

FILM & TV ANALYSIS

V: VISUAL LANGUAGE

Philipp Kneis, M.A. • pjkx.com • 05/10/2010

Visual Language

2

- film is as highly audio-visual medium
- television is audio-visual too

- what are the key differences?

Visual Language

3

- film: usually higher production value (more money)
- big screen (ideally – unless bad cinema, VHS, DVD)
- big sound system (ideally – ~)

- tv: usually lower production value, especially in the past
- small screen (getting bigger though)
- sound often just from tv set – though Surround possible
- different field depth (less long shots, more close-ups)

Visual Language

4

- this means:
 - ▣ film may rely on its visuals and sounds to tell a story
 - ▣ television has to be more restrictive

Visual Language

5

- film: tells one story
- film series are the exception

- television: since the beginning, episodic in nature
- exception: soap operas – continuing story

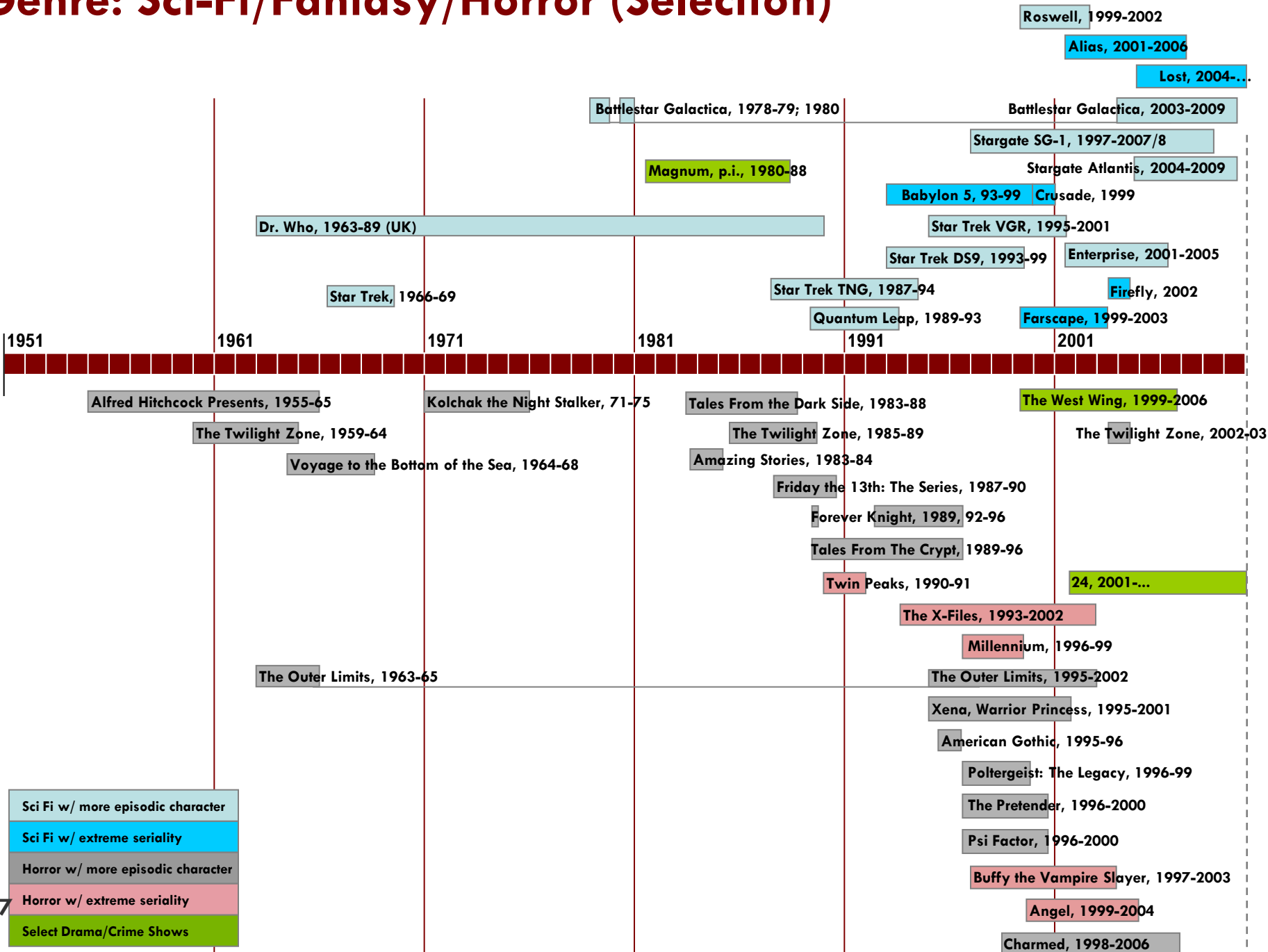
Visual Language

6

- major changes since late 1980s / early 1990s
 - *Magnum P.I.* (1980-1988)
 - *Star Trek TNG* (1987-1994) and subsequent franchises
 - *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991; M: 1992)
 - *The X-Files* (1993-2002; M: 1998, 2008)

- higher production values
- serial narration: higher complexity
- creation of intricate mythologies
- audience loyalty in SciFi/Horror franchise as basis

Genre: Sci-Fi/Fantasy/Horror (Selection)



Visual Language

8

Main Types:

1. no mythology at all, just recurring characters
 - *McGyver, Star Trek Classic, Magnum P.I. (till Season 7)*
2. partial mythology / stand-alone episodes („Monster-of-the-Week“)
 - *The X-Files, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Babylon 5 (seasons 1-2, 5), Stargate*
3. full mythology / almost no stand-alone episodes
 - *24, Babylon 5, Alias, Lost (seasons 3-4)*

Visual Language

9

- example for complex narrative: Farscape
 - ▣ everything is connected
 - ▣ audience „loyalty“ is required for understanding

Visual Language

10

Farscape

(Rockne S. O'Bannon, 1999-2003)

Main Titles Season 4

“Previously on Farscape” Ep. 4.22

clips from every episode so far --- high serial character

Clip from Ep. 3.16 “Revenging Angel”

intertext: quoting *Road Runner* cartoons, *Star Trek*

Visual Language

11

- intertext/post-modern narrative
 - connections to other texts (this is not new in art – it is more a matter of degree than principle)
 - excessive quoting of other franchises, like also on *Buffy*, *Stargate*

 - each pice of art is not only a pice of art, but a statement on art itself
 - self-reflexive text: commenting on making art itself (*The Producers*, *Shakespeare in Love*, etc.)

Visual Language

12

- postmodern style works here because similar audience --- same genre

Visual Language

13

- tendentially, nevertheless, television focuses on narrative / plot / character depth + interaction
- movies are still more visual – and more self-contained, more stringent, approaching unity of time and space (see Aristotle)
- film and television may be both audio-visual, but they are a completely different medium!