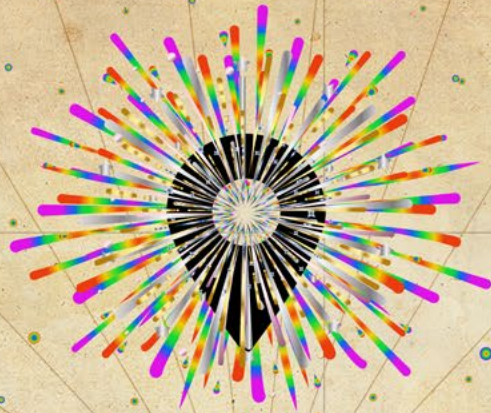


MAP YOUR STORY



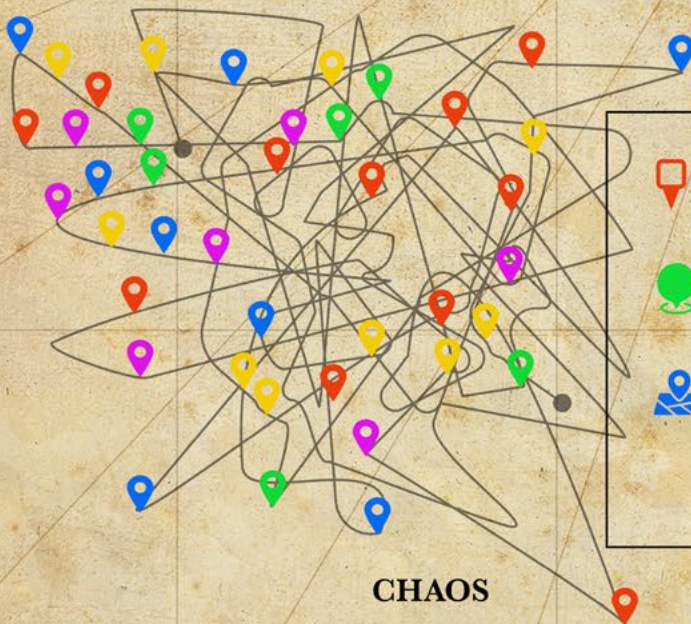
LANDSCAPE



FORCE

NONTRADITIONAL PLOT STRUCTURES

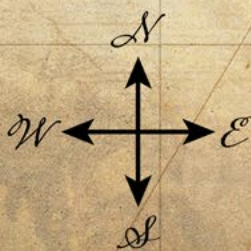
for neurodiverse writers



CHAOS



INFORMATION



MARGIE PIGNATARO

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PUBLISHING

NEURODIVERSE • GLBTQI+ • NONTRADITIONAL



Non-Traditional Plot Structures for Neurodiverse Writers

Margie Pignataro

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Non-Traditional Plot Structures for Neurodiverse Writers

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If you'd like to discuss this ebook, go to the [Nontraditional Plot Structures for Neurodiverse Writers](#) Discord group.



NONTRADITIONAL PLOT STRUCTURES FOR NEURODIVERSE WRITERS

Born from a rejected dissertation proposal and reworked over the course of 15 years into a compelling exploration of narrative, Nontraditional Plot Structures for Neurodiverse Writers challenges conventional storytelling norms. This free ebook delves into how nontraditional plot structures resonate with neurodiverse writers, offering creative frameworks that align with their artistic and intellectual strengths—traits often mislabeled as obstacles.

Through engaging diagrams and dozens of links to free resources, this book examines storytelling across diverse mediums, from Oedipus the King to Squid Game, spanning novels, poetry, visual arts, television, film, theater, and even commercials. The Mona Lisa and “Little Red Riding Hood” provide illustrated and to textual examples of each plot structure. Whether you’re a writer seeking fresh approaches or an artist questioning traditional narratives, this guide provides valuable insights into storytelling beyond the expected.

This ebook lays the groundwork for a forthcoming second edition, arriving next year, which will expand upon these ideas with deeper textual analyses, practical exercises, and hands-on guidance to help you craft your own unique narratives.



Belly Dancing Lisa will be in the second edition.

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focused organization

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high creativity

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The Second Edition



*Lion King Lisa
will be in the second
edition.*

INTRODUCTION

WHY AM I WRITING THIS BOOK?

The genesis of these ideas came from a dissertation proposal I wrote almost 15 years ago. I was pursuing a theater theory/history/criticism and playwriting PhD at Texas Tech University. I researched my dissertation for two years, building the core of my theory on cognitive metaphors from the book [*Philosophy in the Flesh*](#) by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

The head of my committee read my proposal¹ and responded by email. He declared that my concept was “stupid”. He refused to be on my committee if I pursued this. I panicked and had a meltdown. Yet, I wrote a new proposal in a week about horror and nontraditional theater. It was a subject and theory I hadn’t been researching and cobbled together at the last minute.

My committee head read my new proposal and was very pleased. He was ready to go forward.

I dropped out of the program not long after. I refused to get a dissertation with a proposal I threw together so quickly and easily.

I was a difficult, stubborn student. I always have been.

Reading that my proposal was “stupid” was devastating. When a professor of that caliber insulted something I’d spent two years working on, it nearly broke me and cowed me into submission. It took me years to return these concepts, but when I did, I realized I do have something.

My professor was wrong. This is not stupid.

I do not want other writers or artists to have to endure what I did. I wrote in solitude for many years with no one to offer feedback. When I finally did have a community with which to share my work (theater), the feedback was polarized. Professors were confused at best and insulting at worst. I was confused and frustrated and angry. I was also undiagnosed neurodivergent.

I do not want others to be in that painful position. This book is free for that reason. I hope it can help and offer some kind of comfort or excitement.

I have studied nontraditional storytelling across all arts, and I can now discuss and understand them in an organized philosophy. I’ve written bits and pieces on [Instagram](#) in posts, demonstrating these ideas and have had a very encouraging response.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THIS BOOK AND WHAT WILL BE IN THE NEXT

This short book is going to be a brief overview of this theory, despite it being so long (I was relieved when it didn’t expand past 144 pages). Engineers, I’ve been told, always think of backups for the backups.

¹ In the spirit of full disclosure, I have included the original proposal in the [Appendix](#).

I applied that here with my examples and explanations. I have the initial diagram illustrating each structure, accompanied with a textual description. Then I interpret each structure visually using the Mona Lisa, and finally taking the story of Little Red Riding Hood and reconstructing it in the form of each structure. Following this, I analyze three to four examples of the use of each plot in novels, poetry, plays, television, movies, video games, sculpture, etc.

I have also provided descriptions of common terms every writer knows, twice delving deeply into the term's etymological past. I am not doing this because I think writers need this explained. I'm doing this so we are all on the same page and using the same vocabulary in the same way. I also want to demonstrate my own learning and understanding. I want readers to know that I know what I'm talking about (and call me out when I actually *don't know* what I'm talking about).

In 2026, I'll publish a second of this book. It will be a longer version (likely 350-400 pages) encompassing my entire theory, including its origins in cognitive metaphor and emotion. Each plot included here will be further developed, including discussions of variations of each structure, and explain exactly how they work together.

The next edition will have more, such as Creation and Destruction, Coitus, and Time. I will also have an arcane collection of plot structures that I will refer to, at this time, as "Quantum". These structures will truly embrace the full label of "experimental" because many have been untried. These are my speculations based on what I've observed and learned throughout my education. These Quantum plots *should work*, so I will conduct experiments to see if they do.

I will also have in depth analyses of texts; I will copy/paste entire stories or long passages and annotate them, following exactly how the plot structures work.

I will break down each plot diagram and label each point in the same way the Journey diagram has labeled (inciting incident, climax, etc.).

I will have exercises for developing and implementing these structures and how to spot them in your own writings. I will also include writing exercises I did in grad school that I found extremely beneficial.

I'm focusing this book primarily toward writers, but it should appeal to other artists as well. In fact, I use all of the arts to illustrate these ideas.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I wouldn't recommend attempting to apply any of these ideas as you're writing. Rather, read whatever interests you in this book. I've constructed the text so the reader may comfortably jump around. So, read what you find interesting and then forget about it for a while. Then, write something or continue writing. Or read. Reading is always beneficial, even if it's the list of contents on a Twinkie wrapper.

When you're finished with a draft, or need to stop writing for whatever reason, put the draft away for a few days. Or longer. (I've put texts away for over 10 years.) Maybe go through this book again. When you want to write again, return to your text and see what you see.

This book isn't meant to be a list of "Thou Shalts" and "Thou Shalt Nots". Do not use this as a guide. This is a list of options to keep in the back of your mind.

TRIGGER WARNING

Most of the quotes I include should not require trigger warnings. The full text of Antonin Artaud's [Spurt of Blood](#) is cartoonishly graphic. Some of the full original texts, for which I provide links, do require warnings for the following: sexism, racism, homophobia, profanity, violence, graphic sexual situations, and mutilation. I give an extra-special warning for anything by [Sarah Kane](#); her works require all trigger warnings with the exceptions of bestiality and cannibalism.

I feel I should also warn the reader about the presence of [trigonometry](#). It is, of course, optional reading.

I will also swear. When I do so, it is with great purpose. They are the only words that can express what I want to express.

H. P. LOVECRAFT

The longest section in this book is a Landscape analysis of [H. P. Lovecraft's The Shadow over Innsmouth](#). Lovecraft is a controversial and problematic author. He was racist, xenophobic, and misogynistic. He openly supported black lynchings and admired Hitler. It is a great misfortune that his stories reflect these ideas. The stories cast anyone who wasn't white and Christian as sources of evil and abominations. As for his misogyny, women are almost always used in utilitarian positions or as brood mares for Cthulhu-ian monsters to mutate the white race. Other than that, women are strikingly absent: they are non-entities.

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" is the flagship for Lovecraft's racism. It's so appalling in its use of Caribbean natives as avenues of evil that it's almost comic. But, the story is a masterpiece. It's an incredible example of subtle, creeping horror and I've read it several times analyzing every word. I include it for this reason. I will not apologize for Lovecraft, nor will I make excuses. What he does in "Innsmouth", though, is too brilliant to be erased. It can teach us so much more than xenophobia, racism, misogyny, and fear and hatred of any religion that isn't Christianity.

A Vox article, ["Lovecraftian horror — and the racism at its core — explained"](#), by Aja Romano explains the history of Lovecraft, his racism, and offers ways of approaching and processing his texts without erasing them. Essentially, we should not forget their deeply offensive ideas and embrace re-imagining them, essentially, in fan fiction.

AI

I painstakingly constructed this ebook, page by page, using Adobe InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, Express. Colors, images, and fonts all have come from the Adobe store houses of Adobe Color, Adobe Stock, and Adobe Fonts.

I used Adobe AI to construct vector graphics and to augment images. Adobe does not pull materials from the internet to train its AIs: "Adobe Firefly, our family of generative AI models, is trained only on licensed content, including assets submitted to Adobe Stock." ([Content Credentials generative AI training and usage preference](#))




How Do THESE PLOT STRUCTURES HELP NEURODIVERSE WRITERS?

This book focuses on neurodiverse writers, but there's no reason why it shouldn't help neurotypical writers, too. The structures I'm discussing are universal. But neurodivergent writers would find them especially helpful because it is an easy and clear way to look at a plot structure and find structures that are comfortable and instinctively understandable.

I approach this theory from the prospective of being a writer with level one autism and combined ADHD. This could skew my interpretation at times, and I welcome observations of such. To be as simple and clear as possible, I'll use this chart for the neurodiverse traits with which I'll be discussing these plots.

Neurodiverse Traits

Common traits associated with neurodiversities
dyslexia, ADHD, autism, OCD, tourette syndrome, ABI, and more



<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advanced communication skills in explaining and story-telling• Artistic creativity• Attention control• Attention to detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Estimating measurements• Executive functioning differences• Hyperactivity• Hypersensitivity• Hyposensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pathological demand avoidance• Pattern recognition• Preference for non-linear thoughts• Preoccupation with control• Preoccupation with organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social differences• Social interaction difficulties• Social situations difficulties• Spatially gifted or challenged• Special interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenges with direction• Challenges with learning• Challenges with memory• Challenges with organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Imagination differences• Impulsivity• Inattention• Inconsistent spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preoccupation with perfectionism• Processing differences• Recalling math facts• Remembering numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stimming• Strong skills in exploring• Struggles with daily living skills• Theory of mind differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenges with planning• Cognitive flexibility or flexible thinking• Communication difficulties• Complex problem-solving skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased understanding of verbal information• Intense emotional experiences• Intense focus• Lack of phonemic awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repetitive behavior that interferes with daily life• Repetitive unwanted thoughts that interfere with daily life• Sensitive to light	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thinking outside the box memory variations• Time blindness• Trouble following written instructions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehending math logic• Connecting numbers with words• Difficulty with time management• Difficulty writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Language abilities• Left - right disorientation• Letter reversals• Low frustration threshold	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensitive to noise• Sensitive to taste• Sensitive to temperature• Sensitive to texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding math quantities and concepts• Unique gender and sexual orientation experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disturbed coordination• Echolalia• Emotional and energy regulation• Empathy and justice-orientated mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mentally picture three-dimensional (3D) objects or situations• Mind blindness• Need for movement breaks• Obsessive interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensitive to touch• Sensory distinctions• Slow reading• Slow speaking• Slow writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Varying aptitude in math• Varying aptitude in technology• Weak central coherence• Working memory challenges

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We share many of these traits, despite having specific diagnoses. I will focus describing these plot structures in terms of the characteristics themselves. I will refrain from using labels such as “autism” and “ADHD”.

- **ATTENTION:** *hyperactivity, impulsivity, distractibility, inattention, attention control*
- **SENSORY ISSUES:** *Disturbed coordination, hypersensitivity, hypo-sensitivity, sensitive to light, noise, taste, temperature, texture, touch, sensory distinctions*
- **EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING DIFFERENCES:** *inhibiting behavior, adulting, challenges with planning, impulsivity, hyperactivity, difficulty with time management, time blindness, struggles with daily living skills, working memory challenges*
- **SOCIAL SKILLS:** *not understanding social cues/ behaviors, social differences, social interaction difficulties*
- **HYPERFOCUS:** *intense interests, info dumping, special interests, intense focus, obsessive interests*
- **EMOTION REGULATION:** *intense emotional experiences*

All of these “disadvantages” are advantages. We think differently, but our thinking isn’t wrong. We should not have to cram our artistic creations into a square box if we are shaped like a star. We need to tell stories the way that our brains feel comfortable telling them. We need to follow our instincts.

For contrast, these are the obvious “advantages” of neurodiversity:

- *Artistic creativity*
- *Attention to detail*
- *Advanced communication skills in explaining and story-telling*
- *Cognitive flexibility or flexible thinking*
- *Complex problem-solving skills*
- *Empathy and justice-oriented mindset*
- *Imagination differences*
- *Increased understanding of verbal information*
- *Intense focus*
- *Mentally picture 3D objects or situations*
- *Pattern recognition*
- *Language abilities*
- *Obsessive interests*
- *Strong skills in exploring*
- *Theory of mind differences*
- *Thinking outside the box memory variations*

Our advantages give us the intellectual and creative opportunities to create art that is fascinating and comfortable for us.

I’ll take these characteristics one by one, or group when helpful, and explain the conflict neurodivergent authors have with writing.

ATTENTION/CRAVING NEW EXPERIENCES

If ANYONE understands how attention works, and how fast it can shift it’s someone who’s neurodivergent. Someone with hyperactivity can write something that will move quickly with extremely

interesting moments because it's what they want to experience as an audience member. Chaos, Dada, Question, and Object plot structures work well with this.

SENSORY ISSUES

Our senses feel intensified, sometimes to uncomfortable or painful levels. This is an asset when constructing stories. A sense can become a character. Could I be assaulted by the smell of rotting garbage? Can a character have a fist fight with the smell of rotting garbage? This works with Object, Chaos, and Dada.

EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

Writing something enormous, such as a novel, can be daunting because of all the details involved. Inventing a story with dozens of characters, who also have recognizable psychology, and all must have a goal, this can feel like an overwhelming burden. Much of it can be uninteresting, yet "necessary for the plot". We may stop in the middle of writing something because we no longer know what to do, or worse, don't care anymore.

So be simple. Be so simple that the events in a story are easy to remember. The Landscape, Cycle, Object, Dada, and Chaos plots work well with this approach.

Also, be complicated. Make the details as multifaceted as a handful of glitter. The more glitter you have the more hyper and intense the story can become. Chaos and Dada works well with this. Also, Information also does well because the focus is almost entirely on the organization of information. That's much simpler conceptually, and many of us love both information and organization.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Yes, not having social skills can be an issue if one wishes to blend in (which we all work to do because we've been given little choice). But blending and masking in itself is a fascinating and a powerful skill. Not only do we understand how to hide, but we also know how to layer, and juggle the layers like balls. Masking characters can create such interesting and provocative entities. We understand instinctively how contradiction can play a massive role in social interactions. **Aristotle said character is action, but our masking, neurodivergent selves understand that we are not necessarily built from our actions.** This plot structure would work well with Ritual, Portrait, and Chaos.

However, social skills can be difficult, and basic conversations with people can be torture. Neurodiverse writers may feel more comfortable avoiding direct character interaction and dialogue. Chaos, Landscape, Dada, Object, Consumption, and Force offer possibilities for writing stories that are less psychologically focused.

HYPERFOCUS

Infodumping. This is at the heart of the Information plot structure. Sculpting information into a plot



"Object permanence is the understanding that objects continue to exist despite being out of sight. In the context of ADHD, this term is used colloquially to describe how individuals with ADHD can easily forget about tasks, events, or items that are not immediately visible or stimulating." Author: [Andrea Brognano, LMHC, LPC, NCC.](#)

is essentially the soul of murder mysteries and Question plots. Criticism of infodumping resides in the infodumper is “boring”, going on and on about subjects in detail no one is interested in. The Information plot is your gateway to dumping everything you want. If someone infodumps on a subject no one should be interested in (for me, in grad school, it was Elizabethan staging practices), the problem isn’t the information. The problem is the structure of the information and how it’s being delivered. **If you’re obsessed about a subject, there’s a reason for it. What appeals to you will appeal to others, if you know how to convey it.**

EMOTION DYSREGULATION

The Journey plot structure, the most traditional structure we know and use, makes psychologically realistic characters a priority. If audiences cry, it’s a badge of honor.

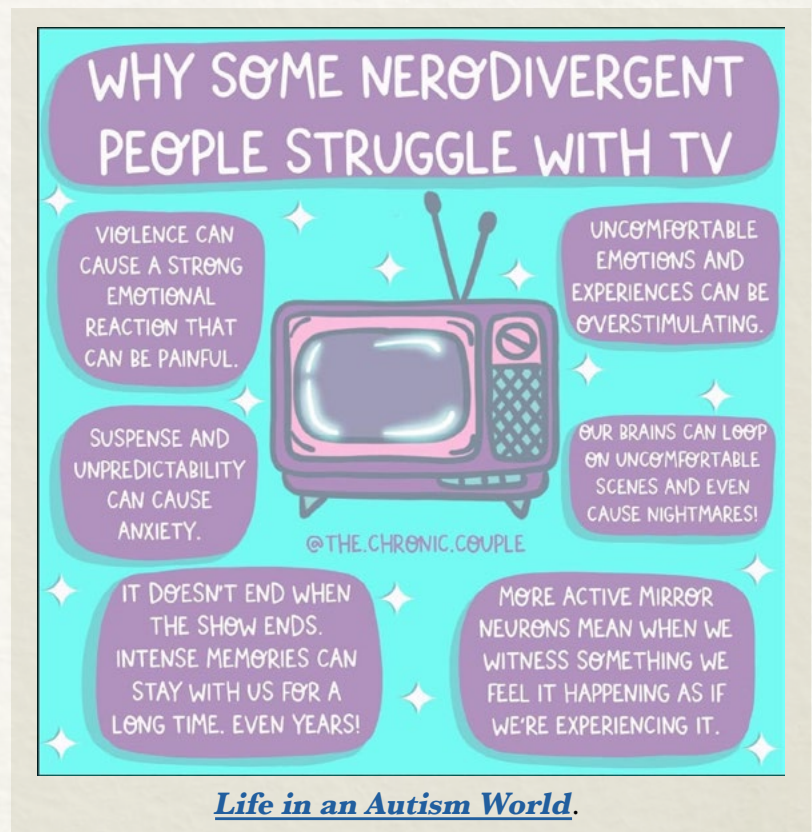
I wrote 800 pages of a play that I had to set aside because I felt traumatized by what was happening to my characters, who, I still feel, are quite “real”. This graphic from Life in an Autism World sums up why: it’s emotion dysregulation. Even though it’s just TV and not real, it’s real. At least it feels real.

There are ways to write stories that don’t focus on emotion. Audiences will instinctively apply emotion to characters and situations if the context is fleshed out. We anthropomorphize everything. They aren’t unemotional, but they can be less intense.

Almost all of the plots I’ll discuss accommodate this choice, some better than others, such as Landscape, Object, Dada, and Chaos.

Emotion isn’t difficult for an audience to feel. It doesn’t require realism. Think of cartoons and animated shows. These are obviously not real and yet we can care about characters almost instantly. The Netflix animated series [BoJack Horseman](#) is a phenomenal example of this.

This book will demonstrate that there are legitimate plot structures for stories that not only will work smoothly with our cognitive differences, but will tell stories in ways that are decidedly neurodiverse at their core. 📍



A NOTE ABOUT LISA



Design 00023 Simple Literature

When I discuss each plot concept, I will use this very lovely [coloring book image](#) of the *Mona Lisa* to demonstrate the plot structures visually (she sneaks into other images as well).

I used this device in an Instagram post and I received feedback it was helpful to see a manifestation of each plot in another art form.

I'm not attempting to make sophisticated or moving works of art. They're only for illustrative purposes.

Lisa also makes her way into many more illustrations. There's no deeper purpose to this other than to be have fun. 📍

A NOTE ABOUT LITTLE RED RIDING LISA

I will use "Little Red Riding Hood" to map these structures. I'll do this as a list, but won't include a visual map. If you'd like to see mapping that includes lists and images, I have mapped [Spurt of Blood](#). I will use this list of events with which to create the different plot structures:

- *Red leaves for Grandma's house with a basket of food*
- *Meets Wolf on the road, tells him the plan, he suggests she pick flowers for Grandma*
- *Red goes to pick flowers*
- *Wolf runs to Grandma's and eats her, dresses like her and jumps in bed*
- *Red shows up and Wolf eats her*
- *Huntsman shows up and kills Wolf*



IMPORTANT TERMS

*I know most of these terms should be well known to writers. I do not wish to insult anyone's intelligence. I would like all of us to be on the same page. My definitions aren't very different, but I have perspectives and ideas about these terms that I feel are important to share. There are also terms that I've invented to explain concepts that have no established names. I'll note these with asterisks (**) preceding the name.*

JOURNEY: I go into the Journey plot in more detail later, so I'll make this brief. This plot structure is very focused upon a hero making a journey in order to complete a goal (which will also change their character), facing obstacles, achieving a climax, and bring the world back to a state of calm equilibrium. The goal must be one that is **obviously and concretely obtainable**. We must know the exact moment the hero has achieved it.

REALISM: This genre is the most common form of storytelling and considered the best form. It is almost always married to a Journey plot structure. **Realism attempts to create a world that resembles the world we live in, the world that we all agree exists, and in as much detail as possible. Characters are psychologically complex.** Settings, props, costumes, cultures, and events are historically accurate to a "museum" level of detail.

ACTION: Something that a character does. **This can be physical, mental, or emotional.** It does not need to be tied to a goal unless it occurs in a Journey plot.

GOAL: In traditional, Journey-structured, realistic plots, a main goal drives the forward the story. **The best goals are concrete and clearly achievable.**

NEGATIVE GOAL (or SOFT GOAL): **A goal that cannot be achieved.** For example, a wife trying to prove she didn't cheat. Teenagers trying to escape from a monster. To be happy. None of these examples can result in a moment when we will *absolutely* know that the wife didn't cheat, they escaped completely from the monster, or that someone is happy. Rather, the husband should find evidence, the teenagers destroy the monster, and the someone buys a house on the coast of Maui.

CLIMAX: When the Climax occurs, **everything that follows that event is completely different than what happened before.** It is a point of no return.

STORY: **A collection of organized information that one entity imparts to another.**

MODE: The manner in which a story is told. **Mode always has meaning.**

PLOT: **A plot is the map of a story.** The plot organizes the events included, the order they are in, characters, etc. The plot is also the philosophy of the story: how a story is told has meaning and makes statements about the nature of experience and life.

SUBPLOT: A plot line that is subordinate to the main plot. Subplots work with the main plot in order to create complications or help for the hero.

It is important to make something very clear: this discussion of nontraditional plot structures

does not include subplots. If there are three structures working within one text, **they work in tandem.** One isn't the "main" story. These structures form the entirety of the story.

GENRE: If a plot is the frame of a house, genre is the decor of the house. Genre has nothing to do with a work's quality. Genres are not a class structure. **Genres are a system of labels we use in order to talk about a piece of writing.** They can be arbitrary, complicated, contradictory, and legion. See [Netflix](#).

CHARACTER: An entity that experiences an event and perform actions.

EVENT: Events are when something happens. These include single or multiple actions.

****NEVER-ENDING EVENT:** Unlike an event, **an NEE has no concrete action.** There is no linear, organized chain of actions. NEEs aren't driven by physical action, but, often, emotional events. NEEs convey emotion, texture, subtly, nuance, unknowns, suggestions, mystery, confusion, and so on.

****SOFT OPENING:** A plot that begins with NEEs that tell the audience almost nothing about the structure of the plot or the nature of the story.

****HARD OPENING:** Almost immediately the plot reveals itself with the major goal to be achieved. In *Oedipus*, it is the discovery and punishment of the murderer of the King of Thebes, which will end the plague and cleanse the world.

EXPERIMENTAL: Calling something experimental is assuming that there is an established, accepted way of doing something and that this effort is an attempt at something different. This also implies that it may or may not succeed.

When something is labeled as "experimental", there is an implied, high risk of failure. That the reader or audience member should anticipate the possibility of failure. Perhaps it's also an apology for what the viewer or reader will have to endure.

There's also little implication or belief that what is considered "experimental" today will become "traditional" tomorrow. Even if the work doesn't "fail", it will still be relegated to the ghettos of literary and theater textbooks.

All art can fail, no matter how a story is told. All art can also succeed.

TRADITIONAL v NONTRADITIONAL: This is a binary distinction rooted in history and culture. **"This is the way we've always done it" versus "we're going to try something new".** But even the "new" isn't new. Surrealism and Dadaism are over a hundred years old. There's a family tree of the influence of these writers that can be traced to the present day. How old does something have to be in order to call it a tradition? Creative writing guides, however, firmly assert that the Journey structure is traditional and the best way to write. That is, of course, merely an opinion.

We need a system of identification in order to understand what we are talking about and what we mean. The areas of experimental and nontraditional art have so many labels and such an absence of understanding that it's no wonder that these art modes are sidelined or considered "at risk" forms.

There's no [Poetics](#) of nontraditional writing and I'm not trying to create one now. I certainly don't believe we need one because single theory-based texts tend to become tomes of orthodoxy and breed stagnation.

WHAT IS A “PLOT”?

This may seem like an unnecessary section. Any writer who chooses to read this book already knows what a plot is, and can probably explain it in great detail. I feel the need to go into this detail in order to support my assertions, which can seem at times strange. I come from an educational background which considered nontraditional writing to be experimental (high chance of failure), fringe (has an adolescent desire to shock), and questionable (people get offended). It's important for me to cover all ground, not so that you know what I'm talking about, but that you know that *I know what I'm talking about*.

I shall begin with the etymology of “plot”:

*Late Old English plot, “**small piece of ground of defined shape**,” a word of unknown origin. The sense of “ground plan,” and thus “**map, chart, survey of a field, farm, etc.**” is from 1550s.*

The first instances of the word “plot” are ground in the ground: it refers to a particularly defined shape of ground. This isn't a natural shape; it's a shape made by humans. It is a physical thing.

Plot, like our friend “journey”, eventually expanded outside its physical definitions and adopted a more complex, even artistic form: a map or survey of a piece of land. **Plot had moved from the physical world into a concept, with a language of symbols and terms to describe it.** A visual plot document reflects the physical world and gives it authority or value. It translates the physical world onto paper.

*The meaning “**a secret, plan, fully formulated scheme**” (usually to accomplish some evil purpose) is from 1580s. OED says “The usage probably became widely known in connexion with the ‘Gunpowder Plot.’”*

Plot develops an “evil purpose” from the 1580s, most likely in connection with the “Gunpowder Plot” to blow up Parliament.

Plot now leaves the physical world behind, though the original physical description still is used. A plot is now an abstract idea and has nothing to do with land. It's grounded in philosophy, morality, and, by extension, danger and violence.

I'd hazard to say that with this new denotation for the word, it also gained an air of intrigue, drama, excitement, dread, fear. It's no wonder that by the 1640s “plot” took on meaning in literature and drama:



Lisa as Guy Fawkes.

The meaning “set of events in a story, play, novel, etc.” is from 1640s.

Plot-line (n.) “main features of a story” is attested by 1940; earlier, in theater, “a sentence containing matter essential to the comprehension of the play’s story” (1907).

These story-telling definitions have been used only when speaking of a story, play, or novel. No one talks about the plot structure of a poem, a sculpture, or a meme. At this point in dramatic and literary history, a plot had specific elements that were unique to stories, plays, and novels: characters and action. Scholars used Aristotle’s model as the Bible of good writing. **Stories had to involve people experiencing conflict in a world we all agree exists. (Nontraditional stories, by contrast, involve people experiencing a world that not all of us agree exists.)**

There is no reason why the word plot could broaden to include nonfiction texts. The original definition based in a physical reality established a core idea that seeped through hundreds of years of use of this word: **a thoughtful plan created by a human being.**

I will use “plot” to describe texts of various forms, such as sculpture and paintings. I’ve never heard of anyone referring to a sculpture as having a plot, but it does. **All art has a story. If it has a story, it must have a plan.**

Plots have plot points. Each point is an event that causes the story to grow. I could say the plot “advances”, but that’s a very linear term. Most of the plot structures in this book gravitate away from the linear. Stories are more like living things that grow and mutilate or evolve in different directions. I learned in grad school that only after the climax does the story change in a significant way: everything that happens after is entirely different than what came before. This is too limited.

Each plot point is an event that changes the story in some way. Once the story begins, nothing that happens after the point is the same as before.

I DON’T BELIEVE IN SUBPLOTS

A “subplot” is a “subordinate” plot in fiction. “Subordinate” is an inferior position and in control of an authority. This isn’t the appropriate attitude toward a subplot. What this reflects is that the “plot” is more important than anything else happening in the text, and the subplots work to bolster the main plot.

I will not be using the term “subplot”. I don’t see any plot submissive to any other. Nor do I believe a text has any one, singular, important plot.

When I use the word “plot” I’m referring solely to the structure of the story: what events happen when. The story itself may have different tributaries and streams that diverge from the main focus, if one exists, but those machinations don’t apply here.

From what I’ve observed through all the texts I’ve studied, (visual arts, novels, films, plays, etc.) a text generally has three plot structures. They are not ranked in importance.

Traditional stories that have Journey plot structures also have, at least, two other plot structures. We generally label them as a “theme” or “device”. The ‘isms, such as surrealism and

impressionism, make things even more complicated. The vocabulary can be very confusing and contradictory. I find most creative writing instruction and guides confusing.

It's much easier to understand and edit a text if one acknowledges how the plots work together as a machine, simultaneously. One plot doesn't break from everything else happening in the text. They work together by establishing plot points, events in the story which cause it to change. The plots work in conjunction, and through their combination they create something more than the three plots in themselves.

A deeper understanding of this phenomena is in the idea of Emergence:

In philosophy, systems theory, science, and art, emergence occurs when a complex entity has properties or behaviors that its parts do not have on their own, and emerge only when they interact in a wider whole. (Emergence, [Wikipedia](#))

Emergence is about interacting and creating something new as a result of the parts interacting. This new something couldn't have existed without the parts working together.

When the plots interact, the story is a product of Emergence. Merging plots will also be greater than the sum of its parts: multiple plot structures create a more nuanced, textured, fascinating text.

The really mind-bendy part is that the plot structures Emerge from the story.

All of this I'll explore further in the second edition. 📍

A Note About the Complexity of Plots

These plot structures function on a macro level: **they map out the story as a whole.** They reveal each event which serves as an action that fills out the story. They illustrate the “big picture”.

The plots also illustrate smaller and smaller pictures. They illustrate components of the story on the micro level. These can be **chapters, scenes, sentences, and words. Setting and character also have their own plot structures.**

Settings can have a Journey structure, which would be a logical physical location in which a character may travel from one place to another in a manner which resembles our own physical actions. It can also be Chaos and the travel of the character can be haphazard and unpredictable. Characters would behave according to whatever plot they would have: a Journey character would be psychologically recognizable; a Chaos character not so much.

This is a huge subject, too big for this book. I have reluctantly and poutingly delayed discussing it further than this until the second edition when I will have ample room. 📍

THE TRADITIONAL PLOT STRUCTURE

Journey

WHAT IS IT?

From my original rejected dissertation proposal: “Traditional plays are structured as a journey with a beginning, middle and an end. Characters are psychologically recognizable and all events are structured around an action which leads to a change within the protagonist.”

WHY IS A JOURNEY DIFFICULT?

- *high emotional content and investment for the writer, which could be uncomfortable or triggering*
- *a complex structure that must be logical; this could also be uncomfortable to think through*
- *requires social interactions which may be confusing or unknown elements*

EXAMPLES

- *Oedipus the King*
- *Hamlet*
- *Lord of the Rings*
- *Star Wars: A New Hope*
- *Raiders of the Lost Ark*
- *The Count of Monte Cristo*

Despite this book being about nontraditional plot structures, it's very important that I establish what is considered traditional. I need to show exactly how nontraditional plots deviate from the traditional Journey and why they do so. There are philosophical reasons behind these choices. **Mode has meaning.**

THE JOURNEY PLOT STRUCTURE

- *It has a beginning, middle, and end.*
- *It is closely aligned with Realism and seeks to create a mirror or museum-quality image of the world.*
- *There is an inciting incident that begins the events of the story. This event pushes the “world” out of equilibrium.*
- *The story follows a hero who must achieve a goal of high stakes. This goal must be difficult and solid. We must be able to know clearly and obviously when the hero has achieved the goal.*
- *The hero will face obstacles, set backs, even weakness. At some point, the hero will undergo a crisis and question everything.*
- *Characters around the hero assume a pyramid like structure of importance; those of lesser importance tend to be flat and not important enough to pay attention to. Characters appear in the story to help or hinder the hero's goal.*
- *All actions have meaning. Everything that is happening has an overarching meaning. It has a beginning, middle, and an end. It is closely aligned with Realism.*
- *At the climax, everything changes. The hero could fulfill their goal or not. Everything that will happen after this point is entirely different than what came before.*
- *After the Hero achieves the goal, all final questions are answered.*
- *The world is again in a state of equilibrium.*



The reason why the great majority of novels, short stories, TV shows, movies, etc. have a Journey structure is because it is the easiest form for an audience to access. It seems to resemble our lives.

The characters go through events that we go through. They talk like us and act like us and feel like us. With the advent of Realism in the 19th century, characters became more psychologically real to us. Journey is also based on simple cause and effect.

There are things a Journey embodies that reflect a certain philosophy in life.

A Journey is about one main character. For several hundred years that character had to have a powerful position in society.

Time moves forward. There is a clear beginning to the story; nothing that happens before is not

important enough to show. Anything that happens after the ending isn't important to show.

Events are governed by cause and effect. They have impact one another. Everything happens for a reason. Everything that happens is meaningful.

The hero is the center of the story, the main character. There are minor characters who aid the main character. Their purpose is tied to the main character's; otherwise, they wouldn't be in the story. People who aren't present in the story aren't necessary for the hero's journey.

This is considered Realism and good storytelling, but it isn't reality. None of those things happen in the world. We do not experience our lives as a Journey structure. Yes, the beginning is birth and the end is death, but even that can be debated philosophically and religiously.

THE ORIGINS OF THE "JOURNEY"

From the wonderful, dedicated people who construct [etymonline](http://etymonline.com):

- In the 1200s, a Journey was a measurement: **the distance traveled in one day.**
- This evolved to include the Old French *journée*, "**one's path in life,**" a much more abstract idea.
- By the 1300s, Middle English included "**act of traveling by land or sea**". This is our understood definition of Journey: **it is a physical action of moving from a point A to a point B.**

Storytelling for the past several hundred years has used a combination of these definitions to construct a plot.

Within the past 20 years or so, we've brought back the abstract, Old French *journée* definition and "journey" has become an abstract concept. Or, it's a metaphor to describe how one experiences abstract concepts, but without the need for a physical ending point.

Our point A to B has become more liberal, confusing, or possibly both.

Let's take Grief. To go on a Journey of Grief, one must have a beginning point (A). In this case, it would be the loss of someone.

The endpoint is B. ***Journeys always have an endpoint. If there's no endpoint, there's no journey.***

Point B, therefore, could possibly be called Closure. This is a broad enough concept that it's nature is decided upon by the person grieving. But there's no way an audience can unequivocally know when closure has occurred. Does Grief have an endpoint? If so, what does that look like?

The path to reach point B is not obvious. Any other Journey can have a very clear path, but this **abstract Journey** doesn't depend upon it.

This abstract Journey doesn't necessarily need to arrive at point B. And if you do arrive at point B, **how will you know you've arrived? What must happen to have closure?** Is closure forever? Will you

never feel grief for this person again? Will you forget about your grief?

This is the divide between Journeys that are traditional with concrete goals and abstract Journeys. These aren't typically discussed in creative writing, other than to say the former is the better, stronger way to write.

MORE THAN ONE JOURNEY

Abstract Journeys are mental journeys. It is moving from one feeling or belief to another. There is a change that occurs caused by a catalyst. There are physical actions that can happen to fulfill the Journey, but they may not seem helpful or successful. For example, planting a tree in someone's name.

By labeling an experience a Journey, there is an implication that there is a destination, an endpoint.

I think it's important to make clear distinctions about an Abstract Journey and a Journey, by using a different term for an Abstract Journey.

An Abstract Journey is an Asymptote. I have an entire section about the Asymptote structure which follows this. I'll say briefly that an Asymptote structure is a Journey without an end and possibly without a beginning. It approaches an end, but never attains it.

In contrast, a Journey is as concrete as possible and ends with an achievable goal. I wish to make something clear: **I am not against the Journey plot structure. There's a reason why it's been used for so long and dominates our culture: it is easy to follow.** But the Journey isn't the ONLY plot structure, nor is it superior to all others.

No story that is told is only ONE plot structure. I've noticed a pattern of stories having a minimum of three active, intertwined structures. Sometimes, the Journey structure isn't even present. These stories work regardless. 📍

THE JOURNEY LISA

Leonardo Davinci's *Mona Lisa* is an example of Renaissance realism. It doesn't seem realistic to a modern audience, but it was cutting edge perspective and realistic facial depictions.

Today, realism focuses on photographic realism. Realistic novels and paintings depict the world as closely as it can to how it really is. There's also hyperrealism: something that appears so real it's difficult to tell if something is a painting or photograph.

This is how we experience Journeys today. So the Journey Lisa is a photograph, a contemporary woman who poses as the original Lisa, and brings with her enigmatic smile a vivid contemporary relevance. 📍



u/StreetKale, r/midjourney, [reddit](#).

THE ORIGINAL JOURNEY: OEDIPUS, THE KING OF THEBES BY SOPHOCLES

Aristotle didn't refer to [*Oedipus the King of Thebes*](#) as a Journey. It was a Tragedy. There were only three forms of plays then: Tragedy, Comedy, and Satyr. The [*Satyr*](#) plays were performed between the acts of a Tragedy and meant to alleviate the heaviness of the story, most startlingly using a "chorus of satyrs, with...costumes that focus on the phallus, and...language [using] wordplay, sexual innuendos, references to breasts, farting, erections, and other references that do not occur in tragedy." Ancient Greek theater was a little bit more entertaining than it seems on the page.

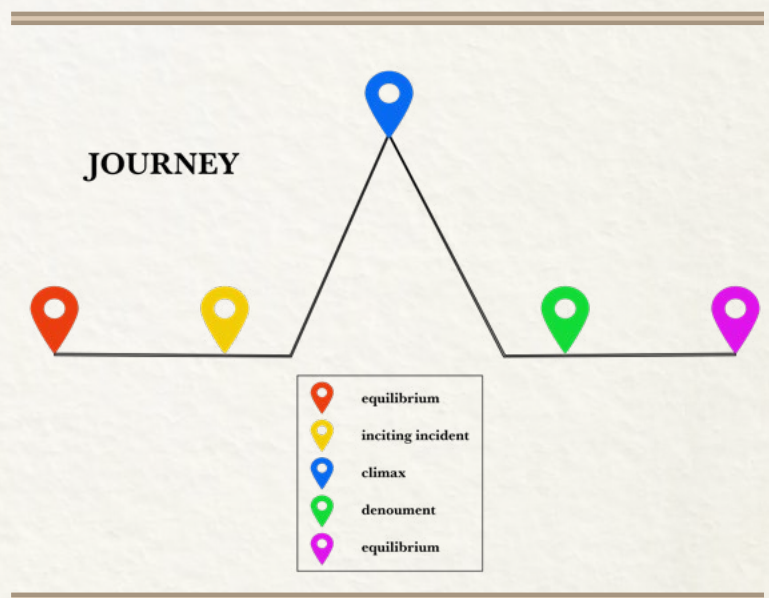
I've studied *Oedipus* as a Journey; our concept of a Journey was crafted from *Oedipus*. The events of *Oedipus* are simple:

- The city of Thebes is suffering from a plague. This is punishment from the gods for not having found the murderer of their former king, Laius.
- Oedipus, the current king, must discover the murderer and punish them to save the city.
- Oedipus runs an investigation, interviewing witnesses.
- Oedipus discovers that he himself murdered Laius (who, in actuality, is his father) in a senseless fight years before, right before Oedipus arrived in Thebes. (He then married Jocasta, his mother)
- Jocasta hangs herself. Oedipus gouges out his eyes and banishes himself.
- The plague leaves Thebes.

The plot for a Journey is clean and clear:

- **Inciting Incident:** Murder of Laius.
- **The World out of Equilibrium:** Plague.
- **Major Goal:** Punish the murderer.
- **Climax:** Oedipus discovers he is the murderer; gouges out his eyes
- **Denouement:** Oedipus banishing himself
- **World in Equilibrium:** Plague leaves.

The climax is especially skilled: Oedipus experiences a reversal (Peripeteia) and recognition (Anagnorisis). The recognition of being the murderer of Laius achieves the goal and it also leads to a reversal. The reversal is his downfall and banishment.



Everything that occurs after this event is completely different than everything that occurs before, and there is no going back. Oedipus can never be who he was again. Gouging out his eyes demonstrates this to the audience. It's not merely an ironic symbol (he couldn't see the truth before and now he can, which causes his blindness). It is a solid act that signifies punishment and heralds the end of the plague.

It's worth noting that these characters are not remotely psychologically realistic. The dialogue (in



Louis Bouwmeester as Oedipus in a Dutch production of *Oedipus Rex*, c. 1896. Public domain.

translation) isn't remotely natural sounding. There are no social interactions in a realistic sense, except for the bare minimum demanded of etiquette. All of the action of the play occurs in the same location in real time. No violence is shown onstage. There are no flashbacks. We never see Laius or the murder. Witnesses "testify" about the murder and other past events.

These are essential characteristics for neurodiverse writers. The play is quite basic and straightforward. The structure can be compared to a philosophical argument more than a emotionally charged drama. Oedipus is compelling and has been for nearly 2500 years. Sophocles made innovations in character development and using a third actor, which allowed for less long choral speeches and more character interaction. The version of reality an ancient Greek audience accepted is not what we would accept today. Yet the story is still compelling.

This is the lesson: **a story doesn't need to be told in a psychologically realistic way if the story itself is compelling.** The action doesn't occur on stage: we don't need to see it because we see how the characters suffer from it. 📍

Why Did Aristotle Believe that OEDIPUS THE KING was nearly perfect?

From Aristotle's *Poetics*:

...the poet should prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities. The tragic plot must not be composed of irrational parts. Everything irrational should, if possible, be excluded; or, at all events, it should lie outside the action of the play (as, in the Oedipus, the hero's ignorance as to the manner of Laius' death).

In other words, how did Oedipus *not remember* killing a man in the same manner, at the same time, in the same place as Laius was killed? How did he not figure this out years before?

It is possible, but highly improbable, that Oedipus wouldn't have figured this out before. What would be impossible, yet probable? Something that shouldn't happen, but does?

Oedipus kills Laius in a battle. It would seem impossible that he could randomly kill his own father in a battle, considering the numbers of men involved and the low chances of it happening. But it is possible. Oedipus would "forget" this killing because it would disappear in all of the other killings which occurred that day. Perhaps Oedipus, via PTSD, wouldn't be able to remember what happened. Perhaps he was particularly vicious and took a "trophy". The trophy would prove the identity. It would also be something he wouldn't want to share with anyone else. 📍

Asymptote

WHAT IS IT?

An Asymptote plot is a Journey plot without an end and possibly without a beginning. The beginning feels like you've "jumped into the middle" and the end feels unresolved. The characters can have solid goals, but they can also have nebulous ones that seem impossible to achieve.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *easier construction with goals that are general rather than specific*
- *more intuitive and emotional*
- *room for sensory experience*

EXAMPLES

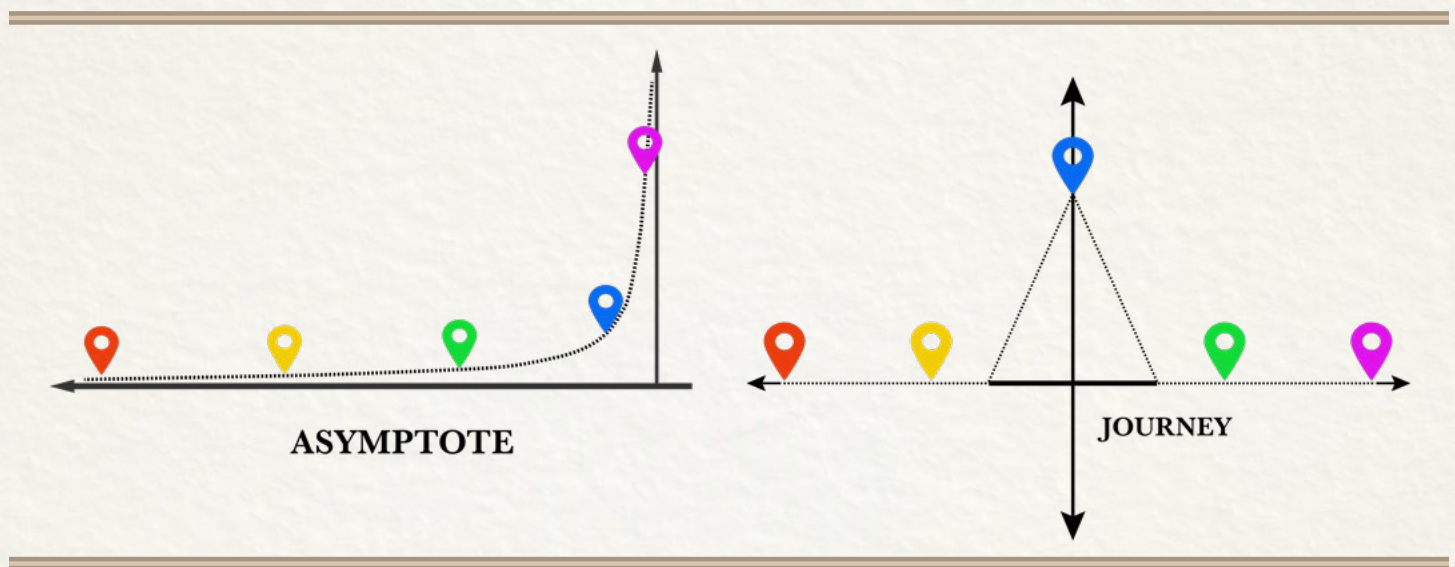
- *18th-19th century novels*
- *horror, supernatural*
- *commercials*
- *Donnie Darko, Pulp Fiction, Rear Window, Gone with the Wind, Annie Hall, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Psycho, A Streetcar Named Desire*

WHAT IS AN ASYMPTOTE PLOT STRUCTURE?

Asymptotes are as common, if not more common, than the Journey structure. They're so common, they could be considered traditional. Rather, they're often criticized for having poor writing because of their deviations from the concrete features of the Journey structure.

An asymptote is a mathematical concept in which a line never touches a line or the X- or Y-axis. It continues infinitely.

By contrast, a Journey graph would directly intersect the X-and Y-axes.



The intersection points with the lines on the Journey graph represent solid, achievable, obvious goals. **For the Asymptote graph, the intersections on the line could be the same types of goals, but they could also be soft goals or negative goals. Soft or negative goals don't possess a solid, achievable end.** The audience will not know if the goal has been achieved, or if it can be achieved. The story could seem unfinished, without many questions answered¹.

There is a philosophical reason for this. **Stories in an Asymptote structure may be attempting to achieve a more emotional, intellectual, and thoughtful experience.** This structure posits that life isn't a list of clear goals with meaningful actions. Sometimes achieving a goal isn't meaningful. Sometimes things happen for no reason, or for opaque reasons. Sometimes life can be confusing.

Asymptote journeys are abstract journeys. Abstract journeys are mental journeys. The journey moves from one feeling or belief to another. There is a change that occurs caused by a catalyst. There are physical actions that can happen to fulfill the Journey, but they may not seem helpful or successful.

¹ In contrast to a [Question](#) plot, which also is structured with questions. A Question plot seeks to answer all questions eventually.

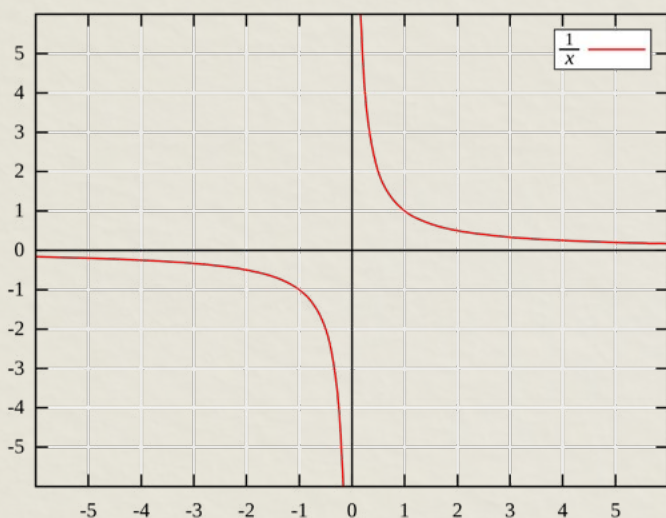
By labeling an experience a Journey, there is an implication that there is a destination, an endpoint. But this isn't necessary with an Asymptote plot.

Asymptote structure is a Journey that may not have an ending or a clear beginning. without an end and possibly without a beginning. The story seems to start in the middle. The ending may come up suddenly, unexpectedly.

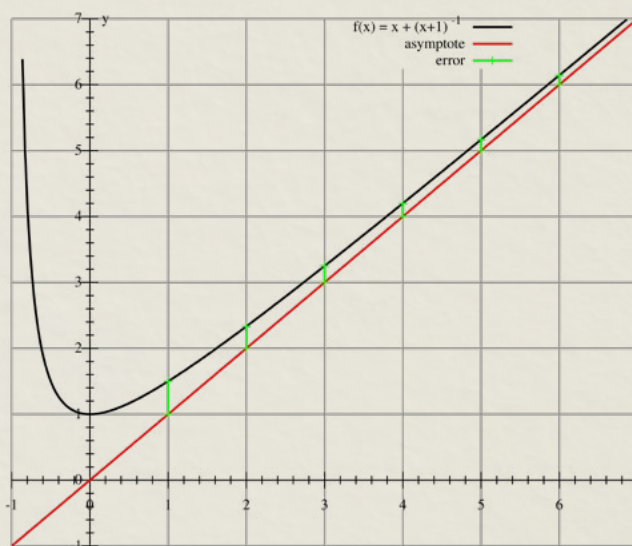
An Asymptote plot embodies the philosophy that “It’s not about the destination: it’s about the journey.”



The Mathematics of Asymptotes



$f(x)=1/x$ graphed on Cartesian coordinates. The x and y -axis are the asymptotes. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Black: the graph of $f(x)=x+(x+1)^{-1}$.

Red: the asymptote $y=x$.

Green: difference between the graph and its asymptote for $\{x=1,2,3,4,5,6\}$.

By [Krishnavedala](#) - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0.

“The idea that a curve may come arbitrarily close to a line without actually becoming the same may seem to counter everyday experience. The representations of a line and a curve as marks on a piece of paper or as pixels on a computer screen have a positive width. So if they were to be extended far enough they would seem to merge, at least as far as the eye could discern. But these are physical representations of the corresponding mathematical entities; the line and the curve are idealized concepts whose width is 0 (see [LINE](#)). Therefore, **the understanding of the idea of an asymptote requires an effort of reason rather than experience.**” ([WIKIPEDIA](#))



THE ASYMPTOTE LISA

Lisa is fading at the edges. She has no solid boundaries. In fact, her boundaries are breaking up, or possibly forming. The central image of Lisa is a traditional coloring. The colors are more realistic, less imaginative. The center is her face, clearly seen, yet there's a fuzziness, a transparency. She's here, but not all here. There's no certain clarity.

Her face is the bend in the asymptote: the portion of the line that has a curving action, rounding itself around the corner of the axes. We don't know where she has begun or ended, but we know where she is. 📍



LITTLE RED ASYMPTOTE MAP



Asymptote plot points:

- 📍 Hood is wandering through the woods (don't know what happened before this)
- 📍 Wolf wanders through the woods, eating something, washes himself in a creek, stares at a bird
- 📍 Wolf and Red encounter one another randomly; he asks where she's going; she's tells him; she leaves
- 📍 Grandma knitting, listening to an old, scratchy jazz record; Wolf suddenly kills her
- 📍 Hood arrives at Grandma's house, stands outside as if sensing something is off
Hood runs off into the woods (soft ending; don't know what's going to happen)



THE JOURNEY v ASYMPTOTE VACATION

What is the difference between a Journey-structured vacation and an Asymptote-structured vacation to Paris to see the *Mona Lisa*?

JOURNEY

A Journey vacation would have a solid, obviously achievable goal. You will also experience events which will help you achieve your goal; these events are meaningful.

“You will know you have achieved your goal of attaining a vacation in Paris when...” you go to the Louvre and visit the *Mona Lisa*.

You know this at the outset. You make hotel and plane reservations. You pack, go to the airport. Your flight is delayed and you spend five hours reading a Stephen King novel. Finally, you board the plane, take off and land in Paris, take a taxi to the Louvre, buy a ticket, go inside, stand in line, and the *Mona Lisa*.

ASYMPTOTE

An Asymptote vacation would have a soft beginning and/or ending with never-ending events.

You set out in a car, driving on an interstate. You stay in a random city the first night. You go to a tiny UFO museum the second night. You drive north, stopping at a national park.

Then one day you see a poster of the *Mona Lisa*. You decide to go to Paris, but, at the last minute, you decide to go to Rome where you wander into a random souvenir shop. You find a postcard of the *Mona Lisa*.



Lisa and DuChamp's Urinal vacationing in Paris.

ASYMPTOTES AND GOD FROM THE VOLVO

When I was studying graphic design, I read a book called [*Design is Storytelling*](#) by Ellen Lupton. I learned quite a lot, and it left me questioning the possible moral ambiguity of advertising (something I also considered having watched all of [*Mad Men*](#)). But, the book is a fascinating look at how storytelling, plots, and characters are used in commercials, social media ads, websites, billboards, and anything involved in someone trying to sell you something.

It also taught me a lot about the Journey plot, and how to use it to manipulate people. That is a coarse way of phrasing it, but it is the intention of advertising.

Ads focus on convincing consumers to buy the product or service the company is offering. This is basic knowledge. How ads attempt to convince consumers is something that has changed through the years. Early advertising (think [*Sears Roebuck catalogs*](#)) focused on the products. Companies told you what you were getting and why it's awesome.

In the 60s, the *Mad Men* era, advertising began to pivot. It began to focus on selling not products, but experiences and emotions. As Don Draper pointed out in the pilot episode, advertising sells "happiness".

Most advertising today uses this tactic solely. It does so by telling a story in which the consumer is going on a Journey and attains what they really want to buy, which is an emotional state. But this isn't a conventional Journey. It's an abstract, mental Journey: it's an Asymptote.

My favorite examples are car commercials. I did a search for Volvo commercials and found one that is over the top with its Asymptote plot.

It's called [*"XC60: The parents"*](#). It appeared in 2021, but the 2025 isn't very different. The Volvo website describes the [*XC60 2025 edition*](#) as "Like your smartphone, but bigger. Intelligent design at every turn. Meet our smart midsize SU with Google built in." The interior is described as "Your new second home. A personal and comfortable interior."



All images are screenshots from ["XC60: The Parents"*](#) by Volvo.*

The commercial for the 2022 XC60 follows a couple, beginning with the moment they view an ultrasound of their twins. Their expression is shock and fear. Time skips forward. The couple is shown repeatedly going to the grocery store to buy heaps and heaps of diapers. The father nearly succumbs to an avalanche of diapers.

They seem to be at the store more often than they're actually in their own home. They drive at what



seems to be top speed around a European city, back and forth on highways. Clips of them in their home show them struggling desperately to baby-proof rooms as their twins are very active. This is significant.

The commercial closes with the woman driving home at night, and begins to doze off. A semi truck is headed right for her, but when her car begins to coast into the next lane, her Volvo corrects and keeps her within the lane.. In the last shot of her,

she is stunned.

The tagline: “The car that looks after you, like you look after others.” It’s followed with one other line: “Volvo XC60 with Lane Keeping Aid. For everyone’s safety.”

There’s no dialogue in the commercial. The characters are middle class and live in a European country. They commute (presumably) to work in the city and live in the country. Their house is immaculately decorated in a standard style. It’s clean and attractive. It seems nestled in cozy woods. It appears ideal.

Their lives are not easy, as we see immediately and instinctively know. We understand they’re overworked and exhausted and we know why: raising twins is tough, especially when it seems it’s only the two of them. No other family or friends are present.

In fact, only their Volvo is present.

The commercial focuses on diapers in relation to taking care of children, which, I think all would agree, is some of the dirtiest, least appealing aspects of parenthood. The multiple packages of diapers they purchased demonstrate they’ve done a lot of dirty work. Diapers also represent protection. A baby wears diapers that must be changed for health reasons. Keeping children clean from potentially dangerous bacteria is vitally important.



Their life is a story Volvo is telling. They want viewers to identify with this narrative, this Journey of parenthood and struggling through childrearing and, most specifically, exhaustion.

The frantic childproofing is also significant: this threads through the commercial an element of potential life-threatening danger. It focuses on the children at first, but it introduces the possibility of violence into the commercial’s universe. It foreshadows the averted accident at the end.

The violence is accidental. This is also important. Children falling off furniture is an accident. Just as if a parent falls asleep while driving is an accident, too. The commercial isn’t interested in assigning blame. The parents are making frantic efforts to protect their children—but have they protected themselves?

This is the story: parents who embark on a Journey of starting a family. This is an Asymptote plot: it is composed of disconnected physical and mental events, moving from one feeling or belief to another.

These events are not solidly connected into a story with a clear goal, though there is coherent cohesion created by the frame of the family. There is always movement forward, though we don't know where we are going.

Then the story changes. The Volvo is on a dark road in the country. The mother is driving and looks exhausted. Presumably, she has gotten up in the middle of the night to change the twins and has realized they are out of diapers.

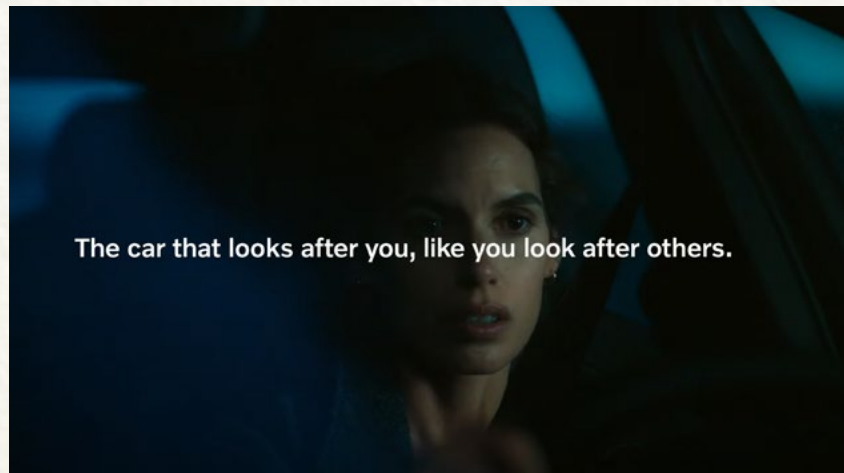
As she drives, she begins nodding off. We know, by our vast experience with storytelling, that we are building to a climax. Her nearly nodding off while driving is something anyone who has done a significant amount of driving, especially at night, can relate to.

The truck appears. She drifts. Volvo automatically moves the car back into her lane and saves her.

Volvo makes this very clear: her Volvo saves her. The mother would be dead if it wasn't for Volvo.

Volvo drives this home with its second tagline: "For everyone's safety". Volvo will save your entire family, including your children.

This is all we're told about the car.



So what is the plot that's occurring in this?

The parents have kids, time passes, their life takes a toll on them, endangers their lives, could possibly kill them, despite them being good people who "look after others". It's a dangerous world and everyone is vulnerable. Bad things happen to good people, but Volvo saves the day. The parents learn that their good judgment in buying a Volvo saved their lives, and will continue to protect them.

These are emotional steps in the plot. The events are connected through what the parents feel, not by what they do. They are not conventionally active; they don't have a solid goal. They are reacting to the world, but the world can be too much for them to protect themselves.

More significantly, Volvo looks after you like a mother. Babies see their parents as people with complete power. Parents take care of them when they don't know they need taking care of. Think of

the childproofing and the energetic children. The parents are also running about and, presumably, need a parent figure to look after them.

This plot reads more like a morality tale, and its purpose is to make money.

This commercial and story is aimed directly at mothers who feel scared and vulnerable and worry they can't protect their children. They go so far as to worry that they aren't good mothers at all. The mother in this commercial would feel entirely responsible for nearly colliding with the truck. The truck didn't drift into her lane: this is important. The mother must be relieved, guilty, and afraid at the end of the commercial. The mother must feel grateful for owning a Volvo. This is the end of the Asymptote plot. We couldn't have predicted that this is where the story was going. It simply happened.



Medea fleeing Corinth on a chariot drawn by flying dragons. [ETHW](#)

To be a well-balanced plot, the commercial should have opened with the very pregnant wife and husband buying the Volvo. That way we clearly see that the pregnancy and Volvo are intertwined. So why wasn't this choice made?

If the story had begun with the parents being active, they would have needed to conclude the story doing something equally active. The mother would have saved herself.

But what we have instead is a [deus ex machina](#) or ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θεός: translated as “god from the machine”. It is a plot device in which something unexpected and unlikely swoops in at the last second and brings an end to a story. Euripides used this technique in [Medea](#), when she escapes in a chariot drawn by dragons provided by the god Helios. (Aristotle criticized this use in *Medea*, and generally found the device a weak writing choice.)

Volvo didn't want us to believe that anything could help her. They wanted us to feel the danger and the hopelessness. This kind of accident happens all the time to good people who take care of others.

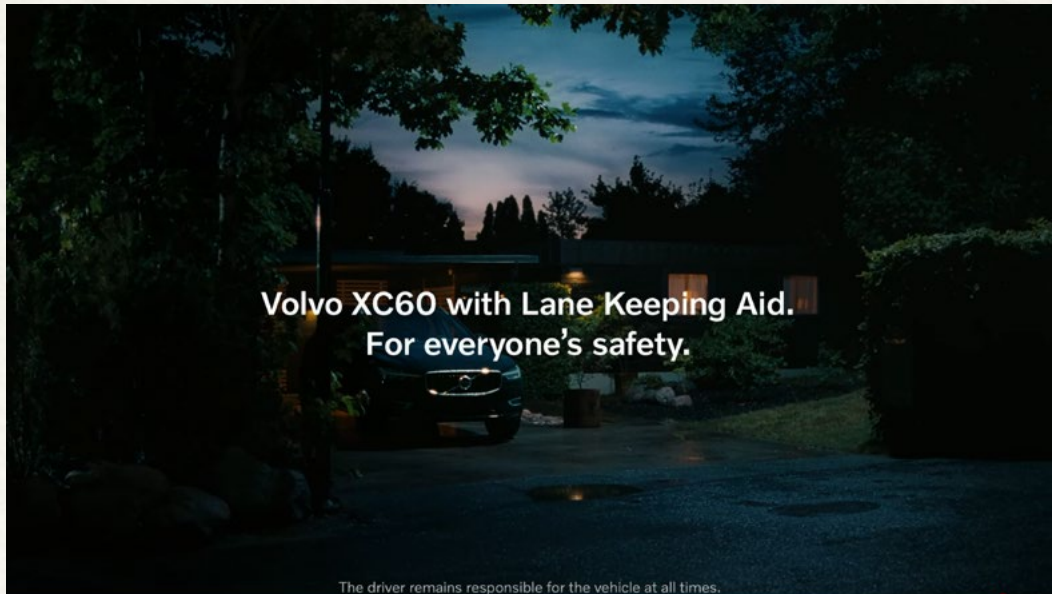
But Volvo came to the rescue. Volvo saved her. If you want to follow the weird logic, god has come from the Volvo and saved the woman.

The story is about Volvo saving their lives. This is not truly an ending because, what really has changed?

Loyalty. All of this has been a demonstration for the family, the mother in particular, of Volvo's worthiness, it's necessary presence in their lives. Perhaps a lifelong devotion.

What about the husband? Where has he gone? What does he feel? We must assume he's equally grateful. His presence isn't needed because he hasn't been active and isn't required to fulfill a solid goal. Asymptotes don't require characters to be accounted for. The father can and does fade into the background. (This is probably deliberate: the commercial isolates the mother, alone on the dark road, without her husband to help her.)

Volvo wants consumers to purchase their safety, their lives, and the lives of their children. That is the experience Volvo is selling. The car is secondary. The safety and lives of families, though, costs about \$45,000.



N.B. It's worth mentioning that Volvo, for legal reasons, must state in fine print that "The driver remains responsible for the vehicle at all times". This, of course, negates the entire story of the commercial.



Cycle

WHAT IS IT?

An adaptation that enlarges or interrogates the original text. It has its own identity, using the original text as more of a suggestion than a blueprint. A Cycle can interrogate other Cycle stories within it.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *Ready-built structure removes stress of having to construct one.*
- *The “restrictions” of having an original with parameters allows the writer’s imagination maximum flexibility.*
- *Allows the writer to focus on the details and nuances*

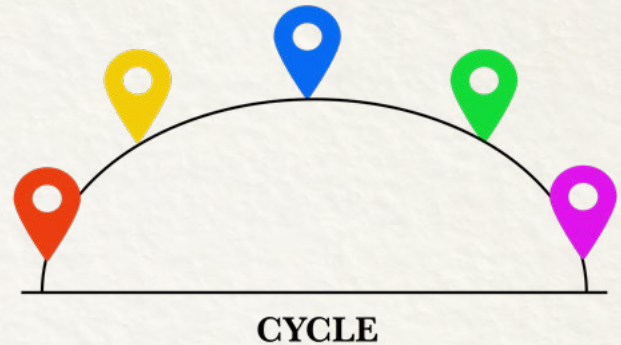
EXAMPLES

- *fan fiction*
- *recreated architecture on the Las Vegas Strip (Luxor, Paris, Excalibur, Circus Circus)*
- *medieval morality plays*
- *The Holy Land Experience theme park*
- *Shakespeare adaptations*

WHAT IS A CYCLE PLOT STRUCTURE?

The Medieval Cycle plays are a series of plays performed together that illustrated scenes from the Bible, or readings of passages. Together the plays formed a story arc from Creation to the Last Judgement. It cycled through events in Christian history. The “cycle” wasn’t so much of a repeating story, but an arch.

This parallels the Yuga cycle in Hindu cosmology. Humanity undergoes four Yuga eras that repeat infinitely. Christian theology doesn’t have this repetition and follows a linear trajectory. A story based on the Yuga cycle and its repetitions could involve a Cycle, as well as a Ritual plot. It would most likely have a Creation/Destruction plot structure; in the second edition of this book, I’ll explore the Creation/Destruction structure.



A Cycle plot is an adaptation, but adaptations aren’t Cycles. An adaptation uses one text to create another, but in a fairly standard and faithful one-to-one format. Cycles use original texts as guides adding other stories, themes, and characters to the original text. As we used to say in grad school, “Fuck the original”.

Current Marvel and DC movies adhere to a strict adaptation structure. Ironically, throughout the years comic books themselves have created their own Cycles. A great illustration of this is Superman. Rumors on reddit say that there are at least 102 official versions of Superman. I found a marvelous article on [Screenrant](#) that ranks from the weakest to the most powerful 45 of these versions. It’s also a good list of some of the wacky Superman Cycles out there.



For reference, this is the 1937 original Superman.



Supersaur, a Brachiosaurus.



Injustice Superman. All of the powers and none of the morality.



Vampire Superman.



Overman, son of Adolph Hitler. Just, wow.

After almost a hundred years of writing Superman stories, variation is necessary to stay relevant and interesting. Each incarnation says something new about the character indirectly. They provide vivid contrasts and new discussion about power, morality, violence, and abuse. Even amongst the dinosaurs.

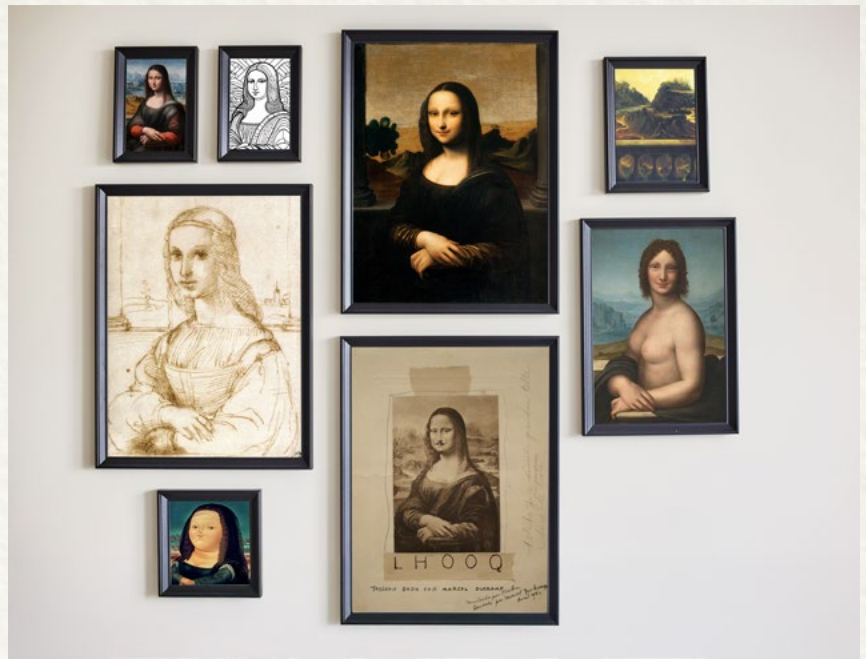


THE CYCLE LISA

There was more than one *Mona Lisa*. At the time of Leonardo's painting, he did alternate versions of Lisa. Other contemporary artists familiar with Leonardo and the work created their own versions.

Some of these paintings are an adaptation of the *Mona Lisa*. Some are Cycles of the *Mona Lisa*. All together they form a macro-Cycle of the *Mona Lisa*.

The original Lisa has burst from the boundaries of her painting and has become an epic all of her own. Looking at this small collection, you can begin to trace a story of a woman through different ages, dress, or moods. These are all visions of the Mona Lisa that the individual artists had. We see Lisa as they saw Lisa through the lens of DaVinci. My arranging them together is itself a Cycle that combines adaptations with Cycles. The arrangement also makes this an Object plot.

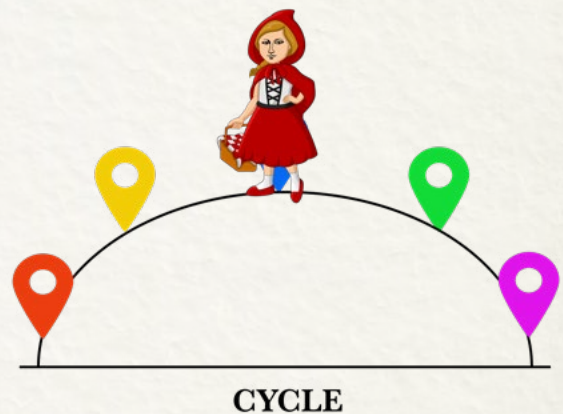


Wikipedia has a [great page](#) about the history of the different Mona Lisas. 📍

LITTLE RED CYCLE MAP

A Marxist Cycle map:

- 📍 The Wolf is a billionaire whose company has laid off Grandma
- 📍 Grandma gets a notice the Wolf is about to foreclose on her house
- 📍 Red to brings Grandma food; Grandma tells her what's going on
- 📍 Red contacts the Wolf and offers "collateral" for another mortgage on Grandma's house; this collateral is too appetizing to refuse
- 📍 Wolf shows up and Red kills him, shooting him in the head



CYCLES IN THE WILD: CANNONESS HROTSVITHA OF GANDERSHEIM

[Hrotsvitha](#) was a German nun in the 10th century and is the oldest known woman playwright. But this isn't the fact that makes her extraordinary: it was what she wrote about.

Hrotsvitha wrote plays about the lives of saints, her main thematic focus being innocence, sexuality, temptation, and chastity. In her own intro, she wrote:

Wherefore I, the strong voice of Gandersheim, have not hesitated to imitate in my writings a poet [the Roman playwright [Terrence](#)] whose works are so widely read, my object being to glorify, within the limits of my poor talent, the laudable chastity of Christian virgins in that self-same form of composition which has been used to describe the shameless acts of licentious women. One thing has all the same embarrassed me and often brought a blush to my cheek. It is that I have been compelled through the nature of this work to apply my mind and my pen to depicting the dreadful frenzy of those possessed by unlawful love, and the insidious sweetness of passion—things which should not even be named among us. Yet if from modesty I had refrained from treating these subjects I should not have been able to attain my object—to glorify the innocent to the best of my ability.



Lisa as Hrotsvitha.

One of the best examples comes from her play [Dulcitius](#). The premise is simple: three sisters refuse to worship the pagan gods and vow to remain steadfast Christians. They are tortured, but transcend and preserve their chastity and purity.

Hrotsvitha, however, isn't writing simple adaptations. She's constructing bizarre Cycle plots.

There's a scene where Dulcitius intends to rape all three sisters. Trying to find their prison cell, he stumbles into a storeroom. Believing he has found the three sisters, Dulcitius "has his way" with pots and pans.

Also, remember: **historians believe these plays were staged and Hrotsvitha's fellow nuns were the actors. This is a crazy, transgressive image of a nun dressed as a man sexually assaulting cookware. I guarantee that the original saint story did not involve this Cycle plot point.**

This is a comedic and slapstick moment in a play about rape, torture, and death. But Hrotsvitha doesn't take this subject lightly.



Agapia, Irene, and Chionia from the Georgian translation of Menologion of Basil II. Dulcitius, [Dulcitius, Wikipedia](#), Public Domain.

Sisinnius threatens the youngest of the sisters, Irena, with sending her “to a house of ill-fame, where [her] body will be abominably defiled.”

Hrotsvitha’s women saints are almost shockingly defiant. They spit insults and condemnations to rulers and any man who threatens them. Irena responds with one of the most electric and important lines a woman character has ever uttered: “If the soul does not consent, there is not guilt.”

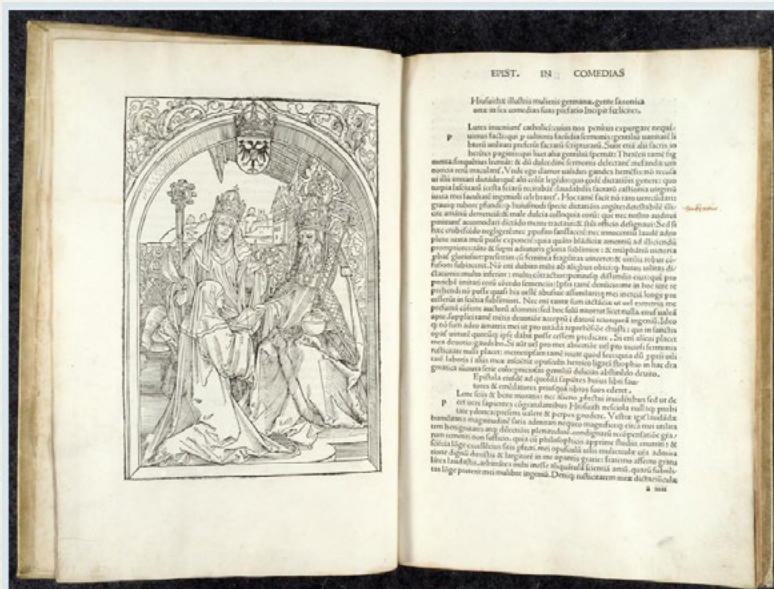
This is shocking for the Middle ages. It’s shocking for any age. “Submitting is not consenting” is something women struggle with accepting today.

Hrotsvitha’s Cycle hides in plain sight feminist sexual politics. But Hrotsvitha isn’t a fool and understands the world she lives in and knows how to play the game. In the introduction, she addresses her male patrons:

To think that you, who have been nurtured in the most profound philosophical studies and have attained knowledge in perfection, should have deigned to approve the humble work of an obscure woman! You have, however, not praised me but the Giver of the grace which works in me, by sending me your paternal congratulations and admitting that I possess some little knowledge of those arts the subtleties of which exceed the grasp of my woman’s mind.

I have no doubt Hrotsvitha believed she was talented and had something important to say. I’ve written for decades. I’ve talked to countless writers about their process and feelings. No one writes anything without believing, at some level, that they have the skills to create something others will appreciate.

Hrotsvitha knew exactly what she was doing, what she intended to say, and who her primary audience was: the other nuns in her Abbey. 📍



Dürer designed two woodcuts for this first edition of the Latin plays of Hrotsvitha, a tenth-century Benedictine nun from Gandersheim. The two woodcuts by Dürer are the frontispiece, showing Celtes presenting the new edition to Friedrich III of Saxony, and the exhibited image of the author Hrotsvitha presenting her plays to Emperor Otto I. The Abbess of Gandersheim, who was Hrotsvitha’s aunt, looks on from behind the kneeling playwright. [Bridwell Library Special Collections Exhibitions](#).

CYCLES IN THE WILD: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND *Grand Theft Hamlet*

Staging *Hamlet* in a video game is not only offensive to the most orthodox Shakespeare scholars and aficionados, it's a nearly-perfect¹ work of fucking genius.

Yes, *fucking* genius. The “genius” is so intense that only the force of a curse word would speak of the explosive nature and simultaneous visceral, rutting experience.

[Grand Theft Hamlet](#) (GTH) is a new artistic medium in the worlds of video games, Cycles, documentaries (Information), and drama. Not to mention, it is a celebration of the free-for-all that is creativity and art.



Grand Theft Hamlet, [promo](#).

William Shakespeare came from a culture of adaptations. Only ONE of his plays seems to have been an original work: *Winter's Tale*. But, scholars tend to think that rather than it being original, we simply haven't found the original source material.

The audiences were aware these stories were nothing new. They weren't expecting to be shocked by new endings or last minute revelations. The audience wanted to see Shakespeare's interpretation of the stories.

In our current theater world are extreme adaptations and Cycles of Shakespeare's plays. I myself directed a production of *Macbeth* with an vision based upon the film *The Exorcist*. One actor played the three witches in a demonic, slithering, form. This was a Cycle production: Shakespeare's plays themselves have become a Cycle, which were based on a Cycle.

Hamlet's numerous incarnations of the Cycle, from Denmark historical records to *The Lion King*. One could make the argument that each cycle builds off the former. No one is going to do *Hamlet* without being very versed in its history and staging.

With GTH, we also have the Cycle of *Grand Theft Auto* mixing in. No, it does more than mix in. *Hamlet* takes place in the universe of *Grand Theft Auto*, and under the jurisdiction to its laws of physics, culture, and societal laws. It's extremely violent and morally ambiguous. It's the perfect setting for *Hamlet*, which is violent, full of questions of morality, life, death, revenge, murder, and what would have been

¹ Why “nearly-perfect”? I think it could be smarter. The film makers fail to embrace fully the moment-by-moment, repetitious time structure of a video game. The best scenes from *Hamlet*, and there were so few overall, were the rehearsals. They kept trying to cram contemporary staging and theater practices into a medium that cannot support them. I felt they didn't truly understand all of the potential *Grand Theft Auto* offered.

considered “incest”.

Every time we play a video game we are entering and participating in a performance. *Hamlet* is a performing text that is hundreds of years old. It is still relevant, and our current interest in it shows how relevant we find it.

“Denmark’s a prison,” Hamlet says, as if the entire country is full of criminals in which he is trapped.

He admits the sky “appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.”

This is good interpretation of *Grand Theft Auto*.

The society of *Grand Theft Auto* is a combination of very rich and very poor. Crime is rampant, murder is common, and in the focus of the game itself; the player plays a criminal and a murderer. The universe doesn’t allow for some other role for the player. It is a corrupt, disgusting world; it is perfect for an existential crisis.

Hamlet itself is full of murder and crime. The Ghost of Hamlet’s father demands that Hamlet, using some epic guilt-tripping and manipulation, murders Claudius, his brother and murderer. Hamlet eventually murders Claudius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Polonius, and Laertes. His mother dies by accident, drinking poison meant for Hamlet. And Ophelia, Hamlet’s girlfriend who he abuses emotionally, dies by suicide.

My favorite moment in the film is one of the versions of Hamlet’s monologue “To be or not to be”. The monologue is done a handful of times throughout the film, a vehicle for feeling out the character and the world.

The version I remember most took place in a dive bar. It is filled with dangerous looking people. The women appear to be sex workers. The men look like they’re looking for a fight. Hamlet is drinking with Horatio when a fight does break out. The entire bar erupts and Hamlet stands to the side and calmly says his speech, slowly moving through the bar and exiting. He emerges without being attacked and killed. He survived the bar and he survived his suicide ideation.

This speech wasn’t included in the final production and I was disappointed it didn’t. It said so much about the point of living in a world so violent and destructive. Why not destroy oneself as well, as this seems to be the status quo? The world is full of rage and desperation; it is unhealthy, with limited lifespans. Why exist? Why continue?

Hamlet is a brutal, disturbing story and GTA is a brutal, disturbing game. When we play GTA, we are submerged in a brutal, disturbing performance. The addition of Hamlet adds cultural layers. It says that this behavior has been occurring a very long time. That nothing has changed. Scheming, lying, murdering, cheating, are eternal vices. We live in a world that can be a dangerous, depressing place and we have always struggled to understand its meaning, and whether life is worth living at all. 📍



Grand Theft Hamlet, [promo](#).

Information

WHAT IS IT?

The ultimate goal of an Information plot structure is discovering data and constructing information.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *infodumping*
- *logical organization*
- *minimal emotional investment*
- *no strong emphasis on social interactions*

EXAMPLES

- *documentaries*
- *magazines and newspapers*
- *murder mysteries*
- *treasure hunts*
- *reality shows*



If you'd like to discuss Information further, go to the [Nontraditional Plot Structures for Neurodiverse Writers](#) Discord group [INFORMATION](#) channel.



WHAT IS AN INFORMATION PLOT?

The ultimate goal of an Information plot structure is discovering data and constructing information, which leads to a logical conclusion. It begins with a thesis, argument, or puzzle and seeks to either support it or discover something unexpected.

This takes the form of characters often discovering or presenting data to the audience, sometimes directly and without much psychological realism.

Information structures are another form of an infodump. Being neurodivergent can mean having very special and intense attachments to subjects. We can obsess over a subject, submerge ourselves in it, tell the world about it, and then move on to the next obsession. This is merely our communication style and is only described by the slightly perjorative “dump” by those who find our information boring.

An Information structure is a way of framing fictional information in a novel, dazzling form. This is a form that is one of the most popular format for a story structure. What is so confusing for fiction writers is that this format is used almost exclusively in a non-fiction setting: journalism, documentaries, biographies, autobiographies, journals, etc.

This information structure can provide the writer emotional distance. It is more intellectually stimulating. Speaking of events in the past tense distances them. It is more difficult to engage with them emotionally, but we still find them fascinating. Documentaries and reports of real events can become emotional, but this occurs through the witnesses or victims of these events. This creates a comfortable emotional balance between intense emotion and logic. 📍

Do We Create or Discover Information?

“Data can be discovered, generated, or observed. But because meaning requires interpretation of the data, information is created. The data is discovered, meaning is assigned to the data, and information is born. Well-formed and meaningful data + meaning = information.” [chloe.dev](#)

“Information is often processed iteratively: Data available at one step are processed into information to be interpreted and processed at the next step.

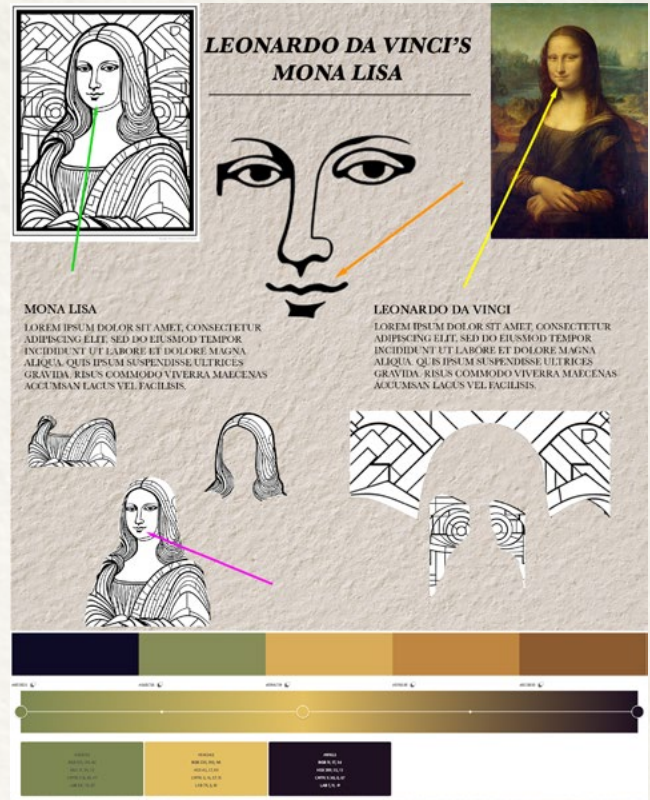
“For example, in written text each symbol or letter conveys information relevant to the word it is part of, each word conveys information relevant to the phrase it is part of, each phrase conveys information relevant to the sentence it is part of, and so on until at the final step information is interpreted and becomes knowledge in a given domain.” [“Information”, Wikipedia](#)

THE INFORMATION LISA

Infographics are artistic images of information, arranged with geometric figures and lines. They are basic structures that put information at the forefront and with almost no emotional connection.

With Lisa, I extracted various pieces of information: the color palates and gradient, a dissection of the painting in its bare form, the original painting itself, and information boxes for texts about Leonardo and Lisa herself. Arrow-tipped lines indicate her smile as an important detail.

The audience won't receive the same kind of emotional experience as a Journey or any others. This is intellectual stimulation, provocation of curiosity, and a desire to learn. These elements are entertaining and pleasurable. 📍



LITTLE RED INFORMATION MAP

Each point on the Information map must give the audience more information:

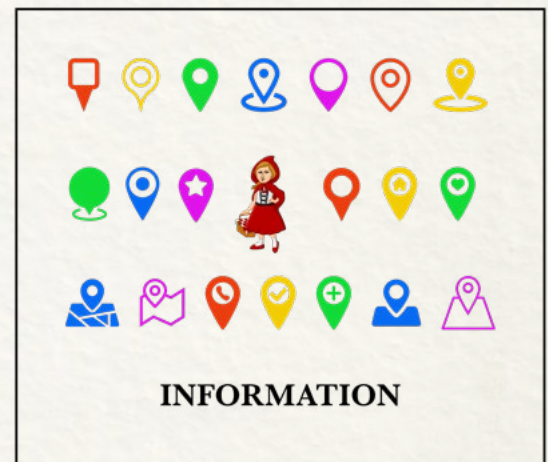
📍 *Police Detective explains the crime scene at Grandma's house, the brutality of Grandma's murder, the collection of evidence and interview with witnesses*

📍 *Interview with the Huntsman, he describes meeting Red in the woods several days before and thought her behavior was weird. She seemed frightened. He knew Grandma, but hadn't seen her in months.*

📍 *Coroner describes the body found---only one. Describes the wounds, cause of death, etc. Grandma had been shredded, but she was also starving to death.*

📍 *Interview with Red, describing her arrest and her own timeline of events the day of the murder.*

📍 *The coroner testifies at Red's trial and (in a shocking revelation) states blood at the scene wasn't of human origin, nor was it any known animal; he wasn't allowed to do a DNA test because they were still unreliable, but he did it on his own. Red is acquitted.*



MURDER MYSTERIES: THE MEGALITHS OF INFORMATION PLOTS

The rules of the Murder Mystery written by Ronald Knox in 1929 for the elite Detection Club. These emerged during the Golden Age of detective fiction. Agatha Christie was the reigning monarch of the genre.

Murder mysteries today do not follow these rigid rules. Many of the rules have been eliminated, one being incredibly racist (#5), and some fell out of favor as the genre merged with others. There are also rules that aren't stated, yet accepted. Women have certain stereotyped characters. Everyone is white. Men must be highly masculine, and if not, their character is questionable. Everyone is also cismale or cisfemale and heterosexual.

The rules, however, are their own highly specialized version of an Information plot structure. These rules are designed in the spirit of fairness for the reader. The reader must be able to solve the mystery on their own.

Structurally, this requires that the majority of the clues must be released early, ideally at the time of the murder. Clues that directly reveal the identity of the murderer are released later, slowly. Most of the detection is sorting through the red herrings and judging whether or not a clue is valuable. The clues must also offer at least one possible murderer or thesis. Yet, the detective will discover that the evidence does not support that thesis.

Sherlock Holmes created the classic axiom: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." Though Sir Arthur Conan Doyle never followed Knox's Decalogue, and his stories do violate several of the rules, this axiom does apply, even today. The Information structure focuses not only on presenting Information that is factual, logical, and accurate, but also presenting information that is wrong, flawed, or impossible.

It is worth noting that the writers and readers of the time didn't interpret murder mysteries as anything more than a "game". Today, mysteries have adopted psychological complexity, moral ambiguity, and rejection of happy endings.

According to Knox, a detective story...



Lisa as Sherlock Holmes.

...must have as its main interest the unravelling of a mystery; a mystery whose elements are clearly presented to the reader at an early stage in the proceedings, and whose nature is such as to arouse curiosity, a curiosity which is gratified at the end.

This is the point of an Information structure: stimulate curiosity, thinking, and analysis. 📍

'Knox Decalogue'

1. The criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to know.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective himself must not commit the crime.
8. The detective is bound to declare any clues which he may discover.
9. The "sidekick" of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal from the reader any thoughts which pass through his mind: his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

["The Golden Age of Detective Fiction"](#), *Wikipedia*.

INFORMATION IN THE WILD:

Crave BY SARAH KANE

A conversation is a common exchange of information. One of the reasons why our species has survived is our ability to communicate.

In graduate school, I learned that a scene between characters who are having a conversation isn't the best, strongest dramatic choice. The most ideal situation is for one character attempting to get something from the other, thereby achieving a solid goal.

A conversation that relies *only* in exchanging information seems to feel as if “nothing” is happening. If a conversation is occurring, something is happening. It doesn't need to be centered around a goal that needs to be achieved. A conversation doesn't need to have conflict.

All that a conversation really needs to be is interesting.

Sarah Kane was a British playwright who excelled in nontraditional plays. Her works are also deliberately and intelligently shocking. They are also exceptionally interesting. My favorite stage direction of hers is from [Cleansed](#): “The rats carry away Carl's feet.” Her plays require multiple trigger warnings.

Why was Kane so shocking? Kane was writing about the world she felt existed. This was her world and reflected what she had experienced and felt. Not everyone lives a rom com. **Traditional stories are based on a world we all agree exist. Kane wrote stories about a world not everyone agrees exists.**

[Crave](#) is her “mildest” play, but it has its moments. The play has four characters referred to only by letters: C, B, A, and M.

The dialogue could be seen as simultaneous monologues that overlap. Or this is people failing to listen to one another. Or perhaps both. I've included the opening of the play below. Each line is a piece of information, given or offered to someone or no one. There are instances when one character is referring to another, but it isn't specifically stipulated in the stage directions.

The audience is in the position of being overloaded with this information, coming so fast that much gets garbled. This creates a grinder of ideas and lost meanings. There's no time to digest any one thing because several more things scream for attention. It flows with the power and violence of Niagara Falls. It is also extremely interesting:



Crave, Chichester Festival theatre, 2020. Marc Brenner, NY Times.

C You're dead to me.

B My will reads, Fuck this up and I'll haunt you for the rest of your fucking life.

C He's following me.

A What do you want?

B To die.

C Somewhere outside the city, I told my mother, You're dead to me.

B No that's not it.

C If I could be free of you without having to lose you.

A Sometimes that's not possible.

M I keep telling people I'm pregnant. They say How did you do it, what are you taking? I

say I drank a bottle of port, smoked some fags and fucked a stranger.

B All lies.

C He needs to have a secret but he can't help telling. He thinks we don't know. Believe me, we know.

M A voice in the desert

C He who comes after.

M There is something in the way.

A Still here.

C Three summers ago I was bereaved. No one died but I lost my mother.

A She had him back.

C I believe in anniversaries. That a mood can be repeated even if the event that caused it

is trivial or forgotten. In this case it's neither.

M I will grow older and I will, it will, something

B I smoke till I'm sick.

A Black on white and blue.

C When I wake I think my period must have started or rather never stopped because it only finished three days ago.

M The heat is going out of me.

C The heart is going out of me.

B I feel nothing, nothing.

I feel nothing.

M Is it possible?

B Sorry?

A I'm not a rapist.

M David?

[A beat]

B Yeah.

A I'm a paedophile.

M Do you remember me?

[A beat]

B Yeah.



Question

WHAT IS IT?

A Question plot uses ambiguity and paradox. These provoke the audience to interrogate and investigate the story in a search for understanding.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *Analysis and research*
- *“fan fiction” instances, both in discussions of theories to full stories that explore answers to questions,*
- *less complicated emotional involvement beyond suspense, fear, anxiety*

EXAMPLES

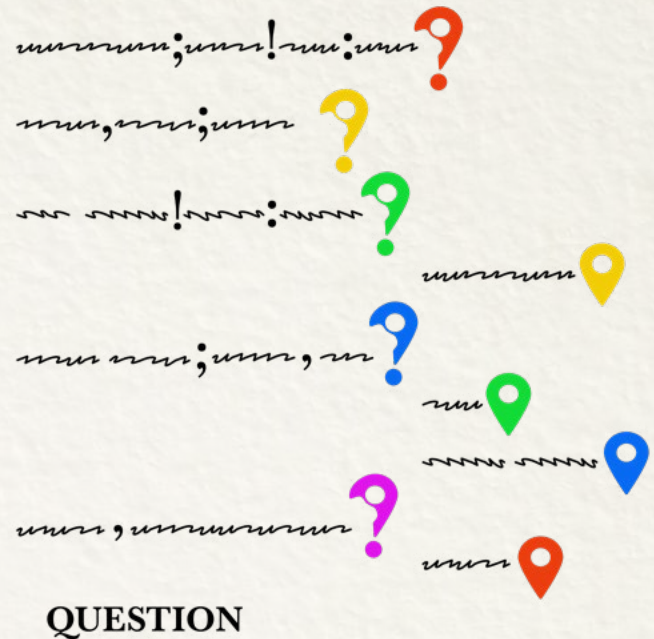
- *Thrillers*
- *Severance, Lost, From, Twilight Zone*
- *Stephen King*

WHAT IS A QUESTION PLOT STRUCTURE?

A Question plot uses ambiguity and paradox to create suspense and stimulate confusion. These provoke the audience to interrogate and investigate the story in a search for understanding.

There are two layers to a question plot:

- The full events of the story with accompanying explanations. All facts are known and divulged.
- The series of questions raised by characters, directly and indirectly. The achievement of goals will involve answering questions. Most likely accomplishing goals will only generate more questions.



The setting and characters aren't well known. We receive bits of restricted information. Important facts of the reality of the story would create a completely different story.

The number of questions doesn't need to be high, as long as the questions are absorbing and thought provoking. The questions asked in *Lost* became more and more contradictory and outrageous. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that the writers had no grand plan for the series and were making it up as they went along. Their great reveal left most viewers upset and cheated.

A story written with a Question plot breaks the fourth wall.

The "fourth wall" is the invisible boundary between the audience and performers on stage. The stage is seen as having three solid walls and then one invisible wall that the actors pretend isn't there. They cannot see the audience and act as if they aren't there. This can also occur in other artistic media.

When the wall is broken, an actor addresses the audience directly. Sometimes there is an exchange with audience members. In Shakespeare and professional wrestling, audiences were/are accustomed to screaming at the actors.

Traditionally, the fourth wall is broken by actors and the production. But with certain shows, most recently [Severance](#), the fourth wall breaks. The highly intelligent production team is fully aware of social media and fan obsession with the show. They have meticulously placed evidence in the form of an [audio book](#), [secret letters written by a former employee](#), and even a [LinkedIn profile](#). The show strategically presents and aids the audience with their investigation and theories. *Severance* has expanded its life by acknowledging the audience and participating in thematic analysis.

A Question plot in certain television shows grow like ivy in isolated and public conversations as fans invent theories, in essence writing their own stories, to answer the questions. The research and analysis I've observed (and participated in) is of high quality, even if the theories don't hold up. I've never seen so many people so passionately engage in such academic activities. 📍

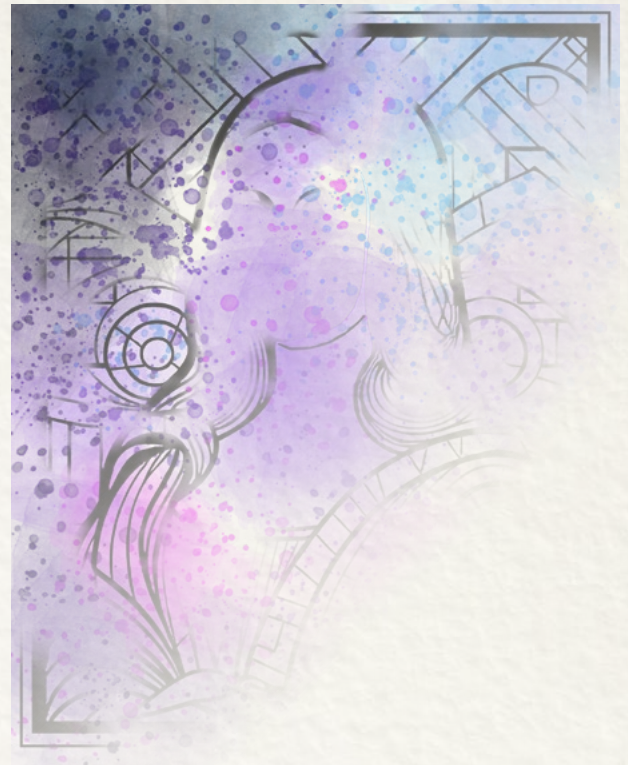
THE QUESTION LISA

At first glance, this seems to be an obscured portrait. Anyone familiar with the basic outlines of the *Mona Lisa* would be able to discern it as her. But this is obviously not the *Mona Lisa*. It's an outline with splashed and watery paints thrown about. None of the colors are remotely like the original painting. The blues, pinks and violets evoke a watery, mysterious feeling. The geometric background is a puzzle, though, as the original has a landscape.

The darkened upper left-hand corner looks like it could be a burn or that the paper had been submerged in dark ink. The opposing lower right-hand corner is non-existent.

We are left with a series of questions.







- Is this the *Mona Lisa*?
- Why is it painted the way it is?
- Where is the bottom corner and what happened to the upper corner?
- Is this the completed work of art?



LITTLE RED QUESTION MAP

Each point on the map should be a question (something isn't explained and is obviously peculiar) and/or an answer:



-  *Red is packing a basket, but we don't know what's going in it.*
-  *She has contemporary clothes in her closet, but she goes to a special box under her bed and takes out a rich red cape; it hums.*
-  *Red is walking through the woods; the trees are damaged, partly burned, some look like chunks are missing. There is rustling, but the source is unknown.*
-  *She hears something running behind her; she draws a gun from the basket, turns and shoots, but nothing is there.*
-  *Red makes it to Grandma's house and finds the house ransacked, Grandma gone, claw marks everywhere. Red turns to leave and runs into the Wolf; he takes a swipe at her, but she deflects the blow using her cloak; the contact makes the Wolf cry out in a sound that causes the trees to shake.*
-  *Red kicks the Wolf and he explodes.*

QUESTION IN THE WILD: CODEX SERAPHINIANUS

[The Voynich Manuscript](#), created between 1404 and 1438, was discovered by Wilfrid Voynich in 1912. It has been called the most mysterious book in the world. The text's language has never been decoded, despite dozens of cryptologists who have been working on it to the present day. In 2017, Nicholas Gibbs claimed the book was written in an archaic romance language and a woman's health manual; [he was quickly debunked](#). In 2018, Rainer Hannig and an AI seem to have decoded the manuscript, discovering it to be [written in Hebrew](#). But no reliable transcript could be produced. The mystery continues.

The [Codex Seraphinianus](#) is the great²⁰ grandchild of the Voynich Manuscript. The *Codex* was created by the Italian artist Luigi Serafini in 1981. It has had very limited publication in small press batches.

It too has a language that is not translatable. Serafini had the inspiration for it from automatic writing and Rorschach tests: something that the reader would read and translate using their own psychology. The images throughout the text, stunning in their color and precision, are of strange hybrids that feel more akin to the landscape of a horror movie.

These books defy literary convention because their content is unknown and, most likely in the case of *Voynich*, will never be known. How do you ascribe a genre to a book with mysterious contents?

Serafini has been upfront about the intentions behind the *Codex*, yet

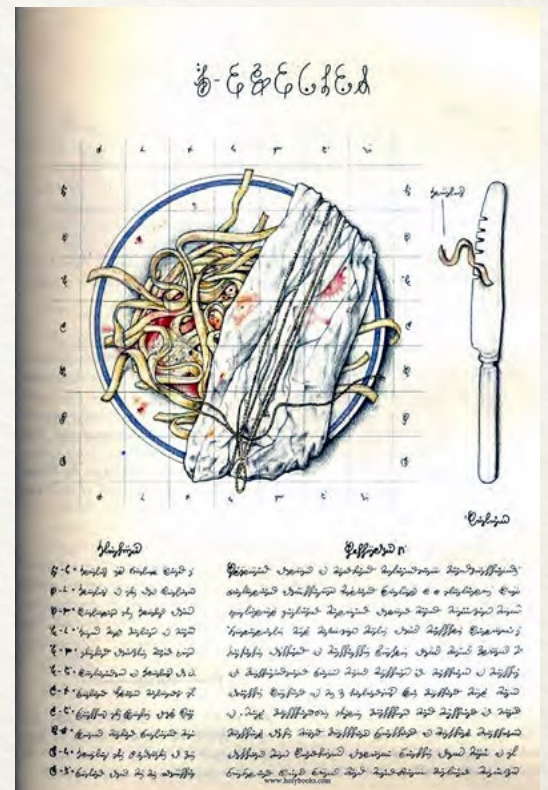
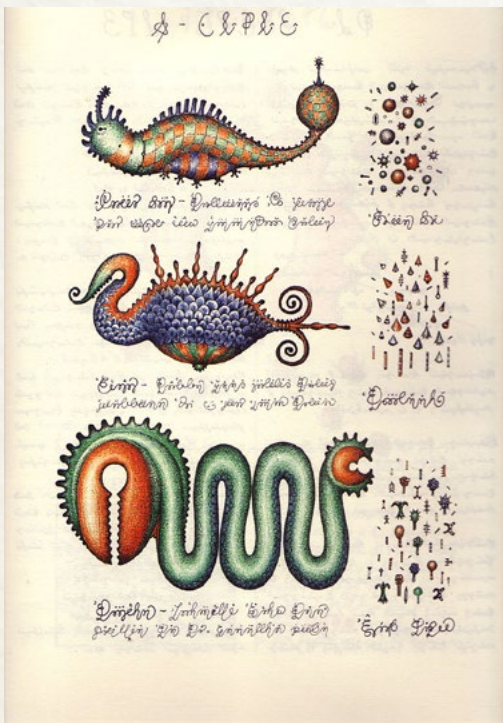
The Codex Seraphinianus

his answers are not concrete. The answers lie within the reader, subject to their personal interpretations; this isn't a solid answer. For many, this makes approaching the *Codex* more maddening.

The formats are the biggest clues: both texts are set up like encyclopedias or [medieval bestiaries](#). They are designed to present information in an organized, clear way with the purpose of understanding the natural world. Of course, these



The Voynich Manuscript



The Codex Seraphinianus

texts do not do that. Yet, like a bestiary, the texts present their confusing and arcane drawings and indecipherable text with confidence. Everything is presented as facts. There is no room for questioning, which raises even more questions. Who believed that all of these bizarre creatures and elements were factual? Could the book have been written by beings from another planet? Ancient Alien theorists say, Yes.

For our purposes, these provocative books have the purest Question plots I've ever encountered. I'm hesitant to say that they also have Information plots, because the information isn't known. Does data need to be understood conventionally in order to be made into information? It is more like an Object plot, as the objects arranged together are in categories. The specific categories, however, are unknown. It cannot be Chaos because there is too much organization and the thread linking everything is obvious: this is about a world. The elements are bizarre, but there is a clear sense to it. So these texts are both too enigmatic to understand, yet too organized to be dismissed as nonsense.



The Codex Seraphinianus



The Codex Seraphinianus

From the first page, a reader would ask nothing but questions. The languages are beautiful and, as many people have observed, alien. The *Codex* has recognizable animals, but they're perversions of what we know them to be. Plants appear fleshy. People merge with objects.

These books also break the fourth wall. Hundreds of people have devoted hours decoding *Voynich*. People are creating stories to explain what is, for the moment, unexplainable.

Whenever readers don't have complete understanding, it excites our speculation. The books excite

The manuscripts must hover in uncertainty and we can only write endless stories to bring meaning where there might be none. 📍

QUESTION v INFORMATION

how are they different?

QUESTION: A plot that pushes the action forward by asking/addressing/answering questions. Most of the time, there are more unanswered questions than answered. The audience is left in the dark, with only a handful of facts to use to create meaning.

INFORMATION: data assembled into knowledge that creates advancement in the story. The plot centers around a central thesis or assertion. The data discovered and/or presented is clear and unambiguous.

how are they the same?

Both plot structures involve the distribution of information. The manner of that distribution is different, but each ultimately is seeking to express clarity and solutions. The Question plot, like Information, does have a thesis or position or logic.

Chaos

WHAT IS IT?

Chaos is a collection of elements that may seem random and meaningless, yet have a string connecting them into a coherent structure. The structure is not obvious, but it is present.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *Pure sensory experience*
- *the seemingly lack of a structure allows for impulsivity and short texts threaded together*
- *“stream of consciousness” creates a freeflowing unloading*
- *infodump meets emotiondump*
- *conventional social interaction isn’t necessary*

EXAMPLES

- *Social media (Instagram, Facebook, X, Mastodon, Tumblr feeds and pages)*
- *writers’ notebooks*
- *surrealism, Dada*
- *collage*



If you'd like to discuss Chaos further, go to the [Nontraditional Plot Structures for Neurodiverse Writers](#) Discord group [CHAOS](#) channel.

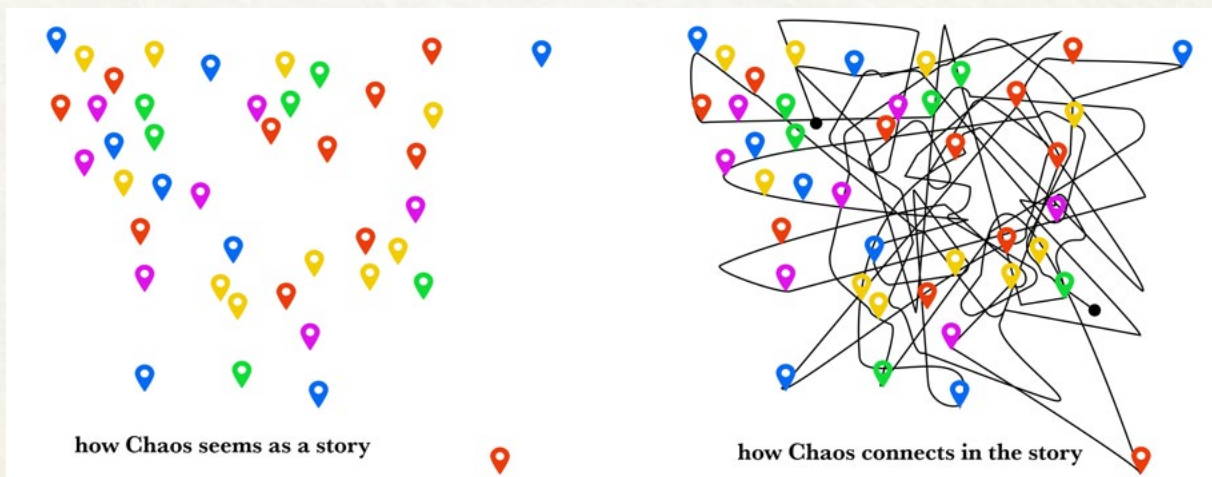
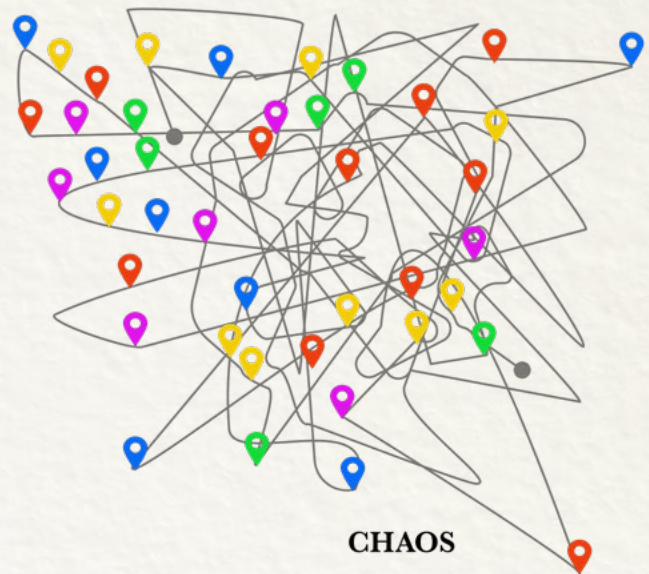
WHAT IS A CHAOS PLOT STRUCTURE?

The ironic thing is that the Journey plot structure and the Chaos structure are *two different versions of the same structure*. All of these nontraditional structures are all different versions of one another.

The Journey plot follows a straight, logical line. It flows in a linear format (even if there are flashbacks),

Chaos is a purposely rejects cause and effect, meaningful connections of events, and realistic depictions of characters and their psychologies.

The string of a Chaos structure isn't easily discerned, but **all events that occur within that structure are related, even if it isn't clear**. It can seem like nonsense or even gibberish, but there's always a connection. A timeline can loop, repeat, change, or invert. An audience may have no idea what's happening. The result is more of an emotional one rather than logical. I form this interpretation using **the scientific definition of Chaos: a system may seem to have no organization, but do, in fact, have patterns and connections**.



Chaos is not linear and doesn't attempt to be coherent. It leaps around. This reflects a specific experience with the world: one that has more questions and confusion than answers and explanations. Life is about the meaning you make and how you arrange it. There are unknowns, nonsense moments, and dead ends.

Chaos is more akin to traumatic flashbacks than a journey, because time can loop and repeat without warning. The object isn't to find a logical, rational story. It's to embrace the confusion created by a confusing world.



THE CHAOS LISA



It may not seem so, but the Chaos Lisa contains elements from the original image. Shards of Lisa's dress have become appendages sprouting from her face. A chunk of the background has been embossed and eclipses a purple circle. The colors are wildly not the *Mona Lisa*.

The faintest outline of Lisa's left shoulder forms faded mountain peaks, as if far in the distance, or a unidentifiable ghost.

The face that isn't the face does faintly resemble the *Mona Lisa*. The smile, at least, remains.

This image seems like nonsense, something with no coherent through-line. Yet, it does have one: the *Mona Lisa*. But this Lisa is haunted, perhaps an imp on an alien world, a suggestion of loss and tremendous energy. 📍

LITTLE RED CHAOS MAP

A Chaos map will look like a list of random elements. These elements can be in any order with repetition, twisted timeline, etc. This seems wrong or not thought out. But all of these elements are put into an order that "feels" right. I'm not trying to be a pseudo-intellectual spouting art-speak; I'm being very serious. This is truly where artistic impulses *must* make decisions. **Respect your instincts and intuition.** See the maps of Artaud's [*Spurt of Blood*](#) as a more detailed example.



📍 *The Wolf and Grandma are interchangeable and the reality is questionable.*

📍 *The basket can contain food, blood, insects, or all three.*

📍 *The flowers can be personified, talking to Red.*

📍 *There can be meat present in different ways, bloody and talking.*

📍 *The Wolf discovers there is no Grandma and no house.*



CHAOS IN THE WILD:

The Book of Surrealist Games

It is tempting to say that the Chaos plot structure is only a revamp of Surrealism. However, Surrealism is a different animal: it's a genre.

A plot is the frame of a house. A genre is how the house is decorated. Therefore a Chaos plot is a type of house, and Surrealism could be its decor. The works of [Salvador Dali](#) are good examples of what that decor would look like.

Surrealism naturally works with Chaos because of its focus, or obsession, with the unconscious. The movement emerged in Paris in 1924 with the publication of the [“Surrealist Manifesto”](#). It champions the unconscious and dreams as landscapes for artists to express themselves. Surrealist art can seem as haphazard as a dream, but underneath it all is meaning built by the artist's unconscious.



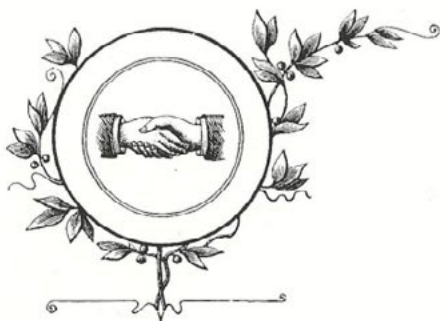
[The Hallucinogenic Toreador](#) by Salvador Dali. Scan of original currently held in The Dali Museum. Fair use.

The Surrealists sought to create what their leader, [Andre Breton](#), called [“pure psychic automatism”](#). This is writing or creating art without any conscious control. A common version of this is a writing exercise every creative writing class has: free writing. One is to write as much as possible, without thinking, for a set amount of time.

The Surrealists believed this kind of activity brought the unconscious to the forefront. They created “party games” to write in groups. Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding compiled these games into [A Book of Surrealist Games](#). Though the Surrealists created the games 100 years ago, they still hold up today as challenging creative exercises.

Reading the generated sentences from “The Exquisite Corpse” (below) one cannot deny that there is a thread running through the statements. “The wounded women disturb the guillotine with blond hair” is packed with possible interpretation. The blond hair could “disturb” the guillotine by blocking the blade. Or, perhaps, the blond hair is a sexual reference: the male executioners cannot bring themselves to kill these representations of ideal beauty. The “wounded” state of the women could refer to an execution botched, or perhaps their wounds are more spiritual, embodied in whatever crimes they may have committed or accused of.

This is Chaos because there is a connection between the words, even though several people wrote this sentence and there was no overarching plan or plot in its creation. I don't think there's anything magical about this; I think human beings, on whatever level, and however they can, find and build meaning. The collages created in the “Re-assembling Reality” exercise (below) accomplish this as well. 📍



CHAIN GAMES

THESE ARE GAMES TO BE PLAYED COLLECTIVELY, AND CAN BE PLAYED BY ANYONE. THE STRANGE CONJUNCTIONS, HUMOROUS OR POETIC, THAT THEY GENERATE GIVE THEM THEIR POINT. NO ONE IS EXCLUDED FROM THE QUEST FOR REVELATION. THE FIRST FIVE GAMES USE THE TECHNIQUE OF PAPER-FOLDING TO HIDE PREVIOUS PLAYERS' CONTRIBUTIONS, AND ALL HAVE AUTOMATIC ASPECTS.

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THE EXQUISITE CORPSE

For a minimum of three players.

The players sit around a table and each writes on a sheet of paper a definite or indefinite article and an adjective, making sure their neighbours cannot see them. The sheets are folded so as to conceal the words, and passed round to the next player. Each player then writes a noun, conceals it, and the process is repeated with a verb, another definite or indefinite article and adjective, and finally another noun. The paper is unfolded and the sentences read out. Players may agree small changes to ensure grammatical consistency.

This is the simplest version of the game, more complicated sentence structures can be agreed beforehand.

The game acquired its name from the first sentence obtained in this way:

The exquisite corpse shall drink the new wine.

Further examples:

The wounded women disturb the guillotine with blond hair.

Caraco is a lovely bitch: lazy as a dormouse and gloved in glass so as not to have to do a thing, she strings pearls to pay the piper.

The avenged topaz shall devour with kisses the paralytic of Rome.

The flame-coloured breast surpasses by one step, one finger, one mouthful, the melodious breasts.

The endless sex sleeps with the orthodox tongue.

25

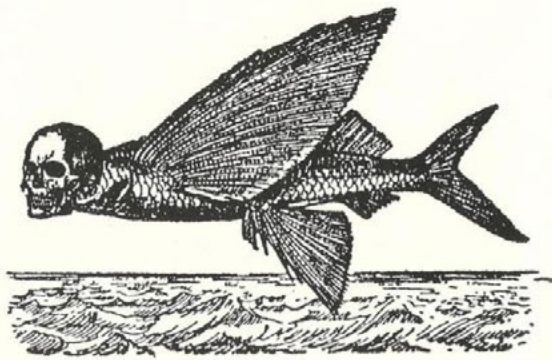
RE-ASSEMBLING REALITY

COLLAGE

Collage, sticking together cut-out images, takes various forms within the scope of this book.

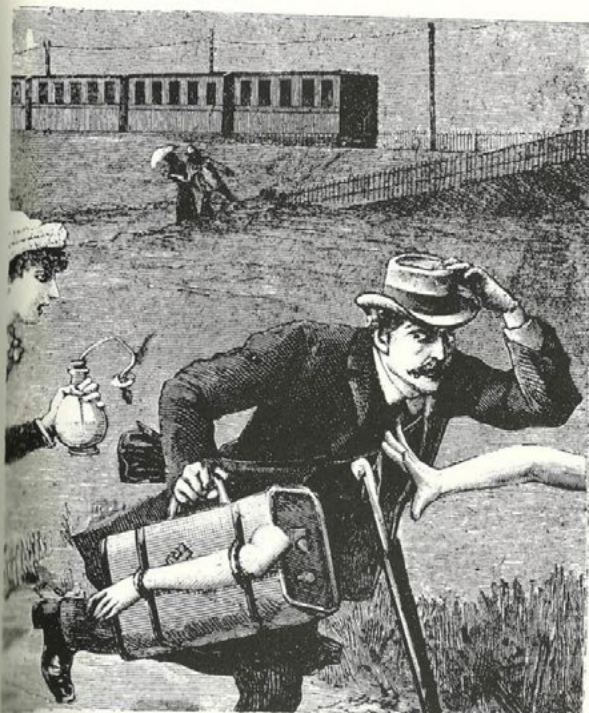
'SURREALIST COLLAGE'

Max Ernst invented this method of pasting together fragments of given or found pictures. By using images that already had a similar 'look' (principally engravings illustrating novels, magazines and technical or commercial publications) he was able to create 'illusionistic' new pictures—bizarre, fantastic, dream-like, ironic or grotesque.



MAX ERNST

60



MAX ERNST. Open Your Bag, My Good Man

61

CHAOS IN THE WILD: ANTONIN ARTAUD AND “SPURT OF BLOOD” (“*Jet de Sang*”)

Antonin Artaud was an extreme, disturbing, complicated, and possibly mentally unbalanced theater practitioner and theorist in the early 20th century.

He developed a philosophy of theatre called “Theater of Cruelty” which was designed to elicit

...a primitive ceremonial experience intended to liberate the human subconscious and reveal man to himself...

doing so by creating a

...communion between actor and audience in a magic exorcism; gestures, sounds, unusual scenery, and lighting combine to form a language, superior to words, that can be used to subvert thought and logic and to shock the spectator into seeing the baseness of his world.
([Encyclopedia Britannica](#)).



Antonin Artaud, 1926. Public domain.

His philosophy can be “experienced” reading his book [Theater and Its Double](#). His most memorable work (in my opinion) is *Spurt of Blood*.

Spurt of Blood is a very short play and I’ve included it following this section, along with a rough visual and textual map of the play. [Josh Taylor](#) wrote a very concise trigger warning for the script: “Surrealist violence, sexuality, and talking with a mouth full of cheese”. It also has this unusual, religious exchange between God (Huge Voice) and the Bawd:

HUGE VOICE: *Bitch, look at your body!*

[The Bawd’s body is seen to be absolutely naked and hideous beneath her blouse and skirt, which become transparent as glass]

BAWD: *Leave me alone, God.*

[She bites God in the wrist. An immense spurt of blood lacerates the Stage...]

The play is a series of exchanges between people identified only as their role: a Young Man, a Wet-Nurse, a Young Girl, a Priest, a Knight, a Cobbler, a Beadle, a Bawd, a Huge Voice (God?), and a Judge. The exchanges between these characters make no rational sense:

KNIGHT: *Let go of your tits. Give me my papers.*

WET-NURSE: *[Screaming in high-pitch] Ah! Ah! Ah!*

KNIGHT: *Damn, what’s the matter with you?*

WET-NURSE: *Our daughter, there, with him.*

KNIGHT: Quiet, there's no girl there.

WET-NURSE: I'm telling you that they're screwing.

KNIGHT: What the Hell do I care if they're screwing?

WET-NURSE: Incest.

KNIGHT: Midwife.

WET-NURSE: [Plunging her hands deep into her pockets which are as big as her breasts] Pimp.

[She throws his papers at him]

KNIGHT: Let me eat.

[The Wet-Nurse rushes out] [He gets up and from each paper he takes a huge hunk of Swiss cheese. Suddenly he coughs and chokes]

KNIGHT: [With full mouth] Ehp. Ehp. Show me your breasts. Show me your breasts. Where did she go?

When it ends, we know it has ended because the text has stopped. Fortifying myself with caffeine and Ritalin, I managed to map *Spurt of Blood* both visually and as a list. The result was shocking to me: there is a deliberate structure within the text. The “randomness” isn’t random, nor is it irrational. Artaud is making statements about relationships, society, the world, lust, nightmares, nature, relations between men and women, and religion. The maps following this section will demonstrate this. In the second edition, I’ll spend a chapter deep-diving into the script, dissecting it line-by-line, and uncover how Artaud is using Chaos, Asymptote, and Force plots skillfully.

There is much violent imagery and questionable inclusions, but it fits Artaud’s philosophy of the Theater of Cruelty: it is a plague infecting the audience. Watching it causes suffering, which leads to a new way of thinking or outlook.

(This play has been called “unproducible”, yet has been produced multiple times.)

This is the most pure form of Chaos I’ve ever read. The elements being thrown at the audience are startling and shocking. Many of the elements seem impossible to create on stage. Each element, in itself, is normal. But when they are combined as they are, when characters interact as they do and say obscure things to one another, it is a jarring experience to read. I can’t imagine watching this thing in person.

Artaud’s intention was to shock. Today, to say a writer intentionally attempted to shock their audience is to say they were being juvenile or they lacked the writing abilities to create something more refined.

There’s nothing wrong with shocking for the sake of shocking. It’s a feeling in writing, and like all feelings there is nothing wrong with it in itself. It simply is. Chaos shocks. It also disorients and confuses. But it doesn’t pretend to do anything else, just like Artaud.



THE SPURT OF BLOOD

Antonin Artaud

TRANSLATED BY RUBY COHN

CHARACTERS

A YOUNG MAN

A WET-NURSE

A YOUNG GIRL

A PRIEST

A KNIGHT

A COBBLER

A BEADLE

A PEDDLER

A BAWD

A HUGE VOICE

A JUDGE

YOUNG MAN: I love you and everything is beautiful.

YOUNG GIRL: [With quavering voice] You love me and everything is beautiful.

YOUNG MAN: [In a lower tone] I love you and everything is beautiful.

YOUNG GIRL: [In an even lower tone] You love me and everything is beautiful.

YOUNG MAN: [Leaving her abruptly] I love you. [Silence] Face me.

YOUNG GIRL: [As before standing opposite him] There.

YOUNG MAN: [In an exalted high-pitched voice] I love you. I am great, I am lucid, I am full, I am dense.

YOUNG GIRL: [In the same high-pitched voice] We love each other.

YOUNG MAN: We are intense. Ah, how beautifully the world is built.

[Silence. There is a noise as if an immense wheel were turning and moving the air. A hurricane separates them. At the same time, two Stars are seen colliding and from them fall a series of legs of living flesh with feet, hands, scalps, masks, colonnades, porticoes, temples, alembics, falling more and more slowly, as if falling in a vacuum: then three scorpions one after another and finally a frog and a beetle which come to rest with desperate slowness, nauseating slowness]

YOUNG MAN: [Crying with all his strength] The sky has gone mad.

[He looks at the sky] Let's hurry away from here.

[He pushes the Young Girl before him]

[Enter a medieval Knight in gigantic armor, followed by a Wet-Nurse holding her breasts in her hands and puffing because her breasts are swollen]

KNIGHT: Let go of your tits. Give me my papers.

WET-NURSE: [Screaming in high-pitch] Ah! Ah! Ah!

KNIGHT: Damn, what's the matter with you?

WET-NURSE: Our daughter, there, with him.

KNIGHT: Quiet, there's no girl there.

WET-NURSE: I'm telling you that they're screwing.

KNIGHT: What the Hell do I care if they're screwing?

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[She throws his papers at him]

KNIGHT: Let me eat.

[The Wet-Nurse rushes out] [He gets up and from each paper he takes a huge hunk of Swiss cheese.

Suddenly he coughs and chokes]

KNIGHT: [With full mouth] Ehp. Ehp. Show me your breasts. Show me your breasts. Where did she go?

[He runs out] [The Young Man comes back]

YOUNG MAN: I saw, I knew, I understood. Here on a public street, the priest, the cobbler, the peddler the entrance to the church, the red light of the brothel, the scales of justice. I can't stand it any longer!

[Like shadows, a Priest, a Cobbler, a Beadle, a Bawd, a Judge, a Peddler, arrive on stage]

YOUNG MAN: I've lost her: give her back to me.

ALL: [In different tones] Who, who, who, who.

YOUNG MAN: My wife.

BEADLE: [Very fat] Your wife, you're kidding!

YOUNG MAN: Kidding! Maybe she's yours!

BEADLE: [Tapping his forehead] Maybe she is.

[He runs out] [The Priest leaves the group and puts his arm around the neck of the Young Man]

PRIEST: [As if confessing someone.] To what part of your body do you refer most often?

YOUNG MAN: To God.

[Confused by the reply the Priest immediately shifts to a Swiss accent]

PRIEST: [In Swiss accent] But that isn't done any more. We no longer hear through that ear. You have to ask that of volcanoes and earthquakes. We wallow in the little obscenities of man in the confession-box.

That's life.

YOUNG MAN: [Much impressed] Ah that's life! Then everything is shot to hell.

PRIEST: [Still with Swiss accent] Of course.

[At this moment night suddenly falls on stage. The earth quakes. There is furious thunder and zig-zags of lightning in every direction through the zig-zags all the characters can be seen running around bumping into each other and falling then getting up and running about like crazy. Then an enormous hand seizes the Bawd by her hair, which bursts into flame and grows huge before our eyes]

HUGE VOICE: Bitch, look at your body!

[The Bawd's body is seen to be absolutely naked and hideous beneath her blouse and skirt, which become transparent as glass]

BAWD: Leave me alone, God.

[She bites God in the wrist. An immense spurt of blood lacerates the Stage, and through the biggest flash of lightning the Priest can be seen making the sign of the cross. When the lights go on again all the characters are dead, and their corpses lie all over the ground. Only the Young Man and the Bawd remain devouring each other with their eyes. The Bawd falls into the Young Man's arms]

BAWD: [With the sigh of one having an orgasm] Tell me how it happened to you.

[The Young Man hides his head in his hands. The Wet-nurse comes back carrying the Young Girl under her arm like a bundle. The young Girl is dead. The Bawd drops her on the ground where she collapses and becomes flat as a pancake. The Wet-Nurse no longer has her breasts. Her chest is completely flat]

KNIGHT: [In a terrible voice] Where did you put them? Give me my Swiss cheese.

WET-NURSE: [Boldly and gaily] Here you are.

[She lifts up her dress. The Young Man wants to run away but he is frozen like a petrified puppet]

YOUNG MAN: [As if suspended in the air and with the voice of a ventriloquist] Don't hurt Mommy!

KNIGHT: She-devil!

[He hides his face in horror. A multitude of scorpions crawl out from beneath the Wet-Nurse's dress and swarm between her legs. Her vagina swells up splits and becomes transparent and glistening like a sun. The Young Man and Bawd run off as though lobotomized]
YOUNG GIRL: [Getting up dazed] The virgin! Ah that's what he was looking for.

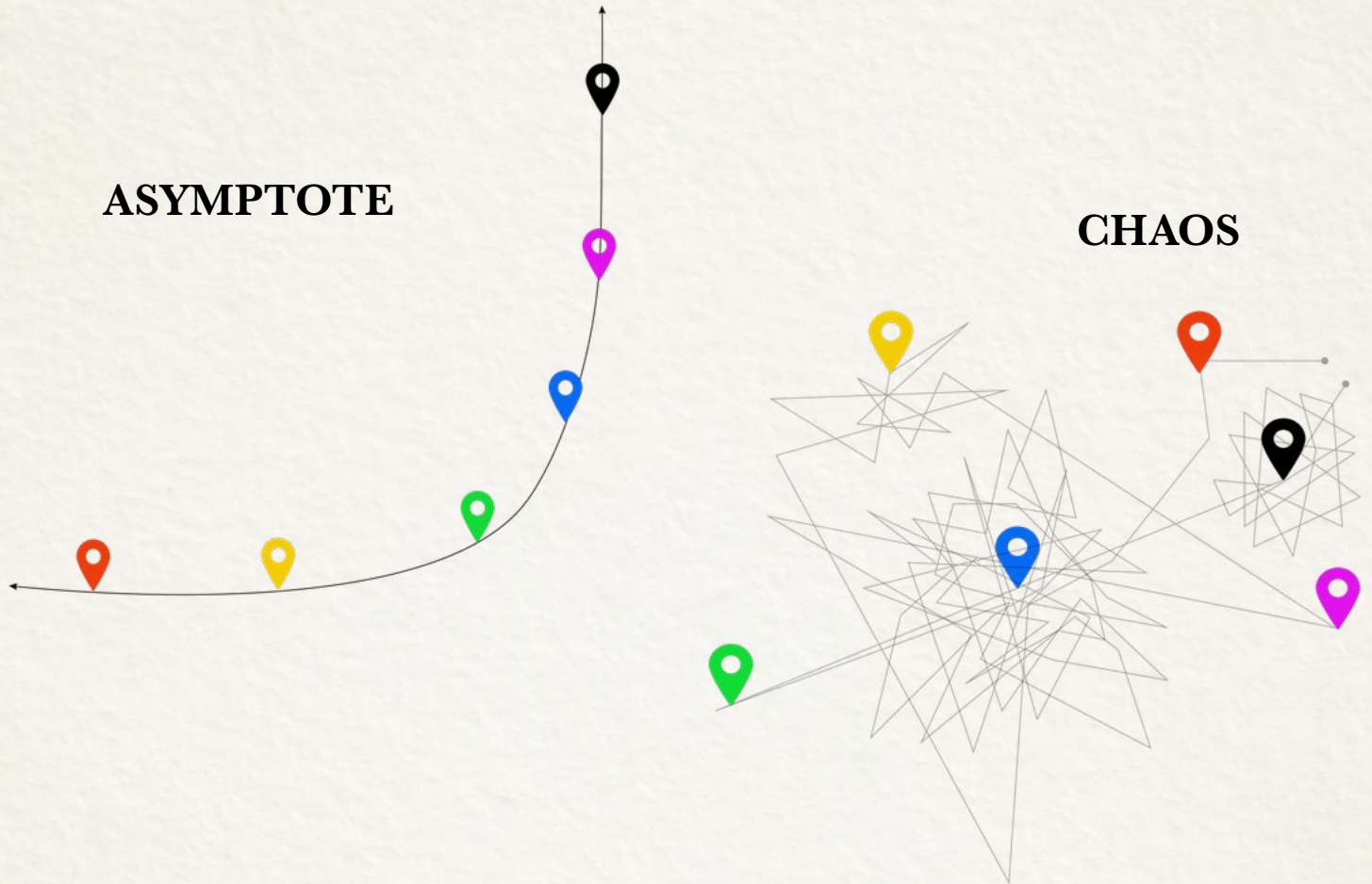


Lisa as the Wet-Nurse.



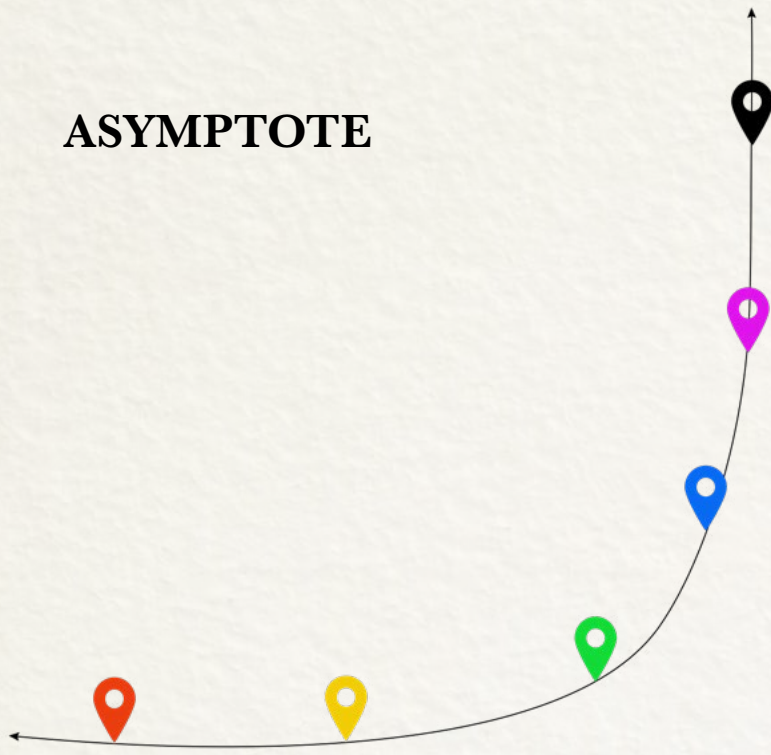
If you'd like to discuss Spurt of Blood further, go to the [Nontraditional Plot Structures for Neurodiverse Writers](#) Discord group channel, ["Spurt of Blood Recovery Group"](#).

MAP OF *Spurt of Blood*, ANTONIN ARTAUD



FORCE

ASYMPTOTE



YOUNG MAN: I love you and everything is beautiful.

YOUNG GIRL: [With quavering voice] You love me and everything is beautiful.

YOUNG MAN: [Crying with all his strength] The sky has gone mad. [He looks at the sky] Let's hurry away from here. [He pushes the Young Girl before him]

YOUNG MAN: I've lost her: give her back to me.

ALL: [In different tones] Who, who, who, who.

YOUNG MAN: My wife.

[...Only the Young Man and the Bawd remain devouring each other with their eyes. The Bawd falls into the Young Man's arms]

BAWD: [With the sigh of one having an orgasm] Tell me how it happened to you.

[The Young Man hides his head in his hands.

The Wet-nurse comes back carrying the Young Girl under her arm like a bundle. The young Girl is dead... The Young Man and Bawd run off as though lobotomized.

YOUNG GIRL: [Getting up dazed] The virgin! Ah that's what he was looking for.

The Asymptote structure is unexpectedly straightforward. The Asymptote focuses on the Young Man and Young Girl. The play opens and closes with them. It is an ambiguous opening. We don't know what occurred before this. They're expressing emotions and without an obvious goal.

The green and blue points form the bend in the Asymptote and are the focus, or major turning point, of the relationship between the Man and Girl. He loses her. This gives him a goal, ultimately achieved when the Wet-nurse carries the Girl in dead. The Bawd and the Young Man run off "as though lobotomized", a rather amusing way to describe the thinking processes that arise from falling in lust.

What makes this an Asymptote structure is the Girl isn't dead and "rationalizes" that her husband wanted a virgin this entire time. This is a "What-the-Fuck?" moment. Was she dead before? Did she rise from the dead? Did the Husband think she's dead and used that as justification for running off with the Bawd? Has anything been accomplished? Is there any way to anticipate what will happen next?



CHAOS

This map of the Chaos structure really aids the writer as a way of seeing visually the events which are chaotic and how they can be seen together proportionally.

This play is replete with Chaotic events. For the sake of simplicity, I've clustered them. The first red point includes a hurricane, stars colliding, raining flesh, scorpions, a frog and a beetle, all of which could easily have their own points.

Each of the points have different "sizes" of Chaos. The red, yellow, and blue points in the map have clusters of lines to demonstrate this. The blue point involves the infamous "spurt of blood" from God's wrist. I felt this was the biggest moment of the story and should be centered with the most lines clustered around it. The yellow point I deemed bigger than the red, simply because it involves lightning and thunder and all of the characters running about, as well as the Bawd's burning hair. I think the involvement of the characters is "bigger" than scorpions, a frog, and a beetle.

The Chaos in SoB seems balanced. Artaud paces the intense craziness and allows for moments for the audience to breathe. Theoretically. The pacing of this play is so wildly fast that all of these moments would seem as one continuous moment. There seems to be no space between them. This is a point of Chaos: to create a "What-the-Fuck" reaction and a slurry of confusion.

There is a noise as if an immense wheel were turning and moving the air. A hurricane separates them. At the same time, two Stars are seen colliding and from them fall a series of legs of living flesh with feet, hands, scalps, masks, colonnades, porticos, temples, alembics, falling more and more slowly, as if falling in a vacuum: then three scorpions one after another and finally a frog and a beetle which come to rest with desperate slowness, nauseating slowness

Night suddenly falls on stage. The earth quakes. There is furious thunder and zig-zags of lightning in every direction through the zig-zags all the characters can be seen running around bumping into each other and falling then getting up and running about like crazy. Then an enormous hand seizes the Bawd by her hair, which bursts into flame and grows huge before our eyes.

The Bawd's body is seen to be absolutely naked and hideous beneath her blouse and skirt, which become transparent as glass.

She bites God in the wrist. An immense spurt of blood lacerates the Stage, and through the biggest flash of lightning the Priest can be seen making the sign of the cross. When the lights go on again all the characters are dead, and their corpses lie all over the ground.

The Bawd drops her on the ground where she collapses and becomes flat as a pancake. The Wet-Nurse no longer has her breasts. Her chest is completely flat.

A multitude of scorpions crawl out from beneath the Wet-Nurse's dress and swarm between her legs. Her vagina swells up splits and becomes transparent and glistening like a sun.



FORCE

There is something that is really interesting in this Force map. When I first selected quotes from SoB, I realized that five of the six quotes appear in the Chaos map. At first, I thought I screwed up: it seemed like Chaos and Force were the same thing. Then I realized a few things.

The points are large groups of events, for simplicity. If I were to map these groups in more detail, they would separate out as Chaos and Force elements. This play could be mapped out down to individual words, perhaps even punctuation (though I'm being very ambitious saying that). The nuances of Force and Chaos would be better reflected in this level of detail.

Even at a highly detailed level, many of the events would still fit into both the Force and Chaos structures. I don't think this is a mistake or a misreading. This is skill.

Returning to the Asymptote plot, it's much "smaller" than Chaos and Force. It's so small that I hadn't realized it existed until I examined the play line-by-line. This isn't a weakness; Artaud makes this plot smaller because it isn't as important as Chaos and Force.

For Chaos and Force to share events expands and highlights the events. The smaller Force event that doesn't repeat, such as the Bawd falling into the Young Man's arms, seems less important than scorpions swarming up the Wet-Nurse's legs. The scorpions are both an element of Force and Chaos. It's a very "loud", unforgettable event. This creates the plague-infection reaction Artaud is wishing to achieve.

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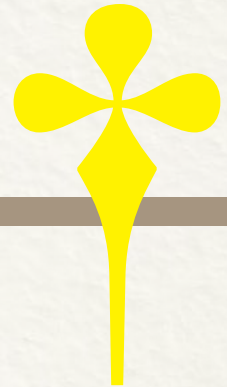
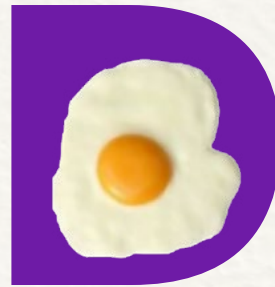
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D



I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense.

Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto",
1918

A complex collage of various images. On the left is a large illustration of a man's face wearing a top hat and a red tuxedo jacket with a bow tie. The man has a large brown mustache, a small pink flower on his cheek, and large, expressive eyes. To his right is a network of yellow lines connecting various icons and images. These include: a cartoon pig on a laptop screen; a brain with a camera lens in the center; a unicycle; a mantis standing on a pink bus; a red sphere; a green sphere; a blue sphere; a string of colorful beads; a small image of an elephant; a small image of a landscape with a tree; a small image of a person in a white dress; and a small image of a camera lens. The background is a light beige color with some green and yellow shapes.

A Dada structure is Chaos without the thread. It's Object without the logic. It's pandemonium. Art pushed and pummeled the boundaries of what art is. The original movement in the early twentieth century emerged from the destruction and horrors of WWI. Artists were disgusted with capitalism and rationality. They wanted to feel and celebrate nonsense. Dadaists rejected any structure because, to them, politicians and capitalists dominated logic and rationality, using it for propaganda and politics. Leaders used logic and rationality to justify a bloody world war. Tristan Tzara wrote his passionate 1918 ["Dada Manifesto"](#):

Where does this leave twenty-first century writers who have been taught that must have a structure, and that which doesn't have a structure is bad writing?

I don't pretend that writers these days who are looking to get published will fervently embrace Dada's frenzied confusion and anarchy. Dada can be disorienting and its nonsense can seem childish and a waste of time. Dada can seem like a child made it. Does art have to look like something a master made? Is art and writing restricted only to those of a elevated education and talent? Dada says if you call it art, it is art. Anarchy can be dangerous, but it is also the purest form of freedom.

So for the twentieth-first century writer, there is joy in freedom, even if it seems frightening and confusing. Putting these Dada pieces together for this section was actually difficult, but very fun. It is actually extremely hard to be purposely illogical and disorganized. 📍



THE DADA LISA

I constructed the Dada Lisa using randomness. I opened a book at random, pointed to a word at random, and then did a Google search of the word and picked an image which would fit. I picked other images at random from what I already had saved. It was honestly difficult to construct something so randomly. My instincts were to make connections and create a theme.

There is no logical interpretation of the Dada Lisa. It's a celebration of confusion and absurdity. According to Dada, it would have no ideology, underlying psychology, or deeper artistic significance. The images of the collage have no relationship to one another. It is what it is.

(I, however, respectfully disagree. I appreciate the energy and playfulness of Dada, but I'm on the side of the Surrealists. I have included in the Appendix [an interpretation of "The Dada Lisa"](#). It is *long*, but I was able to discover/create some meaning. Maybe.) 📍



DADA IN THE WILD:

GERTRUDE STEIN'S *Tender Buttons*

When *Tender Buttons* was first published in 1914, the critics destroyed it. Stein's friends and literary peers laughed at her. They thought this was a scam or she was ridiculing the literary world. The great writer Sherwood Anderson learned of the book from his brother. His brother read it and said it, **"It gives words an oddly new intimate flavor and at the same time makes familiar words seem almost like strangers, doesn't it."** Now the book is seen as a classic and even revolutionary. I have included *Tender Buttons* as Dada, but it could easily also be Chaos. It depends if whether one believes there can be meaning in what seems to be randomness. (N.B. Read these excerpts out loud, especially in the bathroom with good acoustics. The way they sound is fascinating and fun.)

Excerpts from [Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*](#):

MALACHITE.

The sudden spoon is the same in no size. The sudden spoon is the wound in the decision.

A NEW CUP AND SAUCER.

Enthusiastically hurting a clouded yellow bud and saucer, enthusiastically so is the bite in the ribbon.

MILK.

Climb up in sight climb in the whole utter needles and a guess a whole guess is hanging. Hanging hanging.

DINNER.

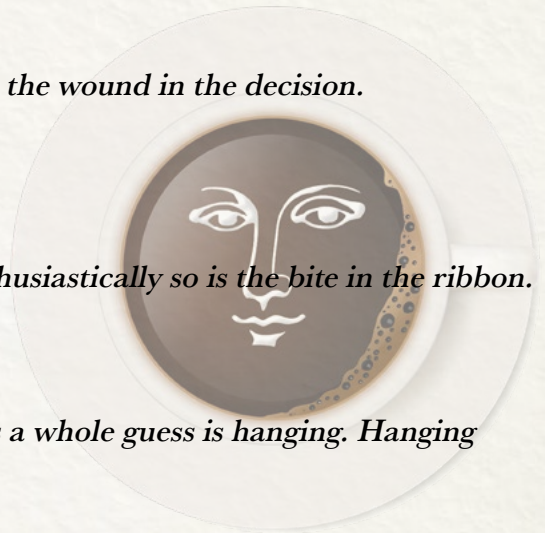
Not a little fit, not a little fit sun sat in shed more mentally.

Let us why, let us why weight, let us why winter chess, let us why way.

Only a moon to soup her, only that in the sell never never be the cocups nice be, shatter it they lay.

Egg ear nuts, look a bout. Shoulder. Let it strange, sold in bell next herds.

It was a time when in the acres in late there was a wheel that shot a burst of land and needless are niggers and a sample sample set of old eaten butterflies with spoons, all of it to be are fled and measure make it, make it, yet all the one in that we see where shall not it set with a left and more so, yes there add when the longer not it shall the best in the way when all be with when shall not for there with see and chest how for another excellent and excellent and easy easy excellent and easy express e c, all to be nice all to be no so. All to be no so no so. All to be not a white old chat churning. Not to be any example of an edible apple in.



Object

WHAT IS IT?

A primary focus on objects and their context, juxtaposition, similarities, differences, etc. We can and do experience the events in our lives as objects. Objects can, in themselves, be characters.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *Stimming: deep focus on details of an “object”, something neurodivergent writers have a special understanding of the human connection with objects.*
- *There is a logical connection that isn't hidden, so the text itself is very straightforward and organized.*
- *No need for social interactions or overly emotional scenes.*
- *Emphasizes objectivity.*
- *Easily create a fast structure of brief chunks of text.*

EXAMPLES

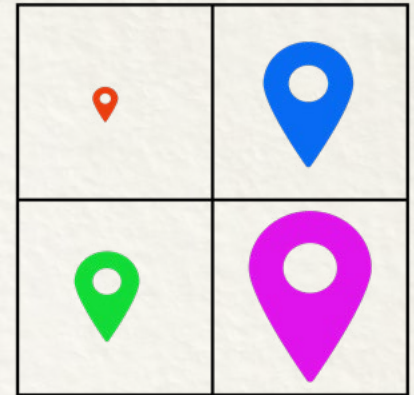
- *Still life and sculpture*
- *albums of photos or playlists of songs*
- *collage*

WHAT IS AN OBJECT PLOT STRUCTURE?

The diagram at the right has four location points in separate boxes. All four boxes are in one box. This creates a collection of points. We observe the collection as one piece comprised of individual pieces. We can look at each piece in contrast to the others. We can form opinions about the arrangement and how that creates its own effect. We can look at the spacing, the choice of colors, thinness of the lines, etc.

An Object plot is essentially a collection. It can also be a single object, such as [Marcel Duchamp's urinal](#).

The drama that we experience with objects is profound. **We can and do experience the events in our lives as objects. And objects can, in themselves, be characters.** Neurodiverse people have special relationships with objects. See ["Google AI: Neurodiversity and Object"](#) for further information.



OBJECT

According to ["Object", Wikipedia](#), an object is a self-contained thing which can be collected, analyzed, organized, observed, contextualized, juxtaposed, broken, destroyed, repaired, or created. It has a specific identity; if the object changes in anyway, the identity changes. We know objects by our senses, which is how we obtain data to create information about its character. We have a classification of objects: animate vs inanimate and physical vs abstract. The former is a determination of life and the latter is about where the object exists.

All of these elements can form the structure of an Object plot. Rather than having human characters go through change, struggles, growth, or death, objects interact in an intellectual framework.

The objects can take the form of simple presentation of entities next to one another, such as a still-life. Dialogue can have an object structure: characters can be objects and describe themselves as such. This information could be delivered in a format akin to a list read dispassionately (see [Hamletmachine](#)).

If there is any sort of "climax" to an Object plot, it could be in the form of Emergence. Emergence is a philosophical, scientific, artistic concept that takes Aristotle's idea of "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" (see [Appendix](#)) to a more complex level. Aristotle sees the whole in terms of value. Emergence sees the whole as a complex system that creates something that cannot exist on its own. Only through the interacting of the parts will produce this thing. (["Emergence", Wikipedia](#))

The easiest example of this is the concept of a soul. Only through the working of the components/objects of the human body will a specific and unique personality or soul emerge. This could be the key to an Object plot: the story begins with a collection of objects, but something about the collection changes as new objects are added, or present objects changed in some form.

I shall go into Emergence in much greater detail in the second edition. At this time, I suspect Emergence has a greater, more significant presence in nontraditional storytelling.



THE OBJECT LISA



The objects in this image are all women. However, the women aren't sex objects. Nor are they flat, basic entities without any agency. Each of these figures has expression of an identity and personal agency. All of them are also enacting Force.






As an Object plot, understanding the image requires taking each figure or figures individually. The most present group is the dancers. Several are different forms of belly dancing. There is one tiny ballet dancer on the far right. The two tallest figures on the right could easily be categorized as drag queens or trans performers. They are undoubtedly women, even if that womanhood lasts only as long as they wear their costume. These dancers bring a dynamic energy to the group; the image seems to be in constant motion. The objects are churning around them.

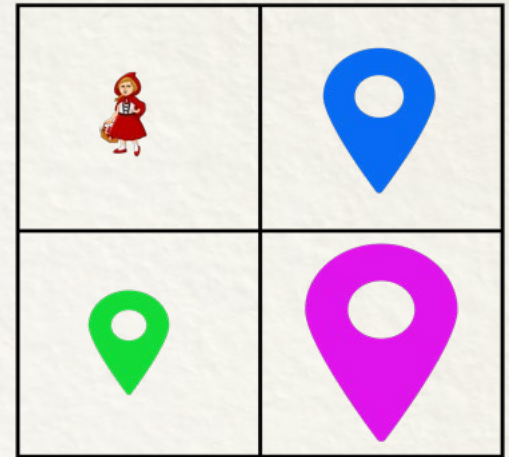
The other figures are no less dynamic. Off to the far left is a fleeing nymph, an image taken from a Pompeian villa. This is a mythological character, but so is the *Mona Lisa* hanging almost dead center. These figures bring an element of endurance over time, as they are the oldest of the images. The rest were created in the twentieth century. There is a housewife in red, on the left; she is deep in contemplation. I see her as a neurodiverse figure, locked within her thoughts, yet content with the distant energy of the others. This could also be said of the center woman reading an enormous book. She sits whilst the others stand, yet she is wholly active in her intellectual activities. **Thinking is a physical action.**

We have a giantess. She is a figure of extraordinary physical prowess, stature, and authority. She is so enormous she cannot fit within the confines of the image. This also makes her mysterious. Her skirt flares up to the right, as if she's in mid-movement. Though I wouldn't classify any of the other figures as sex objects, the giantess is the closest to expressing a sexual identity. I will grant that the display of a woman as only body parts, this image isn't explicit, nor reductive. She is wearing a costume of high heels, stockings, and a skirt. These elements are a common sexual fetish. She is not controlled by these elements, nor identified entirely by them. She controls her exposure. Her context as well destroys any type of exploitation; she is among other women in a vibrant, independent expression. This is what Emerges from this collection: these women together are an expression of independence and societal power. There is joy and celebration. The giantess isn't presented as a commodity to be consumed for sexual purposes. She is participating and evolving with the others. 📍

LITTLE RED OBJECT MAP

Rather than telling the story of Red with one event following another, Object takes it apart. Each point on the map will tell the story as objects, characters included.

-  Any/all of the four characters: Red, Wolf, Grandma, Huntsman
-  The Wolf's teeth embedded in food, chipped, stained, rotted
-  Grandma's clothes stained with blood, torn by claws, covered with hair
-  Basket and food; the food contained, its freshness, nutritional information, etc.
-  Red's red riding hood, what it's made of, where it was made, who typically wears these types of hoods, etc.



OBJECT




OBJECTS IN THE WILD: DUCHAMP'S *Fountain*



Marcel Duchamp *Fountain*,
1917. Public domain.

In April, 1917, Marcel Duchamp had in an exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists a urinal. He called it *Fountain* and signed it "R. Mutt". To say this caused a scandal is to understate the situation. The New York Dadaists got involved, articles and editorials were written, arguing whether or not an everyday object such as a urinal could be considered art.

The urinal challenges the power museums have over art, defining it, creating "artists", and creating culture. If a urinal is on display in a museum, does it automatically make it art? Did Duchamp need to have constructed the urinal himself for it to be considered art, or is it enough for him to declare it art for it to be art? Should museums decide what is and isn't art? What is good art? Is there such a thing?

Duchamp's urinal is also a profound example of an Object plot. ***Fountain* is one object and for it to be considered an artwork, one must examine it and question it.** Is a urinal a work of art at all? The urinal has graceful curves and could even be considered voluptuous. It's an impressive engineering design. Duchamp set it on its side, altering the urinal's discourse, changing its identity. The urinal isn't the only object that has a role in this story. Every piece of art displayed alongside *Fountain* was a part of its story and plot. There were automatic contextualizations, which probably enraged the other artists. If the urinal is considered art simply for being displayed in a museum, could their own works of art be considered the same as a urinal when in its company? 

OBJECT IN THE WILD: HEINER MÜLLER'S *Hamletmachine* (*Die Hamletmaschine*)

In 1990, production of William Shakespeare's [Hamlet](#), directed by Heiner Müller, at the Berliner Ensemble. It had a running time of 17 hours (apparently there were many long pauses). Within it, Müller included [Hamletmachine](#). It runs from 9-11 pages, depending on formatting. To say it is "open to interpretation" is to dodge the complex and painful task of actually understanding it.

It reads like a rant. Hamlet spews, with great force, his thoughts about death, sexuality, his mother, dead father, uncle, Ophelia, communism, and revolution. He sheds his "Hamlet" character at one point and becomes "Actor Hamlet". He dresses in Ophelia's clothes and "stands like a whore". Ophelia herself is the only other character to appear, although she's conflated with a chorus and Hamlet himself. She is heavily sexualized and develops, at one point, breast cancer that "glows".

2

THE EUROPE OF THE WOMAN

Enormous room.

Ophelia. Her heart is a clock.

OPHELIA [CHORUS/HAMLET]

I am Ophelia. She who the river could not hold. The woman on the gallows The woman with the slashed arteries The woman with the overdose ON THE LIPS SNOW The woman with her head in the gas-oven. Yesterday I stopped killing myself. I am alone with my breasts my thighs my lap. I rip apart the instruments of my imprisonment the Stool the Table the Bed. I destroy the battlefield that was my Home. I tear the doors off their hinges to let the wind and the cry of the World inside. I smash the Window. With my bleeding hands I tear the photographs of the men who I loved and who used me on the Bed on the Table on the Chair on the Floor. I set fire to my prison. I throw my clothes into the fire. I dig the clock which was my heart out of my breast. I go onto the street, clothed in my blood.

This small excerpt of one of Ophelia's speeches is a good sample of what *Hamletmachine* is and feels like. Though *Hamletmachine* is a Cycle and Chaos, it also has an Object structure. Looking at Ophelia's lines one by one, each is written as if conveying raw information. There's no emotion or realistic phrasing. "I am Ophelia. She who the river could not hold." This could be one sentence, but it's severed in the middle, dividing it into two objects. Ophelia speaks of herself in the first person, and then third person. This breaks her as a psychologically realistic character, turning her into a kind of puppet, giving the audience facts. The result of this is a cold and harsh Ophelia; she describes horrible things as a machine or an internet search would, spitting out information. "The woman with her head in the gas-oven. Yesterday I stopped killing myself."

The speech careens like a car with a blown-out tire. It seems confusing, but it does have a strong binding string: it does reference and adapt Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The original play take us through the story. Anything that seems or is confusing, I feel, isn't anything that should be dwelt upon too much. Hamlet is angry, in the midst of an existential crisis, fantasizing about fomenting a revolution, and hardly seems in control over his words. That doesn't mean they aren't important or meaningful. It means we probably shouldn't try to dissect it too much. It's a disturbing bit of hysteria. It's confusing bits make it worse. It's very loyal to the original script's misery, hopelessness, and rage. 📍

OBJECT IN THE WILD: GÄVLEBOCKEN

My favorite Christmas tradition is watching the live feed of the [Gävlebocken](#) (or Gävle Goat) in Gävle, Sweden. It's on display between November and the beginning of January.

The goat is made entirely of straw. It has been burned down several times in the past, often by drunk people, once by someone with a flaming arrow. In 2022 the goat was destroyed by birds; in a drawn-out scene reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock, hundreds of birds picked the goat apart until there was nothing left but the frame.

My favorite Christmas tradition is watching the live feed of the [Gävlebocken](#) (or Gävle Goat) in Gävle, Sweden. It's on display between November and the beginning of January.

[The Guardian](#) describes the goat drama best:

The goat, which pulls Santa's sleigh, has come to symbolise Christmas in Sweden, drawing people in from the surrounding country. Families bring their children to look in wonder and, the businesses hope, do a bit of shopping while they are there.



photo by [Seppo Laine](#)

But there are other people in the dark forests that surround the city who hold an entirely different view of the goat. They believe in a time before Christianity appeared in Sweden, when people worshipped Norse gods including the goat goddess Heidrun (goddess of enlightenment) and the god of thunder, Thor, who rode around on two goats. Each night he would burn and then eat them, only to wake up the following morning to them having been reborn and able to pull his chariot again.

The local pagans believe that the Christians of Gävle unknowingly build this giant statue to their god and that every year they must try to burn it down before the end of the year, thus ensuring a return of the sun and another good year of harvests.

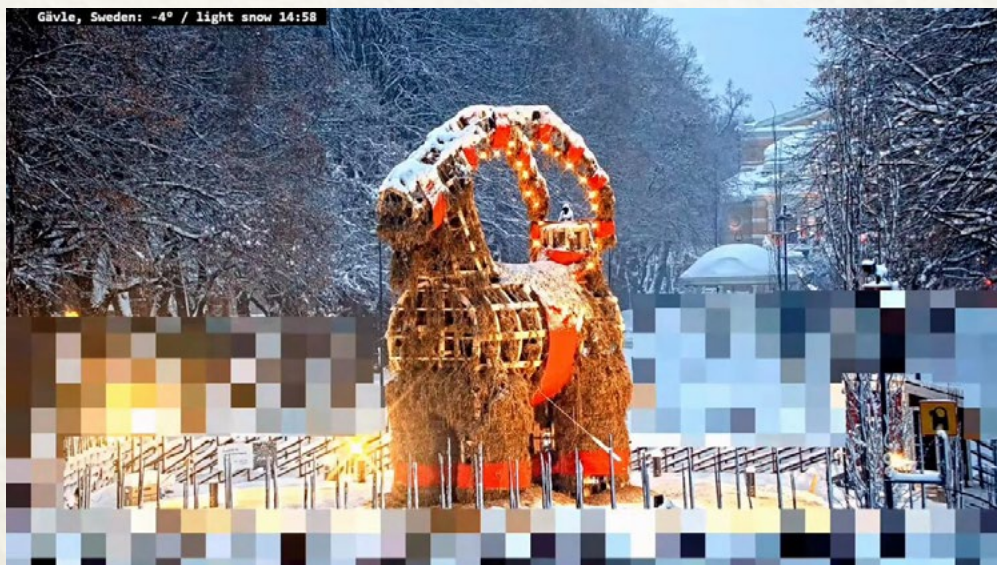
This is an intense, ancient, Object plot. It has gods and warring religions. It has violence, Santa Claus, and ritual sacrifice. But, it is all embodied in one large straw goat, but it isn't the only object in this story. The other objects are the gods and Santa Claus, who are abstract objects. There are people who are in Gävle They are tourists, natives, sightseers, all of whom have the potential to be the one who destroys the goat.

Then there are the birds, the jackdaws, who successfully managed to eat and dismantle the goat in 2022. They could be seen as tools of the abstract-object gods or some other supernatural force, should anyone want to rewrite the myth. The jackdaws did, however, change the ritual by adding a new possible participant.

One object is this story. This isn't a story told in prose or poetry. It's also a Ritual and Force plot. The goat, though, dominates in a massive performance piece that may or may not erupt at any moment. No one knows what will happen. 📍



*December, 2001, the Christmas goat in Gävle, Sweden.
(Andreas Bardell/The Associated Press)*



A still image from a video, [posted on X by @GavleGoat](#), of the goat being eaten by jackdaws, 2023.

OBJECT V CHAOS V INFORMATION

how are they different?

OBJECT: The objects can be animate, inanimate, physical, or abstract. Analysis of the objects together, juxtaposition, and comparison, as well as what they uniquely create together is at the center of the plot.

CHAOS: The story appears incoherent, bizarre, and meaningless. All of the elements are bound together by a thread that isn't obvious, yet invites examination.

INFORMATION: Beginning with a thesis or topic of investigation, the plot presents data in order to form information. This information will bring about a coherent analysis and conclusion.

how are they the same?

Information can be an "object" that can be arranged. The collection of "objects" can seem like Chaos and without an obvious rational overarching idea. Information is not always presented in a coherent format and can seem like Chaos.

Landscape

WHAT IS IT?

A story focused upon the a viewer/character moving through a landscape and how that landscape interacts and changes them.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *Sensory experience*
- *empty of anxiety that could be caused by an active storyline, objectives, goals, tension, obstacles, struggle, and a climax*
- *focuses on the experience of the viewer/character, not on a logical line of thinking.*
- *Can be episodic; even if there is a journey taking place, it doesn't need to be a Journey*

EXAMPLES

- *poetry*
- *paintings*
- *ASMR*
- *travel writing*

WHAT IS A LANDSCAPE PLOT STRUCTURE?

A landscape is not static. A landscape is active, but in a different way than we are accustomed to seeing. **There are enormous physical actions occurring in a landscape, from the flora to the fauna, any humans engaging in activity, any structures that are pregnant with past and future activity.**



LANDSCAPE

A visual artistic representation of a landscape plot is a story about focusing on information and emotions. The only characters present are the landscape itself and the viewer. **Landscape drama involves slow experiences and changes in characters.**

Landscape appears predominantly in travel writing, a genre, I must admit, I have covered very little in formal education. But this lovely [travel writing article](#) sums up the genre eloquently, along with tips to doing the genre well. This description, I think, embodies the Landscape plot structure:

Travel writing should speak to the senses – drawing out beautiful, surprising and entertaining descriptions of sight, smell, taste, sounds, and touch. Travel writing often combines different types of descriptions, from amusing anecdotes, to historical details, to flashbacks from the author’s own memories, to close-ups of minute details, to long shots of impressive vistas and scenes.

There are quite a lot of Landscape plotted stories available on the internet. One of my favorites is “[Scenic Train Ride From Bergen to Oslo \(Norway\)](#).” It is over 7 hours of film shot a mounted camera from the front window of a train as it travels from Bergen to Oslo. The sounds are natural. There’s no music. Conversations in (presumably) Norwegian can be heard, though probably not well enough to be understood. The landscape changes over time. The train moves through small towns, along lakes, and through mountains. Slowly snow begins appearing on the ground until the landscape is entirely covered. Moving closer to Oslo, the snow dissipates and lush green forests come up to the tracks. People loaded with luggage wait in clumps on the platforms for the train idle, occasionally glancing at the train.

When the train arrives at the Geilo station, there is direct interaction. At 3:12:28, a man and child appear at the front of the train and look directly at the camera. Both of them wave. It is a tiny moment and seemingly insignificant. But this is the landscape reaching out to the viewer and impressing itself. This is one of the markers on the plot graph.

Impressionism and Expressionism are two very important concepts for understanding how a Landscape plot functions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Impressionism and Expressionism art movements respectively emerged from Europe. A professor gave me a simple definition in grad school that I’ve found always works: Impressionism is the world affecting the viewer; Expressionism is the viewer affecting the landscape. The movements can be very different or so alike it’s difficult to pin down how a painting can be one or the other. In writing, it’s clearer what’s occurring, as we’ll see in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. 📍

THE LANDSCAPE LISA

I call this “Lisa on Mars”. Obviously, this isn’t the Mars from the photos taken by Curiosity and Perseverance. The temple and trees are fictional inclusions. The colors are vibrant, the sky hinting at an atmosphere that may contain oxygen. The moons, Phobos and Demos, are visible. We do have a red landscape, a reference to the oxidized iron in the sands, but its presence does not fit with an atmosphere. The two states occurred on Mars billions of years apart. Mona Lisa herself, standing on the surface without any kind of space suit, is quite impossible.



Lisa is at the center of the image, and the landscape around her swirls in smudges around her. The landscape has retained some detail and clarity, giving the feeling of this is a process. It can go in either direction: she is absorbing the landscape or creating it. She is shaping it in some way, to the point that the image warps off the canvas or oozes onto it.

Whatever is happening, this is an Expressionistic Landscape plot. Each smear is a point on the Landscape plot diagram. Lisa is a symbol of incredible power, able to withstand and dominate an alien landscape. This is something we attribute to the power of art: it is all powerful. 📍

LITTLE RED LANDSCAPE MAP

This map will chart the story through an expressionistic landscape and how Red’s emotions impact the landscape and people:

📍 *Red leaving her home which seems very safe and idyllic.*

📍 *The woods are frightening, with deep shadows, dead trees, and washed out colors; Red gets lost easily and starts to panic.*

📍 *The Wolf would be a distorted threat. He could be oversized, have intense colors, even magical properties. His interactions with Red are ambiguously dangerous; he ridicules and diminishes her, increasing her fears.*

📍 *Red arrives at Grandma’s house and it seems just as idyllic as her own home. When she goes inside, the interior is covered in blood, and Grandma murdered in an almost cartoonish way. Red gets dizzy, panicked, runs screaming.*

📍 *The Wolf grabs Red as she’s leaving and devours her whole.*



LANDSCAPE





This is Blathers. He is the museum curator, and accepts donations for exhibits. (Source: Animal Crossing: New Horizons)

LANDSCAPE IN THE WILD:



(Source: Animal Crossing: New Horizons)

Animal Crossing has a simple set up. The player's character goes to live on an island and learns how to make money so they can acquire better and better living accommodations and objects. There are DIY projects, flowers to plant, crops to pick, fossils to unearth, and clothes to buy.

The point of the game is to create landscapes: the entire island, rooms in the house, even, in the downloadable content, vacation homes for a company your character works for.

The Landscape Plot (coupled with a Consumption plot; there are three different currencies in the game) allows a maximum flexibility for the player. You can dig ponds or bury rivers. You can build or tear down cliffs. You can put in boarded sidewalks, or sand, or something of your own design. You can build an amusement park, a graveyard, a mossy swamp filled with giant vines, a statue garden with hedges forming a maze. You can move the NPC's houses or redecorate them. You can put your house anywhere on the island or the beach and redesign it as you wish. Each construction completes whatever vision, planned or not, the player is looking to achieve. This is a landscape where the Expressionism is the central activity.



This is Wilbur, the dodo airline pilot. He says enigmatic things, such as, "Wanna bust bunsen burners and bounce back to Orangetown?" (Source: Animal Crossing: New Horizons)

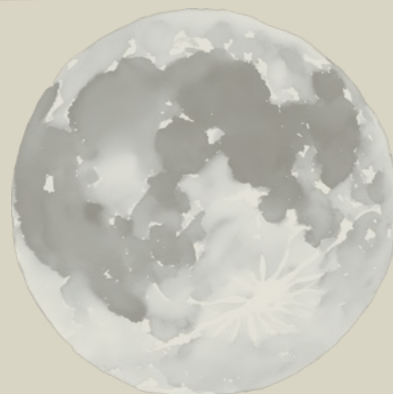
There comes a time in Animal Crossing when the player's character becomes so rich, there's no point in accumulating more money. Every type of furniture or object can be bought or built. You have all the DIY recipes and can build anything. Yet, this isn't the end of the game. One can tear everything down and rebuild and decorate again. (This is a Creation and Destruction plot, which I'll go into in the second edition of this book.) This is when the player becomes the traveller in their own landscape. As you build something new, you experience a new interaction and satisfaction. Like travel writing, each new construction is a new text. How will a player know when they've experienced these constructions enough? When will that text end? When the player suddenly feels the urgent need to tear it all down and start a new adventure again. 📍



This is Gullivarr, a pirate who one occasionally finds passed out on the beach. He needs the player to find or fix his cellphone so his ship can rescue him. He rewards with cool pirate merch. (Source: Animal Crossing: New Horizons)



LANDSCAPES IN THE WILD: HAIKU



A Landscape plot works exceptionally well in a [haiku](#) because there are only three lines and 17 syllables of time with which to work. This creates a landscape that doesn't need to be drawn out. It's a moment in time and a vast experience. There is no time for action, and even the action that does occur, such as the frog jumping, it is not based on character goals. We have no established character of the frog. The frog is not undergoing a struggle. This is not a psychologically realistic reality.

The frog is merely an element of the area, like the “ancient pool” and the “sound” and the “water”. A “dewdrop” becomes an entire world. A forest in winter is a howling emptiness and the scent of wisteria “comes from far away”: both of these are never-ending actions. This is an Impressionistic Landscape plot. All of the elements are to be experienced at once and impress themselves upon the visitor or reader, and inspires and intellectual or emotional change.

*Over the wintry
forest, winds howl in rage
with no leaves to blow.*

--Natsume Sōse

*A world of dew,
And within every dewdrop
A world of struggle.*

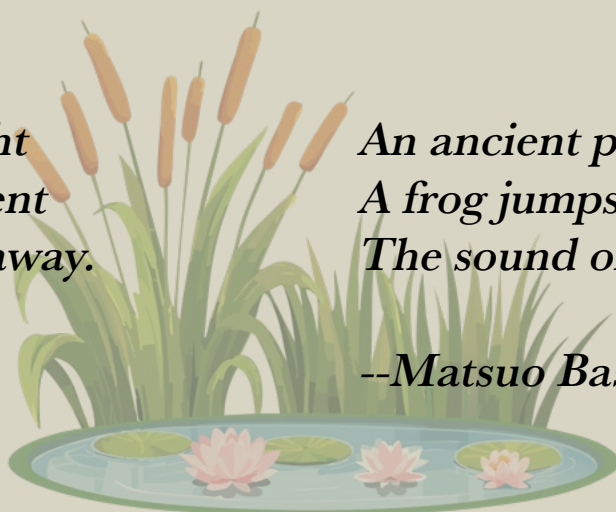
--Kobayashi Issa

*In pale moonlight
the wisteria's scent
comes from far away.*

--Yosa Buson

*An ancient pool,
A frog jumps in---
The sound of water.*

--Matsuo Basho



LANDSCAPE IN THE WILD: H. P. LOVECRAFT'S

The Shadow over Innsmouth

The [first official description and diagnosis of autism](#) didn't occur until 1943. H.P. Lovecraft died in 1939. Unfortunately, we will never have an official diagnosis of whether or not Lovecraft was autistic. However, details of his life and character strongly support that he was neurodivergent in some form. Gary Myers and Jennifer McIlwee Myers argue in [Lovecraft's Syndrome: An Asperger's Appraisal of the Writer's Life](#) that he did, in fact, have autism.



Lisa as a citizen of Innsmouth.

To me, reading his works, I feel it. It isn't simply the structure of his stories and subject matter that reflect neurodivergence that I feel. I feel how comforting and intellectually stimulating his works are. They appeal to my love of research, infodumping, questioning, speculating, even the horror. His works reek of anxiety and fear. His racism screams with horror of the "other". **He has invented his own universe, which all of his stories occur within. This is a characteristic I've noticed appealing to myself and other neurodivergent writers who focus on fantasy or sci fi: it is comforting to write about a world entirely under my control.**

There's a bald lack of social interaction. Any mixing of characters is utilitarian or told passively, in events past by a narrator who wasn't present. There's very little dialogue, and when there is, it's most likely a long speech of past events. All of his characters are out of reach, even when they are narrating things that have happened to them. And as I pointed out in the [Trigger Warning](#), women are mostly absent, unless they must be present for the story to continue. Even then, they are purely utilitarian. In Lovecraft's own life, he didn't marry until 1924, when he was 34; marrying for the first time at this age is unusual for the times.

One could argue that his preoccupation with fear and danger was a manifestation of CPTSD, something with which nearly all undiagnosed neurodivergent people suffer. Writing about horror could have been an exorcism of trauma.

These are reasons why Lovecraft is such an important writer to study, not just because of the quality of his work, but because of his own apparent neurodivergence, and how that neurodivergence manifested structurally in his writing.

Lovecraft's works are primarily constructed with Information plot structures. Think arcane letters hidden in an attic trunk, coupled with much research at the Arkham University archives, along with nefarious books, the primary being the [Necronomicon](#).

The stories do possess Journeys, but only as a framing device. The narrator is telling a story in order to make it "public". The goal is to tell the story; the goal is obviously achieved at the end of the story. It isn't the most compelling Journey, but it gets the job done.

In [The Shadow over Innsmouth](#) has this kind of Journey structure, but it also has the narrator,

presumably, coming to a conclusion about his family history and future, the result of which is directly linked to the telling of the story.

Our unnamed narrator is telling us the story of his trip to Innsmouth. He is traveling from Newburyport to Arkham; it is part of a larger trip around New England exploring old architecture. He decides to travel as cheaply as possible and takes a bus that has one stop in Innsmouth. The stop lasts several hours. Hilarity ensues.

His trip is a story within the framing story of the narration; it's a Journey within a Journey. Lovecraft frequently uses intertextuality in his works. (In the second edition of this book, I'll explore intertextuality as an appealing mechanism in storytelling.) The Journey within the Journey, the past events in Innsmouth, has a goal. The narrator's goal is to get to Arkham. It's simple, and, again, gets the job done. This goal has higher stakes; at its core, the goal is to survive.

Innsmouth also has a gorgeous example of an Portrait plot intertwined with a Landscape plot. It's a piece of travel writing in the form of horror, focusing on the sanity-breaking experiences of the main character.

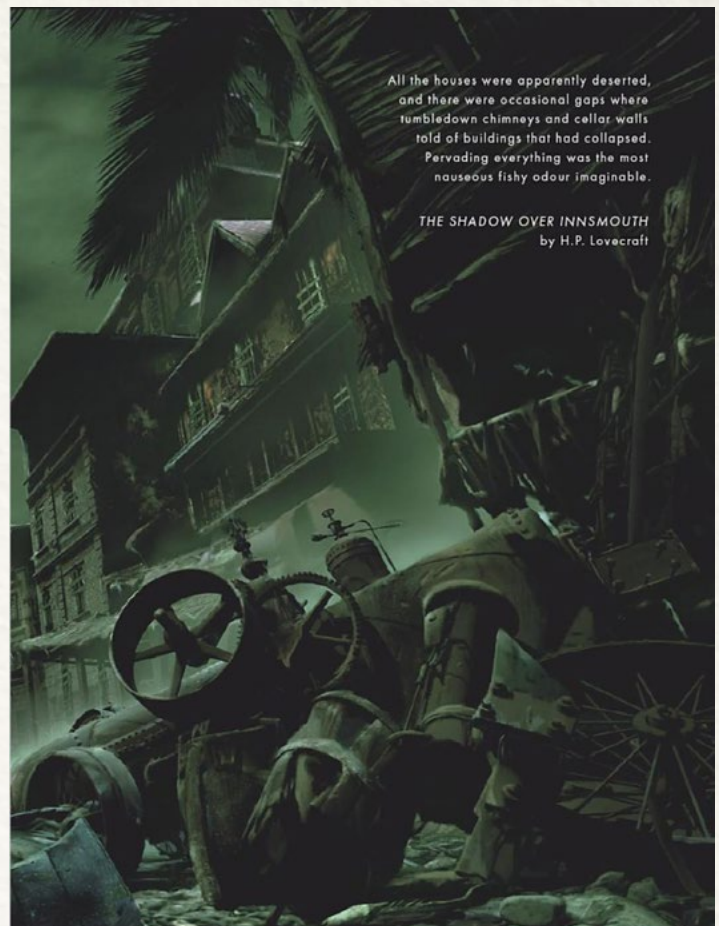
In the second edition of this book, I'll go into great detail about the story. I'll copy and paste chunks of it and do an annotated analysis of its structures and how they work on a macro level and trickle down to the micro level. For now, I'll cover a few of the highlights. I'll also avoid giving spoilers. I usually dislike endings; this ending made me gasp.

There are three plot points on the Landscape map that form the first third of the story. I'll address each briefly.

THE NARRATOR'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF INNSMOUTH THE TOWN

Before the narrator leaves for Innsmouth, the ticket agent gives him a brief description of the town. He hates it. Everyone in the surrounding area hates it. Much of it resides in "race prejudice", but there is also an inexplicable loathing. People avoid the town and almost no one takes the one bus that goes there.

This description informs the narrator's impressions of the town before he even arrives. As we'll see, his impressions grow more disturbing the more time he spends in the town. Yes, the ticket agent's description of Innsmouth could impress the narrator unduly. That's not important in this story. This story isn't about psychological reality; we are not to question the reliability of our narrator. These characters are only what they need to be in order to move the events forward. This is how a Landscape plot works.



Gou Tanabe, [H.P. Lovecraft's The Shadow Over Innsmouth \(Manga\)](#)

It is also a mechanism of the story: we need to have a preview of the town and teasing questions pertaining to what is happening there. Why do people hate this town so much?

I would argue that the ticket agent's monologue is also a facet of the Landscape. The narrator listens to the speech, does not engage in dialogue, and accepts it as if it was text in a book. Yes, it impresses itself upon him. It impresses his expectations and emotions. It is designed to do so. Lovecraft designed this moment to inform the narrator that Innsmouth is not the world he lives in. The world of Innsmouth is repellent and potentially dangerous.

A few hours into the journey, the Narrator sees his first glimpse of Innsmouth:

It was as if the bus were about to keep on in its ascent, leaving the sane earth altogether and merging with the unknown arcana of upper air and cryptical sky. The smell of the sea took on ominous implications...

This creepy description doesn't come out of nowhere. The narrator has also been influenced by his bus driver, for whom he develops instant repulsion that he cannot explain. The bus itself is also decrepit and seems on the brink of breaking down. The description, however, isn't primarily due to the bus driver. The land, sky, and sea all have a profound, disquieting impact upon him. He felt the bus could continue driving into the "unknown arcana of upper air and cryptical sky", leaving the "sane earth" behind. Innsmouth is twisting the narrator's views into a morbidly impressionistic, dreamlike experience.



The "smell of the sea" is the most prevalent and malevolent characteristic of this landscape. He observes, "Pervading everything was the most nauseous fishy odour imaginable." The narrator comments on it frequently, and each instance seems to warp his sanity. (This fixation on a potent, disgusting scent could be a possible example of the writer's experience with hypersensitivity?)

The narrator's choice of words reflects his feelings and how this experience is impacting him. There is nothing positive he can say about Innsmouth: "It was a town of wide extent and dense construction, yet one with a portentous dearth of visible life."

He says "portentous dearth of visible life" as opposed to "sparsely populated". "Visible life" is also packed with implication: is there invisible life or life hiding in the abandoned buildings? As it's "portentous", there is no positive implications that the town is simply abandoned, as many towns focused on one industry can close when the town's factory closes. In this case, several mills and a shrunken gold refinery. Also, a plague seemed to have killed over half of the population.

Here and there the ruins of wharves jutted out from the shore to end in indeterminate rottenness, those farthest south seeming the most decayed.

The sea is the most important point on the Landscape, not in terms of events and actions of the narrator,

but because of how he absorbs it, what it does to his perceptions and how it sickens him. The ruins of the wharves are of “indeterminate rottenness” and “decayed”. These word choices would fit the description of dead bodies, or any kind of rotting organic matter. The landscape is fetid, unhealthy, disgusting, and reeking of death. The sea, a common metaphor for life, is a putrefied miasma.

And far out at sea, despite a high tide, I glimpsed a long, black line scarcely rising above the water yet carrying a suggestion of odd latent malignancy. This, I knew, must be Devil Reef. As I looked, a subtle, curious sense of beckoning seemed superadded to the grim repulsion; and oddly enough, I found this overtone more disturbing than the primary impression.

Devil Reef is vital to the history of Innsmouth. The narrator immediately sees it as malignant, grim, repulsive. But the most significant and important reaction, the impression that the reef makes, is that the narrator feels “a subtle, curious sense of beckoning”. The landscape is reaching out directly to him. To beckon is to implement a physical action, either speaking or a gesture, such as a hand wave or a small head tilt. Somehow the landscape has become physically interactive, beyond simple emotions and ideas. How is this possible? This is beyond basic impressionism. He doesn’t understand why and doesn’t question why. Which makes me ask, why?

The reason why he doesn’t question it is constructed with thick layers of plot. Innsmouth also has a question plot; not asking this logical question, not addressing it and bringing it to the forefront, is a mechanism of a Question plot. It’s not meant to draw the reader’s direct attention; it’s a seed that’s planted.

He doesn’t ask because he doesn’t want to know. That’s a fear response, appropriate to horror. It’s better to push it away and not think about it because thinking about it is too frightening in its implications.

In the Landscape plot, it’s merely “one point of interest”. “Scarcely seeing” Devil Reef at this time is merely one thing in the area to be seen. Because of its physical distance, in a strictly landscape sense, the impact of encountering it would be lessened. It’s far away and not a threat. Yet, he feels beckoned for no conceivable reason. It is something to note and continue away from. He does see the Reef again in the story, and each glimpse fills him with more horror.

THE RESIDENTS OF INNSMOUTH

The narrator’s first impression of the residents of Innsmouth is his bus driver, Joe Sargent.



...even before I noticed any details there spread over me a wave of spontaneous aversion which could be neither checked nor explained. It suddenly struck me as very natural that the local people should not wish to ride on a bus owned and driven by this man, or to visit any oftener than possible the habitat of such a man and his kinsfolk.



The bus driver, Gou Tanabe, [H.P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* \(Manga\)](#)

This reaction is similar, if not identical, to the one people feel when experiencing a racist reaction: unwarranted hatred and revulsion for another person. His comments of not wanting to ride on a bus with this man, nor visit his town, forms the thought behind “separate but equal”.

The narrator's description is highly detailed:

When the driver came out of the store I looked at him more carefully and tried to determine the source of my evil impression. He was a thin, stoop-shouldered man not much under six feet tall, dressed in shabby blue civilian clothes and wearing a frayed grey golf cap. His age was perhaps thirty-five, but the odd, deep creases in the sides of his neck made him seem older when one did not study his dull, expressionless face. He had a narrow head, bulging, watery blue eyes that seemed never to wink, a flat nose, a receding forehead and chin, and singularly undeveloped ears. His long, thick lip and coarse-pored, greyish cheeks seemed almost beardless except for some sparse yellow hairs that straggled and curled in irregular patches;

and in places the surface seemed queerly irregular, as if peeling from some cutaneous disease. His hands were large and heavily veined, and had a very unusual greyish-blue tinge. The fingers were strikingly short in proportion to the rest of the structure, and seemed to have a tendency to curl closely into the huge palm. As he walked toward the bus I observed his peculiarly shambling gait and saw that his feet were inordinately immense.

A certain greasiness about the fellow increased my dislike. He was evidently given to working or lounging around the fish docks, and carried with him much of their characteristic smell. Just what foreign blood was in him I could not even guess. His oddities certainly did not look Asiatic, Polynesian, Levantine, or negroid, yet I could see why the people found him alien. I myself would have thought of biological degeneration rather than alienage.

In Lovecraft's universe, what we call racism, xenophobia, and species-ism, is also monstification. The citizens of Innsmouth are the monsters of this horror story. The major problem with these monsters is that the core of what makes them monsters resides in othering: anyone who is not white nor Christian are either aliens or possibly the result of “biological degeneration”. Racist ideas of the times, even present today, support that anyone not white is not human. For Lovecraft, personally and emotionally, anyone

outside his “world” of whiteness was dangerous. This incredibly specific description implies that physical appearance is a prominent and legitimate reason to feel revulsion towards a person and to question their humanity.

Innsmouth’s people are indistinguishable from Innsmouth itself. The bus driver has no identity other than his physical presence and how that impresses itself upon the narrator. When the narrator arrives in Innsmouth and sees more of the residents, his revulsion increases:

Once or twice I saw listless-looking people working in barren gardens or digging clams on the fishy-smelling beach below, and groups of dirty, simian-visaged children playing around weed-grown doorsteps. Somehow these people seemed more disquieting than the dismal buildings, for almost every one had certain peculiarities of face and motions which I instinctively disliked without being able to define or comprehend them.

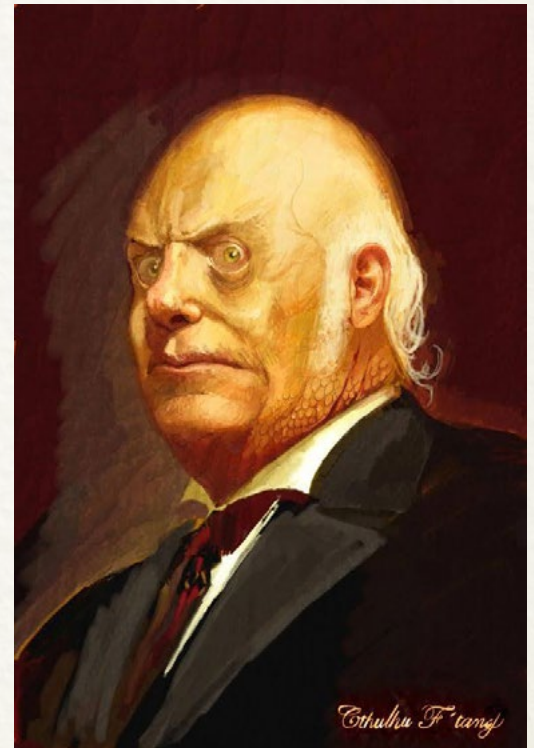
The “simian-visaged children” he describes in Innsmouth is a particularly offensive and racist image used to describe black people of that era and today. This “borrowing” of the slur is not an accident. This is a direct link to Lovecraft’s own racism. The narrator responds to their appearance and physicality with instinctive dislike “without being able to define or comprehend them”. The narrator is a “victim” of these people in that he cannot help being revolted by them. They are creating his racism. He, presumably, is a good, moral person “who could never” hate someone for no reason. He is monstifying the residents of Innsmouth.

A horror story needs monsters. These are the monsters Lovecraft argues are the most terrifying a person could encounter. We, of course, violently disagree.

For a second I thought this typical physique suggested some picture I had seen, perhaps in a book, under circumstances of particular horror or melancholy; but this pseudo-recollection passed very quickly.

The impression of these people and their physicality is now evoking a memory. The Devil Reef beckoned him and the people have reminded him. I would argue that this is a physical action. Remembering something is a physical reaction of the brain and body; memories have a complex intertwining throughout our physical make-up (articles about memory). In order to remember something, there must be some sort of stimulus. This stimulus does not need to have an agency, goal, or intention to summon the memory. The stimulus only needs to be present. It has to be part of the landscape.

In this instance, the landscape, the people of Innsmouth, are triggering an image for the narrator. He has that vague feeling that he has seen this somewhere before, but he can’t place where. We’ve all experienced this. It passes quickly, as it always seems to, and is forgotten. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t important, even vital, to the narrator’s experience. Lovecraft excels at dropping a seed here and there that seem completely



Obed Marsh, Gou Tanabe, [H.P. Lovecraft’s The Shadow Over Innsmouth \(Manga\)](#)

unimportant, but when collected together, the realizations are horrifying.

The narrator encounters a “youth” working in a grocery store in the town, someone not a native to Innsmouth, but someone who grew up in Arkham. In other words, someone outside of this world, someone from the narrator’s own “good” realm. The youth gives the narrator a description of the town, along with warnings of where not to go and who not to talk to. This is ironically the type of conversation black people would have in the Jim Crow south whenever visiting a new town.

The youth’s description is like that of a tour guide and builds the landscape further. The youth isn’t really a character, no more than a book would be that the narrator reads. These passive descriptions are necessary and effective brush strokes of the Landscape structure.

When one came to think of it, it was generally only rather young people who were seen about in public, and of these the oldest were apt to be the most tainted-looking.

The youth was certain that many specimens even worse than the worst visible ones were kept locked indoors in some places. People sometimes heard the queerest kind of sounds... What kind of foreign blood—if any—these beings had, it was impossible to tell.

The youth builds for the narrator the invisible town, what lay within the decrepit buildings and



underground. The landscape has evolved beyond what is seen (and thereby somewhat safe) to the extremely dangerous unseen. This forces the narrator, and by extension the reader, to build their own version of Innsmouth which is more horrifying than anything Lovecraft can create. This deeper penetration into the narrator’s emotions is, again, a function of the Landscape that crosses into the physical: he becomes afraid.

THE “SQUAT-TOWERED STONE CHURCH” OF THE ORDER OF DAGON

When the bus enters the town proper, the architecture becomes more unsettling. In particular, a “squat-towered stone church” of the Order of Dagon. The Order of Dagon appears throughout Lovecraft’s works. It’s a permanent feature of his Cthulhu landscape. This repetition of elements enlarges and creates intertextuality [this

is a plot structure I will explore in depth in the 2nd edition of this book]. The story is more than itself. There is a broader emergence of meaning and information. Each event adds to the landscape itself and interacts with the other elements.

This magical-mystical order that requires interspecies breeding gained so much power within Innsmouth that the original Christian congregations left town. The clock tower on the church catches the narrator’s attention.

Though the hands of its clock were missing on the side I glimpsed, I knew that those hoarse strokes were telling the hour of eleven. Then suddenly all thoughts of time were blotted out by an onrushing image of sharp intensity and unaccountable horror which had seized me before I knew what it really was.

Once again, the landscape physically interacts with him. It has “seized” him. This seizing does not need to be an event in which the clock physically grabs the narrator. He uses the metaphor of “seizing” because mentally and emotionally he is no longer free. The clock has captured his attention and impressed itself into his mind. This is a physical action; thinking is a physical action. It simply isn’t a literal demonstration of the action, but it is physical nonetheless.

The door of the church basement was open, revealing a rectangle of blackness inside. And as I looked, a certain object crossed or seemed to cross that dark rectangle; burning into my brain a momentary conception of nightmare which was all the more maddening because analysis could not shew a single nightmarish quality in it. It was a living object—the first except the driver that I had seen since entering the compact part of the town—and had I been in a steadier mood I would have found nothing whatever of terror in it.

This impression of the “rectangle of blackness” verges on madness. It burns his brain and he uses the word “nightmare” twice to describe it. Also, he cannot analyze or think clearly about what he is seeing, so overwhelmed he is at what he is seeing. He is seeing something which should be unremarkable. It is not to an extreme degree. This is another moment when the Landscape touches the narrator and affects his thinking.

The narrator describes the figure as a “living object”. This is an extraordinary description because of the moral, physiological, and philosophical implications. We have a strong implication that an object which is alive is not human, and is something horrifying, belonging in a nightmare. It is not of this world and it is a danger.

Clearly, as I realized a moment later, it was the pastor; clad in some peculiar vestments... The thing which had probably caught my first subconscious glance and supplied the touch of bizarre horror was the tall tiara he wore... This, acting on my imagination, had supplied namelessly sinister qualities to the indeterminate face and robed, shambling form beneath it. There was not, I soon decided, any reason why I should have felt that shuddering touch of evil pseudo-memory.



The pastor of the Church of Dagon, Gou Tanabe, [H.P. Lovecraft's The Shadow Over Innsmouth \(Manga\)](#)

At first, the implication is that the pastor himself was the “living object”, but it is, in fact, the tiara he is wearing. The jewelry produced by the town of Innsmouth is infamous and beautiful

and spiritually disturbing. Lovecraft gives only scant details about what the jewelry looks like, the most helpful being they are made of gold. The rest, Lovecraft describes it as indescribable, a technique repeated throughout his works and extremely effective as a tool of horror building. Our own imaginations can create something much more frightening than Lovecraft could.

This is a very short and fast description of three points on the *Innsmouth* plot diagram. There are dozens more. I pointed out at the beginning that Innsmouth could also have a Journey plot. It could also have a Portrait plot. The core of this story is a Portrait of the narrator and what this Journey through this horrifying Landscape does to him physically and mentally, and what realizations it brings. I will go into more detail about all of these elements in the second edition.



Portrait

WHAT IS IT?

A Portrait is a depiction of a single person in an attempt to understand them in psychological depth.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *The need for self-reflection and introspection in great, great detail without being bogged down by a conventional storyline and characters.*
- *Scenes can be intuitively structured by feelings.*
- *No need for a formal structure, conflict, climaxes, etc.*

EXAMPLES

- *epistolary novels*
- *biographies/autobiographies*
- *paintings and sculpture*
- *diaries*
- *letters*
- *notebooks*

WHAT IS A PORTRAIT PLOT STRUCTURE?


A Portrait is a depiction of a person in an attempt to understand them psychologically. This occurs often in non-fiction in biographies and autobiographies (coupled with Information).

In a doctoral history seminar, I learned that there is a theory that history is about individuals. One person's life and choices leads to events. A single person creates history.

The Portrait structure follows this thinking: lives are not naturally structured as a Journey; lives are fluid, with unfinished elements, speculation, growth, changing emotions, bad choices, and other messy elements that are difficult to explain.

In my opinion, the element that creates interesting characters are contradictions. My favorite example is [Blondi](#), Adolph Hitler's dog.

Hitler tortured and slaughtered 6 million Jews, yet he had Blondi. He loved this dog. How could someone who attempted to exterminate Jewish people genuinely love a dog? It makes no moral or emotional sense.


These kinds of contradictions form the plot points in a Portrait structure. For Hitler, the concentration camps, Blondi, Eva Braun, his art, conquering Poland and France, all these choices form the structure of his story. Most of these things cannot be resolved in a satisfying way. We can't even be sure of how he truly felt about Eva Braun. But the swirling hellfire tornado of his life is the focus of a  Portrait story.



What Is a "Person"?

Capacities or attributes common to definitions of personhood can include human nature, agency, self-awareness, a notion of the past and future, and the possession of rights and duties, among others...

According to the naturalist epistemological tradition, from Descartes through Locke and Hume, the term may designate any human or non-human agent who possesses continuous consciousness over time; and is therefore capable of framing representations about the world, formulating plans and acting on them.

Animals are slowly being granted legal personhood in various countries: "...apes, cetaceans, parrots, cephalopods, corvids, elephants, bears, pigs, leporids and rodents, because of their apparent intelligence, sentience, and intricate social rules." ([Personhood, Wikipedia](#)) 

THE PORTRAIT LISA

For Portrait, I have returned to the original *Mona Lisa*. I have done so because this is a *portrait* of Lisa. I could have used one of my colored portraits of Lisa, but using the original in the context of all my other homemade works demonstrates how this painting has a Portrait plot structure. This is Leonardo's painstaking expression of Lisa as an individual, her psychology, her experiences, how she impacts others and how others have impacted her.

This doesn't mean Leonardo has been accurate; this isn't a scientific endeavor. Nor is this an autobiography. This is a portrait of the Lisa that Leonardo sees and experiences. This is the position of a writer of fiction, as this is a work of fiction based on a real person.

One could argue that this portrait is a story about Leonardo himself, his own enigmatic qualities, or how he wishes to be seen. 📍



LITTLE RED PORTRAIT MAP



In this story, Red is a psychiatrist psychoanalyzing him in prison before his execution. Each point is an examination of Wolf's and Red's emotions and thoughts about one another:

- 📍 *Wolf's childhood, any evidence of abuse and acts of violence.*
- 📍 *Wolf's beliefs about women, his experiences with them.*
- 📍 *Red would include her own impressions of him, how she feels about him, how she finds him intriguing and frightening; she questions her own judgement; is she developing fondness, can she remain objective.*
- 📍 *Wolf as a manipulator, how he manipulates Red. His anger towards her, his execution, his family, his mother.*
- 📍 *Wolf's expression of vulnerability and fear, how he doesn't trust himself with Red and knows he would kill her if he could.*



PORTRAIT IN THE WILD:

ANAÏS NIN

Reading [Anaïs Nin](#)'s work is not easy for a conventional reader. Contemporary readers are accustomed to story structures based on actions, goals, and coherence. Nin's novels, however, feel as if nothing is happening.

Nin is more well known for her diaries. The 1990 film [Henry and June](#), the first movie to receive an NC-17 rating, was based on a chunk of her diaries.

Her diaries and fiction read like the notes of a psychotherapist, but in prose that could be considered "purple" and "melodramatic". The titles of her novels reflect these qualities: *Seduction of the Minotaur*, *Children of the Albatross*, *Ladders to Fire*, and *A Spy in the House of Love*. Her erotica, [Delta of Venus](#) (1977) and [Little Birds](#) (1979), is vastly more popular and considered classics of the genre.

In her diaries, Nin doesn't hesitate to lie about events in her life for the sake of art, as well as create justification for her actions, such as adultery. For example, from [Henry and June: The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin: 1931-1932](#):

I really believe that if I were not a writer, not a creator, not an experimenter, I might have been a very faithful wife. I think highly of faithfulness. But my temperament belongs to the writer, not to the woman. Such a separation may seem childish, but it is possible. Subtract the overintensity, the sizzling of ideas, and you get a woman who loves perfection. And faithfulness is one of the perfections. It seems stupid and unintelligent to me now because I have bigger plans in mind. Perfection is static, and I am in full progress. The faithful wife is only one phase, one moment, one metamorphosis, one condition.

Nin has several novels that qualify as having Portrait plot structures. She doesn't focus on what her characters are doing or what they plan to do. She focuses on their unique characteristics, desires, and psychology. Nin's characters don't "do" anything. Her novels have no goals, climaxes, or obstacles as we would recognize.

Her characters struggle emotionally. She analyzes each character psychoanalytically (she herself was an amateur psychoanalyst with patients). We get a portrait of the character's inner life and how it changes based on some events which occur. These events, however, are not active in the conventional sense. They are "told" rather than "shown". Rather than show through action her character's personality, Nin describes it in heavy detail.



Anaïs Nin. Photos of Nin in this section are from unknown sources.

This excerpt between Lillian and Djuna in [Ladders of Fire](#) (1946) is a good example of how Nin presents characters, dialogue, and advances scenes:

Lillian's vivid presence filled the hotel room. She was so entirely palpable, visible, present. She was not parcelled into a woman who was partly in the past and partly in the future, or one whose spirit was partly at home with her children, and partly elsewhere. She was here, all of her, eyes and ears, and hands and warmth and interest and alertness, with a sympathy which surrounded Djuna questioned, investigated, absorbed, saw, heard

'You give me something wonderful, Lillian. A feeling that I have a friend. Let's have dinner here. Let's celebrate.'

Voices charged with emotion. Fullness. To be able to talk as one feels. To be able to say all...

'Djuna, take this.' She handed her a silver medallion she was wearing.

'Well, you didn't win Gerard but you shook him out of his death.'

'Why,' said Lillian, 'aren't men as you are?'

'I was thinking the same thing,' said Djuna...

Lillian found this relation to Djuna palpable and joyous. There was in them a way of asserting its reality, by constant signs, gifts, expressiveness, words, letters, telephones, an exchange of visible affection, palpable responses. They exchanged jewels, clothes, books, they protected each other, they expressed concern, jealousy, possessiveness. They talked. The relationship was the central, essential personage of this dream without pain. This relationship had the aspect of a primitive figure to which both enjoyed presenting proofs of worship and devotion. It was an active, continuous ceremony in which there entered no moments of indifference, fatigue, or misunderstandings or separations, no eclipses, no doubts.

'I wish you were a man,' Lillian often said.

'I wish you were.'

Nin's dialogue isn't realistic. Characters say exactly what they're thinking. The third-person omniscient narrator seems subjective and entranced by Lillian and Djuna. The description of Lillian and Djuna's relationship is given to us quickly, in passive description. There could be scenes between them in which all of these events occur. Nin will not allow us to experience these events with the characters. Rather, it is more important for her to tell us.

Nin seems to violate the "show, don't tell" rule. She "tells" us the inner life of characters. She doesn't "show" it through active events where they may make choices or do something physical. But she





Lisa as Anaïs Nin

turns “show don’t tell” on it’s head. When she “tells” us about a character, she does it through expansive metaphors that “show” what is happening within the characters. The metaphors are active. The relationship between Lillian and Djuna “had the aspect of a primitive figure to which both enjoyed presenting proofs of worship and devotion. It was an active, continuous ceremony...”. This “passive” metaphor describes a very active ritual that describes the active emotional life of these characters when together.

This is often dismissed as “bad” writing. Most critics these days, though, embrace it as feminist writing: writing that isn’t based on conflict, but on emotions. Nin’s characters reason with one another and discuss their emotions and struggles.

For Nin, emotions are actions. These emotions form the plot points of a Portrait structure. This scene between Lillian and Djuna is a point on the plot of the story. Contemporary expectations for a story structure demand these emotions are buried within actions. This has also been considered a very masculine approach to writing.

Emotions, however, are physical actions. Physiologically, thinking and feeling are physical actions which occur in the body and brain. The body and brain exert themselves whenever we experience something. Nin posits that physical actions are secondary, or tertiary, in a person’s life. What truly “happens” to a person occurs within their emotions. Emotions and thoughts form the Portrait plot. 📍



PORTRAIT IN THE WILD: *Mad Men* “ELEVATOR SCENE”

As much as *Mad Men* was adored by critics and won 13 Emmy Awards, [critic David Mendelsohn](#) called the writing “extremely weak” and the plotting “preposterous.” He wasn’t the only critic who thought it was the worst show on TV. I, obviously, disagree.

Mad Men takes place in 1960s Manhattan in the Sterling Cooper Ad Agency. It presents an anti-nostalgia look at the times, wearing its misogyny, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia on its sleeve. Husbands cheat on their wives, executives have bars in their offices, and secretaries hunt for husbands. At times, it is grotesque to watch. The pilot episode is particularly uncomfortable.



Mad Men (TV Series) - Promo. Assembled by [PlexPosters](#). AMC.com

What emphasizes this culture is the structure of the series. The story is told in a series of Portraits (combined with Landscapes and Asymptotes). There are conversations that seem to be inactive or have little point. Characters lack overarching, obvious goals. Things seem to happen to characters, causing them to react (as opposed to acting with agency).

Below is an example of this. This scene is from the 2007 pilot. It begins in an elevator and continues for a few lines in the interior of Sterling Cooper Ad Agency. It involves Dick, Harry, and Ken, three junior executives. This is their first appearance in the episode and the series. The exchange that follows is a scene with a Portrait plot point. This scene moves or fills in the Portrait of the entire series and the characters involved.

It comprises the most common never-ending-event: a conversation. It does not end when the elevator arrives at their floor, so we are uncertain when exactly the event will end. In this case, it does not: the



Mad Men (TV Series) - Promo. AMC.com

conversation stops due to an interruption.

It begins with the entrance of the three men “crowd[ing] to the back of the elevator”. This is the exchange:

DICK: Twenty-three.

HARRY: Oh, but not right away.

An attractive YOUNG SECRETARY, holding her purse to her chest, steps on the elevator and turns her back to them. The three men look her over and nod to each other approvingly.

KEN (to the elevator operator)

Pal, can you take the long way up? I’m really enjoying the view here.

The secretary looks down. The operator says nothing. Dick slouches against the back wall.

DICK

You going to Campbell’s bachelor party?

KEN

Yeah, I want to be there before they tie an anchor around his neck and drag him out to sea.

DICK

I heard she’s a nice girl.

HARRY

Who wants that?

INT. STERLING COOPER AD AGENCY - CONTINUOUS

DICK

What did you do that for? She'll probably be assigned to one of us.

KEN

Then she'll know what she's in for. Besides, you have to let them know what kind of guy you are. Then they'll know what kind of girl to be.

In one page of dialogue we have a very clear portrait of these three men, as well as the agency, New York in the 60s, and how women are seen and what they must endure.

The scene is a Portrait structure partly because there's no goal other than getting to work. The conversation doesn't have high stakes, and the three aren't worried about arriving late. They're sauntering in as if they're arriving at a bar, which, in this age, is the same thing.

Each line of the conversation reveals something about the character. Rather than having goals, each line demonstrates each of their characters.

What we learn is Dick is the "good guy". I say that because he scolds Ken for his comments and defends Campbell's future wife as a "nice girl". He's used as a moral contrast in this scene, and for the universe of *Mad Men*, not all men are as sexist as Ken and Harry. This show isn't a sweeping condemnation of all men, which can be politically tempting. We do have one man in this world who stands up for women. Though, to be fair, he doesn't stand up enough.

Harry is a creep. He leers at the secretary and makes a comment, loud enough for the woman to hear, that he prefers women who are sexually promiscuous, placing her in a very awkward, uncomfortable situation.

Ken is the interminable bachelor. In a marriage, women are jailers, holding men down and keeping them from all the fun. What's worse is his last lines, explaining to them (and to us), that women are meant to define themselves according to the men in their life. Women aren't to be independent, but a pliable entity that doesn't make problems.

After this conversation, we know exactly who these men are and what this world is for women. In fact, one could argue that the world of *Mad Men* is in itself a character.

This structure chooses to ignore any aggressive forward-moving plot. At this point in the episode, all we know is that Don Draper has to develop of a campaign for Lucky Strikes cigarettes. This is a goal that is accomplished by thinking and exploration of his character. These are important mechanisms for a Portrait plot structure.

No other characters have any solid goals. They talk to one another and we learn more and more about them. This is *Mad Men*: the show pushes the characters first, as if saying that solid goals aren't important and don't show everything about someone. 📍



Lisa as Don Draper in Mad Men.

how are they different?

OBJECT: Analysis of the objects together, juxtaposition, arrangement, what's missing, etc. It is logical.

LANDSCAPE:
The plot focuses on traveling through a vast landscape. The traveler has Impressionistic or Expressionistic experiences.

PORTRAIT:
A detailed, psychological portrait of a "person".

how are they the same?

- All three plots are named after visual art forms.
- The focus of all three forms are upon things, the world, and people.
- Each explores details, or invites the viewer to find their own features which are personally meaningful.
- These plots aren't interested in action, conflict, or struggle.
- If people are present, their roles are to interact with the subject of the plot.
- These forms can be Impressionistic or Expressionistic: the object, landscape, or person presses itself on the viewer or other characters in the story. This interaction is the heart of each plot.

Consumption

WHAT IS IT?

A Consumption plot focuses on eating, buying, collecting, hoarding, consuming, and even, possibly, sacrificing.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *A need to collect, arrange, organize, and own.*
- *Dopamine oriented.*
- *No complex emotional development needed.*
- *No complicated plot needed.*

EXAMPLES

- *Video games (Pokemon, “Gotta Catch ‘Em All”)*
- *Capitalism*
- *pornography*
- *vampire fiction*

WHAT IS A CONSUMPTION PLOT STRUCTURE?

Consumption is one of the weirdest structures I've found. A Consumption plot focuses on eating, buying, collecting, hoarding, consuming, and even, possibly, sacrificing.

It couples well with Object, Chaos, or Ritual.

Object is self contained. There's nothing else than the object.

Consumption is about collecting and hoarding and eating. It's about the getting as many objects as one can. The value or meaning of the object depends entirely on the character seeking to consume. The television show [*Hoarders*](#) is built out of a Consumption plot and an Information plot: it's an analysis of people who cannot stop consuming, what they consume, and the removal of their appropriated objects.



One hot dog means one thing for us. Eating 50 hot dogs suddenly makes the hot dogs bizarre. Consuming 50 hot dogs causes a crazy transformation in the hot dogs themselves and the consumer. It is gross, freakish, extreme, and a bit impressive in a morbid way. A hot dog eating contest could be considered a ritual: the point is to attain a level of fame for strength, tenacity, and to do something “super human”.

Money is probably the most common object hoarded in media and culture. Someone wanting to make billions of dollars is no different than the winner of a hot dog eating contest.

This is not to condemn the plot. Human beings are [*hardwired for objects*](#). Objects help us survive and make meaning in our lives. We consume to survive. We can also anthropomorphize objects, developing an emotional bond that seems counterproductive and unnecessary. This emotional component could be the heart of a Consumption plot. Neurodiverse people can completely relate to this emotional bond (see [*Appendix*](#)).

Heist storylines, for example, are a negative interpretation of consumption. Perhaps even Indiana Jones and his violent forms of destructive archaeology are offensive in terms of cultural preservation.

Treasure hunting also seems more centered on greed and obsession. Certain types of pornography, which depend upon the numbers of participants, is intended to be a more pleasurable form of consumption. 📍

THE CONSUMPTION LISA

Aristotle said something like, “The whole is more than the sum of its parts.” (See [Appendix](#)) When things are collected together into a whole, the whole is worth more, or has more power or meaning, than the individual elements. Something happens when the things collected interact together; meaning changes or new meaning is created.

Consumption Lisa is a chaotic (perhaps also Chaotic) collection of Lisas. Perhaps this Lisa has become “full of herself”? Or perhaps this is a Lisa that is consumed with confusion, possibly reflecting mental illness.

The colors are from a palette generated from DaVinci’s original painting. They’re smeared and inconsistent. They don’t fill the outlines of Lisa, nor do they seem to have any knowledge of them or desire for interaction.

They’re all operating on different planes, yet crammed in one rectangle. Lisa could be consuming herself, or collecting, or disorganizing. Whichever it is, this story is more than her mere plain coloring book page.



This could be considered a Cycle plot as well, but I think the elements of smearing and combining, especially the nest of black lines at the bottom of the image, speak to a crushing together of the Mona Lisa. She’s being made into a new whole, perhaps one that ultimately, like 50 eaten hot dogs, won’t resemble its originals at all. 📍

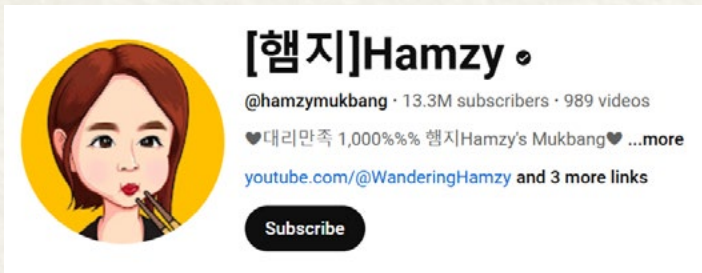
LITTLE RED CONSUMPTION MAP

This is a map of how Grandma is the consumer in a Consumption plot:

- 📍 *Red brings Grandma a basket of food, which she eats immediately and demands more.*
- 📍 *Red brings more and more food and each time Grandma isn’t satiated.*
- 📍 *Grandma begins demanding more of Red’s time, makes Red clean her house, run errands. Red has to use her own money to buy food and pay Grandma’s bills.*
- 📍 *Red meets the Wolf, who is obviously starving; he is about to eat Red and she talks him into eating her grandmother instead*
- 📍 *Red follows him to Grandma’s, watches him kill and eat her; she in turn shoots the Wolf and eats him.*



CONSUMPTION IN THE WILD: *Mukbang*



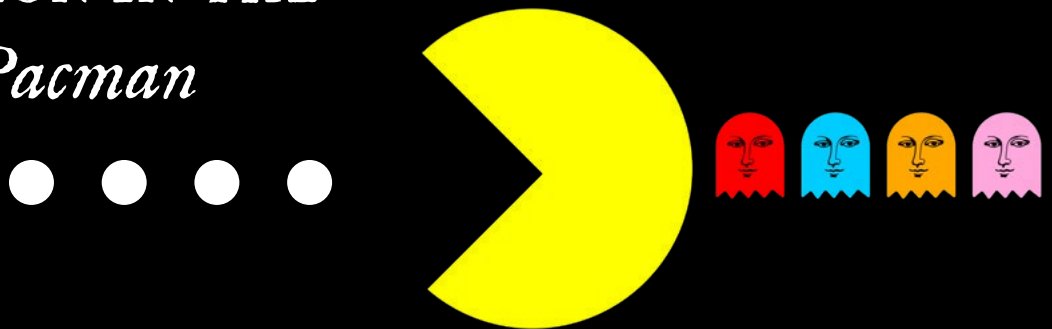
Mukbang comes from the Korean word *meokbang*, which combines the Korean words for “eating” (*meongneun*) and “broadcast” (*bangsong*).

In simple English terms, you could define the word as an “eatcast”. ([Quistodio](#))

Hamzy has an eating channel. She has 13.3 million subscribers to [her Youtube channel](#) and it has had 4,944,300,391 views.

She cooks food and then eats everything she’s made. Or orders pizza and fried chicken and devours it. It’s enough food for a family. Hamzy also has a nearly supernatural ability to eat spicy, raw peppers as a snack while she cooks. Watching someone eat enormous amounts of food does create a feeling of safety: the person is sustained and will survive. It’s a primitive need being filled. This doesn’t need to be read as gluttony. It’s comfort. 📍

CONSUMPTION IN THE WILD: *Pacman*



Every video game I’ve played, encountered, or watched has a Consumption plot structure. In fact, consuming objects and “experience points” are plot points, allowing the player to advance through the game.

For me, the most obvious demonstration of Consumption in a game is *Pacman*. Pacman himself is a giant mouth that eats white pellets, strawberries, cherries, and ghosts. The object of the game is to clear the screen of pellets. Eating everything else adds points. The player with the most points gets to put their initials on the home screen and establish profound credibility.

Other games such as *Last of Us Parts 1 and 2* make consuming items a form of survival. Other games may allow a player to collect a hundred sticks or carry a claw-footed bathtub, an Olmec statue, and 120 pumpkins (*Animal Crossing*). LoU makes players count their bullets and scrounge through corpses. Consuming and collecting when supplies are short and rare creates a survivalist urgency that no other art form can recreate.

Video games are also masters of a pure Journey structure; you always know what you have to do to win the game and you’re told immediately. They’re also unsettlingly experts at structuring a Force plot structure. In the next edition of this book, I’ll have a more detailed analysis of video games and these structures. 📍

CONSUMPTION IN THE WILD:



At the time of this writing, *Squid Game* season two has come out to record-breaking views around the world. At the time of this writing, season two has had 190 million views on Netflix. Season one has had 265.2 million views and 2.2 billion hours viewed. For perspective, the US population is 334.9 million.

I've seen both seasons. I won't go into detail as to what occurs within the series as doesn't pertain to my point. I will say this: watching *Squid Game* is harrowing. I don't recommend it to anyone unless they can handle a lot of explicit violence and emotional turmoil.

The premise of *Squid Game* is that people volunteer to participate in secret "games" in the hopes of winning an enormous amount of money. Though the games themselves are particularly violent, they have violent repercussions. Losing a round of a game results in death. Upwards of one hundred people die each round. The more people who die (inside or outside the games; killing your fellow players is acceptable and provoked) the more money people will win. The prize money will be divided amongst fewer people.

The people who participate are in staggering, crippling debt. The people who watch are masked billionaires who finance the game and watch it, placing side bets on the players. They relish in the blood and gore. In the first season, there is one winner and well over 450 people die horribly.

This is consumption: the rich are consuming the poor as a form of snuff-entertainment. The more who die, the more thrilling it is. Shall I compare it to gladiator games and those who were slaughtered in the coliseum? Gladiators weren't *meant* to die. They were expensively trained. They had prestige and fans. They received tips and nightly visits from devoted female fans. Dying wasn't the point.



Squid Game is demonstrating a Consumption plot in two directions: people consuming money, billionaires hoarding money and creating an economy that encourages debt. The billionaires then use these desperate people to save their financial lives by risking their actual ones.

The people are desperate to consume in order to survive. The billionaires consume money and the entertainment to fill a desperate, dark need that this society has yet to address.



Ritual

WHAT IS IT?

The repetition of established actions in a precise pattern leads to the creation of a new entity or power.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *Has an established structure to work within; allows for more focus on details*
- *Very low anxiety or confusion*
- *Repetition: can be comforting*
- *Low emotional investment*

EXAMPLES

- *Therapy*
- *religious ceremonies*
- *bildungsroman (coming of age or rite of passage narratives)*
- *revenge*
- *cooking videos or shows*
- *journaling*

WHAT IS A RITUAL PLOT STRUCTURE?



This is the act of a ritual repeated. A Ritual plot could have only one performance of a ritual. That one performance, however, includes within it the entire history of the performances. One enacting of a Ritual is the entire repeated enacting of the rituals.

One revenge drama is inevitably tied to other revenge dramas precisely because we believe that revenge is effective and achieves justice and closure.

We make coffee in the morning because we know the caffeine will wake us up. It also provides comfort and stability.

We get married because the ceremonial ritual will make the romantic relationship “permanent” and give us a certain social status. Divorce, conversely, is its own ritual, designed to dissolve the

permanence of the marriage.

The anthropologist [Max Gluckman](#) observed four kinds of rituals, all centered upon action. All of these form the basis of most, if not all, contemporary storytelling, comprised of one performance of the ritual:

Magic Action: Forcing the gods to manipulate the natural world in order to achieve a desired goal. Such as love spells, curses, or raising the dead.

Religious Action: Interaction with the supernatural, such as prayer or sacrifice, asking for help.

Substantive or Constitutive Rituals: Change in social roles or standing, such as a graduation, wedding, promotion, etc.

Factitive Rituals: Protection or strengthening of a group, country, corporation, etc., in a particular niche. This includes warfare, capitalism, farming.

Rituals can couple with Chaos, Information, Force, and others in ways that do not require the hero's Journey structure. The ritual can be repeated in various forms, by different people. The structure of a text must have the basic components of the Ritual, or form a ritual in itself. The plot structure must bring about a specific, intended result. Of course, rituals can fail.

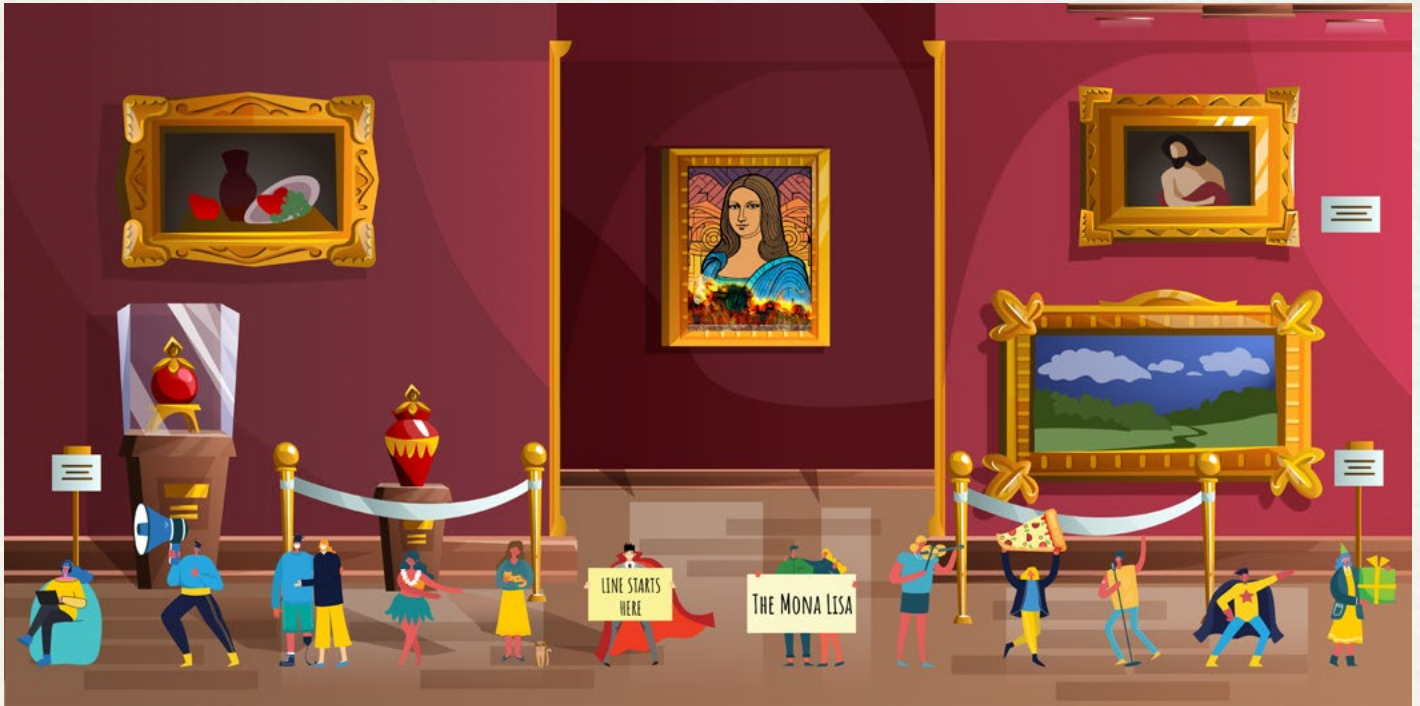
Rituals also change. According to anthropologist [Qing Lan](#), people perform the actions in a rituals because they expect the ritual to work. When the ritual doesn't work, they have three options: “**abolishing the action, changing the action, or introducing new actions.**” [emphasis mine] Rituals also come into being or die out.

Think of it in terms of coffee; a coffee Ritual structure would have repeating actions of making coffee. But caffeine can become less effective. The Ritual can change. The coffee can be replaced with tea, caffeine pills, cocaine, self-mutilation, anything that will keep the character awake. This simple story can be combined with any of the other nontraditional plot structures, such as Consumption or Force. 📍

THE RITUAL LISA

AND

RITUAL IN THE WILD: BANKSY



There's a lot going on here, so I'll take it piece by piece. I've counted five rituals present in this image

The Museum

A museum can be seen as a structure similar to, if not identical with, a temple. Art that is displayed in a museum has instant status with a somewhat assured cultural life time. The artist is given authority and high artistic status, such as a “master” or “priest”. Being hung in a museum has many cultural steps that must be taken and requires sacrifices. All of the artwork reflects the repeating performance of a ritual.

The Line

Standing in line is a common ritual today. There are short lines for coffee or to get a table in a restaurant. There are long lines to ride the Matterhorn at Disneyland. People stand in line for days to get concert tickets, video games, autographs, and even, when I was a kid, Cabbage Patch Kids. The waiting creates suspense, anticipation, and increases desire. A line would work well in a Consumption plot, creating a Ritual reading with consumerism.

Standing in line to see the Sistine Chapel or the *Mona Lisa* carry a different weight. The experience of seeing both is supposed to be something more than a cultural achievement: one expects to feel something exquisite or become more culturally intelligent. One could expect a change of perspective and values. One could see the world differently. The sacrifice of time by standing in line increases the value of the event; the longer the line, the more grandiose the event becomes. The line hearkens back to religious pilgrimages, where one must travel great distances to enter a holy site. The holiness of art isn't something everyone would believe in, but for those who do, the emotional outcome could be weeping and intense

bodily reactions.

The Art Works

The creation of art is a ritual in itself, with the artwork being the product of the ritual. Painting a painting or sculpting a vase, or writing a book goes through several well established actions which have an order. You cannot put a vase in a kiln before obtaining the clay.

The “Mona Lisa”

The *Mona Lisa*, hanging in the Louvre in Paris, is a ritual. My grandmother told me as a child about going to Lourdes in France, accompanying her employer there. Her employer was seeking a cure to her cancer. She did not receive one. Visiting the *Mona Lisa* is a pilgrimage all on its own. One must have the money to fly to Paris and stay there, then pay the entrance fee for the Louvre, and then stand in line for 30-45 minutes to walk past the small painting slowly, as if with reverence. Many have said that the original is stunning in comparison to the original, and the effect of seeing it is akin to a small enlightenment. There is a hint of seeing the *Mona Lisa* is miraculous. Those who experience something new when they see the *Mona Lisa* have performed the ritual successfully.

Love is in the Bin

In 2018, the anonymous artist [Banksy](#) sold his stencil *Girl with Balloon* in an auction (another ritual) for \$1.4 million. Once the gavel hit the podium and the auctioneer declared the piece sold, a Banksy cohort (or Banksy himself) activated the painting. The stencil canvas slowly lowered and emerged from the bottom of the frame shredded. The device failed and shredded the painting only halfway.



Love is in the Bin, by Banksy (photograph by [Sotheby's](#)), [Fair use](#).

Afterwards, Banksy renamed the painting, *Love is in the Bin*. Sotheby's declared that this was the first time an artwork was created during an auction. The art world went bananas, witnessing an event that was “instant art world history”.

The burning *Mona Lisa* is a nod to *Love is in the Bin*. It does what Banksy does, turning the art ritual inside out, criticizing and mocking it. The *Lisa* is not preserved, nor respected. It isn't treasured. Presumably the act of viewing the piece inspired the viewer to set it on fire. The viewer changed the ritual, seeking to create an outcome more satisfying and effective. So what is the outcome of this ritual for Banksy?

First off, this is a violation of the auction and the parameters of the legal agreement Banksy had with Sotheby's and the purchaser of his artwork. The fact that the shredding occurred after the fall of the gavel is destruction of someone else's property.

This is the destruction of something considered valuable, iconic, and culturally important. Artworks are seen as elements of our society that must be preserved for future generations. *Girl with Balloon*, Banksy destroyed a \$1.4 million original artwork. This could be seen as a crime against the law, our art culture, and future generations who cannot learn from and appreciate this artwork. The destruction of the Mona Lisa is a violation of culture that's even more explosive and egregious. Even with the copies, the Mona Lisa must be maintained.



Reactions mid-shredding. A still image from [Shredding the Girl and the Balloon-the Director's half cut.](#)

Banksy's stencil of *Girl with Balloon* was a recreation of a previous work of graffiti. It wasn't original. Stencils are works of art that can be created identically and endlessly. It's difficult to establish a beginning or an ending to the artwork (Asymptote plot?). If Banksy painted five *Girl with Balloons* all over London on the same night, how would we know which was the first or original artwork?

Banksy sees art as something that doesn't belong in museums or the art world. Art is transitory, captured in moments, and at the mercy of the elements. It's clear, also, that spending millions on artworks is also absurd to Banksy and in need of a revolutionary act of violence.

The Mona Lisa coloring page is not the original. It's a copy of a drawing that is a copy of the original. In fact, the Mona Lisas are downloaded images of the scanned drawing of the original. The images I used often were built from other incarnations that I didn't like and reworked. Is the Mona Lisa even in there, or has her image become so iconic that we don't need the original?






The act of destruction creates a ritual whose outcome can be seen as cleansing or a force of creation and destruction. For something to be created, something must be destroyed. The partial destruction is still a destruction. It freezes the work in time; it's both created and destroyed¹. It tugs between the two concepts and has no resolution. That is the product of these works: the instability between life and death. Perhaps that's what our lives truly are after all. 📍

¹ *Creation and Destruction are two plot structures I'll discuss in the second edition of this book.*



The important factor to determine is what will Red receive having conducted this ritual of taking food to her grandmother's house. The easiest and most natural, I think, would be a Substantive or Constitutive Ritual: a ritual which will change social standing. We can say that Red's actions for her grandmother will result in a large inheritance, or perhaps something more specific, an object that Red values for its power.

The story could be mapped in the following way:

-  *Red going to her Grandma's house to take her food is a ritual task; each visit nourishes Grandma, who cannot leave her house to get her own food; it keeps her alive; she will die without Red's visit. The trip always happens in the same way: she wears the same cape, uses the same basket, takes the same food. It has to be this way or Grandma won't eat (agoraphobic and food sensitivities); it has to be Red because she trusts no one else; this could blend with OCD or another mental illness that is ritualized.*
-  *There are incarnations when Red has eaten something from the basket or got mud on her cape and Grandma has been nasty and demands a repetition of the ritual.*
-  *Red meets the Wolf and despite him being a Wolf, they fall for each other HARD. Wolf wants Red to run off with him, but won't because she must get the object Grandma has; she's promised her to finish this "Little Red Riding Hood" Ritual.*
-  *Red arrives at her Grandma's house a few days later and finds the Wolf burning her dead Grandma on a funeral pyre; the Wolf is covered in her blood; he is performing a funeral ritual for Grandma.*
-  *Red tells the Wolf it was her grandmother's body she wanted; Red morphs into a wolf and rips the Wolf's throat out.*



RITUAL IN THE WILD:

Jealousy, BY ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET

Jealousy isn't an ordinary book. The only thing that makes it ordinary is that it is printed on paper and sold as a novel. When I finished reading *Jealousy*, I immediately turned back to the first page and read it again.

Jealousy focuses on, presumably, a man obsessed with the conviction that his wife is cheating on him with a neighbor. He is "presumably" a man because we learn nothing about him. In fact, his presence is like Milton's description of God in *Paradise Lost*: we are told God has one eye and a right hand side.

Our narrator briefly describes his presence through his absence (there's a third chair set out), or by the number of drinks his wife A... makes. The narrator never once accuses A... of adultery, nor mentions it plainly. He never rages or makes scenes.

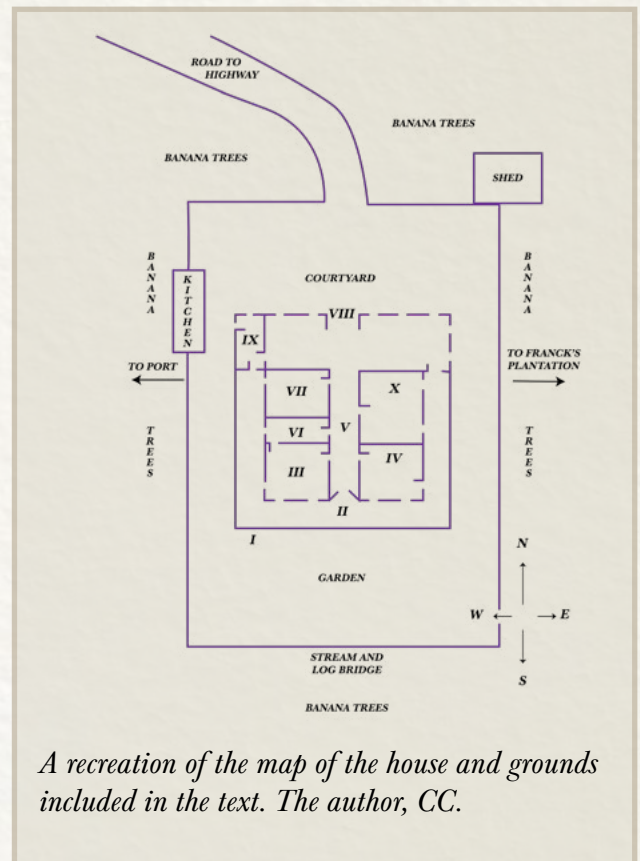
Rather, our narrator methodically and painstakingly describes events, the architecture of the house, banana trees, his wife brushing her hair, the killing of a centipede, and other occurrences that are seemingly benign. He describes them over and over, sometimes with different details, but always with the implication that within these forgettable events there is evidence of her infidelity.

A . . .'s arms, a little less distinct than her neighbor's because of the color—though light—of the material of her dress, are also lying on the elbow-rests of her chair. The four hands are lying in a row, motionless. The space between A . . .'s left hand and Franck's right hand is approximately two inches.

Do two inches equal adultery? The narrator never says. We are left to wonder if this ritual is generating proof and is working.

By the end, he has no evidence. There are no revelations. His wife doesn't leave him. There are no emotional scenes of accusations and fights. The book doesn't end; it stops. We easily assume this analysis ritual can continue indefinitely. I think this is why reading it again immediately felt so necessary.

This is the ritual of Jealousy: obsessive analysis. If the narrator finds the right details, will something happen that will reveal the truth? Isn't this how we discover the truth, through observation? Aren't observation and analysis rituals of the mind? Most importantly, what will this Ritual accomplish for him? Perhaps nothing because the Ritual is flawed and broken. 📍



CYCLE v RITUAL

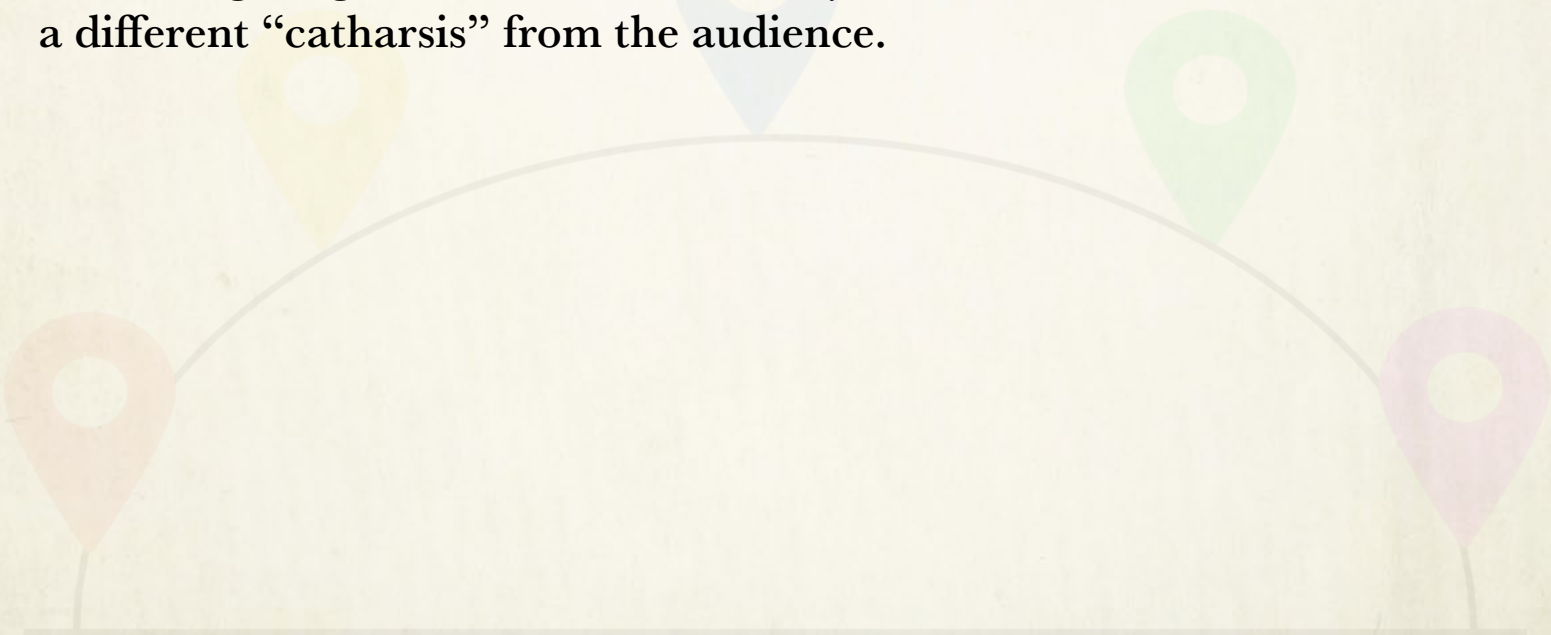
how are they different?

A **CYCLE** is an adaptation, but one that purposely creates new interpretations and meanings of the older story in an effort to say something new.

A **RITUAL** is the repetition of events in order to create something.

how are they the same?

A Cycle can involve a repetition of actions as a Ritual does. The something tangible created from the Cycle could come in the form of a different “catharsis” from the audience.



Force

WHAT IS IT?

Force is strength, power, compulsion, and constraint. One character exerts their will on others in order to accomplish a goal.

WHY IS IT APPEALING?

- *Very little, if any, emotional components are necessary.*
- *No social interactions of any depth necessary.*
- *Characters are mechanisms of the story.*

EXAMPLES

- *Action movies*
- *horror*
- *dance*
- *cooking shows/videos*
- *destruction videos*

WHAT IS A FORCE PLOT STRUCTURE?

Force plot structure has scenes that focus on one set of characters inflicting strength and power on another in order to compel them to do something they want. Anything that involves the physical exertion of will and strength has a Force structure.

The plot moves from event to event like cars smashing into one another (sometimes by literally having cars smash into each other). Each point of the plot is another exertion of force that must move the story forward towards a goal.

A Force plot doesn't need to have a Journey plot as well. In other words, it doesn't require to have the character development and psychological reality of a Journey. It can have a solid goal, but, then again, it doesn't require one.

Force plots traditionally provoke strong emotions, such as rage, shock, anxiety, and terror. Force is one of the most emotionally obvious plot structures, and functions viscerally the entire story. Events occur to elicit emotion from the audience.



The negative emotions give way eventually to joy, justice, and vindication. The ends are usually positive, with the object of the Force relinquishing to the power of the protagonist. The stories are modern morality tales: the bad guys get destroyed, wrongs are righted, the hero rescues/"gets" the girl, and, like a Journey plot, the world returns to peaceful equilibrium. 📍

WHAT IS "FORCE"?

From [Wiktionary definition of "force"](#)

- Strength or energy of body or mind; active power; vigor; might; capacity of exercising an influence or producing an effect.
- The force of an appeal, an argument, or a contract.
- Power exerted against will or consent; compulsory power; violence; coercion.
- Anything that is able to make a substantial change in a person or thing.
- Something or anything that has the power to produce a physical effect upon something else, such as causing it to move or change shape.
- The ability to attack, control, or constrain.
- A magic trick in which the outcome is known to the magician beforehand, especially one involving the apparent free choice of a card by another person.
- Ability of an utterance or its element (word, form, prosody, ...) to effect a given meaning.





THE FORCE LISA

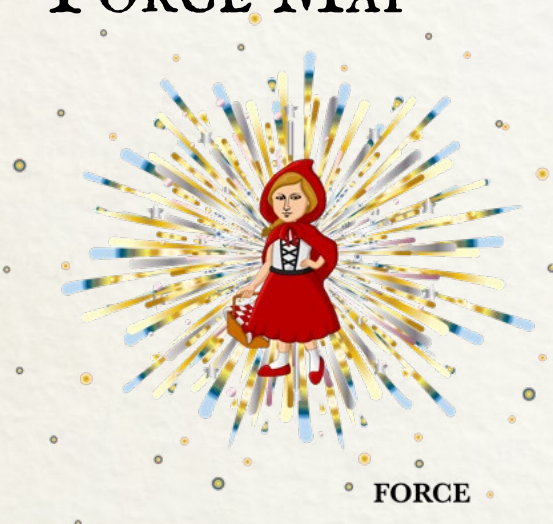
Lisa has been [Jackson Pollock](#)ed. The paint has been forcefully “thrown” on the canvas, smeared and smudged, without regard to keeping within any lines, or Lisa herself.

She peeks from underneath the deluge forced upon her. Is this degradation? Is this an obliteration of her identity? Is she being forcefully oppressed?

Or is this hiding, purposeful, forceful concealment. She has one eye peeking out and the vague outline of the other. Perhaps this canvas is of her own making. The colors are, frankly, ugly. There’s nothing harmonious and inviting. Perhaps she is protecting herself from aggressive admirers or the Jackson Pollocks of the world. 📍

LITTLE RED FORCE MAP

The Wolf is an obvious source of Force in the story, but he doesn’t have to be the only one. **This map uses Red and the Wolf as Force plot points:**



📍 *Red hunts and kills various animals. She rings their necks or beheads them, eventually butchering them.*

📍 *Red digs up potatoes and chop them up with carrots. She chops herbs, roasts ingredients, whips eggs, etc.*

📍 *The Wolf hunts in the woods; he kills deer and squirrels.*

📍 *The Wolf kills most of the animals in the woods, and moves on to humans, which he kills, butchers, and eats.*

📍 *Red and the Wolf meet in the woods; he takes her basket of food and as he eats everything in it, Red slits his throat. She shows up at Grandma’s with fresh, bloody wolf meat and makes a stew.*



FORCE IN THE WILD: LISA THE 13TH

Slasher movies from the 80s are fascinating because of their grotesque violence, misogyny, and terrible writing.

On the right, Lisa dons the mask of Jason from the [Friday the 13th](#) franchise, the movies that terrified me as a child (only the commercials; I wasn't allowed to watch the movies). Of course, the genre also has *Halloween*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. These are the titans of the genre.

I cannot think of better, even seminal, examples of works using a Force structure. I'd argue that these movies are also existential Asymptotes and the main characters are the killers themselves. They are certainly the agents of action, in that their actions cause changes in the story.

At the beginning and end of these movies, we have no idea what's going on. People are murdered and we have no rational explanation as to why.



We know who the murderer is, but we don't ever get a credible reason as to why. Some of the incarnations attempt to offer one that resembles a psychological portrait (Rob Zombie is the only one to succeed even a little with his [Halloween remakes](#)), but we're still clueless. All we know is that the killing will continue because the killer cannot be stopped. This is the existential bit: we're trapped in a cycle (or perhaps a Ritual, designed to elicit a visceral, physical response?).

Jason in *Friday the 13th* is the only active actor in each movie. By that I mean his goals structure everyone else's goals. All other characters react to his slaughtering. His kills grow the plot. I don't want to say that he is pushing the plot forward, because that implies that there's some kind of linear, organized progression, even a final goal. These horror movie plots seem to expand outward, thereby consuming all events.

Characters spend more time running away and being killed than being proactive. Often actions taken by characters to defend themselves and get away will always be negated by the end, when Jason (and the other horror characters) inexplicably resurrect.

The only thing driving the stories forward is Force. One murder after another, each more bizarre and creative than the last. But this is an insatiable plot: Force isn't looking for a conclusion, only for repetition, more exertions of power. Presumably, Jason is enraged because a camp counselor killed his mother. Maybe? Actually, I don't know. The movies aren't well-written psychologically and I doubt the writers cared much about Jason's nuanced motivations. 📍

FORCE IN THE WILD: THE HYDRAULIC PRESS CHANNEL

For the past ten years, Lauri Vuohensilta and his wife Anni, a very charming, adorable, and funny Finnish couple, have been crushing objects on their [Hydraulic Press Channel](#) (HPC). They will crush everything, especially dangerous objects, such as ball bearings and batteries. But they will also playfully crush food, toys, every day objects, and small Playdoh figures Anni has made. These figures are considered “dangerous” and Lauri says ominously before activating the press, “So we must deal with it.” For the truly dangerous objects, the couple hides behind bullet proof glass.



Lauri and Anni Vuohensilta. All photos are screenshots from The Hydraulic Press Channel.

The plot structure of these “presses” is short and basic. An object is placed on the press. Lauri activates the press. The press comes down and destroys the object. Over the years, the channel has improved their filming tech and can show explosions in slow motion and from various angles.



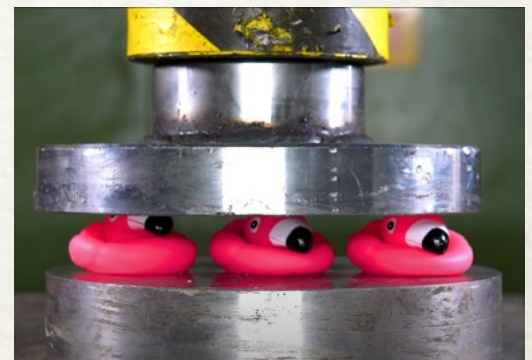
The appeal is in the process of the crush. Seeing an ax head bend under a press seems an impossibility; the force used seems magical. Watching Skittles morph into shooting worms is another fantastical moment, as well as the satisfying squish of three flamingos becoming a single squirting pancake.



The HPC is a dedicated Force drama, but it is also something else that I'll be exploring in the second edition: a Creation and Destruction plot. The objects are purposefully destroyed, and each act of destruction creates something new. One could also take the logic further and say that the appearance of the objects on the press “creates” them as something to be crushed.

I had first thought that a Creation and Destruction plot would be two separate plots, but each act causes the other.

As I said, I'll go into this more in the second edition.





FORCE IN THE WILD: THE MATRIX LOBBY DANCE

When I first saw this scene in The Matrix, I thought it was gorgeous. I knew it was an elaborate dance even though at the time I couldn't explain why.

The violence which occurs in this scene is and isn't realistic. We have already been told that this world is a simulation and Neo and Trinity can manipulate it to their advantage. What follows is outrageous combat instigated by two people dressed in black latex and unrealistically, almost comically, armed.

What I found most important is the choreography of the guards. Neo and Trinity are extremely precise in their movements, beginning the scene with mirroring one another. But the guards are slouching, expressing emotion, falling without grace, even seeming hampered by their physical form.

But is what Trinity and Neo doing in this scene considered dance? Definitions of dance are extremely broad: a set of movements to music. But even music isn't always needed. Some kind of rhythm then? This scene has a soundtrack and it's well synced to what is happening.

This qualifies as dance. The choreography is precisely executed moves to music. (This sort of changes the way we could see action movies and violent scenes in horror movies.)

It is definitely Force. It takes willpower and exertion of strength to produce these moves. Force doesn't require violence or death. Molding clay is an act of force.

One can track the Force plot structure through the scenes. Neo's one handed cartwheel while shooting guards is an important moment, as is Trinity's run up a wall. These moments not only collectively accomplish getting to the elevator, they are character development. We can see how powerful Neo and Trinity are, supporting the claim that Neo is in fact the chosen one.

Appendix

[Plot Structures Summary](#)

[Bibliography](#)

[Essential Free Resources](#)

[Analysis of “The Dada Lisa”](#)

[The Original Dissertation Proposal](#)

[Google AI: Neurodiversity and Objects, a Theme](#)

[Aristotle Did Not Say, “A Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts”](#)

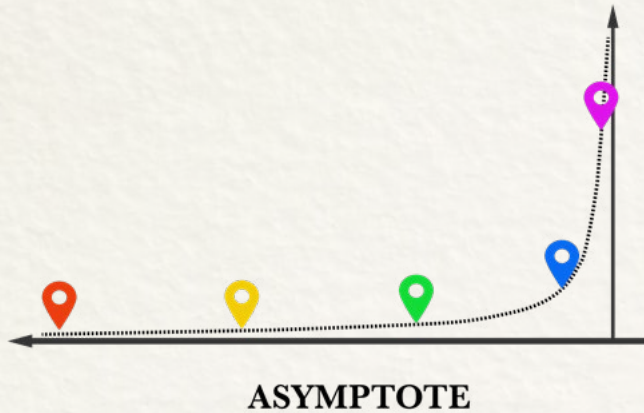
[About the Author](#)

[The Second Edition](#)

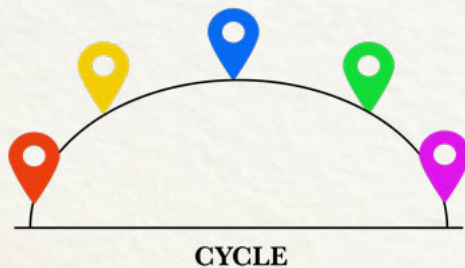
PLOT STRUCTURES

summary

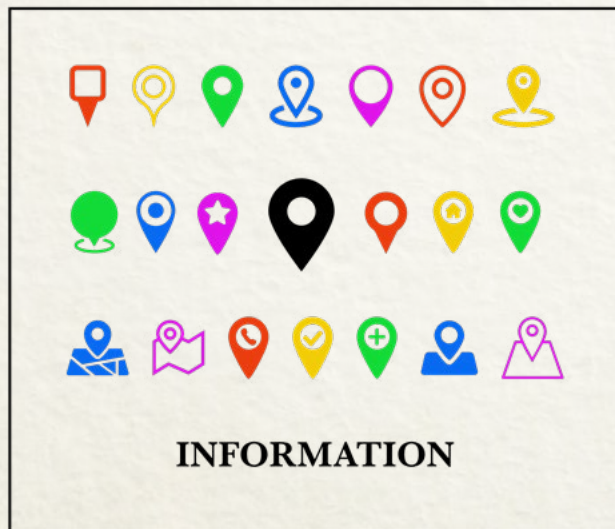
FOCUSED ORGANIZATION



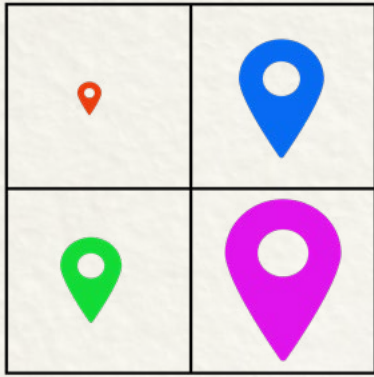
The beginning feels like you’ve “jumped into the middle” and the end feels like something is unresolved. This is typically described as bad writing.



An adaptation that makes significant changes to the original in order to say something new. It can be a vast epic or a piece of micro-fiction.



The story is about the collection of data and its organization into coherent and logical information.



OBJECT

Events and/or characters are arranged together as if on a shelf. Through analyzing juxtaposition can one find a coherent meaning.



LANDSCAPE

The “character” or “event” is a large “area” full of details. The narrative is slow, without action, other than elements that stimulate an emotional response.



PORTRAIT

Focus is given primarily to the psychological development and analysis of the main character. Each step forward in the plot reveals more information. Goals aren’t important.

POWER



A character that absorbs or takes into their possession objects, people, animals, etc. These things become their property or part of their body or mind.



A sequence of events that have been done before, in a specific way. The outcome of these events is the manifestation of something, physical, emotional, magical, etc.



The story is about exerting power and will upon another power. It doesn't need to be violent. The core of Force is a person's ability to do something.

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ESSENTIAL FREE RESOURCES

[Open Culture](#)

This is a behemoth of free material. Books, courses, art, anything. Like, anything from any time period or place.

[Wikipedia](#)

It's one of my most used resources. That being said, I'm fully aware that Wikipedia is not entirely reliable. It's also true that many books, articles, and scientific experiments are not entirely reliable. I reference Wikipedia articles that are well sourced and thorough.

Gutenberg Project

[USA](#)

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Intrepid, dedicated people all over the world are transcribing all kinds of texts and posting them online. Gutenberg USA has download options that work with Kindle or other reading devices. Australia and Canada Gutenbergs are different, independent sites. Both countries have different copyright laws than the US. There are authors available in Australia and Canada that aren't available yet in the US. Canada Gutenberg give non-Canadian downloaders a warning that they must check their local copyright laws before downloading anything.

[Internet Archive](#)

This is my go-to for downloading old movies, but it also has a magnificent library of scanned books. Those not in the public domain are available for "borrowing", which is still a sweet deal.

[Open Library](#)

A project of the Internet Archive, the Open Library seeks to create a webpage for every book ever published. At the time of this writing, their catalogue has 28+ million books.

[Online Etymology Dictionary](#)

An incredible resource for anyone who needs to know the history of any word.

[Sister Wendy: The Complete Collection.](#)

This is an odd addition to this list. I have studied art in school. I took a couple of doctorate level courses in college. Those courses were extremely helpful. But it was watching Sister Wendy on PBS that I learned how to see and understand. She was a British Catholic art historian, who spent her last years living as a hermit and studying art. The episodes she made with the BBC are personable, charming, astute, and brilliant.

ANALYSIS OF THE DADA LISA



This image has five references to women, all of which are distorted or impossible. A possible sixth is the pizza in the bowler hat, with the arms posed in a clearly feminine way. The bowler hat brings a masculine interpretation, though the shoe could fit women's clothing. The figure seems a kind of burlesque, drag performance. The pepperoni could also be interpreted as a phallic reference. Most likely this is a gender-bending character with power: the "head" may be a pizza, but the arms have enormous expression and, presumably, agency.

The most obvious, and unusual woman in this piece is the one sleeping in the palm of a giant hand. She's presumably asleep, a small smile on her lips, and is wearing a low-cut black nightgown that screams 1950s sex pulp novels. But she does appear happy, her head nestled on a hot dog the size of a pillow. There are several questions: why is the hand so large or why is she so small? Why is she sleeping on a giant hot dog? Why is she dressed so revealingly? Why is she happy?

This could be a reference to the surrealist's unconsciousness. Perhaps the Dada Lisa is the source of her happiness, a dream that she's enjoying. Perhaps her positive expression gives us a clue to approach this work more positively.



There is a disturbing reading, though, that needs to be addressed. She is laying in the palm of a male hand. This is an image of control, especially since she is made so much smaller. Just like Tinker Bell kept in a cage. She's dressed in a sexually provocative style; this gives an added layer of control and objectification.

We have a sound wave moving through the image: it could be interpreted as the women speaking or listening. The mouths all seem to be covered, distorted, or hazy. The Taylor Swift image (under the woman with her head down and the fish) is the most obvious symbol of a voice and speaking out. But her image is blurry, as if far away. Perhaps our vision of her is distorted; we cannot see her because of our own deficiencies. The other woman, at the left, seems segmented by a pane of glass, creating

repetitions and fragmentation. The Mona Lisa attempts to show herself through globs of paint, but we get only shards of her image and swaths of vibrant color.

As for the pink and green penguin wearing a chef's hat: it faces the potato book, as if consulting it for something to create and consume. The fish positioned on the woman laying on a table: the fish itself is colored with an odd, unnatural blue texture. It holds the women down rather than swimming past them, though this is more likely. Either way, the fish is obscuring the women, possibly also making a derogatory comment about women and their bodies.

Texts nearly bisect this image: "But-why, but how come?", the nineteenth century numbers, and the potato book.

The quote is from an early twentieth century newspaper headline, but it's also a quote from a Twilight Zone episode, "A Most Unusual Camera" (something I was able to reference without needing to look it up because I'm that kind of nerd). The question begins with "but" and repeats it. "But" is a word that will contradict what has come before. "I want to go to the store, but I don't have any money." This quote implies that something has been said or happened that is inexplicable and disturbing, hence the repetition of "but" and "why" in another form, "how come". This is an expression of a reaction to something that makes no sense and it's not acceptable that it is senseless. We deserve an explanation. (Perhaps a rebellion against the tenets of Dada?)



The numbers are arranged in a display of different fonts.

Numbers are a concept that seem to provide us with a better understanding of the natural world: we can predict occurrences in nature, develop science and technology, and run capitalism. Numbers seem to promise us an answer to inexplicable questions. But these numbers are an artistic arrangement. They are not in a mathematical equation or tallying up a credit card bill. They give us nothing concrete, but are aesthetically pleasing. When we search for the answer to "how come?", we are given numbers that are not used as they were intended. Perhaps this is mockery. Perhaps this is a deeper answer in itself: art and aesthetics are the way.

The potato book. Just like the numbers not being numbers, the book is not a text providing information other than a full color image of a seemingly endless expanse of potatoes. Perhaps it is a book about potatoes, a text that studies them scientifically. Maybe it's a cookbook. I think the most important question is, "but how come" potatoes?

Potatoes are a magical vegetable. They can be cooked in a multitude of delicious forms and be made into vodka. Historians in 200 years will probably look back on french fries as a harbinger of the doom of humanity. But what a way to go. Could this be the point of the answer to the question? French fries and artistic numbers? Aesthetic and culinary pleasures? Let us not forget the whimsical pink penguin chef, even the gender-bending pepperoni pizza? No doubt historians will look back at pizza, mouths agape, and wonder how we all survived so long with this diet.

We also have the Hot Dog pillow: is this the source of a pleasure, comfort, even security?

Taking everything together, we have women that have a questionable or distorted voice. They are fragmented, blurry, hand drawn, indistinct, nearly blots of color. They can all be asking, "How come?"

Perhaps the answer is in art and physical pleasures.

Perhaps the Dada Lisa is the dream of the sleeping woman, who is attempting to speak or form coherence, but struggles by self-distortion, a lack of agency, and ignorance of who she is. The multiple women could be simply one woman, the woman who has no power, yet believes her life is good.



THE ORIGINAL DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Plays are usually broadly categorized as Traditional and Non-Traditional. Using the model set forth by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, Traditional plays are structured as a journey with a beginning, middle and an end. Characters are psychologically recognizable and all events are structured around an action which leads to a change within the protagonist. This can be delineated by the following complex metaphor:

The Subject is the Product of the Changing Self, the Change Instigated by the Subject going on a Journey, during which Actions occur which are Caused by Purposeful Reasons.

Non-Traditional plays do not follow this structure, nor this complex metaphor. The category seems to be a container which stores “Everything Else”. Non-Traditional plays do follow under -Isms (Futurism, Dadaism, Post-Modernism, Absurdism, etc.) but even these subcategories become muddled when the -Isms begin to merge and collide.

This dissertation seeks to establish a clearer system to categorize plays using cognitive linguistic theories. I will remove the labels of Traditional and Non-Traditional and ascribe categories based upon Image Schemas. Traditional plays, structured according to the above metaphor, would follow under the Journey Image Schema. Journey is the umbrella metaphor; beneath it includes Subject vs. Self, Actions are Meaningful Events, Cause and Effect, etc. When speaking of the play structurally, Journey is the appropriate metaphor as it is what provides the skeleton of the play. Other metaphors simply flesh out and do not have dominant control.

Non-Traditional plays, I argue, do not use Journey as the Image Schema for the structure of the play. A journey is not the predominant issue. Non-Traditional plays can use a range of Image Schema for their structures: Objects, Force, In-Out, Creation-Destruction, etc. According to the theory of embodied cognition, human beings use metaphors in order to negotiate with our environment and make sense of our world; there is no other way of interacting with our world without metaphors. Therefore, no matter what the intentions of the playwright, an Image Schema must be used in the structure of a play. There is no other way for a human being to think.

I will argue that all plays have an Image Schema, and not necessarily that of the oldest and most popular Journey. I will construct two plays structured with alternative Image Schema. Through a series of experiments, I will demonstrate that not only am I able to construct plays using new Schemas, but an audience will observe and experience the alternative structures.

The experiments will have three different parts. The first part will involve a Traditional Play, one which must use the Journey Schema. The second part will involve a Non-Traditional Play which is not my own--one which uses a Schema other than Journey. And the third part will involve my own work created for this experiment.

In each part of this experiment, the subjects used must be of two different categories: those who are theatrically educated and those who are laymen. The separate Theatre trained group may have

especially trained observation skills which may afford them the ability to “see” the structure better than those without training.

Each part of the experiment will involve the subjects answering a survey about the play in question. The survey will include a list of words and simple images; the subject will be asked to select words and/or images which “generally illustrate the events in the play.” The words and images will be basic representations of several Image Schemas. I predict that the subjects will select those words and images appropriate to the Image Schema present in the play in question.

GOOGLE AI: NEURODIVERSITY AND OBJECTS

a Theme by Google

[I did a search on Google under “neurodiversity and objects”. The AI spit out this. I’ve never copy/pasted something from an AI before and presented it as legitimate research. However, this small list and tiny works cited section is actually pretty great.]

Neurodiversity, the idea that differences in cognitive functioning are a normal part of human variation, can influence how individuals perceive and interact with objects. Neurodivergent individuals, including those with conditions like autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, may have unique sensory experiences, cognitive processing styles, and preferences related to objects and their use. [1, 2, 3, 4]

OBJECT-BASED PERSPECTIVES: [5, 6]

Unique Sensory Experiences: Neurodivergent individuals might have heightened or diminished sensitivities to certain sensory inputs, impacting how they experience objects and their textures, colors, and sounds. [5, 6]

Cognitive Processing Differences: Some neurodivergent individuals might have enhanced abilities to focus on specific details of objects, like colors or patterns, while others may have difficulties with visual processing or spatial awareness. [1, 7]

Intense Interests: Certain neurodivergent individuals may develop intense interests in specific types of objects or collections, which can become a source of comfort and engagement. [8, 9]

Object-Based Social Interaction: Some neurodivergent individuals may find it easier to connect with others through shared interests in objects like books, movies, or specific hobbies, using these as a shared anchor for social interaction. [10]

Fidgeting and Self-Regulation: Fidget toys, tactile items, or visual/auditory devices can be used by some neurodivergent individuals to help regulate their sensory inputs, focus, or manage anxiety, demonstrating the link between objects and well-being. [11]

Objects as Comfort and Structure: Certain objects, like favorite toys or specific clothing, can provide a sense of comfort and structure for neurodivergent individuals, helping them navigate challenging situations or transition between activities. [5, 10]

NEURODIVERSITY AND OBJECT-RELATED EXAMPLES: [8, 9]

Autism: Individuals with autism may have intense interests in specific objects or collections, like trains, cars, or specific types of books, and may also exhibit heightened sensitivity to textures or sounds related to certain objects. [8, 9]

ADHD: Some individuals with ADHD may find it easier to focus on tasks that involve objects

or hands-on activities, like building with blocks or engaging in crafts, as these can help channel their energy and attention. [12]

Dyslexia: Individuals with dyslexia may have visual strengths, including a heightened ability to understand 3D objects or patterns, which can be leveraged in artistic or technical fields. [12]

Dyspraxia: Those with dyspraxia may experience challenges with fine motor skills and spatial awareness, which can impact how they interact with objects and perform tasks involving manipulation or coordination. [13, 14]

- [1] <https://www.prosperhealth.io/blog/neurotypical-vs-neurodivergent-experiences>
- [2] <https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/our-people/neurodiversity-at-cuh/what-is-neurodiversity/>
- [3] <https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2024.1434143>
- [4] <https://www.aaha.org/newstat/publications/so-whats-this-neurodiversity-thing-anyway/>
- [5] <https://www.centracare.com/articles-stories/watch-for-red-flags-of-neurodiversity/>
- [6] <https://www.tiimoapp.com/resource-hub/sensory-processing-difficulties>
- [7] <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6305364/>
- [8] <https://www.verywellhealth.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-neurotypical-260047>
- [9] <https://lexxic.com/resources/neurodiversity>
- [10] <https://neurodivergentinsights.com/object-based-vs-social-based-conversations/>
- [11] <https://candorgroup.ca/neurodiversity/navigating-neurodiversity-with-fidget-items/>
- [12] <https://www.goodrx.com/conditions/autism/neurodiverse-child-signs>
- [13] <https://carescribe.io/blog/what-is-dyspraxia-a-quick-guide/>
- [14] <https://www.creasedpuddle.co.uk/dyspraxia-what-you-need-to-know/>

ARISTOTLE DID NOT SAY, “A Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts”

This is the direct quote from Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 8.6:

*Concerning the challenge we just faced about how to describe things in numbers and definitions, What is the reason for a unity/oneness? For however **many things have a plurality of parts and are not merely a complete aggregate but instead some kind of a whole beyond its parts**, there is some cause of it since even in bodies, for some the fact that there is contact is the cause of a unity/oneness while for others there is viscosity or some other characteristic of this sort. But a definition [which is an] explanation is one [thing] not because it is bound-together, like the *Iliad*, but because it is a definition of a single thing.*

Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἀπορίας τῆς εἰρημένης περὶ τετοῦς ὁρισμοῦς καὶ περὶ τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς, τί αἴτιον τοῦ ἓν εἶναι; πάντων γὰρ ὅσα πλείω μέρη ἔχει καὶ μὴ ἐστὶν οἷον σωρὸς τὸ πᾶν ἄλλ' ἐστὶ τι τὸ ὅλον παρὰ τὰ μέρη, ἔστι τι αἴτιον, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἐν τοῖς σώμασι τοῖς μὲν ἀφ' αἰτίας τοῦ ἓν εἶναι, τοῖς δὲ γλισχρότης ἢ τι πάθος ἕτερον τοιοῦτον. ὁ δ' ὁρισμὸς λόγος ἐστὶν εἷς οὐ συνδέσμων καθάπερ ἡ Ἰλιάς, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἓνός εἶναι.

Thank you, [SENTENTIAE ANTIQUAE](#)



*The author holding a
Kerpie doll autographed
by William Shatner.
(2012)*

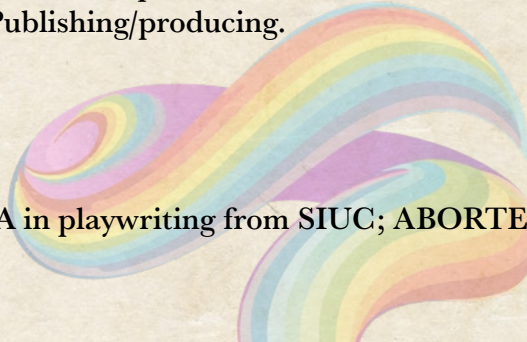


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I have been writing with serious intent for thirty years. I've been published and produced multiple times. My education has focused on literary theory, theater history and criticism, as well as creative writing. I'm also a trained graphic designer.

Specializations/Interests

Nontraditional writing. Playwriting Cycles. Elizabethan Theatre and playwrights. Shakespeare and First Folio Cue Script Technique. Holistic Editing. Publishing/producing.



Education

BA in English Literature from UCLA; MFA in playwriting from SIUC; ABORTED PhD from Texas Tech.

Publication

I have been published as a playwright (the play is terrible). I had articles about Shakespeare published, as well as blog pieces. I've self-published several novels and one book of poetry under the name Lady Ristretto. I have also worked as a freelance erotica writer with individual clients.

I'm also developing Other Authors Publishing, a company dedicated to neurodiverse, GLBTQI+, and nontraditional authors and texts.

Production

I've had several plays produced at universities and theatre companies, in Illinois, Texas, and New York. I was a founding member of the Trama Theater in Illinois and Experimental Artists Theatre in Texas. Currently, I have been developing the Nudist Chicken Theatre Company, a nontraditional, anti-theater, anti-money group in Las Vegas.

Curriculum Vitae

This is mostly stuff I did during my college years and immediately following, including papers I wrote and presented at conferences, Shakespeare work, and university teaching experience.



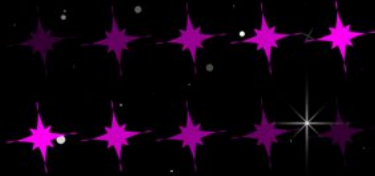
character driven.



Graphic Design

- My portfolio.
- Zombie Spaghetti, my Redbubble store.
- Zombie Stromboli, my TeePublic store.

CREATION



DESTRUCTION



TIME

NONTRADITIONAL PLOT STRUCTURES

for neurodiverse writers



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