



Bachelor Research

Loving and Leaving the Rules of Drama

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Abstract

Motivation

Considering dramaturgy as the substantial tool for the implementation of the unique creative and substantive aim of a film, this bachelor research will contribute to an efficient film production by widening the rather inexperienced screenwriter's and director's sight for the conscious use of it.

The essential main opinions on classical dramaturgy for the feature film, represented in the contemporary theoretical discourse are examined, while the work draws an overview divided by the four chapters into four approaches. So, to derive an open and adaptable solution it will mainly answer the question:

Which main perspectives for now and the future can be traced from the contemporary theoretical discourse on classical dramaturgy of feature films?

Methods

This research on screenplay's dramaturgic questions is made theoretically and based on two profound and popularly established main works in relation to insider's tips of lecture.

In Chapter One, the reader obtains an idea about the classical dramaturgy in order to take exercise on Chapter Two, where a short overview how to break obsolete conventions besides an accurate example is provided. Chapter Three investigates forms beyond the classical dramaturgy, also to find a differentiation. A conclusion and outlook is given in Chapter Four in order to motivate the reader for his or her own screenwriter's adventure, closing this research.

Findings

There are as many approaches for screenwriting, as there are screenwriters, but classifications are derivable. To acquire this very individual kind of skill requires not only active exploration of already existing through research and analysis, but also exploration of the own phantasy, both with endurance and passion.

Implication

This author discovers one significant connecting screenplay's feature, where the examined statements and advices of all used references are aiming at: Authenticity.

Content

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Knowing and following the scheme.....	2
A short retrospect	2
The handicraft basics	3
Structure spectrum	3
Genre	5
Setting	6
Figure	7
Design principles	7
Transition: A road to Rome	13
The Hero and the audience	13
Chapter Two: Consciously breaking the scheme.....	17
Another example	17
Chapter Three: Intentionally ignoring or caused by unawareness.....	21
Doing it intentionally	21
An unaware origin	23
Transition: A role of the pictorial	23
Chapter Four: Integration.....	25
Classics	25
Revolutionaries	26
Liberals	26
Conclusion and outlook	27
List of sources.....	28

Introduction

All stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies. They are known collectively as The Hero's Journey.¹

The reader is welcomed to enter together with this author the complexity of screenwriting, which contains philosophical and psychological, but also structural layers.

During this research, general overviews combined with selected insights will be passed, meaning, the reader is asked to be attentive for his or her will and individual interest, in which direction deeper insight and examination is required, to find the appropriate access to screenwriting. For now, the common first exploration begins in order to initiate the reader's own further steps.

Chapter One: Knowing and following the scheme

After years, you would merge your knowledge with your creativity, summon your courage, and venture to composite your first piece.¹

As a close comparison to writing for the screen, this comment is also a clear reason for exploring the elements of stories, in particular the elements of the so-called classical dramaturgy, which generally is associated with Hollywood's screenplays.

While the flexible pattern of The Hero's Journey in Hollywood can be recognised since its beginnings, in The Golden Age starting during the late 1920s, until now, subject matters and style of Hollywood's screenplays undergone severe changes:

A short retrospect

In the late 1960s, a young generation of directors, producers, and actors, peering to Europe, developed screenplays with new revolutionary thematic elements, narrative developments and artistic values according to societal changes and technological possibilities, such as 35mm camera film or the use of editing for artistic effects.² *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969) are known as some of the most significant examples for this new style which also expressed a new emphasis on realism.

Hollywood's era of blockbuster mentality was introduced by the box office success of *Jaws* and *Star Wars* in the late 1970s. The financial disasters of *Heaven's Gate* and *One from the Heart* in the early 1980s, led to *the realisation by studios of the importance of blockbusters, advertising and control over production*.³ During that period of reorientation and caused by the adaptation for screenwriting by Christopher Vogler, also Joseph Campbell's model of The Hero's Journey was given more conscious attention by filmmakers.⁴

The model, which *can be traced in all kinds of stories, not just those that feature 'heroic' physical action and adventure*⁵, and also is *a great key to life as well as a major instrument for dealing more effectively with a mass audience*⁶, seemed to be very useful to the studio's executives.⁷

Generally, over time and today various and often opposing positions concerning the use of this model coexist in the film industry. Calling this universally valid broad system into question has its place and function: It is vital for artistic development, variety, and individual expression.⁸

In this author's point of view it is now important to differentiate between the model as a tool, the way it is used, and the aims pursued. Though the commercial aims behind a scheme used can be claimed and certain implementations and results can be criticised, the former role of Hollywood's studios as training companies in dramaturgy based on experience should be considered.⁹

In this regard, standardisation as one of the techniques of mass production to handle a large number of stories *should be employed sparingly and with great sensitivity for the needs of the particular story, and it should be used as a form, not a formula, a reference point and source of inspiration, not a dictatorial mandate.*¹⁰

Before moving through the philosophical backgrounds regarding the generally defined classical dramaturgy's content of feature films, based on the standard work *The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler (which refers to *The Hero with a thousand faces* by Joseph Campbell) now in this chapter, the structure's elements of a story and the design principles by Robert McKee are examined.

The handicraft basics

The following overview concentrates on the main statements and terminology in *Story: Die Prinzipien des Drehbuchschreibens* by Robert McKee, part 2 and 3. In the first step, the structuring elements of a story are viewed, also in order to consider, how these insights affect the screenwriter's awareness.

Structure spectrum

The mastery is, not only to choose view moments of a life, but also to give a whole lifetime to the audience.¹¹

Structure means to assemble selected events of a character's life strategically to express the character's perspective and to arouse emotions. The story event initiates a meaningful change of value through a conflict in a character's life.¹² For example:

In *The Rainmaker* (1956) the protagonist moves not only through an inner conflict of religious belief and emotional fear of failing, but also through an outer societal conflict. He aspires to be a rainmaker in a world of drought. But he works through, faces his conflicts, and elicits a majestic thunderstorm from a cloudless sky. One value here is courage / cowardice and it changes from negative to positive.¹³

A scene is action triggered by a conflict in more or less space and time and ideally changes a valuable life condition of a character visibly, means it should be a story event. Also, exposition can be integrated during a story event, for example to induce the audience into intimate information about the character or historical information about the character's world.¹⁴

If the smallest element does its work, the profound purpose of a story will be served.¹⁵

The beats in a scene mean the interaction elements to create step-by-step the turn or change in the scene.¹⁶ The sequence consists of scenes and culminates the most in its ending scene. So a sequence contains more massive changes of values than a single scene.¹⁷

The next larger structure element is the act built on the sequences and marked by a major reversal. Acts form the story's arc from the first act over the second, to the third act, with its own specific directions.¹⁸

So, a story is a series of acts to reach the story's climax, which is the absolute and irreversible change of a character, comparable to a resurrection. For example: A hardworking, optimistic, and honest young businesswoman turns into a ruthless, cynical, and corrupt veteran of business.¹⁹

Plotting through the story means to decide and navigate from one possible story event to the next and to design them over time.²⁰ McKee drafts a plot triangle in order to differ between them.

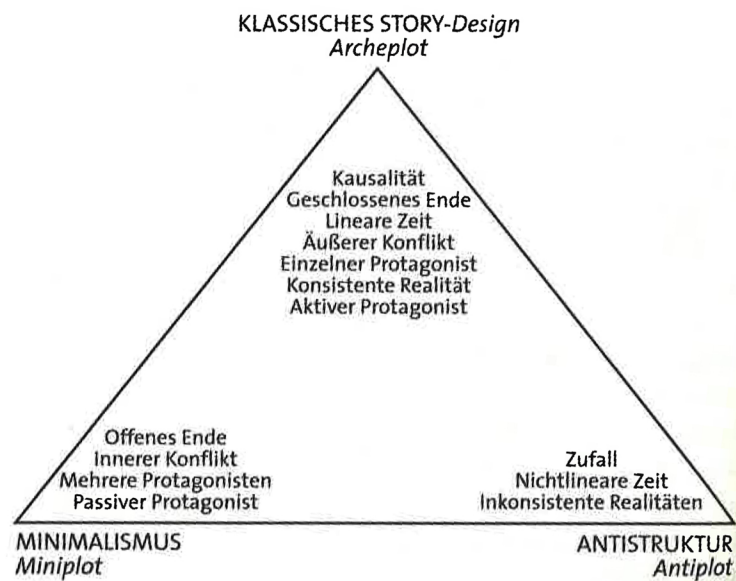


Figure 1: The plot triangle²¹

Archeplot:

As the classical design, it has one active protagonist who fights mainly against outer antagonistic forces. He or she pursues an aim in continuous time in the context of a fictional, consistent and causal reality. At the closed end the protagonist has experienced an absolute and irreversible change. For example: *Chinatown* (1974)²²

Miniplot:

Often, the seeming passivity of the protagonist is connected with concentrating more on inner conflicts and aims than on outer. In a multiplot the story is divided among more than one protagonist with different conflicts and aims. The story's climax can leave one or two questions and aroused emotions open, so that some responsibility to close the story lies with the audience. For example: *Paris, Texas* (1984) or *Pulp Fiction* (1994)²³

Antiplot:

Contrary to the causal, the coincident reality expresses a lack of connection between events in live. Inconsistence of reality refers to the rules of the story's reality: There are no consistent rules. They can change during the episodes, which creates absurdity. Nonlinear time is given, if its course is not comprehensible. For example: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1974)²⁴

Nonplot:

Here is a clear excluding regarding the plot triangle (and figure 1), caused by the significant differentiation between change versus stagnation. The valuable live condition of the protagonist stays the same. For example: *Short Cuts* (1993)²⁵

The now following subchapters meaning, genre, setting and figure are related to the story's structure.

Meaning

What if..?

The premise is the writer's vision and idea to create a story and is triggered by the controlling idea: The story's ultimate meaning to be expressed by the plot and the aesthetic emotion of the climax at the end of the last act.²⁶

The principle of the aesthetic emotion says, that a good story gives the audience what life does only very seldom, namely meaningful experiences charged with according emotions. Life's experiences get meaningful over reflexion in time, but in art they are meaningful at the same time they happen.²⁷

Intellectual analysis, as ingenious as it is, won't feed the soul.²⁸

The audience has to believe in the deeper and demonstrated story's truth: The story itself is the proof and the structure is the mean by which this truth is expressed and proved without explanation, but with dramaturgy.²⁹

The controlling idea is one sentence, answering the questions, how and why life is changing in this certain way, thus it contains the two components value and cause. For example: Life will be full of happiness, if we love unconditionally.³⁰

Referring to the antagonistic forces, the writer has to take care of not taking sides of one party, because the rhythm of the oscillation between positive and negative charged value builds the story dynamically, subtly or ironically in time. Also, equally strong or stronger antagonistic forces are contributing to the authentic proof of the controlling idea's establishment.³¹

As can be seen by the following quotation, the story's truth is not ultimate, but relative concerning the audience:

The great classics of our ages say: That's life. They give no solutions but clearness, no answers but poetic openness, by revealing conflicts, which every generation has to solve by its own and new way to be human.³²

Genre

From Aristotle (384-322 BC) with only four basic genres, namely simple or complex tragedy and simple or complex comedy, until nowadays, the range of genres has been widened and specified, oriented on practice. For example, there exists the genre Horror with subgenres such as the Uncanny, the Supernatural and a mixture, the Super-Uncanny.³³

The genres are delimited of each other by their conventions concerning setting, events, values, and character roles. Convention (that something happens) and cliché (how something happens or how in particular it is performed) must not be confused. As with the setting, it is about to know and understand the genre and to use the resulting restriction to inspire and focus creativity, but also to be aware of the audience's expectations.³⁴

Hitchcock said: It's better to start with cliché, than to end up with cliché.³⁵

To master genres, allows being able to mix and create new genres, thus to be innovative, not only contemporary, but also visionary. The very first question regarding the genre, is: What is my favourite genre? Because, the necessary perseverance for writing is best fed by the writer's love for the work.³⁶

Setting

The only reason for all clichés is, that the writer doesn't know the story's world.³⁷

A story's setting has four dimensions:

The epoch is the place of the story in time. The duration is the story's length in time. The location of the story specifies its place within space. The conflict level is the story's position within the hierarchy of human struggles: From the unconsciousness to the stars, a story can be established at all levels and their combinations of life's experiences.³⁸

To know and respect the rules of the fictional world - the setting - while plotting and choosing the story events, is vital for an authentic and comprehensible story.³⁹ So the first step toward a good story is the creation of a small, recognisable world, because the vaster the world, the more narrow is the writer's knowledge of it. Knowledge based on research and consisting of memory, phantasy, and facts, is the key to overcome the hurdle of cliché.⁴⁰

Figure

Characterisation is the unique sum of all recognisable human parameters, such as age, IQ, sex, social status, language, home, car, gesture, personality, attitudes, values.⁴¹

The true figure's character discloses only under high pressure and is expressed by his or her decisions.⁴²

Thus the differentiation between characterisation and character is fundamental to acknowledge the content nullity of the question, if the character or the plot is more important. Because a figure's character evolves the plot through its decisions, so the plot reflects the character, which means that every story is character-driven.⁴³

Ideally, the plot takes the most inner nature of a figure to the extreme and changes it to positive or negative. An appropriate structure design is required to enhance the pressure for an authentic expression of the figure's character.⁴⁴

Design principles

After overviewing the story's elements of structure in context with terminologies and connected to meaning, genre, setting and figure, now are following concentrated explanations regarding the design principles and its terminologies:

Protagonist:

A protagonist is a strong willed figure, who has conscious and unconscious, contrary desires to follow persuasively and to the extreme, but not obviously in vain. He or she doesn't have to arouse sympathy but empathy. In the audience's eyes, his or her last action must be unsurpassable. If there are more protagonists, one differentiates between plural protagonists, who have equal conflicts and aims, and multi protagonists, who have individual conflicts and aims.⁴⁵

In order to create empathy, the writer works with a figure from inside out by asking: If I was this figure in this certain situation, what would I do?⁴⁶

Thus the writer puts him or herself into the figure's inner centre to create the reaction on the inciting incident, which had unbalanced the figure's world in the first place. The reaction has the intention to rebalance the subjective world, but affects unexpected antagonistic forces instead, on which the figure has to react again. The result is a constant increase of gaps between expectation and actual response until the climax, which can be located at different levels of conflict.⁴⁷

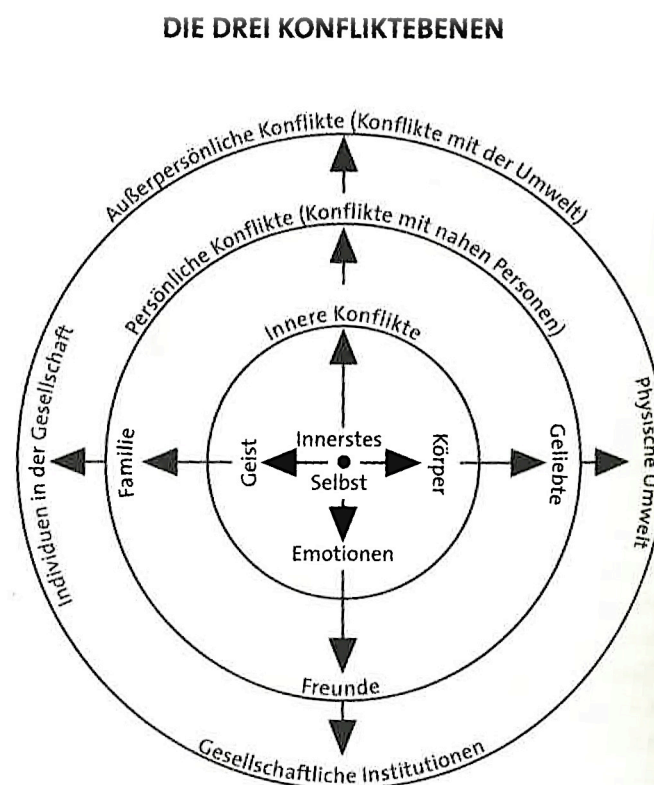


Figure 2: The three levels of conflict⁴⁸

Triggered by a story event (inciting incident) in the first act, the figure's aim has always to do with a search of rebalance. The aim's value increases proportionally to the risk, the figure is ready to take for it.⁴⁹

In conclusion, the inciting incident brings the protagonist's life out of balance - could be positive or negative - which arouses conscious or unconscious wishes to rebalance life. The protagonist gets confronted with inner, personal and outer antagonistic forces, and achieves or doesn't achieve the aims.⁵⁰ Briefly, a story's design consists of five parts: The inciting incident, progressive complications, the crisis, the climax and the resolution.⁵¹

Inciting incident:

The audience's witnessing of the mainplot's inciting incident raises the dramaturgic question of the film and projects the obligatory scene, which means the crisis, into the future. So, the story must not end, before the audience hasn't seen the crisis. Placement in time of the crisis's indication, the inciting incident, depends on, how much the audience has to know about the protagonist to react fully, which means emotionally and rationally. It's important that it happens as soon as possible but not before its time, because too early results in confusion and too late results in boredom. Besides that, the quality of the inciting incident has to fit into the setting, to the figures and into the genre, such as every other event.⁵²

Meeting these expectations, the inciting incident can be as slight as a woman's gesture, who lies her hand on the table, while glancing at you in this certain way.⁵³

So, the writer connects the inciting incident with the crisis and creates an indication, also called foreshadowing.⁵⁴

Crisis, climax and resolution:

The crisis forms the most extreme pressure on the protagonist in the last act, when he or she is eye to eye at the strongest antagonistic forces. It proves the protagonist's inner transformation by his or her ultimate decision and action, which is the climax. The resolution afterwards serves to close the story and is the audience's emotional conclusion.⁵⁵

Progressive complications:

At least death hits everyone, who is not affected by the human conflicts and abysses. But if we want to have any satisfaction in life, we have to face antagonistic forces before death comes.⁵⁶

The extensive main part of the story, the second act between inciting incident and crisis, leads the protagonist through conflict creating story events with increasing antagonistic forces and points of no return: While the protagonist's first action, triggered by the inciting incident and in order to rebalance the conditions, is supposed to be minimal and conservative, during the story, the protagonist has to muster more and more will power and abilities to overcome the following gaps.⁵⁷

Concerning the genre, the writer has to decide about the complexity of the conflicts. To reach more complexity, the writer can plunge figures into conflicts within all levels, if he or she doesn't want to write for the genres Stream of Consciousness, which remains within the level of inner conflict, the Soap Opera, which remains within the personal conflicts, or the genres Action, Adventure, and Farce, which remain within the outer conflicts.⁵⁸

Act:

The audience requires a poetic experience, which contains the entire fullness of life.⁵⁹

This applies to a certain length of time, so a story can be told with one or two acts, but concerning a feature film, it should include at least three acts. This approach dates back to Aristotle and is connected with the three meaningful changes (major reversals) of direction which go along with three acts, and is understandable through the following view on a story's rhythm: The case is bad and then good or the other way round. The case is good and then better, or bad and then worse. There is an end, but something is missing: Even if all characters are dead, without a third meaningful change, the edge is not reached.⁶⁰

An exemplary convention is, to organise a 120 minutes feature film with a first act of 30 minutes length and the last act of 20 minutes (inclusive 2 minutes between climax and dissolve for the resolution). Thus the second act of 70 minutes might be at risk of dragging. The next figure demonstrates, how subplots, their inciting incidents, and major reversals can be used to counteract that:⁶¹

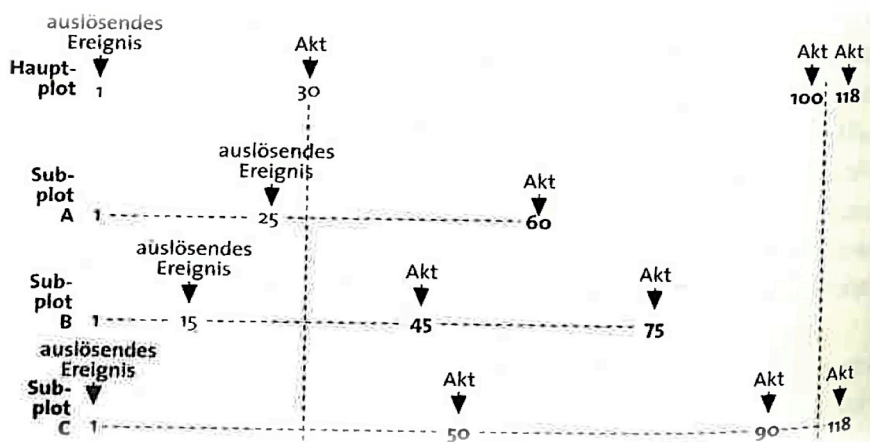


Figure 3: Act design⁶²

McKee differentiates between the use of multiplots, which means there is no single mainplot, but more equivalent plots, running simultaneously, and the use of subplots, in addition to a normally time-dominating mainplot.⁶³

There are four reasons to use subplots:

In order to create irony by contradicting the mainplot or as a reverb to strengthen the mainplot and create variations of the story's theme, or as a preparing subplot, if the inciting incident needs to be postponed, or just to complicate the mainplot.⁶⁴

The figure above shows one of many variations to design the story's macro structure. The following statements concerning the act design are therefore demonstratively:

Mid act climax means to integrate an additional main reversal within the second act to change the rhythm into four acts and to obtain more tempo.⁶⁵

If more than three acts are used, also the creative challenge grows, because of the act's main reversals. There is a risk of cliché and repeating.⁶⁶

If it's necessary to place the inciting incident of the mainplot very late in the first act, it could simultaneously have the function of the first act's main reversal. For example, if the audience needs time to get to know the protagonist, to react fully on the inciting incident. In this case, a preparing subplot for the audience's attention is needed.⁶⁷

For the most feature films, a pretended end is inappropriate; instead the second last main reversal should promote the dramaturgic question: And what's happening now?⁶⁸

Mainly, the placement of the inciting incident determines the act's rhythm, thus there are many possibilities to design story's acts: Number and placement of main reversals depend on protagonists, antagonistic forces, genre, but also on the writer's philosophy and worldview.⁶⁹

Scene:

The turning point, when the gap between the protagonist's (and the audience's) expectation and actual result of the protagonist's action, rips down, has four effects: surprise, enhanced curiosity, new insights connected to what has already been seen and a new direction from now on.⁷⁰

While sending the audience attention back to what has been seen until now to find an answer, triggered by the turning point, and its raising of the question: Why did that happen? This means, to use setups and payoffs. The writer plants preparing answers into the story which explain the afterwards happening turning points.⁷¹

During the transition of values (for example: the value trust / suspiciousness changes from positive to negative), which goes together with the turning point (for example: the protagonist comes home and finds her husband in an intimidate situation with the neighbour), the audience experiences emotional changes. The precondition is an empathy with the authentic and comprehensible protagonist, the knowledge about the protagonist's aims and attitudes, and the wish that she achieves her aim. Regarding the emotional turns, the writer should be aware of the law of diminishing returns, which says that the more often the audience gets a certain emotion, the less effect will it have. Also, it is to differentiate between the short termed emotion and the feeling of a story, meaning the sustaining mood or atmosphere, which decisively affects the turning point's resulting emotion.⁷²

Decisions, which the protagonist has to take in a scene, only confirm the nature of decisions, if the certain question causes a dilemma: It is not about to chose between right and wrong or good and bad, but between wishes with equal weight and value, thus which both are positive or negative.⁷³

Concerning continuity and development, between two scenes a connecting transition can be required. It connects through something equal or through something contrasting in the scenes. This could be an action, objects, sounds, words, ideas and characters. For example: Quality of light - equal from shady to shady or contrasting from red to blue light.⁷⁴

Rhythm is determined by a scene's length. Pace refers to action and dialogue in the scene. So, tempo starts with the screenplay: The writer has to control rhythm and pace, even without the conventional increasing of pace within more and more shortened scenes (as change of the rhythm), in order to design a scene's development. Otherwise, the cutter will do it - eventually not within the writer's meaning.⁷⁵

Dialogue is a tool to characterise the figure, define the plot, and to relieve tension through humor.⁷⁶ But:

A man who tells a woman that he desires her but is afraid of losing her is a lot less interesting (to us and her) than is the man who avoids such a confession because he knows that is precisely what would doom him.⁷⁷

Thus, regarding film as a pictorial language, which is also an inspected aspect in Chapter Three, the writer should have in mind:

The best advice concerning dialogue is: Avoid it. Don't write a single line of dialogue, if you can find a pictorial expression instead of it.⁷⁸

Transition: A road to Rome

Within the process of screenwriting, first the writer moves through weeks or months of drafts on scenes, figure's biographies, fictive realities, idiomatic expressions and research, in order to discover the story's climax. Then he or she throws away a large part, while selecting and developing only the pure jewels from the climax on backwards. This is the development of the step outline. During the work including analysing and testing, it happens that the story surprises the writer, because the dynamic plotting might changes the planed controlling idea.⁷⁹

When the writer has the story, he or she tells it a friend over a cup of coffee within a few minutes, observing the friend's physical reaction. If the story triggers silent delight or a 'Wow..', the story is ready for the treatment before the complete screenplay. As long as the majority of listeners doesn't react in that way, there is no sense in working further, because what does not work within 10 minutes, is not supposed to get better by getting longer.⁸⁰

As for this author, Robert McKee's quotations are representing a profound examination, on the one side from a very rational investigation to structure the process of writing, just to have a helpful and flexible scheme, and on the other side, including philosophical approaches and careful consideration to force individual creativity - while keeping sight of the audience's resonance.

After obtaining selected, but also adequate insight into the screenwriting's basics, in order to affect the reader's judgement positively and to show a significant perspective on screenwriting, this research pans and zooms on possible dramaturgic causes of the scheme: The backgrounds and opinions regarding the functioning of The Hero's Journey as a philosophical background.

The Hero and the audience

Every good story reflects the total human story, the universal condition of being born into this world, growing, learning, struggling to become an individual, and dying. Stories can be read as metaphors for the general human situation, with characters who embody universal, archetypal qualities, comprehensible to the group as well as the individual.⁸¹

An idealistic, childlike and very charming access to screenwriting, in this author's view, gives Christopher Vogler, by opening up the sight more on philosophical, mythic and psychological aspects of The Hero's Journey as a metaphorical dramaturgic concept.

He references to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a thousand faces* and C. G. Jung's Archetypes as constantly repeating characters or energies, which occur in the dreams of all people and the myth of all cultures⁸² and which are the divided aspects of the human personality to play out the drama of our lives.⁸³ According to Jung, the strong correspondence between the Archetypes of dreams and myths can be explained by the common origin of the human collective unconscious.⁸⁴

The Archetypes can be thought of masks, worn by all characters temporarily as they are needed to advance the story. For example: Entering the story as a Herald and then switching to a Trickster or Mentor. So, there is a psychological function or part of a character's personality and a dramaturgic function in the story. Most common and pure Archetypes, as characters, but also as the Hero's facets, which can populate the landscape of storytelling are:⁸⁵

The Hero himself or herself: The self-sacrificing ego to protect and serve and on its search for identity and wholeness.⁸⁶

The Mentor: Higher and wiser self, aids and trains the Hero.⁸⁷

The Threshold guardian: A menacing face at gateways to handle with.⁸⁸

The Herald: Brings the call to adventure to the Hero.⁸⁹

The Shapeshifter: Changes the form to meet the story's needs and keeps the Hero guessing.⁹⁰

The Shadow: An unexpressed, unrealised or rejected dark side.⁹¹

The Ally: A humanising and balancing companion.⁹²

The Trickster: Embodies mischief and desire for change.⁹³

By these very view words about the basic functions of the Archetypes, the infinite possibilities of expression, variation and combination are not examined. As aspects of the Hero's personality, but also confronted with them outer during the story by the representative characters, the Hero learns fusing the Archetypes into a complete human being who has picked up something from every one met along the journey.⁹⁴

*People still need catharsis, and a good story is one of the most reliable and entertaining ways of bringing it about.*⁹⁵

The dramatic purpose of the Hero is to give the audience a window into the story. The audience *is invited, in the early stages of the story, to identify with the Hero*⁹⁶ and so, to participate the catharsis, which terms the purifying emotional release, coming a long with the phases and turning points of growth: The gradual stages of change in a character. The following character arc is here compared with The Hero's Journey model, thus with the story's arc:⁹⁷

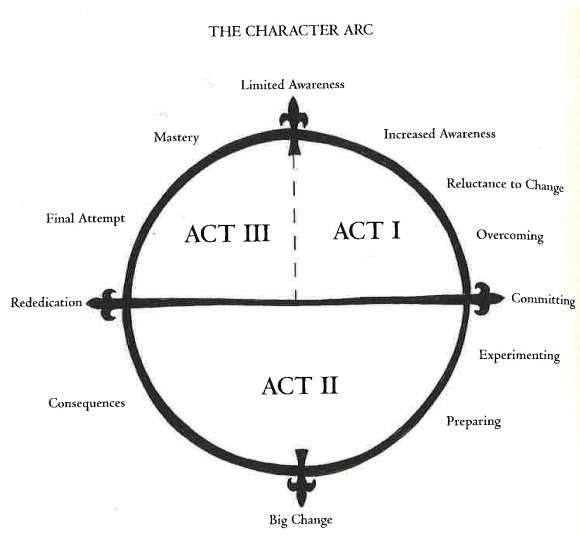


Figure 4: The character's arc⁹⁸

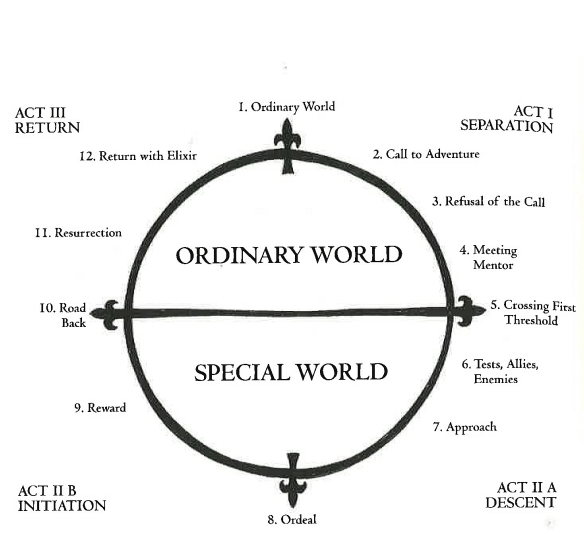


Figure 5: The story's arc⁹⁹

The 12 stages in figure 5 are forming The Hero's Journey:

1. Heroes are introduced in the ordinary world, where
2. they receive the call to adventure.
3. They are reluctant at first or refuse the call, but
4. are encouraged by a Mentor to
5. cross the first threshold (a point of no return) and enter the special world, where
6. they encounter Allies, tests, and enemies.
7. They approach the inmost cave, crossing a second threshold, where
8. they endure the ordeal.
9. They take possession of their reward and
10. are pursued on the road back to the ordinary world.
11. They cross the third threshold and experience transformation and resurrection.
12. They return with the elixir, a boon or treasure to benefit the ordinary world.¹⁰⁰

In comparison to McKee, Vogler differentiates between crisis and climax clearly in time: The crisis stands for the ordeal during the second act as the central event of the story:¹⁰¹

*Sometimes things have to get worse before they can get better.*¹⁰²

The climax, as the big moment in the third act, is the Hero's final exam on the road back to show what he or she has learned and provides the feeling of catharsis.¹⁰³

The stages are supposed to be a flexible, durable and dependable map: *One of many ways to get from here to there.*¹⁰⁴ That means, symbols can be changed infinitely, and any elements can appear at any story's point to suit the story and the society's needs. So it can easily be translated to contemporary genres.¹⁰⁵

To organise the work of development and structuring more flexible, McKee and Vogler recommend to use index cards rather than writing on sheets of paper. The question, which begins to arise to this author, is:

How can one break or even leave such flexible and adaptable rules of an universal scheme - and: Is there even a need to break or leave it?

The Writer's Journey, seen as The Hero's Journey, says: Yes. Because, isn't it necessary to leave the ordinary world in order to gain the reward?

The reader is asked to notice this confirmation of the scheme, which the now following growing detachment of the scheme brings simultaneously. With the next following step and chapter, looking on how the writer can break the scheme, this research moves further within the scheme.

*Artists who operate on the principle of rejecting all form are themselves dependent on form*¹⁰⁶

*You have to know everything about structure in order to move beyond it*¹⁰⁷

The rules are still in the central focus.¹⁰⁸

Chapter Two: Consciously breaking the scheme

Feel free to bend and break conventions, but only for one reason: To replace them by something more important.¹

This can be seen as a hint for the writer to reflect if the revolt meets the story's needs or if it just ends in itself. In this author's opinion, that point of view should not leave unnoticed the relevance of a revolt itself for the writer's development.

Hitchcock knew, there is neither a necessary contradiction between art and commercial success, nor there is a necessary connection between art and the artistic film.²

Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) is exemplary for breaking rules concerning the protagonist: Marion Cane passes exposition, inciting incident, points of no return and the dramaturgic increasing troubles. Within the second act, she decides to give up her immoral aims and suddenly gets bloodily murdered: A shock for the audience who has already been prepared on her as the protagonist. This happens in minute 45, and not until minute 66 opens a new possible and reliable orientation by the protagonist's sister and the private detective. This switch of the protagonist works because of the initially distanced and voyeuristic view on Marion Cane. The audience is empathic but does not sympathise with her, so there is no full identification.³

Another example⁴

Concerning identification, Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush draw attention to a certain (and this author worrying) view on the others in films, by the following example, in order to illustrate changing worldviews and the resulting film's performances:

*You cannot give every character agency all of the time or your story will have no focus. But if you find you are repeating patterns in which you deny agency to a class of characters - i.e., all women cannot speak up in a relationship - you and your script may be saying something about your view of the world that you are not aware of and which you did not mean to say.*⁵

In this first screenplay's extract, the other hasn't agency, meaning the ability to act on its own, to exhibit will, and change the direction of the story by a beat - thus no power to affect the protagonist or the audience. In that case, the other is a voiceless, faceless class of people and remains alien to the protagonist and the audience:

INT. CAR - DAY

Robert steers with his knee and fools with the radio. There ain't much good out here.

DAVID (O.S.)

Girl!

Robert's head springs up.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - ROBERT'S POV - DAY

Through the windshield, he can just make out a woman with her suitcase at her feet. She is turned away. Only her back is visible.

ROBERT (O.S.)

Nice.

INT. CAR - DAY

Robert swings the wheel toward the side of the road.

EXT. CAR - DAY

Before the car comes to a complete halt, David is out the door. In his anxiety, he stumbles and falls to his knees.

Here, the boys have agency and drive the scene, while the woman does not and is furthermore not characterised, except as to her gender: Presented as an inanimate object of desire named by the beholder.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - ROBERT'S POV - DAY

Through the windshield, he can just make out a woman with her suitcase at her feet. She is turned away. Only her back is visible.

Now they are close enough to see her. As the car approaches, she turns. She is a beautiful young woman, maybe 25 years old.

ROBERT (O.S.)

Nice.

Robert hits the brakes.

Although almost joyful when she turned, as she focuses in on their car, her face clouds with rage.

Now, there is a little more characterisation to the woman (which serves only to emphasise Robert's reflective agency and point of view or POV) and she has agency, even if she had turned reflexively at the car's sound - her action bends the story. Her textured reaction is the beginning of reflexive agency: The audience doesn't know why her face changes, but begins to suspect a backstory. To spin it much further to active agency and a fully identification:

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - ROBERT'S POV - DAY

He can just make out that the hitcher is a young woman standing by the raised hood of an old Impala.

ROBERT (O.S.)

Nice.

Now they are close enough to see her. She is a beautiful young woman, maybe 25 years old, but before Robert can register anything else, she drops her thumb..

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY

..and ducks her head under the raised hood of the car. Her smile fades. The young woman, KAREN, looks out across the barren landscape. She is absolutely alone. She looks back at the engine. She tabs the distributor cap, but the crack won't go away. She'll never fix it.

Making up her mind, she steps back out and slams the hood.

INT. CAR - DAY

David flicks off the radio.

DAVID

Forget it. It's getting dark. We're lost.

ROBERT

Yeah.

As Robert starts to speed up, he glances off to the side of the road again.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Wait.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - ROBERT'S POV - DAY

The woman has her thumb held high. Her smile is dazzling.

INT. CAR - DAY

Robert begins to spin the wheel. David turns back to him.

DAVID

Not now.

He puts his hand on Robert's arm to stop him

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY

Karen drops her thumb and grins as she watches the car pull off the road.

The sequence is totally refocused on shifted POVs and uses for example a match cut from Robert to Karen's action of arm drop for a flowing transition. First smooth match cuts are used and then cross cutting are established to raise the dramaturgic tension. (To find the origin and complete example, the reader notes the quotation mark at the underlined headline above.)

In this author's opinion, the example gives a feeling of a cliché performance, showing and strengthening the impression of just moving within a scheme. But during development, it also demonstrates empathy with the others or antagonists and so the switching can be seen as fostering the audience's ability to switch the perspectives, which is the inconsistency of an antiplot.

So, some films need more than one protagonist and creative handling of them is also possible by a continuous switch or by two or more protagonists simultaneous, but often with one of them pointed out. For example, in biographical films a structuring figure can be needed in addition to the dominant figure, who the film is about.⁶

To break the story's linearity (it's told in the present and aiming to the future) the writer can start with the end, unwrap in retrospective (this is often done in the genre Thriller), or emphasise the backstory by using flashbacks, or move in a circle, but also jump back and forward.⁷ This author recommends the book *Freistil: Dramaturgie für Fortgeschrittene und Experimentierfreudige* by Dagmar Benke.

Obviously, there exist countless possibilities to bend and break the classical scheme, but as also Dagmar Benke says, the writer has to cultivate the scheme in the first place before being really creative in adapting it to the story's needs.⁸

Chapter Three: Intentionally ignoring or caused by unawareness

According to Robert McKee, the writer always moves in the plot triangle (c.f. Chapter 1, figure 1) somewhere between archeplot, miniplot and antiplot. Otherwise, the writer decides to leave the plot, entering a field, McKee terms roughly narrative, which means to be without a story's arc and in stagnation. McKee points out, that these different narrative approaches reflect the different cultural worldviews, for example the typical American versus the typical European.¹

You have to make your own 'political' decision, where you want be at home.²

McKee takes for granted the principle of the shrinking audience, while moving away from the archeplot. Most people are representing the worldview of being the alone and active protagonist of their closed life with irreversible and absolute changes and with outer antagonistic forces in a continuous and causal reality.³ Furthermore he states:

The author has to make his or her living with screenwriting.⁴

The author has to cultivate the classical form.⁵

The author has to believe in his or her story.⁶

Out of context, one could interpret these statements as fundamentalist warnings, wise advices, but also as a call to adventure.

To write out the classical scheme can happen from two perspectives, namely before even being aware of the classical form or after being aware of the classical form.

Doing it intentionally

*Avoid formula, distrust order and pattern, resist logic and tradition.*⁷

First, this author points out the general flowing transition between breaking rules by forming them, up to perverting them, and leaving them, in order to get free from rules, which comes along with the different variations and ideas on classical dramaturgy and its scheme.

Since this research examines the ideas by Robert McKee and Christopher Vogler on classical dramaturgy, and though both authors confirm the scheme's flexibility, this author means to recognise a possible clear theoretical differentiation between breaking and leaving:

As said above, the difference is, if moving in or outer the plot triangle, thus using a story's and therefore a character's arc, or if expressing stagnation, through the story and the characters. Breaking means here, in its extremes, the pure miniplot or the pure antiplot, while leaving the scheme is represented by the unspecific nonplot.

This differentiation accompanies the terms closed versus open and dramaturgic versus epic. One speaks of dramatic restriction contrary to epic broadness. For the reader's orientation, in the following are often found characteristics of the not easy to identify epic film:⁸

Noticeable presence of a storyteller: auctorial or in ego-perspective.⁹

Suspension of dramatic advance, causality, and finality.¹⁰

Wound and endless.¹¹

Suspension of the audience's emotional identification and catharsis.¹²

Relative passive characters without recognisable aim.¹³

Conflict results of circumstances and coincidences instead of the character's action.¹⁴

Focusing on the audience's rational reflection.¹⁵

Today epic or episodal films are associated with equivalent plots, which occur simultaneously or consecutively, without general rules and mostly associated with an own uniqueness and the terms Arthousefilm or Not-Aristotelian.¹⁶

What's wrong or right depends on the material itself, but also on the expectations of all parties.¹⁷

An epic-Thriller-experiment

The genre Thriller is built on the central emotion fear and needs the audience's identification with a weak protagonist, who overcomes through the plot the superior threat. The catharsis, happening during the climax, leaves the protagonist and the audience purified from fear. Compared to the epic characteristics above, it seems, the genre Thriller is incompatible with an epic film. At the same time, such experiment expresses the screenwriter's desire for reaching die audience emotionally and rationally. This synthesis has the potential to be a great piece of art.¹⁸

An unaware origin

In addition to the classical (Aristotelian) form and the epic form, exists the lyric form, which focuses on a character's inner world and emotional state. It works with symbolism but without dramaturgy.¹⁹ This definition reminds of the genre Stream of Consciousness, mentioned in Chapter One.

As a very pristinely access to undramatical film performance, the lyric film shows aspects comparable to the origin medieval mystery play, which expresses the unawareness of time and space based dramaturgy: The scenes are isolated and exchangeable. Instead of process, the pictorial language dominates with symbols, while physical limitation is suspended. That also affects the figure's role, which is not driving the plot but stands for a certain state.²⁰

Concluding, this author can locate the following differentiation: While dramaturgy expresses more on outer processes during time and suggests reality and the epic refers to certain situations and triggers reflection about reality, the lyric form concentrates on inner states and abstracts reality.

Richard Blank and Jean Claude Carrière point to the fact that besides and before Aristotle also in China, India and Japan advices for storytelling had been gathered.

So, in an old Chinese book is proposed, to avoid length and repeat, but maintain a pleasant rhythm. Further, a Japanese master formulated the Jo-Ha-Kyu, which means dividing into three (namely into preparation, development and event) - not only into three acts, but even sentences or single words into three parts.²¹

A very old text in Sanskrit says, that a good play gives the audience answers refering to business, family concerns, world affairs, but also the inner life. Furthermore it has to offer solace to a drunken man who stumbles in by coincidence.²²

Carrière concludes all imaginable rules of dramaturgy to the following essence:

Grabbing the audience's interest.²³

Transition: A role of the pictorial

Blank discovers a new kind of suspense, not created by the plot of a rational scheme but by a new view, which confuses, corrects, lifts, and widens the own sight and ideas. It enters everyday life. Therefore, also without dependence on time and precisely because of this lacking causality, the door out of boredom can be found: Through the unexpected view expressed by the film's pictures.²⁴

The confrontation with another specific worldview, in particular the screenwriter's view will be intensified, if screenwriter and director work very close together or are the same person: The auteur film, where the screenwriter also can be the film's director, expresses the symbiosis of word (writer) and picture (director) and allows great authenticity.²⁵

The screenplay is the film's first version.²⁶

Carrière thoughtfully points out, that a screenwriter is more a filmmaker than a writer and compares the screenplay to a caterpillar, already containing all potential of the butterfly. For this, the screenwriter's knowledge about the process of filmmaking, particularly cutting, but also light or sound, in order to characterise the atmosphere in scenes with details, is vital to create the screenplay, which stands at the beginning of a transformation process. Here, the important first step for the writer is, to free his or herself from literary demands.²⁷

Chapter Four: Integration

Writers and directors are challenged to balance dramaturgic and epic (and lyric) tools for the specific film and its unique requirement, depending on the film's content and the expectations: What do the producers and the screenwriter want to achieve at the audience's side, at the critics, at the box offices?¹

As a thumb rule, the more dramatic elements, the bigger are the chances to reach a broad audience, who expects entertainment and suspense. The more epic elements, the bigger are the chances to not only reach the audience's emotional identification, but also their mind.²

Concerning content and the writer in person, the film's theme is the key between dramaturgy and epic: While the dramaturgy's structure is built on causality and the epic structure is built on coincidence, the theme refers to the film's unconscious part, the film's soul. It's connected to the unconscious desire of the protagonist and a very universal feeling or state, which every human being understands, such as respect, love, trust, tolerance, egoism, betrayal, responsibility.³ The theme is closely related to the film's controlling idea, but can be expressed by one word.

The author can't avoid the revelation of his or her attitude about the screenplay's theme.⁴

In order to finally approach the reader's resolution (and to confirm The Hero's Journey again), this author will address the ultimate question and the near end of this research in personal form:

What is your individual, most inner aim as a screenwriter?

Every screenplay from your hand requires your honest answer, your attitude, for the further decisions and actions of the specific screenplay's development. Because your attitudes and aims are changeable, dynamically in interaction to your work's circumstances mentioned above. Particularly, a firm and fundamental position should be clear, because your screenplay's theme and further the controlling idea should be compatible and based on it.

It may happen, that you don't find a quick answer or don't work on a screenplay at the moment, thus in my opinion, an overview of some exemplary statements, I found during research, helps:

Classics

Neither it's the screenwriter's responsibility to cure the society's matters and raise morality, nor to renew the faith in mankind, or even to express his or her inner self. The responsibility is, to write truth, which means to believe in the story's meaning.⁵

Is The Hero's Journey an instrument of cultural imperialism? It could be, if naively interpreted, blindly copied, or unquestioningly adopted. But it also can be a useful tool for the storyteller in any culture, if adapted thoughtfully to reflect the unique, inimitable qualities of the local geography, climate and people.⁶

Critics say it is a propaganda device invented to encourage young males to enlist in armies, a myth that glorifies death and foolish self-sacrifice. There is some truth in this charge, for many Heroes of legend and story are warriors and the patterns of The Hero's Journey have certainly been used for propaganda and recruitment. However, to condemn and dismiss these patterns because they can be put to military use is shortsighted and narrow-minded.⁷

I believe that much of the journey is the same for all humans, since we share many realities of birth, growth, and decay, but clearly being a woman imposes distinct cycles, rhythms, pressures, and needs. There may be a real difference in the form of men's and women's journeys. Men's journeys may be in some sense more linear, proceeding from one outward goal to the next, while women's journeys may spin or spiral inward and outward.⁸

Revolutionaries

We suggest that you learn to look at the strength of your own impulses for guidance and that you build from this through trial and error. While this is more frightening than working with a preconceived model, it encourages you to do the real exploration necessary to write material that is truly original and alive.⁹

Liberals

Anxiously, we are looking for simple formulas and mindsets, which have nothing to do with today's realities.¹⁰

Countries such as Africa, where storytellers have traditionally meaningful roles, can't afford new media and have no regional or national productions. They depend on stories written under different skies, mainly from California, which is flooding the world with mediocrity.¹¹

Dramaturgy is about existential questions, our attitude about reality. The rational scheme is obsolete - but no fear! Imagine how parallel lines meet in infinity. Maybe, you will also meet yourself there, as a screenwriter.¹²

Films without classical dramaturgy need their unique form, which can be found hidden in the material itself.¹³

Conclusion and outlook

*The Hero's Journey is only a guideline, a starting point for hammering out your own story language and rules of thumb.*¹⁴

The classical dramaturgy includes two main components: The archaic (egocentric) worldview expressed by the metaphoric Hero's journey, which is the story itself and the origin for the second component, the structuring scheme, which is the recognised, rationalised and defined pattern.

The structuring scheme can be seen as a rational constructed tool, in order to understand, how the origin story works, and then, to be able to configure it creatively. Since the scheme's rationality, it might be that the writer's creativity gets restricted too far: This is about the cooperation from head and belly - control and trust - in the process of writing, instead of their competition. Therefore, the clearness of this tool's individual purpose (relating to expectations in the film) is vital for balancing scheme and fantasy, and merging the unique story.

*The forms of stories change with the needs of the audience. New story types with different rhythms will continue to be created.*¹⁵

At its best, during the writing process, the examination of structure and the own creativity inspire each other, so that the writer actively contributes with his or her screenplay to the contemporary and future forms of the feature film's performing.

*It's true that exciting new possibilities are created by computers and the nonlinear thinking they encourage. However, there will always be pleasure in 'Tell me a story.'*¹⁶

Outgoing from individual and human alternating phases of development and stagnation in general (in order to find certain balances) the question is, if today the egocentric seeming worldview of the origin and very flexible Hero's journey is (or should be) obsolete - and if it is: What follows? Luckily there is a huge source of films from all over the world to analyse.

My conclusion is, that the potential of a feature film to get a timeless classic, starts with the screenplay's authenticity, which matches our time's spirit and so scores the audience's resonance, while the commercial success can be ensured by the appropriate structure. As for me, reflecting the spirit of our age has also to do with recognition and integration of previous steps or states.

I hearten you as a screenwriter, also to draw from the full source of already collected and written down vast experience and knowledge, in order to transform your own unique vision into a screenplay.

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