CHAPTER 2

STORY DESIGN

B eing clear what it means to manipulate imaginative universes and story worlds which were purposely created to be developed on different media platforms within transmedia projects, it is now time to dive full body into the narrative, to dig into plots, characters and actions that make our stories. Time to unveil their secrets and show them in the most effective fashion to the multiple audiences interacting in our communicative system.

The first thing to do is to define the narrative forms in the main medium (*mothership*) and later focus on those of the other assets of our communicative system. Then we will have to go deeper into and define the structure, or *dramatic skeleton* of each individual story. At a later moment time relations between stories in the different media shall be defined and their subject deepened. Last it will be necessary to portray and make an outline of characters in the narrative ecosystem with their psychological profiles. Yet, let us focus on one thing at the time, keeping in mind – when necessary – basic elements of narratology used by traditional storytelling and yet also crucial at this stage of our work in transmedia story world. In an attempt of summarizing at its best the structuralist theory, we shall point out how a story must first have the two 'C's, that is *conflict* (between characters) and internal *change* (inner in its status or in its protagonist). This is the first essential guideline useful to

define the 'form' of the narrative structure in the main medium
of our communicative system.

THE STORY CRAFTING PROCESS

Defining 'form' in a story world depends on the different types of
narrative structures one can find in the communicative system.

Structure of the tale, incipit and *ending* are the most important
steps of this story crafting process and belong to any form of
storytelling. They however become of a higher importance in the
step of planning a transmedia narrative when, for example, the
ending of a story may become the hook for the incipit of another
tale on a different platform, or when the structure of a story
may works as a model for all the others of a given project. An
example? The launch of the final chapter of the 2010 movie saga
The Dark Knight Rises, whose premiere in cinema theatres was
anticipated by Warner Bros. by an alternate reality game. It came
to represent a communicative system mainly based on the web
which produced textual and visual content published on social
networks and superheroes loving communities both virally and
in a non-linear fashion. How?

Documents presented as classified, 'stolen' and inaccessible were
published in the months before the release of the film on
seemingly secondary or marginal websites. The first content to
be released was a special issue of "The Gotham Observer", whose
front page gave the news of the celebrations for the death of
Gotham City's protector , Harvey Dent, the same event that was
to trigger the story in the film. A number of articles on the
newspaper were also giving clues which would be acknowledged
in the movie: the works at the city stadium, the objective of the
villain's – the dreadful Bane – terroristic attack, or the news of
the rise of robberies and of the first cracks in Dent's repressive
system to dam Gotham's overflowing corruption. Following this,
other 'materials' were diffused on the net, at regular interval
over the following weeks. First a city map with spots circled
red where mysterious diggings were taking place, then Lucius

Fox's letter to his old friend Bruce Wayne telling him the family company was in dire straits, with also the president's reply stating he was refusing to shake the dust off an old plan for a nuclear reactor to save himself and the company. Eventually other documents were released: a report from Gotham intelligence on Professor Leonid Pavel – a nuclear physicist mysteriously gone missing – and GCPD officer John Blake's personal files (the future Robin and one frequently reprimanded for acting the vigilante). Those documents and images created a notable teaser effect on Batman's fans and represent a valid synthesis of the work carried out by the authors of the movie's advertising campaign on the so far discussed narrative plans: the imaginative universe (Batman and Gotham), the story world (the relationship between Lucius and Bruce, Bruce and John, which also reveal new details about the plot), and the incipit and endings of some narrative lines (the map to play with, the report on the missing scientist…). All those elements were used to arouse the public's curiosity, involve them in an active way by making them learn those news from social networks and the press, rework and share all over the world.

In crafting the tale of a story world there are mainly five types of narrative structure authors and producers can use: *step, ring, frame, pierce* and *mixed*. In the stepped structure the narrative progresses one stage at a time, closing every scene before opening the following one (as it is – for instance – in traditional fairy tales). In the ringed structure the first and the last scene of a tale juxtapose; in the space between the two the rest of the story is narrated. The example might be that of a long flashback like in Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump*. The frame structure temporary nestles a tale within another in the course of the narrative (as it is for James Cameron's *Titanic*), while the pierce structure is when the tale moves seamlessly forward stage after stage: the previous is not exhausted yet and already the protagonist is thrown into the following (the example is that of David Fincher's *Seven*). Last, the mixed structure results from the contamination of two or more structures among those just discussed (as for example
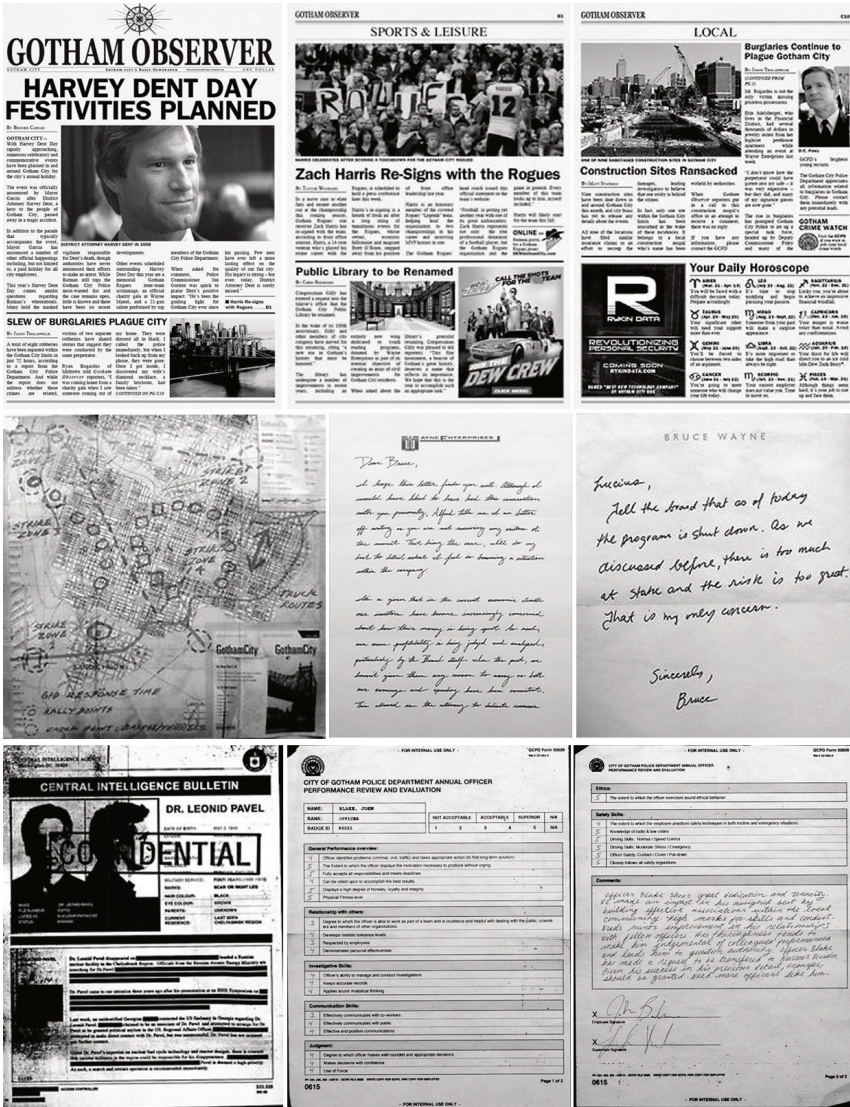
Img. 2.1 The Dark Knight Raises (2012). Viral online materials in the transmedia alternate reality game of the movie.

Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*). All of those types of structure may be contaminated or hybridized in terms of space and time, either concurrently or at different stages in transmedia story worlds, as I am going to show in the following example.
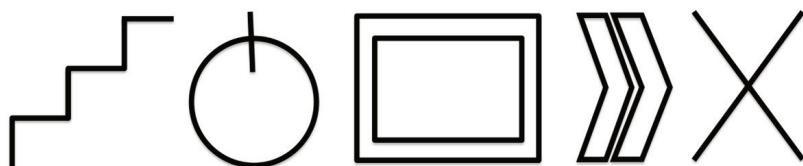
Img. 2.2 Icons of the five types of structure: step, ring, frame, pierce and mixed.

During a night at a disco, A, B and C, three youths of a small town, get involved in a murder. The police finds no evidence sufficient to incriminate them and, after the turmoil following the initial steps of the investigation, they decide for a change of scene. Up to this point the narration is made through a single medium: episode one of a TV series (presenting with a step structure). A and B move to different cities where they find different jobs and slowly lost touch with each other. Their rapport is solely entrusted with stories published on two e-books the audience can read in real time to learn about updates. C, on the other hand, walks a path of his own, until the two friends (A and B) discover he was the culprit. The public follows his tread through a three episode frame structured m-series. Then A and B start a highly daring manhunt to catch C before he disappears; here the tale's structure turns into a pierce one. The two youths know where he is heading and they decide not to give the police any information but try to clear their own name by themselves. The story of their detection comes back on television where it ends until someone, one of the characters or the anchor man himself, will start to tell us (using the ring structure).

Once the structure of the different asset is set, it is time to deal with that of each single story. For each tale we shall have to find the start (*incipit*) and the ending (*explicit*) of its storyline. For what concerns the beginning, three different types can be taken into consideration: *traditional*, *in medias res* and *in retrospect*.

With traditional incipit the beginning of the story and that of the narrative occur at the same time (Once upon a time…); the in medias res incipit is when the beginning of the narrative occurs during the course of the events told in the story (for example a gun shooting A and B are involved in at the beginning of the story), while we have the retrospect incipit when the narrative starts after the events have taken place, events which are recalled when the story is already concluded (for instance events told by C after he is arrested by the police with A and B's help).

Finally, about choosing the ending, it is useful to remind how it can alternatively be *open*, *closed*, *surprise* or *double* (*repeated*). The closed ending happens when all the events in the story cease their course (positively, with a *happy ending*, or negatively, with a *dramatic ending*); the open ending – on the contrary – leave the main narrative line open; the surprise ending hides a twist in the events which can make the public's point of view on the story dramatically change. Eventually, the double or repeated ending terminates the different narrative threads of a tale through different scenes (an example can be found with choral narratives, when the story follows more characters at the same time). These traditional rules of narratology – as well as others – remain basically unaltered in their inner nature but, in the case of transmedia narratives, they undergo substantial mutations. In order to make this concept more simple it will be helpful to come back to and develop the story of A, B and C and the small town murder. In the case of a closed ending A and B will live happily ever after, while C shall die in a gun shooting (dramatic ending). In an open ending A and B shall live in constant fear of C's revenge, who escaped his former friends framing and police investigations. In the third case the public will discover – with great surprise – that B was the real murderer, although C couldn't reveal this without putting A's life at jeopardy. If the story ends with a double or repeated ending, we shall tell how A is going back to his small town life, B is staying in the big city to start a new life and have a brighter future, while C shall face his destiny, chased by the police. The use of a transmedia project

whose main features are decided from the beginning might give to opportunity to present with more alternative, simultaneous endings, even a different one on each platform. Or, also, direct the platforms towards the building up of the same ending, although in different timings. Alternatively, tell *post eventum* what ending the three characters would have liked to be their own ending, or leave it to the public, perhaps establishing a contest with prizes, to create an ending within few days from the project release.

The story crafting process is a very useful operation to establish the time and space boundaries of a transmedia story world: it can be compared to the definition of the perimeter and the foundation of a building. The more a story crafting is solid and well balanced, the more effective long-running the whole of the tales within our project's communicative system shall be. The making of the meaning and the crafting of a correct interaction among all the stories set – or that may be set, also in the future – in our imaginative universe are at stake here.

THE TRANSMEDIA DRAMATIC SKELETON

If we go deeper down the narrative matter of a story world, we end up directly into the magma and the raw physiology of its stories. If we want to design the *dramatic skeleton* of a transmedia project we may find all the traditional narrative pattern of writing and screenwriting to be of some use, and yet they shall soon turn out to be insufficient and in need of being integrated and hybridized. The most common contamination is that between the three-act structure theorized by Syd Field in 1991, and the narrative paradigm of the Transformational Arc of the protagonist, elaborated by Dara Marks in 2007. While the three-act narrative model follows the protagonist's experience in its major keypoints, such as:

- the *ordinary world* at the beginning;
- the *first turning poing,* or the narrative trigger;

- the *point of no-return*, in the middle of the narrative (mid-point);
- the *second turning point*, leading to the ending;
- the narrative's final *climax* (either positive or negative),

Dara Marks's model[1] concentrates, on the other hand on the inner development process lived during the tale by the main character of the story, either in the main plot (interpreted through the events – obstacles, further problems, strokes of luck… – experienced by the character) than in the subplots of the story world (the primary subplot of the story, which consists of the relations intentionally or unintentionally created by the character – love, hate, friendship… – and the secondary subplot, which is the process of inner – positive or negative – transformation of the character).

Moreover, considering this paradigm, the resistance process of a character follows a series of steps 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 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

1. The paradigm of the transformational arc of the character was elaborated in 2007 by American editor Dara Marks; it represents an evolution of Syd Field's development of the Aristotelian three-act structure, with three different levels of reading. See: D. Marks, *The Transformational Arc*, 2007.

tales they inevitably have to be "gradually" shared with the audiences throughout the different media involved in the communication system. 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 defined the nebula of the imaginative universe: 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*).

Img. 2.3 V for Vendetta (2005). Visuals from the movie, the comic series and the Anonymous movement.

In the story, the plot and the 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, he arranges a "final" attack on the offices of the regime (*plot*). But one night, V meets the young Evey, a lonely girl 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 anti-monarchic 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 (2007) 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 recreated by the emergent "communities of knowledge" organized in fandoms of an even more tactical, temporary and intentional kind.

What happens, though, if we were to use the outcome of the *hybridation* of three-act model with that of the transformation arc in the definition of a transmedia story world? Let us assume we have a low complex story world to work on, spread over three
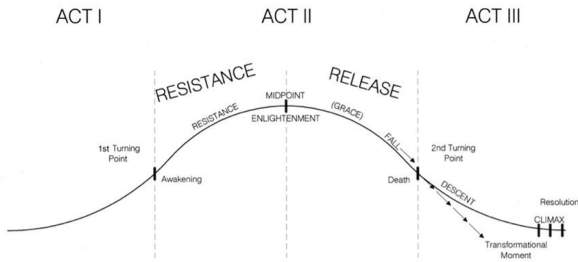
Img. 2.4 The three-act narrative structure crossed with that of the transformational arc of the protagonist. Different fonts – bold, caps and lowercase – signal the main different passages as described by Syd Field and Dara Marks.

platforms and let us use again the story of our friends A, B and C and their small town crime.

Let us restart from the days immediately after the murder, when C goes visiting his parents up North and he disappeared. A and B, on the contrary, end up in the big city: the former becomes a secretary in a legal firm, the latter a clerk in a shopping mall. They slowly lose touch with each other because they secretly suspect one another (*fatal flaw*).

Let us start from here and build our three-tracks dramatic skeleton. A and B's life goes on smoothly until one day they watch the news on TV where a report reveals them an important detail about the crime (awakening: to be revealed, for example, in the e-books we have mentioned before). The two friends try to reconnect to each other, they meet in a bar and together they make a reconstruction of the true events of that night. And they have it all clear (enlightenment, to be dealt with in depth in the TV series). Eventually, despite A's hesitations (resistance, to be revealed through in his e-book), they decide to start chasing C in order to clear their own names (and here we get to the tale's mid-point, in all the three assets). They then discover where C hides

(grace, to be told in a breath-taking sequence of the m-series), but, after having tried to frame him, they cannot catch him and have to start all over again (*fall*, in the TV series). With the aim of compensating the previous failure, B (whom we know being the real murderer) decides to give the 'manhunt' a strong boost and such a move brings him and A to the second turning point of the narrative, the one that closes the second act of the story (in all the assets of the project). The following step is therefore that of the death-match between the three youths (climax) which puts A's redemption under the spotlight. On the very top of the heat, in fact, A brings up what C has done (transformational moment, to be developed in the TV series), but at the end of a final confrontation she will discover that C is innocent. She and C get then rid of their sense of impotence and finally gain awareness of their new reality (to be told in the e-book's last story). B shall end up in prison and A anc C will never go back to their small town. They do not belong to that past anymore and perhaps the time to give their new relationship in the big city has come. All is ready for the ending (resolution) of the three stories in the different media involved.

Finally, in building the dramatic skeleton of a transmedia narrative it is important to consider how the moments when the public's imagination reaches its most productive state are two: the *incipit* and the *first turning point*; in other words the 'once upon a time' and the first turn of events, the one physically triggering the narrative. In those moments all is still virtually possible and the platforms involved into the narrative are still 'open' and pointing towards any narrative point: choices are virtually countless. Also, at the first turning point of the story the audience shifts directly from pre-vision, when they imagine the story, to active involvement and emotional participation. This is the moment when the audience enter the tale and 'something for them' decides if a given narrative is seducing them or if it is leaving them indifferent, if it fascinates or repulse them, if it increases or disenchants their desire to consume the story. This is the moment when, if the author works effectively, the public

will want to 'take the first leap' from a medium to the other of the project.

On the contrary, at the second turning point (the one marking the passage from the second to the third act of the story) the audience's *suspension of disbelief*[2] and their capacity of interpretation have inevitably become more passive and the situation gets even worse while we approach to the final climax of the story. Now it is too late to stimulate the public into active participation, while there are still strong chances of involve them through strong narrative content and touchpoints connecting a media to another. The public, loyal to the show by now, is hungry for knowledge about details and side-stories and they will accept to postpone the story's ending, only to get there with a satisfactory load of information and a comprehensive idea of the narrative and imaginative perspectives of the whole tale. What happens, on the other hand, if our story world is based on a non-linear narrative, or a serial narrative, spread on more media? In order to systematize all the stories and their media platforms, we should first ask ourselves:

- are the stories self-conclusive or are they just parts of a serial story world (for example are thy *prequel* or *sequel*, *pre-series* or *after-series*)[3]?

- does the story world present with secondary narrative spaces enabling it to create other stories within (*spin

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2. The *suspension of disbelief* is a concept that comes from Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*Bibliographia Literaria*, 1817) and refers to "the reader's willingness to accept the author's vision of a time, place, world or character that, were they not in a work of fiction, would be unbelievable. The audience has to be willing to put aside the fantastical, the incongruous, the unlikely and even excuse narrative shortcuts or streamlining in order to accept and be engaged by the story". Ref. to: Dowd, T., Fry, M., Niederman, M., Steiff, J., *Storytelling Across Worlds*... cit., p. 21.
3. The concepts define episodes which, in a saga, *precede* or *follow* the story originally told; respectively, in single tales (*prequel*, *sequel*) or serially (*pre-series*, *after-series*).

off[4], *reboot*[5], *what if*[6], *missing moments*[7]) or outside (*alternate universe*[8]) its imaginative universe?

- does the story world present with secondary narrative content enabling it to attract other stories (*out of character*[9], *untold stories*) into its imaginative universe?

- do stories involve the use of original characters, of protagonists from prior narratives (*cross-over*), or real people: VIPs, showbiz stars, etc… (*real person*)?

In the case of stories which do not 'live on their own', but which, on the contrary can be referred to sagas, myths or other participative narrative forms, transmedia narratives tend to repetition , re-tread , alteration and co-authoriality. Transmedia narratives modify space and time, interchange all the possible actions, suggest different worlds from the original and stimulate authors and public into a productive interaction with them, with

4. A *spin-off* is a narrative created by reworking background elements of a pre-existing narrative. It might exploit some parts of the story, characters or actors. For example, a videogame focusing on the character of Catwoman, from *The Dark Knight* saga, as it happens in *Batman: Arkham City*, produced by Rocksteady Studios for Warner Bros. in 2011.

5. A *reboot* of a serial narrative is a narrative which completely renews the original story, keeping only characters and imaginative universe intact, as it was, for instance, with many superheroes, from *Batman,* reworked in the new franchise *Il cavaliere oscuro,* to Sam Raimi's *Spiderman*, which has turned into *The Amazing Spiderman*, to *Superman* in the most recent *Man of Steel*.

6. A *what if* is a narrative which can be reconnected to a pre-existing narrative universe, but where the story is set in a different time or space from that of the original narrative. An example can be the frequent 'transport' of the *Star Trek* crew in the past on Earth, as it happened in the 1966 tv series.

7. A *missing moment* A missing moment is a story that tells about events in a different time or, or which might integrate the original tale, set in its imaginative universe. For example, the story of the life of Bella Swan before meeting with Edward, useful to find out more detail about the *Twilight* saga.

8. An *alternate universe* is a story which uses a pre-existing imaginary universe and introduces new characters into them. This is what, for example, J.K. Rowling has done transferring part of the Harry Potter imaginary into her 2016 *Fantastic Beasts*.

9. An *out of character* is a story which uses characters from a prior narrative and takes them outside their original imaginative universe. Raja Gosnell transporting a group of Smurfs in nowadays New York in his 2011 movie can be an example of it.

the narratives and with all the possible other digital spaces where to enjoy the stories. Here it is, therefore, the three-act dramatic skeleton we have introduced at the beginning of the chapter, as it would look like if the story world were made of serial narratives spread concurrently on more media.
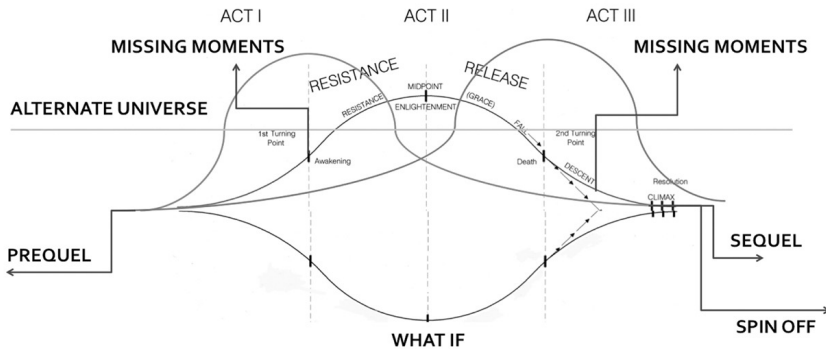
Img. 2.5 Transmedia Dramatic Skeleton of a complex story world, made of different stories developing serially the imaginative universe of a narrative in space and time.

In order to finalize the design of the dramatic skeleton of the story world of a transmedia narrative a final step will be required: a check on the temporal sequence the stories present within the overall time of the narrative. From this point it is possible to adopt five different basic dramatic strategies:

- *sequential* narratives;
- *parallel* narratives;
- *simultaneous* narratives;
- *non-linear* narratives;
- *two way.*

Briefly recalling them in their essential features, it is useful to remind how sequential narratives see the different storylines of a tale following one another without juxtaposition of any sort. In simultaneous narratives, the storylines start and end sharing the same portion of the story spread on different media. The parallel narratives are when different storylines run side by side on different platforms. In non-linear narratives the different storylines are fragmented and then reassembled within their communicative system in disjointed sequences. Finally, in two-ways narrative, two or more storylines flow in opposite directions into the same narrative universe, allowing seekers, co-creators and audiences explore and enjoy the tale in both or just in one way, in the communicative system. As usual, an example.

Westworld is a ten episode science fiction western thriller series created for HBO in 2016. Written by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, the tale is inspired from Michael Crichton's *Westworld* (1973) and *Futureworld* (1976). In the plot, Westworld is a futuristic Wild West-themed amusement park visited by guests which interact with androids apparently without any risk and just as an entertainment experiences. But, as we all know, androids often suffer for reminiscences, dreams or unpredictable memories…

The nebula of the imaginative universe of the series mixes science fiction and fantasy lit (from Crichton's *Jurassic World* and from *Alice in Wonderland* in primis, both mentioned either in the images than in the dialogues) with videogames DNA and open worlds.

Game design is also a curious, useful perspective to deep into the narrative structure and in the characters' identity of the series, with titles like *Bioshock* and *Red Dead Redemption*, just to mention two of the most evident. The character of Maeve, one of the android, suffers the same identity conflict of Rachel in *Blade Runner*. Bernard, the strategist, is similar to *Hunger Games Catching Fire* Beetee (role acted by the same actor), two mentions of the series *Lost* were put in the tale (thanks to executive producer J.J. Abrams, creator of that series) and many *easter eggs*

and music tracks were seeded here and there often reminding us that "this isn't a western, that this isn't taking place in the 19th century. It's taking place somewhere else – sometime else" as said its creator Jonathan Nolan. But how to help the audience in taking confidence with Delos corporation and its mysterious headquarter and employees, and how to bring the park to life? This has actually been the main result of the transmedia skeleton developed for the series. By forcing the audience to behave as if they were in the park, and making the 'contact' experience with the society since the beginning of the narrative as real as it could be, two experiences were created at the same time when the series was broadcasted: one online and one on virtual reality. They were focusing exactly on those two objectives and presented with similar features: they were simultaneous narratives, parallel and non-linear.

In Discoverwestworld.com, the official series website, the user was introduced to the experience by a virtual receptionist named Aeden, who answers every visitor's question in a stated but brilliant an ironic way. Every answer digs the spectator into the philosophy of the series with phrases like: "The world is literally your playground. What would you like to do?" or "The technology at Westworld goes way beyond television. You can watch TV, but you can live Westworld". Then, if the visitor typed in the access code topbar 'Violentdelights', he was automatically linked to Delos corporate website which contained private email, staff chat, a map of the headquarters building of the firm, and could explore some programmed storylines for Dolores, our new "Alice" and the main character of the tale. Then, in the same, first week, the dramatic skeleton of the series was brought to life at the 2016 edition of New York Comic Con, into a stylish building presenting the park. A long hallway, handsome receptionist, official flyers and cards, video promo on loop and… a HTC Vive experience where the visitor was first introduced to the Westworld shop, to provide himself with guns, hat etc. and then entered a videogame experience. As one of the guests, she/he had to interact with the sheriff and some other cowboys, but when
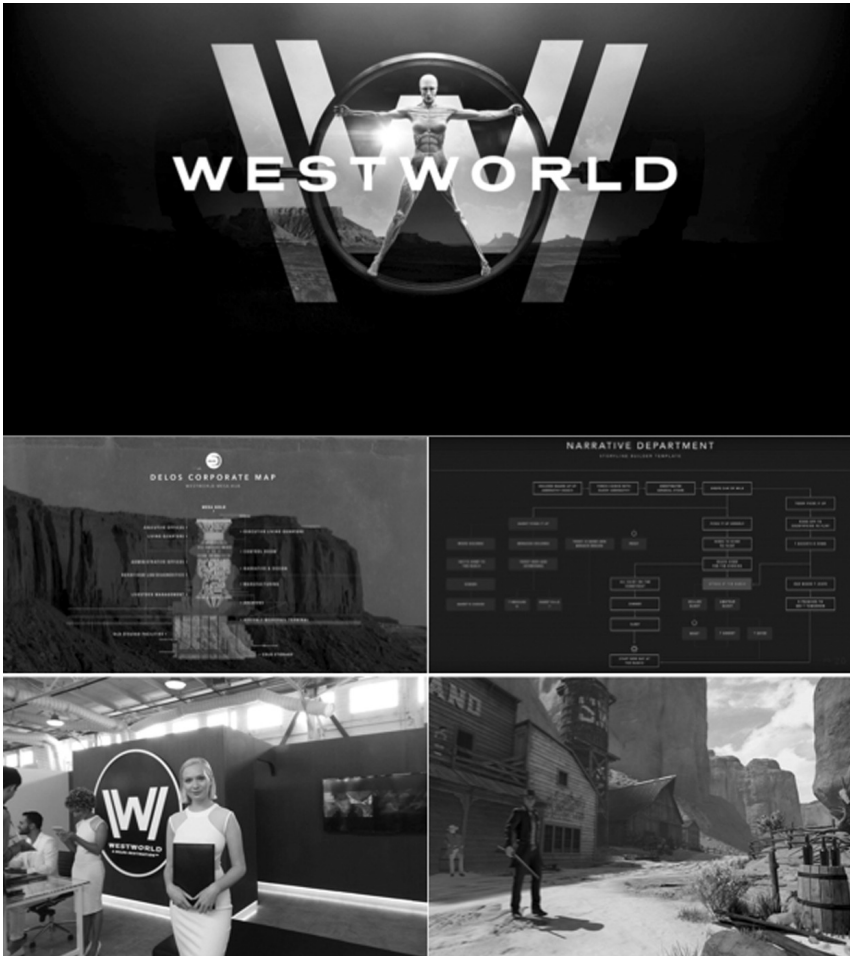
Img. 2.6 Westworld (2016). Logo Series, official website (map and storylines) and virtual experience of the transmedia project (simultaneous, non-linear and parallel narratives).

he died, he sat in the office and started a live action experience which brought him to the Delos Lab presented in the series. Finally, they gave him official ADV materials and a contained farewell. Just one month more, and the second season of *Westworld* would be announced, thanks to the immediate success of its multilinear dramatic skeleton and the tested high

engagement of its transmedia skeleton, either online than in the real world.
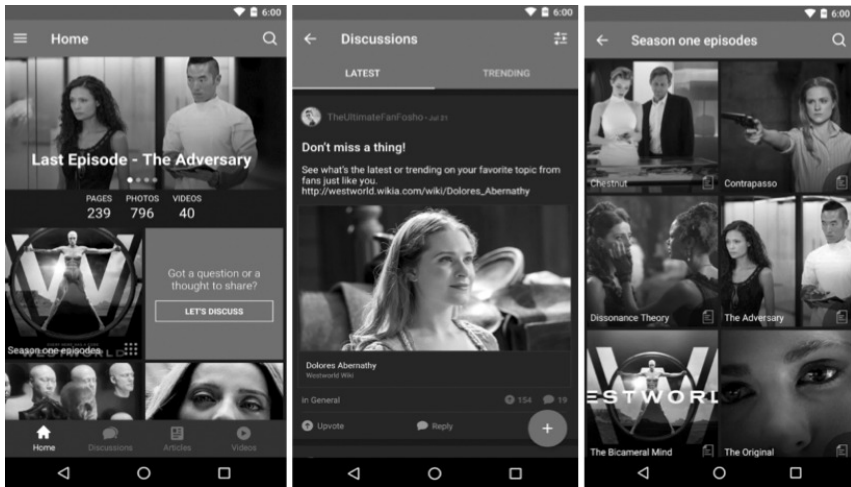
Img. 2.7 Westworld app. Designed by fans for fans, and released just one month after the beginning of the series.

MULTILAYERED NARRATIVES

What clearly emerges out of all the examples presented so far is one of the dramaturgical features typical of transmedia: its natural inclination towards narratives presenting with different internal points of view and more fruition levels for the story. Transmedia audience loves the fruition of more stories at the same time, an element which allows them to autonomously choose both the POV (*point of view*) in the story and the form in which they can 'consume' the different plots and subplots offered by the media assets of the communicative system. It is not enough for those levels to be present in the narrative, they in fact need to be cross-cultural, compelling and engaging. As Simon Staffans reports: "Narrative 'layers' cut across channels and forms of media so that we can reach more people at scale. A layered narrative allows space for interaction, sharing, collaboration and contribution. Every unique layer makes the source material stronger and the core story more engaging".[10]

Multilayered narratives represent transmedia's favourite habitat, particularly with projects deriving from pre-existing and orderly imaginative universes and which need to be furtherly developed through the simultaneous use of different platforms and experiences.

In the light of such perspective we can list at least three different narrative planes in a transmedia project: the narrative's *main plot* (dedicated to the story world), a *primary subplot* (dedicated to the protagonist's relationships with the other characters) and a *secondary plot* (dedicated to the protagonist's evolution during the course of the narrative); in addition we can find at least one either *inner* or *outer point of view* with whom the building up of the imaginative universe is entrusted. These models may add up to further narrative levels, even those which were not part of the original author's plans or were created directly by the audience to fill the so called *narrative gaps*[11] typical of transmedia universes. Here too I shall present with a personal example.

Hunger Games is a novel by Suzanne Collins which has generated, starting from 2012, a movie quadrilogy. Its imaginative universe is that of the post-apocalyptic future of Panem, a State in the U.S. territory organized in 13 districts and ruled by a central big town: Capitol City. Every year a couple of promising youth from each of the 13 districts is forced to participate to the Hunger Games, a sort of 'olympic games to the finish' with the aim of offering a symbolic sacrifice victim to pacification, which happened seventy years before the story.

The universal synthetic structures of the imaginative universe are those of the reality show disguised behind the mask of a 'final battle'. The Hunger Games winner shall in fact be the one and only survivor to the games, at least until the protagonist of the story – the young Katniss – appears on to the scene.

10. Staffans, S., *One year in Now Media...* cit.
11. In transmedia storytelling, *narrative gaps* represent unanswered spaces seeded in the story arc of the tale in one or in multiple media. Fans love exploring these open spaces and play a role in the knowledge distribution process.

The imaginative isotopes of the narrative are the games' contest arena, the conflict between city and districts and the reference to the mythological episode of the sacrifice of seven young men and seven young women Minosse dictated to the people of Athens, part of the Minotaur myth. A 'rite of passage' where the protagonists recall different archetypal figures (the heroin: Katniss, the young 'Lara Croft' of the story; the old wise man; the shapeshifter, etc…)

The transmedia bouquet created for the development of the story in the first movie chapter of *Hunger Games* on different platform involved different narrative levels made of plots and subplots:

- the Panem website, where the public could register and become citizen of one of the districts (randomly chosen by the system);
- the profile in the main social networks, where the public could vote the mayor of each district, state the names of their 'tributes' and be a part of Panem's daily life;
- the *Hunger Games Adventure* social game on Facebook;
- the Capitol TV, addressed to the project's public, which had been transformed into citizens of Panem;
- President Snow's emails motivating and 'sedating' the public in the wait of the next Hunger Games.

Unlike the book and the film, as it can be easily understood by looking at the above list, the inner point of view of the project's communication system was not univocal, as it focused on the story of the protagonist; it was on the contrary a collective one, fragmented in different dimensions and possible realities for the people of Panem. A dangerous choice, which must be seen under the light of the whole saga and not just the single episode. The audience's response confirm the appreciation such choice: free to express and tell on Facebook through the different viewpoints,
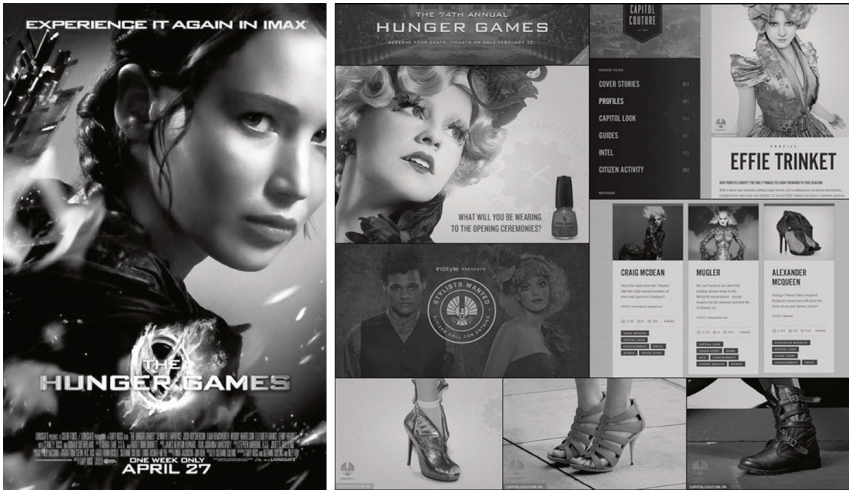
Img. 2.8 Hunger Games' poster and the "Capitol Couture" website, a fashion magazine where the audience could shop, gossip and discover the new designers of the next 'games'.

the users logged-in as inhabitants of the different districts soon started to know each other, form secret alliances and organize in order to rebel, even anticipating strategies and tactics which were to appear in the following episodes.

The presence of the three different level of fruition (primary plot: rules and setting of the Hunger Games; primary subplot: the web material for the citizens of Capital City; secondary subplot: the life as a citizen of one of the districts, on Facebook) was thought more to make the public familiarize with the imaginative universe, rather than with the protagonist of the story. As a result, those fans who thought those narratives were not sufficiently focused on the protagonists of the 'games' started migrating on other editorial platforms with the aim of autonomously rewriting and reinterpreting the original adventures of Katniss and their other beloved heroes, for instance in the form of fanfiction. In order to fill this gap and 'bring back home' all those energies and enhance the image of the heroine of the saga, two years later, on the occasion of the Italian

launch of the sequel *Hunger Games: Catching Fire* I created the transmedia project *Be Katniss*, in order to support and advertise Jennifer Lawrence's participation to the International Movie Festival of Rome in 2013, relying on a different mixture of multilayered narrative. Primary asset of the project was a book tour organized by different steps which, through an in-depth analysis of the relationship between literary saga and movie adaptation, would approach gradually the film release with a series of events spread over the city, devoted to the "mockingjay" Katniss Everdeen.

Img. 2.9 Be Katniss (2013). Official poster of the transmedia book tour and iconic moments of the first two movies on the myth of Katniss Everdeen.

The transmedia bouquet of the project focused on three big meetings dedicated to the main character of the story through books, movies and games, supported by activities in the real and in the digital worlds. Contest on social network, the launch of the book tour during one of the main events in Italy for comics fans and moviegoers: ROMICS (the "Italian comicon", with 220.000 attendees in four days), an online contest in partnership with Mondadori (the book's Italian publisher), three events with

professionals and artists devoted fans of Katniss (titled "Be Katniss", "The myth of the Mockingjay" and "Women stand up in Panem") and the premiere of the movie in the festival, organized by Universal Pictures International Italy with the participation of the leading actress and other members of the cast. The "Be Katniss" project reminds us another crucial factor when it comes of multilayered narratives: the necessity of visually fasten the different levels of the story world to iconic moments shared and easily recognizable by the public, elements which allow the audience to leap from a medium on,to the other confidently and comfortably, in order to be fed with all the plots and subplots of the project's communicative system with almost no solution of continuity.

DESIGN THE THEME OF THE TALE

No author can afford underestimating the importance of the *theme* in a narrative, theless with transmedia. The theme is the deepest meaning and the implicit message of a narrative. It is the reason why an author sits down and starts telling a story; their very narrative fuel. The theme should always be synthetized into one or two words: redemption, generational clash, violence pays, love wins, identity… The theme is a narrative's Cocoon, something which can make a story last forever. In the case of transmedia, three essential coordinates establish that:

- the theme of a tale must be kept alive in the public throughout the whole 'journey' the audience makes on the different media (that is, it must create aspirational stories the public involved into the transmedia project would want to live on their own pulses);

- the theme of a story must inhabit the protagonist and contaminate – through the experience the protagonist lives in the narrative universe – all the media involved in the project (such action is called *embodying the theme of the hero*);

- the theme must never be directly made explicit in the

story world. On the contrary, it must be found in the synthetic universal structures of its imagery, or hidden in the most emotional spots of the dramatic skeleton. In this way it shall be more effective in journeying through the narrative's communicative system without favouring one medium over another, or one audience over another.

<div align="center">ASPIRATIONAL STORIES</div>

Aspirational stories represent a crucial element of transmedia storytelling as they embody its very capacity of directly influence the public's ambitions and expectations: they seed the message a narrative contains. Aspirations stories are adventures anyone who finds pleasure in watching their heroes living them, secretly longs for living in some way too. They are set in universes we shall never part of and are lived with such an intensity we shall never be able to have. Then, as Jeff Gomez, transmedia producer e CEO di Starlight Runner Entertainment has it: *inner stories* which can amplify the "power of intimacy" of the audiences[12]. An example?

In 2009, for season two of *True Blood*, a TV series created by Alan Ball that follows the adventures of vampires who are well-integrated into American society thanks to the invention of a synthetic type of blood that makes them apparently innocuous, HBO worked to expand the show's audience by launching a transmedia "integrated event level marketing campaign". This started as an online alternate reality game which centred around the website Bloodcopy.com, and spread out across social networks (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and MySpace) and through an online forum on the HBO website (with an exclusive interview with Samson the Vampire). In the same days, some people received plastic syringes with synthetic blood. Then, a True Blood Carbonated Drink was commercialized during the release of the series. Moreover, an American Vampire League

12. Giovagnoli, M., *Transmedia Storytelling*, 2011, p. 135.

was created to support vampire rights, while debates about whether or not American people wanted vampires living in their neighborhood were held in fictional newspapers and on TV. An effective transmedia project which mixed the imaginative universe of the series along with a generous display of sharp vampire canine teeth and blood and without ever mentioning the theme of the series: social integration and fear of diversity, and confronting the dark side inside us.

In a way we might consider the aspirational stories as those stories we would never want to live and therefore, we are – for different reasons – pleased by the possibility of watching them staged on more screens: it might be because of voyeurism or the need of exorcising reality, or simple curiosity or cynicism. In transmedia, dramatizing a complex theme or one socially relevant is the perfect objective as it is possible to create – without even mentioning it – communicative systems which can easily arouse conversations on more platforms and therefore have a great impact on the public. A personal example, here too?

The movie *Aquadro*, produced by Tea Time Film and distributed by Rai Cinema in 2013 was the first European movie to mention the transmedia producer in its final credits (my name, really). The plot of the story was as simple as striking: two youths have sex in a school lab and they make a video of it. But the video ends up online without their consent. They are thrown into a living hell and decide to flee when… Hang on: what does Aquadro means anyway? The symbol is a tattoo the girl has on her breasts and which plays with the initial of her name and of that of her boyfriend's. A sort of a 'scarlet letter'. The sign by which she is recognized by everybody on the Net. And yet, at the same time, it rises to be a sign of freedom, of protest, a sign which we choose to use for the movie's transmedia campaign with the aim of gaining the public's empathy and arouse curiosity about its distribution in a large and larger audience (which, as it was for the video in question, was first online and then on TV).

Img. 2.10 True Blood (2009) Images of the alternate reality game of the second season. Fliers, drink and manifesto of the American Vampire League.

In this case, though, in occasion of the launch of the movie we therefore created a series of urban games students could play in shopping malls and discos, art-toys downloadable from the official website, viral videos and tattoo contests, interviews in
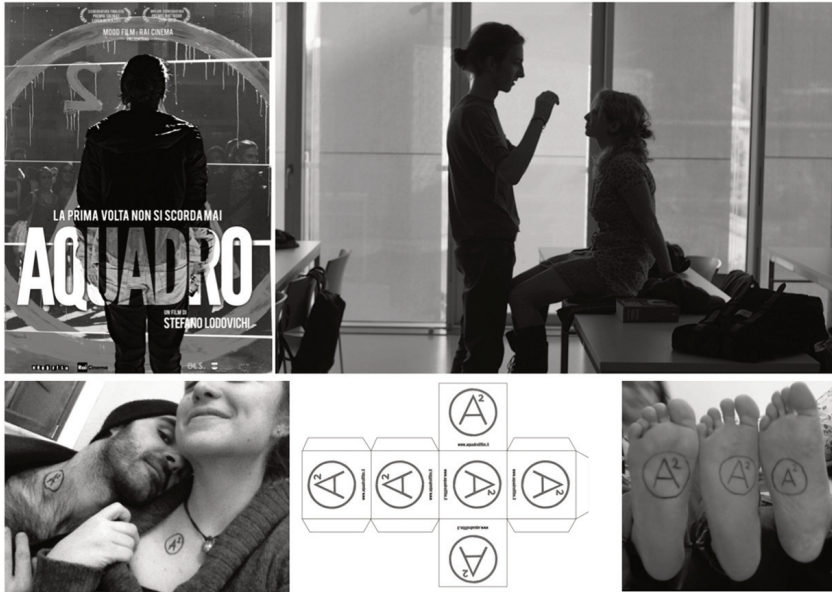
Img. 2.11 Aquadro (2013). Introducing the theme without mentioning it in the transmedia launch of the movie.

schools and universities, social media activities (on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) and a unique, private premiere of the movie for a selected group of fans. The campaign was a success with the public and the movie has won several prizes for independent productions in Italy and France.

THE TWO GOALS STRUCTURE

There are times when the theme of a narrative is innate with its protagonist to the extent that it gets confused with its objective, or even with a 'double objective'. In the *two goals structure*, the protagonist begins with being focused on something and then, as the narration spans, he or she discovers he or she has to reach for something else more valuable or simply more risky[13]. The theme is at the same time the trial and its passing, and

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13. For a definition of the "two goals" structure see Siegel, D., *La struttura in nove atti*, in *Script*, 30/31, 2002.

different media have to take care to hold this in trust, in order to enhance the value of each of the goals across the steps of the narrative both from the point of view of the characters and of the multiple audiences of the story. An example, even if no "purely" transmedial?

In James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), the protagonist, Jack Sully, is a paraplegic Marine who fights for himself (he betrays the Pandorians in order to regain the use of his legs) and at the same time for a better world (he merges into being one of the Na'vi). In this case we have two themes, actually: the individual redemption and the universal supremacy of nature over man; one opposing the other. In the movie's marketing campaign Cameron himself admitted that such an ambiguous protagonist might have been a little disorienting for the public. "It's a very difficult proposal in our modern marketing world", commented the director, who also admitted that the movie, "put pressure on us to create the equivalent value of an existing brand without being an existing brand". This is also the reason why the initial choice of the Avatar campaign was to launch a 15-minute free preview of the movie dedicated exclusively to the discovery of the hero of the story, when the public's attention was focused on his portrait as a person (what we called *embodying the theme of the hero*) rather than on the double objective of the story. The same strategy was applied in the augmented reality of the commercial products of *Avatar* associated to brands like McDonald's (where a thrill card allowed the users to 'become Jake' and explore the world of Pandora on their computer, just by putting the card in front of a webcam)[14] and Coke (for which you needed a Zero Coke can in front of a videocamera to download the movie's exclusive content). Jake Sully as a human being and as an avatar harmonized with the universe, a "Pinocchio 3.0 re-imagined for the electronic age", as Derrick De Kerkhove did put it. An absolutely gripping theme for the movie public but which was not involved into the transmedia project of the videogame

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14. Rose, F., *The Art of Immersion…* cit., p. 53.

inspired to the movie, issued before *Avatar* premiered and solely
focused on the primary theme of the character, the warfare and
the individual factors, which probably found its reason in the
need of preserving the narrative space to the franchise's main
asset: the movie itself.

Img. 2.12 Avatar (2009). The double objective/theme of the story
developed through the different media. It appeared in the film poster
(Jake/Avatar/Nature) but not in the videogame and in the AR toys.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY VS THE "TWELVE STATIONS" PARADIGM

Transmedia loves combining narrative paradigms in its communicative systems, and *The Hero's Journey* and the *Twelve Stations* models are the two most important paradigms ever, mostly used for the main assets of the projects.

The Hero's Journey paradigm is rooted in the studies about the creation of myths in folktales and oral tradition, from Vladimir J. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* to the theorization of the archetype of the Jungian Hero, from Joseph Campbell's studies and his *Hero with a Thousand Faces* to the TV screenplay guide by Chris Vogler[15]. 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 (see further on in the third chapter of this book) but it often offers a low level of interaction with the audience that likes to identify, in particular, with the hero on the big screen or *play the hero*. At the same time, thanks to The Hero's Journey paradigm, the presence of numerous archetypes (heroes, shadows, herald, threshold guardians, shapeshifters, tricksters or allies) allows the audience to side temporarily with all the 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. Considering the analysis of this paradigm, the twelve steps of The Hero's 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, to be more effective, this point of entry has to be immediately shown in a clear way in all

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

the platforms which start developing the story and its theme.

2. *The Call to Adventure*: suddenly, something shakes up the hero's life. Or, the hero starts off in a situation of normality from which some information is received that acts as a call to head off into the unknown. 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.

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[16], accepting the challenge; others, instead, totter and are reluctant. 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 trains him or her, gives them advice and suggestions that will help in the journey and in life. The mentor is the Jungian archetype and the embodiment of the 'guide'. In transmedia projects, moreover, the mentor addresses both the hero and the audience simultaneously, and their 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 often presented in each medium of the publishing project and it is the first, real and basic

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16. Vladimir J., Propp defines this kind of heroes as *seekers* in: Propp, V. J., *Morphology of the Folktale*, 1968.

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. And this is valid for a single user as well as for a community or a group, split by the choice of allies and enemies in their jumping from one medium to the others of the communicative system.

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. 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?' and will start cheating and exploring the communicative system to find the proper answer to all their questions.

9. *The Reward*: the Hero gains something special by facing death… and the multiple audiences of the transmedia project win with him!

10. *The Road Back*: the hero leaves the Special World and its adventure, and brings the treasure home. This new equilibrium might match that of the beginning but it must not be identical to it. In transmedia narratives this is when the audience is reminded of the best and most emotional moments of the story; it is mostly the time when the general meaning of the story expands to reveal

its theme to the public, which is for yet one more time called forth to experience the narrative both in the real world and in the digital world involved into the communicative system.

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. This is in fact the moment when non linear narratives, characters' backstories and possible in-depths about the overall meaning of the tale are used in the communicative systems of reference with the aim of pulling the strings and solve the mysteries within the story, those same enigmas which had been shared with the public in the most interactive way possible.

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 just like the hero was 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 *Twelve Stations Paradigm* is quite 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* (see chapter three), 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.
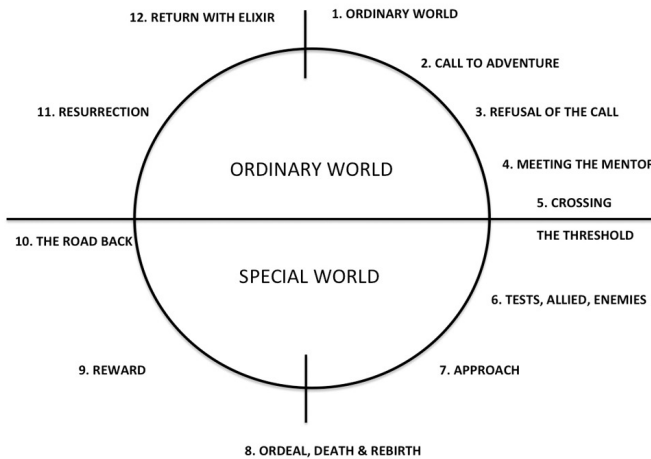
Img. 2.13 The Hero's Journey Paradigm Scheme.

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[17]. It proves very effective in transmedia narrative, especially in that distributed on the web – 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, it is often presented in the beginning of the tale but revealed and maximized at the

17. Forlai, L., Bruni, A., *Come raccontare una grande storia che emozioni il pubblico*, 1996.

end of it (usually, in two media of the communicative system, at least).

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 herself. 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.

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.

Then, since Hero's Journey and Twelve Stations express different focus points (on the protagonist and the adventure the first, on the plot and the psychological mechanics, the second) but have some point in common, personally I use combinations of the two, highlighting some points and selecting them depending on the project and its universe mythology and story worlds. The same is often done, even unconsciously, by participative or synergistic groups of fan and audience creators. An example?

There's a mysterious Ministry in Madrid, born to avoid intruders coming from other eras to change history for their own benefit. The Ministry of Time uses its patrols to protect the magic doors which permit the time travel. But its newest patrol, formed by a soldier, a student woman and a paramedic, start time travelling by their own for personal interests and not just for work…

El ministerio del tiempo (2015) is a Spanish fantasy television series written by Javier and Pablo Olivares, produced by Onza Partners and Cliffhanger for the spanish broadcaster RTVE. Authors and producers both created a complex transmedia bouquet for the series since its first season but developed it in a polymorphic narrative lifelong process in its second season, thanks to the amazing contribution of the fans. The transmedia dramatic skeleton of the first season consisted in:

- a training video course for ministry employee, presented by historical characters and protagonists,

distribuited online. The fans immediately start interacting with it and creating their own videos mentioning their favourite historical hero or artist, for example [the ordinary world / the call to adventure];

- *Puerta del Tiempo*: a weekly live TV show, with interviews to the cast and vip guests answering audience's questions in studio [tests, allied, enemies / the antagonist];

- An hyperactive WhatsApp Group led by the authors, with trials and extra contents for participants (called 'ministéricos') [meeting with the mentor / objective];

- An occult archive on Instagram, with limited access to historical images coming from the missions of ancient patrols, not viewed in the series [the inner ghost / the refusal of the call];

- One Generador de Certificados for 'ministéricos' [crossing the threshold].

The dramatic skeleton of the second season too, mixed different paradigms and pushed forward audience's engagement. Each content created ought to contribute and enrich the plot, the characters and the imaginative universe of the new episodes but, at the same time, should give the audience new ways to interact and deepen into the imaginative universe of the tale. The transmedia bouquet was enriched with:

- *Tiempo de valientes*, a six chapter audio-journal of Julián, one of the main characters who describes travels not seen in the series [unconscious wound / the call to adventure];

- *Tiempo de Confesiones*, the vlog of one of the Ministry secretary, explaining the secret meaning of some scenes and actions shown in the series [the inner ghost / crossing the threshold];

- *El tiempo en tus manos*, a ten minutes virtual reality

experience for cardboards and Samsung Gear, both entertaining and educational, playing with the imaginative universe and the historical references of the series, and with a recruiting test for patrols applicants [crossing the threshold / tests, allies, enemies / the ordeal / the war];

- *La tienda*, the official gift shop of the series, with artworks created by fans;

- *El tiempo es que el es*, the first official novel of the series, based on the thrilling story of Elias Sotoca, one employee of the ministry entrapped in the 780 a.C. and discovered by a secret manuscript [resurrection / the road back];

- A Role game and a fictional Intranet available online on the Ministerio's website [crossing the threshold / tests, allies, enemies];

- Comic books and fanfiction tales produced by fan for fan [thematic revelation / return with the elixir].

To carry out projects and works simultaneously distributed on multiple media, then, storytellers and transmedia producers mix and create their own paradigm over time, to define "dramaturgic outlines" that are useful for each of their project. Given the example of a narrative adapting itself to the tale and to solid and accurate narrative models and following the logic sequence of the events and its telling in the different media involved in a communicative system, what happens in transmedia when a project changes its narrative skeleton while in progress, with the aim of making the fruition of its contents more appealing, complex or free from logical rules ? We are given two possible solutions in this case: *branching stories* or *polymorphic narratives*.

BRANCHING STORY STRUCTURES

Branching story structure come from game design and is an important way of crafting and imagining plots, goals, clues and
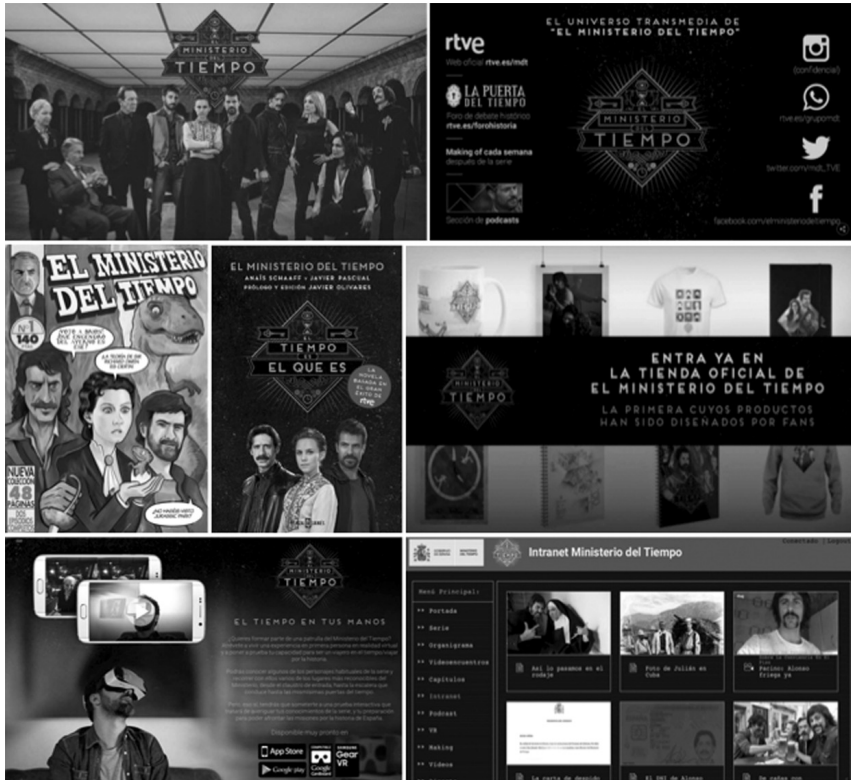
Img. 2.14 Ministerio del Tiempo (2016). Transmedia project, platforms and polymorphic narrative contents for the second season of the series: ministry's intranet, novel, comic book, VR experience and gift shop for fan.

media interactions in transmedia story worlds. The premise of the branched structures is that in videogames and in interactive installations there are two simultaneously acting stories: the *story written* (or *planned*) and the *story played*. The videogames' grammar joins the three act structure with parallel and non-linear narratives mixing story, game play and player's decisions either *before* than *during* the tale. Transmedia projects and *narrative designers* often use narrative introductions or contributions (*cinematics* or *video tutorials*) and in-game plots (*scripted scenes*, *game play* and *exposition sequences*) as shapes,

models and paradigms not just for the interactive spaces of their dramatic skeletons.

The branching paradigm uses *story sequences*, *key plots events*, *decision moments* and *character interactions*, in fact, to create chains of *nodes* and *branches* which establish bridges/touch points/links among all the contents, the actors and the actions either in linear than in non-linear plots leading to one or more *finale*.

As Janet Murray wrote in her *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, then, in branching narratives the story itself depends on the *sense of agency* of the player. If in static story worlds and in the aspirational stories the audience's sense of presence constantly look at characters' emotions, actions and motivations, in fact, in videogames "*agency* is the satisfying power to make meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices"[18]. And satisfaction means engagement, motivation, sharing will, participation and loyalty as well.

Branching structures of a narrative can be something complex and difficult put together but it can also contribute significantly to the multilevel and multilinear story worlds of the transmediasphere. Those elements in fact facilitate interaction and projecting between storytellers, designers, producers and developers. Their schemes are sometimes the proper field – or even battlefield – to tell, develop and manage transmedia properties and universes and properly underline their complexity and internal *armonìa*.

POLYMORPHIC NARRATIVE

The polymorphic narrative simultaneously uses different media, adapts itself in progress to audience's choices and allows its authors/users to make a unique experience and totally yield to a flow of stories, adventures and fascinations. It creates a content flux which results strongly cooperative and emotional. In other

18. Murray, J., *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in cyberspace*, 1998.
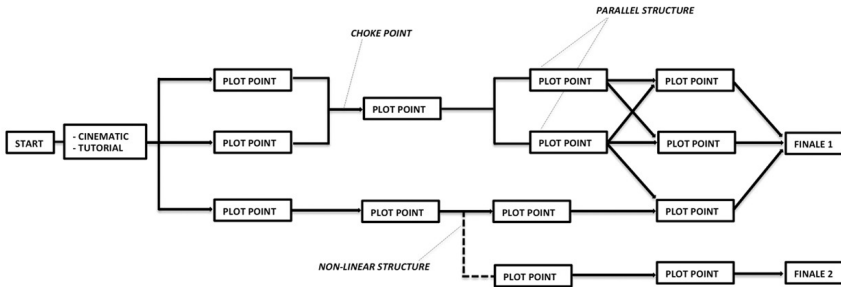
Img. 2.15 Branching story structure. Example of chokepoints, non-linear and parallel stories.

words, it's literature and fiction getting closer to games, with narrative time synchronized to that of fruition creating digital othernesses where it would be possible to exalt Pierre Levy's four variables necessary to develop "collective intelligence"[19]: *nomadic mobility* (of players and characters played by them), *control over territory*, *ownership over commodities* (exchanged both in the virtual and in the real world), and *mastery over knowledge* (either shared or hidden, according to the objectives of the games). Also in this case we shall provide with two examples, one drawn from transmedia 'prehistory' and the other from the present.

In October 2007 the TV serial *CSI-NY* 'landed' on the metaworld of Second Life, with a very peculiar idea. In the television narrative, an episode of the series saw protagonist Mac Taylor (Gary Sinise) entering *Second Life* to flush out a murderer who was luring his victims by surfing the metaworld. Simultaneous to the airing of the episode the authors proposed to the audience three different forms of synergistic fruition:

- solve the case through the interaction with links on the CBS website, or visiting the *CSI* lab in one of the New

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19. Lévy, P., *Collective Intelligence*... cit.

York skyscrapers reconstructed within the metaworld of Second Life;

- join the game *Murder by Zuiker*, following the traces left by the killer in change of virtual gadgets for the 100 contestants who would get closer to the solution of the case;

- become the detective, using the kit for investigations and wearing a uniform, with the possibility of questioning suspects so to be able to solve the same case which was being aired, built as to close with a cliff-hanger and leave the audience suspended… until the following February! A complex initiative, which added the recreational dimension typical of the treasure hunt or the book game to the television narrative, and at the same time was metaphorical unlocking the doors of the writing section of a great TV series to the narrative model of interactive fiction, to the transcoding of narratives and to the *additive comprehension*[20], typical of the new transmedia narratives.

For a short fraction of time, when author and user draw close as they do in polymorphic narrative, we do witness to a case of *omusia*, identity, as it is more commonly in the case of the *Alternate Reality Stories*. ARS as polymorphic narrative are the result of a contamination between alternate reality games and interactive storytelling and owe their terming to Jane McGonigal, who defines them as interactive stagings played online and in real places at the same time, in the space of days or weeks, by small groups as well as by thousands of participants engaged with a narrative product[21]. The only element which does remain the same is the form of internal learning provided by

20. The definition of the audience's additive comprehension in transmedia narratives is due to Neil Young, former Electronic Arts, as it reads in: Jenkins, H., *Convergence Culture*, 2007.
21. McGonigal, J., *Reality is broken. Why games make us better and how they can change the world*, 2011.
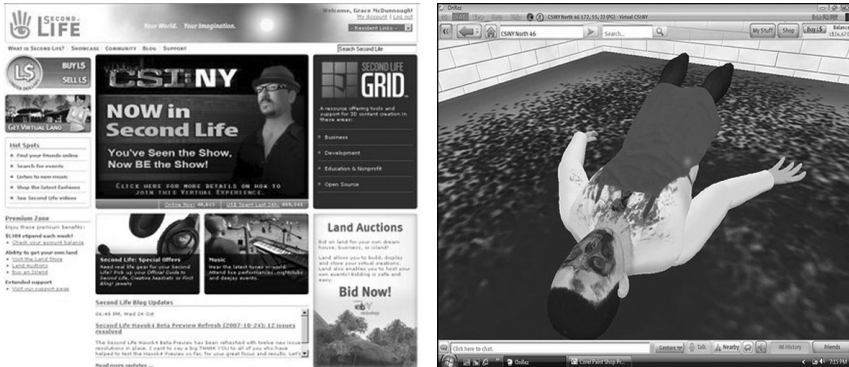
Img. 2.16 Left, CSI-NY (2007) Second life launch, with the pay off "You've Seen the Show, Now Be the Show!". Right, screenshot with the picture of the victim of the virtual assassin in the detection *Murder by Zuiker* set up by the production.

the narrative. It can be considered as an *expert paradigm* (EP), crucial to the success of the narrative. It is exactly because of the presence of stirring, user-friendly expert paradigms that polymorphic narrative projects are gradually gaining even more spaces in transmedia storytelling, hybridizing and contaminating with comics, cartoons and movies all over the world.

> Many of the networks, channels and publishers struggle with justify the expense of transmedia projects. They wrongly believe that they already have these audiences come into their shows, so why would they spend any more money to make these extra content? But, as I said, this is all about building a *deep body*. Another problem is the manpower that it takes to create this extra content. It can be extremely taxing for the creative team of a narrative to have to come up with all of this new material. The audience also gets very used to consuming this content quickly. The faster you make the content, the faster it can be consumed. One of the tricks is to allow the audience itself to start creating content for themselves. For me, this has become a key component of transmedia storytelling – welcoming you in the audience as co-authors, allowing them to have ownership of some of the narrative. — *Tim Kring – transmedia creator and showrunner* (Heroes, Crossing Jordan).

Polymorphic narratives work like rhetoric for advertising, like special effects for a movie; they are boosters some spaceships use to correct their trajectories in the narrative's endless space. They are concerned with building up narratives and also with the use of a communicative system. A crucial priority of polymorphic narratives is allowing authors and users to let themselves unrestrictedly go with the flow of stories, adventures and suggestions by interacting with them synergically.

One last feature of polymorphic narratives is, as we have noted, the fact that they base the narrative of the story world on the exchange and the continuous evolution of content and experiences, both in time and in the different media assets. It is a voluntary and fully aware evolution which – in the public eye – ups the ante, and which, in extreme cases, might lead to *mindfucking*, that is when one builds ambiguous or misleading frameworks of meaning in the narrative, so that they can easily be overturned in progress or at the end of a story. The audience fully participates into the narrative and is disoriented first, and compensated at the end of the tale, as nothing they have believed until the uncovering was actually reliable.[22] For instance, in transmedia communicative systems, while a medium shall work as a mouthpiece for deception, another one shall support it and the third shall wait until the end before unveiling the truth and closing the narrative circle. Such a strategy is functional mainly to 'raise the temperature' of a story when the dramatic arc created for the project and the public's engagement are believed to be unsatisfactory. We are now providing with an example that has become more than a classic of transmedia history: the so-called transmedia *mystery box*.[23]

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22. M*indfuck* narratives can – on a theoretical plan – be associated to R. Anton Wilson's 'Operation Mindfuck', which we find in his 1975 *Illuminatus!* trilogy. More recent examples can found in *Fight Club*, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Hours* and *The Game*.

23. In his TED conference in March, 2007, J. J. Abrams (*Super 8, Lost, Star Trek, Star Wars: the Force Awakens*...) defined the *mistery box* as one of his most effective storytelling tools. According to this theorization, sometimes the mistery is more important than the plot, in the story. The mistery box "represents infinite possibility, hope, potential.

Mixing the production model of Renaissance workshops with the one of a communication agency, *LOST* (2004-2010) creators Damon Lindelof e Curlton Cuse worked to make the writing process of the TV series simultaneously useful to the creation of all the other official brand products as well, enabling *permanently changeable imagery*[24]. First example of a transmedia project for a TV series, *LOST* tells the adventures of a group of people who survived a plane crash and harshly struggle for survival on a mysterious and violent island. The tale used the transmedia dramatic skeleton in all the contents of the transmedia bouquet and *LOST* gradually became a mobisode (*Missing Pieces*, short-form videos about a manuscript found on the island, used to show the motivations and the backstory of the characters), novels (as the bestseller *Bad Twin*), and at the same time a series of console/pc video games (as *Lost: Via Domus*), a game app and a series of alternate reality games considered canon (*The Lost Experience*, *Find 815*, *Lost University* and more), with numerous usable and playable , editable spaces for the audience, all of them characterized by a strong osmosis between *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*[25]. With an endless exchange between the immediacy of the tale and its permutations, and the obscurity and presence of alternate and hyper structured additions, which are not always found in the audiovisual series, but that exist in other kinds of media spaces managed by the authors (hypermediacy).

All the narratives connected to the series ranged from the multi-character choral narrative , the TV narrative, the graphic adventure, the first-person quest (in multi-player modality for videogames), using *plot-driven* or *character-driven* narrative

Mystery is the catalyst for imagination. And there are times where mystery is more important than knowledge".

24. In narratives with *permanently changeable imagery*, Jaime d'Alessandro points out, the "system of rules [...] works as a scaffolding for any sort of imagination. Projections of one's own personality in an immaterial space come alive thanks to a great collective narrative" in J. D'Alessandro, *Play 2.0*, 2005, p. 96.

25. For the definition of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*, Ref. to: Bolter R., Grusin, R., *Remediation*, 2003.

skeletons, for each season. At the same time, taking a closer look, we can see how in all the transmedia assets of the franchise the two goals structure could also be found; this was obtained using the background of the characters and moving through the present time of the plane crash, the flashback of their lives before the airplane crash and obscure anticipations about their future on the island.

Finally, in the last season of the series, when all the narrative matter had reached its most complex point and, as Damon Lindelof has declared, he and the other creators of the show had run out of possibilities for further *flashbacks* and *flashforwards* in their narrative, for the first time in an audiovisual narrative they decided to import one of the transmedial strategies most typical of stories divided on more media at the same time: *flashsideways*. These are secondary detours about characters that happens concurrently to the narrative, so that the ground of possible variation becomes wider and the long awaited ending of the series gets less predictable[26].

TRANSMEDIA CHARACTERS

In any whatsoever narrative form characters are our eyes and ears. In transmedia they also come to be our voice and our guide within a project's communicative system. Moreover, in narratives using more platforms, characters and points of view often contaminate and interact, both with each other and as a carrier of conversation between authors and audience, community, users and consumers.

> The power of transmedia storytelling to tell "inner stories" through different media today consists in "character-based storytelling". Creating a proxy for the individual to experience the story on an emotional basis. The clearer the point-of-view, the more accessible it is to the person to experiencing it. — *Daemon Lindelof – transmedia*

26. Neil Landau interviews Damon Lindelof in: Landau, N., *The TV Showrunner's Roadmap*, 2014.

Img. 2.17 LOST. Videogames recreating on mobiles (left) and console (right) the story's narrative imagery of the series working on visual immediacy in graphics choices, and on hypermediacy in narrative ones.

*creator for TV* (Lost) *and cinema* (Star Trek, Prometheus, Star Trek – Into darkness)

It is not within the scope of the present work the aim of giving an in-depth view of all the features of character creation and of character design. I shall therefore focus on the creative and technical elements crucial to conceive and develop characters in transmedia projects.

The majority of good stories take the characters through a journey. To me, I find both external and internal obstacles interesting. The multi-form nature of transmedia lends itself to providing different perspectives. This means we can venture much further into a character, and their relationships with others. In one medium we find the characters going through a narrative arc, but then we can also delve further and discover a previous narrative arc that makes their recent one even more significant. This is one of the beautiful aspects of transmedia: the cumulative effect of depth across time and space. And of course, given that transmedia requires an audience to actively join the dots across media and also play a role in the story world, the whole experience can facilitate a player journey too. As players spend time with characters, they potentially grow with them. — *Christy Dena – transmedia pioneer and Director of Universe Creation 101.*

Let us start from the different aspects of *character building* in a transmedia universe, and particularly from the choice of the point of view. In transmedia communicative systems, and in the different assets of a project, the point of view in a narrative is never unique (*univocal*); it can also be *inner* (if the narrating voice either is that of one of the characters, or it lives around them), or *outer* (if the narrating voice lives outside the world inhabited by the characters) at the same time. What really matters is that once a choice is made one must be faithful to it until the end of the narrative. The same goes with *focusing*, that is the position the narrating voice assumes with respect to those of all the characters taking part into the tale. In each medium involved into the project, focusing can be *inner* (if the narrator knows as much as the other characters do), *outer* (if the narrator knows less than the other characters do) or *zero* (if the narrator is all-knowing, and knows more than the characters do).

Representing an alternative, one to the other in traditional narratives, all points of view and focusing are essential carriers in the process of building up an interactive dialogue with transmedia multiple audiences. Some points of view may be entrusted directly with the public, or also doubled through the creation of new characters or settings where one can temporarily

move the narrative from the eyes of their consumer's "hive mind"[27].
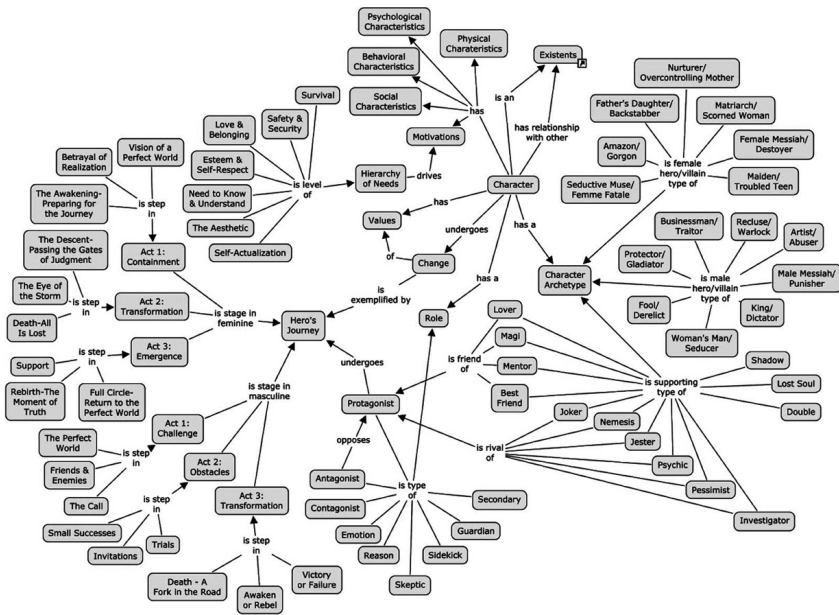
Img. 2.18 Transmedia Characters' neural map: roles and identities (transmediadigest.com).

Portraying characters brings us on to a completely different ground. In order to build effective transmedial personas it is necessary focus since the beginning on two crucial conditions of transmedia communication:

- even the most extraordinary, inhuman character ought to be a real being with a real life, to be shared at different levels by the audience in the different assets of the transmedia bouquet;

- good transmedia characters often keep secrets and

27. About the metaphor of the human mind seen as a 'story hive' for the users of transmedial narratives, see Rose, F., *The Art of Immersion*… cit., p. 8.

enigmas in their backstories or in the course of the tale,
or must be in jeopardy for some reasons, to let them be
someway discovered by the audience.

The need of presenting with characters who can with no
traumatic interruptions be moved from a platform to the other
does not necessary implies the use of 'easy' or 'flat' characters.
On the contrary, in order to work in the most effective way on
more media at the same time, transmedia characters must have –
more than traditional characters – some essential dramaturgical
features:

- an *inner ghost*, an event from the past still haunts the
  protagonist of the tale (on one or more platforms);

- an *unconscious wound*, an event from the past still haunts
  the protagonist of the tale. A weak point or shadowy
  area the protagonist is not aware of, inside him or
  herself, and must now inevitably deal with (on a always
  growing number of platforms)[28];

- a *mask*, which strictly connects the character to gender
  clichés and – at the same time – exploit their
  mythological and archetypal roots, greedily feeding off
  the both direct and indirect quotes drawn from other
  languages and media imagery;

- a *hierarchical role*, more evident than in other characters
  active in the narrative (so that it can be reduplicated or
  altered with full awareness in the different assets of the
  communicative system).

An interesting example comes from transmedia franchise *Tron:
Legacy* and Sam Flynn (Garrett Hedlund), who, in the narrative
is Kevin Flinn's (Jeff Bridges) son, an engineer who created the
multinational ENCOM and the virtual reality system *Tron*,
before disappearing for twenty years, that is when the new

28. We have already dealt with the concepts of inner ghost and unconscious wound in the
Twelve Stations paradigm. But I hereby restate them here for the reader's comfort.

chapter of the story begins. For what concerns the portrait of the character, Sam is the typical figure of the rebel and irrepressible son who would do anything not to go down his father's path, even hacking his own company to diffuse software and application on the Net (interior ghost). It is only when he himself enters the virtual reality system that he will be able – with quite a lot of strain – to trust his father again (unconscious wound). His positive mask and his role shall therefore result enriched by the parental gap existing between father and son, by Sam's will of fighting his own interior ghost and from his will of giving a contribution to actively save the world which is threatened by the parallel universe the characters are trapped into (two-goal structure). All this presents with a complex psychological mechanism which needs time to be understood and that, for this very reason, was excluded from all the promotional content of the movie, which were more oriented towards the figure of the father and the controversial father-son relationship, as it can be seen in the videogame as well in the animated series, in the alternate reality game as well as in the co-marketing actions implemented with Coca-Cola Zero, Nokia and Marvel Comics for the screen launch (following modalities quite similar to those we have dealt with when analyzing Jake Sully's case in *Avatar*). On the other hand it must be observed how part of *Tron*'s narrative universe was devoted to an in-depth narration of the events happened in the 20 years span separating the first film narrative from the second (missing moment). Works such as the videogame *Tron: Evolution* or the graphic novel *Tron: Betrayal* were published before the film was released is that they could make a significant contribution to a more immediate understanding of the super technological story world around which the narrative is framed.

It must also be observed how, in terms of character crafting processes, transmedia often gives priority to emotion rather than portraying, and to action rather than to emotion. Transmedia, conversely, usually does not state any priority on the dichotomy conflict-change, leaving the public free to interpret, to

Img. 2.19 *Tron: Legacy*'s transmedial universe. In order to create a more efficient imaginative hook linking back to the first movie, the character of Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges) is more present in the cut scenes of the videogame *Tron: Evolution* (up) and in the comics *Tron: Betrayal* (down left) than the son – the actual protagonist – is. The same can be said about the marketing campaign "Life Circle" – which hints at the conflictual father-son relationship – created by Coca-Cola Zero in the form of a mobile game.

completely autonomously choose whether to experience the identity of the protagonist, of the antagonist, or that of the other characters within the different media of the communicative system. For these reasons – as we have debated in the first chapter of the present book – in transmedia storytelling the mythological roots and the archetypal references are usually more important than the character's motivations to act.

> I believe that the best version of the best character for a transmedia projects is to have a tremendous amount of mythology and a deep cannon of story that surround the characters. The idea is to use the diverse attributes of each platform in their own unique way to

tell the story thanks to the characters. An idea, for example, is to have the characters appear to exist in the real world – giving them a social media presence that allows them to speak to fans. — *Tim Kring – transmedia creator and showrunner* (Heroes, Crossing Jordan)

Img. 2.20 Mythological Archetype for transmedia heroes and characters – Simulation.

In order to secure the public's loyalty, transmedia projects and story worlds finally offer the public at least two characters – or two groups of characters – who can 'harbor' each medium's audience. The most popular solution is generally that of creating and preferring characters who do not appear to be too 'original' and extravagant. Who can move but are not cumbersome for a public asked to consume many experiences connected with the narrative. Mentors, guests or avatar who can satisfy the audience from the beginning and who do not need particular filters in terms of imaginative suggestions in order to do that.

It is not only the element of tridimensionality, of complexity in drawing psychological profiles and in shaping inner hierarchies that can make transmedia characters ready to be used simultaneously and with no juxtapositions on different story lines and platforms. With all those features transmedia characters, to quote a famous line from the *Blade Runner* movie:

'burn twice as bright [and therefore] burn half as long', thus forcing their authors to resolve such an existential gap in four different ways:

- creating a double (doppelgänger) or organizing them in small groups of co-protagonists;

- leveling them on to their 'negative' correspondent on different media: for example protagonist vs antagonist (a mechanism which, on a closer look, is another form of doubling the identity);

- giving them a mutant nature, whether this be voluntary or induced, natural or the outcome of different kinds of alterations (as it is the case with supermen, fantastic or science fiction narratives);

- taking them from 'other worlds', esotic or alternative if compared to ours, so that they can be enriched with suggestions and with the imaginative heritage of different narrative universes.

The passage from an asset to the other of a communicative system eventually requires voices, characters and inner points of view of the narrative to be always and straight away crystal clear for the audience; they must be easy to perceive and regular in the presence on the different platforms of the editorial project. As Christopher Markus and Steve McFeely, screenwriters of *Captain America: Civil War* and other Marvel Cinematic Universe movies has it, for example: "The way to maintain the tone of each separate movie is just to be honest and genuine with your characters. […] The different characters really do dictate their tone. We mean, Tony [Robert Downey Jr.] is so irreverent and so stream-of-consciousness that it would seem a disservice to put some giant, heavy, political conspiracy plot in an Iron Man movie. It would feel like you don't get what's fun about this"[29]. In this respect it is useful to add a thought on the identity of

29. Berkovitz, J., *Captain America Writers talk…*cit.

characters from very complex imaginative universes, which are characterized by more story worlds running at the same time. In this case in fact there can be characters who slightly modify their features following the story world they act in. For instance, the character of Iron Man in the Marvel Universe can be found with different shades in the three *Iron Man* movies, or in *The Avengers*, while he can assume again different hues in *The Invincible Iron Man* comic book series and in *The Avengers: Earth Mightiest Heroes* animated series. "He's really close, but there are subtle differences. His personality is very similar across all the versions, but the relationship he has with other characters varies. His backstory, what the Iron Man armor itself can do and cannot do varies as well"[30]. But it still remains one of the most seductive transmedia icons in the Marvel imagery!

As it was already observed concerning the presence of more points of view and subplots in a tale, also in the choice of the characters the new transmedia narratives rely predominantly on stories with more protagonists, choral narratives and dramaturgies, in movies as well as in TV series , in videogames, literature, comics advertising, interactive arts and communication in general. This happens mainly for editorial reasons (you involve more target at once), economic reasons (you compress the financial weight of the different media in your budget), legal reasons (you optimize the value of the project's intellectual properties) and productive reasons (you simplify the processes related to the different industries concurrently working on the same project).

One last distinctive feature of transmedia narrative with regard to the building of characters is in fact – as already anticipated – the possibility – in the course of the narrative – to deconstruct the existing hierarchies between the characters acting within a story world (protagonists, mentors, helpers, objects of desire, antagonists and background characters). The different assets of a communicative system can give priority to different

30. Dowd, T., Fry, M., Niederman, M., Steiff, J., *Storytelling Across Worlds...* cit., p. 42.

Img. 2.21 Examples of characters belonging to different transmedia story worlds: mutant superheroes drawn from other literary worlds (Maximum Ride), in comics (Marvel and DC Comics heroes), in TV series (Glee) and in movies (The Hobbit Saga).

mouthpieces, rule out others or bring on some others new, always bearing in mind how the characters of a franchise or of a portmanteau are not only catalyzers for the public's consumption, but also gates crucial to access the interactive sharing of the content of a narrative. In this view the protagonists of stories simultaneously developed on different media must first of all be functional to the narrative and to its active consumption by the audience, much more than it is in traditional storytelling.

WORKSHOP 2 – STORY DESIGN

Take the concept, the imaginative universe and the nebula you have developed in the exercise at the end of chapter one. Start from the story crafting process. Create the dramatic skeleton. Define plot, primary and secondary subplots you shall place in

the different media of the communicative system. Organize the story using sequential, parallel, simultaneous, two-way and non-linear narratives. Eventually define the theme of the tale and use the narrative paradigm you reckon to be the more convenient to be sent to the audience of each medium. Create coherent, effective and tridimensional characters who might potentially become 'active depositaries' of the audience love and performative engines for its active interaction. Finally gather all the material in an orderly way; it shall be useful for the work we are looking ahead to.