which one might consider type of nihilism-a reference which is frequently alluded to within the film itself.

The Dude equates to an American version of The Stranger's Meursaults in the sense that he lives without responsibility, contemplation, or regret. The Dude individual who consistently denies the possibility of meaning or truth to existence; the entire world may be reduced to opinion and perception for Jeffrey Lebowski. As should already be apparent by now, nothing in the movie is particularly meaningful in and of itself (though his friends may assert otherwise). The Dude is merely acted upon and made to react.

The act of bowling is an adapted symbol which I will take to be representative of the Myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus tragic Greek hero who is damned to endlessly toil by repeatedly pushing a rock up a hill (and when it reaches the top, it rolls back down and he must start all over again). Sisyphus figures heavily in Camus' portrayal of the Absurd Man. As the bowling ball is to the dude, thus is the epistemic rock to Sisyphus. This ceaseless labor is a metaphor for the absurd repetition and meaninglessness of everyday life. (On a side note: I would argue that the metaphor is more precisely portrayed in The Big Lebowski, for it also confides a sense of mortality-the bowling ball will not simply roll forever as the rock of Sisyphus would, it reaches the end of its lane eventually and invites the epistemic possibility of

death). Like Sisyphus, the Dude becomes a tragic hero the moment he becomes conscious of the absolute absurdity of his existence (This occurs for Mersault and The Dude with the impending realization of his own deaths). The Absurd Man realizes that he cannot hope for meaning, true knowledge, the future, or at all; Camus argues would find solace in the guaranteed futility of his actions.

Realization of this nihilism grants a kind of freedom, however, as made evident in the comparison between both Jeffrey Lebowskis in the film. One is a nihilist and the other a vain megalomaniac who has dedicated his life to the pursuit of meaning, power, and wealth. Without these illusions he is but a restricted version of The Absurd Man, and therefore he is portrayed as paralyzed from the waist down, unable to move or act without the help of scientific knowledge and sound reason. The Dude, by comparison, needs no degree of hope and therefore exists more freely than his futile antithesis, so long as he accepts the responsibility for his lifestyle instead of existing in a state of perpetual ignorance.

The world is a place devoid of meaning save the meanings which would be imposed upon it by humanity, and in this sense The Dude's paranoid, raving, and indifferent friends who attribute any random series of larger meanings and possibilities upon a single event contrast to The Absurd Man in The Dude.

QUESTION: HOW IS "AMERICAN PSYCHO" LIKE THE PAINTING BY PIETER ARSTEN?

Aeresten balances images of sin and excess with images of salvation. The background painting beyond the images of butchered flesh is an image of Mary and Jesus being lead by Joseph. Values of affluence in Dutch society in the 15th century are questioned.

American Psycho questions the values of American culture.

Patrick Bateman is hollow. His world is white. His room is white. He lacks a credo to live by except to buy and cover his life with a veneer of acceptability with creams and lotions which make him look, feel and smell good while he rots internally. He recognizes that misogyny and racism are used in corporate culture to keep the status quo of white male dominance and he lashes out with his own brutality. He is the manifestation of the corporation.

"Being There":

QUESTION: WHAT DOES THE CHARACTER OF CHANCE THE GARDNER (CHAUNCY GARDINER) SYMBOLIZE? America's preoccupation with superficial experience.

QUESTION: WHEN CHAUNCY MEETS THE PRESIDENT FOR THE FIRST TIME WHAT DOES THAT EXCHANGE REPRESENT? Truth only exists on TV. Knowledge acquired by learning from books is no longer valued.

"Snatch": British Social Realism, B New Wave, Kitchen Sink Drama, Derivative

Also: Brought up blaxploitation, sexploitation, Russ Meyer, Tony Richardson, Grindhouse movie directors: Roger Corman, Quentin Tarantino, Robert Rodriguez.

"Jackie Brown" Quentin Tarantino; Grindhouse Blaxploitation homage to Pam Grier.

Other blaxploitation films mentioned in class:

"Blacula"

"Shaft"

"Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss song" Melvin Van Peebles

"Coffy"; Black female vigilante who avenges the addiction of her sister to drugs at the hands of white drug dealers.

elements:

White man is generally the villain

created in response to Black Power movement of the 60s and 70s.

Hero is usually on the "wrong side" of the law.

Why were blaxploitation films vilified by the Black Power structure?

Black women were portrayed many times as promiscuous at the least and as a prostitute at worst. Many believe that this stereotype became a staple in mainstream movies. The Black pimp, or the black gangster usually portrayed as the hero supposedly give these movies cutting edge realism, but often sustained a negative belief system opposed by those in religious and social justice circles.

Even Denzell Washington portraying a rogue cop, a variant of the gangster pimp in "Training Day" (2000) some believe buys into that stereotype.

IN "JACKIE BROWN" DOES TARANTINO PERPETUATE THE RACIST NARRATIVE PRESENT IN MOST BLAXPLOITATION FILMS?

The Jezebel stereotype was used during slavery as a rationalization for sexual relations between White men and Black women, especially sexual unions involving slavers and slaves. The Jezebel was depicted as a Black woman with an insatiable appetite for sex. She was not satisfied with Black men. The slavery-era Jezebel, it was claimed, desired sexual relations with White men; therefore, White men did not have to rape Black women. James Redpath, an abolitionist no less, wrote that slave women were "gratified by the criminal advances of Saxons."¹

1. James Redpath, *The Roving Editor, or Talks With Slaves in Southern States* (New York: Burdick, 1859), p. 141.
2. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York, 1968), original 1855, p.60.

The character Jackie Brown played by Pam Grier appears to have an attraction for two white men in the story, namely Max Cherry played by Robert Forster and the ATF Detective played by Michael Keaton, but one could argue that she is only using them, and no sexual encounters ever take place.

HOW DOES THE USE OF COLOR IN CHARACTER'S CLOTHING CREATE A REINFORCEMENT OF THE CHARACTER'S DEVELOPMENT?

WHAT ELEMENTS ARE PRESENT IN "JACKIE BROWN" THAT COULD ONE POINT TO THAT WOULD BE CONSIDERED HOMAGES TO BLAXPLOITATION FILMS OF THE 70S?

The soundtrack, the titles, the cars that the protagonists drove.

COLORS ARE CONSTANTLY USED TO DEVELOP AND FORESHADOW SHIFTS IN CHARACTER MOTIVATION. GIVE EXAMPLES?

Her character has changed. She has become more dangerous and a more sinister character at the beginning of the movie Jackie wears true blue colors and by the end she is wearing darker or more sinister colors. One could argue that this was a subconscious attempt by the director to influence and shade our viewpoint. Max Cherry, the very name conjures up the virgin, always wears gray. Symbolic perhaps of his lack of commitment to good or evil, but when he begins to be attracted to Jackie his greys shift to a bluish tint. His car is an off color blue. The white man is now wearing true blue colors. By the end Jackie is wearing black and in the final scene drives away in a black car. Her

apartment is red signifying "danger".

GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM: AN ARTISTIC FORM DEVELOPED AFTER WWI WHOSE SEVERE ANGULARITY CONVEYS A SENSE OF DISORIENTATION.

Used in the film "Metropolis" by Fritz Lang, and "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" Robert Wiene
DIRECTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MOVEMENT: Fritz Lang, Robert Wiene

FRENCH NEW WAVE: New wave often used ground breaking techniques to allude to American films that they often paid homage to. Their philosophy was to absorb the old films into a new narrative to create an interpretation which may the effect of accentuating its historical relevance.

DIRECTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MOVEMENT: Francois Truffaut, Jean Luc Godard , Quentin Tarrantino

italian new realism: Realism born out of the expedience of WWII Italy films from this period dealt with political intrigue and melodrama. The use of Jump cuts to conserve film, and exterior shots without elaborate sets were necessary after the impoverishment caused by WWII.

DIRECTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MOVEMENT: Roberto Rosellini

Seminal directors noted for their specific film styles:

John Ford: Westerns and Irish period works; noted for expansive shots in Monument Valley ("The Searchers")

C B Demille: Showman ship and Biblical epics; Hays Code object for "The Sign of the Cross"

ALFRED HTCHCOCK: Thrillers/slashersMaster of Suspense ("Psycho", "Vertigo", "The Birds", "Rear Window" to name a few)

JOHN HUSTON: Prolific Master of many genres including Film Noir (credited with inventing the style) "The Maltese Falcon"

ORSON WELLES: Director of the world's most studied film and often called greatest film "Citizen Kane"

WHAT IS AN ALLEGORY?

In short an allegory is a narrative which teaches an abstract message or conveys a spiritual point.

At the beginning of semester I spoke of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"

The Myth of Sisyphus is also an allegory.

The movie "Being There" was an allegory.

QUALITIES WHICH DEFINE POST MODERNISM IN FILM.

Some of us equate reality with stability. It is comfortable, if nothing else, to hope that there are some things in the universe that are immovable, inert and irrevocably changeless, but the universe does not act as we would hope. It never has been stable. Nothing is truly inert. What postmodernism explains in film as it does in other art forms, is that the stability of a system rests within the understanding of the individual that the system in which we live is always in flux. Change is inevitable and eternal.

What films do well is question our beliefs system, by cutting open the belly of the grand narrative and exposing its entrails to view. What becomes apparent more often than not is that those things that you believe are true are never quite as simple as they seem.

