Theoretical input on scriptwriting

gathered by Anne Baraou
(version 1.2)

Introduction 3

1- Stories in general
Definitions 4
Storytelling motivations 4
Means of storytelling 6
Storytelling desires and needs 6
Means to receive stories 7
Receptions 8
Some special cases of storytelling 9
Why so many stories everywhere and all the time? 11
How are stories constructed? 13

2- What is the main tool?
What can't we do without? 17
What do the characters in a story do? 19
Some useful notions 21
Character theories and classifications 28
Appendix : Needs, emotions, feelings and flaws 35

3- Beyond characters - More definitions
Driving idea, basic idea, starting idea 38
Story world and exposition 42
The hook concept 43
The concept of dramatic beats 45
Climax, acme 46
Muddy middle 46
The structure in acts 46

4- Speeches about storytelling 47
(Classifications, Narratology, Genette, Ricœur...)

5- Speeches about scriptwriting 56
(Advice from various professionals)

6- Genres of story 79
Drama 80
Nonfiction 85
Fantastic-Fantasy-Poetic 97
Humor 101

7- Dividing/Editing 117
Telling a story in a single image 118
Framing 119
Main camera effects 122
Offscreen 122
Rhythm 124
Digital particularity and multiple-choice stories 137
Regarding video games 139
Appendix: How to present a screenplay? 141

8- Dialogue 142
Difference between heard dialogues and read dialogues 142
What are the dialogues for? 145
Choice of words 146
Errors and tips 150
Some strong links not to be overlooked 155
Silent storytelling 157

9- Exercises 158

10- Storytelling workshops 162
Examples 163
Building a workshop 166
Soft skills 167

Acknowledgments 168

Sources 168

This present compilation has been built up over the years, by successive additions. Transitions have not been refined and the collection as a whole is not balanced by subject (I wrote more about the aspects that interest me more). Some examples are dated (I don't have time to update them). Some references (to still popular books when I started) will soon be obsolete, I hope.

Internationally repeated (though rarely nuanced) advice can now be found easily on Internet (websites, podcasts, youtube channels) referencing endless sources to discuss the same things, enough to get overwhelmed listening or even listing them. In short, this is a long, idiosyncratic summary of a universe of thoughts about story telling.

This document, **free to use**, isn't anything formal like a research work or a "book". It has not benefited from any professional proofreading (typographical, spelling or editorial). So feel free to send me comments or corrections (anne@baraou.com). I chose, to lighten the whole, to use the neutral gender that the reader should take care to not read as a masculine.

Introduction

“Theoretical work is a search for a theory. That work should absolutely never be confused with an actual theory.” Henri Meschonnic (French linguist, 1932-2009)

What we know is not ours. Marcel Proust (1871-1922), *Within a Budding Grove.*

Always be careful with theories and rules. The more you analyze stories, listen to pretended rules, learn theories, the more you can feel like you don’t have anything worthwhile to say (which is, remember, not the case at all). Getting older has the same effect. So never get old, that’s all. Then good bye! Oh wait, why did I agree to do this?

Well, actually I’ve tried to bring together, within the limits of my current knowledge, a number of notions, theories, notes and examples that I would have liked to find more easily when I started as a writer. I’m going to start with the very beginning, but we’ll go fast. It’s just that, when you’re too focused on your own work, it’s never a bad idea to open your mind and also relax about what is exactly storytelling.

There are only two things I ever taught: storytelling and sex education. They are similar in many ways. Both involve emotions, feelings, desire, skills, some natural tendency or predisposition but not really talent (for both, it’s more like the more you do it the better you get, at least usually). Everybody can do either.

When you have health issues you go to see a doctor. When you have building issues you go to see an architect. When you have storytelling issues, you don’t go to see an English teacher! As well as, if you have love-making issues, you don’t go to see a professor of sexual studies.

Also, both subjects started to be studied around the same period in history, when novels became a thing, and movies, and sex (or “love-making” in a proper romance).

You can be attractive (you have good ideas) but unable to proceed or even not interested in having sex (I mean telling stories) frustrating people around you. You can be average, feel empty (“I don’t have anything to tell”) but actually find some way to do it very well. And again theories won’t help much for either of them.

Ok, enough with getting you aroused, let’s focus on storytelling then.

1- Stories in general

Definitions

<u>Narration</u> comes from the Latin *narratio* (action to tell, to have known) derived from the older Latin *gnarus* (the one who knows, with its opposite *ignorant,* who doesn't know). Its Indo-European root is *gné* (to know). Narration is a "detailed relation" or a "recital" of events as an "account" or a "sequence" of facts and actions.

<u>Story</u> comes from the Latin *historia*, which comes from the Greek ἱστορία, which had a meaning a little closer to "research" or "result of an investigation". From Indo-European *weydtor* (wise person, who knows, *weyd* being to see).

<u>Conter</u>, in French, comes from the Latin *computare* (to count). ***<u>Raconter</u>*** is therefore "recounting, recalculating, enumerating" (the details of a story). Telling has the same meaning root of counting from old Germanic language.

<u>Récit</u>, in French, comes from the Latin *recitare* from *citare* (to cite or to name, *recito* indicating first the call of names at the Court before expressing any kind of reading or recitation) originating from the Indo-European root *ki* (to move) which also gave the Greek *κινέω* and, later, cinema.

Gérard Genette (French literary theorist, 1930-2018) proposed (in 1972) to call *<u>histoire</u>* <u>(story)</u> **"**the narrative content", *<u>récit</u>* *"*the discourse or narrative text itself" and *<u>narration</u>* "the productive narrative act and, by extension, the entire real or fictional situation in which it takes place".

This difference between story and narrative discourse was taken up by Tzvetan Todorov (1939-2017), a French philosopher born in Bulgaria, also husband of Nancy Huston), as two "aspects" of a literary work: story (which evokes some "reality") and discourse (what the narrator is saying).

So telling is linked simultaneously to an act of quantifiable knowledge and to the act of making it public, of communicating. To tell would be to make known what one has sought to know about something.

Storytelling motivations

Storytelling is almost <u>everywhere</u>. From the most obvious media (books, tales, songs, plays for theatre, poetry, movies, TV series, board games, role-playing or video games) to almost all of our environment.

Some paintings and sculptures (a sculpture seems more narrative when there are several elements or characters, we already imagine relationships between them or a process, a progression), our life that we speak about (the holidays, something we saw,

we observed, we witnessed, any anecdote), our lies too, the family stories or even the entire genealogy of a family, news in the press, advertising, historical, social, or scientific stories (we have long talked about *Natural History*), political speeches, rumors, urban legends, conspiracy theories, religious mythologies: lives of messiahs, their descendants, saints, or different gods (for instance, Greek or Hindu).

Our more intimate imagination is also storytelling: dreams, fantasies, fears, superstitions (some people tell themselves how something could happen so that it doesn't happen. On the other hand, others fear that imagining a sequence of events could make it happen).

We all receive and spread a lot of stories. As Canadian journalist Robert Fulford (1932-) said, storytelling "*remains the only form of expression, the only entertainment that gives us as much pleasure at three years old as at seventy-three years old".*

"Narrative effect" or "narrativity": There is a human tendency to "narrativity", to be telling stories, (momentary, fragmentary, linear or multi temporal). Philip John Moore Sturgess (1946-), for instance, saw the sequence of events in a story and its interruptions, its variations, as a kind of building force (and each narrative would have its own), not a model or a structure but rather an impulse that "*links what is disparate, not similar".*

Unlike Gérard Genette, who drew attention to the "*singular, artificial and problematic aspect of the narrative act"*, I will remain here in a vision of storytelling that is accessible, easy for all people to practice.

Quite often, storytelling has a teaching function. When you're trying to understand something, for example an advertising message, or what a politician is saying, you look for a narrative example of what it means, a short story: "If I use this product/if this person is elected, this is what will happen."

Similarly, when one wants to explain or teach something, a story form helps learning it, even in less literary subjects. When my daughter was in middle school, she was studying a property of triangles: the sum of angles, which is always equal to 180°. To remind her of this, I mimed a man who had to join his hands together to dive, forming a triangle between his two shoulders and his joined hands. If the sum of the angles was greater than 180°, the man could not close his arms and dive, if the sum of the angles was less, he crossed his arms and would not dive better. Without being mathematically relevant, this little story helped my daughter to remember this property of any triangle.

I was particularly delighted the day I found an interview with Monica Neagoy (an American doctor in mathematics and international consultant in didactics) who said none other: "*Let's take the example of addition: before introducing symbols or operating techniques, we take the time to understand the meaning of addition. To do this, children invent 'addition stories' and experience various situations in order to construct their mental images of what it means to 'add up'."*

Means of storytelling

All cultures tell stories, by speaking, singing, miming (or signing), showing, playing, writing, drawing, even if there are different traditions concerning the characters and their number, or the pictorial representations and the times of storytelling (chronology, beginnings, endings).

To receive as to transmit a story is to integrate a system (or "horizon") of expectations (expectations about fiction, reality, literary genre...) regardless of cultural differences in storytelling methods.

Storytelling is always addressed to an audience, whether it is oneself, especially in dreaming (we are our first audience), one's people (friends or family) or strangers (readers, listeners, spectators, gamers, consumers, voters).

By listening, watching, reading a story, we make all sorts of hypotheses that guide our reception and that the story told will either validate or refute, making us revise these hypotheses as we go along.

Since each reader, listener and spectator has his or her own personal story, each person receives/perceives a story in his or her own way. A story that seems dull, bland or beyond understanding to us may very well "speak" to someone else. Our individuality makes the inevitable subjectivity of such judgments. There are stories that few people like, but they really like them a lot precisely because theses stories are unusual. There are also stories that are appreciated at one age and not at another (not yet or never will be). Though, we can still seek to receive any story with an open mind even when the story doesn't move us much, at first glance.

Storytelling desires and needs

Among the desires or needs of the audience that will be invoked by storytelling, we can highlight the following ones:

- The desire to escape (the song that makes us dream, the book that inspires us, the image that speaks to us, the travel diary that makes us visit places, the epic tale that takes us far far away, the video game that absorbs us more than gives us enjoyment, the TV show we binge watch).
- The desire to feel (action, pride, excitement, fear, shame...) which explains the process of identification and the effect of catharsis (historically linked to tragedy but that we can as well find in *binge-watching*).
- The desire to understand, which we can see in the desire to know what follows, what is going to happen next, how does it end (and the indifference to know it when we don't care for a story).
- The desire to learn, to feel educated, to increase our knowledge. Thomas Bidegain (1968-), a very good French screenwriter, explains that a viewer who learns something is never bored. The documentary part of a great story (film or novel) is often of primordial importance. In video games, there is also sometimes a desire to acquire an (although fictitious) skill that is close to that.

- The desire to believe (special effects, magic, powers, superior beings, stories looking real, stories known by everyone, hearing that there are “good” people, that love triumphs - and comes to excuse everything) to which we could add sometimes the desire to be protected (by fiction), sheltered from reality (living in one’s own world, redesigning the world in thoughts...) which is connected to...
- The desire to be reassured, secured (by a moral or happy content or ending, the punishment of the bad guy, or the repetition of an almost identical story, *running gags, gimmicks*, same old tune, chorus of a song, prayers). We also find this taste for repetition in reading again and again a comic book we already have read; in watching again a film or a cartoon; in the pleasure of knowing that everything will return to normal at the end of a serial episode; in following characters and an environment we already know, even if the story itself doesn’t fascinate us or no longer does in serial storytelling (TV, films, novels, comics or games) which is always a clever mix of repetition and surprise. This desire also seems to be at work in the “core gameplay” of video games (actions that are repeated over and over again). Finally, this desire to be reassured may also be linked to the desire to “share”, to be part of a group (common stories, religions, TV series, video games).
- The desire to act (to decide, by operating the controls of a video game, perhaps by identify to a character in action, by communicating verbally or non-verbally with those who tell us a story or who receive it with us).

Video games also handle the desire to possess and to compete.

Means to receive stories

Each means of storytelling induces its means of reception: Speaking and singing require listening (and not everyone listen in the same way); mime, dance (more generally, gestures, expressions and attitudes) require watching (and everyone watch differently); writing calls for reading (and not everyone reads the same story, even if it is printed). We don’t all see the same film, or all the same things in a film. While this may seem obvious when it comes to fiction, we should keep in mind that there is no reason why it would be different for a story that is closer to reality.

Telling something makes many various connections (or small systems) between those who tell and those who listen/read/watch.

Showing (broadcast) versus spreading (distribute): We can see a difference between the “show” that imposes (once people have bought their ticket, we must not disappoint them but we hold them) and let’s say the “distribution” (publishing, exhibitions, radio or TV replay) that proposes (readers control the pacing of their reading, it is an essential characteristic; listeners, gamers, spectators can switch off or go away at any time, so we will try to prevent them from doing so or we’ll try to push them to come back soon). Thanks to recording, replay, streaming, podcast, downloading, “spectators” now totally manage their reception and can divide as much as they want their viewing of a film or of an episode initially thought of as a whole.

For Paul Ricœur (a famous French philosopher, 1913-2005), it is through reception that we can understand the "*confrontation*" between the temporal experience of the world of the reader/spectator/listener and the temporality of the story, and it is this confrontation that constitutes the final stage of the storytelling, which is the response of the receiving audience, considered as a receiving subject. According to him, the storytelling has no other function than to be "*refigured*" by the receiver (even if the receiver has to deal with the elements of the story in order to find his or her path through it according to the strategy fomented by the author).

Maybe we can say that the form of reception/action that interactivity (choosing the narrative path in an open game or a "choose your own adventure" book, but also by zapping in front of the TV, or in our dreams where we rewrite many things, and in all that is told of daily life where reception can influence production) clearly identified in these obvious media is also, more subtly, at work in the other classic ways of reception. So, as Thierry Hentsch (a Swiss philosophy teacher, 1944-2005) puts it simply, *"any careful reading is a kind of rewriting*."

On the other hand, French researcher Marielle Macé (1973-) insists on the passivity and availability inherent in reading. In a true interactive reception (for example in a game or a dream), the audience member is not outside the story but can be part of it (through an avatar), or at least participate in it by choices and actions.

Receptions

Some ideas, texts and stories are conceived in relation to a very specific media, others can be developed, to some extent, without knowing the final media, or they can be transported from one medium to another, or be developed in the same time for several identified media.

There are different levels of prediction/anticipation about the future process of reception in writing, depending also on whether you work only at its beginning (for example a raw script, just a draft, or the design of a video game universe), all along the creation process, or even simply at its end (writing from existing images, adding a text to them, or to an installation, or on a pre-existing music).

In the same way, sometimes there remain "narrative" marks of the production process of some art work: the visible brushstrokes give us an idea of the making of a monochrome painting; the still life painting has been arranged on purpose; a kinetic or geometric or constrained work tells us about calculation and ingenuity; an autobiographical work speaks about someone... Not to mention the explanations associated with some art work that will influence its reception by giving indications on its production (dying Mozart's Requiem, deaf Beethoven's 9th symphony) or even simply the title which sometimes gives an angle, a viewpoint. For instance, the title of *Claire's Knee* (*Le Genou de Claire,* 1970) by Eric Rohmer (1920-2010), considerably leads the reception of the film which doesn't have the suspense it would have had if simply called *The Knee.*

Writing to be read, to be said or to be sung is not received in the same way. Its future reception is more or less integrated into the writing, sometimes very intimately, sometimes much less than we'd think. Plus, as we already said, the reception is multiple, during the creation process as well as after publication/projection/exhibition and with time: the co-writers when there are any, friends, publishers, producers, sponsors, public audience, institutions, new generations...

You can find good examples of big differences of perception in film reviews. One newspaper thinks this film is a masterpiece, another magazine says it's dull or average... <u>There is never only one reception, even from the professional reviewers or critics</u>. This is the purpose of Henry James (a famous American naturalized British novelist, 1843-1916) in his short story *The Figure In The Carpet* (1896) using the first person to speak about a literary critic's quest. He compared the correct understanding of a written work to a pattern in a Persian carpet that only those who are looking at it in the right way can understand.

The length of time the work is available, the payment/wage and the author's career are affected by these different receptions, in one way or another. A lot of things depend on the receptions: questioning your work, doubts, changes in your way to work, offers of translation, reception by other cultures, possible changes for another media (film, radio or stage adaptations), exhibitions...

Speech on your own work could be created from the experience of writing it as well as, with a little more distance, at the moment of its reception (the meaning that one has put into a story can be shifted or extended by the interpretation that others make of it) and even, much later, when it's seen put back into its time and its thematic or its geographical context.

The reception of your own writing is not easy: to accept criticism, indifference or even success (sometimes too fast, sometimes where you did not expect it), to reread and surprise yourself, to assume what has been made public, to know how to build on what you have already done in order to progress.

The well-being of the audience (spectator, reader, listener, player) is not always the priority of young writers. However, without pushing to write "feel good stories" let us recall that beauty, poetry, hope, laughter, fluidity or easiness (for example in the lack of suspense in a romantic comedy), curiosity, gentleness, love, playfulness, wisdom, or justice are feelings making a difference in the way a story is received! Much nicer than annoyance, disappointment, disgust, boredom, jealousy, hatred, fear. Though, on the circle of emotions, there are more negative ones than positive ones...

Some special cases of storytelling

Some storytelling is quite **singular**, especially that produced by poets from various cultures, who have developed their own way of expressing themselves rather than doing so according to a standard "better way", musicians may do the same in their songs, or more visually, directors like Michel Gondry (1963-), Quentin Dupieux (1974-), cartoonists like Chris Ware (1967-) or many others requiring a particular immersion in their world to follow what they are expressing.

Digital comics (see p. 137) now offer a field of exploration way beyond the first homothetic reproductions, by calling for a little animation (turbomedia, parallax, sounds effects) and a more interactive reception (vertical or horizontal scrolling, infinite canvas, multiple choices) leading to non-linear storytelling (which is also practiced elsewhere, in "choose your own adventure" books, games and not only video games, a few plays like *Intimate Exchanges* by Alan Ayckbourn (1939-) adapted in a french movie (*Smoking No smoking)* by Alain Resnais (1922-2014), web fictions, or the season 5 of the *Black Mirror* TV series....)

Plus, in a way, hasn't every contemporary life become a form of digital comics ? Increasingly sequenced and framed by in screens (computers, telephones) that allow you to split up, to express yourself instantaneously as well as to archive, to retouch, to add movement, to exchange in sms bubbles and to comment on images online...

Let's also mention the use of extended reality (virtual, augmented or mixed), which is only in its beginning: see for example the work of Marty Cooper Hombre_McSteez (on youtube and facebook). Also check conferences organized for the event *Immersity* in Angoulême since 2018 https://www.immersity.fr/ on this specific topic.

On the other hand, experiments in storytelling by artificial intelligence do exist (as in music and in painting): In 2016 a program was fed with dozens of science fiction movies and series scripts to write an original short film made in 48 hours (and quite clearly lacking coherence): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LY7x2Ihqjmc

A dozen novels were also written, between 2016 and 2019, by artificial intelligence. Some users of artificial intelligence programs relate their work to the way Stan Lee (1922-2018) used to begin with a synopsis and to ask the artist to draw from it whole pages of spectacular images embodying the story from which Stan Lee then wrote the dialogues detailing the narrative. Artificial intelligence produces a large quantity of images, according to the directives given to it, and it just remains to organize and connect all that. This mode of creation has every chance of developing in an increasingly digital future.

Some stories, however, are beyond the field of a single medium, author or era:
- The very famous books, including those that were sacred to religions long ago.
- Remakes (story that we adapt to the taste of the day) and revivals (story that we rediscover).
- Adaptations (from book or stage to film or to radio, from film to book) .
- Reinterpretations or parody.
- Transmedia worlds developed in the same time on different media (for example: films or cartoons + books and/or comic strips + songs + games) like Star Wars, Hunger games, Naruto, Wakfu, One Piece... which have become narrative references for one or more generations. The word "crossmedia" is also sometimes used to refer to the same stories in different media.

There is a need for storytelling great events (like mythologies, sacred books, very popular films, early TV news...) or to hear the same story told several times (rereading a novel or a comic book, watching a film or a cartoon episode again) and to, all of us, tell again the same stories. And we sometimes hear that a writer can

disappoint his audience if he doesn't continue, in some way, to write the same book over and over again.

In this great world of storytelling, there are many ideas that are stirred up, revisited, dusted off or copied. In general, we are not original, unique and the first to have the basic idea and mechanism of a story. It is important to be aware of this in order to appropriate this good old tool called storytelling. We live in the cult of new things because we live in repetition (of history in particular).

The example of *Freaky Friday:* It is the story of a mother and her teenage daughter whose minds are switched for a whole day after they have just had a fight.

It was first a book for teenagers, written by Mary Rodgers (1931-2014), published in 1972. Then she wrote three sequels in the 80s.

At the same time, her novel was adapted three times: as a movie, first in 1976 (she wrote the screenplay) with Jodie Foster, then on television in 1995 with a small change in the script, and in 2003 with Jamie Lee Curtis in the role of the mother with several small changes. There was also a movie adaptation of the first sequel in 1984, and a TV adaptation of the second sequel, also in 1984. Here is an writer who has spent at least thirty years of her life more or less preoccupied by the same story.

But in fact, as early as 1882, the English writer Thomas Anstey Guthrie had published *Vice versa* in which a father and his son have their minds exchanged by a magic stone during Victorian times and they understand each other better afterwards (Anthony Trollope, the famous English novelist of that time, is said to have suffered a stroke from laughing while reading this novel). And in 1947, the BBC had adapted the novel into a six-part radio drama. There were also three TV and five film adaptations, starting in 1948 by Peter Ustinov, and then in 1981 and 1988 in an adaptation transposed to modern times.

So, this story has lasted more than 120 years, in almost twenty written or audiovisual forms. And it's probably not over yet.

This makes me think of the English word milking referring to the maximum exploitation of an element (idea, setting, character, situation, process).

Why so many stories everywhere and all the time?

Storytelling is a vital need (we cannot live without stories). Jonathan Gottschall (an American scholar specialized in literature and evolution, 1972-) said that *"Homo sapiens is a great ape with a storytelling spirit*." We are narrative animals. Okay, but why?

The novelist Umberto Eco (1932-2016) as well as Nancy Huston (1953-) wrote that it was to tame the real world and to produce meaning from all the disparate events of our lives**,** unlike parents who wonder whether their children are escaping from reality in the virtual worlds of video games. But I'm not sure that Umberto Eco or Nancy Huston played video games a lot.

Thomas Bidegain rephrases this same philosophical notion of "representation" (the action of making something present in the mind, of producing images in it, of

concretizing a thought, by means of the senses or memory): for him, stories serve to represent the world through their filter because things only exist if they are represented.

For the Swiss historian-philosopher Thierry Hentsch (1944-), it is because men know they will die that they tell stories, to nourish the memory of those who will succeed them.

It has always seemed to me that our simple awareness of having been born and having to die was already a beginning and an end, a story. How many psychoanalysts and other gurus have tried to define, like script doctors, the stages of a life (Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Erik Erikson, and thousands of books about personal development). BUT, this passion for stories begins before we are old enough to be aware of our future death! Would it be enough to be aware of being born? It's true that we don't necessarily need any end in a story. See the current international taste for TV series where the end is not what matters.

For French screenwriting teacher Yves Lavandier (1959-), who uses the word *dramaturgy* for what we call storytelling, everything comes from imitation. A child represents the human actions of his parents or siblings, he never stops imitating, then he creates fiction tales for himself and he plays roles in them. Fabulation and duplication are part of his daily life. The child is at first a spectator, then an author (an adapter, more exactly) and finally an actor. Storytelling is similar to the children's "pretending" game, it is the adult equivalent. The first actor-spectator-writer is the child we all were. This recalls the work of the Belarusian psychologist Lev Vygotki (1896-1934) on the child's inner monologue and the links between socialization and learning. Games and stories are universally present in societies, undoubtedly as vital as each other, and there is some storytelling in games as well as a "playfulness" in storytelling.

This is like a narrative drive (against which supporters of abstraction would fight, or just writers rejecting the focus on plot, actions and characters like the Nouveau Roman novelists in France in the 50s or James Joyce way before them).

For the American psychologist Jerome Bruner (1915-2016), we tell stories in order to "make ours" all the daily affirmations around us, to build a bridge between what is established and what is possible. He referred to psychology experiments to link our storytelling ability to our ability to perceive causality (which children have from the age of 6 months). We can also find this idea in the work of French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) for whom storytelling is connected to our desire to organize the reality and to construct human time. This ideas about storytelling in human nature are saying that stories are a way, a tool, by which we understand ourselves.

American neuropsychologist Michael Gazzaniga (1939-) believes that we have a **brain mechanism** that he calls "*the interpreter*" (like a translator) and that elaborates stories from our actions in order to give us the impression of having an unified mind. In this mechanism, speed is more important than accuracy. This explains a lot of lying instinctive lying reactions, making up stories to cover ourself or to make sense of what we have done, or to attract attention (as compulsive liars do too much). Elements of this mechanism have been observed in great apes, even dogs. And it

would be this mechanism, working all the time all our life long, would build our feeling of uniqueness.

Another theory is more social. We live surrounded by other human beings and we seek from birth to know/understand/anticipate what they think. Our love for storytelling would have been selected by evolution (through culture) because it helps our ability or our need to read others (to "calculate" them). "Human resources" theorists have understood this, comparing stories to maps that help people to know how things are done in a company, proposing generic types of stories for personnel management purposes. And "public relation" theorists have also pushed companies to become "corporate characters".

In any case, being universal, storytelling is extremely useful to communicate, teach, dream, seduce, hire, fool... It is a **very powerful social tool**.

How are stories constructed?

There are well-established storytelling methods that can be learned, which are usually reproduced by imitation. There have always been more or less justified theories, from Plato to contemporary "script doctors". The new generation of very creative TV shows are now generating dramaturgical templates: working a lot on the deepth of the characters, then embarrass them as often as possible, which ends up being repetitive. The end is no longer important, they only accumulate and rearrange elements so as to develop the story almost indefinitely, a bit like imaginative games of children. This way of doing things is not suitable for all stories, but neither are feature film writing conventions.

There are stories that do well for a given time or completely the opposite (nobody cares), there are various styles and tastes. There are also different traditions. Stories are not all told in the same way in the West (Occident), the Orient or in Africa. We often hear that humor is different from one country to another. But the British make everyone laugh and actually some Japanese manga too (from *man* meaning entertaining and spontaneous and *ga*, drawing).

In Europe, we are fortunate to be at the crossroads of several cultures within Europe as well as from Africa, Asia, North and South America, we have access to thousands of stories from elsewhere, rich and varied. This is not the case in all areas of the world. I have personally drawn inspiration from Czech and Japanese animated pictures, Colombian, Polish, Albanian, Austrian and Chinese novels, Greek and Celtic mythology, Spanish, Italian or New Zealand films, and English and American series.

Storytelling (often called writing, even when the story will not necessarily be read) is made of **culture**, **collecting** and **imagination**.

The mechanisms of reception are largely anticipated by the best storytellers (when we tell a story, we try to put ourself in the shoes of the person who will listen to it, watch it, read it, discover it; we test its effects; we modify elements according to its reception).

This making process can be initiated in an individual, in a solitary way (the novelist, alone at his table) or in collective/collaborative way (for TV series, news,

sacred books, rumors). It can come in one go (this is quite rare but it can be the case in improvisation or for certain people who lose spontaneity when they rewrite) or step by step, with additions, rewritings, by successive phases of contribution (in comic strips, in cinema, use of senior screenwriters, dialogue writers, rewritten scripts, sometimes directly generated in groups for American TV series where episodes are first imagined in a *writers room* of six to ten members).

There is sometimes a feeling that the idea comes to us from elsewhere, falls on us. And that solutions often come when you don't look for them (but after looking for them a lot, after working on them). The history of scientific discoveries is also full of such anecdotes.

Right state of mind for each writer, habits, discipline, tics, the mystique of the creative moment, the reading immersion, the language immersion, collective writing processes and their different types of practical organization, spontaneous writing, structured writing, imposed or voluntary constraints, improvisation, editing/cutting, automatic writing: It can be useful to be aware of and have some mastery of certain writing modes or to have found the one that best suits you as a writer or as a group of writers. We can also try to break our routine to see if it brings something. The English poet John Keats (1795-1821) spoke of "negative capacity" to designate the ability of a writer to be in uncertainty, mystery, doubt, without irritatingly seeking facts and reason, that is to say to be able to step aside and adapt our way of seeing the world to our subject and the characters we're using.

David Lynch (1946-) talked about "fish to catch" for ideas: *"Ideas are like fish, and you don't make the fish, you catch the fish. You can catch ideas from daydreaming, or from going to places. You can be going down the street, see a reflection on a little pot of pool and the gutter — and Bang ! an idea will come."*

To find ideas, the body in movement (even dancing) has the reputation of being more effective than a static position (because it removes some control over thoughts by occupying the brain with something else and avoiding visual interference). But to formulate ideas, a static position is more effective (this overlaps with the notions of "standing work" and "sitting work" that we can hear about in movie writing). A screenplay is moreover written more by talking than by writing. The writing time for a feature film can range from 1 to 5 years before shooting, which makes it possible to find funding and to help the director to "find" his film through extensive discussion, between director and screenwriter, between director and producer, or within a team of screenwriters or with various readers (friends, tutors, broadcasters...) but also by meeting different people who are able to explain an environment, or inspire some characters, by their way of being or their hurt and suffering.

Some authors rather advocate calm, close their eyes and try to see and feel what the characters are feeling, or simply imagine a movement. Some speak about four phases: incubation, enlightenment, verification/integration, and trance exit.

A technique used by Stendhal (1783-1842) or Francis Bacon (1909-1992) is to "keep going" instead of "trying to start" a new project. You can write your story without necessarily starting at the beginning of the part that will be told. You can also somehow "trap yourselves" by keeping a strain or spillway file that will filter the ideas. For my part, I realized that my brain tended to find better (or just more

attractive?) ideas to avoid having to do the work in progress so I'm tempted to put myself in a situation of work obligation (but life already brings enough) to harvest the next good ideas.

Trying to think non-verbally, like some scientists, with diagrams, can also help. Delaying the writing work is generally a good rule (with the idea of letting the idea "germinate").

There is undeniably a notion of play in writing (writing linked with joy and pleasure), as we see with the exercises of imagination or in the game in which writers play with expectations of the audience.

Doing thought experiments out of the daily life which surrounds us is a good dynamic. Working on several projects, moving from one to another, also allows you to take a step back. It is particularly useful to abandon a bad idea as quickly as possible, in order to "fail economically".

The most important thing for creativity often seems to be open-mindedness. But one can wonder if this porosity, necessarily linked to an era and a social environment, does not also lead to a homogeneity of creation. Anyway, a scriptwriter is usually someone naturally curious, interested in everything, very observant (and sometimes thieving) attentive to daily life as well as extraordinary things. The idea is to build a story by bringing into what has begun to interest us everything that can feed it.

Three elements generally required are open-mindedness (or curiosity), self-confidence and pleasure in writing. Then you have to learn to construct and render the real, to deconstruct clichés, to write with/for bodies (especially if it's a film) and to think about the off-screen and un-said. Yes, above all, it's learning to hide (elements of the characters, explanations, events in the ellipses, actions off-screen, subtext).

But few writers escape the "10000 hours theory", popularized by Swedish psychologist Anders Ericsson (1947-2020), advocating that, in order to acquire an expertise, you need to practice a lot (but with quality training, a taste for hard work, and questioning yourself). And, as French writer Olivier Cadiot (1956-) said, *we write very little, we spend lots of time reading over.*

Also be aware of surrounding influences: advice, rules and theories found in books, all what has been written about writing, collectives to which you can belong, emulation, challenges, friends, mentors, encouragement, test readers, advice from publishers, public opinion, critics...

Once the hands and especially the brain are involved in storytelling, from a writer's point of view, we can try to channel the flow of inspiration, to identify the things and beings that inspire us, to flesh out characters, to grind real matter, to define and refine a world, an ambiance, a mood... Choosing the points of view, building parallel, crossed or linear plots, relying if necessary on the theories of storytelling (there's no point in reinventing old theories to achieve your goal although it's about as much learning as unlearning), not missing the twists, hooks, joints, doing a real work on dialogue, knowing the levels of language, the syntax and the vocabulary adapted to the style you're looking for, without forgetting interpretation, the "casting", even drawn or in the form of a simple recorded voice, and the acting (gestures, attitudes so

often neglected in projects and which can make the accuracy of the interpretations) except when it is the role of a director.

There are a bunch of questions: How to insert descriptions and how are they useful, how to manage actions, how to interlock them with dialogues and descriptions ? We have to work on the pacing, the sequences, cutting or editing (according to the organization of the work and the chosen media, this can come at the beginning or at the end of the process).

It is also necessary to know how to reread (how many times?), to decide on cuts and additions, to confront yourself with rewriting: when I deconstruct/reconstruct, what should I keep? What should I do with my unfinished or rejected projects ? Should I keep and organize my daily ideas and notes?

If storytelling is universal, making a professional job of it is not easy at all. It takes enough desire (and, if possible, pleasure, to keep the desire), culture (with more or less taste) and practice (which can also be called work).

About the writer's job, it seems to me that scriptwriters are less likely to hate themselves than novelists because scriptwriters usually "sell" their knowledge more than themselves. Scriptwriters ask themselves the same questions as all writers, but maybe they like the ideas more than they like themselves. Further, scriptwriters often have the opportunity to dig into several fields, which is riskier for novelists, even graphic novelists. Scriptwriters look for "work" more than fame. In exchange, they get less celebrity. In audiovisual production, a screenwriter works FOR a show or FOR a director (cinema). He does not write (as far as possible) the same way for everyone.

Working as a duo (filmmaker brothers, writer-director duos, or filmmaker-editor, the classic comic book writer/drawer, or some more skillful duos such as Dupuy-Berberian and Ruppert-Mulot) allows for back and forward exchanges that lead to great creativity but require trust, common interests and complicity to work well. Each duo has its own way to go, some will prefer to divide the tasks, others will discuss almost everything together. In French movie making, discussions between the scriptwriter and the director often last months. They talk about situations, events, characters, before building a story more or less in order, then writing scenes, sometimes in a very physical way, verbally, which can modify the first storyline or some structure elements and generally remove what was too explained, emphatic or redundant. Ken Loach (British film director, 1936-), who is very loyal in collaboration, with his scriptwriter as well as with his editor, explains quite rightly that "*the more secure we feel in a relationship, the more audacious we can be".*

Teamwork**,** collective work, also has different ways of organizing itself. It generally responds to production constraints (efficiency and success required for large audiovisual productions, production lines for video games, limited budget for collectives and fanzines artists) with variable, often hierarchical organizations, combining daily work in the same room, working each at home, distance meetings, sending anonymous contributions (done not to influence the decision-maker's choice)...

We can also speak of a form of collective creation when we find similarities from one story to another. If an idea is good, there is no way only one person has it, and it is also rare that this idea is used only once, as we saw above with the example of *Freaky Friday*. Hollywood productions, for instance, confess ancestral influences (like Shakespeare, Hitchcock or Kubrick...) rather than being inspired (more probably) by Japanese manga (as Christopher Nolan for *Inception,* Darren Aronofsky for *Black Swan* or, of course, Disney *for The Lion King*). Those borrowings, if not stolen (plagiarism) or unconscious, are often declared and negotiated: adaptations, remakes, reuses and mashups (very common since data storage and digital editing tools became less expensive). See http://www.mashupcinema.com/en/home-mashup/. This practice also gave a few full-length French films like *La dialectique peut-elle casser des briques ?* (1973) by René Viénet, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98) by Jean-Luc Godard, *La classe américaine* (1993) by Michel Hazanavicius and Dominique Mézerette, *The Clock* (2011) by Christian Marclay or *Ne croyez surtout pas que je hurle* (2019) by Frank Beauvais.

Montaigne (Michel de Montaigne, French philosopher 1533-1592) wrote a long time ago that "*We are just all repeating each other.*" Virginia Woolf also said it: *"For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice. [...] For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately."* And Thomas Bidegain, that "*Repetition is the victory of enthusiasm* (necessary for the characters) *over experience* (which they will have at the end of the story)."

The concept of intertextuality (created in the 60s by Julia Kristeva, a French philosopher, 1941-) is based on the principle that any text (by extension here any story) can be read as the integration and transformation of one or more other texts. Roland Barthes (famous French philosopher, 1915-1980) made it official, in the article on "text theory" in the *Encyclopædia Universalis* (1974), that "*every text is an intertext; other texts are present in it at various levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous culture and those of the surrounding culture; every text is a new fabric of past quotations"*. Later, Gérard Genette developed the notion of transtextuality where the text is not considered in its singularity but through its transtextuality, or textual transcendence (meaning: everything that puts a text in relation, obvious or secret, with another text) that he classified into several more detailed analytical categories.

2- What is the main tool?

What can't we do without?

A **character** (or more)! Even when you want to tell the story of an immaterial or abstract idea, like "love", or the story of something like "mechanics", it becomes a

character. When the character is not human (an animal, a plant, an object) it is often anthropomorphic. It is more or less anthropomorphic and humanized. Besides, Will Eisner (1917-2005) used to say that "*if animals' faces were more flexible, more reflexive of emotions, they might be less easily killed by humans*."

Experiments conducted in 1944 by American psychologists Fritz Heider (1896-1988) and Marianne Simmel (1923-2010), based on an animated film with geometric figures, showed the propensity of viewers to account for the movements of figures based on intentional human patterns. According to Heider, our need to give such explanations could be explained by our concern for coherence in an inherently uncertain and unstable world (we just already heard about that). This is also what the most beautiful attempts to do without character seem to show, such as the graphic novel *The Cage* by Martin Vaughn-James (1943-2009). Just because we don't follow a character doesn't mean there aren't any. And it is not because there are one or more characters that we should go only by what happens to them, as so many great writers have brilliantly shown us (Goethe, Joyce, Woolf, Proust, Musil, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Céline, Sartre, Camus, Duras, Butor, Sarraute, Kundera, Ernaux, Murakami, etc).

Obviously, character and story are intimately linked. For Aristotle (384-322 BC), the story and its events comes first, before the character in the story: there is no character without a story, but an action without a character is conceivable. As Paul Ricœur also said, "*the identity of the story makes the identity of the character",* an identity that applies to the individual (the character in the story) as well as to a community.

By "character", we first think of a human being. But, since man has the ability to be interested in (let's even say to "identify") many things, we can have stories of animals, inhuman monsters, we can personify objects, a house, a landscape that will carry stories.

This is why I am not fond of the idea that identification could be more or less "possible", "easy" or "successful", which is often overestimated, especially in the creation of children's books. I think that a child acquires fairly quickly the ability to be interested in and to follow characters other than "super nice" kids or animals.

You can love a story even if you find it unbelievable or cliché, exaggerated. Critical distance and appreciation are mixed enough to take more than simple identification or projection to explain the relationship between the characters in a story and the audience. We don't necessarily want to put ourself in the shoes of all the heroes and there is a difference between experiencing and knowing that someone can experience, between understanding and concurring. We would benefit from talking about **immersion** rather than identification. Or cognitive engagement. Because the spectator or reader can experience at the same time emotions and thoughts, in a kind of "deep reception". Although we know that becoming too explanatory disconnects the immersive process. Similarly, the public can be touched without being really "immersed". And the belief that the spectator or the reader projects his own torments in the suffering of the characters seems questionable to me.

Also, for example, seeing a character in the process of simply thinking seems to me to connect us to the character just as much as seeing him in motion and

interaction. That can be shown by the gaze of the character or some gestures, his hands, or images of what he is looking at or imagining himself seeing.

Though I don't deny that we can identify with the main character in a story (as what we'd like to be or what we'd like to know how to do, or what we used to be or what we don't want to be anymore or just out of sympathy), there can also be a process of <u>successive identifications,</u> one after the other, with different characters in the same story. Identification circulates: it can move from one character to another. It Identification should be stronger when there is a danger of death, an injustice, an accident, a debt, the loss of a loved one. It is helped by the vision or the description of the daily life of the character (which provides some authenticity) and sometimes by familiar or appropriate places (where we'd like to be or where we'd fear to be).

We also hear (or heard) in children's book publishing that girls have less difficulty to "identify" with male characters than the reverse (boys with female characters). Social imbalance easily explains this (heroic models being mainly male), and children's literature could/should (and is gradually beginning to) counterbalance it rather than encourage it.

What do the characters in a story do?

Characters can act or not, speak or not, but they remain the main tool, the means by which the story unfolds, as well as the carriers of the "messages" that the writers pass on, more or less consciously.

Characters are most often <u>transformed by the story</u> (at least this is the most common belief) thanks to their <u>ability to create and resolve conflicts</u> (again, a classic belief says that conflict is necessary in successful storytelling).

Writers of American TV shows spend months working on the definition of their characters before starting the slightest plot of the slightest episode. That's how important our Western culture think they are. Which is not illogical: when you know someone very well, you know how that person will react, what they think and how they speak. In the end, the well worked character is more credible, it sounds less artificial or wrong. Its actions and dialogues seem coherent. It's a bit like a puppet coming to life. Some characters shine like jewels that intrigue us, fascinate us, seduce us, take us with them. We sometimes hear that <u>the scriptwriter must be like a lawyer</u> who defends his characters. See, for example, Sam Mendes' film *American Beauty* (2000) where each character has very marked characteristics while never being only good or only bad, something that often comes up in the writing of his scriptwriter Alan Ball (1957-) who also worked on *Towelhead* (a movie he directed in 2007), *True Blood*, and *Six feet under.* Though, there is a risk (described by screenwriters) that very well defined characters start to live a little too much "by themselves" in the mind of the writer and become less at the service of the story. This is generally avoided by team work in audiovisual productions but it might require attention in more solitary creations.

<u>Appealing characters</u> are usually built with their <u>**flaws, vices, problems, imperfections**</u> (you can make a list of them, I'll give you one below). A perfect

character gets absolutely no interest. The flaws compensate for the qualities needed for the story, and eventually turn into assets/advantages. The flaws make them more human. They are also particularly useful in comedies, to make people laugh, and in dramas to scare them.

Dr. House is mean and he limps. *Nemo* the fish has got an atrophied flipper, Dory has memory loss. Marcel Proust's narrator is frail, not in good shape at all, and very jealous. In Lucas Harari's (1990-) graphic novel *L'aimant* (2017), the character, who is a little "nasty" or frustrated, is shown to be angry, which is very clever to add some kind of adventure, a form of danger, of conflict, where the story, although beautiful and mysterious, didn't really have any.

Ken Loach said that "*stories have to be lived, characters are contradictory and the fun of making a film is discovering the completely unpredictable way people interact. That's where comedy and tragedy come from, that's where everything that makes us human comes from. The characters we put on the screen are full of contradictions, flaws and defects. It is the fragility of the human being that is dramatic, not stereotypical perfection. We find characters, a story, and it is how these characters are involved in that story that tells our vision of the world.*"

French filmmaker François Truffaut (1932-1984) recommended writing characters who are aware of their lack of security, who know they are going to die, which makes them indubitably human.

I'm slipping in here (again) a remark by Thomas Bidegain about the triumph/victory/success of the main character, which must be compensated by modesty, to avoid the audience from preferring the bad guys (who lost but look nicer than the arrogant hero). With the exception, however, of some unshakable heroes, who always stay impressive and inspire non-stop respect, no matter what.

For Yves Lavandier, the characters feed off conflict. "*A character who has no trouble in his life is a boring character in his fiction.*" For him, the characters have to struggle at all costs, not wait to be rescued, unlike Rose in *Titanic* (which this scriptwriting teacher hates). He gives them the right to doubt a little but not too long. "*A self-respecting protagonist may have a moment of doubt - it makes him human - but it shouldn't be too long before he goes back into the ring, on his feet.*"

Everything exists in terms of characters: heroes, anti-heroes, main characters with or without supporting characters, multi faces characters, teams of several characters, from the most ordinary to the most extravagant or the most typical and hackneyed. In books, characters are sometimes described at length, sometimes barely sketched out, either because we don't want to be bothered with details or because we prefer to surround the character with mystery. In storytelling with images, they can simply be shown (drawn, filmed, played by an actor) without any further description, but the image says a lot: their way of life, the way they stand, move, dress, their voice and their way of speaking, their vocabulary, their tone in relation to each other.

Unlike typical TV shows, writing feature films often require writers to decide first about actions generating conflict leading to other actions or reactions which all come to define characters (though some filmmakers also do the opposite, defining their characters at length before deducing the best actions from them). American writer JD

Salinger (1919-2010) had a writer character (in *Franny and Zooey,* 1961) say that the absence of nuances in the psychology of characters in film was justified by the fact that *"nuances are necessary to the novel but are not photogenic"*. Which is obviously debatable (the images and the acting can provide many nuances) even though cinema has a tendency to overdramatize, particularly when adapting novels.

Sometimes we are told much more about the characters, their past for example in a "backstory" (or their future when it comes to explaining how we got there, by *flashback)*. The characters' past is often used to make their actions believable (as in life). A French director Nicolas Dufresne (or Duduf, 1984-) disagrees in his blog with the American belief of defining the character's past to explain his actions. He quotes Aristotle to defend the idea that the character is defined mainly by his actions and his goal. He opposes explaining past and future goal. Well, one does not prevent the other at all. A French TV technocrat once told to me the three important elements of "characterization": the goal of the character, his weak point and his nuances. Okay then.

The characters have <u>words</u> (dialogue), <u>thoughts</u> and <u>actions</u>. But there is also silent a possibility of silent stories (without dialogue). To tell something, speech is not mandatory. Neither is thinking. Neither is action.

However, screenwriting teachers will generally harp on the same points about the **journey** (or transformational **arc**) of the main character: What is his goal? (We will talk about this several times.) What is his deepest desire or need? What are the reasons for his actions that move the plot forward? And of course, what is the triggering factor, what are the obstacles (conflict), the emotional journey, the stakes (what the character might lose or win) and the learning at the end? (For example, a very rational character comes to make irrational choices at the end of the story; an honest one ends up lying or the other way around; one hates someone or something who will become his best ally or asset).

Some useful notions

Defining characters can take time. Short stories are more often about events than about characters.

To begin with, I will quote Italo Calvino (Italian writer, 1923-1985): "*Who are we, what is each of us, if not a combination of experiences, information, reading, dreaming. Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, a combination of styles, where everything can be mixed and reorganized in every possible way."*

To create characters is to think <u>**at the same time**</u> about <u>the universal</u> (what is human?), <u>the particular</u> (to which groups does the character belong? who speaks? where do I write/come from as an author?) and <u>the singular</u> (what is only his, hers, yours, mine, which is not necessarily "exceptional")**,** as we intuitively do every day in life, in principle.

It is not impossible to think of the universal not from the "all" but from the singular, and thus try to escape from universalist abstraction without renouncing to the universal. As the French philosopher Alain (1868-1951) used to say, *"it is always*

in the individual that Humanity finds itself" (in *Propos*, 1911). You can look at the stories of the 19th century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) or those of French famous writer Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and many others concerning the notion of the "singular universal".

For example, the most award-winning short film of all time, *Luminaris* (2011) by Argentinean Juan Pablo Zaramella (1972-), has an extremely simple narrative structure and focuses above all on the originality of the atmosphere, full of this universal singularity: https://www.youtube.com/l7Z1VBQkdIM.

Speaking of universal, it should be noted that to give up both the singular and the universal in order to be content with being what one is *simply because one is* is Sartre's definition of a bastard. There is an unbearable, intolerable, individuality who renounces the universal to keep up only with the particular, who gives up as universal (that's how you have to be/think; everyone is evil...) who claims to have discovered the universal in a figure (a leader, a guru, an obscure force...) and puts the "we" in the place of the human, and who often remains at the stereotypical level.

Person, subject, identity, avatar, character, cliché: When we move from reality to fiction (which is the basic principle of storytelling, even for fiction, since we don't live in fiction), the construction of the characters mixes a large number of influences and representations (our self-image and the image we have of others) that constantly evolve with the fashions, times and spaces of communication.

Person

The "person" is defined as an individual of the human species, without distinction of gender, but distinguished from the simple biological individual because considered as a being conscious of his existence, possessing a continuity of psychic life, as well as being part of the community. The "person" is also the self, what makes individuality.

It is also a grammatical category marking the relationship to the person speaking, to whom one is speaking or about whom one is speaking and which, in many languages, is showed morphologically in the verb, the personal pronoun, the pronoun and the possessive adjective. The first person is oneself, the second person is the identified other, the third person is the more distant other. But the Japanese language (and the manga in which they are thought) uses a much more codified range which is part of a defined grammatical system to express politeness. Other languages, such as Chinese or Vietnamese, distinguish between an "us" including the person speaking and another "us" excluding him or her.

In French, "person" also means, strangely enough, "nobody".

Chris Fowler (1973-), a British archaeologist, has particularly studied the concept of person and identity in ancient times. He quoted the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) who, at the beginning of the 20th century, became aware of the historical variations in the concept of person. Mauss took as an example the American Indian and Australian Indian communities in which the person is characterized by his character**,** the role he plays in sacred dramas and myths of origins. The idea that the

role is a lasting, sustainable, form of personhood is also found in ancient Etruscan communities and in ancient Rome.

The person has an history related to a socio-cultural context. The Western concept of individuality is not at all universal. Objects and bodies constituting the person, in some communities, are not the property of autonomous individuals but due to others. The status of the person depends on the cultural context. If the Western conception of the person is based on the idea that the person is indivisible and autonomous, anthropology raises the question of cultures where the person is divisible into several aspects that go beyond the boundaries of his skin, composed of his actions and the actions of others**,** permeable to external forces. Chris Fowler also quoted the British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1941-) who showed that the person is always relational, even if social relations in the West tend to produce individuality.

French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) studied "*ego technologies"*, collective mechanisms of individual limits, long before online social networks arrived and the construction of our "digital identity". The contemporary western person turns out to be the result of complex negotiations that are themselves dependent on relationships, habits, ideas and culture. And we regularly change the way we function as a person, as we change our habits, our experiences and our knowledge, even if some ways to be are predominant in discourse or media.

As a result, new technologies offer the possibility of new metaphors for the body and the person, without necessarily replacing the old ones. The flow of multiple images and expressions of ourself on the Internet creates a constant exchange between different metaphors, types of relationships and permutations of the person. For example, just in France in 2016, 126,509 people (population 66,6 M) were listed by the police for using at least two different civil statuses.

This concept of **relational person** contributes to move the concept of person away from a single definition, fixed from birth, indivisible and contained/confined/ delimited by the human body.

On the other hand, psychologists at the service of companies managers have established various typologies, classifications developed by consulting firms, such as the one distinguishing *directors* (individualists who are effective in the present), *innovators* (individualists who are useful in the future), *reassurers* (analysts of the past) and *empaths* (adapting to others). And we of course have those that can sometimes operate in fiction and are inspired by the archetypes of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) from which some scriptwriters also draw inspiration *(the innocent, the wise, the explorer, the rebel, the magician, the hero, the lover, the entertainer, the ordinary man, the guardian angel, the leader, the artist)*.

The Dutch psychologist Gerardus Heymans (1857-1930) developed a systematic classification of characters according to two components: emotionality (E) and activity (A), which can be fluctuating or more durable (S). He obtained the passionate (E+ A+ S), the phlegmatic (E- A+ S+), the angry (E+ A+ S-), the sanguine (E- A+ S-), the sentimental (E+ A- S+), the apathetic (E- A- S+), the nervous (E+ A- S-), the amorphous (E- A- S-).

In the same logic, the Myers-Brigg typological indicator, called MBTI, is sometimes used by Anglo-Saxons people. A test allows to classify the candidate among 16 psychological profiles from the 2 possible preferences on these 4 dimensions:
- Energy source: E ↔ Extraversion / I ↔ Introversion
- Collecting information: S ↔ Sensing / N ↔ Intuition
- Decision taking: T ↔ Thinking / F ↔ Feeling
- Way of action: J ↔ Judgment / P ↔ Perception
Then you get a MBTI type like manager, actor, inventor, protector, artist, researcher, adviser, idealist...) All very positive!

Other descriptive models exist. The so-called *Big Five* (or OCEAN) was developed in the 80s and the 90s to measure personality according to five main criteria (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism) and has its own quiz called NEO Pi-R. *Enneagram* was popularized in the 70s from an esoteric base of geometric figure establishing 9 points distributed on a circle from which was drawn a typology of nine personalities, linked to motivations, obsessions, desires and strategies, gathered in 3 categories (intellectual, emotional and instinctual). Which gave: the reformer, the helper, the achiever, the individualist, the observer, the loyal, the enthusiast, the protector, the peacemaker.

And while we're at it, there is also the classification of players, created in 1996 by the English author Richard Bartle (1960-) according to their favorite actions in a game: *achievers* called diamonds (the cards pattern) attracted by success (later divided into *planners* and *opportunists*), *explorers* called spades, attracted by immersion (divided into *scientists* and *hackers*), *socializers* called hearts, attracted by cooperation (including *networkers* and *friends*) or *killers* called clubs, attracted by competition, (being *politicians* or *griefers*). http://mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm.

We have also heard about interpersonalization of a narrative content, which consists in seeing the world proposed by a story mainly through the interpersonal relationships between the characters, excluding more broadly social or more strictly personal relationships such as introspection. This tendency can be found in some plays, novels, films or series. In any case, a character is characterized by his interactions with the other characters, as we saw the social science demonstrated that a person is always relational. Many writers prefer to have interactions between characters get action moving instead of having action imposed on them.

Subject

The subject is perceived as acting, it has a function and, moreover, a grammatical meaning representing an action (or supporting an action expressed by a verb in the passive voice). It is a living being considered in its individuality and from the point of view of its qualities, its needs, its actions or its evolution. But the subject is also the one submitted to observation (subject of biological, psychological, sociological studies) or to the king, the queen. The American philosopher Judith Butler (1956-) pointed out that *"no individual becomes a subject without first becoming subjected or*

undergoing subjectivation" (close to subjugate or submit in my French woman understanding).

The French clinical sociologist Vincent de Gaulejac (1946-) distinguishes different figures/shapes of the subject (social, existential, reflexive, acting) which refer to different theory fields. The subject is constructed by escaping from his initial subjection. "*To want to be a subject is above all to understand how we are originally subjugated, submit."* The individual and the society are, obviously, linked, inseparable. "*The individual is at the crossroads of multiple networks and interdependencies, of cognitive arbitrations and interactive adjustments,"* both a product and a producer of these combinations. "*The individual precedes the subject who can be seen as a movement, as an attempt never definitively completed* [to question the assigned identity] *and raises to create mediations between the different forms of the social to which he or she is subject. The subject is not a state, a substance, an already there, but a potentiality, a virtuality, a becoming. Its raising depends both on the desire to be, and not only to live, and on the socio-historical context, and is achieved through the reconfiguration/reinterpretation of its history."*

I'll talk below about the notion of identity in the nonfiction storytelling.

Avatar

The term "avatar" comes from the Sanskrit *avatāra* and refers to the descent to earth of superior beings incarnated in various forms and their manifestation. It was above all an incarnation of the god Vichnu or other gods of the Hindu religion.

It was first used to designate the transformation or metamorphosis of a person or something that has already undergone other transformations (in physical appearance, opinions, etc.). Today, this word represents the digital incarnation of an individual in the virtual world of video games, forums, blogs and social networks.

Some fictional characters themselves have avatars (or "doubles") like Dr Jekyll or the characters of Fight club, Black Swan, Enemy, Mulholland Drive, Twin Peaks, Avatar, Legion... A way often used to set up the "inner enemy" (more later).

Character

The word "character" refers to the roles played, to the persons embodied. But also, depending on languages, to a moral quality, a symbol, an odd person, someone who attracts attention, sometimes admiration or esteem by his behavior, appearance, or what has happened to this "real character".

We will usually take care to tell the names of the main characters quite early at the beginning of the story. Each writer decides if he has to define the past, the physical aspect, the social position, the personality traits and the habits of his characters. Some classical French novelist (like Racine, Stendhal, Mauriac) looked for very consistent characters linked to the story for sake of clarity. Others preferred more mystery, actually closer to reality (like Dostoevsky, Proust, Sartre). Adepts of the Nouveau Roman (a type of French novels in the 1950s) went further, condemning the very importance of characters.

Fictional storytelling, when creating its characters, does not escape the stereotypes that constantly surround us, perhaps useful for its cathartic function. A number of cliché characters are familiar to us: the hero alone against everybody (or fighting against a failing system), the knight, the princess, the mad scientist, the tortured artist, the naive cute girl, the superhero, the super-villain, the simple minded, the witch, the old wise man, the miss in distress, the good savage, the femme fatale, the faithful servant, the amazon warrior, the evil clown, the nymphet... It's like these archetypal clichés will last forever, we never seem to get tired of them, they are like a common base of knowledge whose evolution, even if slow, is not without holding up a mirror to our society (and which can explain, for example, how the Dallas series, particularly caricatural, has been able to be immensely successful, both internationally and in the United States). As Hitchcock has said, *it's better to start from a cliché than to end up with it.* Contemporary Czech writer Patrik Ouředník (1957-), whose joyful work is marked by an interest in these clichés, believes that *it is possible to take the language of an era as the "truth of an era", in other words to take hold of a number of language tics, stereotypes and commonplaces and make them act and confront each other in the same way the characters do in traditional storytelling.* At least, that's what he tries to do in his writing.

Some theories (especially those used for video games) about character creation advocate a kind of clarity of the main character that is supposed to be quite simple because we couldn't tell everything in the space of a single story and because every human being would be too complex to be represented by a character. It is then a question of repeating the important things and avoiding things that are unrelated to the plot... which usually leads to poor characters.

The iceberg theory, on which this belief is supposed to be based, does not, for me, go in that direction. It says that only a small percentage of the character will be revealed to the public but not that it is useless to define it further. So we shouldn't hesitate to define characters in depth (physically, psychologically and socially) even though all that depth won't be used in the story. Social class, profession, religion, place in the family, siblings, political opinions, little things avoiding caricature, personality trait, obsession, ambition, fantasies, and above all failings, flaws, handicaps, as we saw above. The right question will then be, as always, what to hide?

Some writers make real character sheets. The French novelist Jo Witek (1968-), for example, even does a sort of "casting" by searching on Google image to get a precise idea of the characters she creates and have them in mind.

When a character has to last several books or seasons, it is important to maintain its coherence, even if the character can evolve. Making it act in a way contrary to what was previously defined can make the public no longer believe in it and quit. For example, in season 3 of the Duffer brothers' *Stranger Things* TV show (2019), the characters of *Eleven* and *Max* decide, totally outside of their rather "badass" definition, to go shopping in a supermarket (probably because they have this main set built for the season, or because they have to place products, or because it's a gender cliché that's stronger than these two characters, even though they are supposed to be the opposite of that cliché...) and they have lost some of their fans with this scene.

Point of view

Narrative points of view are generally considered to be true, reliable (the reader, listener or spectator believes what he is reading, hearing, watching) but they can also become more uncertain, dubious (for example, the memory of one of the characters turns out to be wrong) or even *gonzo* (a journalistic point of view claiming its subjectivity).

In memoirs, dairies or autobiography, the reader expects to read what really happened, following a pact of trust. Regarding fiction, the 18th century English poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge (spoke of the "*willing suspension of disbelief*" of the readers. This suspension of disbelief is maintained by the simple internal coherence of the story (and by the need to believe, in love, in good people, in the afterlife, in the price paid for the book or the movie ticket...).

As Thomas Bidegain pointed out, the point of view makes all the difference between "*thousands of deaths that you don't care about in disaster movies and worrying about a guy who lost his underwear in another story, a story where you see the world through his eyes. 'Who's telling me this story?'* *Lack of point of view often leads to inflation* *(more action to cover this lack).*"

The different types of point of view described in literary analyzes are: internal focus (which can be told in the first person or not), zero focus or omniscient (which can be neutral or more subjective, *"involved"* said Ursula Le Guin), external focus (which can be neutral like a camera or more subjective like a witness which also can be told at the first person).

The point of view is usually carried by the main character. But not always. Besides *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by Henri James, see, for example, Ethan and Joel Cohen's *The Big Lebowski* (1998), where the narrator is only revealed at the end, or Rob Reiner's *Princess Bride* (1988), based on a script by William Goldman (1931-2018), which offers a double complicity to the spectator, with the characters in the story told and with the sick child who is reluctant to read. Some video games also feature narrators who are not the character being played. The discordance of several points of view (or voices) has also sometimes been the very object of the story as told.

A change of point of view within the same story must be really useful, particularly in literature (short story, novel). If it simply reflects a whim of the author, it will be more likely to discourage the reader or to keep him away. Not everyone is Virginia Woolf or Tolstoy. *The Counterfeiters*, a French novel by André Gide (1869-1951) is a monument of changing points of view, due to many characters and crisscrossing plotlines. In a production with images, the framing and camera angles can underline or diminish the narrative point of view. So can sounds and music in any audiovisual production.

According to the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), Dostoyevsky's novels are constructed as a dialogue of points of view. It's not one writer or narrator who describes, presents and characterizes the characters, but rather dialogue of several characters that are constructed through their own words by which

they address themselves, the writer, the narrator, other characters and a potential third person. The writer or narrator does not dominate and does not give a framework for the dialogue, he is on an equal level with the characters. This notion of dialogism or polyphony in novels has been widely reused and reinterpreted in several fields of study, such as law, psychology and sociology.

Dramatic irony (more on this later)

Very often mentioned in scriptwriting teaching (especially for cinema), it consists in giving more knowledge to the spectator/reader than to the character.

It's a very good tool for audience participation, since the audience is put in a flattering position, invited by the writer to become his partner, above the characters. Dramatic irony can have a more diffuse form in which the spectator feels or guesses (instead of really knowing) something that some characters do not feel. It comes easily thanks to the knowledge that every spectator has on storytelling.

When the spectator guesses too easily a mystery required for the story to work fine, the dramatic irony becomes involuntary (usually in police or spy stories) and the spectator gets bored. For example, Ben Stiller's film adaptation of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013), where a close-up that is too long on the wallet thrown away at the beginning of the film revealed (for me) the end of the story in advance.

I'm bored by films which do not take into account what we already know when going in to see them, by their own promotion: For example, if we know that a movie is about the return of a person who was supposed to be dead, it's dull and gratuitous to put in scenes of terrible grief at the beginning, even if the characters themselves don't know yet what is to happen.

Unconscious knowledge of the characters: In daily life, the line between what we know consciously and what we feel unconsciously is not very clear. Sometimes the character prefers to ignore or refuses to believe what the viewer knows. Using dramatic irony consists, in some cases, in showing the energy taken by the unconscious to avoid admitting truth when it's too cruel. This dramatic irony gives more accuracy and depth to the characters psychology. Yves Lavandier spoke about this process in Volker Schlöndorff's 1985 adaptation of Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman,* in Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a doubt (*1943) and Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen (*1998).

To finish with definitions, a **gimmick** is a repeated detail that helps to memorize a character: a sound or a gesture he makes, an expression he uses. In comedy, the gimmick is most often exaggerated.

Character theories and classifications

(We'll see the theories about stories further below)

In stories based on characters, it is often the characters themselves, rather than the sequence of events, that give the complexity of the whole story and the logic of the sequences, which avoids the unbelievable use of chance or divine intervention, as in

tales or ancient theater where, in the last act, a *deus ex machina* allowed the drama to end.

Literature studies often distinguish different types of classic characters. First, those from preexisting myths (like Andromache, Hamlet, Roland, Tristan and Isolde, Phaedra, Don Juan). Then, those created by literature who became references for cultured people (Gargantua, Macbeth, King Lear, Emma Bovary) or more mainstream (Romeo, Carmen, Cyrano, Zorro) like the ones from movies (The Tramp, Peter Pan, Indiana Jones, E.T.). These types are obtained by accumulation (of personality traits shared by certain people), by magnification (of specific social or moral aspects, like in *Les Misérables,* Emile Zola or Molière), by symbolization (of an idea or a condition, like in epics, tales, or Voltaire), or just by their behavior which, although singular, is universally accepted (for Odysseus, Othello, Tartuffe, Hamlet, The Pink Panther) and their complexity (or sometimes simplicity) allows different interpretations in posterity.

Many stories are written with the characters already created according to a world or an ambiance but not necessarily according to a precise story to be told. This is especially the case for tv and animated shows as well as franchise films such as Super Heroes, but also for example autobiographical novels.

We generally look, in storytelling, for some diversity (the characters are not all the same, they are "characterized") and some movement (of meetings, encounters, crossroads, with characters stepping out of their comfort zone, their own little world). The meeting of two opposed characters is always a good carrier (of potential conflict, of comedy contrast, of a larger identification range). Movies made it a universal recipe in all genres for a long time.

The capacity of empathy that a character generates (his ability to make us feel what he feels) will be a big deal, even if this character isn't like us at all. Empathy is a human usual skill ("I know what is important to others in the light of what is important to me"). But we can also say that the "sympathy capital" is something draining away, gradually lost, while empathy is earned thanks to (good) writing, and acting. It is in any case the most immersive way to tell a story.

In order to create more empathy, most often we complain or we expose ourself as a victim (because people empathize with those who suffer, who get lost). But we also need an environment/background of universality (to be endearing). Even a character who seems antipathetic can be endearing, the important thing will then be his ability to evolve, to change. A bounce effect can also be a tool to make the audience like a character using other characters more immediately likable which appreciate or take care of this other character (sometimes for absurd or improbable reasons but it still works). There is necessarily a form of emotional blackmail in the search for empathy. But you mustn't overdo it, of course, otherwise you lose cleverly won empathy because you've played too big.

For Nicolas Dufresne, this empathy is only born if the character reaches the complexity and depth of a real human being, with his features and contradictions, whether the character himself is human or not. But there is no evidence of that.

The theory of the "*uncanny valley*" (a term proposed in 1970 by Mori Masahiro, a Japanese scientist, 1927-) which comes from robotics, is sometimes used to talk about

the realism of the characters. According to this theory, when a robot (here a character) is non-human enough to be immediately identified as a robot (character), a human being would be attached to its human aspects and would have some empathy for this robot (character) but when the robot has an appearance that is closer to a human (while not being human) it starts to create a feeling of strangeness, often represented by a depression in a curve where the vertical axis would be the empathy towards the robot (character) and the horizontal axis its degree of realism. Well, it's just that no serious study shows that this effect really exists.

In 1955, the English writer Edward Morgan Forster (1879-1970) distinguished between flat characters (predictable and fixed) and round characters (with a "psychological thickness"). Maybe this is just the best way to say it.

Elsewhere, we will find three categories of characters: pretext (barely existing), pawn (used, exploited) or person (acting subject). It is like the distinction of classic distribution: main role, secondary roles, extras.

By the way, the secondary characters**,** by being more ordinary, are often closer to us (we identify more easily with them than with the hero).

The American screenwriter Scott Myers (1959-, better known for his advice and script analysis online than for his own stories) uses the symbol of *"Finding the Animals"* to talk about characters**:** Animals can be domestic or wild. Domestic characters are then those that behave as the reader/viewer expects, and wild ones will surprise or shock more, they are less predictable. Animals are alive, biological and intuitive, just like characters. They represent archetypes (the fox is crafty or sly, the raven means bad luck, the lion is lazy, the owl is wise). In myths and dreams, animals can guide.

There are also directors who distribute to the actors, with their role, an animal to which the actor can refer to interpret his role. (There is an amusing reference to this technique in the final season of *Jane the Virgin* TV show).

First, to go back in time, let's first recall this very dated theory:

- The protagonist wishes to achieve the goal.
- The auxiliary or adjuvant assists him to reach the goal.
- The antagonist tries to prevent him from succeeding.
- The sender entrusts the mission to the protagonist. He is also the protector of the value system of the story (the judge in a police story, the godfather in a mafia story).
- The recipient is the one who will benefit from the goal, once it has been achieved (the princess, for example).

Vladimir Propp (a Russian "folklorist", 1895-1970) pointed 7 types of characters:

- The villain or the bad guy (who produces struggles for the hero).
- The donor (who gives the magical, symbolic or material help).
- The auxiliary/helper (which can be universal and perform all functions, like a horse, or partial but with several functions, like the fairy, the genius of the oriental tale, the magic ring, or even more specific with only one function, like the sword or the violin playing by itself).
- The princess or her father (the purpose of the quest that makes the hero go for it).

- The committer/dispatcher (who mandates the hero and designates the object of the quest).
- The hero (or heroine).
- The false/bogus hero (someone who claims victory, tries to take credits for the hero when the hero has not yet returned from his quest).

Scott Myers also distinguishes 5 functions of key characters in movies (mainly Hollywood ones) but not the same ones:
- The protagonists (most of the time the central character, it's his/their goal, their journey which is the backbone of the plot). The hero must start as far away as possible and have obstacles that come from the outside. If he crosses them, it's thanks to him, if he doesn't, it's the obstacles' fault. Enthusiasm is necessary for the protagonists in the first act. Enthusiasm confronts reality in the second act. In the third act, the protagonists have gained experience.
- The nemesis (who opposes, acts against or in the opposite direction of the protagonists). Usually, their goal is alike as the protagonists goal but not with the same intention. Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) said *The more successful the villain, the more successful the picture*. But he "divided" the villain in *North by Northwest* (1959) into three characters (the seducing hypocrite played by James Mason, the dark secretary, and the brutal henchman) to make it more believable than only one character combining all this traits. A distinction can be made between enemies (who want the hero to die) and opponents (who have the same goal as him but want to achieve it instead of him). Usually, the enemy is inside (the inner enemy). When we tell a story we make it seem as if he's across the street, a stranger, but that only serves to reveal our internal torments. See, for example, *Apocalypse Now* or the books of French novelist Marcel Aymé (1902-1967) who played a lot with internal conflict as well as conflict between ordinary characters. On this subject, Thomas Bidegain has a good expression, he asks "*What do we do with the beast?"* When our impulses are not controlled, things end badly. The American professor Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) talked about the *inner dragon* (an inner wild violent animal that can reveal itself in a character). The inner enemy is the *dark side of the force,* it's *I am your father* (so, a part of you).
- The attractor(s) (allied to the emotional development of the protagonists).
- The mentor(s) (allied to the development of thinking and acting).
- The trickster(s) (often an acolyte, he tests the will of the protagonists, neither ally nor enemy or switching from one to the other).

Then, Scott Myers sees 20 different types of characters, much like the character types in role-playing games:
- Addict (especially the addict to power, often due to past wounds, internal conflict, self-destruction, the action takes power over the character who can then do what he does not want to do, it's a good way to break a sequence of events too logical).
- Advocate (who has the ability to empower, to speak for the poor, who needs enemies, and makes us feel hope that there are good people and fair causes).

- Angel (with or without power, good or bad, protecting or satisfying a wish like genies, it can make a counterpoint to the conspiracy of a villain).
- Artist (who sees the world differently, immerses himself in creation, lives on the edges, in a marginal way).
- Bully (it's someone to hate, who creates a contrast with the good guys, generates the conflicts that are the key to the drama, compare the bully to Campbell's "dragon" (inner enemy that can reveal himself in a character).
- Clown (sometimes only visual, it creates confusion, chaos or disclosures when there is a background of truth in a joke, it's a character we laugh at, make fun of - or scares us but then it's not the same function anymore).
- Companion (it's *Chewbacca* or *Timon and Tumba*, often clown too, or alter ego to the point of forming a duo, he helps the hero, completes him, creates a strong bond, entertains the audience and give a boost to the story).
- Destroyer (violent and more radical than the bully, like monsters or big villain obeying their strict rules, for example, the Emperor in *Star Wars*).
- Femme fatale (still here?, maybe interesting from a Hollywood representation point of view, it's the temptress who makes sexuality or pleasure dangerous for the character, but then why not include her in the gambler or addict category?).
- Gambler (who takes risks but not by addiction, someone you can find in sport, who has instinct, often lone wolf, sometimes in a team, good or bad).
- Healer (doctor, counselor, a person who is trusted, sometimes insensitive, wearing the mask of professionalism, it allows to explore the roots of the desire to care and the complexity of the helping relationship).
- Innocent (a child, an adult with protected life, maybe unconscious, sometimes extraterrestrial, like *E.T.,* sympathetic, outsider, someone for whom we are <u>afraid</u> and whose we become <u>witness of his learning</u>, sometimes has magical powers, there are also innocent bad guys).
- Loner (mysterious, it's a character <u>we are curious about,</u> like *Yoda,* or who is alone, we <u>want to make him less lonely</u>, it is easy to identify with him because we are all alone, the effects of what he does <u>are accentuated by the loneliness,</u> more appealing because solitary, silent or invisible enemy, sniper-like, or wise recluse, Clint Eastwood played a lot of them).
- Martyr (whose etymology in Greek is close to "witness").
- Orphan (supposed to be nice but so cliché and often a convenience of writing, especially for youth, a character who has a purpose - to put a family back together, find his parents, find out who he is, like *Harry Potter, Bambi, Moogli, Babe, Superman, Spiderman, Luke and Rey Skywalker in Star Wars*).
- Prostitute (a character to whom we compare ourselves, how much are we willing to sell ourselves to get what we want?).
- Rebel (great identification again, everyone <u>likes to disagree</u>).
- Rookie (outsider who doesn't know the rules, semi-innocent or innocent trained, motivated but who needs help, <u>we learn with him at the same time</u>. An experienced character can find himself banished or outside his comfort zone and become a rookie again).
- Visionary (mixture of artist and wise).

- Warrior (professional called to rescue, old in his last fight, sometimes a new combativeness linked to the discovery of powers, a training, a revenge to take, sometimes a group of warriors, Myers proposes three questions to define a warrior: Against whom? How? Why?).

If a character seems flat to you, or if you feel that you have too many explanations in the way of your story, you can try to add one of these 20 aspects and see what it would say more about your character.

For example, they do this in season 2 of the Duffer brothers' series *Stranger Things* (2017), they use the artistic side of Will, a teenager who draws, a kind of absent lead role (in season 1 he is a prisoner, in season 2 he is possessed). To avoid him explaining too much, they make him draw (they added "artist" to his definition) and the other characters interpret his drawings to find solutions. Hobbies, obsessions, and inner worlds of characters are story implants generally efficient to make believable further scenes. François Truffaut used to enhance his characters with an obsession.

Very often, teams of characters, particularly frequent in action stories, are composed by choosing from these supposedly complementary categories. And we often watch clan oppositions: in the Bible (Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Isaiah), Capulets and Montagues in William Shakespeare, *East of Eden by* John Steinbeck (1902-1968), the film *Giant* with Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson and James Dean, adapted by Georges Stevens from the novel of Edan Ferber (1885-1968) or, of course, the TV show *Dallas*.

There is also a range of characters in ensemble (or mosaic) stories like it's almost always the case now in TV shows which draw their plot twists from the diversity of characters and connections between them. Many famous novels have used this process, for example *The Reprieve* (1945) by Jean-Paul Sartre, and so many others since.

Duos (pairs of characters) are also generally conceived in a complementary way, based on two contrasting characters, which allows either a distribution of tasks to be accomplished or a repetition of their differences and disagreements (particularly useful in comedy).

Be aware of the **"**Smurfette syndrome" which occurs when the story is based on a group of male characters (friends, colleagues, adventurers) along with a single female character, usually defined in a stereotypical way and existing only in reference to the male group. (See also "female gaze" and the Bechdel's test below).

Hollywood says **"*The main character must be likable*"*:*** He or she must be captivating, intriguing, moving, especially if you want the reader of the script (producer/publisher) to keep reading. Not necessarily "likable". Let us remember *Taxi Driver* (1976) by Martin Scorsese (1942-) which manage to make us "like" an odious character (also thanks to Robert de Niro's talent, of course).

Also, ***"The main character must not change his or her goal during the story":*** By giving a goal to the protagonists we offer an end to the story and it helps to build it. That's what the plot is often reduced to, a character starts here and ends there. If

they have a goal, it helps them to be active (in trying to reach that goal) and it avoids having passive protagonists. Which is another rule that's not only for Hollywood (it's very common in children's book publishing): ***"The main character must not be passive."*** Though, when you want to get closer to real life, you have to admit that humans are at least as often passive as active.

Teachers dislike passive characters so much that Yves Lavandier had to find reasons for *Casablanca*'s character (*Casablanca* is a famous movie by Michael Curtiz in 1942, adapted, by four screenwriters from a play not performed at the time, the rights to which had just been purchased by Warner Bros, very often studied in scriptwriting class), Rick (Humphrey Bogart), who doesn't give the impression of being very active even though we can see a lack of meaning in his new life. Lavandier thinks he's "*reactive",* that "*his goal is not to get involved"*. Lavandier thinks that Rick "*fights to remain neutral, politically and emotionally. The biggest difficulty on the road to this goal is the love he still feels for Ilsa and the temptation she embodies. Another temptation (therefore, another difficulty) is the noble cause of Laszlo (Ilsa's husband)".* His goal would be to remain neutral (emotionally, politically, professionally), which would generate reaction rather than action. But isn't every action a reaction? Or would Lavandier not have found, if reading the *Casablanca* script before the film existed, that this character, who is so great, was poorly defined? And what would he say about, for example, the character played by Bill Murray in *Lost in Translation* (2003) by Sophia Coppola (1971-) funny and moving thanks to his passivity? Perhaps we can say that these characters are without a main goal but with a strong need.

It is indeed important to know the difference between goal (which doesn't say anything about motivation) or will (more conscious) and need (which can lead to different goals) or desire (more hidden, more linked to the real motivation, and which may reveal itself to the character during the story or simply as a dramatic irony between the writer and the audience). Very often, **the character wants something but needs something else.** So be careful with this supposed advice to keep one and the same goal to the protagonists. Instead, let's look into the depths of the characters' desires and needs and how this can tell us about their journey and destiny. Most of the time, the first goal is material or concrete (about sport, family, profession, ecology) and become a more noble will or reveal a deep desire. The reverse, from deep desire to material or concrete, is extremely rare (though villains sometimes follow that arc). Examples given by Scott Myers:

- In the film (by Harold Ramis in 1993) *Groundhog Day* with Bill Murray, Phil's goal is to stop living on the same day, the desire that emerges is to become a better person for himself and others.
- In *Tootsie* (by Sydney Pollack in 1983), Michael's goal (played by Dustin Hoffman) is to get revenge for his girlfriend and prove that he can play anything and the desire that emerges is to be a better man as a woman.

Thomas Bidegain says that a character MUST have a clear goal but MUST change his goal during the story otherwise he looks like a big idiot. And it's often by trying hard to reach the second goal (after having confronted the first one with reality) that he also manages to reach the first one.

Some examples of more or less intentional goals: the irrepressible drive, the conquest (of territory or of a person, a group, a people), the proof of unconditional love, the thirst for truth, for justice, power, money, social success, the need for the absolute or for peace, the dream of independence, greater freedom, a message of revolt, getting out of distress (loneliness or addiction), the search for an ideal (filling a void), moral or political awareness, the return to sources or to innocence, the imposed mission to accomplish, the escape (from prison, from a nightmarish place), surviving in the face of danger of death (generally regarded as the most empathetic goal for the audience).

Let's mention here the famous screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (1958-). He wrote *Being John Malkovitch, Adaptation, Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind, Anomalisa*) and played with the definition of a character in almost everything he wrote. Or, less famous, Frederick Tremblay's short film *Dolls Don't Cry* in which stop motion dolls make stop motion dolls: https://vimeo.com/326391429.

In helping students in their storytelling, what seemed to be missing most often, from my point of view, were:
- Well-made links between the characters.
- A likable universality of some main characters.
- Attitudes telling about character's personality.
- Actions that say a lot, that make sense.
- Some fantasy, poetry, or dreamlike or strange sparkles given to the characters that they could have, like everyone else.

For a fairly substantial panorama which can probably give ideas and above all show the metamorphoses over the centuries of famous literary figures, you can consult the *Everyman's Dictionary Of Fictional Characters* by William Freeman updated by Fred Urquhart.

Appendix: Needs, emotions, feelings

Needs of the audience in which the characters are the most decisive: feeling, believing, learning, acting.

List of (temporary) emotions or (deeper) feelings that a character may provoke in the audience: The 6 or 8 axis of emotions (it's worth what it's worth but it can help) are often represented on a circle (you can find plenty of those on Internet). They are :
- Joy, dream, serenity, calm.
- Sadness, to the point of despair.
- Fear, to the point of fright.
- Irritation, annoyance, anger.
- Surprise, stupefaction.
- Disgust, shame, regrets, disappointment, contempt, disdain (this axis appears more on French circles)

- Trust, admiration, love (this one more often circles in English)
- Interest, vigilance, curiosity, anticipation, excitement (axis the least mentioned)

There are several versions. But, see: only 2 positive axis, 2 more or less neutral (surprise and interest), and 4 negative (sadness, fear, anger, disgust) where we could, hopefully, have something designed with as much positive emotions than negative emotions. Are human beings supposed to feel bad more often or with more intensity? For Kenneth Burke (1897-1993), *"man is the inventor of negative"* (the purpose was first to communicate "don't do that" as means of moral education). Henri Bergson (1859-1941) also observed that when we are trying to get the idea of "nothing" we tend to imagine a hole, as if something has been removed, which represents the idea of "no".

According to Portuguese neurologist Antonio Damasio (1944-), emotions belong to the body and cause a series of determined chemical and organic alterations. Feelings come after emotions and have a deeper relationship with thoughts. Faced with something new, the emotional response is more intense.

Positive emotions tend to fade as they are repeated, each time less intense, until they eventually disappear. Negatives, on the other hand, tend to be more persistent. The impact they have can last for several years. These emotions remain present even though the situation has already disappeared.

The *law of closure* (from Nico Frijda, Dutch psychologist, 1927-2015) says that emotions tend to build an absolutist idea of reality. When the intensity of the emotion is very high, everything is analyzed as black or white (we become only able to see part of the problem).

It's interesting that the conception of our different emotions is not so universal and that the difference between emotion and feeling is not always established (Anglo-Saxons for example tend to insert love in the circle of emotions). Emotion seems to lie between perception, evaluation (judgment), communication, and motivation (especially for the ones that prompt us to act like fear or anger). It also has a role in memorization (particularly exacerbated in post-traumatic stress).

List of flaws to build a character

- Abrupt, frank, too direct.
- Quibbler, punctilious, persnickety, fussy.
- Intolerant, dogmatic, psychologically rigid.
- Addict, obsessive.
- Apathetic, logy, lifeless, lackadaisical.
- Anxious, impatient, impulsive, nervous, agitated, stressed out.
- Conventional, formalist, ceremonial, affected, mannered.
- Arrogant, pretentious, megalomaniac, scornful, contemptuous.
- Bossy, commanding, strict, censoring.
- Docile, submissive.
- Weak, ill, maimed.

- Fragile, sickly thin.
- Petty, stingy.
- Chatterbox, gossipy.
- Resigned, jaded, negative, sour, defeatist.
- Caustic, curt, rude, disrespectful, insolent.
- Sullen, grouchy, capricious.
- Sharp, aggressive, brutal, nasty, cruel.
- Secretive, dissimulator, liar.
- Unstable, moody, fickle.
- Social climber, calculator, manipulative.
- Wary, mistrustful, expecting catastrophy, fearful, phobic.
- Angry, bad tempered.
- Hung up, shifty.
- Complicated, obstructionist.
- Unsure, uncertain, undecided, unconfident.
- Rich.
- Poor.
- Stiff, starchy.
- Big spender, broke.
- Overflowed, disorganized.
- Lax, lazy.
- Distracted, dizzy, confused, drugged.
- Imprudent, negligent, off hand, irresponsible.
- Blind.
- Deaf.
- Insensitive, individualistic, egotistical.
- Emotional, overly sensitive.
- Invasive, excessive.
- Envious, jealous.
- Superficial, incompetent, limited.
- Brazen, shameless, coarse, ill-mannered.
- Ordinary, insignificant, influenced, follower.
- Vulgar, gaudy, showy, dressed inappropriately, noisy (ticks, mouth sounds).
- Whimsical, fanciful, goofy.
- Disobedient, unbowed, rebel.
- Hypocritical, slanderous, sly.
- Immature, childish.
- Uneducated, ignorant.
- Indiscreet, spying, prying, intrusive, nosy.
- Introverted, shy, asocial, solitary, silent.
- Sputterer, stutterer, inaudible, incomprehensible.
- Mute.
- Slow.
- Heavy.
- Short.

- Macho, misogynist.
- Clumsy.
- Stubborn, obstinate.
- Closed, judgmental, reactionary.
- Rustic, rural, redneck.
- City dweller, townie.
- Nerd, out-of-reality.
- Egghead, understanding annoyingly too fast.
- Plaintive, complaining, wailing.
- Shirker, slacker.
- Procrastinator.
- Racist.
- Resentful, bitter, vengeful, bad loser.
- Out-of-date, fuddy-duddy.
- Head in the clouds, forgetful.
- Predictable, repetitive.
- Offended, suspicious, paranoid.
- Sad, melancholic, depressive.
- Naive, too nice, pollyannaish.

3- Beyond characters

More definitions

"To write is to try to know what you would write if you wrote - you only know it afterwards - before, it is the most dangerous question that you can ask yourself. But it is the most common one too." Marguerite Duras, French novelist (1914-1996).

Driving idea, basic idea, starting idea

A project (not commissioned by someone else) is the result of a basic idea which can be a message, an ambiance, a mood, important characters, fights against the society or against yourself, something that will push the writer and provide him with the energy to carry out the project.

For some writers, a story idea is simply the association of a problem or theme (for example jealousy, courage, revolt, purity, solidarity, memory, lie, power, doubt, duty) and a metaphor that can illustrate it. Moreover, word of mouth leading to the success of a film, a series or a book, often involves the simple statement of the theme or the subject, of "what it is about" more than of the plot itself but, if the first audience has not been responsive (amused, moved, surprised, interested) to the vision or to the reading of the story, there is little chance that they will want to recommend the book or the film.

As all the themes have already been covered, consulting theme guides or dictionaries can probably help a beginner navigate quickly through them and target what to read and watch without feeling overwhelmed by the extensive list of books and films that came before and are all highly recommended.

This driving idea can be constructed, structured from the start or partly unconscious and it can reveal itself during the writing, even afterwards. The writer will usually have to release it to sell his project (to a publisher, a producer) and then to promote it (to the press, the readers). Carefully defining the basic idea is particularly necessary for an audiovisual production where everyone (and especially the writer-director tandem) must agree. Moreover, a screenplay written on his own by a non-director screenwriter has very little chance of being produced, especially in Europe.

For Ken Loach, "*the stories that work the best are the ones that seem relatively unimportant or trivial but that have big consequences. A small stone that makes a lot of waves."*

The starting point can be a scene, a beginning, a sound or an image, like a seed which will develop or like a pyramid which would grow, generating other ideas to support it, or like a backbone, not necessarily apparent.

We could also say that you have to develop the initial idea with others ideas, just as a trunk needs branches. Olivier Cadiot also speaks (in *Histoire de la Littérature récente,* 2016) of horticultural pruning by "*keeping the line of the main branch"* and admitting your errors (dead branches). He also talks about ideas like "*bodies that you do not yet know"* to which you have to "*find a voice"* that will *"always be too much something"* if you do not find the right *"distance"*. Roland Barthes spoke of *"sowing",* like that of a seed germinating in the brain of the one who had it. For François Truffaut, we let the idea *"enter our mind, grow and develop"*, we take notes, until we feel sufficiently "*invaded"* to start working. For Olivier Cadiot, *"having the idea is living with it"*. See also advice from famous writers in chapter 5.

How do you know if an idea is "good"? For some writers, the notion of combining two generally opposing ideas or <u>two concepts of very different origins</u> makes the interest of a driving idea, creating a contrast, a new combination or an imbalance revealed or created, a dynamic that involves a new insight. For example, the idea of the film *Stepmom* (1998) by Chris Columbus and tons of movies do little more than bring together two characters that have nothing in common. But sometimes none of that, like *Marriage Story* (2019) by Noah Baumbach: just a theme and a desire (a word that comes up very often among writers) to deal with it. An idea is in fact something that will make people write so it must <u>provide pleasure</u>, joy to the writer. Hence, also, the fear of locking oneself into an idea simply because this idea is attractive.

Other authors tend to speak of <u>solving a problem</u> (a given problem, such as an adaptation; a problem found when they see that something is missing, that there is something to do, a concept to use; or a problem that they create themselves). Eric Rochant (1961-) recommend trying to develop ideas before deciding whether they are good or not by starting to accept them all in a brainstorming way, like cooking (by

trying different ingredients to see how they taste). For example, for the TV show *The Bureau*, he did not want the character to lie out of love but accepted this idea by linking the object of this love to an international political issue.

To be the judge of the quality of a story, Thomas Bidegain suggests asking these three questions: *"What does it say about the world? Does it produce images? Have I seen these images before?"*

Beware, as he also said, to the notion of "exceptional" (or outstanding): If, for a story to have interest, it has to be "exceptional", this judgment could be linked to the mediocrity of the observer (as the one deciding what is or isn't exceptional). We will exchange with benefit, again, this idea of "exceptional" by the one of "particular" (singular which tends towards the universal). For him, *"a story is like a box"* (because it must have a structure, a frame) and *"all the elements composing the story must fall in this box, not next to it. If everything possible can be in the box, nothing is interesting, nobody cares. So we have to rather try to close the doors of the box than to open them."*

We often hear the advice to "talk about something that is close to your heart" but the authors would not have many topics if that was the case, nor the screenwriters a lot of jobs. It's more about taking to heart the thing that you want to talk about. Let's quote once again Olivier Cadiot: *"If you have only one idea* [...] *throw a fragmentation grenade on it. Explode this idea into millions of pieces* [...] *then spend half a century looking at those little pieces* [...] *Tell me about it."*

Still, it's good to measure the importance of working on the writing itself, beyond the plot. More than the idea, the good progress of the story or the surprises at the end, it is the ambiance, the mood, the atmosphere of a story that we remember above all, that affects us, that can even haunt us. But it is the storytelling that will allow its production or publication, its success, its remake, ... For example, the short film *La Jetée* (*The Pier)* by Chris Marker aka Christian Bouche-Villeneuve (1921-2012), released in 1962, internationally inspired filmmakers (and a David Bowie music video) before being the subject of the Terry Gilliam's remake *Twelve Monkeys*, in 1995. If its looping story is clever, it is above all the ambiance, the mood of it that is impressive.

In film schools, they often study Mike Nichols' film *The Graduate* (1967, with Dustin Hoffman, adapted from the autobiographical novel of Charles Webb published at the age of 24) especially the use of the metaphoric pattern of the aquarium. This pattern (apart from the main character being offered a scuba diver outfit at the beginning of the novel) is not used by the book, where the character is more lost, alcoholic and immature, near to a disaster rather than locked in a jar, but it is an excellent interpretation of this book (with the addition of the gag *scotch/bourbon* and the race after the bus to Berkeley as well as the music by Simon & Garfunkel). In the movie, he doesn't sell his car, because it's more glamorous to make him drive to chase Elaine again and run out of gas and arrive after the celebration of the wedding (while he arrived just before in the book) which also allows to add the symbolic line *It's too late! Not for me!* between Elaine and her mother, a celebration also shown in a jar, an aquarium. Let's focus on the film's ending, unusual for Hollywood. The film manages, thanks to the performance of the actors (their lost looks) to preserve the

uncertainty and freedom of interpretation of the end of the novel. Depending on whether you are pessimistic or optimistic, you see a happy ending or not.

Some writers speak of necessity, others of fate, duty, pleasure. The question of the writer's goal arises in any case, for everyone. Where are we going to? and with what tools? As in any creation. The belief that you have to ask yourself "why" you want to tell this story before asking "how" is not necessarily relevant. It can lead to abstraction and procrastination and the "why" does not necessarily has to be separated from the "how".

The writer often has in mind **values** he wants to highlight or criticize. It is sometimes by showing things the opposite of these values, or characters struggling with these values, that they appear. Though this injunction to support or criticize values is quite normative. We always find the same messages of tolerance, acceptance... sometimes till boredom.

There is inevitably a balance to be found between coherence and innovation, between empathy for ourself and our ideas and empathy for the public we are addressing.

Statement of intent: A writer's statement of intent is a document of one to three pages presenting the intentions of an audiovisual project (and it tends, alas, to develop in other fields). The author (often pretending that there is only one) must explain why he has written or wishes to write on a theme or an issue, why this is really close to his heart (therefore a form of hypocritical sincerity is required relating to the story told), and why it is important to write this film or this series today (even when this statement is often written after at least a first version of the screenplay is already done). It generally begins with the origin of the project. It is also agreed to slip in references by linking them to the project (explaining how the writer is not going to redo something already done). This document will often be used as a filter when reading the other elements of a project, the decision-makers will generally seek to see if the intent is found in the rest.

At the beginning, you have some characters already in mind, the first story threads, some vague or detailed ideas about the mood, the atmosphere, or what seems to you a brand new idea usually not so new. You have a style, you like a genre, you might already know the point of view of the story. Each writer has desires, tendencies and goals to achieve which all require questioning. What part of my ideas are stereotypes? Must I necessarily get rid of them? Should I listen to myself? To what extent? Would a mix of tones or genres in my story make it more interesting? How to get ideas across without hammering them (clandestinely)? What balance to choose between actions and words or descriptions and actions?

But in your mind you also have limits. Sometimes you think of (what you know or believe about) the market. There is your personal journey, your future or imaginary career, your ambition, your way of life. You can hope to make a living from writing or you can keep away from this illusion, you can have strong models, idols, sometimes from another century, you can target a specific audience or a more private

target or both, not always consciously. You have to understand and maintain your creative engine.

For example, we should be wary of ideas based on nostalgia or based on things we're fed up, which, both might not be enough to create some meaning.

A personal example: my initial idea for *Les Plumes* (2 volumes I published with François Ayroles, Dargaud, in 2010 and 2012) was to deal with uncompromising assertive male characters, 4 novelists who sell themselves and who are used to asking questions (about themselves and about the world around them), too many questions. They know what it is to be a character, they are like Russian dolls and they also repeat themselves so much to promote themselves that they hate themselves. I wanted them to be only male characters, to fight against those who only allowed me to speak about women and I wanted to have fun with another vision of women, something between fantasy and misogyny.

From there, I was able to use what I knew how to do (the humor of daily life and existential questioning) by generating situations that destabilize solitary characters who are fond of their small universe (the writers), which of course has comedic potential (quickly broken monotony, shift, inability, misunderstanding of the world and misunderstood by the world, especially in a situation of social events) spiced up with professional competition, fear, resentment and sarcasm. Then all I had to do was to create a stable close-knit group with these guys to compensate for those characteristics (through friendship, mutual help, and dialogue showing they knew each other very well).

My motivations: While we're at goal and writer's motivations, I've tried to list my personal ones by going over the books I've published, and order my goals by importance:
1. To laugh and to make people laugh but not at all costs (it came like that, it was not my basic intention when I started to publish books but more and more, this motivation grew and is now decreasing).
2. To play with formal ideas (principles or constraints).
3. To talk about everyday life, about ordinary reality augmented with humor (now dropping).
4. To build characters (but that came later).
5. To produce a poetic or unconventional, unique, original atmosphere (that was my motivation as a young writer which came back later).
6. To send a message (rarely).
7. To respond to an external request or command (very rarely but it did happen).
<u>Each of you can have fun doing this little introspection on your own list of projects.</u>

Story world and exposition

It is the greek *diegesis* used by Gérard Genette, a world with its laws, possibly similar to our reality, partially represented by the story, but whose construction is extended

by the imagination of the audience. The diegesis usually represents the world of the whole story, as opposed to reality, and which includes all the levels of a complex story.

Some people draw a distinction between "story" and "diegesis", pointing out that the same diegesis can support different stories (for example, legends, series) and that a story can have different diegeses (stories inside other stories). In addition to transmedia "universes" already mentioned above, we can also think of many often fantastic universes such as *The Obscure Cities* (1983-2009) by Benoît Peeters (1956-) and François Schuiten (1956-) or the multifaceted comic book series *Dungeon* created by Joan Sfar (1971-) and Lewis Trondheim (1964-) since 1998. By building a network of self-references and by empowering certain elements, these "expanding" universes gain in internal coherence and plausibility.

The same Lewis Trondheim and Sergio García (1967-), for their part, quite curiously defined the "ambiance" of a comic book based on four elements: time (past, present, future or imaginary), duration (of the story for the characters), place and context (social environment of the characters).

Depending on where and when the story takes place, the universe will require more or less explanation (which is part of what is called the **exposition**) to insert into the story, especially when there are no images. Ursula le Guin mentions the very eloquent notion of "expository lumps" (also called *infodump*): a too large ill-advised explanation. You have to disaggregate the information and dilute it into the dough of the story, make the information part of the narrative. The exposition must be invisible. A character who discovers a world at the same time as the viewer/reader is a classic example of a generally acceptable exposition.

The use of symbols can also help to set the mood for a story, even when they are not necessarily distinguished by the reader or viewer. Without being too heavy, one or more symbols (object, decoration, clothing, word used) can give subtle indications which direct the reception of the story or anchor it in a certain way, sometimes in counterpoint, and participates in its "atmosphere".

The story world (ambiance, design, mood) is often what the audience is going to remember the most about a book, a film, a game, a show.

The hook concept

From my point of view, there can be all sorts of hooks: an unusual character, an unexpected action, a landscape, a striking atmosphere, a playful form (a puzzle story for example), a fascinating object, beautiful dialogue, a philosophy underlying, ... For screenwriters, it will mainly be emotional hooks since there is a strong belief that playing on emotions guarantees success. Success follows when you grab the audience by the feelings, sweet talk them. This powerful hook is used especially at the beginning of the story, to focus on the desire or the often frustrated need (and from which the goal will arise) of the main character.

It is interesting to ask ourselves, as a reader, what are our favorite "hooks" (what hooks us when we read a story, watch a movie). For me, that would be, in no

particular order: the poetry and the uniqueness of an atmosphere, of an ambiance, the gentleness, the friendship, the sensuality, the flexibility of mind, as well as forces, power (of nature, of special individuals, even “super powers”), also that which makes me understand things and other people (empathy), and of course sharpness or subtlety of humor.

How to use an emotional hook (advice with American sauce) : Emotions belong to the body, they cause chemical and organic changes. Feelings come after emotions and have a deeper relationship with thoughts. When faced with something new, unforeseen, the emotional response is more intense.

What emotions known to all are we going to use? And how do we use them? When you have decided which emotion you want your readers to feel, along the writing, they are supposed to access again this emotion when you repeat the first hook that gave this emotion in the story or when you create another hook with the same emotion.

Obstacles often allow the emotions of the characters to show quite easily. One of the most basic emotions is desire (which is actually never named as such on any “wheel” of emotions). If the characters are motivated, even just having a desire for something simple, the audience is supposed to feel more connected to the characters. And the stronger the characters want something, the more exciting their story is supposed to become (audience is supposed to wonder what the characters are going to be able to do to accomplish their goal, to fulfill their desire). Desire would be the basic emotion that would keep the audience involved in the story being told. When the main character really wants something, you have to put obstacles in the way of creating conflict and difficulty in order to trigger an emotional response from the audience and keep them hooked.

Other emotional hooks can be:

- Shame: Creating something embarrassing or awkward for the character helps the audience to feel connected.
- Debt : everyone can identify.
- Unfairness, injustice: We have sympathy for the victims.
- Opposition, conflict: The presence of incompatible characters in the same story (especially adventure) naturally creates a dramatic tension.
- Fear, of course, when the character is in danger.
- Prediction is supposed to work too: To partially predict what will happen next makes the audience want to know if that’s what will happen.
- Surprise: If the audience is surprised regularly, they no longer try to anticipate too much what will happen next, they no longer have any idea what will happen.
- Exaltation, big enthusiasm: When a character is excited, it tends to make the audience excited too.

The formulation “but who is in the car?” has been used to explain that even a spectacular accident scene does not provide emotion to the spectator if he does not know who is in the car (because, in that case, there is no emotional issue).

It is above all the authenticity, the sincerity of the emotional scenes that will work. Show rather than tell and show in the least stereotypical way possible (don't do what has already been done and seen a thousand times) while remaining believable.

For Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), emotion must come first, whether writing or reading. But to *"get our emotion directly and for ourselves is only the first step. We must go on to riddle it with questions*". What she calls "art of fiction" (for the sake of simplicity) is the arrangement of emotions, which is done by inherited, remodeled or invented methods. The writer can create his book from his own emotions or he can process emotions into something able to stand on its own. And for Woolf, *"the drama is hundreds of years in advance of the novel"* by being more experienced in narrative techniques (known as dramaturgical, and from which today's audiovisual culture derives) and she considers that readers and publishers should exert a salutary and demanding pressure on the novelist (with which the playwright must reckon in the face of actors, spectators and the audience trained for generations in the art of going to the theatre).

Recent psycho-sociological surveys also show, as expected, that the most diverse emotions are "projected" by readers or viewers onto texts or images, according to their own expectations and experiences.

The expression **narrative (or dramatic) tension** is used about everything (curiosity, astonishment, suspense) which encourages the receiver of a story (reader, audience) to wait for what follows with a combination of anticipation and uncertainty. This anticipation is at the heart of the writing process of many screenwriters who seek to direct it, to let the viewers anticipate in order to better surprise them afterwards.

The concept of dramatic beats

It is an information, an action or any event that alters the character's journey and makes the story move on. Surprises, shifts, twists, turns, incidents, ... It's sometimes very small, like the simple intonation of surprise of a character as much as it could be his death or the destruction of an entire planet. In the storytelling machinery of recent TV shows (which will probably end up being boring), each beat bringing some success carries a germ of a disaster to come (as in *Breaking Bad*, 2008-2013).

Hamartia (from the Greek ἁμαρτία) designates a reprehensible but excusable act that results in both deserved and undeserved misfortunes. Some screenwriters use this term to name a dramatic beat constituting a pivot, a strong obstacle (also known as trigger factor) which turns normality into drama (and the story into action) and leads to a point of no return and a second hamartia which pushes the plot towards its end and would be the climax (if I understood correctly, we end up getting confused in all these overlapping terms). The term plot point can also be used for any event which pushes the action or the plot in another direction and the term twist when it is about a radical change (most often a reversal at the end of the story).

Breaths between these beats generally bring the human dimension, a note of humor or poetry in dramas, a note of thought or emotion in comedies.

Oppositions of situations or atmospheres serve to bring them out (trap, tension, ephemeral peace, worry, chain of events, shouting, laughter), to surprise the reader/ spectator and to give the story a sort of depth (but which can also look artificial or become exhausting).

Climax, acme

You hear all the time about it in story analysis and storytelling teaching. It's a special beat, the culmination of a story, at its maximum development, of the highest degree of intensity of the storyline, at the top of a happy or unhappy progression. It's funny to note that here the storytelling shares its vocabulary with medicine (these terms also being used to describe the course of a disease or, less pathologically, an orgasm). This is supposed to be the moment when the real theme of the story is revealed.

It must not be confused with the end of the story, happy or sad, concluded or open, ultimate surprise or outcome/result/completion, to be followed, with or without suspense or "cliffhanger" (like someone actually hanging on a cliff as the story ends) often used to designate an end which seeks to make the audience want to know the continuation.

Muddy middle (opposite of climax)

This is the weak moment in the middle of a story (muddle in the middle, as BBC writers would say), when the characters tend to chat, bump into each other or pass each other while the reader/spectator is waiting for a resolution, or the story progressing. The characters follow a little too much their path, the story goes on as planned, a little too much. This could be because there was not enough conflict (opposition, obstacles) from the beginning.

The muddy middle can allow a form of breathing, but Bidegain quotes Hitchcock on this point: "*Life is not only breathing, it is also having your breath taken away.*" And I would quote, long before him, Joseph Joubert (1754-1824): *"The paper is patient, the reader is not."*

In order to avoid this problem, the idea of "constant progression" and, as we will see later in the Rhythm chapter, of "compulsory acceleration" is very present among movie writers, according to the principle that any agitation would end up no longer operating on the spectator if it is not progressive. Spectators must not look at their watch. And you can't have a film that is just highlights. Both Hitchcock and Rohmer used this principle, though their films are very different.

The structure in acts

Most plays have a simple structure: first act (with a triggering factor), second act (with the climax at the end), third act (resolution). This outline can be found even in non-linear stories by reconstructing the puzzle, or with a triggering factor in

flashback (as, in part, in *Casablanca*). The **triggering factor** is designed to push the character to react and/or put him in a dilemma.

This structure is often enhanced, at the beginning of the third act, with a twist (a second triggering factor which doesn't surprise as much as the one of the first act but who results from what preceded) in order to relaunch the action and which involves a second answer to the same dramatic question. A highlight moment is introduced between the end of the second act and this twist that relaunches the action in the third act, a moment when the protagonist generally thinks he no longer has a goal (falsely achieved or impossible to achieve). This allows the third act to be a little longer and to have its own climax (often more intense than that of the second act, in order to have a crescendo (like in the Hitchcock's movie *Rear Window,* 1954) which provides a second answer (often the opposite of the one at the end of the second act) to the same dramatic question, as well as the final resolution.

For example, in a lot of Hollywood movies, the hero fails at the end of the second act and succeeds at the end of the third. Sometimes the dramatic response is the same (usually positive), but you have to do it twice.

The examples where the answer is first positive and then, after the twist at the beginning of the third act, negative, are pretty rare (see *Les enfants du Paradis*, by Marcel Carné, 1945, a classic French movie of poetic realism).

We will see later various discourses on the structures of stories and the so-called recipes for composing them (especially oriented towards Hollywood-type feature films). Some today use software to organize their ideas, others use columns of Post-it (one per strong beat or set of scenes or chapter with one line per character) to visualize the structure, to make it more or less symmetrical (first act of a quarter, second act of a half, third act of a quarter). Post-its make it possible to synthesize an idea and desacralize it (therefore to move it, modify it, replace it or give it up more easily). Howard Hawks (1896-1977) already stuck luggage labels on a wood board to arrange his films.

Whatever the number of acts, the purpose is always to propose a world and to deal with it, usually by surprising (triggering factor, twist, character study, reverse resolution...). But surprising too much turns into a sham, a fake story or a gag (see the British TV show *The Wrong Mans*, in 2013-2014, based on this principle).

4- Speeches about storytelling

"Make a story to know how to do it. A small one, yours, and a large one at the same time, ours. Hoping that they overlap." Olivier Cadiot

We cannot deny that there are elements of plot that we find universally for ages in all the narrative media (seduction, abandonment, revenge, sequestration, escape, regret, redemption, blood ties, a perilous mission, a confrontation of two worlds, a foreign

element which brings justice or purification or revelation, the strength of the group). Let us take a quick look at what thinkers have to say about it.

Plato (this old Greek guy you know, from 428-348 BC) opposed narration (*diegesis*, storytelling where only the author speaks) and representation (*mimesis*, imitation where only the characters speak). Aristotle (this other Greek from 385-322 BC) said narration was one of the two ways of imitation (the other being "drama").

But, as Gérard Genette showed, a story cannot truly imitate reality. As realistic as it can be, it comes from a "narrative instance" (someone telling). And, as we saw, Genette used *diegesis* to mean the world where the story takes place (or just the sequence of actions, what happens in the story).

On the other hand, if art imitates life, life imitates art too. "*Have men ever been able to resist the desire to imitate the actions and the style of the stories so skillfully told by storytellers?"* American psychologist Jerome Bruner wondered.

In 1884, Henry James wrote that "*The only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of the novel is to be interesting*." He said: *"Don't think too much about being optimistic or pessimistic but capture the color of life itself."* He said: *"Be generous and delicate*, *have taste*," and "*first have the sense of reality"* (even in fiction, that it seems real) then "*ingenuity"* (be smart). Be aware of the "*huge amount of freedom you have"* when you write a story (more than with any artistic production). "*Try to render how things are, to grasp the color, the deepness, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle*." Events or actions, descriptions or settings and context, dialogue, all this must be completely interwoven together for Henry James. Because a story is "*something alive*."

He advised too to take notes. What aspiring writers do quite intuitively, like aspiring artists have sketchbooks.

He did not separate characters (which determine the events) and events (which illustrate the characters).

About this "looking real effect" dear to Henry James, it is often a question of details, sometimes even curious or out of place, which give the impression that they could not have been invented and then help to set up the truth of the story. But this effect can also become too forced, the part of documentation too heavy, the trick of false "real" too apparent.

For **Virginia Woolf,** the novelist is "*terribly exposed to life*". He never forgets and he is rarely distracted, stimulated and manipulated at the same time by the material from which he writes. "*He can no more cease to receive impressions than a fish in mid-ocean can cease to let the water run through his gills.*"

For her, good writers have found a way to harness this sensibility to serve their purposes, by dominating, supporting and transforming their perceptions.

The more you observe, the more there is to see. *"The writer's task is to take one thing and let it stand for twenty: a task of danger and difficulty; but only so is the reader relieved of the swarm and confusion of life and branded effectively with the particular aspect which the writer wishes him to see."*

And she is well aware that the reality of life *"is grossly impure; and that the side she flaunts uppermost is often, for the novelist, of no value whatever."*

Maurice Blanchot, a French novelist (1907-2003), thought of a story as a movement, and, for him, the two "*navigations*" that move the story forward are: the desire to give voice to time and the transition from the *song* of reality to the enigmatic *song* of imagination, which is like a distance to cover.

In 1895, the French play writer Georges Polti (1867-1946) published *The 36 dramatic situations* (in order to serve as a basis for any story) by drawing inspiration from the works of Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806) and Goethe (1749-1832):
1. *Begging*: a character in danger begs to be helped.
2. *Saving*: a character proposes to save one or more others.
3. *Avenging a crime*: a character avenges the murder of another character.
4. *Avenging a loved one*: revenge in the same family.
5. *Being stalked*: a character must run away to save his life.
6. *Destroying*: a disaster happens because of a character's actions.
7. *Owning*: a desire for possession (of something, of someone) prevented or delayed.
8. *Rebelling*: a character revolts against a higher authority.
9. *Being brave*: a character tries to get the unreachable.
10. *Abducting or kidnapping*: a character kidnaps another character.
11. *Solving a puzzle*: a character tries to solve a difficult puzzle.
12. *Obtaining or conquering*: a character tries to grab something precious.
13. *Hating*: a character has a deep hatred for another character.
14. *Competing*: a character wants to achieve the enviable situation of another one.
15. *Deadly adultery:* to possess her lover, a character kills her husband.
16. *Madness*: under the influence of madness, a character commits crimes.
17. *Fatal imprudence*: a character makes a serious mistake.
18. *Incest*: an impossible relationship between relatives.
19. *Killing a friend or a relative thinking it's a stranger*: a character kills a loved one without knowing it.
20. *Sacrifice yourself to an ideal*: a character gives his life for what he thinks is good.
21. *Sacrifice yourself to loved ones*: a character gives his life to save a loved one.
22. *Sacrifice everything to passion*: a passion becomes fatal.
23. *Having to sacrifice your people*: for an ideal, a character kills a loved one.
24. *Competing with unequal weapons*: a character faces another stronger than him.
25. *Adultery*: a character cheats on another character.
26. *Love crimes*: a character in love gets lost and commits a crime.
27. *The dishonor of a loved one*: a loved one commits in bad activities.
28. *Love prevented*: a love story is stopped by family or society.
29. *Love the enemy*: a character loves another even if he is his enemy.
30. *Ambition*: a character is ready to do anything to achieve his ambition.
31. *Fight against god*: a character confronts God to satisfy his ambition.
32. *Jealousy*: jealousy pushes a character to do bad things.
33. J*udicial error*: a character is unfairly accused and condemned.

34. *Regrets*: consumed with guilt, a character feels bad.
35. *Re-union*: after an absence, characters meet again.
36. *Mourning hardship*: a character must mourn a beloved character.

Around 1910, the Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne (1867-1925) created a comparative method to study folktales (which was completed in 1927 and in 1961 by the American Stuth Thompson and, in 2004, by the German Hans-Jörg Uther) today called ATU index and who distinguishes 4 main groups (with 2340 types):
- The *animal tales*, who have animals for main protagonists (n°1 to 299, by type of animal, wild, domestic, with human and animal, …).
- The *ordinary tales* (n°300 to 1199), subdivided into *fantasy tales* (supernatural adversary, wife, tasks, or helpers, magical objects, strength and supernatural knowledge), *religious tales* (mainly Christians, God rewards and punishes, the man in Heaven, the man promised to the Devil, the truth comes to light), *etiological tales* (which explain the world), *tales-novels* (the hero obtains to marry the princess, the heroine marries the prince, proofs of fidelity and innocence, tame shrew, good precepts, cunning actions and words, tales of fate, thieves and murderers), *tales of the ogre fooled* (work contract, never get angry, bet or contract between man and the devil, man kills or hurts the ogre, the ogre is scared or intimidated, the man fools the devil, souls are saved from the devil).
- The *facetious tales* (n°1200 to 1999, stories of mad people, of married couples, mad woman and her husband, mad husband and his wife, mad couples, looking for a wife, mocking old maids, skillful boys, happy accidents, stupid man, deceived priest, jokes about priests, lies, bragging).
- The *formula tales*, where a phrase is repeated from the beginning to the end by the main character and which often have no end (n°1200 to 2340, sorts of songs based on numbers, objects, names or animals, where it is a question of death, eating or other events).
- The *unlisted tales* (n°2400-2499).
Inside these categories, some numbers are not provided with any title for the moment.

At the same time (or before, depending on one or the other, but around 1924), the Russian R. M. Volkov proposed 15 possible storytelling subjects:
- The innocent pursued.
- The simple-minded hero.
- The three brothers.
- The hero fighting against a dragon.
- The search for a bride.
- The wise virgin.
- The victim of a spell.
- The owner of a talisman.
- The owner of enchanted objects.
- The unfaithful wife.
- ...

Vladimir Propp rightly criticized these categories as nonsense. The first category speaks of the plot, the second of the quality of the character, the third of the number of characters...

At the same time, the French historian Joseph Bédier (1864-1938) studied medieval literature and tried to find constitutive elements rather than categories.

Similarly, the German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) considered 7 categories :
- Mythological fairy tales.
- Pure fantasy tales.
- Biological tales.
- Tales about animals.
- Tales about the origin.
- Funny tales.
- Moral tales.

And the French anthropologist Denise Paulme (1909-1998) pointed to these categories, in 1976:
- Animal tales with etiological function (explaining the world).
- Tales of people.
- Astronomical or cosmic tales.
- Mythical stories.

Vladimir Propp criticized the classifications preceding him, which related more to the subject than to the structure, were subjective and made that a tale could be found in several boxes. Today, classifications are based on the vague idea of *pattern* (recurring element, parts difficult to separate, composing blocks). Thompson distinguished three elements: *actors of the tale* (gods, animals or humans), *background elements* (objects, traditions, beliefs) and *isolated incidents*. And seven main types of patterns:
- Mythological (The Creator, gods in general, various explanations).
- Animal (mythical animals, magical animals).
- Taboo (supernatural beings, devil, sex).
- Magic.
- Dead people.
- Wonder/Marvelous.
- Ogres.

This rather empirical classification has been criticized by the French semiologist Joseph Courtés (1985-2005) who advocated a more syntactic typology. For him, each pattern should be an element of the story. More recently, Jean-Jacques Vincensini continued this kind of study of medieval literature based on notions of *figures*, *journey* and *themes*.

The American Alan Dundes (1934-2005) also proposed to divide the stories into *motifemes*, such as, for example, the notion of lack (something is missing or has

disappeared). The Swiss Max Lüthi (1909-1991) added the idea of *blind patterns* for elements that do not have a storytelling function and *truncated patterns* for elements having only occasionally a function. While these truncated patterns may be seen as decadent or due to a faulty transmission of the story or the tale, they are often what give the story all its charm.

In opposition to this notion of patterns, the anthropologist Nicole Belmont (1931-) refers to *mental images* of the story (or the tale), produced by sort of a mental condensation mechanism, as in dreams.

In the 60s, narratology (the purpose of which is to study the structures of stories), following the translation of a first studies of Russian folktales by Vladimir Propp (written in 1928), proposed *narrative structures*, meaning models of construction of the stories, looking to identify the common principles of composition of the tales (which he imagines to have appeared in order to reproduce and replace ancient initiation rites), principles which would tend to universality.

Propp divided into three sequences the 31 possible functions of characters' actions, themselves divided into 7 abstract categories having 7 spheres of action. This formalism was widely criticized by the famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009).

By "function" they meant the action of a character, defined in terms of its meaning in the sequence of events of the plot, covering all the significant actions in the tales. Though they are not all present in all stories, all the analyzed stories present these functions always in the same order:

1. Distance or absence.
2. Prohibition/interdiction.
3. Transgression of the interdiction.
4. Questioning (of the villain by the hero, of the hero by the villain).
5. Information delivered (on the hero or on the villain, for example, a map).
6. Attempt to mislead.
7. The hero lets himself be fooled.
8. The villain succeeds in his crime (captured or make someone disappear).
9. Request is made to the hero to repair the damage.
10. Acceptance of the mission by the hero.
11. Hero's departure.
12. Hero is tested by a donor.
13. The hero passes the test.
14. Gift: the hero receive a magic agent (power, tool).
15. Arrival of the hero at the place of his mission.
16. Battle between the hero and the villain.
17. Mark (the hero receives a wound, a ring, a scarf).
18. Defeat of the villain.
19. Resolution of the initial issue.
20. Return of the hero.
21. The hero is being pursued.
22. The hero escapes obstacles.

23. Unrecognized arrival of the hero (incognito).
24. A false hero claims the reward.
25. Test to recognize the hero.
26. Hero's success.
27. The hero is recognized thanks to his mark.
28. The false hero is discovered.
29. The hero is transformed (he has changed).
30. The false hero is punished.
31. The hero marries the princess or gains access to the throne.

In 1949, Joseph Campbell published *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* in which he explained that the main myths around the world, which have existed for thousands years, share the same basic structure, which he calls "*monomyth"*.

"A hero ventures to leave the everyday world for a land of supernatural wonders: he meets fabulous forces there and wins a decisive victory. The hero returns from this mysterious adventure with the ability to confer powers on those close to him."

It's simple: Departure (separation), Initiation and Return. A start, a middle, an end. Campbell quoted many classical myths (including the lives of Buddha, Moses, and Jesus) from many cultures, which follow this basic structure (quite evidently, given the simplicity of the said structure). He also wrote a lot about the Freudian and Jungian concepts very popular in the 1940s and 1950s, although the structure of his *monomyth* is unrelated to these concepts.

His hero's journey model, independent of academic analyzes at that time, influenced writers everywhere and still influences contemporary creators such as video game designers.

More recently, for the French semiologist Claude Bremond (1929-), a story is made up of a sequence of three elements: opening of a virtuality of action, actualization of it and result (yeah, again, start, middle, end). Actions are performed by two categories of characters: active ones and passive ones, and the story is defined as a succession of roles in action. By introducing interaction into narrative theory, Bremond brought storytelling closer to game designing.

In 1950, French philosopher Étienne Souriau (1892-1979) wrote *Les deux cent mille situations dramatiques* (The Two Hundred Thousand Dramatic Situations) which, quite eccentrically, lends itself to multiple readings and offers an open and exponential combination based on six functions. He compared a dramatic situation to a cube, a sort of interface between the work (*"home"*) and the *"palpitation of reality"* where a human *"screed"* places the characters in a system of forces.

Filmmaker Jean-Pierre Melville (1917-1973) said he had listed 19 possible dramatic situations between police and thieves which were all in *While the City Sleeps* (1950), an adaptation of William Riley Burnette's novel by John Huston.

The “quinary structure” (it is not for nothing that telling and counting have the same root) lists the initial situation, the complication (or disturbance), the action (the means used to deal with the complication), the resolution (consequence of the action) and the final situation (result).

The “actantiel model”, proposed by Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992), a Lithuanian semiotician who lived in France, is less linear and more based on functions or roles of the different elements of the story (in particular the characters) according to three axes: desire, communication and power.

It was then replaced by the “canonical model”, from the same guy, who organizes the narrative elements into different components: the *action* (itself broken down into *skills* like *want to do*, *have to do*, *know how to do* and *be able to do*, and *performance* relating to the real fulfillment of the action), the *manipulation* (positive or negative, specific to *wanting to do* and *having to do*) and the *sanction* (evaluation, judgment of the action and its reward or punishment).

More recently, the work of the French linguist Jean-Michel Adam (1947-) on the narrative structure has made it possible to underline the symmetries of a story: symmetry between the initial situation and the final situation. From the initial situation, a horizon of expectation is created, the promise or the possibility of a balance, of a restored world. We can even conceive of a form of going back determination from the final situation, programmed by the story, back to the initial situation. Furthermore, the triggering factor (initial complication) and the final resolution also have a symmetrical relationship. So a story that functions “canonically” would be a story with a transformation of an initial situation into a final situation in a specific way.

We can then distinguish the main sequences from the secondary sequences, more ornamental, that could be removed without modifying the meaning of the basic story. These ornamental sequences, called *catalysis* by Roland Barthes, make the charm of the story, of the writing, contribute to its richness, in a way filling the narrative space between the structural functions.

The model of a narrative sequence according to Jean-Michel Adam is:

- Introduction/prelude.
- Initial situation.
- Complication.
- Actions.
- Resolution.
- Final situation.
- Final evaluation.

The ideality of this model would allow us to observe the differences between the different ways of storytelling.

We can also, at the same time, quote again the American psychologist Jerome Bruner who, relying on the work of Kenneth Burke (1897-1993) and Erik Erikson (1902-1994), took up the idea that a fiction or a real story is made up of at least five elements (not the same five as the quinary model, of course): one *agent* who engages in an *action* to achieve a *goal* in a *context* well determined by using certain *means*.

But this story begins when a rupture or "*trouble*" (to use Burke's own expression) happens between some of these five elements: it can be between agent and action or between goal and context, etc. From Bruner's point of view, these imbalances correspond to the crisis all human beings are going through.

Another theorist we already talked about, Gérard Genette, pointed out four analytical categories:
- The *mode* (the way) manages the *regulation of narrative information* by telling the *distance between the narrator and the story* allowing to know the degree of precision of the information of what is told, the most distant (indirect) or the less distant (direct) and the function of the narrator according to his implication (simple story, communication with the listener, value of testimony, ideological function).
- The *narrative instance* is the articulation between the *narrative voice* (who is speaking?), the time of the telling (when do we tell? compared to the story told) and the *narrative perspective* (by whom do we perceive the story? also called "focus" or "point of view" which was later augmented by François Jost (1949-) by the idea of *ocularization* for visual media) whose enunciation has similarly been augmented by the idea of *monstration* by André Gaudreault (1952-) for visual media. Monstration which can then be divided into its iconic part (what is represented) and its plastic part (in what way) in particular via the term of Philippe Marion *graphiation* (graphic identity) for comic books (but which Marion curiously connected to a supposed empathy of the reader linked to his supposed childhood memory of having a practice of drawing.)
- The *narrative levels* are the interlocking, the small stories in the main story and the possible effects of metalepsis (which consist in the transgression of boundaries between two narrative levels, in order to deliberately blur the difference between reality and fiction, or to create an effect of slip or trickery). The storytelling plays with this *moving but sacred boundaries between two worlds: the one where we are telling, the one we tell about*.
- The *narrative time* is the relationship between the storytelling and the story, the temporal position of the narrator compared to what is told, playing on the order of the story (the things can be presented disordered or in the order in which they unfolded), the narrative speed (a whole life can be summed up in one sentence as we can tell 24 hours in a thousand pages, with also all the effects of slowing down or accelerating, using pauses and ellipses) and the event frequency (the number of times we tell what happened one or more times) in the storytelling.

Paul Ricœur, more philosopher than formalist, saw storytelling as an act operating a form of *time configuration*, an operation of synthesis of the heterogeneous, which can be opposed to the temporal experience (of reality) seen as discordant and chaotic. He distinguished three interdependent levels of what he called *mimesis*: the first one supposes a prior understanding of human action *(prefiguration)*, the second corresponds to the actual plot setting or storytelling *(muthos, configuration)* and the last is the reception of the story by the public *(katharsis)* which he named "*refiguration of temporal experience*".

The *plot setting* is the arrangement of facts in a system resulting from a complex configuration and it requires bringing together events separated in time and space, and then choosing, prioritizing, articulating (configuring) to produce a story. German Nobel price of literature Thomas Mann (1875-1955) said: "*To tell is to set aside, meaning both elect and exclude*." Ricœur added: "*Literature would be forever impossible to understand if it wasn't about configuring what already figures in human action*."

In 1990, a guy named Philip Sturgess produced a thesis in which he defined *four main storytelling types*, of which he gave four representative examples: *Under Western Eyes*, 1911, by Joseph Conrad (disorganized storytelling); *Ulysses* by James Joyce, 1922 (representational storytelling); *At Swim-Two-Birds*, 1939, by Flann O'Brien (metafictional storytelling); *Darkness at Noon*, 1940, by Arthur Koestler (sequential storytelling).

Another guy, a Canadian communication teacher, Philippe Sohet, summarized storytelling as:
- A "story" (semantic dimension).
- Told in a certain way (syntactic dimension).
- In a precise communication context (pragmatic dimension).
- With the help of a unique medium (media dimension).

So, a lot of people said a bunch of smart things which actually don't really help us as story tellers. Now let's see what other people have said about actually writing stories (If you're going to tell stories without images, you'll still find information below because you'll have to think about organization, genre, rhythm and dialogue even though you'll rather end up with a "manu"script.)

5- Speeches about scriptwriting

Let us quote the French scriptwriter Benoît Peeters (1956-) to start with: "*What is a script? [...] Let's try a temporary definition: the script would be a summary, a description or an evocation of a narrative work that does not yet exist and that it has the function of making that narrative work possible.*"

From this author, I particularly recognize myself in the evocation that he made of the work of co-authored writer (working in collaboration with an artist or with a director) as a "*writing of the other*" where it's about "*designing everything and not predicting anything*", working on the emergence of real images but *"discovering as new what we thought we knew"* and be pleasantly surprised every time.

We could also talk about weaving or knitting. In literature, you can hear canvas.

The script is something written taking part in the elaboration of a product of images and possibly of sounds, which is presented as an informative text. Without

taking care of the form (what it looks like), the script is only there for the content of the story that it sets up.

The word *scenario* came from Italy where it first designated the scenic space, and its organization before becoming the canvas of a show, in the sense of directing instructions, before becoming in the 19th century the argument, the theme of a play, or the detailed plan of a novel. The beginnings of cinema, which left a lot of room for improvisation, used rather synopsis, brief descriptions of the plots. The development of a more industrialized movie making made the screenplay more important as a text written before filming and which defines its story and its structure. The screenplay or scenario of a film gathered the dialogues, the description (always in the present tense) of the actions as well as some possible indications relating to the characters, the costumes, the sets, the visual and sound effects.

The French writer Jean-Claude Carrière (1931-) talked about an ephemeral (short-lived) object. "[The scenario] *is not supposed to last, but to fade, to become something else. Of all the things written, the screenplay is the one that will have the smallest number of readers [...] But it is not a vague writing, an in-between, a piece of literature that must be transformed into a moment of cinema. The script is already a movie."*

The script answers to the need for a specific narrative support (film, comic book, series, novel, short story), it generally calls for simplicity and precision.

To distinguish the notions of story, storytelling and script/scenario, a French teacher in video games, Ronan Le Breton (1972-), takes, about the creation of games (or what he calls *narrative design*), the example of Cluedo: Each game starts with the same event (someone killed Dr Lenoir), the difference is that in each game, the scene of the crime, the murder weapon and the murderer are different. The <u>scenario</u> takes the form of an equation with several variables: <u>crime scene + criminal + crime weapon.</u> While <u>storytelling</u> represents for him "*what the game tells players during the game"*: the house of crime materialized by the board, the cards that the players have in hand (and which are false leads: worthless rooms and weapons, false suspects) and the envelope containing the correct answer (the murderer, the crime scene, the weapon). And the <u>story</u> is for him "*the work of the players"* who must solve the mystery of Dr Lenoir's crime.

In everyday French language, the term scenario has two meanings today, that of the <u>story told</u> and that of the <u>way of telling it</u>. Practical guides and other recipe books on scriptwriting speak, for their part, in their vast majority, of feature films screenplay, most often in a process of seeking audience success.

Some audiovisual beliefs

Jean-Claude Carrière, again, said: "*Be aware at all times that literature is the number one enemy, that any literary effect in scriptwriting won't help the director, who will not know how to use it. You have to forget about beautiful sentences, beautiful ideas."* Belgian cinema historian Jacqueline Aubenas (1930-) explained: "*We must move from too written, from too much said, from too much explained to strong suggestions, dry*

constructions. The beautiful sentence is not a goal. Style belongs to the images and the rhythm."

Scott Myers gave some tips for writing a compelling, entertaining and fun story for script readers in Hollywood. It's interesting to know, it can help to unblock you. He listed the tips that help especially to have a screenplay be easy to read, appealing to decision-makers (as false storyboards are made about advertising videos to seduce advertisers) who have frames of references. He criticized them, showed counter examples, or how the writers twisted the rules (and he used these so-called rules to make tools of them) because there are recommendations or principles that professional script readers have in order to select what they're going to read or to throw away. Here they are :

- *Paragraphs of 3 lines maximum:* It's more readable, and directors don't like writers to describe scenes too much. You have to describe the actions a way to suggest the shots and camera movements (without writing *we see* or *we hear*). "*Example of a scene without dialogues and without directions:*

The old van was parked higher up along the sidewalk. They race to the car. Sophie leaves Charles behind. Then victoriously taps the bumper of the van.

Paul and Miranda catch up with them. The van is parked in front of a house with a sign "for sale".

Miranda tries to look through the dirty windows of the car. Sophie begins to climb the small ladder on the back of the van when Paul pulls her back.

Miranda grabs Sophie's hand and pushes Paul away. They all stop and listen. The radio turned on in the van, a song from the 70s.

Sophie throws a snowball which resonates by crashing into the metal of the door.

Paul grabs her hand.

The four friends continue to walk to the end of the block.

Behind the dirty windscreen of the van, a shadow appears watching them walk away."

- *Don't write things you can't film:* In fact, it's just a way of saying that you shouldn't try to be literary or give your opinion. For him, it is a choice linked to what he calls the *narrative voice* which is not the narrative point of view but the addition of the genre (comedy, action-adventure, drama-police-tragedy-suspense, fantasy-scifi, nonfiction-historical-political) in which you place your story and the style (general tone, atmosphere) that you want to give to it. It may be necessary to judiciously indicate the mood, tone, thoughts and feelings of a character, to achieve that narrative voice.

- *Avoid using transition terms* (such as CUT TO or DISSOLVE TO). So please don't if you send a screenplay to Hollywood.

- *Using flashbacks or using a voiceover are signs of weakness:* Not if they're essential to your story, or if you can use them in a unique (or, at least, original) way, if you can provide convincing moments with a flashback or a voiceover (or comic book captions!). Basically, if it's not an easy way out, it won't look like it. And there are plenty of good examples in movies or series. The voiceover or flashback can have a humorous value, create a premonition or create mystery, it can play on the memory,

the reliability of the narrator, involve a twist, be a narrative tool (through a recording, for instance), a confession, or underline the deep change of a character...

Using a voiceover (more pervasive for the viewer than the ones in comic book captions, sometimes called *narratives*) gives a voice (of course) so a tone, sort of embodies the narrative voice of the story, so you have to think it through before using it. See for example classical *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) by Billy Wilder, *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1951) adapted by Robert Bresson (1901-1999) from the novel by Georges Bernanos (1888-1948), *American Beauty* (2000) by Sam Mendes who uses great voiceover and flashback. There may also be dialogue in voiceover on images showing something else than the characters speaking, particularly when their voices have already been identified. Conversely, Some film adaptations add a character to transform the literary interior monologue into a dialogue of confidence type in order to avoid the permanence or the emergence of a voiceover.

On the other hand, the non-linearity of a story (by using flashback or flashforward) can make it possible to create particularly successful kinds of narrative puzzles (divided or interlocked stories), used for a long time in literature and many times in cinema, as by Atom Egoyan the adaptation of Russell Banks (1940-) novel *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) or by Gus Van Sant for *Paranoid Park* (2007) where flashbacks, whose we can see later in chronological order, first constitute a puzzle linked to fragmented memory and guilt of the main character. *Career girls* (1997) by Mike Leigh (1943-) only works thanks to the flashbacks comparing the past and the present of the two characters.

Both are frequently used in literature without any heaviness (which can be implied by using images) to set up a relation between non-chronological parts of the story, to reveal the mental state of the hero, to underline the non-linearity of fate, to demonstrate the plurality or the subjectivity of points of view, to connect several stories, several paths, several characters, to dilute time or to create suspense. Not to mention the stories in reverse chronology which begin at the end (*in ultima res*) or in the middle of the story (*in medias res*) to go back, or just where we know the end and which are therefore only a flashback like the novel *The Last Day Of A Condemned Man* (1829) by Victor Hugo, the short story *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, (1922) by Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *Counter-Clock World* (1967) by Philip K. Dick or dozens of varied films (*Rebecca*, *Sunset Boulevard, Apocalypse Now, Memento, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Melancholia*...)

- *Certain steps must arrive at a certain place (pages) of the script:* A film is often written in three acts. What happens at the start? What is the end of act one? Often in act two, there is a climax or a twist (helping to go to the end). How does act two end? What is the end of the story? So at least five keys to the plot to think about. Sometimes ten or twelve. Some French screenwriters used to compose a feature film in 30 sequences (sets of scenes), others in 56, others in 70. A sparkle (something bursting out) is supposed to happen every ten pages in the script. Others say every five pages.

So again, think about it next time you're going to send a script to Hollywood! That said, reading grids (and "reading notes") exist elsewhere, in any country in audiovisual and even in publishing. They are supposed to help form a more objective

opinion on a project. In television production, they are the subject of a continuous flow between the broadcaster (channel or platform, main funder) and the writers. They are also sometimes applied by producers to choose projects and by members of public funding allocation commissions. This means that knowing these grids can make it possible to better meet these predetermined expectations, sometimes at the expense of a more unbridled or original creativity.

Claiming to anticipate the viewer's experience, these grids primarily protect decision-makers. They have analytical keys based on supposed "dramaturgy" in a rather great ignorance of the practices of other cultures than Hollywood (for example Japanese for cartoons, which maintains a generational gap between Western producers and the adolescent or young adult audience) based on reassuring keywords: they talk about "stakes" which would be more or less clear or strong to "keep people on the edge of their seat" (as if that were the goal of every writing), of "want" established quickly enough or not quickly enough, of "journey" of the character more or less easy to perceive, of possible lack of "conflict" in the plot, of the story keeping its "promises" or not, of the characters being endearing or not (often from the few elements that there are in a synopsis), of the ease of reading the project, of the subject beeing universal or promising and if it's well documented, of the intention possibly "embodied" or not, sometimes a little of the structure and relevance of the visual choices (some producers of animation, for example, do not see the interest of using this technique for a "realistic" story) or of tone (irony would not be understood by children, metaphor by teenagers, whereas the most recent studies contradict these conceptions and it is enough to have worked with children and teenagers to know their great variety). The luck of writers is that the producers or the publishers do not all have the same application of these homogeneous grids and are still numerous enough to contradict each other in their appreciation of a project.

Writing rules at Pixar quoted by American writer Emma Coats

Analyzed by Stephan Vladimir Bugaj downloadable here (free ebook):
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52675998e4b07faca3f636a5/t/527f0a75e4b012bf9e7361c5/1384057461885/Pixar22RulesAnalyzed_Bugaj.pdf

1. *You admire a character for trying more than for their successes.*
2. *You gotta keep in mind what's interesting to you as an audience, not what's fun to do as a writer. They can be very different.*
3. *Trying for theme is important, but you won't see what the story is actually about until you're at the end of it. Now rewrite.*
4. *Once upon a time there was ___. Every day, ___. One day ___. Because of that, ___. Because of that, ___. Until finally ___.*
5. *Simplify. Focus. Combine characters. Hop over detours. You'll feel like you're losing valuable stuff but it sets you free.*
6. *What is your character good at, comfortable with? Throw the polar opposite at them. Challenge them. How do they deal?*

7. *Come up with your ending before you figure out your middle. Seriously. Endings are hard, get yours working up front.*
8. *Finish your story, let go even if it's not perfect. In an ideal world you have both, but move on. Do better next time.*
9. *When you're stuck, make a list of what WOULDN'T happen next. Lots of times the material to get you unstuck will show up.*
10. *Pull apart the stories you like. What you like in them is a part of you; you've got to recognize it before you can use it.*
11. *Putting it on paper lets you start fixing it. If it stays in your head, a perfect idea, you'll never share it with anyone.*
12. *Discount the first thing that comes to mind. And the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th – get the obvious out of the way. Surprise yourself.*
13. *Give your characters opinions. Passive/malleable might seem likable to you as you write, but it's poison to the audience.*
14. *Why must you tell THIS story? What's the belief burning within you that your story feeds off of? That's the heart of it.*
15. *If you were your character, in this situation, how would you feel? Honesty lends credibility to unbelievable situations.*
16. *What are the stakes? Give us reason to root for the character. What happens if they don't succeed? Stack the odds against.*
17. *No work is ever wasted. If it's not working, let go and move on – it'll come back around to be useful later.*
18. *You have to know yourself: the difference between doing your best & fussing. Story is testing, not refining.*
19. *Coincidences to get characters into trouble are great; coincidences to get them out of it are cheating.*
20. *Exercise: take the building blocks of a movie you dislike. How d'you rearrange them into what you DO like?*
21. *You gotta identify with your situation/characters, can't just write 'cool'. What would make YOU act that way?*
22. *What's the essence of your story? Most economical telling of it? If you know that, you can build out from there.*

The case of Pixar is interesting because all the films they make look alike now. They tell of the evolution of a main character helped by another one who is very different, quite the opposite of the main one, and helped by a bunch of less important characters whose only goal is to make the main character become mature.

Advice from American screenwriter Carter Blanchard

- There are at least good idea each day in any newspaper.
- Obituary notices give good ideas about people who weren't famous but who lived interesting things and sometimes unbelievable things.
- Listen to your family, to your fiends. (I would add: Make people talk to you.)
- Don't watch TV.

- Read classical novels and others. Watch movies.
- Make the list of the most important events in you life. What made you change? What made you who you are?
- Write about what you know. If you think it's not interesting, it can be very exotic for other people or other times as far as you can find original/interesting characters to go with it.

Advice from British writer J.K. Rowling (1965-)

1. *What you write becomes who you are…So make sure you love what you write.*
2. *I always advise children who ask me for tips on being a writer to read as much as they possibly can. Jane Austen gave a young friend the same advice, so I'm in good company there.*
3. *You've got to work. It's about structure. It's about discipline. It's all these deadly things that your school teacher told you you needed…You need it.*
4. *Sometimes you have to get your writing done in spare moments here and there.*
5. *Sometimes the ideas just come to me. Other times I have to sweat and almost bleed to make ideas come.*
6. *You have to resign yourself to the fact that you waste a lot of trees before you write anything you really like, and that's just the way it is […] I wrote an awful lot before I wrote anything I was really happy with.*
7. *The five years I spent on Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone were spent constructing The Rules. I had to lay down all my parameters. The most important thing to decide when you're creating a fantasy world is what the characters CAN'T do [...] I came up with lots of the characters you meet at the school. Loads and loads of details, but not really the narrative. It's as though, subconsciously, for years, I had been preparing for writing Harry Potter.*
8. *Failure is inevitable. Make it a strength.*

Advice from American writer Stephen King (1947-)

<u>On the writer state of mind:</u>
1. First write for yourself, and then worry about the audience. (Not exactly the Pixar rule, right?) *When you write a story, you're telling yourself the story. When you rewrite, your main job is taking out all the things that are not the story. Your stuff starts out being just for you, but then it goes out.*
2. Don't worry about making other people happy. *The least of all should be polite society and what it expects. If you intend to write as truthfully as you can, your days as a member of polite society are numbered, anyway.*
3. The magic is in you. *I'm convinced that fear is at the root of most bad writing.*
4. Stick to your own style. *One cannot imitate a writer's approach to a particular genre, no matter how simple what the writer is doing may seem.*
5. Writing is about getting happy. *Writing isn't about making money, getting famous, getting dates, getting laid, or making friends. In the end, it's about enriching the lives*

of those who will read your work, and enriching your own life, as well. It's about getting up, getting well, and getting over. Writing is magic, as much the water of life as any other creative art. The water is free. So drink.
6. Dig. *Stories are found things, stories are relics, part of an undiscovered pre-existing world. The writer's job is to use the tools in his or her toolbox to get as much of each one out of the ground intact as possible. Sometimes the fossil you uncover is small; a seashell. Sometimes it's enormous, a Tyrannosaurus Rex with all the gigantic ribs and grinning teeth. Either way, short story or thousand page whopper of a novel, the techniques of excavation remain basically the same.*
7. You become a writer simply by reading and writing. *You don't need writing classes or seminars any more than you need this or any other book on writing. You learn best by having a life then by reading a lot and writing a lot, and the most valuable lessons of all are the ones you teach yourself.*

Technical advice:
1. Take care of the introduction, the beginning of the story. *The first line should welcome the reader into the story, it should say "Listen, come here, you want to know what's going to happen."*
2. Write one word at a time. *In the end, it's always that simple. Whether it's a vignette of a single page or an epic trilogy like The Lord Of The Rings, the work is always accomplished one word at a time.*
3. Don't use passive voice. *Timid writers like passive verbs for the same reason that timid lovers like passive partners. The passive voice is safe.*
4. Avoid adverbs. *The adverb is not your friend. Use context. Avoid adverbs, especially after "he said" and "she said."*
Here I'm adding that the very famous French novelist Albert Camus (1913-1960) advised to also get rid of adjectives.
5. Pay attention to paragraphs. *Paragraphs are almost always as important for how they look as for what they say,*
6. But don't obsess over perfect grammar. *The object of fiction isn't grammatical correctness but to make the reader welcome and then tell a story… to make him/her forget, whenever possible, that he/she is reading a story at all.*
7. Be careful with descriptions. *Description begins in the writer's imagination, but should finish in the reader's, in a way that will cause your reader to prickle with recognition. The reader's boredom goes with the writer's power of description when the writer has lost sight of his priority, which is to keep the ball rolling.*
8. Leave out the boring parts and kill your darlings. *Cutting to speed the pace, that's what most of us end up having to do. Kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little heart.*
9. The research shouldn't overshadow the story. *If you do need to do research because parts of your story deal with things about which you know little or nothing, remember that word 'back'. That's where research belongs: as far in the background and the back story as you can get it. You may be entranced with what you're learning but your readers are probably going to care a lot more about your characters and your story.*

About the writing surroundings:

1. Write with a closed door. *It is the way to tell the world and yourself that you're busy. You seriously commit to write.*

See also, of course, Virginia Woolf (1982-1941), *A Room of One's Own.*

2. Set up your working place in a symbolic way. *It starts with this: put your desk in the corner, and every time you sit down there to write, remind yourself why it isn't in the middle of the room. Life isn't a support-system for art. It's the other way around.*

3. Turn off the TV and eliminate distraction. *There should be no telephone in your writing room, certainly no TV or video games for you to fool around with. If there's a window, draw the curtains or pull down the shades unless it looks out at a blank wall.*

4. You have three months. *The first draft of a book -even a long one- should take no more than three months, the length of a season.*

5. Take a break. *If you've never done it before, you'll find reading your book over after a six-week layoff to be a strange, often exhilarating experience. It's yours, you'll recognize it as yours and yet it will also be like reading the work of someone else, a soul-twin, perhaps. This is the way it should be, the reason you waited. It's always easier to kill someone else's darlings that it is to kill your own.*

6. Read, read, read. *You have to read widely, constantly refining (and redefining) your own work as you do so. If you don't have time to read, you don't have the time (or the tools) to write.*

Mark Twain thought he had to write 1800 words a day, Stephen King suggested 2000 a day.

Stephen King Bonus:

There are two secrets to success: I stayed physically healthy, and I stayed married.

Ursula Leguin (1929-2018) also spoke very well of the concomitant importance of digging into one's subject and knowing how to leave it aside, not to say everything, to prune, to cut unscrupulous, especially the beginning of the story (advice she attributes to Anton Chekhov). "*The story is not in the plot but in the telling*." She opposes the belief that conflict is the only or main tool of a story; she values instead the transformation, the movement, the trajectory of a story.

Challenging detective stories rules

S.S. Van Dine (1888-1939), whose real name was Willard Huntington Wright, was one of the most popular American mystery writers of the twenties and thirties. In 1928, he had fun with the 20 rules for writing detective stories:

"The detective story is a game. It is more, it is a sporting event. And the author must play fair with the reader. He can no more resort to trickeries and deceptions and still retain his honesty than if he cheated in a bridge game. He must outwit the reader, and hold the reader's interest, through sheer ingenuity. For the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws, unwritten, perhaps, but none the less binding: and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them.

1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.
2. No willful tricks or deceptions may be played on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.
3. There must be no love interest in the story. To introduce amour is to clutter up a purely intellectual experience with irrelevant sentiment.
4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery.
5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions--not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession..
6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues, he has not solved the problem.
7. There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice. Three hundred pages is far too much pother for a crime other than murder. After all, the reader's trouble and expenditure of energy must be rewarded. A tiptop murder arouses our sense of vengeance and horror.
8. The problem of the crime must be solved by strictly naturalistic mean.
9. There must be but one detective only. To bring the minds of three or four, or sometimes a gang of detectives to bear on a problem is not only to disperse the interest and break the direct thread of logic, but to take an unfair advantage of the reader,
10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story--that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar and in whom he takes an interest. For a writer to fasten the crime, in the final chapter, on a stranger or person who has played a wholly unimportant part in the tale, is to confess to his inability to match wits with the reader.
11. Servants (such as butlers, footmen, valets, game-keepers, cooks, and the like) must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. This is begging a noble question. It is a too easy solution. It is unsatisfactory, and makes the reader feel that his time has been wasted. The culprit must be a decidedly worth-while person.
12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.
13. Secret societies, camorras, mafias, have no place in a detective story. Here the author gets into adventure fiction and secret-service romance.
14. The method of murder, and the means of detecting it, must be rational and scientific. That is to say, pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices are not to be tolerated in the detective stories.
15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent--provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should reread the book, he would see that the solution had,

in a sense, been staring him in the face--that all the clues really pointed to the culprit--and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often thus solve the problem goes without saying. And one of my basic theories of detective fiction is that, if a detective story is fairly and legitimately constructed, it is impossible to keep the solution from all readers. There will inevitably be a certain number of them just as shrewd as the author; and if the author has shown the proper sportsmanship and honesty in his statement and projection of the crime and its clues, these perspicacious readers will be able, by analysis, elimination and logic, to put their finger on the culprit as soon as the detective does. It's part of the game.

16. A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no "atmospheric" preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action, and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion.

17. A professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of a crime in a detective story. Crimes by house-breakers and bandits are the province of the police department (not of authors and brilliant amateur detectives). Such crimes belong to the routine work of the Homicide Office.

18. A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to play an unpardonable trick on the reader.

19. The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal. International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction (in secret-service tales, for instance). But a murder story must be kept gemütlich, so to speak. It must reflect the reader's everyday experiences, and give him a certain outlet for his own repressed desires and emotions.

20. Here is a list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective-story writer will now avail himself of. They have been employed too often, and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author's ineptitude and lack of originality.

1. *Determining the identity of the culprit by comparing the butt of a cigarette left at the scene of the crime with the brand smoked by a suspect.*
2. *The bogus spiritualistic seance to frighten the culprit into giving himself away.*
3. *Forged finger-prints.*
4. *The dummy-figure alibi.*
5. *The dog that does not bark and thereby reveals the fact that the intruder is familiar.*
6. *The final pinning of the crime on a twin, or a relative who looks exactly like the suspected, but innocent, person.*
7. *The hypodermic syringe and the knockout drops.*
8. *The commission of the murder in a locked room after the police have actually broken in.*
9. *The word-association test for guilt.*

10. The cipher, or code letter, which is eventually unravelled by the sleuth."

Oblique Strategies and other games

The *I Ching* or *Yi-jing* usually translated as *Book of Changes* or *Classic of Changes*, is a Chinese divination manual 3 thousand years old. It has been read all around the world, providing inspiration for religion, philosophy, literature, and art. It can be used in a way like this game of 113 cards *Oblique Strategies* (subtitled *Over One Hundred Worthwhile Dilemmas*) method to promote creativity created in the 70s by British musician (from Roxy Music) Brian Eno (1948-) and the German painter Peter Schmid (1931-1980). Each card offers a challenging constraint intended to help artists (particularly musicians) break creative blocks by encouraging to think differently or about something else when logic is not efficient.
Some examples:
- *Convert a melodic element into a rhythmic element.*
- *Fill every beat with something.*
- *Shut the door and listen from outside.*
- *What would your closest friend do?*
- *Make an exhaustive list of everything you might do and do the last thing on the list.*
Oblique Strategies is now available online: http://stoney.sb.org/eno/oblique.html

More universal, family or educational, *Rory's story cubes*, a set of dice with various symbols, can also be used to stimulate narrative leads or get us out of our own habits and automatic thoughts: https://www.storycubes.com/

Not to mention the obvious role-playing games, there are also different story-telling card games, such as *Once upon a time* and other various Tarot card decks (including the *Jeu de Marseille* created in 1941 by the surrealist artists) as used by Italo Calvino to write *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1973).

Teachers may use a variety of methods to develop children's imagination, sometimes in the manner of surrealist games (game of preferences, answers to unknown questions, "exquisite corpse", one within the other,...) and other constraints, or more simply: free association of words from a name chosen at random; association of two distant names allowing an effect of strangeness and sometimes generating metaphors; hypotheses of the type "what would happen if..." (association of a name and a state or an action); neologisms (by adding prefixes or starting from typing mistakes); imposing a pre-existing structure; modifying a famous story or extending it or mixing it with another, transposing it, or extracting the structure and using it in another way; breaking down a famous character into characteristics subject to stories; starting from a set of physical objects made available; ... all this functioning by going from the nonsense of randomness to the sense of a story.

Some self-declared script-doctors or gurus

Advice (quickly) from Robert McKee (1941-)

- Find your style. Choose the elements that define your way of telling a story and create your script signature. Tell your vision of things while avoiding the error of drawing attention to yourself by technical artifices.
- Create original stories. Many are tempted to do what they have already seen, even unconsciously. Beware of the first drafts. They are often carriers of things already seen. Be harsh on yourself. Refuse shortcuts, ease, self-satisfaction. Learn to redo, correct, throw away. Fight against stereotypes.
- Create universal stories. Stories that may concern a majority of people in any part of the world. This does not mean that they should not have a cultural identity. But if, on the other side of the earth, the public cannot identify with the basis of the story, it is not the local public who will.
- Remember that the public is smarter than you are. Don't explain them what they see, what to think, how to feel. Don't give lessons. Consider the public's capacity for anticipation and deduction greater than what we imagine. (I underline the only advice that I think is really useful).
- Become aware of the reality of the market. It is not enough to have talent. The worlds of television, entertainment and publishing take other parameters into account. Without forgetting a part of luck.
- Do not replace substance by form. If the writer does not succeed in moving the audience by the intensity of a scene, he will not be able to save it with words or to hide its illogical unfolding or the weakness of the motivations by spicing it up with artifices to make it work.
- For him, a film contains, on average, 40 to 60 beats (meaning changes) of different importance. Things change in a story only by conflict. Each scene brings a change in the character's life, which goes from positive to negative or from negative to positive, from self-confidence to doubt, from doubt to self-confidence. This dialectic can consist of a sharp opposition or something more subtle. There are only two ways to bring these reversals: by action or by disclosure.
- A character experiences only two emotions: pleasure and suffering (and their endless combinations). You must not confuse "characterization", which is everything the character let us see of his social figure (profession, clothes, etc.) and his true personality, which is revealed only through his choices under pressure. Choice is change. The choice is the dilemma.
- If the character is what he seems, there is no story to tell. A story reveals the character's true personality, less often his change (except learning or redemption stories). The character is the audience's metaphor for humanity. He exists less as himself than by the forces against his desire and by the reaction which he opposes to this antagonism. A character is a contradiction. The more contradictions a character has, the more complex he or she is.

Advice (also quickly) **from John Truby** (1952-)

He has been known since 2007 for his 22 steps of work (and not of a story) to build a script. His purpose is to highlight the characters, their evolutions, and above all the effect that their actions have on the audience. For him, a story is not a mechanism that we build block after block, but a living organism that we develop and grow.

Each event is correlated with the others: the sequence of events has a unity. Every event is essential. The events seem to come from the main character, and not imposed by the writer. The plot forces the character to evolve (Truby does not invent anything but slightly differs from McKee on this point).

Step 1: Clearly define the disclosure
The final disclosure of the hero corresponds to the theme you want to speak about: the first work step is to start from the end (where do you want to go with this story?) to clearly determine the disclosure that the hero will have to face.

What will the hero learn at the end? What does he know at the beginning? What is he wrong at the beginning? He can only learn something at the end if he is wrong at the beginning. These questions should make it possible to clearly write the moral of the story in one sentence.

Step 2: Define the world of the story and the hero's place in this world
The world must be chosen according to the theme and it must be perfectly suited to the hero and the story you want to tell. For Truby, many authors do not think enough about their world in relation to the theme. The place and the time must serve the interests of the story. (Note that this is not what JK Rowling advised at all, although Truby talks more about writing a unitary fiction than a saga.)

Step 3: Define the hero's need and weaknesses
Every good hero has a deep need, related to the disclosure defined in step 1, that he will have to satisfy but he is not aware of it at first. He has weaknesses that hinder him: a psychological weakness (singular, linked to his history) and a moral weakness (who hurt someone at the beginning of the story, out of selfishness, cowardice, greed, stubbornness...)

It is only during the confrontation with the adversary that the hero realizes his deep need and the weakness that prevents him from satisfying it. He then tries to get over that (and in most stories he ends up doing it).
The hero's evolution at the end of the story should allow the injured character (and the audience) to forgive him, to underline his evolution.

Step 4: Define the hero's desire
Desire (not to be confused with need) is what the hero wants, his goal in the story. This is the trail that the audience will follow with the hero. At the start it should not be too important. Then, either it stays the same but increases in power and strength (recommended), either the initial desire is replaced by a different desire (but it must be stronger, and have the same function: to satisfy the need, even if the hero is not aware of it).

Step 5: Choose a trigger factor
This is what will force the hero into action, usually what links the hero's need and desire. He has a need that he is not aware of and the triggering event brings him a temptation linked to his desire.

An effective trigger is one that makes the hero think he has just overcome a problem he was facing when in fact he has just gotten into the biggest mess of his life.

Step 6: Choose one or more allies for the hero
Allies will help and make the hero look good. To highlight the hero, they must not look like the hero or be more interesting than the hero. For Truby, we always have to tell the story of the most interesting character (so if it's the ally, swap heroes and ally).

Provide the ally of his own desire which doesn't have to be the same as the hero, but the ally too has to want something.

Think about defining the point of view of the ally in relation to the theme of the story (and it is better if it is not the same as the hero's one).

Step 7: Choose the opponent (possibly mysterious)
The opponent (chosen according to the hero) is the character who will prevent, voluntarily or not, the hero from satisfying his desire, without necessarily being bad or mean. But there must necessarily be a conflict (the resolution of which will expose the theme of the story).

The opponent influences the psychological weakness of the hero and he has a strong link with the theme of the story. A similarity between the hero and the opponent is necessary (family, friend, professional, historical bond ...). They may have the same or opposing needs, the same weakness or opposing weaknesses.

As the theme is seen through the hero's need and weakness, it is interesting to do the same with the opponent and to study several possibilities:
- A mysterious opponent (called *iceberg*) that must be unmasked before being able to defeat him makes the final victory more prestigious for the hero.
- You can create a hierarchy (from the most obvious to the most hidden) of opponents under the leadership of a main opponent and disclose this hierarchy to the hero and the audience, as well as their real objective, bit by bit, but getting faster.

Step 8: Investigate the interest of a false ally
The figure of the traitor is always fascinating, either who will betray the hero, or who will seem to harm but who in the end will be a help. The false ally can stay in the enemy camp until the end, but also (this works very well) having spent so much time playing the ally that he has become attached to the hero. After betraying him, he can then return to his camp.

Step 9: Define the first disclosure
It is a decision, a modification of desire that shifts the plot to the heart of the matter, shortly after the triggering factor. The hero makes a surprising discovery that forces him to make a decision, to take a new direction. The best disclosures concern the

opponent. The desire must increase in intensity, or be modified. If the desire is modified, it must be linked to the original desire and above all be stronger. Each subsequent disclosure must be stronger than the previous one.

Step 10: Imagine the hero's plan
It is important to put yourself in the shoes of your hero and imagine for him the actions that he can decide to satisfy his desire. Don't let the plan go smoothly. In almost every good story, the hero's initial plan fails, forcing him to reconsider his strategy. Sometimes the training of the hero by a mentor plays an important role in this phase.

Step 11: Imagine the opponent's plan
The opponent also has a plan, often much more complex than the one of the hero. Almost all the disclosures of the story depend on the opponent's plan. The more complex and well-hidden the opponent's plan, the more interesting the plot will be. If the opponent is intelligent, he will have planned counterattacks to the hero's most obvious plans, which will create the best disclosures and force the hero to surpass himself.

Step 12: Drive and dynamics
It is the collision between step 10 and step 11 which will give the sequence of actions. In general, the adversary wins several victories and remains, a good part of the story, untouchable for the hero. The plot must develop, not repeat itself. The hero tries different approaches in his actions.

Step 13: Use the hero's moral weakness
Out of desperation or frustration, the hero may perform immoral actions related to his weaknesses. So, a character (often an ally) can intervene to confront him (most often verbally) and blame him for his attitude. Usually, the hero refuses criticism but this allows you to orient the story towards the theme.

Step 14: Imagine an apparent defeat
Think about a time when all will seem lost for the hero. Often towards 2/3 or 3/4 of the way through the story, the hero experiences a defeat which suggests that all is lost. This false defeat forces the hero to get back on his feet. The final victory would then be more beautiful. According to Truby, the false defeat shouldn't be small, you really have to believe the hero has failed (but who still believes that after hundreds of stories like that?;~) It can experience various failures, but the story should only include one apparent defeat, otherwise this tool loses its dramatic power. This is a classic feature of Hollywood films where the emphasis is placed on the possibility (very important in American culture) of a second chance. Where the characters of stories from other cultures will rather persist and persevere.

Step 15: Define a second disclosure
After the apparent defeat, the hero has a new disclosure which relaunches the story and makes the audience understand that victory is still possible. It is important to define steps 14 and 15 together so that everything is coherent and credible. Desire, at

this point, must become an obsession. The hero would do anything to be successful, which can weaken him morally again.

Step 16: Disclosure to the audience
Use dramatic irony: the audience learns new information that the hero does not know. This may correspond to the disclosure of the false ally. Something makes the audience understand who the traitor is, before the hero learns it himself. But it can be something else: the disclosure of a secret weapon, an opponent's special ability, a hidden part of the opponent's plan. Whatever information is provided, it must underline the opposition.

Step 17: Disclosure to the Hero
Soon after, the hero needs to learn what the audience already knows. In some stories, he learns it from the opponent himself who reveals all the secrets still hidden because he thinks he has won. The masks have fallen, the mysteries have disappeared, the final struggle is approaching. Between the two disclosures, you have to take advantage of the dramatic irony to the maximum. If we have just revealed a traitor, the hero can entrust his child to him or reveal a secret to him.

Step 18: Create key scenes
There are three strong scene elements that can be found in different places in the story, often the last third: the narrow door (the hero must pass through a physically narrow passage, a metaphor for the pressure he is under and the reduction of his leeway, often under a big threat), the hero's humiliation, and the vision of death (the hero realizes that this story can make him lose his life and that makes him fight harder).

Step 19: Staging the confrontation
Think about the final battle. Behind a possible violent physical confrontation, the values and ideas of the characters (the theme) clearly show. Putting the confrontation in a narrow place helps to highlight the conflict and the pressure of the moment. The beginning of the confrontation is the moment to highlight the similarities between the hero and the opponent, to show how much they look alike but that their differences are becoming decisive.

Step 20: Organize the hero reveal
The test of confrontation should allow the theme to be exposed to the audience. The hero is led to really change, realizing his real need, and having the opportunity to satisfy it (sometimes at the cost of his initial desire). Everything leads to this point where the hero realizes his weakness.

You can also give a disclosure to the opponent, at the same time as the hero, which brings two points of view (the opponent must be able to learn and change). Then, connect the two disclosures: we have to learn something about the hero AND about the opponent (and the theme must be found in the combination of these two disclosures).

Step 21: Illustrate the moral decision
Once the hero has understood his weakness and his need, he must make a decision. This is the very last stage in the character's evolution: it is at this point that he proves to the audience that he has changed or that he is incapable of it. Find a way, through a symbolic action, to show that the hero has changed. The actions speak for themselves.

Step 22: Describe the new balance
Once the need has been satisfied (or not, in the case of a tragedy), things return to normal. The new balance is not a return to the initial situation but, on the contrary, it highlights the difference with the beginning of the story.

Advice (still quickly) **from Blake Snyder** (1957-2009)

He wrote the most popular screenwriting book, *Save the Cat!* (2005) which soon became a book series (and a blog, a software, seminars), where he breaks down the structure of Campbell's *monomyth* in (15) steps and (40) suggestions of beats that all screenplays should contain. The title comes from the idea that the hero should do something nice the first time we meet him, like saving a cat, that will make it easy for the audience to like him. Each step has its page numbers in the screenplay:
1. *Opening image* (p.1): This first scene must hook the audience and give the tone and the stakes. There should be a mirror effect with the final image, creating sort of a frame to show how the main character has been transformed by the story.
2. *Theme stated* (p.5): A question is asked, which the hero isn't necessarily aware, and the story is going to work like an argument about this question.
3. *Set-up* (p.1-10): Presentation of the story world and of the main characters, of their lacks or flaws which will become time bombs in the story.
4. *Catalyst* (p.12): This is the triggering factor which creates an imbalance or some upheaval.
5. *Debate* (p.12-25): The hero is doubting. His choice is difficult.
6. *Break into two* (p25): The hero makes the decision to leave his comfort zone. This decision is generally due to an event pushing him to make a choice.
7. *B-story* (p.30): The hero meets someone. This B-story will allow to escape a little from the main story and, most importantly, to come up to the theme (because it brings another point of view, so a debate becomes possible). The characters that the hero meets are very different from the ones he knew in the first act.
8. *Fun and games* (p.30-55): The ambiance is developed, the story world is shown. Trailers usually come from this part. Dangers are present but not overwhelming yet. There is room to dream and have fun.
9. *Midpoint* (p55): Back to the stakes. The story should be divided in two equal parts before and after this midpoint which can be a false defeat or a false victory.
10. *Bad guys close in* (p.55-75): The enemy seems defeated or triumphant but forces are changing, backup is on the way, the hero or the enemy regains some strength. In the team, people start to change, to fight or to go wild. We are headed for trouble.
11. *All is lost* (p.75): The situation is now the opposite of what it was at midpoint. From false victory to false defeat or the opposite. Everything is falling apart and the

hero finally finds the strength (or enough room, if a mentor just died, for instance) to awake what was already inside him. Snyder advice to put an image of death here.
12. *Dark night of the soul* (p.75-85): Deep despair moment. The hero hits rock bottom.
13. *Break into three* (p.85): There is a glimmer of hope. The hero understands (often while talking with a character of the B-story) that he must change in order to be victorious. The crossing of A and B stories give the answer.
14. *Finale* (p.85-110): Practical application of what has been learned. The hero takes the lead and confront the enemy.
15. *Final image* (p.110): Proof that the hero permanently changed.
Snyder also defined ten basic stories all movies are supposed to tell (we already saw that tendency with old folklorists): *Monster in the House, Golden Fleece, Out of the Bottle, Dude with a Problem, Rites of Passage, Buddy Love, Whydunit, The Fool Triumphant, Institutionalized, Superhero.*

Among American gurus, there is also Christopher Vogler and his 12 steps or the convoluted "theory" of Melanie Anne Phillips which takes care of replacing well known notions by new and not better words, obsessively puts everything in boxes of 4 cells, proclaims absurdities (like the hilarious "mental sex" of characters) and mainly indicates ignorance of real practices. Above all, following these baseless rules would be just the opposite of the pleasure provided by any creative process.

Yves Lavandier's considerations (the French guy of the advice band)

Self-proclaimed storytelling (which he calls dramaturgy) theorist, he developed his main ideas (often stating the obvious) in a self-published book in 1994.
- Storytelling existed before theater and cinema, life is filled with conflicts and ruled by causal links.
- The art of storytelling is learned, like all human activities.
- Storytelling is a game played by two: author-audience. This is why dramatic irony (which consists in giving the audience information that at least one of the characters does not know) is a fundamental mechanism, omnipresent in all genres (tragedy, comedy, drama, suspense, thriller, ...) and all sorts of storytelling.
- All great storytellers know the rules of storytelling, even unconsciously.
- You can respect the rules and care about the audience while keeping your freedom.
- dialogue, in a play for stage or for radio, is the tip of the iceberg. Even for radio, structure and characterization are very important.
- Stage is, like cinema, an art of image.
- To write a good story, you need three elements: conflict, conflict, and conflict.
- The most powerful language of the story is its structure, far ahead of dialogue. But it is also the most difficult to master.
- The structure in three acts (dramatic, not logistical) is based purely and simply on a universal triad: before-during-after. The structure in three acts is found in the vast majority of works.

- The simple structure which includes three acts, a crescendo and a climax exists on every level, from a dialogue sentence to the entire piece of work. It is also found at the scale of the series. It is a fractal thing (shapes based on a simple structure that reproduce on multiple levels). The pattern is the same whether we look at it from near or far. It applies to all kinds of things in all kinds of fields. Lavandier extended this notion to everything around him, from the life of a person to the entire world history.

For Lavandier, it is not enough to give a single goal to your protagonist. Four things are necessary about the hero's goal:
1. This goal should be known to the public fairly quickly at the start of the story. As long as the audience does not feel the will of the protagonist, they ignore what is being said to them and, according to Lavandier, it is not good.
2. The goal must be motivated. The protagonist must share his desire with the audience. If the audience does not understand the goal, there is no point.
3. The goal must be difficult to achieve without being too hard. You have to know how to balance the obstacles.
4. The protagonist must have an unwavering desire to achieve his goal. We shouldn't feel like he could give it up easily. The more the protagonist wants, the more the audience will be passionate about his story.

Lavandier is very keen on things that he thinks are promised (and therefore due), like announcements that have not been exploited and that disappoint him. He cites many films which leave "*preparation without conflicting payment"* and disappointed him.
For him, the least bad solution would then be to remove the promise itself from the work. The difference between broken promises and false leads is that the latter, on the contrary, generate more conflict. "*The problem is not that an author does not keep his promises, the problem is that he avoids conflict."*

About this and more...

Payment: is the coming back of an item of the story already appeared before (placed there precisely to be reused in preparation). Payments are known to be rewarding for the audience who then feels like facing a coherent story. But such a preparation can also be a trick (for example, the false memory of a character, or a morsel of "red herring").

In *Mean Streets* (1973) by Martin Scorsese, the preparation of Johnny's debt to Michael awaits its inevitable "payment" until the last minute and all the other potential dangers (other debts, lies, fights, a small knife, a caged feline, a dinner with a black dancer, shots from a roof, a discovered affair) are defused one after the other, increasing the tension of this expectation, representative of Charlie's general stress where nothing really "pays"(and neither does the end).

MacGuffin : The MacGuffin, famous thanks to Alfred Hitchcock, gives a pretext, a fake reason, for the action by having some importance for the main characters but not

for the reader or viewer. It simply has the function of triggering the twists and turns. It is the stolen object, the document to be found, often something material.

For Hitchcock himself, his best MacGuffin was the one in *North by Northwest* (1959) because the government secrets that are discussed through the film do not even exist in the form of documents, they remain a pure abstraction.

Hitchcock laughed at those who demand explanation and perfect consistency for all elements of a story. What interested him was to manipulate the audience without giving too much importance to small details. He thought of a film as a show and not as a copy of reality.

Hitchcock told to filmmaker François Truffaut (1932-1984) this joke, between two travelers in a train: "*One says to the other: 'What's that package you have above your head on the luggage rack?' He says: 'Oh, that's a MacGuffin'. So the other man says: 'What's a MacGuffin?' 'Well, it's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Adirondack mountains of New-York.' The other man says: 'But there are no lions in the Adirondack mountains of New-York.' 'Well then, that's no MacGuffin!' So that shows you the emptiness of the MacGuffin.*"

Truffaut also underlined that Hitchcock was used to cleverly get rid of the MacGuffin around two third of the way through his pictures in order to avoid to let it become a final stake which would inevitably be disappointing.

Chekhov's gun: "*Remove anything that is irrelevant in the story. If in the first act you say that there is a gun hanging on the wall, then it is absolutely necessary that a shot be fired with this gun in the second or the third act. If it is not intended for use, it shouldn't be hanging there,"* Russian writer Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) is supposed to have said. This principle is also sometimes called "second shoe" according to a Hollywood anecdote (in a hotel room, a character hears another customer, in the room above, take off his shoe which falls loudly, and he can't manage to fall asleep until he heard the second shoe fall).

Famous American writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) mocked it, giving in his essay *The Art of the Short Story* an example of two characters that are introduced and then never again mentioned in his short story *Fifty Grand*. Hemingway valued inconsequential details, but conceded that readers will seek meaning in them.

As the audience anticipates that if a gun has been seen it's going to be used, it can actually be a smart thing to do something else instead.

Red herring: Coming from hunting vocabulary (smelly fish to distract dogs to chase what you don't want), it is something that misleads and distracts from the main question, one or more false tracks to end in a reversal, giving a whole new meaning to the plot. This process is generally initiated, once the main frame is installed, by integrating characters' lies or clues, as many true clues as false clues. Because if the twist has not been triggered by true clues, it will seem out of nowhere, like a good old *deus ex machina*, implausible. This is why you have to think about not too obvious clues.

Let's recall here that only the **coincidences** that are bad for the characters (strokes of bad luck) are easily accepted by the reader/spectator, unlike those that help the characters and seem to an easy writing option. Except to play with these codes as for example Woody Allen did in *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995) or to be in a poetic or fantasy genre. For example, happy accidents providing superpowers to characters at the beginning of science fiction stories go very well.

The use of dissimulation ellipsis also allows to hide elements by relying on the logic of the viewer or reader. Indeed, the reader will tend to fill these ellipses with what seems to him the most likely, whereas nothing has been revealed. The reader or spectator is trapped by his own coherence.

Misunderstanding: Frequent in comedies, it can take various forms that are not only for comedy and can be a trigger or pivot for a plot. Cf *North by Northwest*, 1959, by Alfred Hitchcock; *Brazil*, 1985, by Terry Guilliam; Red Rock West, 1993, by John Dahl.

All tricks are good to take, we can also have a character who is presented as main at the beginning of the story and turns out to be secondary or opponent.

We can also think of a plot in terms of energies, transformative forces which presides over the birth, development and end of the conflict. That's also why it's called "**arc**" of the storyline (going up then down). Internal forces (for example a crisis of consciousness in a character), of external forces (an event arises which changes the balance of a situation) or mixed order (both internal and external, by a casual link).

Beyond recipes to build a story (most often praised about Hollywood movies), the keys will, most of the time, be (depending on the medium, the decision-makers and the targeted audience):
- Ease of identification.
- The status quo is broken (creating conflict).
- The emotional hook.

A film very often boils down to a character with a false goal who evolves to discover his deep desire/need thanks to the obstacles he encounters. This is also how we end up with thousands of stories where there is artificial conflict, competition, envy out of control and absurd mistakes (to create a kind of lazy dramatic irony). Making people believe some rules are the best (or even universal) way to tell stories denotes a flagrant lack of culture (so many masterpieces in literature or cinema are counterexamples, not to mention nonfiction works). Following these rules instead of questioning them put young writers at risk of limiting or impoverishing their creativity. However, decision-makers tend to buy these rules and, since some of the stories following these structures are very successful, and since some of the tools they use are indeed worldwide powerful, let's not be too judgmental.

For example, see this Chinese advertisement which applies these principles very properly: *Joy and Heron* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQGuVKHtrxc) Everything is there: conflict, irony, surprise, triumph of love (as a reward).

Short exercise: Find ideas for other short films with this dog!
I played the game:
1. *A naughty little boy visits the man and his dog. The dog avoids him but the man lifts him up and puts him in the arms of the little boy who mistreats him. At every visit. The dog ends up running away, giving his master a last sad look. He is walking along the road when he sees the nasty boy coming in front of him. Quickly, the dog hides in a bush. From there he observes. The bad boy is chased by morons who beat him up. So the dog comes out of his hiding place and defends the boy. The morons run away, the boy becomes the dog's friend and he is no longer mean to anyone.* But, oops, I forgot dramatic irony...
2. *At night, mice eat the dog's bowl. When he calls out, his master thinks he's the one who ate his bowl and who doesn't need more. The following night the dog stays up guarding his bowl but he falls asleep, when he wakes up, he cannot catch the mice which slip under his paws. The following night, starving, he grabs a bottle of milk and carries it outside, next to a neighborhood cat. Baited, the cat follows the dog home and falls on the mice which he scares away and pursues outside. The dog puts back the bottle of milk and hurry to eat his food. Next morning, the master finds that the milk has a funny smell.*

This scene from *Frozen* (2013) follows pretty much the same recipe (without the dramatic irony): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9aXaAHJkKA

Ethical help for writers

In France, the Canopé network, which publishes educational resources, produced a analysis grid for publications for young people (but valid for audiovisual) whose objective is to identify what, in the characteristics of the characters, their actions and the point of view brought to them, contributes to reinforce certain unequal stereotypes. This grid, which can be downloaded for free, can help to make choices. Maybe you have one or can make one in your country.

Notions of **male gaze** (theorized in 1975 by Laura Mulvey about Hollywood movies showing women as object of men's desire) and **female gaze** (which is not about showing men as objects of women's desire but rather to highlight women's experience, often more realistic, less fantasized) can help to adjust your settings in this matter. Many audiovisual productions did a great job about it (among others, films by Jane Campion or Céline Sciamma and TV series like *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Killing Eve*).

Let us mention here the **Bechdel-Wallace test** (named after Alison Bechdel, American comic book author, born in 1960 and her friend Liz Wallace who had the idea) which shows how certain films, books and other works are centered on the male gender. It shows the absence or the restrictive aspect of female roles in cinema, which are either non-existent or used to make the male hero look good. Three positive requirements (who appeared in one of her comic book in 1985) are (to pass this test, you must answer yes to all three):
- Are there at least two female characters in it?
- Are these two women talking to each other?
- And, if so, do they talk about something other than a man?
It is a reading grid which does not judge the quality of the story nor does it serve to prove that it would be sexist or not but which gives an idea of the absence of real women in films most of the time.

The (American science writer born in 1943) **Ann Finkbeiner's test** is also interesting to consider about the description of a real person or a female character (and not just female scientists). It says that an article about a scientist shouldn't mention either the fact that the scientist is a woman, nor the profession of her husband, nor her childcare arrangements, nor how she nurtures her underlings, nor how she was taken aback by the competitiveness in her field, neither the role model she represents for other women, nor the fact that she is or would be "the first woman to ...".

Finally, let's have fun with another, more bizarre test: According to Ford Maddox Ford (1873-1939), a British writer from the beginning of the 20th century, the only reading of the page 99 (generally between a quarter or a third) of a novel would make it possible to judge the desire to read it (or not) in full.

Even funnier, the literary price of the page 112, inspired by a nice idea from Woody Allen (1935-) in *Hannah and her sisters* (1986): A man (played by Michael Caine), in love with his sister-in-law, meets her in a bookstore and offers her a collection of poems by E. E. Cummings (1894-1962) while insisting, as they leave, that she read the page 112 because this poem (*somewhere i have never traveled, gladly beyond*, 1931) reminds him of her. Then, when she reads it, she feels deeply moved.

6- Genres of story

"Literary genres are enemies that won't spare you." Henri Michaux (Belgian poet 1899-1984).

The literary genre (which is not purely literary) is a waiting horizon, a set of rules (more constructive than repressive) existing before the work and guiding the

reception of your work. A sort of family resemblance, a rule of conduct or a view of the world.

French university teacher Antoine Compagnon (1950-) explained very well how the reader/spectator, facing a work, integrates a *waiting system* (form, theme, style) including genre (which is a discursive convention). Reading or watching, we assume about the genre of the story. Genre and style are linked.

Journalism uses more often the expression “reading contract” which includes dimensions specific to the genre it belongs to, to the way it is broadcast or published and to its uniqueness from its genre. There may be a deliberate desire to play on this contract to establish a particular relationship with the viewer/reader, like a game.

A mix of genres is also very often sought after. Alternating drama and humor, adventurous challenge and psychological tension, action and emotion, allowing the nature of the feelings solicited in the audience to be balanced, is present in a number of novels, comics, in comedy-drama (“dramedy”) and actually in most of new TV shows now.

Drama

There is a difference between drama in the sense of dramatic (dramatic effects in a story) and the genre called *drama*.

The genre of drama is often defined as taking place <u>between tragedy and comedy</u>, less tragic than a tragedy, less funny than a comedy.

In a drama, **the issues are strong** so the **end** is more important than for other genres.

Various categories are sometimes mentioned : dark drama, action, crime, thriller, horror, family drama, melodrama, escaping, historical, western, war drama. Those categories are not the same in France and in the US, for example. I don’t know what they are in your country. It is generally agreed that the most effective drama is one that features a character in danger of death. He has a reputation for being able to get the audience to accept the most unlikely actions.

The definition of a crime fiction for example is not that easy, it could be only the presence of a murder, even just an assault or, only an intention or a suspicion of murder? But these can as well exist in a funny story or a love story. However, a crime fiction will often have this structure:

1. Initial mystery.
2. Investigation:

- Facts review (places, clues, body).
- Formulation of an assumption (mobile).
- Creation of tests (search for evidence, trap, bluff …).
- Taking this tests.
- One test is convincing (sometimes false leads “red herrings” with a failed test, in this case a second assumption is developed).
- Verified assumption.

3. Mystery solved and punishment.

For the Noir fiction, variant of the crime fiction, the point of view is usually changed to the side of the criminals and the crime will be committed more or less inexorably at the end, following this type of story structure:
- Projected perfect crime.
- Plan development.
- Execution of the plan.
- Mystery for the police (and it goes on with the classic organization of the crime story).

In the chivalric or heroic romance, the hero goes through a series of tests, during an adventurous quest from which he will emerge victorious and rewarded. It was the main medieval genre of which *Don Quixote* (1605) by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) constitutes an admirable parody.

In the "picaresque tale", the hero crosses cities, different social backgrounds, varied adventures, without changing much. It differs from the 19th century "learning story" in which the hero gets more mature along the journey.

Whatever the category, to go to the drama genre, you must ask yourself: **What makes people cry?** The socially accepted answers would be:
- A baby crying is a call (out of hunger), or an expression of anger or pain.
- A child or an adult crying can also be a call (have pity!), or anger (injustice, frustration) and pain, but also empathy (because we see people crying, because we feel sorry for them), fears (to be abandoned, to die, to fail).
- For old people crying, we can add nostalgia (of what we have lost, self-pity).

Importance of dramatic tension in drama: The drama implies a regulation, in the storytelling, between **suspense and surprise**, for each event of the story: surprise (immediate) or suspense (that you make last). For example, the sudden death of a character (surprise!) or a threat that makes one wonder *Is he going to die?* (suspense...)

During a suspense, according to Thomas Bidegain, *time slows down and becomes heavy*. The less we know, the better it works. The suspense is often amplified by an alternation of improvement and degradation (where the hero is only narrowly saved). Surprise is an affirmation, suspense is a question (a promise of an answer). **These are the two main tools of the drama.** A disaster (like the end of the world we know) or any danger are more in the suspense category. (Actually, before the disaster it's a threat and, after it, it's a lack, the world must be reconquered or rebuilt).

About violence in a drama, remember that *violence calls for violence*, if we took out the weapons, we will have to use them. See above, Chekov's gun.

Hitchcock said: "*There is no terror in the bang* [of a gun]*, only in the anticipation of it."* It's anticipation of the viewer/reader that creates fear and dramatic interest in the story and that needs elements to be able to function.

Scorsese talked about "quiet violence" in his movie *GoodFellas* (1990) from the book *Wiseguy* by Nicholas Pileggi. Actual test screening made him remove the more brutal violence from the film.

So: **drama = anticipation + uncertainty.**

Remember that each story proposes (or imposes) its own reality and that any story is a balance between accuracy (realism) and exaggeration (imagination, effects of interpretation, comedy, tragedy, twists ...).

So, to quote Jerome Bruner again, we are going to wonder for each storytelling decision "*how to make go together the taste for the prediction (the pleasure to anticipate things) and the seduction of possible things happening?*"

Each story has a time of its own. The more tight the story is (meaning with ellipses, omissions) the more dramatic it will be.

In a drama, there is also a frequent use of *a priori* (fears, stereotypes) because they speak to the guts (which get tired less quickly than the brain). But in the comedy too. Special care will be taken of the point of view in the storytelling, remembering that **the inflation of twists and turns** is often because of a **lack of point of view**.

The **mystery/secret** (in opposition of dramatic irony) consists for drama in making the audience (or the readers) understand that they ignore one or more information. We wonder what the characters are doing or what they are talking about or even the meaning of an image. We do not know. The mystery creates intellectual curiosity and its resolution is an enlightenment, very rarely surprising. French filmmaker Jean Aurel (1925-1996) thought that a film scene that hid nothing was not good because "*people believe much more in what they guess than in what they see*".

Music often plays a big role in audiovisual drama because it can give images a different meaning. For Ken Loach, "*music gives an universal meaning to a small film with two or three characters in a working class environment. It can be an open door to the universal.* (This is probably a somewhat ethnocentric view.) *As it has great potency, we should use it with caution (like a sauce on a dish).*"

The term "melodrama" is used for a story characterized by the accumulation of external obstacles, most notably the injustices of life and unfortunate coincidences. The inability to overcome this type of obstacle reinforces the feeling of melodrama.

The **Indian cemetery trick** is a common concept in dramatic and not only in fantasy stories. Many horror stories have used it to justify their plot, like *The Shining* (1977) by Stephen King (adapted as a movie by Stanley Kubrick in 1980) of course, or *Poltergeist* (1982) by Tobe Hooper. This is a fairly common recipe in American fantasy literature. Everything seems to be going well but something secret is wrong, a shadow on the board, something that happened before the story or in the distant past and that pushes us to understand the story through the drama that preceded it.

We also talk about **agnition** to signify the acknowledgment, by a character or by the reader, of the real identity of another character. Its most frequent version is the false

stranger. It is found in all genres (comedy, drama, fantasy, nonfiction). In popular soap operas, there may be a lot of them. (See the way the TV show *Jane the virgin* ironically used this mechanism to excess.)

Endings (see also list p.127)

The end is often seen as capital, as the culmination of the story, especially for feature films. The end is supposed to teach something, an acceptance, a warning or a hope. Starting to write with the end of the story already defined has the reputation of being liberating or reassuring. However, even screenwriters (like Gérard Brach, 1927-2006) have claimed to work without knowing the end not to get locked in too much rigidity of a pre-established framework.

The best way to learn to write dramatic stories and satisfying endings is to practice building short stories, texts with a punch line, even without writing them in full.

The end can be a **revelation** when there is an awareness of the hero who discovers a new meaning to his existence, a way to live better, his ability to act in a way he would not have suspected at the beginning of the story or a deep truth, often relating to how to behave better with others (this is the typical end of romances).

The end can be a **disclosure** when the revelation concerns the role, the goal or the plan of the main character, a truth hidden from the beginning and which radically changes the meaning of the story (sometimes the character becomes aware of this truth at the same time as the audience after giving the viewer/reader an incomplete vision of reality so that he can forge convictions that will eventually collapse).

The end can be a **discovery** when the mystery is solved (discovery of a truth about another character, a past event or situation, the identity of the murderer or the evidence that will bring him down, something that allows the ultimate action and the achievement of the goal).

The end can be a **twist** when the discovery concerns a way to reverse an unfair (and preferably hopeless) situation.

The end can be an **exterior surprise** when it comes to the discovery of a hidden component of the character's environment that changes the hero's situation (a kind of passive disclosure).

And it's a **punch line** when it is rather a quick twist or shift in the situation. On the contrary, there can be an end with **several levels** : one option is a blast of twists and turns, preferably at odds with each other.

We generally distinguish the end of the story (the hero has won) and the end of the character (he returns home changed). But, in order to speak of an end, it has to exist. The endless stories don't bother me, although for a movie it's a little disturbing. In the long novel *In Search of Lost Time* (1906-1927) by Marcel Proust (1871-1922), the end is nice, he becomes a writer and he is at peace but this is not necessarily what impresses us, it is the journey that is pleasant, not the destination. Even more with *The Man Without Qualities* (1930-1932) by Robert Musil (1880-1942).

If the end is the last impression you have of a film or a book, I don't think it's the memory you will keep of it. Also, an annoying (and considered as a bad choice)

ending can be, on the contrary, memorable. See (or not) *Subway* (1985) by Luc Besson (1959-).

In a closed ending, the hero dies, the murderer is arrested. In an open ending, often used in stories of love or conquest, the characters have met or they have managed to settle down somewhere but nothing is said about the following. They are taken to the next level, it is the end of a cycle but another cycle begins. News storytelling, continuously speaking of unfinished and prolonged events, inevitably remains open (like life in general), but literary, television, comic book or manga serials can also seem endless, never finished by means of infinite developments. Be careful to distinguish an open ending from a non-ending (where the author simply didn't know how to end the story).

When you write a story, you decide what to **expose** to the reader/spectator (and if he knows more than the characters, we have seen it, it is the dramatic irony) and what you are going to **hide**. The end can allow **surprise** when you think carefully about how to **distribute essential information** still missing.

The end is generally understood as a **logical, coherent and honest extension** (because if it's too big, it won't work).

The end must be **understandable**, but please avoid the long explanations, like Hergé (1907-1983) did in many *Tintin*. An end which is too subtle takes the risk of not being understood by everyone. (See for example the last season of *Twin peaks* (2017) by Mark Frost and David Lynch.) There is usually the option of writing the more subtle ending and to have a **test,** to get people reading it (or watching it, but it's much more expensive to do that for a long film), then to add explanatory elements if the testers didn't understand. Understandable does not mean predictable. You will do your best so that the end is not too obvious and so not anticipated by the public, whether it is a drama or a comedy. On the other hand, heroic adventure stories do very well with a predictable final victory, as do, of course, romantic comedies where the happy ending is the very principle.

Beware of the effects of verdicts (the "sanction" of the old canonical model) which, if they are frequent and sometimes necessary (every trial implies a verdict) are not sufficient to build a good story. You will ensure that the true conclusion of the story is played out elsewhere than in the verdict. Also beware, of course, of too lucky coincidences, of final piece of bravery which solves everything, of the lesson of morals, and of "it was all a dream".

The script of *La Grande Vadrouille (Don't Look Now... We're Being Shot At!,* 1966) a very famous French movie (maybe the most watched in France so far) by Gérard Oury (1919-2006) was originally way too long. It continued in a flight leading the protagonists to Spain. Presented to the producer Robert Dorfmann, he indicated that it was necessary to end the story at Albi, a city where the fugitives passed. Since then, the word Albi designated, in the Oury/Thompson family, a point from which a script goes on and on, becomes repetitive.

The beginnings and ends of novels are of particular importance. For example, in *Germinal* (1885) by the French novelist Émile Zola (1840-1902), the opening and the

ending of the book respond to each other. When they are similar, it's called a "bookend". You can always think about working an ending scene in connection with the beginning of the story.

Some writers decide a word which corresponds the best to the ending they want, to the possible shift of the situation it represents, and they make this word appear in the last dialogue (or the last paragraph of a short story).

You need to think about the ending quite quickly in the construction of a drama story, I would actually say from the beginning.

When you're not happy with the ending, you may wonder what emotion it sparks. If you don't know, that may be the issue. Choosing one can help you to see if it sparks a better ending idea. Do not hesitate to mistreat the characters (yes, we grow attached to these little guys).

And very often, let me repeat it, love prevails to excuse everything, since we like to believe in its triumph. Let's recall here that literature made a several categories of it: "Racinian" love (in reference to the French playwright Jean Racine, 1639-1699) where passion is stronger than reason; "Cornelian" love (in reference to the French playwright Pierre Corneille, 1606-1684) where reason ultimately wins over passion; "Proustian" love (in reference to the novelist Marcel Proust) which arises from an anxious need and generates a feeling of possession, obsession and jealousy up to the desire to eliminate the loved one. Stendhal described love as a disease following 7 stages (admiration, pleasure, hope, real emergence, idealization, doubt, reinforced idealization) and distinguished 4 kinds, insisting above all on projection (which he called crystallization). Psychologists have made a triangle of love (based on passion, commitment and intimacy), or they summon Greek mythology, or they list 7 types of love, sometimes even 12.

Nonfiction

Nonfiction stories (report, documentary, travelogue, interview, engaged story, biography, autobiography, introspection) are usually set on a human-scale time, where the present we experience is linked to a remembered past (it happened like that), to an anticipated future (what will it look like), and sometimes to an imaginary moment (utopian or dystopian).

Within the various stories based on reality, the main question of this genre remains the "reading contract" that it proposes, from the most informative (documentary) point of view to the most subjective (introspection) or assessing (reviews, lampoon).

All the writing skills of journalism will be useful for this kind of approach. I will discuss here only a few definitions and some practices that seem interesting to me in their relation to the autobiography and the interview.

Stories mixing reality and fiction also exist, of course. This is what we do daily in our minds. Autofiction novels were trendy a while ago, gonzo journalism (immersive style not claiming any objectivity) also, thanks to the success of the film adaptation in 1998 by Terry Gilliam (1940-) of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, an American novel

from 1972 by Hunter S Thompson (1937-2005). More recently, the not quite documentary film *Nuts!* (2016) by the American filmmaker Penny Lane (1978-), mixes interview and animation as much as fiction and reality to tell the life of a fake American doctor, entrepreneur and politician, John Romulus Brinkley (1885-1942) who claimed to cure men of impotence by transplanting goat testicles into them.

Combining nonfiction and a formal constraint probably still offers many hybrid possibilities. We could consider that many stories only increase or augment (as we say today) reality, whether they are fantastic, dreamlike or futuristic, not to mention memoirs, humor about daily life, or satire). But today's technologies of virtual reality and technically "augmented" reality promise future developments that will more and more blur the limits between fiction and nonfiction. They now use the word "storyliving" to create these stories with process often similar to game design.

Reality, truth, fiction

No definition of the words narration or telling refers to the topic of "reality" or "truth". However, as soon as something is told, its relation to reality does exist. Is it real? Is it sincere? Is it true? we often wonder in front of any "story" (which, remember, comes from "history").

As opposed to "fiction" (or dream or legend), reality, authenticity or truth would be what exists regardless of the mind that is the judge of it.

The idea of reality refers to the materiality of things, to the concrete manifestation of an event. It is a designation, a representation, a non-fictional character or a non-fictional story that exists independently and is not the product of thought. It is also the concrete and material environment of man, the sum of social events that constitutes the situation in which a person finds himself.

For Martin Scorsese, "*life is a shock, made of surprises, of this madness which means that we do not know what is going to happen from one moment to the next. There is no 'Reality', just the existence of something in the present which disappears even before we have time to realize it.*"

Each story proposes or imposes its **own reality**, I'm saying this again. A story is a balance between reality and exaggeration (dramatic effects of anticipation and uncertainty produced by storytelling structures, imagination and interpretation). Didn't Petrarch (1304-1374) already say that true happiness (here the audience's) only belonged to memory (here the proposed reality) or to expectation (here the suspense and surprise)?

Ken Loach said for example that, "*in films, the sound is often too perfect, the voices crystalline, too clean, we cannot perceive the atmosphere of the room, the circulation outside, this slight natural echo. The same goes with camera movements. The camera must not anticipate what is going to happen because it does not know it. If we film a character before he speaks, we know he's going to speak before he does and we lose the sense of reality. Sound, camera movements, lighting or even make-up can make the actors' interpretation lose all sense of reality.*"

Authenticity is defined as the quality of what is an authority (see “author” inside authority), of what cannot be controversial, of what is true, pure, but also the deep value in which a human being can engage and express his personality. You can be authentic (genuine) without being real. Authenticity comes from Greek *authentikós* which means “is determined by its own authority”.

Truth has even more definitions, current, literary or philosophical (of course, everybody wants the truth!): knowledge recognized as right, absolute value or simply in conformity with what exists; principle of straightness, of wisdom considered as an ideal in the order of thought or action; conformity of thought or of its expression with the experience; an essential idea which imposes itself; an opinion considered as being taken for granted by all; something not suspected of dissimulation or of lying; certainty about the nature of the sources and on the reliability, objectivity or sincerity or naturalness of a person; honesty of a word, of a feeling; reliable, confirmed information, in accordance with reality or with the idea that something is a precise and vivid resemblance to a model. And again, as for authenticity, “what constitutes the value of a being or an object, is essential to it and justifies its existence, the deep nature of a person, as opposed to appearances or to the more or less correct idea that one has about this person”. But also, in the plural (“home truths” in English) declarations made without accommodation, often about people weakness, and therefore usually unpleasant for the recipient.

The terms “narrative nonfiction” or “creative nonfiction” are often used to name what tells real facts as if it were fiction, what “tells a story” but with precise and verified information, for example in the style of immersion journalism. The author generally gives field-based observations. This type of story comes from reality but formally approaches the novel. Already in the 19th century, Gustave Flaubert and the Realism (which opposed the 18th century Romanticism) then Émile Zola, with the Naturalism, conducted journalistic investigations, compiling extensive documentation, in order to write their novels.

“A novel is a mirror that one walks along a path,” said Stendhal (another famous French novelist of the 19th century, 1783-1842). And when Blaise Cendras (a Swiss novelist 1887-1961) was asked if he had really taken the Trans-Siberian, he replied “*Why the hell do you care if I made all of you take it?”*

We can also mention Tom Wolfe, Emmanuel Carrère, Svetlana Alexievitch (Nobel Prize in 2015) George Orwell, Truman Capote or Joseph Kessel (who even wrote some dialogues from exact lines people had said).

Some interesting experiments are made, I guess in many parts of the world and many languages, where unknown people are helped by well-known writers to tell about their position in society.

Let us not forget that the capacity to transform personal experience into a multiplicity of narrative logics is one of the characteristics of humankind.

In French, the term *storytelling* (which is supposed to be translated as “tale of facts”), a word from American literary and audiovisual creation (where, as you know, it has no negative connotation) designates the tendency to put anything into stories in marketing (often based on the history of brands or products), also from company managers (who find stories to tell in order to motivate their employees), for the military (who train on narrative video games) as well as on the advice of “spin doctors” (communication advisers) who construct political life as a story. This mechanism, this “storytelling machine” deliberately plays on emotions, seeking to replace rational reasoning thanks to the ancestral power of transmission (and therefore to the capacity to convince) of storytelling. These methods are involved in the more and more political ability to see a difference between facts (reality) and fiction (fake). But, when the historian Alfonso Mendiola analyzed two stories (in 1552 and 1632) of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, we could see that these methods are quite old. The truth is not opposed to fiction in those writings. “*Then, to tell the truth meant to remember”* (facts were considered to be memorable, in this case the conquering feats of Hernán Cortés). It was already more a matter of communication than of observation and its storytelling was already guided by the desire for recognition and wealth.

“Subjective visions outshine any debate” says Thomas Bidegain. The media go to opinion polls and street interviews. Vox pop is easier than expertise or complete surveys. We are sheep-like, we prefer to know what the neighbor is thinking rather than thinking for ourselves. Same thing you can observe among activists.

Data storytelling is a much more recent concept whose objective is to tell a story constructed from data in order to illustrate them in a form more understandable and likable than simple tables of numbers and curves. The idea is to make complex analyzes easier to get by decision-makers, who do not always have the capacity to interpret the data. The way to do it is similar to regular storytelling, usually with a hook or something to attract the attention of the audience, various themes, emotions and an ending or a series of ends. Specialists in *data storytelling* are starting to appear in many companies. Others are developing computer tools that convert data, such as baseball game statistics, into news reports, and soon hope to provide a similar service that would turn sales or marketing data into news.

As consumers and voters begin to understand that they are being told stories, marketing is now promoting the *storymaking* or *storyliving* that seeks to make people more “active” in creating the story that sells. Brands no longer pour out a monologue but encourage customers to come and comment, to “play”, to discuss their own experience, to “share” recipes, photos, in a totally self-interested interactivity that allows the brand to rely on what its target wants to hear and, again and again, to manipulate customers thanks to the very simple compliance theory of social psychology.

Fiction is defined as the product of the imagination which does not have a complete model in real life or as a conscious or unconscious imaginary construction which can

also be formed in order to mask or embellish the real. Just as the idea of reality approaches the one of truth, the idea of fiction sometimes approaches the one of lie.
But, is there a specific property of fiction? Is it telling a fictional story? Having a fictional narrator? Is it what would distinguish it from nonfiction telling historical or autobiographical facts (what Genette called "*factual*" where the author, identified, takes full responsibility for the assertions in his story)?

Genette also said (in 1986): "*One cannot study the fictional story both as a story and as a fiction: the "as a story" of narratology implies by definition that one pretends to accept existence (the fiction), "before" the storytelling, of a story to tell; when "as a fiction" implies, on the contrary, that one rejects this hypothesis (this fiction) of method - and with it the very notion of storytelling, since, without a story, there can be no storytelling, and then the fictional storytelling would only be a fiction itself, a fiction of storytelling."* Well, he did write that but I quoted it just to mess with you and to check if you're still reading.

To construct a fiction is to impose writer's choices. As Thomas Bidegain says, "*there is an obligation of means, not of results. It's the intention that counts. Whereas, in real life or non-fiction, there is rather an obligation of results."*

The pact of truthfulness: About fiction, let's remember the *willing suspension of disbelief* from the readership stated by Coleridge. This suspension of disbelief is maintained by the simple internal consistency of the story (and by our need to believe). For example, the "hammerspace" (fictional place from which the things that a character makes spontaneously appear) in cartoons and video games doesn't bother anyone.

The words narration and fiction do not have quite the same meaning in French and in English: *narrative* may have, in English, a negative connotation equivalent to *storytelling* in French. The distribution of the meanings of lies and falsehood varies according to cultural areas, historical moments and fields. Also, the denunciation of propaganda using *storytelling/narrative* is less a discredit of fiction than a rehabilitation of reality.

For Paul Ricœur, who studied the links between history and storytelling (which he called *plotting*) and who showed that both operate in a similar way, fiction maintains close links with reality and is not in complete opposition with it but constitutes a complementary aspect of time, an alternative temporal experience.

Also, Jean-Paul Sartre (French writer 1905-1980) said: "*Either history withdraws as a knowledge of death, or the subjective historical survival must change our conception of history."*

From Antonio Codro Urceo in the 15th century to Nancy Huston today, we have regularly sought to erase the difference between fiction and reality, most often to plead our own cause.

Telling a fiction is lying with the consent of the person to whom you are lying. To lie well, you need to have memory. And the person must accept to forget (that they have already been told the same story). For Thomas Bidegain, "*fiction reduces the vast reality to the size of the human mind.*"

About human spirit and truthfulness, let us mention here some **cognitive biases** useful for writers. On this subject of biases, here is a very complete article (2016) by Buster Benson https://betterhumans.pub/cognitive-bias-cheat-sheet-55a472476b18 which, in 2019, became the book *Why Are We Yelling?: The Art of Productive Disagreement.*

First, as we have already seen, we all tend to see patterns and stories in what we perceive. We also overestimate our ability to understand the mental state of others (and therefore of characters). And the Barnum effect (which encourages us to take a vague description of someone for ourselves, which is quite logical since we are not so different from each other) can justify the fact of recognizing ourselves in characters.

Attention biases are used by writers, disseminating information in an understated way so that it becomes relevant and seems consistent when recalled in the story or suddenly emphasized by a character.

Negativity too: even at equal intensity, negative things impress more than neutral or positive things. And novelty is usually seen as potentially bringing more risks than benefits.

The influence of the first impression (anchoring effect) is also used to make a character immediately likable, knowing that the information is perceived in a selective way that goes more easily in the direction of the first impression. We also tend to remember better the first elements of a list, but rather the last information that we have been confronted with or that have been repeated.

Having previous exposure to someone or a situation makes that person or situation more positive, which may account for the benefit of a staggered exposition (introduction and necessary explanations of the universe) of the story. Not to mention the tendency to tell oneself that something is true because it can probably be the case or to perceive a will behind what is fortuitous or accidental which are very useful in surprising the reader or the spectator.

Compliance or social influence on commitment (tendency to pursue a committed action in spite of everything) also makes it possible to retain a reader or a spectator without having to constantly provide him with important information.

There is also the tendency to consider that a good action will necessarily be beneficial or rewarded while a bad action will be harmful and punished.

The audience will tend to avoid anticipating options for which they lack information. And it will be difficult to ignore irrelevant information (Stroop effect), which can be useful for slipping a false lead.

Excessive reliance on a tool (if you have a hammer you think you have to hammer everything) certainly plays a role in superhero or gangster stories.

And the characterization takes all its importance when we know that the content is judged according to the container or the transmitter.

We also have a tendency to over-emphasize unusual things (funny, bizarre, visually stunning) and under-emphasize expected information. And it is easy for people to notice that something has changed.

Let us also mention the need to reinterpret in order to eliminate dissonances, to consider knowledge as immutable, or the strong tendency to overestimate the frequency of a recurrence, and the possibility of showing by hiding (Streisand effect).

Identity is what is one, what represents only one reality. It is also what remains the same or equal to oneself over time (personal identity), the awareness of the persistence of the ego (especially when we speak of loss of identity). More formally, through legal status, identity makes it possible to recognize a person under the law.
Let us not forget the mathematical identity (equality) and the philosophical *law of identity* (each thing is identical with itsel) or the big concept of identification in storytelling, psychology and society. Identity then seems to provide a bridge between individuality and equality.

This pluralist concept of identity, which Claude Lévi-Strauss defined in 1977 as a "*virtual home*", especially questioned by psychoanalysis, is seen by Vincent de Gaulejac as a "*set of elements whose interactions give rise to a singularity*." He is following on from Paul Ricœur about the *narrative identity* (which we have to consider in nonfiction) "*who may include change, mutability, in the cohesion of a life* [here we have a bridge between clinical sociology and the typical hero's journey]. *The subject then appears to be constituted both as a reader and as a writer of his own life, according to Marcel Proust's wishes. The literary analysis of the autobiography confirms that the story of a life is constantly being "refigured" by all the true or fictitious stories that a subject tells about himself. This refiguration makes life itself a web of stories told.* [...] *Narrative identity is not a stable and flawless identity; just as it is possible to compose several plots about the same incidents* [...] *it is always possible to plot different, even opposed stories over one's own life.* [...] *the narrative identity never stops being made and unmade."* See for instance the autobiographical work *Persepolis* of French writer from Iran Marjane Satrapi (1969-) or *The Arab of the Future* by Riad Sattouf (1978-).

The French sociologist Claude Dubar (1945-2015) developed the idea that the previous forms of identification of individuals (cultural, genealogical, statutory, ethnic, religious) lose their importance in favor of reflexive and narrative forms. "Think about yourself!" "Tell about yourself!" He defined *narrative identity* as an autonomous construction of the person starting by putting our personal story into words that have meaning for ourself, to escape the determinations and the weight of this same story. By storytelling it, in a way, we would tame or win over our life.

German psychoanalyst Erik Erikson was a former student of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), and an author of a theory of development based on eight successive psychosocial stages. In his view, *interior* identity and *social* identity develop together over the course of life.

The French academic Nolwenn Hénaff (1971-) talked about a number of needs to be met in this search for identity, all very dependent on the Other: needs for existence, integration, valuation, control and individuality (which is especially

expressed through opposition among young people). According to her, the intimate (private) identity would be more about our body and our drives, affects, imagination, than about social identity (to which nonfiction storytelling refers most of the time).

As for the more recent **digital identity**, it's all sorts of data (writings, audio or video content, messages on forums or chats, usernames, images, profiles, pages viewed, purchases) that we leave behind, consciously or unconsciously, during our browsing on the Internet.

Let us recall here the effective categories regarding persons (real characters): what is **singular**, what is **particular** and what is **universal**. See page 19.

It may be useful to look at the active and guided practice of storytelling in several fields of social work. It provides tools to help people to make decision and to think about the future. For example groups of collective life history method, individualized biographical work, or tales building in systemic therapy.

Shortly before 1920, the Chicago School (Sociology Department of the University of Chicago) inaugurated the use, in this field of research, of autobiographies, personal letters, diaries, life histories, testimonies. Most of the Chicago School's research combined the use of personal documents and other more traditional documentary sources (newspaper articles, archives of churches, social work institutions, trial minutes) and avoided the use of interviews (considered as manipulation of the interviewed by the investigator) or direct observations.

Life history method has gradually become a tool for social intervention. It is obviously not enough to speak about ourself in order to escape social determinations, but an appropriate work can change the way our history operates inside us and it can help us to deal with our contradictions.

For example, in France, involvement and research groups organized by the International Institute of Clinical Sociology offer an exploration of the links between personal, family and social histories that are organized around different themes (family, love, money, ideals, work, knowledge). They take place over three or four days with a dozen participants. The goal is to understand the processes influencing our history by collecting details on this history through different techniques of oral and written expression. This method makes it possible to collectively analyze the "family romance" and the conflicts at work, and to seek to develop possible responses, as close as possible to each person's experience. Vincent de Gaulejac, who directs this work, said: "*Individuals and communities nourish their respective identities through storytelling.* We are not so far from psychoanalysis *where the subject recognizes himself in the story he tells himself about himself.*" Maybe not so far from show-therapy either (for example at work in TV reality shows or autobiographical blog comments) where "*how people look at us has become a therapy.*"

Many other uses of the life history method have been tried in social work (in retirement homes, for child psychiatry, in fight against cancer, in welcome centers or shelters, for social workers' training, as support for farming installation, with

volunteers for adoption or with people suffering from social exclusion). Social workers are very adept at the life history method because they are usually trained in many things useful for storytelling: psychology, sociology, systemic analysis, listening techniques, expression methods, group management, taking account of intercultural communication. The life history method, adopted by a group and led by a professional aware of the challenges, allows people to put emotions into words as well as to examine the paths, to look for the inflection points of the paths, the adaptations, the strategies of each person. The exercise can also endanger fragile audiences (reliving the past is not always easy) and the emotion inherent in this process must be able to be properly managed.

In 1986, in an article entitled *The biographical illusion*, Pierre Bourdieu (French sociologist 1930-2002) underlined the need, during a life history method process, not to be careful about a life trajectory seen as a succession of positions of a subject who actually has nothing constant in a space itself constantly transformed, that he compared to a landscape we go through which is only the *social surface* (reflecting the ability of each to act in different fields) whose construction should not be overlooked.

Are you still with me? The trajectory of an individual is indeed not linear (and nobody remembers it chronologically) but made up of phases and breaks, of more or less predictable transitions, mandatory crossroads, more unforeseen bifurcations, in heterogeneous temporalities. It is rather a matter of constituting a medium to make a person aware of the resources built during his life by accessing the reasons that motivated actions, the sources of commitments, the adaptability and skills acquired, the reflective and creative dimensions of the person considered as an active character. <u>Let's stay aware of this when we set up stories in a way that doesn't seek to follow the so conventional hero's journey...</u>

Often, a person tells a fragment of his life by choosing himself where it begins. When this work is done one-to-one, the story is usually initiated with an open question such as *tell me how you got to* and it's not a monologue, it is built by the interview and the follow-up questions which aim to identify different steps then to refocus on the junctions in order to bring out the different alternatives that the person may have had, as well as to identify his social environment and how other people who may have influenced him.

One of the limits of this kind of life history process is that it can tend to artificially unify a journey by finding reasons to justify the stages experienced. Tools should be found to minimize these reconstruction effects. For example, mind mapping makes it possible to graphically project the representations that a person holds (of a problem or a question, a choice). The concepts, nubs or keywords are written and connected by links/bonds of causality, proximity and influence. It is a visualization of the mental representation that one has of a person's speech about a particular situation. The interview transcript can also be organized in a chart which, like the map, visualizes the information collected. There can be a mind map or a chart about the key moments and all the persons involved (supporting cast) plus another mind map or chart about the main character motivating forces and reasons behind.

These graphic representations are produced either during the interview or later by the interviewer and presented to the person for comment and modification. Then they question the repetition of some themes, the paradoxes of the story, the important events that have been overlooked. This exchange around the different interpretations of the story is part of the process. The goal is never to find a "good interpretation" but to produce useful knowledge about the journey and for the rest of the journey (as well as to have a tool to talk about in order to help people by promoting understanding, memorization and creativity).

On the other hand, the repetition that can appear in mental maps of people with comparable backgrounds can also help a better understanding of what they went through and then (when you want to tell about them) a better storytelling.

Telling your own story is a step forward, whatever the emotions or the traumatic aspect linked to some parts of it. When this work is done with families in exile, the story often becomes a way of transmitting, combining memory of the past, present and future, with also managing to forget (which protects either the family, or the person who tells or a witness to events and which avoids heavy silences).

The systemic therapy proposes, like an anthropologist, to grasp more information about a person and his history through circular questioning, using hypotheses, the person telling about himself being always considered as the only expert.

The "systemic tale" is a story that condenses, in a timeless and evocative form (like a tale), the essential elements organizing the belonging of a subject (to a family, to a group) as they appear to the observer. This story is left endless and must be completed by each and every member of the family or group. A complete systemic tale is co-created. As a metaphorical object, said to be *floating*, it can be used as a testimony of intersubjectivity and a reminder of reality (and of the limits of the system itself). It is not an interpretation but a trace that solicits the creative resources of people to invent what happens next, their future. It is sometimes also a ritual of separation which seeks to avoid the feeling of rupture and to help detachment.

Let me here just speak about a very local project called *Writing bedroom* carried out as part of the Culture & Health program of the Bergonié Institute for the fight against cancer, in Bordeaux, France. The writer, Didier Delahais (1960-), was invited to visit cancer patients and to talk with them about the "outside", about life outside the limits of the hospital. He invited them to remember a place of their childhood, or a loved one, things seen, life events, desires, obstacles or openness to the world. He took notes and went, in half an hour, from the spoken words to a written text using vivid imagery and proposing other connections, shortcuts or accelerations that he immediately read aloud, provoking reactions from the person. The idea was to maintain a sense of continuity, dignity and integrity the disease could have damaged, to move away from the usual portrayal of a fight, to live in the present with the cancer by protecting all the places which don't belong to it.

Also, engaged account type storytelling obviously represents, in itself, a huge mine of books, shows, blogs, tumblr and podcasts more or less radical or collaborative. Especially in matters of abortion, harassment, rape, homosexuality (in the least tolerant countries), transidentity, or all things where people may wrongly feel

ashamed or guilty. To tell this story can then become public advocacy, in addition to therapy. A narrative activism is also expressed in podcasts, particularly feminist ones, because this form gives long speaking time and does not convey images.

The tendency to tell stories in order to denounce has particularly increased lately. in collaborative platforms which underline the ordinary sexism in every environment. It is difficult to measure the impact of these collections of anonymous testimony, but they have the merit of showing the extent of a problem often minimized by being so many that they cannot all be questioned. The people concerned can use it to show that they are not alone in suffering these behaviors. Once the anger is released by the story deposited, we can seek to move forward to deconstruct the mechanisms, share knacks against bad behaviors and protect ourselves.

As storytelling is powerful, of course, it has the power to harm people. It can happen that we can't stop telling and reliving again and again an event to the point of suffering (the central symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder is reliving, which manifests as flashbacks or nightmares in which the persons feel they are going through what happened as a looping, incessant, hard to silence way and which may require professional support). We can also feel like we are the character of a bad story, or it can be difficult to hear a fiction close to our history as a simple story.

It's also known how painful it is to have to tell and tell again what we are going through, what we have gone through or what we have witnessed. Simple repetition is boring and telling the story without reliving it in some ways is not easy. The forced repetition experienced by victims when filing complaints, assembling insurance files or requesting assistance is an additional difficulty for them.

Finally, some forms of storytelling can be badly received by the audience. For example, Icelandic journalist Thordis Elva and Australian Tom Stranger wrote a book together in which they told their reconciliation, twenty years after Tom raped Thordis (when they were 18 and 16) after years of emails and a face-to-face meeting organized in South Africa, halfway between their two countries. They expressed discomfort then forgiveness (for Thordis) and denial then awareness (for Tom) during a TED conference (from "Technology, Entertainment and Design", conferences organized internationally by a non-profit foundation for the dissemination of ideas). Giving a voice to his rapist not prosecuted by justice undeniably shocked a part of the audience.

The French historian Anne Vincent-Buffault analyzed the way in which "*compassionate manliness [...] reverse the stigma by transforming weakness into strength"* when a politician shows his empathy or the fact of having suffered, of having had to overcome ordeals and that this would be his strength, "*far from the stiffness and male restraint, old men's fashion of the 19th century. Compassionate manliness is usually introduced by a story, a story of their conversion"* (how they became compassionate).

When you work on reality, you might face the limits of private life. Today, privacy is less associated with physical spaces (bedroom, bathroom) but more with an

intentionality. “*My privacy is where I want, when I want”* said French psychiatrist Serge Tisseron (1948-).

Nolwenn Hénaff wrote that “*if the modern world has to face a great difficulty in distinguishing the public sphere and the private sphere, it is to forget that this border has constantly fluctuated over the course of history and that it is still contested and still under construction”.*

Private life has traditionally been conceived as an isolation mainly caused by constraints (family obligations, social pressure). Today, privacy is more exposed because this concept has evolved. In an uncertain search for identity, the interest shown in the privacy of other people is usually explained by a need to validate one’s own experiences.

Anne Vincent-Buffault studied the history of how feelings and emotions were showed, starting from a pronounced taste for the pathetic, valued in France during the 18th century and the French Revolution, which can be found in the pleadings of lawyers of that time who used pathos in their storytelling, which was going to be depreciated in the 19th century, seen as too soppy. Mistrust then set in regarding emotions, seen as proofs of weakness. Private life was associated with a model of reserve, secrecy, modesty. Emotions were protected from being seen. “*At that time appeared of the private diary, barometer of the soul. The disorder of the interior life, the variability of feelings remained, that’s what the diarist tried to tell about. But this model of intimacy also became a way of life with fine adjustments, in the name of domestic power which organized the occupations, more precisely those of women and girls. It developed behind the wall of private life, as Stendhal said, or “privacy” which, in English, links intimacy and secrecy.* [...] *The mix-up between private life and intimacy had consequences on the expression of feelings and on the division between male and female roles.* [...]

During the 19th century, demonstrative sensitivity has become inadmissible or, at least, its value was degraded to the point of falling under a minor genre, feminine and popular: sentimentalism. Above all, a new ideal of self-control and restrained sensitivity was developing, as a guarantee of depth and men dignity, to which the naturalized sensitivity of women, children and common people was opposed. In the second half of the 19th century, [...] *the sentimental novel became a secondary genre, reserved for women.*

In the 20th century, the movies, when they started, were judged like a popular entertainment, the films qualified as weepies were accused of leading the spectators in tears towards the troubled zones of weakness. [...] *The tasteful judgment of critics (literary, cinematographic) remained, since, marked by the refusal of pathos.* [...] *The concern to avoid clichés, rituals, socially prescribed forms implied that more use has been made of the individual’s capacity for invention.* [...] *Now in the 21h century, it is also in the name of freedom that feelings are expressed instead of being repressed or restrained. Shamelessness and showing our suffering or our capacity to sympathize invaded public and political domains. We are witnessing a molding of unhappiness which calls for empathy.”*

Russian kinoks: In the 1920s, *Kinoks* (whose name means “the eyes of the cinema”) were a small collective of committed Soviet directors of which Dziga Vertov (alias David Abelevich Kaufman, 1896-1954) was the center piece. Their goal was a cinema without any screenplay, without actors and without sets, where it was only a question of capturing real life, whatever the place. The *cine-eye*, better than human vision, was supposed to make it possible to restore life, creating a simple connection between reality and the spectator. The cinematographic processes were revealed: the cameraman appeared in the image, shown while filming, the media were demystified. Another assumption of Kinoks was the *interval theory*: editing allows a movement to be extended by another shot which may have no connection with the previous one. The result was the creation of echoes, analogies and rhymes that formed an almost musical rhythm that no intertitle will interrupt. The viewer was constantly stimulated by rapid editing, superimpositions and surprising connections. It often took several viewings to understand.

When Vertov resolutely broke with the principle of the invisible cutting in favor of a jump-style cut, Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948), for his part, preferred collision in his method, believing that an idea should be derived from the juxtaposition of two independent shots. The more distant the first image is from the second, even contradictory, the more the impression on the viewer will be strong and will generate a third term, not contained in the first two. (See below the chapter Editing.)

Fantastic-Fantasy-Poetic

In contrast, here you will move away from reality. Of course, a drama can also be fantastic, as well as some fantasy or poetry can also be a drama. These categories, again and fortunately, are not rigid.

While we might ask ourselves what is moving in order to write a drama, what really exists in order to write a nonfiction, what makes people laugh or smile in order to write a comedy, we will ask ourselves here rather **what makes us dream** and **what is scary?**

Fear is a very useful emotion which is used, at the base, to decide the fight-or -flight instinctive response. Usually accepted for children, less for adults, there are all sorts of rites of passage (for instance, the rite of watching horror movies among adolescents) in order to come to terms with fear. The feeling of strangeness, less universal, will itself be due to a difference or an added value compared to a given reality.

So, what is scary?

- Element of surprise.
- Empathy (fear is contagious).
- Danger: death, threat of (physical or moral) suffering, risk-taking (speed, distance, height, depth, behavior, handicap).

- Lack, loss or overflow: mourning, theft, failure, madness, rejection, punishment, judgment of others, success, fame, deception, trickery (including clowns).
- Phobias and anxiety (which also participate in simple strangeness).

What can be strange?
- The dreamlike (bizarre or illogical).
- Poetry.
- Fantasy (which could be defined as unquestioned fantastic).
- Anxiety or heaviness: from darkness, stickiness (snakes, slime, drool), swarms (insects, spiders, multiple legs), vertiginous things (height, the void), the confined (detention, isolation, cellar, tunnel, water, crowd), unclear danger (unidentified shapes or noises, needles, blades, weapons, explosions, falling objects, collapses).

What makes us dream?
- Smoothness and elegance (poetry, marvelous, superior beings, magic, ease of the dancer).
- Pleasure (linked to sensations and their learning, beauty, relaxation).
- Memories (nostalgia, feeling of continuity).
- Escaping (projection towards a better future, another life or an appealing imaginary world).

In these genres, there is usually a relation to our own fantasy, therefore to the sexuality, a little more flagrant (fear, pain / joy, pleasure / suffering) in this kind of story. But in humor and drama too.

Claiming to be in the fantastic genre has often enabled writers to get around the morality of an era or a place. Because it is often in the fantastic part (symbolic and poetic) of a story that the doubts about how to understand the message of the story provide quality and diversity. A certain joy also emanates from these different possibilities of explanations or interpretations, even about the diegetic reality of the story (see, for example, the last season of *Twin Peaks* (2017) by David Lynch), besides what can even escapes the author (I am not sure that Georges Lucas suspected that the most striking memory of his Star Wars films (1977-1983) would be "*I am your father"* which is not the most fantastic part of all this saga).

Fantastic genre

The fantastic genre refers to dreams, to the supernatural (magic, powers, other worlds) and/or to fear, horror. The themes of horror fantasy, since 18th century's British novels and German E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) tales, are ghosts, the Devil, vampires and zombies.

Again, other genres (detective, science fiction, romance, adventure) can have fantastic elements just as genres other than comedy can contain humorous elements.

Remember that each story proposes or imposes its own reality. A story is a balance between correctness (reality) and exaggeration (imagination, interpretation, tragic and comic effects).

A fantastic story generally has to do with "**reaction**". The unusual, the mystery pushes the reader/spectator to identify with a character who undergoes something and must react (whereas, in the detective or adventure story, he is pushed to identify with a person who acts intentionally and can make mistakes, an investigator, a hero). A fantastic story often speaks about the quest of an innocent character facing a reality that is beyond him and that confronts him with his shattered perceptions. It doesn't always need special or spectacular effects. For example, in *The Exterminating Angel* by Luis Buñuel (1900-1983), only the repetition of a scene with very slight shifts shows that there is something out of order, all the rest is only an impassable but invisible boundary (and nobody is innocent).

The fantastic themes vary from the Gothic universe (fear, mental dissociation) to more classic artifices (doctor or lawyer confronted to weird clients, for example) and to more contemporary perspectives (social marginalized people, citizens facing the abuse of an extremist ideology...)

Fantasy genre

In fantasy, the marvelous, the supernatural goes without saying. It is admitted by the characters and reader/spectator (while it's an issue in the fantastic genre). The main characteristics of fantasy's heroes are usually courage, resilience and kindness. This genre also often has an initiation purpose.

Fantasy includes most of science-fiction, where the story world is usually particularly elaborated, as it's the main idea of this genre to create other realities.

Possible or "parallel" worlds : American scholar Thomas Pavel (1941-) criticized narratology's claims to explain literature through semiology. He used the philosophical theory of possible worlds (elaborating the possibility that there are other worlds than ours) to study fictional worlds and their relationship to reference worlds, the level of existence of fictional characters and the truth value of fiction. But the American philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906-1998) showed the uselessness of this theory and defended the idea that possible worlds are part of the real world. Even if a fiction is not "real" (by nature), it still teaches us something about our reality. The possible participates in reality, in its construction. Fiction can be seen as a thought experiment, an invention making it possible to glimpse other possibilities, other alternatives.

Common sense willingly attributes to fiction a cathartic function (projecting our fantasies and passions into fiction to be appeased in reality) and a metaphorical function (helping to think about and act about our life and our society). The fables used animals to criticize the society of men, the imaginary worlds can be imitations or exaggerations of our society and our relations between beings (in particular by exacerbating the duality between good and bad or between order and chaos).

There are very often parallel worlds in today's fantastic imagination. We have more tools to imagine them (visual effects, game consoles, scientific research on relativity,

big bang, space-time, common religious culture and world-famous movies like *Star wars*, *Marvel*, books like *Lord of the Ring*, *Harry Potter*, or *A Song of Ice and Fire* adapted in *Game of Thrones* TV show, or animated like *Dragon Ball*, *One Piece* or *Naruto*) and also more and more appearance of what has already been invented (collections, reissues, remakes, digital recordings, streaming). The parallel worlds are, in a way, expanding.

Poetic genre

It is rather an added value, which consists of making things say more. By the choice of words (often full of imagery) and images, figures of speech, literary device, expressiveness. By rhythm (sentences, dividing, editing). "*Poetry is nothing but time, a perpetually creative rhythm"* said the Mexican poet Octavio Paz (1914-1998).

Poetry is linked to the concept of beauty. We often say *it's beautiful* instead of *it's poetic.* In French we can also say *how well said this is !* when it's poetic because poetry is a positive social value. "*Poetry remains the most vulnerable place and the most revealing of what a society does with individuality"* said Henri Meschonnic. It has more often to do with feelings than with knowledge.

Some make a distinction between poetry which is *form oriented* and poetry which is *content oriented*. Also about *poetic license* as the freedom that is given to this genre compared to other styles of speech.

Famous French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) rightly pointed out that laughter and poetry do not usually go together well, but he believed that the best grotesque humor genre required a "*prodigious poetic good mood"*.

Dreamlike (oneiric) genre

It is daydream, hallucination, even if we distinguish in our daily life the dream (envy, pleasure, happiness) from the nightmare (fear, suffering).

The dreamlike genre emphasizes the dream process in sleep or what remains of it when we wake up and what society says about it. There is a common imagination (from empathy as well as creating empathy) about dreams and nightmares, not necessarily related to our desires and fears. The dreamlike genre allows more narrative discontinuities, playing with the point of view (which is not necessarily reliable) of unstable characters and illogicality.

Intimate narratives are what goes most easily towards the dreamlike genre. Let say:
- Fantasies.
- *Family romance* which Freud was talking about (when a child invented an alternative, imaginary family that would better satisfy his frustrations).
- Small personal systems (we imagine possible scenarios for making decisions, often trying to anticipate the reactions of the people around us).
- Notebooks and diaries, more or less private (which can allow, on re-reading, to find feelings and emotions for characters and, of course, for autobiography).

- The practice of daydreaming even some sleeping but lucid dreaming, if indeed it has a different interest from the awake daydream (to make the difference, try to look at your hands, if you succeed, you are awake, if not you're asleep), a form of narrative meditation from mental images that arises in a state of relaxation and can compose a scenario. This technique can be used in the way that suits everyone (analysis, creation, unblocking). Several techniques would make it possible to improve the capacities of lucid dreams (which are different from classic dreams by a gamma activity of the frontal cortex of the brain measurable by electroencephalography): noting your dreams, falling asleep in the skin of an actor, repeating to yourself that you want to have a lucid dream. A child's (under 16) brain in development is more likely to achieve this. Lucid dreamers report using their dreams for experiences of pleasure as well as turning their nightmares into pleasant dreams. Some say this practice helps them in solving problems and stimulates their creativity. (source : https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/amerjpsyc.127.2.0191)

Humor

I will try not to go beyond the microcentury of theory. (That is, 52 minutes and 35 seconds of reading, a millionth of a century, example of nerd humor.) Because the famous German philosopher Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) said (according to Freud) that one of the characteristics of humor in general was that it "*amuses us only for a moment*."

For an historical summary of the various western theories on humor, see this clear and accessible article by John Morreall in the encyclopedia of American University at Stanford: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/humor/

Laughter

The English cartoonist Max Beerbohm (1872-1956) pointed out in 1920 that "*It is said that the mental symptoms of love are wholly physical in origin.* [...] *The physical sensations of laughter, on the other hand, are reached by a process whose starting-point is in the mind.*"

He also thought that a written text could not make us laugh as much as a live performance (as far as I know, he didn't comment on cinema or comics) and especially not as much as things happening in real life. There are indeed much more examples of hilarious things in plays, films, TV shows, stand-up comedy and comic books. Though humorous novels or short stories do exist.

Laughter can have **different reasons**:

- Comic (set of processes aimed at provoking laughter) and humor itself (a frame of mind that highlights the pleasant, funny or unusual aspects of reality). To simplify, we could say that comic includes humor but that it does not always have humor. Some people think that humor (they mean more "irony") is not necessarily funny. (See also

English humor below). Personally, I often say that I published not funny humorous books.
- Tickling.
- Contagion (neurons involved in muscle contraction would pre-activate zygomatic linked to laughter from simple observation). Recorded laughter in some television shows seeks to make people laugh by contagion.
- Nervousness and tiredness: nervous laughter is a build-up of tension which is released to avoid panic. Close to nervous laughter, a fit of laughter is an uncontrolled and long laugh.
- Cultural practices (to attack others, or to defend oneself, to appease a situation, as therapy, by superstition to ward off a worrying thing). Laughing at someone is communicating to others that it does not represent any danger, even if he identifies himself (or other people identify him) as a source of danger (from social hierarchy, physical strength, religious authority, magical power, etc). This is also the case about sour laugh in an unpleasant situation (when we hope there is no danger). A reinforcement of belonging is built through laughter, for example in comedies where a stranger is mocked, or when the suitors are each more crazy than the other, when friends are excessively eccentric (as opposed to the hero who is the norm). Laughter also makes it possible to fraternize and has universal components. Laughing together means being able to help each other.
- Madness, which often generates inappropriate laughter (the stereotype of mad scientist and some villains uses this idea).
- Substance use (alcohol, drugs, medication) or gas based on nitrogen and oxygen. Pathological laughter is also encountered after damage to certain parts of the brain.

Biology of laughter

The action of laughing increases the level of serotonin and dopamine, which produce an immediate pleasant and antidepressant effect to erase the effects of unnecessary fear or tension. Laughter is being triggered when an individual suddenly realizes that there is in fact no danger. Mockery and exaggeration make particular use of this lever, catharsis humor too.

In 2006, neuro-immunologists in California found that preparing to see a comedy film increased beta-endorphin (a neurotransmitter that helps relieve pain) by an average of 27% and somatropin (growth hormone that keeps the immune system strong) by 87%. Two years later, they showed that the anticipation of laughter also reduced the level of three stress hormones: dihydroxyphenylacetic acid (dopac), cortisol and epinephrine (by respectively 38%, 39% and 70%, in average).

When we laugh, the contraction of the diaphragm stimulates nearby organs: liver, spleen, stomach, intestine. Laughing also relaxes the muscles of the face, the neck, the arms, and the stomach.

Laughing is considered inborn for humankind. It appears around the 4th month of life, it is a vital function (it cannot be prevented, no more than sneezing).

When laughter has been triggered once, it tends to be triggered more easily a very short time later. Comedians are well aware of this.

Laughing slightly makes people excited (catecholamines, composed of 80% adrenaline and 20% norepinephrine, are secreted by the sympathetic nervous system) but then tends to lower the tension. One minute of giggles would equal 45 minutes of relaxation. We also say that a laugh is worth a steak, at least that laughing 10 to 15 minutes would result in an energy expenditure of up to 40 calories (but has it been proven?)

Laughter would disconnect the left brain's hemisphere and so lower the receiver's guard. That's why humor is very useful to deliver a content. A laughing spectator is more receptive and can hear better what is said.

Certain conditions can prevent laughter (and sometimes even smiling): stress, physical effort, grief or meditation which, as Freud laughably wrote, "*leaves no room for the funny side, except in the case where it's suddenly interrupted."*

Ancestral function of laughter: Laughter does not express joy, but it makes people happy: for those who hear laughter, it indicates the absence of danger (I'm saying it again). It lets you know when and where there is no more danger for the group (parents or friends). We could also apply this explanation to the fact that a person or a community does not want to laugh at a joke when they think that this joke represents a danger for them.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) told us so in one of his first comedies (*Love's Labour's Lost):*
"A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it."

For Plato, Socrates (another pretty famous Greek from 5th century BC) or Hobbes (English philosopher of the 17th century), the reason for laughing was different, it came from a feeling of moral or physical superiority that one can feel over someone else. They were speaking about laughing at someone, in the sense of mocking, like Charles Baudelaire in 1855, who wondered about the essence of laughter, "*laughter comes from the idea of one's own superiority* and *one will find at the bottom of the laughter's thought an unconscious vanity*." This is not the case today in most forms of humor, often based on absurdity, exaggeration or self-deprecation (which Baudelaire hardly mentioned) rather than mockery.

He affirmed more poetically (besides the famous "*The wise man only laughs with trembling"*) that *"laughter is intimately linked to the accident of an old fall, of a physical and moral degradation. Laughter and pain are expressed through the organs where the commandment and the science of good or evil can be found: the eyes and the mouth".* He also wrote that, for a Christian, "*the laughter on his lips is a sign of as much misery as the tears from his eyes"*, and that "*man bites with his laugh"* rather than with his teeth, as, still according to Baudelaire, he seduces with tears rather than cunning.

He distinguished the ordinary comic said "*indicative"* (mockery) from the "*innocent"* comic (childish joy) and from the "*grotesque"* that he considered as a superior creation (for example in the work of Rabelais, a French writer of the 16th

century) going towards the "*absolute*" comic. Baudelaire thought that by pushing indicative comic you obtain "*fierce*" comic and that by pushing innocent comic you obtain absolute comic which would also have the particularity of ignoring itself (but his examples on this point are under par). However, he did perceive the "*permanent duality*" of humor which, as in "*all artistic phenomena*" indicates the **potency to be both yourself and another**.

Sigmund Freud distinguished "comic" (more or less random funny things) from "wit" (which would have more connection with the unconscious and would respond, when you are trying to be witty, to an exhibitionism drive to put yourself forward) in a rather unconvincing way and, as often, with sexism and contempt for social class. As with regards to humor, he saw in it an attitude of refusal of pain, an elevation of the ego, an affirmation of the pleasure in spite of unfavorable external realities, without leaving mental health (unlike neurosis, madness, drunkenness, ecstasy or withdrawal into self) and a way in which the superego would reassure the ego in a parental way (we are not so far from the ancestral function of laughter and the capacity to be both yourself and another that Baudelaire referred to).

At the same time, German writer Otto Julius Bierbaum (1865-1910) summed it up very well : *Humor is when you laugh anyway.*

As for the French psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik (1937-) *humor is a valuable factor of resilience* (bouncing back). (And the factors that conversely would prevent recovery from trauma are isolation, loss of meaning which prevents telling what happened, and shame). Laughter therapy, by the way, is studied by "gelotology".

In 1972, American psychologists Jeffrey Goldstein and Paul Mc Ghee introduced their *Psychology of Humor* declaring that there isn't a definition of humor acceptable to all researchers. Which French writer Pierre Daninos (1913-2005) put it this way, *humor : ordeal of definers*.

American actor Steve Allen (1921-2000), who premiered the *Tonight show* in 1954, said: "***Comedy is tragedy + time***". That is to say that any tragic event can become funny over time, with distance, thanks to our ability to evolve: By laughing at what is wrong, we become superior to what is wrong.

However, Thomas Bidegain cleverly added that, in reality, often *comedy + time = tragedy* (about things we laugh at until they turn out to be tragic, like the election of Donald Trump for example).

And for catharsis humor (like Charlie Hebdo), one could define it as = drama (or tragedy) + (a little less time than for a comedy).

Burst of laughter: Zeuxis, greek painter from Antiquity, laughing at the portrait of a witch he had just finished, is said to have died from laughing. In French, "laughing to death" means LOL. Our laugh can indeed surprise us and "burst". It is the achievement of stage comedians and of comedy writers: to make an audience burst into laughter, or part of the audience. (But Stalin, for example, was NOT known to do that).

Fit of laughter: More nervous and particularly difficult to stop, giggles are rarely triggered by a deliberate comic effect. It happens most often when it is not socially adapted to laugh out loud and it can be very contagious.

Smiling

We smile for pleasure, well-being, fun, imitation, hiding... There are several types of smiles and more reasons for smiling than for laughing. We see immediately that it will be easier to make people smile than to make them laugh.

Originally, smiling was more an expression of submission, of defense. Smiling is, like laughing, inborn (the part of imitation would only serve to accelerate the learning of nuances and cultural particularities).

The concept of invisible laughter or *laugh in the soul* attributed to Blaise Pascal (French writer, 1623-1662) has been used by critics about Molière (famous French playwright, 1622-1673). The concept of non-laughing humor could apply to several forms of subtle humor (see below).

There is undeniably a shameful or rude social aspect to laughing and smiling, most often taken as a mockery, an insult, something a little dirty or intimate that should not be displayed in public, something vulgar for a laugh and arrogant for a smile.
At the same time, we will hear people reproach in case you don't laugh often or not smile enough (particularly for women, to the point of wondering if society would not try here and there to make the smile the feminine of laughter, like man can laugh and woman should smile).

Comedy

Comedy can be seen globally as an attack on human vanity. It does not give, like serious drama, an importance (which flatters it) to the human being. So, writers, critics, institutions and some spectators or readers take it less seriously.

Humor has, however, the reputation of nourishing critical mind . See the work of the American professor John Morreall (1947-).

The way each one looks at its own existence is often more plaintive than mocking. Yet war prisoners have testified that jokes and pranks were common in the camps, if only to avoid going mad.

Comedy is democratic. A good gag brings everyone together. Which can bother those who like to establish hierarchies. And since it is popular, comedy is often making money, which can also add to its shame (at least in Europe).

While the lightness of comedy might make it seem like it's written with ease, it's actually easier to be serious than to make people laugh. François Truffaut said "*Anyone who has ever tried to write a screenplay could not deny that comedy is indeed the most difficult genre, the one which requires the most work, the most talent, the most humility too*."

Comedy characters are above the dramatic system (the storytelling constraints of coherence), they have more rights but they need to be "well rendered" (with the right

part of exaggeration), and the actors to play their role especially well to make it work (to make people laugh). On this point, see all the characters in many English comedy sketches: *Monty Python*, *Harry & Paul*, or *Father Ted* and *IT Crowd* by Graham Linehan (1968-).

Umberto Eco, in *The Name of the Rose*, invents a passage of the lost second part of the *Poetics* of Aristotle where he would have spoken of comedy: *"We will show how the ridiculousness of actions is born from the likening of the best to the worst and vice versa, from arousing surprise through deceit, from the impossible, from violation of the laws of nature, from the irrelevant and the inconsequent, from the debasing of the characters, from the use of comical and vulgar pantomime, from disharmony, from the choice of the least worthy things. We will then show how the ridiculousness of speech is born from the misunderstandings of similar words for different things and different words for similar things, from garrulity and repetition, from play on words, from diminutives, from errors of pronunciation, and from barbarisms."* But you can see that these are modern ideas. He also has his main character say that Isidore of Seville (570-636) defined comedy as *"something that tells of stupra virginum et amores meretricum"* (the lust of virgins and the love of prostitutes, always the idea of contrast).

Comedy subgenres:

- Farce (based on gags).
- Plot comedy (plenty of twists) and light comedy (where everything is represented in an amusing and lighthearted way).
- Comedy of manners or sit(uation)com(edy) (observation and irony about family, work, society, religion, a country) more or less tinged with character comedy (strong characters, families, friends, groups).
- *Screwball comedy*, a Hollywood subgenre from the 1930s-40s that mixed elements of sitcom, romantic comedy and farce. It took its name from American slang in which screwball referred to an individual with strange or even eccentric behavior, a word coming from baseball in which the screwball (screw ball) is a ball thrown with a twist. Its main characteristics were the combination of slapstick humor and witty dialogue around a plot centered on morals, in particular the themes of breakup, divorce or remarriage. Elements of the genre continue to appear, sometimes in the form of tributes, in contemporary films. The strong personality of the female characters was the most notable ingredient.
- Heroic comedy (irony, self-mockery, for example *Monty Python*).
- Romantic comedy (the end is known in advance, it plays on emotions and universality until the inevitable triumph of love).

The different kinds of humor

(Unsatisfying classification)

- Self-deprecation: laughing at yourself and at your own faults, which helps to be likable and to reduce pressure (even between animals).

- Character comedy: humor based on the exaggeration of a human flaw making the character ridiculous, absurd or unusual.
- Gesture comedy: humor based on exaggerated gestures such as funny faces, slapstick (Jacques Tati, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin ...), falls, knocks.
- Absurd or nonsense: humor based on the absence of logic and awareness of the irrational part of life and language.
- Language comedy: spoonerism, play on words, pronunciation errors, dialects, neologisms. For example, the definition of "second-beard" (average length of which a beard grows in one second) on the model of "light-year".
- Situation comedy: it lies in the incongruous or paradoxical aspect of a situation (misunderstanding, cross-purposes, escalation of events).
- Burlesque comedy: it is often about treating a "high" subject with a "low" style. In burlesque, the gags often come from a space comic (for example Charlie Chaplin in the lion cage in the movie *The Circus*, 1928).
- Heroic-comic: on the contrary, here the deal is to speak about a "low" subject with a "high" style, by exaggerating as parody often does, or by adding an incongruous element.
- Sarcasm: laughing at others with superiority. Innuendo where we laugh at the person who is not in the secret. As well, we can say the opposite of what you think. Often used to make fun of the more arrogant characters and to make them more likable.
- Grotesque: distortion of things, caricature. Exaggeration of other humor.
- Deadpan humor: it casts doubt on its own comic function. In-joke or private joke: a joke that can only be understood by insiders (which can be used as subtext, setting a complicity with the public, a dramatic irony).
- English humor: famously subtle, it is often based on paradox and self-deprecation. It is related to the British origin of the word "humour" (at the end of the 18th century because before that, the Puritans disapproved of laughter and banned comedies) described as a <u>shift</u> linked to the English temperament, implying a dual nature of characters and situations. The smiling awareness of our own eccentricity, of our dual nature, is precisely the primary meaning of the sense of humor formerly known as the "English reflex" (self-mockery). Then, the said English humor has used the deadpan humor and tongue-in-cheek. Then also nonsense. "*How to recognize English humor from French humor? English humor emphasizes with bitterness and despair the absurdity of the world. French humor laughs at my mother-in-law,"* said the French comedian Pierre Desproges (1939-1988). Here we find the difference between humor and comedy (which features a low character and leads to a happy ending, requirement of comedy that we find in classical plays as in early movies). Humor is often seen as a superior form of comedy, nobler than usual comic, as a phenomenon often more apt to speak of unhappiness than of happiness. In any case, nothing forces a humorous story, unlike a comedy, to have a happy end.
- Jewish humor: based on self-mockery (about religious practices or the community), it is often marked by stereotypes (mother, money, mutual aid) of Jewish people about themselves or of others about them. But it can take a more universal form, on the absurdity of the human condition or its relation to God.
- American humor (for me): English humor + Jewish humor.

- Dark humor: it takes for theme something sad to underline its cruelty. Let us quote here a French artist, Jacques Vaché (1895-1919), who met in 1915 the French poet André Breton (1896-1966) assigned as a medical intern at a military hospital. André Breton was immediately seduced. Vaché proposed "*desertion within oneself*" and obeyed only a law: *"umour"* (without h). Despite his attempt to make the concept of umor explained by Vaché, Breton spent part of his life looking for a definition. From his research, André Breton wrote his *Anthology of dark humor* (1940).
- Running jokes: the effect consists of repeating the same words several times, the same gestures or reactions of characters, particularly appropriate to the definition of comedy by the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) as "*some mechanical put over some living."* The repetition can also relate to body language, the mechanical aspect of which gives rise to a funny shift or to imitation (mimes, imitators, parodies, satires). It's called "gimmick" when the running joke identifies with a character (for example Sheldon in *Big Bang Theory* TV show).
- Meta-humor: it's humor about humor. For example, when Thomas Bidegain said that "*There are only two kinds of joke, the running joke and the running joke."*

Humor always comes from a **contrast**, a **shift** between two levels of reality, between a norm and an exception, between two registers of language. When the comic relief comes from the dialogue, it is often from changes of register which create effects of contrast and surprise (our brain quickly wondering if there is a danger and quickly realizing there isn't) and empathy (you have to laugh or else you'll cry).

In *The Art of creation* (1964), Hungarian writer Arthur Koestler (1905-1983) studied what makes humor an act of creation. It first assumed, in the author as in the receiver, the ability to take some distance by freeing ourself from the emotion. Humor is at the intersection of two usually separate internal logics, what Koestler called "*bisociation"*. He underlined this "*privileged place of creative activity which is always located at the intersection of two planes"* forcing the humorist, the scientist and the artist to "*walk a tightrope"*. Koestler wrote that the emotion that makes us participate in the richness of reality, which he called "*oceanic feeling"*, can inhabit the scientist as well as the artist. He clearly desired to show that all creative activities have a common structure and define this structure. Koestler knew very well that this theory "*would be contradicted by the future statements of psychology and neurology"* but he hoped it would stay "*a sketch of truth"* suitable to stimulate researchers.

Irony

Irony should be explicit. When the public takes literally words that wanted to be ironic, it can be the public's fault or it can be the writer's fault which did not realize that the elements revealing the irony were not clearly understandable by the public. The larger is the audience, the more likely is failure. Language is complex, so are the references of various people. In addition, we rarely say one thing at a time.

Irony sometimes requires, for example, to indicate that one does not mean what one is saying. Orally, the tone and the expression of the face is sufficient. Irony sometimes consists in seizing on a stereotype to make fun of it. It must then be clear

that it is indeed the stereotype that we are making fun of and not that we are recycling.

All that is said with irony is not admissible literally. Humor cannot be an excuse for the worst jokes, and this limit is not the same for everyone. The difference between a racist or a sexist joke and one that isn't is not that one is funnier than the other, but that one is more acceptable than the other.

In fiction, the most virulent critics and negative feeling (of sadness or anger) on the part of the public, often affect comedies. There is a difference between "laughing together" and "making fun of" that is not so obvious or consensual. Humor does not always get on well with everybody, it becomes subject to debate, suspected of hiding an unworthy message, where the same story told in a dramatic way would probably have shocked nobody. Let's then again underline the importance of the register in any narration.

Remember that Baudelaire made a difference between *indicative comic* (ordinary, caricature or Molière, where it would be about laughing at others) and *absolute comic* (where we would not exclude ourselves from the object of laughter). More recently, others have made the same difference but under the words irony and humor.

The definition of irony varies. Rhetoric says that it is a process consisting in saying the opposite of what we want to mean. We can also base irony on polyphony: the speaker does not behave as the enunciative instance of his own discourse.

Irony tries to make its target lose face, whether the target realizes it (this is the case with sarcasm) or not (then a third instance is needed, the spectator, who understands the irony). Humor, on the other hand, would put the target on the same level as the speaker and aim to save face.

French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903-1985) saw irony as half-skillful and humor as skillful. Irony would consist in criticizing and showing the inadequacies and contradictions of the world or of men, and humor would consist in going to the end of this logic by accepting these contradictions and by assuming them: the humorist is not outside of humanity.

For Gérard Genette, humor would also be on the side of the absolute comic (of which Baudelaire spoke), that is to say harmless or at least non-aggressive.

For Henri Bergson, the difference between irony (which takes ideal for real) and humor (which takes real for ideal) seems very light. According to him, there are only a few <u>comic effects</u>:

- *Jack-in-the-box*: the idea is expressed, the interlocutor represses it, it is expressed again. It is a flood of words which rushes forward, which you stop and which always sets out again.
- *Jumping-jack*: a character thinks he speaks and acts freely when he is just a toy in the hands of another.
- S*nowball effect*: accumulation or chain of involuntary actions.
- *Repetition*: the scene, the situation takes place several times.
- *Inversion*: it is "the biter bit", the robber robbed...

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (around 1830), at the time of romantic art, German philosopher Hegel (1770-1831) developed the concept of "*objective humor"* where

would be resolved the contradiction between the interest taken in the accidents of the outside world, on one hand, and the vagaries of the personality on the other hand.

More recently, for Guillomette Bolens (1965-), French professor of English literature and comparative literature whose research focuses on the history of the body, the analysis of gestures, motor cognition and kinesthetic intelligence in art and literature, "*humor in interaction is always associated with a certain tempo* (rhythm, beat) *and a certain tonus* (muscle tension)".

For the French novelist Dominique Noguez (1942-2019), language is the fundamental code used by each unique speech, and humor, for its part, is a coded language, it is not immediately understood, but requires competence on the part of the receiver. This is an "*overcode*", not individual at all.

The understanding of a humorous statement depends on the sharpness of the receiver, the socio-cultural framework, the time, the general and particular context in which the statement is produced. Humor is the speech of a tribe (a kind of dialect). Humorous speech is not necessarily transparent, but it is better if it is not opaque. Noguez explained that humor is *translucent*, and that this translucency, to work well, must be based on three things: humoring (author), humored (public) and the structure of the context in which the author and public interact. If one of these three elements is not favorable (for example if the humoring is too hermetic, if the humored is not receptive enough, or if the context is not joyful), the viability of the humorous speech will be at risk.

He proposed a typology of possible humorous speeches, before the list that he delivered later by colors (see below):

- What does not go without saying presented as going without saying: this is the case of nonsense.
- Feigned naivety: we can find many examples of this in Voltaire's work (French writer, 1694-1778)
- Sad things not presented sadly or cheerful things not presented cheerfully: it is here that Noguez put, among other things, dark humor.
- Friendliness presented as wickedness, praise as reproach, or vice versa: it is the unclear limit between humor and irony, which often depends on the attitude of the speaker or of the audience.

For Noguez, humor is always careful not to pass judgment. We only have a minor part of the conclusion and we reconstruct the whole reasoning from the humorist's value system (which constitutes the major part of the conclusion) and is the most important (humorist's system of values or background or level of reality) because humor without sufficient backworld is reduced to a pun or a simple joke. But restraint is also important (for comedy writing, you must avoid allowing the system of values on which you are implicitly based to show through too much) which leads to an unstable balance.

Another important characteristic is that humor has a very strong self-awareness, it is never involuntary.

The colors of humor: As more literary classification, this idea of the colors of humor is based on the greater or lesser relation to reality: at the very end of the list, pushing realism at the most, there is "black humor", at lower level, "gray humor" and when the emotional response outweighs the realism, it's "pink humor".

Philippe Noguez took up this idea and proposed a classification of the different types of humor according to their color which specifies either the theme used, or the subject, or both:

- Yellow humor is on the side of self-deprecation (close to melancholy). Personal or familiar theme with disparaging and unmoving comments.
- Black humor goes with macabre theme of scandal or death (for example, *Amputation of the leg is a big step towards a sedentary lifestyle.*)
- Purple humor has to do with religion.
- Gray humor is about everyday life (a playful way of being depressed) Ex: *Although living alone, he had had a napkin ring made in his name.*
- Red humor deals with human misfortunes. Ex: *The very beautiful sentence* Workers of the world, unite! *no longer resists a Formica kitchen.*
- Pink humor would be on the side of sentimental attenuation. Ex: *When the wrong notes were too wrong* [on the piano]*, she would say in a plaintive voice, abstractly, like a discreet order given to a spirit, "We must bring in the tuner." But the spirit was not delivering the message.* (André Gide, in *If It Die...*, 1924)
- Green humor has a naive point. Ex: *Mrs Rosa had no height and her buttocks went straight to the shoulders, without stopping. When she walked, it was like a house moving.* (Romain Gary, *The Life Before Us*, 1975)
- Blue humor has for theme fantasy or dream, sometimes with absurdity on the top.
- Chameleon humor would be on the side of parody.
- White humor would just be the tendency to attenuate common to all kinds of humor, the goal being to soften reality. Ex: *I don't bend my knee in front of anything or anyone, I have osteoarthritis.* (Louis Scutenaire, Belgian surrealist writer, 1905-1987)

Humor is not joy. In humor, there is necessarily a negative part: we make fun of ourselves (self-mockery), others (mockery) sometimes with other others (sarcasm), we laugh at bad situations, to defend ourselves from the bad guys.
Humor is deeply linked to melancholy and to affects like despair and sadness. Any humorous message, no matter how light, always tries to spar off an emotional reaction in the receiver, often sympathy (which would reveal, according to psychoanalysts, a tendency to narcissism in the humorist). Bipolarity is the basis of humor (union of opposites, duplicity, inadequacy, shift, out of step, *bisociation* as Arthur Koestler said).

Examples

As with all the other genres we discuss here, we will gain understanding by immersing ourselves in the various humorous tools used in many literary and audiovisual productions. The following pages provide a number of references to consult, more than for other genres above because, it is the most difficult one, as

François Truffaut said. There is of course a mixture of the different kinds of humor in the majority of humorous works. Many examples below should fall into several categories (which are themselves unsatisfying).

Running jokes
There is an aspect of nervous laughter in plays for stage and TV running jokes:
- *Harry and Paul* https://www.youtube.com/O9IJnmbneLc
- Or this quite enjoyable video montage: https://youtu.be/OxCYbcVuWlk
- Also, Monsieur Fraize (it's in French but you can get it as it's mainly repetition with additional slapstick): https://www.youtube.com/RuquclenCMY
- *Peanuts* by Charles Schulz (1922-2000) developed a world with a large interpersonal component, designed in an efficient, sober and timeless way, using strips (almost 18,000 during 50 years, published in 2,600 newspapers, 75 countries and 21 languages) or half pages. The temperaments of these characters who became world famous took several years to establish themselves. The series works on punchlines succession, often with running visual gags (sometimes reused ten times in a row without getting boring), irony with respect to the misunderstandings and annoyances of childhood, transpositions of thoughts and adult behaviors on children and on a dog, wit and placidity (of Snoopy or Woodstock) in the face of events.
- André Franquin (Belgian cartoonist, 1924-1997) also used a lot of running gags (and sarcastic irony on opponents of *Gaston*, in addition to the contrast between Gaston's creativity and laziness in comparison to the boredom of office life).

Exaggeration
- It is present in all TV comedies, at least those about the stupidity of the dumb or eccentric characters (too talkative, too obsessive, too depressive or too self-assured), generally representing the social human flaws of the moment. This was already the case with Molière. See the cult British TV sketches of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974) created by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ChPAqPdDdw), Harry and Paul (2007-2012, https://vimeo.com/12161557) by Harry Enfield and Paul Whitehouse, Father Ted (1995-1998, here is episode 6 of season 2 https://www.youtube.com/fqgi7PCdyPw) and *IT crowd* (2006-2010, here is one of the many cult extracts https://youtu.be/1EBfxjSFAxQ) by Graham Linehan. They all offered funny characters with strong features as well as visual gags of exaggeration, running jokes, social references and absurd or reverse logic (such as a character who intentionally breaks things to prove that they are fragile).
- In French comic books, let's mention *Les Bidochons* by Binet, *Quai d'Orsay* by Christophe Blain and Lanzac (where caricature, motion lines and dialogue of the main character works perfectly with the use of running gags and a bit of sarcastic irony against him, which makes him likable enough to be funny, we laugh at him by a knock-on effect through the experiences of the people around him), and the theatrics of the characters shown by Catherine Meurisse.
- The exaggeration can be found more orchestrated (and leading to absurdity) by the decisions and actions of the characters rather than by their characterization (look and

manners). For example, in the French films of Pierre Salvadori as well as in the most famous English humoristic novel series, *Wilt* (1982-2012) by Tom Sharpe (1928-2013). In comics, we will find this trend in *Red Monkey Double Happiness Book* (2009) by South-African author Joe Daly, as well as with French writer Fabcaro (*Zaï Zaï Zaï Zaï*, 2015) where the absurd leads to social criticism tinged with self-mockery, embellished with puns (and this book of one sequence by page requires a systematic gag at the end of each page).
- The exaggeration can also be over the whole diegetic world, as the same Joe Daly did for the comics *Dungeon Quest* (2009-2013) pushing to the extreme the way in which role-playing games work, spiced up with disillusioned psychedelic esotericism resulting in sarcastic derision.

Self-deprecation
- It is very common in autobiography and in stand-up comedy. See the American comedians Louis C.K. (1967-) or Ryan Hamilton (1976-) and so many others.
- *Le Chat* of Belgian cartoonist Philippe Geluck (1954-) used self-mockery in the form of dramatic irony in which the author makes the cat joke about himself, addressing the reader directly, accompanied by puns and visual gags in a subtext form, where the subtext is not spoken, but merely drawn.
- The comic strip *Garfield* by Jim Davis used this same process. First published in 1978 in 41 newspapers, by 2010 it was present in more than 2,570 newspapers, in 111 countries and in 28 languages. It is one of the most published comics in the world.
- In movies, there is, at least in France, a *feel good* trend, probably coming from English social comedies, seeking sympathy by soft self-mockery (usually about a group of friends or a family, a part of the country, ...) while not taking any risk of offending anyone.

Sarcasm and irony
(The difference between this kind of humor and exaggeration is not very clear but I would say that, here, the author is making much more fun of the characters. Ok, well, it might just be a difference in my vision of it. Damn, these categories are really not effective.)

Irony between the author and the public about characters:
- Two famous French TV shortcom series, both created by theater companies, also used the different kinds of stupidity and cowardice of their characters: *Les Deschiens* (1993-2002) of Jérôme Deschamps et Macha Makeïeff and *Kaamelott* (2005-2009) of Alexandre Astier and Alain Kappauf.
- French cartoonist Claire Bretécher (1940-2020) developed great irony in her stubborn or anxious characters, associated with banality of everyday life situations (which speaks to everyone). She also used exaggeration, even in her drawing style, especially with the offbeat world of *Cellulite*.
- This is also the case with Lefred-Thouron (1961-) whose simple-minded characters are more provincial or with reverse logic. And his friend Diego Aranega (1970-) often used this sarcastic distance as a punchline in the series *Victor Lalouz* (2006-2008).

- Riad Sattouf in *Pascal brutal* (2006-2014) and *La vie secrète des jeunes* (2004-2012) used sarcasm on his leading character with exaggerated virility or in the way he relates the exchanges of people in street scenes. Likewise Blutch (1967-), in *Blotch* (1999-2000), with a touch of self-mockery using as character a caricaturist with almost his name and being all mean.
- Other young French authors such as Florent Ruppert (1979-) & Jérôme Mulot (1981-) or Geoffroy Monde (1986-) relied more generally on the cynicism of their characters. As does too the animated series *Bojack Horseman* (since 2014) created by Raphael Bob-Waksberg.
- Austrian artist Nicolas Mahler (1969-) only needed a minimalist drawing (and also a lot of suggestion going through subtext and off-screen) to make fun of his introverted character *Flasko* (2003-2007) or of a not very helpful bureaucrat *Mrs Goldgruber* (2005, 2008).
- In contrast, American artist Chris Ware (1967-), with *Jimmy Corrigan* (1995-2000) offered a slow and tender irony, sometimes almost sad, far from plot twists and surprises, closer to the mood at the origin of humor. The dramatic irony then also lied in the intelligence granted to the reader.
- Let's mention too the books of Belgian artist Olivier Schrauwen (1977-) including *Arsene Schrauwen*, 2014.
- And maybe the films of Quentin Dupieux (1974-), French musician (Mr Ozio) and filmmaker, could also be considered to be using soft irony, with their zany little worlds.

<u>Irony between the author and the public about society</u>:
- American stand-up comedian Dave Chapelle (1973-) first came to my mind.
- Not to mention the animated series *The Simpsons* (since 1989) created by Matt Groening (1954-) of which we no longer present the nicely stupid characters who allowed us to make fun of USA society as much as of universal human faults.
- As many other TV shows, *Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019) created by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, although closer to a sitcom, also played satirical irony on the world of scientific academics being not very good at real life. Likewise the series (but to be followed) *Silicon Valley* (2014-2019) created by Mike Judge about the HighTech world.
- French animated old TV series *The Shadoks* (1968-1973) created by Jacques Rouxel (1931-2004) handled absurdity, parody of quotes and neologism with a very specific rhythm (paced by the voice and the elocution of French actor Claude Piéplu) and used several levels of reference (like *Gibis* for British people) allowing this European allegory to be watched by the whole family. Comedy films often attempt this approach (enjoyable by the whole family) with varying degrees of success.
- The famous French comic book series *Asterix* (created in 1959 by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo) also used a general and rather tender and proud irony in its representation of the Gauls (and even more about the Roman imperialists) as well as running gags, puns, visual gags and effects of shouted dialogue (using larger and bolder lettering). As they are invincible, we never worry about them, which gives a

good-natured side, a de-dramatized comedy (only the in-house fights are more or less serious).
- In irony, the public “translates” or places what the author tells on another level. For example, the French comic strips *Baron noir* (1976-1981) by Yves Got (1939-) and René Pétillon (1945-2018) used a simplified allegorical world, populated by sheep, an eagle, a crocodile, a rhinoceros and an elephant for political satire.
- French cartoonist James (1968-) also used a form of irony (and self-mockery) on his middle and upper class characters, in the corporate world (*In My Open Space*, 2008-2012) or the latest trendy stereotype (*Hipster Than Ever*, 2015) in which the irony very often is transmitted via the subtext.

Catharsis humor (dark comedy)
It uses violence, creepiness, gore. See the animated series *South Park* created in 1997 by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, or *Beavis and Butt-Head* from 1993 to 2011, created by Mike Judge and, for comics, the Australian cartoonist Simon Hanselmann (1981-) or the worlds of French artists Vuillemin, Willem, Whinsluss, Ultimex, It can sometimes also use insults. See the one-man shows of George Carlin (1937-2008), or some lines of the English comedian Ricky Gervais (1959-).

Offset/Contrast
From the simple offbeat atmosphere to the representation tending towards the absurd (or showing the absurdity of the real world), humor, as we have seen, is always a form of comparison, of contrast, it’s about playing between two levels of reality, two registers.
- French artist Daniel Goossens (1954-), in for example the series *Georges and Louis*, while also being ironic about his characters, particularly masters the effects of reformulation (unexpected illustration of a text, contrast between text and pictures, use of caption and recurrent cultural references).
- Another one, Anouk Ricard (1970-) uses the vulgar or stupid way in which some of her characters express themselves in contrast with the childish register of her drawing style, and the contrast between some zany characters and the seriousness of a police investigation. For example, with a real plot in *Commissaire Toumi* (2008) or conflicts of people in the business world in *Coucou Bouzon* (2011). The gags are created using surprise and contrasts between the characters.
- The comic book series *Pico Bogue* (2008-2019) by Belgian Alexis Dormal (1977-) and Dominique Roques (actually his mother) makes an extensive use of the contrast between the constraints of the adult world and the eye (poetic, amused, capricious, protesting or upset) of two children.
- In *Petit Christian* (2003, 2008), Blutch (again) played on the contrast of registers between the posture of the American classical movie hero and a kid not at all self-assured, all tinged with self-mockery (telling the story in the first person).
- André Franquin (again) for *Idées noires* (1977-1983) made a contrast between a lighthearted storytelling and dramatic endings linked to exaggerated human stupidity (using visual gags) and dark anticipation effect allowing to downplay the situations.

Swiss artist Anna Sommer (1968-), since *Remue Ménage*, 1996, created a contrast between the poetry of her art (which is moreover silent) and the saucy, sometimes murky situations of the characters, spiced up with final surprises.

– French artist Avoine (1939-2017) also practiced a silent humor of contrast between the sweetness of his style and the blackness of events (suicides, accidents) as well as through poetic transformation (cat's whiskers becoming music staff, effects of symmetry), or suggestion (of what happened to lead to a picture or what is giving another explanation of the picture, of the anticipation of a disaster, of a feeling - shoes with teeth around the ankle), playing with illogical views (change of scale or mixture of environments, such as a parachutist crossing a swimmer, a tightrope walker who is tying the rope on which he is actually walking), inversion of references (skeleton holding a man's head in his hand) and various associations (goalkeeper with a dog, cook with a pan on a tennis court).

- American cartoonist Richard Thompson (1957-2016), in his syndicated comic strip *Cul de Sac* (2004-2012), takes great advantage of the contrast between the logical world of adults (parents, teacher) and the incomprehension and exaggeration of childhood (Alice and her friends) as well as the exasperation and nihilism of adolescence (Petey). https://www.gocomics.com/culdesac

- Young French comic book artist Philippe Valette (1992-) used in *George Clooney* (2013) a contrast between a spontaneous quick and childish drawing style and the rather adult or adolescent vulgarity of the dialogues and events, spiced up with absurd surprises seemingly generated by improvisation. http://georgesclooney.blogspot.com/

Comedy of action and surprise

- This is the case with many mainstream (or broad) comedies in movies, the comic relief of which is based more on the unforeseen sequence of actions (with surprises at a sustained pace) than on exaggeration (or this sustained pace is the exaggeration, oh boy, look at me desperately trying to categorize). For example, in Western comedy films (see *Texas Across the River,* 1966 by Michael Gordon with Alain Delon and Dean Martin) or the hugely successful South-African film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) by Jamie Uys (1921-1996).

- This is also the case for many American animation series, more or less zany, such as *Spongebob* (since 1999) created by Stephen Hillenburg (1961-2018), *Adventure Time* (2010-2018) created by Pendleton Ward (1982-), full of optimism and candor, or, also based on a pair of characters but in a more adult and parodying tone, *Rick and Morty* (since 2013) created by Justin Roiland (1980-) and Dan Harmon (1973-), as well as the adaptation of the much more poetic *Hilda* (since 2018) by Luke Pearson (1987-).

- The great French press cartoonist René Pétillon (1945-2018) also knew how to use adventures at a sustained pace in his series *Jack Palmer* which allowed him to deal with clichés and to make people laugh on subjects supposedly tricky for comedy (such as Corsican mafia, tax haven or hijab).

- Lewis Trondheim (1964-) also mixed with ease the naivety of his characters, the absurdity of the situations and the poetry while knowing how to handle surprise, twists and suggestion, for example by using off-screen action, particularly in his

beginnings where he got the best funny potential out of his graphic limits at that time (*Psychanalyse,*1990, *Lapinot et les carottes de Patagonie*, 1992, *Le dormeur,* 1993).

Absurd humor
The absurd is present to different degrees in almost all comedic works, but some have pushed it a little further (but not too much).
- I'm thinking of the world of American artist Edward Gorey (1925-2000), also British artist Glen Baxter (1944-), or the French Pierre La Police (1959-) and French filmmaker Bruno Dumont (1958-).
- French cartoonist Nikita Mandryka (1940-) started the adventures of a *Masked Cucumber* in the 1960s, a world based on childish humor (explained or underlined) in the manner of Gotlib (1934-2016), with a form of poetry and a hint of irony added for adult readers.
- And, to end, French artist Laurent André published only one small book *Quel est le propos ?* (2005) using sounds, everyday life, popular culture and social trend with very little storytelling (but an importance given to the choice, the arrangement and the lettering of the words, sentences, and dialogues) as hilarious as unique, which still makes me want to mention it here and to regularly quote it since.

7- Dividing/Editing

"To inevitably succeed in a great novel, you have to imagine living your life in sequences and episodes." Olivier Cadiot.

Each media or narrative support will have an influence on the organization of the storytelling and obviously implies knowledge of this media limits and possibilities. If you write without images, you will still have to organize, sequence, "cut out" your story (but the following part about the rhythm should concern you more).

French historian of cinema Georges Sadoul (1904-1967) pointed out that some stories told by pictures, such as Épinal prints, had already adopted the main editing (*montage*) processes from the beginning of the 19th century. These illustrated stories were adapted, with little change, for the magic lanterns. Then the newborn cinema found in this repertoire the process, and perhaps the scripts of several first movies.

Now, there is more improvisation in the shooting of a documentary film (as well as in written or drawn reporting) so more improvisation (and work) to edit it (as it's less determined by a strong script or a preceding storyboard) but some fiction films are also largely rewritten during shooting and editing, in which the director or even the scriptwriter often participates. "*Editing is in a way like making music, but with your eyes. You must cut when your eye tells you to cut*," said Ken Loach. He also shoots his

films in the order of the story, scene after scene, so that the actors can live their character.

Continuing to build the story as it is developed is also common in comics or literature (but hardly exists in animation where each second is expensive). There are advantages to this operation. The rendering of characters, settings and atmospheres, can then influence the story which can take into account in its continuation what has been put in images and make adjustments. Moreover, the almost real-time collaboration between the artist and the writer (when they are two different people) is generally a source of good finds and osmosis.

Formats: Literature and comic book publishing did impose some forms due to cultural trends or printing constraints. Stage plays usually care about the attention span of the audience. But the audiovisual field is the most dogmatic in terms of length (duration) imposed on writers. Some formats have been created by television in order to organize broadcasting between advertising slots, then pay-TV channels and content platforms made those more flexible. Streaming is also changing habits and trends of the moment (looking for the right length of time based on a reception tendency supposed by producers). As this seems to be different from one country to another, I'll let you figure out what producers are looking for right now where you are.

Telling a story in a single image

Storytelling with images does not come only from putting images together, it can exist in a single image.

First, the perspective builds a depth of field and establishes a space that has a narrative effect, it is perceived as a temporal reserve and therefore narrative (this space will be covered by the characters or by written dialogue which will both establish a story, depending on the medium).

Then, the eye (and head and body) orientations of the characters, their gestures, *emanatas* (pictorial elements indicating a feeling or a mood), some motion lines or a movement decomposition, also participate in telling a story. There can be as well a particular way to decompose the movement by distributing it to different characters (like in large pictorial scenes, a few panels from Hergé, a few photos by Robert Doisneau, Edward Hopper paintings, Félix Valloton and many others).

In addition, the reading direction (from left to right and from top to bottom, in the West) sets up a progression inside the image (depending on the size of the image and its proportions).

Sometimes a high-angle (looking down) point of view (and, less often used, a low-angle, looking up, if for example the scene takes place in the sky) allows to show several elements which would be hidden in a frontal view, it places the reader higher than the action and shows him elements to connect to tell the story.

We must of course take into account narrative clues meaning things that have happened (or that we anticipate will happen): for example, a spilled glass, a damaged car, a gun still smoking, drops of blood, a broken gas pipe.

Also, the lines of force and composition of the image (visible and invisible guidelines), often analyzed as "going down", could also be (for semiologists) contributing to tell something.

Finally, hiding something can indicate that there is information to be discovered (off-screen or hidden within the framing, behind a door, a dirty window, in a half-open box, a mirror). This can push the reader of the image to look for the story.

Dramatic irony is also possible in a single image, by revealing to the reader (or painting viewer) an element that the characters in the picture do not see.

Benoît Peeters spoke of "condensation" for narrative painting and of "segmentation" for comics (which only retains the most operative stages). Therefore, in comic book, the relation between storytelling, time and panels is much more complex than Will Eisner or Scott McCloud (born in 1960) said. And there is no real "grammar" of it because it's not a "language", as regularly proven by all the brilliant examples not using the supposed to be specific codes.

Perhaps even the narrativity of a photograph participates in the photographic paradox which freezes movement, thus in a way "kills" while "immortalizing".

Framing

Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot, said Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977). Let's remember *comedy = tragedy + time* from Steve Allen (see above). Here, comedy = tragedy + space, we remain in the idea to step back for hindsight.

A script does not directly decide these elements but it is important for a writer to not neglect thoughts about the storyboard, the framing, the setting, and the costumes. All these can provide storytelling elements, contradictions, depth, information on the state of mind of the character, …

For example, in comics, we sometimes completely remove the setting in a panel to refocus on the character (who remains in the story world at the same place).

The Coen Brothers often show the whole set when characters interact with each other, which provides detail and information about the exchange, and brings the viewer closer to each character. Ken Loach explained that *"In real life, you don't come into contact with people in close-up but, as much as possible, in a frame that goes from head to shoulders. The angle of the lens used must be about similar in order to film the characters in a respectful manner and put the viewer in the position of another person. If the camera takes the place of the eye, we get a human response. Whereas if we use a wide-angle lens and install the camera very close to the person being filmed (...) we transform people into objects."*

For the multiple examples of film framing choices, see the youtube series *Every Frame a Painting.*

The **field size** is the size of the main subject within the image. There are traditionally four to ten different values. Each of them causes a different effect:

- Long shot (or extreme long shot) frames one or more characters with the environment.
- Full shot frames one or more characters from head to toe.
- Medium shot stops around the waist, in order to isolate the subject. A variation, medium-long shot, stops at the knees, and American shot stops mid-thigh, emphasizing the action of the arms (it's called the cowboy shot in Westerns).
- Close-up frames the character's head, usually from the shoulder line, used to highlight the face. Extreme close-up goes from the forehead to the chin. It can mark an intense emotion. Italian shot (from Spaghetti western) shoes only the eyes.

In comic books, a large panel isn't necessarily a long shot, neither necessarily means a long "time" (as Will Eisner wrongly wrote it).

"Camera" angle: Eye-level angle gives a feeling of neutrality. When framing a character (for example in an interview), the eye line must be above the median horizontal line of the image. High angle gives a feeling of domination. Low angle gives a feeling of vulnerability (often used for a subjective point of view). But this is not always the case, you can make the viewer believe that there is domination to better turn the situation around or play on ambiguities.

In comics, these "angles" are not always associated with these effects, probably because it is not a question of "photographic" reality (even changed by filming) but of drawing (even if sometimes realistic drawing).

Depth of field: A well-known concept in photography, depth of field, is the extent of what is sharp in the shot. It allows you to measure the clear and blurry parts by focusing, using the distance to the object, the focal length, the aperture stop, the available light. In audiovisual, in addition to obviously "focusing" the attention within the framing, it can be used to reveal an element of the story (character, object) that has remained blurry with a "rack focus" (focus changing during a continuous shot), to raise the suspense of a distant danger still unclear, to show the change in importance of a character, to accentuate a subjective shot, to notify the viewer of something that the character doesn't see, to insert a secondary or offbeat story. A large depth of field (usually obtained thanks to special effect or today's digital techniques) allows to imitate theater drama (or reality) by limiting the cuts and offering a greater freedom of the eye, while editing shots with smaller depth of field rather takes the place of the viewer's eye. It is to ensure optimal readability that large depth of field is omnipresent in TV news. It also makes it possible to indicate a form of equality, by the same sharpness for each character, or to underline a distance (two clear characters at a great distance from each other), in other words to produce meaning, beyond dialogue, like all (photo) graphic tools do. Filmmakers made great use of it, like Erich Von Stroheim (1885-1957), John Ford (1894-1973) in *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1940, or, of course, Orson Welles (1915-1985) with *Citizen Kane*, 1941.

Even today, for some directors of photography, a large depth of field avoids the less natural effect of the small depth of field. At the beginning of the history of cinema, blur was indeed considered as an optical defect and used mainly to signify a state of discomfort, a dream or a memory, something unlike reality. Our human eye,

however, does not have an infinite depth of field but it compensates and supplements its information through eye movements, accommodation reflex and brain work. What we are looking at is ideally always clear, sometimes less (without glasses, when we are tired or using psychotropic drugs) even if the peripheral vision is indeed blurred.

In animation, today's software can reproduce all the effects of depth of field that live cinema got us used to.

In some video games, the user can choose the depth of field of their subjective vision to decide whether they want to see it all coming or stay more focused on what they are looking at.

In comic books, the use or non-use of perspective effects could more or less fulfill this function of "depth" or flatten things.

Eye directions: A character looking "towards the outside" (where there is usually the least space in the frame) makes you want to know what this character is looking at (which is not good for interviews, for example).

In another way, even when what he is looking at is not apparent, a character looking "towards the inside" kind of fills the frame and balances the composition. We give the character some room so that his eye doesn't "hit" the frame and the rest of the frame doesn't look empty. And it is better if this eye is looking to the right because our culture tells us to "read" from left to right, even cinema images.

Looking directly at the camera is generally prohibited in fiction movies (except when the 4th wall is broken, or as a comic effect with Jean-Luc Godard (1930-) or Woody Allen for example, or when an amateur film is shot by the characters themselves like the film in *Raging Bull*, 1980, by Martin Scorsese (1942-), or in a more fleeting way with Charlie Chaplin and Orson Welles) the viewer then feels as though he is been "watched".

Movement directions: It is always better to leave space in front of the moving subject in a frame (and during a movement of the camera) or a comic book panel. Otherwise it will seem that the character is continuously stumbling on the edge of the frame. Leaving more space in front of the subject than behind allows to obtain a more dynamic composition, by anticipating the movement. We generally stay in a static frame (the character comes out of the frame) when we do not want to reveal the off-screen. In comic books, a character which goes from right to left gives the reader the impression of "going backwards".

Static frame: Although it is rare for a film to consist entirely of static shots, it is generally advisable to take most of the shots this way when starting as in being a beginner. Movies with constant movements are difficult to watch.

Split-screen: Split-screen is when the audiovisual screen is separated in a few frames, each presenting a different scene, or a different point of view of a scene, usually in order to increase a suspense tension or to create a shift between two scenes. Sparingly used in expressionist movies, split-screen later became an ideal tool for telephone conversations in Hollywood pictures. Then, it has been used in crime films

like *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968) with Faye Dunaway et Steve McQueen, or by directors such as Richard Fleischer (1916-2006), Brian de Palma (1940-) and Quentin Tarantino (1963-). Some complex framing compositions, using walls, reflections or mirrors, sometimes reproduce, in a softer manner, this kind of two-in-one framing effect. Let us also mention that in TV shows, the more recent use of screens inside the frame (which has been done in video games for a long time), sometimes superimposed with transparency, using text messaging between characters or screens characters are looking up, for the purpose of storytelling. William Klein (1926-2022) had already cleverly used television screens, in addition to mirrors, actors looking at the camera and graphic effects in his 1966 film *Who Are You Polly Maggoo?*.

Main camera effects (and effects mimed by sets of panels in comic books)

Panoramic: A panoramic consists of rotating the camera on its axis, from left to right, right to left, from top to bottom or from bottom to top, for example to discover a landscape or to follow a moving subject (it gives an effect of following something with your eyes because it is a natural human movement). The panoramic shows us an image of which the frame moves without affecting the relationships between subjects.
Tracking: The camera moves to follow a moving subject or to discover a place, sideways (we move next to a character, or along a set) or tracking in or tracking out. We discover a changing space (as through the window of a train, a car) where the different subjects slide in relation to each other, in order to reveal the full depth of the scene. In a tracking-in shot, when the camera approaches, the relationship between the subject and his environment is modified. We are familiar with this perception even if it is a little more “mechanical”. Some other effects (like crane shots or takes done with a camera stabilizer) can be more subjective or give a slightly subjective view (like we fly over or pass a character or follow him even if “we” is nobody).
Zoom: Zooming allows you to get closer to (or further away from) a subject without moving the camera. It allows you to make movements that you cannot or dare not do, to “put your finger on”, to focus more. With a zoom-in, space is forgotten and we feel channeled towards the subject. This approach can have an indiscreet aspect and even going as far as “contact”. Zooming out allows you to go from detail to a wider view, but in this movement, it is always the starting subject that is in the center of the frame. Moreover, the zoom-out is often (in documentary for example) used when the character or the filmed object goes out of the frame (enlarging the frame is a way not to “lose” it). It is also used with the intention of reframing for example to locate another character or another object in the field. It is not a natural function, our eye cannot zoom in or out.

Offscreen

Offscreen is what is not shown in the frame (of the film, of the art, of the description) but suggested. By recomposition and deduction of continuity, our eye is used to thinking outside the field of vision on a daily basis. Like certain literary effects can

approach a camera effect, giving the impression of following a character with your eyes, of going with the character or of zooming in on a detail, of widening a perspective, offscreen can also be suggested by words though it's more specific to images.

During dialogue, once we know who is talking to whom, offscreen is frequently used (with or without offscreen voice) by all image media.

An offscreen sound (or dialogue) can anticipate or amplify an action, worry or amuse, suggest an undisclosed reverse shot (particularly used in horror movies), make it plausible that a character does not hear something, or also, for example, expand the time of the story or the perception of a character by repeating itself. Offscreen sound can be used to reinforce a cross-cutting showing parallel actions, giving it a temporal unity thanks to the continuous sound covering several shots.

An offscreen element can have a progressive entry into the frame (for example a weapon) dramatized or suggested (like a murder when a balloon held by a child flies away after he met a bad guy).

Offscreen can show the effects of a feeling, of a sensation by avoiding the more direct or heavy acting. For example, something is happening during a long take shot which "goes" and shows elsewhere and we discover what happened only when the camera comes back.

In comedies, surprise can arise from offscreen, and again offscreen actions of which we will only see the result (a fight, see also this below about dialogue).

Offscreen (in any case "out of sight") can also be inside the image, hidden by a setting or by a character.

All these effects can be used in video, animation, digital or in comics, in painting (for example by Edward Hopper). As soon as there is an image there is an offscreen of the image, the same can be said of writing without embedded images but nonetheless "visual" in its content. Moreover, very visual novels are reputed to be difficult to adapt into films because they already contain strong images (most often without offscreen) that are quite unreproducible in film.

Sequence: Sometimes unclear term, usually meaning, in audiovisual work, a succession of shots whose action takes place in the same time and the same place. We also speak of spatial and temporal continuity. But the word scene is more common when using specialized software such as *Final Draft* (commercial) or *Celx* (free). Other conventions apply to the writing of an audiovisual scenario, you can find them online or in the appendix of this chapter p.141.

Sequence shot: A sequence shot is a long take (single shot) which covers an entire scene or part of a scene, which can take place in a single place or successively in several places. The sequence shot is characterized by the use of camera movements. Otherwise, it's just a long take. The sequence shot seeks to show the space where part of the story takes place when the simple long take (with a fixed camera) aims to create an oversized time compared to the temporal logic of the story in order to understand a change of the state of mind of a character.

It was often used to follow a character. When, from editing, it was broken with other “cutaway shots” or broken up into several sections, it became a “master shot”. Often used in video clips (for example by Michel Gondry), it gives the impression that the camera has an ambulatory power which allows it to embrace the whole space, without interruption. When it is used systematically, it even seems to oppose the principle of editing by rejecting the ellipsis and the confrontation of successive shots.

For comic books, Scott McCloud (1960-) gave an example of a horizontal panel in which the story is established from left to right and which therefore represents thanks to the balloons a longer time in a single image (quite the opposite of what we are used to consider as a “photographic moment”). Artists like Vincent Vanoli (1966-) or Sergio García Sánchez (1967-) have made a beautiful use of large panels with story “routes”. A comic book panel cannot indeed be assimilated to a “time”, its diegetic duration may vary.

Framing and point of view in video games : The “view” angle can seek to convey the point of view of the hero played, in a “subjective camera” (which reduces the field of vision, a screen having no peripheral vision, and therefore increases the vulnerability), from the side (for two-dimensional games), from behind, from above (in high angle for strategy or construction games) or with a camera (often orientable) next to the character.

Online games are often linked to the perception of the player’s avatar, and generally ignore what is happening elsewhere.

Rhythm

“Rhythm is not a measure; it is a vision of the world.” Octavio Paz.
“The rhythm engages a breathing imaginary.” Henri Meschonnic.

The concept of rhythm refers to the arrangement of the parts of a whole, which takes into account the relationship between the time of the storytelling and the time of the story itself but also the reappearances (for example, those of portraits, of similar or opposite scenes, of landscapes or characters) which allow effects of patterns and variations. Olivier Cadiot asserts that Marcel Proust said that “*a book is being prepared like a dress or a war.”* Among famous French novels dealing with rhythm, we often mention *Madame Bovary* (1857) by Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) about the “rhythm” of two ceremonies (wedding and funeral), two dance balls, two house moves, two meetings ; *Butterball* (1870) by Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) where two meals are opposed, one shared, the other not ; or the *The Red and The Black* (1830) by Stendhal (1783-1842) where there is the haunting repetition of the “scene in red”. We can speak of leitmotif about the small musical phrase of Vinteuil in *Swann in Love* (1913) by Marcel Proust. And we have already said above that, in *Germinal* (1885) by Emile Zola, the opening (incipit) and the closing (end) of the book responded to each other.

Music (itself sometimes perceived as more or less “narrative”, by its melody, its sounds or its own rhythm) is a major rhythmic tool of the audiovisual storytelling. We distinguish the dramatizing music which underlines the action (support the suspense, the emotions, the comedy, the tempo as in cartoons, or of the essence in opera and ballet), the music of atmosphere (indicating a more or less light or distressing ambiance), the music accompanying (and helping to define) a character (in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* by Jacques Demy or in some animated series such as *Naruto*, where each character has its own musical theme). Just in the same way as other sound effects can be used for dramatization, atmosphere or become emblematic of a moment, a character, or a place. More generally heard than listened to, music makes it possible to arouse sensations and can also participate in the general rhythm by emphasis, in a more autonomous way.

In any case, a comedy is never able to make people laugh permanently (and rarely at the level of a comedy play where actors on stage can wait until spectators have finished laughing to continue). Nor a drama, even melodrama, is able to make cry permanently. There must always be some form of work-study. The same goes for the fast-paced action of adventure stories.

The definition of the main character can also lead to a rhythm (that of his life, of his work) as so beautifully done by Jim Jarmusch in his film *Paterson* (2016) with Adam Driver.

Other alternating elements of the story carry rhythm (night/day, emotions/calm, action/rest, words/silence, interior/exterior, group/solitude).

The paralleling of several storytelling levels (beyond the look for plots and arcs of literary serials and especially TV shows) has a strong impact on the rhythm. The difference in thematic or expressive treatment can establish a dialogue between embedded stories and, for example, allow the second story to give an answer to the question asked by the first while avoiding the heaviness of a too strong demonstration, or it can help to understand something that the main story will have simply shown (to rub it in), or it can put stories in opposition when the subject is more discursive than demonstrative (or when you seek to make the public doubt). Mary Shelley was already using three stories embedded in *Frankenstein* written when she was only 19 and published in 1818. An embedded imaginary story can also support, by its improbability, the realism of the main story (which would have been less believable without this trick). Rhythm offers endless possibilities.

The organization of complementary sequences or chapters of different natures (parallel stories or with varying approaches, styles or lengths) can also create rhythm.

For Ursula Le Guin, “*the rhythm is what keeps the song going, the horses still galloping, and the story moving”* and, in prose, “*an important aspect of the narrative sentence is its length.”* She also quotes Virginia Woolf on the state of mind that creates the rhythm of a writing like *“a wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it”*.

<u>Mandatory acceleration:</u> In a feature film (or an episode of a TV series), it will generally be applied a logic of acceleration, crescendo, race towards the end, to avoid

boredom of the spectator and the effect of "floppy belly" we already talked about. Audience concentration is greater at the start of a film than at the end. Boredom and impatience await, so it seems necessary to make things go faster towards the end, with more action and less dialogue, or shorter, louder dialogue. This technique is also applied in short stories and some novels, but literature generally plays with storytelling time in a much more flexible way than audiovisual, speeding up and slowing down at will. This is one of its great technical advantages. Hitchcock preferred to compare a feature film to a short story (containing a single idea that is finally expressed when the action reaches its climax) rather than to a novel or a play. Though Virginia Woolf also talked about acceleration in writing a novel, how it can summon insignificant things sown along the way in previous chapters and give the impression to reach the top of the world from which vantage point you can see the story spread out below.

The concept of ellipsis

As Thomas Bidegain (him again!) said, "*In the ellipsis, what is most important is what you don't see. You appeal to the imagination through omission. Just like donuts, for it to exist there must be a hole in the middle*." Ellipsis is inevitable, it is in the choice of its length that is all the interest.

Very short: it is the decomposition of a movement, a gesture, by a succession of sentences, film frames or comic panels, a kind of slow motion effect. Same frame repetition called "iteration" is often used in comics to give an effect of in place, time that passes slowly, or time that stops (in the middle of an action, like with "bullet time" photography). A character who does not move while there are things changing behind, gives the impression of time passing quickly for him. In this case the ellipsis is on the contrary very long.

An example of an extremely long ellipsis (or elliptical summary) is this sentence by Gustave Flaubert in *Sentimental Education* (1869) in order to summarize several years of a character's life: "*He traveled, he knew the melancholy of steamers.*"

A slightly emphatic ellipsis generates a kind of filling by the reader/spectator (sometimes generating mental images that do not belong to the story but which we can remember). You can surprise the audience if it turns out afterwards that what was anticipated in this ellipsis did not happen. Most often the ellipsis is used to avoid delays and repetitions (when, for example, a character must explain to another what we already know, during a testimony or an interrogation).

But there are also "ellipses" created by the choices of focusing, of spaces shown, even in a "real time" story such as some plays and their adaptation into films (like *Rope*, 1950, by Alfred Hitchcock) or *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) by Agnès Varda.

Even in literature, Olivier Cadiot speaks for example of melting the "glue point" "*wishing that the connections disappear like a successful transplant where everything circulates between the limbs*" or you can choose to make it apparent "*to keep the elements a little separate and feel the tears between what we wanted to stick together*".

Final pruning sometimes operated to lighten or speed up a story should be done with care, avoiding to remove parts containing important information for the audience.

The amount of (time or space) ellipses and their variation gives a large part of the rhythm of the story, often also the "touch" of its author or director, even though it's not the only thing involved. (It would be to forget acting, costumes, dialogue and voice-over, lighting and scenery, landscape atmosphere, or graphic style in the case of comic books and animation, sound and music).

There we are back to the essential of any storytelling: What to hide?

Link between dialogue and images editing or dividing

For a long time, in TV films, when character A spoke, he was seen saying his line from start to finish, then when character B spoke, it was his turn to appear in the frame, from the start to the end of his sentence. Today, fortunately, the public is used that this boring editing no longer being imposed on them (but fast beat editing can also be tiring and it limits acting).

In comic books, the number of balloons in a panel will contribute to the general rhythm, to a possible feeling of rhythmic exchanges, tit for tat, or, on the contrary, to leave time for reflection, astonishment or contemplation to the characters (if possible without boring readers, that is to say by finding a way to make them participate in this reflection or in this contemplation, this moment of poetry, of small actions) for example by using a change in framing (as in *Peanuts*) and by inserting silent panels.

Let's say that, generally, the more panels you put between the balloons, the more you give the feeling that there is time between the said lines. A division that remains "dynamic" using action panels can soften this feeling (even though becoming a form of slow motion since there are more panels than necessary to only present the action). Dividing (also called the "breakdown") is sometimes decided according to the volume of lines, the room available in the panel to "fit" the dialogueues, the questions and answers between characters. You have to particularly think about this rhythmic articulation, several balloons a panel involving larger panels, generally higher and with a good organization of the reading order of the balloons from left to right (unlike manga, read from right to left, which, after translation, is the opposite of the reading direction of the texts inside the balloons). French artists Florent Ruppert and Jérôme Mulot have pushed the number of balloons to its maximum in a single panel (sometimes as large as a whole page) giving an effect of real "ping-pong" to the discussions between their characters.

In comic books, you always consider the reading direction of images and texts when dividing into panels, unless you attracted the eye with a global strong graphic effect. Arrow signs can be used to direct the reader when the reading order of the panel is less obvious (see Chris Ware over and over again) knowing that feeling more directed in reading can also give the impression of rigidity. In any case, we will avoid putting an answer balloon above the question or to the left of the question even when it is below it.

In a large horizontal panel, the storytelling effect is established by reading direction and can allow, thanks to dialogue balloons that flow from one another, to make this image represent a longer time (like in a cinematic sequence shot, as seen above).
For Scott McCloud, if the text is clear (in respect to the story, the meaning) then the image can wander. Vice versa, if dividing into images conveys the story clearly, it is the text that can give a more precise meaning or function to what is told by the images. He sees in it a form of interdependence leaning on one side or the other. In any case, there is always a balance to be found between text and images in comic book dividing (as between images, dialogue and sound environment in audiovisual)!

Rhythm in comic books

Comic books (or graphic novels if you prefer to sound fancy) are a sequencing that creates links, shifts, a relationship between different rhythms: the dividing in number and size of panels, the action (or actions placed in parallel) and the thread(s) of dialogue (which have their own rhythm) and captions. You intuitively play on the differences between these rhythms. Slow-fast, alternations, large breathing spaces inside the story, with or without text.

However, all storytelling media can be said to be sequential because they all have sequences and ellipses (literature, cinema, video games) and rhythmic choices. I don't think that dividing for comic books is, as Will Eisner suggested, similar to Morse code or a music sore. It would be so reductive. But each media does induce different ways to divide. Comic books sometimes seem more concise than audiovisual. But, the main difference is that you have to organize frozen moments. It's a common mistake for literature or audiovisual writers when they try to tell a story for comic books. They have hard time to visualize the frozen panels. Either they write a long text and the artist divides it, either they give impossible instructions with too many things happening in each panel. To use Jacques Dürrenmatt's expression (about Tintin), comic book "*is literature and also something other than literature"*.

You can be careful not to create the sizes of panels only according to the text or the organization of each page but by trying to think about how these two rhythms work together. The comic book dividing in panels actually incorporates a reflection on reading time.

The reader follows the story thanks to images, dialogues and captions, we can consider that they are two or three "lines" or "threads" combined in the reading. Even four if we separate onomatopoeias from images or from text.

Control of the reading time belongs to the reader (otherwise they would be a spectator) but the scope of the story and its rhythm are decided by the authors. A reader rarely stops in the middle of a short story or a chapter of a graphic novel. But, when there is no chapter, it is the reader who decides his reading breaks (and the time that passes before going back to it). If the insertion of TV advertisement has pushed the scriptwriters of American series to base their dramatic acts on these cuts by managing to have some kind of suspense pushing the spectators not to leave the program during the commercial, if the game designers are looking for tips to have players coming back after each game session, the writer also has tools to keep his

reader, such as readability (lettering, spelling, fluidity), the confidence that the reader places in the writer (by being interested in the topic addressed, the graphic style, the previous titles of the author, a press article, word of mouth), his notoriety (when the author is famous the reader generally loses part of his critical mind), a rapid and sustained rhythm (captivating story), the obvious talent (astonishing effect of a mastered or innovative writing and/or drawing style), suspense and other hooks (emotional, poetic, humorous) taking the time to make the reader want to know the following, to learn something, to know more about a given subject, to feel in agreement with a character, or lulled by an atmosphere, disoriented, amused.

For the various options of arrangements between rhythm of the story actions and rhythm of the page dividing, as well as different sorts of linkages, evolution of points of view, possible contrasts between writing style and drawing style (or "graphiation" in the academic language of Philippe Marion), see the work of authors like David B (1959-), Marc-Antoine Mathieu (1959-), Chris Ware (*Jimmy corrigan* and others works), Italian artist Manuele Fior (1975-) (*L'Entrevue*, 2013), French artist Jérémie Moreau (1987-) (La *Saga de Grimr*, 2017), Belgian artist Brecht Evens (1986-) (*The City of Belgium*, 2021 in English), Italian artist Piero Macola (1976-) (*Les Nuisibles*, 2019), and many others.

Dividing in sequences and panels in comics (as in literature or in audiovisual) is intuitive but everyone does not have the same "intuition". For instance, Hergé regarded his stories as movies. The more we have read books and comics, watched films, video clips, series, the more we know the main uses, and if we have some reading habits (graphic novels, strips, comics) we will tend to reproduce what is done there in terms of rhythm, number of panels, size, use of angles, close-ups. It is worth questioning automatic thoughts and habits to imagine other dividing choices, wondering what they would bring. Because we can quickly adopt habits and, for ease, no longer question their relevance. It feels like there are still plenty of things to try or invent about dividing more than concerning storytelling itself, both being of course interlocked.

It can also be useful, from my point of view, even when you do not practice drawing yourself, to know a minimum of the basics in order to collaborate with an artist and to be able to suggest and sometimes to understand what is wrong with a drawing or a panel. A few notions are welcome: of composition, perspective, landscape or architecture, lighting (source of light, treatment of shadows), human, animal and material anatomy, attitudes, expressions and gestures of the characters represented, gravity, matter, substance and the functioning of tools or furniture.

Likewise, in live-action audiovisual, script girl experience can help you understand many things related to filming or editing. Unlike animation, a live-action movie is constantly rewritten during the shooting and up to sound editing. Filming and editing are linked in audiovisual matters: a film editor does not work miracles, he (most often she though) chooses in rushes but cannot save bad shots, bad acting or an uninteresting story. Many actors have gone "behind the camera" and written their own films after having carefully observed the audiovisual production chain.

Benoît Peeters described four main styles of dividing in comics:
"Conventional" (waffle iron): It involves dividing the page by 3 or 4 horizontal lines, each line being made up of 2 to 5 panels. The story adapts to this predefined division and the regularity of the pages creates in the reader a habit which pushes him to be especially interested in the story. Claire Bretécher (*Les Frustrés*, 1973-1981) or Simon Hanselmann (*Megg, Mogg and Owl*, since 2013) most often used a waffle iron with 12 square panels. Self-imposed dividing constraints (like the waffle iron) also help the author to focus on something else (the organization of the story, the events really necessary for the story, the point of view, dialogues, attitudes or expressions of the characters)
"Decorative" and "productive": Each page is unique and different from the others. It is a clearly graphic approach. The layout is thought out as a whole, ensuring the balance of lines and shapes. The visual impression of the pages prevails. However, its organization can perfectly serve the story or the story can be adapted to it. Then Benoît Peeters calls it *productive* dividing, where the aesthetic choice of the page makes the author imagine a storytelling specific to this arrangement, a method that American artist Winsor McCay (1869-1934) would have used. We also think of many and magnificent pages of *Philemon* by Fred (1931-2013), or W*atchmen* by Alan Moore (1953-) and Dave Gibbons (1949-), or the palindrome book *Nogegon* (1990) by Luc and François Schuiten, or Marc-Antoine Mathieu, or Chris Ware...
"Rhetorical": The layout is made to serve the story and therefore adapts to its needs. The size of the images and their arrangement will vary depending on action, dialogue and silence, the story generally slowing down in large horizontal panels and accelerating by vertical and narrow images or successive small panels suitable for quick reading.

Jean-Claude Forest (1930-1998), quoted by Benoît Peeters, thought that the comic book reader was "*above all a spectator"*. He advocated having, for each page, an image "*sufficiently intriguing so that it can only be understood by reading the text"* in order to encourage reading the comic book.

You're dividing in all cases for a medium: strip, one-page story, short story of a few pages, comic book with a precise number of pages imposed by a publisher (for printing reasons, future albums sometimes just bring together previous strips as it was the case even for Hugo Pratt), graphic novel (large and free number of pages, smaller dimensions), manga, webtoon or even (in China) lianhuanhua (small traditional illustrated booklets with one panel with caption per page). Whether you have chosen this medium according to your basic idea, whether it is imposed by a magazine, a publisher (series) or simply being realistic in the production of an era or of your notoriety (what you can get published), you're dividing a story the same way you're writing a story, using intention, intuition and experimentation. Too much intention (this thing that they talk about in all the books on writing) will kill any uniqueness or become didactic, too much intuition takes the risk to not interest anyone other than you, too much experimentation risks to become artificial or unreadable. The balance varies according to the authors, there isn't one and only "good" balance.

American filmmaker DW Griffith (1875-1948) applied in the cinema the principle of parallel narratives in 1908, from which arose the parallel editing which made it possible to carry out at the same time two adventures separated in space but most often simultaneous in time, lived by different characters of the same story, but it was already done plenty in novels and comics.

Dividing into scenes

(Ellipses between scenes, non-linearity, parallel stories, endings as a beginning)

A **scene** is a set of sequences (it can be only one) relating to the same action. Though some people described it the opposite way, a sequence being a set of scenes linked together by a main idea. (As we have seen, the term sequence is used in storytelling studies to refer to narrative blocks and it is in this sense that it operates then.)

The two stages of setting a plot, the elaboration of the story (sometimes called "standing work" in French cinema) and the organization into scenes ("seated work") are not always as distinct as they appear. When dividing into scenes, better ideas can emerge about the organization of the story, the beginning, the end, the motivations of the characters, their actions... Especially for the medias where you are telling the story "with the eyes" (by the image).

If two scenes (or two sequences of a scene) have the same intention (for example to show the fear of a character), we must choose between one or the other or merge them into one.

We will also often avoid passing from immobility to immobility by choosing instead to alternate immobility and action. Action arriving just after an ellipsis is generally rewarding, not only in audiovisual. All choices will be part of the chosen rhythm.

Whatever the medium, for a somewhat long story, once the plot has been decided, you will seek a balance (when dividing into scenes) between plot (you don't show the way too much to the readers/spectators) and frustration (they don't understand anything and stop reading/watching or they go on for wrong reasons). You give clues and proofs rather than explanations. You do not say everything (readers/spectators have more freedom for interpretation/appropriation) nor everything at the same time (readers/spectators are at risk of missing out on some of the intentions if there is too much information).

When dividing for comic books, some authors visualize the future pages as if they were super-panels or meta-panel (to use the words of Will Eisner). But others prefer to move their story forward page after page, with a vague structure. There is nothing to stop you mixing these two approaches.

From one scene to another, from one chapter (or episode) to another: you will tend to create a form of closure/suspense like a music "fermata", then a new opening (which lasts a little and maybe extends the suspense), or simply a longer ellipsis, or a

focusing on a more or less symbolic detail (or clue), or a switch of point of view, you could establish a parallel story connecting later, or superimposed, interlaced stories.

The term capper is (or was) used in the audiovisual industry to talk about an effect of underlining, of accentuation by a gesture, a noise, a sentence, an expression, the most used being the nocturnal thunderstorm lightning with thunderclap.

When stories are told in parallel, in order to join, cross or not, there will be a tendency of the reader/viewer to think that they are happening at the same time ("during that time") unless otherwise indicated. The concept of "story time" can be questioned as soon as there is a mixture of several stories or stories in the story. The same goes for non-linear storytelling (digital, or in a three-dimensional space) with reading crossroads, characters crossovers or multiple choices.

In comic books, the possibility of multiple (often short) stories in the background is most often used to bring some poetry or a crescendo of visual gags interfering with the main comedy plot. This process is also used in illustrated books for children where the reader delights in finding small parallel stories. It's also present in animated cartoons though limited by audiovisual reception.

Openings/beginnings : For a very short story, whether audiovisual, strip or short story in one or two pages, you will start the story as late as possible to gain in intensity.

In a short comic book story, we often integrate the title as a banner or in the first panel, we divide the story in pages and then we think about its beginning according to the place in the first page. We can sometimes (depending on the publishing mode) choose the layout of the pages (facing pages or double-sided page which involves turning the page to see the following) and integrate this important element of reading in the design. Often it is not clear how such a short story will be published, whether the first page will be on the left or on the right (facing who knows what).

For long stories, you can refer to all the work of literary analysis about the subtle and varied incipits that novels have been able to offer for more than four centuries. In the audiovisual fields, many scriptwriting guides, specialized websites and YouTube channels provide examples of particularly successful film openings. In graphic novel, you will have everything to gain from consulting the choices made by many authors (Hergé, German artist Andreas (1951-), Chris Ware, Emmanuel Guibert (1964-), Ruppert & Mulot or your own favorite ones). For comedy, absurdity or exaggeration of the triggering factor generally works to quickly impose a specific story world.

You will first cut into chapters or scenes to estimate the total volume of the story and assess whether the story holds up, beyond the simple desire to tell it, knowing that there is room to tell its beginning, in a second step, with several possibilities. For example:

- Beginning preceded by an introduction, a quote. Or even an explanation like in a theatrical prologue: a journalist tells us the facts (see *E la nave va*, 1983, by Frederico Fellini) or even a character (*To Die For*, 1995, by Gus Van Sant, or *LA Confidential*, 1997).

- Set of clues (mixture of different temporalities, different places where the story begins, will happen, or will end). There are many possibilities for engaging the storytelling where everything is not explained or linear, in order to attract the reader.
- Slow start, slightly contemplative/descriptive, of a few panels/shots/sentences.
- Just a long shot (horizontal large panel or even a full page in graphic novels, panoramic shot in audiovisual, description of a place, a group or an era in literature) then occurs action.
- Direct start in the action, as late as possible, to captivate the audience.
- Start focusing on a detail then widening and action.

The whole first part of the story, which consists in informing the reader/spectator about the characters, the situation, the time, is called "exposition". The characters discuss or are introduced in their daily intimacy. A character is meeting another who is ignorant of everything the public should also know. A short story introduces the main information. The exposition by the image of Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) is particularly famous. It immediately shows all the necessary elements to understand the situation and the character. But dosages are not always obvious and it varies according to fashions and times. See above (p.43) on the importance of diluting information. Exposition requires some preparation but if the preparation is too full it becomes too long (and needs to be compensated, for example by beautiful images and good dialogue). Usually the main characters are quickly named. The end is sometimes symbolically suggested so it will seem more credible during the conclusion (but the film *Psycho*, 1960, by Alfred Hitchcock is a good counterexample).

From one sequence to another: Within the same scene, you usually keep a form of continuity. In comic books, you often use the turn of page to move on to the next sequence (or scene, depending on the pace of the story). Here are some elliptical linkage of frames or panels :
- The cut (clean cut between the shots, the panels).
- Strip break in comic book: you can use it for a change of sequence (or scene if the story is very fast).
- Right page break in comic book (the reader turns the page) can be used for suspense purposes in a story of several pages, especially in long story where it is decided which page will be on the right.

Ellipsis is a matter of memory: the reader/spectator remembers the previous images or sentences without effort. He also remembers what he has seen/read since the beginning of the story but less precisely (and in a more variable way, depending on his concentration). The reader needs more concentration than the spectator but he can start again several times if necessary or if something outside interrupts his reading. He can even go back. On the other hand, when it's comic book, he does not look at the panels one by one without seeing the others but he memorizes and links the panels to understand the story.

Creating links between images: The audiovisual gradual transitions of the dissolve type (crossfade, fade-out, fade-in) with a softening effect, existed before the cut

which is more distant from the historical effects of the theater (see the films of Georges Méliès, 1861-1938). Fade-out is still used, usually to mean an ellipsis.

In comic books as in audiovisual, we can have an overlap of sound (via onomatopoeias for comics) or of a voice over or an offscreen voice, or even captions as a commentary. Sometimes the panels are only an illustration of a text which carries the written story in captions (see the work of David B and other stories often of the account type), alternating with parts put in dialogue form where the action takes place "in real time" for important moments or twists in the story. See also the collaboration between Jacques de Loustal (1956-) and Philippe Paringaux (1944-) in terms of more or less detached and complementary link between drawing and text.

You can use "shot reverse shot" effects in a dialogue exchange or when a character observes something or someone.

You can use a transition image to move on to something else or to pause (with a long shot or a short breath), at the beginning or at the end of the page for comic books, with a large panel, even a full page, or a more distant point of view.

You can also have, in comic books, graphic effects of the page or double-page composition connecting the panels or creating interferences. See Winsor McCay of course. Or Chris Ware again and, on the French side, Moebius (1938-2012), Philippe Druillet (1944-), Marc-Antoine Matthieu (1959-), or Ruppert & Mulot. These effects can take priority over the ellipses dividing of the story told and tend towards painting, as we have seen with the concept of "decorative dividing".

You can use interactivity: pop-up tear strip, clicks, rotation of the book, use of different layers or inks. The very fact of turning pages being voluntary, it is less passive than the cut from one panel to another, from one audiovisual shot to another. The tension and the passive surprise in film partly explain (the realism of the images and the special effects too) that there are more horror movies or series than books (even comic books) that are scary (or bursting readers into laughter). We have more control and distance while reading.

Scott McCloud (who really seems to like the number 6) described 6 categories of links from panel to panel [that I don't really think are convenient]: He distinguished between transitions of "*moment to moment"* [where, however, there is even a small action in the example he gave], "*action to action"* [where there are simply more graphic effects suggesting movement], "*subject to subject"* [when just not staying on the same character or scenery], "*scene to scene"* [regardless of whether these scenes take place at the same story time or one after the other], "*aspect to aspect"* [from the same moment or from the same atmosphere, even if there is an action or several moments], and finally transition "*without apparent logic"*. From there, he counted each type of transitions that he has defined in different productions and deduced (from his point of view and in his time) a difference between Western dividing and Japanese dividing, linked to the more contemplative and refined Eastern culture and to the number of pages of mangas compared to American comics.

Lewis Trondheim and Sergio García, for their part, also mentioned transitions "action to action", "subject to subject", "scene to scene" and "point of view to point of view" plus more graphic links (background continuity, lines continuity).

<u>Framing variations from one panel to another, from one shot to another</u>: For the audiovisual industry, the screenplay does not generally intervene in the shooting script or the framing choices. I refer you to the multiple guides, tutorials and other online courses in filmmaking and photography directing if you want to get an idea of the generally accepted uses.

For the link between dividing, framing and rendering of internal movement in comic books, besides all American superheros comics, see for example the work of Chistophe Blain (1970-) in *Quai d'Orsay* (2010, 2011) and that of André Franquin in *Idées noires* (1977-1983). You will have the essentials.

For changes in viewing angles (high-angle and low-angle effects, as in comics for superhero fights) or more talented and less exaggerated, see the work of French artist Vincent Perriot (born 1984).

For changes in "focal length", remembering that the comic book close-up is not a cinema close-up, it is less indecent (because drawn, stylized) and less frozen (in front of a camera a close-up is rarely in motion, except for some tracking shots), see Chris Ware again, *Jimmy Corrigan* for its fine use of the close-up, a sort of zoom effect but in panels small enough not to invade the page, or the strips of the *Baron noir* (1976-1981) by Yves Got and René Pétillon. In comics as in audiovisual, the audience suffocates if the representation remains too long in close-up.

The changes of framing, of allowed space and of perspective, which focus the vision on an element can also sometimes constitute a kind of emphasis, or a call to mind (for example by low angle or character looking directly at the camera, as in *Citizen Kane* of Orson Welles, 1941).

<u>Dividing/editing images to create an effect other than ellipsis</u>: The *Kuleshov effect*, whether its name is a historical myth or not, is about the influence of the frames ones on the others (following or previous) in the cinema, described at the beginnings of film editing, but all that already existed in comics.

Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970) would have insert suggestive images in the shot of an expressionless actor's face (plate of soup, child in a coffin, lascivious woman) which would have given the audience (his students) the impression that the actor's playing varied subtly, expressing hunger, sadness, desire. It's something obvious in many stop-motion films where all the emotions are induced by context or voice-over. As well as in many graphic novels today where artists don't want to use much facial expressions for the characters' feelings. On the contrary, classic comic books (as Will Eisner underlined it) largely use expressions and lettering effects to indicate to the reader how to "hear" the dialogue.

Yes, editing (or dividing) brings together different shots (or panels) that, sometimes, only make sense when they are brought together. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Bolsheviks advocated this shock, this confrontation, this conflict between the shots of a film. Sergei Eisenstein's work on editing (length of shots, rhythm, underlying intellectual message of the filmmaker, tone given by a dominant such as a color, a duration, an expression of a character or some light effects) is associated with an enormous effort of composition within the frames (lines of force, dynamics, points of structure at the location of the golden ratio). At the time,

Hungarian filmmaker Béla Balazs (1894-1949) opposed Eisenstein's editing which, in his eyes, became like a puzzle, a riddle, saying they were "ideograms" or "dissertation in hieroglyphics". He believed that forms like this set cinema back.

Artistic movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism refuted storytelling in cinema (the films should not take up the traditions of theater and novels but seek their meaning through random editing, without any concern to create a story, and without psychology). Double exposure to obtain superpositions mixing the most diverse objects and characters made it possible to produce symbolic scenes whose, coming together, would show a new meaning. They were looking for the cinema equivalent of automatic writing. See *An Andalusian Dog*, 1929, by Spanish director Luis Buñuel (1900-1983). We can find this approach today in some music videos.

You may have also already heard of André Bazin's cinematographic idea of "forbidden editing" which advocated that when the essence of an event is dependent on the simultaneous presence of two or more factors of the action, editing should be forbidden because the spectator would have known that there was a "trick", since he would "have seen" that the action had been shown in separate shots. Except that the spectator can believe it anyway because editing has connected all the elements! Editing is about storytelling, not about reality. For example, Alfred Hitchcock did not follow this dogma at all in *Rear Window* (1954).

Creating meaning through associations and ruptures: Many effects other than ellipsis are easy to achieve. Especially in comic books where, reading is being less directed, they seem less emphatic or didactic than in audiovisual where the same intention will rather be dabbed within the overall rhythm (such as the aquarium motif in *The Graduate* film by Mike Nichols mentioned above or many others among the best directors).

Many literary devices can be transposed into images to create transitions other than ellipsis, such as comparison as in the silent small comics J*ean qui rit Jean qui pleure*, 1995, by François Ayroles (1969-); a more or less exaggerated metaphor; an accumulation (poetic, didactic, dramatic, descriptive with details giving a painting effect); the repetition of a catchphrase, of a panel (to signify an obsession, a perpetual return, or a certain immobility); a distortion of the representation in subjective vision; a parodic transposition; an addition of an incongruous element; a breaking the fourth wall (address the reader/spectator directly) sometimes involving a form of exhibitionism of the storytelling seeking a funny effect (see the British TV show *Fleabag*, 2016-2019 from Phoebe Waller-Bridge, (1985-), or the American comics *Dead Pool*, since 1991, as well as its film adaptation). Finally, the narrative metalepsis generates a level change for a story element (when there are multiple connected stories). For example, the character who is reading a story (or is playing as an actor) in a film, or in a play, turns out to be a character of the read story, who can enter or leave this story.

I encourage you to dissect the best effects and tips of the works that you liked, in any field, to understand their inner machineries.

Endings (see also p.83): Dividing takes into account the ending of the story, whether it is necessary to "speed up" or to "slow down" when the end approaches. Here is a small list of endings that will inevitably involve dividing accordingly to get them:
- Visual final gag.
- Double-gag (as often in *Peanuts* by Charles Schulz).
- Punchline or surprise (see for example the book for children *Purple Coyote* by Jean-Luc Cornette and Jean-Marc Rochette, 1999, where the reader imagines that the character will come out of it by mimicry, the main mode of learning for children, while he learns something wiser at the end. This ending is particularly well thought out because it is a surprise that makes you laugh while opening the possibility of a discussion between parent or teacher reading the book and child listening to the story).
- Commented end.
- Swallowing time after disclosure (or revelation or discovery). Poetic or didactic epilogue. Succession of frames or larger panels, contemplative, silent or with non-informative dialogue, or in a more light or more philosophical register. You will generally avoid long explanations because we are reaching the end and there is no more room or you want to say too much to conclude (although, since Hergé did it, we could also consider that it is a style in itself).
- Reward in the second ending, as in classic tales.
- Open end, indecisive, slow or abrupt (as for the film *The Lobster* of Yórgos Lánthimos, 2015).
- Cliffhanger/suspense (end of an episode or of a TV show season).
- Suggestion of future twist by a clue introducing another end "level" in the last images of the story (or sometimes before the end, not to disturb it, or sometimes after the credits for the end-of-season episode). Additions during or after the end credits of feature films are generally rather bonus anecdotes often about the making-of.

Digital particularity and multiple-choice stories

Digital comics have introduced effects that have an obvious impact on dividing. (Links in the following may have become inactive or obsolete as this industry moves very quickly.)

The vertical or horizontal **scrolling** panel after panel or without frames (webtoon) imposes different transitions. Vertically, see for example *L'Odyssée 2.0* (2016) by Camille Prieur and Vincent Malgras http://odysseedeuxpointzero.prieur-malgras.com/ which includes animation effects. Horizontally, see the long neat scrolling strip *Phallaina,* 2016, by Marietta Ren (1984-) https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=fr.francetv.apps.nve.phallaina (free on Google Play and Apple Store) based on 1,600 screens, divided into 16 chapters. It has been also printed on a physical fresco of 115 meters. This is a horizontal *slide* available on smartphone or tablet, with a *parallax scrolling* graphically very well done, as well as the storytelling and the transitions: overlap dividing varying the viewing angles, the framing (zoom effects) and the lighting (shadows effects). The absence of cuts does not prevent ellipses and there is a strong atmosphere with just the right amount of drama and fantasy mixing

several worlds (illness, mythology, love story), with a chaptering induced by loading time (at that time). *Protanopia* (2017) and *RRR* (2017-2019) by André Bergs (a paid app on Apple Store and Google Play) offer navigation by swiping pages or panels, including a sensitivity to the orientation of the tablet for the first and a possible navigation inside the panels for the second. **3D rendering** will indeed, perhaps, become an option of interactive browsing. There had already been a few attempts by Gabriel de Laubier: https://sketchfab.com/elbriga. Not to mention the stunning adaptation *S.E.N.S.* (2016, now unavailable) in virtual reality of the book by Marc-Antoine Mathieu S*ens* (2014) which necessarily intensified the internal focus of the character.

Turbomedia, closer to a slideshow, plays with the gradual appearances of inserted elements (drawing, text, animation). The reader can therefore be surprised at each panel (and no longer simply by turning the page). Small animations add to the atmosphere or make it possible to draw the attention of the reader to a detail, or even help the storytelling (gesture, action). This reading mode (as well as many Instagram multiple views posts, for instance) eliminates the question of panels arrangement in pages and involves thinking about divisions differently. *MediaEntity* by Simon Kansara (1984-) and Emilie Tarascou (1984-) was an example (in 2012), followed by several comic books (also linked, via an app on mobile phone, to additional digital content) and by an attempt to a transmedia development http://www.media-entity.net/en/ (free start, paid to continue).

Other approaches mix turbomedia and page layout or multiple-choice navigation, like *L'immeuble* (2017) by Vidu https://turbointeractive.fr/limmobilier/ *The Tombs of Blackpaw* (2017) by Li and Jordan https://www.exocomics.com/500/ or *Super Pixel Quest* by Emmanuel Espinasse http://superpixelquest.com/

The concept of **infinite canvas** proposed by Scott McCloud consists in using the space of a "page" which can take the size you want and which theoretically has no limit. As the eye is limited by the size of the screen, navigation is more easy vertically than horizontally on a non-touch screen (via a mouse or a pad), it is more pleasant on a tablet (with the fingers). Reading directions within this narrative page are guided by arrows, character paths and iteration (the character is repeated in a decomposed movement, as well as elements of the scenery) or by lines connecting the panels. In such a branching story, you have to find a graphic way to organize crossings and digressions.

The concept of narrative (digital) sculpture is studied (by Canadian researcher Félix Lambert) in this link which can give ideas of "canvases" other than the supposedly infinite plane McCloud spoke about:
https://www.academia.edu/11744670/Narrative_sculptures_graph_theory_topology_and_new_perspectives_in_narratology

Digital multiple choice, leading most of the time to several possible endings, is done by clicking (possibly unlocked by a session only at a certain level, in video games) or by guided advance on a web (infinite or not).

In branching, multiple choice or random stories, taking place in a real or virtual space, the strong structural constraint most often leaves little option for dividing, as we can see with a strip in no ordered three dice (*Cocktail* by Anne Baraou & Vincent

Sardon, 2002), a Scrabble game with comics panels instead of letters (*Scroubabble,* collective, L'Association, 2005), a comic dominoes (*Domipo* by Anne Baraou & Killoffer, 2009), two four pannel random slot machine strips online (*Bandits manchots* by Anne Baraou & Fanny Dalle-Rive, 2014 and 2015), or this box of interlocking triangular panels to build stories by joining the pieces together according to a color code (∏*ramid* by Renaud Farace and Olivier Philipponneau, 2018).

Non-linear storytelling (branching storylines) also employed by "choose your own adventure" books, or more recent Japanese "visual novel", uses the principle of multiple choices while limiting it to a manageable form (not exponential). See these two resources:
https://cad-comic.com/images/news/planetofdoom_storytree.x60343.gif
https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/cyoa-choose-your-own-adventure-maps

Regarding video games

Writing (interactive) video games (which uses text, image, movement in 2D or 3D animation, voices, music and sounds) is in general even more collaborative than audiovisual writing and rarely the work of one person. It arises from the relationship between the different designers: creative director, artist, scriptwriter, game designer, programmer, director, sound designer.

The script more or less invites the player to contribute to the story. The player becomes a co-writer, not of the script itself but of the narrative path. Its participation depends on degrees of freedom and interactivity offered. It also seems that freedom of the player gives more freedom to the scriptwriter. There is an obvious link between the unfolding of the story and the gameplay (possibilities offered to the character played and chosen by the player) as well as the general experience offered to the player through the interface (point of view, angles of view, menus). As Olivier Henriot, "expert" at Ubisoft, explains, writing video game consists of "*creating logical experiences in parallel with the associated gameplay; knowing when the player is available to integrate information; asking ourselves how to make him follow or collaborate to what is happening; solving the equation between what the player controls and what he experiences; making people understand without having to explain directly* (as in other media); *regularly reminding the player of what is expected of him by constructing short stories to make sense about what he does; and varying the tone.*"
You will find online resources on these topics. for example those from American researcher Marie-Laure Ryan.

To obtain a narrative game, you can either start from a set of rules and goals, and dress them with a story to make them more appealing, or start from a story and turn it into a game, to allow the player to interact with a fictional world.

You decide on an action plan, on participation modes, on the type of interface, or new resources (such as the camera which makes it possible to film a gaming phase) and you call on a scriptwriter in the last stages of development to wrap all of these

inventions in a story. But while the storyline helps to sell the game and inspires the artwork on packaging or advertisement that promise action as gripping as a movie, it is quickly forgotten once players are immersed in the game. The interest in "shooters" type games, for example, does not lie in the plot, but in the novelty of the weapons, the sense of danger, the speed of the system's reactions to the player's actions and the overall realism of the images, that is to say in competition and spectacle. Curiosity , suspense and surprise as well as an emotional attachment to the characters are not difficult to obtain in a game where there is a strong visual immersion.

Most video game stories set up goal loops followed by rewards ("gain" in the game and, for the player, pleasure of understanding, solving, discovering, "succeeding"), from the smallest reward to the last greater one (at the end of the game) in a search for a mix of fun and immersion ("flow") which will be the components of the rhythm of this kind of narration generally alternating imposed key scenes and gaming phase options (the number of which varies according to budget) between each key scene.

The storytelling is one of the means of maintaining the player in the game (or of bringing him back, as in other storytelling fields) while avoiding, in the best case, dissonances between the gaming phases (gameplay) and the story, as well as believability breaks (for example, if there is no consequence to what the player does). You usually make more use of the scenery (often richer in storytelling elements than in traditional fiction) conducive to exploration and therefore to immersion and interactive elements (which can be optional, such as collected newspaper pages, radio station the payer can listen to, or non-player characters telling stories).

Very often, this type of storytelling feels a little disembodied. Also the written dialogues are not always read by the player and the played character is a little too present (character sheet, missions, equipment). The tutorial often serves as the first chapter or as a prologue. Most of the creative budget goes to "cut scenes" (full motion videos). Perhaps memorizing these spectacular scenes allow the player to recreate mental images that may not have existed in his actual gameplay (which is after all also the case when reading a novel).

A more rambling form of storytelling can come from the story world itself in simulation games or build-your-own worlds (Minecraft being the freest) or in a form of polyphony (old role-playing games where story is co-constructed by the game master and the players; or persistent online worlds where the players, without really changing the story, enrich it by playing together) or even when the program uses pre-integrated randomness (for interactive fictions or games where obstacles and resources will be randomly found within a framework that remains well defined). A more flexible storytelling, more like mapping, exists in open world games (where the player is not or little led by a story) much less linear (endless, multi-beginning, with unordered chapters). See the American game designer (1950-) Chris Crawford's writings and videos on these specialized topics.

Here are some examples of (already obsolete) drawn narrative digital games: *Forgetting*, by Troy Chin, was a "choose your own adventure" or "visual novel" form. It was a kind of multiple choice game. The main character had amnesia and the reader explores the room where he was. At the beginning, and each time you clicked on an interactive object, a comics panel appeared to give information. There were

several possible endings that depended on the objects you clicked on and the order in which you clicked. The graphics were however quite poor.

Digital comics of the English author Daniel Merlin Goodbrey (1978-) can be viewed on his website http://e-merl.com and an interview (2017) here https://www.du9.org/ Entretien/daniel-merlin-goodbrey/

Examples can also be found on the website of the French screenwriter specializing in interactive storytelling Camille Duvelleroy: http://supersimone.com/portflolio/.

Other (not free but not expensive) examples: An interactive (French) story on 68 comic screens, *Sylvie pour la caisse 5* by Oriane Lassus, 2018, takes place in the world of a supermarket https://hecatombe.ch/shop/fr/accueil/44-sylvie-pour-la-checkout-5-9782940432196.html; *Framed,* totaling more than a million downloads, is a comic book puzzle game with movement in the panels that need to be reordered so that the story continues favorably; *Tengami* is a pop up book game; *Alto's adventure* offers a nice snowboard atmosphere, a kind of graphic slide where everything is based on movement; and (why not) *Facade*, a poorly designed prototype of an interactive drama (where we come, in first person view, to visit a couple on the verge of divorce) based on artificial intelligence, produced in 2005, downloadable here https://www.playablstudios.com/facade.

Appendix : How to present a screenplay?

A film script is not divided into shots but into numbered scenes (a unit of time and place). We change scene when we change place or time. Each scene is introduced by 4 indications all in capitals :
- Its number.
- EXT. (outside) or INT. (interior).
- The place of action.
- The time of action (often just DAY or NIGHT).

Everything is written in the present tense (which Ursula Le Guin rightly assimilates to imperative mood: this is what we must see) in Courier font, size 12pts, with 55 lines per page.

Avoid useless conjunctions and everything that does not pass via image or sound as well as any technical indication, tough some visual ideas cango through descriptions and line breaks.

Characters names are capitalized the first time they appear in a description and before each of their lines.

Dialogues are shifted towards the center compared to the rest of the text.

Use a specialized software or look for precise format online.

Examples are easy to find online.

Here American TV shows: https://www.scriptreaderpro.com/best-tv-scripts/

Here BBC productions: https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/scripts/

Here French films (in French): https://lectorsanonymes.org/scenario/

8- Dialogue

Kenneth Burke described language as a "*symbolic action"* of all the human world, to such an extent that it constitutes it. For him, we are "*bodies that learn language."*

Those who define man as "the animal which uses tools" (*homo faber, homo economicus...*) then define language itself as a kind of tool. But, although instrumentality is an important aspect of language, it cannot be given as its *essence.* Language is rather an action that can be used as a tool.

As the French writer Bernard Werber (1961-) said: "*Between what I think, what I want to say, what I believe I say, what I say, what you want to hear, what you believe to hear, what you hear, what you want to understand , what you think you understand, and what you understand, there are ten possibilities that we might have some problem communicating. But, let's try anyway..."*

Difference between heard dialogues and read dialogues

For example, the dialogues of the novel *The Red and the Black* by Stendhal (1783-1842) are not designed to be played, heard, but read, punctuating the rest of the text (actions and descriptions) in an intermixed way .

When writing dialogue for **listening** (theater, audiovisual, radio, podcast) it is better to get into the habit of pronouncing them (if possible aloud) in order to really hear them. You can have fun saying aloud the same dialogue in several different ways to understand the variety of possible interpretations, you can also try to improvise, or record yourself.

Any screenplay will have several versions after the one which is sold (which is read but not spoken) and the first draft (which is always rewritten so it will only be a base). It is generally not necessary to be concerned from the start by each line, with all the rewrites that will follow.

A long monologue is not the same thing to read or to hear, it's not written quite the same way (hence the interest not to make the characters "talk" too much in your head when you're writing to be read, although the reader might make the character talk in his head himself when he reads this monologue).

Directing voices and actors in *live action* or in animation will be very important to avoid misunderstanding the written dialogues because they would not be well said. By the way, today, 3D modeling systems of real actors made it possible to have more realistic movements and attitudes of characters in animation and video games.

The actors themselves can also suggest modifications of the dialogue when they read it, changes of fluidity, and even of meaning, of logic, of better chosen words. Clint Eastwood (1930-) is known to strike out much of the dialogues written in the scripts he performed. That's also what artists often have to do when dealing with scriptwriters who don't know how to handle available space in comic book pages and panels.

Be aware that audiovisual culture comes from the theater stages, not from printed literature. Audiovisual writers have sometimes been actors or stand-up comedians. The audiovisual pitching system also favors performers. It is, by the way, a culture linked more to the real-time rhythm of the show than to orality itself, television shows having largely detached themselves from the tradition of "soap" or radio-like opera (dominated by words) to move towards more attention paid to the image and the staging.

The temptation of the spectacle has developed into comics and, after the "drawn concerts" (where artists are drawing live while music is performed), there are now attempts at a script equivalent in the form of stage readings spoken aloud comic books, by their authors or by actors. I have no idea if this exercise has any chance of prospering.

When writing dialogue for **reading**, remember that there are many more misunderstandings in written exchanges than in oral conversations. We even invented emoticons (*emoji* in Japanese) to overcome this. You don't master the interpretation by your reader (neither his level of reading or his speed) nor his level of language or his language immersion (but that's the same for the heard dialogue). So, if you want to take the reader somewhere (which is more or less open depending on the storytelling mode, quite free to interpret or more guided), you will have to find other means: to accept the varieties of interpretation (to be more open), to improve your lines, to use captions or tips in the dialogue to compensate for the "acting" of the static drawn characters (in comics) which is not always guaranteed, to overwrite expressions or attitudes, to use clichés ... Everything will be a question of balance. You can highlight some dialogue effects by the drawing (in comics or with illustrations) or by the movement (animation) or by the choice of words (when they don't risk to get overacted by a director or an artist) but if you highlight too much you risk repelling your reader/spectator.

Stage directions (plays, films, podcasts): The fewer stage directions you put in, the more the dialogue will seem well thought out. The best is actually to avoid them, in order not to direct the performers too much (it is the role of the director, not of the writer) and not to upset the buyers of scripts (because yes, it is one of their common beliefs that you shouldn't use stage directions in a script). A stage direction makes an entire line inefficient. Actors don't like being told how to interpret a dialogue. We will therefore avoid the (upset), (sad), (joyful) between the name of the character who is speaking and the dialogue. In its context, the dialogue must sufficiently induce interpretation. But you might use them more in animation (where there are voices of real actors only in famous series or feature films).

Introductory verbs are not used when the image performs this function but they can be used in the dialogue. For example: "*Do not yell at me! You say that so harshly", "I can feel aggression in your voice", "No need to whine like that"* are giving acting indications. The dominant character will "attack", "accuse", "yell at", "order". The

dominated character will “apologize”, “admit”, “accept”, “ask timidly”. Things like that.

Importance of characters’ staging and acting (even only drawn): The interpretation of the dialogues in the audiovisual field appeals to the attitudes and the “non-verbal” as well as, of course, to the tone and the intensity of the voice (“in a cold voice”, “in an annoyed voice”, “in a thundering voice”, “in a calm voice”).

The characters are standing or seated, they get up, enter, exit, they touch each other, jostle each other, they block the road, fight, repress a bad gesture, or nod their heads.

Their body language can underline what is happening in the dialogue: Whoever wants to convince or threaten will use his body to intimidate his interlocutor. He is going to approach him, he can stay up to look down on the one who is seated, or he plays carelessly with a weapon, unless he is staring at him aggressively. His victim goes on the contrary, trying to step back, clenching his hands on the armrests of his chair, not daring to look up, sniffing, wringing a handkerchief between his hands, having a tic. The anxious and the angry will walk up and down, bang their fists on the table, have sudden movements, run their hands through their hair.

In writing, we will use the story **context**, the general atmosphere, the sounds, noises or onomatopoeias that accompany the dialogue as well as introductory verbs: whisper, scream, yelp, shout, stammer, choosing his words carefully, hesitantly, looking for words, spelling it out, etc.

In comics, diction is rendered as lettering. Lettering, too often underestimated, plays a big role in the desire to read a caption or a dialogue in comics. As Benoît Peeters underlined it, crafting homogeneity, or “equality of treatment”, between text and drawing (thanks to hand lettering) is one of the fundamental aspects of comic book. This can probably also explain the visual failure of photo comics (I’ve seen only one exception, the book *Bloody Mary*, 1983, by Jean Teulé and Jean Vautrin, where additional graphic effects blackened the pictures to tend to this crafting homogeneity.)

Some bad machine lettering do not at all make you want to read otherwise quality books. Be careful of lettering composed on a screen without any notion of the future print size. Be careful of the use of falsely manual typography, too homogeneous. Be careful of balloons drawn without knowing the amount of text and therefore, having too much blank around the lettering. In any case, be careful! Some authors use size variations or bold type lettering to underline some important words and make it easier to read a dialogue and to understand its meaning and its tone.

Comic book captions: They are used to complete the dividing (time indications) or to give indications about the character’s mood or about the atmosphere, to comment (dramatic irony), to bring another voice or a parallel story thread. Captions are generally considered to complement the dividing, but they can establish a real relation with the balloons of the characters. Captions are not exactly equal to a voiceover. Comic books also have the tool of thought balloons (sometimes using an

image or a symbol) which make it possible to communicate a feeling or a character's reasoning.

What are the dialogues for?

Some excellent writers (novelists, screenwriters or comic book artists) are bad dialogue writers. So, to be a "dialogue writer" is sometimes recognized as a profession (in the audiovisual field). French poet Jacques Prévert (1900-1977) had an outstanding reputation as dialogue writer. He mastered (quite logically) the art of introducing some poetry into film dialogues. Jean-Loup Dabadie (1938-2020) was also a famous dialogue writer of French cinema, with sentences particularly worked to function orally, in an orchestral way, written with lots of dots, repetitions, onomatopoeias, thought for the interpretation and not for reading.

In principle, dialogues have two essential functions:
1. **Keep the action going.** Like any element of dramaturgy, dialogues must serve the plot, meaning to generate (or resolve) conflict, action, or curiosity. Sometimes they make the subsequent action or dialogue believable, as in many detective stories (for example, in the film *The Unknown Girl* (2016) by the Dardenne brothers, the line from a mother about his son "You can ask him, he's always outside" allows the main character to continue her investigation which could seem quite unlikely when merely described in a synopsis.)
2. **Characterize the characters**. Dialogues tell us about a character by revealing:
- His social origin, his level of education and culture, through the vocabulary used, the grammar, the references and the representations used by the character.
- His geographical or ethnic origin through a possible accent or regional expressions the character uses.
- His personality or temperament through the phrasing and the tone used, which provide indications about the person speaking (his degree of confidence for example).
- His emotional state, also through the phrasing and tone, which tell about the degree of nervousness, of sincerity.
- The relationships of the characters to each other (affection or animosity, trust or mistrust, respect or contempt, domination or submission, seduction or repulsion ...)

Note, in this regard, the possibility in comic books of using whisper balloons (with a dotted circle) to indicate that a dialogue is spoken aside, not to be heard by all the characters in the panel. You can also reduce the size of the lettering to achieve this effect, usually accompanied by an attitude suggesting it.

You can as well choose graphic ways to identify a specific character's speech more immediately in the middle of all the speech balloons by a specific color or something else.

Dialogue can also be an exposure tool (this is often the case in autobiography or stories of everyday life also called comedy of manners). It possibly allows to situate the action in the chronology of the plot. It can be used to give information to the

viewer/reader, even a clue. But, as far as possible, for an audiovisual exposition, you will privilege image over dialogue. In no case should you count on this tool to make the plot or the motivations of the characters understandable. And in comic books, please avoid as much as possible long spoken explanations like in Tintin, in a hurry at the end of the book (am I repeating myself here?). Motto *Never explain, never complain* can be kept in mind to avoid the worst pitfalls. Hitchcock (him again) believed that cinema dialogue was just one noise among many, and that the actions and looks of characters should tell the story visually.

Also be wary of announcement effects, sometimes tempting but most often a bad idea. Announcements are generally then contradicted (except in the tragedy where the prophecy comes true), which is anticipated by the reader/spectator. However, because anticipated, the announcement effects can precisely be used to orient interest, the eye of the reader/spectator in order to hide other tricks. For example, we make a character say to another character "Don't open the door! It's dangerous." The audience anticipates that the character will open it (it doesn't have to be Bluebeard's wife) but, in the meantime, they don't necessarily see something else coming.

Payment-dialogue: Yves Lavandier opposed the "*clever dialogues"* (which are self-sufficient) to the "*payment-dialogues"* (which would only take on their full meaning in their context), which is, it seems to me, the case for ANY dialogue.

Point of view and narrator: The narrator (answer to the question "who is speaking?") is a concept that is widely used in analysis or literary criticism while it is still debated by theorists. Is there a narrator for all fictional stories or only for some of them (which would assume that stories can be told without a narrator)? Communicative storytelling theories defend the idea that any fictional narrative is based on communication between a narrator and its recipient (this was Gérard Genette's position). Non-communicative theories say that defining any fictional story as an act of communication is admitting without examination something that can perfectly well be challenged. To the question "who is speaking?", they answer that, in some fiction stories, nobody speaks, or rather that this question is not relevant.

Choice of words

"The difficult thing in literature is knowing what not to say," wrote Gustave Flaubert in his *Correspondence*.

And as Virginia Woolf said, "*words do not live in dictionaries, they live in the mind."* She recommended thinking and feeling before using words, to indulge the unconscious, to not deprive words of their freedom.

More prosaically, communication and advertising have always known that when they add emotion on everything: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYcXTlGLUgE

Tones

At the end of 4th century, the Latin grammarian Diomedes proposed six *qualitates carminum: heroica, comica, tragica, melica, satyrica, dithyrambica*.

In the 13th century, English philologist (teaching in France) John of Garlande classified the texts according to a system including the degree of reality of storytelling: *res gesta* or *historia*, *res ficta* or *fabula*, *res ficta quae tamen fieri potuit* or *argumentum* and the feelings expressed: *tragica, comica, satirica, mimica.*

In the 18th century, German philosopher Freidrich Hölderlin distinguished three fundamental tones attached to the presentation of the hero: *naive* (or natural) in harmony with the world, *heroic* who opposes the world, *ideal* which synthesizes the whole. At that time, Hegel, August Schlegel and Jena Schelling defended a lyrical, epic, dramatic triad: the *epic* corresponded to an objective vision, the *lyrical* to a subjective vision and the *dramatic* brought the two together. This triad progressed with most famous French writer Victor Hugo (1802-1885) for which the *lyric* is the expression of primitive times, the *epic* (including the tragic) that of ancient times, and the *dramatic* that of modern times (marked by the tearing of the soul and of the body). German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) took up an equivalent triad, placing the *tragic* at the top of this same aspiration to synthesis.

In 1957, the Canadian critic Northrop Frye (1912-1991), in his turn, theorized four *seasons* of the story: *comedy, epic, tragedy* and *satire*.

Today, there are a dozen usual tones, whatever the genre of the story, depending on the desired goal:
- Joyful or comic to make people laugh or smile,
- Didactic to transmit knowledge,
- Realistic to produce the illusion of truth,
- Epic to give events or characters a higher dimension, which goes beyond them,
- Fantastic for arousing anxiety or fear,
- Wonderful to dream,
- Lyrical to share feelings,
- Pathetic to move,
- Tragic to arouse seriousness and pity,
- Polemical to defend ideas,
- Satirical to make fun of something (but isn't it included in the comic register?)
- Laudatory or epidictic to praise or blame, to judge directly.

(Irony for me is not a tone, it can be used in every of them.)

Again, all that is usually intuitive in writing but, when you block on a dialogue, you can go back to the theory to help you and thus to ask yourself in which tone you want your character to be located, which emotion you're seeking to stimulate.

Reminder: list of emotions (fleeting) or feelings (deeper) that a character can provoke in the reader or spectator: See Appendix p. 32.

Registers

Let's just take an example:

- Frozen language: *It matters not*
- Formal language: *It doesn't matter to me*
- Neutral language: *I don't mind*
- Casual language: *I don't care*
- Slang language: *I don't give a damn*
- Vulgar language: *I don't give a fuck*

Formal language is mainly used in writing, it has an official and normative register, the grammar is strict.

Neutral language is employed with an interlocutor we don't know intimately and with which we have a certain distance. The vocabulary is usual, for example it is the language of the school.

Casual language is used with relatives, close friends. The vocabulary is loose, sometimes abbreviated. Some syllables may not be pronounced. The grammar is not strict.

Slang language indicates the will to shock or to amuse. It also diverts words from everyday vocabulary to give them a slang meaning. The rules of normative grammar may or may not be observed.

Vulgar language uses crude words, readily insulting or with a sexual connotation.

To create dialogue that look true, it is useful to learn to listen to those around you, the people you meet and to be inspired by them. For some outstanding characters, we can listen, watch and then imitate (or, failing that, invent) the attitude, gestures or facial expression of a singular person (as an actor does). The drawn stories have the advantage of making it possible to control the expression and the attitude of the character who speaks or listens, at least to the extent permitted by the style of the drawing. Hence the interest of writing dialogue according to the drawing style!

Dialogue must be realistic but at the same time **better** than real life**.** Most of our daily interactions would be soporific to read or to listen to. You have to be better than that to captivate readers, move them, shock them, make them laugh or scare them. As Virginia Woolf said, *"To survive, each sentence must have, at its heart, a little spark of fire, and this, whatever the risk, the novelist must pluck with his own hands from the blaze."* The writer must be exposed to life, taking the risk of being carried away and deceived by this duplicity, seizing treasures and disregarding the waste. Then the readers will think *"I have never known people behaving like that. But you have convinced me that so it is, so it happens."* For readers even more than for spectators. (It's easier to close a book, even a comic book, than to leave a movie theater or turn off the TV, although watching replay and shows on computers is changing that in our multitasking life.) For example, it can be useful to use shifting, non-fluidity, that questions do not necessarily generate expected answers. When a character asks what time it is and another answers him something having nothing to do with the time (he got back pain, he wants to beat his boss, he ran into a friend from childhood), it will always be more interesting than if he replies giving the time.

There is also a way to use overlaps of different character sentences in order to give an impression of realism or dynamism (see for example the dialogues of Noah

Baumbach), as well as with the repetition of groups of words, taken up by the character responding or questions that do not leave a break ("What?","I didn't hear very well"," Are you talking to me? "...). Not allowing time to answer, answering a question with another question, finishing the sentence of the interlocutor, are ways to obtain dynamic dialogue.

Repetition: In dialogue written for listening, repetition is important (because it is natural, musical and effective), more often in the cinema or in long TV series than in shortcoms or sitcoms, which are closer to plays.

Repetition also has its place in literature, particularly brought up to date in the 20th century, of course as a figure of speech (see Gertrude Stein, 1847-1946, and her famous phrase *"A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose"* in her poem *Sacred Emily*) or as a rhythmic tool (see Samuel Beckett, 1906-1989, and so many others) but also to get across impressions or ideas (sometimes in a monologue). See Marguerite Duras (or Michel Butor or Alain Robbe-Grillet, 1922-2008) whose stories are often constructed from the repetition and rewriting of narrative sequences that return and respond to each other within a text or from one text to another or even from one medium to another. But also, for example, with Milan Kundera (born in 1929) in *The Joke* (also in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) when the character, towards the end, realizes that forgetting is more powerful than revenge or forgiveness while thinking of the forgetting of which he himself will be the object. It uses three repetitive phrases without it seeming redundant: *"In reality the opposite is true: everything will be forgotten and nothing will be redressed. The task of obtaining redress (by vengeance or by forgiveness) will be taken over by forgetting. No one will redress the wrongs that have been done, but all wrongs will be forgotten."*

Neologism: Used by teens and youtubers, and fantasy stories ("doobidoob" in A C*lockwork Orange*, 1971, by Stanley Kubrick), particularly science fiction, comedy too (Homer's "doh" in *The Simpsons*), the invention of words is easier in audiovisual than in text to read (though also doable). Examples: *padawan*, *wookie* (and *ewok*, when reversed) in *StarWars*. I refer you to the Internet for the neologism creation processes (portmanteau words, *Brexit* being a famous one, twisted words, derivation).

Catchphrase: In a dialogue, a text, it is an expression (motto, turn of phrase) closer to the slogan than to the gimmick, something that the public will want to quote, to reuse. They are common among YouTubers (because teens love catchphrases). Or for example, the invariable *Carol Beer* character's response "Computer says no" in the British show *Little Britain* (2003-2005) by David Walliams and Matt Lucas. For the anecdote, the very famous line of Arletty "*Atmosphere, atmosphere, do I have an atmosphere face?"* in *Hôtel du Nord* (1938) came from the writers' mockery towards the director Marcel Carné, who was constantly worried about the future "atmosphere" of the film, so much so that the writers couldn't take hearing him say that word anymore. More simply, some keywords or markers can be cleverly slipped into dialogue. You usually have to navigate between Jean-Claude Carrière's idea that "*a*

good dialogue is not noticeable" and that of Michel Audiard for whom a good dialogue not only stood out but was also retained by the viewer.

Mental images: Words have the capacity to generate mental "images". Drawn images are sometimes devalued because children and above all adults must acquire and then possess the capacity for abstraction. As a matter of fact, drawn images don't look abstract at all. Conversely, there is a valuation of abstract images, mental images, visualized from words. As if representation had less richness or potentiality, its subtleties are denied and a text is always worth more than an image, among other things, if it has the capacity to generate images in the reader's mind. Images that will unfold, that will organize themselves, question words, build a story and make people think. A bit like a comic strip!

Dialogue can convey strong images which come to be superimposed on the ones on the screen, as for example, in all the adaptations (the US one being *In Treatment*, 2008-2010) of the Israeli television drama series *BeTipul* (2005-2008) who "says" more than "shows" and also generates a complicity between writers and spectators through the work on the psychoanalysis of fictional characters, in a kind of participatory game playing with identification, a game that does not take the spectator for an idiot.

Some people, like Will Eisner, find that there is more privacy in prose where the reader enjoys "translating" descriptive parts into mental images. They think it's more personal and allows more involvement than the simple examination (Eisner even spoke of "voyeurism") of existing pictures. But nothing proves that the reception of a story with pictures doesn't also generate mental images. Very often, as Benoît Peeters pointed out, memory recomposes imaginary comic book panels from elements of several ones. Movies also generate ghost memories of images and sounds, of scenes that are not really on the film roll.

Guillemette Bolens, for her part, situated the cognitive activation of storytelling simulation (rather creating tensions than mental images) on the side of movement (the addition tonus + tempo) of which we have a knowledge from our body. Why not!

Errors and tips

Tics are ticks: Identify our writing tics! Stephen King advises against adverbs, Albert Camus adjectives, but Ursula Le Guin emphasizes the importance of getting rid of "*ticks"* like *"sort of, a bit, just, rather, enough"* that we tend to use when we have learned to avoid any aggressiveness in our words. The same goes for *"very, suddenly, excellent, curiously, somehow."* We all have a few tics.

Explanation dialogue: A character says what he thinks or feels when it is his actions that should give the information. If a woman sends a plate to her husband's head, we can imagine that she is angry with him, it is useless to make her say it (but if she does not say anything, it could be a little weird). Another case: the character tells in great detail what happened in a previous scene, or even in his past, while the author could

have conveyed this information through image (audiovisual or comic book). This difficulty can easily appear at the beginning of the stories when you have to convey as much information as possible and you become a little too didactic. Using feelings can help to avoid the overly informative aspect. (For example, a character gets angry because of what he has just learned that the reader/viewer needs to know).

Screeds: The unnecessary dialogue is quite terrible for the rhythm of a plot, and soporific for the audience. If you are not Shakespeare, Molière, Beaumarchais, Proust or Musil (or let's say John Patrick Shanley, already winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, who wrote the great dialogues of *Moonstruck*, 1987, for Cher and Nicolas Cage), it is better to get to the point: concise but effective sentences, which keep the action going or reflect the characters' emotional states, their personality... Unless the character is enormously talkative, in which case the length of the dialogue becomes an element of logical characterization even if it is risky.

Stopgap dialogue: The characters are talking about everything and nothing. The author has no precise idea for his scene and is just filling it. If you work well on the structure of your story and the definition of your characters beforehand, you shouldn't fall into this trap.

Writer's big message: in a dialogue, his philosophy on the world around him, on human relationships or this and that, doesn't interest readers/spectators. Unless it's really remarkable. Usually better to convey the message through situations that characters live and their reactions rather than through their didactic words! *"Do not dream of influencing other people, I would say, if I knew how to make it sound exalted. Think of things in themselves"* as Virginia Woolf again so aptly puts it. The message often presents itself, as an unconscious achievement, without starting from it. A work should not be designed to convey a message.

Advice often given to apprentice screenwriters in the audiovisual industry:

1. Never convey information through dialogue when you can do so through images.
2. When you are obliged to use dialogue to convey an element of the exposure, use a secondary character rather than a main character (to reveal the main character's soul, his intentions, his qualities), but Jane Campion (1954-), New Zealand filmmaker, did the opposite in her series *Top of the Lake*, 2013.
3. When a scene opens with a discussion between characters, start that scene as late as possible in the dialogue, when the characters are addressing an essential subject. The public does not care at all for the greetings and banalities exchanged about the rainy weather. The same goes for the end of a scene. Leaving the characters in the middle of a conversation rather than ending the scene with pointless goodbyes. This advice may turn out to be wrong. Who came to talk to whom, who started the conversation, or who can't stand it and walks away can sometimes be very useful information.
4. Avoid, as much as possible, writing long blocks.
5. Take care of punctuation, it sets the tone, and breaths of the text.

6. Another tip, which may prove to be a bad advice: give each character a way of speaking that is specific to him (phrasing, vocabulary, rhythm, tone, accent), which implies documenting and above all inevitably risking to sound fake. Ideally, we hear that we must be able to read a script by hiding the names of the characters and nevertheless know, for each line, which one is speaking, which seems particularly heavy to me because that is not even the case in real life but which can be interesting when a character is immersed in a context that is not his own.

It reminds me of Ken Loach, who takes time to choose actors close to their characters because "*it is very difficult to interpret a character who is not of your social class or to imitate a regional accent, because it is not only due to the phonetics. The way to use language, the attitude and the meaning of humor also has their part*." Maybe writers should keep that in mind instead of trying to look for a specific way of speaking for each character.

7. In an audiovisual scene, the best line often occurs at the end of the scene. This is also used a lot in literature. It is a good way to end a scene (but not too many scenes in a row, of course).

<u>**Subtext importance**</u>: What makes a dialogue valuable is sometimes what is <u>not</u> said, <u>what the interlocutors think without saying it, but what their words express</u>, the innuendo of the characters. When a scene is well dialogued, the viewer/reader can "read between the lines". Because, in a good story as in life, people rarely say everything they think or believe. A dialogue benefits from being enriched with indirect meanings just as it can benefit from being imaged. Do not hesitate to make the unconscious of characters speak in seemingly innocuous lines! Not saying everything right away, making some characters lie, using allusions and counterpoints to actions are also good tips.

Example of a funny subtext (in real life, at the restaurant the other day):

The server: - *There is a glass of wine included in the menu. It's an English wine.*

The customer: - *And is it good?*

The server: - *It is an English wine.*

Through dramatic irony that I keep telling you about, dialogue creates a complicity with the public, when the latter knows something that one of the talking characters seems to ignore. Suppose, for example, that we learned in a previous scene that a character is condemned by an illness. Now this same character goes to a party and doesn't tell anyone about his state of health and just listens to everyone having fun. Whatever words this character will then pronounce, however simple they may be, they will have a particular resonance for the public who "knows".

Everything having been done and said before, it is important to think, as much as possible, of doing and saying things in slightly different ways (whether that is being in love, in ang, by stealing, killing, fleeing, helping, …)

<u>Understatement</u>: In order to avoid heaviness, it is a way of saying terrible things in a tone that is not, without becoming comical. Let's just say lighter or in a roundabout way (like in a famous French scene from the film *The Baker's Wife* (1938) by Marcel

Pagnol where the main character expresses to the cat Pomponette what he cannot say to his wife who just returned after having run away with another man).

Verbal gag: Wit is often defined as *the ability to discover something similar within the dissimilar* that is to say, again and again, by association, used in attack, reply or comment. When a same word (or group of words) is associated with a different meaning, this association creates the funny effect, often through a form of surprise. Play on words (neologism by condensation, inversion of words, assonance), euphemism, antiphrasis, translation of meaning or deviation from logic, apparent fallacy to bring out another idea, exaggeration, causticity... There is a certain fascination for the wittiness.

Verbal gags can be based on surprise (for example when a character calls rabbit droppings "caviar" in the episode *The Plague* from the TV show *Father Ted,* or in the mistake between sandwich bread (*"pain de mie"* in French) and pandemic in the French film *Problemos* by Eric Judor, 2017) or on concision when the verbal gag does not say too much, does not explain, lets the association be made (for example with the exchange "just a finger" in the French film *La cité de la peur* by Alain Berberian, 1994) but not always, especially when it comes to running-gags (where automatism triumphs over logic) or the comic based on an analogy which needs more development to be funny (for example in the French play and film *Le dîner de con* by Francis Veber, 1993, where there is a very long exchange playing on the adverb "just" and the first name "Juste"). Verbal gag can also use absurd humor applying the "kettle logic" described by Freud (various explanations each plausible but logically incompatible whose only the association is funny).

Off-screen dialogue (in addition to the usual shot reverse shot) use the fact of not seeing who is speaking (or making a noise), especially for violent actions, can make them funny or frightening, through their non-representation, playing only on the dialogue and the mood (within the given genre of the story) as we saw in the chapter about dividing.

Think about others characters, those who are not speaking. What do they do? In or out of scope, are their attitudes, expressions, actions, reactions described or shown? A lot of things can go that way. Watch for instance (among hundreds) how it's done in *Moonstruck* where we listen to Cher guided by Nicolas Cage's way to react and vice versa. Not to mention that putting yourself in the shoes of the characters who hear the dialogue can help you to avoid imposing unnecessary, incomprehensible or soporific ones on them.

Use silent rests to punctuate some remarks, to arrange breathing times during which the viewer/reader can take an interest in the complex emotions conveyed by the characters. (The quite talkative stories don't bother me personally, but I'm not representative.)

Refine dialogue, remove without qualms everything that is not essential or that is explanatory. A thoughtful look or gesture is usually worth a long speech. We will generally try to say as much as possible in very few words.

Create a new level of conflict, of tight interactions. There are already in the story from the divergent goals of the characters, but nothing prevents making them confront each other also verbally. Warning! Dramatic conflict does not mean arguing of fighting: seduction, teasing, questioning, rivalry, encouragement and other power struggles, as well as empathy or pathos (joy, sadness, hope, bitterness, discouragement), stimulation (emulation, manipulation) or interplay in a group (training, pressure, glory, disgrace) can be expressed without raising voices.

Create rhythm. Writing dialogue is sometimes compared to writing a music score. If you have the same tempo from start to finish, the result is flat. You need a crescendo, cuts, silences, repeats, etc. This is especially true when writing a comedy, but any story requires this special care. Be careful here too, too much rhythm turns to caricature or to look like an American movie (from my point of view which is more literary than audiovisual, more poetry and humor than action and adventure seeker). Using different narrative tenses within dialogue can also help create rhythm. Saying the past, the present, the hope (or the foreseeable) can create an alternation, a dynamic. The different uses of the present tense can also create rhythm.

In dialogue or any prose, narration in the present tense is like the words of someone telling what is seen in real time and installing a kind of urgency and a certain power of focus which, as stressed by Ursula Le Guin, turn the affect down. While narration in the past tense offers more feeling, and more continuity of sensory experience, because it's closer to the human spirit which does not live in the present moment (except for emergency situations). Storytelling in the past tense undeniably has a better ability to go back and forth in time.

Brain state of dialogue writing: If a scriptwriter is bored while writing dialogue, the audience is likely to be bored while reading or hearing it.

So, as we have seen, you "listen" around you and you also "listen" to your characters. You're getting a little crazy. You integrate the characters in your head, you embody them more or less, according to your temperament, you let your brain think alone, speak alone. It's not that you hear voices but almost. You read it later or you have someone else read it. You can have several versions and choose, either have one version that you will improve little by little.

Reading your dialogue aloud allows you to test their rhythm, their phrasing, when you write to be heard. Having them read by interpreters (relatives, for example) can make it possible to check that they are understandable and effective. But, in general, friends will tell you it's fine, out of kindness or to get rid of you, and they'll be bothered to read your stuff anyway (unless you're already famous and your requesting flatters them).

Read again after 1 or 2 months (ideally 6 months)! Ursula Le Guin recommends to always proofread aloud. She attaches great importance to the sonority of prose, since

for her, part of the meaning is conveyed by the sonority of the words; the sonority of the words and the rhythm of the sentences bring to light what happens in the story. For her, focusing on the musicality of the writing can allow you to express something differently and is, at the very least, a good practice exercise. Gustave Flaubert said he “burned up his lungs” privately reading aloud his own work. He found that a badly written sentence could not survive such a test.

In the making of American animated shows, “table reads” are organized once the production script has been established (there are episode contents decided in groups or by the writing director, then a first draft written by one of the writers of the team, then the writing director decides of what is wrong and asks the group to improve or he improves himself and we arrive at the “production script” read by the actors around a table, which is then further improved according to what has been noticed during the reading, then there is an animatic (a kind of animated sketch) and there, the team can still change details but not much (because it costs more).

Some strong links not to be overlooked

What to watch out for while writing, when you hit a brick wall, or when proofreading (and which seemed to often miss in students work):

Context and dialogue: *“I want to die”* (in front of a cliff) or “*I want to die”* (in front of something that tempts us, or that shames us, or that demoralizes us) do not have the same effect. The emphasis is given by the context. Keeping the context in mind when writing dialogue also helps to avoid saying too much (which is often found in audiovisual or comic book young writers when they tend to think about their dialogue independently of the image).

A dialogue placed in the right place can show that a character continues thinking in the following of the story without having to go through spoken words again.

Dialogue of secondary characters, even short, can be terribly useful. And this is often the only way to show their goal or activate their purpose in the story without giving them too much importance.

Point of view and dialogue: If you work sufficiently on the point of view (focusing) of your entire story as well as of your scene (subjective point of view, omniscient point of view, external neutral or external subjective point of view), it will influence the dialogue. Do not forget that, in real life, everything is not necessarily said (and most importantly not heard) by everyone. By the way, for Jacques Dürrenmatt, it is an asset of comic book *“to compete with literature”*, that of *“bluring the boundaries between points of view impersonal (without identity), ocular (we see through the eyes of a character what others can see) and imaginary (we see what a character thinks, imagines, dreams, fantasizes).”*

Narrative voice and narrative distance: In order not to incorrectly use these terms already used by Gérard Genette, I will have to suggest another one: ***"narrative grip"?*** This is a whole composed of the general tone of the story depending on its genre more or less identified and on the different tones used within this genre, of the (one or more) points of view in the story as well as the rendering induced or included in the script. This blend regulates the distance between the story and its (reading or watching) audience and gives the singular voice of its author.

From the coldest to the warmest, we can have an exterior story, detached, distant, or contemplative, intrigued, worried, concerned, investigative or embodied, interpreted, passionate or exaggerated, overplayed. You can play with this scale to regulate the immersion in a story fully "lived" by the reader/spectator/viewer (through identification with a character or simple empathy) and the distance which often makes it possible to gain meaning, from full clarity to deep mystery (too much distance leading to author's flight most often followed by an audience's flight).

From adding a tone to mixing genres: Scott McCloud highlighted that two different styles of drawing (one more "iconic" for the characters and one more "realistic" for the backgrounds) could be useful in comics. Coming from animated cartoons, it allows the characters to stand out and, according to McCloud, the readers to better identify to the characters and get the background. You can also use it to "objectify" a character or an element which becomes less important in the action, to pass it in the background. Japanese manga (from *man* meaning piddling and *ga*, drawing) artists are specialists in this technique. The idea of designed to be (that of the characters) and designed to see (that of the background) is also useful in the dialogue, and the variable "acting" of the characters, which can also be in slight contrast to the action or the background. Recent TV shows use a lot of mixes like that (a touch of nostalgia and softness in *Stranger Things*, action added in *Sense 8*, messianic and humor in *The OA*, humor and stylistic exercise in *Orphan Black*, for the sci-fi genre series) or the addition of tragedy (two traumatic deaths) in the comedy *Fleabag*. It also seems to me that, for instance, screenwriter Andrew Niccol (1964-) has never been so good as when he added comedy to his sci-fi ideas (*The Truman Show*, 1998 and *Simone*, 2002, compared to *Gattaca*, 1997 and *In Time*, 2011).

Stream of consciousness: Stream of consciousness is a kind of cognitive point of view, it is the flow of thoughts, impressions and associations of one or more narrators (see novels of Virginia Woolf or William Faulkner), it is not the simple interior monologue of a character (generally less rational and looking more like deliberation, awareness or decision-making process). This approach can help overcome overly dogmatic dramatic or storytelling rules.

Interactions:

- In any story with dialogues, there is a difference between the words and their interpretation by the character (attitude, expression, gesture). This is the very essence of interpretation. Many subtle effects can come from these thin differences and few

are used by writers, cartoonists or animators who, most of the time, do not have any acting knowledge.
- Comic book offers the possibility of playing between some “parallel threads” (images, dialogues, thoughts, captions) of reading. Think about the interactions between captions and dialogues (or images inside balloons), between different dialogues in the same place or not, at the same time or not (but linked by the organization of the story told with static images), between dialogues and thoughts, between drawings and captions (such as, in real life, when the eye wanders while we are thinking or listening to something). All these can lead to singular and relevant styles.
- In comics too, the modulations of the volumes of the “voice” (by the lettering size) and of the “noises” (onomatopoeias, which hardly anyone pronounces) or graphic effects of movements and emotions (drops, stars, spirals and other symbols sometimes named *emanatas*) constitute another imaging rhythm parallel to the one of drawn panels, on which you can also seek to play. Jacques Dürrenmatt also questioned the possibility of a more inventive use of punctuation marks in comics. Sure, let’s do it!
It also seems to me that, today, the extremely widespread practice of various messaging on screens has popularized the mode of exchange with “balloons” (of variable size but generally limited) and its possibilities of comedy effects, specific punctuation, or new fragmentation of speech, bringing a broad understanding of this kind of dialogue to almost the entire population, and in return influencing the choices made by comic book writers. This communication mode is also more and more integrated inside the frame in audiovisual productions. In particular, the iconic dot dot dot indicating that the interlocutor is writing.

Silent storytelling

In silent storytelling, the interpretation approaches mime and non-verbal “language”. Without words, <u>actions</u> (small actions or gestures, large actions of the plot and especially interactions), <u>attitudes</u> and <u>expressions</u> of the face, <u>staging</u> and <u>dividing</u> (or audiovisual editing, see previous chapter) will therefore be particularly important to play on associations without going through words.

The use of one or more **<u>points of view</u>** allows to express emotions, feelings, opinions of the characters (their “outlook”) without going through dialogue.

Do not hesitate to review the best old silent movies (even if they used intertitles) if you want to practice this storytelling, as well as the sequences of American photographer Duane Michals (1932-) or many good examples of silent old graphic stories or new comic books (by Caran d’Ache, Théophile Steinlen, Gluyas Williams, Moebius, Marc-Antoine Mathieu, Lewis Trondheim, Thomas Ott, Shaun Tan, Winshluss, Gudim), children’s albums and animated films (for example those of Bill Plympton, Nick Park or Michael Dudok de Wit) which use sounds but no dialogue.

We can indeed distinguish two kinds of silent stories: the completely silent ones (the characters do not speak, only images, noises and music “tell” the story) and the

one using intonations with a sort of language, without precise words, or a language that we do not understand but which allows to indicate that there are verbal exchanges and to show the tone of them (comic strips might use scribbles, abstruse signs or an imaginary alphabet for this purpose).

9- Exercises

Characters

- Describe two real people: one who has impressed or influenced you, the other one you hate (because he or she has hurt you, disgusted you or something else).
- Create 2 or 3 fictional characters and get inspired by a minor news item (accident, crime, local small story) to start your own story that connects them.
- Transpose a known story (for example, from an Andersen's fairy tale or any fabulist work like the French La Fontaine) into another context with different characters.
- Imagine a simple situation causing a conflict and, then, developments of this conflict, from the most realistic and simple to the most delirious.
- Imagine a misunderstanding (try a comedy one and a drama one).
- Write a beginning of story (the imbalance that sets it off) starting from "What is the ultimate..."

Beyond characters

Find and divide into moments a story starting from a process, a message or an atmosphere. If possible, write some of the dialogues.

Processes:

- A story starting from an image you have found and like (or a random one) and finishing by another image found or random.
- A story inspired by a room, house, building, monument, or office.
- A story in which smells are of great importance.
- A story with ducks and (human) skeletons.
- A story where there is a character on the first day, two on the second day, three on the third day.
- A story in which ten things fall.
- A story in which trees speak.

Messages:

- We don't need no education.
- It takes a year and all the seasons to pass to be able to mourn.
- Not all children are innocent.
- I hate love.

Atmospheres:

- Frozen Far North, long shadows, snow, ice.

- Cactus, dry heat, scorpion or snake or centipede.
- Fog, mist, droplets, cotton or blur or reflection or halo.

Another exercises:
- In an already written story, keep only the beginning and the end, imagine other possible ways between them.
- Choose or make a random choice of images without text (found photographs, archive images, internet searches, more abstract drawn shapes) and invent a text that links them as illustrating moments in a story.
- Write a story that ends with the same image as the one itbegins with, working on the notion of a return to balance.

Drama

Find and divide into scenes one of these options:
- The enemy is a lawyer (brave, healthy, good and loyal).
- Remorse is instilled in a discreet and unspoken way.
- A very short story with a long false lead and an unexpected final twist.

Find a story respecting one of these structures:
- A character manipulates another. The latter ends up realizing it and, to get out, gets even more into trouble.
- Five characters: Two good ones, a neutral, a bad one and a very bad one:

The bad one persuades the neutral one he needs to harm the two good ones who, by luck or vigilance, anticipate what will happen and get by but are helped by the very bad one who goes on to want their loss. By cunning, the good ones conquer the very bad one and find the neutral one who managed to run away or get rid of the first bad one who manipulated him. They makes up.

Imagine as long as possible one of these situations:
- What is happening after the end of *The Fox and the Crow* from Jean de La Fontaine or from Aesop (or after any other tale). Has the crow learned the lesson? Does he keep the taste for flattery? Is he taking revenge? Does he found a school for crows? ...
- Create dramatic tension by making last a "before disaster" (see for example the prom ball scene in season 1 of *Top of the Lake,* 2013, by Jane Campion and Gerard Lee). We feel that things are going to go wrong and there is a false lead.
- Character under the influence of another or of a drug, of an illness, does whatever it takes until we become afraid for him.

Non fiction

1) In pairs, collect face to face (by agreeing on what you're ok to tell, openly or anonymously): what I like about myself, what I would like to change, what I will have to accept (can't change).

2) Tell (cut into scenes) an episode in your real life during which (you choose):
- you acted cowardly
- you left someone who loved you or whom you loved
- you have betrayed the trust or the hopes of a loved one
And another where:
- you felt particularly humiliated
- you felt particularly alone
- you particularly regretted your behavior

3) Make a detailed portrait of the person who has impressed you the most in your life so far and of the other person who has disgusted you the most, sticking as much as possible to objective elements and real facts.

4) On a documentary topic that interests you, list everything you don't know, including things that you are not absolutely sure are true, real, genuine, verified.

Fantastic

1) Write any words that come to your mind for a moment and then look for a reason, a meaning in what you have written.

2) Find a story from the point of view:
- of a shoe
- of a dead corpse
- of an entrance hall

3) Find a story based on one of these propositions:
- In the whale's belly, there is anything and everything.
- One morning, the lights from somewhere (hamlet, city, continent) don't really illuminate. And neither will daylight.
- A story in the form of a chest of drawers, each chapter being a drawer that you open. They can be read out of order, like a puzzle, but with depth, development or different small worlds for each drawer (minimum 3 drawers).

Humor

- Make a list of your flaws, put it in scenes (real or imaginary) that make them visible, find a punchline.
- Find a double running gag (two running gags in parallel).
- Find a story on the principle of distraction: first start (example: a character is going to buy a toy for his daughter) + second start that produces anticipation by association of ideas (ex: "one day I fought a bear ") + anticipated surprise (the bear is a teddy bear) + callback (which refers to the first start: "I had to buy it, my daughter had a damaged teddy bear").

Think of a shift, a funny contrast

- Find an effect in two steps: Myth (a few sentences or an image with caption) and reality (idem, looking for a funny effect in this contrast)
Or: “We say that ...” then “I rather believe that ...” while also seeking a funny contrast.
- Find several versions of the same anecdote, distorted and told by several people, looking for a funny effect in the difference between these versions. Play at different lengths (more or less detail described or shown, of information collected, added, imagined and ellipses) to work on different rhythms. Play on versions with or without dialogue (or captions or silent, if it is a story told by images).
- Duplicate a short sentence (or an image) and find various consequences for it, going crescendo into the improbable or the catastrophic. Find an end (punchline, surprise or sudden realistic descent).

Dividing

- Telling the life (birth-death) of a human character, animal, object or concept, in just two steps (two sentences, two drawn panels) by looking between the two for an ellipsis that produces a meaning.

- As a group, work on the beginning of a story, the first scene, the first images, all starting from the same known story. Then compare the respective choices.

- In a given story, known or not, change the order of events (for example using a flashback). Try to make it completely non-linear.

- Detect the acceleration and deceleration that would have been possible (for which you could have opted) in an already existing story (short story, graphic novel, film).

- Cut a simple action into several “times” (described moments, gestures, shots or panels). **Let’s see this one in details with** “Leon is cutting his trousers”:
If it’s a short story, write its script. If it’s a comic strip, you can sketch it or only describe how many pages, how many lines and panels, what will be represented in each panel and what will be written as dialogues (speech & thought balloons), noises, and/or captions. If it’s a short film, you can make a story-board or just a script.
You have endless options.
You can work on who is Leon (could be someone else pretending to be Leon) and why he is cutting his pants, what is he thinking about, what happened before, what is he remembering while doing so or what is supposed to happen after... Is he cutting trousers for the first time or regularly each of his trousers? You can focus on the present, his mood, is he upset or glad, about cutting trousers, is it difficult for him?... But maybe you don’t care about who he is or how he feels and you want to focus on something else, on all his gesture while cutting, his tools, on what’s going on around him... You also can decide if it’s going smoothly or if he is damaging the cloth, being nervous, angry, desperate or maybe he is just pretending to cut trousers for some reason, maybe he’s dreaming, or thinking about something else...

So, you can go for adventure, comedy, drama, fantastic, poetic, marvelous, tell a nonfiction story about cutting pants, you can be mysterious, funny, serious, whatever you feel like. It can be a short story or a long one. With dialogues, only captions, all silent...

Dialogue

- Practice dialogue writing with scenes chosen from novels or your own synopsis, no matter if these dialogues won't be used in the end.
- Read plays aloud, no matter if you are not doing theater. At least "pronounce" them mentally. Speed reading removes subvocalization, it is the enemy of dialogue writing.
- Put words on images: choose a series of existing images, organize them into a story using captions that link them.
- Have someone else erase all the dialogues from a comic book (of a few photocopied pages) that you don't know and find some to replace them.
- Watch (with the sound off) a short film you've never seen, write dialogues for the characters and play it back while reading them when they speak.
- In groups of three, create a dialogue between an agitator, an angry character and a calming or fearful third one on whom everything will fall.
- Imagine a dialogue between two characters with very different registers of speaking but who are completely in agreement and understand each other very well.
- Invent the monologue of a villain to reveal to the public the cowardice of the hero.
- Find pictures all in the same style (or ask an artist friend to draw random pictures), put them in order and write a caption running above them to tell a story linking this pictures.

Drawn **silent** exercise:
- A character runs after himself and as he is getting left behind he is overtaken by himself.

10- Storytelling workshops

(For children, teenagers, adults)

We often hear about image education (at least in France) which seems essential to all teachers as images proliferate and have power. I tried to offer a kind of storytelling education, as the stories we are constantly told (as numerous as images) often linked to these images. Understanding how stories are made (point of view, dramatic irony, emotional hook, humorous tools, triumph of love and other tips) is as useful as understanding how images are made if you want armed citizens in the face of power like marketing, politics, fake news, activism, dominant cultures and religions.

Examples

Here are some ideas that I have experimented with or that I think are interesting. The possibilities are, of course, many more.

Workshops for children or teenagers

Tell about the meeting of your parents (what you know, what you imagine, what you would have preferred or a mixture of all that) in half a day or a few sessions depending on the finishing stage hoped-for.
Whatever angle you choose, you are going to ask yourself questions about the content, the structure, the production. There are many possibilities...
- I know the story and I want to tell it:
I choose my tone (poetic, humor, drama) and my point of view (who's narrating?). The story is told chronologically (but we can also have a flashback), in any case linear, with panels (or paragraphs) which are linked (a silent story is possible if the workshop is also about drawing) and between which we have several possibilities of temporal ellipsis (I take more or less my time to tell, I "cover" a more or less long period, I detail more or less the collected or invented information). I can use dialogues (balloons). The story can also be told by a text-image blend, or with linked captions illustrated in the panels (and a greater or lesser difference between them and the images).
- I want to have fun with what I know and what I don't know:
For example, I can play on a contrast between the myth (what was told to me or what I would have liked to hear) and the reality (what rather happened, or what was revealed to me after), this effect will create additional (comic or tragic) meaning. I can also associate the "story" of the meeting and what I had imagined before asking the story (more poetic approach) or my reaction (or that of another member of the family) when I (or he or she) was told this story. In this case, we can have a story on one page and the other on another page (opposite or on both sides). We can also have alternating panels between the two versions (stories in parallel). I can also tell, in a more condensed way, several versions of the meeting, imagined at different periods of my childhood, told by different people who didn't remember it the same way, or who have improved the story over time. If the official story is very incomplete, I can think of a parcel, riddle-style (with mystery panels or several reading paths), or I can imagine a game of the goose (spiral). I can also report my investigation or my interviews to know the story.
- I don't want to tell this story:
Instead I can, of course, tell how my grandparents (or other close people) met. I can also speak about me. The way my parents met is hurtful or this idea makes me sad because I'm adopted, or my parents are already dead or I don't want to think about them. What I'm going to tell will surely help others to see how much life isn't easy for everybody. I don't have to tell all the story, some small details will do it.

For the realization, I think about the size of the pag(es) and the panels (In what length and writing style do I feel most comfortable? Do I want to try something else?) and the tools (same questions for the graphic representation, its style, its realism, as well as for drawing it myself or using cutting-out and collage or taking pictures of people, places, things connected to the story, and using a computer).

Bubble bath (in 3 sessions)
It's a workshop to make a large poster representative of a group of people at a given time. The poster is made up of accumulated speech "balloons", and kind of look like bath foam. The sentences contained in these balloons can also be read aloud by the members of the group, recorded and assembled like a sound bath, overlapping more or less. These short texts are not dialogues responding directly to each other but they compose a whole. Several speaking exercises are used to generate them:
- In groups of two (face to face), one says good things about himself or herself, each in turn, to the one opposite who takes note. They agree on a sentence that is worth it.
- One by one, for the whole group, each kid say something (which should not be a private disclosure) about someone in the group that he or she admires, protects, has come to know or that we has forgiven. We write the sentences on the board and we discuss together the most beautiful or "meaningful".
- A box passes among the group and collects written things, more secret: dreams, poems. After anonymized entry, the content is read to the group which retains what it prefers (by voting or debating).

The poster is made with all these sentences (filling the balloons) by the group if there is enough time usually using a computer (unless the workshop is also about lettering).

The ribbon (in 3 sessions)
It is a very long dialogue running on one or more walls. Several forms are possible: silhouettes (kids outlined on the wall or their shadows painted) or symbols representing people, with balloons above, maybe just dashes with sentences written at 45° (then we can only deduce who speaks by the text). The dialogue ribbon generates a story or simply an atmosphere. Themes can be proposed: "All compulsive liars" (members of the group invent actions, qualities, events, ...) "What I never manage to say", etc.

Everything that involves identity (school, community, gender, digital, private-public) is a good theme: What do I say about myself, about others? What is the opposite of intimate? (Public? Superficial? Cold? Foreign? Open? Visible? Solemn? Fictional?) Which are my tools and issues when I interact through screens (avatars, photos, emojis, memes, common references, frustration, addiction, saturation)? And my poetic identity, do we talk about it? Mood vs Humor (gags and role-playing of a painful or harmful mood)...

When we begin to work on the dialogues of the ribbon, we use the contrasts by asking, for example, which characters are speaking or listening, light or heavy, funny or serious, rude or civilized, talkative or concise, aggressive or protective, to define their way to speak.

Longer workshops (for highschool students or young adults)

Story broths

It takes a few sessions, we start from real people by asking students “Who impressed you? Who disgusted you?”. We all listen to each student speaking. Then, in groups, helped by having heard this mix, they create different fictional characters. We do the same about minor news items (stupid accidents, small weird crimes or miscellaneous local stories): each student must bring one over. Then, in groups again, they can use all the characters already created and those facts to invent a fictional story. Next time, we read all the stories, refine the endings and for the last session each group have to write the dialogues of three or four selected scenes in these stories. Last session, we read aloud all the dialogues to see how much they are different even telling the same scenes. All this can be displayed on a large wall during the time the workshop is going on and after, to show the work done.

Teenagenda

Using several tools allowing to bring out the real questions of the teenagers students in their life, common ones as well as specific singular ones, we then go towards fiction, telling all a week (from Monday to Sunday) of a fictitious teenager female character (same age than the students), defined by the group, through three things, all collectively written: the character’s diary, her texting exchanges and her online posts. A constraint is announced in the middle of the workshop: said character, female, wakes up on Thursday being a male. What does it change? What do we do with it in our history? Three (French) results are together online (as I conducted this workshop in three different highschools at the same time).

Fan(cy) fiction

After the whole class has read a novel, we seek to find out and share the way in which each student has perceived each character of this novel in order to better collectively appropriate the writer’s work (and when I can reach the writer, I talk to him or her to be able to tell more about it to the students), then we continue the pleasure of reading in collective writing, in small groups, who proposes stories using the same characters and taking place either before or after the time of the initial story, that is to say by constructing prequels or sequels.

My anecdote

This project asked each student to write a little story from their daily life, to make two pages (eight panels) on a waffle iron division. This encourages them to focus on what happens in the story rather than on its presentation. The idea is that everyone remembers an event, big or small, that amused, confused, mocked them, or made them proud. It shows them how to grasp what makes the story interesting (a qui pro quo, a surprise, a mystery) and how to define the eight beats that, taken together as a whole, are enough to tell it. This exercise helps the student take a step back from what actually happened, to share moments of questioning, bravery, helplessness or

shame. This helps them, and any reader who was been in a similar situation, to gain perspective on those moments.

International tale
Each teenager in a group of migrants (from various countries, who didn't speak the same language) was asked to choose an animal from his country, to draw it, give it a name and find a flaw this character might have. Then, we looked for behaviors all this flaws could lead to and we built a story together using all the animals-characters, helped by some drawings. (For example, the bull named Jack and drawn like a yak by another teenager made us discover that the starting point could be this angry Jack wanting to become a peaceful yak to escape from bullfights.) We wrote the wole story from an omniscient point of view. Then each teenager had to write the same story from the point fo view of his character.

Building a workshop

Often, as Arthur Koestler said, the simple connection of two different fields can be used to generate creativity, imagination.

There remain the questions to be asked for the preparation: What is the sponsor waiting for? What context and means? (Duration of the workshop, in a school place or an activity center or a summer camp, public of what age, number, voluntary or compulsory, material available). What can I learn personally from this workshop?

A printer-publisher, Pipifax, in Zurich, had this decision criterion which I find perfect: only accept the job if there are at least <u>two</u> positive responses to these <u>three</u> questions: Are the people (sponsors, team or audience) nice? Is it well paid? Is the work interesting?

The "framework" of a workshop is important. It can be imposed in an institution which has well-established rules but it is sometimes necessary to have to ask it before or at the beginning of the workshop: roles of the speaker, the teacher or another co-facilitator, rules of speaking, layout of the room (chairs, tables to move)...

Both the public and the sponsor can be very attached to certain words, certain expressions, which it may be necessary to define well together to be sure that we are all talking about the same things.

The workshop often needs to be adapted as it unfolds, depending on dynamics of the group, content evoked and skills involved. There are well-known intervention techniques that we can take advantage of.

Afterwards, a quick review makes it possible to assess whether or not the planned goals have been achieved for the sponsoring institution, the public and yourself, whether or not the experience was positive and easy-going, whether or not there is a need for deepen your knowledge about intervention.

Soft skills

Transmission skills are easier for some but it can also be learned (as long as one wishes) through very simple listening exercises and presentation techniques encouraging group cohesion or about the organization of sessions (look for “empowerment education” approaches). For an adult audience, I usually start a round table by asking each one their first name, their “culture” (everything that this person wants to include in this word), their environment (subject of interest, concerns of the moment) and their mood (of the day or the week).

For a young audience (even for young adults), I usually ask each of them to talk about the person who impressed them the most in a good way and about the one who disgusted or disappointed or shocked then the most. It’s a good ice breaker. Each time, you can find the two unifying categories of people they complain about (at least in France): liars (especially the ones pretending they are miserable) and big hypocrites. This usually sparks a team spirit (against the “bad people”) and allows to introduce notions of universality, particularity, singularity about characters creation.

Social skills are never, neither definitively nor daily, acquired. Knowledge (or success) can hinder them. During a workshop, it will consist, from my point of view, of:

- Being able to explain the goals or expectations.
- Avoiding to take a superior air.
- Finding ways to link theory and practice (which can simply be done by often giving specific examples).
- Stimulating more than training.
- Knowing how to adapt what has been planned to what is happening.
- Wanting to learn from this experience, to talk about yourself, to meet a group of people.
- Being able to hear a collective thought, which we seek to synthesize to allow immediate appropriation. It will sometimes be necessary to remind the group of the journey together, the collective path.
- Knowing how to remotivate those who are giving up, to catalyze others, install a dynamic of mutual assistance.
- Knowing how to listen and be nourished by this listening.
- Being kind and friendly.
- Showing respect for individualities, as long as they do not harm the group.

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(which is NOT a reading list)

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