

THE CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF FILM GENRE
FOR THE SCREENWRITER
Creating Film Genre's Mental Space

submitted by

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to

University of Exeter, UK

as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies

October, 2011

Minor Revisions March 2012

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led PhD project consists of two sections: the first examines a breakdown of the components of film genre to be used as practical guideposts for my own creative practice as a screenwriter and (hopefully in the future) for other screenwriters; the second section contains my practical application – first acts of three screenplays that are constructed utilizing my research and subsequent assessments. Using a theoretic construct presented in the area of philosophy in the 1990s by cognitive theorist Gilles Fauconnier called ‘mental space’, a concept exploring a person’s natural inclination to construct a comprehensible idealized cognitive model (ICM) of any given situation in order to understand his or her role in it (Fauconnier 1994:8), I examine how Fauconnier’s concept can be applied to building a film narrative and specifically how it can be applied to a screenwriter’s understanding and breaking down of the components of film genre. I also employ the work of scholars focused on the audience’s reception, especially the reception of film genre. In the practical section of my practice-led PhD, the writing of the first acts of three screenplays that share location, similar core cast of characters and plot points but are constructed in three distinctly different film genres (western, horror, romantic comedy), I endeavor to apply elements I have termed the ‘mental space of film genre’ in order to determine the adjustments and changes necessary to move narrative from one genre to another in order to fulfill various genre perimeters and genre expectations. This work is meant to increase a screenwriter’s technical skills in the craft of screenwriting.

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