The Design of Imaginary Worlds. Harnessing Narrative Potential of Transmedia Worlds: The Case of *Watchmen of the Nine*

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Abstract

Today, more than ever, audiences are surrounded by imaginary worlds in which a wide variety of products and activities can be fully explored through multiple media windows. Imaginary worlds allow members of the audience to enter vicariously in the narrative space, spending a certain amount of time in speculative and explorative activities, experiencing the 'possible world' through the stories set within it. According to this, it is possible to differentiate between story and storyworld. While 'stories' are self-enclosed arrangements of causal events that come to an end in a certain period of time, 'storyworlds' are mental constructions shared between recipients and authors in which new storylines can be developed.

This paper aims to discuss the implication of world-building activity for the design practice. Considering narratives and world-making practices as a matter of design, this essay will tackle the following question: how can a designer use the creation of storyworlds in his practice to activate new perspectives on specific contexts?

In doing so, the first part of the essay is a brief summary of how imaginary worlds have evolved through the decades. Then, the second part is devoted to the

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presentation of the so-called Storyworld Canvas, one of the narrative design tools developed in our research group in order to support both storytelling practice and storyworld creation. Finally, the paper describes the project Watchmen of the Nine with the aim of analysing its storyworld from the perspective of the design domain, considering storytelling and world-building activities as ways to enrich the design practice.

Keywords
Transmedia Design, World-building, Narratology, Narrative Design Tool, Design Practice, Communication Design.

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From storytelling to world-making

More than ever, today people live in a highly mediated context and audiences are surrounded by imaginary worlds, in which a wide variety of products and activities can be experienced through multiple media windows. Imaginary worlds allow members of the audience to enter vicariously into the narrative space, spending a certain amount of time in speculative and explorative activities, and experiencing the imagined world through the stories set within it. As a consequence, it is possible to differentiate between 'story' and 'storyworld'. While stories are self-enclosed arrangements of causal events that come to an end after a certain period of time, storyworlds are mental constructions shared between recipients and authors, in which new storylines can be developed. The experience of storyworlds includes tactics of consumption that are led by the audience itself (de Certeau 1980), and participation is based on the concept of "world gestalten" (Wolf 2012: 52).

This paper aims to discuss the implication of world-building activity for design practice. Considering narratives and world-making practices as a matter of design, this essay will tackle the following question: how can a designer use the creation of storyworlds in his practice to activate new perspectives on specific contexts?

The starting point for answering this question will be a brief summary of how imaginary worlds have evolved through the decades, to aid understanding of how creators tackled the process of world-building. As identified by Wolf (2012), people have been building storyworlds for centuries "to amaze, entertain, satirise, propose possibilities, or simply make an audience more aware of defaults they take for granted" (2012: 65). The earliest examples were story cycles in which either historical figures acted as transnarrative characters (e.g. King Arthur), or mythical characters (e.g. pantheons of Greek and Roman gods) were featured within fantastical and unknown worlds. The difficulties for characters in reaching these possible worlds (Ryan 1991; Bradley & Swartz 1979) led authors to the development of a traveller's

tale that opened up the "age of exploration" (Wolf 2012). In this case, the imaginary worlds became a way for people to read fictional and non-fictional stories related to either realistic places or fantastical and mysterious ones.

While the traveller genre focused on aesthetics and cultural differences, utopian fiction concentrated much more on the descriptions of everyday life, and political and socio-economic systems. This is the case of Plato's Kallipolis and its usage as an educational and reflective tool. Wolf went further, and noticed that "[m]any utopias, however, also included an increased reliance on technology, reduced autonomy for individuals, and greater regulation and control by the state" (2012: 94). The failure of utopias led to dystopias, a term which was introduced in 1868 by John Stuart Mill to describe utopias that went wrong. It is not by chance that the blurring boundaries between utopia and dystopia rely on the personal desires and beliefs of people who are experiencing that world. While traveller's tales allow people to reach other possible worlds, and utopias are able to activate new perspectives on specific contexts, the genres of science fiction and fantasy are the ones that really encourage the audience to enter vicariously into the narrative space.

Design practice and world-building: methods and tools

According to scholars such as Ryan and Thon (2014), and Wolf (2012), storyworlds are mental constructions shared between recipients and authors, whose development is guided by three main properties. The first one – invention – is related to the elements that make a constructed (secondary) world different from our own (primary) world. According to Wolf, "[i]nvention, then, is what makes a secondary world »secondary«" (Wolf 2012: 38). In that case, changes can be related not only to the nominal and the cultural realm – in which authors can give new names to things or invent new artefacts, objects, technologies, and cultures – but also to the natural and the ontological realm, in which new flora and fauna appear in worlds ruled by new physical laws. The second property – completeness – refers to the degree of development and feasibility that a world attains through details and additional information. If a world is sufficiently complete – or rather a sense of completeness can be achieved – audiences will continue to find answers to their questions and the narrative space itself will be believable (Wolf 2012: 61). In the end, the feeling of completeness is connected to the third property – consistency – i.e. the degree to which a storyworld is arranged according to interrelated and non-contradictory elements. This means that not only is completeness connected to consistency, but in fact all three properties are interrelated and must be consid-

ered simultaneously. As stated by Wolf (2012: 154), "[i]t is through the completeness and consistency of these structures that world gestalten are able to occur" Wolf (2012: 154) also points out that "narrative is the most common form of structure", especially because imaginary worlds are usually experienced through stories set within them. Despite this, it is possible to recognise several elements which, all together, allow both authors and audiences to think about pieces of information as a whole world.

In the following paragraphs, three different frameworks (Figure 1) that label organisational tools for the design of imaginary worlds are described as a possible basis for both analysis and design practice. These different frameworks were conceived by different authors in different times; however, they present many common elements. In fact, the dimensions which constitute the three frameworks include elements that can be organised according to three basic components: 1) a space, 2) a time, in which things exist, and 3) one or more characters who populate the imaginary world.

The first framework was developed by Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca (2004; 2014) and is based on three main dimensions: mythos, topos and ethos. Mythos describes not only the established story, lore, and legend of the imaginary world, but also the background story that gives meaning to the storyworld itself. Additionally, mythos can be seen as the necessary knowledge for interacting with the world or correctly interpreting the events. Topos shows how spaces and events unfold over time, while ethos refers to the explicit and implicit moral code that allows people to understand the characters' behaviours, by living the experience of "worldness".

The second framework considered in this paper was developed by Mark J. P. Wolf (2012). Wolf stated that there are three main elements used in building storyworlds: maps, timelines, and genealogies. He highlighted how these three organisational tools are enough to create the feeling of completeness: maps enable readers to visualise an imaginary world, the construction of chronologies helps them connect the events temporally within a whole history, and ancestry lines provide the means of connecting characters. However, Wolf then went further and added five more structures serving to finalise the world-building activity: nature, culture, language, mythology and philosophy.

The last framework was defined by Davide Pinardi and Pietro De Angelis (2006). They identified seven elements – Topos, Epos, Ethos, Telos, Logos, Genos and Chronos – taken from the work of the Italian philosopher Carlo Tullio Argan, and which allow for the description of the storyworld in which the characters move. Topos refers to the natural and artificial environment and its physical description. It describes in detail not only the different environments comprising the whole world, but also the place

where a particular character lives, which in turn has its own characteristics. Maps and images complete the description, giving a visual dimension to the imaginary world, and helping with the mental construction of the secondariness (Wolf 2012). Epos refers to the historical memory, the sharing of past events or the personal story of the character(s). Epos can refer to external events, for example accidents or natural events, or to a character's personal experiences. Ethos represents the rules, values and norms that regulate behaviours within the crafted world. The personal ethos of one character can often be in conflict with the values of the society in which s/he lives, and this can generate an inner struggle. Telos refers to the personal goals and purpose of the character(s). The telos is able to shape the direction toward which a character moves, defining his/her intentions and agency. Logos refers to the language, both verbal and non-verbal, which makes communication possible within the imagined world. Genos represents the set of relationships in the narrative world: the way characters interact with each other. Finally, chronos refers to time, and is instrumental in defining the temporal dimension in which the storylines unfold. Expression of the epoch, historical period, or era gives the storyworld a temporal dimension, which articulates the beginning and the end of the narrative strands.
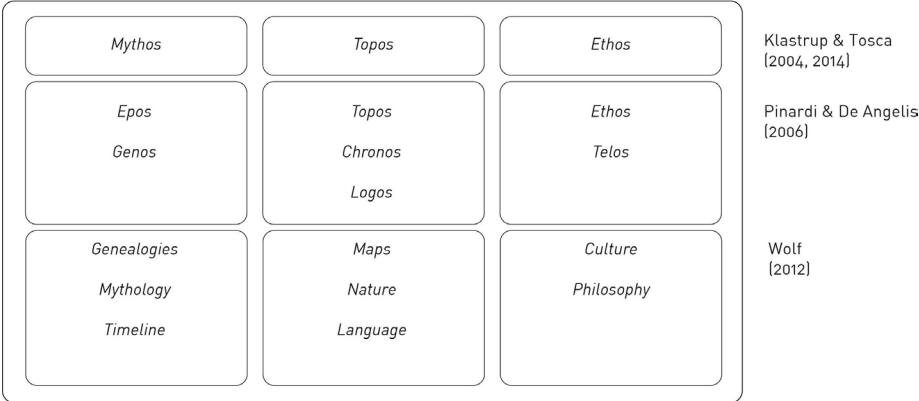
Mythos	*Topos*	*Ethos*	Klastrup & Tosca (2004, 2014)
Epos *Genos*	*Topos* *Chronos* *Logos*	*Ethos* *Telos*	Pinardi & De Angelis (2006)
Genealogies *Mythology* *Timeline*	*Maps* *Nature* *Language*	*Culture* *Philosophy*	Wolf (2012)

Figure 1.
Frameworks that label organisational tools
for the development of imaginary worlds.

This last framework constitutes the basis upon which the design practice was conducted, as part of the research activities of Imagis Lab[1]. A set of design tools was developed, and subsequently tested and refined within both educational and research activities, to support the world-building activity.

[1] A design-research group based at the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano.

The aim of the research is to provide designers with a useful structure, by creating a design tool which includes a qualitative description of a story-world (Figure 2) based on the variables identified by Pinardi and De Angelis.
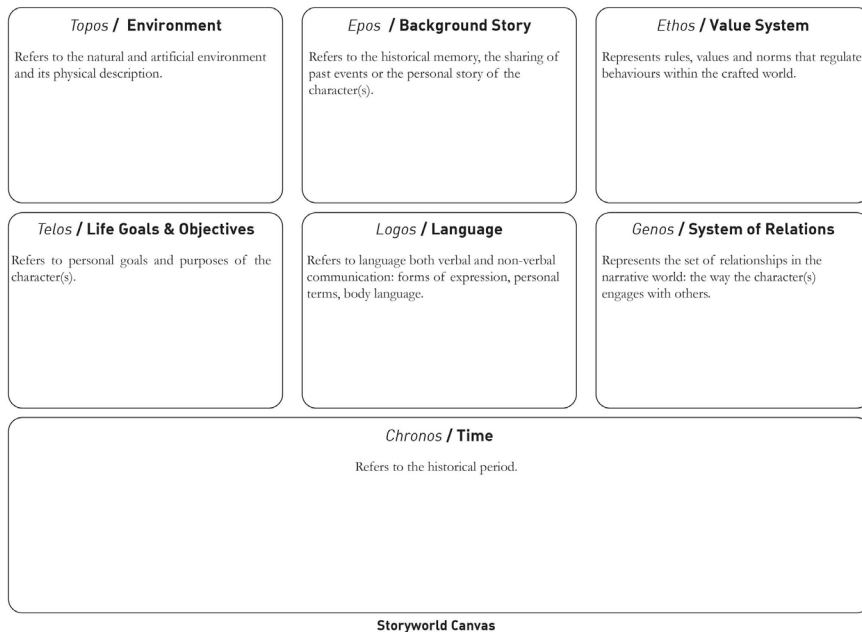

Topos / **Environment**	*Epos* / **Background Story**	*Ethos* / **Value System**
Refers to the natural and artificial environment and its physical description.	Refers to the historical memory, the sharing of past events or the personal story of the character(s).	Represents rules, values and norms that regulate behaviours within the crafted world.
Telos / **Life Goals & Objectives**	*Logos* / **Language**	*Genos* / **System of Relations**
Refers to personal goals and purposes of the character(s).	Refers to language both verbal and non-verbal communication: forms of expression, personal terms, body language.	Represents the set of relationships in the narrative world: the way the character(s) engages with others.

Chronos / **Time**

Refers to the historical period.

Storyworld Canvas

Figure 2.
Storyworld Canvas.

The Storyworld Canvas represents the result of this phase, and is part of a set of tools developed in order to support both storytelling practice and storyworld creation. The design process is guided by a user-centred approach so that the hero's journey can easily be translated into the user's journey, and the transformative arc of the story can fruitfully become the structure of a design scenario proposing to the stakeholders possible and preferable design solutions.[2] The set of tools was tested in workshops with both re-searchers and professionals (Piredda, Ciancia & Verditti 2015), and during teaching activities with both design and non-design students. The following paragraph presents one of the storyworlds generated by a group of design students using the Storyworld Canvas, and the stories subsequently generat-ed from the starting-point of this created narrative world.

[2] The role and contribution of storytelling and the narratives within design practices are the subject of ongoing debate within the design community at international level (Bertolotti, Daam, Piredda & Tassinari 2016).

Case study: *Watchmen of the Nine*

The narrative world was built as a pilot experience, in 2015, by a team of design students[3] taking the "Communication Design" studio course at the School of Design, Politecnico di Milano.[4] The students developed the imaginary world using as their starting-point Zona 9 (District 9), a suburban area of Milan in which the University campus is located. The team of design students developed a transmedia world that can be conveyed through several media, reaching different target audiences. They began by exploring the neighbourhood, meeting local people, shooting video interviews, and collecting pictures and stories from the residents about their memories and anecdotes. From all of this, the designers developed a dystopian imaginary world and created five main characters, which give the project its title: *Watchmen of the Nine*. The storyworld was created starting from this research conducted by the students in the field. Inhabitants of Zona 9 were interviewed, as were local associations of citizens who were developing actions to report on the lack of green spaces in their locality. Many interviewees perceived and declared environmental issues as being the most urgent to resolve in order to move towards a better quality of life. As a consequence, the main goal of the transmedia project was to raise awareness about the environmental situation in the Zona 9 district and engage citizens to take an active role in improving the suburban area. The research led to the creation of the storyworld *Watchmen of the Nine*, a sci-fi adventure that tells the story of five heroes who are sent back from a dystopian future (year 2115) to the present (year 2015) in order to save the world. In the year 2115, the future presents a world in which nature is almost completely extinct and the few remaining green areas represent a privilege enjoyed only by a rich élite.

Building the storyworld

The storyworld of *Watchmen of the Nine* was constructed using the Storyworld Canvas and applying the variables of Topos, Epos, Logos, Genos and Chronos. The design process followed a complex method, which started from the analysis of the current situation, not only for the specific suburban area in which the main storyline takes place (Zona 9), but also giving consideration to trends and news affecting the world. The creation of the storyworld started by imagining an "over-world", a term which describes the future in 2115. As is typical

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[3] Simone Carnevale, Andrea Fossaluzza, Gionata Marenghi, Pedrag Stajevski, Luca Tantimonaco.
[4] Final Synthesis Design Studio, Prof. Marisa Galbiati, Francesca Piredda, Katia Goldoni and Marco Ronchi (Twig Agency), with Mariana Ciancia, Simona Venditti and Gabriele Carbone.

for the science-fiction genre, the future scenario takes inspiration from an analysis of the present and, using cause-effect relationships, describes one possible world of the future (Ryan 1991). The over-world of *Watchmen of the Nine* describes a future in which energy resources have been completely depleted, forcing people to use nuclear energy on a massive scale. As a consequence, water and air pollution increased exponentially, forcing people to minimise their interactions with nature and between each other. Digital relationships are the only kind possible and people are completely addicted to technology. The clichés and elements of science-fiction imagery are recognisable and allow the audience to fill in the gaps in the narration and enter the narrative world, guided by the three distinctive properties of invention, completeness, and consistency (Wolf 2012). The main point of access to the narrative world is the website D9News[5], which represents the news website of Zona 9 and the world of 2115 (Figure 3). Using the metaphor of the news website, the world of the future is described using text and images, and the website allows viewers to enter this world and activate the process of world gestalten (Wolf 2012).

Figure 3.
Author - Simone Carnevale; photo title - Screenshot from D9News website.

The design process continued and focused on creating the storyworld in which the main storyline takes place. The authors used the framework categories defined by Pinardi and De Angelis (2006) in order to describe the main continents of the future, then focusing on the city of Milan, and narrowing to the specific area of Zona 9. The description of the latter offers a dialogue between the real world, such as the places in the neighbourhood as its citizens know them, and the imaginary world, which preserves some

[5] http://d9news.imagishub.it; www.d9news.polimi.it.

elements of reality and removes others. The topos describes the main land-marks and their role in the future, for instance the train station, the University and the local library. The logos focuses on the massive presence of foreign people, generating a mix of different languages. The genos describes the difficulties people of the future have in creating bonds and relations between each other, due to the ubiquity of digital technologies. The epos focuses on the backstory and describes how the suburban zone evolved in a dangerous and mostly abandoned area. The chronos refers to the temporal dimension of the future in 2115, while the telos and ethos are described through the main characters who populate the storyworld.

Creating characters

The same framework used to create and describe the storyworld (topos, epos, logos, genos, chronos) was then used to create the five main characters who are the focus of the story in the fictional world. Moreover, each character presents some specific traits connected to the identification of personal telos and ethos, through which their background stories were developed. The five Watchmen result as five archetypal anti-heroes; they are, in fact, a group of social outcasts, who in 2115 joined a venture to travel one hundred years back in time (to 2015), for different personal reasons (telos). For example, the character of Marquise Jonathan William De Marchi, nicknamed "The Short" (Il Corto), decided to travel back in time because of money problems, and he acts as an infiltrator committed to sabotaging the Watchmen's tasks in return for money. This character plays the narrative role of the shapeshifter (Vogler 1992).

The second character, Ivan, nicknamed "The Wide One" (Lo Spesso), decided to be part of the Watchmen in order to save his beloved Nadia. This character can be considered as the archetypal hero (Vogler 1992), but he starts out as an ordinary person; he is solitary and unwilling, honest and idealistic, with no awareness of his key role.

Similarly to the creation of the storyworld, the design process for the five characters took its inspiration from analysis of the real world. The exploration of the Zona 9 neighbourhood included meetings with some of the people there, documented through video interviews. These elements can be considered as the basis upon which the personality traits of the Watchmen were created.

Crossing the borders of reality

The project had the objective of producing a disruption between fiction and reality, capitalising on opportunities to let Zona 9 citizens meet the Watchmen. The story characters, wearing costumes which made them recognisable, met the citizens in the street and participated in local events and activities (Figure 4). Creation of the *Watchmen* characters involved defining their internal and physical characteristics and also designing their appearance, including costumes. The hypothesis of having the characters carry or wear futuristic objects was evaluated and tested during a workshop held in collaboration with LUCA School of Arts,[6] in which the students made prototypes of gloves and visors with a futuristic aspect (Figure 5). Wearing these objects, the students went around the neighbourhood "in character" as the Watchmen, registering and observing the reactions of the citizens. As a consequence of this in-field experimentation, the costumes were then refined, in order to decontextualise the characters from the present time.

Figure 4.
Author - Andrea Fossaluzza, Simone Carnevale, Luca Tantimonaco and Predrag Stajevski. Photo title - Pictures of the students (Andrea Fossaluzza and Simone Carnevale) in character as the Watchmen around the neighbourhood.

[6] Seven students and their professors, Virginia Tassinari and Wim Buts, visited the School of Design (Politecnico di Milano) joining our class and participating in a three-day workshop (27th-29th October 2015). The main goal of the workshop was to prototype key elements of the narrative worlds developed, enacting and performing actions in order to demonstrate the possible uses and interactions.
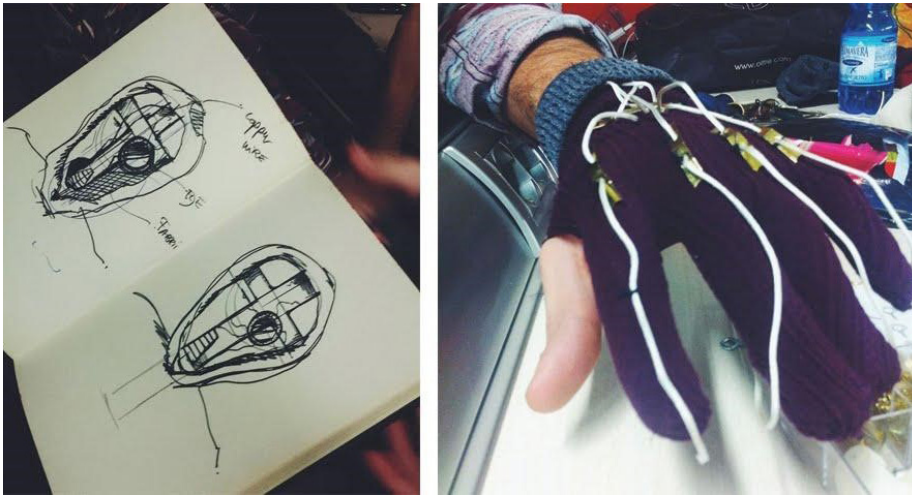
Figure 5.
Author - Simona Venditti and Francesca Piredda.
Photo title - Pictures from the workshop with Virginia Tassinari and Wim Buts.

The science-fiction genre's plot device of time travel represents a way to establish a relation between the real world and the imaginary world through a temporal dimension. There are no gates that allow the audience to enter the Future or the Present, or which keep the two worlds separated. Rather, there are many simultaneous actions whose consequences and effects are evident and perceivable in the future (e.g. in this case, the absence of green spaces and plants). The time travel undertaken by the characters also represents an inner journey, which on the one hand leads them to find a solution for saving the planet, but which also represents the ideal route the audience may undertake in moving from passivity to active citizenship. The narrative world of the future has a potential social impact; by showing a possible reality, it provides further interpretations about the present, stimulating actions and activities:

> As we tell and listen to stories, they often prove to be a means of transportation into another reality. In foresight and design, they embody future changes we would like to see become reality, improvements to our context. As such, storytelling helps to trigger and guide processes of change. Change is not neutral however. It has a direction and stimulating the imagination through storytelling is what can inspire such direction (Baerten 2016: 188).

Storyworlds as narrative engines

In order to test the capacity of the crafted storyworld to generate infinite possible stories, and in order to stress the properties of invention, completeness and consistency, different groups of students were involved in storytelling activities during their educational paths. The universe of *Watchmen of the Nine* generated different but coherent storylines, and includes, in total, a short movie, a micronarrative (or proto-narrative, Turner 1996; Jenkins 2004) on Twitter, two Facebook fan pages, a digital "graphic novella", a website, an event, a workshop, and an urban game. According to the concept of world gestalten (Wolf 2012: 52), people experience a storyworld through the characters in the stories, using imagination to fill in the gaps and bringing the imaginary world to life. The different storylines are interconnected and fit perfectly in the storyworld. Figure 6 presents a map of the storylines, as well as the main key points and plot points.
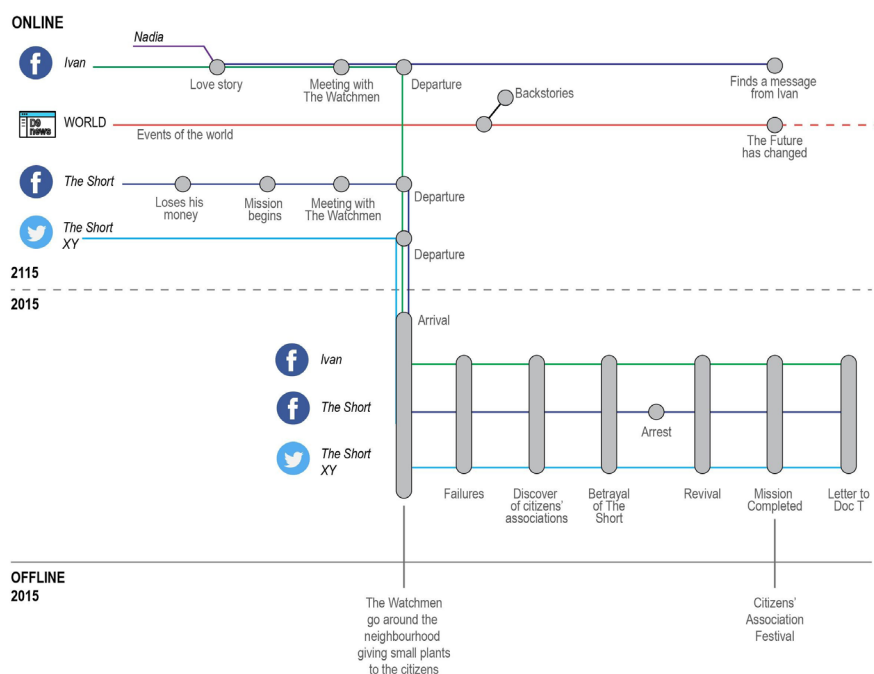

Figure 6.
Author - Simona Venditti.
Photo title - Media mix and plot points of Watchmen of the Nine.

Three storylines developed on different media are presented, in order to underline the relationships between the real (primary) world and the imaginary (secondary) world in terms of (1) partnerships with the stakeholders

and engagement of the local community online and offline, (2) visual representation and (3) relationship between reality and fiction.

Guardiani della 9 (*Watchmen of the 9*)

Author: Andrea Fossaluzza
Year: 2015
Platform: Facebook
Profile: https://www.facebook.com/guardianidella9/
Partners: Coltivando (the community garden at Politecnico di Milano, www.coltivando.polimi.it)

This spin-off focuses on the story of The Short, from his arrival at Zona 9 (in the present) to the completion of the time travel, i.e. the moment when the Watchmen understand that they are no longer able to return to 2115, but they are satisfied because they engaged the local community in concrete actions aimed at creating a sustainable environment. The Short is the narrator of the story and he publishes on Facebook his updates about the mission, which started on June 26, 2015 and finished on November 9, 2015.

In order to secure the engagement of the local community, considered as the main audience, the Facebook fanpage narrates the backstory of The Short and provides updates about the time travel. Moreover, blurring the boundaries between fiction and the real world, the fanpage promotes an event which was scheduled for real in the neighbourhood: the Citizens' Associations Festival. The narration itself was conceived as a way to engage with people from the local community, inspiring them to participate and promote the Festival themselves. The event was configured as an opportunity for the many associations present in the local area to introduce themselves and find possible collaborations. In fact, it represented an important moment for networking activities between different groups of active citizens. The Festival also had the goal of promoting the website D9News, giving participants the opportunity to play an active part in the narrative by influencing the online news with their actions and ideas. Thanks to the relationship created during the Festival between the public and the characters, the event had a high number of interactions on social media – considering the small scale of the event – (reach: 3300; 270 views and an average of 91 interactions).

In total, 51 posts were published on Facebook. The posts about events happening in the present show places that are familiar to the community of citizens, while the posts recounting past events in The Short's history

are more introspective. Six "teaser" videos are published, showing news reports from D9News channel about how the city appears in 2115. For designers, this storyline represents a way to nudge audience members to reflect more about environmental issues, and actively take part in local activities (e.g. participating in the Festival).

@Corto2115; @XY2115
Authors: Laura Ferreira, Chiara Miceli, Davide Povolo, Silvia Tremolada, Alessandro Zotta
Year: 2015
Platform: Twitter
Profile: @Corto2115; @XY2115
Partners: Coltivando (the community garden at Politecnico di Milano, www.coltivando.polimi.it)

This spin-off focuses on the background stories of two of the Watchmen as the main characters. The story genre is a modern form of the epistolary novel developed on Twitter: the team of students built an instant-messaging conversation between The Short (@Corto2115), who speaks from the present, and the assistant of the scientist who developed the mission (@XY2115), speaking from the future (Figure 7).

Stressing the properties of completeness and consistency (Wolf 2012) of the created storyworld, for this storyline the team of students was able to create a new character and to sustain narrative coherence through the visual representation. As an example of "twitterature", the students focused on the creation of a specific logos for both the main character and the new character. In fact, these two characters are expressed through the manner in which they communicate: one character's "speaking style" is characterised by a corruption of various languages, while the other character uses simple, very short sentences, resembling those in a telegram.

As for visual representation, even though this is mainly a copywriting project the team of designers decided to create new illustrations. Unlike the original visual representation (Figure 3), the new illustrations use a form that imitates 8-bit style. This deceptive contradiction, at least in visual terms, is on the contrary coherent with the narrative strand; coming from a future scenario characterised by limited resources, the transmission between the future and the present is represented using low-resolution visuals.

Figure 7.
Author - Laura Ferreira, Chiara Miceli, Davide Povolo,
Silvia Tremolada, Alessandro Zotta.
Photo title - Screenshot from the ig profiles @Corto2115; @XY2115.

Il Viaggio di Ivan (*Ivan's Journey*)
Authors: Gabriele Clemente, Rossella De Vico, Elisa Pintonello, Lorenzo Rizzoni
Year: 2016
Platform: Facebook
Profile: Il viaggio di Ivan,
https://www.facebook.com/Il-viaggio-di-Ivan-1749654475262869/
Partners: Coltivando (the community garden at Politecnico di Milano, www.coltivando.polimi.it)

Ivan's Journey is a science-fiction "graphic novella" published on Facebook. The narrative is composed of five chapters which were published on Facebook fanpage between January 28 and February 7, 2016. Chapters were published on the Facebook timeline twice a week for two weeks, as Facebook photo albums. The "graphic novella" tells the story of Ivan and his time travel from the future in order to save the life of his lover (Nadia). The story is told as a flashback from Ivan's point of view, with his innermost thoughts and feelings behind any decision and action he takes shown as notes in text balloons (Figure 8).

This story is based on Vogler's structure of the hero's journey (Vogler 1992). Ivan is overwhelmed by rage and desperation because he discovers that the time machine broke during the trip, preventing him from returning to the future. He is forced to stay in 2015, but he decides to leave a letter to his lover Nadia, in which he explains how his actions saved her. Nadia will read the letter in the future, but she will never be able to meet Ivan again.

While the narrative was unfolding on Facebook, a workshop[7] was organised and the citizens of Zona 9 were invited to attend. They were asked to draw a picture on a postcard to express their wishes for the future, focusing on the environmental issues. The cards thus designed and produced by the citizens became part of the narrative content and were included in a final video, which shows Nadia reading Ivan's letter from the past. The message then is that Ivan was able to save Nadia thanks to the citizens' help.

In this case, the borders between reality and fiction were blurred by inviting the citizens to participate in the storyline and add their own contribution to the narrative by presenting their own visions about the future.

Figure 8.
Author - Gabriele Clemente, Rossella De Vico, Elisa Pintonello,
Lorenzo Rizzoni.
Screenshot from the FB page Il Viaggio di Ivan .

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[7] "Cartoline dal futuro" ("Postcards from the Future"), 30th January 2016, Politecnico di Milano.

Final remarks

Watchmen of the Nine is a character-driven storyworld. To activate the world-building activity, the framework ideated by Pinardi and De Angeli (2006) constituted the basis for the creation of both storyworld and characters. In particular, the Chronos (Pinardi & De Angelis 2006) inspires and supports both the definition of the characters' personal growth, and the world's transformation. The case study presented in this paper is a good example of a transmedia narrative that combines entertainment with social purposes. Entering the universe of transmedia fiction projects represents for the audience a complex experience based on platforms, different types of content and the conveyed stories. The adherence to a genre allows the public to recognise and decode the references and clues that link the real world with the imaginary one, and to fine-tune their expectations. The storyworld defines, then, the constraints that both designers and prosumers (Toffler 1980) have to respect, in order to develop further storylines and to participate in grassroots initiatives: "[e]ven the implicit cultural bargain between author and reader introduced constraints on what could be thought, said, and understood in public" (Sterling 2009: 22).

In fact, some of the secondary characters who feature in the imaginary world are real people and citizens of the Zona 9 neighbourhood, and have been involved – online or offline – in the transmedia system. As underlined in the previous paragraphs, the project uses science-fiction elements and clichés (e.g. travelling in time, the time machine, the mad scientist) in order to elicit reflections about the present time by presenting a critical vision of the future. Narratives highlight the cause-and-effect relationships between the behaviour that the community has today, and changes that may arise in the future as a result of those decisions. In this way, the audience members become more aware of their environmental choices, and of the slow but progressive changes that individual behaviours can produce. This kind of perspective represents a weak signal heralding big changes in terms of cultural paradigms: after the Second World War and the atomic bomb, science-fiction stopped celebrating technology and science as advanced tools for defying nature and its laws. The positivist approach was abandoned in favour of so-called negative utopias and "sociological science fiction" (Sadoul 1973; Giovannoli 2015). Many questions and doubts arose, and the relationship with technology became pessimistic and unsettling, as the cyberpunk culture demonstrated. In our contemporary society, sustainability values are replacing technological positivism in prefiguring a possible positive future. There is still uncertainty and unrest – the heroes are still anti-heroes – but collaboration and widespread creativity, as values for the community, can make a difference.

Storyworlds can be considered as generative narrative engines, which allow for an infinite number of possible stories and are able to activate new perspectives on specific topics and contexts. In the design field, both storytelling practice and world-building activity can be seen as ways to enrich the design practice, giving the designer tools for the expression of ideas and creative solutions (storytelling) that can be set within a constructed world (world-making). The audience can immerse itself and participate in the meaning-making process, becoming part of the stakeholder system. In fact, world-building activity as a design practice can lead to the creation of narrative spaces that are able to unlock the potential of people and contexts. On the one hand, designers can create storyworlds for envisioning possible real-life worlds, using tools from the storytelling practice. On the other hand, constructed worlds are consistent with strategic goals, and the world itself enacts a value system, which should be meaningful and accepted by the target audience. In this way, people take part in the constructed worlds and contribute to developing a new glimpse of a situation through the use of tactics that encourage audiences to interact with the story.

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