

**Escape to Immersion**  
**Experience Your Inner Hero**  
Senior Experience Thesis  
Kate Oakley  
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The art of storytelling is as old as humanity. From the visual storytelling elements of cave paintings, to spoken oral stories, theatrical performances, and modern day cinema, stories have helped communicate and share human experiences for tens of thousands of years. There are three general ways audiences connect to stories: for educational or learning purposes, stories for personal identification or relatability, and stories for escapism.<sup>1</sup> A story can be one of these individually, or it can be a combination of two or all three at the same time.<sup>2</sup> There are traditional stories that portray characters overcoming obstacles and there are alternative narratives that use visceral ways of communicating through a concept.<sup>3</sup> This paper will focus primarily on escapism or fantasy based storytelling through a traditional narrative because that is how an audience connects on a deeper emotional level to the story. The human desire to create alternate experiences that transcend beyond our physical world through storytelling functions as a universal means to communicate. Storytelling can relate human experiences, and increase the users' emotional connection, which can be applied through communication design.

“‘Why, it is just like branches of trees!’ exclaimed Lucy. And then she saw that there was light ahead of her; not a few inches away where the back of the wardrobe ought to have been, but a long way off. Something cold and soft was falling on her. A moment later she found that she was standing in the middle of a wood at night-time with snow under her feet and snowflakes falling through the air.”<sup>4</sup>

Whether it's climbing through a wardrobe, falling down a rabbit hole or stepping through a mirror, stories have transcribed the human desire to move beyond this realm and into one more fantastical than our own. This desire exists not just in one culture but universally, spanning across the world.<sup>5</sup> We see it in the form of life after death in religion, in a fairytale's ability to

transport the hero from one reality into another, and in the recreation of reality and its ability to give action to a main character. Storytelling feeds the human desire to exist somewhere other than the here and now—to cross a portal into another reality. It provides lessons and experiences we can relate to or ones we have yet to learn. This ability to transcend universally makes storytelling a unique tool for communication. This tool can be used in conjunction with communication design as a system to gain deeper access into human desire, and a connection of design to the user and viewer.

Today, designers have to encompass a multitude of skill sets. They have to not only be great designers, but also communicators, researchers, strategists, artists, and of course storytellers. Storytelling as a tool has become more prevalent in the design industry as more magazine articles, design studios and classes boast of its use in the creative process. Designers have always been surrounded by narrative structures as they create graphics that visually bring to life their client's work. As exemplified by designers' long support of the advertising industry, which has consistently had a strong narrative component. But, as our society is rapidly changing and becoming more technologically driven, designers are expected to take on a bigger role. Now, do you want the red pill or the blue pill? But, choose carefully because, "you take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes."<sup>6</sup>

Historically and academically, narrative has been a part of the design process. Designers have helped visualize another person's narrative by creating book covers, movie posters, and motion title designs. In these historic offshoots of graphic design, the designer is simplifying the

story into an introduction for the viewer. Saul Bass, an American graphic designer starting in the 1950s, was known for his ability to create visuals that could summarize the complexities of a whole story down to single images that stuck in the viewer's mind.<sup>7</sup> With title sequences and poster designs such as, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (Figure 1), Bass simplified the movie's storyline of a recovering heroin junkie who succumbs to his old habits with the graphic of a jagged arm that speaks to the urban themes present in the film.<sup>8</sup> Book cover designer and comic book fan, Chip Kidd, is another designer that uses narrative in his work. Kidd stirred up the book cover business starting in the 1980s by incorporating photography and graphic elements into an industry that relied heavily on illustration. In his work, such as the cover for *Jurassic Park* (Figure 2), he distilled the book's concept into a visually intriguing image that creates a dialogue for the reader between the cover and the text.<sup>9</sup> Another motion graphic designer, Kyle Cooper, is currently one of the most sought after film and television title designers in the industry. He has produced title sequences for hundreds of films and television shows such as *SE7EN*, *Spider Man*, and *American Horror Story*.<sup>10</sup> (Figure 3) His ability to create seamless graphics, which tell the story that is about to unfold, have helped push the discipline of graphic design into the field of kinetic motion. All these designers are examples of how design has taken an existing narrative and simplified it visually, yet creates a storyline within the image.

Storytelling has had its own history, but it has always been a way in which people relate universally to one another. It has the power to influence on a mass scale and therefore becomes an effective device targeting the user and viewer, as we can see in the film and advertising fields. Many filmmakers, such as George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, have attributed much of their successful storytelling abilities to American author Joseph Campbell, who was a formidable au-

thority on the topic of comparative mythology.<sup>11</sup> In his 1949 book, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Campbell presents a set of steps in telling stories spanning universal themes associated with the hero's journey and their personal transformation. Campbell starts with two forms, comedy and tragedy, which he explains are connected to a single theme that reflects the inevitable path of our universal tragedy: our own death. "Tragedy is the shattering of the forms and of our attachment to the forms; comedy, the wild and careless, inexhaustible joy of life invincible."<sup>12</sup> We use story as a method to cope, share, relate, and push our creative fantasies into a space of reality. These ideas of comedy and tragedy are personified in Campbell's writings on myth and dreams. Myth is a story that perpetuates ways in which we relate human culture to one another, whether it is art, philosophy, religion, or science; stories have helped us express and relay these ideas from generation to generation.<sup>13</sup> He also explains that these myths are not purely manufactured, but forms of the human psyche that exist not based upon individual culture but as universal themes that span across the whole of humanity.<sup>14</sup> Campbell uses the ideas of myth and dreams to tap into Swiss psychotherapist Carl Gustav Jung's ideas of the unconscious. Campbell references the idea of the collective unconscious in dreams as:

"It is the realm that we enter in sleep. We carry it within ourselves forever. All the ogres and secret helpers of our nursery are there, all the magic of childhood. And more important, all the life-potentialities that we never managed to bring to adult realization, those other portions of ourself, are there; for such golden seeds do not die. If only a portion of that lost totality could be dredged up into the light of day, we should experience a marvelous expansion of our powers, a vivid renewal of life."<sup>15</sup>

Jung and his formation of the *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* highlighted universal human themes. The unconscious, an idea familiarized by Sigmund Freud, is the place for content that has been repressed or forgotten. Jung explains, the *Collective Unconscious* is a

deeper layer that doesn't exist from personal experiences but rather from ingrained content that spans everywhere and to everyone.<sup>16</sup> The idea of the archetype then is the specified form or content within the psyche.<sup>17</sup> Jung describes that man has a desire to understand and relate through the psyche, as the human mind projects its inner understanding into the form of outer experiences.<sup>18</sup> He exemplifies this through astrology and humankind's attachment to give the stars (outer experience) more meaning beyond their physical existence and into mythologies that foretell a person's past, present, and future (inner understanding); this is a concept that has existed for thousands of years and one that still continues to exist for some today regardless of our understanding and current knowledge on the subject.<sup>19</sup>

Although Jung's concept of the archetype has met some criticism, this idea of a universal unconscious is by no means Jung's alone; it spans disciplines. German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche states, "In our sleep and in our dreams we pass through the whole thought of earlier humanity. I mean, in the same way that man reasons in his dreams, he reasoned when in the waking state many thousands of years. . . .The dream carries us back into earlier states of human culture, and affords us a means of understanding it better."<sup>20</sup> Adolf Bastian, known for his contributions to ethnography and anthropology also spoke of "Elementary Ideas" which came into existence naturally from the structures of society.<sup>21</sup> French Archaeologist and sociologist, Henri Hubert and sociologist Marcel Mauss define it as "categories of the imagination."<sup>22</sup> This idea of a patterned form of behavior or shared human desires relates back to ancient times, across cultures, and thus is a powerful tool in the art of storytelling.<sup>23</sup> Much of the criticisms regarding the idea of a collective unconsciousness, have been less of a correlation between genetics and more of a

cultural passing down of these collective ideas.<sup>24</sup> Whether gained through genetics or culturally isn't as much the concern as whether we as human share similar universal desires.

The universality of a story was broken down into 18 steps in Campbell's book, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* that followed what he called the "nuclear unit of the monomyth." "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."<sup>25</sup> His steps laid out are broken into three categories: Departure, Initiation, and Return.<sup>26</sup> The steps are as follows:

World of Common Day, Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, Crossing of the First Threshold, Belly of the Whale, Road of Trials, the Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, Atonement with the Father Apotheosis, Ultimate Boon, Refusal of the Return, the Magic Flight, the Rescue From Without, the Crossing of the Return Threshold, Master of the Two Worlds, and Freedom to Live.

In the Departure stage, the hero starts out in their ordinary world, then receives a call to adventure which they either accept or refuse.<sup>27</sup> There is a supernatural aid to conquer the first threshold or by going into the unknown.<sup>28</sup> In the Initiation stage the hero encounters many tests in the foreign land and meets this world's goddess who bestows the land's wisdom upon the hero.<sup>29</sup> The hero must conquer the previous unknown knowledge in the form of the female while repressing his own superego and id thus becoming free of his fears and reaching his potential through self-aware change.<sup>30</sup> The Return stage starts with the hero's refusal to go back home but they are somehow called back with new gained insights.<sup>31</sup> The hero then crosses back into their own realm knowing they are distinguished from the god but still share a common desire using

their newly gained knowledge.<sup>32</sup> The hero then becomes master of both worlds and passes back and forth freely with the gained knowledge that life is a cycle.<sup>33</sup> (Figure 4)

There has been criticism of Campbell's patriarchal approach as can be seen at a mere glance of some of his outlined steps such as *Woman as the Temptress* but, we can take these steps and simplify them into a more modern approach. This has been done by writer, teacher, and Hollywood development executive, Christopher Vogler in his 1998 book, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structures for Writers*. Vogler simplifies it down like this:

“The hero is introduced in his ORDINARY WORLD where he receives the CALL TO ADVENTURE. He is RELUCTANT at first to CROSS THE FIRST THRESHOLD where he eventually encounters TESTS, ALLIES and ENEMIES. He reaches the INNERMOST CAVE where he endures the SUPREME ORDEAL. He SEIZES THE SWORD or the treasure and is pursued on the ROAD BACK to his world. He is RESURRECTED and transformed by his experience. He RETURNS to his ordinary world with a treasure, boon, or ELIXIR to benefit his world.”<sup>34</sup> (Figure 5)

Whereas Campbell's outlook was one from a 1950s era and founded in myth, Vogler has approached the material as an evolution from the hero's journey concept that Campbell put forth. Both still give in to the idea of universal storytelling that spans time and culture. These steps to telling a story and the concept of archetypes give way to a formula that allows for a universal communication. Designers can use this formula for storytelling by relating human experiences, which increase the user or viewers' connection.

“So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again and all would change to dull reality-”<sup>35</sup> We as humans are daydreamers. Scientific studies have shown that we daydream an average of fourteen seconds

long, two thousand times per day.<sup>36</sup> While fantasizing half of our wakeful lives, we often think up narratives of the past and future, such as how we could have better handled a conflict, how we wish our life was different or how escaping into another realm would solve all our current existential problems.<sup>37</sup> While our physical body is situated in the confines of reality, our mind is open to wander freely against time and space.<sup>38</sup> As we all have these desires that surface in the form of daydreams, we are expressing a storyline inside our own mind that in turn can manifest itself in our imagination as a great tool in the form of storytelling.

As design continues to grow and change, the role of a designer does too. Designers begin to take on a bigger role and can incorporate storytelling as a skill in their creative toolbox. The art of storytelling is definitely alluded to in deciding what your design style is, what era it resembles, and what colors are used. Narratives created through personas or mind mapping begin to take on a storyline, as designers use both to research and push creative concepts. Professionals have also spoken about sensory design; what does your design look like, what does it feel like, how does your design sound, or what does it taste like? These are the settings for the story of your design. Within these setting there is a universality to the form of communication that designers can harness and use as a creative tool.

Communication designers use the building blocks of design as a way to tell their client's story. By using color, type, hierarchy, time, space, imagery, line, and focus, designers begin to create and build a storyline.<sup>39</sup> Color can influence what messages the design invokes, but it is important to note that cultural associations must also be taken into account. For instance, here in the U.S. when we think of the color white it generally evokes ideas of cleanliness and openness,

but in Egypt white brings ideas of death and mourning.<sup>40</sup> These choices need to be made considering what messages the designers wants to portray, but this exemplifies why designers also need to be researchers. Type choice is similar in that the designer needs to be familiar with the messages their typeface decisions are evoking. Typefaces have a history of their own, some are old and classic, while others are new and modern and depending on what story the client wants their brand to tell, the designer must make type choice that reflect that storyline.<sup>41</sup> For example, when redesigning a new identity for a century-old university that wants to retain its prestigious status, a classic serif font like Garamond would be more appropriate in telling that university's story of its history than say the modern geometric structures of Futura. Another way in which designers set the story is by the softness or harshness of line or imagery used in a graphic visualization. If a client wants their story to have a humanistic touch, then softer lines and imagery should be used to help foster the human touch in that story, but if the client's story is one that is more about cutting-edge technology, then harder lines should be used.<sup>42</sup> (Figure 6)

It is through storytelling that we become emotionally invested in characters, plot lines, and life lessons.<sup>43</sup> It is this emotional interest that designers seek to harness because it is beneficial to brands. Brands, such as Starbucks for example, are not simply selling you coffee, they are selling you the story of their brand. They want you to be emotionally invested, not just in the product itself, but in the community that surrounds that product.<sup>44</sup> What are the people like in the community surrounding the brand? What does that brand smell like? What sounds do you associate with that brand? People don't go to Starbucks for the coffee; they go there because they like the story that brand gives them. Looking at the Starbuck's website it states, "To say Starbucks purchases and roasts high-quality whole bean coffees is very true. That's the essence of

what we do – but it hardly tells the whole story. ... It's not unusual to see people coming to Starbucks to chat, meet up or even work. We're a neighborhood gathering place, a part of the daily routine —and we couldn't be happier about it. Get to know us and you'll see: we are so much more than what we brew."<sup>45</sup>

Designers use storytelling to help communicate and could use these unique universal storytelling abilities to help foster a relationship with the user and viewer. As technology and digital forms of communication continue to develop, our society continues to become faster paced with never-ending multi-tasking and limited attention spans. This increase in digital forms of media begins to change the way in which we communicate. Digital media constrains the amount of characters we can input, the type of information, and the size that the information is displayed. As our written form of communication begins to shorten and diminish, visual forms such as video and photography continue to be more prevalent and important. Visual forms allow us to reconnect the user and viewer, in a fast paced environment through storytelling; holding their attention with human experiences that they can relate to and learn from.<sup>46</sup>

Narrative expert, Robert Fulford states, “Stories are how we explain, how we teach, how we entertain ourselves, and how we often do all three at once. They are the juncture where facts and feelings meet. And for those reasons, are central to civilization.”<sup>47</sup> Communication designers are in a unique position. While looked at mostly as visual conjurers, they actually dance the line between verbal and non-verbal communication.<sup>48</sup> As the definition of designer and the amount of communication we are exposed to continue to grow, designers can position storytelling as a considerable tool.<sup>49</sup> This tool provides communication that connects more readily with the viewer

and user because it involves the audience, switching them from passive observer to involved participant.<sup>50</sup>

Another way in which we use storytelling in design is through user experience design (UX). UX design is a process of learning about your customer and their needs to find solutions that are then tested and redefined based upon the customer's input.<sup>51</sup> (Figure 7) This branch of design is geared to connect people to the design process and stories are a great way to engage people. In the UX process, stories can:

“help us gather and share information about users, tasks, and goals. They put a human face on analytic data. They can spark new design concepts and encourage collaboration and innovation. They are a way to share ideas and create a sense of shared history and purpose. They help us understand the world by giving us insight into people who are not just like us. They can even persuade others of the value of our contribution.”<sup>52</sup>

Artists have used the art of storytelling in performative and immersive ways. Storytelling's unique universal structure allows for a collaborative process that engages the user. In 2014, the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts created an international event called the *Science of Fiction Festival: Rilao* in which people created a fictional world over the course of one day.<sup>53</sup> (Figure 8) Led by production designer and narrative media artist Alex McDowell, this event is not merely a conference with speakers and passive listeners; it is an event that allows for the collaboration of “the one-hundred-percent participation of creative minds across diverse disciplines.”<sup>54</sup> The Cinematic Arts website explains their approach to a fully trained individual, is an interdisciplinary one with knowledge in various forms of media and collaboration.<sup>55</sup> Their next event *The Science of Fiction III: Spaceship Earth 2016* is arriving later this October alongside a partnership with the Buckminster Fuller Institute and the World

Building Institute.<sup>56</sup> With participants across multiple fields of study and ages ranging from 7-70, this event will examine interconnected ecosystems through the lens of storytelling to “employ Fiction as a powerful tool to reimagine our Spacecraft, revisit the Manual, and, most importantly, plot out paths to real, tangible near-term outcomes to chart the course to 2036.”<sup>57</sup> It is events like these that are creating an environment that harnesses the power of storytelling, participation, and collaboration to create something meaningful and long-lasting in the minds of the active audience.

In the thesis exhibition that will be constructed in conjunction with this paper, the user and viewer will become an engaged part of the story as they enter the space; it will allow them to engage in the steps to the hero’s journey, acting out a universal storyline. The exhibition will be heavily based on the escapism form of storytelling but will also be open for the audience to connect through the personal identification form (relating to the stories or imagery used in the exhibition) or the learning form (awareness of Campbell’s hero’s journey steps to universal storyline). The exhibition will allow the user and viewer a chance to create, collaborate, and connect with one another while in the space. This will be accomplished by way of contributing to a story using a simplified version of Campbell’s steps. This also functions as a way to point out the universality of the art of storytelling but not in an overt manner. The users and viewers will be able to connect these written steps to their physical experience by walking through the exhibition, giving them a deeper level of meaning through interactivity.

It is storytelling’s ability to universally traverse communication that opens up the opportunity for collaboration and a connection to human experiences. Communication designers are in

a unique position between being makers of visual graphics and concept artists that allows them to branch out into various forms of media. Utilizing the art of storytelling in concepts can help to further reach audiences and engage them; creating work that has a lasting effect on the user and viewer. Storytelling has the power to provoke feelings of relatability, meaning in our lives, insights, and information. As designers trained in the art of communication we should employ storytelling as a creative tool, as it is positioned in such a way that it opens up universal forms of communication through the human condition.



Figure 1: Bass, Saul. *Man With the Golden Arm*. Poster. 1955. Accessed 02-21-16 <http://illusion.scene360.com/design/49712/saul-bass-anatomy-of-a-poster/>

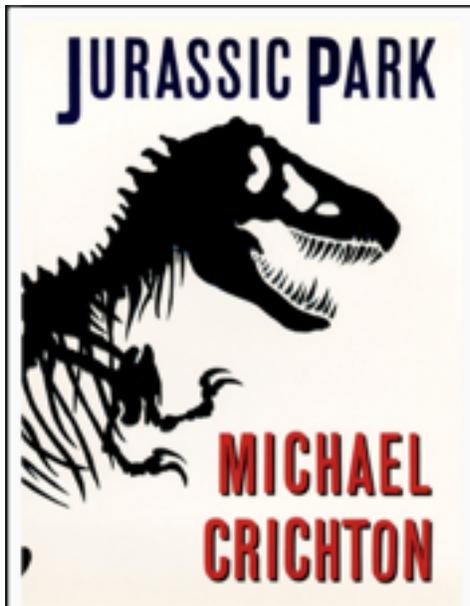


Figure 2: Kidd, Chip. *Jurassic Park*. Book Cover. 1990. Accessed 02-21-16, <http://chipkidd.com/home/portfolio-3/>



Figure 3: Cooper, Kyle. *American Horror Story: Freakshow*. 2014. Accessed 02-21-16, <http://www.prologue.com/projects/american-horror-story-freakshow>

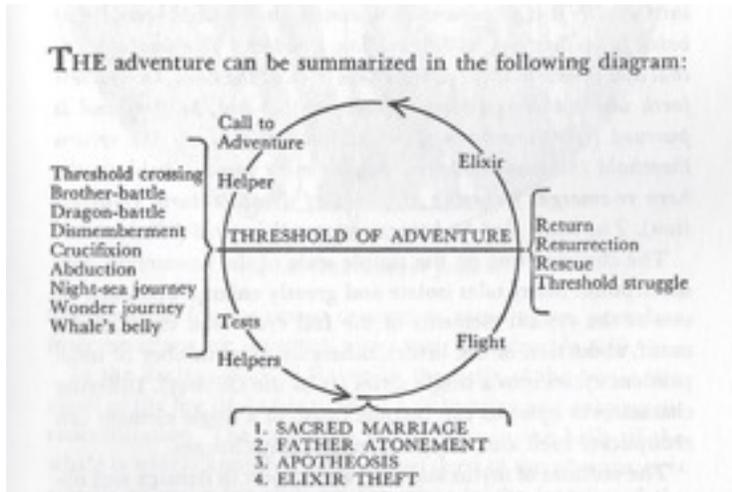


Figure 4: Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc. 1949, 245.

The Writer's Journey – Third Edition  
Christopher Vogler

**TABLE ONE**  
COMPARISON OF OUTLINES AND TERMINOLOGY

<i>The Writer's Journey</i>	<i>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</i>
<b>ACT ONE</b>	<b>DEPARTURE, SITUATION</b>
Ordinary World	World of Common Day
Call to Adventure	Call to Adventure
Refusal of the Call	Refusal of the Call
Meeting with the Mentor	Supernatural Aid
Crossing the First Threshold	Crossing the First Threshold Belly of the Whale
<b>ACT TWO</b>	<b>DESCENT, INITIATION, PURIFICATION</b>
Tests, Allies, Enemies	Road of Trials
Approach to the Inmost Cave	Meeting with the Goddess
Ordeal	Woman as Temptress
	Atonement with the Father
	Apotheosis
Reward	The Ultimate Boon
<b>ACT THREE</b>	<b>RETURN</b>
The Road Back	Refusal of the Return
	The Magic Flight
	Rescue from Within
	Crossing the Threshold
Resurrection	Return
Returns with the Elixir	Master of the Two Worlds Freedom to Live

Figure 5: Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. California: Michael Wiese Productions. 1998-2007, 8.

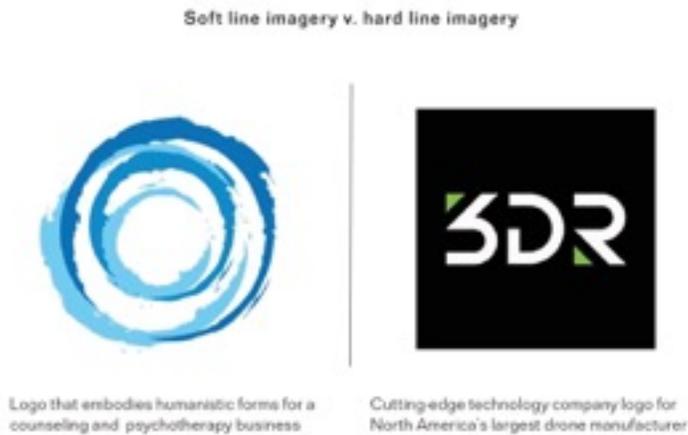


Figure 6: Counseling & Psychotherapy Limassol Cyprus. Accessed 03-13-16. [www.counselling-cyprus.com/psychotherapy/humanistic-therapy/](http://www.counselling-cyprus.com/psychotherapy/humanistic-therapy/)

3D Robotics. Accessed 03-13-16. [thedisruptory.com/company/3d-robotics-2/](http://thedisruptory.com/company/3d-robotics-2/)

## the ux design process

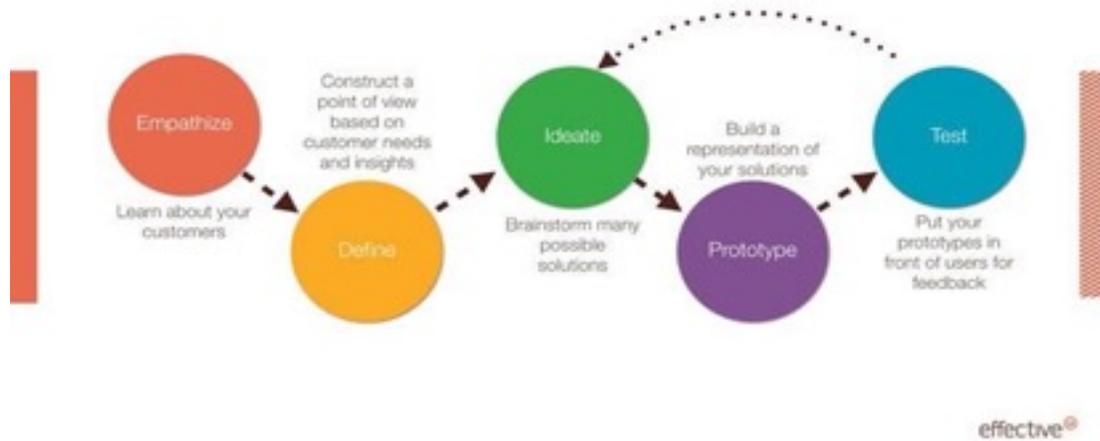


Figure 7: EffectiveUI. “The UX Design Process: What Clients Need to Know.” Accessed 03-13-16. <https://medium.com/@effectiveui/the-ux-design-process-what-clients-need-to-know-d6ed00d0b977#.47zveyg04>



Figure 8: von Hauser, Nero. “2.5.16 Science of Fiction Cut.” Filmed 2014. Vimeo video, 5:04. Posted 02/2015. <https://vimeo.com/154376301>

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- <sup>3</sup> Osgood, Carrie. In person communications. March, 31, 2016.
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- <sup>8</sup> Eskilson, *Graphic Design: A New History*, 305-306.
- <sup>9</sup> Eskilson, *Graphic Design: A New History*, 387.
- <sup>10</sup> Cooper, Kyle. *Prologue*. Accessed 02-21-16, <http://www.prologue.com/whats-past>
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- <sup>13</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 25-28.
- <sup>14</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 17.
- <sup>16</sup> Jung, Carl Gustav. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. New York: Bollingen Foundations Inc., 1959. 4.
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- <sup>18</sup> Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 6.
- <sup>19</sup> Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1949. 18.
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- <sup>22</sup> Jung, Carl Gustav. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. New York: Bollingen Foundations Inc., 1959. 42-43.
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- <sup>26</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 30.
- <sup>27</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 49-68.
- <sup>28</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 69, 77-78, 90-91.
- <sup>29</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 97, 109-116.
- <sup>30</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 121-122, 126-131, 149-151, 172-173.
- <sup>31</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 193, 196-197, 207.
- <sup>32</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 217.
- <sup>33</sup> Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 229, 238.
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