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DESIGN AND DRAMA

DRAMA

At the dramatic heart of a good story, from Aristotle to Dürrenmatt or Suter, one finds protagonists who stumble over "inciting incidents," lose their equilibrium, cross thresholds, and experience a deep form of change and transformation. ⌖

The characters who have been thus changed also ultimately change their own society, their community, their family, an institution or a company. The "elixir" of knowledge gained in the course of an adventure is not used to their own advantage, but to promote the survival of their community. The human being who has been transformed by adverse circumstances sacrifices himself or herself for others. End of story. Only in classical tragedy is this varied. A protagonist who cannot change in the face of those "inciting incidents" is brought down and digs their own grave.

The audience recognise themselves in the character and his or her fate; they identify with the main character, and at the close of the drama they experience an inner "catharsis"—an emotional purging of the soul. ⌖

In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell investigated myths, sagas and religions to find common structures, situations and archetypes in them. Christopher Vogler *(The Writer's Journey)* has applied Campbell's findings to successful Hollywood blockbusters. ⌖

In *Screenplay: The Foundation of Screenwriting*, Syd Field presents the classical three-act structure as a golden rule: the first act is the introduction, the second act brings confrontation, the third act the resolution, with "plot points" between them as inciting incidents. Field's Hollywood theory is based on old German and British theatrical knowledge compiled by by Gustav Freytag in the 19th century in his *Die Technik des Dramas* (first published in 1863). ⌖

ARCHETYPES

Archetypes such as the "guardian of the threshold," "mentor," "shadow" and "trickster" are found in Campbell's work, in the fairy-tale analyses of Vladimir Propp (in his *Morphologie des Märchens*, published in 1928) and in the archetypes described in C.G. Jung's analytical psychology. ⌖

According to Jung, archetypes offer important information on the "collective unconscious" that all human beings share. What Campbell and Vogler refer to as the "hero's journey" is for C. G. Jung the individuation process of a human being. Every person designs his or her own "life script" that is altered in the course of their life, and is oriented towards "landmark events," rather as the classical film hero struggles with "inciting incidents" as described by Robert McKee.

Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives* (New York: Touchstone, 1960).

Aristoteles, *Poetik*, ed. Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009).

Joseph Campbell, *Der Heros in tausend Gestalten* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1999); Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structures for Writers*, 3rd ed. (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007).

Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundation of Screenwriting* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984); Gustav Freytag, *Die Technik des Dramas* (Berlin: Autorenhaus, 2003); cf. John Yorke, *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* (London: Penguin Books, 2013).

Vladimir Propp, *Die Morphologie des Märchens* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975); C. G. Jung, *Archetypen* (Munich: dtv, 2015).

Robert McKee, *Story: Die Prinzipien des Drehbuchschreibens* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 1997).

Good stories will reveal Jung's individuation process in a protagonist for whom the audience feels empathy, and who demonstrates something that the audience feels is within them too, is under threat or growing inside them. The great stories show how characters take off their outer masks and find their inner selves. They acquire the "authenticity" and the ability to form relationships that C.G. Jung also wanted his patients to achieve.

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One of the classical rules for authors says that there has to be something universally true and collectively applicable to all humanity at the end of a good drama. "Tell the truth!" should be a fundamental moral rule for authors, says Robert McKee. Can we perhaps apply this rule to the design guild, who also like to uphold the concept of "authorship"?

DESIGN
When creating their own worlds, designers are very similar to authors or scriptwriters. They design products, spaces, lines of communication, ideas and exhibition concepts.

Friedrich von Borries defines design as "the planned—i.e. the intentional, deliberate, goal-oriented—design of physical and virtual objects, interior and exterior spaces, information and social relationships." One could also describe the process of developing a "story world" or a "story bible" in similar terms. 🔢

> Vilém Flusser sees not just the designer in particular, but human beings in general as "designers." The central aspect of becoming human, says Flusser, is the act of designing. "Human beings depict the world no longer as it was presented to them, but rather as something designed by them, and they are themselves no longer subjected to what is given, but design themselves." 🔢 Human beings, according to Flusser, do not see themselves today as subservient subjects, but as a project that designs—one that looks forward and liberates itself in the act of designing itself.

In every work they create, authors design their own worlds with specific rules and moral precepts. They design them intentionally and purposefully. Their worlds contain physical things and virtual things, interior and exterior spaces, and social relationships.

> In the classical three-act structure according to Syd Field, or in the model of the hero's journey à la Christopher Vogler, at least two different worlds are designed: that of the "usual, normal world" of the first act, in which the protagonist feels at home and whose spaces and laws he knows, and that of the "different special world" that the main character enters at the beginning of the second act: this is an environment he has not known up to now, and is full of new rules, unknown people, hitherto unseen spaces, unheard opinions, sensitivities and moral dimensions that are initially not clear either.

STORY DESIGN

When the hero enters into a new world in the second act, he also enters into a "semantic space" (a concept developed by the Russian literary scholar Yuri Lotman) that is fundamentally different from the world of the first act. 🔢

Friedrich von Borries, *Weltentwerfen: Eine politische Designtheorie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016).

Vilém Flusser, *Lob der Oberflächlichkeit: Für eine Phänomenologie der Medien*, vol. 1 of *Schriften*, eds. Edith Flusser and Stefan Bollmann (Mannheim: Bollmann, 1995), 307.

Jurij M. Lotman, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte* (Munich: UTB, 1993).
Marie-Laure Ryan, ed., *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

Literary and filmic spaces signify values that are represented both by the characters acting in those spaces and also by colours, symbols or furnishing details. The space, the décor and symbolic accessories emphasise the fundamental values of the world in which the main character exists. The cinema and TV tell stories not just through people, dialogue, actions and reactions, but also through semantically charged spaces.

A classical story begins when a character breaks out of his first semantic space into a second, bringing in his values and his symbols and coming up against resistance in the new world (Vogler calls it a "special world"). It is there that this transformation of the hero begins.

Authors have always been lonely "designers of the world." The industries of film, TV, games and transmedia art all design and produce their own "story world" in a team.

DESIGNING THE WORLD

The concepts of the "story world" and "designing the world" can be applied both in the fictional world of stories and in documentary and journalistic genres.

In the fictional world, authors design their own world and define people, landscapes, fashion and culture, politics and natural laws. For example, when animals speak with people in the fictional world, this is the truth and the reality of that world.

In the journalistic, documentary field, the author or the designer develops a story world of their own through choosing people, spaces and symbols for the production in question. If the journalist has to personally appear before the camera, then they have to develop a mask and a dramaturgy for themselves in order to become a public "person" (C.G. Jung).

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Journalists and film makers like to concentrate on protagonists who are challenged by outside events and have to make fateful decisions despite their inner dilemmas. They cheat death, they change, and they survive. In receiving a dramatic story, the audience has an opportunity to reflect on its own inner dilemmas, changes and transformations. Whoever sees others survive, sees themselves survive too.

Linda Aronson, *The 21st Century Screenplay: A Comprehensive Guide to Writing Tomorrow's Films* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2010).

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SURVIVAL

The design theoretician Friedrich von Borries calls this type of action "survival design." ⌧ "People design in order to survive." For von Borries, survival design "means not losing hope, not giving up, but offering up something to confront death, civilisational and natural catastrophes, social ills and political crises—the will to make the world a better place." ▦ And he goes on to say that "survival design helps people to survive in situations in which they really can't survive." ⌂

> Authors are survival designers. Their characters become heroes when they have survived situations or catastrophes in which the probability of survival was minimal.

Von Borries goes one dramatic step further. Survival design creates fear, he says, when catastrophic scenarios and situations assessed as life-threatening can be seen as a threat to the status quo. Here, fear is produced in order to control people's thoughts and emotions.

> Fear—even when it is only imagined—is a useful means for designing dramatic characters.

Numerous tragedies and comedies—from Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* to the urban neurotics of Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*—deal with people who only imagine a catastrophe or who categorise a past event incorrectly and are consequently living in a state of inner fear or sadness, or who are unable to see a future that is not terrible and to be feared.

SELF-DESIGN

> Writers and dramatists design the social relationships of their characters and the identity of a society, which also makes them "designers of societies." A society is just as recognisable by its representative buildings as by its dress code, objects, symbols, rituals, urban planning and ways of living—in other words, by its design. According to von Borries, design represents power structures, or "provides items of equipment for the lifestyle that promises happiness." ▦ The goal of good design, says von Borries, should be to design societies, not to subjugate them.

Conversely, we can add to his statement by saying: the goal of good dramas is to design worlds that can make pragmatic utopias temporarily accessible to the senses. The goal of a drama is not to change the world,

von Borries, *Weltentwerfen*, 41.
Ibid., 48.
Ibid., 49.
Ibid., 85.

but to let individual human beings (the audience, the reader or the user) turn an imagined possibility into an inner reality for just a moment.

Ibid., 93.

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> The highest goal of drama is an Aristotelian catharsis in which people reflect on themselves through having experienced a drama, in order to afterwards take a fresh look at themselves and initiate a process of self-renewal.

This highest goal is something we should also be able to expect from good design. Friedrich von Borries speaks of "self-design." "It's not life, but our own self that is designed. This self-design and self-change is the primary task of Western human beings today." ⊱〳〳 Peter Sloterdijk discusses this extensively on a philosophical level in his 2009 book "Du musst dein Leben ändern" ("You must change your life"). 〳⸕〵

Peter Sloterdijk, *Du musst dein Leben ändern: Über Anthropotechnik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2009).

> For von Borries, self-experience and the creation of meaning are fundamental components of psycho-mental self-design. He speaks of "porous" people who have a self that is not complete, but that is flexible within itself, and is "open to transformation and interlinkage." Porous people accept themselves as deficient beings who endeavour to design themselves without fixing a desired result in advance.

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DESIGNED DRAMA

We might argue, following the example of C.G. Jung, that designed drama and dramatic design can help the individual to press ahead with their own Jungian individuation process.

> Dramatic stories help the porous person to work on themselves, but do not subjugate them with any regulative rigour, instead offering the self the freedom to develop.

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Story design continues to have an impact on the listener, the reader and observer, and helps them to design the possibilities of their own, real world. Dramatically charged, "storified" design can thus help us to design new opportunities for our own, real world.

DRAMATIC DESIGN

The Japanese designer Hiroko Shiratori creates "narrative-based design." The companies she works for include the Australian cosmetics company Aesop, a "storified company." In its newsletter, the company says almost nothing about its own prod-

ucts, but instead tells the readers about people, cit-
ies, art and books. On its packaging, Aesop prints
philosophical sayings by writers such as Marcel
Proust.

The concept of "design fiction" refers both to that which is created
when designers observe society and technologies speculatively and
thus design speculative, visionary products and prototypes, and to
that created when authors design products, machines and spaces in
their texts. The science-fiction author Bruce Sterling coined the phrase
"design fiction" in 2005.

Umberto Eco wrote of "quality fiction," arguing
that "Quality fiction always says something about
reality." ⌬ The same should apply to "Design fic-
tion": a good, high-quality, designed product says
something realistic about the world in which it was
created and is to be used. ⌬

Designers and authors are world designers and world interpreters in
their works.

THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
In the second decade of the 21st century, the "ex-
perience economy" prompts emotions and memo-
ries. During and after such an experience, the users,
observers or clients create large-scale, meaningful
connections and memories that are greater than
was the individual experience in reality.

The "experience economy" is changing the manner in which companies
are designing and offering products. Thus a "food court" becomes a mul-
ti-sensory experience in which individual ingredients or menu courses
are united with their own dramaturgy. Kitchen and service personnel
perform a kind of work that is perceived by the clients as a highly person-
al experience. The buyer is not a client, a customer or a user, but a guest.
He is not looking for any benefits, but for sensations. Just like the em-
ployees, they too are a player in a "scripted drama." A visit to a cafeteria
includes the performance of the barista, the sound and the smells of cof-
fee-making and the different stopping points of the guest when ordering,
fetching and consuming the coffee. These are "storified companies." ⌬

Visiting a museum or an exhibition, having a one-
week holiday in a tourist resort or shopping in a fur-
niture store are all packaged as archetypal emotional
journeys.

"Mediatecture" is the name of a young discipline that combines media, space and interaction together in a narrative-based, meaningful oneness. Mediatecture designs installations, exhibitions and product presentations like a classically structured story, through shifts in the narrative mode and the introduction of an arc of suspense that leads us to a convincing, emotionally satisfying end. 🏛

> MAKING SENSE
> Just like the protagonist of a story, the mere product itself assumes a personality and a social identity, becoming a "storified product."

The consumer or the user relates to the product like a character in a three-act structure. First, there are the introduction and the first act: at the visceral level, the user approaches the product with a kind of "gut feeling" The second act offers confrontation: the user is confronted with the product at the behavioural level. The third act brings resolution: its use continues to have an impact; the product is felt to be either positive or negative, and is recommended or rejected (this is the "reflective level").

> Introduction, confrontation, resolution—even Donald Norman's "layer of user experience" follows this classical dramatic structure. 📖

Christian Madsbjerg's book *Sensemaking: The Power of the Humanities in the Age of the Algorithm* offers the main argument for designed drama and dramatic design in the opening word of its title: "Sensemaking." 🏛 It does precisely what story design can achieve: it creates meaning, so that the audience, user, listener or reader can reflect on their own highly personal design of the world, and focus more on others and their survival than on their own life.

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Umberto Eco, quoted in Alex Coles, ed., EP Vol. 2: *Design Fiction* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 13.

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

Thomas Gerace and Robert McKee, *Storynomics: Story-driven Marketing in the Post-Advertising World* (New York: Hachette Books, 2018).

Andrea Rostásy and Tobias Sievers, eds., *Handbuch Mediatektur* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018).

Ellen Lupton, *Design is Storytelling* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017), 60.

Christian Madsbjerg, *Sensemaking: The Power of the Humanities in the Age of the Algorithm* (New York: Hachette Books, 2017).

AUTHORS DESIGN THEIR OWN WORLDS WITH SPECIFIC RULES AND MORAL PRECEPTS