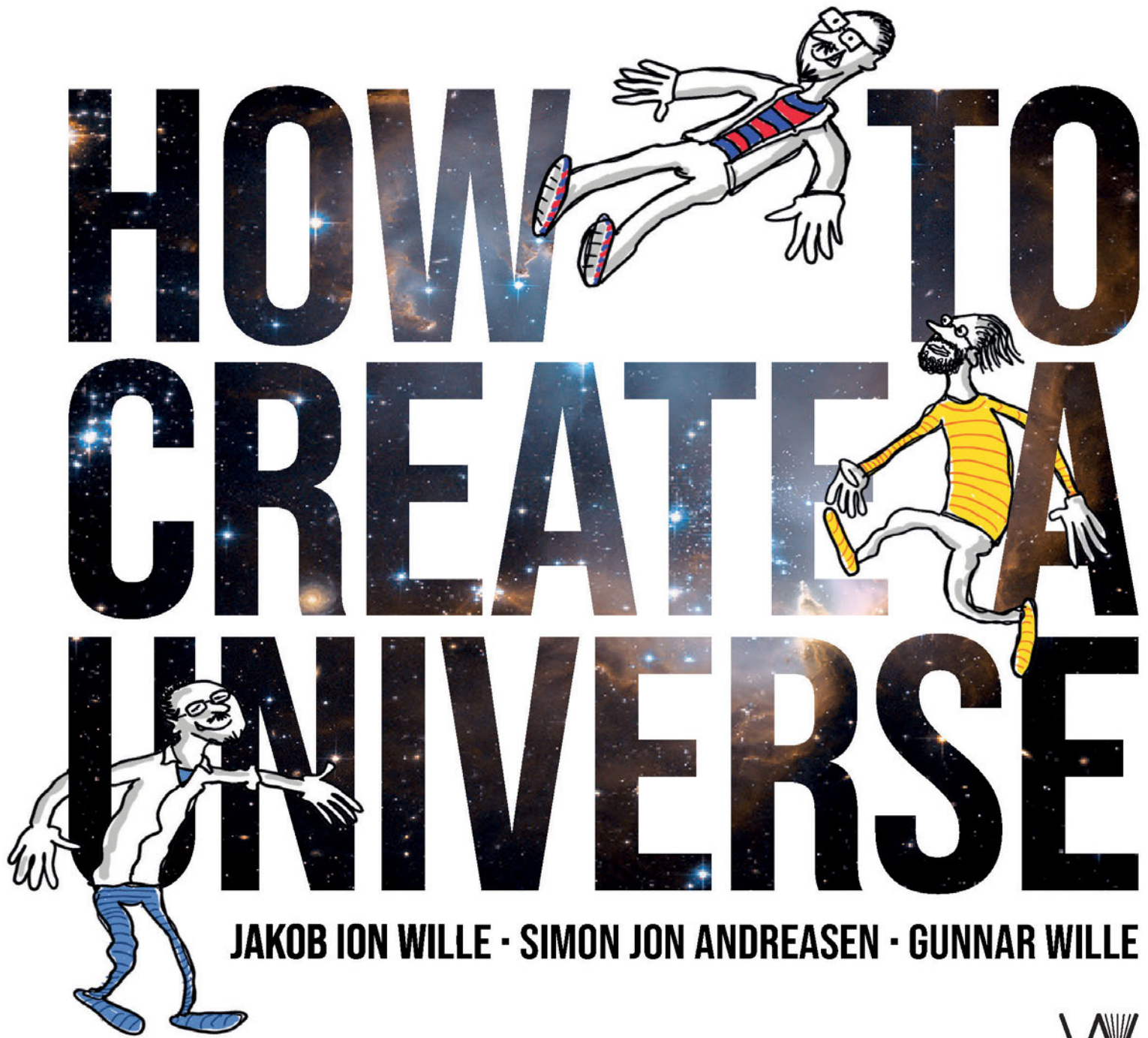


HOW TO CREATE UNIVERSE

The title 'HOW TO CREATE UNIVERSE' is written in large, bold, black letters with a starry, nebula-like texture. Three cartoon characters are integrated with the text: one floating above 'HOW TO', one sitting on the 'A' of 'CREATE', and one standing to the left of 'UNIVERSE'.

JAKOB ION WILLE · SIMON JON ANDREASEN · GUNNAR WILLE



How to Create a Universe

How to Create a Universe

JAKOB ION WILLE
SIMON JON ANDREASEN
GUNNAR WILLE

Published by
University of Westminster Press
115 New Cavendish Street
London W1W 6UW
www.uwestminsterpress.co.uk

© the authors 2025

First published 2025

Cover: Anders Thulin and Gunnar Wille
Illustrations and layout: Gunnar Wille
Translated from Danish to English by Dorte Herhold Silver
Published with support from Nordisk Film Fonden and The Royal Danish Academy

ISBN (Paperback): 978-1-915445-81-0
ISBN (Open Access): 978-1-915445-82-7

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/mpub.13071693>

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA. This license allows for copying and distributing the work, providing author attribution is clearly stated, that you are not using the material for commercial purposes, and that modified versions are not distributed.

The full text of this book has been peer-reviewed to ensure high academic standards. For full review policies, see: <http://www.uwestminsterpress.co.uk/site/publish>.

Suggested citation: Wille, J., Andreasen, S., and Wille, G. 2025.
How to Create a Universe.
London: University of Westminster Press.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/mpub.13071693>

License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0
To read the free, open access version of this book online, visit <https://doi.org/10.16997/mpub.13071693> or scan this QR code with your mobile device.



The universe that is created is an important part of any work of fiction – perhaps the most important

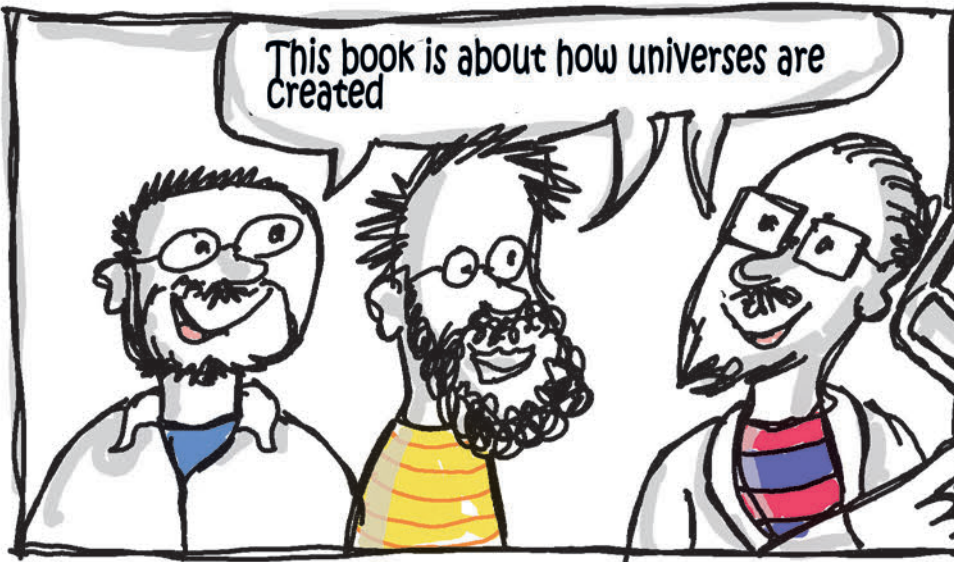
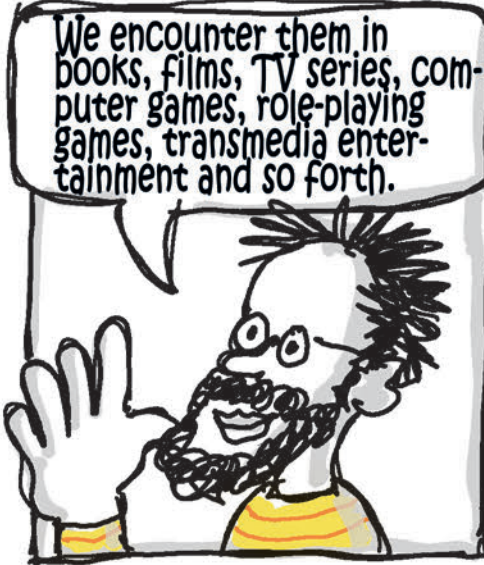
How to Create a Universe walks you through the creation of the kind of universes that audiences are increasingly drawn to and absorbed in: the extensive, narrative and visually rich universes of TV series, computer games, animation, theatre, film, literature, exhibitions and so forth.

In this context, we are not just talking about the large commercial universes, such as *Lord of the Rings*, Marvel or *Star Wars*. A universe can be any work of speculative fiction that pulls you in and offers wider possibilities for immersion, experiences and engagement than more traditional, finite and narrowly defined works.

How to Create a Universe is a guide to the creation of universes for works of fiction in the form of books, film, TV series, computer games and other narrative art forms. ‘All fiction offers us a world we can’t otherwise reach,’ writes American science-fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin. Such a universe may be in the past, in far or imaginary places – or lead us into minds different from our own (Le Guin, 2021, p. 7). *How to Create a Universe* explains how you can design your own universes. The book is a journey through the amazing process

of developing a universe that you, your co-creators and your audience can enter and explore. The itinerary of this journey is the method for universe building developed by the book’s authors.

According to Mads Møller T. Andersen (2022), research into development processes, design and creativity has so far been focused on the work of individual artists or designers, the sociocultural conditions for the creation of art or, in a more social constructivist approach, the creation of a cultural or artistic identity. By contrast, this book follows a similar approach to design research by focusing on methods and tools and, not least, interdisciplinary collaboration. Combining approaches from art research and the humanities with media studies and development processes, the book draws on extensive studies of works across different media, including film, TV series, games, computer games, theatre, literature and oral lore. We are inspired by explanations from narrative theory and biological evolution of the human urge to create and delve into fiction and fictive universes. Furthermore, we share the interest in methods, tools and collaboration models that characterizes design thinking.



The emergence of new media formats and technological innovation in media production have changed our expectations of where and how we encounter media fiction.



In addition, the audience now expects films, TV series, games and so forth to be open to immersion, interaction and co-creation in potential cross-media experiences.

That is changing the playing field for professionals working with content development and the production of fiction ...

and for students of the field.

With this book, we will do our best to assist.

We describe this publication as a handbook because it is aimed at practical applications. Chapters 1–8 introduce and discuss theory and practice related to specific steps of universe building, followed by topical interviews and conversations with leading researchers and universe builders. Each chapter concludes with practical exercises and tasks with specific instructions for the next steps in your process of building a universe or your teaching. Thus, the aim of *How to Create a Universe* is primarily pragmatic and generative: the focus is on

active creative work, although many of the presented models can also be used for analysis.

The book's structure

Chapter 1, **Definition: What is a universe?**, presents our understanding of what constitutes a universe and outlines theoretical approaches to and conceptualizations of universes. Thus, Chapter 1 has a greater emphasis on theory, concepts and definitions than the rest of the handbook.



Students and teachers at the Japan School of the Moving Image who took part in a Master of the Universe course in October 2022. (Private photo)

Chapter 2, **Concept: How do I get an idea for a universe?**, presents and explains the Star Model, which we developed to help you develop your own universes. The Star Model forms the basis of our method for universe building, and its questions about the different dimensions of the universe will guide you as you develop your own – from the first spark to the outline of the universe.

In Chapter 3, **Design: How do I illustrate my universe?**, we begin the process of creating visual images of the universe and describing it in greater detail. The chapter will help you get started collecting visual references and drawing maps.

Chapter 4, **Content: How do I produce content for a fictional universe?**, offers the first glimpses inside the universe. This stage of the process can be compared to prototyping in the design world or the creation of a vertical slice in gaming. Our method is inspired by so-called devising techniques from experimental theatre.

Chapter 5, **Document: How do I create a universe manual?**, deals with how you can communicate your universe – both internally, to everyone involved in the development of the universe, and externally, to stakeholders and investors. Since universes are often large and complex, you need to structure your material in a way that makes your project interesting and meaningful.

In Chapter 6, **Format: How do I develop experiences in a fictional universe?**, we introduce you to dramaturgical and narrative structures that you can use to create coherent sequences of experiences in your universe.

In Chapter 7, **Launch: How do I engage with the audience?**, the universe meets its audience. Your contact with the audience is not limited to the one-way act of publishing or releasing your work – the audience may also be involved as you develop your universe, and fans can keep it alive and relevant.

Chapter 8, **Future: How do I work with universe development in the future?**, takes a look at future development potential in the field, which we are already seeing the beginnings of today and which may become more prevalent in the future. One example is universes in the metaverse.

In Chapter 9, **Masters of the Universe: Explorers on the search for ultimate universe**, we venture into the wider world to have our – primarily Western – notions of how universes work turned upside down in an encounter with the East. This meeting refines and adds new nuance to our method.

Use *How to Create a Universe* as a guide, a picture book, a work of reference or a collection of recipes, whether you are a professional artist, a student, a researcher or a teacher – or if you are simply curious about how universes are created.

Research and background

The book is based, in part, on qualitative interviews with more than 30 artists, designers and researchers. In selecting the interviewees, we aimed for a varied mix in terms of gender, age and nationality, although Western and Asian experts are overrepresented. Most of the interviews were conducted as loosely structured group conversations in 2017–2022; a few were carried out as solo interviews. You can find our question guide and the full text of some of the interviews at masteroftheuniverse.org.

We also went on research trips to Los Angeles (2017), where we visited production designer Alex McDowell, among others, and to South Korea and Japan (2022), where we visited the team behind the TV series *Squid Game* and Makoto Shinkai's animation company Co-Mix Wave Films, among others. In addition, the book is underpinned by extensive studies of relevant literature and works of speculative fiction.

The authors further draw on their collective experience as artists, entrepreneurs, educators and researchers in the fields of fiction and living images. Gunnar Wille has a lifetime's experience creating works in every conceivable media format. Simon Jon Andreasen is one of Denmark's computer game pioneers and has also directed and produced radio and TV programmes and documentaries. Jakob Ion Wille has worked with dramaturgy, script develop-

ment and exhibition design, and for a number of years, as a researcher of visual narratives and production design. All three authors have taught universe building and been heads of education: Simon Jon Andreasen and Gunnar Wille as Head of Animation and Games at the National Film School of Denmark and Jakob Ion Wille as Head of Production Design and Visual Game & Media Design at the Royal Danish Academy.

The methods and exercises recommended in the book were tested from 2018 to 2023 in workshops held at the National Film School of Denmark, the Royal Danish Academy and other Danish educational settings and in art education programmes the world over, including Natfa in Bulgaria, Zanzibar Filmlab in Tanzania, Gobelins in France, Filmakademie Baden Württemberg in Germany, Viken filmsenter in Norway, the Japan Institute of the Moving Image in Japan and the Animation Workshop in Denmark.

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the help of our patient wives/girlfriends, Edith Nielsen, Malene Arnfred and Gitte Grønfeld Wille. Cecilie Knudsen and Thomas-Bo Huusmann helped us plan, organize and transcribe our many interviews. Mariann Nederby Madsen of Vision Denmark has been a major

inspiration and cheerleader of the project since its tender start in 2017. We are also grateful to our friends and colleagues for good advice and ideas. We thank friends and colleagues who read and commented on the chapters of the book before they were finalized and published, not least Professor Susana Tosca of the University of Southern Denmark, Professor Ida Engholm and Associate Professor Jesper Juul of the Royal Danish Academy. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Head of Institute Anders Thulin and Arthur Steijn, Alessandro Canossa and Christina Reedtz Funder of the Royal Danish Academy, Thomas Howalt, Kristine Ploug, Christian Ballund and Henriette Nøddebo Wibe from the National Film School of Denmark and Head of Education Jens August Wille and Siggí Oli Palmasson of the Danish National School of Performing Arts. The project matured through discussions with writer Cecilie Eken, manga researcher Jaqueline Berndt, Head of Education Elin Algreen-Petersen, Head of Artistic Research Martin Ziir, Head of Education Asako Eguchi, director Rasmus Klosterbro, Rector Stanislav Semerdjiev, researcher Sophus Helle, project manager Nawell Amour, researcher Rio Ootomo, media thinker Inga Von Staden and production designers Liselotte Justesen and Alex McDowell. Thanks also to writer Michael Valeur for inspiring thoughts and to our editor at Samfundslitteratur, Henrik Schjerning, for his patience and eagle-eyed attention.

Also, and not least, we are grateful for input from the many students we tested our methods on.



Their input and good advice and recommendations helped us fine-tune the methods presented in the book.

The project was funded by research grants from the Royal Danish Academy, the National Film School of Denmark and, in particular, Nordisk Film Fonden, to which we are abundantly grateful and without which this project would not have been possible.

Contents

- 1. Definition: What is a universe? 17**
- 2. Concept: How do I get an idea for a universe? 49**
- 3. Design: How do I illustrate my universe? 83**
- 4. Content: How do I produce content for a fictional universe? 112**
- 5. Document: How do I create a universe manual? 144**
- 6. Format: How do I develop experiences in a fictional universe? 174**
- 7. Publishing: How do I engage with the audience? 214**
- 8. Future: How do I work with universe development in the future? 251**
- 9. Masters of the Universe: Explorers on the search for the ultimate universe 277**

Interviews in chronological order 300

Works 301

Bibliography 305







Clay tablet with cuneiform writing from ancient Mesopotamia. A fragment of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the 5.5-metre-tall superhero and antihero of Uruk. The original text was written about 4,000 years ago and exists only in fragments on clay tablets such as this one. Here on display at the Sulaymaniyah Museum in Iraq.

1. Definition: What is a universe?

The heavenly bodies, in their courses, have in their power to move human minds to unknown heights of delight. We are not generally conscious of them; when their idea is suddenly brought back, and actualized to us, it opens up a tremendous perspective.

Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa* (1937)

One of the oldest and most entertaining texts in literary history is the epic poem of the wilful King Gilgamesh from ancient Mesopotamia. It opens with a description of the royal city of Uruk. We are invited up onto the city wall to admire the vast and magnificent city and the beautiful temple, whose secret tablet box contains the text about Gilgamesh's exploits. In a double exposure, place and character are introduced in a single movement and blend into one.

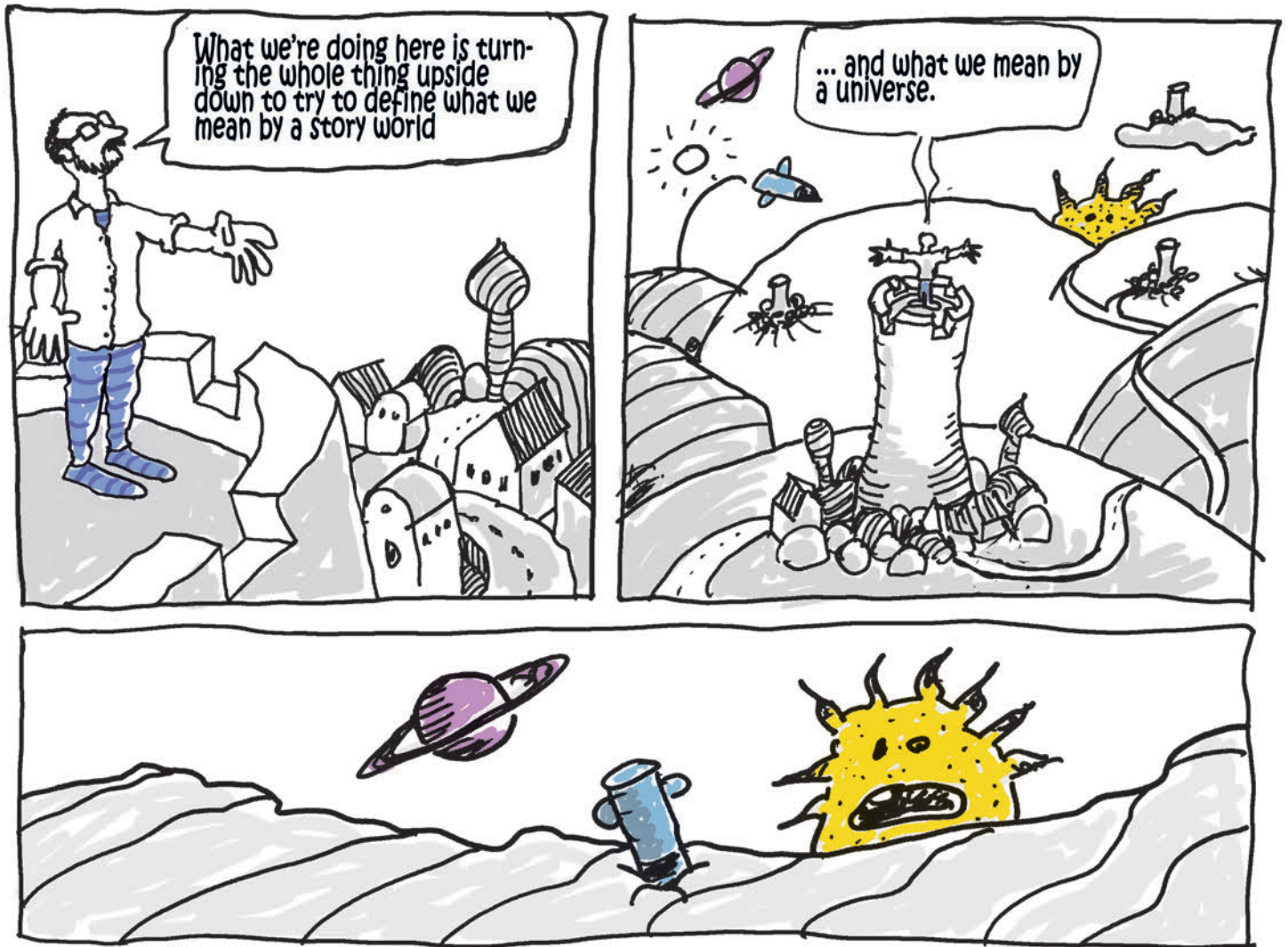
We understand that the greatness of Gilgamesh and of the city are one and the same. After this introduction, the narrative picks up pace, and we see the universe unfolded through Gilgamesh's extreme acts and his bromance with the wild man Enkidu. It tells

the amazing story of these two superheroes, who put any prejudice about dusty ancient tales to shame. The story reaches its conclusion in the place where it began: in the city of Uruk. We learn about the protagonist's altered perspective on life (after the loss of Enkidu) and on Uruk, to which the entire poem may in fact have been a tribute. It seems obvious to perceive the city and its surroundings as the narrative universe.

Turning our gaze from Gilgamesh to the rich and expansive history of fiction overall, we see a vast collection of amazing and unforgettable places, from Asgard to Moominvalley to Gotham City. In Italian writer Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1974), the places themselves are the main attractions and drivers of the

narrative, but usually, we experience the location as a backdrop for the story, with much – and sometimes everything – left to the imagination.

In this chapter, we turn this perspective upside down to examine what a universe is and how it shapes our understanding of stories, fiction and other content.





The following chapters deal with how to build and organize worlds and universes, but first, we need to establish some basic concepts

Story world

A place, world or ‘universe’ is a key condition for stories and other experiences to unfold, for example in a computer game. However, as audience, we often tend instinctively to focus on plot and characters. As pointed out by Danish film scholar Torben Grodal, among others, plots and narrative schemata are stored in our minds. For example, experiences of causality are key to our understanding of everyday human reality (Grodal, 2003, p. 174). On a basic level, we understand that things happen for a reason, and if evolutionary biology is to be believed, this insight and our related ability to plan actions and prepare for possible consequences are part of the reason behind our success as a species and our expansion across the globe. It is also one of the reasons why we tell stories. Cause-and-effect sequences are the backbone of conventional storytelling, which serves as simulations of possible events. Stories offer an opportunity to rehearse life in a

relatively safe setting. Although places are a built-in feature of basic narrative schemata – for example in a story about venturing out, getting lost and finding one’s way home – a focus



on place or space in conventional stories will often be perceived as a suspension of the narrative progression.

To illustrate our limited focus on place in fiction, American narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan uses a quote from E. M. Forster's *Aspects*



Of the Novel (1927) (Ryan & Thon, 2014, p. 35; Ryan, 2016, p. 16): ‘The king died and then the queen died of grief.’ This brief story gives us everything that we, as audience, expect: the principal characters (the king and queen), causality (the queen dies because the king dies) and a theme (grief). Ryan’s point is that in this example, the world is absent. Time and place are left to our imagination. Lacking any specific knowledge about it, we quickly develop mental images. Time may be associated with a period when kings and queens had a more prominent role than they do today. The Middle Ages, perhaps. We are also quick to imagine a place where the royals live: a palace or a castle. We might also imagine the royal residence embedded in the culture we happen to know best. This assumption is based on what American philosopher John Searle calls the ‘principle of minimal departure’: lacking any other information, we imagine what is most familiar to us. This phenomenon is also known as ‘the reality principle’ (Ryan & Thon, 2014, p. 35). Forster’s mini story is open to all these interpretations, and we construct them so effortlessly that we sometimes overlook their significance.

In visual media, such as films or TV series, indications of time and place will inevitably be more specific. Narration theorist Edward Branigan was one of the first scholars to use the term ‘story world’ to describe the diegetic

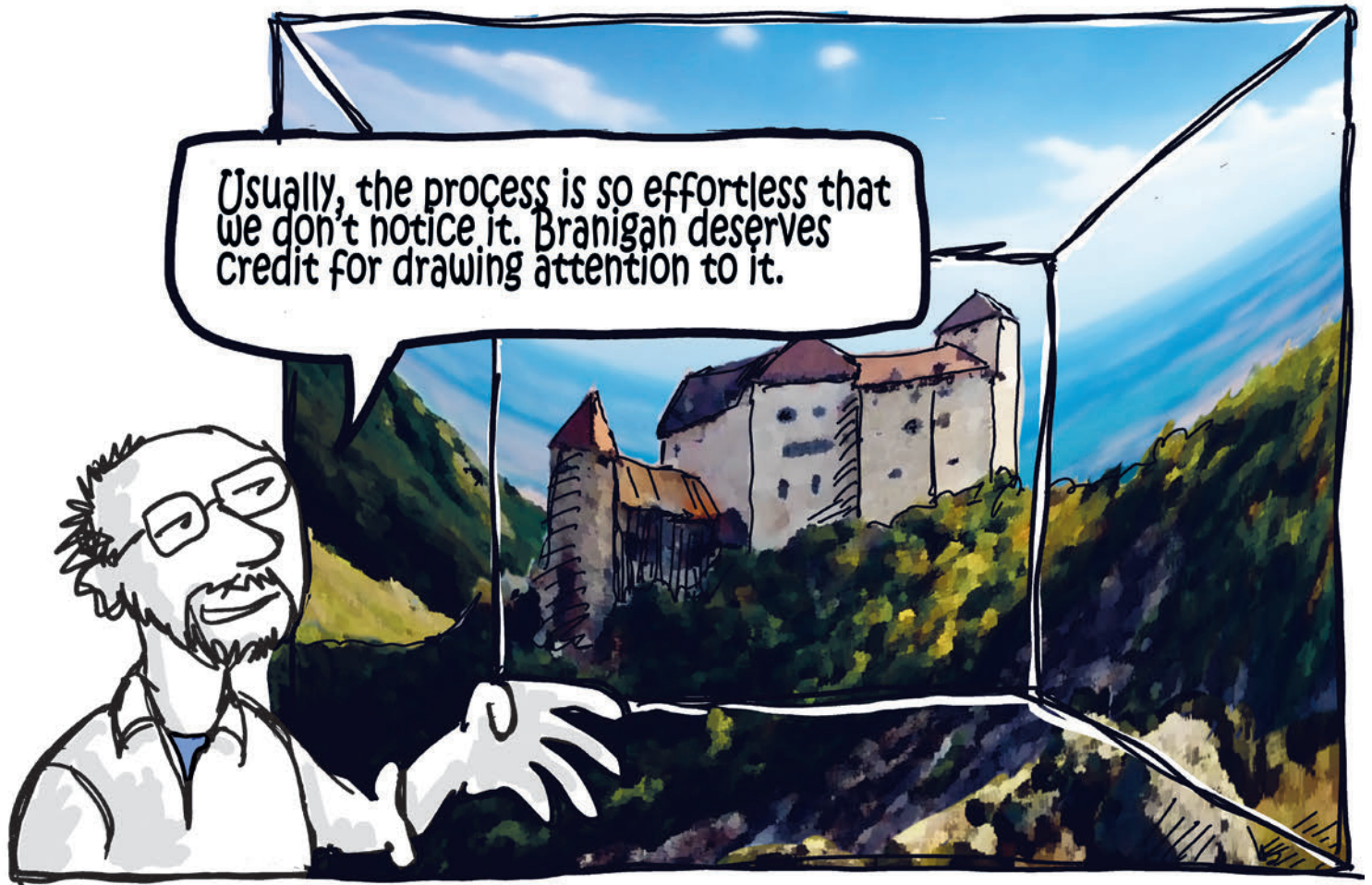


space in film and other moving images. The term ‘diegetic’ is typically used to mean the universe that is accessible to the characters in a work of fiction; what might also be called the fiction’s ‘textual world’. We decode the diegetic as we take in visual narratives. More specifically, Branigan regards the story world as the three-dimensional space viewers create based on the two-dimensional input from the moving images (Branigan, 1992, p. 33).

To Branigan, this spatial dimension is a mental construct that the audience creates in order to navigate in the story.

Another way to understand a fictional universe is to view it as a combination of narrative

and spatial aspects. We might imagine it as a two-dimensional system of coordinates with a horizontal axis representing time, the dimension in which the plot *unfolds*, and the vertical axis representing space, the dimension in



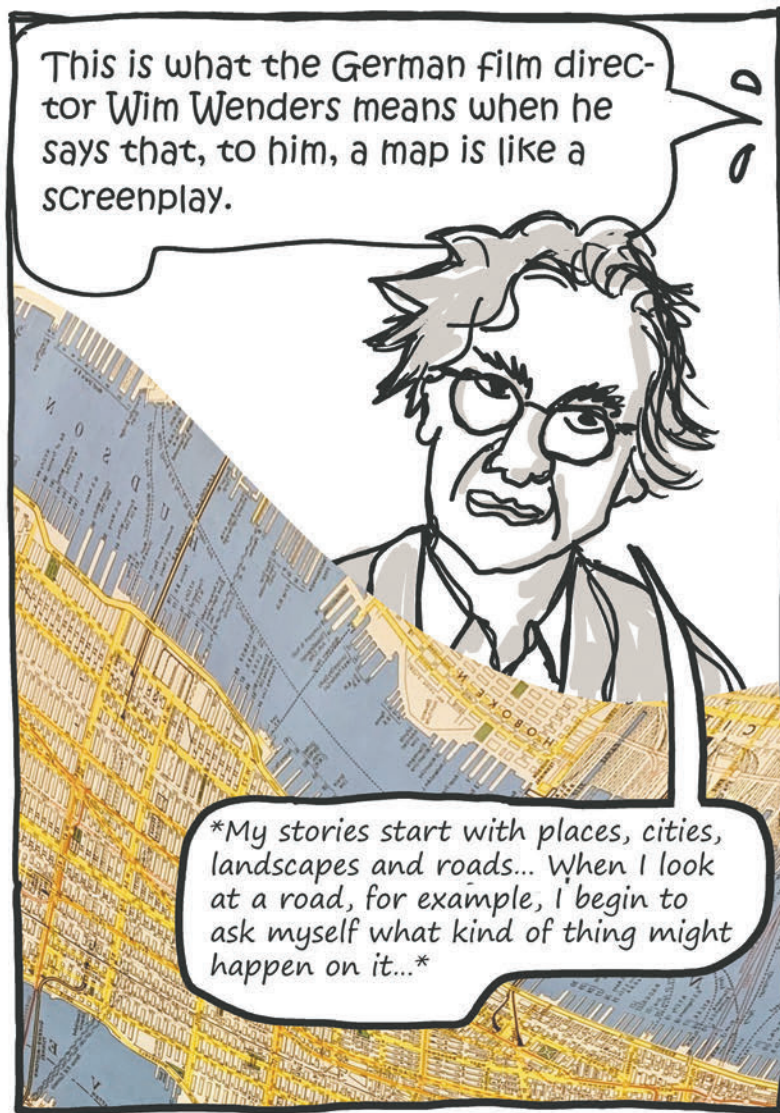
which the plot *takes place*. The narrative is tied into time, and the world is embedded in space. In this sense, the world consists of the interweaving of time and space.

Russian literary theorist Mikhail M. Bakhtin uses the term *chronotope* to describe this interweaving of time and space in literature (Bakhtin, 1937–38/2006), from *chronos*, meaning time, and *topos*, meaning place. Story and world are seen as inseparable, interdependent and mutually contributing parts of a single whole.

In working with the sorts of universes that this book deals with, your inspiration will sometimes come from the place and sometimes from the characters or other elements of the universe, which we will discuss in the next chapter. For now, our focus is on establishing the terminology. So, what do we mean by a universe?

Transmedial worlds and universes

So far, we have talked about the concepts of story world, place, *chronotope*, diegesis and universe. There are many different terms for what we also called the ‘textual world’ of a work of fiction. ‘Story world’ has become a widely used term, while ‘world building’ is applied to the process of creating a fictional world. If a work of fiction has an interesting universe, some might even say that it reflects excellent



*(Wenders, 1991, p. 52).



world building. For a number of reasons, we prefer ‘universe’. The main reason is that we wish to avoid the limitation implied by ‘story world’, which places the emphasis on ‘story’ and ‘world’. This may sound pedantic, but words matter. Let us look at the latter element first: in this book, we mainly speak of universes because a universe is more comprehensive and potentially expanding than a world, which implies something more finite, static and delimited.

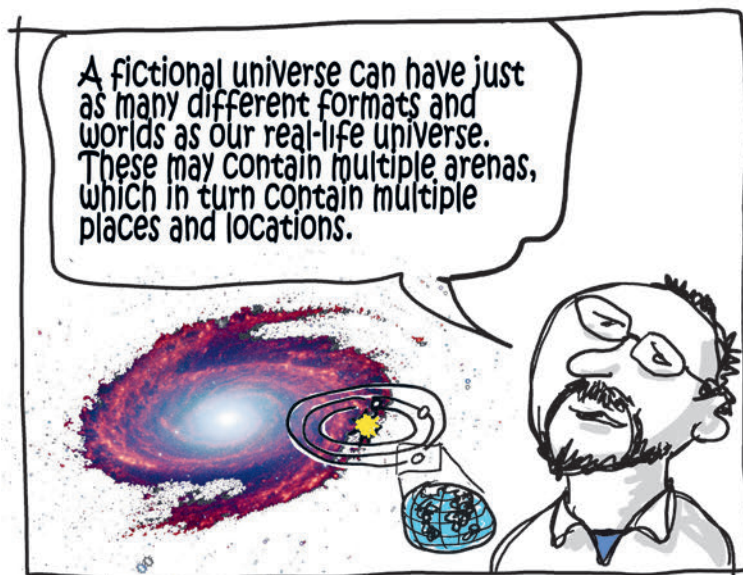
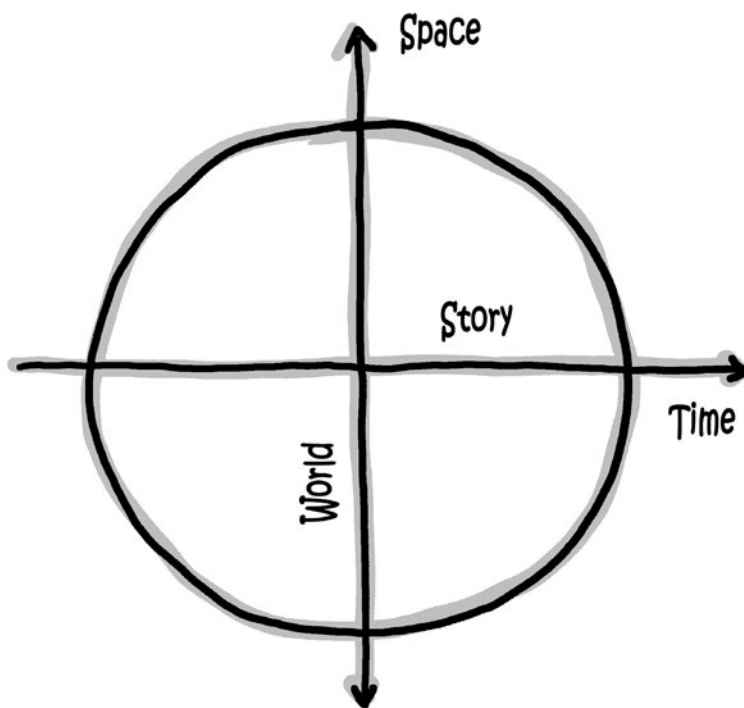
For example, the Hundred Acre Wood in A. A. Milne’s children’s stories about Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet constitute the story world.

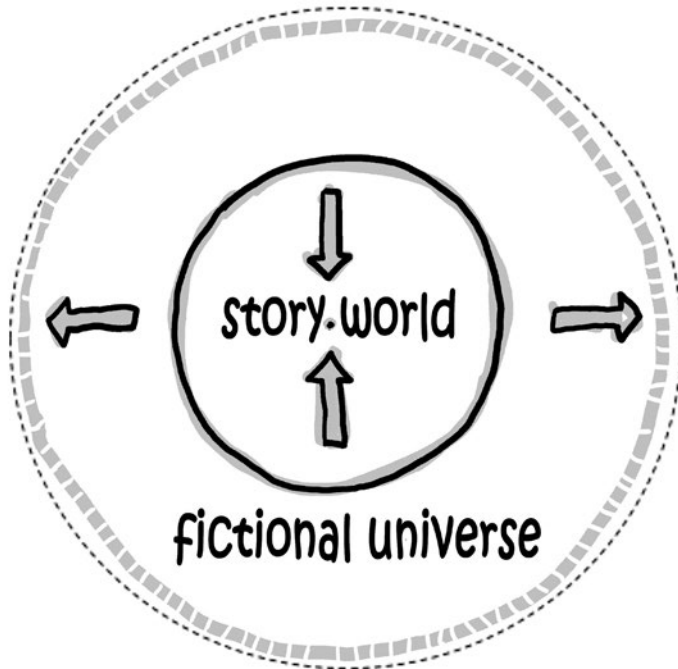
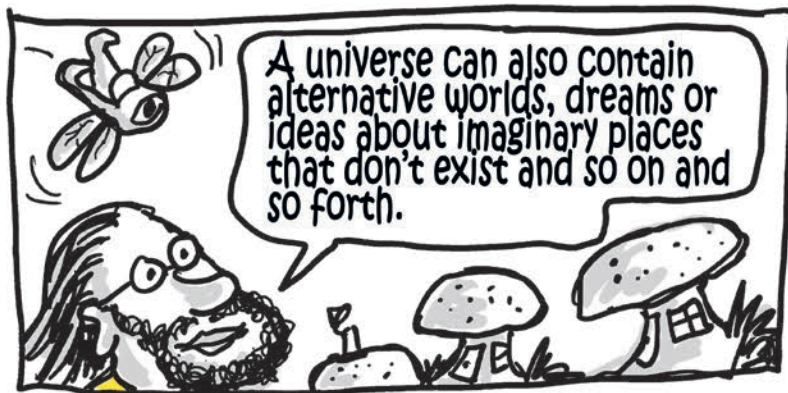
However, when this wood appears in other media, such as stage productions, film, TV series, games or amusement parks, or when fans or other authors use it as a basis of new stories and images, the Hundred Acre Wood begins to take on the characteristics of a universe. By choosing the term ‘universe’, we point to the transmedial quality of Winnie-the-Pooh’s world, that is, its capacity to transcend genres and formats. In our view, ‘story world’ points inwards, while ‘universe’ is more dynamic and inclusive and thus points outwards. A story world is centripetal, while a fictional universe is centrifugal. American media professor Ja-

son Mittell has described the TV series *LOST* (2004–10) as a work of fiction that expands across media in a way that he characterizes as ‘centrifugal storytelling’ (Mittell, 2014, p. 264).

As mentioned above, some narration theorists describe universes as textual or diegetic, in part to be able to distinguish diegetic from *non-diegetic* material. Non-diegetic material is everything that surrounds the work of fiction, for example the people and technology that created it, but often it is also used to mean aspects experienced in the fictional world that are not really part of it, such as scratches on a film or reflections in a camera lens. Lars von Trier’s films often show traces from the production, such as the chalk lines on the stage floor in *Dogville* (2003). In cinematic theory, background music and title sequences are regarded as non-diegetic, because they are not visible or audible to the diegetic characters.

Thus, non-diegetic aspects can still be important parts of a universe. This is true not least in theatre and computer games. The auditorium and audience are important for the experience and an inseparable part of the universe of the play, just as gamers and consoles are in a computer game universe (Jørgensen, 2007). As we shall discuss later, the interaction with audience and fans is an inseparable





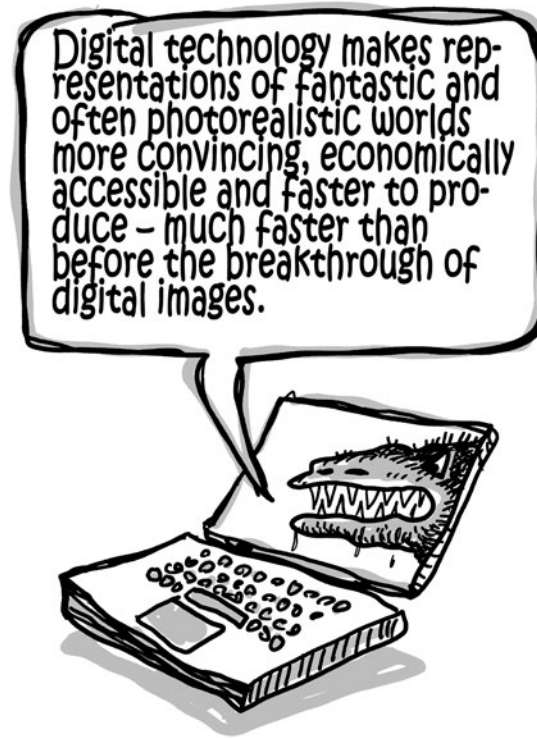
part of building a universe that feels real and relevant to the audience. Thus, the term 'universe' lets us include all these non-diegetic elements in our understanding of universes and our efforts to build them.

Fiction and design

Even though we like stories and consider them an inseparable part of the way we understand the world and experience universes, we wish-

to tone down the narrative aspect that is implied by the term ‘story world’ in favour of the more open term ‘universe’, which may contain multiple stories and other experiences, such as games. When we describe content in a universe, we typically describe it as fiction. Universes may also contain documentary or factual content, but our topic here is works of fiction. Like the term ‘universe’, we perceive ‘fiction’ as a more inclusive term.

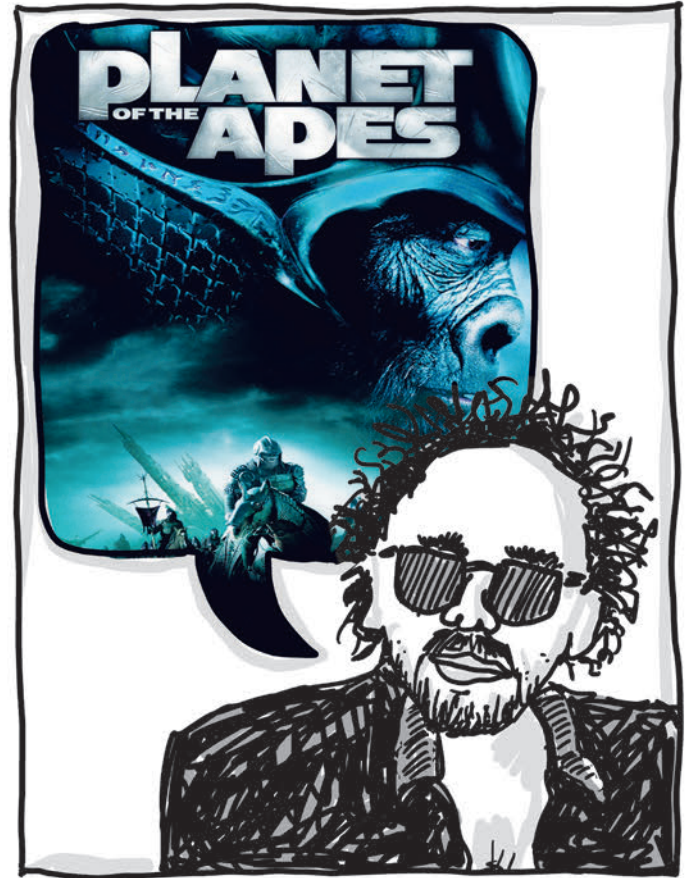
While a story in what we call ‘publishing formats’, such as literature, stage plays or films, is understood as a finite narrative sequence, with a beginning, a middle and an end (albeit not always in that order), ‘fiction’ is a more open term. For example, works of visual art in the form of paintings, digitally manipulated images or staged photographs may be regarded as works of fiction. Images are usually perceived directly and immediately and are decoded in a way that does not have a discernible beginning or end. In a sense, an image is infinite. Another relevant consideration in this context is the use of ‘fiction’ to refer to the universe of a computer game. While it is debatable to what extent computer games are narrative (Juul, 2005), it is less problematic to describe them as fictional universes that invite different forms of play and interaction.



Another intrinsic quality of ‘fiction’ is that it refers back to the Latin term for creating or shaping something by hand: *fictio*. This highlights a connection between design and fiction that is an essential topic in this book. Fiction is not limited to authored texts but also includes drawings or designs. One of the key reasons behind the popularity of universes that are drawing large audiences today, not least as films, TV series and computer games, is the design of the images that represent them.

As the art of universe design has become increasingly sophisticated, functions such as art direction and production design have come to occupy more central positions in the development of popular franchises, such as Star Wars, Marvel and DC.

In examining this phenomenon, transmedia scholar Henry Jenkins, who appears in an interview at the end of this chapter, brings up the work of film director Tim Burton. Jenkins writes that Burton, who has a background as an art director, has developed a reputation less as a storyteller and more as a cultural geographer who explores his worlds through images. While Burton's *Planet of the Apes* (2001) was a disappointment in terms of storytelling, Jenkins argues that every single shot deserves close attention and contributes to the fictional world, which has devoted fans delving into encyclopaedic studies of costumes, architecture, design, music and so forth (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 117–118). Whether this increased focus on fictional universes is seen as getting in the way of storytelling or as a positive feature that enables new forms, new technological imaging and media developments have indisputably contributed to this focus and changed our expectations of stories, experiences, design and visual style in moving images.



Stories, worlds and universes in summary

Thus, on the one hand, our interest in universes is conditioned by new technological means of creating experiences and visual images, and on the other hand, the fictional universe has always had a narrative dimension. As human beings, we may have a natural inclination to

focus on storytelling, but the connection between place and stories is so fundamental that we describe even the simplest narrative structures in geographic terms, as a progression away from home, into the world and then back home again. Linguistically, there is even an etymological link between the term ‘plot’ as a narrative element and the act of plotting a position on a map. Similarly, a ‘plan’ may refer both to premeditated action and to an architectural design. When we read or otherwise experience stories, we create mental maps of the world in which the story takes place.

As Henry Jenkins likes to point out, our interest in universes also relates to the way we take in experiences through a growing range of different media. Even though a universe may unfold in a single format, it is in the nature of a universe to extend to multiple formats. Works of fiction are rarely confined to just one format, such as oral tradition, but often, they are also written down, published as a book and perhaps manifested in games, stage productions or comic books. This transmedial phenomenon is often seen to be particular to new publishing formats, but in fact it has existed as long as we have had stories (Mittell, 2014, pp. 253–254; Bordwell & Jenkins’ blog, 2009). For example, the stories in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* did not exist solely in cuneiform

fragments but were also represented in visual art, architecture, drama and other stories and mythologies. Furthermore, churches, temples and other places of worship are excellent examples of settings where mythological stories are manifested in speech, text, images and dramatization – and in ways that invite cocreation and participation.

Undoubtedly, our tendency to associate transmedial universes with new media is related to the wider dispersion resulting from increased commercialization and accelerated digital distribution across a growing number of media platforms. The available range of publishing formats has expanded dramatically, and the pace of dispersion has accelerated.

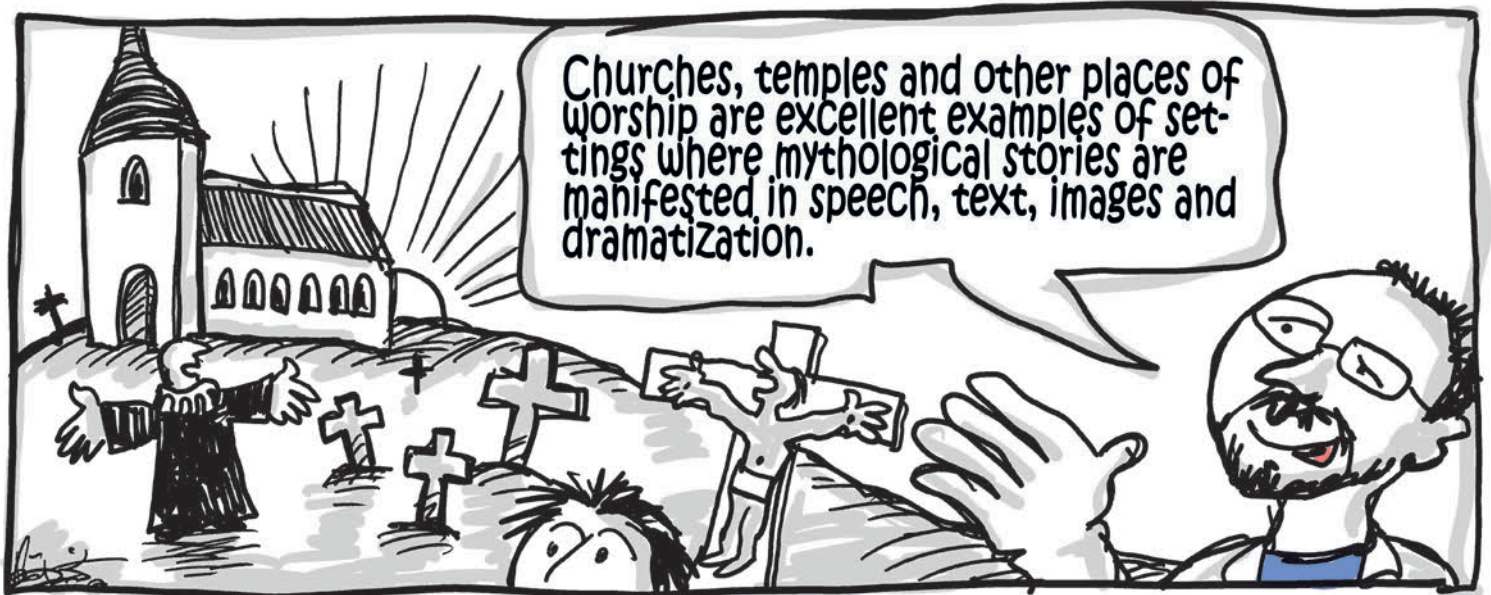
Finally, we may understand fictional universes as representing two creative modes: either as the form of continued existence a universe achieves when familiar characters and universes spawn new published works or as the more basic form of artistic universe building that is this book’s main topic.

On the one hand, fictional universes are regarded as stories that are open to modification and adaptation. Here we can distinguish between commercially designed offshoots, as we know them from major franchises, such as Star Wars, Marvel and DC, or fan activities, such as fan art, fan fiction and cosplay.

Whether these offshoots are commercial or fan-driven (or a mix of both), they are crucial to the dynamic of a fictional universe in which ideas are adapted and recirculated.

On the other hand, universe building may also be regarded as an artistic process requiring cocreation and close collaboration between people. This handbook deals with building viable universes, in a process that is not just about one person writing a story, for example, but about designers, writers, visual artists, directors, actors, composers and others – and perhaps even AI – working together to build a universe.

In order to clarify the creative element, this is often described as ‘story world building’. English production designer Alex McDowell uses this term and highlights the designer’s role in the development of new fiction through related processes (McDowell, 2017). With inspiration from writer J. R. R. Tolkien, American theorist Mark J. P. Wolf uses the term *subcreation* to describe the creation of fictional worlds (Wolf, 2012, pp. 24–25). We prefer the term ‘universe building’ to describe the artistic or design process of developing and creating a new universe.





As explained above, the growing focus on creating universes is driven by technological advances in image creation and our ways of experiencing them. We use new media, and universes often have a transmedial character. Although we cannot avoid using the term media in this book, we prefer the term 'publishing format', because 'media' – a little like 'de-

sign' – has come to include so many different phenomena that its meaning is watered down.

Ryan lists problems with the term by pointing out the many different phenomena the term 'media' can cover, including 1) channels of mass communication, such as TV or radio, 2) technologies of communication, such as

printing or the computer, 3) specific applications, such as computer games or social media, 4) ways of preserving data, such as sound recording, film or photography, 5) forms of art, such as drama, architecture and comics, and 6) the material substance of which signs are presented, such as oil, paper, the human body and so forth. The term 'biomedia' has even

been used to describe DNA (Ryan & Thon, 2014, p. 26).

The term 'genre' is also ambiguous and may refer to what we call a medium, such as film or theatre, or a particular style, such as expressionism or realism. In this book, we mainly use 'genre' to refer to stylistic features and



‘publishing format’ to refer to formats, such as computer games, film, TV series, theatre, books and so forth.

In summary, we aim to use ‘media’ only to discuss transmedial qualities; we use ‘universe’ where others would use ‘story world’; we use ‘fiction’ where others would use ‘stories’; and we use ‘publishing format’ where others would use ‘media’ or ‘genre’.

With these basic concepts in place, we can now proceed to the next chapter, which deals with how you can begin to develop your own original universe using our Star Model....







Henry Jenkins is an American media scholar and professor of communication, journalism and film at University of Southern California. Among Jenkins's principal works are *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), *Spreadable Media: Creating Meaning and Value in a Networked Culture* (2013), *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activists* (2016) and *Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination: Case Studies of Creative Social Change* (2020).



Stephen Joyce is an associate professor at Aarhus University, School of Communication and Culture. In his current research, Joyce is focused on transmedial world building across creative industries. He is the author of *A River of Han: Eastern Tragedy in a Western Land* (2015) and *Transmedia Storytelling and the Apocalypse* (2018) and of numerous articles on literature and contemporary media.



Susana Tosca is professor of media studies at the University of Southern Denmark, Department of Design, Media and Educational Science. Tosca's research includes hypertext, digital literature, digital art, computer games and transmedial worlds, most recently with a particular focus on Japanese popular culture. Among Tosca's principal publications are *Understanding Video Games* (2008, 2012, 2015, 2019), *Social Media Storytelling as a Method for Teaching Literature* (2016) and *Transmedial Worlds in Everyday Life: Networked Reception, Social Media, and Fictional Worlds* (2019).

How does each of you define a story world, and do you differentiate between story worlds and universes?



Stephen Joyce:

I really liked Susana's concept of mythos, topos and ethos. I think about it in relation to the James Bond franchise and whether or not I would

count that as a story world, or if that is a franchise built around a particular type of character. And I don't really see it as having the story world elements that I associate with other world building franchises: that it's got to have some mythos, the sense of a backstory or a richer history that does develop from one part to the next, some sense of the geography of it – it doesn't have to be mapped out completely but the sense of extension that goes with it. I'm particularly interested in story worlds which are defined by the ethos. If I'm thinking of something like *The Walking Dead*, that's defined by having to make these terrible ethical choices.

Susana Tosca: Actually, we made this model a bit by chance. Lisbeth Klastrup and I came from literature, so we thought of it as sort of an analy-

sis model. It looks like something you could use in a literature class. But then we found out that designers and computer games people used it in a generative way to think of the world in ways they hadn't done before. It became a sort of design template or a world generator. On the other hand, we had sort of forgotten the characters, and we got some criticism for that. Some of the big franchises, like *Sherlock Holmes*, for example, are very centred around characters. We hadn't thought about that initially, but if we had to start all over, I think we would like to work more specifically, with characters. But yeah, I think



I agree with this idea of something that is bigger than that. Later on, I've been approaching all these different models, like [Canadian media scholar] Marc Steinberg's work with the Japanese Media Mix [transmedia franchise], where he proposes the idea of convergent and divergent worlds. You can generate stories either in a way that fits what you have until now or a world that is rich enough that it can support all kinds of timelines, as long as something is recognizable. A more modular approach is interesting. I guess there are many approaches. If you had asked me this question 20 years ago, I might

have said something about subcreation and, you know, held myself to Tolkien, but now, we have been growing and developing the model.

Henry Jenkins: I started studying worlds through the fans' perspective and, very much, a media perspective. Now we're doing more and more work directly with world building, which helps clarify our thinking. I was always struck by Tolkien, of course, but also by [American film scholar] Dudley Andrew's discussion of [American philosopher] Nelson Goodman, where he introduces the idea that Dickens could be a world, carved out of existing London of a particular period. Dickens himself doesn't directly connect texts to tie his various books together, but they feel like they belong together. Readers can construct a world where it's plausible for characters from two different Dickens novels to bump into each other on the street and have some sort of conversation. And that's literally created by the British television series *Dickensian* (BBC, 2015–2016), where they bring characters together from all of Dickens's novels in a coherent world. That's very different from subcreation, where you set out to design a world that is built separately from the real world. It is a perceptual process of how we think about the world, how we see connections across text. Talking to fandom, it became clear rather early on that the notions of coherence and continuity

and world building, which are often assumed, don't work once you look at different kinds of fandom, because transmedia text, including all of its extensions, also includes fan fiction writ-



ing. Fan fiction thrives on multiplicity rather than continuity; on the idea of actively rewriting the world.

Why this interest, or renewed interest, in the worlds of fiction and how they are created?

Henry Jenkins: I think that interest comes from multiple directions. One is that franchise building in the entertainment industry more broadly leads to the question of how to build intercontextual or transmedia connections across text. Those texts that have the densest worlds seem to work best as raw materials. On the other hand, it seems tied to the push for systematization. Worlds understood as systems of inter-

connected parts are attractive to thinkers and any number of interdisciplinary spaces. So, my colleague at USC [British production designer] Alex McDowell has done a number of things pulling together experts across a range of fields who think about the future of cities, the future of environments.

Susana Tosca: I don't know if you know the universe of Gundam and how popular it is around the world. It's a huge media mix with all sorts of things in manga and anime and games and everything. This universe has so many divergent components, timelines and characters that have nothing to do with each other. And then, on this side is this very dedicated hardcore fandom of people collecting all the single objects and getting really upset if things are in the wrong colour or something like that. It has gotten to such a level of complexity that the company behind it, Bandai Namco, has adopted a strategy in which there is a huge degree of freedom to use the different elements of the divergent universes in a sort of database approach, where they say, 'Okay, we don't care what you do with things; as long as you combine recognizable elements, the universe will somehow continue.' This is a very extreme example. It turns out that content gets stripped down to nearly iconic elements, where nearly the only thing left is the fact that you have people in these suits of armour fight-

ing each other, but none of the other elements are present. You don't have the same story, you don't have the same characters, you don't have continuity in any way, just the iconic armour suits. It has been stripped down to this very basic idea, and in this way, you ensure that everybody has something to latch onto. But it's so light, in a way, that it's really nearly nothing. But still, the universe survives. I think this is really interesting, because in the West, we are much more invested in story and characters, but this is really flying in a whole new direction.



Henry Jenkins: I think it's a great example. As you were talking, I was thinking about, what are the media franchises that have had the longest active life? And we could go back to Victorian era things, like *Sherlock Holmes*, or we could think about the Oz stories, which are more or less continuously relevant now in public domain in the US, where there are many versions being told all at once. Then we would go to DC and the Batman/Superman world, which has changed radically many, many times over in its history.

We could go to James Bond, where the films have been in continuous production, and we're debating whether or not there was a world but there is a sense of discontinuity across the changing casting. *Doctor Who* would fall into this, *Godzilla* in Japan would be one that I would say you want to think about, a world which has many, many more films than Marvel has produced to date. Almost all of them have stripped down the mythology and have loose connections between the individual units, and they don't maintain strong continuity, except around certain core elements, which allows them to signal that they fit within a similar world. Even those elements can be swapped around. You could have a female Holmes or a female Watson, and it would not seem a radical break with the core principles of that content world. So, continuity or coherence may not be the central factor that allows these things to hold together and revitalize themselves over time.

Stephen Joyce: I agree with that. We could also flip the question around and think about franchises that failed. My default example is *Terminator*, which continually tries to take off and is continually being forced to reboot because it never succeeds, and I think that that continuity element was a real problem for them. The first two films created that 'grandfather paradox', and then every creator after that couldn't work

out how to resolve it successfully. And it really hampered the universe in a way that *Doctor Who* never was. *Doctor Who* is like, 'no, no ... There's no such thing as a grandfather paradox



here. Don't even attempt to do it.' It signals to its own audience that there is no coherent singular *Doctor Who* timeline. That element is stripping it down and just saying 'he will show up anywhere at any time', and that is a part of the magic of the show.

Susana Tosca: That's a really good point. *Terminator* and the idea of time travel is so attached to that particular situation, which is the world of humans against the machines. It traps you in that particular story. You can never escape.

If the next film had been about another human time, like prehistoric times, with another Terminator in another situation, then maybe you could have had situations where Terminators travel in time, but not in that particular loop. So, it just makes it too attached to one particular plot.

Stephen Joyce: It creates a possibility of a world, right? That's what the fourth one attempted to do. This is part of the mythos. There is a post-apocalyptic phase of the story, so we're just going to jump to there and take it from that point. And they had a whole trilogy planned out. They had expansions across multiple platforms. I think that's also a problem, if it's too centred in one medium, to provide that sort of canonical scaffolding. Because then that medium fails, it starts to take down everything else.

I think many of the story worlds we see are richly built across different platforms, so even when one is beginning to fail, that extended universe holds up everything else, right? I think, maybe we're seeing something like that with the Star Wars movies at this point. They seem to have lost energy, but the extended universe is so dense, and Disney's resources are so big, that they can just shift it over into TV with the Mandalorian and start spinning it out into other platforms. And that's a real advantage, but it's also something that takes away from conti-

nunity. But I think that dense web of texts can hold up even the failure of the main canonical scaffolding.

If you had to measure the qualities of a



world, where would you start? In classical fiction, since Aristotle, one might have looked at the ending or the quality of katharsis, but what about the world?

Henry Jenkins: I've been arguing that great world building is just as aesthetically valuable as great storytelling. I think the key values are vividness, immersiveness. Tim Burton is an example of a director who can't tell a story to save his life – I always want to see the new Tim

Burton thing, because it's full of vivid world building. His version of *Planet of the Apes* is one of his crappiest films, but see the amount of thought that went into designing architecture for apes, designing music for apes, taking advantage of their affordances, making them more ape-like than in the original film. There are really rich insights there. My best example of world building in this regard might be Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*, where I want to just stop every frame of that film and look at all the details and the backgrounds and the social structures that are mapped there. And yes, he's a better storyteller than Tim Burton, but I still hold that up as a masterpiece of great world building, regardless of the story that he tried to tell.

Susana Tosca: But is it because you want to sort of inhabit that world as a spectator, or because you think that the world is so rich that you could actually keep on telling stories? You get this impression that we're getting this one story, but I know there are, like, a thousand stories in this world.

Henry Jenkins: To me, I think it's generative. It's a successful example of world building as part of the aesthetic of a film. And again, you can have a world that's rich enough to sustain many stories. Stories individually don't have to be that strong. They can be just vehicles to take

a cursor through the different parts of the world and allow us to see what's there and that density of detail in the spectacle it creates. And the amount of appreciation based on the amount of thought behind it seems to go into an aesthetic of world building.





Exercise 1: Universe – content and strength

Spend an hour analysing one of your favourite universes by describing the ingredients broken down to the aspects of Where, Who, When, How and Why.

Do the exercise in a draft format and make sure you consider all five aspects:

1. Where: Describe the place or places of the universe. View it from a helicopter perspective and as a creative playground where things can happen. It is a good idea to write some notes on how distances in space/place relate to conflicts and dilemmas in the universe.

One approach might be to sketch a map of the geography of the universe, mapping

- where the different characters live or belong
- where actions or characters connect
- visual references that give an impression of colours and design in the universe

2. Who: Describe the characters of the universe as if you were the divine power that created them. It is helpful to describe different types rather than individual characters.

One approach might be to describe the characters by

- drawing/mapping the characters' mutual relations
- preparing character sheets for each character or category of characters including such aspects as strengths, weaknesses, secrets, visual characteristics and so forth
- describing the development of character categories or individual characters in the published work

3. When: Describe when the universe plays out – over the course of a single day or several millennia, for example. The timeline of the universe is not the same as the timeline of a story. This part of the exercise is about describing the general aspects.

One approach might be to draw a timeline where you

- map the main events happening in the universe

- use simple dramatic models and tools to describe the beginning, the middle and the end
- illustrate how colours, moods and tone change over the timeline of the universe

4. How: Try to describe how your universe functions. It is a good idea to write this down as a set of rules. If you are describing a sci-fi universe, this may pertain to possibilities created by technology. In a mythological universe, it may be rules laid down by the gods.

One approach might be to take your starting point in

- rules if your universe springs from a game; rules determine what the characters do, how they move around and how they interact
- communication and movement if your universe springs from a film

This activity describes how the characters communicate in the universe, how they move around, what the infrastructure is like or what the ground rules are in the community of the universe.

5. Why: Try to describe why the universe is important.

This may relate to a moral issue, for example whether you can punish people for crimes they have not yet committed (*Minority Report*), or an artistic ambition, for example to rethink the cyberpunk genre.

In your description, you might

- put into words how the universe uses and breaks with genre conventions
- draw a mind map of the theme and related issues
- try to describe the universe in a sentence that begins with ‘What if ...’ – for example, ‘What if a humanlike creature from space landed on Earth to find it had super powers?’ (guess who :-))

Present your universe to a colleague/classmate/friend and discuss which aspect is the strongest: what is the strong point of the universe, and how do the other aspects support this strength?



The film *Tony Takitani* by director Jun Ichikawa based on the novel by Haruki Murakami





TONY[®]
TAKITANI
House

2. Concept: How do I get an idea for a universe?

*I love dream logic: I just like the way dreams go.
But I have hardly ever gotten ideas from dreams.
I get more ideas from music, or just walking around.*

David Lynch: *Catching the Big Fish* (2007, p. 63)

The T-shirt

Japanese writer Haruki Murakami once wrote an essay about one of his many beloved T-shirts. He later dedicated an entire book to the topic. His favourite T-shirt, purchased in a thrift shop in Maui, is a yellow shirt with the name “‘Tony’ Takitani’ printed on it. This made him wonder what kind of person Tony Takitani might be (Murakami, 2021).

The shirt inspired Murakami to write a short story, which was turned into a film in 2004, directed by Jun Ichikawa. In this case, a name on a T-shirt turned into a fictional character who appears in a short story that in turn became a film. The short story and the film portray Tony, a technical illustrator,

who falls in love with a woman. Once they are married, he discovers that she is a shopaholic. After her tragic death, he asks a female assistant to dress up in her clothes. That does not work out well, but that is another story.

The point is that sometimes, something surprisingly simple can spark a great idea. That is, in essence, the topic of this chapter: how to come up with and develop ideas for a universe, like the one that began with the name Tony Takitani on a T-shirt.

Ideas are our starting point. However, a key focus in this chapter is on our Star Model and how you can use it to develop the initial outline of an idea into a fully fledged universe.

Having many ideas

Some artists say that their process is based less on them finding ideas than on ideas finding them. In the 1999 documentary *I Am Alive* by Danish film-maker Jørgen Leth, Danish poet Søren Ulrik Thomsen talks about becoming a well, ready to collect ideas when they come down like rain.

Film director Alfred Hitchcock once explained that, sometimes, the initial idea for a film would appear to him as a vague, hazy pat-

tern with a certain shape; his next step, then, would be to find a suitable narrative idea to suit it (Hitchcock, 1937). Others describe how ideas arise when the setting they are in has room for different thoughts to meet. That was the case, for example, for A. A. Milne, English author of children's books, when he returned from serving as an officer in the British Army during the First World War and sought refuge in the scenic landscape of Ashdown Forest in East Sussex together with his friend, illustrator Ernest Howard Shepard.



The two friends watched Milne's son, Christopher, play in the wood with his stuffed animals. The observations and drawings from their time here turned into the widely beloved illustrated stories about Winnie-the-Pooh and Christopher in the Hundred Acre Wood. In this case, the combined presence and interaction of the different actors was the driving force: the boy, who engaged in action, the illustrator and the writer. In addition to the human actors, the landscape, serving as place or setting, and the stuffed animals, serving as characters or props, also contributed to the construction of the universe and the stories about Winnie-the-Pooh.

French sociologist Bruno Latour (2008) describes this interaction between actors – both human and inanimate – as an actor-network, which he sees as the framework of all creative work. Thus, ideas do not come out of thin air. But they do come. The challenge is what to do with them.

The rest of this chapter looks at how you can begin to develop your universe, unfolding your idea and turning it into a universe. We recommend that you use the Star Model to ask a series of questions about the different dimensions of your universe in order to map it out in a meaningful and structured way.



* Einfeldt, 2020, p 28



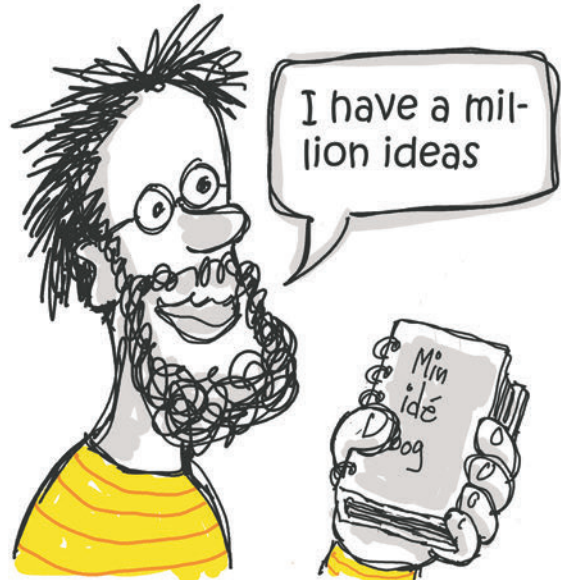
In this chapter, we look at how you can expand on your ideas to create the outline of a universe.

Ideas can come from anywhere, and you probably have a lot. An idea might spring from a conversation you overheard on the bus, a topic or an issue that interests you or an experience a friend told you about. It might begin with a place that somehow resonates with a feeling you are having right now. Or it might begin with a T-shirt. It is important to have a lot of ideas. As you are reading this book, you probably have ideas to spare – if you don't, the book has exercises to help you get started.

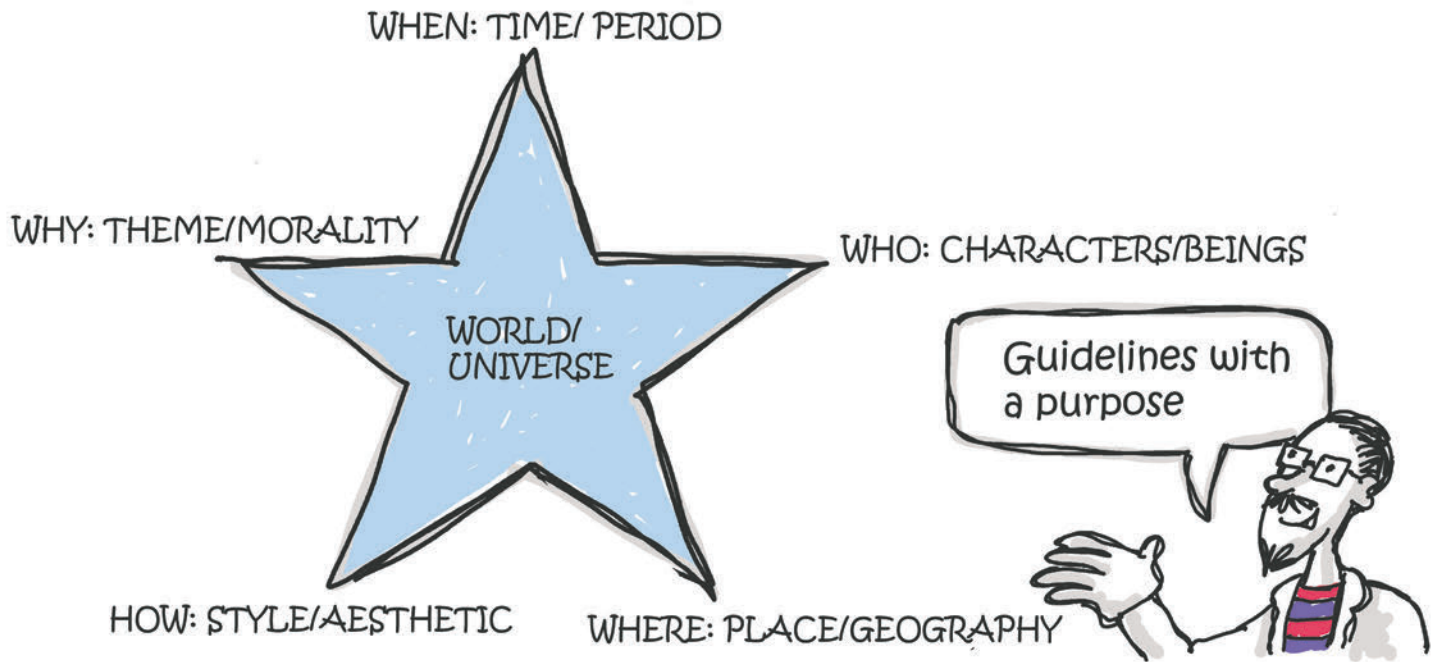
The basis of the Star Model

The Star Model is basically a question guide, akin to the Roman politician and speech-writer Cicero's so-called rhetorical pentagram (Lundholt & Hansen, 2019, p. 98). Just as the pentagram offered a guide to help structure a speech, the Star Model can help you structure a universe. Like the pentagram, the model asks questions that it is sensible and rewarding to consider. Thus, it is a generative tool that aims to aid your creative process. Howev-

er, you can also use it in reverse. As American film historian and theorist David Bordwell points out, a benefit of poetics is that the recommendations can also be used as a tool for examining works of art and the traces of the artistic decisions that shaped them (Bordwell, 2005, p. 243). In the following, however, our focus is on the *creating*.



I have a million ideas



The Star Model, which we will review shortly, has similarities with a model designed by scholars Susana Tosca and Lisbeth Klastrup to describe ‘worldness’. Their model describes fictional worlds structured based on values, places and stories or, in Greek: ethos, topos and mythos (see the interview in Chapter 1 and Klastrup & Tosca, 2014, p. 297 and 2019, p. 43). Another narratologist, David Herman, describes how the audience understands and mentally maps a story world

through questions, such as *who did what to and with whom, when, where, why and in what manner* (Herman, 2017, pp. 24–56 and 2009, p. 106). In our approach, the theoretical understanding of universes and the Star Model are supplemented by and based on practical artistic experience and training provided by, among others, German transmedia architect Inga von Staden and transmedia storyteller Jörg Ihle.



The core idea of the the Star Model – and about throwing your heart over the obstacles

The Star Model can help you identify the fundamental components of a universe through a series of simple questions based on *where, when, who, how* and *why*. The model is deliberately shaped as a star and can be accessed from each of the five points. Thus, the Star Model does not have any given starting point but should be seen as a series of interconnected points that you can combine intuitively or arrange in whatever order is most mean-



ingful for the idea you are working on. The starting point is your initial idea. To some, this might be a challenge, but a piece of ad-

vice from American writer Stephen King is to simply start with like and love (King, 2010, pp. 181–182). In other words, the beginning should be enjoyable, related to something or someone you care for or a question or a mystery that nags you.

The theatre company Frantic Assembly uses a theatrical technique called devising, which we will return to in Chapter 4. In devising, the initial inspiration is called a ‘spark’ (Graham & Hoggett, 2014, p. 14). In architecture and design, the initial, crucial idea is called a ‘primary generator’ (Darke, 1979, pp. 36–44). In other contexts, the impact of the first stimulus is sometimes called the ‘primary effect’.

You need to *throw your heart over the obstacle*: seize the most important element, the one that really matters to you, without overthinking it. Maybe, what you love and feel like doing is a particular genre. Some people regard genre as a lesser category to be eschewed to avoid the risk of reproducing clichéd formats and elements. We do not share that view. There is always a risk of producing a work of fiction that does not work as intended or which lacks originality. However, this has nothing to do with genre. If you are really into romances, social realism or science

fiction, why on earth would you not want to make that your starting point? In our model, the question of genre is related to HOW. In the following, we review all five questions of the Star Model.

HOW examines how something is made and how it is perceived, including rules and style. As genres, both social realism and sci-

ence fiction are associated with certain aesthetic expectations, such as bone-chilling rain in social realism and cold and clinical lighting in science fiction. Science fiction, of course, is also associated with the concept of time, specifically the future, which is covered by the model's WHEN.

In this way, one point of the star quickly leads to the next. If you follow King's advice, you

might start with a place or an occupation you are familiar with – playing the trumpet, being a technical illustrator or being a plumber. This brings us to the WHO point.

WHO

What you like and what you are familiar with can turn into science fiction if you place the plumber on a space ship in the future. That might not be a bad start; in fact, that was the beginning of the story *Cosmic Engineers* by Clifford D. Simak, which Stephen King has high praise for (King, 2010, p. 185). In this story, the space ship quite naturally defines WHERE.

WHERE is the setting of the universe. This might be a space ship, a galaxy or a person's mind. A universe can be any size whatsoever. This is entirely up to the universe builder.

WHERE

HOW

WHEN

In creative work, you are often advised to begin with *what if?* This is good and helpful advice. *What if* ignites your imagination and invites empathy. What if a plumber landed on a planet without water? In principle, you could relate this question to any of the points of the star, but since it often has a thematic, ethical or even aesthetic character, in our model, it relates to WHY, which we discuss in more detail later.

WHY

The structure of the Star Model

You can access the model from whatever point is most meaningful to you. For the sake of simplicity, we will begin at the top, at WHERE, continuing clockwise round the model, to WHEN, WHO, HOW and WHY.

WHERE does the universe take place? This question deals with the universe's location and geography. It could be a courtyard, a hospital built on swampy marshland, a desert planet, a boarding school in a parallel universe or a person's mind.



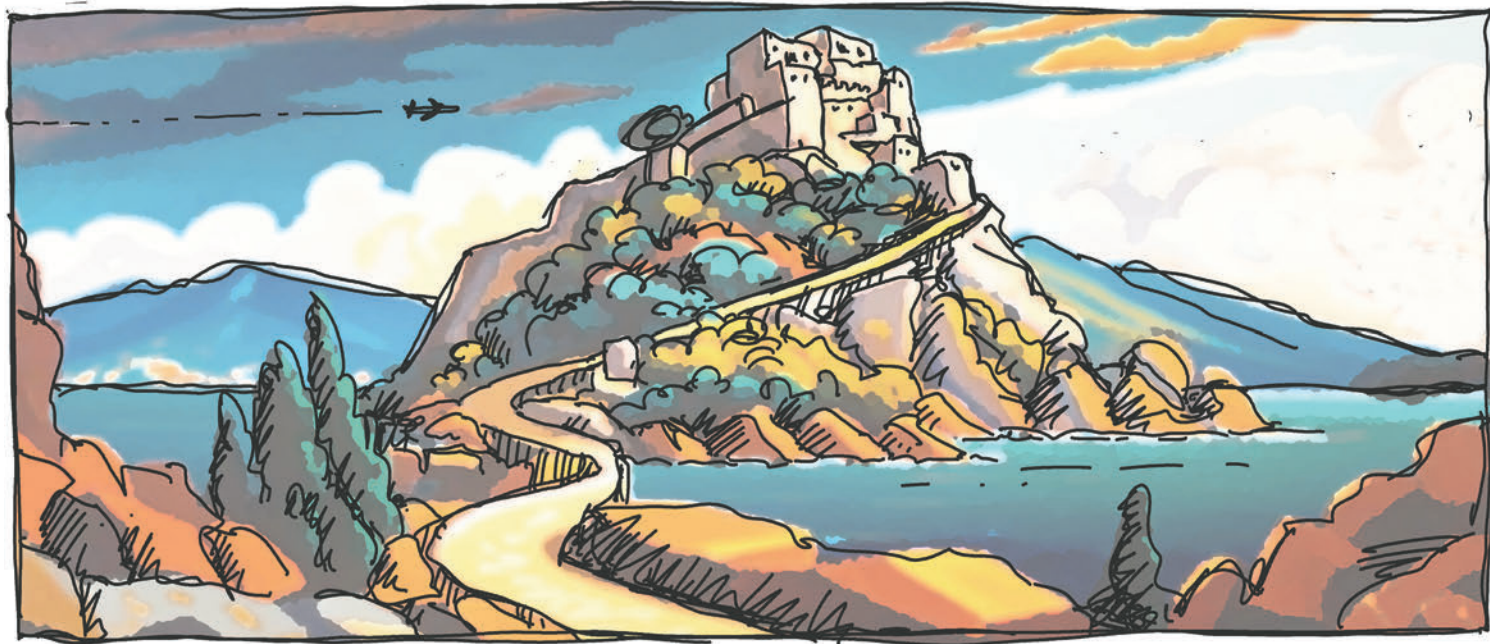
There are several technical terms that could be applied to this, including setting, arena or level. Each term emphasizes different qualities of the place, a topic we will revisit later. The key point is, however, that the place is where the story unfolds. You can speak of the affordances of the place and how the place enables different types of actions (Grodal, 2017). For example, a tree stump affords seating, and a coffee cup invites you to take a sip while reading. Some computer games and action-driven stories may be explicitly shaped by affordances, for example if you are trying to find your way through a forest or a game level and need to use a fallen tree to cross a

gully, as in the computer game *Limbo* (2010). Generally, there are intimate connections between the fictional geography and the narrative structure, a topic we will revisit several times in this book.

Like Henry Jenkins, we may see the story as a vehicle that takes the audience through the world and lets them experience the place in all its varied detail, enjoy its tactility and decode its social structures (see the interview at the end of Chapter 1).

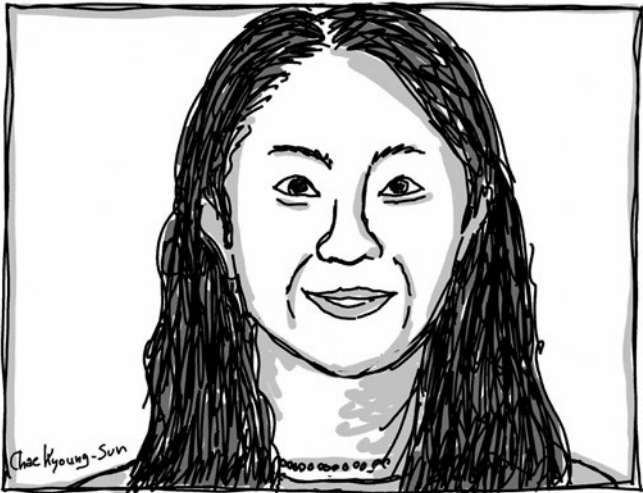
In their basic narratives, fictions – from

Homer's *Odyssey* to, for example, John William's *Butcher's Crossing* (1960) or the computer game *Journey* (2019) – are about finding your way or fleeing through a world. As such, they touch on fundamental narrative material (Grodal, 2017). The focus is on movement and, not least, on making it safely home. The significance of place is also reflected in the sheer number of films, TV series and computer games titled after their location. From the TV series *The Bridge* (2011–2018) to *Borgen* (2010–2022) (The Castle; the nickname



for Denmark's parliamentary building) and from *Nashville* (2012–2018) to *Dune* (1965) and *Limbo* (2010).

It is important to consider the meaning of different approaches and terms associated with place and which aspects they highlight. For example, philosopher Martin Lefebvre associates the term 'setting' with something that invites filmic action, while 'landscape' invites aesthetic contemplation (Lefebvre, 2006). On the other hand, interior locations may invite a focus on characters, while exterior urban settings can highlight and reveal social structures and historical traces.



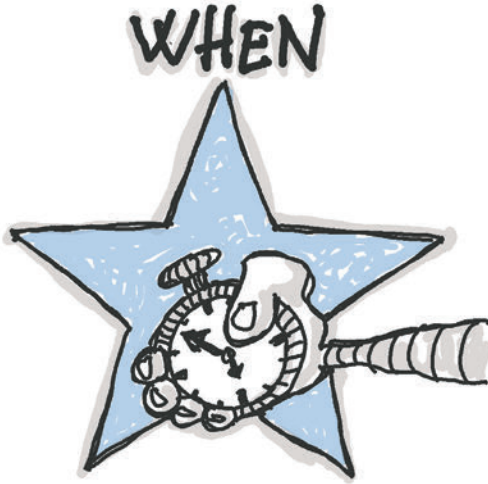
Production designer Chae Kyoung Sun, who was involved in creating the TV series *Squid Game* (2021–), explains that it was im-

portant to show urban settings in the series' Seoul sequences in order to highlight the social structures that the series addresses (see the interview at the end of Chapter 4). Place is thus defined as the geographic framework around the action and, ideally, contains layers of information that can be visualized in maps: political borders, terrains, natural and cultural landscapes, such as cities and plantings, fauna, conflict zones and so forth. As narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan points out, a universe may also contain places that occur in dreams or are merely mentioned and which are not directly a part of the diegetic world of fiction (Ryan et al., 2016, p. 24). A universe can contain underworlds, secret unknown places or legends of places that do not exist.

WHEN does the universe take place? This question deals with time, which can be understood in five different ways: 1) the historical period of the universe, 2) sequences in the form of seasons or times of day, 3) the organization of time, 4) the experience or perception of time and 5) how time behaves in the universe.

If we look at time as historical period, we are dealing with past, present or future. Is the universe unfolding now or in the Stone Age? A universe may also have parallel times or a future that we never see but only hear

about. There may be an origin story, a historical or mythological time preceding the period during which the universe takes place, as in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion* (1977).



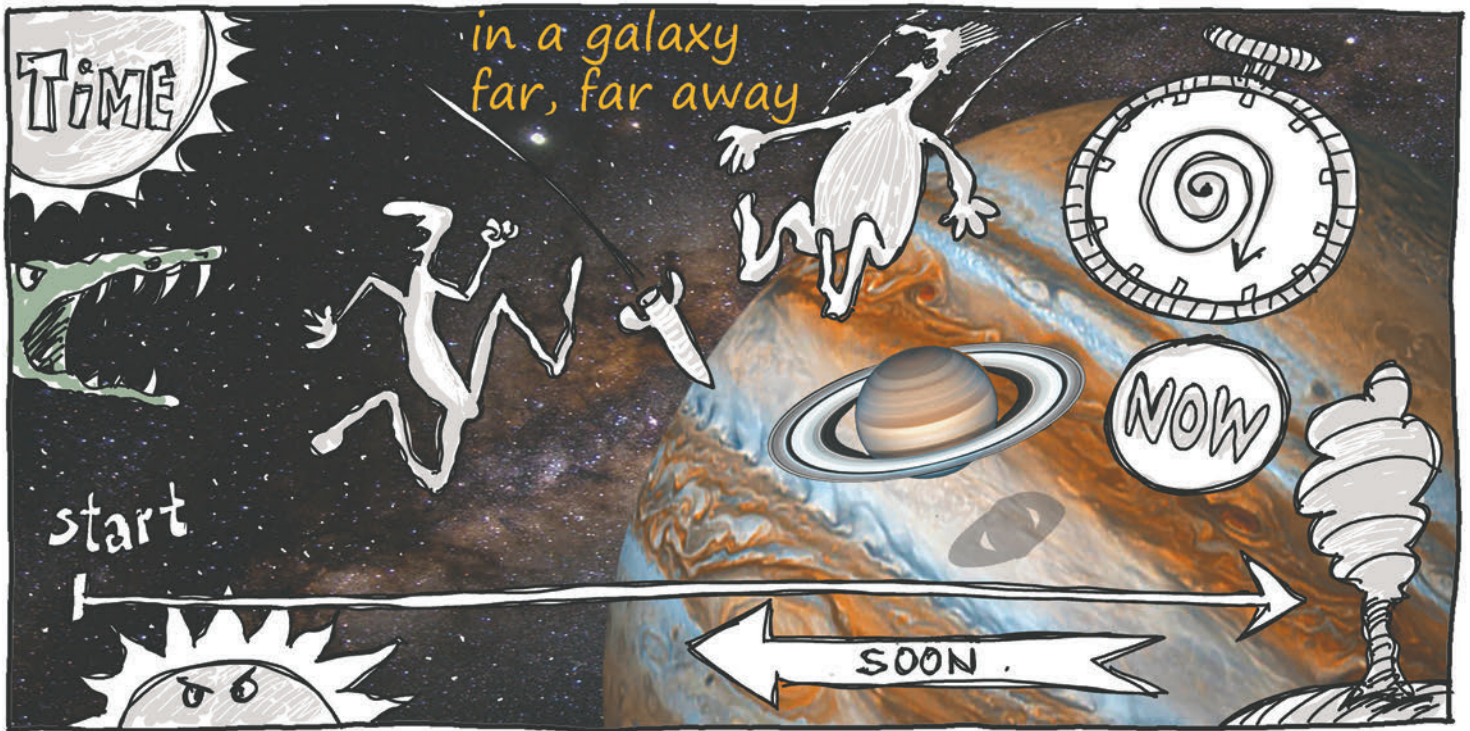
Whether a particular historical period is past, present or future, it can be experienced in a wide variety of ways. For example, the past may point to the future, just as a future universe may have a contemporary feel.

The period may be defined more closely through a definition of historical periods, which in turn implies a connection to a specific place. For example, in a European context, there is a difference between the Italian and the Scandinavian Renaissance. In an American context, there is a difference between life

in the western United States in 1821 compared to 2021. Time and place are interwoven in so-called *tempospacial* units, which Russian philosopher Bakhtin called *chronotopes*. Bakhtin had a particular interest in *adventure chronotopes*, which fall outside common historical classifications and apply to categories such as myths, legends and fantasy. Fantasy is characterized by playing out in a sort of parallel or suspended time. By contrast, the period may also be a specific time in earth's history that is charged with significance, such as 9-11, shorthand for 11 September 2001, the date of four terrorist attacks against the United States, or 22 July, which is also the title of Paul Greengrass's 2018 film about the terrorist attack on Utøya in Norway in 2011.

Time can also refer to a season or a time of day, for example the melancholic tone that characterizes dusk, as in *Nordic Noir*, or the changing of the seasons from winter into spring and summer.

The quantitative time indicated by these periods is also known as *chronos* time, which typically also points to the organization of time. In this regard, we can distinguish between the duration of the work of fiction and of the fiction itself. For example, a film may last about two hours, while the duration of a computer game is more elastic.



Within the timeframe of a work of fiction, time may be dramaturgically organized in a variety of ways. Time may be perceived in chronological progression, or there may be large gaps or leaps in time, resulting in a fragmented experience. Or several times may flow into one and be experienced simultaneously, as in a dream. This approaches the subjective experience of time known as *chairo*s time. As a universe builder, you may seek to convey a lyrical experience, as time almost stands still.

The structure of time can be one of the most exciting and complex aspects to work with.

Understanding the nature of time can in itself be a key topic. Christopher Nolan's *Inferstellar* (2014) can give you an idea of the potential of speculations on time theory. Understanding the structure of time is just as counterintuitive to our senses as grasping that earth is not flat, as Italian theoretical physicist and philosopher Carlo Rovelli writes, adding that the nature of time might just be the

greatest remaining mystery (Rovelli, 2020, p. 12). In this context, we recommend that you begin with the simpler concepts of period and duration.

WHO is the universe about? A cleaner, an octopus or a dust bunny? This question pertains to the main character or protagonist as well as, more broadly, to other existences or beings.

Initially, it seems obvious to imagine the main protagonist as a human being, but in a more inclusive approach with a broader potential, you may consider the creatures in your universe as beings or actors. In her novel *The Employees* (2018/2020), Danish writer Olga Ravn describes robots as humanoid because they are difficult to distinguish from human beings.



You may also handle beings as groups or clusters without initially naming and individualizing them. This lets you avoid the risk of drawing attention away from the universe as

a whole. A group may be one among many factions, such as the Survivors, the Stalkers or various zombie groups from the comic book and TV series *The Walking Dead* (2010–).

In fiction, beings may include objects or animals with humanoid behaviours that enable an emotional connection. In Pixar movies, clownfish and desk lamps are living characters with human emotions. This is called anthropomorphism and is common in fairy tales and fairy-tale universes.

Of course, you might also imagine a fictional universe as in Stanislaw Lem's novel *Eden* (1959). *Eden* includes beings that are impossible to understand, which is exactly the point. Thus, a character is, above all, a figure that acts and feels. Although background, development and characteristics also matter, the most significant qualities that Aristotle characterized are that the character must be good, appropriate, true to life and consistent (Aristotle 335–323 BCE/2005, XV). Tension in the characters relates to the conflict between *want* and *need*. Many stories and genres – from hospital romance novels to stories about samurai – relate to a particular occupation and how it is carried out, just as the oldest stories, according to German philosopher Walter Benjamin, have instructions about crafts

and craftsmanship built into their structure (Benjamin, 1996).

Thus, your characters must have potency or abilities in order to be interesting. In addition, they need to have an outlook on life or a temperament, which in antiquity was categorized as either melancholic, sanguine, phlegmatic or choleric.

In addition to groups and characters and their orchestration in various roles, there are types or archetypes such as heroes, villains, allies and so forth, as described by Swedish dramaturgist Ola Olsson and American story analyst Christopher Vogler with inspiration from American writer and scholar of mythology Joseph Campbell (Vogler, 1992).

There are a number of adjacent terms for what we have called 'beings'. These terms highlight different qualities of beings, which you might consider. For example, 'character' comes from Greek *kharakter* meaning engraving, symbol or imprint on the soul, suggesting a sort of innermost truth or secret. The term 'figure' points to the body and its potency and appearance, while 'role' comes from the rolled-up papyrus scrolls theatre dialogue used to be written on. In this sense, 'role' points to the being's linguistic dimension and its utterances. 'Person' refers to a mask. Thus, the description of the being affects its tone, which is an aesthetic issue. You may also want

to consider whether the way in which the universe is experienced is coloured by, for example, subjectivity or objectivity in the character and, in extension of this, whether the universe is experienced through a collective or through an individual. Of course, the being or character also has an aesthetic dimension, which is expressed, not least, through their costume.



HOW do things in the universe happen? This question has to do with the rules of the universe and about how we experience the universe. It has to do both with the rules in the universe, such as laws (including laws of nature), language, communication, infrastructure and so forth, and with aesthetic, as it is expressed in the genre and in visual or linguistic features.

While WHERE looks at the fictional world's geography and landscape, HOW is the lens through which we see the landscape and the rules that determine what is possible in this world. A simple way of categorizing stylistic expressions is to distinguish between denotative, expressive, poetic and symbolic features.

A denotative style is characterized by a neutral, realistic and objective representation of the world as it is and without connotations; that is, without implied associations or meanings. An expressive style involves intense, heightened emotions and stark contrasts. A

poetic style is characterized by patterns and ornamentation with an emphasis on sensuous qualities, such as fragrance, flavour, sound, tactile experiences and so forth. A symbolic expression is characterized by more abstract features with an emphasis on form, colours and lines that do not necessarily refer to any recognizable reality (Bordwell in Nielsen, 2004).

The universe builder's professional background also affects the process. A visual artist or designer may begin with a focus on form. Game designers often find inspiration in



a particular set of rules or a gaming mechanism that, similar to a stylistic choice, determines what the audience is going to see, experience and feel. For a writer, the process may be guided by a fascination with a particular genre, as described by Stephen King, or with music, which is a recurring theme in Murakami's books, which sometimes involve listening to Charlie Parker or J. S. Bach.

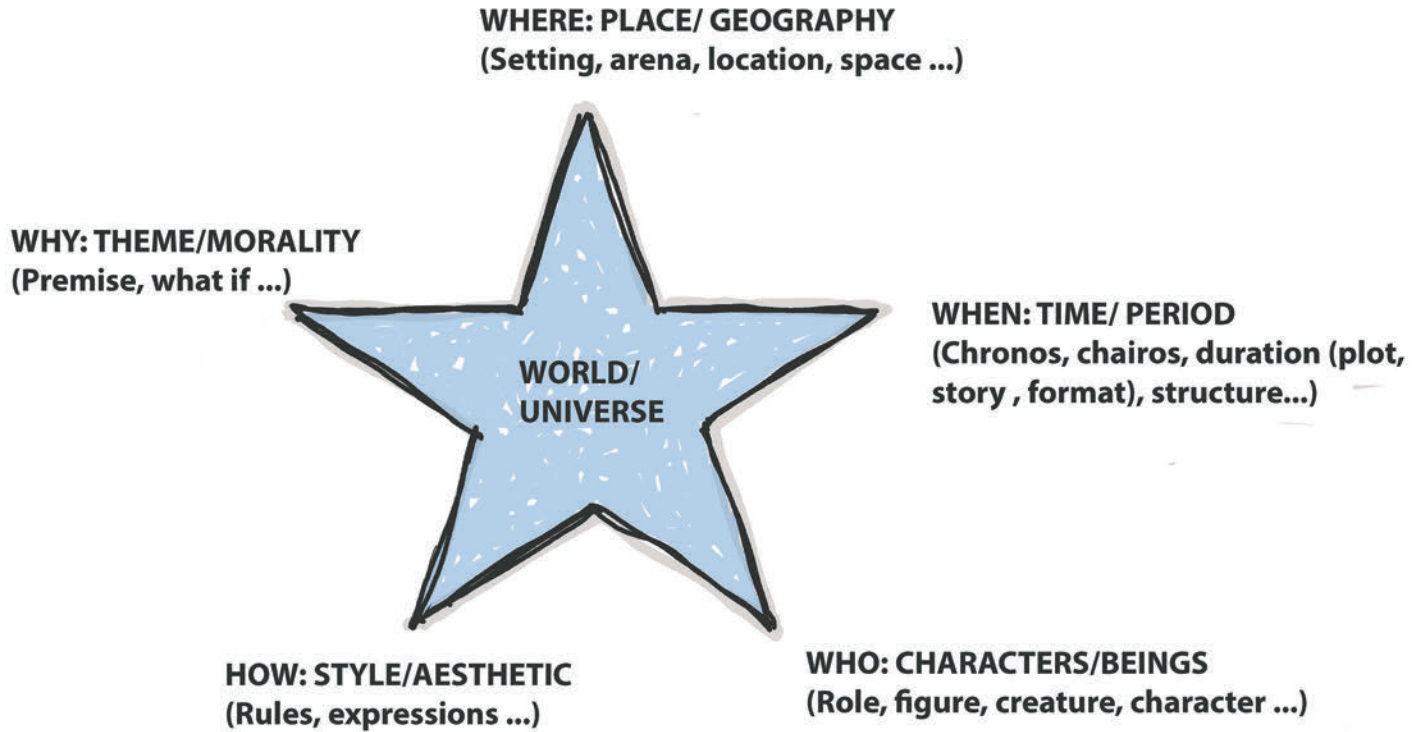


WHY build this universe? What do you want with the universe, and why should others take an interest in it? This question has to do with theme and premise. A theme may be understood as the topic that the universe is about, something that is of particular significance. This might be human feelings, such as love, greed or jealousy, or it may be ethical or political issues, such as sustainability or

democracy. The moment the theme is associated with a question or an assertion, we may speak of a premise or 'The Big Why'.

There are two types of premise: 1) a question-based premise, also known as 'the magical *what if?*' and 2) a premise based on a proposition or a moral topic, as defined by dramaturgist Lajos Egri (1942/1988, pp. 2–30). For example, if you believe that the critical state of our planet is due to humanity's intrinsic urge to consume, the theme might be greed. In this light, *Dune* may be seen as a geopolitical work of fiction with a focus on planet-wide ecology, which makes it an early example of so-called cli-fi, science fiction with a focus on climate change.

A question-based premise might be 'What would happen if humanity was dominated by uncontrollable greed?' A moral premise, on the other hand, could be 'Humanity's intrinsic greed will lead to our demise'. To be workable, a premise should be open to contradiction. Advertising and communication professionals are often taught to begin with WHY when they present a new idea. *Start with Why!* (Sinek, 2011). That makes sense in a sales pitch, but when you set out to develop something new, you probably do not know the exact answer to that question. Instead, it might be helpful to think of WHY as the theme that interests you. You can also engage



in *what if* experiments. What if all human beings were women? What if mammals began to be able to breathe under water? The morality-based proposition premise may be formulated later, in subsequent iterations as you continue to develop your universe.

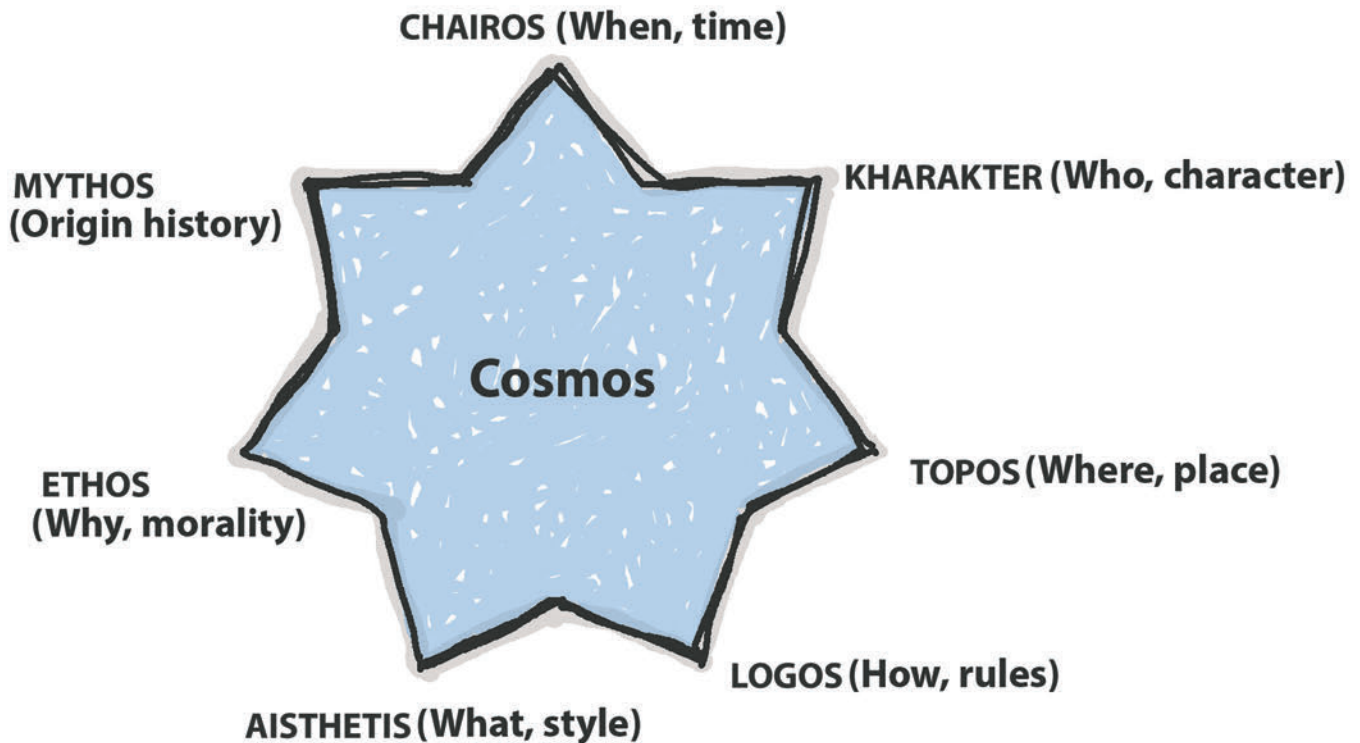
Above you see the Star Model with all its questions.

The analytical seven-point star

The Star Model is about asking simple questions about the universe you have set out to develop. As mentioned above, the model has some similarities with Susana Tosca and Lisbeth Klastrup's Worldness Model, which includes the dimensions of topos, ethos and mythos (Tosca & Klastrup, 2019, p. 43). The two models have significant overlap and differences. For example, the Star Model does

not explicitly address mythos in the sense of the universe's origin or cosmology, although our model does link the mythology to time: WHEN. Tosca and Klastrup use ethos as an example of morality in the diegetic world, while our focus is on the universe-builder's own stance in the development of the universe. The primary purpose of our model is

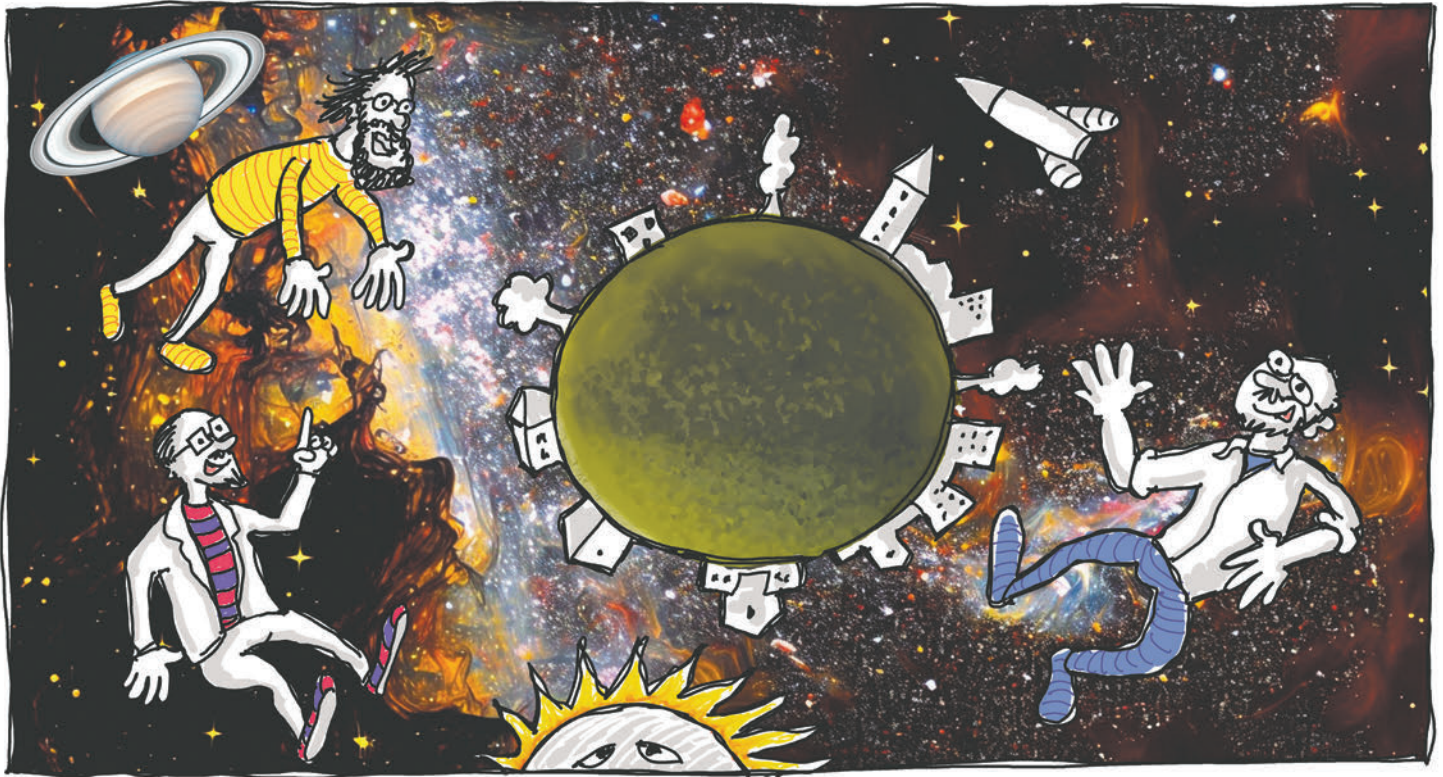
pragmatic and generative, while the Worldness Model is primarily analytical. Both models can be turned on their head, combined and expanded. For example, the Star Model might benefit from a distinction between rules and style. A combination of the two models, using the Greek terms, would include seven dimensions: *chairos* (time), *kharakter* (character),



topos (place), *logos* (rules), *aisthetis* (style), *ethos* (morality) and *mythos* (origin). This could be described as the analytical star, which might have practical applications as well.

We could go into a much more detailed discussion of possible conceptions of a universe, but our purpose here is simply to offer a holistic, non-linear and non-hierarchical model that will be useful as you begin to conceptu-

alize your universe. Importantly, the model is not designed to help you develop plot or story, just as it does not point to any specific medium or publishing format or art form such as film, TV series, novel, stage performance or computer game. These choices are the topic of the following chapters. At the end of this chapter, you will find some exercises to help you get started using the Star Model.





Manga comics:

Manga has conquered Asia, and the popularity of manga series is rapidly growing in the West, where new generations love the almost endless series in which gigantic universes unfold in every conceivable form. In this conversation, we meet two young mangakas (manga artists) in Kyoto. They are both from South Korea, where manga is no less popular than in Japan. The two mangakas we are about to meet are not just manga artists but also scholars, teachers and curators in the manga school and museum in Kyoto. After a tour of the museum and in their library, which has the world's largest collection of mangas, we sit down in a café to talk about how a manga is made.



Koo Bon Won is a South Korean manga artist. Since 2013, she has been the head of manga courses at Kansai University of Foreign Studies in Japan. She is also in charge of practical training in manga in a special course for foreign students and teaches Japanese studies (manga and anime as Japanese culture) in the foreign language department.



Yoo Sookyung is a South Korean manga artist. She is a researcher at the International Manga Research Center at Kyoto Seika University in Japan, where she is also a manga instructor. Besides, she works as a freelance manga artist and translator.

From a tiny idea to an entire universe – how is the universe created for a manga?

Koo Bon Won: The character is the most important. It always begins with the character. The character is the basis of a universe or a story, in my mind, since the world may change, but the people don't change. For example, the good guy, how you define a good guy or how you define a bad guy. You make it really extreme, so the bad guy only decides to do bad things, and the good guy only decides to do good things. Also, the main character has to be someone the readers can empathize with. So, even if he decides to do bad things, you have to understand why he had to do it this way. The basics of the character are always the same. There's a very happy one or very depressed one, and because this character is the happy one, he decides in this way. When he chooses a negative way, there must be a very, very clear reason why he decided this. Once you have the basics of the characters, you give them a situation. And ideally, the characters should move. So you make settings for them. They are so alive in your mind that it doesn't really matter if you put them in a science-fiction world or a real world. The character is so lifelike that he could be your friend.

Yoo Sookyoung: There are two types of manga. Manga that emphasizes character. And manga

that emphasizes the setting. As a student, I had the assignment of drawing a really short manga with Kyoto as its theme. Even though my grandfather was from Korea, but he was able to speak the Japanese dialect that is spoken in Kyoto, so I made up a story about how he had come to Kyoto, Japan, as a young man and met a woman there. After his death, his granddaughter finds a box of Japanese postcards. She travels to Kyoto to find the woman, who explains that she met the woman's grandfather and that they fell in love and spent a single, wonderful day together. However, their cultures, their parents and the relationship between the two countries made it difficult for them to have more than that one day. So the rest of their lives, they continued to exchange postcards. While they were young, they were not brave enough to take action, and only when they were old did they realize that this was the best day of their lives.

After writing the plot, I decided how many pages I would use and divided the plot on the pages. Then I made a storyboard and drew the manga – I think it was 24 pages. I drew the characters in order to get to know them, and I took some photos of Kyoto to make the whole



thing more realistic, but the only truth in the story was that my grandfather was able to speak this Japanese dialect and that the Japanese – to this day – love to send postcards.

Koo Bon Won: I'm not as systematic, because I get my inspiration very randomly. For example, I was scribbling random characters; I scribbled two characters on the same paper, and then I thought, oh, they could be in a relationship or something like that. I drew it so nicely that it could be a manga scene. Then I thought, what kind of scene could this be? What kind of relationship could they have? And then I began to make settings that could get them into this relationship, and so forth.

Yoo Sookyung: Manga with good characters lasts longer. For example, there is a story called *Ikegami*, which takes place in Japan. The story is that all children get a vaccine, but you don't know what's in it. Either it's harmless, or it will kill when you turn 20. The Japanese government decided to show the importance of life. You can randomly die. *Ikegami* is the paper you get when you're 20, before you die, and then some characters only have a few days left. I cannot remember the characters at all, I can only remember the set.

Koo Bon Won: When we see the drawing of a character, we should know that this character

looks like a good student because of the way she wears the uniform and the tie, which looks very ordinary. Another character may have punk hair and a uniform is very wild, you can already see, okay, she's not an



extraordinary character, not really loved by her teacher and so forth. So the visual features have to fit the characteristics. Like the one who looks like a really ordinary student, she always wants to be number one – but then you add one thing, like maybe she has a night-time job hosting for men. Even though it is not prostitution, dating old men for money is a social problem for young female high school students. So a character who looks really ordinary creates this kind of twist. There is also the character's upbringing, what his or her life was like. Is this character in Japan? In Korea? Is it a science fiction world? So normally, we always start with the character and then go out into the world.

Yoo Sookyung: For example, if we talk about *Sailor Moon* [famous manga character and

eponymous series], sometimes you can't remember the story, but you clearly remember her personality. In the case of animation or manga, of course, one of the most important things are characters, because you remember them as your friends. You can talk about your friends personally, and you can talk about characters personally.

Koo Bon Won: You can see this in the Doji Market, which is manga fan art. Here, fans take original manga characters and put them in different backgrounds. For example, Naruto, Sasuke and Sakura are put into a Japanese high school, so the world starts with the characters, but it grows into a universe. And the main characters basically do not change.

In our world, we would also give the character skills, something that they're very good at. It could be a bad thing, killing, or a good thing, maybe they can fight or they can protect. So, do you work with that?

Koo Bon Won: It depends. It can't be a skill. For example, in manga for children, you prefer a very normal girl, so you can emphasize that she's not Madonna. But as with the good guy and the bad guy, normally, she would always decide for the good even if it doesn't make things better for her. This is important for em-

phasizing the main character. And this could be a skill, that you decide to do good.

But the characters don't have special skills? They can't fly?

Koo Bon Won: No, it's like *Squid Game*. The main character is very, very ordinary, but normally, he decides to do good, even when he is in a very, very critical situation.

Yoo Sookyung: It is about empathizing with the main character. In the case of manga for boys or manga for girls, this is important. If the character is perfect from the beginning, the character might not grow up, and then you can't see the process of development and it won't be touching. So even a perfect character should have some weakness. In the case of children's manga, usually there's a really perfect enemy who shows the main character's growth. At first, they might not be able to fight each other, but towards the end, it will be possible, and the main character will win. And then you can empathize with the character.



This character used to be nothing but grew and developed their skills, and now they're really strong. In the case of children's manga, if there is a really beautiful and smart heroine, who is loved by many guys, I would feel bad. But if the heroine is nothing special but she has a warm heart or she's loved by many people, I will have some hope that I, too, can be loved by people like that, if I behave in this way.

Koo Bon Won: The character can really be a friend. It's very important that the readers like this character. Normally, you create a character and the character's purpose and goal, which could simply be survival. And then you start introducing troubles, obstacles that keep the character from reaching their goal, and drawing how they can overcome these problems. And because the character is alive, as mangaka, we try to make the problem as difficult as possible. How can I make it even more difficult for him? Should I kill all his friends? Should I do something to his friends before I kill them? How can I make it even harder or even better? And then the character will do what he needs to do.

Yoo Sookyung: It's actually hard to explain why or how the characters are so important in manga. It has something to do with the distance between the manga characters and the

readers. For example, when I read European comics, I feel like I'm watching the situation, and there's a certain distance. I'm watching as a third person, but when I read manga, I am in the story. Manga is designed to make you



feel that way, for example with the use of close-up images. And then sometimes, you know, manga artists go a little far. So you feel really close to the character. You don't really feel like you are the character when you're reading, but almost.

It's almost like a first-person game, where you are inside the character, even though it is a fictional character.

Koo Bon Won: I always think of this really well-made character called Char, in *Gundam*. He was the villain, but he was so attractive. The audience was able to empathize with Char and understand why he was a villain. He was very charismatic. During the story, he died, and many of the viewers committed suicide because Char died. Later, in a movie, he came back.

There is also Luffy [from the manga *One Piece*], who wanted to be the king of the pirates. The question is whether Luffy develops at all? He doesn't really seem to. As a main character, Luffy is well defined and convincing because he is very strong. His perfection is in his strengths. He is not rich, he is not the king of the pirates yet. We already know how he would behave in a certain situation, and that drives the story.

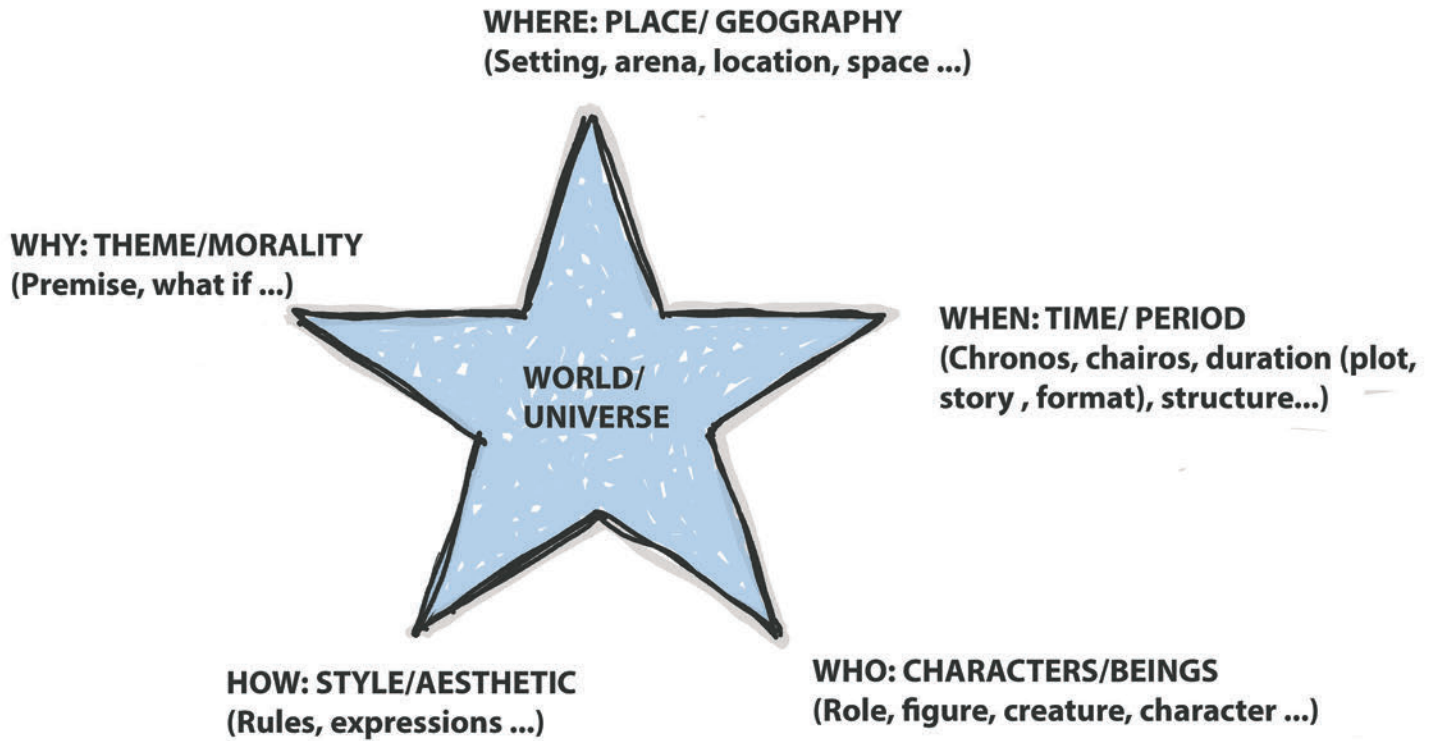
However, when the story reaches a certain stage, as an author, you lose control of the character. You have to keep feeding them new relationships or situations. And that's what happens in *One Piece*. *One Piece* is beginning to get messy, because the series is too long. The development in Luffy's strength and power is exaggerated. New problems mean new characters who are stronger than him, and he has to overcome them. So he's becoming stronger.

And then you end up like Superman without kryptonite.

Koo Bon Won: Yes, but it's not just Luffy now. So it starts with the character, normally with the main character and his purpose, but the development of the story drives the development of the universe. And that can become a side story. I was talking about the fan art community, where they take the character, but sometimes it's also the other way around. They put their own characters into the world of the manga. In that sense, the world setting itself has become a kind of character, which develops.







Exercise 2: Create an original universe

Spend no more than one hour to build a universe.

As your starting point, choose one of the following three settings as your inspiration.

Setting 1 (the animated universe):

- City
- Pigeons
- Child vs. adult

Setting 2 (the fantastical universe):

- Himalaya
- Mythological creatures, spirits and human beings
- Reason vs. superstition

Setting 3 (the realistic universe):

- Concrete suburb
- Criminal gangs and families
- Community vs. individual

Then formulate a *what if* or a *big why* question.

A *what if* question might be, ‘What if we could predict murders?’ as in the film *Minority Report*.

A *big why* question relating to the same theme might be, ‘Can you punish people for crimes they have not (yet) committed?’

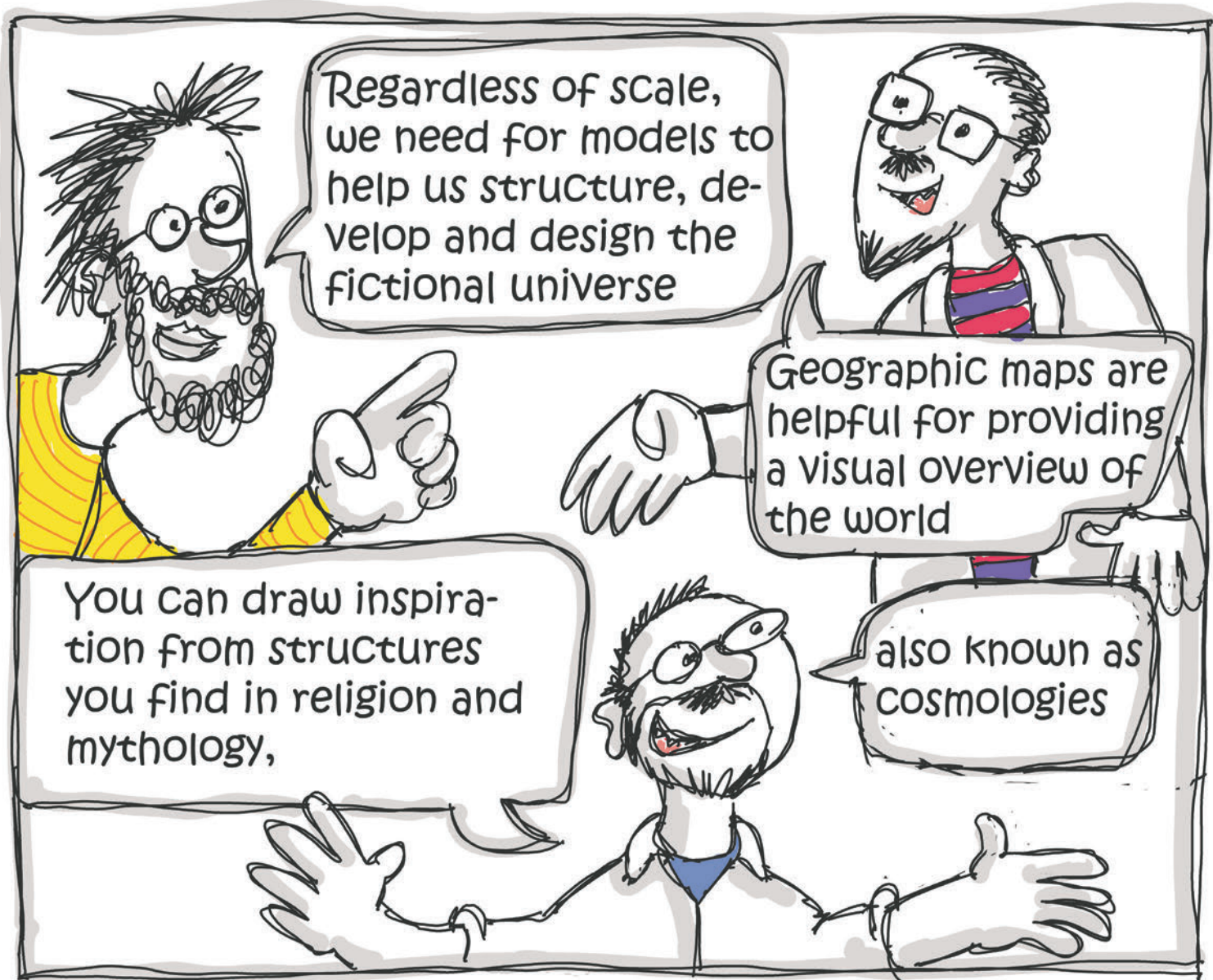
Create a concept for your universe based on the three ingredients and your questions by using the five points of the Star Model: WHERE, WHEN, WHO, HOW and WHY.

Present the universe to a colleague/classmate/friend and discuss which points of the star are the strongest, with the greatest potential. Enlist their help to flesh out the other aspects to develop a universe concept that has a solid description for all five points of the star.

Image from the Hubble Space Telescope:
The giant red nebula (NGC 2014) and its
smaller blue neighbor (NGC 2020) are part of
a large star-forming region in the Large Ma-
gellanic Cloud, a satellite galaxy in the Milky
Way, located 163,000 light-years away.







Regardless of scale, we need for models to help us structure, develop and design the fictional universe

Geographic maps are helpful for providing a visual overview of the world

You can draw inspiration from structures you find in religion and mythology,

also known as cosmologies

3. Design: How do I illustrate my universe?

The tale has root [in the map], it grows in the soil; it has a spine of its own behind the words.

Robert Louis Stevenson, *My First Book* (1896)

A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face.

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph* (1945)

In the previous chapter, we discussed how you can develop the idea for your universe using the Star Model and its questions about the different dimensions of the universe. That is just a start, though, and we need to add more detail. This chapter deals with how you can explore your universe, with its internal contradictions, contrasts and structure and the elements that hold it together.

Perhaps you want a well-structured universe, or maybe you prefer to let it grow wild – or you might like a universe with blank spots on the map and unexplored territories. Whatever the case, you will need to develop more in-depth knowledge about the boundaries of the universe and its thematic centre. One way

to do this is by sketching maps and cosmologies, which is the topic of this chapter. Popular universes, such as Harry Potter, *One Piece* and Marvel, are so comprehensive that they have spawned handbooks and wikis where you can explore their history, characters, language(s), geography, technology, culture, design, botany and zoology. Part of the appeal of a universe is its encyclopaedic aspects, which are related to ordering and organizing the vast and complex constructions of the fictional world. J. R. R. Tolkien famously built his universe on an extensive mythology, which later spawned an independent publication, *The Silmarillion* (1977). By contrast, other universes, such as Jorge R. Gutierrez's *Maya*

and the Three (2018), are based on existing cosmologies and mythologies (see interview later in this chapter). There is a great deal of life and inspiration to be found in in-depth knowledge of the mythology or origin story of your universe.

However, the development of a universe is not necessarily about describing or illustrating everything in minute detail. That is far from necessary, and in most cases, it is not even desirable.

A benefit of both fiction and documentarism is that even the largest and most comprehensive universes do have boundaries. In a documentary universe, the writer or director chooses which parts of this hypercomplex reality to include. As we shall see later, it is important to bear in mind that the material you use to describe or visualize your universe should inspire and invite others to take part in developing it – and your material will not have the desired inspirational effect if it seems too complete from the outset. That is why universe builders often base their work on delimited settings, such as cities and islands, that are characterized by having natural boundaries that set them, more or less, apart from the rest of the world. A city or an island may offer a microcosm that is manageable, while also inviting exploration, as

Danish animation film director Karla Nor Holmbäck explains in relation to her creation of *Holly på Sommerøen* (Holly on Summer Island) (2018) and *Rosa and the Stone Troll* (2023) (see interview later in this chapter). Moreover, the sea around an island may be viewed as an allegory of the gap between the worlds of fiction and reality (Ryan et al, 2016, p. 57).

Regardless of the potential size of your universe, it is helpful to base it on an underlying structure. Let us begin by demonstrating how cosmologies can inspire and help you develop the structure of your universe and how this structure can in turn inspire your visualization of it. The thematic contradictions that exist in a universe can be translated into visual and spatial contrasts. Typically, this is based on what is covered under the WHERE point of the Star Model.

As we discussed in the previous chapter, geographic maps can be very helpful for building a visual concept of a delimited world. Maps invite exploration, and any blank spots or uncharted areas invite journeys into the unknown.

The chapter closes with a discussion of the significance of viewing your universe as a metaphor. One of the advantages of a metaphor is that it acts as a condensed image of the universe. Together, images, metaphors

and cosmologies constitute both visual and textual dimensions of your universe.

Cosmology and the structure of your universe

The word *cosmology* comes from Greek and means the study of the universe. Basically, it describes religious and scientific views of the nature and structure of the universe.

These worldviews are commonly expressed in mythologies that deal with stark contrasts, such as night and day, all and nothing, life and death. Some of the most compelling and inspiring narratives revolve around strong opposing forces or phenomena. In Norse mythology, for example, the world arose out of chaos when the first living being, the giant Ymir, was created. Ymir was nourished by the cow Audhumbla, which itself found sustenance by licking the hoar frost off a salt stone. From this salt stone sprang the gods and giants that killed Ymir. Later, Ymir's flesh became the earth, his bones became mountains, and his blood became the sea. The sky was made from his skull, and the clouds from his brain.

According to the French structuralist and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, one simple way to understand cosmologies, as they are expressed in religious myths and legends, is through contrasts that are ordered into so-called binary opposites and the connections

between these contrasts, which he calls mediators. This thinking has also inspired literary analysts and film critics (Bordwell, 1989, pp. 81–83). The American dramaturgist John Truby similarly highlights the significance of contrasts or opposites (Truby, 2007, p. 153). A typical example of a cosmological contrast is that between chaos and order, as in the story about Ymir, in which the salt stone may be understood as a mediator.



In building your universe, you may view it in relation to a cosmological story and structure. That will help make your universe seem coherent and may also provide inspiration for describing and visualizing your work.

The powerful contrast between life and death plays a central role in the Pixar film *Coco* from 2017. It is like a version of *Orpheus in the Underworld* set in Mexico. To create the Land of the Dead in the film, the designers based their work on the history of Mexico City and the original Aztec city on the site, which was situated on an island in a lake in the middle of the country. That provided the idea for inverting Mexico City, portraying it as an underground metropolis with coloured

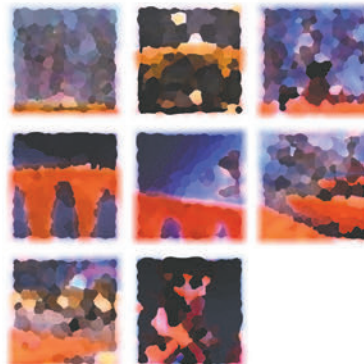
towers protruding from the deep, like corals (pixar.com/feature-films/coco). By contrast, the Land of the Living has fewer colours, and the village where this part of the plot plays out is characterized by small houses with flat roofs. In the design, bridges, traffic and the cemetery were cast as locations that – like the film score – connected the lands of the living and the dead. This is an example of a universe that consists of simple opposites, with the Land of the Living versus the Land of the Dead. The two parts of the universe are connected by mediators in the form of bridges, cemeteries and music.

The contrasts in Jorge R. Gutierrez's *Maya and the Three* (2018) is closer to the original

THE CITY OF THE DEAD



THE BRIDGE



THE VILLAGE



Mayan religion. In our interview with Gutierrez, he reflects on the stark contrasts between civilization, an animated nature and the world of the gods.

Many fairytales and stories – from *Gilgamesh* to *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* series (1900–) to *Valérian and Laureline* (1967–) – are about travelling to a special world. The most fundamental narrative schemes, as they have been outlined by thinkers such as Joseph Campbell, Vladimir Propp and Algirdas Julien Greimas (who presented the structural models as so-called Actantial Model in 1966), revolve around a journey to a special world that stands in contrast to the ordinary, everyday world. In addition to this main contrast, creators may also, as John Truby notes, establish a number of subworlds (Truby, 2007, pp. 175–176). In the following, we have chosen to divide the world into several sections or parts.

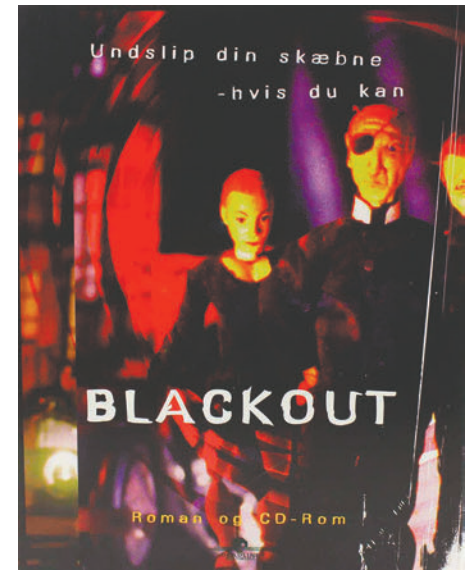
Thus, your exploration of the universe may be organized around a structure consisting of contrasts, like the opposites we find in most cosmologies.

As you gather research material in the form of references, sketches, texts or notes for your universe, it can be helpful to organize this material on two physical or digital boards, each representing one of the two opposites. In the design profession, these types of boards, fea-

turing a collection of inspirational and referential materials and capturing both style and atmosphere, are known as mood boards.

The contrasts in question may be both thematic and visual, and they can be expanded to include additional contrasts. For example, in our interview with Chae Kyoung Sun, the production designer for *Squid Game*, she explains how the series universe essentially consists of the contrast between the city and the underground structure of the secret island, where the cruel ‘squid game’ takes place. However, the contrasts between the different residential areas of Seoul also play a role (see the interview at the end of Chapter 4).

The classic Danish game *Blackout* (1997) – which one of the authors of this book was involved in creating, along with writer Michael Valeur, among others – is based on the significance assigned to the four elements of earth, fire, air, water in the worldview of



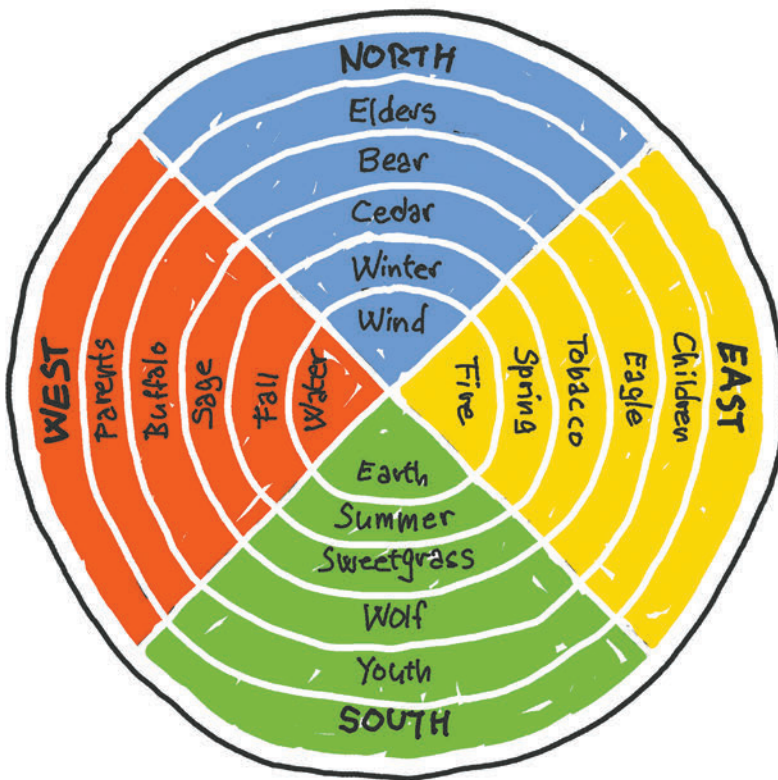
antiquity. The game plays out in a fictive city, whose master plan is modelled on the four elements.

In this world, water is associated with the docklands, air with the more affluent neighbourhoods, fire with the more sinister downtown, and earth with the concrete blocks of the suburbs.

Similarly, the characters in the game are modelled on the four temperaments, which

were associated with the four elements through the four ‘humours’, or bodily fluids: blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm. Depending on how the game is played the player understands his or her psyche as either melancholic, choleric, sanguine or phlegmatic. Thus, the four-part structure of antiquity provides the structure for organizing all the material in the game, while also making the gaming experience meaningful.

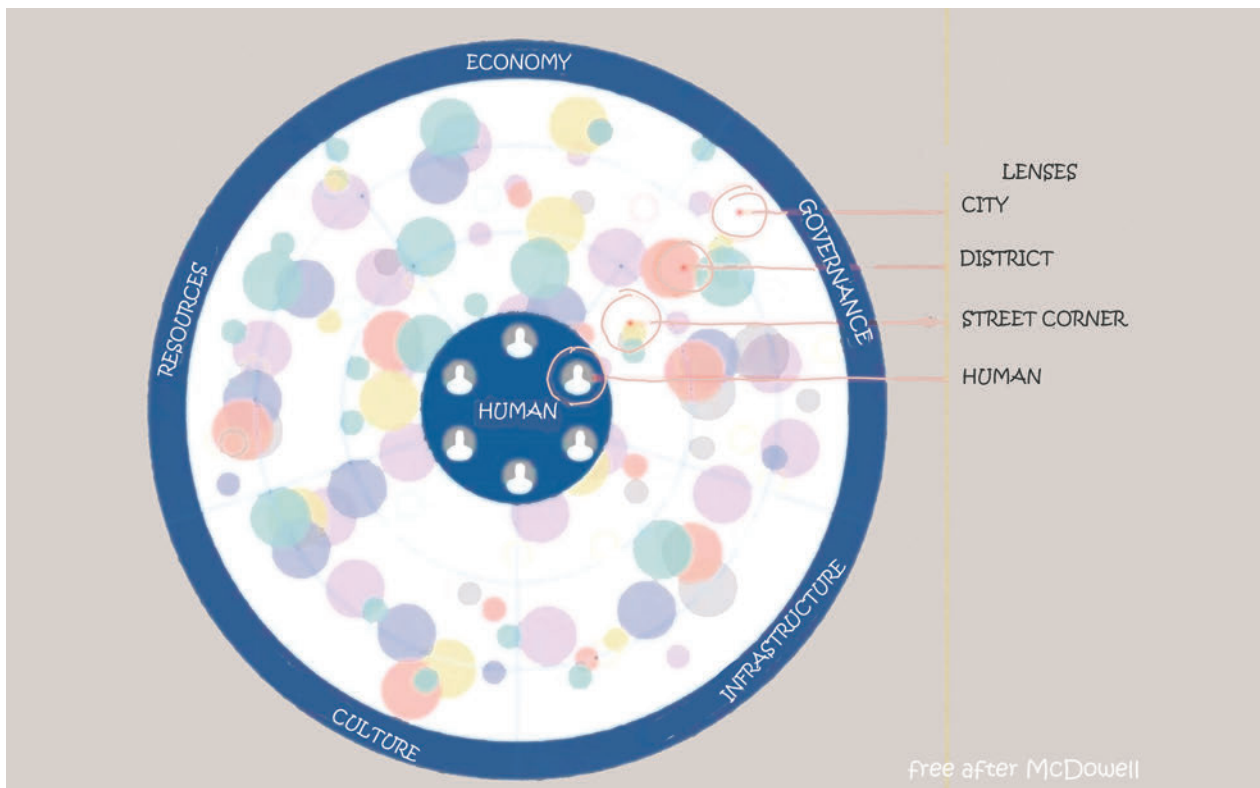
The four-part structure underpinning the worldview of antiquity is also found in the so-called medicine wheel, which visualizes the structure of the cosmological worldview of so-called indigenous (Nordic, American, African) peoples. In the medicine wheel, the four corners of the world are associated with different life phases, animals, plants and seasons as well as the four elements. The medicine wheel encourages the user to view the world from different perspectives in order to establish a more complex and nuanced understanding in a way that may also provide inspiration for designers (Engholm, 2023). This holistic approach to design and to the creation of fiction also characterizes the philosophy behind the world-building mandala model that the American production designer Alex McDowell recommends for mapping the world (McDowell, 2017).



The mandala approach to mapping

McDowell's mandala model is a system for gathering design and research material for your universe in a way that is more complex or detailed than the method we reviewed in the previous section, which was mainly based on thematic and visual opposites in the universe. Like the medicine wheel, the mandala consists of concentric circles. At the centre of the model is the individual human being, who can move outwards along different

scales, which are subdivided into sections or domains. Thus, using the mandala, we move from 1) the individual level to 2) family relations, to 3) other social communities, to 4) the city and to 5) the world and the global perspective. This system of circles is divided into different sections that refer to different domains: resources, environment, economy, terrain, culture (and cultural history), politics and so forth. McDowell recommends using the model as a tool for design and navigation



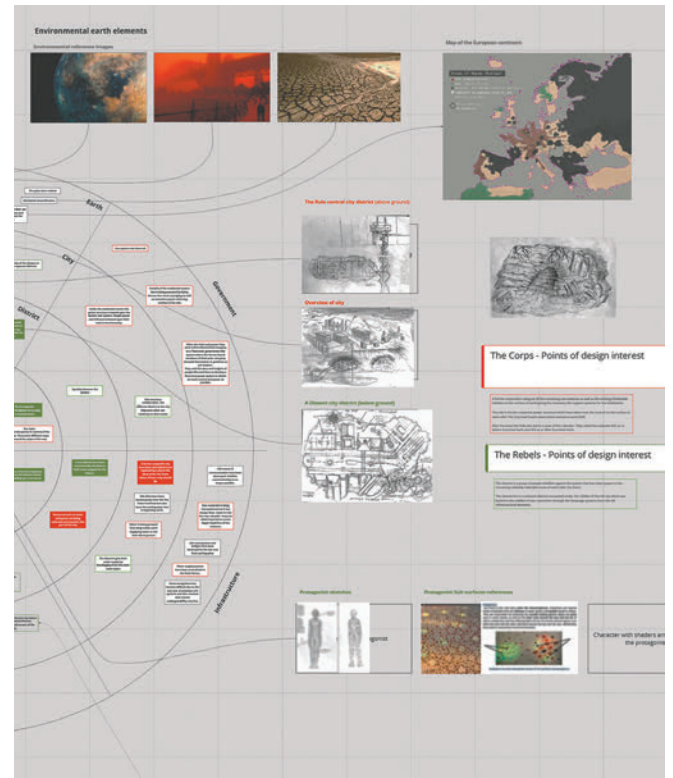
when gathering and organizing background or reference material for a universe.

By identifying the intersections in the model, you can examine, for example, how family and environment are interrelated. Or how the individual moves from home through the public urban infrastructure to the professional sphere of work.

This figure illustrates how a student from the Royal Danish Academy – Design, Casper Øbro, used the method to gather reference materials for his graduation project *Beneath the Rouble* (2021). The model has been adapted to appear less complex. Thus, the focus is on the human perspective, in this case the protagonist's point of view, and the different spheres are people, districts, city and planet earth. The different sections here are culture, economy, resources, ecology, power/government and infrastructure. Material has been added in the form of sketches and reference material in the form of photos and descriptive texts. Everything is gathered on a Miro board, a sort of digital board where it is easy to collect material and share it among the individuals involved in building the universe.

Maps show the way

When you use a model, such as the mandala, to organize the inspiration material you have gathered, your material will usually begin to



look like a geographic map. If it does not, perhaps because most of your material consists of descriptions, it may be helpful to arrange them into a structure that resembles a map.

One advantage of a map is that it provides a strategic overview of your universe. If it is well made, it may also offer an easily decoded non-linear way of illustrating the sometimes complex structures that exist in a universe. See examples on pp. 91–93.

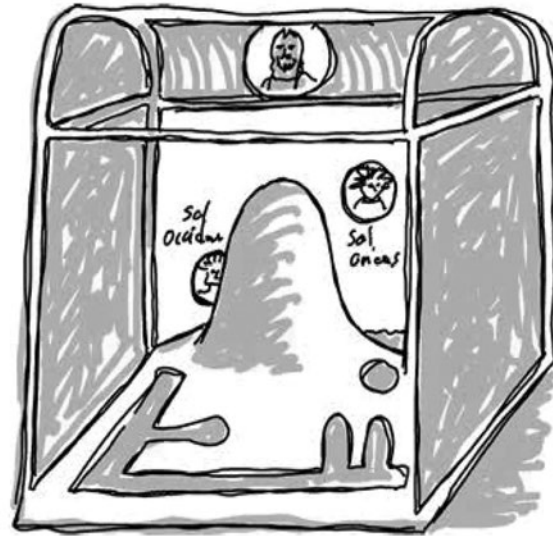
It is therefore not uncommon for novelists to use maps as a basis or aid in creating their stories, as Tolkien, Tove Jansson and Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of *Treasure Island*, did. Stevenson describes how the stories almost seem to grow out of the map, while Tolkien articulated the need for maps when working with complex stories. He adds that if you do not have a map from the outset, it becomes difficult to create one later (BBC interview, 1964).

A well-designed map that combines inventory and image in a single format can provide an overview of the world that brings out the narrative possibilities as well as geographic, political, social and all sorts of other structures. In this sense, the map is an excellent boundary object (Star & Griesemer, 1989) for communicating a universe.

Naturally, the map does not have to be a scientific version of a fictive world. Instead, it may be designed in accordance with the rules that apply in that world. In both digital and analogue games, what we call ‘maps’ in the present context constitute the all-important basic element. This is especially evident in strategy games, where the map is the game board.

It may be inspiring to look at both historical maps and maps representing non-existent

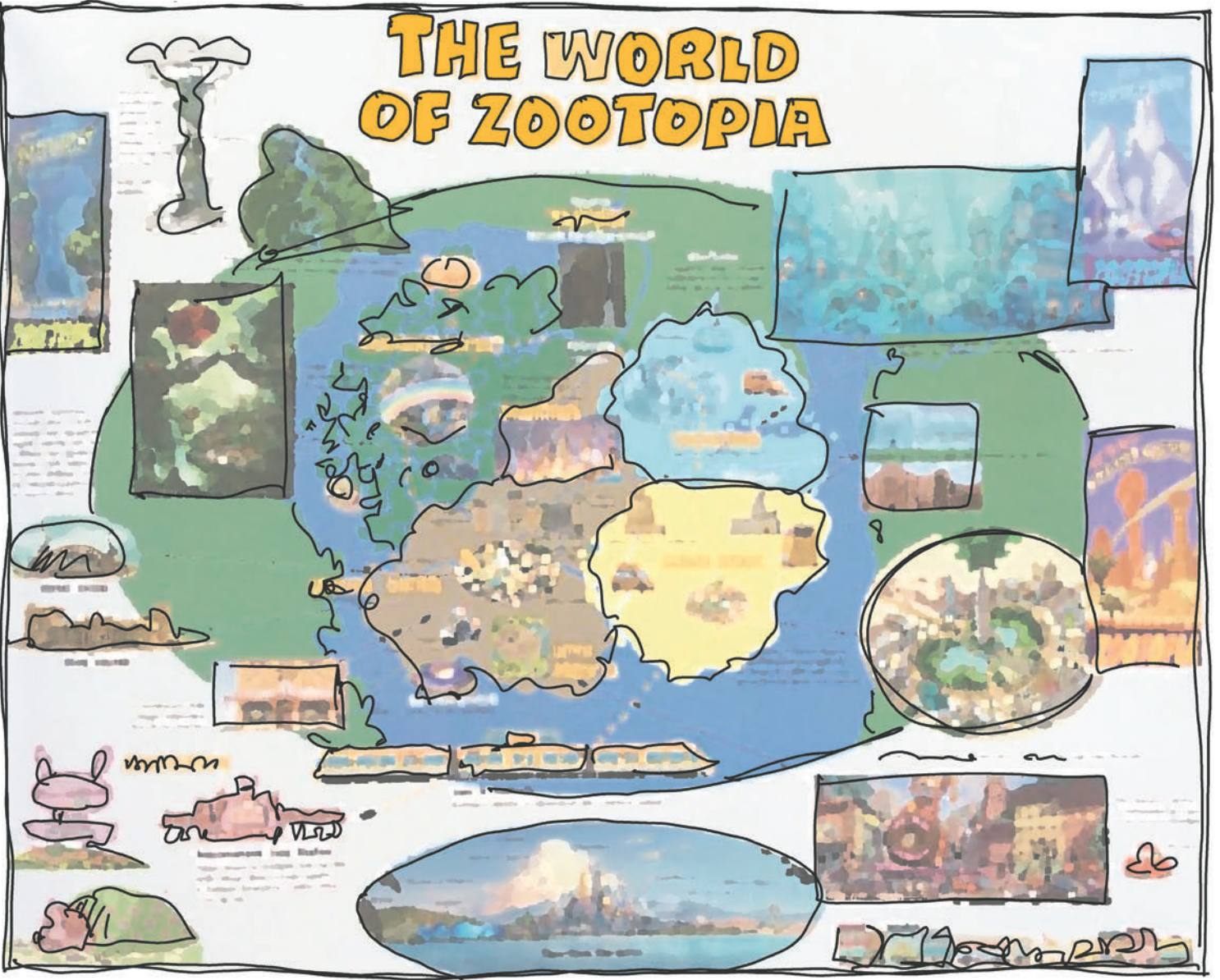
places that people have believed in over the ages, such as Atlantis or the Realm of Prester John, which were part of widely held alternative worldviews during the Middle Ages. So-called psychogeographic maps, which some artists create to illustrate their mental world, can also be a source of inspiration.

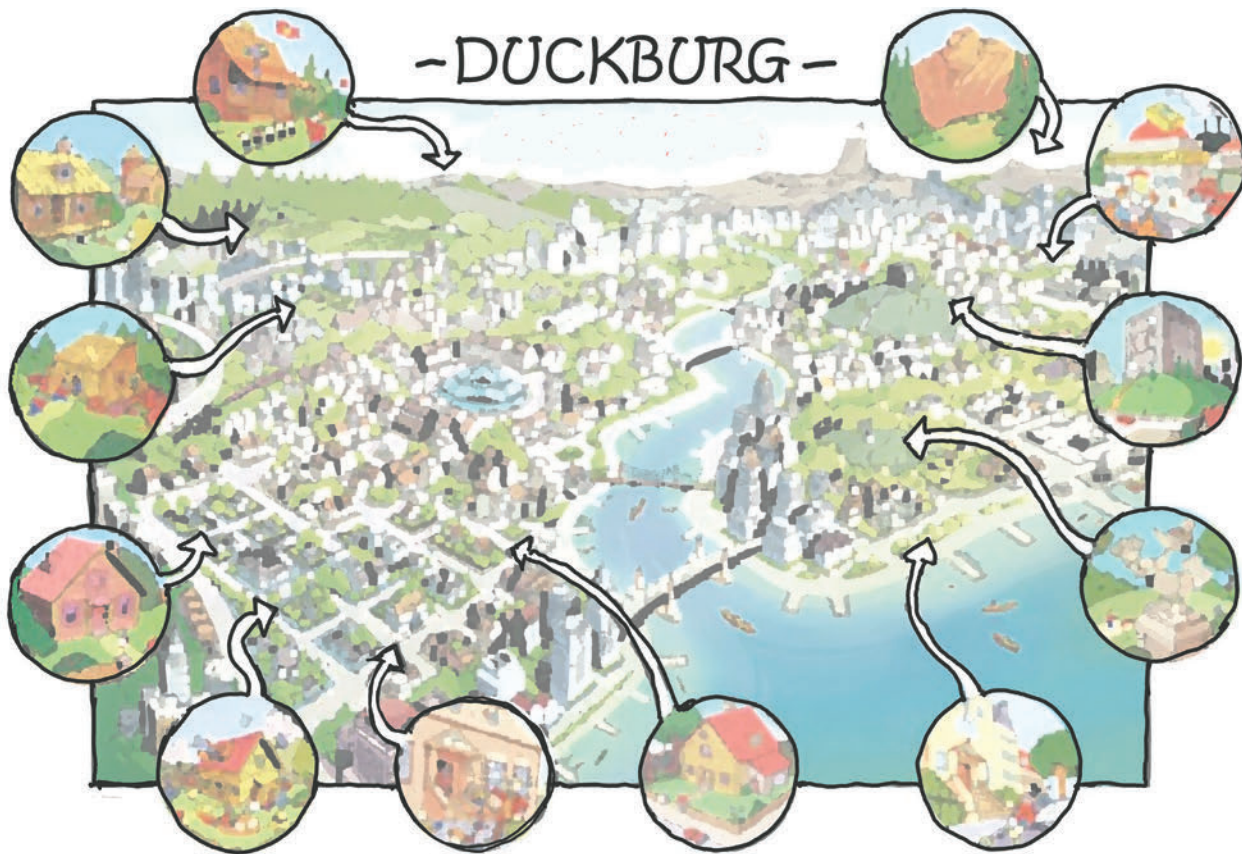


Tove Jansson created the map of *Moomin Valley* (1945) as an overview map that combines an illustration of Moomin Valley with a plan of the Moomin family’s house.

Depictions of the world as a tabernacle, as something balanced on the back of a tortoise or as the world in a medieval map, with its sea monsters and giant squids, are all great

THE WORLD OF ZOOTOPIA



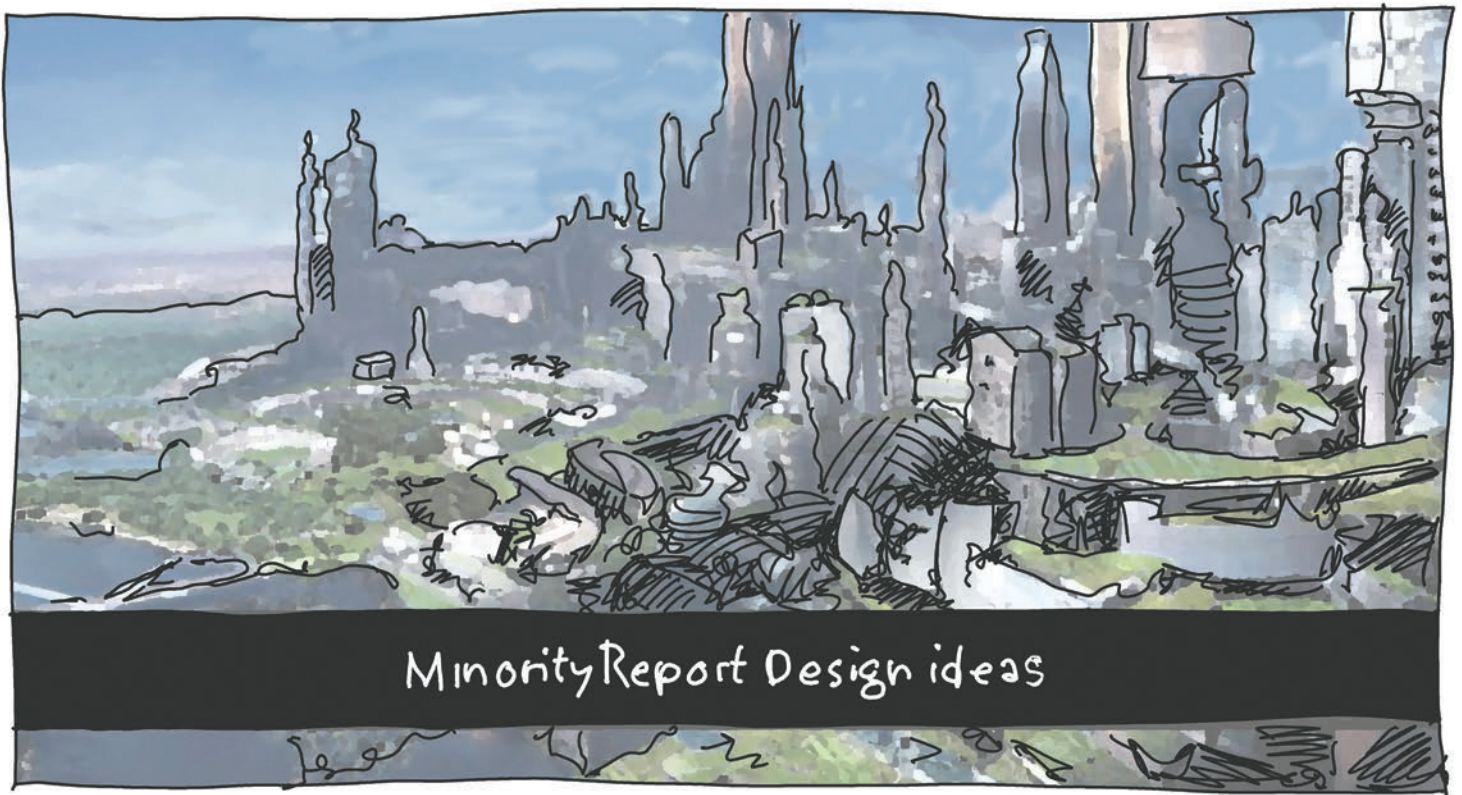


examples of inspiring overview illustrations that convey a basic notion and contain stories.

After gathering research material about your universe using the mandala or cosmological opposites, it may be helpful to draw or sketch the universe as a map, ideally with uncharted areas that invite journeys of discovery and cocreation.

The illustration from the making of the film *Zootropolis* (2016) can be read as a com-

bination of a mandala and a map; together, the two aspects organize the design references. The map of *Duckburg* indicates the development of the town and shows the main locations, but the map itself is a later representation of Duckburg, which was originally created in 1944.



Construct a model of the world

The map is very valuable for both the development and the experience of the universe. However, you can also take it one step further and construct a model of your world. In developing the film *Batman Begins* (2005), director and script writer Christopher Nolan and his production designer, Nathan Crowley, constructed a model of Gotham City in Nolan's garage in order to explore the spatial, visual

and narrative possibilities of the place at a time when only a few pages of the script had even been written.

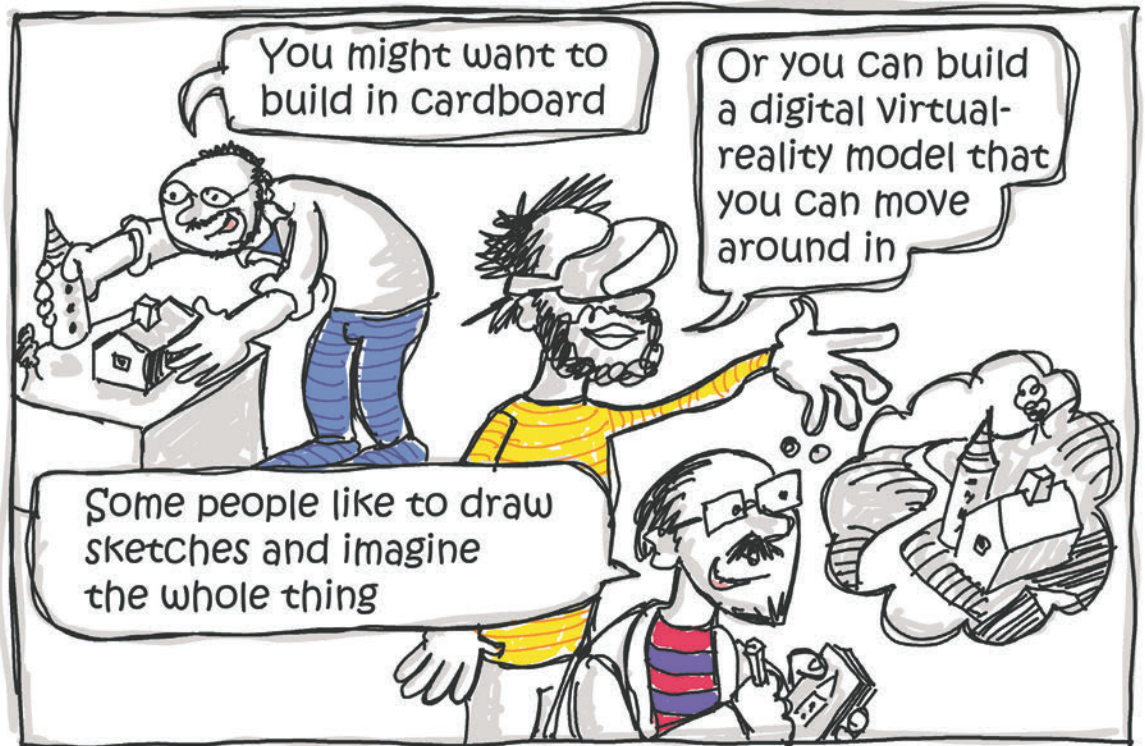
Crowley characterizes this exploration of the film's world as a sort pre-pre-production; that is, a phase preceding the part of film development known as pre-production (Wille, 2015b; Lisowski, 2012). No one has worked more systematically with this model in connection with film production than production

designer Alex McDowell, who generally views design and script as equally important in the development of visual fiction (McDowell, 2017). McDowell describes how he worked with script writer Scott Frank in the development of Steven Spielberg's adaptation (2002) of Philip K. Dick's short story *Minority Report* (1965): together, they explored the connection between urban space and story by constructing a three-dimensional model of a future Washington, DC.

The key point in this context is that the digital models that were created during this process were used for digital location scouting, which inspired the first scene in the film, which was a vertical car chase on the outside of a skyscraper.

In the next chapter, we discuss how you can create small scenes or sequences based on the universe you have described, sketched or maybe even modelled.

The advantage of this approach is that it gives you and your project partners the opportunity to explore the developing universe in three dimensions. It also lets you work with visual effects and digital scenography from an early stage in the process. But less will do. Alex McDowell, who is a keen advocate of using digital technology in the development of major fiction films, explains that the basic mindset behind the digital method is not inherently different from when he used cardboard



models to design music videos in his early career. He also recommends engaging in the cocreation processes that characterize the development of major fiction universes and which we discuss in Chapter 4.

Metaphor and mythology

The methods and models for gathering research material that we described above can result in very large collections. To keep your material from appearing overly eclectic and, ultimately, unmanageable, it is helpful to base your research on a single unifying image. A map can be a unifying image, but you could also use a single illustration that has a clear link to the theme you want to address by acting as a metaphor.

For example, to describe the almost unfathomable size of King Agamemnon's army in the *Iliad*, Homer used a metaphor. He described the army as a great forest fire raging on a mountain top, its light seen from afar, as it flashes upon the sky. That is a powerful image, but, clearly not content with this comparison, Homer went on to list all the army's generals, heroes and units in verse after verse. This almost endless list is overwhelming in a different sense than the image of the forest fire. The point is that Homer needed both (Eco, 2009). If Homer had been able to provide a drawing, the illustration of the army

with all its units storming forth like a forest fire would probably also have made a compelling scene.

Designers often produce a key visual, a basic image, that they can return to and which acts as a unifying and meaningful element. In this sense, a basic motif or a visual metaphor serves the same purpose as the theme of a narrative or a piece of music. In order to keep the world or the story together, John Truby recommends the use of metaphors and images to prevent a fragmented or disjointed effect (Truby, 2007, p. 170).

Metaphors are compelling, evocative and narrative signs that are also very effective at communicating ideas. Like icons, they work by means of similarity and comparison (Peirce, 1903). This points to an important difference between symbols and metaphors. A metaphor is a comparison, while a symbol is an arbitrary sign. One example of a metaphorical comparison would be that between the Land of the Dead and the metropolis in the film *Coco*, as mentioned earlier. The city has the same quality as the island by forming a delimited microcosm. In this sense, an island can also serve as a metaphor for an isolated city. In modern narratives, the metropolis is often used as a setting for the universe, and a common metaphor, according to Truby, is the city as a machine. In this view, the city

is perceived as a more or less well organized and productive institution with fixed rules and hierarchies (Truby, 2007, p. 169). Take the films *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *Matrix* (1999–), for example. You can also compare

the city to a mountain, an ocean or a jungle. The urban jungle is a metaphor that worked its way into everyday language use, to an extent that, by now, it may seem like a cliché, but the metaphor also works in great films, such

as *Batman Begins* (2005), *Blade Runner* (1982) and *M* (1931) (Truby, 2008, p. 171).

Of course, the metaphor can also be turned on its head, as the jungle or the forest can be viewed as a city, for example. You may treat a home as a prison, or a prison as a home. Part of the fascination of Frank Herbert's novel *Dune* (1965) and Denis Villeneuve's filmic adaptation, *Dune part 1 and 2* (2021–24), is the representation of the desert as an ocean. The desert is described with ocean metaphors, with sand moving in waves, the invisible life under the surface of the sand – the huge and mysterious sandworms, which you are only safe from if you stick to the scattered rocky islands protruding from the sand.

Sometimes, a metaphor works best through a story about the metaphor itself. In building a



universe, it may therefore be helpful for you to also develop the underlying mythology of your universe; even if you ultimately only experience a small sliver of this mythology, it



contributes to the inner logic, depth and credibility of the universe.

As in Wim Wenders's neoclassical film *Wings of Desire* (1987), your narrative may be related to the fundamental mythology or cosmology of your universe. The fundamental

mythology helps make the fiction believable and compelling. This phenomenon is called 'suspension of disbelief', as we put our scepticism aside and go along with the story's underlying premise. In the film, the city is portrayed as a place of fallen angels and a dustheap of history. Wenders explains that he wrote a fundamental mythology in order to work out the inner logic of this universe. In the film, Berlin is a city of the 1980s, still divided and carrying the scars of war – and inhabited by angels.

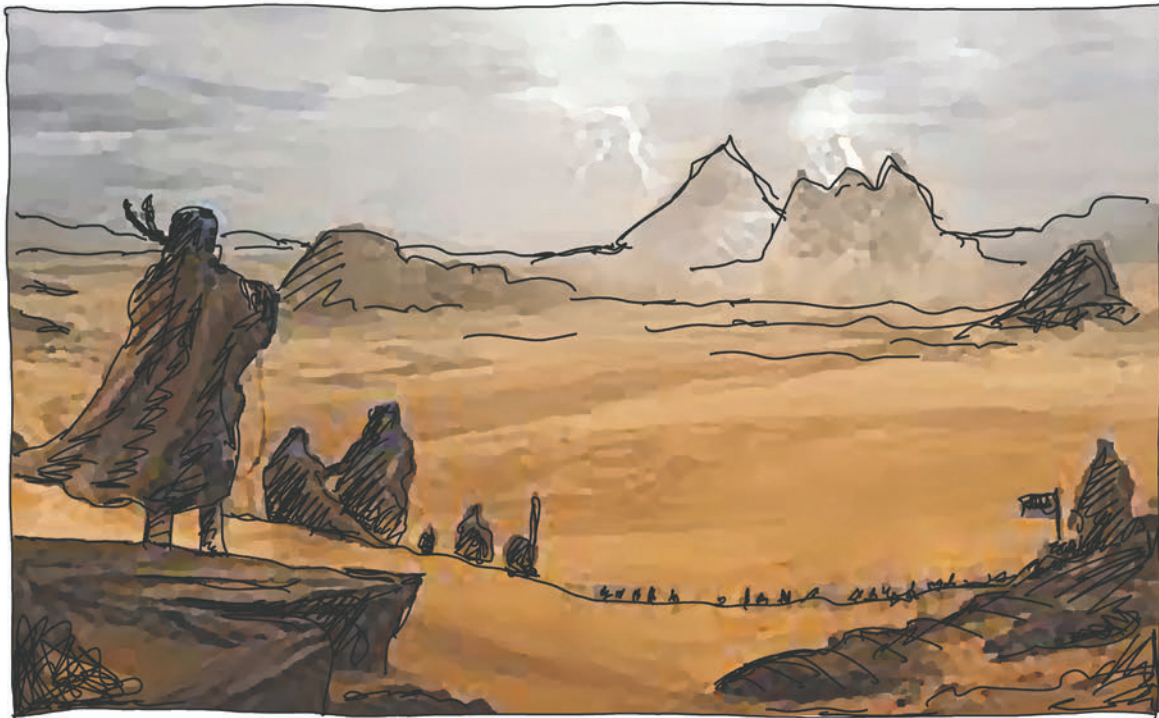
In Wenders's cosmology, which is not explained in the film but which he later described in an essay, the reason why there are angels in

Berlin is that, after the Second World War, God turned away from earth. Only the most credulous angels still cared for humanity, and God banished them to the worst imaginable place after the war: Berlin (Wenders, 1991). These angels are fascinated with people's

stories, listen to their thoughts and music and love hanging out in music venues and libraries. It is an amazing universe that comes to life through its simple contrasts, design choices and mythologies.

In order to build a coherent and meaningful universe, it may be helpful to define a basic motif or to find a metaphor that works with the chosen theme. Typically, this would be what you described under WHY in the Star Model. The metaphor you choose will be even more compelling if it is somehow related to the theme and mythology of your universe.

This chapter has provided insight into how you can approach the development of your universe at a general, strategic level. The next chapter looks at how you can dive into your universe to create 'glimpses'. A glimpse is an example of what can happen in your universe, materialized in a dramatic scene, a film clip, a game sequence or some other type of experience; something that might be part of the published format. We will also take a closer look at the general design process in the development of your universe.





The animated universe:

In an animated universe, anything is possible. The characters can be bicycles, shoes or cars. The locations can be in the mind or in outer space, or both at the same time. The themes can be as serious as in a political documentary or sillier than in a stand-up show or sitcom. And time can twist in parabolas and move at any speed. But of course, there is always a method to the madness when an animation director builds a fictional universe. In this interview, we talk to one of our main heroes, who created iconic characters in *Claymation*; to a director who takes a seemingly exotic approach and whose films take us into worlds that are both familiar and alien; and to a young rising star from Denmark, who is one of our former students.



Peter Lord is a British animator, film director and producer. He is a cofounder of the Oscar-winning animation studio Aardman Animations, which is best-known for its stop-motion claymation films, including *Chicken Run* (2000), *Wallace and Gromit* (2005), *Flushed Away* (2006), *Shaun the Sheep* (2007) and *The Pirates! Band of Misfits* (2012).



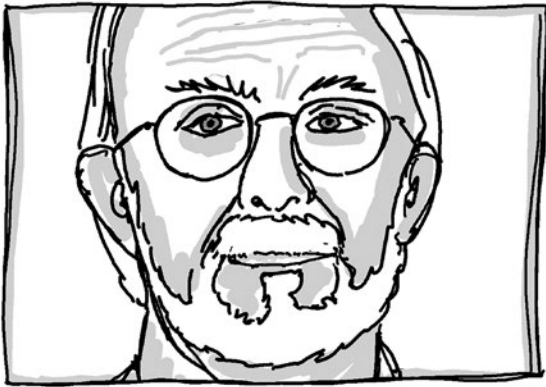
Jorge R. Gutierrez is a Mexican animator, director, painter and writer. He is best known for the animated Nickelodeon series *El Tigre: The Adventures of Manny Rivera* (2007), which earned him several Annie and Emmy Awards. His work also includes *The Book of Life* (2015), *Son of Jaguar* (2017) and, most recently, the animated Netflix series *Maya and the Three* (2021).



Karla Nor Holmbäck is a Danish animation director and illustrator. Holmbäck trained as an animation film director from the National Film School of Denmark (2018), with *Holly på sommerøen* as her graduation project. In 2020, Holmbäck debuted as the author and illustrator of the book *Vores fantastisk forskellige familier* (Our wonderful, diverse families) (2020). Her film *Rosa and Stone Troll* premiered in 2023.

What is a fictional universe in animation?

Peter Lord: The obvious thing to say is that animation lends itself to fictional universes very easily because as a storyteller/filmmaker, in theory, you're not constrained. I have to say



that, in my experience, those worlds have often been quite small and quite British and within the realms of naturalism – which is a strange thing to say, because animation is a fantastic, free-flowing medium, as Jorge's work demonstrates so dramatically. In my experience, the universes are both rooted in reality and radiating out to include the impossible, with animals that talk and our own laws of physics.

Karla Nor Holmbäck: You're not constrained, and your imagination can expand. I really love these microcosmic universes where you can tell these magical stories and expand a really small

universe into a big one. Right now, I'm working on a feature with fairies and butterflies and stuff like that, and you wouldn't be able to do that in real life.

Jorge R. Gutierrez: A fictional universe in animation, for me, really should be grounded in a reality of the artist. I am someone who is always looking inward and at experiences that happen to me, my life and my family to make fantasy out of those things. I think a lot of our great myths are retellings of real events but constructed and presented and embellished and edited through the view of a storyteller, filmmaker or an artist.

I think childhood is destiny. So wherever we grew up really informs our idea of what magic is. I'm from Mexico, a country full of conflict. The Aztecs and the Spaniards clashed, and Mexico was born. We have the only flag in the world where a killing is happening: an eagle is killing a snake. So we thrive in conflict, and in a weird way, all the magical things that I like about Mexico are ways to say that conflict is okay, as long as it's for a good reason. Because no conflict could mean that you gave up. To me, that's the real magic – when it transcends the surface, and there's a deeper meaning underneath. The best mythologies are the ones where the humans teach the gods a lesson. To me, that's kids teaching adults a lesson.

Karla Nor Holmbäck: I create my own mythology. I grew up with a mom who changed her religion quite often, so I'm fed up with all these different kinds of stories. In the end, it is just the same. In my stories, I want to create my own worlds.

Jorge R. Gutierrez: As kids, growing up, we're all told different things. The idea of someone going to the underworld to fight the ancient Gods exists in Africa, exists in Europe, exists, obviously, in Japan, exists in Asia, exists everywhere in the world.



In Mexico, what we were told was basically: your dad was Spain. He literally destroyed the pyramids and the temples and built churches with those stones. And dad raped mom, which was the Aztecs, okay? And you're the child. You have to acknowledge who dad was. And you have to acknowledge who your mother was, but you are not defined by the act of the rape. You are defined by what you will do on your own.

As a kid, that's very big stuff. So as I kept growing, and what most people in Mexico do,

is they don't want to think about the past. They don't want to think about those mythologies. Yet they completely embrace the mythologies of Europe and Japan and, to some extent, the Hollywood mythologies. But they don't want to think about the mythologies that they come from, because there's pain.

So my idea with Maya was – pardon my French: fuck that. It's our birthright to share these mythologies with the world. And if Greek mythology and the Arthurian legends can be told a thousand times, why can't we tell these stories?

So, I'm going to go into all the things that people don't want to think about. And I'm going to make my story about that. And I'm going to make it for kids. And I'm going to make it worldly. Early on, at Netflix, they were scared: those stories are so strong, those sentiments might not go over well. Happy to report, Maya was in the top 10 in 54 countries. That's how I treat mythology. Never let your culture define you. You define your culture

Peter Lord: It's very interesting hearing Jorge talking, particularly because you're talking with great passion about this amazing subject, and the end result is staggering. Britain is a strange place. We don't embrace our mythology at all. As a Brit, if I'm looking outside England, you find yourself looking to Ireland or Scandinavia for their myths, because in England, the myths

are lost or very deeply buried. Once you have mentioned King Arthur and Robin Hood, you pretty much covered the whole thing. I wish there was more.

How do you get an idea for a fictional universe?

Karla Nor Holmbäck: It always starts from something I have experienced. For example, right now, I'm working on an idea that started



with me taking a walk in the forest. I saw all these beetles running across the road. We have these black beetles in Danish forests, and they walk so slowly that they always get smashed on the roads. I spend a long time collecting things for that idea. It may take some years, and then

it kind of just builds up in my head. I'm kind of like a sponge that collects ideas.

How do you keep the universe alive?

Peter Lord: With character! For example, we were asked to create a character to be the figurehead for a fundraising for a children's hospital, a very good cause. But it's hard to develop character from nothing, because character is such a profound notion, and it's so multi-dimensional. You keep a universe alive by creating characters who have their own life, actually. It takes months and years, probably. Take this character called Morph. Maybe after five years, you can start to say, what would Morph do if he met a live electric wire or a gigantic cake, three times as big as he was? Understanding the characters deeply, where they come from, what they care about, what they love – to me, that fills out the imaginative world.

How do you create experiences for a fictional universe?

Jorge R. Gutierrez: It's grounding. Father, son; couple who didn't work out; friend who betrayed someone; family torn apart; abandoned kid. Everybody can relate to those universes, they are super empathetic. Once you put those things in a fantasy world, or a fantastic

world, the heart is true. And now you can have dragons and monsters and anything you ever wanted.

To me, it's that balance. The great fantasies, the really awesome magical fantasies are those that make you feel privileged that you get to experience this world that you've never seen before. The beautiful painting of this universe that you go into, as a viewer and audience. The closer you look, you go, 'Oh, it's a mirror.' It's a mirror of society, a mirror of what we're going through. To me, the great, magical worlds comment and reflect on the time when they were made. So when people say they want to make something that's timeless? Impossible! Everything you make reflects the views of that time, whether you like it or not.

So when you have the good universe and the good character, the story tells itself. Is that it?

Peter Lord: Yes. A different type of answer is that to me, when it comes to creating a fictional world, although it's going to exist in a written form, and in an animated form, I always start with drawing. For me, drawing is a way of thinking. Letting your mind free by doodling, the pen and the pencil. I find that stories emerge from that. I know that with my extremely famous colleague, Nick Park, he does the same thing. From the drawing emerges the

character, and from the drawing emerges the stories.

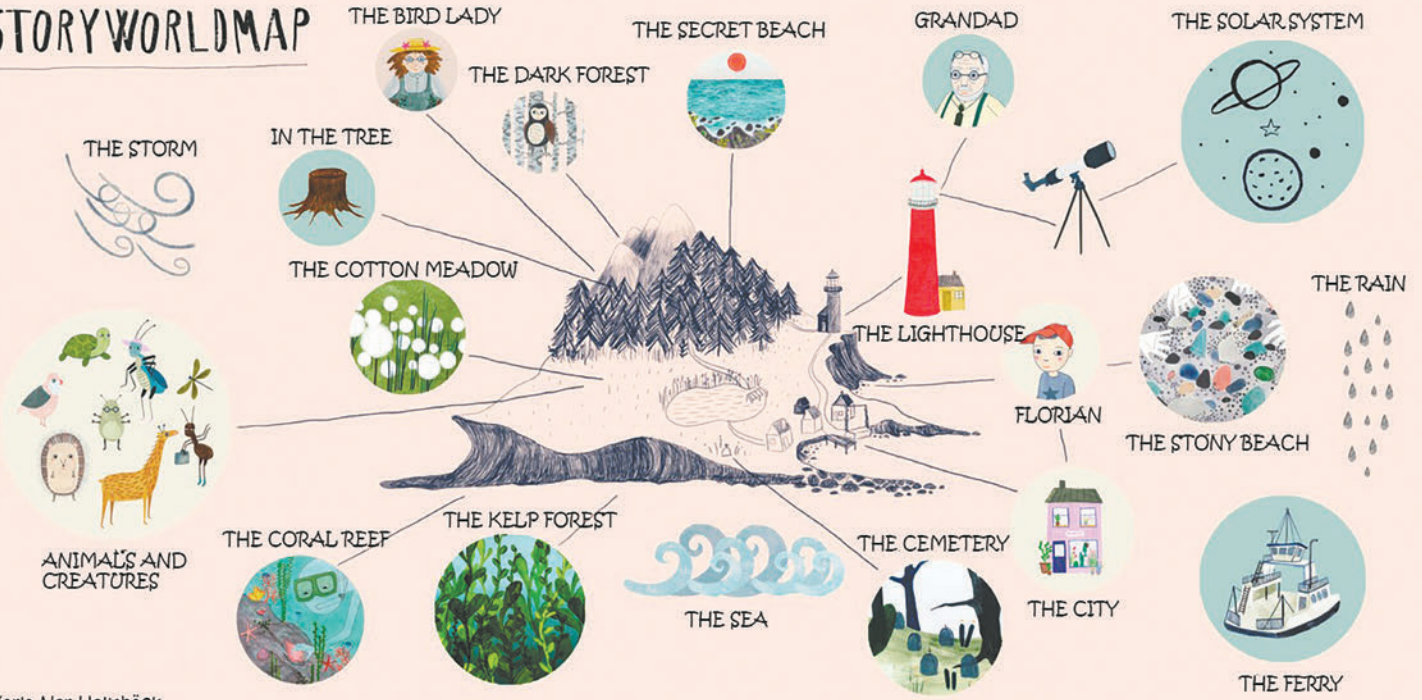
Karla Nor Holmbäck: I write a lot. And then I collect images and photographs and do these big mood boards. I never actually doodle, as Peter just said. But I think it's because I'm too much of a perfectionist.

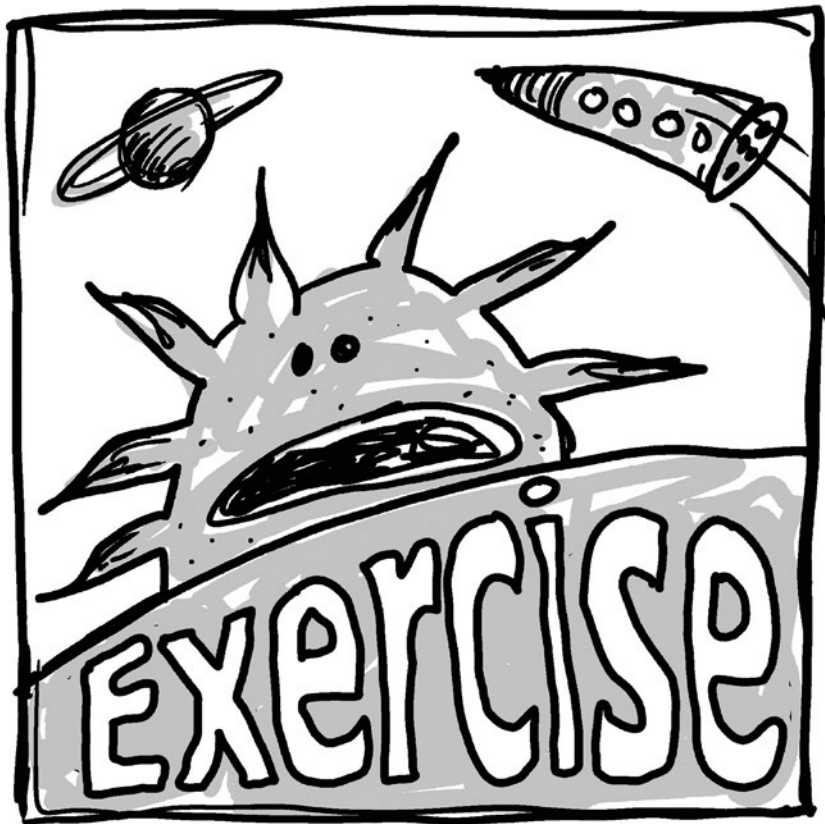
Jorge R. Gutierrez: I'm not a sketchbook guy. I had a mentor in school. Awesome, beautiful designer, Maurice Noble. He taught me this technique that I still use to this day. He gave me an assignment to design a wolf for him. He told me go to the library, spend the day doing research, just looking at paintings and all these artist interpretations, but not to draw anything. 'Whatever you do, do not draw anything. The next day, when you wake up, whatever is stuck in your head, draw that.'

Peter Lord: Another great tool, which is not visual, is walking. If I need to have an idea, the best thing is to go to the countryside somewhere and walk.



STORYWORLDMAP







WHO

HOW

WHY

WHEN

WHERE

Exercise 3: Describe your universe

Based on the fictional universe from Exercise 2, you are now going to add detail to your universe by creating a miniature ‘bible’ for it. You can spend an hour or two on this exercise. Make a map, map the characters, create thematic mind maps, timelines, rulebooks and so forth. You should still use the star to describe the universe (WHERE, WHO, WHEN, HOW and WHY). But this time, try to rely on visual references as much as possible and include mythologies, metaphors and maps.

Here are some tasks for you to consider:

WHERE: Draw a map, and try to make it as colourful as possible, perhaps supplemented by metaphors and mediators. Consider adding text.

WHO: Draw an overview of relations between groups of characters, including how they interact and how they relate to any themes, conflicts and mythologies. Consider adding text.

WHEN: Draw a timeline with iconic visual references for the main events in your fictional universe. Consider adding text.

HOW: Create a visual overview of things that it is possible to do in the fictional universe and of any significant rules and infrastructures. Consider adding text.

WHY: Try to describe why this fictional universe is important and what place it should occupy in the world. You may add visual references to support dilemmas, conflicts or other aspects. Consider adding text.

It can be helpful to use a digital board to save your fictional universe.

4. Content: How do I produce content for a fictional universe?

The design of the logic of the world precedes the telling of the story.

Alex McDowell (2017)

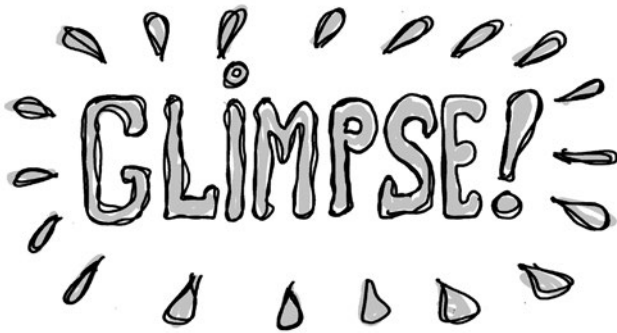
In the previous chapter, we recommended a method for gathering and organizing the material that, in its totality, outlines the fictional universe you wish to develop. We suggested using the Star Model as a set of helpful questions and an entry to exploring and describing the different dimensions of the universe.

Next, we described how the Star Model can be used as a basis for gathering and producing visual material and other forms of inspiration to illustrate the universe. This material can be organized in a variety of ways, for example as mood boards, which often have a linear structure, or by using production designer Alex McDowell's circular mandala model (McDowell, 2017). We also suggested that you might want



to draw or sketch a map to have a coherent illustration of the universe and its various sites or locations. Your fictional world could also be summarized in a metaphor. Describing the city as a jungle is a metaphor that offers certain thematic, spatial and visual indications of the world in question. All these methods aimed to explore the possibilities of the universe at a general and – if you consider the world in a map format – largely strategic level.

In this chapter, we discuss how you can create scenes, sequences and experiences in your fictional universe. We offer some suggestions for how you can explore and experiment with the dramatic and *visuospatial* potential of a universe that is in the making. We refer to the test scenes and experiences that are generated via these experiments as ‘glimpses’.



When Alex McDowell and script writer Scott Frank used a digital model of a future

version of Washington, DC, to develop the first scene of *Minority Report*, what emerged was a glimpse. And perhaps, what A. A. Milne and his illustrator created as they watched Christopher play with his soft toys in the forest was also a glimpse. An important point, for McDowell and for us, is that these glimpses should not be created by you or any other person alone – we recommend that you create them together with others.

You can create glimpses by working with visual artists, designers, writers, actors, researchers, photographers or others who take an interest in the developing universe. You might also work with creative professionals who can help you prepare your universe for various media formats, and you might engage with experts who have specialized knowledge of relevance to your universe, for example researchers with in-depth knowledge about your theme or people with personal or professional insights and authentic knowledge from locations and environments you do not have access to.

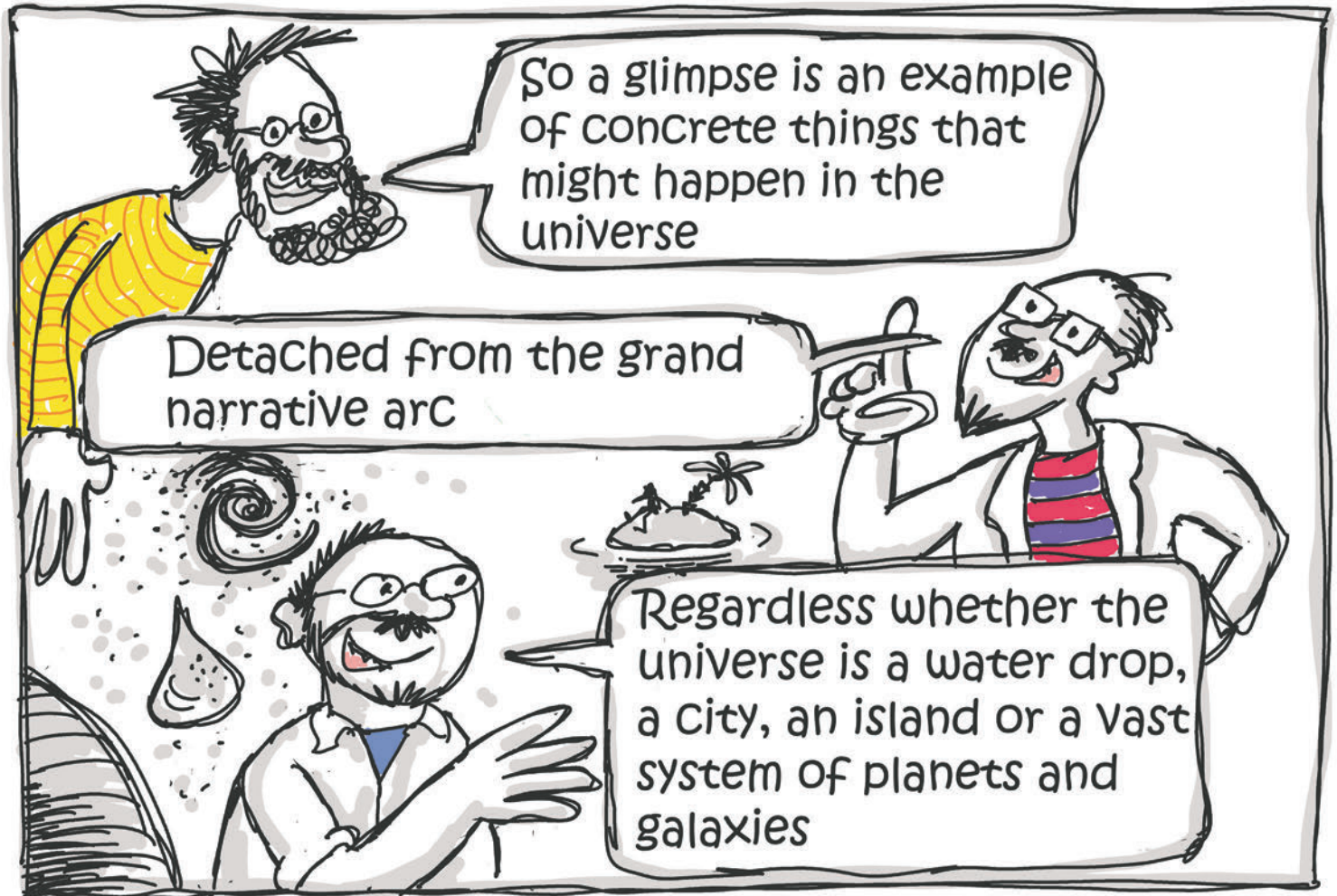
A glimpse into the universe

To us, a *glimpse* is a brief insight into what might happen in a fictional universe when a character, for example, lands their spaceship in a more or less random location. A glimpse would then be an example of what might happen in a universe before the

creator of the universe has decided whether to publish the universe as a computer game, a TV series, a novel, a film or a different format entirely. Thus, the glimpse is created before you know your medium or your publishing

format – and before you have an overview or have decided on a dramaturgical sequence of events.

The glimpse may also be in the form of a medium, in which case it offers a small test



of whether the universe is suited for this specific format. This type of test may be compared to a designer's use of *prototyping* to test a potential product or a game developer's use of demos and *vertical slices* that contain a small segment of the game play.

A vertical slice is a production of a brief sequence in a game universe that can be used to indicate the style and design and to test the mechanics of the game; it might be thought of as a high-quality *game demo* (Lemarchand, 2021, p. 76). Typically, the goal is that a vertical slice should feel 90% visually and technically finished; thus, a vertical slice offers a glimpse of the finished game.

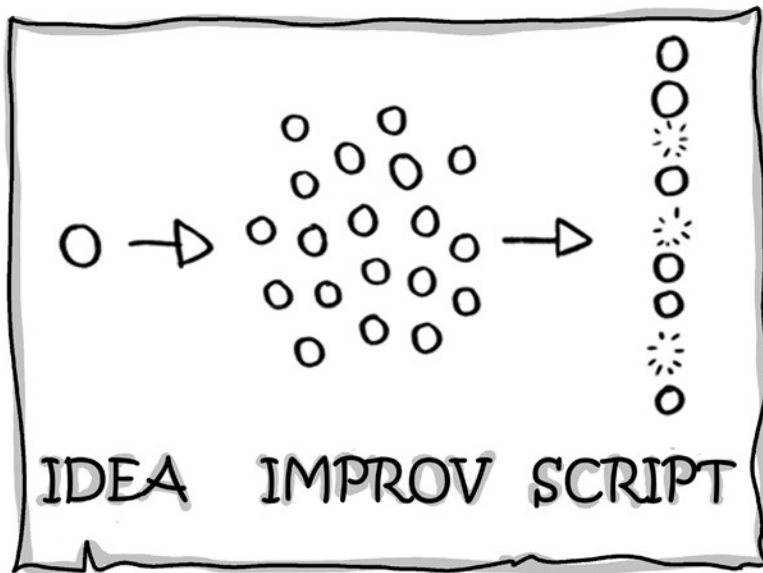
In the design world, an approximation of a finished product that can be used for testing is called a *prototype* or, if it is more sketch-like, a *pretotype*. Different media and art forms may use more or less overlapping terms for these approximations to the finished product. To an architect, a production designer or a stage designer, such a prototype takes the form of a *sketch model* or a *scale model*. In theatre and film productions, improvisation can be a way to test the dramatic potential of an idea. In summary, glimpses can take on different forms,



and especially in the creation of transmedial universes, there are countless ways to generate prototypes and glimpses.

Unexpected glimpses through devising

Devising typically involves creating a play without a script by working through three phases, from idea to improvised scenes to a



finished play. We recommend the use of devising in world building as an efficient and low-cost way of creating plots and glimpses for a fictional universe.

Let us look at an example of a devising process: the idea is to produce a play about amateur boxing. Based on this idea and, perhaps,

research in amateur boxing environments, you spend four weeks working with an ensemble, consisting of a stage director, some actors, a stage designer, a composer and so forth.

The ensemble meets in an auditorium or a rehearsal space. Together, they create about 24 scenes by improvising dialogue and movements. The director gives the actors small *set-ups*, such as ‘Let someone punch you’. The stage designer inspires the actors with props, objects and costumes. The auditorium itself is included, with its stage design, lighting, sound and music, which the ensemble uses in their improvisations. Each scene is written down or recorded. After the four weeks, a playwright writes down the finished play, for example by placing 12 of the scenes into a sequence and adding elements suited to heightening the dramatic quality of the performance. Then the actors rehearse the play for a few weeks until it is time for the premiere. The actors and the rest of the ensemble do not need much time to rehearse, because they were all involved in creating the characters, locations, themes, rules and chronology. Apart from the publishing format (theatre), they have cocreated all the ingredients of the universe: the Star Model’s WHERE, WHO, WHEN, HOW and WHY.

The unique quality of theatrical devising is that the director and the actors do not have a finished story and script ahead of time. By transferring this cocreative process to the construction of your fictional universe, you can create glimpses into your universe that are not just ‘theatrical glimpses’ but which have an artistic form, such as tiny segments from books, games, comics and all sorts of

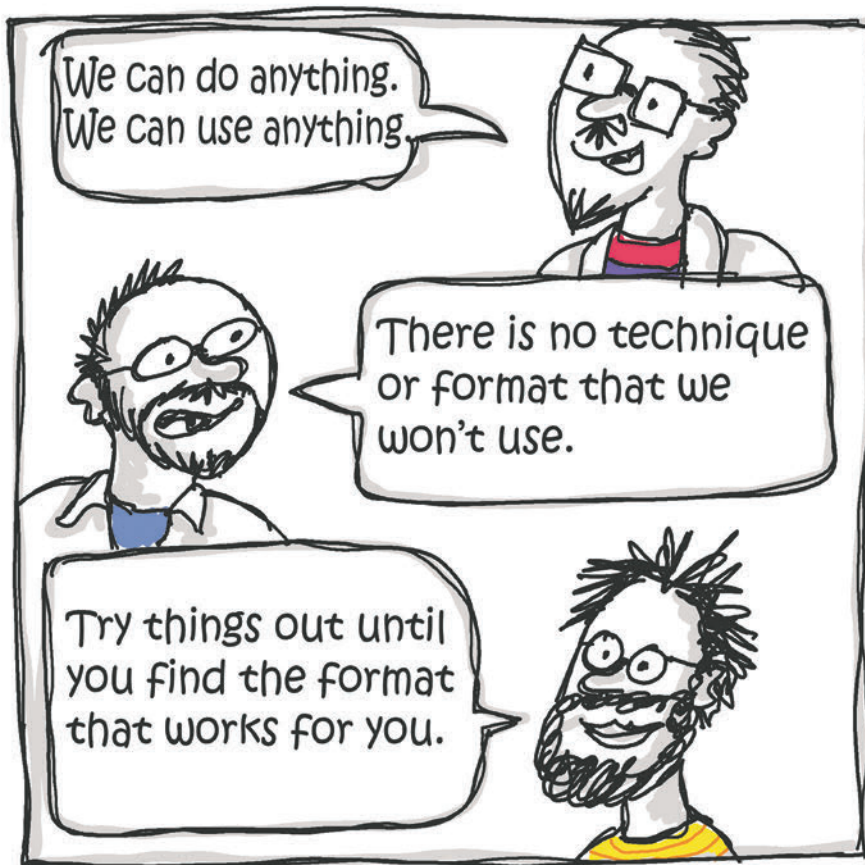
other experiences that you think might result from your universe.

In fact, the glimpses are a sort of mini-test and early prototypes that can help you determine what sorts of formats your universe is suited for.

Transmedial devising

A devising process can be custom-made to fit the participants, the situational time and place and the problem, theme or universe you wish to explore. Thus, devising is not a fixed method, and there are many ways to design a devising process that matches your universe.

For inspiration, we offer an example of a fairly simple way to create transmedial glimpses into a universe. The method is illustrated through a series of workshops at the National Film School of Denmark that involved actors, filmmakers, game developers and script writers and which ran from 2019 to 2022. What is described here is a *rapid prototyping* process using three two-day *sprints* to create glimpses into the Island universe.



The Island universe was developed in connection with an artistic research project at the Film School by a team working with fictional universes. The team was not just interdisciplinary but represented several different art forms. It included scenographer Siggí Óli Pálmasson, writer Cecilie Eken and the co-author of this book, film and game director Simon Jon Andreasen. Prior to the workshop series, the team had used the Star Model to create a universe.

The universe is called Island; it takes place on a Danish island called Island. Most of the

year, it is inhabited by an ageing, grey-haired population. During the summer, the population on the island grows, as busy parents in the city drop off their children with the grandparents.

The grandparents and the grandchildren are so culturally distant from each other that the summer holidays are a drag for everyone. The old people want to go into nature for (much too long) walks. The children want 24-7 screen time. However, when a local collector clears out the estate of a deceased person on Island in the beginning of the sum-

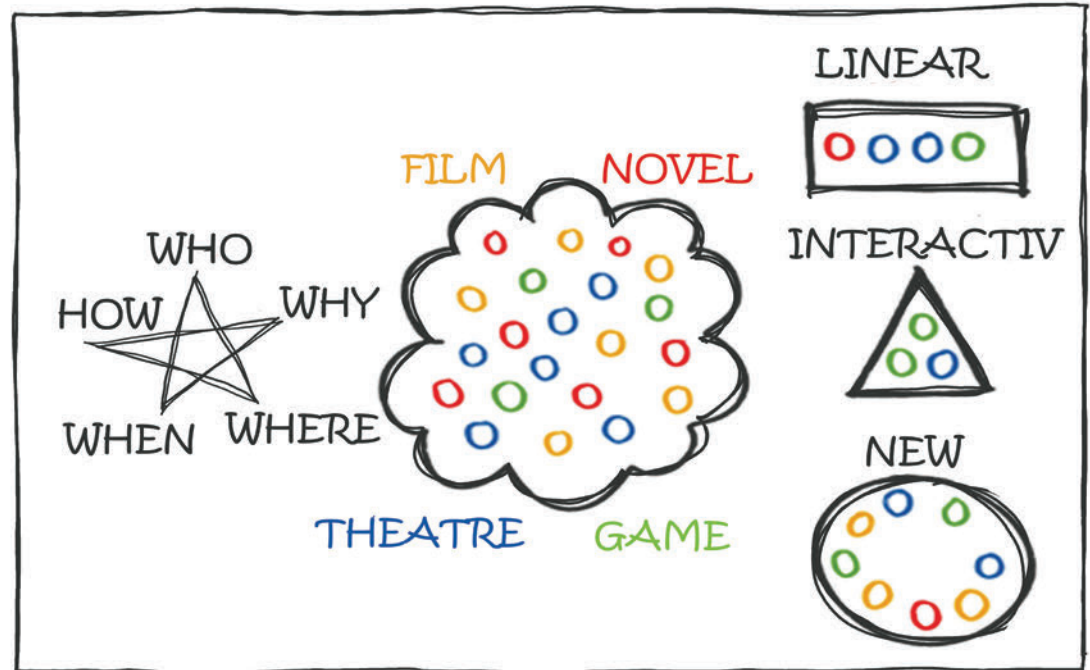


mer holidays, he finds a small suitcase with eight magical objects. Each of the objects contains a dangerous and chaotic form of magic, and the result is a complete state of anarchy on Island. The power cuts out, and wild creatures run rampant in the woods. No screen-time, no long walks. Instead, the old people and the children have to work together to restore order, so they can recreate the normal summer holidays routines before it is time for the children to return to their overworked parents.

The Island universe was described in a universe bible with just 10 pages of text and illustrations. Three experimental devising workshops were held at the Film School with the purpose of creating transmedial glimpses and testing the method.

During the first two-day workshop, four actors improvised more than 20 dramatic glimpses, which were documented on video. The second two-day devising session was carried out by four game developers and filmmakers, who created four animated glimpses

and one that was a visualization of a game experience in the universe. In the final devising workshop, four script writers who normally worked in film, theatre, literature and gaming described more than 20 glimpses as scripts for film, theatre, literature and games that might unfold within the Island universe.



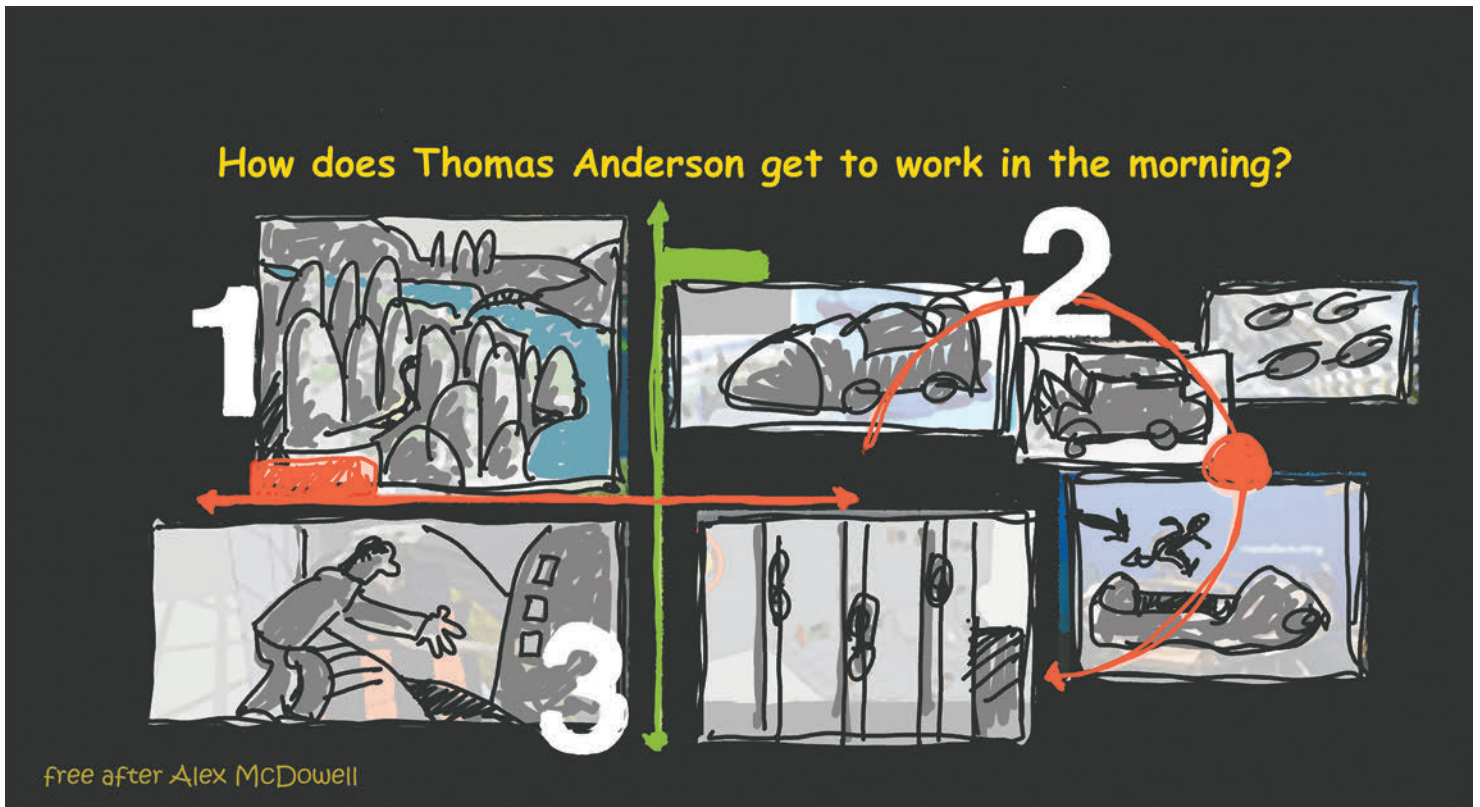
Based on these 50+ glimpses, the three universe-builders developed a transmedial experiential concept intended for a multi-generational audience. The experience was designed to be published in an online digital format for children, as a podcast for an older

audience and as a series of site-specific plays on Danish islands that are typical summer destinations, where they could be enjoyed by the entire family, across generations.

During the three devising workshops, the artists used so-called *sprints*, which are specific tasks to be solved within a tight time frame. The glimpses were used to design the final publishing format. Together, they provided a clear indication of the types of formats that the Island universe was suited for.

This experiment demonstrates that you can devise in any format you like – digital or analogue, using writing, improvisation or any other method.

We recommend that you design your own devising methods aimed at the media you would like to test for your fictional universe and which you and your cocreators like working in.



Other ways of pre-visualizing your universe

As part of our work to develop universe-building methods, we visited production designer Alex McDowell on our first trip to Los Angeles in 2017. At the time, we viewed the creative artistic process as a menu, where each artist had a selection of creative ‘dishes’ – metaphors for stages in their artistic process. By presenting their menu, they could let artists from other disciplines know how they work, which might facilitate their collaboration on universe building across art forms.

Perhaps we came up with the metaphor of the menus and the many dishes because we were hungry and yearning for the outstand-

ing burritos and tacos on offer in Los Angeles. McDowell, who at the time was working on one of Hollywood’s largest and most popular fictional universes, liked our menu concept and pointed out how game technology can be used to visualize and cocreate universes – meaning that you can use game technology to build a virtual version of your universe so you can explore it with others and create experiences, in the same way that theatrical devising is used to generate ideas for dramatic scenes.

Alex McDowell pointed out that the experiments we had carried out at the Film School and at the Royal Danish Academy were not dissimilar from the techniques he used back in 2002 in the development of the Steven Spielberg film *Minority Report*.

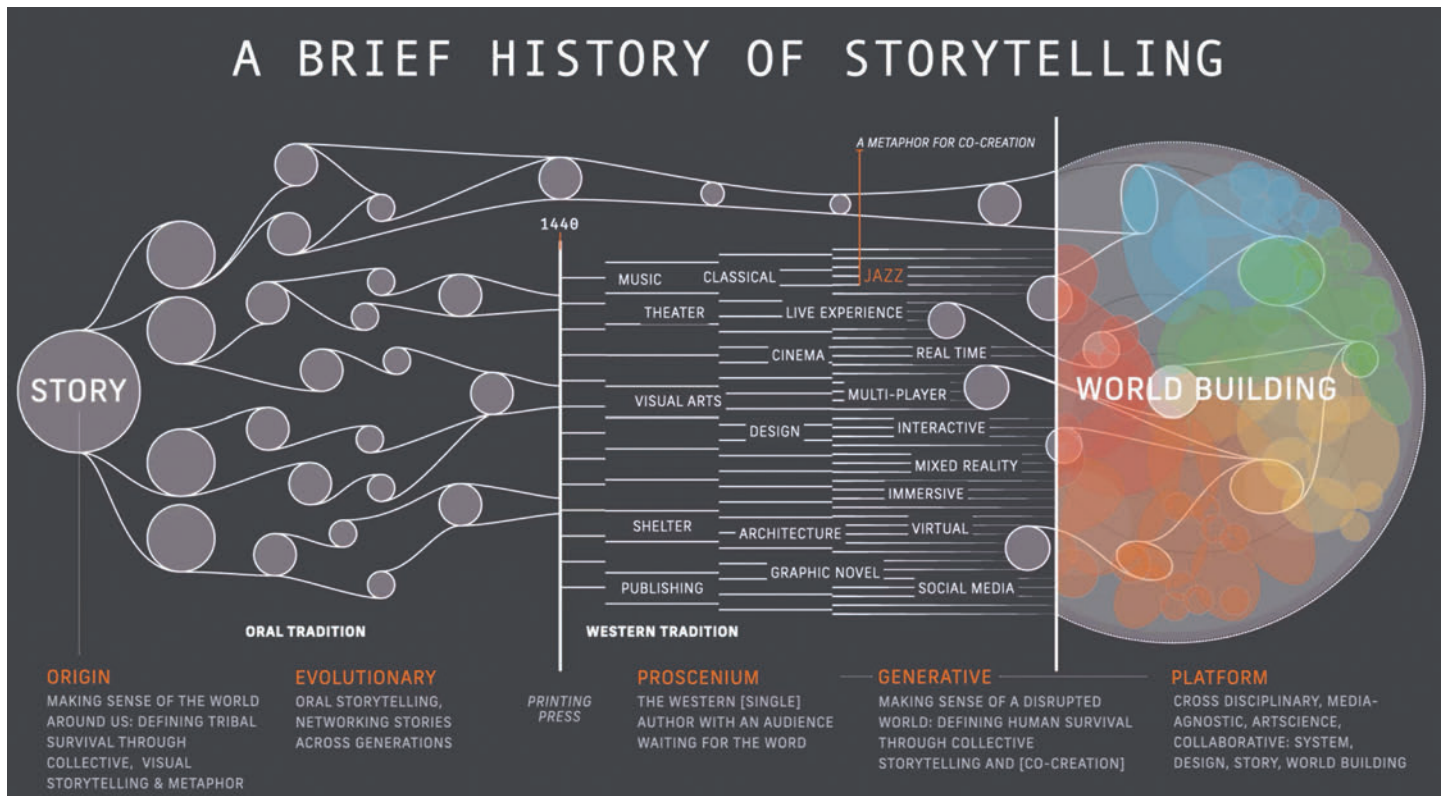
McDowell later described this approach as D-viz or design visualization. D-viz involves first building parts of the current story world in a game engine. Here, perhaps with the use of VR goggles, the location can be explored and modified in collaboration with a film crew. This method was used in the later Steven Spielberg project *Ready Player One* (2018) with design by Adam Stockhausen. It



may seem overwhelming to have to build a section of the fictional world in a digital format, but today, the technology is free to use, as we did in the digital devising session for *Island*, which used free pre-designed 3D characters and stage sets. According to Alex McDowell, the principles of the method are not significantly different from the visualizations he created in a cardboard box when he made music videos in his youth.

When we met, he elaborated on his approach: 'It's a very theatrical approach. But it

does the same thing as a story room in animation and maybe as a rehearsal does with acting and the director. And it is very close to prototyping for games' (interview, November 2017). Thus, new technologies enable us to work with stories in a way that is closer to the way in which stories used to circulate and live among people before the breakthrough of mass media and the industrial production of film and TV.



Conversation with Alex McDowell



Building the world first lets you develop stories from the world exponentially. It's a very theatrical way of working, and it's also similar to what you do in a story room when you do animation or rehearsals with a director.

Or games.

Yes, I think it's very close to prototyping.

You don't have to rely on the traditional methods, you can use whatever works. The way you work in animation is often much more productive than in film production, because it is a visual medium, and it's always a collective process that begins without a script.

Back in the day, Disney never used a script. He had the story in his mind. He WAS the script.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF STORYTELLING

It's backwards to spend years on a script, as you do in filmmaking, if instead, you can build a world and find your stories there. You have to wait for a 180-page script just because the movie studios want a form or a template they know and are able to control.

Film really began as animation. Live-action film might just turn out to be a brief interlude in the history of moving images.

Today, you can build giant cities and worlds on a computer, and based on that, all sorts of stories may develop. I have developed a series of tools that can make ideas explode in a universe.

Minority Report Design ideas

Challenges in devising

A key point for Alex McDowell is that, ideally, the range of professions involved in the developmental phase of a fictional universe should reflect the ones that are later going to realize it, for example as a film (McDowell, 2017). Films, TV series and computer games may involve a very wide range of professionals, many more than a stage production.

The short, enlightening article ‘The Door Problem’ about the different areas of expertise involved in game production lists the overwhelming number of job functions required to create something as seemingly simple as a door in a computer game (England, 2014). Less will do, but it is an important point that devising – especially devising an entire fictional universe – may serve as a break with the more hierarchical *waterfall* processes that



have traditionally dominated universe building, not least in film. The term stems from computer programming and is a metaphor for a sequential production flow, similar to the assembly line in Henry Ford's automobile factories (Lemarchand, 2021, pp. 71–72). In a different context, the English music producer and artist Brian Eno speaks of rejecting the notion of the artist as a lone genius who single-handedly invents everything in the universe. Instead of the individual *genius*, he proposes what he calls the *scenius*: community intelligence. Eno calls for a sort of ecology of ideas that leaves room for new thoughts and new ways of collaborating (Eno, 2016). This concept aligns with the fundamental principles of devising – and with many of the most modern and digital ways of creating fiction, for example in games and films with special effects.

The physical community of the theatre may seem far removed from, for example, the digital world of computer games, special-effect superhero films or the new generation of fantastical universes in TV series, such as *Game of Thrones*. However, to Alex McDowell, there is a direct connection between the development methods provided or made relevant by the new technologies and the original, pre-industrial ways of relating to the narrative (McDowell, 2017).

Similarly, as early as during the 1990s, interaction designer and researcher Brenda Laurel pointed to similarities in the experience of stage plays and computer games. In addition to the narrative layers, these shared aspects include engagement, improvisation and a participating audience (Laurel, 2000 [1991]). As for design processes, experimental theatre also inspired development methods associated with cocreation that use tests based on prototyping in dramatized action contexts (Hasle, Brandt, Clark & Binder in Binder & Foverskov, 2010, pp. 204–209). Devising is based on development techniques from experimental theatre, where the participants cocreate a play in a cross-disciplinary process without having a script (Kjølner, 2001, pp. 80–84).

Devising means to *conceive, concoct, create* or – perhaps the most apt synonym in this context – *design* and *construct*. As a theatrical technique, it was first described during the 1960s in reflection of changing conditions and trends (especially in British and American theatre) and as a way of developing content for stage performances that were not based on a written script but instead relied on other, prelinguistic scenographic elements, such as lighting, sound, body, voice, space, media or other aspects that might play equal

roles in processes based on experimentation and improvisation.

The theatrical technique is associated both with didactic work, such as drama courses in schools and institutions of higher learning, and with experimental performances by such companies as the Wooster Group of New York, Frantic Assembly of Wales and Odin Teatret of Holstebro, Denmark, and other groups working with performative or post-dramatic expressions (Lehmann, 1999). While these companies, and others working in the same tradition, often have critical ambitions and embrace a fragmented expression, that is not necessarily what we have in mind when we recommend you to consider using devising.

Death to the auteur, long live the auteurs!

Working with devising and cocreation in the development of fictional universes is not all blissful harmony. These approaches can present major challenges for the individual participants, especially for writers, who are used to the privilege of being the gods of their own universes. The challenge to the role of text as the foundational material can lead to particularly intense reactions during the development process, not just in stage productions but also in film and TV. For example, in a comment on this approach, Alison Oddey writes that spatial and visual concepts in particular often serve as the point of departure for devised theatre

(Oddey, 1994, p. 17). That may sound like an advantage, but the marginalization of text in the development of fiction represents a break with the traditional hierarchies in development and production that you must be prepared to deal with when you use devising in universe building.

Thus, in a cocreative process, the rigid hierarchies that dominate much of our working life – not least in film and TV productions – have to be dismantled or, at least, temporarily suspended, as they are in theatrical devising processes. For economic, historical and production-related reasons, the film and TV industries in particular have been based on hierarchies, credits and job positions. The control mechanisms that the film industry uses to maintain the status quo are so ingrained that both production management software and financing are conditioned on the existence of a script.

The absence of a script is not the only obstacle. Inclusion and placement in the credits of high-profile productions have long been crucial for the careers of freelancers and independent operators in the media industry. Attribution is similarly essential: films are typically attributed to the director, while TV series are more likely to list the script writers or showrun-

ners as the primary creators. Computer games and animation productions, on the other hand, are often attributed to the production company: people generally speak of a Pixar animation film or a Blizzard game. A similar development format, with less individual focus and a more collective perspective, also characterizes many satirical productions.

This kind of distributed collective creativity or joint authorship – Brian Eno’s ‘scenius’ concept (Eno 2016) – which, ideally, includes contributions to the development process from multiple sources without concern for hierarchies and job positions is highly productive, and perhaps it is in fact applied in other production formats, including film, despite their continued use of individualized attribution (Redvall & Bruun, 2022, pp. 70–71).

As the Hungarian psychologist and creativity scholar Csikszentmihalyi pointed out, creative development never happens in a vacuum but unfolds in more or less comprehensive communities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 315). Similarly, the French sociologist Bruno Latour included nonhuman participants, such as settings and tools, in his so-called Actor-Network Theory

(ANT). This dimension has not grown less relevant at a time when media production relies on computer technology, digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI), such as the Midjourney



visualization program or Leica and ChatGPT, which facilitate scripting. Thus, even if you do not have a network of colleagues to engage with in development or devising processes, you can now experiment with these processes by interacting with AI. This was the case when computer game writer Charlene Putney and digital designer Martin Pichlmair developed the AI scripting tool Leica, because they found that they needed a network in their writing

process (Talk at Computation and AI for creativity, The Royal Danish Academy, 14 November 2022). The American musician, songwriter and performance artist Laurie Anderson similarly works with a team of researchers who have created a text engine to emulate the style of her late husband, Lou Reed (Kleon, 2021).

Thus, you can use devising, D-viz or artificial intelligence to experiment with the experi-



ential and narrative potential of a fictional universe before you have a script and a coherent story.

The experiences in your fictional universe are then created through on-stage improvisation, the exploration of a 3D model, AI or – simply – your imagination and a sheet of paper in a digital or analogue process. We refer to these experiments or improvisations that you cocreate with others in a universe as

‘glimpses’. In your work with a universe, these glimpses represent the first peeks into your universe.

Later, we will get back to how you can connect the individual glimpses and link them to the story, plot and experiences of your universe. But first, in Chapter 5, we will look at how you can convey your universe to others, using design manuals, universe bibles and wiki-worlds.





The modern TV series:

One of the hottest places in the world for the creation of TV series universes is South Korea. In the West, we look in awe at the steady flow of new series from South Korea pouring out through streaming services. The series mix genres and create something with twists and plots that seem completely alien but also alluring. One of the biggest hits is *Squid Game*. The universe is strangely haunting. But do we get it?

Here, we speak with Chae Kyoung Sun, who created the physical sets and the visual design of the *Squid Game* universe with a team of craftspeople.



Chae Kyoung Sun is a South Korean production designer and art director. She is especially known for her work as a production designer for the Netflix series *Squid Game* (2021), which earned her an Emmy Award for best production design. Chae Kyoung Sun has also worked on *Detective K: Secret of the Virtuous Widow* (2011), *The Royal Tailor* (2014) and *The Fortress* (2017).

How would you define a fictional universe?

Chae Kyoung Sun: I try to express it in a visual way. So when you talk about a fictional universe, I don't create one out of nothing. I look at the script, the written word, and I try to understand what is written there and then I express it. Sometimes it's very spontaneous. Sometimes it takes me a long time. And then other times, I get inspiration from something that happened a long time ago in my past. I really think about it a lot, a lot, a lot.

What happened with *Squid Game*?

Chae Kyoung Sun: There's so much to talk about with *Squid Game*. For the director, the main objective wasn't to have this hugely popular TV series that would sweep the world. To him, it was something very personal, and he was inspired by his childhood. He wanted to express the realities of Korea today and talk about the problems that society was having because of capitalism and things like that. And of course, I was influenced by the director's

intention. I looked at textbooks, for example, from the 1970s and 1980s of gym clothes, the green gym clothes, props, all of the books and stationery that were used at that time.

There is a lot of contrast in your universe. You have the city with its different areas, the island where the game takes place, the island with the staircase and so on. Did you draw a map of this world, with all its contrasts, in order to navigate in it?

Chae Kyong Sun: Before the island itself, we had to think about how we are going to build the universe. So, yes, we did have a map. We had a sketch of all of the different levels, for example on the underground, level one, level two, to give the *Squid Game* staff an idea of the location. For the red light/green light we knew that it was going to be on the ground floor, for example. So we did have an idea, and we did have a map, so to speak. I've done a lot of interviews, and I've received a lot of questions. It's the first time I have had such a question, so I think you have a very detailed mind.

We are trying to explore how you actually create the world. Did the script change during your conversation with the director?

Chae Kyong Sun: No, but the content and the drawings changed a little bit, and this was

mainly because of space. When the art team designed something, the space changed. For the dorm, the director had imagined bunk beds in two storeys, but we proposed the Colosseum type, where you can have an arena in the middle. So, the positions and the structure – the space itself, the universe – changed because of our design suggestions. The riot scenes, the way they moved, all of that also changed. The stunt people decided to make some changes because of our suggestions for the space itself. So I think I did have a definite impact, not on the script itself, but on the visual aspect, because of the space. The budget also played in. At first, we wanted to have 10 robots, and we



had to make do with one, but I think that was much more effective, because the robot turned out to be 13 metres tall. So, it turned out to be a lot more effective. Also, for the VIP room, almost towards the end, the models turned out to be props. So, the human beings are props. We wanted to have this 'survival of the fittest'-aura around it, more instinct than rational thinking. Raw emotion.

You said that you built a map of the island because it was unusual. To us, *Squid Game* and Korea are unusual.



Chae Kyoung Sun: If you look at Seoul, it's divided by the Han River. So we're here in the northern part. And there's also the southern part. If you cross the Han River, there are a lot of bridges, and a lot of them have tunnels. So I was inspired by those tunnels. If you go through them, you might be able to see where the main character is supposed to have lived.

The show was also about nostalgia.

Chae Kyoung Sun: In Korea, there are a lot of so-called kids cafes. My inspiration did not come from a particular kids' café but from all of the different colours of the cafés, which lie hidden in my subconscious. With the colours of the labyrinth, I was actually afraid that people might think that this is too much like a kids' café. I didn't want them to think that the stairs and the labyrinth were actually like a kids' café. I wanted to use that and turn it on its head, because people think of pink as being a very childish colour, for example.

You were talking about Korean society being very competitive. Is there an area where this competitiveness is particularly pronounced, for example as it is on Wall Street in New York?

Chae Kyoung Sun: If you go to Noryangjin. It's very specific to Korea. There are lots of aspiring students – both the young students and those who have finished college and who want to become lawyers, prosecutors, civil servants. They end up staying in these tiny rooms, where you can just lie down and maybe have a desk. So, they live on very little space. And there are all these private institutes for them to study, with lots and lots of different signs with the names of the institutes and also the sign saying,

‘Congratulations, you’ve made it!’ ‘Congratulations, you passed!’

The other side of *Squid Game* is the homelessness.

Chae Kyoung Sun: There are a lot of homeless people by Seoul Station, and there’s another area, Dorim, which is a little bit like Harlem [New York]. Many of the architectural structures are very similar. We actually did some shooting there, for example the scenes where they’re taken into the van. Then there is Mapo, an island in Seoul, where we shot a few scenes in back alleys. Also the last scene, where the grandfather is looking outside, and he sees a homeless person wandering, that was taken from the IFC Mall in Yeoui-Daero. I looked at how I could express space in order to reflect all of the characters’ feelings and emotions.

All of the characters were losers, failures in society. I wanted to express them by the fact that they had no house, no home to go back to. They were on the streets. Deserted. So, I looked at all of the elements that you can find in the street, like the tunnels and the asphalt, and used that as inspiration for the dorm where they’re all sleeping. I wanted to express the coldness of the pavements. How blood spreads on the asphalt, in the ‘Tug of War’ episode. All of the participants die in *Squid Game*, and only

one goes back to his home. I expressed that in the ‘Marbles’ episode, with all the alleyways, all the doors. There are lots of doors. But behind the door, there isn’t a nice garden, there isn’t a home that they can go back to. Just doors. I wanted to show what the participants were feeling, and I did that through space. My inspiration for the dorm came from an illustration of a room with very high grey walls, with stairs and ladders – broken ladders. There was a man sitting crouched next to the wall. The main character.

Another inspiration was the big wholesale supermarkets. Huge warehouses with lots of products stacked up and ladders for getting to them. A very materialistic universe, but that was basically how we view human beings in modern society. Consumers who are usable, expendable. So that was what I also wanted to express.







Exercise 4: Create glimpses into your universe

Spend an hour creating different glimpses of the universe you described in Exercise 3, using devising. This exercise works best if you work with others, but you can also do it on your own. It involves acting out five-minute tasks 'on stage', imagining that you are inside your fictional universe. After each task, write down your experience and what you imagined.

Note: While devising, you should be in a room where you are not going to be disturbed, perhaps a classroom, your bedroom or your living room. You do not need a lot of room, but it is important that you get up and move. You have to get up, it is not enough to sit on a chair and imagine that you are moving. Generally, physical movement often facilitates creative processes.

Before each task:

- Stand up
- Set your stopwatch to five minutes
- Find some music from a film score, for example the score from the film *The Village*, which you can find on most music services.

Task 1: A glimpse of you hiding:

- Start the music
- Start your stopwatch
- Imagine that you are in your universe, in a crowded place
- Move around your space while physically hiding
- Use your body to avoid being spotted
- See, hear and imagine what you are experiencing
- When the five minutes are up, take ten minutes to describe your experience
- You can describe your experience as a film scene, a scene in a stage play or a game, write a poem, make a drawing or choose some other format.

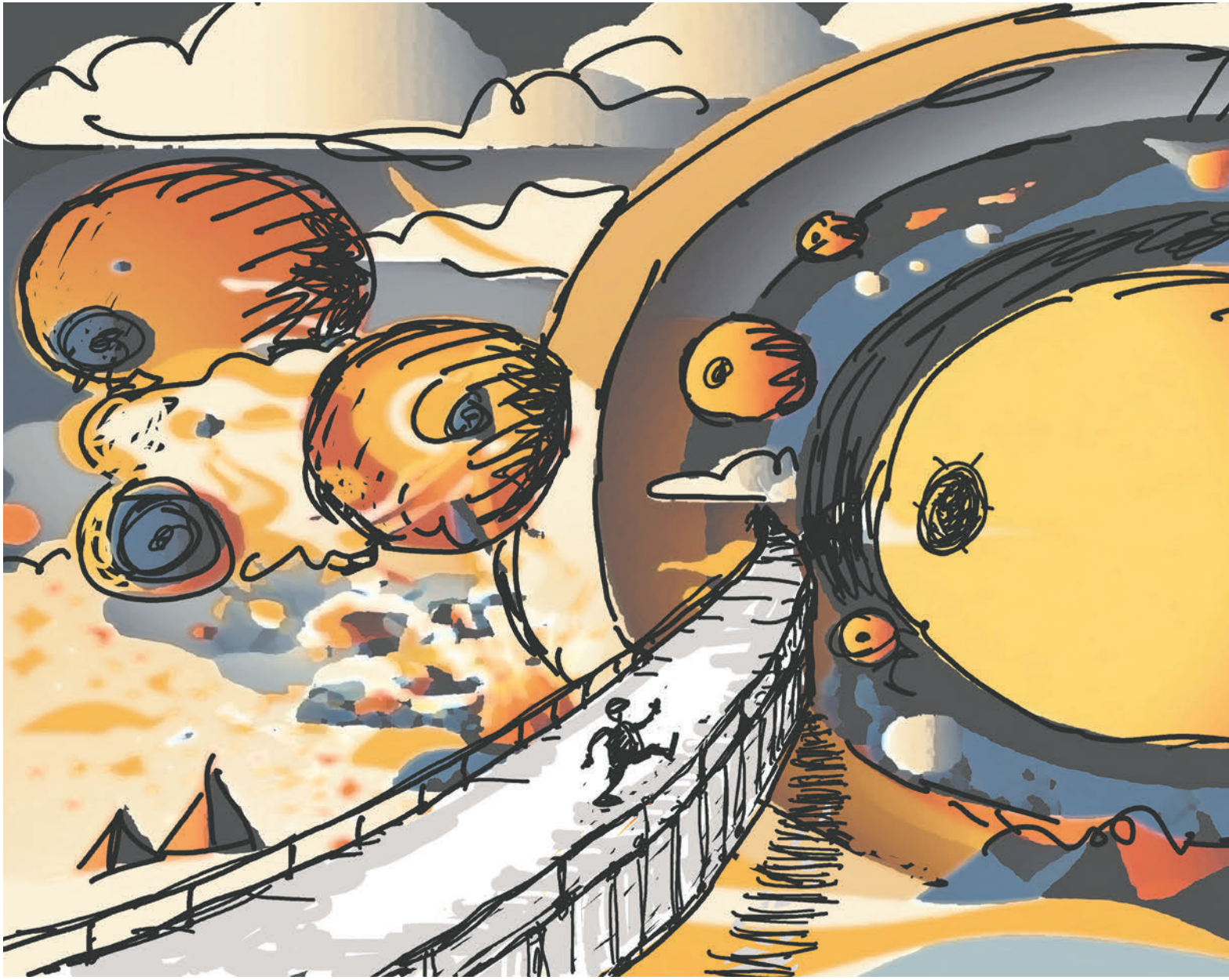
Task 2: A glimpse of you seeing something:

- Start the music
- Start your stopwatch
- Imagine that you are in your universe, in a high location that lets you look over at 'the other side'
- Now, stand on a chair
- See, hear and imagine what you are experiencing
- When the five minutes are up, take ten minutes to write down your experience
- Describe your experience in a different format than in the first task. If you described your glimpse as a film scene, write this one as a scene in a stage play, write a poem, make a drawing, describe it as a game or choose some other format.

Task 3: The other person:

- Start the music
- Start your stopwatch
- Imagine that you are looking at someone else through a window/a piece of fabric/a mirror or some other barrier that separates you
 - Now stand across from another participant in the exercise/class/workshop; if you are doing the exercise on your own, stand in front of a mirror
- See, hear and imagine what you are experiencing
- When the five minutes are up, take ten minutes to write down your experience
- Describe your experience in a different format than in the first two tasks. If you described them as a film scene and a scene in a stage play, for example, you can describe this glimpse in a poem, make a drawing, describe it as a game or choose some other format.

If you are doing this in a class, you can make up more tasks for each other. You may use props, costumes and other scenographic elements. You can also add lines. Inspired by the devising process and glimpses, describe two different formats that you would like to publish your universe in – for example, a film and a game. Describe them in a high concept. Max. 12 lines per format.





5. Document: How do I create a universe manual?

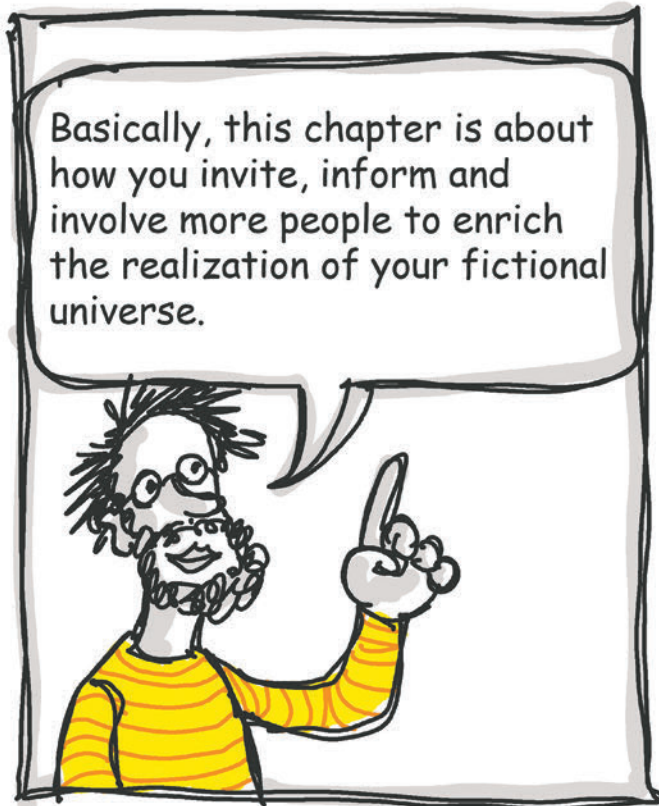
I like to give my proposal in an artistic and specific way, using visuals and examples, and also adding a little bit of exaggeration.

Yohei Tanede, Hallinga (2012)

When you have explored, developed, mapped, devised, created glimpses of and perhaps built scenes in your fictional universe, you need to document, share and present the material in a way that makes it meaningful to others. These ‘others’ could be a wider circle of designers, writers, game developers, actors, animators, cinematographers, composers, directors and others who will be contributing directly to the development and production of your universe – or they may be external stakeholders, such as potential project partners, investors or audiences.

If the material was developed digitally, it may already be available as shared docu-

ments, for example on Google docs, Discord or a digital work platform, such as Miro or Mural. In any case, it is now time to share your work with a large group in a way that is meaningful, inviting and accessible. The purpose of this internal presentation is to provide access to your material and to create a coherent and inspiring overview for the people who will be cocreators in various ways and contribute to the production of your universe. These external presentations should address the financing, distribution and promotion of the universe in a way that is suited to attracting investors and thus securing the future existence of the fictional universe.



It may be a cliché to say that you are inviting your project partners or other co-conspirators on a journey, but if that is the feeling you leave them with, you will be off to a good start. An upcoming journey is about expectations, goal alignment, plans and objectives. The journey should fill you with excitement and joyful anticipation, but you also need to convince your travel companions that the plans are both wildly exciting and realistic.

This points to Aristotle's *rhetorical appeals*: *pathos*, through the feeling of anticipation; *logos*, through the travel plan; and *ethos*, through the focus on what makes the journey meaningful. These appeals are, of course, key aspects of the pitch or presentation of a fictional universe (Lundholt & Hansen, 2019, p. 95).

Other key aspects include the structure of the universe and what mediation format you choose for your presentation. There are many possible approaches, but you should choose a format that has some connection to the potential publishing format or formats, just as your presentation should include a degree of openness. Often, the material used to convey these aspects internally is described as a *concept bible*, *story bible*, *design bible* or *world bible*, while the term *pitch document* is often used to describe external communication material. Netflix uses *pitch deck*.

In this chapter, we will discuss a number of different formats and propose principles for how they may be conceived and structured. Finally, we invite you to create your own communication and pitch material based on a set of exercises.

Bibles and props to be used in presentations

There is some variation in the terminology that is used to describe the formatting of materials for media productions, such as the ones we are looking at here. As mentioned above, the term *bible* is often used about a collection of writings and/or visual material that conveys or controls the project concept or the ground rules, content and style of the universe.

We may also speak of the more open formats of *design manuals*, *world wikis* and *Miro boards*, among other terms, as means of in-

ternal communication and *pitch documents* for external communication. While there are more or less standardized principles for what goes into a *bible*, the presentation of the universe in the internal communication should be open in a way that promotes its development potential in terms of future production arrangements and user involvement.

Although different stakeholders may have different priorities, in principle, the pitch material should have the same content as a bible, just in a more condensed form. Overall, these different expressions may be categorized as

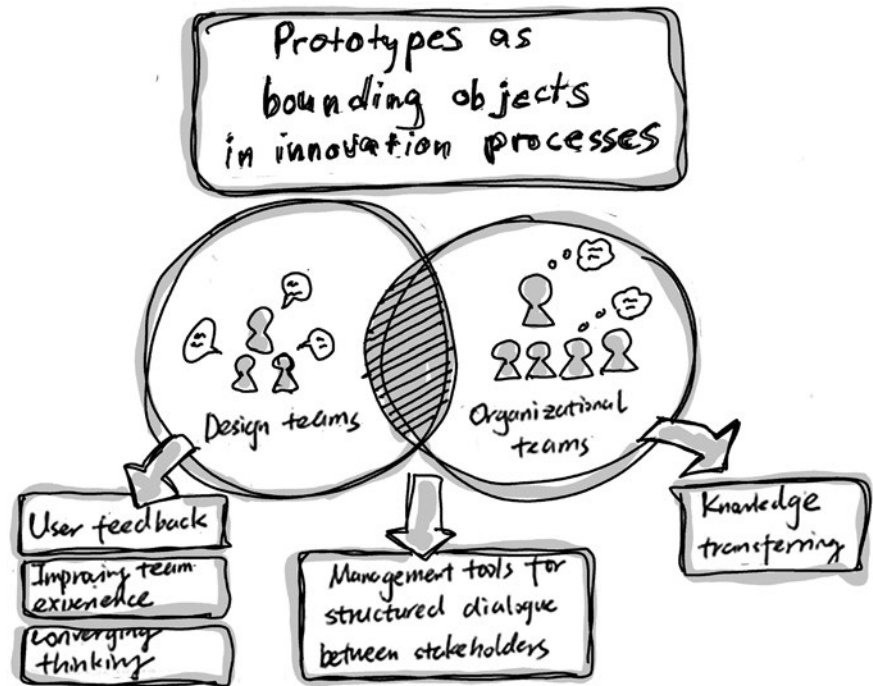


what is known in design theory as ‘boundary objects’. A *boundary object* is an object or a medium that communicates complex material to people of different backgrounds and areas or levels of expertise. The term was originally proposed by the researchers Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer as a way of describing qualities of objects in a museum context that mediated information across different areas of specialization and domains (Star & Griesemer, 1989).

Thus, a ‘boundary object’ is an object or communication format that, like a *bible*, aims to ensure the flow of knowledge through an institutional network of internal employees and external partners. Museums typically use boundary objects to facilitate the process when sponsors, theorists and amateurs collaborate to create representations for exhibitions, such as samples for analysis, maps of various territories or fieldnotes for an exhibition on natural science. As mentioned above, a map is a good example of a boundary object whose conventional but complex qualities make it adaptive to various circumstances and suited to expressing complex, concrete, abstract and specific topics to a wide audience.

In a different context, the researcher Louis Bucciarelli has described how physical mock-

ups, sketch models or prototypes possess the communicative qualities associated with the concept of *boundary objects* in engineering design (Bucciarelli, 2002, pp. 230–231). In the complex world of filmmaking, scripts typically served as primary boundary objects, just as mainly text-based bibles later did in the cre-

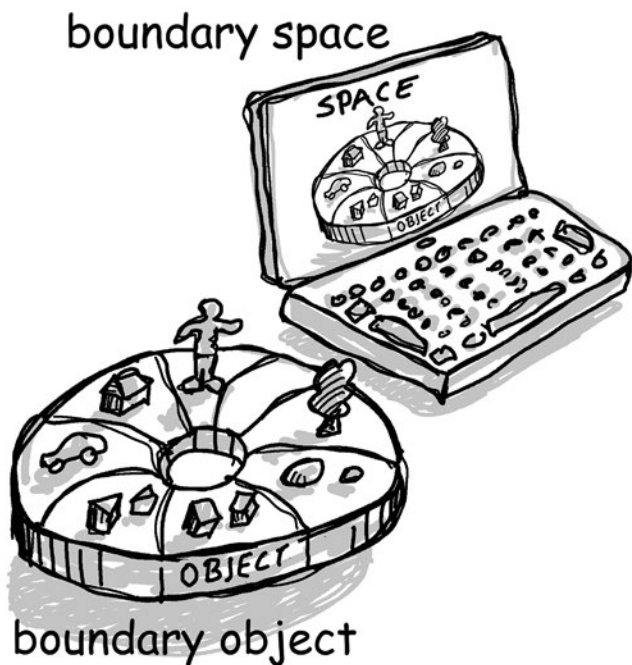


ation of TV series, for example *The Wire*. In the world of animation, *storyboards* and *colour scripts* have become the primary *boundary objects*. The creation of digital games often favour analogue paper prototypes.

Communication platforms

Design concepts, such as bibles, manuals and world wikis should be comprehensible to people from different professions and thus facilitate the internal and external communication in the group, department or institution where the development and production takes place (Wille, 2015a, pp. 207–208).

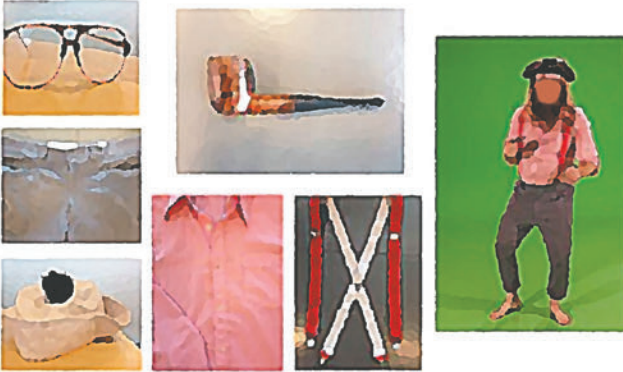
We may also speak of a *boundary space* if, for example, the art department in charge of the production of a TV series, animation or game serves as the shared forum, not just for the development of visual materials but also for others involved in the development of the production (Wille, 2015a, p. 209). In this sense, the art department of the TV Drama department of DR (Danish Broadcasting Corporation) was often used as a meeting place for the key creatives involved in a production, such as the director, the writer, the camera operator, the producer and the production designer. It proved productive to hold important production team meetings surrounded by visual research material, location photos, scale-models, costume samples, working drawings, illustrations, graphic design and storyboards. In animation productions, the animation *story room* – which was invented by Walt Disney but is also used by Pixar, among others, to test scenes in a team setting – may serve a similar function.



In games, animation and other productions that do not primarily involve physical objects, we may speak of a new type of boundary space that has a digital infrastructure. An illustrative contemporary example of a way to convey a fictional universe is DR's productions for children. In this regard, DR has served as an international model of universe building.

For example, the design principles guiding DR's popular *Ramasjang universe* (2017–) are distributed across several websites containing more or less detailed guidelines for the shows, characters and games that are part of

the universe. The example below from DR's website describes the design, costume, poses, universe, character design of the character Onkel Reje (Uncle Shrimp) for both live



action and animation within the Ramasjang universe.

The Ramasjang universe is visualized as an island where various activities unfold



across a variety of genres driven by the overarching ambition of being a magical place that encourages play, based on a stated principle of 1 hour of television to 100 hours of play. To provide inspiration and support for the various productions incorporated into the development of the Ramasjang universe – including animation film, live-action shows with various hosts and games and other digital activities – the team constructed a physical model of the donut-shaped island indicating the different possibilities. In this sense, the island is a tangible boundary object, while the website is an example of a boundary space with a digital infrastructure.

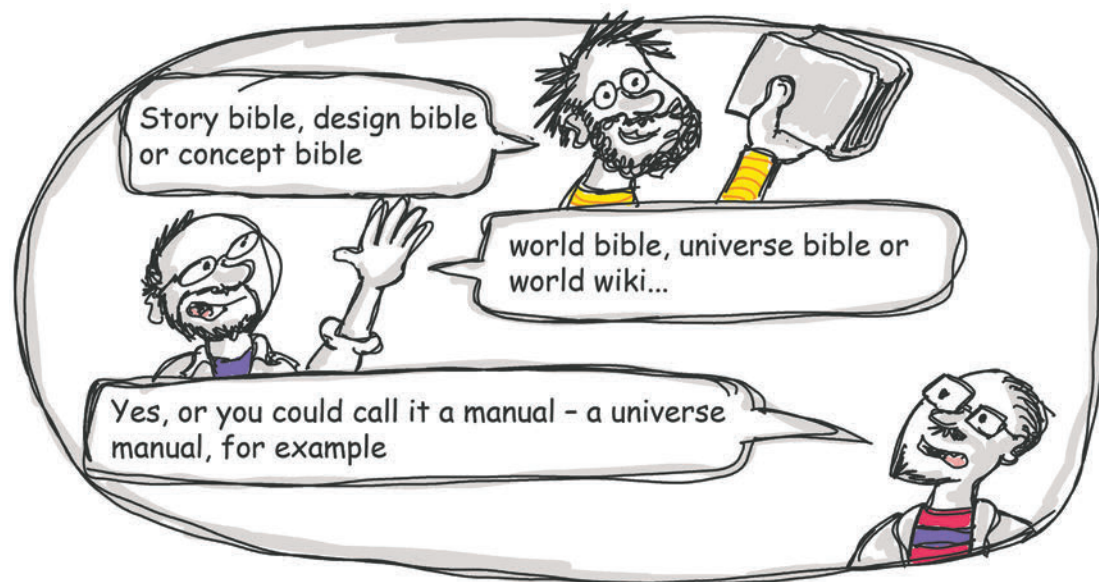
Bibles, manuals, guidelines and world wikis

To make sure that the design and narrative principles are implemented at every level of a large-scale production or concept that the maker owns or has as their *intellectual property* (IP), the term *bible* is typically used to refer to the document that defines the foundation and ensures consistency in the development and subsequent life of the production.

If the bible emphasizes and outlines the narrative content, as is traditionally the case for TV series, it is called a 'story bible'; if the emphasis is on the visual content, as in animation or films with many visual effects, it is called a 'design bible' or a 'concept bible'. The two types are not mutually exclusive, and in

many cases, they fuse into a single book or manual.

When working with fictional worlds or universes, you may also produce a world bible or a *universe bible* or, in case of a more open, digital communication structure, a ‘world wiki’.



In large productions with talented illustrators and designers, the material that is produced and organized into bibles or manuals may have sufficient artistic quality to be shared on websites or published as coffee table books, like the publications from the Japanese Studio Ghibli or CoMix Wave Films or from computer games, such as *Cyberpunk*

2077 (2020) or *Last of Us*. The books are an excellent source of inspiration for designing the structure of your universe presentation.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the wealth of visual content that these concept books offer is typical of the culture that develops around large universes. This type of fandom is mostly associated with genres such as fantasy or science fiction, and it is often an integrated aspect of the user experience and engagement. This means that there is a commercial potential in the material that is initially produced for in-house use. More importantly, however, this circulation of material also creates the potential for interactions or conversations with existing or future audiences and fans. Like co-creation, this user interaction is significant for the development of the universe, but in combination with the transmedial nature of the universe, it may also challenge the notion of the bible as the fundamental document.



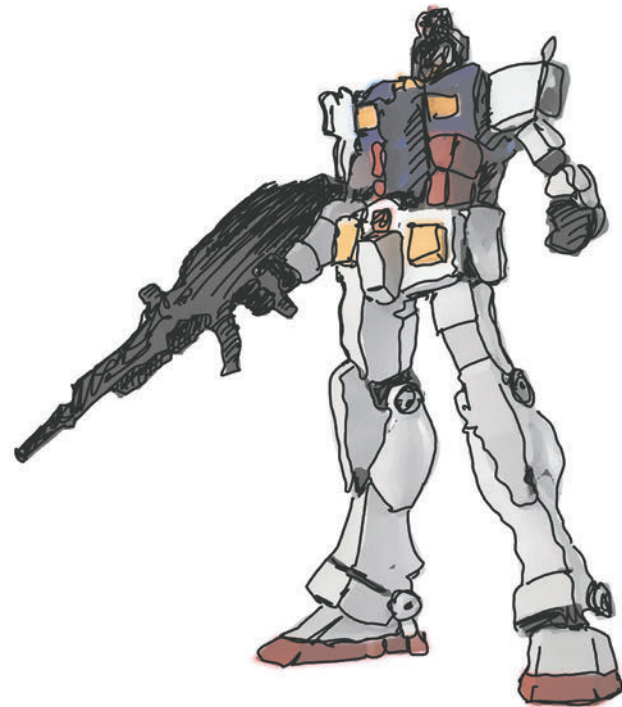
The static bible or the open wiki

The term *story bible*, *design bible* or *world bible* conveys the concept of the fictional universe, but in addition to its implication of a physical book, bible also has connotations of a legal text with an emphasis on mythology or lore. The notion of a set of rules that the bible term implies can be problematic, because it may seem overly rigid. Therefore, we may need to consider other terms or principles for the communication of fictional material – not least universe-building material.

In *A Playful Production Process for Game Designers (and Everyone)*, Richard Lemarchand cautions against the computer game bible as an ‘old-fashioned, too-big-to-be-useful game design document’ (Lemarchand, 2021, p. 151). Others, like Jeff Gomez of Starlight Runner, find them highly useful as development and navigational tools in transmedial productions. (See the interview with Gomez in Chapter 8.)

Some large universes place a strong emphasis on having a coherent underlying narrative that is described in a story bible, thus

elevating lore to law. In the opening chapter, we described how such an approach to a basic narrative can become an obstacle to the further development of the universe, as was the case for *Star Wars* until the universe was opened to stories about side characters and new locations in the series *The Mandalorian* (2019–) and various Lego-versions. An even more radical example is the *Gundam* universe, which, apart from a few design details, was made available for further development by fans and others. (See interview with Tosca in Chapter 1.)



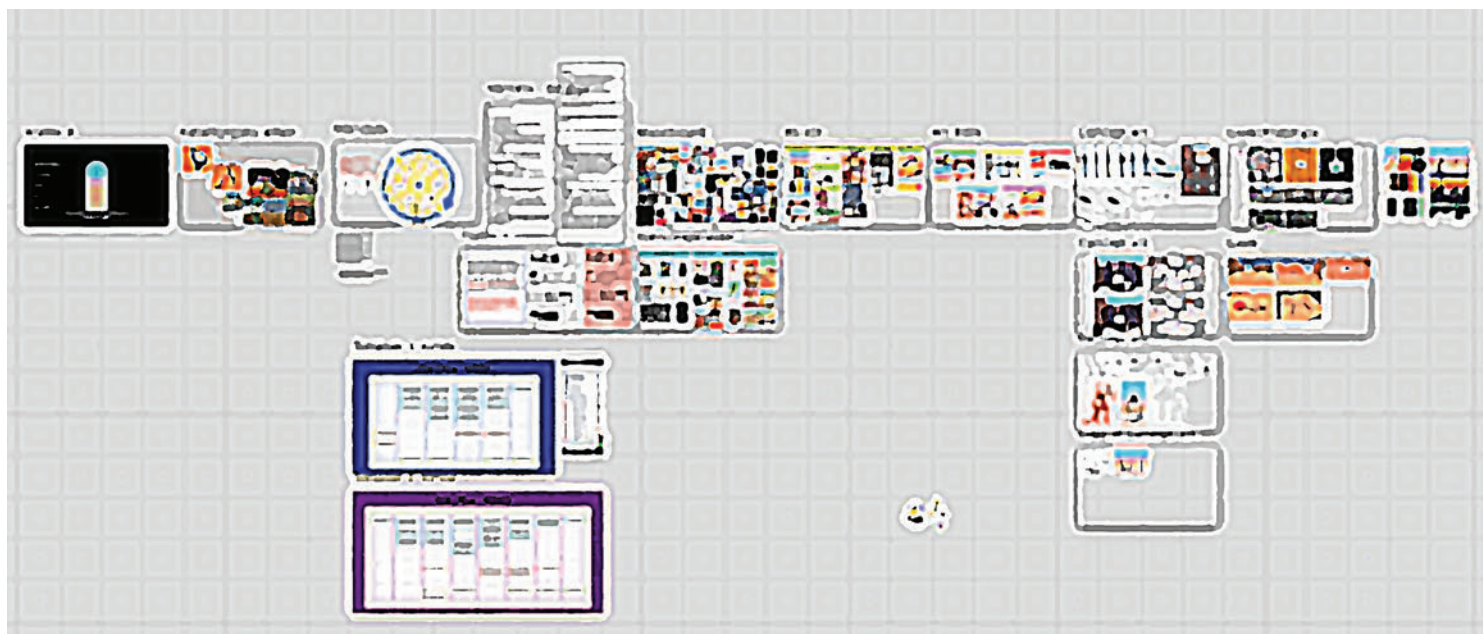
World wiki and Miro board

To avoid the unnecessarily restrictive associations of *a bible*, many prefer to describe the types of documents that describe the principles of a universe as *manuals*.

This shift in terminology may be explained by shifts in production and cooperation forms. Since most productions today have digital elements, it seems obvious to base the documentation and communication of a fictional universe on a digital infrastructure and architecture. A digital online platform, such as a Miro board, is an excellent forum for collaborating on the development of design and visual material. You can also present

a universe by means of a digital, user-driven hypertextual encyclopaedic structure, like the underlying framework of Wikipedia. Finally, a design-based world description may also contain texts, just as a world wiki may contain design and visual material. Thus, the game producer Eddaheim is basing their game *Neon Knights* (2022) on a world wiki where all knowledge about the game world is gathered and shared.

Naturally, a world wiki based on an open encyclopaedic structure has a different, more interactive feel than *a bible* or *a manual* with a linear structure. You need to find the presentation format that works best for your



universe. Each format will have its pros and cons, and it is important for you to consider whether the structure reflects the format or formats that the universe can be published in. You can also take a more or less conscious approach to staging the universe with a view to inviting and welcoming people with different backgrounds and interests, for example by keeping place or pages open and blank, as in the manuals for role-playing games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974–).

What goes into the description of the universe?

Whether you are working with concept or pitch material, it can be helpful to view the presentation material as a world in its own right, based on the same principles and visual qualities as the universe it represents. Internal material for conveying the fundamental principles of the universe may consist of extensive and complex documents of up to 50 pages, while the material for a concept pitch is typically no more than 2 to 5 pages long.

David Simon's bible for the TV series *The Wire* (2002–2008) about crime in Baltimore, from street crime to political crimes, is a purely text-based introduction to the concept, places, key characters and groups of the series, supplemented with outlines of the initial episodes (Simon, 2000). By contrast, production designer Jette Lehmann's design bible

for Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia* (2011) consists mainly of visual references based on Trier's vision, which in turn drew inspiration from the film *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), the Tjolöholm Castle in Sweden, where part of the film was shot, and paintings by Bruegel and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. Jette Lehmann's design bible, or 'concept binder', has the area around Tjolöholm Castle as its main arena, and the first illustration in it is a photo-manipulated map that shows the various locations.

Reading through the bible, one transitions from overview images of the castle and its surroundings to images with a more textural character, with exterior and interior



photographs of the building and copies of floor plans. This material is shown in combination with inspiration material from the imagery of the Romantics. Next, the binder contains examples of interior designs and contemporary American home design. The last part of the binder includes wallpaper samples by William Morris and examples of glass mosaics from the castle. In this way, the concept binder provides guidelines for the visual design while also facilitating communication with the people involved in creating the designs, both in and outside the physical art department (Wille, 2015a, pp. 220–222).

As described, bibles and concept binders may be structured in different ways, depending on the purpose and eventual publishing formats you are aiming at.

The most convincing productions – analogue as well as digital – have a match between the potential media formats (film, series, game, transmedial and so forth) and the mediation format of their boundary object (linear bible or interactive world wiki). There should also be a balance between the visual and the textual material that is presented. Of the two examples above, one is text-based, while the other is visual, but they also served different purposes: one is mainly a story bible with a pitch character, while the other is a design bible intended mainly for internal use. They have similar structures, though, in that they both start out big. A piece of advice for

this effective mediation is to think of it as a funnel that should have as wide an opening as possible.

In this sense, *The Wire* is described as a series that, in addition to being a crime thriller, also has ambitions of discussing universal questions about the human condition in the context of a focus on urban American culture.

Similarly, the concept binder for *Melancholia* begins with a wide opening that maps



the filmic arena and then moves into specific locations, exteriors, interiors and, finally, design materials. Thus, in terms of the Star Model, one example begins with WHY, the other with WHERE.

Because fiction is usually based on characters, or ‘beings’, this is usually where the introduction to the universe begins or continues. If you create a linear universe manual, it may therefore be a good idea to start out big. The opening of the manual may include a presentation of the characters, the world or the resonance, that is, whether it feels mean-



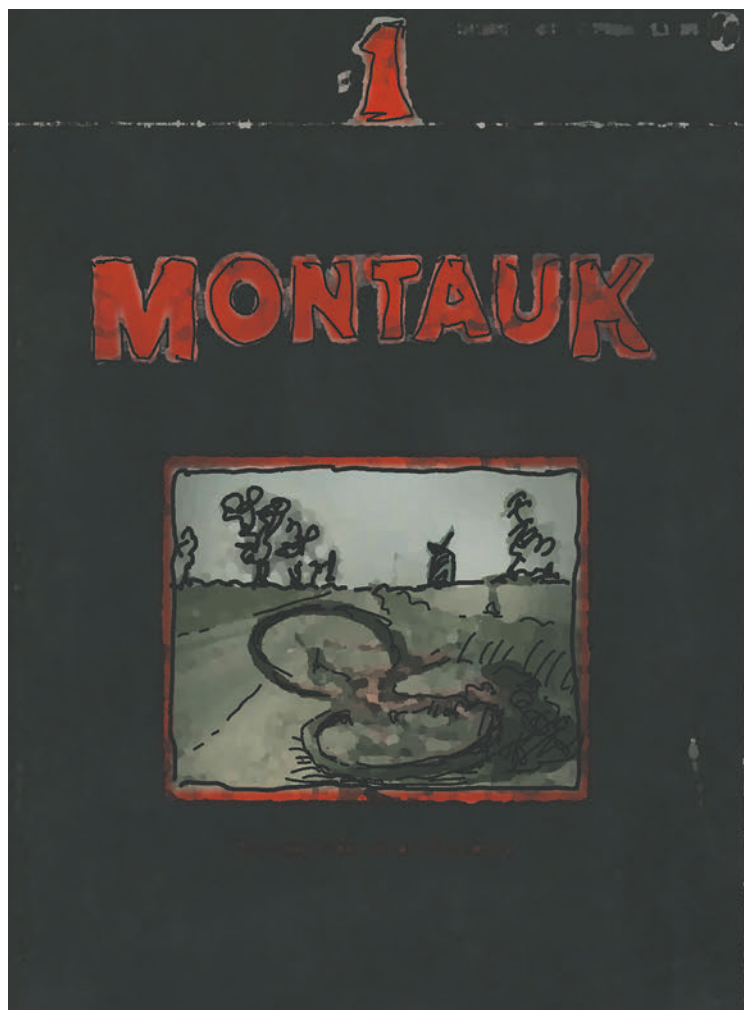
ingful to the audience: WHY. As mentioned above, this introduction should be adapted to the purpose and target group; you can choose the sequence you think will be most effective; and you should include illustrations and maps. For example, the design bible for *Head-*

ventures in the Underworld begins with visual design studies and research before moving on to the design principles for characters and sets. Naturally, the presentation may also be arranged in a non-linear manner, as a wiki site or on a Miro board.

Stranger Things

A good example of a concept bible that also worked as pitch material is the presentation of the series *Montauk*, which later turned into the popular Netflix series *Stranger Things* (2016–). The layout of the presentation is like a mix of a cheap *pulp fiction* publication and a faded report with crumpled, yellowed pages with coffee stains. The cover strikes the mood with a picture of a red children’s bicycle lying abandoned on a gravel road with an ominous radar station further along. Underneath the image, the series is described as epic *sci-fi horror*. The obvious homage to the genres is part of the communication, and the *Montauk* presentation is full of references to iconic 1970s and 1980s films, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *E.T.* (1982), *Hellraiser* (1987), *Stand by Me* (1986) and *Jaws* (1975). The subsequent sections describe the background of the series, including the inspiration from the ‘*Montauk Project*’ conspiracy theory, which revolves around the idea of experiments carried out on a secret American military base during the Cold War.

The document briefly outlines the story of the series, then introduces the dramatic structure, reflections on style and genre and,



finally, in the closing section, the characters and groups in the environment are described. The text is accompanied by faded images from primary references, ranging from *E.T.* to *Hellraiser*, and the whole document is steeped in 1980s nostalgia. The Montauk document appears as a project pitch that combines the content of a story bible and a design bible in a well-structured and inviting format. The document consists of 23 pages of interwoven text and images organized into two-page sections.

The different sections are:

1. Introduction
2. Background about the 'Montauk Project' conspiracy
3. Story
4. Structure
5. Tone and style
6. Introduction to the horror genre
7. The children as a group
8. The outsider as a character
9. The teenagers as a group
10. The adults
11. About the franchise potential of the series.

The original version of the document is available online.

Adventure Time

Above, we have described how bibles, manuals and world wikis can focus either on the narrative or on design aspects. They are most effective if story and design are integrated in a way that considers possible publishing



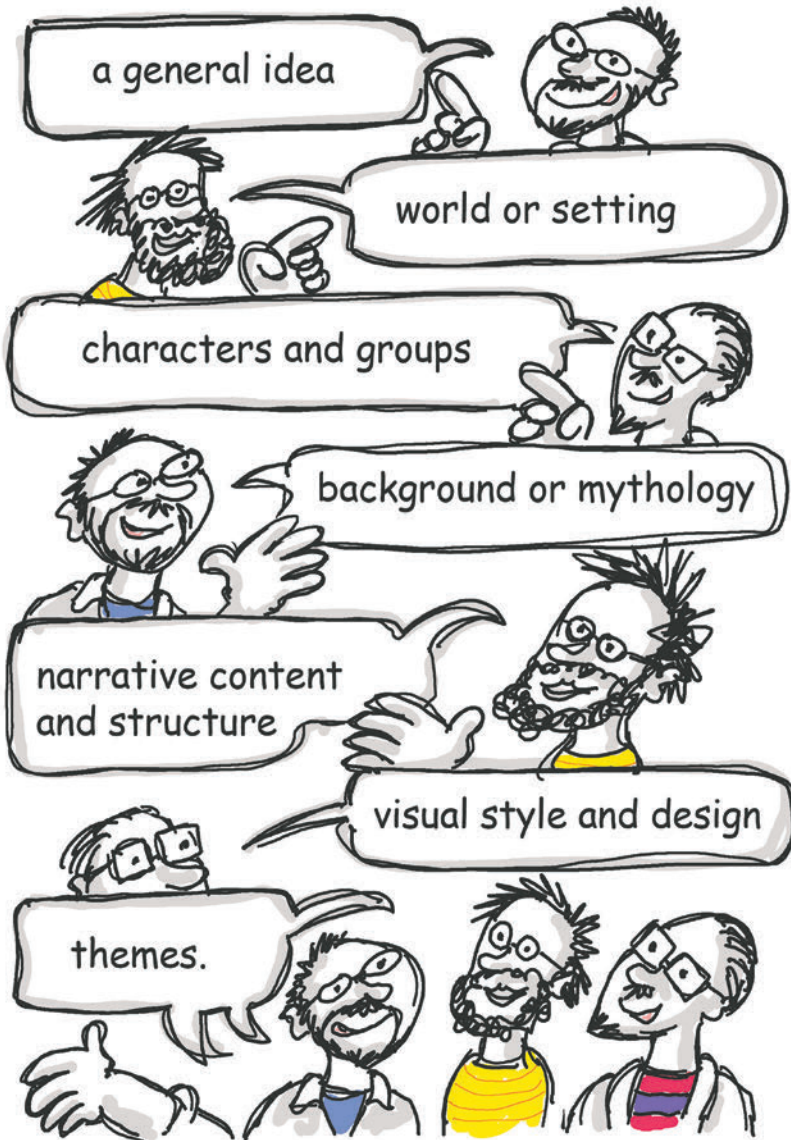
formats and remains open to user input. A well-designed universe bible or manual with an integrated format will often have similarities with a pitch material. One example of this is the material for the animation series *Adventure Time* (2010–) created by Pendleton Ward (and reproduced in an art book about the series that you can find online; see the reference list).

The presentation of *Adventure Time* is conveyed in the same direct and dynamic, mu-

sical, playful and colourful linguistic and visual style that characterizes the series itself. The document also addresses the characters of the series and their internal and external conflicts. For example, the character Finn is described as *a dude split in half*, just as the presentation also touches on the hate-love relationship between Princess Bubblegum and Marceline the Vampire Queen. Naturally, the manual includes a map that offers an overview of the different parts of the world as well as more detailed design principles for and *outlines* of various stories. The key point in this context is that the document contains material from fans and users of the universe in the form of drawings and models.

Both *Montauk* and *Adventure Time* thus address the transmedial potential of the universe





and the possibility of involving the audience, to a greater or lesser degree. This open character is an important aspect of the presentation and pitch materials. As mentioned above, it might be a good idea to open the material even more, for example by representing the universe or the world with blank spots or sections to invite contributions from users and fans. In the same vein, we might imagine lists of characters that include blanks and so forth. In deciding how to organize and present the material for a fictional universe, you should consider the following issues:

1. Think about the purpose of the presentation and consider the target group. Is the focus internal, as a manual for specific groups in production, or is it external, as a pitch aimed at potential stakeholders or investors?
2. Is it entertaining to explore, and what emotions does it appeal to?
3. Is there a good balance between text and visual material?
4. Is there a match between the presentation format and intended publishing formats?
5. Is the presentation open to input from employees, stakeholders and/or users?
6. Does the material have a logical structure, so that you move from the general overview to the more granular level?
7. Is the material well-structured, so that the receiver does not feel lost or experience tunnel vision?

8. Does the material contain proof of concept, a vertical slice, a video sketch or other semi-prototypical approximations of the finished version?
9. Does the presentation include a map?

In this chapter, we have looked at how you can structure presentation and *pitch material* for your universe. Your presentation should contain condensed concept material and answers to the basic questions from the Star Model. An open presentation in the

form of a world wiki is especially useful if you wish to involve employees and users in the further development of the universe. The latter is important, not least, if you want a sustainable universe with the potential to develop, grow and have a long lifespan. In the closing chapters of the book, we demonstrate how you can work with this actively. In the next chapter, we take a closer look at how experiences and stories based on your universe are created and can be structured.





Board Games:

If you can have a universe in a video game, surely you can have one in a board game. But how do you get an idea for a board game? In this conversation, we have gathered some of the world's most interesting board-game designers. A super-talent, a mega-star and one of our greatest board-game heroes. This is a business where the makers are not widely known to the public but are stars among boardgame aficionados.



Rob Daviau is an American game designer and a cofounder of Restoration Games. Daviau has more than 20 years of experience as a game designer. He has created numerous games, including *Risk Legacy* (2012), *Pandemic Legacy* (2015–2020), *Mountains of Madness* (2017), *Downforce* (2017), *Betrayal Legacy* (2018) and *Return to Dark Tower* (2021).



Jonathan Gilmour is an American board-game designer. Gilmour has worked as a game designer since 2009. His work includes *Dead of Winter: A Crossroads Game* (2014), *Kids on Bikes* (2018) and *Dinosaur Island* (2019), among many other creations.



Nikki Valens is an American board-game designer. Valens has worked professionally with game design since 2013, creating a wide range of games, including *Eldritch Horror* (2013–2018), *Mansions of Madness* (2016–2017), *Legacy of Dragonholt* (2017) and *Quirky Circuits* (2019).

When you think of the universe, the characters, the settings, the themes and so on, what do you consider a universe?

Nikki Valens: I tend to think of a story concept first and then build a setting that best facilitates that type of a story. So if I'm wanting to tell a story about friendship and camarade-

rie, I'll build a setting that allows me to really show that to the best of my ability. So I tend to start with characters and the story I want to tell with those characters, before the world even. But then I build the world around them to fit the needs of the story and fill in the details and the background and make it more lived-in – and in some cases more realistic, I guess.

Some of them are bigger than others. In some cases, the design is a town and the surrounding area, and we are not really filling in what the rest of the continent or the planet or the universe looks like, because it's just not part of that particular story that I'm telling. But in other cases, it's much more than just that. It will include the cosmology of how magic works or in what ways physics are different from our real world.

Rob Daviau: It's very similar to the world you'd find in any medium – the setting, the characters, the themes, the rules for that world. Perhaps in a board game, it's more about the emotions than the story. For me, it's about what experience or emotions I want you to feel in this world. So it's all the things that you would expect in a fictional setting, with the ability to manipulate it slightly, like a video game.

But doesn't it apply even more to a board game, because in video games you can have cut scenes, cinematics and so on?

Rob Daviau: I'm working on a game now. It's a world that's quite different. I think it's a re-

ally cool world with new characters, but how do the players learn the rules to this world? It's interesting to me what players know about the world from the moment they hear that title to the box cover, to reading the rules, to opening a board or drawing a card. And then how do they continue to learn about this world and the characters?

Jonathan Gilmour: I think it's the setting and the mechanics that the game evokes, and the experience that you want the player to have and feel. I'm very much an experimental game designer, so I always try to think who the players are and what they are doing, and make sure that the theme and mechanics align with that. So, for me the universe is all of that world that they're absorbing through the art in the game.



Rob Daviau: How do you get an idea for a story world or a universe? If you take Tolkien: I want a game where you just open a book and it's like the beginning of a fantasy novel where you see a map of the world. I study that for like 10 minutes before I start reading, because I want to guess where the action is going to take place and what this world is.

I have a degree in history, and sometimes, I will just think of a myth or a character from history and use that as a starting point. Sometimes it's something totally unrelated. A person walks by on the street, and I'm like, what's their story? They're an interesting character. What world should they live in? So, they all start from a different place, but it's history, emotions, people, maps ... I'm a big map person.

Nikki Valens: A lot of times, I have either an emotion or a specific type of character interaction or social interaction in mind that I want to see play out in a story. I want to show it to people and have them be able to be a part of that moment, and then just kind of figure out what I need to do in order to make that happen. Like I mentioned earlier, I tend to start with stories or characters first and then build a world around them, as opposed to starting with a world and then building a story inside of it.

And how does this relate to *Quirky Circuits*?

Nikki Valens: With *Quirky Circuits* I wanted to create a cooperative action programming game, because I didn't feel like there were many cooperative action programming games compared to the many compet-

itive ones. So I started with the idea of what emotion I want to evoke from the players when they play this game. After getting some mechanics in place, and play-testing it a bit, the type of cast that was produced was basically the robot getting stuck in corners and going off on its own and maybe backtracking on itself and just doing things. And that was the moment I realized this is just a Roomba. And that realization basically spawned the entire setting of what *Quirky Circuits* would be.

Jonathan Gilmour: So many of my games come from the genres or the stories that I love. Growing up watching Romero and Fulci and all the different zombie movies heavily influenced *Dead of Winter*. You know, growing up with *The Goonies* and reading *Paper Girls* was inspiration for *Kids on Bikes*.

Nikki Valens: How do you illustrate and describe a story world or universe? I think this really comes down to what kind of media has inspired me for that particular game. With *Dragonholt*, for instance, it's very much somewhere between a role-playing game book and a novel, so it's much more inspired by literature. It's very written word, and it's very poetic, versus something like *Artisans*. It still has a lot of text, but my inspiration for that was literally more like sitting around a table with people and doing a screen reading of a play or a movie.



So, even though it is just a lot of text, it's a very different feeling and a different vibe. In that case, the world is not illustrated from a narrator's perspective but from the perspective of the characters you're playing as, and what they can see and experience. So how I go about actually showing the world you are in is kind of different from game to game, because I draw on a lot of different inspiration – whether it's from comic books or animation or cinematography or any other media form that I'm fixating on at that moment in my design career.

Jonathan Gilmour: For me, illustrating the universe is creating those mechanics that I want the players to experience. When the illustrations and the writing come in, the things that a player is doing are evocative, and make them feel like they're living in that world – mechanically as well as through the illustrations and writing. So I spend a lot of time thinking and asking myself who I am as a player, and what I'm doing, and what would be fun to do in this world and then trying to make the actions all circle around that experience.

When you look at *Dead of Winter*, it's like a huge, almost like a movie set with all the characters and stuff. How do you communicate your idea about the world?

Jonathan Gilmour: A lot of times I'll find some reference art to show them what I have

in mind. When I'm showing the game to a publisher for the first time, it helps me to evoke those things, so they have an idea. With *Dead of Winter*, I just talked heavily about the comic book *30 Days of Night* and showed them how black and white art with splashes of red was so strong and wasn't really being done in a lot of games. I wanted that start feeling ...



Rob Daviau: Some publishers say, don't give me final art, because we're going to do final art. But I do find if you give them placeholder art that sets the tone, they're much more likely to get it and want to do it. I also co-own a publisher, so right from the beginning, I'm thinking about the final product. I'm designing with the final product in mind, and as we're working on the game, we're keeping the mood and the feel and the final look in mind.



Nikki Valens: It can definitely be pretty difficult to communicate to the publisher what the vibe and mood should be. For evoking experiences and emotions, you need to have gotten a playable prototype to a point that you can have them play it and feel it for themselves. But for the setting and the vibe of the

world, it helps finding reference art or stuff that you can use as mood boards and stuff like that. I tend to keep giant folders of art that I've found that I love. For instance, I have a giant folder of solarpunk artwork that I go back to every now and then. I just look at it and go, oh, this is so beautiful. I really want to make a setting in a game that can have this feeling to it.

How do you keep the consistency throughout the development process?

Nikki Valens: In terms of maintaining a cohesive vision I usually tend to start with a

mood board or even write up an actual vision document, and then I just revisit it fairly regularly just to be sure that I'm still at the place that I wanted to be. If I've gone off track, I ask myself, Do I like where I've gone even more than my original vision? Is it worth changing the vision to try to meet this other thing I've found?

Jonathan Gilmour: Agreed. And I think for world-building, Trello and Twine are both really good tools that help keep the story portions in a visual manner.

The future of board games ... Where do you think the universes will go?

Nikki Valens: If the trend of the size of the stories I tell is any indicator, we'll get some pretty epic stories eventually if I can manage to not go bankrupt.

Rob Daviau: There's a lot of games coming out. The market has broadened enough that it's like genres of music or movies. So, you'll have people say, I don't want to play a big epic game, it takes too long, and there are people who can't wait for that.

Nikki Valens: Yeah, it used to be like trying to hit whatever was popular at the moment, but now, everything kind of is just its own thing.

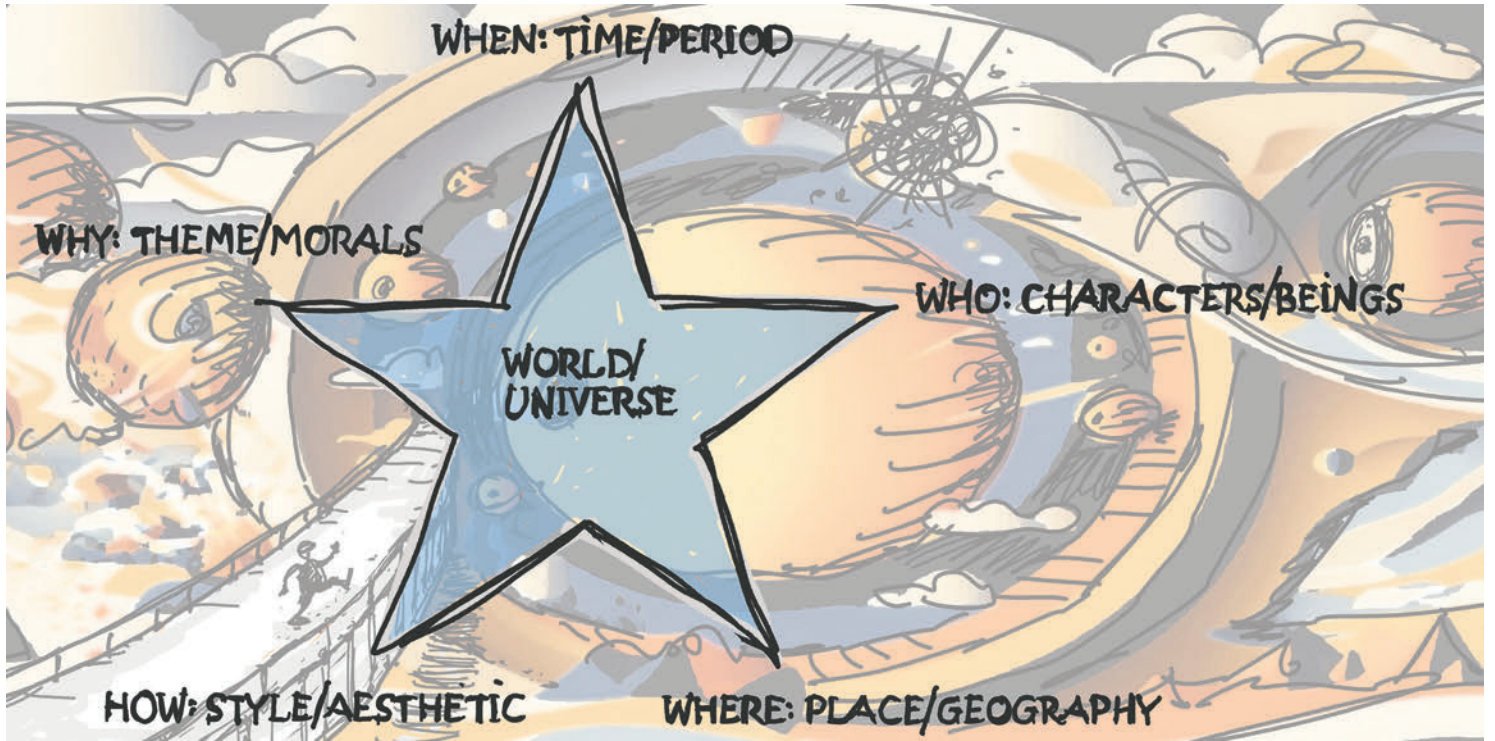
Jonathan Gilmour: Yeah, the tendrils just spread farther and farther out in subgenres upon subgenres. Like music. I have a ton of hope and excitement for apps and games. I'm infatuated with them when they're done well, like *Mansions of Madness*, which is a perfect 10 in my opinion. I want to see more serialized content coming out for games like that. I think that's really exciting, being able to drip-feed content out to players to keep a game fresh digitally.

Rob Daviau: I just want to make a game, that, when you open it, it feels like a paperback book, and you see the world right there. And it evokes that same feeling, for me at least, of being like 11, and I'm like, what's this going to be about?









Exercise 5: Create a universe manual

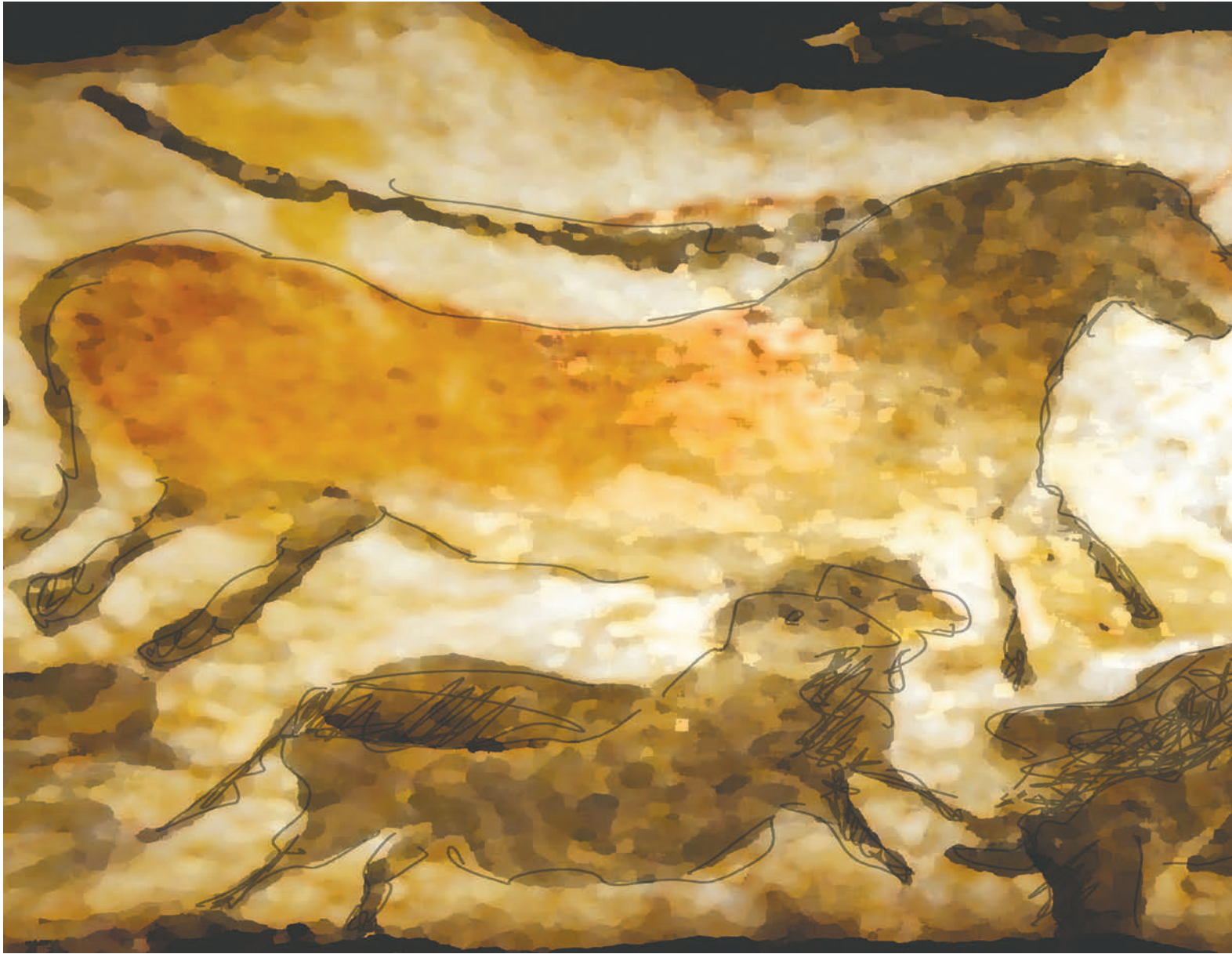
Create a universe manual using the material you created in previous exercises. Your manual could include the following content:

The title of your universe

- Log line – perhaps written as the ‘what if’ or ‘big why’ that you worked in Exercise 2
- Key art – a single illustration that captures the mood of a situation in your universe
- A half-page synopsis – write a brief summary of the universe as a whole based on the points of the Star Model that you worked with in Exercise 2
- Describe two formats that your universe might be published in – the ones you described in Exercise 4
- Now create detailed descriptions of each of the five tops of the star that you used to describe your universe in Exercise 3. About one page per star point; ideally, use maps and other illustrations
- Conclude by adding your name and contact information – this is important both in relation to project partners and for a pitch.

As much as possible, try to make sure all the material in the universe manual inspire you and others to consider new aspects of your universe and new formats for it.

You may find it helpful to use creative AI tools to enhance your universe manual with illustrations and suggestions for formats.





6. Format: How do I develop experiences in a fictional universe?

The story is in the world; not the other way around. That is to say, a world is big and hopelessly uncontrollable. It spills messy outside the edges of any one story.

Travis Beacham, *Pacific Rim: Tales From Year Zero* (2013)

In the previous chapter, we asked you to create material to convey and present your fictional universe to both internal and external target groups. It may seem strange to ask you to do this before we have asked you to develop stories and experiences in your universe or an overarching narrative structure. Narrative work often occupies a privileged position in the literature about working with both written and audio-visual fiction. In this context, however, we choose to delay it, to prevent it from stealing focus from the process of developing your universe.

We agree with the quote above, that stories and experiences come from and, ideally, grow organically out of the universe once it has been established. Thus, the creation of your universe comes first. However, narratives are such an essential framework of human experiences and understanding that we cannot ignore the narrative content, even if we do try

to create some distance. Human beings are intrinsically storytelling beings, and just as we understand the everyday world around us through stories, our experience of fictional universes is also inextricably connected with stories.

This chapter deals with stories and experiences in fictional universes. It also deals with their overarching history and underlying mythology. Our approach to experiences and stories primarily draws on dramaturgy and narratology; in the present context, this means that we are mainly interested in structures and their experiential potential, while the content is up to you.

The main point is that, just as scenes and plots in specific works, such as a TV series, film, game or novel, may have a beginning, a middle and an end, so does the overarching history of a universe. How the stories in the universe unfold over these different stages

can vary a great deal, but the best approach will usually be to deal with them one at a time.

Narration and narrative structures

Ever since Aristotle's *Poetics*, dramaturgy has typically viewed stories and drama as structures that unfold through causal developments that take the audience from the story's



beginning through the *middle* and, finally, to the *end*.

This is a meaningful understanding of narrative structures, because they have similarities to life experiences, which are characterized by causal mechanisms and have a beginning and an end. However, the fact that the basic narrative schemas have this structure does not necessarily imply that you always have to reproduce them in conveying or structuring experiences.

As the French film director Jean-Luc Godard once said, the beginning, middle and end do not necessarily have to come in that order. Time and characters may be doubled, as in the Swedish playwright Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (1907), or time may be experienced simultaneously, as in the surrealist films by David Lynch or Gaspar Noé. There are all sorts of ways to tell a story, but in order to understand it, the audience usually need to be able to decode the causal structure.



The story may present its content as a linear chronological series of events, or it may not. Regardless how the story is presented, however, people will always try to deduce a structure to be able to grasp chronology and

causality. As described in Chapter 1, the way in which the story orders and presents its content is called the 'plot', which also resembles the *sujet*.

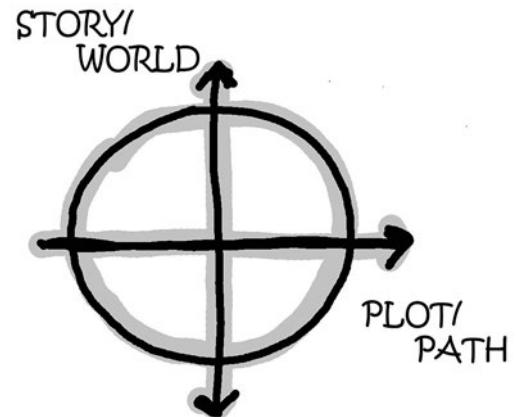
What we can deduce or mentally construe based on the information conveyed through



the plot is called the 'fabula' or 'story'. Thus, the plot is the narrative presentation of content, while the *story* is what we deduce based

on the information in the plot. This means that even if the plot may be dramaturgically fragmented, as in the work of Godard and others, in order to understand the narrative at a story level, we usually look for a causal, linear order. As we did in Chapter 1, we may also compare 'story' to world and 'plot' to the path that the narrative follows through the world.

This principle is illustrated by Christopher Vogler's Joseph Campbell-inspired model of



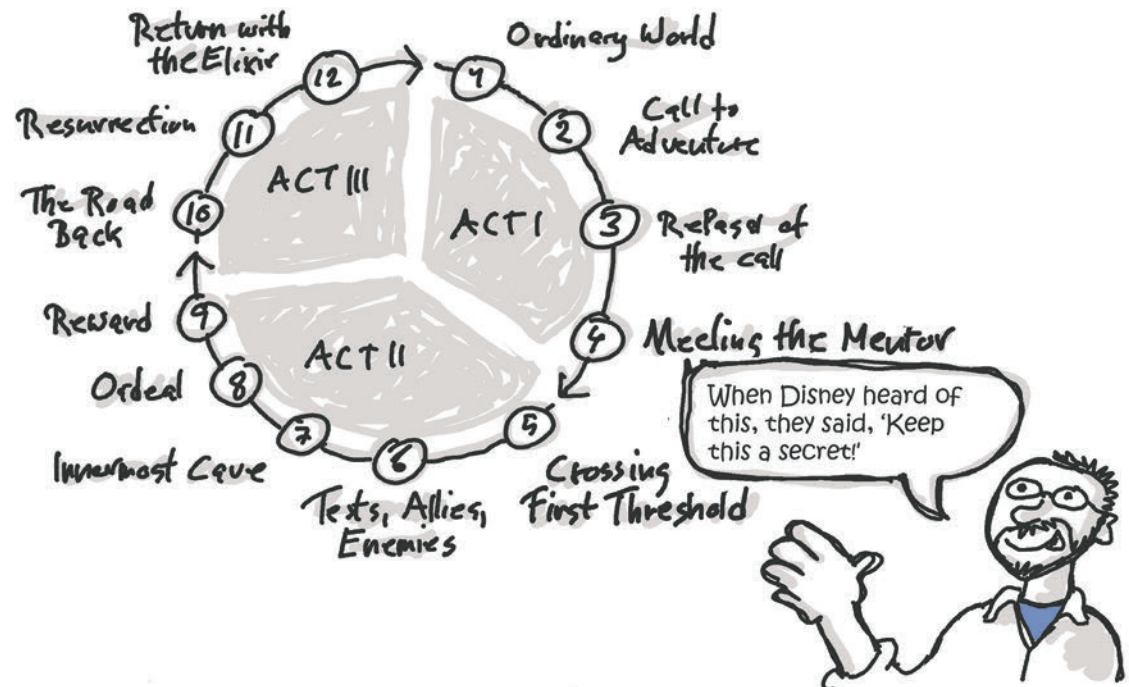
the hero's journey (see illustration on the opposite page; from Vogler's *The Writer's Journey*, 1992). The journey through the world is simply written into the model. The model may be criticized as being too formalistic and prescriptive, but that was never Vogler's intention (Vogler, 1992, p. 26). Instead, the model demonstrates how world and story can be perceived as two sides of the same coin. With inspiration from the narrative theorist

Richard Gerrig, David Herman similarly proposes a travel metaphor to describe how people experience and perceive the universe (Herman, 2009, p. 119). In conventional stories, the journey through the universe ends with a homecoming.

Theatre, literature, film and computer games all contain many other narrative structures. However, one advantage to the three-stage structure with a beginning, a middle and an end is that it matches a virtually universal human understanding of the world, as organized in time with a beginning and an end. This despite the fact that time actually behaves in much more complex ways. For simplicity's sake, we base the following discussion of some of the qualities of universe narratives on the three stages but add nuance as the discussion unfolds. First, we will review the most common dramaturgical structures, followed by some of the new

The Hero's Journey

Christopher Vogler's take on the monomyth



narrative forms, which are mainly found in transmedial universes.

The chapter concludes with practical exercises to help you get started on creating stories and experiences for your own universe.

Basic narrative plot structures

The way in which a story maps a world can be described as the story's *plot*. In discussing the narrative strategies or basic dramaturgical structures of the plot, we can identify three principal forms that it will be helpful to know as you work with the narrative path in a universe: 1) classical drama, 2) episodic and 3) simultaneous (Szatkowski, 1989).

The first form has a conventional dramatic *Aristotelian* structure: the narrative structure is causal and linear, with one scene following naturally from the preceding one and with a gradual build-up to a climax and conclusion. The modern take on this conventional dramaturgy also emphasizes character development. Some works place a strong emphasis on direct character development, but sometimes, it is rather the universe that changes around the character.

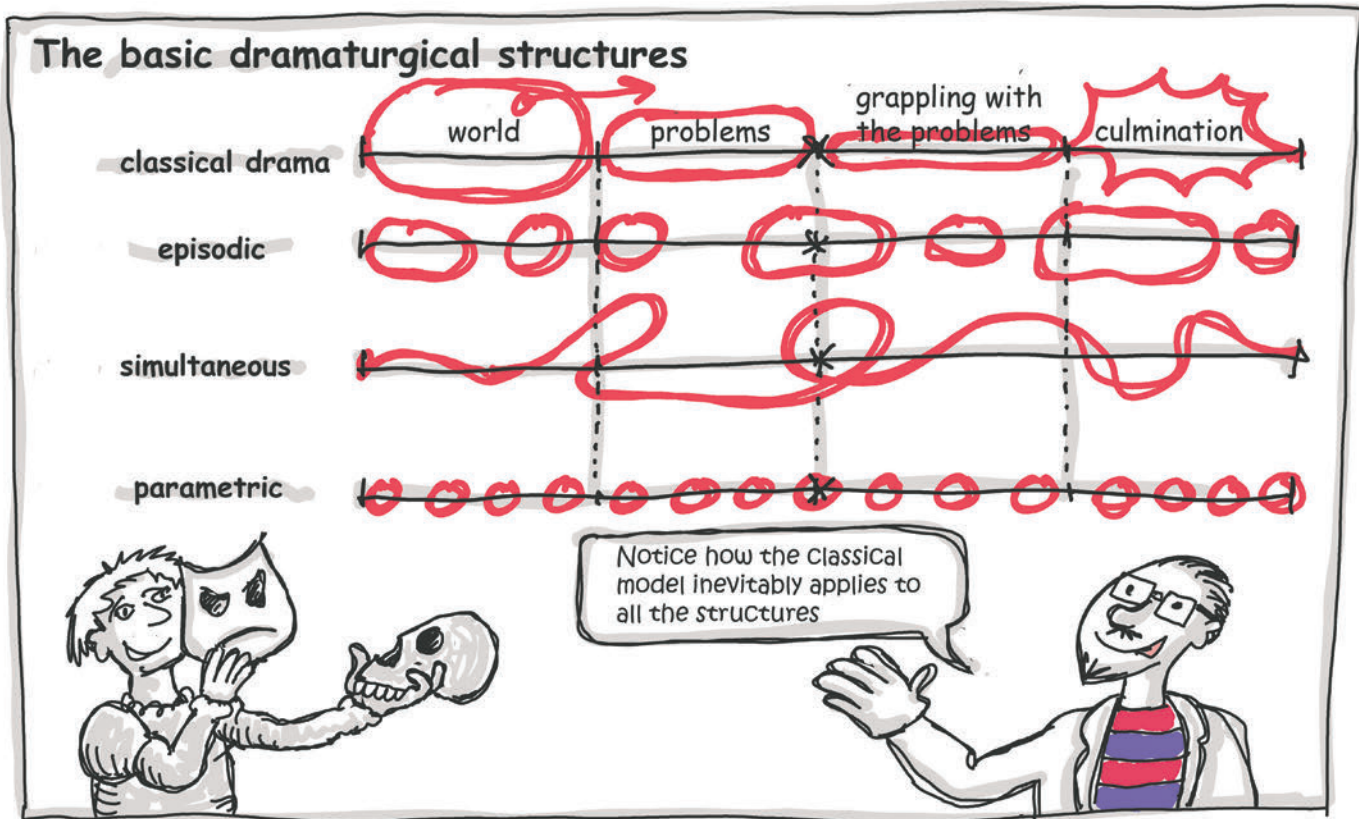
In the final section of the chapter we revisit how Eastern narrative structures, such as *kishōtenketsu*, are similar to – and different from – the conventional Western Aristotelian dramaturgy that is the basis of the present discussion.

The second basic form is the episodic structure, which is more temporally fragmented, based on tableaux, episodes, monologues and, perhaps, direct statements to the audience. This episodic dramaturgical format is

often associated with the German playwright Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre (Brecht, 1960) and the so-called *Verfremdung*, or alienation, effect, that occurs when the fiction draws attention to its own construction. However, the episodic format also exists, in a different form, in the ancient Greek tragedies by Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophokles.

The third form is the simultaneous structure, which is characterized by contemporaneity, as present and past, reality and dreams are mixed up and experienced at the same time. As mentioned above, this form is seen in the Swedish playwright August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, in which characters are doubled, and time and place are dissolved (Strindberg, 1907).

In the world of film, the conventional structure applies to 90% of all productions – from *Casablanca* (1942) to *Dune* (2021–2024) – while the episodic structure is found, for example, in the Italian director Pasolini's adaptations of *Decameron* (1971) and *Arabian Nights* (1974) as well as more popular productions, such as *500 Days of Summer* (2009) by Marc Webb or some of the Danish director Lars von Trier's films and TV series, including *Dogville* (2003) and *The Kingdom* (1994–2022). The simultaneous form is found, for example, in the more surrealist works by film directors Luis Buñuel, David Lynch or Gaspar Noé.



Above, we have referred to film, TV series and theatre, but the same forms can be found in other publishing formats, including games, which often address the player directly via text or speech, not least in *tutorials* and other instructions.

Robert McKee's book on cinematic dramaturgy, *Story*, similarly operates with three dramaturgical structures (McKee, 1997, pp. 45–57).

David Bordwell's discussion of narrative formats in film distinguishes between four so-called *modes*, with the most common being Aristotelian *classical narration*. The other three are the more subjective *art-cinema narration*, which has some similarities with the simultaneous form, and the argumentative montage-based *historical materialist narration*, which has some similarities with the episodic

format, and, finally, the systemic *parametric narration* (Bordwell, 1995).

It is debatable whether the parametric structure is truly narrative, but in the present context, it is a significant variant. The universe contains a large amount of information, which invites the sort of encyclopaedic exploration and mapping that characterizes parts of the transmedial experiential culture. As we have discussed above, encyclopaedias and wiki-pages aimed at fans of popular universes provide an encyclopaedic organization of the experience. The encyclopaedic form is not actually narrative, but, as Bordwell points out, some narrative films have parametric qualities. One example is the British film director Peter Greenaway's films, which are sometimes organized by alphabetic or numerical systems. Some experimental films and music videos also have a parametric character, as the form system overshadows the narrative content.

The various dramaturgical structures that have been discussed above are often associated with fiction, but their advantage is that they can all be used to characterize factual presentations. To distinguish between fictions and documentary formats, we can characterize the documentary forms as didactic; that is, related to education and information (Christensen, 2023, p. 54).



The narrative trunk, branches and roots

Narrative theory speaks of stories being created by *weaving* and *braiding* multiple plot *threads*. This brings to mind the three *norns* Urd, Verdande and Skuld in Norse mythology. Sitting at the roots of the world-tree Yggdrasil, they braid the strands of human fate, creating a web of threads related to the person's past, present and future: their beginning, middle and end.

The image of the tree structure, with a trunk, branches and roots, and that of the weaving or braiding *norns* can be seen as understandings of stories and plot threads

that can be used to create and experience universes.

A conventional story follows a path to a definite ending, while fictional universes invite more open, woven structures that move through multiple dimensions, sometimes across or in parallel with a narrative main track. In a universe, story threads tend not to spring from the beginning of the story but instead project from the centre of the universe. Moreover, the end, which carries great aesthetic weight in conventional storytelling, is sometimes lost from sight in the multiple possibilities of these many story threads.

Later in this chapter, we will discuss the difficulty of shaping or even getting to the end of the story of your universe – and how this can in fact be an important quality.

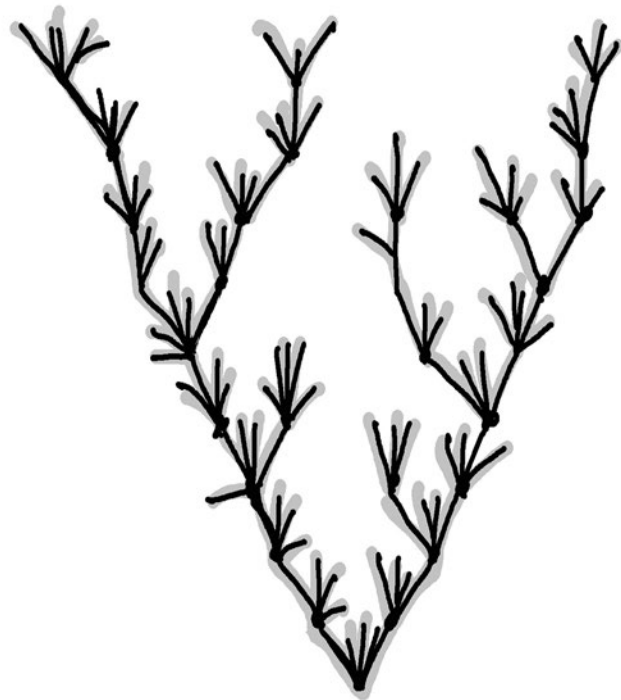
We recognize the basic branch structure of interactive stories from nature, but you can also think of the many episodes and offshoots from some TV series as branches. Take the prequel *Better Call Saul* (2015–), which is an offshoot from the series *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013), or the *Wednesday* (2022–) series, which grew out of the universe *The Addams Family* (1964–).

In contrast to these sidelines branching out from a common source, we have the so-called *rhizomes*: thin plant stems branching out underground without radiating from a

specific mother plant, like fungal *mycelium* which grows in every direction.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze sees a crucial difference between structures with a central root and rhizomes. Root structures, first of all, have a clear origin, while rhizomes have no single source or centre. The Internet could be seen as a good example of rhizome structure of the kind described by Deleuze & Guattari (2005).

Some universes have a clear origin in the form of a *primordial text*, like the first story

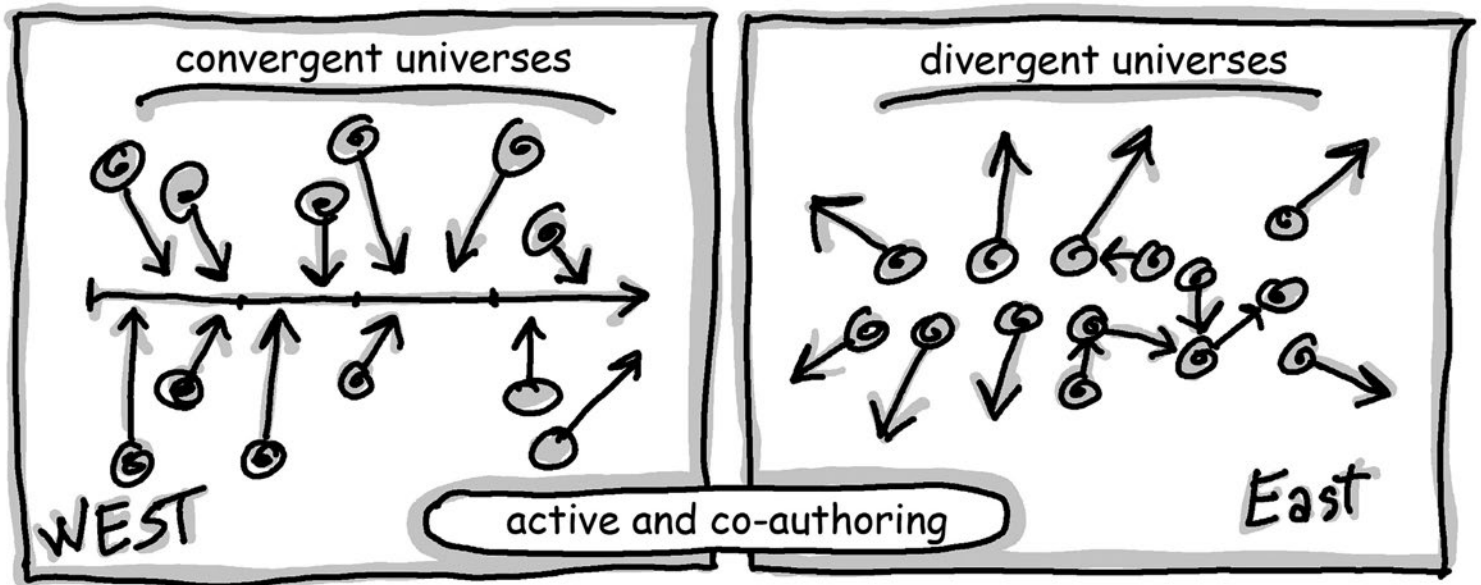


about *Donald Duck* (1934), for example, or the first *Watchmen* album (1986), but many stories and universes do not have a clear origin but rather develop freely and, like rhizomes, without a beginning. Many fairy tales and myths do not have a known origin, which leaves them free to grow and change as they spread from storyteller to storyteller. The same could be said of the different forms of fan fiction that are often associated with transmedial story worlds. As for transmedial story worlds, it is meaningful to distinguish between a Western (primarily American) form, in which the various narrative offshoots

refer to a coherent and consistent universe, and a more open Eastern (primarily Japanese) form.

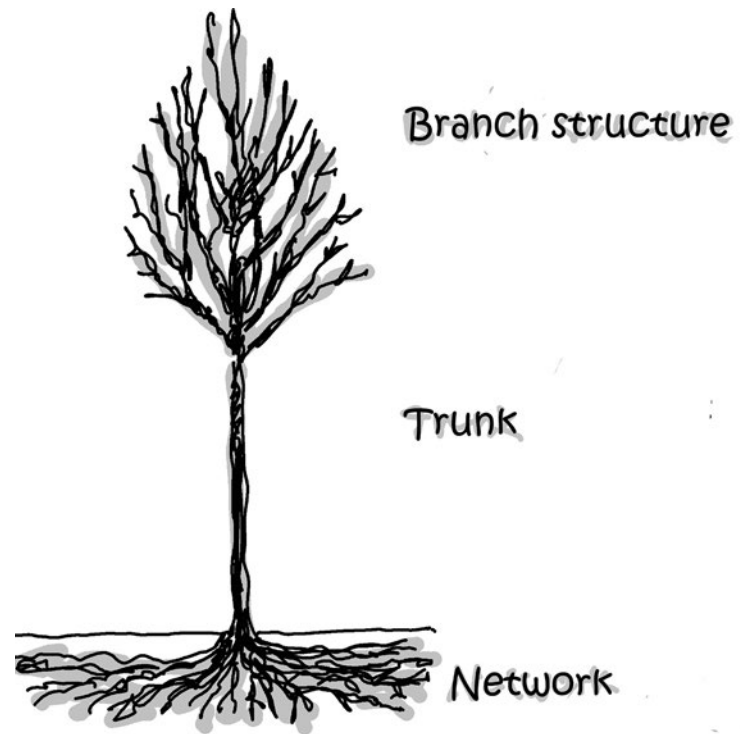
In relation to this, the media scholar Marc Steinberg distinguishes between two related but distinct forms. One is represented by Henry Jenkins's notion of convergent stories, which are shared among fans across various publishing formats and all refer to the same coherent world, as with the *Matrix* franchise.

The other form was inspired by the Japanese critic and producer Ōtsuka Eiji, who developed the concept of the so-called Media Mix (Eiji & Steinberg, 2010). The core idea



of this concept is to offer the user or the audience several minor stories in various publishing formats in a way that invites a higher degree of co-authorship but which also – and this is the crux – allows for several coexisting and potentially contradictory versions of the same world (Steinberg, 2012). It could be argued that Western transmedial thinking is convergent, while Eastern media-mix thinking is divergent. In a convergent universe, it is possible to establish timelines and create bibles, while the same is not necessarily the case in a divergent one. The media-mix universe may contain multiple parallel or partially overlapping versions of the world (Steinberg, 2012, pp. 86–87). Media-mix structures are closest to the unruly rhizome structures.

To return to the image of the tree in Norse mythology, we can view the narrative structure as 1) a trunk, 2) a branch structure or 3) a network of roots. The *trunk* will be a traditional, delimited narrative work driven by causal relations, while the *branch structure* invites offshoots or serial extensions of the story, while the underground *network* that thrives in the dark invites uncontrolled co-authorship by fans and other cocreators.



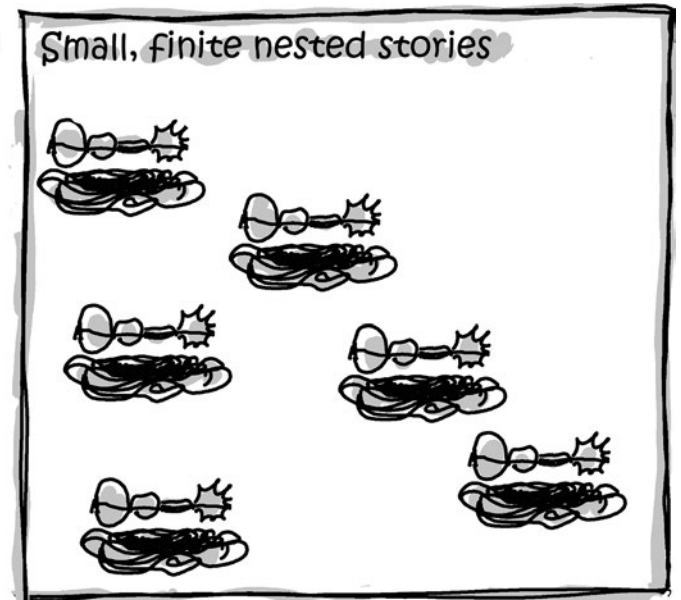
Narrative braids, nested stories and narrative fabric

To illustrate some of the universe-driven narrative characteristics, we can look to the American story-world scholar Mark Wolf, who describes how stories within a universe may be in the form of *nested stories* or *narrative braids* (2012, 199–204). In this context, *nested stories* are interlinked stories that unfold within the same universe. Examples include collections of episodic stories such as *Arabian Nights*, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349–52) or Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1976). Mythological stories within a shared religious cosmology could also fall under this category, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 CE) can be seen as an example of a braided work with several *nested stories*.

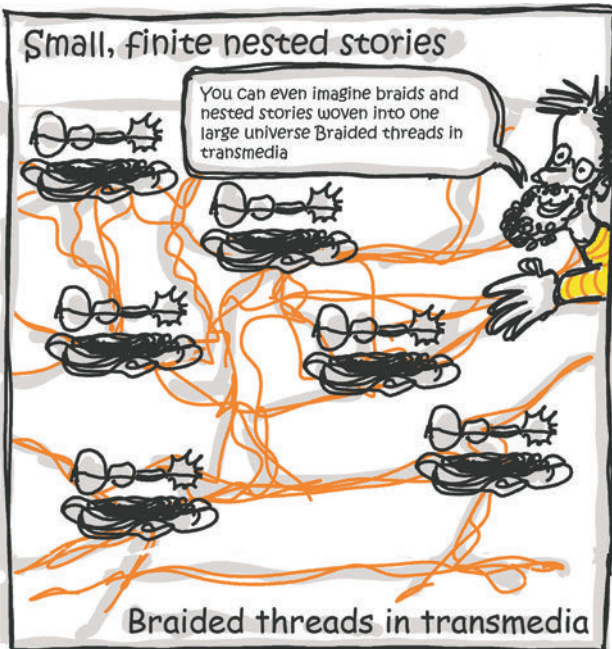
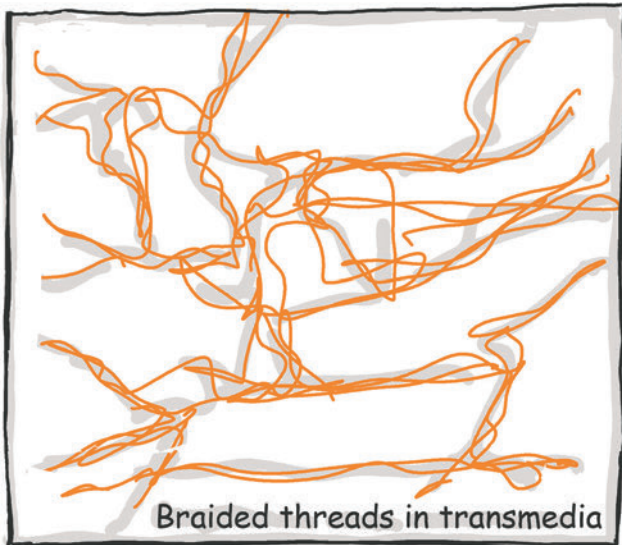
Narrative braids, by comparison, are more comprehensive. Mark Wolf uses the term mainly to refer to transmedial stories, in which multiple threads are braided or woven into something that may be perceived as a more or less coherent *fabric*. This fabric is woven of all the stories that are *simultaneously* related to a particular fiction or topic. There are many of these braided stories related to popular franchises, such as *Superman* (1938–) or *Watchmen* (1986–).

The narrative threads of *Watchmen* spring from a primordial comic-book story and then progress through various formats, includ-

ing Zack Snyder's *Watchmen* films (2006), Deadline Games' computer games (2009) and HBO's TV series (2019) as well as various forms of fan fiction. Together, all these stories make up a comprehensive, expanding and unruly fabric. In this sense, the fabric concept has similarities with the rhizome concept. The stories of the Bible, in all their different forms and publishing formats, may be understood in a similar fashion.



In summary, nested stories are small local stories related to the same fabric in a universe, and the braid consists of all the threads in that universe.



While the individual nested stories may constitute a more or less open structure and may be organized with a conventional beginning, middle and end, the larger fabric has a more open structure that does not have a beginning or an end. If your work involves interactive experiences, it is important to give due consideration to how the different braids or networks of branches are structured and connected.

The beginning of the universe

Even if the universe generally has an open character and could be described as a braid with branches and nested stories, it may be helpful to examine how the fictional universe relates to the three narrative stages.

In the following, when we write about the weight of ‘beginnings’ in a universe, we are not referring to how, for example, the conventional dramaturgical structure introduces the *plot* with an opening scene or *teaser* but instead to the weight of what comes first in the overall history of the universe.

As we see it, the history of the universe can be organized into a beginning, a middle and an end. Thus, the beginning of the universe will contain its mythology and relevant *back-stories* and may determine the establishment of the universe and how compelling it can be. If the world-based stories, as suggested above, down-tone or have less of a focus on



the end, beginnings, in the form of backstories and mythologies, could be said to carry added weight. That is certainly what Mark Wolf suggests.

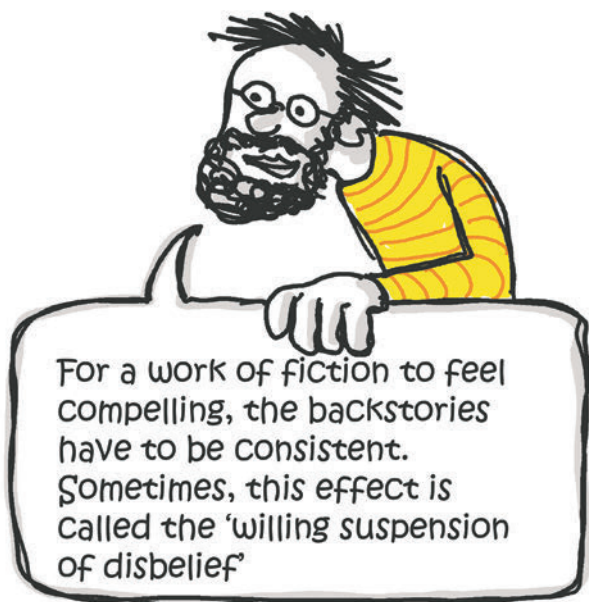
Mark Wolf notes that world history and mythology, or what is known as *lore* in a gaming context, occupy a privileged position in stories based on a universe (Wolf, 2012, p. 202). For the fantasy or science-fiction stories often associated with fictional universes, the natural explanation for this is that while we already know the nature and backstory of our own, so-called *Primary World*, the *secondary world* that is the setting of fantastical fiction is imagined and based on that one specific work of fiction. Even though realistic fiction is also based on imagination, fantastical fiction

needs to make more of an effort to establish itself as compelling.

The universe has to seem credible, even though it is artificial. To achieve this, it can be very helpful to craft a so-called *origin story* that establishes and describes how the universe was created, what ground rules apply, what beings live in it, how chronology works and, not least, why the universe is interesting and relevant. In other words, the five questions of the Star Model can be used to provide an introduction to the universe.

Good examples of this kind of introduction include the one in Lars von Trier's TV series *The Kingdom* (1994–2022) and the scrolling text at the beginning of the *Star Wars* films and series. The effect of these introductions is to induce what the British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge called the *willing suspension of disbelief*: the kind surrender to and immersion in a fantastical narrative world that audiences routinely engage in, and which, according to Coleridge, depends on the care and attention to internal truth applied by the maker of the fictional world.

Tolkien was critical of the concept of the *willing suspension of disbelief*. As he saw it, the compelling power of secondary imagined worlds depended on their 'inner consistency of reality'. Suspension of disbelief was only necessary if the construction failed, Tolkien argued (Tolkien, 1939).



A fictional universe that does not deviate from the everyday real world does not require a great deal of explanation for people to be able to relate to it. Ryan's principle of *minimal departure* describes the assumption that the audience will be able to fill in any gaps in the new world by drawing on their knowledge of the world that is familiar to them (Ryan, 1980).

If, instead, you create a fantastical universe with fantastical beings, fantastical rules, fantastical paradoxes of time and *out-of-this-world* themes, you need to do a lot more explaining to enable your audience to follow your story. You could say that realistic universes are conveyed with a fairly high *narrative speed*

and limited *granularity*, or detail, while fantastical universes are conveyed with a higher degree of granularity. One of the leading figures of science-fiction literature, Ursula K. Le Guin, borrowing the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's term, writes that descriptions in science fiction are likely to be somewhat 'thicker' than in realistic ones, which can rely on 'assumed common experience' (Le Guin, 2011).

This heightened *thickness* and *granularity* also characterize, for example, films such as *Blade Runner* (1982), the TV series *Altered Carbon* (2018–), the film *Dune* (2021) and the animation series *Arcane* (2021–). As we have discussed, the audience in fact expects this greater granularity of backstories and mythologies, to a degree where some take particular joy in exploring and searching any inconsistencies in a universe.

The *origin story* or backstory may be told separately, for example in a prologue, or it may be distributed throughout the course of

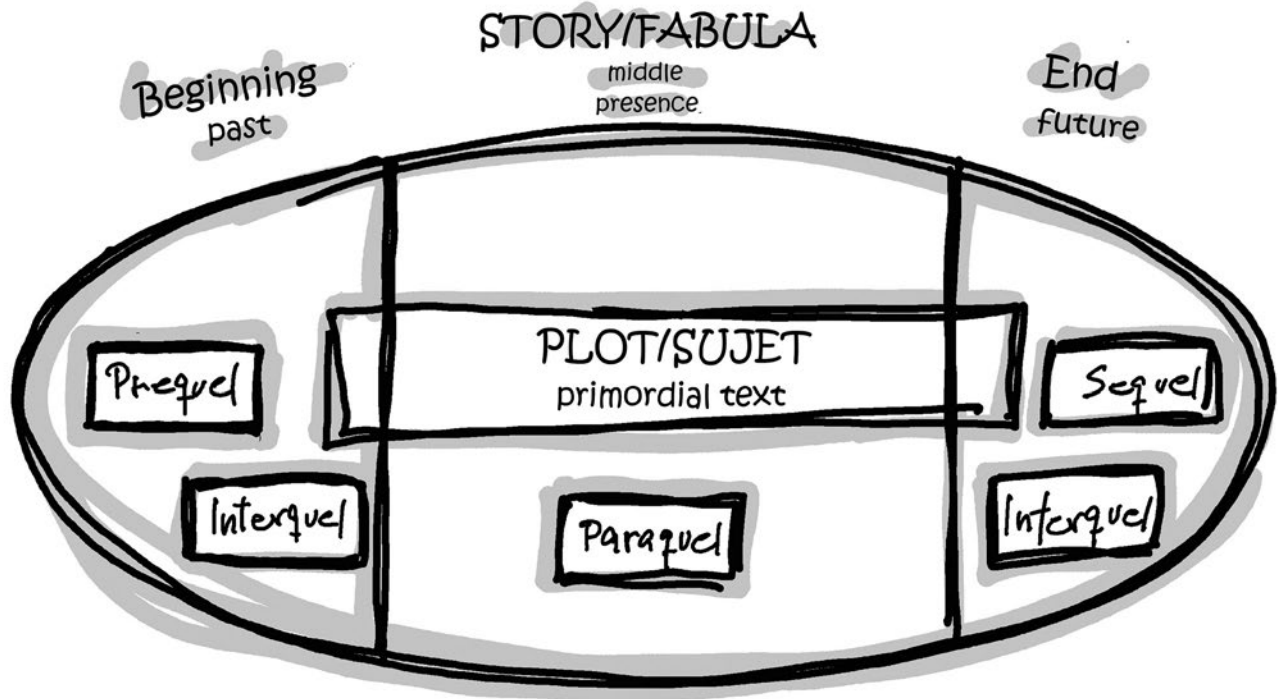


the narrative or appear as a sort of appendix, in a separate publication. In visual fiction, backstories and mythologies may also be shown or decoded vertically, for example in the background of the image in the form of architectural and ethnographic clues in the production design.

Some computer games, such as *Myst* (1993–1996) or *The Elder Scrolls 5* (2011), revolve around finding clues and solving riddles to uncover a hidden backstory. The backstory

may also appear as flashbacks in the finished world, as traces in the visual design or as stories told by characters in the universe.

In other cases, the backstory of the universe is told in a single image that makes everything fall into place. As pointed out by the production-design theorist C. S. Tashiro, one particularly impactful example of this is the toppled Statue of Liberty on the beach in the first version of *Planet of the Apes* (1968), which lets the protagonist know that he is not, as he thought, on an alien planet but in fact finds



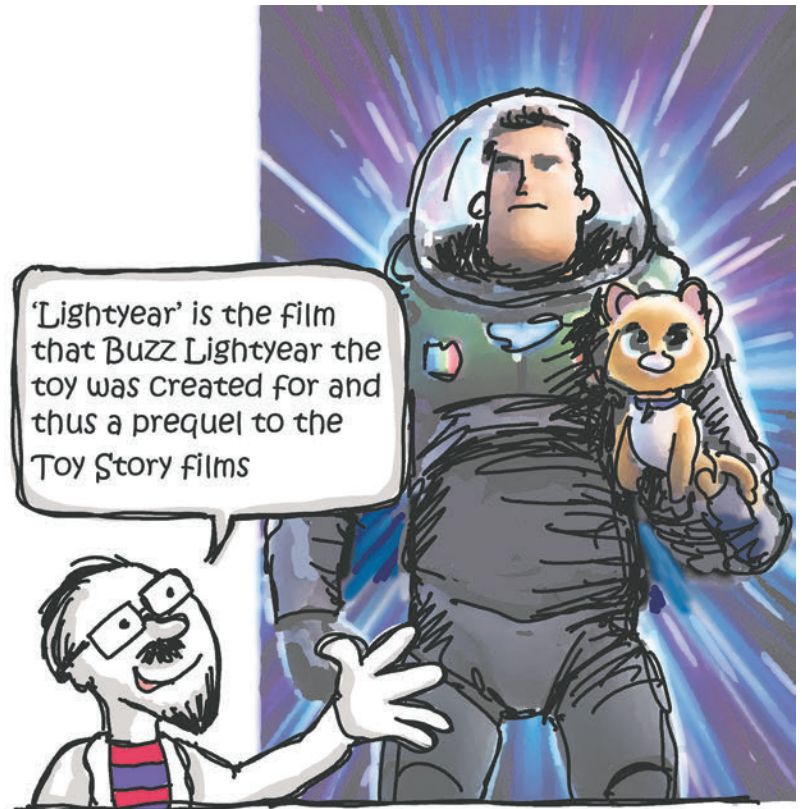
himself on earth after the collapse of human civilization (Tashiro, 1998, pp. 7–8).

The many bulls featured in ornaments, visual art and sculptures in the novel and the film *Dune* (2021) suggest an obsolete cult of bull worship in House Atreides, one of the centres of power in the *Dune* universe. The history or significance of this cult is not elaborated, but the presence of these traces adds to the compelling and cohesive feel of the universe and adds to its depth. In addition, this myth resonates with the juicy story of the Minotaur in the labyrinth on Knossos, one of the bull myths of classical Greek mythology. In well-designed worlds, the mythology of the fictional world, its origin and – as in *Dune* – its ethnographic development are found as traces in the design of the environment, artefacts and buildings, thus inviting vertical decoding.

It may therefore be important to develop the underlying mythology of the universe. Even if the audience ultimately only sees a tiny part of it, the mythology will contribute to the internal logic, depth and credibility of the universe.

The emphasis on mythology and backstories is also reflected in the independent genre of *prequels*, which may have the character of independent works of fiction. The obvious example is the *Star Wars* universe: the fact that

it was released as a trilogy consisting of parts IV, V and VI created expectations of subsequent expansion of the universe through the addition of *sequels* and *prequels*. Another example is *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), written by C. S. Lewis as a prequel for his *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950),



published five years earlier. Generally, the suffix *quel* is often used as a way to position a story on the timeline in relation to the primordial text that established the universe, as shown in the model on the previous page.

The centre of the universe

While we broadly understand ‘backstories’ and ‘mythologies’ as related to the very beginning of the universe, as it is established

the middle is *now* – and closely related to human experiences and emotions.

These experiential and emotional modes relate to narrative points of view that enable our so-called *vicarious experience* of the universe. This section discusses some of these vicarious experiences and points of view and examines how they relate to narrative structures. We also look at some alternative structures related to the narrative possibilities that exist in the universes, including experiences in *multiverses*.

In the development of stories in and about a universe, it is easy to take a somewhat detached approach, viewing the universe from above and attributing too much weight to the backstory. This *top-down* approach may push the human experience into the background and create a sense of emotional detachment. Naturally, this may be exactly the effect you are aiming for, but that is not typically the case.

If you tend to take a top-down approach in universe building, you will need to shift to a *bottom-up* approach in your storytelling by providing access to your universe through a sensing and active character or other figure in your universe. The devising technique that we described in Chapter 4 is one way of doing this.

You may also approach the sensory aspect as in Chris Marker’s classic short film *La Jetée*



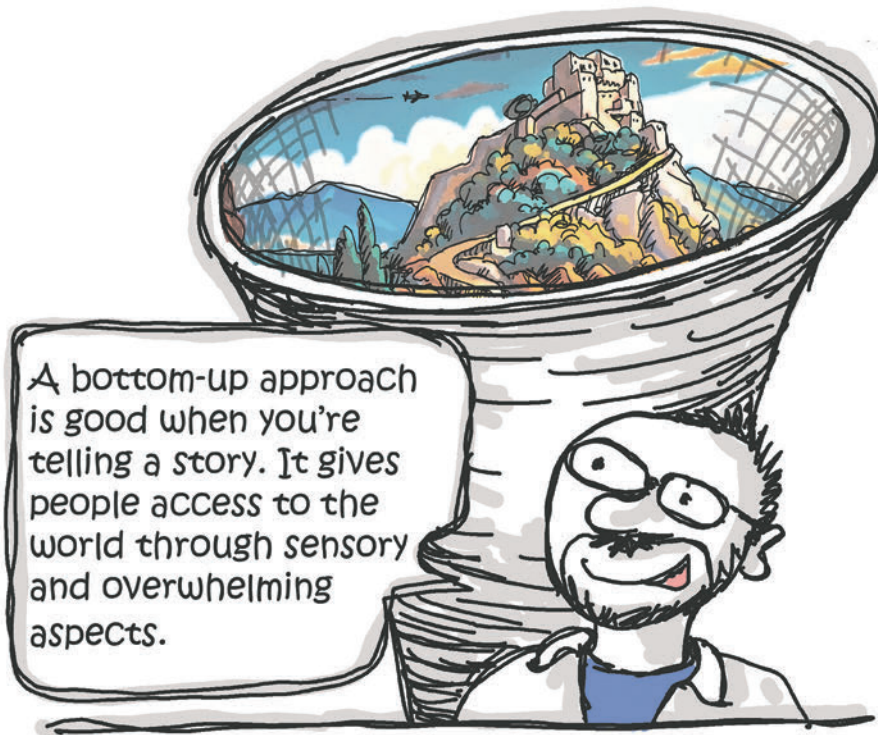
and made compelling, the remainder relates to the middle and the end of the overarching narrative of the universe. Thus, the beginning points to the past, the end points forward, and

(1962), in which time travellers are selected for having the most intact emotional ties to the intended destination. In the film, it is the emotional recollection and the connection to the past that make time travel possible. Similarly, you can seize the opportunity to experience a universe through the emotions in it. The technique is reminiscent of an *anamnetic* experience, which is about recalling something that has been forgotten. In theatre, this is called *sense memory* and refers to working

with recognizing emotions (Stanislavskij, 1957), but your starting point may also be a conflict, a mystery or a paradox.

Whatever you choose, the protagonist's point of view will be key to how the universe is experienced and perceived, whether the protagonist is a single individual in a film, multiple characters in a series or the main character in a game, who is controlled by the player. The choice of a protagonist is, of course, an important decision in the develop-

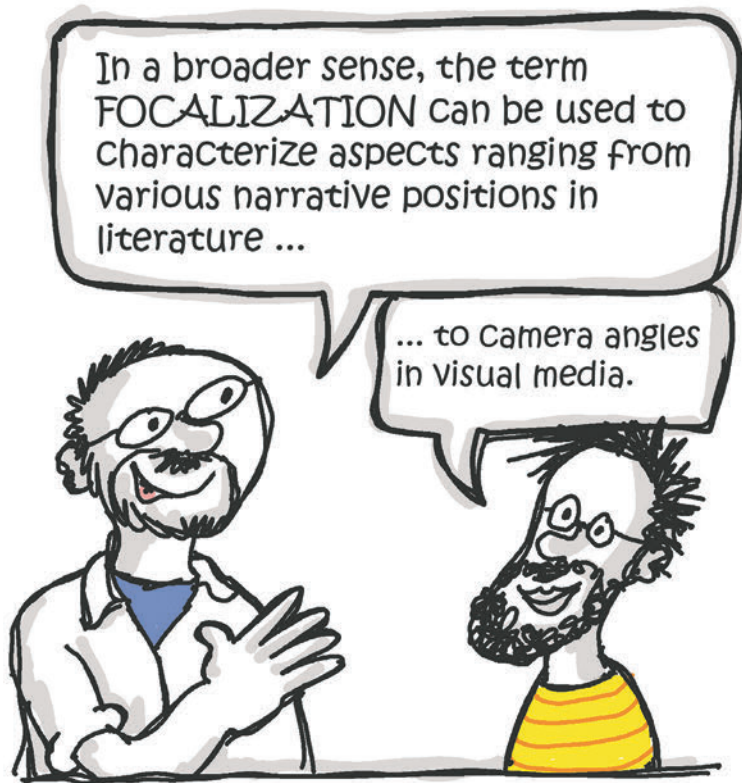
ment of fiction. However, the experience of the universe is often tied to several characters and can easily be based on two characters at once: a married couple engulfed in conversation in a bed or the experience of a mechanic on board a spaceship with an alien. The story also generates contrast and tension through varying *intersubjective* points of view. The stories unfolding in a universe may be quite comprehensive and offer opportunities for a diverse range of perspectives and points of view. In this way, your work with the



universe also lets you develop more nuanced, complex and contradictory images of the universe, coloured by these different points of view. The manner and points of view you provide to your audience are also described as *focalization*.

Focalization in a universe

The term *focalization* was introduced into narrative theory by Gérard Genette. Later, this



concept of the audience's points of view was expanded to film and visual media by Edward Branigan, among others. In this broader sense, *focalization* can be used to characterize aspects ranging from different narrative positions in literature to camera angles in visual media.

In this context, our use of *points of view* or *focalization* is not about camera angles but about how people experience a universe via the characters in it.

In visual works of fiction, experiential modes are closely related to aesthetic choices related to camera work. As important as this aspect is, it is not the topic of this book, so instead, we will simply characterize vicarious experience as 1) inner, 2) subjective, 3) intersubjective or 4) collective. These distinctions are partially inspired by Jan-Noël Thon, who in connection with cross-media fiction distinguishes between subjective versus intersubjective representation (Thon, 2014, p. 70). The most common access to a universe is through either subjective or intersubjective focalization. Subjective focalization is limited to a single character and their experience of the universe. On the one hand, this way of experiencing a universe involves a high degree of immersion into the character's psychology, and on the other hand, it provides a more limited or biased perception of the world around the character.



An extreme example of this is the movie *Son of Saul* (2015), in which the camera is constantly shooting close to the protagonist, giving us a first-person perspective on the nightmare world of a concentration camp. First-person points of view in videogames as in *Halo* (2001–2021) can have a similar feel.

Although intersubjectivity might not provide an objective presentation of the world, it does offer a more complex and multifaceted experience. As described earlier, alternating between two points of view can add tension to a conventional story, but intersubjective representation also enables many-sided and complex kaleidoscopic experiences, and the same event may be experienced from the perspective

of multiple points of view, casting doubt about objectivity, as in Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957–60) or Akira Kurosawa's *Rashômon* (1950).

While subjectivity and intersubjectivity are the most common approaches to the world, internal and collective representations are more extreme forms. In the internal experience, the subject's experience takes over the fictional world in a way that gives rise to a secondary world, for example in the form of dream visions or fantasies, as in the films *Rosemary's Baby* by Roman Polanski (1968) and *The Lighthouse* by Robert Eggers (2019) or games, such as the Danish games *Englen* (The Angel) written by Michael Valeur (1999) or *Psychonauts* by game director Tim Schafer (2005).

By contrast, collective focalization does not include psychologized individuals but treats crowds or groups as characters. David Bordwell describes that this type of representation is typical of Russian silent-film classics, such

as Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which show workers collectively clashing with the army and the bourgeoisie (Bordwell, 1986). Some games and TV series, such as *The Walking Dead* (2010–2022), similarly focus on collective characters.

Interquel and paraquel structures

We have previously discussed how finite stories of a certain length or scope may be perceived as nested stories in a comprehensive narrative braid. In addition, Mark Wolf points to two types of works in addition to *prequels* and *sequels*, which he calls *interquels* and *paraquels*.

While prequels and sequels relate, respectively, to the beginning and the end of the story, *interquels* and *paraquels* are more or less in the middle. An interquel may be characterized as a narrative sequence playing out in between existing episodes in a larger work consisting of multiple parts. Again, the *Star Wars* universe is a good example, with the TV series *Obi-Wan* (2022) filling in the gaps between film episodes III and IV and the gap in between the two initial trilogies of the series.

Paraquels are more complex. Wolf uses the term to refer to stories that represent the same event from multiple perspectives. In literature, the most commonly mentioned ex-

ample is Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*: a four-volume work that presents the same events through four different characters, whose names are also the names of the



four individual volumes: *Justine*, *Balthazar*, *Mountolive* and *Clea*. As mentioned above, the same kaleidoscopic technique is also used in the sophisticated representation of a crime in Kurosawa's *Rashômon* (1950) and in the

TV series *The Affair* (2014–2019), which describes marital infidelity from multiple perspectives.

Intermedial multiverses, crossovers, mash-ups and compilation fiction

The concept of paraquels allows for different universes or different versions of the universe to meet. This phenomenon of overlapping universes is called *intermedial multiverses*, or simply *multiverses*.

In a scene in the film *The Multiverse of Madness* (2022), Doctor Strange explains the multiverse theory with an ironic reference to the animation film *Into the Spider-Verse* (2018), where different versions of Spiderman associated with different historical editions meet each other. In the film, it is a logical and witty paradox that superheroes from different universes know of each other through popular films. Both films play with the notion of so-called multiverse interference, including journeys to and clashes between parallel universes. Naturally, this type of story will only be possible in works of fiction that operate with and take an interest in universes as a phenomenon.

There are also examples of so-called *crossovers* between figures from competing universes, such as the Marvel and DC ones, al-

lowing Spiderman and Superman to appear together, for example (Wolf, 2012, p. 217). In fact, we always operate with some degree of multiverse interference, especially in fiction film and in theatre, for example when very famous actors have roles as undercover agents or ordinary people, but what makes the examples above stand out is the way they highlight the phenomenon as a theme.

Other examples include the so-called *mash-ups* that mix seemingly incompatible genres, for example *space westerns* or combinations of retro sci-fi-superhero and period films, such as *Wonder Woman 1984* (2020). The most successful genre mash-up universes might be the mix of Lego and the *Star Wars* universe in the *Lego Star Wars* games and films, which mix the universe and design of space adventures with the humorous and playful Lego style.

Bringing multiple universes and their characters together in a new universe is also called *compilation fiction*. A good example is the TV series *Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016), in which characters associated with Victorian London meet characters from contemporary Gothic short stories. Thus, you can see Dorian Gray, Jack the Ripper, Dr van Helsing, Frankenstein and Dr Jekyll together in the same world (Albertsen, 2023).



Although these universes have multiverse characteristics, as described above, it could be argued that they generate new universes in their own right. Whatever the case may be, it can be interesting and rewarding to explore what happens if you let your universe meet and fuse with one or more other universes. Or if you create your universe as a mash-up of several different genres.

The end of the universe: The never-ending story

One of the qualities of a universe is its potentially infinite nature; a quality that stands in contrast to the one we normally appreciate in conventional stories.

Much of the quality of a conventional dramatic story relies on the end and the effects it brings, such as the liberating insight that comes through *anagnorisis* and *katharsis*. In Aristotle's description, a drama is a course of incidents in which the end ties up all loose ends, and ends, heroes and heroines live on in good or bad fortune (Aristotle, 2000).

The emphasis on the end in the form of the concluding closure and the homecoming which the conventional story is expected to include stands in contrast to the infinite possibilities provided by fictional universes. The smaller local nested stories may of course have ends. The status of the end is highlighted by the Dutch geographer and anthropol-

ogist Tim Ingold, who sees a connection between storytelling, weaving and braiding. He also associates the act of keeping a story alive with finding one's way through a landscape – and with preserving a culture (Ingold, 2007). The values associated with the finite conventional story are challenged by the practices of indigenous peoples that Ingold brings up. For the Khanty people in Siberia, for example,



stories told in the evening are never allowed to end until everyone has fallen asleep. Anyone who has ever had a bedtime story read to them – or read to their children or other loved ones – will be familiar with the value of letting the story guide the listener into sleep

and will know that this is not possible if the story is concluded.

This Khanty example describes a different kind of closure to the one where everything has to reach a conclusion and end with a moral lesson. For the Khanty people, there is something other and more at stake. The Khanty word for *story* literally means a *way* or a *path*, and thus, coming to the end of one has negative associations to being caught in a loop or reaching a dead end. Similarly, the Oroqen people's hunting stories rarely cul-

minate and end with the death of the prey, as conventional hunting stories do. Instead, their stories focus on everything of interest that the hunter witnessed along the trail. For the Oroqen, stories should not end, for the same reason that life should not end (Ingold, 2007, pp. 90–91). To them, the never-ending story was as essential as the hunter's saddle. The passing of the saddle from generation to generation could not be broken, nor could the story or life itself be allowed to reach its end. This represents a profound connection between story and life that should not be allowed to end.



Less essential but formally comparable views of endings are found in the serial publishing formats such as TV series, films and book series. TV expert and researcher Jason Mittell writes that TV series all have a *beginning*, but they do not all have an *end*, if by 'end', we mean *a conclusion* (Mittell, 2015, p. 319). Instead, the series end in various ways. Some simply *stop* or are *discontinued* without reaching a resolution, while others attempt to provide a sort of *wrap-up* when a season ends. Some manage to provide a *conclusion* or *finale* (Mittell, 2015), but in fact, a series does not need a concluding end – it could simply stop. Shifting one's focus away from the end makes it easier to move round the universe and explore what it has to offer.

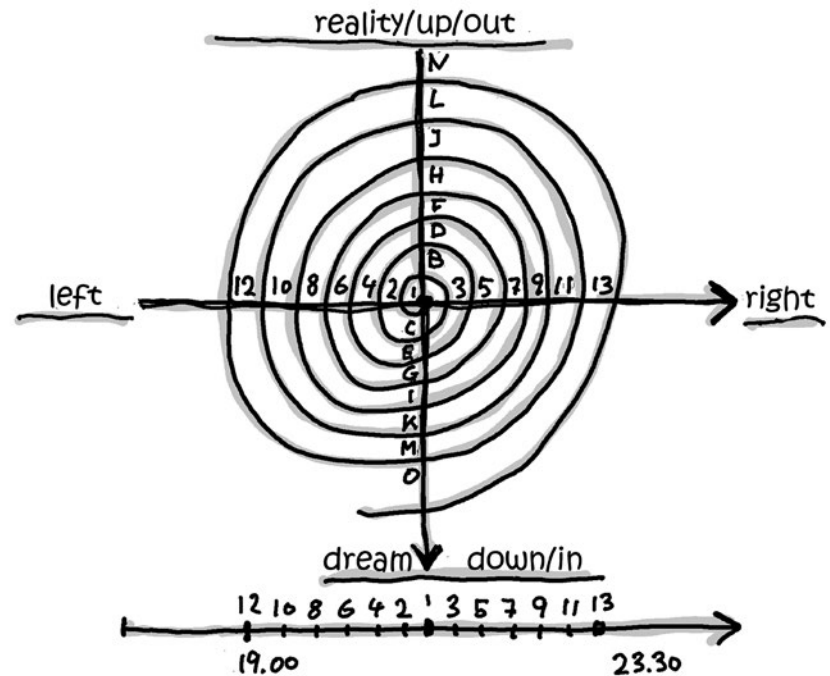
The emphasis on long courses of events that invite the audience to explore or reflect on the world they are moving through is also found in *slow cinema* and so-called *open-world walking simulators* of computer games. Several literary classics, including works by Charles Dickens and Dostoevsky were originally published in a serial format. Many works of literature are so extensive that they cannot be absorbed in a single sitting.



To illustrate this point, the German artist Ilan Manouach created a 21,540-page book consisting of 102 previously published vol-

umes of the *One Piece* manga series. The book is titled *Onepiece* (2021), weighs nearly 20 kg and is impossible to read.

The open circular dramaturgical structures that the long, unfinished works of fiction can be compared to are sometimes described as



feminine structures, while the finite and more conflict-driven ones are characterized as masculine (Mulvey, 1975). We do not really agree with this gendered categorization, but the circular dramaturgical representations do allow for approaches that can provide inspiration.

For example, the Danish playwright Ulla Ryum wrote how a story can revolve around a central secret, mystery or trauma which is illuminated from multiple angles and narrative levels (Ryum, 1982).

A similar perspective on the connection between the universe and its characters, which in a sense reflects Ulla Ryum's point, is found in the narrative format that is practised mainly in Japan and Korea but originates from China. In Japan, this form is called *kishōtenketsu*. The word refers to the different parts of the story, with *ki* meaning the introduction, *shō*

meaning development, *ten* referring to the twist, and *ketsu* to the conclusion.

Superficially, this resembles structures known in the West, but there are important differences, especially in the emphasis on conflict and character development. In a *kishōtenketsu* format, the characters do not change, and the stories may appear fairly free from conflict, but the world around the character can suddenly change. Thus, *shō* does not mean character development but represents a broader understanding of the character's universe. Similarly, *ten*, the plot twist, does not necessarily represent a conflict but a key change in the world around the character. *Ketsu* also does not necessarily provide a moral end where good wins out over evil, or the other way around, but rather a more open end that may have a mystical quality (Kindree, 2019; Shah, Rafi & Perumal, 2023).

The difference between conventional dramaturgical structures and *kishōtenketsu* is subtle but significant. The *kishōtenketsu* format does not provide the same experience as a conventional Western narrative, in which everything proceeds causally towards its conclusion. Instead, it often presents a series of scenes that, in combination, provide a better understanding of the world or the character but which do not contribute to major plot twists or developments. In this sense, the *kishōtenketsu* dramaturgical structure with its



focus on world, imagination and play is well suited to world building (Kindree, 2019). After watching Ghibli films by Hayao Miyazaki such as *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988) or *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) or films by Makoto Shinkai such as *Suzume* (2022) or *Your Name* (2016) or reading novels by Haruki Murakami such as *IQ84* (2009–10) or *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994), a Western audience may well feel puzzled by the plot and wondering what actually happened.

The *slice-of-life* stories in the Japanese *iyashi-kei* genre cultivate undramatic and *plot-less* structures to make room for everyday and atmospheric experiences in a way that has been compared to Brian Eno's ambient music (the-artifice.com/slice-of-life-anime).

The Netflix series *Makanai* (2023) by Kore-eda Hirokazu is a clear example of the *iyashi-kei* genre, which also includes, for example, *Aria* (2005), *K-On!* (2007) and *Yokohama Kaidashi Kikou* (1994–2006), to mention some of the better-known anime and manga examples of the genre, as well as literature and music.

So how can you create stories and experiences in your universe? As described in the section on devising, you can create small stories and experiences of varying narrative formats. You can also work with the dramaturgical struc-

ture of the universe itself by examining its history through a dramaturgical lens. If your universe has a backstory, you can describe it as an *origin story*. Does it have a special time during which all the exciting events can happen, and do you need to restrict all the experiences that are created in the universe to that time? Is there a future? And is this future described, or is it just hinted at? Or is the historical timeline of your universe not a conventional Western format with an escalation of conflict and a start-middle-end structure but instead a *kishōtenketsu* one? How you tell the story of your universe and design its dramaturgical structure is very much an aesthetic choice that reflects your goals for every aspect of your universe.

From story, which will probably feel recognizable and familiar to most, we will now move on to the part of universe building where the universe is going to meet its audience in one or more publishing formats. This is a journey that may be simple, if you just publish your universe in a book format. But it could get very complex if you choose to publish in multiple formats – not least if you publish digitally online.



As Tim Ingold sees it

Hey, can I just add something about universe narratives ... A universe always has its own grand narrative. In many cases, it's quite simple, like the birth of our own universe with the Big Bang and the subsequent development of galaxies, stars and planetary systems and its course to likely destruction billion of years from now.

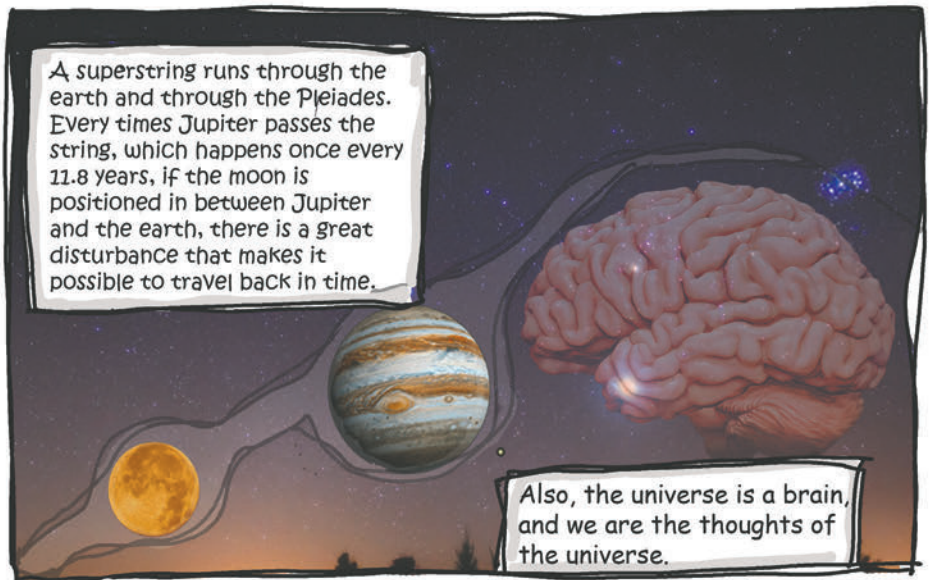
My own universe about Skruppen*, De Wille Drenges** and the Planet Eye was not fully shaped from the outset. At first, all I had was the story about Skruppen's arrival to earth and its attempt at persuading Gustav to make the world colourful and striped.

The first thing I made was an exhibition. Then I wrote a play, and based on that, I created a TV series, and THEN I began to write and draw a series of books ...

I had the idea to make a book series and created a general structure based on eight book concepts that described how the world ended up colourful and striped. I only wrote four of books, though, and then I ran out of steam in 1992. The universe concept wasn't strong enough.

Many years later, in 2001, I had the idea that all the universes I was going to create would be part of a shared universe. However, each of them should still be able to work on its own. I called the concept a fragmented narrative.

*The Skrup from outer space ** The Wille Boys



^{**}The Wille Boys, ^{***}Dr. Wille's Wunderbare World, ^{****}Rjtas Christmas, ^{*****}The ugly carpet peeing dog



Anime and novels:

One of our biggest heroes in anime universe building is the studio CoMix Wave Films, which produced anime series for streaming as well as anime films for cinemas. Many view cinema as a dying format due to the competition from streaming and home projection systems. However, with films such as *Your Name*, CoMix Wave Films proves that the experiences they offer are compelling enough that millions of people – not just in Japan – are willing to pay for the experience of sitting in a darkened room immersed in colours and fantastical stories that take place in enchanting universes. In this conversation, we meet Tomohiro Tokunaga, who produced the latest film by master director Makoto Shinkai. He talks about their unique approach of writing novels rather than scripts when they set out to make a new film.



CoMix Wave Films is a Japanese anime film studio in Tokyo that was founded in 2007. It is known for its anime films, short films and TV series, especially the ones created by director Makoto Shinkai.



We would like to hear how CoMix Wave creates worlds.

Tomohiro Tokunaga: We are particularly dedicated to the creation of books and the creation of content in general, but specifically books. Right now, I am having conversations with [director] Makoto Shinkai about the process of how everything should play out.

Most companies that make animation films only make animation films, they don't also make books. Could you tell us about this process?

Tomohiro Tokunaga: First of all, Makoto Shinkai spends a whole year at home, thinking about the ideas and the materials he wants to put in the film. Then Shinkai Makoto delivers the materials and what we might call the morally true version of what he wants to create to the production staff. Based on that, they see what materials they have and what kind of work they will be creating.

This material that he delivered, is it text?

Tomohiro Tokunaga: Yes, it is. Next, the producers spend half a year to a year discussing what the work looks like, and whether they feel there is anything that doesn't fit. And that's the next phase.

When they begin to develop the characters and the backgrounds, how do they approach the artistic development of character and background?

Tomohiro Tokunaga: The big difference in how he works compared to other anime productions is that first he works on the material as a book. Then they develop not only the storyboard, but the animatics themselves. So they create something that could be called a preliminary version, including everything from quotes to music and so on. And that's the main difference.

In other productions, they don't create that much content from the very beginning. Usually, they will have the frames, but the information and the amount of data they would have to work with would be much more inferior and less clear. Makoto Shinkai gives very clear instructions about what he wants. And they start working with that.

And that's why they develop the preliminary version from the beginning, including everything.



When you make the storyboard and the animatics, how do you work with the colours, for instance? Do you use colour boards or mood boards?

Tomohiro Tokunaga: Every director has their own particular point that they focus on a lot. In the case of Makoto Shinkai, it's actually colour, which is something out of the ordinary. Usually, when they produce the first animatics or even the film, they will decide on a colour. They will say 'pick a colour', and if they say black, for example, they will pick a black that they find they have in common in their minds. But after that, once they have created everything using



the same colour, Makoto Shinkai will change the colour very slightly in every single scene. So, actually the colours in each frame are different.

Makoto Shinkai changes the colour of each frame by changing the lighting. For example, in one frame, the light is here, and in the next one, it would be here. Since there are so many people working on the productions at the same time, this is not something that usually happens. But Makoto Shinkai was originally a director who worked individually, so this is a key focus for him. Not only the change in colour but how the light reflects and so on. He's very fond of lighting and colour.

When you map out what the characters or the locations are going to look like, do you use photo references? Or how do you use references for the artists to draw backgrounds and characters?

Tomohiro Tokunaga: We actually take a lot of photos. When the first version of the film comes from the director, it is a text-only version, and even if everything is quite explicit, the place usually isn't. For example, now we are in Tokyo, which consists of regions called prefectures. It is a very wide region, so to speak. The place is not fixed at all. But once they are done, they try to decide if maybe this part in this particular region is where the action is supposed

to take place. They say, 'Alright, maybe in this particular location? How about this one? How about this one?' And afterwards, everyone actually goes to one of those places. They take hundreds and thousands of photos and bring them back to the studio. *Suzume*, the current film, actually takes place all over Japan. They actually went all over Japan and took photos, and then the director had a look at them and decided what fits the mood.

At what stage do they put in the voices?

Tomohiro Tokunaga: For the first, preliminary version, he uses his own voice and the voices of his family. And then they deliver that to the sound producer. It takes around a month and a half to add the actual voices. It took quite a lot of takes. A single line will require around 30 takes.

In regards to the story, it seems like the world of one movie is much bigger. We see books coming out that are based on the movie. Is this a normal way for CoMix Wave Films to work? That you have the film, the core, and then more stories around it?

Tomohiro Tokunaga: In the case of Makoto Shinkai, that is what he does. And he does it at the same time as he produces a film.

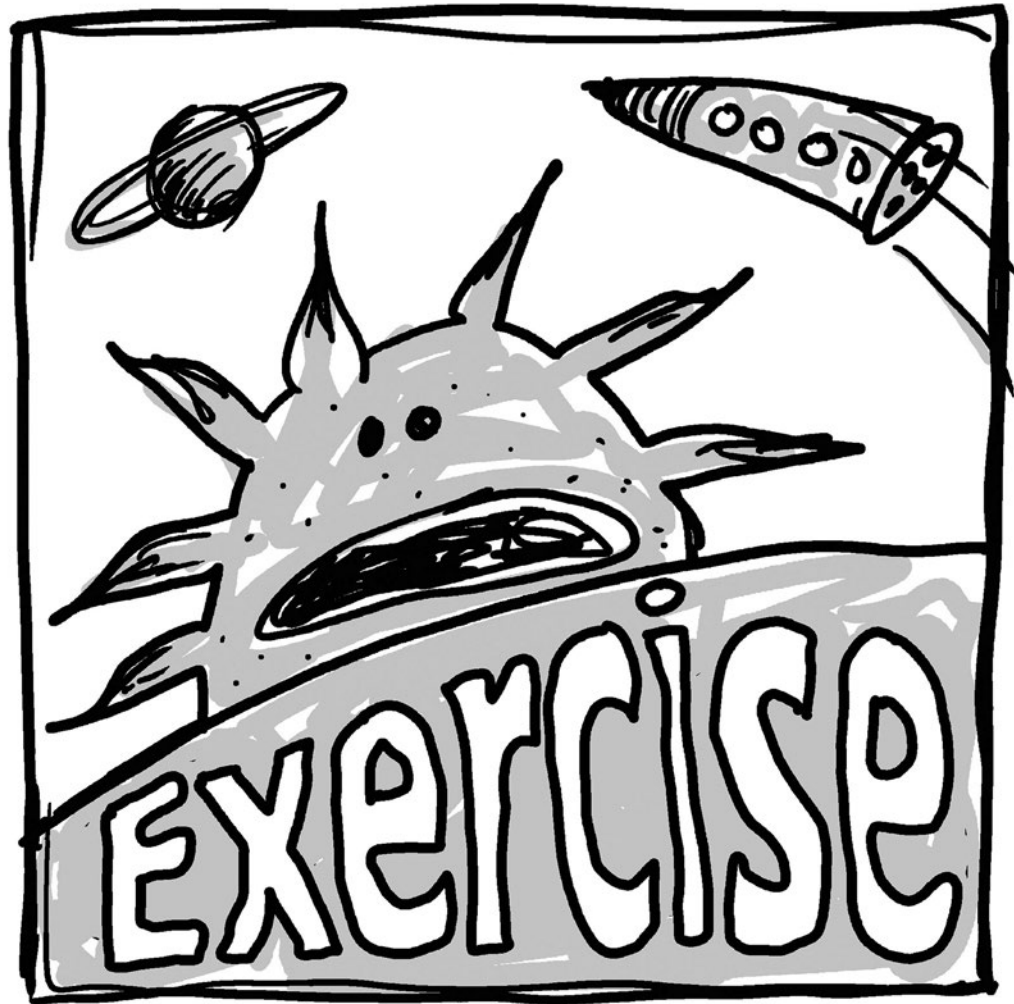
When Makoto Shinkai gets an idea for a universe, how does the first spark of idea come to him?

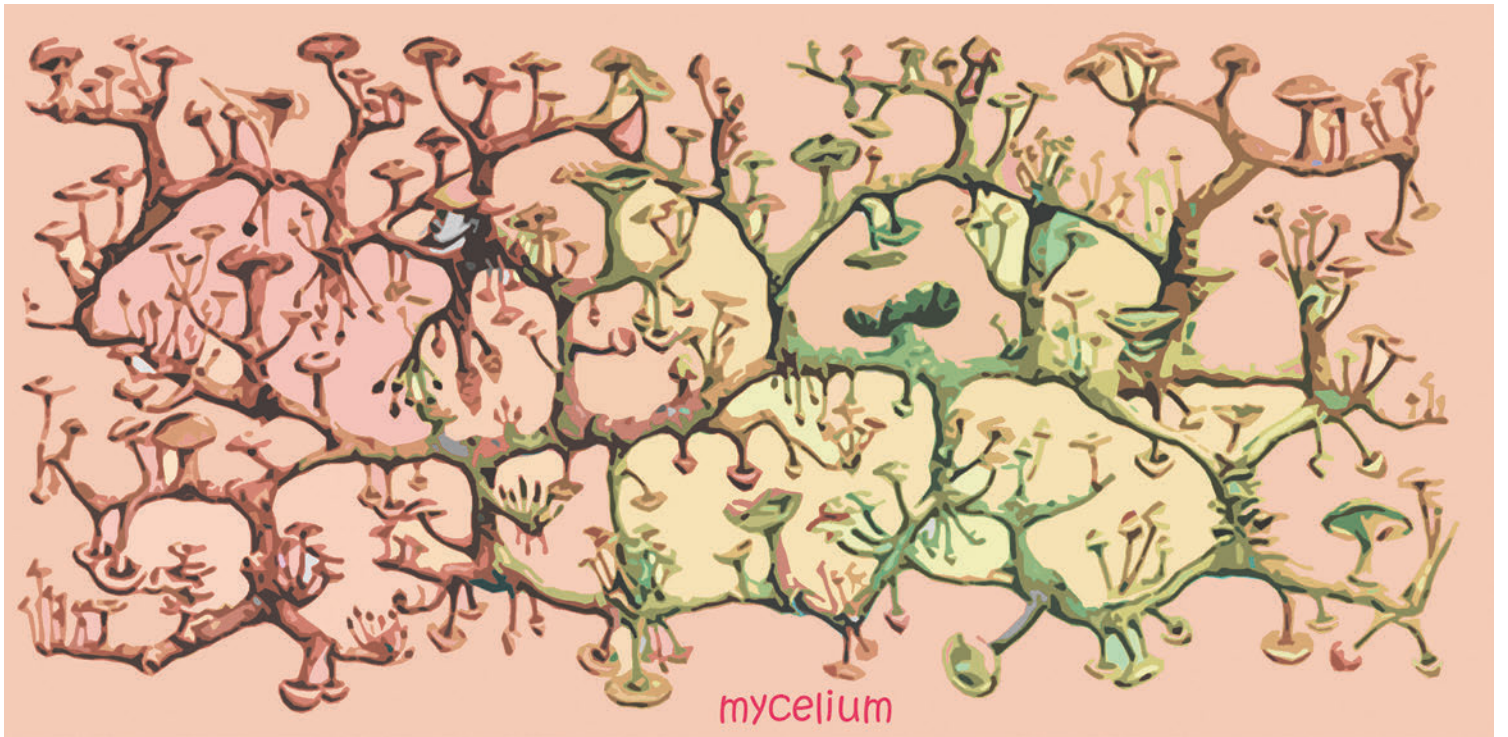
Tomohiro Tokunaga: In the case of *Your Name*, for example, it revolves around ... relationships between men and women and also disasters. In the case of *Suzume*, he realized that for a while, he had been creating and seeing more images of desolated places, lonely places. That is how the idea came to him. *Suzume* revolves around these desolated places.

You have the books, and you have the films, but are you also considering making games, theatre or other things at CoMix Wave Films?

Tomohiro Tokunaga: Basically, no. CoMix Wave is not thinking about that. They don't have people who would be able to create games. Their roles are different, a different degree of specialization is required. It's not that they don't want to, it's that they are not able with the staff that they have currently.







mycelium

Exercise 6: Create a transmedial experience

Design a transmedial experience based on the universe manual you created in Exercise 5, especially the two formats you described.

Based on what you just read in Chapter 6, start out by identifying the strengths of the two formats you have chosen. If you are working with a film or a stage play, you will often have a dramatic narrative. If your other format is a game, perhaps you can expand the experience of your universe by letting players explore locations, rooms, mysteries or other aspects of the universe.

For inspiration, it might be helpful to focus on one of the following aspects:

- **CHARACTERS:** Consider letting your audience experience each format through a different character, or set of characters, to experience the same story or universe in different ways.
- **POINT OF VIEW:** Consider designing the transmedial narrative to offer one experience from a first-person point of view and another from a third-person point of view.
- **TIME:** Consider having one experience take place in one time and another experience in a different one. Past, present, future, parallel times and so forth.
- **ARTISTIC FORMAT:** Consider having one format provide a rational experience with plot threads and explanations while the other is more poetic and sensory, for example in the form of a picture, a poem or music.

You should be able to argue how the two experiences together becomes $1 + 1 = 3$, meaning that the transmedial experience is more than just the sum of the two formats.

7. Publishing: How do I engage with the audience?

The medium is the message.
Marshall McLuhan (1967)

When you have developed your universe, it is time to explore what publishing format or formats it is best suited for. Maybe you have always dreamt of developing a TV series or creating a game, and perhaps this particular format is a key source of motivation for you.

However, the point of the method we recommend is to postpone this decision and to base it on the qualities of your universe. That is the topic of this chapter: what factors or parameters should you consider as you decide how to publish your universe and which media or publishing formats to choose. This is not only about the aesthetic expression but also relates to communication aspects, including how to keep a universe alive and relevant to the audience, both during development and once it has been published.

To address some of these questions, let us first turn to Marshall McLuhan's seminal

book *Understanding Media* from 1964. One of the points in this book is that any new medium – or 'publishing format', as we call it in this context – is, to some extent, defined by the content of earlier media (McLuhan, 1964, p. 19).

In this sense, the content of a book is the written word, while the content of the written word is the spoken word. In its so-called *multimedial* form, the Internet incorporates a



multitude of older media, such as text, sound and – static, moving and interactive – images. Thus any medium may be said to contain another medium. In the 1960s, when McLuhan wrote his books, research was overly focused on media content, understood as the message of the medium and the form of the message. As a result, it tended to overlook the values produced by the individual media themselves. It is this insight that is captured by McLuhan's famous statement, which, by now, has almost become a slogan: *the medium is the message*.

However you choose to understand this phrase, it means that not only does your choice of medium – or publishing format – affect the audience's perception of the content you wish to share: the medium also shapes the content.

Media are not neutral but contain codes and features that influence the content. For example, there are different values associated with producing and taking in old-fashioned flow or scheduled TV compared to the brief experiences of social-media *feeds*, where peo-

ple can respond with likes or other forms of social interaction.

The significance of this basic principle has not lessened in mass-media age, and it is only further intensifying with the proliferation of interactive and social media. Just as a medium can be said to contain another medium, we can also associate different narratives or

experiences with the possibilities or properties of different media. For example, a dramatic single or few main-character narrative is often best suited for a film or a play, while a narrative that involves multiple characters may spawn multiple stories and is therefore better suited to a series experienced via a streaming platform. The notion that different media

are best suited to or provide different types of experiences is also known as *media affordance*.



Media affordance and intermediality

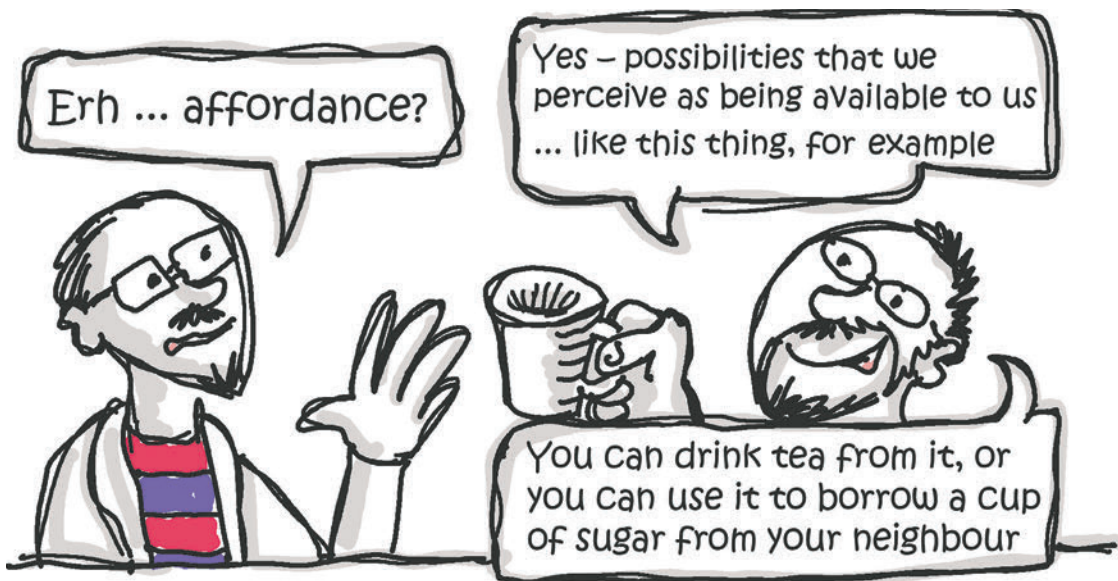
Affordance is a term from the study of cognition that was originally coined by the perceptual psychologist James J. Gibson. It describes the possible actions that a given object affords or enables. You can grip a knife and use it to cut something. It can also be used as a murder weapon. It can be used to pare and slice a fruit. In order to explain the concept of affordance, Gibson refers to a short, illuminating quote by gestalt psychologist Kurt Koffka:

‘Each thing says what it is (...) a fruit says “Eat me”; water says “Drink me”; thunder says “Fear me”; and woman says “Love me”’ (Gibson, 1979, p. 129).

Thus, ‘media affordance’ describes both what a medium is capable of and what it is best suited for, in terms of the experience you wish to give your audience.

Klastrup and Tosca use the term in their discussion of *worldness* (Tosca & Klastrup, 2019, p. 42). Not as a set of rules – it is more complicated than that – but as a set of principles that can be helpful for choosing among available publishing formats. Since McLuhan’s time, we have seen the emergence of new media as well as growing media integration. The very concept of universe building is related to transmedial experiences as different publishing formats interact or need to be experienced and understood as a whole.

Furthermore, the new media are increasingly *multimedial* and *intermedial*. Previously, new media, such as the Internet, were described as *multimedial* because they contained input from multiple media; today, publishing formats are described as *intermedial* when they deliberately use features or devices that are typically associated with a different publishing format. This is



the case, for example, when film sequences draw inspiration from computer-game sequences or when a computer game incorporates inspiration from cinematic narratives. A few years ago, the American film director Martin Scorsese complained about franchise films and superhero movies. He compared the later films in the Marvel universe to theme parks (Scorsese, 2019), and not in a favourable way. Scorsese argued that the film's content should be the personal story, following the tradition of the film director as auteur. Thus, intermediality and media affordance are related.

In creating a universe, you can aim to give your film or computer game some of the experiential qualities that are found in other media, such as a theme park – or literature.

Questions about media affordance and trans- and intermediality relate to questions about the possibility or potential of *adaptations* and, thus, how the same content can be mediated through different publishing formats.

Adaptations

According to Professor Linda Hutcheon, who studies film adaptations, the main question in relation to adaptations has shifted away from a focus on thematic and narrative persistence in the transition from one medium to another, to a focus on world building (Hutcheon, 2006, p. xxiv).

Social and interactive media make it clear that a publishing format should not necessar-



ily be understood as the final destination of the content, and that content can be shared, circulate and be modified across different media. Until recently, this was not obvious, although historically, content has never been bound to a single, immutable medium. As Jason Mittell wrote, the spread of a narrative from one medium to another is as old as media themselves (Mittell, 2014, pp. 253–254).

Ever since storytelling began, stories, myths and experiences have been told and retold from person to person and expressed in ritual dance, theatrical performance, cave paintings, decorations on vases and all sorts of media. Digital media have intensified and accelerated this process and enable greater audience interaction and cocreation both during and after the development and launch of the published universe.

In this way, the publishing format also becomes a platform that the universe creator can use in communicating and connecting with their audience and fans, who in turn may contribute to the development of the universe and help to drive it forward, as the Norwegian young-adult TV series *Shame* (2016–2017) famously did. Thus, your choice of publishing format reaches into your world and enables contact and feedback from the audience that is the lifeblood of the published universe.

The difficult choice of publishing format or formats

If your development process includes active user and audience involvement, you naturally need to choose which channels to engage through and whether you want to initiate the outreach from the outset or later in the process.

In this context, we will first look at publishing through more traditional media. In



the closing section of the chapter, we discuss user-involving approaches.

Basically, of course, you should use the language and the format that you favour, are most familiar with and are most excited about. However, there are certain issues you should consider before making your choice.

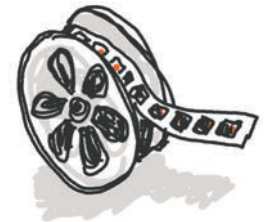
For example, if you wish to express yourself in a way that gives a strong platform for your own or someone else's narrative voice, with a potential for internal reflection, the written word would seem a good choice.

The narrative voice – the feeling that someone is telling you a story – is a key stylistic feature of literary publishing formats. In film, the so-called auteur theory highlights the individual director's characteristic style, which is viewed as just as distinct as the expressive style of a literary writer. In this understanding, the cinematic content is equal to the novel, whose content is the author's writing style and voice. This phenomenon, in which the style of one medium influences another medium, is what we call *intermediality*. There is nothing unusual about intermediality or about publishing formats constantly borrowing features from each other. However, we highlight it here to underscore that there are no firm rules for what types of content are best suited for certain publishing formats. There are, however, principles that can be helpful, depending on the particular affor-

dance of a given medium. In the following, we will examine these principles, before we return to the topic of intermediality.

We have already associated the phenomenon of voice with the novel and the personal expression of auteur films. The Russian auteur film director Andrei Tarkovsky calls filmmaking 'sculpting in time' (Tarkovsky, 1986). To him, the unique quality of film is its ability to capture and hold on to time. Similarly, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze relates certain film types to the image of either time or motion (Deleuze [1983–85], 2013a, 2013b). We could add that film has a time-bound format, as it is restricted to a certain duration, for example, 90 or 120 minutes. Of course, this time aspect also characterizes music, theatre and TV series, but time (or controlled duration) is arguably more important in film than in these other formats.

Similarly, even though computer games also revolve around narratives and locations, they arguably have a particular emphasis on rules and action. If the rules of the game do not provide meaningful interactions for the player, or if the rules appear unrelated to the narrative, the game falls apart. Some newer and more experimental games might focus



more on locations, and less on rules, to allow the player to move through a story slowly, with no risk of losing.

With their serial format and long duration, TV series are well suited for character-driven content. The content of comic books and graphic novels emphasize an aesthetic visual expression, and the stories often have lots of action. Social media are well suited for communication (Tosca & Klastrop, 2019, p. 42).



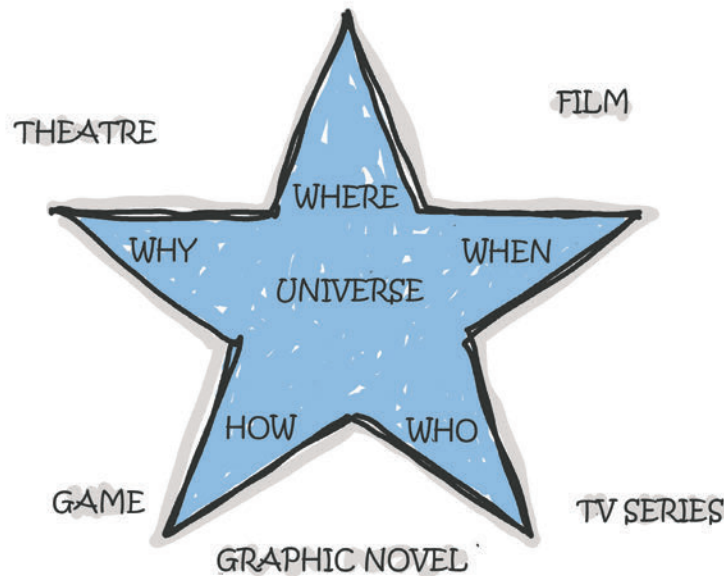
By combining the theory of ‘media affordance’ – the idea that certain media are particularly suited to providing certain experiential qualities – with our Star Model, we can create a navigation tool for different publishing formats. Although the model is, of course, somewhat generalizing, it does offer an indication of the direction of your universe and the content you are developing. In the model, TV series are described

as highly character-driven, but like other formats, they are also location-driven. As described, film is closely tied to time, while games are rule-driven, comics or graphic novels are driven by aesthetic rules and so forth.

Intermediality

In the previous section, we looked at the connection between the experiential qualities of the content you have developed and different publishing formats. It is important to bear in mind that there are no right answers when it comes to publishing formats. We offer some principles and pointers that you may use as guidelines for determining which formats

your universe is suited for. A computer game may well be driven by significant themes or locations, just as a film may of course have an emphasis on style or characters. However, if the film jumps around between a large cast of characters who are portrayed through a sequence of episodes, we would say that it has characteristics

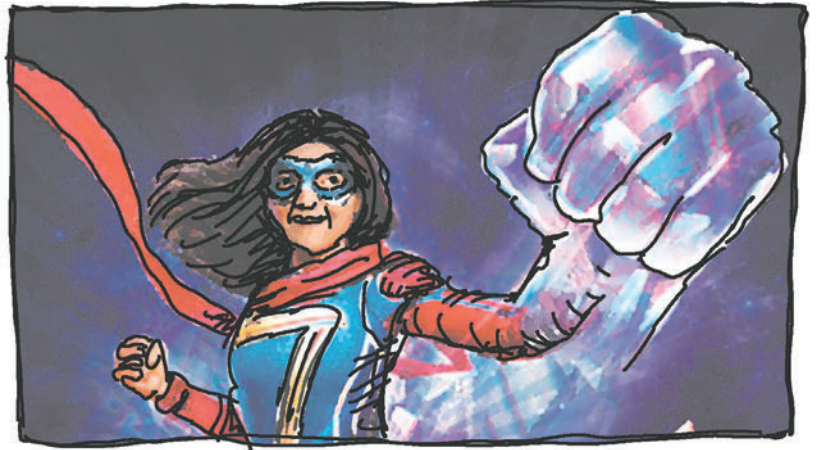




from the TV series, just as a film with a strong personal narrator may be said to possess literary qualities. We call this phenomenon ‘intermediality’. While *remediation* is associated with adaptations from one medium to another, intermediality relates to how an expression that is generally associated with a particular medium or publishing format is transferred to and shapes a rival publishing format (Bolter & Grusin, 2000).



We might even say that all media or publishing formats are based on other formats to some extent. Film is intermedial because the moving images possess qualities from theatre, literature, photography, music, design and visual art. Computer games are intermedial because the interactive medium incorporates aspects from board games, film, theatre, literature, visual art, design and so forth. Older media, such as film and TV series, can also absorb expressions from new media, as when social media features appear as a graphic layer in the TV series *Miss Mar-*



vel (2022–) about a Muslim teenage girl who is also a superhero. The series is based on a graphic fiction series of the same name. Similarly, computer games may include features such as ‘cut scenes’, which have a cinematic expression, or special graphics, like *Florence*, which includes features from the graphic novel.



If a publishing format clearly refers to and uses elements that are normally associated with an adjacent medium, this may be described as focused *intermediality* or *hypermediality*. Thus, some fiction films use computer game elements in action sequences that are reminiscent of game sequences or have a character with multiple lives, like *Lola* (1998) or *Russian Doll* (2019–2022). In transmedial

texts, this form of mediality may spill over into several media. An even clearer example is the graphic novel series *Scott Pilgrim* (2004), whose narrative style uses effects from computer games, specifically combat games, while the film adaptation of the series from 2010 mimics the graphic novel's use of computer game features (Thoss, 2014).

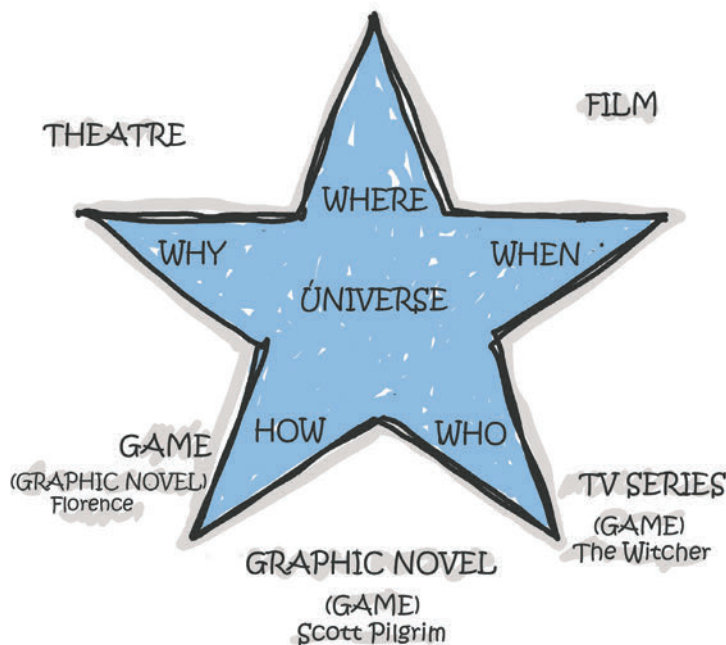
Thus, when you choose a publishing format, it is a good idea to consider which medium best facilitates or has the most relevant *affordance* for the experience or narrative you want your universe to convey. In this process, the glimpses you created through devising may prove helpful. Perhaps a glimpse of your universe will be spot on for a series; or perhaps a collection of glimpses suggest a game direction. It may also be helpful to consider whether the publishing format you are looking into contains other media and how clearly you wish to

incorporate aspects of these adjacent rival media. This is particularly important in universe building, because these borrowed features may act as links or mediators to adjacent and transmedially related publishing formats.

This model is an attempt to illustrate intermediality through specific examples. As described, *Florence* is a game with elements from graphic novels, while *Scott Pilgrim* began as a graphic novel that borrows gaming features. Meanwhile, the TV series *The Witcher* (2019–), *Arcane* (2022–) and *Last of Us* (2023–), which spring from a game universe,

have preserved certain aspects of their origin. Thus, *The Witcher* is not only an example of intermediality but also of adaptation.

Like the previous model, which illustrates media affordance, this one, which illustrates intermediality, should be seen as a dynamic instrument. The different media formats and their expressions can be combined in a



number of ways – imagine that the different discs or rings can rotate around each other, so that a film may, for example, include a computer game aesthetic.

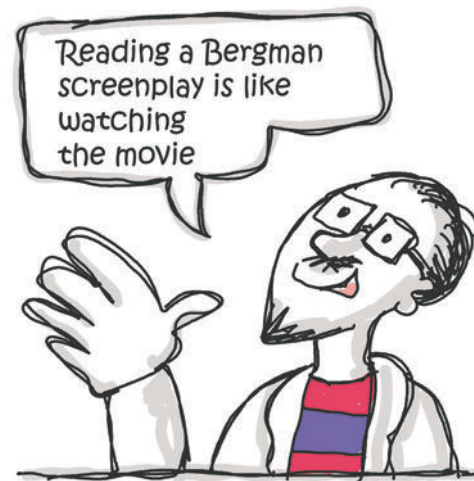
Adaptation from one medium into another – or several others

We speak of adaptation when content from one publishing format is transferred to or translated into another. There are countless examples of film adaptations from classical theatre, literature and comics. From William Shakespeare to Jane Austen to Marvel and DC, to mention just a few of the most popular ones. Researcher Seymour Chatman conducted a thorough analysis of the potential problems in translations between film and literature, illustrated by the example of Jean Renoir's *Une Partie de Campagne* (1946) based on a short story by Guy de Maupassant. While the literary text is quite free to jump in time and between different points of view, reflections and emotions, each of these expressions in film requires a translation into specific visual choices (Chatman, 1980). When a novel describes a beautiful woman, the film has to present a concrete example of what such a woman might look like.

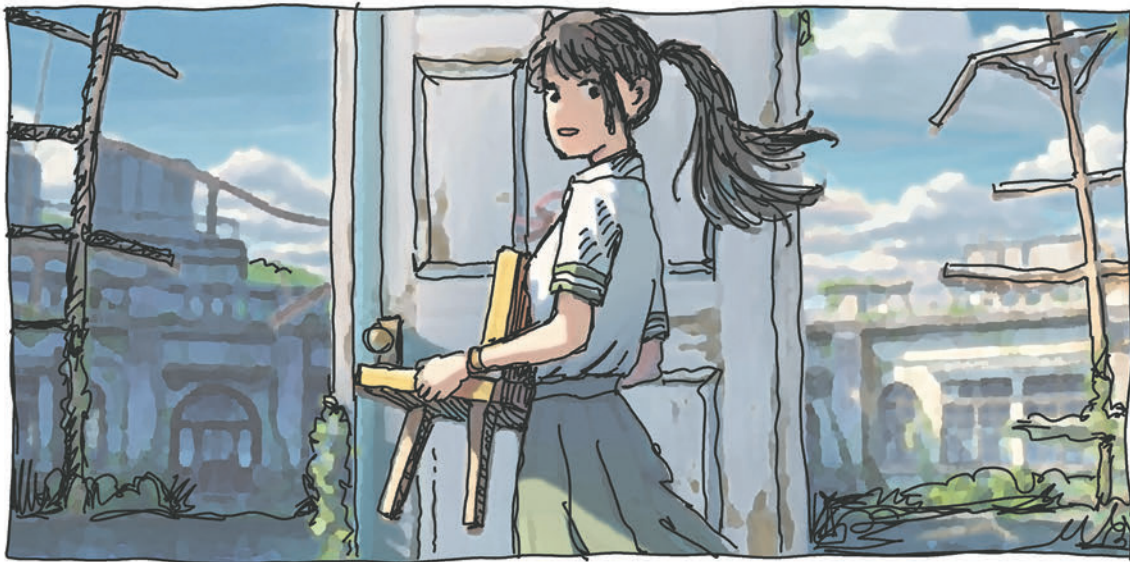
While these adaptations are difficult, we should not forget that any creative process involves some sort of adaptation. For example, the Italian film director and semiotician Pier

Paolo Pasolini characterized the screenplay as a structure that wants to be another structure. In its text format, the film script dreams of becoming a different text in the form of moving images (Pasolini, 1965). In this sense, like the script for a stage play, a film script always has a double existence.

In design thinking, when a design sketch or prototype is transformed, it becomes a *design*: an object or product that was *designed*. Thus, the transfer from one medium to another is an essential part of the creative process. In theatre, there is even a tradition that scripts by famous playwrights, such as Sophokles, Shakespeare and Strindberg, not only serve as a basis for plays but get a life of their own in a book format. Similarly, illustrations from Makoto Shinkai's or Miyazaki's concepts for animation films, for example, are also published as beautiful books.



Despite the challenges of adaptation, some filmmakers make it a core element of their development work. A good – and perhaps slightly surprising – example is the Japanese anime director Makoto Shinkai, who is known for visually overwhelming animation films, such as *Your Name* (2016), one of the highest-earning animation films to date. Shinkai, who studied literature, first writes his creations as books. His films are based on the books, which have a clear vision and thematic content that is communicated to staff in his studio CoMix Wave Films. His latest film, *Suzume no Tojimari* (2022), is a romantic love story, but it is also, and equally, a location-driven film about abandoned places around Japan.



Thus, Makoto Shinkai's works are based on his books and the tens of thousands of photos that production designers and other employees take and collect from all over Japan. The research material is then translated into drawings, concept illustrations and, in the next stage, storyboards and animatics by a team of producers and directors, who are each responsible for individual sequences in the film, almost like a showrunner for a TV series. Concurrently with this work, Shinkai writes books related to the film universe. (See interview in the closing section of Chapter 6.)

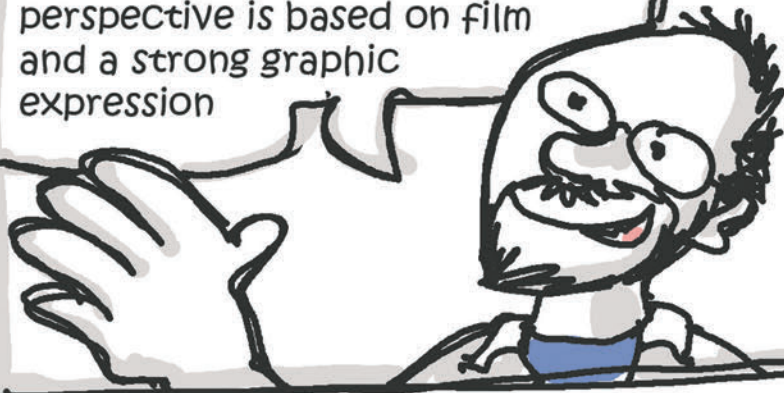
Shinkai's films are thus developed as a sort of collective adaptation of a work of fiction that initially has a literary character and is also

published as such. The further development of related literary works around the film universe shows an original approach to transmediality and the role of adaptation in that context. Thus, an internal adaptation takes place, as the universe is shaped into one or more publishing formats as part of the creative process.

Makoto is interested in and has studied literature



Arnt Jensen, who is the game director of Limbo and Inside, has always been interested in film but trained as a designer, so ... So his perspective is based on film and a strong graphic expression



That was very clear in Limbo and in the brief scene of the boy suddenly seeing the giant spider's leg ... That scene fully sold the game



Primordial text and mothership

The significance of the challenges and possibilities in adaptation, as Linda Hutcheon writes, were intensified with the advent of transmedial publishing formats based on fictional universes, since they characteristically exist in several media at once. In relation to adaptation, Seymour Chatman was interested in the aspect of loyalty to the text, while Hutcheon takes a different, analytical approach. In the example above, in which Shinkai, to some extent, adapts himself and his own text, there is no doubt about the origin or urtext underlying the film and his novels. However, this is far from always the case. The origins of even some of the most iconic texts are lost in the mists of time. *Hamlet*, which has been performed countless times on stage and screen, as perhaps the most recognizable text by the world's most renowned playwright, William Shakespeare, is a good example. The version of *Hamlet* that we read today, for example, is composed of fragments from three different versions of the play. Furthermore, we should not imagine that Shakespeare wrote his text in a vacuum: he was surrounded by actors and others who in all likelihood contributed to the play. Furthermore, its underlying narrative was inspired by the Danish historian Saxo's interpretation of a story from oral tradition about the Danish Prince Amlet, who may or may not have been a historical figure.

And so forth. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's version is perceived as the urtext, and the theatre medium is perceived as what is known in a transmedia context as the 'mothership' (Jenkins, 2014).

In a transmedia context, the *mothership* is understood as the publishing format that serves as the yardstick for other formats or the central core that publishing experts view as the most essential. As illustrated by *Hamlet*, the mothership does not have to be the same as the urtext. While Hamlet's urtext is the story reproduced by Saxo or an even older story that is lost in the mists of oral tradition, the mothership is Shakespeare's theatrical version – or, rather, the composite document.



Similarly, Tove Jansson's *Moomin* stories originated during the 1930s in a graphic format, where the Moomintroll (or Snorker) was merely a side character in a satirical political drawing that later evolved into illustrated children's books (1945), comic strips (1954), plays (1959), TV series (1969), theme parks (1993), merchandise and computer games (1996). Although the Moomintroll begins as a character in graphic art, the books will be perceived as the mothership.

In a contemporary transmedia context, the relationship was further complicated, but as researcher Stephen Joyce suggests, we can distinguish between motherships with a *narrative* or an *industrial* core (Joyce, 2023). For

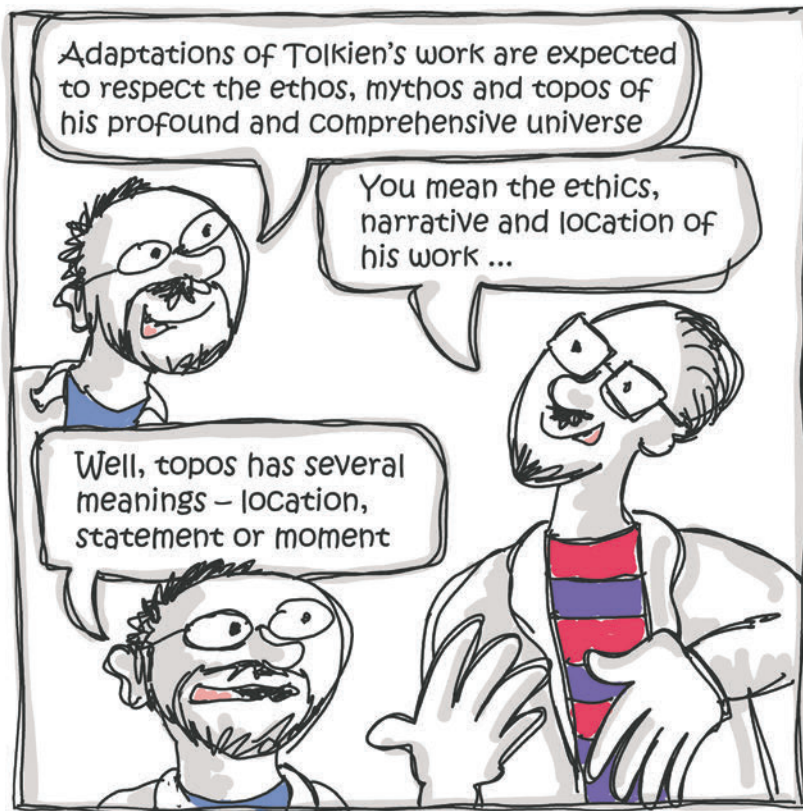


example, the narrative core of *The Lord of the Rings* could be said to be related to the literary publishing format, while the industrial core relies on Jackson's film adaptation and, perhaps subsequently, Amazon Prime's TV series *The Rings of Power* (2022–).

In some cases, the different motherships of a narrative may end up being so far apart that they can no longer be regarded as belonging to the same universe, even if they are labelled as such. For example, it is debatable whether the Disney version of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1837) has any real connection to the original text, or whether Andersen's *The Snow Queen* (1844) and Disney's *Frozen* (2013) are related at all. There are many differences between Andersen's and Disney's versions of the two narratives; in particular, the Disney version replaces many of Andersen's lyrical and tragic qualities with comedic and dramatic ones.

That said, *adaptation* is, above all, about maintaining a certain 'narrative consistency' and respecting certain qualities of the basic text of the original work of fiction. In the example of the Japanese *media mix* universe *Gundam*, which we discussed in Chapters 1 and 5, new stylistic and narrative features were allowed, provided that basic qualities of the characters in the universe were preserved. Adaptations of Tolkien's work, on the other hand, are expected to respect the ethos,

mythos and topos of his profound and comprehensive universe. Respect and preservation are core themes to Linda Hutcheon, who thus puts the *intention* of an adaptation over *accuracy* (Hutcheon, 2012). One of the qualities of the adaptation is that it keeps a narrative alive to be discovered by new generations in contemporary media formats. In this process, certain modifications to accommodate the new publishing formats are unavoidable.



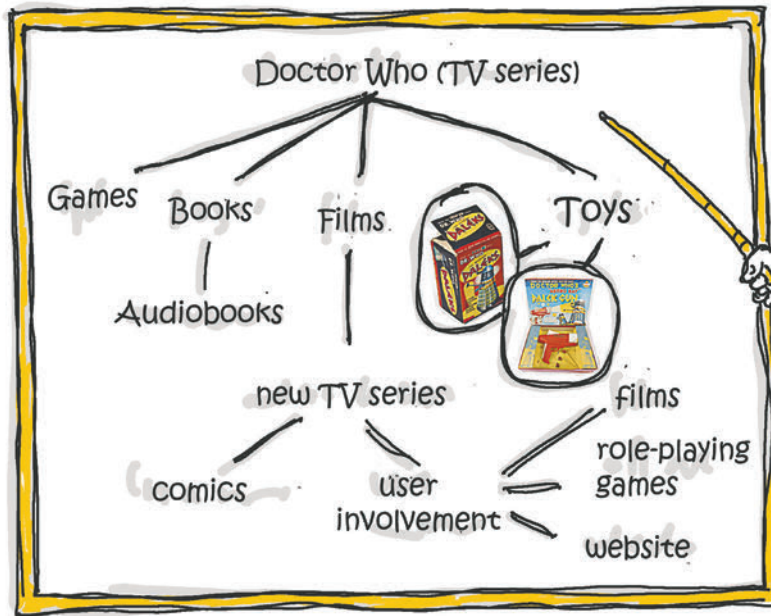
Distributed cocreation

As we have discussed, adaptation is an aspect of any creative process, but the significance of this aspect is intensified with the proliferation of new *publishing formats*. Not only is adaptation a part of any creative process, the range of possible media adaptations is continually growing.

When a universe creator decides whether to adapt their universe to other publishing formats, it is important to consider the relationship between the language or affordance of the original text and that of the new publishing format.

It is also important to consider the issue of control of the universe at a fairly early stage in the creative process – especially with regard to the financial and legal rights: the maker's intellectual property (IP). IP rights constitute a particular and important issue for works that are, to some extent, cocreated. This issue is largely beyond the scope of this book, but the degree to which the maker's IP should be protected or set free is, nevertheless, a significant consideration. At the very least, you should consider what degree of transmedia expansion and, perhaps, free usage you wish for the content or IP of your universe. In these considerations, you may find it helpful to consider the researcher Colin B. Harvey's scale or taxonomy of the control of IP-rights when content is distributed through multiple media (Harvey, 2014).

Harvey's taxonomy was devised for analytical use but is well suited to illuminating the possibilities of different publishing formats on a scale ranging from formats that typically offer a high degree of control to other formats that are outside the maker's control. It



of Doctor Who, as represented in the series, is the urtext, and the mothership is the TV series format. In the middle of the scale, there

Taxonomy is a way of describing the connection between a category and specific entities

are a number of alternative formats with varying degrees of closeness to the urtext and the mothership. These include films, radio plays, computer games, short stories, comics and newer TV series based on the universe, such as *Torchwood* (2006–2011), *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (2007–2020) and *Ky* (2009–2010). From the beginning

should be noted that all of Harvey's examples are based on IP rights to film or TV series and that these are characterized as urtexts.

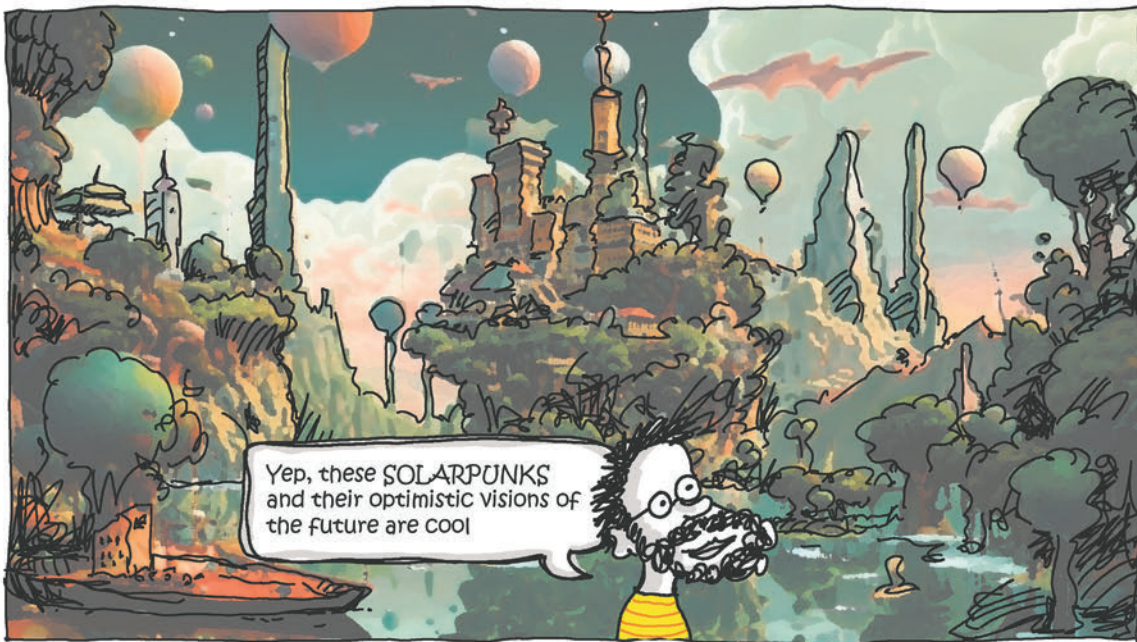
In this sense, the urtext is the publishing format that establishes the IP or the universe, such as the story of Doctor Who in the eponymous BBC TV series from 1963. The story

during the 1960s, *Doctor Who* also spawned merchandise, such as the Dalek model and the Astro Ray Gun shown here.

Towards the other end of the scale, we find related material with a high degree of user participation, such as a *Doctor Who Comic Maker* website and a licensed role-playing

game. Finally, at the very end of the scale, we find user-generated material, including fan fiction, a role-playing game and films (Harvey, 2014).

You can consider how much control you wish to exert over your universe and how much you can share or place entirely in the public domain. It is worth noting that much of Harvey's research into storyworlds is based on the notion of an urtext that makers may deviate from, to varying degrees. As we have discussed, however, not all universes are based on a specific and precisely defined urtext. A contemporary example is *Solarpunk* visuals that circulate without reference to an urtext.



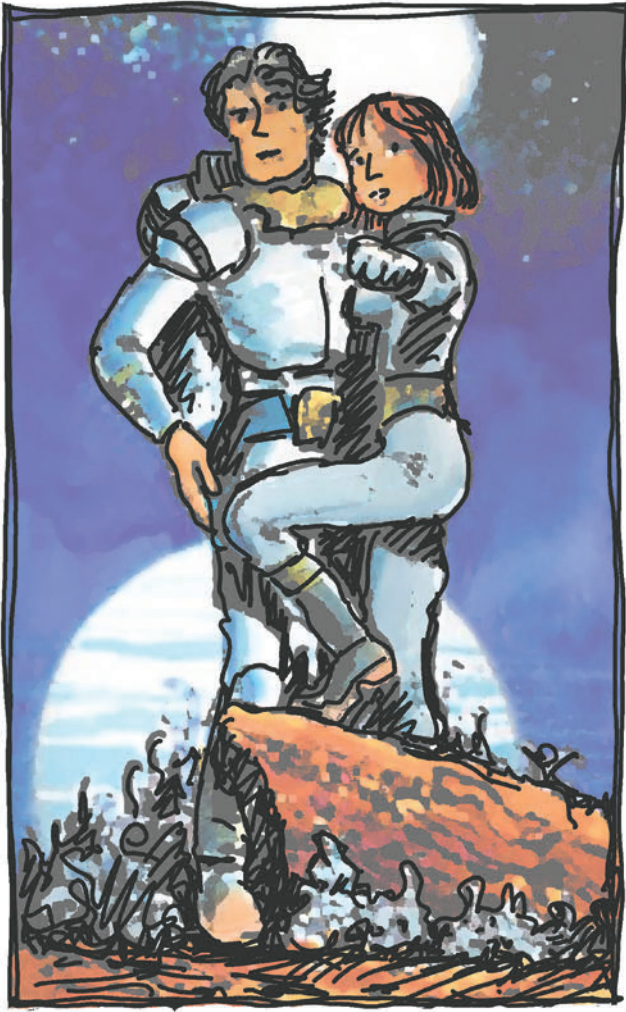
Thus, the scale can also be read from the opposite direction, with content springing from fan fiction. Fan fiction shared on social media by anonymous or unlicensed makers can sometimes end up in commercial publishing, even if that was not necessarily the original intention. In the West, E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) is an example of a narrative that was created as fan fiction under the title *Master of the Universe*, based on the *Twilight* series (2008–2012), and which ultimately found its way into the conventional formats of novels and films (2015). The same is true of the film and book series *After* (2015–) by Anna Todd, a work of fan fiction based on

the members of the boy band *One Direction*.

There are countless examples of online fan fiction networks, for example yomou.syosetu.com in Japan, which attempts to pick up new stories for publishing formats such as manga or anime.

The durability and survival of the fiction universe depend on the value and life that

the builders of the universe allow it to have among the users. As comics creator Pierre Christin wrote in his preface to the first published issue of the comic *Valérian and Laureline* since the death of his creative partner



Jean-Claude Mézière, they had both been opposed to the notion of endless continuations of the series – but they had also both appreciated it when other writers or illustrators created their own stories about Valérian and Laureline’s time-travelling adventures. In this way, Virginie Augustin became the first woman to take over the baton when she published an album aptly titled *Where Stories Are Born* (2022).

Social media and user participation

The lifespan and originality of a universe depend, to a high degree, on its openness – not least in relation to its audience, users and fans. The survival of the universe depends on life, and life is created and preserved when audiences, users, fans and others are invited to join in the storytelling.

As discussed in previous chapters, it can be very valuable, even crucial, to invite the future users of the universe to take part in creating it. It is equally important to maintain and develop this connection throughout the lifetime of the universe. Both depend on the media that support this relationship and the opportunity for cocreation.

In Scandinavia, the Norwegian young-adult TV series *Shame* (2015–2017) is a prime example of a universe that successfully engaged in this type of user dialogue during its development and maintenance. In the

following, we review some methods and recommendations based on the experience gained from the development of *Shame*.

David Kleeman, who works with the development of universes and metaverses for Dubit, has proposed a model for how a universe can be manifested and developed through different media over time. We will discuss this model later.

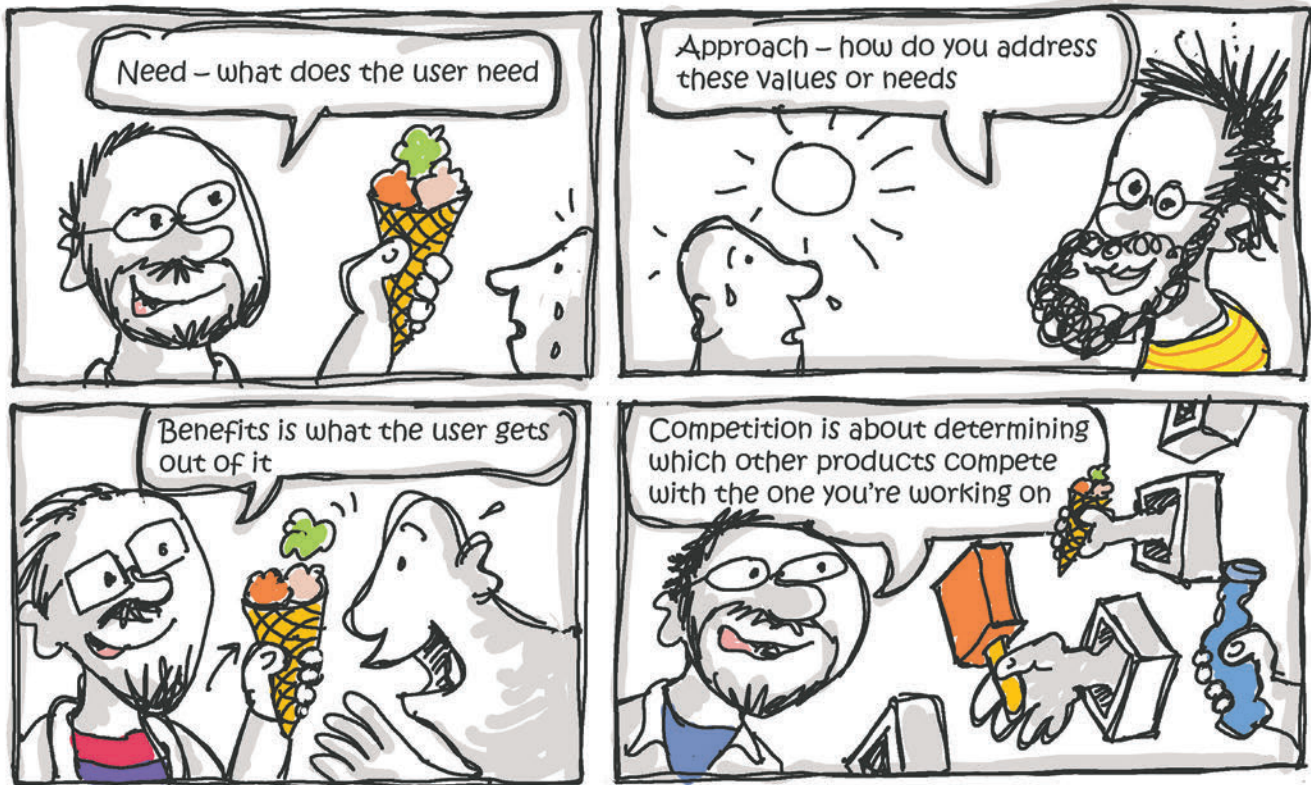


The TV series *Shame* revolves around a group of more or less ordinary grammar school students – parties, friendships and romantic entanglements, less than perfect lives and shame in today's Norway. Young viewers are a very difficult target group to reach, and they are sensitive to missteps in the representation of what is supposedly their own world.

Naturally, you always need to be familiar with the domain you are trying to portray in your universe, which is why most script development manuals recommend thorough prior research. Naturally, this is even more important if you do not have first-hand insight into a real-life universe you wish to portray, as was the case with *Shame*. The challenge is to find the necessary time to engage in this investigation, beyond ordinary desk research. In the development of *Shame*, the top priority was to reach out to a potential young audience and meet them at eye level. The series, which in many ways represented a paradigm shift in Nordic TV production, was based on in-depth research, especially aimed at understanding the dreams and fears of 16-year-old Norwegian girls and their use of media and music. To this end, the Norwegian team drew inspiration from the NABC model developed by Stanford Research Institute.

The NABC model was designed for development and communication based on the concepts of user needs and value creation. The abbreviation stands for Need, Approach, Benefits and Competition, with Need referring to the needs and values of the potential audience (Redvall, 2018). Thus, it is a user-centred model that requires time-consuming in-depth work.

The group in charge of developing *Shame* first used the NABC model in a standard anal-

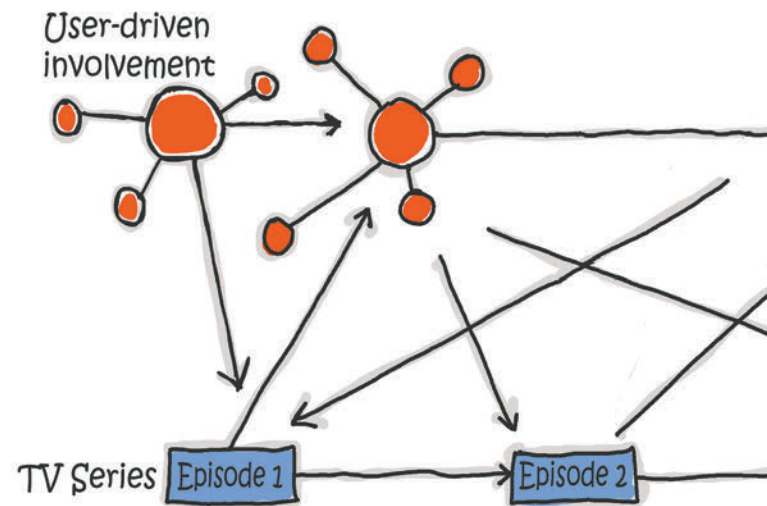


ysis of available data from NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) and then applied it in what was later described as a four-month 'pre-production insight gathering process' (Redvall, 2018, p. 151). In a much more thorough process than the NABC normally recommends, the developers carried out some 50 in-depth 3-hour interviews with 16-year-old Norwegians. The research process also included analyses of Snapchat and Instagram stories as well as material from school visits.

Insights from the research material, for example about the significance of getting a seat on the best bus for the weeks-long graduation celebration party, language, social media use and music preferences, were included in the material for the scripts. The casting process of a total of 1,200 young people also provided significant input along with the fact that the scripts were written just before and even during the shooting. This approach provided inspiration to the design of characters

and stories in the series. So did the feedback from online fan sites, which provided input that could be used directly in the series due to the fast-paced production schedule (Redvall, 2018, p. 156).

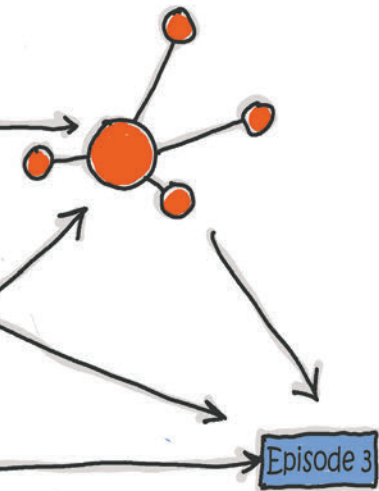
While input from fans usually comes in after the fact – in serial productions, in between seasons – the producers of *Shame* were able to incorporate the material more or less directly. The mothership of the series was an online blog, and fans were able to interact with characters from the series through social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr. The first indirect or word-of-mouth marketing of the series similarly happened through social media. This digital-first strategy was fairly new at the time and meant that scenes could be released during the week to give the impression that the story was unfolding in real time. This effect was intensified by activities on social media, where one of the characters, for example, had 700,000 followers in Norway. The short time from script development and shooting also meant that the show-runners could incorporate elements from audience feedback into subsequent episodes. It is not uncommon for content in TV series to adapt to audience requests in this way, but normally, this happens in between seasons, not in between the individual episodes, as it did in *Shame*. You can see the model here.



Fanatomy and cocreation

Series like *Shame* are usually developed in interaction with their target audience. As shown in the example above, this can happen through social media or other publishing formats that are open to interaction and communication.

Thus, the new media platforms not only allow for a form of distributed creation that is valuable in the development of a universe; they also help secure the continued life of the universe. As we know, Henry Jenkins places a high priority on fan activities as a key part of the storyworld – to the extent of almost equaling the two phenomena.

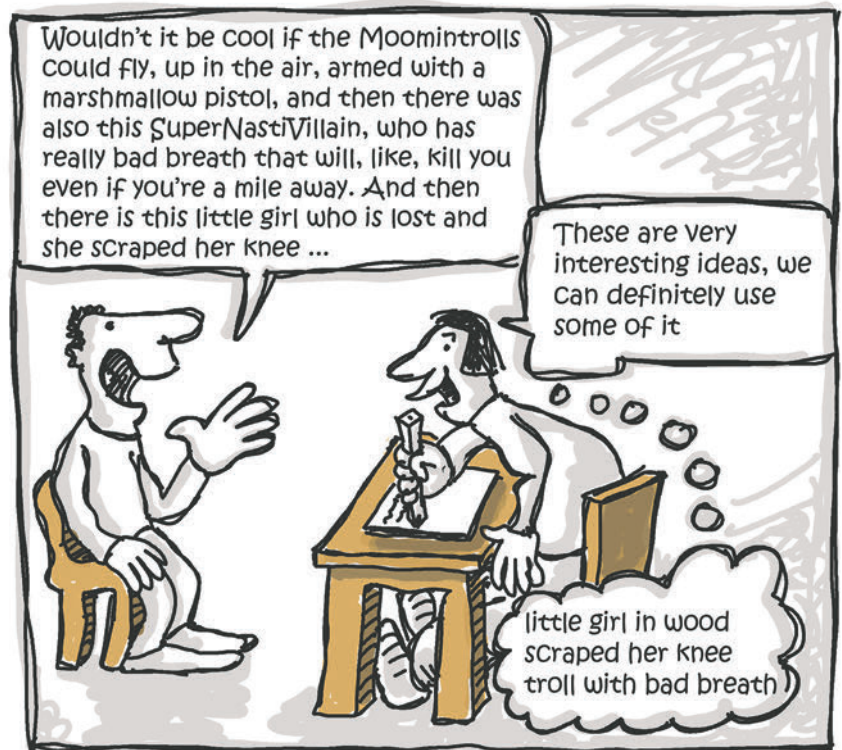


David Kleeman, media strategist and deputy director of the company Dubit, bases his work on a model he calls ‘fanatomy’ (see interview with Kleeman in Chapter 8). Dubit creates content such as games and events for *synthetic worlds* such as *Roblox*, *Minecraft* and *Core*. In the next chapter, we discuss

the importance of metaverses for the understanding of universes; for now, we will provide a brief introduction to the fanatomy model.

The model illustrates how a development process can be structured in rewarding and meaningful contact with its potentially co-creative audience. Some of this audience will consist of potential superfans who continuously follow and feel shared ownership in their relationship with the universe. The NABC development model includes certain ethical dimensions that are important to bear in mind when development, content and marketing are mixed, for better or for worse: do you invite your audience to take part in content development because, as a universe cre-

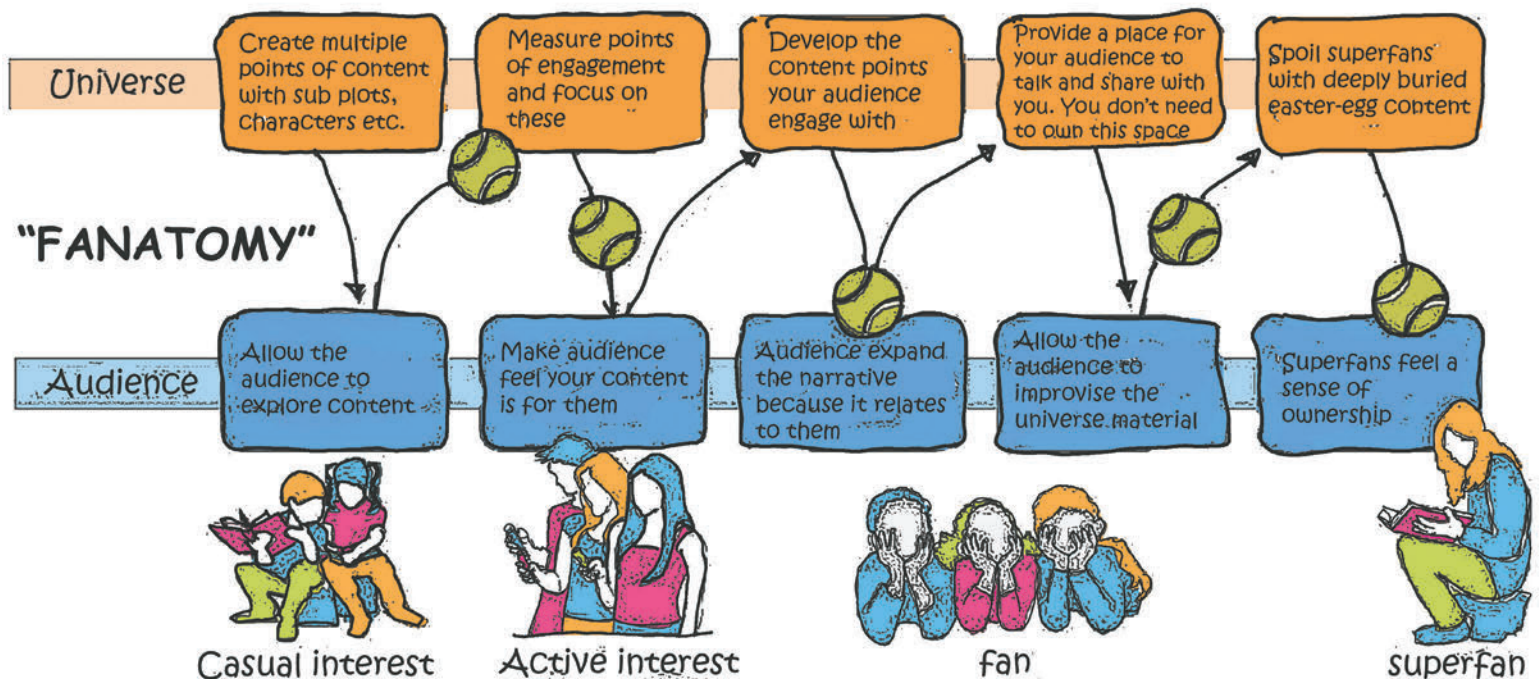
ator, you aim to turn fans into loyal superfans or because you are genuinely interested in the dialogue and cocreation you are inviting them to engage in? The latter is of course crucial, as was the case in *Shame*. The Dubit model offers interested participants access to content that was initially developed in a relatively low-cost production approach. This might include access to game prototypes, video sketches or concepts – reminiscent of the ‘glimpses’ we discussed previously – with the purpose of



determining which material attracts the most interest. Subsequently, they produce more of this particular material, which is tested again with what is, hopefully, an actively interested audience. Based on these trial balloons and tests, the company invests in the development of content that will continue to be of interest to the group that the developers have now established a continuous contact with. This group is invited to take part in cocreation and may itself attract other users and fans.

If the universe is digital, developers can provide access to virtual forums where the

audience can debate or develop more content that is not necessarily under the control of the original developers. Another option is to develop additional, perhaps more specialized, deeper content in the form of easter eggs: unexpected or surprising and often hidden content that special fans or superfans will discover and take an interest in. Superfans are extremely loyal to their preferred universe, and from a commercial perspective, of course, it is relevant to have a large group of dedicated fans.



The art of letting go

A key moment in the *fanatomy* model is when the content production is set free. By its very nature, this part is obviously beyond the developers' control, but it is important to dare to give up control if you wish to have a living and dynamic universe.

For example, the goal set by DR (Danish Broadcasting Corporation) for its digital children's universe was that it should consist of 10% TV and 90% play. Thus, the main activity in this idealized model was not in direct relation to the medium – which is TV or streaming – but in the form of related physical activities.

These types of fan-based activities are not only desirable but necessary if you wish to keep your universe alive, in the sense that it is continually developed and renewed in a meaningful way. In this sense, we may speak of *media ecologies* driven by exchanges between developers and producers on the one hand and audience and active fans on the other. Development is also kept alive by fans sharing or mediating the activities of other fans, as it happens on websites dedicated to fan art and fan reviews. For example, sites where readers review and analyse books and add colour codes to indicate the different types of experiences provided by the books can have a major impact on the interest in a book.

Another distinct manifestation of a media ecology dynamic is *cosplay* and *fan* conventions and festivals. *Cosplay* is generally used to refer to a costume practice among young people with an active fascination of modern Japanese culture and visual storytelling. However, the phenomenon is not limited to Japanese pop culture or costumes in a narrow



sense – cosplay also has clear references to Western culture and distinct performative elements. Photography is a key activity in connection with cosplay. Audience, fans (*otaku*) and photographers are integrated in the cosplay culture, just as the recirculation of photographs, videos and gifs on social media play a significant role in this cultural expression (Wille & Mackinney-Valentin, 2018).

In this chapter we have attempted to provide an overview of the various factors to consider in the choice of publishing formats for your universe. Among them is media affordance, meaning which media and publishing formats your universe is suited for.

We have also discussed the way in which different media interact and influence each other. Interaction has become more important, faster and more intense with the prolif-

eration of online media that enable interaction and cocreation among a large number of participants. Exchange between media makes the issue of adaptation an important point to consider.

Similarly, social media add significance to the question of user involvement and fan activity. The space where universes, fans, audiences and users can meet without shielding themselves from other parallel adjacent or rival universes is sometimes called a *metaverse*. Like the concept of cyberspace during the 1980s, ‘metaverse’ is a slightly overhyped concept that can be tricky to get a proper grasp of. In the context of this book, however, it is hard to avoid. In the following chapter, we discuss the significance that the metaverse may hold for you and your fictional universes.





Production design:

We gathered these four experienced film-production designers, one of whom is also a researcher, to hear about their methods and tools. Our main focus is on universe building, but they all speak from their own specific approach to the worlds that they develop.



Jane Barnwell has a background as a production designer but is now a reader in Contemporary Media Practice at University of Westminster, UK, where she teaches practice and theory. Barnwell's publications include *Production Design: Architects of the Screen* (2004), *The Fundamentals of Film-Making* (2008) and *Production Design for Screen: Visual Storytelling in Film and Television* (2017).



Suzie Davies is a British production designer who worked on more than 20 feature films and TV series. She is especially known for the film *Mr. Turner* (2014), which earned her an Oscar and a BAFTA nomination for best production design. Davies's work also includes *The Zookeeper's Wife* (2017), *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* (2021) and *Saltburn* (2023).



Udo Kramer is a German production designer who has created both German and international films and TV series. Kramer's work as a production designer includes *Measuring the World* (2012), *Point Break* (2015), three seasons of the Netflix series *Dark* (2017–2019) and *1899* (2021). Most recently, he completed the sixth season of the Netflix series *Black Mirror* (2023).



Gustav Pontoppidan is a Danish production designer and art director. Pontoppidan is especially known for the film *Winter Brothers* (2017), which earned him the Robert Award for best production design in 2018. His work as a production designer also includes *The Guilty* (2018), *Q's Barbershop* (2019), *Enforcement* (2020), *The Blue Orchid* (2020), *Kamikaze* (2021) and the award-winning VR production *End of Night* (2022).

What does production design mean for you in regard to visual fictional universes?

Jane Barnwell: Production design is everything you see in a film or any visual media. It's the creation of everything in that world, apart from the actors.

Udo Kramer: As a production designer you are kind of a connecting part of all the other artists working on the film. Somebody needs to steer through this environment and think about it together with everybody else who is responsible for creating that movie. That makes it so interesting because it's kind of like ... You are invisible if you do your job right. Ideally, it should be an atmosphere, that is just there. It's about capturing a three-dimensional world into a two-dimensional picture and try to communicate an atmosphere through a picture.

Gustav Pontoppidan: It's like when you read a book when you were younger you imagined everything. It's your idea of a world, and there are so many ways, depending on the project, to develop it. It's like being a kind of painter and puzzle maker.

Suzie Davies: I bring the world to life. So that script that comes in, and I will develop it and go with my instinct. The older I've got, the wis-

er that I feel my gut is in what that story needs. How that story needs to sit in the world.

The story is always the bible for me, and my job is to complement and possibly enhance that story. The two things that are the most important for me are the script and the actors – the people that are going to inhabit my world. I want to make that world as comfortable or as uncomfortable as the script suggests. I don't want them to be wondering or feel out of character when they're in, say, a house that they live in.

I think whenever you read a book or read a script, you imagine those characters and wonder what they're wearing and how they behave. But to then see an actor inhabit that character and tell you things about how they anticipate they will act within the world, that really helps with the world building. I'm fortunate to work with Mike Leigh, and I learned a lot from him about how to let the actors tell you their story so that you can then create their world.



How do you get an idea for production design for a universe?



Jane Barnwell: I guess it's a feeling and it's a lot of images. I get images of something, and then I can feel it. Not like being in love but like a strong feeling. And then it's about having some photos on that feeling, I guess. Like when you read something for the first time. That's how I usually get an idea.

Udo Kramer: I get like a gut feeling of what's going on in the script. Sometimes it's not ideas for designs but colours or temperatures. And I normally get interested in what the figures and the characters are doing in the script, and I want to know more about it. I normally start with an extensive research process, where I use as many different pictures, sources and media to describe the world as I can find. Maybe it's a particular time period, historical or future. I like to start with the detail rather than huge pictures.

For example, I like to look for travel descriptions and private letters. I go to libraries, but I

don't flip through image libraries – I'm more trying to find out what is behind it. What is the political situation, what is the overall situation and what might cause us the atmosphere, and that creates your pictures.

I read an interesting article on how climate is changing design and how stories are told. For example, all the German fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm. All these stories are connected to a time which we call the small Ice Age, which causes long hard winters, less light, lots of stabbing, forest and isolation. If you see how this world is created, which still is a worldwide stereotype of German heritage, you can view it in combination with the climate change of the small Ice Age. If you start from there, you can delve into your research and suddenly you get new pictures in your head of big forests, cold and darkness – and ideas about what that means for people's supernatural fantasies and ideas.

I love to do that. I can be kind of dragged away by this experience until I feel like, 'OK, what's the point Mr. Kramer? You don't have a useful idea that you can pitch!'

How do you illustrate and describe production design for a universe?

Udo Kramer: I normally start to sketch actually and try to assemble the pictures that I like the most and put them together and see if

there's something happening as a collage. The pictures that I can't get, I will draw. I am a bit unconventional, in that I do everything except concept art, which I think is kind of a killer in this process.

There are a lot of modern techniques in relation to production design. Udo, what do you think of the possibility of virtual production?

Udo Kramer: Virtual production might be a misleading term, as it gives you the idea that there is a production happening virtually, which is of course nonsense. For me, it should be just a tool to tell your story, like a magic toolbox, and you need to know how to play your tricks. I think it's kind of a Siegfried and Roy show to use everything you have in your box, to convince people to follow the story, the emotion that is there. The point should be to integrate your tricks into a story.

It's also a budget thing. A classic establishing of the world would be a wide shot with a lot of extras and period cars. And then you follow the protagonist disappearing into the crowds, round a corner and up the staircase into his kitchen, where the curtains are closed. With this technique you don't need to follow this 100-year-old trick to establish and cut to the scene. I think, if you get a digital version of your exterior you would possibly think in a different way. Sell your magic without necessarily

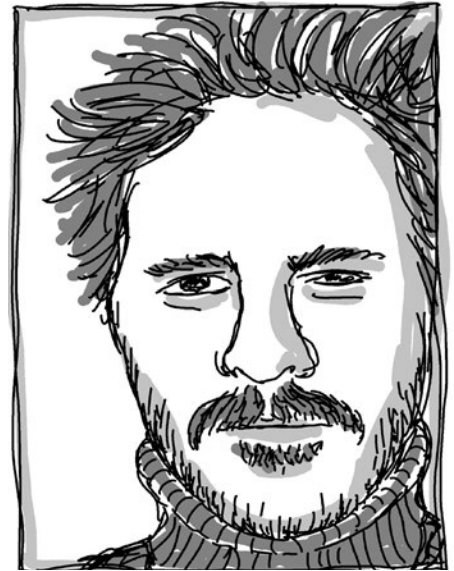
putting all your money on the 10-second shot to establish the environment.

Also, I personally don't believe in this trick at all. I think it's a bit lame nowadays, because everybody knows how it's made and if it's not connected to the story, to the acting, then I think it's a bit lame. As artists we should always find new ways to get the audience intrigued into the world itself, and that doesn't necessarily come with massive establishing shots.

So from that perspective, virtual production is definitely an interesting tool, and we try to embrace it.

Gustav Pontoppidan: I love virtual production. It's a new trick and a new set of tools in your box that comes with other possibilities and restrictions that you have to work with creatively and work around or work with.

Knowing how to use it right to fit the story and your design is always the key. The only thing is, it's so damn expensive. We haven't seen a democratization of the tool yet.



Udo Kramer: It's coming. I saw students mocking up LED screens in their basement, and if you use open-source software you can start experimenting. It's just a question of how high the resolution is. So if you are artistically interested, and you want to experiment, you can



do it now. Of course, not at the highest quality level but experimentally.

What kind of media do you use to communicate design ideas to an art department or other artists in a production?

Suzie Davies: I think it's really easy to get comfortable with everyone using Dropbox, Smug-Mug or whatever photo stream and just load loads of images. But over the years I have seen that it needs to be refined because some producers and directors don't work two-dimensionally.

They like to see three-dimensional things. So I still will do white card models if required and if they're tricky or unusual builds. I think it's really useful for the whole team to be able to look at it in one place. I find looking at things on a computer, trying to compare images, is difficult, so I still put photographs on the wall. They're only maybe A4-printed, but you can take that picture off that wall, put it next to that one, imagine that you're going to walk from here to here and then you're going to go into this set.

Recently, I used a lot of just basic SketchUp walkthroughs of any sets that we're building. As much as I like people to be in the room looking at these images, talking about the ideas, sometimes, obviously, you're working with international crews and you've got people all over the world. So to be able to send a little animation of a build is really good, often just a very basic wireframe SketchUp model. I haven't really spent any money building this physically, and the DOP [Director of Photography] can say, 'I don't need that, I'll never see the ceiling, or



can I have a window there, or we'll never see that wall.' You can look at colours before you've even spent money on paint and render things with wallpapers before you spend money on wallpapers. And I think for a lot of productions those images are very

useful to them to make very quick understandings of what we're up to and where we're going.

Sketches and concepts are lovely, but I think that next layer is very helpful to production. And I try to mix it up. I try and judge what each production needs, really, and what new tricks are up our sleeve to help promote this. I think I always come back to printing photos to be able to compare. It's so difficult just to see things if they're on your phone, on your iPad or on a computer. I also like to put presentations on as big a scale as I can – rather than A4-size, I'll put them on a big telly or projector in the art department.

So, that's the sort of combination of things I use, and I try to keep an open mind to react to the sort of production team I'm working

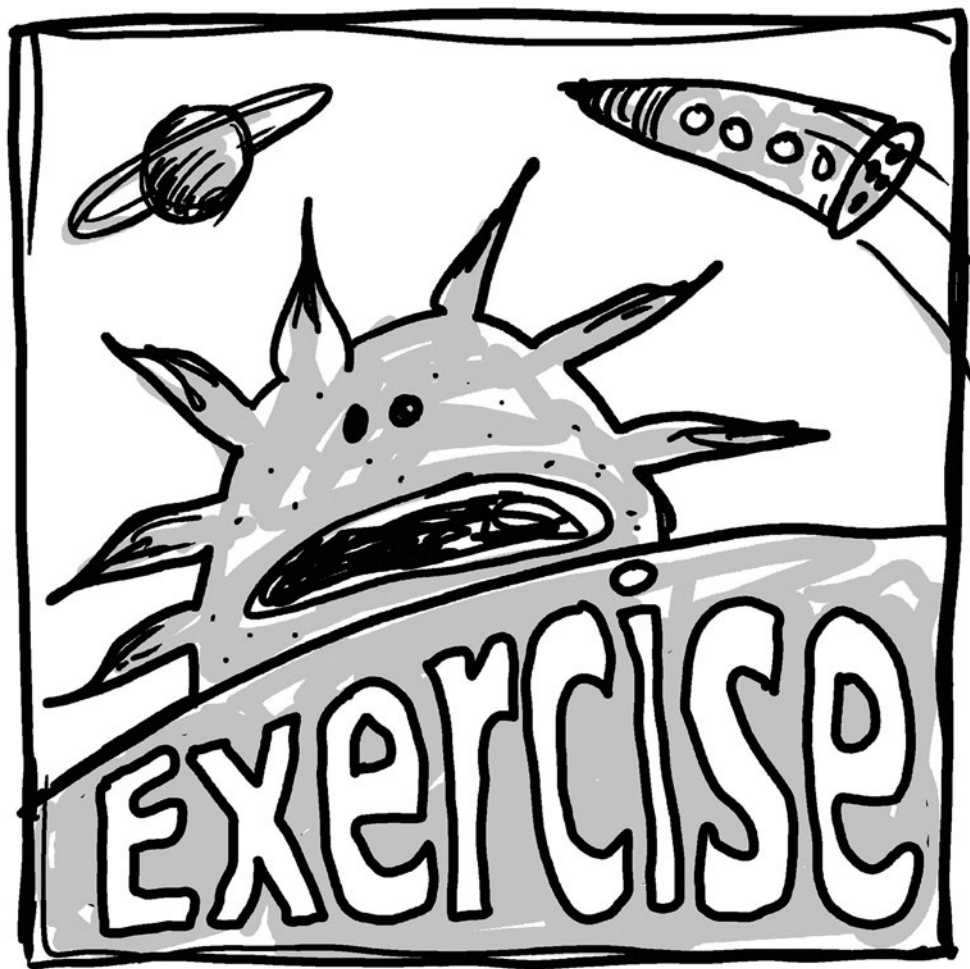
with. Also just using the dynamics of a crew and what team I've got with me. I might have someone who's amazing at Rhino or CAD, and they can do it really quickly, and within half a day we've got a build that we can get signed off.

Gustav Pontoppidan: I've started working with Miro, which is like a giant board where I can put all these images up, so I don't have to print that much. I just added a big screen in my office and then we can compare. You can just drag stuff around on this giant board.

Jane Barnwell: Those kinds of shared whiteboards are brilliant in the early stages. But it is really good to physically be together, if possible. So it's a combination, really, where this variety of tools opens up a lot more possibilities, which is great.









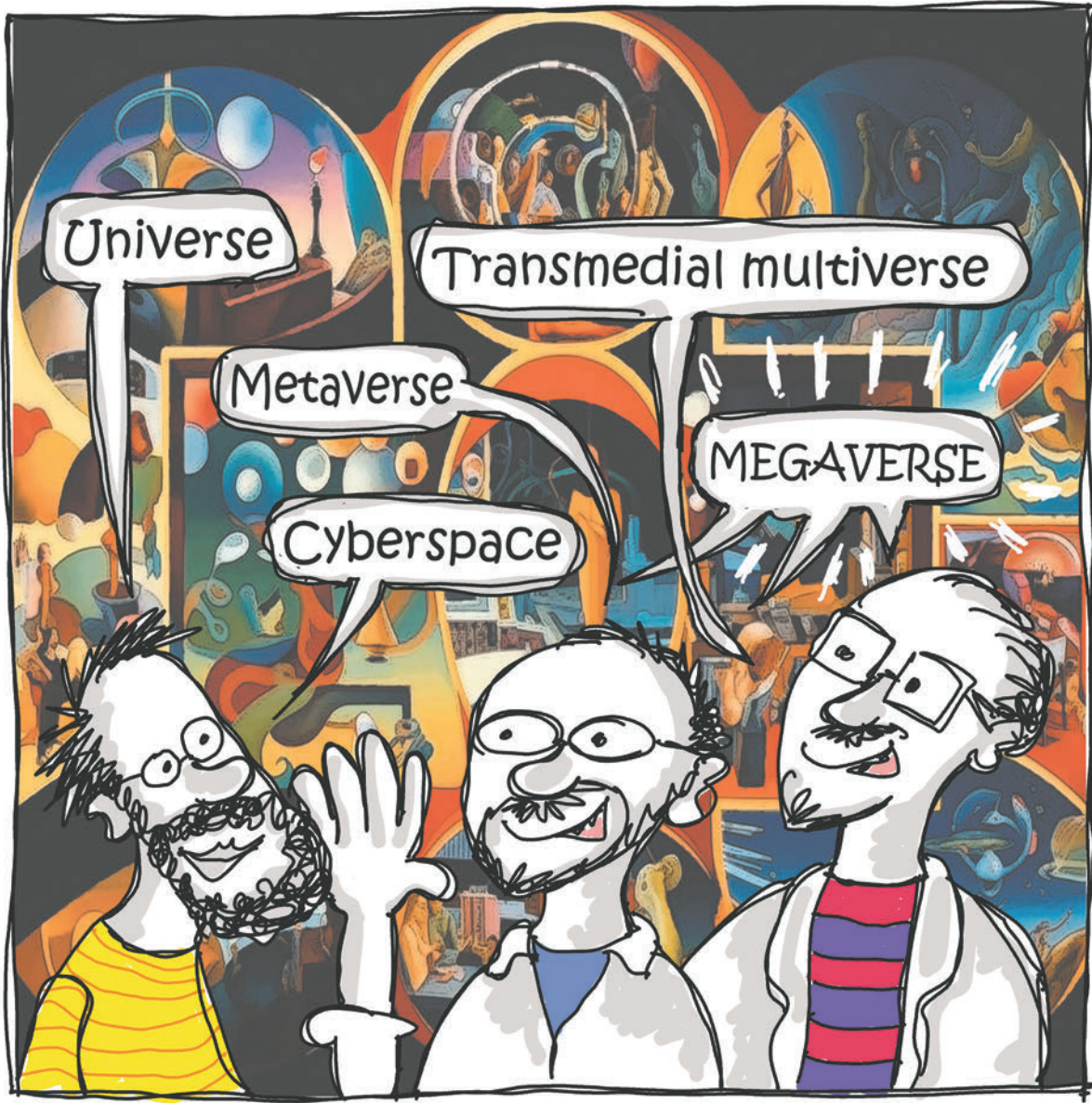
Exercise 7: Develop a multimedia strategy for publishing your universe

Based on your universe from the exercises in previous chapters (or a universe you are currently working on), develop a strategy for publishing your universe. In this exercise, approach the trans-media structure as a series of publishing formats.

Consider, discuss and describe

- what is your goal for the universe
- who is your target group and which media/formats are best suited for reaching your intended audience.
- when and in which order you should publish your different formats to maximize their ability to support each other and reach the audience
- how you can maintain or perhaps expand your universe with new formats or sequels in order to reach your audience
- any ideas for how you can engage your audience in the universe through cocreation, fan art, fan fiction or live events.

Your strategy should demonstrate how you intend to reach your audience, whether you are simply planning two publishing formats to be released on the same day or with serial publishing across different formats over the course of weeks, months or years.



8. Future: How do I work with universe development in the future?

All the world's a stage.

William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (1623)

In the closing section of the previous chapter, we looked at how audiences, users and fans can contribute to the development of your universes and interact with them through fan communities. We also briefly touched on metaverses: places or simulated worlds that provide access to multiple universes in ways that provide a space for immersion, interaction, community and cocreation.

Creating or designing a platform or a universe in an open simulated world may be regarded as the ultimate form of universe building and an indication of something that we will probably see more of in the future. In a sense, ‘metaverse’ is simply a term for what was once known as *cyberspace*, a concept that was associated with a potential open and artificial future world. However, a metaverse can also be compared with something that already exists in the physical world. If we un-

derstand ‘metaverse’ as ‘simulated world’, we are constantly undertaking mental simulations of the real, physical world around us in order to understand what might happen in it. When we seek to describe the qualities of the metaverse more narrowly, we often refer to phenomena in the physical world that create a space for open interaction and playful engagement with fiction, such as carnivals and so-called fan conventions.

In this chapter, we outline some of the background for the metaverse concept and examine it as something that may exist in both the physical world and the virtual world. We call this expanded understanding of the metaverse the ‘megaverse’.

Metaverse and cyberspace

Today, the metaverse appears as a somewhat hyped phenomenon – reminiscent of the hype surrounding the notion of cyberspace

during the 1980s after the release of William Gibson's science-fiction novel *Neuromancer* (1984). A fascinating and tantalizing buzzword, whose actual substance may be hard to pin down.

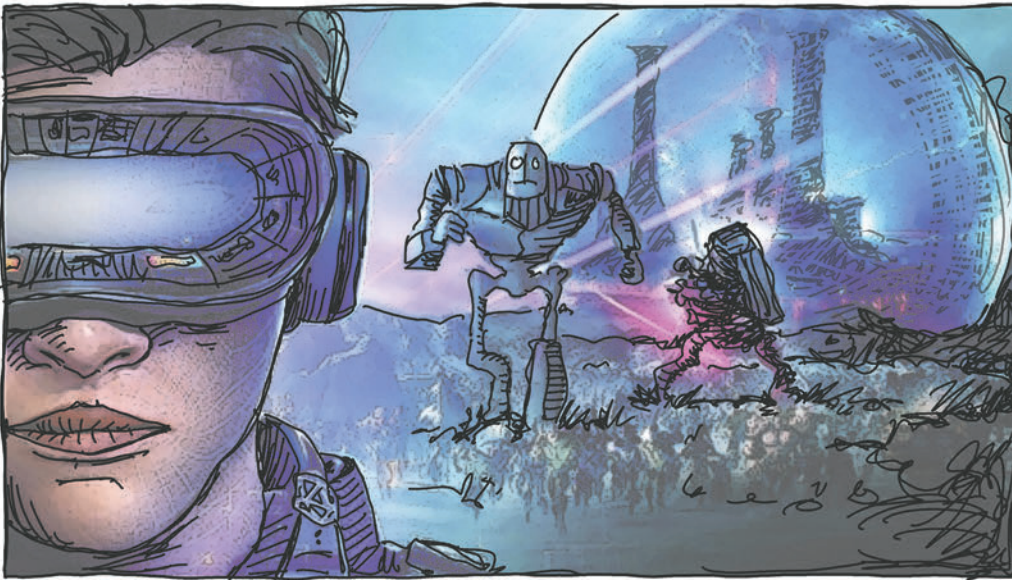
Let us examine the concepts more closely. In the *Neuromancer* novel, cyberspace was represented as a future iteration of the Internet that appeared as a sort of collective hallucination. In many ways, the *notion* of the metaverse is reminiscent of this fictionalized representation of a future version of the Internet. What makes the metaverse so hard to grasp, according to the American writer Eric Ravenscraft, is the notion of it as a single platform that holds all digital content, as it is portrayed, for example, in Steven Spielberg's

science-fiction film *Ready Player One* (2018) (Ravenscraft, 2022).

In *Ready Player One*, the protagonist disappears into a collective synthetic world that is experienced through virtual-reality goggles and other equipment designed to extend physical experiences into the digital realm. The problem with this notion of the metaverse as an all-encompassing virtual place is that this version of the metaverse does not exist.

Like the term 'cyberspace', the word 'metaverse' also comes from science-fiction literature, more specifically from Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash* (1992). The metaverse is largely applied to either optimistic or – as in Spielberg's film – *dystopian* visions of the Internet, portrayed as an immersive, virtual 3D world with an emphasis on social interaction.

The problem with both utopian and dystopian notions of the metaverse as a shared 3D-immersive digital world is that it is doubtful whether such a world will ever exist. There is a wide gap between the utopian notion of the metaverse and the realization of such a vision. The existing metaverses have a much more limited scope and are best described





as places that – like *Second Life* (2003–), *Roblox* (2006–), *Minecraft* (2013–) or *Sandbox* (2022–) – make content available that enables us to build, narrate and compose experiences using content from different universes. People can then interact with this content in real time in a sprawling network. Thus, there is not one but many metaverses, so that we may even speak of a *multiverse of metaverses* (Ravenscraft, 2022).

Tech analyst Matthew Ball describes the qualities of metaverses as offering *synchronous live events*, with *no cap* on the number of concurrent participants, based on a *fully func-*

tioning economy and offering engaging *experiences* that span both the digital and physical worlds (Ball, 2021).

In addition to visual fiction, the metaverse is also a locus of trade, advertising, social communication and education as well as events, including fashion shows and concerts, such as the Travis Scott concert (2022) in the *Fortnite* game (2017–).

Since metaverses often – and in some cases by definition – contain elements from



different universes, they can be difficult to distinguish from multiverses, and indeed, the structures overlap. One variant of the multiverse is the *intermedial multiverse*, where figures that belong in a physical medium, such as tangible toys, play characters from a

different medium, as in the *Lego Star Wars* games and films.

As we see it, however, a multiverse is primarily something that may appear in a work



of fiction which contains elements from different fictional universes, such as *Doctor Strange* or *Penny Dreadful*.

A metaverse is more like a *platform* that hosts content from multiple universes in ways that enable interaction and immersion across universes, such as *Roblox*, *Minecraft* and *Sandbox*.

We also see metaverses occur in relation to partially physical experiences, for example via blended media, such as virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR). To some, a metaverse is closely associated with VR and other immersive or visually enriched experiences, but in our understanding, a metaverse is not dependent on particular technologies but may

also involve physical locations or spaces that are open to a variety of interactions and transactions.

In our view, VR and AR are not in themselves intrinsic to metaverses but are associated with them because they enable visual immersion, experienced through VR, and because they represent the mixture of worlds that characterizes experiences in AR. Contrary to popular belief, the term 'cyberspace' (which metaverse is associated with) was in fact not introduced by Gibson, although he was the one who made it famous. Instead, the term appears to have been coined by the Danish artist Susanne Ussing and architect Carsten Hoff, who established Atelier Cyberspace for exhibiting physical, spatially oriented works of art, such as *What Is Happening?* during the late 1960s.

The works of art at the gallery dealt with interaction and spatial immersion in a phys-



Atelier Cyberspace, *Sensory Space*, Forum, Copenhagen 1969.

ical setting. Initially, cyberspace was thus not associated with the Internet, just as we also do not see metaverse as conditioned by digital media. Quite tellingly, descriptions of the characteristics of the metaverse often compare the concept to physical experiences similar to those that might play out in a sandbox or a theme park (Ball, 2021).

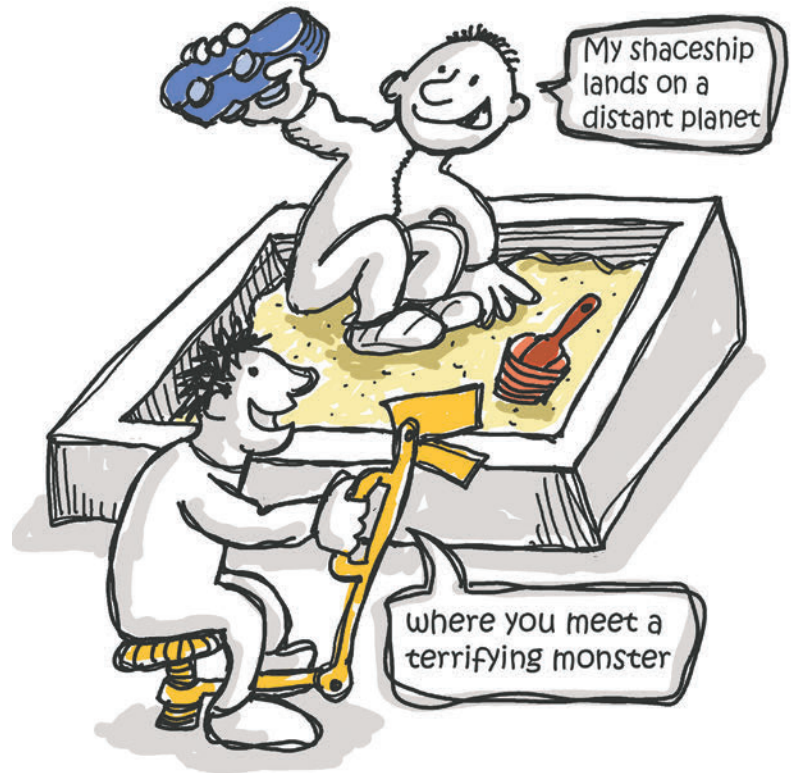
Future universes as theme parks or sandboxes

We may envision future universes as digital spaces, as combined digital and physical spaces or as more or less overlapping with metaverses and multiverses. However, a simpler way of grasping the experiential potential of future universes is to imagine a familiar physical world combined with digital elements. In this book, we choose to call this future hybrid a ‘megaverse’.

Generally, the *megaverse* is based on creating a setting and making content available that allows the original creator of the universe and future fans to build, tell stories and compose experiences, the way we might use the different toys in a sandbox. The *Sandbox* game has embraced this metaphor and created a world where it is possible to play with elements from different universes.

In a sandbox and other physical settings, children meet and play with characters from different fictional universes. The playground contains multiple universes and allows for

the development of games and narratives through social interaction. Elements from different universes can appear side by side, without anyone perceiving it as disturbing multiverse interference. The excavator originally belongs in the sandbox universe, but it can easily move into other playground universes, such as the swing set or the slide or up a tree. *My Little Pony* meets *Gundam*, *Barbie* and *Lego* characters with no apparent technological or conceptual problems.



In an adult context, the streetcorner, the beach, the theme park and the market square all invite play and social or commercial interaction. The ideal digital metaverse possesses some of the same qualities as the physical meeting places that allow for storytelling, fantasies and play.

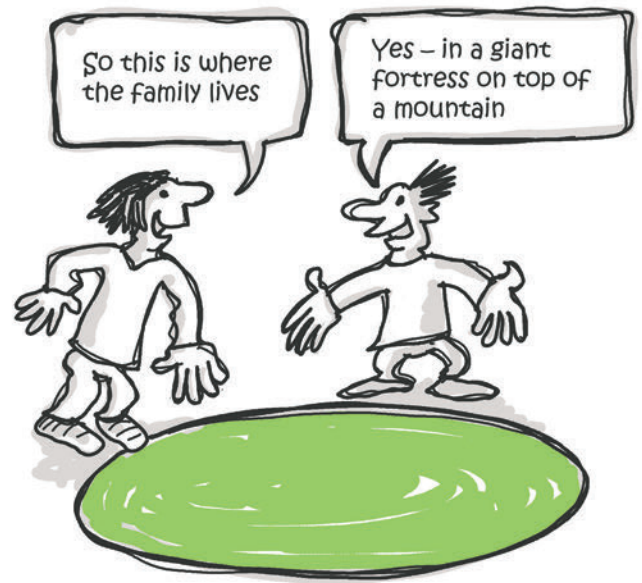
The magic circle

This open and welcoming quality may be illuminated by Eric Zimmerman's concept of the *magic circle* in relation to games. Zimmerman borrows the concept from anthropological descriptions of ritual practices whose effect depends on the observance of specific rules. To this, game theory adds the variable outcome, the players' stakes and so forth (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003).

To some extent, this application of the *magic circle* applies to all works of fiction, whose rules we accept, for example through the establishment of the fiction contract, in order to enjoy the benefit of the full experience. With reference to Lisbeth Klastrup's work, this can be compared to what Coleridge called the *willing suspension of disbelief* of the fictional world that is proffered (Klastrup, 2008). Typically, the boundary of this world is clearly marked: in traditional fictional formats, such as theatre and film, we pay admission, and the beginning of the fictional work is marked by the film's title sequence or the opening of

the stage curtain. In the comfort of our own home, when we kick off our shoes and open a book, the opening pages indicate that we are now entering a construct. In digital metaverses or synthetic worlds, such as *Roblox* or *Minecraft*, the log-on process is a clear indication that we are entering the space provided by the different platforms, and that there are certain rules we need to observe to avoid being excluded from the digital communities.

The entrance to the universe of physical play has a less distinct boundary, which is



more like a membrane that is open to diffusion. Similarly, within the *magic circle* of play, the fictional universes that are invented in play, or which inspired it and which the play activity interacts with, are separated by vague boundaries and easily flow into each other.

Conventions, carnivals and infinite universes

As described in the previous chapter, one important quality associated with the fictional universes is the activities performed by the audience and fans, either voluntarily and spontaneously or as an integrated and vital part of the existence of the fictional universe.

In the *megaverse*, a successful universe has to be open to allow for maximal exchange with other universes. We compared this condition to what happens in a sandbox or in a playground. However, the physical megaverse may also take place within a more organized framework with clear connections to popular fictional universes or religions. One clear example of activities taking place among fans and others with an interest in a popular fictional universe is the various pop culture conventions, such as *J-Popcon* and *Comic Con*. These conventions typically celebrate pop culture phenomena – especially Japanese and American ones – such as comics, superheroes, computer games, manga and anime. In addition to presentations of new releases and

talks by producers and creators, these events contain a strong element of fan activities and presentations of fan art, fan fiction and other user-generated content. There are also interactions with fictional universes from series and games, for example through digital remixing, such as *game-modding* (game modification) and *machinima* (in game filming).



The most striking fan activity at these conventions is probably *cosplaying*, with fans dressed up in replicated or reinterpreted costumes from visual narratives. In a sense,

dress-up may be seen as an extension of childhood play, and it is an activity that both young people and adults enjoy. It also offers a safe space for exploring identities and scenarios related to social identity, gender and sexuality. In this way, cosplay as a part of fan culture helps to reflect and develop universes through dress-up, posing and exchanges between fans at conventions and on social media (Wille & Mackinney-Valentin, 2018).

Transmedia researcher Henry Jenkins briefly describes cosplay as an example *re-enactment* in a context where Japanese fans of

the *Matrix* universe (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999) showed up in costume in public spaces to re-enact key scenes from the *Matrix* films (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 115–116). Historically, re-enactments of myths or fictional worlds are not unusual, and this lets us relate cosplay to universal human activities such as dress-up and pretend play and to cultural phenomena with more or less focused performative elements that have been practised in Europe and elsewhere in the form of carnivals and other rituals (Wille & Mackinney-Valentin, 2018).

Spectators of medieval liturgical dramas would typically take in tableaux based on the beliefs of the church, such as the Passion or horrific representations of Purgatory and the eternal torments of Hell, or they would observe processions move past, like today's carnival processions. During these experiences, they would see several people dressed up as the same familiar character, as the processions will have included many Jesuses, Marias, devils and Roman soldiers, just as cosplay will feature many



Starwars fans by J-Popoon 2016



Dreadpool and Lady Bug J-Popoon 2015



different Deadpools, Spidermen and Imperial stormtroopers. The specific timeframe and the random order of a parade or procession not only makes the iconic features of the costume essential but also the performers' recognizable gestures and poses. The same features are seen, in a more or less stringent way, at cosplay conventions, where superhero poses and signature gestures are core elements.

The tableau character of this format is also present in theme parks. Another comparison, which may be even more significant in this context, is the origins of the underlying texts that are being performed. Both the Biblical texts underlying the medieval processions or tableaux and the pop culture texts are of apocryphal or unknown origin. Furthermore,

the narrative is non-chronological and fragmented and relies on a mix of media technologies (Domsch, 2014).

This is not to imply that, for example, medieval carnivals and cosplay are representations of the same underlying phenomenon; the point is that dress-up with inspiration from fiction has deep roots and relates to activities that unfold in open digital universes – a topic we will now return to, after this brief digression into the world of dress-up.

Open digital worlds or metaverses

Typically, metaverses are thus associated with open digital worlds or synthetic locations that offer opportunities for various degrees of co-creation and social interaction as well as with other experiences and events, some of which have a real or perceived live character. As described above, the open digital universe or metaverse thus possesses many of the qualities that are also found in the open physical worlds of play and carnivals.

The two dimensions constantly overlap and reflect each other and may therefore be difficult to tell apart. As in physical play, the digital format lets us play with narratives,

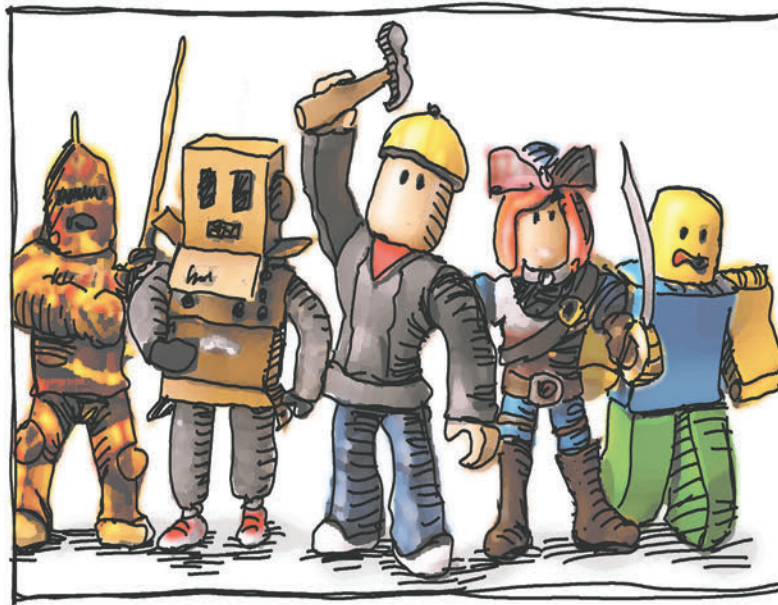
games, masks and dress-up by appearing through a digital avatar or similar guise.

A metaverse such as Disney's *Dreamlight Valley* (2022–) lets us move in and interact with Disney's fictional universes, as in a physical Disney theme park, where characters from different Disney universes meet and interact with park visitors. Visitors to the original Disneyland (1955–) could thus experience different worlds or themed lands, such as *Tomorrowland* and *Fantasyland*, alongside the beloved Disney characters, including Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

Later, the parks expanded and added attractions to include the corporation's growing portfolio of worlds or universes from LucasArts and Pixar, such as *Star Wars* and *Toy Story*. This intensified the composite or eclectic park experience. Other commercial theme parks for

Lego, the Moomintrolls or Ghibli have a similar feel but the latter two in particular have a more homogeneous stylistic expression. Similarly, Disney's *Dreamlight Valley* only includes material from the Disney portfolio.

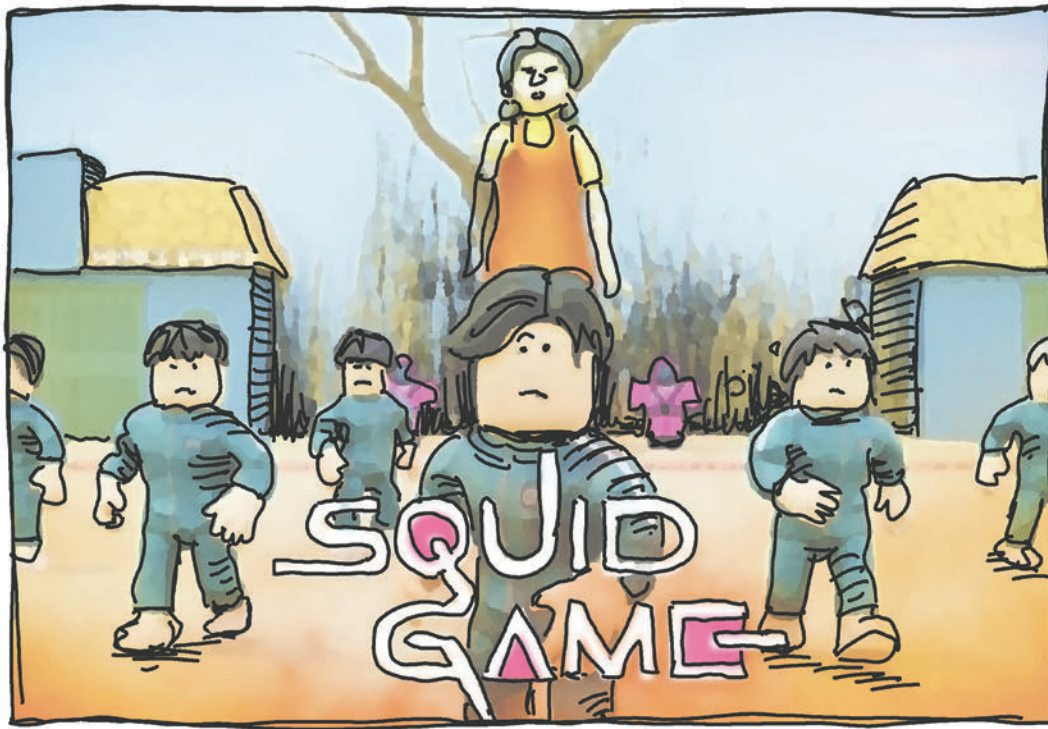
Other metaverses, such as the games *Roblox* and *Minecraft* and, to some degree, *Fortnite*, let the users actively build and design narratives and games that borrow from other parallel or rival universes. In its ideal form, the open world of the digital metaverse offers and facilitates opportunities for creating interactions through social creativity in an immersive 3D world using characters or oth-



er elements from different fictional universes – even from rival brands. A good example of this openness is Netflix's decision to allow *Roblox* users to build games with clear references to the popular TV series *Squid Game* in their metaverse.

Naturally, it might be debated whether it is appropriate for children and young people to use an 18+ series in this way. However, the results were surprising and demonstrated that this opportunity to share material created on the basis of an existing IP right was a huge hit. As in the communities that emerge

Another example is *Warrior Cats*, which began as a book series in 2003 and developed a strong fan base that has been present on *Roblox* since 2011. The fans' activities gave rise to a community around a game that in 2022 had 2 million unique players per month (Kleeman talk at Copenhagen TV festival in



among fans and other convention-goers in the physical world, social interaction and the chance to help others and cocreate something new are essential values.

2022; interview with Kleeman in this chapter). In addition to the commercial potential, a metaverse is ideally associated with values related to friendly social interactions with others in a creative community that is organized differently than the competitive and conflict-driven forms that are typically associated with experiences in computer games and fictional universes. To illustrate this point, *Fortnite*, which is a game with a metaverse character, has introduced an area in its game universe where the rules of the otherwise highly

competitive game do not apply: a sort of *safe space* with room for other types of experiences and social interaction.

Parallel universes and invitations to play

As we wrote in the introduction to this chapter, *metaverses* or *megaverses* may be regarded as the ultimate form of universe building. In their ideal version, they are places that allow other users to create something new in a universe, even including elements borrowed from parallel or rival universes.

If you want to create something that works in a metaverse, you need to consider whether it invites play and whether it contains elements that can be used as building blocks, also in other universes.

It is difficult to top Lego and *Minecraft* in this regard, but less will do. Essentially, it requires a degree of openness that allows for elements created for your original universe to be used outside it – as in the case of the Netflix series *Squid Game* or, in a more extreme example, the *Gundam* universe. To do this, you have to relinquish control and allow your original universe or characters to *mix with* elements or characters from other universes. This loss of control may of course pose an artistic problem as well as a legal and financial issue in relation to intellectual property rights.

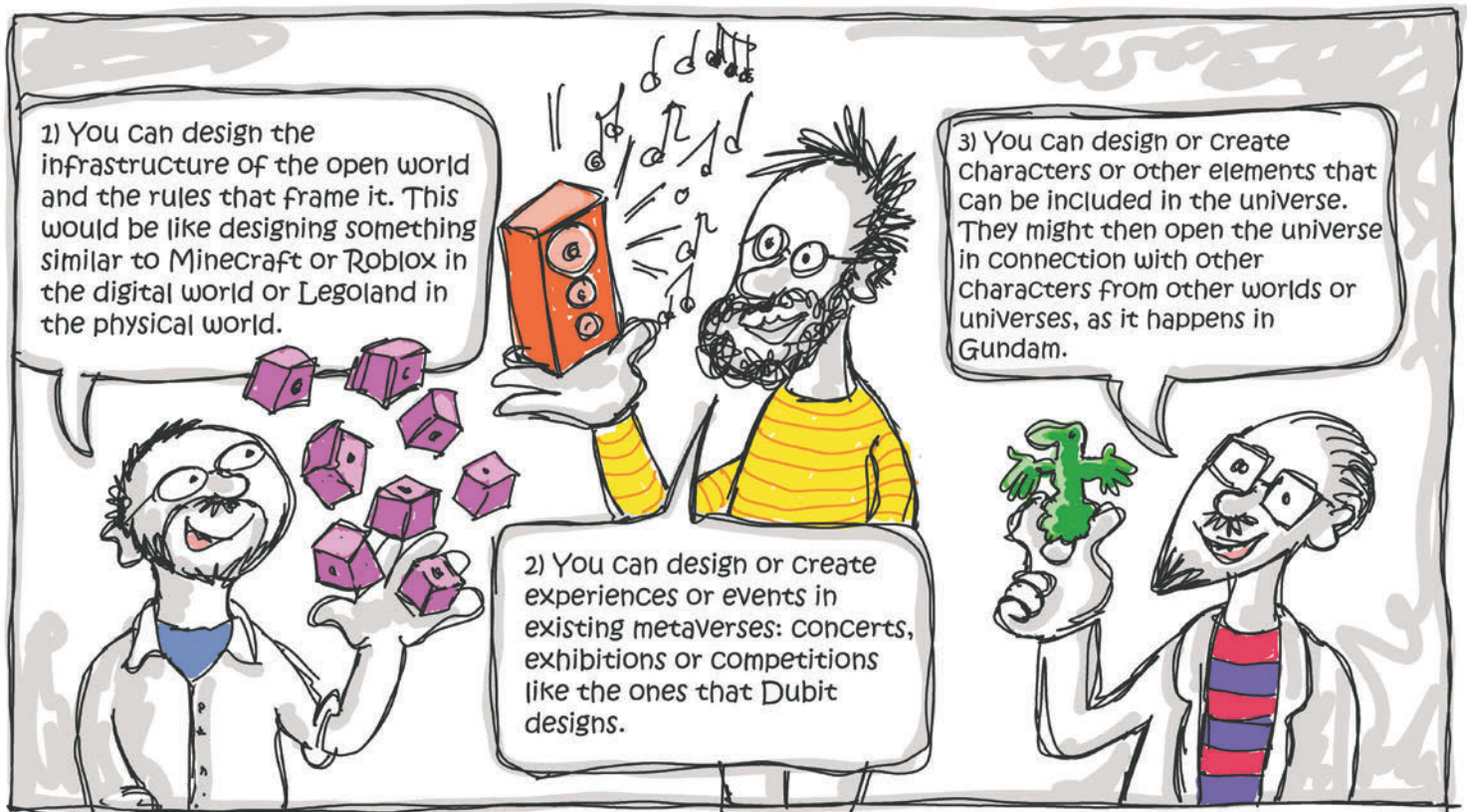
While the *Gundam* robot universe has allowed the use of the characteristic robot characters in a wide range of contexts, Lego and *Minecraft* provide the building blocks and framework for the creation of new characters in connection with games, narratives and other experiences. Companies like Dubit specialize in creating experiences and events in metaverses, as they have done for the Brit Awards and the English football team, among others.

While the concept of the metaverse may seem unwieldy and difficult to pin down, it is essentially a simulated world among other simulated worlds. Creating a meta- or megaverse like the ones we know from Lego or *Minecraft* is a huge undertaking, so instead, you may consider creating content that works in existing megaverses: a character or a theme with the potential to generate conversations, activities and exposure on social platforms and in other media – and perhaps, over time, form the basis of a new megaverse.

With inspiration from the Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom (Bostrom, 2003), some believe that the world itself is a simulation, and that we are all living in some kind of computer game or simulated world, as in the *Matrix* universe. This takes the notion of infinite simulation to a point where we cannot follow. Instead, as we have hopefully made clear, our

interest lies in discovering how creative and imaginative people – such as you and us – in this, the best of all possible worlds (as the Germany 18th-century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz would put it) can build our own fantastical and meaningful universes, whether in cosy little Denmark or around the world.

To explore how people in a very different part of the world, which we are not in daily contact with, go about building universes, we brought our universe research to Asia, where we met with some of our universe building heroes in Korea and Japan. You can follow us on that journey in the next chapter.





Multiverse:

We have gathered three individuals who develop some of the world's biggest and most popular fictional universes. This involves IPs worth billions of US dollars which they are responsible for maintaining in a hypercomplex reality, where new universes are pouring out via streaming services. And where existing works of fiction are transmogrifying from their original formats to new ones in a quest to capture a restless audience fluttering around the digital world in the search for resonance and novelty.



Jeff Gomez is an American writer and transmedia producer. He is the CEO of Starlight Runner Entertainment, which produces and consults on transmedia productions. Gomez's work has played a role in numerous productions, including Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*, James Cameron's *Avatar*, Hasbro's *Transformers*, Sony Pictures' *Spider-Man* and *Men in Black*, Microsoft's *Halo* and Nickelodeon's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.



David Kleeman is a British strategist, analyst, writer and speaker with more than 35 years' experience from the children's media industry. Kleeman is senior vice president of Dubit's Global Trends, a research and strategy consultancy firm and digital studio with a focus on children and teenagers. He was president of American Center for Children and Media for 25 years.



Mikkel Lee is a Danish writer and producer. He works as senior story lead at Lego, where his work involves combining stories and play. Lee's work with children's entertainment includes developing programmes and concepts for CBBC, CBeebies, Nickelodeon and Lego, including the TV series *Nexo Knights* (2015–2017) and *Hidden Side* (2019).

How would you define a fictional universe or metaverse?

Jeff Gomez: To me, a story world is the fictional universe that exists within a novel, comic book or movie or other specific piece of content in which you are telling the story. The story world is the greater universe that you may or may not see in that individual piece of fiction, but the story world also exists beyond the confines of that piece of content.

The story world in my definition actually also includes the world of the audience member, especially now that we have metaverses and video games and other kinds of content in which the audience is no longer leaning back: ‘We are participants. We collect pieces of the story world. I want all of the movies, I want all of the novels, I want all of the comic books, and I want to play within that world. So, my feelings and my discussion around the world and my participation in the world are part of the story world.’

Mikkel Lee: I very much align with Jeff’s definition. It’s also our experience at Lego that the story worlds we create are much larger than the individual sets or characters – and larger than the comic book, the TV show, the game or the metaverse. And in our case, of course, they very much include the audience, because the audience is actively consuming them and hopefully



also engaging and playing with them, building them, changing them and making them their own, with the Lego pieces in mind. We always conceptualize from a starting point, but then it expands quickly and very broadly. We need to make sure that the world is rich enough to contain and be valid for these other platforms.

How do you develop the format for a universe such as a metaverse? Do you even think about formats when you’re creating conceptual metaverses?

David Kleeman: Dubit is in the business of creating immersive worlds. We created the



first Flash-based virtual world for teens in 1999, and we've always had things bouncing back and forth between research and the studio. It's been fascinating for me to watch as technology and platforms have changed how young people use the various platforms they have available.

When a company, a brand or a content owner approaches us with an idea, we try to guide them in the most productive direction. I think the most challenging thing for us right now, as we've made this pivot to more metaverse platforms, is to not turn away from all the other venues where kids consume content, like YouTube, books, mobile games or fairly straight casual games. When someone comes to us with an idea, I hope that we are still asking them the same kinds of questions: Where did it start? Where did it take life first? What platform? Sometimes someone comes to us with a book, and they want to see if there is a place for it in the digital or screen-based world. Others come to us with something from televi-

sion, and they feel it needs to expand. We tend to ask about the heritage of the brand – 'What could you *not* lose without your fans saying that it's no longer the same thing – and what can be left behind in order to create the best fit with a new platform?'

We usually start every project by spending a couple of days on a creative summit between our studio team, our research team and the client. We try to work out who and where the audience is, how they want to play or engage, what is the best format – and that can obviously lead to some uncomfortable moments. They might think this would make a wonderful game, and we think it would make a wonderful ... something entirely different. Then we need to negotiate.

How do you illustrate and describe a universe and a metaverse?

Jeff Gomez: My company has earned a good reputation on illustrating and describing the universe in mythology documents. If the universe already exists, we do a very, very deep dive to understand what the visionary message is. When something is shaping up to be quite successful, there are often very few or an individual vision behind the project, and we try to get at the essence, the fundamental building blocks of the narrative, and the message.

The mythology document has to be useful to the stakeholders, so we always measure the usefulness of what goes into these documents by what the fundamental messaging and the aspirational drivers of that story world are going to be. Once we understand that essence, we are able to compile a list of major characters, creatures, vehicles, weapons – all the objects and their locations, chronology, metaphysics and how the magic or super science works. A universe can be 100, 1,000 or 10,000 pages and heavily illustrated. Sometimes when the content pre-exists, we simply import the images from, say, the Disney studio. When it doesn't exist, that's fun! Then we work with some great illustrators to conceptualize what these things might look like.

Mikkel Lee: That sounds very familiar. Both when we create new IPs or look at existing ones, we build something we call a concept compass. Things in the concept compass are not solid yet, and we usually take elements through rigorous testing with kids, users and parents. Once we have gone through that long and iterative development process, we end up with a concept bible which describes all the elements.

In my mind, there are three types of stories: stories that entertain you, stories that make you wonder and stories that make you do something. From the point of view of Lego, we are very much interested in the last cate-

gory. When our audience watches or engages with our story world, we want them to engage with the bricks and play and build up their own world and make their own stories.

We have a different part of our development that we call the IP Play Puzzle. Maybe that's a horrible word, but think of it as a conceptual framework for the universe. It has the elements that Jeff described: world, locations, characters, good and bad and in-between features. It has tools and icons, the optics that people use, the vehicles and so on. But in the centre of this conceptual framework, we have what we call an inner logic, which I think is similar to what Jeff referred to as mythology. Or magic – because magic is usually also part of the mythology.

It's very important for us that this inner logic of the concept is playable. Whenever you create an imaginary world, you have to explain the rules to your audience. In Star Wars, we know there is the Force, and in



Harry Potter, you can go to school and learn magic, and in Ninjago, there's the power of *spinjitzu*. In crime shows, you have individual detectives who have specific skills in order to solve crimes.

To create an inner logic that is playable and which may actually make the kids do something, you basically inject play types into this inner logic. Play types may be, say, hide-and-seek, discovery, mission play or nurture play. Then you build your world, your character and your locations based on that, and suddenly, it starts to make sense why this world is like this, why these specific tools are used to do this. In our description of play types, nouns do not belong in the inner logic. It's all about action and doing, so verbs are your friend.

On the one hand, you have this descriptive book of mythology or rules, but on the other hand you want an open world that you want people to engage in. Is there not a dilemma in having a rule book for something that you want to be open to future growth and input from yourselves and from fans?

David Kleeman: We use the term 'the anatomy of your fans', which is about how you move people from being casual fans to being in-depth fans of your brand – and how you use your in-depth fans to bring more people in. That involves opening up to your fans and allowing them to respond to you, listening to them.



What we find with the current generation is that even if you don't accept their suggestions for how to bring their ideas into your world, they appreciate the idea that you're listening. You can improve your 'fanatomy' just by being perceived to be authentic and listening. But then you get these amazing examples where people have really accepted fan input. For example, *Warrior Cats*, originally a book series published by HarperCollins that sold hundreds of millions of copies and also had a very active YouTube and fan fiction community. The publisher let people write and make videos about it. When they decided to put *WarriorCats* on

Roblox, rather than coming to a company like ours and saying, ‘build us a Roblox world,’ they looked at the 15 to 20 *Warrior Cats* worlds in Roblox, and one of them was exactly what they would have created, had they started from scratch. So they entered into a partnership with the teenager in Florida who had created that world. The publisher promised to provide creative and financial resources, provided that the teenager kept going in the same way. So it’s about being open to how others see the world, how your fans see it.

Jeff Gomez: With regard to fan engagement and fan involvement in these worlds, what David was talking about is enormously tricky. I know we’re headed to a new place in the evolution of entertainment which allows for the possibility of fan participation within the context of the canonical universe. The notion that a fan creation, a piece of fan fiction, can be annexed into the canon of a story world is very intriguing.

David Kleeman: Jeff, when you hear Netflix say about all the people creating *Squid Game* games or *Roblox* on various social game platforms, ‘This is great, this is promotion, and it’s also a way that we can find out how our audience sees our content’ – is that a danger zone or ...?

Jeff Gomez: I think that’s wonderful. I’m always a big promoter of fan fiction, fan labour, fan creation, but ask Netflix a slightly different question: ‘I’m a web 3 company, and I have an intellectual property that ought to be a Netflix series.’

And Netflix says, ‘Oh, so you own 100% of this intellectual property?’ And we say, ‘No, actually, 10,000 people have participated and have equity in this intellectual property.’ Netflix isn’t even going to begin to entertain that idea. So this is difficult, because, in a trans-media universe, as a web 3 company, you want to be able to create metaverse components and have it be extensible across multiple media platforms. The model hasn’t been constructed yet that can allow for it.



Mikkel Lee: I think this question of *Squid Game* is really interesting, because I obviously think that play is extremely important and very interesting for my target group. But it’s

also interesting how important it is to adults. And here we have a concept where the inner logic is full of play, like all the kid games from Korea that these poor contestants get to act out.



And it's just phenomenal that this inner logic of play also works for adults. We also saw it in another Netflix show, which was brilliant, *Queens Gambit*, which probably has the best inner logic I've ever seen in my life. You also saw how this world was built up around – spoiler alert! – a poor girl who loses her family, goes to an orphanage, and she's filled with drugs, but she uses them in a clever way. She sort of tricks the system, so that it expands her mind. And this is the inner logic: I can use drugs to get better at playing chess. Not an inner logic that I recommend people play out, but adults also buy into it when these story worlds come with a playable inner logic, and they want to participate and act in it. And we see that on Roblox, and we see that in all the metaverses. People want to be a part of and act out what these brands and concepts are about.

Do you create these descriptions and illustrations as actual books, or are they PDFs or wiki sites?

Jeff Gomez: They're also searchable PDF documents that are cross-referenced, so you can click on a proper noun and be taken to the source element, like a wiki. But when we work with a big Hollywood studio, they want something that looks like a coffee-table book, you know, a big leather-bound oversized document. Our *Men in Black* bible weighs 20 pounds and is made of steel. It looks like it's from outer space.







Exercise 8: Create a multimedia strategy for publishing your universe

Based in your universe, think about online platforms where you can make elements of your universe available. The purpose of this exercise is for you to reflect on how people may experience elements from your universe and perhaps even play with them in other universes. Perhaps you can even imagine how people can play with elements of your universe in competing universes and, similarly, how other universes might be allowed into yours. This exercise is not restricted to digital publishing formats but could also include a strategy that plays out in the physical world.

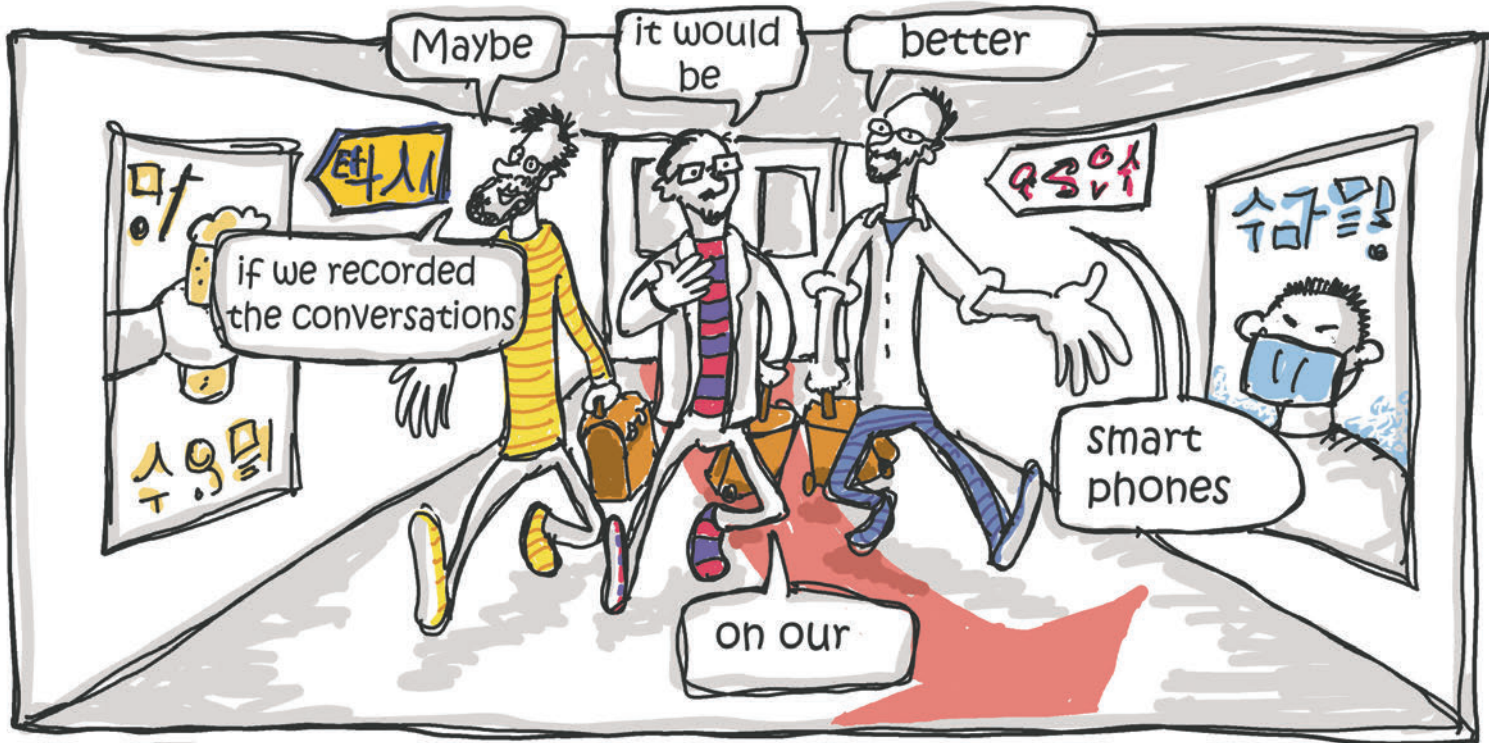
Present your thoughts to a colleague/fellow student/friend and discuss what possibilities they see and how elements of your universe might resonate with other people besides yourself and people like you.

9. Masters of the Universe: Explorers on the search for the ultimate universe



For quite a few years now, we have been gathering knowledge and information about universe building. All that knowledge has now been entered into The Book: thoughts, notes, drawings, conversations and so forth. Most of it is theory, but there is also a fair bit of experience. And now, the time has come for us to head out into the real world. To get out there and meet existing universes. Touch them, spend time in them, sniff around and be touched in return. We are explorers on our way into the black holes of the universe landscape. We hope to discover new insights or find the holy grail. We are completely open and receptive. Seoul is a universe, Tokyo is a universe, and we leave behind the safe and familiar universe of Copenhagen. Like travelling from one galaxy to another The journey starts NOW ...





We invent four rules for our investigations.

Rule no. 1: Always observe what's different from our own world. Don't look for similarities, there are plenty of those – same cars, clothes, hair, international shops, buildings and so on



Rule no. 2: Describe the gigantic structures that hold the universe together. Transport structures, social structures, cultural structures, historical structures.



Rule no. 3: Describe the building blocks/thingies we find that make up the universe.



Rule no. 4: Always be completely open and receptive.



When we discover something that is different or which we don't get, we call it a crack.



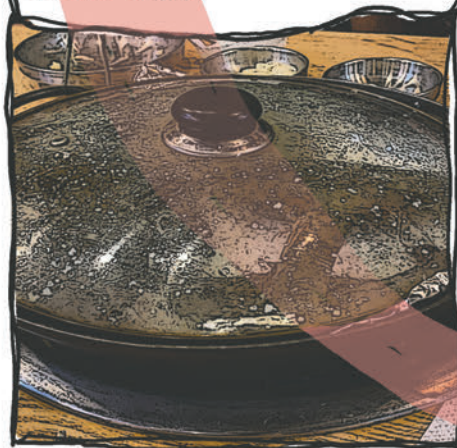
In front of the seafood restaurants, there are fishtanks with live fish, shrimp and squid.



We have heard that you can order live squid that are cut up in front of you and served raw and ultrafresh.



The closest we get to that is live shrimp that are cooked at the table.



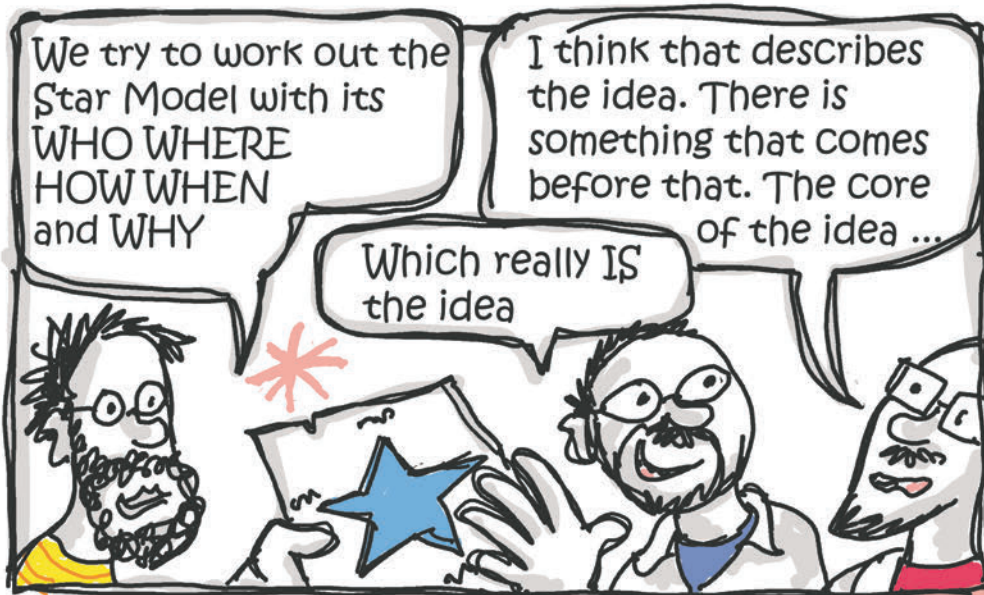
We can't make sense of what they're saying, but to them, it's as clear as day ...



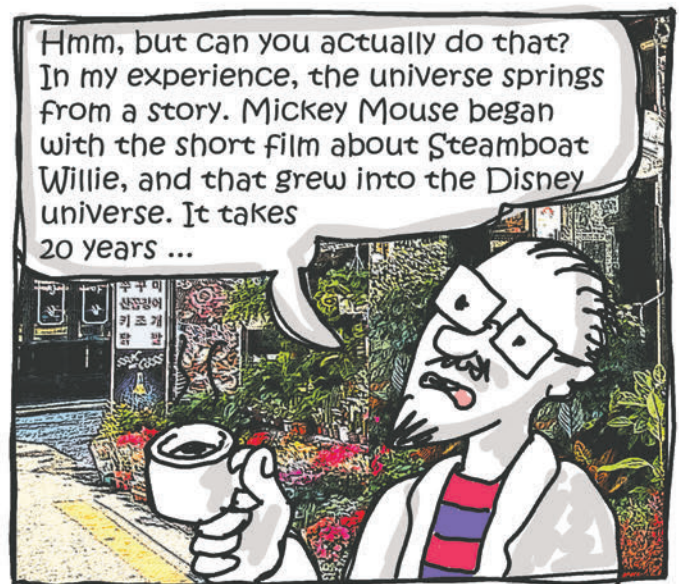
사피이 나
Very good
오침어?

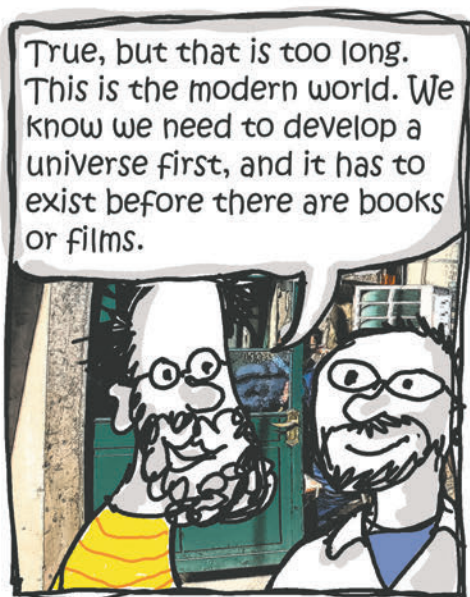


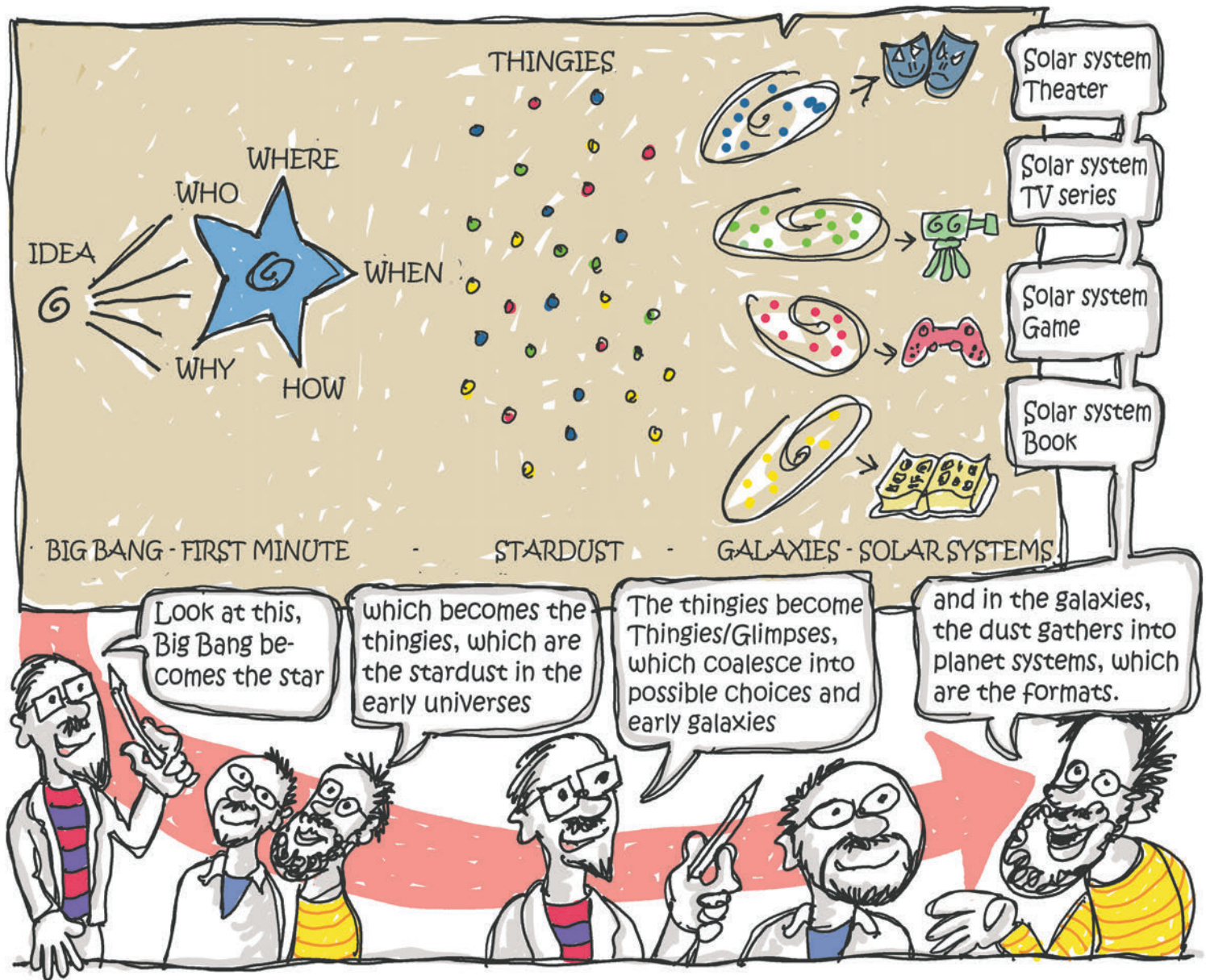
A little later somewhere else



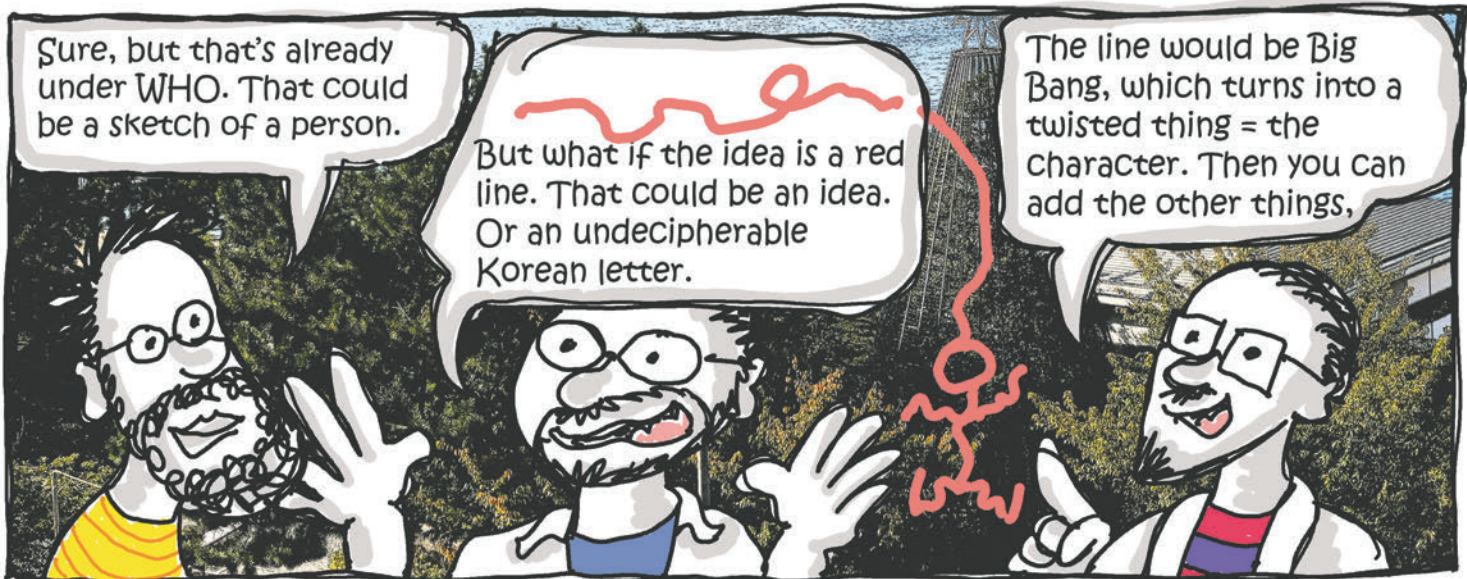
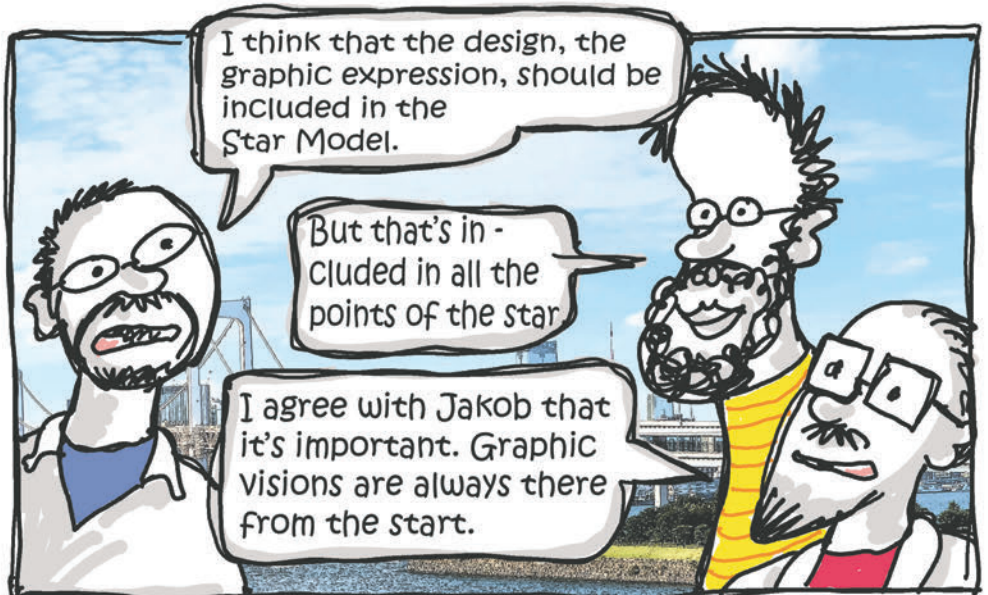


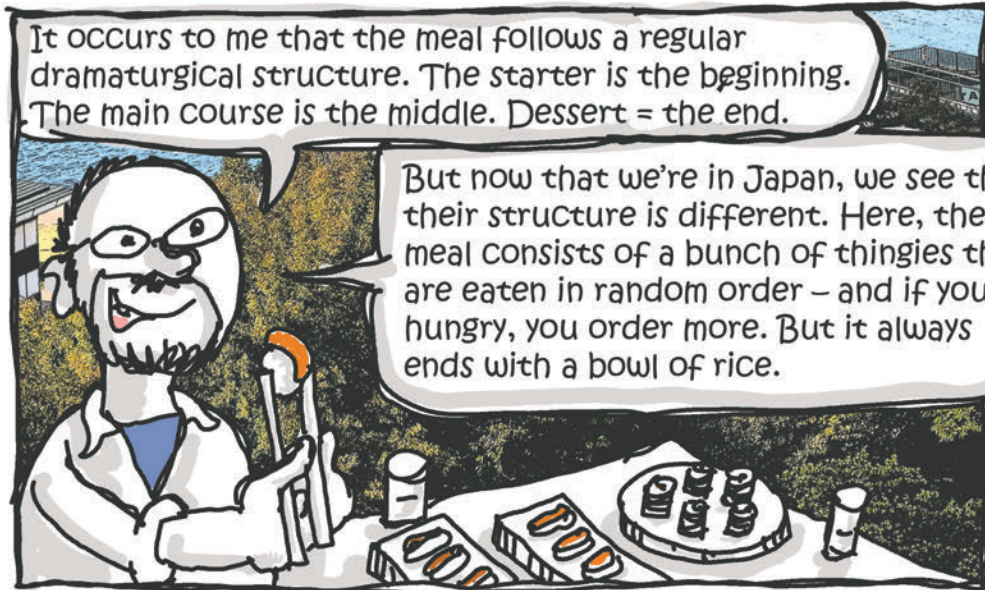












In his book *Empire of Signs*, Roland Barthes says of the Asian cuisine that food is served as a collection of fragments. No part has a privileged position in a structured menu, as in the West. Using your chopsticks, you select your next bite, based on which flavour or colour appeals to you in the moment.



刺身
寿司

We visit animation director Kōji Yamamura and have a long and rewarding conversation about Japanese culture and Japanese storytelling traditions. Yamamura is known for his very artistic short films, and we are curious to discover if our universe development model works here too.

Like our thingies here.

Japanese storytelling consists of a series of moments that turn into a narrative.

Yes, you could say that.

How do you begin one of your films??



I begin with an idea. It might be a picture. A man who has a tree growing on his head. Or a boy in a high-rise. Some of my friends live in a house like that. And I thought, maybe the lift continued into the ground. Deep down, and maybe there would be a forest there that he steps into.



Starting with a dream and then years of work. A long journey before the dream becomes a finished work. A film may take six years to make. I become all the characters as I work.



We noticed that machines in Japan often look like animals. We see animals come to life, but we also see objects come to life.

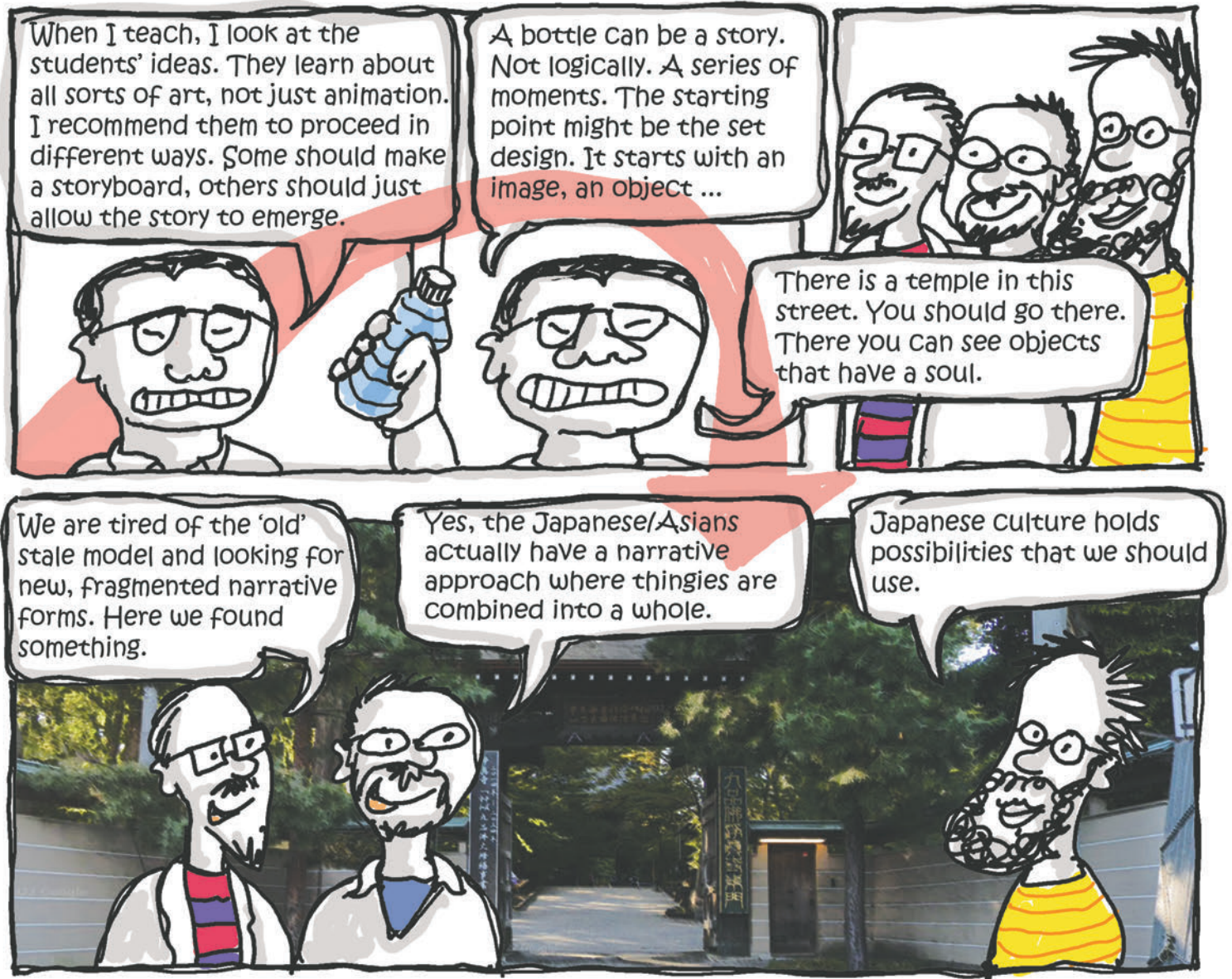


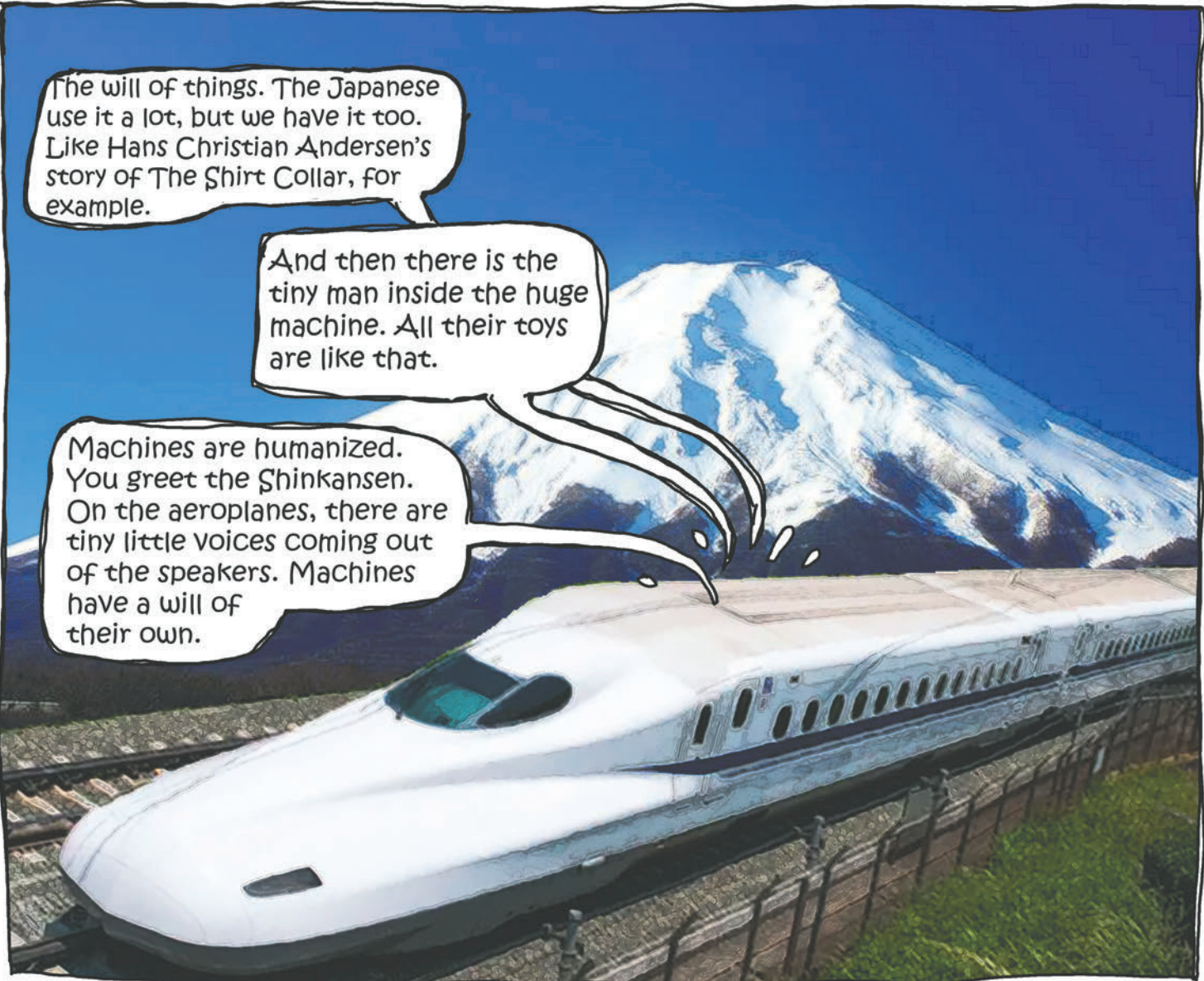
There is a spiritual connection with things. Everything is human. Nature is connected to humans



You can find stones that have a soul. Not all stones, special stones.





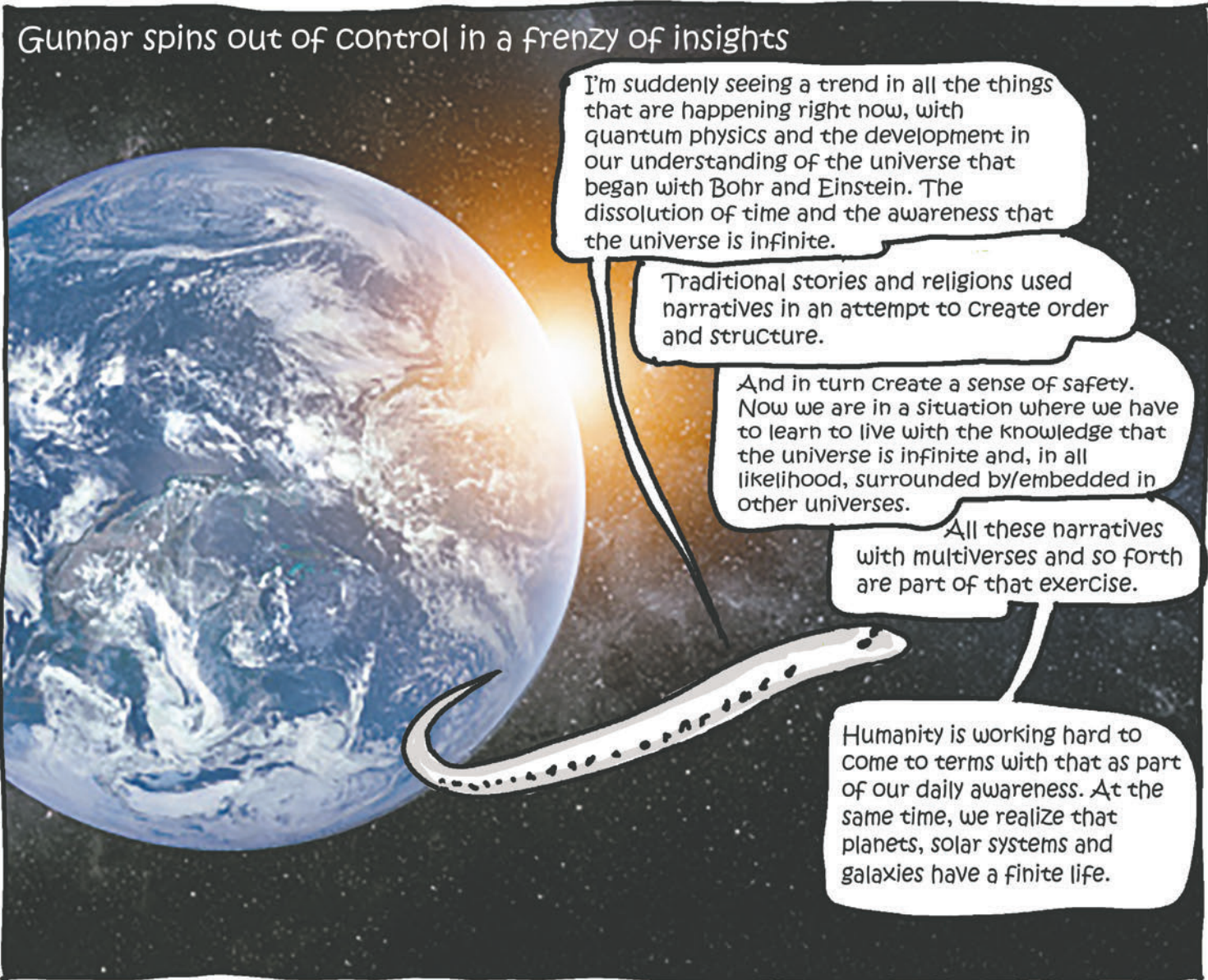
A high-speed train (Shinkansen) is shown on tracks, moving towards the viewer. In the background, the snow-capped peak of Mount Fuji rises against a clear blue sky. The scene is framed by a black border, suggesting it's a panel from a comic or a stylized photograph.

The will of things. The Japanese use it a lot, but we have it too. Like Hans Christian Andersen's story of The Shirt Collar, for example.

And then there is the tiny man inside the huge machine. All their toys are like that.

Machines are humanized. You greet the Shinkansen. On the aeroplanes, there are tiny little voices coming out of the speakers. Machines have a will of their own.

Gunnar spins out of control in a frenzy of insights




I'm suddenly seeing a trend in all the things that are happening right now, with quantum physics and the development in our understanding of the universe that began with Bohr and Einstein. The dissolution of time and the awareness that the universe is infinite.

Traditional stories and religions used narratives in an attempt to create order and structure.

And in turn create a sense of safety. Now we are in a situation where we have to learn to live with the knowledge that the universe is infinite and, in all likelihood, surrounded by/embedded in other universes.

All these narratives with multiverses and so forth are part of that exercise.

Humanity is working hard to come to terms with that as part of our daily awareness. At the same time, we realize that planets, solar systems and galaxies have a finite life.



Resources are not infinite. They can be used up. Imbalances may arise. Everything falls apart, so that new worlds/universes may emerge.

We ask, 'What preceded the Big Bang? What lies beyond the universe?'

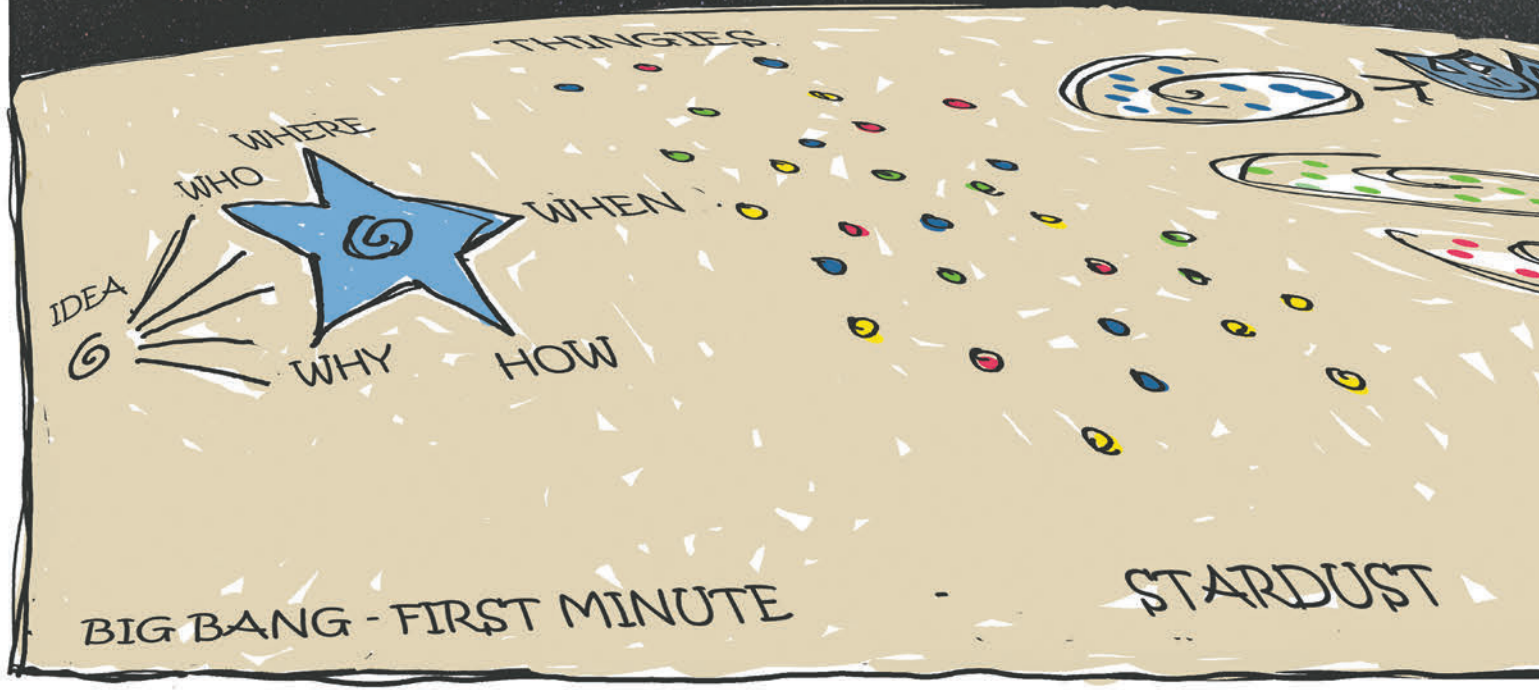
And we ask, 'Where did God come from? Which world does God reside

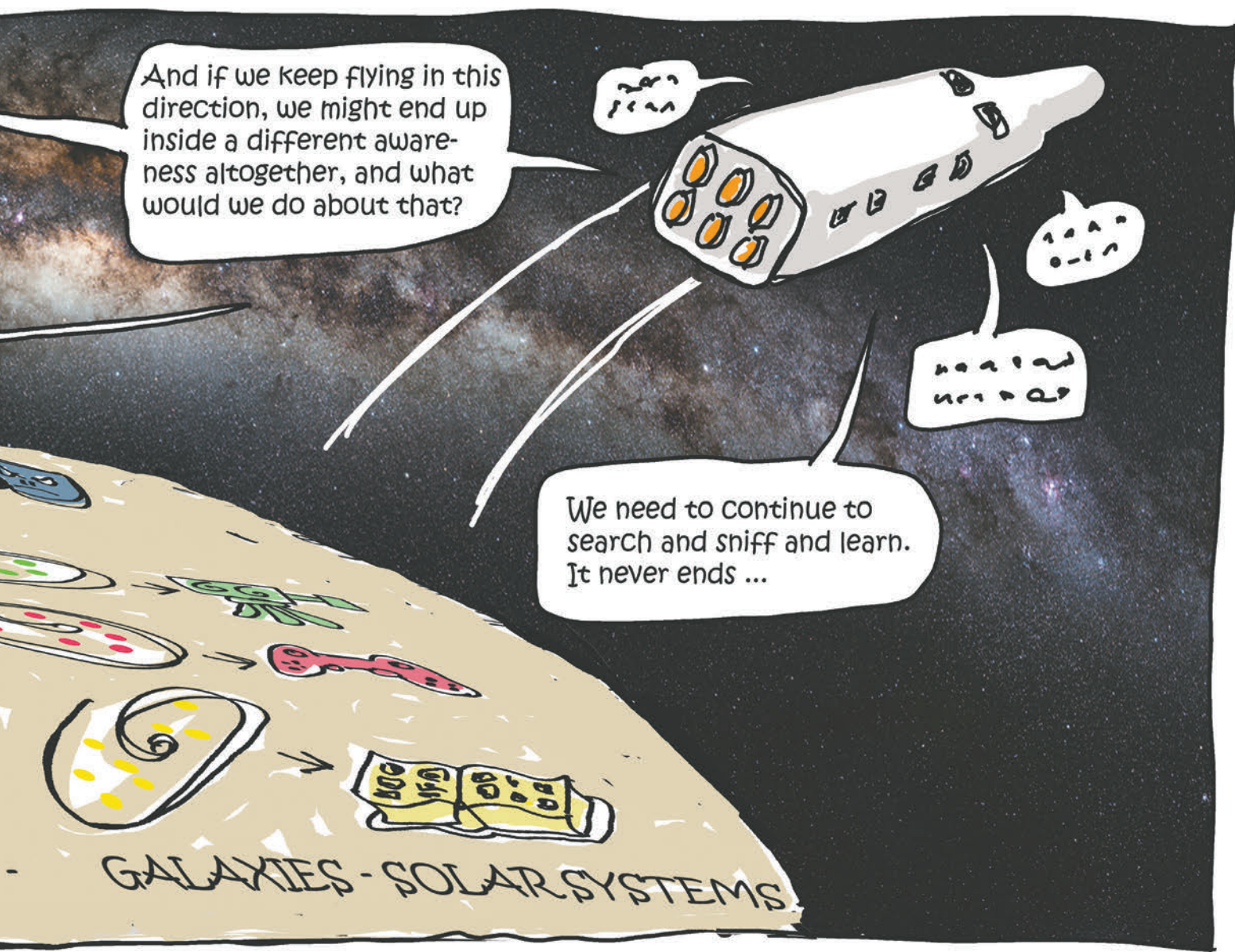
Speaking of quantum physics, which has it that light can be a particle and a wave at the same time ...

Look at that star, for example, It is HOW, WHERE and WHY at the same time

the different universe development models may all be true even though they're different.

And we are WHO and HOW ...





Interviews in chronological order

Alex McDowell (production designer and experimental designer), Los Angeles,	22 November 2017
Susana Tosca (researcher), Zoom,	22 September 2021
Henry Jenkins (researcher), Zoom,	22 September 2021
Stephen Joyce (researcher), Zoom,	22 September 2021
Rob Daviau (game designer), Zoom,	30 August 2022
Nikki Valens (game designer), Zoom,	30 August 2022
Jonathan Gilmour (game designer), Zoom,	30 August 2022
Jeff Gomez (producer and writer), Zoom,	27 September 2022
David Kleeman (media strategist and analyst), Zoom,	27 September 2022
Mikkel Lee (producer and writer), Zoom,	27 September 2022
Jane Barnwell (writer and production designer), Zoom,	28 September 2022
Suzie Davies (production designer), Zoom,	28 September 2022
Udo Kramer (production designer), Zoom,	28 September 2022
Gustav Pontoppidan (production designer), Zoom,	28 September 2022
Jorge R. Gutierrez (animation director), Zoom,	5 October 2022
Karla Nor Holmbäck (animation director), Zoom,	5 October 2022
Peter Lord (animation director), Zoom,	5 October 2022
Chae Kyoung Sun (production designer), Seoul,	16 October 2022
Kōji Yamamura (animation director), Tokyo,	22 October 2022
Koo Bon Won (manga creator), Kyoto,	23 October 2022
Yoo Sookyung (manga creator), Kyoto,	23 October 2022
Tomohiro Tokunaga (producer), Tokyo,	26 October 2022

Works

Film

- 22 July* (2018) Paul Greengrass
- 500 Days of Summer* (2009) Marc Webb
- Arabian Nights* (1974) Pier Paolo Pasolini
- Avatar* (2009) James Cameron
- Batman* (1989) Tim Burton
- Batman Begins* (2005) Christopher Nolan
- Battleship Potemkin* (1925) Sergej Eisenstein
- Belle de Jour* (1967) Luis Buñuel
- Blade Runner* (1982) Ridley Scott
- Breathless* (1959) Jean-Luc Godard
- Casablanca* (1942) Michael Curtiz
- Chicken Run* (2000) Nick Park & Peter Lord
- Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) Steven Spielberg
- Coco* (2017) Adrian Molina & Lee Unkrich
- Cries and Whispers* (1972) Ingmar Bergman
- Deadpool* (2016) Tim Miller
- Decameron* (1971) Pier Paolo Pasolini
- Detective K: Secret of the Virtuous Widow* (2011) Kim Seok-Yoon
- Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022) Sam Raimi
- Dogville* (2004) Lars von Trier
- Double Indemnity* (1944) Billy Wilder
- Dune* (1984) David Lynch
- Dune* (2021) Denis Villeneuve
- Dune 2* (2024) Denis Villeneuve
- Enforcement* (2020) Frederik Louis Hviid & Anders Ølholm
- E.T.* (1982) Steven Spielberg
- Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) Dan Kwan & Daniel Scheinert
- Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015) Sam Taylor-Johnson
- Franz Kafka's A Country Doctor* (2007) Kōji Yamamura
- Frozen* (2013) Chris Buck & Jennifer Lee
- Gangs of New York* (2002) Martin Scorsese
- Godzilla* (1954) Ishirō Honda
- Hellraiser* (1987) Clive Barker
- Holly på Sommerøen* (2018) Karla Nor Holmbäck
- Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) Hayao Miyazaki
- I Am Alive* (1999) Jørgen Leth
- Interstellar* (2014) Christopher Nolan
- Irreversible* (2002) Gaspar Noé
- Jaws* (1975) Steven Spielberg
- La Jetée* (1962) Chris Marker
- Lego Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Out* (2012) Guy Vasilovich
- Lightyear* (2022) Angus MacLane
- Lola* (1998) Tom Tykwer
- Lost Highway* (1980) David Lynch
- M* (1931) Fritz Lang
- Matrix* (1999–) Lana & Lilly Wachowski
- Measuring the World* (2012) Detlev Buck
- Melancholia* (2011) Lars von Trier
- Men in Black* (1997–2019) Barry Sonnenfeld & F. Gary Gray
- My Neighbour Totoro* (1988) Hayao Miyazaki
- Minority Report* (2002) Steven Spielberg
- Mr. Turner* (2014) Mike Leigh
- Mt. Head* (2002) Kōji Yamamura
- Muybridge's Strings* (2011) Kōji Yamamura
- Pirates of the Caribbean* series (2003–2017) Gore Verbinski et al.
- Planet of the Apes* (1968) Franklin J. Schaffner
- Planet of the Apes* (2001) Tim Burton
- Point Break* (2015) Ericson Core
- Rashomon* (1950) Akira Kurosawa
- Ready Player One* (2018) Steven Spielberg
- Rosa and the Stone Troll* (2023) Karla Nor Holmbäck

- Rosemary's Baby* (1968) Roman Polanski
- Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010) Edgar Wright
- Son of Jaguar* (2017) Jorge R. Gutierrez
- Son of Saul* (2015) László Nemes
- Spider-Man* (2002) Sam Raimi
- Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018) Peter Ramsey, Rodney Rodriguez & Bob Persichetti
- Stalker* (1979) Andrei Tarkovsky
- Stand by Me* (1986) Robert Norman Reinher
- Star Wars* series (1977–) George Lucas et al.
- Strike* (1925) Sergei Eisenstein
- Suzume* (2022) Makoto Shinkai
- Terminator* (1984) James Cameron
- Terminator 2* (1991) James Cameron
- The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989) Peter Greenaway
- The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* (2021) Will Sharpe
- The Fortress* (2017) Hwang Dong-hyuk
- The Guilty* (2018) Gustav Möller
- The Lighthouse* (2019) Robert Eggers
- The Little Mermaid* (1989) John Musker & Ron Clements
- The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003) Peter Jackson
- The Philadelphia Story* (1940) George Cukor
- The Royal Tailor* (2014) Lee Won-suk
- The Wizard of Oz* (1939) Victor Fleming
- The Zookeeper's Wife* (2017) Niki Caro
- Tony Takitani* (2004) Jun Ichikawa
- Transformers* (2007) Michael Bay
- Twilight* series (2008–2012) Chatrine Hardwicke et al.
- Une Partie de Campagne* (1946) Jean Renoir
- Watchmen* (2009) Zack Snyder
- Wings of Desire* (1987) Wim Wenders
- Winter Brothers* (2017) Hlynur Pálmason
- Wonder Woman 1984* (1989) Patty Jenkins
- Your Name* (2016) Makoto Shinkai
- Zootopia* (2016) Byron Howard, Rich Moore & Jared Bush
- TV series**
- 1899* (2022) Baran bo Odar & Jantje Friese
- Adventure Time* (2010–) Pendleton Ward
- Altered Carbon* (2018–2020) Laeta Kalogridis
- Arcane* (2021–) Christian Linke & Alex Yee
- Aria: The Animation* (2005) Kozue Amano
- Better Call Saul* (2015–) Vince Gilligan & Peter Gould
- Borgen* (2010–2022) Adam Price
- Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) Vince Gilligan
- Dark* (2017–2020) Baran bo Odar & Jantje Friese
- Dickinson* (2019–2021) Alena Smith
- Doctor Who* (1963–) Sydney Newman, C. E. Webber, Donald Wilson et al.
- Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) David Benioff & D.B. Weiss
- Hidden Side* (2019–) Mikkel Lee
- K9* (2009–2010) Bob Baker & Dave Martin
- Kamikaze* (2021) Annette K. Olesen
- LEGO Nexo Knights* (2015–2017) Mikkel Lee
- Lego Star Wars* (2016–) Bill Motz, Bob Roth et al.
- Lost* (2004–2010) J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof & Jeffrey Lieber
- Maya and the Three* (2018) Jorge R. Gutierrez
- Ms. Marvel* (2022–) Bisha K. Ali
- Nashville* (2012–2018) Callie Khouri
- Obi-Wan Kenobi* (2022) Hossein Amini
- Onkel Reje* (2013–) Mads Geertsen
- Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016) John Logan
- Russian Doll* (2019–) Natasha Lyonne, Leslye Headland & Amy Poehler
- Shame* (2015–2017) Julie Andem
- Shaun the Sheep* (1995–2002) Nick Park
- Squid Game* (2021–) Hwang Dong-hyuk

Stranger Things (2016–) Matt & Ross Duffer

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (2012–2017) Kevin Eastman & Peter Laird

The Addams Family (1964–) David Levy & Donald Saltzman

The Bridge (2011–2018) Hans Rosenfeldt, Camilla Ahlgren, Nikolaj Scherfig et al.

The Kingdom (1994–2022) Lars von Trier

The Last of Us (2023–) Craig Mazin & Neil Druckmann

The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power (2022) J.D. Payne & Patrick McKay

The Makanai: Cooking For The Maiko House (2023) Hirokazu Kore-eda

The Mandalorian (2019–) Jon Favreau

The Sarah Jane Adventures (2007–2020) Russell T. Davies

The Walking Dead (2010–) Frank Darabont

The Wire (2002–2008) David Simon

The Witcher (2019–) Lauren Schmidt Hissrich

Torchwood (2006–2011) Russell T. Davies

Wallace and Gromit (1989–) Nick Park

Watchmen (2019) Damon Lindelof

Wednesday (2022–) Alfred Gough & Miles Millar

Literature

1Q84 (2009–2010) Haruki Murakami

After (2015–) Anna Todd

A Game of Thrones (1989–) George R. R. Martin

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) Lewis Carroll

Amlet (1160) Saxo

Butcher's Crossing (1960) John Williams

Comic Engineers (1950) Clifford D. Simak

Crime and Punishment (1866) Fyodor Dostoevsky

Decameron (1349–52) Giovanni Boccaccio

De Wille Dreng (2019) Gunnar Wille

Dune (1965) Frank Herbert

Eden (1958) Stanislaw Lem

Fifty Shades of Grey (2011) E.L. James

Gilgamesh (4000 BCE) Unknown

Hvisken og råb (1972) Ingmar Bergman

Iliad (c. 700 BCE) Homer

Invisible Cities (1972) Italo Calvino

James Bond (1953–1966) Ian Fleming

Minority Report (1956) Philip K. Dick

Neuromancer (1984) William Gibson

Oliver Twist (1838) Charles Dickens

Out of Africa (1937) Karen Blixen

Pride and Prejudice (1813) Jane Austin

Sherlock Holmes (1897–) Arthur Conan Doyle

Skruppen fra det ydre rum (2007) Gunnar Wille

Snorri's Edda (c. 1220) Snorre Sturluson

Snow Crash (1992) Neal Stephenson

The Aleph (1945) Jorge Luis Borges

The Alexandria Quartet (1957–60) Lawrence Durrell

The Employees (2018) Olga Ravn

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1950) C.S. Lewis

The Little Mermaid (1837) H.C. Andersen

The Lord of the Rings (1954–1955) J. R. R. Tolkien

The Moomins (1945–1955) Tove Jansson

The Magician's Nephew (1955) C.S. Lewis

The Odyssey (675 BCE) Homer

The Silmarillion (1977) J.R.R. Tolkien

The Snow Queen (1844) H.C. Andersen

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900) L. Frank Baum

Tony Takitani (1996) Haruki Murakami

Treasure Island (1883) Robert Louis Stevenson

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1994) Haruki Murakami

Warrior Cats (2003–) Erin Hunter & Dan Jolley

Winnie-the-Pooh (1925) Alan Alexander Milne

Comics

Batman (1939–) Bob Kane & Bill Finger

Donald Duck (1934–) Walt Disney

Gundam (1979) Yoshiyuki Tomino
K-ON! (2007) Kakifly
Moomintroll (1954–1959) Tove Jansson
One Piece (1999–2023) Eiichiro Oda
Pacific Rim: Tales From Year Zero (2013) Travis Beacham
Sailor Moon (1991–1995) Naoko Takeuchi
Scott Pilgrim (2004–2010) Bryan Lee O'Malley
Superman (1938–) Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster
The Walking Dead (2003–) Robert Kirkman & Tony Moore
Valérian and Laureline (1967–) Pierre Christin & Jean-Claude Mézières
Valérian and Laureline: Where Stories Are Born (2022) P. Christin & Virginie Augustin
Watchmen (1986–) Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons
Yokohama Kaidashi Kikou (1994–2006) Hitoshi Ashinano

Computer games

Blackout (1997) Deadline Games
BlockStraPlanet (2014–) MovieStarPlanet
Core (2020) Manticore Games Inc.
Cyberpunk 2077 (2020) CD Projekt RED
Dreamlight Valley (2022–) Gameloft
Dune (1992) Cryo Interactive
Englen (1999) Deadline Games

Florence (2020) Annapurna Interactive
Fortnite (2017–) Epic Games & People Can Fly
God of War II (2007) Santa Monica Studio
Halo (2001–2021) Bungie Studios
Headventures in the Underworld (2016) Luis Gustavo de Arruda Sampaio
Journey (2019) Jenova Chen
League of Legends (2009–) Rito Games
Lego Star Wars (2005–) Traveller's Tales
Limbo (2010) Playdead
Minecraft (2011–) Mojang Studios
Myst (1993–1996) Robyn & Rand Miller
Neon Knights (2022) Eddaheim
Psychonauts (2005) Double Fine Productions
Roblox (2006–) Roblox Corporation
Second Life (2003) Linden Lab
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (2011) Bethesda Game Studios

The Last of Us (2013–) Naughty Dog
The Sandbox (2012–) PIXOWL INC.
The Witcher (2007–2015) CD Projekt RED
Watchmen: The End is Nigh (2009) Deadline Games

Board games

Betrayal Legacy (2018) Rob Daviau

Dead of Winter: A Crossroads Game (2014) Jonathan Gilmour
Dinosaur Island (2019) Jonathan Gilmour
Downforce (2017) Rob Daviau
Dungeons & Dragons (1974–) Gary Gygax & Dave Arneson
Eldritch Horror (2013–2018) Nikki Valens
Kids on Bikes (2018) Jonathan Gilmour
Legacy of Dragonholt (2017) Nikki Valens
Mansions of Madness (2016–2017) Nikki Valens
Mountains of Madness (2017) Rob Daviau
Pandemic Legacy (2015–2020) Rob Daviau
Quirky Circuits (2019) Nikki Valens
Return to Dark Tower (2021) Rob Daviau
Risk Legacy (2012) Rob Daviau

Theatre

A Dream Play (1907) August Strindberg
As You Like It (1623) William Shakespeare
Hamlet (1603) William Shakespeare
Medea (431 BCE) Euripides
Oedipus Rex (429 BCE) Sophokles
The Persians (472 BCE) Aeschylus

VR

End of Night (2021) David Adler

Bibliography

A

Abrams, J.J. & Damon Lindelof. 2004. *Lost: Lost Series Bible*. <https://screencraft.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Lost-Series-Bible.pdf>

Aggerholm, Naja, Jakob Ion Wille & Kim Toft Hansen. 2020. *Production Design: Fra proces til udtryk*. Samfundslitteratur.

Albertsen, Anita Bech. 2023. "Transmedia worldbuilding and mashup mythology in Penny Dreadful". *Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media*, 2(1).

Andersen, Mads Møller T. 2022. *Researching Creativity in Media Industries*. Lexington Books.

Andreasen, Simon Jon. 2020. *Storyworld 2.0. Research catalogue: An international database for artistic research*. <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-exposition?exposition=982784>

Aristotle. 2000. *Poetics*. Trans. S. H. Butcher. Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication.

B

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 2006. *Rum, Tid & Historie: Kronotopens former i europæisk litteratur*. Forlaget Klim.

Ball, Matthew. 2021. "The Metaverse: What it is, where to find it, and who will build it". MatthewBall.Vc, 13 January. <https://www.matthewball.vc/all/themetaverse>

Barnwell, Jane. 2003. *Production Design – Architects of the Screen*. Wallflower Press

Barnwell, Jane. 2017. *Production Design for Screen – Visual Storytelling in Film and Television*. Bloomsbury.

Barthes, Roland. 1983. *Empire of Signs*. Hill and Wang.

Barthes, Roland. [1957] 1972. *Mythologies*. Paladin.

Beacham, Travis. 2013. *Pacific Rim: Tales From Year Zero*. Legendary Comics.

Becker, Howard Saul. 2008. *Art Worlds*. University of California Press.

Benjamin, Walther. [1936] 1996. *Fortælleren og Andre Essays*. Gyldendal.

Binder, Thomas & Maria Foverskov. 2010. "Design as everyday theatre:

Re-thinking co-design as social drama". In Joachim Halse, Eva Brandt, Brendon Clark & Thomas Binder (Eds.), *Rehearsing the Future*. The Danish Design School Press: 204–209.

Blixen, Karen. 1937. *Out of Africa*. Putnam.

Bolter, Jay David & Richard Grusin. 2000. *Remediation: Understanding new media*. The MIT Press.

Boni, Marta. 2017. *World Building: Transmedia, fans, industries*. Amsterdam University Press.

Bordwell, David. [1986] 1995. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Routledge.

Bordwell, David. 1989. *Making Meaning: Inference and rhetoric in the interpretation of cinema*. Harvard University Press.

Bordwell, David. 2005. *Figures Traced in Light: On cinematic staging*. University of California Press.

Bordwell, David. 2007. *Poetics of Cinema*. Routledge.

Bordwell, David. 2009. *Now Leaving From Platform 1*. David Bordwell's website on cinema, 19 August. <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2009/08/19/now-leaving-from-platform-1/>

Bostrom, Nick. 2003. "Are you living in a computer simulation?". *Philosophical Quarterly*, 53(211): 243–255.

Boyd, Brian. 2009. *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, cognition, and fiction*. Harvard University Press & Belknap Press.

Branigan, Edward. 1992. *Narrative Comprehension and Film*. Routledge.

Brecht, Bertolt. [1960] 1982. *Om Tidendes Teater: En ikke-aristotelisk dramatik*. Gyldendal.

British Design Council. 2023. <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/>

Bucciarelli, Louis L. 2002. "Between thought and object in engineering design". *Design Studies*, 23(3): 219–231.

C

Caldwell, John Thornton. 2008. *Production Culture: Industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television*. Duke University Press.

Campbell, Joseph. 1990. *The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on his life and work*. Harper & Row.

Carroll, Joseph. 2019. "Biokulturel litteraturteori og -kritik". In Trine Kellberg Nielsen, Casper Andersen, Alexander R. Kratschmer & Mathias Clasen (Eds.), *Menneske, Kultur, Evolution: Et biokulturelt perspektiv*. Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

Chatman, Seymour. 1980. "What novels can do that films can't (and vice versa)". *Critical Inquiry*, 7(1): 121–140.

Christensen, Nikolaj. 2023. *Midt i Fortællingen: En grundbog i audiovisuel dramaturgi*. Forlaget Ajour og Samfundslitteratur.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 1999. "Implications of a systems perspective for the study of creativity". In Robert J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of Creativity*. Cambridge University Press: 313–336.

D

Darke, Jane. 1979. "The primary generator and the design process". *Design Studies*, 1(1): 36–44.

Deleuze, Gilles. 2013a. *Cinema I*. Bloomsbury.

Deleuze, Gilles. 2013b. *Cinema II*. Bloomsbury.

Deleuze, Gilles & Félix Guattari. [1980] 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Trans.

Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press.

Domsch, Sebastian. 2014. "Staging icons, performing storyworlds: From mystery play to cosplay." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 9(1): 125–139.

E

Eco, Umberto. 1994. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Harvard University Press.

Eco, Umberto. 2009. *The Infinity of Lists*. Rizzoli International Publications.

Eco, Umberto. 2013. *The Book of Legendary Lands*. Rizzoli International Publications.

Egri, Lajos. [1942] 1988. *The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its basis in the creative interpretation of human motives*. Touchstone Books.

Eiji, Ōtsuka & Marc Steinberg. 2010. "World and variation: The reproduction and consumption of narrative". *Mechademia*, 5(1): 99–116.

Einfeldt, Martin. 2020. *Kreativitet, Innovation Og Humor: De bedste teorier og de bedste råd*. Samfundslitteratur.

Engholm, Ida. 2023. *Design for the New World*. Intellect Books.

England, Liz. 2014. "The door problem' of game design". *Game Developer*, 24 April. <https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/-quot-the-door-problem-quot-of-game-design>

Eno, Brian. 2016. "Brian Eno on 'scenius' aka community 'genius'". *Facebook, MOTA – Museum of Transitory Art*, 1 September. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1192642650799133>

F

Freeman, Matthew. 2019. *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early twentieth-century transmedia story worlds*. Routledge.

Fullerton, Tracy. 2018. *Game Design Workshop: A playcentric approach to creating innovative games*. CRC Press.

G

Gibson, James J. 1979. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Houghton Mifflin.

Gottschall, Jonathan. 2013. *The Storytelling Animal: How stories make us human*. Mariner Books.

Graham, Scott & Steven Hoggett. 2014. *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theater: Book of devising theatre*. Routledge.

Grodal, Torben Kragh. 2003. *Filmoplevelse: En indføring i audiovisuel teori og analyse*. Samfundslitteratur.

Grodal, Torben Kragh. 2009. *Embodied Visions: Evolution, emotion, culture, and film*. Oxford University Press.

Grodal, Torben Kragh. 2017. "How film genres are a product of biology, evolution and culture: An embodied approach". *Palgrave Communications*, 3(1).

H

Halligan, Fionnuala. 2012. *Production Design*. ILEX.

Harvey, Colin B. 2014. "A taxonomy of transmedia storytelling". In Marie-Laure Ryan & Jan-Noël Thon (Eds.), *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a media-conscious narratology*. University of Nebraska Press: 278–294.

Herman, David. 2009. *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Herman, David. 2017. *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*. The MIT Press.

Hitchcock, Alfred. 1937. "Direction". In Charles Davy (Ed.), *Footnotes to the Film*. Lovat Dickson Ltd.

Hutcheon, Linda. 2012. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge.

I

Ingold, Tim. 2015. *The Life of Lines*. Routledge.

Ingold, Tim. 2007. *Lines: A brief history*. Routledge.

J

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 2009. "The aesthetics of transmedia: In response to David Bordwell (Part One)". *Pop Junctions*, 10 September. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/09/the_aesthetics_of_transmedia_i.html

Jenkins, Henry. 2003. "Building Imaginary Worlds: An Interview with Mark J.P. Wolf (Part One)". *Pop Junctions*, 2 September. <http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2013/09/building-imaginary-worlds-an-interview-with-mark-j-p-wolf-part-one.html>

Jenkins, Henry. 2014. "The reign of the 'mothership': Transmedia's past, present, and possible futures". In Denise Mann (Ed.), *Wired TV: Laboring over an interactive future*. Rutgers University Press: 244–268.

Johnson, Steven. 2011. *Where Good Ideas Come From: The natural history of innovation*. Riverhead Books.

Joyce, Stephen. 2023. "Video games in transmedia storyworlds: The witcher and the motherhood problem". *Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media*, 2(1).

Juul, Jesper. 2005. *Half-Real: Video games between real rules and fictional worlds*. The MIT Press.

Jørgensen, Kristine. 2007. "On trans-diegetic sounds in computer games". *Northern Lights*, 5(1): 105–117.

K

Kindree, Jimmy. 2019. "Is conflict necessary? Kishōtenketsu and the conflict-less plot". *Words like trees*, 27 January. <https://wordsliketrees.wordpress.com/2019/01/27/is-conflict-necessary-kishotenketsu-and-the-conflict-less-plot/>

King, Stephen. 2010. *On Writing: A memoir of the craft*. Scribner.

Kirby, David. 2010. "The future is now: Diegetic prototypes and the role of popular films in generating real-world technological development". *Social Studies of Science*, 40(1): 41–70.

Kjølner, Torunn. 2001. "Devised theatre: Experimental drama". In Bjørn Rasmussen, Torunn Kjølner, Viveka Rasmusson & Hannu Heikkinen (Eds.), *Nordic Voices: In Drama, The-*

atre and Education. Idea Publications: 73–91.

Klastrup, Lisbeth. 2008. "The worldness of EverQuest: Exploring a 21st century fiction". *Game Studies*, 9(1).

Klastrup, Lisbeth & Susana Tosca. 2014. "Game of Thrones: Trans-medial worlds, fandom, and social gaming". In Marie-Laure Ryan & Jan-Noël Thon (Eds.), *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a media-conscious narratology*. University of Nebraska Press: 295–314.

Kleeman, David. 2022. *Ready for Metaverse?* Talk, 22 August. Copenhagen TV Festival.

Kleon, Austin. 2021. *3 Stories About Artificial Intelligence*. Austin Kleon, 10 October. <https://austinkleon.com/2021/10/10/eh-aye/>

L

Larsen, Peter Harms. 2003. *De Leven- de Billeders Dramaturgi*. DR.

Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford University Press.

Laurel, Brenda. 1991. *Computers As Theatre*. Addison Wesley.

Lefebvre, Martin. 2006. *Landscape and Film*. Routledge.

Le Guin, Ursula K. 1994. Introduction. In Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Fisher-man of the Inland Sea*. Orion.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 1999. *Postdramatisches Theater*. Verlag der Autoren.

Lemarchand, Richard. 2021. *A Playful Production Process: For game designers (and everyone)*. The MIT Press.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. [1962] 2021. *Wild Thought*. University of Chicago Press.

Lewis-Jones, Huw. 2018. *The Writer's Map: An atlas of imaginary lands*. Thames & Hudson Ltd.

Lisowski, Tom. 2012. "Nathan Crowley". Artstars: Conversations with production designers & art directors, 16 December. <http://www.artstars.us/?p=832>

Lundholt, Marianne Wolff & Per Krogh Hansen (Eds.). 2019. *Kommunikationsmodeller*. Samfundslitteratur.

Lynch, David. 2007. *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness and Creativity*. TarcherPerigee.

Lynch, David & Kristine McKenna. 2018. *Room to Dream*. Gads Forlag.

M

Manguel, Alberto & Gianni Guadalupi. 2000. *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places: The newly updated and expanded classic*. Mariner Books.

McCloud, Scott. 1993. *Understanding Comics*. William Morrow.

McDowell, Alex. 2017. "PD4C21: Production design for the 21st century". *Kosmorama*, 268.

McKee, Robert. 1997. *Story: Substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting*. HarperCollins Publishers.

McLuhan, Marshall & Quentin Fiore. 1967. *The Medium is the Massage: An inventory of effects*. Random House.

McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The extensions of man*. McGraw-Hill.

Miller, Laura. 2016. *Literary Wonderlands: A journey through the greatest fictional worlds ever created*. Black Dog & Leventhal.

Mittell, Jason. 2014. "Strategies of storytelling on transmedia television". In Marie-Laure Ryan & Jan-Noël Thon (Eds.), *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*. University of Nebraska Press, pp. 253–277.

Mittell, Jason. 2015. *Complex TV: The poetics of contemporary television storytelling*. New York University Press.

Mulvey, Laura. [1975] 1999. "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema". In Leo Braudy & Marshall Cohen (Eds.),

Film Theory and Criticism. Oxford University Press.

Murakami, Haruki. 2021. *Murakami T: The T-shirts I Love*. Alfred A. Knopf.

N

Nielsen, Jakob Isak. 2004. "Bordwell on Bordwell: Part II: Functions of style". 16:9, 8.

Norman, Donald A. 1998. *The Design of Everyday Things*. The MIT Press.

O

Oddey, Alison. 1994. *Devising Theatre: A practical and theoretical handbook*. Routledge.

Ödlund, Nils. [n.d.]. "Kishōtenketsu for Beginners: An introduction to four act story structure." *Mythic Scribes: The art of fantasy storytelling*. <https://mythicscribes.com/plot/kishotenketsu/>

Olsson, Ola. 1982. *Några Anteckningar om Dramaturgi*. Nordiska Teaterkommittén.

P

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. [1965] 1988. "The screenplay as a 'structure that wants to be another structure'". In Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Em-*

piricism. Indiana University Press: 187–196.

Peirce, Charles Sanders. [1903] 1998. "What is a sign?". In Peirce Edition Project (Ed.), *The Essential Peirce*, Volume 2. Indiana University Press.

Pratten, Robert. 2011. *Getting Started in Transmedia Storytelling: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

@rainbow09. [n.d.]. "The kishotenketsu structure of digimon adventure tri: An insight to traditional Japanese storytelling". *Tumblr*. <https://firstagent.tumblr.com/post/170017182946/the-kishotenketsu-structure-of-digimon-adventure>

R

Ravenscraft, Eric. 2022. "What is the metaverse, exactly?". *Wired*, 25 April. <https://www.wired.com/story/what-is-the-metaverse/>

Redvall, Eva Novrup. 2018. "Reaching young audiences through research: Using the NABC method to create the Norwegian web teenage drama SKAM/Shame". In Davinia Thornley (Ed.), *True Event Adaptation: Scripting real lives*. Palgrave Macmillan: 143–161.

Redvall, Eva Novrup & Hanne Bruun. 2022. *Medieproduktionsanalyse*. Samfundslitteratur.

Rose, Frank. 2012. *The art of immersion: How the digital generation is remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the way we tell stories*. W.W. Norton & Company.

Rovelli, Carlo. [2017] 2018. *The Order of Time*. Penguin Books.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. 1980. "Fiction, non-factual, and the principle of minimal departure". *Poetics*, 9(4): 403–422.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2005. *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2*. John Hopkins University Press.

Ryan, Marie-Laure, Kenneth Foote & Maoz Azaryahu. 2016. *Narrating Space/Spatializing narrative: Where narrative theory and geography meet*. Ohio State University Press.

Ryan, Marie-Laure & Jan-Noël Thon. 2014. *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a media-conscious narratology*. University of Nebraska Press.

Ryum, Ulla. 1982. *Om den Ikke-Aristoteliske Fortellerteknik: Rapport från seminaret 'Dramatikern i Dialog med sin Samtid'*. Nordiska Teaterkommittén.

S

Salen, Katie & Eric Zimmerman. 2003. *Rules of Play: Game design fundamentals*. The MIT Press.

Scorsese, Martin. 2019. "I Said Marvel Movies Aren't Cinema. Let Me Explain" *The New York Times*. 4 November. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/opinion/martin-scorsese-marvel.html>

Shah, Mohamad Razeef, Mohamed Eshaq Ahmad Rafi & Vimala Perumal. 2023. *Investigating Storytelling Differences Between Western and Eastern Computer Animation*. Atlantis Press.

Simon, David. 2000. *The Wire: A dramatic series for HBO: The Wire series bible*. https://screencraft.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The_Wire_-_Bible.pdf

Sinek, Simon. 2011. *Start With Why: How great leaders inspire everyone to take action*. Portfolio.

Smith, Harvey & Matthias Worch. 2010. *What Happened Here? Environmental storytelling*, Game Developers Conference.

Stanislavsky, Konstantin. [1957] 2001. *The Actor: Work on oneself: The creative process of re-experiencing, Part I, CWE Volume I*. Routledge.

Star, Susan Leigh & James R. Griesemer. 1989. "Institutional ecology, 'translations' and boundary objects: Amateurs and professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology,

1907–39". *Social Studies of Science*, 19(3): 387–420.

Steinberg, Marc. 2012. "Condensing the media mix: Multiple possible worlds in the Tatami Galaxy". *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 21(2): 71–92.

Strindberg, August. [1907] 2019. *A Dream Play*. SFA–89.

Szatkowski, Janek. 1989. "Dramaturgiske modeller: Om dramaturgisk tekstanalyse". In Erik Exe Christoffersen, Torunn Kjølner & Janek Szatkowski (Eds.), *Dramaturgisk analyse: En antologi*: 9–90. Aarhus Universitet.

T

Tarkovsky, Andrei. 1986. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the cinema*. The Bodley Head Ltd.

Tashiro, C.S. 1998. *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History of Film*. University of Texas Press.

The Duffer Brothers. [n.d.] *Montauk: An epic tale of sci fi horror: Stranger Things series bible*. https://screencraft.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/StrangerThings_Bible.pdf

Thon, Jan-Noël. 2014. "Subjectivity across media: On transmedial strategies of subjective representation in

contemporary feature films, graphic novels, and computer games". In Marie-Laure Ryan & Jan-Noël Thon (Eds.), *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a media-conscious narratology*. University of Nebraska Press: 67–102.

Thon, Jan-Noël. 2016. *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*. University of Nebraska Press.

Thoss, Jeff. 2014. "Tell it like a game: Scott Pilgrim and performative media rivalry". In Marie-Laure Ryan & Jan-Noël Thon (Eds.), *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a media-conscious narratology*. University of Nebraska Press: 211–229.

Tolkien, J. R. R. [1939] 2008. *On Fairy Stories*. HarperCollins.

Tosca, Susana & Lisbeth Klastrup. 2019. *Transmedial Worlds in Everyday Life: Networked reception, social media, and fictional worlds*. Routledge.

Truby, John. 2007. *The Anatomy of Story: 22 steps to becoming a master storyteller*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

V

Vogler, Christopher. 1992. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic structures for storytellers and screenwriters*. M. Wiese Productions.

W

Ward, Pendleton. [n.d.] *Adventure Time: Adventure Time Series bible*. <https://screencraft.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/AdventureTimeSeriesBible.pdf>

Wenders, Wim. 1991. *The logic of images: Essays and conversations*. Faber and Faber.

Wille, Jakob Ion. 2015a. *Film som design: Design af levende billeder i film og tv-serier*. PhD dissertation, Copenhagen Business School.

Wille, Jakob Ion. 2015b. "Shaping dreams: Design ideas and design fiction in movie and television production design". *Artifact*, 3(4): 9.1–9.10.

Wille, Jakob Ion & Anne Marit Wade. 2016. "Production design and location in the Danish television drama series *The Legacy*". *Kosmorama*, 263.

Wille, Jakob Ion & Eva Novrup Redvall. 2017. "Production design and the creation of story worlds: Introduction". *Kosmorama*, 268.

Wille, Jakob Ion & Maria Mackinney-Valentin. 2018. "Klædt i fiktion: Når fortællinger materialiserer sig på kroppen". *Kosmorama*, 271.

Wolf, Mark J.P. 2012. *Building Imaginary Worlds: The theory and history of subcreation*. Routledge.

Wolf, Mark J.P. 2016. *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A subcreation studies anthology*. Routledge.

Wolf, Mark J.P. 2017. *The Routledge companion to imaginary worlds*. Routledge.

Wolf, Mark J.P. 2020. *World-Builders on World-Building: An exploration of subcreation*. Routledge.