CHAPTER FIVE

Fancy… a Paradigm?

Even if considering the three-act structure of the story that dates back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, organized in:

SET UP > CONFRONTATION > RESOLUTION

transmedia tales and projects use several storytelling paradigms that vary greatly from each other, both if they have a single author and if they are the result of participative or synergistic involvement of the audience. To carry out projects and works simultaneously distributed on multiple media, creators and transmedia producers use narrative bibles, interactive maps, flow charts and protocols that are re-workings and crossbred works from other narrative disciplines: for instance, screenplays, game designs and information architectures.

Thus, everyone creates his own paradigm over time, but must define "dramaturgic outlines" that are useful for entertainment, advertising and information as well as for institutional communication or tourism, in the artistic field or the educational one…

Considering the basic structure of this reasoning about transmedia storytelling, I will analyze the three storytelling

paradigms most in use today. They are: the *transformational arc of the character, the hero's journey and the twelve stations structure*[75].

It has to be said from the start that the most important discriminating factor of using a particular dramaturgic model is its *function*: as the three paradigms have different features, their applicability differs in cases of a single medium or in multiple assets of a communicative system.

The Transformational Arc of the Character

In order to describe the inner development process of the main character of a transmedia story, the author must equally distribute hints in the multiple media involved and attentively tell autonomous stories that, at the same time, must be stimulating and able to create, in their respective audiences, as *spontaneous* a process of sharing and cooperation as possible. Thus, what does the transformational arc of a character involve, concretely? And what is its relation and use in the field of transmedia narratives?
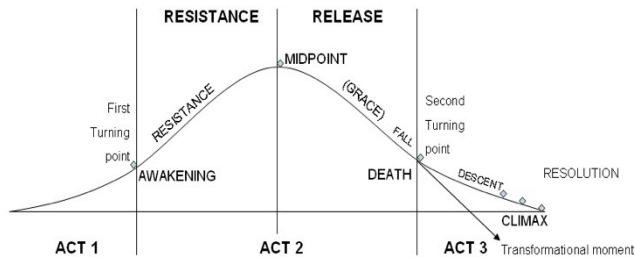
The paradigm of the transformational arc of the character was created in 2007 by the American editor Dara Marks, and is itself an evolution of Syd Field's development of the Aristotelic three-act structure, with three different levels of reading which are:

- the plot of the story, interpreted through the events (obstacles, further problems, strokes of luck…) that are experienced by the character;

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[75] L. Forlai, A. Bruni, *Come raccontare una grande storia che appassioni il pubblico* (1996).

- the primary subplot of the story, which consists of the relations (intentionally or unintentionally) created by the character (love, hate, friendship…);
- the secondary subplot of the story, which is the process of inner (positive or negative) transformation of the character.[76]

Considering this pattern, the perfect narrative structure lets the three dramaturgic dimensions of the character develop following the story, in a communicative system of one or more media. Starting with the *set-up* of the tale, passing through the *first turning point* until the *midpoint* to the *second turning point* and then the *climax* and the *resolution* of the tale, the character will develop from an initial status of *resistance* to the inner transformation, until a *release* that will change him forever.

Img. 2 - The *Transformational arc of the character* paradigm.

Moreover, considering this paradigm, the *resistance* process of a character follows a process that starts from a *fatal flaw* (an essential lacking quality, fatal mistake or unbearable condition) in the beginning, and goes through an *awakening* (the character

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[76] D. Marks, *Inside Story. The Power of the Transformational Arc* (2007).

is not completely aware of a new situation created by an unexpected event) until the first turning point of the tale, and then through an *enlightenment* (a complete awareness of the inner conflict) in the *midpoint* of the story. Then, the *release* process through which the character faces, matures and accepts his own transformational arc, allows him to pass from the midpoint to the second turning point of the tale, proceeding from a status of *grace* towards a *fall.* Following this fall, he arrives to face death at the climax of the story. This is the point in which the *transformational moment* of the character starts, and it finishes his transformational arc.

All these passages, in most of cases, are developed through a mainstream narrative, but in the transmedia tales they inevitably have to be "gradually" shared with the audiences throughout the development of the tale.

An example? Between 1982 and 1985, on the English magazine "*Warrior*" there was a weekly strip publication of *V for Vendetta,* a tale written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd. A few years later, the several publications of this comic were collected in a *graphic novel* which, in 2005, was released as a movie directed by James McTeigue, based on a screenplay by Andy and Larry Wachowski.

Comics, novels and movies all accurately reproduce the tale: an uchrony within a post-nuclear setting, in a future ruled by an Orwellian and obscure fascist regime (as in *1984*) with catastrophic corruptions drawn from Ray Bradbury (*Fahrenheit 451).*

In the story, the plot, primary and secondary subplots are focused on the protagonist V, who survived a terrible concentration camp and is now determined to take revenge by killing his jailors. Meanwhile, (through the use of a clear *two goal structure*), he arranges a "final" attack on the offices of the regime (*plot*). But one night, V meets the young Evey, a lonely young lady marginalized as he is, with whom he becomes infatuated; she will stand by him until the end of the tale (primary subplot). Moreover, thanks to her, when V dies, his

desire for justice spreads to the whole population: by putting on his mask – the one which belonged to Guy Fawkes, an antimonarchic conspirator who, in 1605, planned the bombing of the English Parliament – the population will finally begin to fight against the regime (secondary subplot).

All the stages of the pattern of V's character transformational arc can be found both in the graphic novel and in the movie, from resistance to the awakening, from the status of grace to the final climax and resolution of the tale. However, in contrast to the graphic novel, in the movie: imprisonment and all the other processes of existential friction are only slightly mentioned, while the imprisonment he imposes on the young girl, to make her follow his passage from life to death, seems to be more violent and detailed.

However, even with some internal variations, the paradigm of the transformational arc in *V for Vendetta* was used again for the launch of the movie, for the advertising campaign of the book (on paper press magazines, on Web…), in the novel by Steve Moore[77] based on the movie's script and in its theater adaptations (for example, the one on stage in Sweden in 2006); they all confirm the tale as a symbolic example of transmedia narrative focused on the transformational arc of the protagonist, ready to be re-created by the *emergent communities of knowledge* organized in fandoms and in communities of an even more tactical, temporary and intentional kind.

The "Transmedia Hero's Journey"

The "Hero's journey" paradigm is rooted in studies about the creation of myths in the folk tale and oral tradition genres,

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[77] S. Moore, *V for Vendetta* (2006).

from Vladimir J. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* to the Jungian Hero Archetype's theorization, and then from Joseph Campbell's studies and his *Hero with a Thousand Faces* to the TV screenplay by Chris Vogler[78]. Referring to the Structuralist lesson applied to folklore and epic tales, the "Hero's Journey" lets the structure of the plot and the story of the tale depend on the mythological experience of its protagonist.

From the point of view of transmedia narratives and projects, the Hero's journey paradigm is the most effective for supportive communicative systems, but it often offers a low level of interaction with the audience. The media to which it refers are cinema and games: the audience likes to identify, in particular, with the hero on the big screen or "play the hero" online, by mobile phone or console. All the bridges identified from one medium to another throughout the tale have this same basic expectation. Surely, in transmedia tales and projects, for multiple media and multiple audiences, sometimes there would be multiple "hero's journeys", which are developed in an autonomous or participative way by the audience; but the interaction never reaches a high level. Considering the analysis of this paradigm, the twelve steps of the journey are:

1. *The Ordinary World*: the hero is introduced to the audience living in his world at the beginning of the tale. In transmedia tales, this bridge very often uses an external narrator, omniscient or even invisible, as happens, for example, during the entry of the competitors in a reality show's arena.

2. *The Call to Adventure*: suddenly, something shakes up the hero's life, or "The hero starts off in a mundane situation of normality from which some information is received that acts

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[78] To refer to the creation of the "Hero's journey" narrative paradigm: C. Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (2007) and J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) and C.G. Jung, *Gli archetipi dell'inconscio collettivo* (1968).

as a call to head off into the unknown"[79]. In the transmedia tale, this "interruption" of the story's flow is a topical moment, which has to be used in the main medium of the project, but then repeated in the other media in order to reinforce the uniqueness of the hero's experience. It could happen, for example, in the game intro of a videogame taken from a movie.

3. *Refusal of the Call*: the hero tries to turn away from the adventure, but can't do it. In front of a "call", some of the characters act on impulse[80], accepting the challenge; others, instead, totter and are reluctant. "Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or 'culture,' the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved. His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless—even though, like King Minos, he may through titanic effort succeed in building an empire or renown. Whatever house he builds, it will be a house of death: a labyrinth of cyclopean walls to hide from him his minotaur. All he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his disintegration."[81] In transmedia tales, if spaces of real-time interaction with the audience of one or more media exist, in the moment of the hero's refusal, it is always better to let the audience act, in order to allow them to empathize more directly with their new favorite character.

4. *Meeting with the Mentor*: the hero meets someone who gives him training, advice and suggestions that will help him in the journey and in his life. The mentor is the Jungian archetype and a "guide" incarnation. "More often than not, this supernatural mentor will present the hero with one or more talismans or artifacts that will aid them later in their quest." In transmedia projects, moreover, he addresses both

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[79] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monomyth
[80] Vladimir J. Propp defines this kind of heroes as *seekers*, in: V. J. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968).
[81] J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

the Hero and the audience simultaneously, and each time his voice challenges or helps the user to correctly interpret the experience of the tale.

5. *Crossing the Threshold*: at the end of Act One, the hero leaves the Ordinary World and enters the special, unknown world of his journey. In transmedia tales, the first threshold is always presented in each medium of the publishing project and it is the first, real and basic moment to make the audiences of multiple media collaborate among them.

6. *Tests, Allies and Enemies*: once the threshold is crossed, the Hero and his audiences (with their allies and against their enemies) start their experiences and face challenges from one medium to another. To let himself be involved and immersed, the user must earn a good score, reaching visibility or power exactly when, in the tale, a choice or action is made or started.

7. *Approach to the in-Most Cave*: the hero and his allies prepare for the major challenge in the Special World. In order to positively reflect the emotions the protagonist has had, it is necessary that each of the involved media interpret the emotional tension of the character in its own way.

8. *The Ordeal*: the hero enters a central space in the Special World and faces his greatest fear[82]. In transmedia tales, this is the most important moment for the live use of the tale; when it ends, the audiences or communities, in particular those in new media, will begin to ask themselves the same question, "Will he succeed?", as we saw, for example, in *CSI* in *Second Life*.
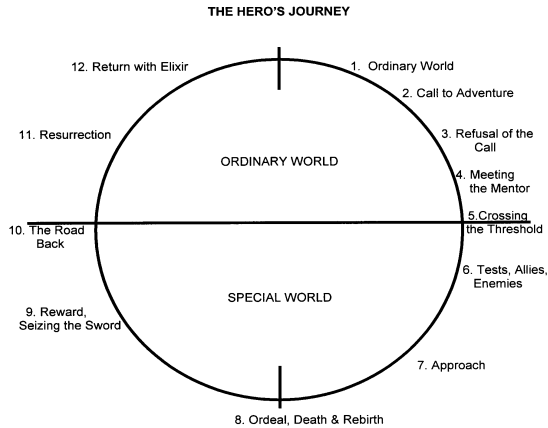
9. *The Reward*: the Hero gains something special by facing death …and the audiences too! For example, by using personal *gifts* or special content addressed to the main followers of the project and to the main champions of the tale (again, using social network campaigns or community activism as well as mobile narratives and little events).

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[82]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Writer's_Journey:_Mythic_Structure_for_Writers

10. *The Road Back*: the hero leaves the Special World and his adventure, and brings the treasure home. In transmedia tales, this is the point to remind the audience of the best and most emotional moments of the story, at least in one of the multiple media involved, through single videos or trailers, preferably on the web, due to the ease of uploading them and giving audiences access to the content.

11. *The Resurrection*: the last sacrifice, the last climax, the last death and rebirth of the Hero, to bring about a change in the inhabitants of his own Ordinary World and in the audience. In transmedia tales, a narrative strategy often used at this point is to develop the tale in two directions simultaneously. For example, during a TV series broadcast, on one side there will be the generalist media focused, firstly, on the protagonist, and then on the other characters; on the other side, on the Internet and in the content created for mobile users, there is the opposite process, focusing on the secondary characters (maybe to develop into a new series), then focusing on the protagonist of the tale.

12. *Return with the Elixir*: "the hero returns home or continues the journey, bearing some element of the treasure that has the power to transform the world as the hero has been transformed". But first, something (the elixir) made him and his story immortal. What? In transmedia tales, this is the moment to spur into action, for the last time, all the audiences of the project; it might be through a final contest, which would be able to have them converge on a single, final arena of the tale, as often happens in the charity or fund-raising projects.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

12. Return with Elixir

1. Ordinary World

2. Call to Adventure

11. Resurrection

3. Refusal of the Call

ORDINARY WORLD

4. Meeting the Mentor

5.Crossing the Threshold

10. The Road Back

6. Tests, Allies, Enemies

SPECIAL WORLD

9. Reward, Seizing the Sword

7. Approach

8. Ordeal, Death & Rebirth

Img. 3 - The *Hero's Journey* paradigm.

The epic tone and the strong imaginative power of the protagonist of the tale make the "hero's journey" paradigm one of the most used patterns in transmedia storytelling. But the presence of numerous archetypes (heroes, shadows, mentors, herald, threshold guardians, shapeshifters, tricksters and allies) allows the audience to side temporarily with other characters throughout the tale. This helps the sharing of the imaginative universe of the story and, at the same time, works very well in the "marketing of the tale" of the transmedia culture. An example?

The *24* TV-series, which due to its *framed*-narrative structure combines the narrative pattern of a TV reality game with that of traditional fiction. In fact, in *24,* each season tells about a sequence of events that take place during a single day, through 24 episodes of 45 minutes each – which last 60 minutes after considering the advertising breaks – and each lasting for an hour of real time in the fiction. By using *frame narratives,* that is the division of the pattern into sub-frames (technically, *split-screens*), the audience simultaneously follows different narrative levels and stories developed through multiple subplots. But this is not the end of the process. Throughout the years, the series has expanded into different

media, specifically videogames, mobile episodes, "webisodes", books, mobile games and comics, but all together followed the same narrative pattern: the hero's journey of the protagonist Jack Bauer, an agent of the Counter Terrorist Unit of Los Angeles, who through the different seasons of the tale and the multiple media of the communicative system of the project has gone from the west coast of the U.S. to Washington, to finally arrive among the skyscrapers of Manhattan.

The "Twelve Stations" Paradigm

The *Twelve Stations Paradigm* is similar to that of the hero's journey, but it is more focused on the character's inner psychology and motivations, dividing the narrative universe into two main spheres of influence opposed to one another: good and bad, right and wrong, protagonist and antagonist, all with their own points of view... It is exactly for this reason that such a model can be applied to mostly competitive transmedia systems, where the single media have the possibility of choosing what side to be on and divide audience between them, often promoting in their own mechanisms participative narrative forms.

The "Twelve Stations" is the outcome of the integration between the model of the Hero's Journey and that of Syd Field and Linda Seger, made by Italian editors Luigi Forlai and Augusto Bruni. It proves very effective in transmedia narrative, especially in that distributed on the web (weblit, fanfictions) – where there is much more opportunity for audience interaction – and in advertising (including in its gaming dimension), where there is a stronger contrast between the characters' motivations and those of the brand and the audience. The twelve stations of the paradigm's structure are:

1. *The Inner Ghost*: an event from the past still haunts the protagonist of the tale. The ghost represents the actual motivation of the character and leads the narrator into using a particular register (strict? Ironic? Subtle?) In transmedia narrative, a symptomatic example is represented by the *McGuffin*, typical of Hitchcock's narratives, echoed across media, in order to involve the audiences of the given narrative more intimately.

2. *The Unconscious Wound*: a weak point or shadowy area the protagonist is not aware of, inside him or herself, and must now inevitably deal with. In transmedia narratives this issue is generally not explicitly revealed, with its presence left to the audience's deduction, or it can be evoked in a more advanced stage of the narrative, as a part of the live imagery of the story.

3. *Inciting Incident*: also called the *catalyst*. The part of the story in which the Protagonist encounters the problem that will profoundly change his life. The different media involved in the narrative have the ability to show it from different viewpoints, leading the audience to choose which side to be on.

4. *Objective*: according to his or her objective, the protagonist of a given narrative attempts (comically, adventurously or dramatically) to overcome his or her ghost and, without knowing it, heal his or her unconscious wound. It is quite common that, in transmedia narratives, the protagonist's objective is combined with those specific to the audience such as victory points, rewarding powers or visibility within the narrative communities of the tale.

5. *Antagonist*: a character pursuing the same aim as the hero's, only with different motivations, though coherent and reliable. The antagonist is the bearer of completely different ideals than those of the hero; in a transmedia narrative the extent and nature of space given to the antagonist within a given media must always be clear from the initial planning phase, more so in competitive communication systems.

6. *The War*: rather than the actual conflict between hero and antagonist, this is the preparation for the final confrontation between their own worlds, their own ways of interpreting life and death, their own personal universes. In transmedia narratives this is the moment of leaving the "microphones open" and let the audiences confront each other, without fear of *flamers* or excessively trying to manipulate the debate.

7. *Facing Death*: the final duel with the antagonist is preceded by an intimate confrontation between the hero and his or her self. The hero pays Death a visit to which he or she will act in a way that will lead him or her to redemption, or to an irretrievable defeat. In transmedia narrative this is the only instance when the narrative must go back into the hands of its original author.

8. *Final Battle*: only one of the contestants shall eventually reach the shared goal. In this perspective, in transmedia tales each medium involved must have the possibility of expressing its own viewpoint, according to its own language. This is, moreover, the space which is most devoted to the entertainment dimension, as well as that which provides a reward for the public, for example thanks to events or contests.

9. *Awakening*: at the end of the battle a new viewpoint tells another hero's story. It consists of a new awareness, at times a real *understanding*, as in ancient classical drama. On other occasions there is simply an escape to a new world or a newer immersion into the protagonist's ordinary environment. In this case, each medium is free to tell such a passage in its own way.

10. *Transformation of the double*: during the course of the final battle, the Antagonist goes through a path of mutation and awakening, similar to that undergone by the Protagonist. Of course, as a consequence, the story changes again. An example? Identities exchanged by two families who

do not know each other at the end of a holiday, in the ending of a *swap show*[83].

11.　　　*New balance*: defeater or defeated, together with their followers, returns to the initial world of the story, even though it is not what it used to be. An important change occurred in their existence and so it will have to be with the audience. In transmedia narratives this is the second and last celebrative occasion where contests or events, both physical and online, can be organized in order to completely integrate the project's audiences and communities. Obviously they do so by recalling the most touching passages of the story.

12.　　　*Thematic revelation*: subtly, the basic message of the story becomes universal to the public's eyes, remembering that, as already pointed out in the previous chapter, the theme of the narrative (the protagonist's unconscious wound) is more effective if invisible during the whole course of the tale.

Once a story told using the "twelve stations" ends, it is ready to be shared, commented upon and "carried on" by one or "n" authors all over the world, in the same media frame or in others. Forums and archives, for instance, grant a generally higher degree of interactivity to a transmedia narrative, and are therefore more appropriate to synergistic actions by communities and authors spread all over the Net. A personal example?

The creation of my transmedia independent project *Proiettiliperscrittori* (*Bullets for writers*) dates back to 2003. It was the first transmedia project I worked on, and it represented an original case of user-determined narrative[84] in those years.

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[83] *Swap* are those narratives and formats (for reality, game, show and fiction) where the story provides for a planned exchange of role or frame, among the protagonists of the narrative, but not of identity.

[84] About the definition of 'user-determined narrative' P. Sermon, *The emergence of user- and performer-determined narratives in telematic environments*, in: A. Zapp (ed.) *Networked Narrative Environments: As Imaginary Spaces of Being* (2004).

Originally planned as a creative writing lab, initially spread through radio and web TV, its *competitive system* was supported by a blog and a novel to be strongly influenced by the audience. In its radio incarnation, for instance, *Proiettiliperscrittori* was a show made of twelve episodes of advice on writing broadcast by a speaker and combined with examples taken from cinema and television narratives. At the end of each show, an expert speaking from home would give his ratings and evaluations via blog and his contribution was submitted to the show's community's own evaluation. The debate would carry on during the following five days, while on the sixth, the one before the next show, a new subject would be launched, with preparatory links, bibliography and filmography shared with the public. The project went as far as to allow the listener to implement the last three radio shows and one was even read by a regular follower. A video version was, in the meantime, available on web TV, linked to the *Proiettiliperscrittori* blog. But the most important change, and its moment of highest degree of interactivity, was reached thanks to the connection to publishing and the printed paper. In the summer of 2004, in fact, right after the end of the radio show, I launched a new format via blog: a textual web fiction divided into episodes called *Fuoco ci vuole* (*Fire, we need*). Following this format, an episode of the series was broadcast online on the blog around midnight every three days. Each episode of *Fuoco ci vuole* was subdivided into two parts, separated by a ten-minute pause in the process of online publishing. Each part was enriched by a photograph or image found on the web or submitted by the readers. Moreover, as had already happened with the radio show, the following day was dedicated to the readers' comments. In the next 24 hours the episode was corrected and reorganized following the suggestions which emerged in the online debate.

Fuoco ci vuole told the story of a clumsy summer experienced by four friends who go through all sorts of adventures in a deserted and hostile Rome. The characters

were living, both individually and chorally, four variations of the twelve stations paradigm, and the story was rich with filmic and literary quotes, which were sent to the public in the form of a contest. The hunt for the locations named in the story was frantic, as pictures and comments were coming in a flood and soon represented a further modality of interactive consumption. The public immediately elected its favourite character among the four in the plot and kept following its role in the narrative, contributing with suggestions for plots, relationships, and dialogues (some of which were used, while others were not), always in a perspective of (online) reasoning and confrontation. Supported by a wide community of faithful followers of the whole project, only two weeks after the twenty-sixth and last episode was posted online, *Fuoco ci vuole* was bought by a publisher and went through a further "re-mediation": initially conceived as a radio screenplay, it later transformed into a web fiction, and in the spring of 2005 became the first transmedia novel ever published in Italy. Thanks to its audience. Together with its audience.