Design and Narration: Languages, structures and narrative models as matter for design[1]

Design e narração: linguagens, estruturas e modelos de narrativa como matéria para o design

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Abstract

Every design project is the history of a transformation occurring as an answer to a certain need or opportunity. The action of narrating is therefore implicitly (and in some cases also explicitly) present in every design process. The understanding and study of the constituent elements of narration can therefore represent an instrument of conscious appropriation of techniques and methods often enacted in a spontaneous, unconscious, habitual way. Unlike design, a young discipline whose methodological apparatuses still need to be constructed and perfected, narration has a long history. It has seen a rich and articulated decoding process, which has enriched itself from time to time by having crossed the most various fields - from visual art to music, from literature to multimedia. The aim of the present paper is to underline the potential of narrative languages, formal structures and content schemata in the design field, by putting in contact the perspective of the writer-scriptwriter (who deals with narrative design) and the perspective of the designer (who deals with design as narration and with the narration of design). As exemplification of such potentialities, the paper presents some projects wittingly generated and examined with a narratological approach and some methodological remarks derived from direct experiences. The reported experiences intentionally belong to two very distant worlds, the field of the Cultural Assets and the one of the Commercial brands, to emphasize the versatility and richness of the approach.

Key words: design, narration, brand, cultural assets.

Resumo

Cada projeto de design é a história de uma transformação que ocorre como uma resposta a uma determinada necessidade ou oportunidade. A ação de narrar é, portanto, implicitamente (e em alguns casos, também explicitamente) presente em cada processo de design. Assim, a compreensão e estudo dos elementos constitutivos da narração, pode representar um instrumento de apropriação consciente de técnicas e métodos, muitas vezes adotados de forma espontânea, inconsciente e habitual. Ao contrário do design, uma disciplina jovem cujos aparelhos metodológicos ainda precisam ser construídos e aperfeiçoados, a narração tem uma longa história. Ela tem passado por um rico e articulado processo de decodificação, que enriqueceu-se com o tempo, tendo atravessado os campos mais diversos - da arte visual à música, da literatura à multimídia. O objetivo do presente trabalho é destacar o potencial das linguagens narrativas, estruturas formais e esquemas de conteúdo no campo do design, colocando em contato a perspectiva do escritor-roteirista (que lida com o design da narrativa) e da perspectiva do designer (que lida com o design como a narração e com a narração de design). Como exemplificação das potencialidades, o trabalho apresenta alguns projetos gerados e analisados com uma abordagem narratológica e algumas observações metodológicas derivadas de experiências diretas. As experiências relatadas intencionalmente pertencem a dois mundos distantes, o campo dos bens culturais e o das marcas comerciais, para enfatizar a versatilidade e riqueza da abordagem.

Palavras-chave: design, narração, marca, bens culturais.

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[1] This article was written by Davide Pinardi (*First and foremost: narrating*), Raffaella Trocchianesi (*Design, narration and cultural fruition*) and Angela De Marco (*Brand design and narrative characters*).

First and foremost: Narrating

Classic mythologies and Nordic sagas. Biblical parables and landscapes from the works of Dante Alighieri. Grand pictorial cycles and eschatological visions. Shakespearian tragedies and novels by Stendhal.

These are all narrations, as we all know.

But sociological analyses and journalistic chronicles are narrations too, as are historiography reconstructions and the promises of politics, the dreams of film and the paradises of marketing. Not to mention the closing arguments of court cases, television formats and event scientific theories.

The first are mainly narrations "of invention".

The second are mainly narrations "of reality".

The first create virtual worlds, of imagination or fantasy, and are used to dream of possible or impossible alternatives to what really exists, to imagine new paths, to plan new worlds, to tell of otherwise invisible dimensions.

The second, on the other hand, create new frames for our vision of reality and are used to change our viewpoints on everything around us, to change our relationship with the world, to transform the scale of values, behavioural models and forms of social relationship.

In short, narration is not just inventing imaginary worlds, but also describing, interpreting and transmitting real worlds. Narrating means creating links between virtual and real, fantastic and tangible, absolutely tiny and immensely huge portrayals. Thanks to narrations, we human beings build up our personal and collective identifying structures. And we do this by reconstructing the worlds of the past in which we originated, analysing the worlds of the present in which we have to live, planning the worlds of the future that we wish to create.

It is through narrations that we relate to what exists *to transform it*.

The culture of design is narration.

Narration of reality, because we have to understand where we come from. And narration of invention because we have to be able to see where we are going.

The culture of design is there in the middle, between what already exists – but which I have to succeed in seeing from a different angle – and what can be – but which I have to succeed in imagining and communicating to others.

And if, in the culture of design, we include alongside it architecture, town planning, fashion, etc., creating design, architecture, town planning and fashion means building up narrations.

But what are the basic rules of narration, of this ongoing human process that produces representations and communicates them?

To establish this, we have to focus on the age-old detailed history of narration, breaking down all those disciplinary barriers that now seem to segment it into lots of different plots, lacking shared, corporative and self-referential rules. In some way we have to go back in time to its foundations. It is not paradoxical to say that the literary construction of a mythical Trojan war follows the same rules of edification as an IKEA store (Pinardi, 2010), that the making of a film shares essential phases of the layout of a museum: the results can be better or worse, but the explicit or implicit operating method is the same. While, in the Middle Ages, the foundations on which the initial preparation of the man of culture was based were the arts of the Trivium (rhetoric, grammar and dialectics) nowadays perhaps the foundation should be the "science of narration" (not of communicating, which is a one-way broadcast).

The "science of narration" teaches that a narration requires certain fundamental elements: the grasping of attention, the fiduciary pact, the controversy, the sharing of signs, the use of metaphors, and the construction of frames. This goes for complex narrations and synthetic narrations. The shorter and more concise a narration is, the closer it has to adhere to the rules of narration. If I know that I am narrating a *thing*, this becomes a *narrative object*, but if I don't know that I am narrating it, it remains nothing more than a *thing*. If I take away the narration from a *narrative object* it goes back to being a *thing*.

From this point of view, not even the most genial prototype imagined by the most famous designer, the artistic product of the greatest creative expert, the fashion garment of the most celebrated designer or the project of the most brilliant innovator are actually *narrative objects*. The narrative potential of an object definitely does not lie in the real or presumed greatness of its creators or in the thing itself (whether it is big or small). It lies in the fact that a particular object manages to be the carrier of a connected narration. The geniality of a product lies in its capacity to narrate or to be ground, pretext, inspiration, spark, mould, etc. for a narration and, at the same time, the importance of a cultural asset lies mainly in the way in which it is narrated.

The culture of design (in an artistic-creative context) seems to be a *specific capacity-talent for creating not "things" but objects that are or will become narrative.*

Objects that will possibly narrate themselves or which can be narrated or re-narrated by future narrations but which already, at the moment, have an intrinsic inclination for narration or sufficient potential to become the bearers of narrations.

The difference between a thing and a *narrative object* lies not in the thing itself, but in the *narrative aura* that it catalyses.

The creation of narrations or potential narrations contained in a single frame seems, obviously to be a work which is complex, refined and, in many aspects, intangible. Just consider the requirements to be simultaneously met:

- the need to affirm an existing or potential conflict;
- the creation of a fiduciary pact with the person being narrated to;
- fixed a playing field;
- building a system of signs;
- knowing how to use metaphors, metonymies, tropes, etc;
- succeeding in proposing potential analogical charges, etc.

These are always very challenging tasks. Yet often, luckily, human creativity has managed to take them on. On numerous occasions instinctively guessing the rules of narration, elaborating them on the basis of previous experiences rather than studying them directly. But obviously, knowing and directly understanding the foundations of a discipline can greatly simplify the task.

Design, narration and cultural fruition

A field of investigation and application of design which sees narration as important design logic is the fruition of our cultural heritage. This is an area which has been marked by considerable transformation in recent years. One of the reasons for this change can be found in the relationship between work of art and user. The possibilities of replication that invest the value-related dynamics of contemporary art create new "conditions for use" which call upon the design world to convey form to new spaces and new models of fruition. The languages that best interpret this process are those that belong to new technologies: virtual, digital, multimedia and interactive technologies become territories for confrontation and experimentation, to arrive at organisational and communicational logics that require interdisciplinary skill for their direction in order to allow the experience of fruition to be a veritable event, and also to achieve technical specificity capable of controlling and fully exploiting the technological potentials. Often technology is what makes it possible to work on multiplying the level of communication by the work of art, generating a stratification of senses which allow increased knowledge, simultaneously enriching the visit by levering on the experience-oriented dimension. Consequently it is design of relation that becomes an important subject of study and innovation (Trocchianesi, 2009).

Considering the complexity of cultural fruition (which in this case we are looking at on a museum and territorial scale) and the interesting and variegated models that make up important project matter for possible variations on the theme in the future, it seems even more evident that the narrative paradigms can become a design tool, not only for the structure of fruition, but also in terms of languages and instruments at organisational, audiovisual, signage and technological levels. Dernie (2006) presents theories on three types of presentation space: *narrative space* which overcomes the exhibition model of the encyclopaedia to propose an itinerary developed into episodes with evident alternations of pauses, overviews and detailed close-ups; *performing space* which breaks free from a certain linearity of fruition to embrace associative logics, placing the visitor in a position to take an even more active part in the process, through the dynamics of "play" and "theatre". In this process, new technologies are called upon to surprise and perform the space and the relationship between work of art and subject; *simulated space* in which real and virtual dimensions sometimes overlap, evoking spaces, places and worlds that go beyond the architectural structure to open up completely to the intangible structure of new multimedia languages.

It seems interesting to flank this spatial interpretation with the new grammar of language and the new aesthetics of narration mentioned by Giovagnoli (2009), who focuses on the new narrations of the cross-media area which reformulate (in terms of form and content) the traditional story, touching the four fundamental functions of narrating fiction: *the narrative function* which we could interpret as that function that absolves the user's need to escape, taking him out of the real, everyday context

and projecting him into an extraordinary setting; *the Bardic function* in which the story becomes the mediator between the social and the fantastic components; *the ritualising function* which, in my opinion, opens the path of cultural design to an action that filters social and relational dynamics and, above all, to the communicative platforms and relative programming arrangements; *the modelling function* according to which a model of reality is built along with, in this case, a model of simplified fruition in order to intervene with innovative actions and verify their validity; and lastly, an interactive and articulated *totemic function* which closely relates the user with the cultural asset. This last function opens out onto complex problems related to the esoteric nature of the dynamics that require the exchange of contents (in the case of cultural fruition these contents are largely intangible, belonging to the sphere of knowledge). The term "totemic" also looks at the new narrations that use *mutant subjectivity* acting as mediating elements between the epic style of ancient narrative techniques and the new technologies which can also be found, unsurprisingly, in authentic totemic forms disseminated throughout the urban territory (cf. *Mondovì* case study presented in this document), and offering an interactive fruition to the visitor-citizen called upon to give an informal and unconventional opinion (communitarian and tribal to use definition closer to the area of anthropology and sociology), to be users of a collective and complex asset, as well as (often) producers of content, feeding a system of ongoing appropriation of the narration between equals.

It is no mere coincidence that, in the age of all thing temporary and "fluid", one of the most incisive instances of new narrations is dynamism, nomadic and inconstant fruition. This presumes a vast expansion of the narrative supports (along with a multiplication of languages and uses), meaning also the experimentation of devices which are *close* (sometimes attached) to the user (multifunction mobile phones, handheld computers, iPods, iPads, consoles...) which open up the way to new forms of narration and fruition in which timing, actions and the acquisition of new information unhinge traditional models and generate new behavioural dynamics.

The design-related practice of *storytelling* (Salmon, 2008) cohabits with the logics underlying the new definitions of narrative, experience-related and relational marketing.

Narrative paradigms

We are going to look at several case studies that propose interesting models of fruition of cultural assets (both on a museum scale and a territorial scale), which offer extensive scope for investigation and design in the link between cultural fruition and narrative infrastructures.

This link is a fertile ground for design and innovation, facing issues ranging from the need to increasingly personalise the cultural offer to suit different types of user, to the search for new communicative languages.

In particular, these cases are split into five paradigms of fruition, which correspond to five methods of design the relationship between cultural asset and user. The five worlds that are evoked as models from which to draw de-

sign guidelines and narrative dynamics are interaction, literature, theatre, play and film.

The interactive paradigm

These cases make it possible to focus on certain state of the art narrative methods: *fan fiction, brandstories, pods*. These are new narrative forms which implicate participation, made of stories created by individuals who conceive their stories and set them in big narrative frames. The main narrative instance of this type of story is *sharing*.

Theoorganiccity.com

Of particular interest is this web project which allows you to go on a journey inside America's urban contexts. Seated comfortably in your own home, you can choose a narrative style (comedy, horror, fantasy...) and begin an authentic experience through the suggestion of the story.

The Organic City uses new technologies to create a story world digital collaboration focused on the centre of Oakland and the areas around Lake Merritt.

The aim of the project is to link up the community through this communication channel where it is possible to find and tell local stories based on the identity and suggestion of the places (the project also offers other services which envisage the use of mobile multimedia readers and Pocket PCs).

In this context, the relationships between place, history and community are explored, starting with the components of identity and experience.

In a specific area of the website, it is possible to listen, tell or allow yourself to be taken around the town by the stories themselves (www.theoorganiccity.com)

The Experimental Witch

This case is not directly linked to the fruition of the cultural heritage, but is particularly significant as a participative model. It is a competition aimed at video makers, who are asked to reinterpret Paulo Coelho's *The Witch of Portobello*, telling the story from the viewpoint of one of the fifteen characters. The aim of the project is the creation of a mash-up movie using the combination of the fifteen best shorts chosen by the writer himself.

Hidden forest

This is a big family tree in the town of San Giuliano Milanese, established in 2009 by Matteo Balduzzi, Daniele Cologna and Stefano Laffi. The album is created using the treasures guarded in the family trees of the town's houses and families. The project involved five different districts, each one symbolising a decade of urban and social history from the Second World War to the present day. A container acts as a Temporary District Museum and is managed by ten young people, aged 16 to 24, from San Giuliano, who are responsible for meeting the local people, interviewing them and collecting photographs, writing up the interviews and filing all the material. This Museum-Container which travels from district to district

is made up of two parts. The first is a History Bar, a place to meet and talk, a place where stories are told and retold thanks to a laboratory-space in the back, equipped with a digital workstation to register and file the material. The second part is devoted to displaying the materials collected, creating a collective installation in progress, which lends visibility to the relationship between the stories, families, people and identity of the place (www.forestanascosta.net).

Narration museums

Narration museums (Studio Azzurro, 2010) propose the "display" of a cultural heritage which has a strong intangible component, via interactive and multimedia languages between documentary and performance. Not so much a presentation of the tangible object as of the story that surrounds it.

These museums are organised in such a way as to communicate to the visitor contents and concepts that would otherwise be hard to understand. They often exhibit stories, events, historical heritages and/or social issues. Where the objects displayed represent the theme related to the museum, they are not exhibited in a precise and "ascetic" way, but set in a historical or thematic context to reconstruct the original cultural environment. The aim is to propose just a few elements in spectacular, theatrical or conceptually structured contexts at museographic level and in terms of layout. The need to exhibit an intangible cultural heritage (historical events, collective memory, presentations of social problems, rites, trades...) or a selection of objects which have been handed down to us with a strong historical or aesthetic value, means ensuring that their arrangement, narrated via the languages of new technologies (with a strong multimedia and interactive component) succeeds in reviving, as though in a story, a particular period in time or the story of a specific social group. These experiences generate the idea of a museum as a *narrative habitat,* an active place of artistic experimentation and territory of the memory. The multimedia technologies used favour the experience-related approach; interactive languages enhance the value of the conditions of participation with the public and with the virtual communities.

Museums of this kind include the Museo Laboratorio della Mente (Rome, 2008), the Montagna in Movimento museum (Vinadio, 2007) and the Museo Audiovisivo della Resistenza (Fosdinovo, 2000), while the exhibitions include that dedicated to Fabrizio De André in the tenth anniversary of his death (Genoa, 2009), Transatlantici (Genoa, 2004) set up by the Museo del Mare to celebrate the city's nomination as European Capital of Culture.

The literary paradigm

The link between narration and literature is so immediate that it needs no explanation. However, there are cases in which the literary component forms the foundation for the project for fruition, insofar as the structure of the theme or of the story conveys meaning and shape to the exhibition (in the case of a museum) and to the cognitive space (in the urban case).

Kafka Museum, Prague

In this case, the "raw material" presented is the life of Kafka, starting from the pen of the man himself; it is his prose and his literary production that lend shape to the museum's thematic sections and which establish accents and rhythms in a multilingual layout which makes us of perspective tricks, photographs, diaries, letters, first editions, projections, notice boards, metaphysics and theatrics office furnishings featuring drawers that open up to show visitors "clues" relating to the author and the events of his life, wall-mounted telephones that ring and reveal unexpected audio stories. The visitor is inside the museum but also projected into the city: into the Prague narrated, described and experienced on the pages of his books, getting lost somewhere between the literary dimension and the urban dimension.

Urban Storytelling, Holden School

The Holden creative school of writing of Turin (which boasts prestigious teachers such as Alessandro Baricco and Gabriele Vacis) is active on various fronts regarding the enhancement of the value of the cultural heritage. In particular, it has given form to two different threads of research and design, based upon the narrative component: a system of writing for museum audio-guides strongly characterised by the theatrical-interpretative viewpoint (cf. exhibition entitled *Vittorio Alfieri. Aristocratico ribelle (1749-1803),* Turin 2004, dubbed by the actor Silvio Orlando); and a workshop section called *Urban Storytelling* aimed at young writers having to tackle the topic of the city, generating a system of stories starting from the observation and the direct experience of the urban dimension involved (writing workshop on the *Memoria di San Marino, Narrare le città: Raccontare Pisa, Raccontare Marsala* in which, for two days the city streets are transformed into a stage on which young writers tell the secret and collective memory of Marsala; *Raccontare Carbonia, Contos de Contai. Ogni storia è una miniera)* (www.scuolaholden.it/Projects/Narrare-citta.aspx).

The theatrical paradigm

The logics of the case studies related to this paradigm are based on narrative structures that refer to the theatrical dramatisation technique and the theatrical interpretation, conveying a significant and unconventional characterisation of "staging" to the fruition.

Mp3 Mondovì. Podcasting for customised itineraries

This project (Bollo, 2008b) began in two prototype phases in July 2008. It is a podcasting system for customised itineraries in the area of Mondovì and the Monregalese district, developed by the Fitzcarraldo Foundation, Turin University and local actors.

It involves a system of interactive multimedia totems located throughout the territory which distribute stories. The "story dispensers", created to a design which reflects and reinterprets the shapes of the petrol pumps immortalised by Edward Hopper in the 1940s, inform and allow the free transferral of digital audio files that tell of places of artistic historical interest, suggesting itineraries to be explored and telling a story that goes back almost a thousand years. The stories tell of the often unknown characters and heritage of baroque Mondovì, of the neighbouring areas where it is possible to listen to the voices of pilgrims on the road to the Sanctuary of Vicoforte or of smugglers climbing along the Ellero valley, one of the most important medieval Salt Trails. During this first experimental phase, two dispensers have been set up: one travelling dispenser (which visits various boroughs within the territory during events and festivals, as well as tourist destinations linked to winter and mountain tourism), and one permanently installed at the arrival point of the Cable Way that links the lower part of Mondovì (Breo) with the higher part (Piazza).

The creation of MP3 Mondovì was encouraged by specific basic requirements: first of all, the identification of innovative narrative methods to evoke the elements of historical-cultural attraction of the two old parts of the town of Mondovì and their relationship with the neighbouring territory, which accompany the tourist and the resident on the exploration of itineraries, places and landscapes linked to the baroque heritage and enriched by information of aspects – some of which significant, others simple anecdotes – of the history and stories of Mondovì. There was also the intention of testing technological solutions (podcasting, interactive totems, mobile devices such as mp3 players and mobile phones) capable of guaranteeing the maximum degree of freedom, flexibility and ease of use by potential users of the system (presumably with differing needs, reasons for visiting and familiarity with technological devices). The technology created allows those interested to download the itineraries described directly onto their portable devices (mp3 player, I-POD, Creative or multimedia phone) linking up "to the story dispensers". Anyone can download the audio files free of charge, without restrictions, by connecting their mp3 player to the plugs that "protrude" from the body of the totem, or using Bluetooth technology.

Storytelling, the product of a joint and widely interdisciplinary effort between the various members of the project team, has been conceived as a voluntary detachment from the usual stylistic and content-based timbres of the classic audio-guide to pursue the form of a story told by several voices – destructed, ironic and sometimes a little surreal – aimed at restoring suggestions, fragments of conversation which open up the way to possible readings and interpretations of the territory and of the key characters that have moulded it.

Errare Audio Walk

This is an innovative audio-guide (produced by Fandango) which takes the visitor on an unusual journey through the centre of the city of Parma. The visitor is "guided" by the narrating voice of a character which encourages affection for the place and also envisages the possibility of getting lost due to an unconventional route.

Audio walk is just that, a walk accompanied by a soundtrack which consists in a sort of travelling show in which the real actor is the lone spectator. During the Audio-Walk the spectator-actor is required to go to the departure point, where he/she will be given a portable CD player and earphones. When he/she presses the start button, the sound track, made up of dialogue, sounds and music that create a theatrical composition under development, closely linked to the city's architecture, will begin. The spectator is guided by precise instructions, issued by the main character of the soundtrack who acts as "guide", against the background of the city's monuments and buildings, along a predetermined itinerary that tells a story (www.audiowalk.it).

The playful paradigm

This method of fruition links the literary theme to the play theme, implicating the visitor in a "hypertextual course" which accompanies him/her to the various levels of knowledge of the cultural asset in question.

WhaiWhai

The WhaiWhai project of the Italian company LOG607, is a tourist-play guide which exploits the use of mobile phones to encourage visitors to become involved in a narrative experience of a town. The hardcopy tourist guide is structured as a series of stories with mixed up pages (each page is split into three separate parts). They can only be restored to their correct order thanks to the clues sent by text message in the form of "riddles", allowing visitors to continue the game.

WhaiWhai recently launched an application for i-Phone which allows visitors to play the same game without the use of the hardcopy guide, based exclusively on the use of the smartphone (www.whaiwhai.com).

Gonzaga Chronicles. Errant narrations with eight mysteries (by R. Trocchianesi, E. Giunta)

This is a project for a system-product to enhance the value of a network of historical shops in Mantua city centre and several artistic-architectural emergencies by means of a system of artefacts made up of a game (cards and rules of the game), an audio-guide (with 8 soundtracks) and signs next to the shops. The aim of the game is to encourage a themed and involving shopping experience, allowing visitors to explore the city from a commercial and cultural point of view. The eight cards, which correspond to eight urban itineraries (traced and narrated by a specially dramatised audio-guide) represent characters, rites and values that are part of the city's history.

The film paradigm

This model of narrative fruition uses film as the main element of the museum itineraries proposed below. In these cases, the visitor's involvement is created by a form of storytelling in themed episodes, with precise scenic timing.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC, 1993 (R. Appelbaum Associates)

This museum layout bypasses the purely chronological order to propose a narrative sequence made up of objects and artefacts that tell the story of everyday lives. The tone is tragic, dictated by the dramatic nature of the theme and of the historical events. Consequently the environments, arranged into "three acts" (like a real play) have high-impact titles: the space-incipit is entitled *Terror begins*, and the visit proceeds through the three floors in which the space that corresponds to the three acts is articulated: *Nazi assault, Final solution and Last chapter*. The layout uses different languages in an anguishing climax in which everyday objects and photographs belonging to thousands of normal people create a sense of identification in visitors who, to increase the feeling of involvement, are crammed into metal lifts and given a "passport".

Expedition Titanic, Hamburg 1997 (by Atelier Bruckner with Gotz Schulz, Haas –Architekten)

In this layout too, the sense of involvement is based on the creation of a direct contact between the visitor and the people who lived through the tragic experience of the sinking of the Titanic. The first "scene" shows the model of the ship, theatrically lit up, focusing on the most feral part of the ship: the hold. This brings visitors immediately into contact with the private and intimate dimension of the passengers. The central narrative element of this project is the creation of five heroic figures, five passengers who may or may not survive, who accompany the user during the visit, creating an "affectionate" relationship with him/her. The texts are based on real stories. A central corridor leads to the various moments-spaces of the story: *Arrival on board, Life on board, the Tragedy, the Rescue,* ending with a long closing topic *The room of silence and legend*.

Brand design and narrative characters

The development process of a brand can be likened to the process of construction of a narrative character. In both processes the "narrative" power of the construction of meanings and that of "staging" interweave in an inseparable and fecund way.

This likening has naturally useful consequences in terms of the development of methodologies. In this sense, certain indications come from the English-speaking countries, where branding as a discipline originated and has undergone the most florid development.

Morphological studies of narration and knowledge encoded particularly by that powerful process-building machine that is the film industry, are still full of stimuli and offer space for further re-elaborations useful to the purposes of this convention.

What follows is the summary of certain reflections ensuing from personal research into the sphere of narrative sources and from tangible applications in the context of projects developed for Milan Polytechnic and for Robilant

& Associati. The last part, which describes the process of tangible application of narrative instruments to the development of a brand, is strongly linked to the vision of the profession of brand-designer and to the approach to design matured within the sphere of professional activities at Robilant & Associati.

The construction of narrative characters

As highlighted by Robert McKee (2001), doyen of American screenwriting, the construction of the characters in the narration of fiction has witnessed the consolidation of two methodological approaches:

- a "random" approach triggered by casual data: an impression given in a car, a fashion photo, a peculiar verbal expression recorded by a sensitive writer, trigger the phantasmagorical mechanism that gives life to the character;
- an "industrial" approach, based on the use of "unfinished products of the imagination": "archetypes", figures that have always populated the myths of all cultures, are the basis for the construction of powerful characters, the energy of which crosses space and time.

We can add to these approaches that suggested by McKee and strongly sustained by other theorists such as the Hungarian Lajos Egri (2010), based on the sincere and passionate observation of Self for the identification of those deeply human characteristics that link everyone all over the world, that determine our behaviour and allow us to understand and describe others.

Among the three criteria mentioned, the "industrial" approach seems to be the most "promising" to those of us who work on the construction of transmissible methods, which have the power to facilitate and inspire the designer's creativity.

As highlighted by Jung, the original reference for much of the theory of "archetypes", commonly referred to as personal unconscious, "rests on a deeper layer, which doesn't derive from personal experiences and acquisitions and is innate. This deeper layer is the so-called collective unconscious" (Jung, 1977). The collective unconscious is populated by archetypes "determined forms present in the psyche of each of us in all times and all places".

Deep down examination inside ourselves or the meticulous and empathic observation of those around us draw, in the end, on those same deep and collective structures of being that we call archetypes.

The use of the archetypes of cinematographic narration[2]

The application of the archetypical figures as seen by Jung to cinematographic narration has found its main ref-

erence in Chris Vogler (1999), story analyst for the American majors.

"Struck", to use his own words, by the studies of religion and comparative mythology of Joseph Campbell and by his book entitled *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1973), Vogler analyses the structure of the legend as a reading key and design tool for the stories of literary and film heroes. He builds up the so-called "theory of the hero's journey", which identifies certain universally traceable "legs" in the heroic adventure that forms the basis of every story.

He also defines certain basic figures, deriving from Jung's archetypes, functions embodied in every story by the different characters:

- Hero: The character that moves the story, undertaking a physical or mental journey.
- Mentor: The guide who helps, trains or teaches the hero.
- Threshold Guardian: he puts the hero to the test, setting obstacles in his way and reawakening his inner demons. He leads him back to his "emotional wounds", vices, dependences, self-imposed limits and neuroses.
- Herald: He announces the start of the adventure, imminent change, and the fact that it is necessary.
- Shapeshifter: He changes shape, disguises himself, sowing doubts and creating suspense. He is a catalyser for change and his changing behaviour is at the service of the story.
- Shadow: In general he is the antagonist of the hero. He sheds light on unexpressed negative tendencies and places him in danger.
- Trickster: He is the sidekick providing goliardic moments. He creates difficulties, reshuffles problems by expanding or spreading conflict, but also offers moments of relaxation and comedy before a feat. He is the enemy of the status quo, of hypocrisy and egocentricity.

Vogler's classification is flexible, "fluid" and universal: each of the figures can be embodied by one or more characters and each character can embody one or more functions, although each one usually has a main function.

The figures/forces are as broad and general as to be present at all time, all together in any story, in the form of physical characters or inner and metaphoric pulses. Each figure hides further archetypes, and behind each hero there is a "fertile field to be explored" according to the words of the author.

In subsequent theories used by authors and screenwriters, the figure of the hero has been more amply articulated and broken down, with the definition of more characterised archetypes, through the attributes of specific gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines of ancient myths and legends. In this way, we have moved on to the

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[2] For the sake of "narrative economy" the decision was made to omit the passionate examination of the morphological analysis of myths and fables (Propp, 2000) and to refer exclusively to the subsequent re-elaboration of the studies carried out by the narration of fiction, and particularly to writing for film, particularly close to the context of brand design due to the "industrial" set-up of the sector and the need to orchestrate and coordinate a variety of media and professionals.

construction of veritable catalogues of characters, with increasingly precise and less flexible contours[3].

Archetypes in the construction of the character-brand

Moving on the sphere of branding, pioneers of the application of archetypes are Carol Pearson (psychiatrist and former scholar of the application of archetypes in the field of social psychology) and Margaret Mark (brand strategist), authors of "The Hero and the Outlaw".
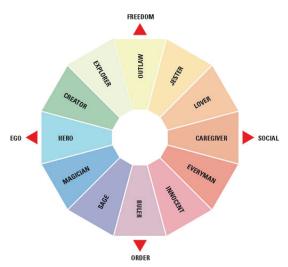

Figure 1. The axes and archetypes defined by Pearson and Marks (1999) in the re-elaboration by Jansen (2006).

From the analysis of the motivational theories of Maslow, Erickson, Kegan and Wilbur, the writers identify certain constant directions, which articulate human needs into 4 polarities: freedom/order, independence/social belonging.

This develops a pair of correlation axes which, in a rush of (slightly rash) enthusiasm, define the "first system of management of meaning" (Pearson and Marks, 1999).

The system was accepted (albeit with some reticence) and disseminated by advertising experts like Geoff Howard Spink (2002, 2003), chairman of Immedia Communications, and its testimonials include managers of "legendary" companies like Nike and Starbucks.

More recent texts by international brand scholars have presented some reflections or reinterpretations, replacing or rearranging certain archetypes (Wertime, 2002; Eberl *et al.,* 2007).

Meanwhile, in the blogs of creative experts who – in a limited number – resort to the use of "brand archetyping", debates ensure as to whether or not it is appropriate to aggregate this or that figure, and personal visions of "archetypical wheels" are presented[4].

The myths, fables and legends of all cultures prove how archetypes do not form a rigid system, but rather an eternal, yet fluid and live matter, which is remixed constantly. As Durand, father of *archetypology* remembers,

uniting the claims of numerous social psychologists, "the constancy of archetypes is not represented by a dot in the imaginary space, but by a *direction*" (Durand, 2009).

It is in identifying *great directions and methods of convergence* (the system of axes, in the case of Pearson and Marks), rather than in "archetypical catalogues" that, in my opinion, the most versatile and precious contribution for a designer in terms of "professional instrumentation" lies.

Whether you use the axes of Pearson and Marks, the still actual Voglers *functions or great determinants* deriving directly from social sciences, they must be considered as *compasses* that lead us towards imaginary regions: once we have reached them, we have to consider them exclusively as portions in which to take samples, to access the endless and passionate repertory of metaphors placed at the disposal of the designer by legendary and mythological stories, by the *fables* of every country and every time.

For these tools to be effective, it is necessary for the designer to become an avid and assiduous user of stories, by reading books and watching films, listening to oral narrations and observing people. In this way, it is possible to build up a constantly full and new reservoir of knowledge which is not immediately applied, friendly pictures and figures which can be used during his "immersions" in the imaginary world.

It is important for him to enter into contact with "as many different pictures as possible", which stimulate and constantly feed his potential in terms of images and don't cause him to become rutted in definite signs, so that, as recommended by Bergson to the writer-philosopher (Bergson, 2001), "the *sign eliminates the sign*, so that signing and metaphors do not intellectually accumulate, taking up space for everything but the intuition of what is real".

The brand development process

The application of archetypical tools to the process of construction of the brand-character imposes certain details.

If it is true that the brand is an artificial creature, it is also true that it is the projection of a real, composite and delicate creature, which is the company.

The grafting onto a company of a brand which is incompatible with the company's DNA is an operation which implicates definite rejection in the long term. In the best case, it imposes a continuous retouching of the "make-up" with extensive investment: starting from the real identity of the company and not from an abstract desire is fundamental in order for the branding activity to be sustainable.

In this sense, the brand development process is exactly the same as that of a natural organism.

The form and dimension of the brand depend first and foremost on its "genes". Next they are conditions and largely determined by the environment.

With the opportunism typical of nature, a brand will stretch out its branches in the direction of the sun, moulding its shape on the space available in the forest of other brands.

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[3] Examples are: *45 Master Characters* by Lynn Schmidt (2001) or *The Complete Writer's Guide to Heroes and Heroines* by Cowden (2000), *Bullies, Bastards And Bitches*: *How To Write The Bad Guys Of Fiction* by Morrell (2008).

[4] We refer mainly to the debates on the following blogs visited on 18/07/2010: http://www.internettmarkedsforing.no; http://visual-branding.com/eight-outlines/creating-a-brand-personality/; http://fortyagency.com/expertise/20-brand-archetypes

It might even leap out of a lake, transforming itself from fish to amphibian when necessary, but the structure has to have the appropriate "exaptations" (Gould and Vrba, 2008)[5].

The first step to take in the construction of a brand is an in-depth analysis of the business organism: an analysis which is both internal (exploring experiences, events, the approach to the market and the opinions on the world of a representative group of the company thought-action) and external (it compares this experience with the image that the company projects through its communication tools and with the opinion of "expert users"), synchronic (comparing the company with its current competitors) and diachronic (examining the "company biography", the events that have built it up as an entity over time and the changes that look set to characterise its future).

Going back to the narrative metaphor, we can say that this investigation reveals the "subject" of the company's history or what Dara Marks, one of America's favourite story editors, calls the "theme", i.e.: the subject accompanied by the intention, of the point of view on the world by its author, which reflects personal values[6].

The process described sees the company simultaneously as author of its own theme (naturally thanks to the "inspirational" contribution of the brand designer) and character in the story which, together with other brands in its own and other sectors, it interprets in the consumer's mind.

From the definition of the theme and the analysis of the reference market context, the brand designer may, via a creative and research-based activity, trace one or more archetypes in the vast stretches of the collective imagination, capable of expressing the theme of the company and, at the same time, offering a good orchestration with respect to the antagonistic and allied brand-characters.

The brand designer will give the archetypical connotations identified a singular and unrepeatable form, alchemically enhancing the seeds found in the narrative stores explored with the unique features of the company and its environment.

In this sense, the role of the brand-designer is similar to that of the screenwriter, who elaborates the theme, making it visible, distinguishable and comprehensible, by dividing it into scenes, dialogues, settings and indications on the actions of the characters and their personalities; everything that can be of help in managing the direction.

The brand designer does not convey an image alone to the company, but a character and a 3D status. The archetypical profile identified, when sincerely shared and embraced by the company, is expressed through the action, informing the organisational profile, and its relationship with employees. The archetypical theory can also be used (and is used) in the organisational and managerial field.

Like the hero of any narration, the company's action has an external aim – its mission – and an "inner" aim – the project aimed at its people – which, in the best case, proceed parallel in its story, nourishing each other.

In this way the analogical circle is closed, generating a virtuous convergence between branding and company management. This last adventure, however, is still all to be faced, at least in the field of my direct experimentation.

Conclusions

The meaning of this paper, involving different and interdisciplinary competencies belonging to the areas of humanities and design, apart from showing the need for continuous dialogue and confrontation, enlightens the design vocation for direction and screenwriting. Design "qualifies" itself - in a more and more sophisticated way – as a builder of meaning and value, an innovator of shape and functions and an expert of the mise-en-scene.

The almost "irreverent" distance between the presented sectors of application – the development of commercial brands on one side and the valorisation of cultural heritage on the other side, aims at underlining the richness and fertility of this dialogue.

In an era when the perception of a brand, the purchase of a good or the cultural fruition have to turn into memorable events not to get lost, the narrative dimension becomes an essential design driver.

At the same time, design, which is always interpretating new languages and, in the course of its interpretational experimentations, creates newer languages, can offer new tools to narration or open new roots within narratological studies.

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[5] Gould, palaeontologist and historian of science, used the term exaptations to define the "characters that now increase the possibility of survival of organisms but which have not been moulded by natural selection for their current role".

[6] We consider the subject as the first draft of the idea of a film, the extreme synthesis of the event to be told. The theme is the subject, accompanied by its thematic intention, the "unequivocal voice of the author, his personal point of view and, above all, what his personal values reflect" (e.g.: "The Dead Poets Society": subject= to become men; theme = to grasp the moment/become the masters of our lives). The theme is "what conveys meaning to the activity of the plot and an end to the movement of the characters". [...] "The construction of the character starting with the thematic intention will make the story much more complex, interesting and honest on an emotional level" (Marks, 2007). This concept can be likened to the definition of "business talent" promoted by Robilant & Associati, corresponding to that indivisible link between essence and potential, identity and message carried by a company in a so-called "natural" way.

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