

THE LIVES WE DREAM AND DO NOT REALIZE

The Story Grid Mission Statement

SHAWN COYNE



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY VICTOR CASTRO

"Pray for the dead, fight like hell for the living."

—Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, 1837–1930

The Boxer

New York, New York, September 19, 2024

4:59 a.m

In the penultimate minute of the darkest hour just before dawn, I found myself writing this:

*If I were offered the following deal:
All of the assets I've created
will be liquidated and allocated to my
surviving wife so that our children:*

- 1. Will be able to finish college
without having to take on debt and*
- 2. Have some money left over to get
them started in their lives,
meaning
they will have enough to be able
to find gainful employment or start
a small business and someday
afford to buy a house and start a
family of their own*

In exchange for:

My life...

*At this moment, I would make that
trade.*

Rereading those sad words, I now sit wondering why I felt that way.

I take comfort in the probability that Arthur Miller must have felt similarly when he wrote *Death of a Salesman*, which presaged the even more tragic and absurd *The Crucible*. We both fell into a disturbing liminality, regardless of how we got there.

I realize my confession is about wanting to return to wherever I came from. If I were Sigmund Freud, I'd call it that death wish as a resisting of the demands of the future. But it's paradoxically bound to another need.

This is the need to carry on, persisting against the past, as represented by my desire to leave a sustaining legacy for my family. And

just like Willy Loman and no doubt his creator, Arthur Miller, late at night, my remembrances of past travails and projections of future tribulations swirl within. I grow ever wearier of the incessant internal jabbering.

Will it never cease?

The inner war is the assault of would haves, could haves, and should haves—a simultaneous longing for those painful internal tormenting fires to burn out but a knowing that their secession would be an abandonment of our purposeful calling within. So, like pugilists at rest, we look toward the heavens and steel ourselves for another round with our internal and external foes.



A bronze statue, a Hellenistic Greek original circa 330 to 50 BCE, of unknown origin resides at Palazzo Massimo alle Terme. It depicts an ancient boxer in between bouts. It is known as an example of the movement away from idealized depictions of the body and toward emotional and psychological realism.

What does it mean when a society defines a person as worth more dead than alive? That's absurd. Isn't it?

There must be other kinds of legacies than simply the objective quantitative means of purchasing stuff to pass on to one's heirs.

What of those legacies?

The warm feelings, thoughtful care, and demonstrative expressions of wanting what's best for others?

Shouldn't those legacies be celebrated and passed on with more vigor and emphasis than indexical bank liquidations and asset transfers?

Obviously, yes.

The loss my family would have to confront upon my sudden physical absence would be catastrophic. No amount of money could or would assuage it. I'm certainly more than the sum of my purchasing power.

It occurs to me now that those dark thoughts were not really indicative of my desire to quit. Instead, they were about changing course, getting back in the ring to become something and someone different from who I am now. The dark depths opened up for me as the means to realize I've hit a crossroads, that there is more to me and my work than just the fruits of the labor and the contemplation of its justification.

Far more.

And it's a weird crossroad because it's not about me anymore.

It's about **you**.

II

Ten Years Gone

New York, New York, September 19, 2014
11:54 p.m

I'm alone in a windowless back room of an office building on New York's Vandam Street, just north of the Holland Tunnel, when I upload my first blog post to www.storygrid.com.

I built the website by myself, from scratch.

I resolved to do so after reading a book. I'd just turned fifty years old, and the old dog was curious about these new tricks. After finding the book compelling, I enrolled in the author's online course to better understand the practicalities of communicating with

strangers on the internet's brave, relatively new World Wide Web.

Lastly, I followed the step-by-step procedure he—a stranger who lived in Lynchburg, Virginia—instructed me to follow to effectively announce my grandiose intention to teach the world how to tell better stories with clarity and conviction.

I can't explain why *I*, a grizzled book publishing veteran with extensive marketing and publishing experience launching bestselling projects, put my faith in someone I'd never met. The inescapable truth was that I needed a mentor to help me best present my life's work directly to a not yet known—and very possibly marginal—audience. Turn and face the strange. What I can describe is a weird intuition that whoever this guy was, following him was my best bad choice.

The truth was, even at this late stage of life, I didn't know who I was. So, naturally, I was unsure of how to present whatever I thought I could be in this alien environment. Due to a series of spectacularly incendiary (innovative but risky) decisions over my then twenty-four-year publishing career, I now sat in the aforementioned small windowless fortress of solitude running a one-man literary agency.

I rented the converted closet from a colleague who'd taken pity on me. She'd continue to do so as long as I continued to hand over \$1,235.00 a month. For New York real estate, it was more than a fair deal.

Inside my bubble, I made a nice, prosperous living; to characterize it otherwise would be facetious, but I knew I was squandering my potential. The money was fine, but I wanted more out of my fourteen-hour working days than that.

You see, I'd been lied to unintentionally (and intentionally) innumerable times about all manner of personal, professional, and existential matters by caring (and uncaring) people in the world I'd chosen to live in. Hence, my eventual barricading of myself on Vandam, metaphorically living alone, alienated in a book-publishing version of a *van down by the river*.

"His future is behind him," is how a former mentor would have described me back then. Ever the mercurial fighter of status quo authority, I set out to prove him wrong. Not that he or any other of my former colleagues were paying attention to my self-imposed exile. They had their own shit to contend with, and I was, in all likelihood, one of the furthest things from their minds. But as we all need projections of antagonism to spur us on, my tyrannical former boss fit the bill.

The core of my life's work had yet to be publicly

presented. I had in mind the scientific construction of a narrative theory that was "not magical" but also "not formulaic," rather Platonic and formally derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*.

The truth was that few in my coterie—the New York and International Literary Circles—were interested in it. Though few, if any, had read Aristotle, they thought it was an impossible quixotic dream. And in their estimation, encouraging such a pursuit would be ill-advised. Better to keep my head down and turn the best-seller crank as best I could like the rest of them.

When I began to explain my propositions, I was invariably met with dismissive variations of that old saw, "Everyone knows storytelling is subjective." It was as if they'd all received the same software program and would not critically investigate the factory settings' specious assumptions. I knew because I'd been programmed by the same one in my "higher education" training. What I'd been told about storytelling rang absolutely false to me. Why? Because of the axiomatic paradoxical assumption that it was both unscientific noncausal "subjective opinion," code words for meaninglessness, and historically causal of virtuous and perverse behavior, meaningful "good and bad narratives"—absurd.

This idealized refrain—which cryptically separates the population

into those born with an innate ability to tell causal stories and those who weren't—is still one of the dominant misconceptions of our time. Most people cling to its veracity as strongly as nihilists cling to absurdity. Often, those nihilist/absurdist clingers are one and the same. They speak of "controlling the narrative," as only the innate storytellers, the "special, chosen ones among the ignorant hordes," can do. This notion goes back to Plato's *Republic* and his proposition that storytelling should be in the hands

of philosopher kings, not persuasive propagandists. However, that's a can of worms best left for another investigation.

Storytelling is a scale-invariant universal. And all observers show and tell stories.

This historical and contemporary

reality is inescapable—the misunderstanding of storytelling not as an integral scientific, spiritual, and philosophical practice but as a manipulative tool to use against the environment and the suckers who can't figure out who, how, or why they're being played. Its evidencing is so disturbing that it brings me to despair. Hence, my not-infrequent late-night musings about throwing in the proverbial towel and playing along with that mischaracterization for my own private fame and fortune. Why not just turn that bestseller crank and chuck the narrative theory stuff?

Thus, when at last deciding to "go public" with my propositions that meld the two intellectual cultures (Story is indicative of the humanities, and Grid is indicative of science), I thought it made sense to seek help elsewhere, far away from the maddening crowd of New York publishing. And culturally, you can't get further away from Manhattan than Lynchburg, Virginia.

But would anyone hear my call and respond to my www.storygrid.com channel? Who knew?

**"The only way into truth
is through one's own
annihilation; through
dwelling a long time in
a state of extreme and
total humiliation."**

— Simone Weil

For decades, I'd read, written (as a ghost), and edited hundreds of financially and often critically successful stories people had told me, and I coauthored one bestseller myself. Eighty-six percent of the books I'd shepherded into the marketplace were profitable, compared to a less than forty percent success rate by the major traditional publishing houses.

What I'd learned that others ignored is that the complex stories, the mythic ones, are "true," meaning they resonate as absolutely consistent with real-life experience. The others—the overly chaotic or overly ordered ones, the propaganda ones—are false. They can seem true, like a very well-told lie, but are "false." Or as philosopher Harry Frankfurt technically categorized them, they're bullshit.

Simple as that.

So the time had come to fully commit to my internal editor, whom I'd come to trust as my means to distinguish authentic, earnest propositions from manipulative lies. My bullshit detector.

And my experience commercially exploiting that editor in the shadows would have to guide the next chapter of my own, teaching others how to transform their stories that were bullshit and "didn't work" into ones that weren't bullshit and "did work." If I could teach what I knew to others...more bullshit would be detected in the world, and more truth could then result.

Based on this stranger's complex story, the one he presented in his book and course, I trusted that he was telling me the truth about what he knew and did not know about how and why people chose to embark on transformational investigations. That's fancy talk for the simple act of spending time reading a blog post and then coming back to read the next one.

After all, opening oneself up to new information that can level up

understanding is the birth of transformation. If there was no new information—no alternative signaling about the gravity of storytelling—then transformational bullshit detection would be impossible. I had the information about how to build bullshit detectors. I just needed to broadcast it.

Here, I thought, was another person who openly expressed exactly what he thought was the honorable way to build

an audience, to virtuously send out signals. Plus, he did so without making promises he couldn't possibly keep. In fact, he repeatedly warned that creating a website was in no way a "get-rich-quick scheme." The long, hard slog could prove financially draining, so one should enter the arena for reasons beyond getting rich. Chances were,

you wouldn't, so you needed another motivation to drive your commitment.

I also liked the fact that I was no one special to him. My identity and reputation made no difference to what he presented. Anyone else who bought his book and took his class got the same information I did. He didn't seem to have "the real truth" hidden away, only available to big players capable of backchanneling shortcuts or writing bigger checks for the real easy, get-rich-quick stuff.

I was just as much of a rando to him as he was to me. So I handed over my \$917, and he told me with clarity and conviction what he thought it took to attract attention authentically on the internet circa 2014.

I did what he advised, and here's the first post from that fall, Friday, September 19, 2014.

"This force which you didn't ask for, and this destiny which you must accept, is also your responsibility. And if you survive it, if you don't cheat, if you don't lie, it is not only, you know, your glory, your achievement, it is almost our only hope..."

— James Baldwin

THE STORY GRID

What Good Editors Know

HOME ABOUT RESOURCES

What an Editor Does

by Shawn Coyne | 12 Comments

When a person meets me for the first time and learns that I make my living as a literary editor, the first question he invariably asks is:

"What exactly is it that you do?"

The book I'm writing, *The Story Grid: What Good Editors Know*, and this website is the long answer.

The short answer is this:

When a manuscript that intrigues me arrives, I read it. I don't take notes. I just read it. If I finish the entire book—twenty four times out of twenty-five, I'll abandon it early on as the obvious work of an amateur—I will start to think seriously about its publishability. Does it work? Will it sell?

My editorial juices have started flowing now. Already I'm beginning to analyze and break down the manuscript's narrative. My decades of experience are telling me where, more or less, the Story is working and where it is not.

So far my process is identical to that of every other professional editor. But now, at this stage, I'll do something that no one else does.

I will run the manuscript through *The Story Grid*.

I'll do this as deeply as necessary and as many times as necessary to identify the problems, to evolve suggested solutions, to hone the story and shape it and elevate it to the highest level of storytelling craft.

Over a twenty-five year career as an editor and independent publisher (as well as a writer, agent, and manager) I've used this method to bring hundreds of works from raw manuscripts into A-level published fiction and non-fiction. Books that I have edited and published have grossed more than a hundred and fifty million dollars in North America alone. But more importantly, these books have changed people. They've changed the lives of readers and they've revolutionized the lives of the writers who authored them.

The Story Grid is a tool. It's a technique. It can't make something out of nothing, but it can make something out of almost-something, out of not-quite-something, out of two-inches-away-from-something. And it can inspire a work from idea to first draft.

What *The Story Grid* offers is a way for you, the writer, to evaluate whether or not your Story is working at the level of a publishable professional. If it is, *The Story Grid* will make it even better. If it isn't, *The Story Grid* will show you where and why it isn't working—and how to fix what's broken.

What follows in the days, weeks, months and years to come is how you can become your own editor.

Help Me, Help You!

Enter your email and join THE STORY GRID editorial department. You'll get free access to all of THE STORY GRID resources as I build them, one or two posts per week dedicated to the editing process and a ton of other stuff I haven't figured out yet.

* = required field

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Archives

Select Month

III

Middle of the Road

New York, New York, September 19, 2024
6:36 a.m.

After rereading that first post, it's a good sign that I still stand by what I wrote back then.

Obviously, there's much more to say about the evolution of *The Story Grid Methodology* into *The Story Grid Universe Theory*, as anyone who has taken one of my online courses will attest. But it remains clear that learning how to edit stories and eventually understanding what editors do (transformation of internal and external narration for the better or worse) is the pathway to fixing what's broken (false) and bettering what's working (true) in one's personal and shared worldviews.

After spending the last several years discovering the convergences between coherent science, spirituality, and philosophical traditions through Story Grid's lens, I now know that storytelling is far more universal than I'd previously realized.

Before there was spirituality, philosophy, or science, there was storytelling. It is the root tautology behind existential evolution (the abstract universe), environmental ecology (the interpretive world), and cognitive development (the conceptual cosmos). All ecological parts are observers who tell stories, knowingly or unknowingly, and the whole of those parts is greater than their sum. I subscribe to physicist and philosopher John Archibald Wheeler's interpretation of quantum information theory as the emergence of the participatory universe. As such, I understand that all observable phenomena are themselves observers.

Observers make sense of the universe by following universal narrative patterns (macro phase shifts, meso threshold crossings, and micro transition bridges), again knowingly or unknowingly. My favorite coffee mug, in all likelihood, does not "know" it's undergoing transformational degradations that follow dissipative patterns, but it does so nevertheless. The power inherent in understanding these patterns is

immeasurable. Simply, stories structure all that is, was, and ever will be.

So what's all the hullabaloo? Obviously, you don't need to understand the internal combustion engine to drive a car, and you technically don't need to understand my theory to tell a story. So why am I writing this "mission statement"?

I need to publicly declare the importance of my life's work and accept that my declaration will invite ever more dismissive "everyone knows storytelling is subjective" wave-aways about my conclusions.

I won't just receive those barbs from the usual suspects—the literary professionals and the mistaken folk wisdom they spread in the culture to aspiring writers looking for magic or formulas. It's probable I'll get them from contemporary scientists, spiritualists, and philosophers whom I respect. But I also understand that chances are they won't even consider my work at all, instinctually concluding from my premise that it's unworthy of investigation. After all, there are no "Story departments" at universities or any metaphorical acknowledgment that—as water is to fish, the air is to birds, the earth is to worms—the story is to *be*. My axiomatic proposition that storytelling is akin to the abstract science described by Claude Shannon's Mathematical Theory of Communication, the intellectual substrate of the digital information age, has yet to be fully appreciated. But it's time it should be.

It's difficult, too, as the people closest to me, who aren't contributing to Story Grid but admire my passion and zeal for the project, aren't convinced I know what I speak of either. They've also been implanted with the same "everyone knows storytelling is subjective" protocol. My explanations require such an extensive survey of the collective cultural grammar from antiquity to the present day that I exhaust their patience quickly. Just as I'm probably exhausting yours now with all of my Hamlet-esque dithering.

What does any of this have to do with you?

Hopefully, once these findings are well-understood and spread, no one will be thinking about me and my life's work. The recurring narrative patterns are so self-evident that any claim I "invented" them is ridiculous. If anyone codified the molten core of my theory, it was a guy who lived twenty-five hundred years ago—Aristotle in his *Poetics*. All I've done is clarify the essence of his understanding into actionable steps and choices one can use to make sense of the world.

But make no mistake, his and my findings require an educational reconfiguration. We need to stop teaching people how to "write" convincing arguments and begin to teach them how to tell and perform complex, mythic stories. In other words, we need to teach people how to "author."

I know the long-term effects of this return to Aristotle's four-causal framework and conformity theory will be well worth it, but the short-term turbulence we'll need to weather—the inevitable resistance to its adoption—is not insignificant.

To tell better stories—from the micro bottom to the meso middle, up to the macro top, and through the meta whole—we'll need to add another layer to our pedagogy and upturn the tables of what we earnestly believed was the way forward before.

IV

Changes

Nashville, Tennessee, November 7, 2024

9:18 a.m.

The only way to level up physically, psychologically, metaphysically, and behaviorally as an artist (another word for a creative being, i.e., you) is to turn and face the strange. We must undergo a painful personal four-part transformation. And the only way to leave a compelling, cathartic, meaningful, and lasting legacy is to express those four painful life-changing revelations by telling a mythic story that's "not about

you" but about "what's in you."

Why?

Because what's in you is also in me, and your cousin Larry, and your stepsister Phyllis, and any being with the ability to make choices, for that matter. We share that dynamic core stuff, and the only way through this difficult life is by knowing and understanding in the depths of ourselves that we are not alone. Everyone is torn asunder by paradox. No one is immune to the polarities of experience.

Seriously.

What's required of us all is to tell a complex story by acting out and authoring a mythic one.

What's a mythic story? It's one that is more true than the quotidian and mind-numbingly boring reality of everyday

existence. It's a synoptic integration of the big moments of one's life distilled into a seamless sequence of escalatingly meaningful happenstance. It's the kind of story that we hear, read, watch, whatever, and our jaws drop, awestruck at the authenticity of the translation of someone's obvious insight into the human condition. We don't question that the author was telling us their honest-to-God truth. The work leaves us stunned...both in pity of the poor protagonist who suffered through the events and fearful of our falling into the same vortex. We are purged of emotion. That's what Aristotle meant by catharsis. Aristotle's father was a doctor, and catharsis is a medical term that means "to purge."

It's important to note that a mythic story doesn't mean that you'll "like it." There are more mythic stories to tell than we can even begin to imagine. Some of them will speak to you. Some of them won't. But what they all have in common is that you can't help but finish them to find out what happens. How did the story resolve itself? If you can write a mythic story, you will find an audience. And of that audience, many of them will reach catharsis. They will be released from feeling alone. They will bind to

**"The truth does not change
according to our ability
to stomach it."**

— Flannery O'Connor

you and be thankful for your authorial authenticity.

This is what Story Grid is all about.

To tell and author such a story requires metaphorically reaching down into ourselves and finding the profound truths and falsities of one of a series of disturbing and resonant experiences by exploring the possibility that you've misunderstood your triumphs as failures and failures as triumphs.

'Cause guess what? You have. That is the paradoxical truth in all its beauty. For all appearance of wins, there are hidden losses, and for all appearance of loss, there are hidden wins.

To author such a mythic story requires a personal mapping of universal territory. The author must map the situation they're portraying to an analogous experience in their personal history.

Without personal mapping, a story is inauthentic (that means not mythic, not truer than true), no matter how well-written or crafted. It's—excuse the expression and again, using Harry Frankfurt's technical definition—bullshit.

Mythic stories are true and require authentic expression of personal experience. Bullshit stories are false and are inauthentic expressions of non-realized experience—fake.

V

Wonderful World
Nashville, Tennessee, November 8, 2024
3:47 p.m.

Story Grid refuses to teach bullshit generation and propagation.

Instead, all true story-gridders must undergo the four storyteller transformations. For once they've crossed the final Rubicon—the holistic leap from inauthentic to authentic—they will have the power to tell and enact mythic stories worthy of their individual and our collective being.

VI

Wake Up Time
Delta Flight 3815, November 9, 2024
11:13 a.m.

Personal mapping is the deep work we all need to embrace so we can coherently share the truth as we know it in communion with the big truth as we desire it.

What big truth do we desire?

It is the continuance of all that is, was, and ever will be after we are no longer privileged to be participants in it. In other words, we want whatever experience we're all sharing and exploring together to carry on after we're gone. We want it to continue. It's meaningful and important.

Why?

Because it's heartbreaking and enlightening and compelling and

unjust and all those other qualities, quantities, and relationships we can't quite put our finger on and name. It's simply unbelievable to be able to be a part of this wonderful mess. To

get to care about others and things is divine. You obviously care or you wouldn't desire to become an author.

I can no longer soft-pedal this difficult and painful process—personal mapping of universal experience—or gloss over it.

It is absolutely necessary for the continuance of whatever this is.

Fear of financial, relational, and intellectual retribution is not justification for not standing by the truth.

We can't hide our love away anymore. We have to express it in mythic story, or the bullshit stories will devour us and destroy what's left of whatever this is. What I have in mind isn't a course, a pathway that most people are interested in. They say they are, but when it comes to actually doing the work necessary to overcome intransigent obstacles, they balk.

As Friedrich Hegel said of Immanuel Kant, "He won't get into the water until

**"Apart from Beauty,
Truth is neither good,
nor bad... Truth matters
because of beauty."**

— Alfred North Whitehead

he knows how to swim." You'll never know how to swim, of course, unless you get in the water. What's required to map personal experience onto a universal mythic pattern then is to just keep getting in the water...to keep imitating the patterns until they become your own.

Most people are really interested in reaching some idyllic utopic promised land in the future or returning to a former idyllic promised land in the past. And they're looking for minimal personal/emotional investment in that journey.

I can assure you that neither the future utopia nor past nostalgia is attainable, and anyone who says otherwise is bullshitting you. Those who sell such nonsense are either naive, duplicitous, or both. No magically chosen people are gifted storytelling as a superpower, and no formula will make you one without undergoing the four transformations. One can only follow these four transformational processes and their recurring patterns to realize one's authentic narrative and leave a legacy of truth.

No authentic transformation, no truth. Simple as that.

VII

Everything I Am Is Yours **New York, New York November 9, 2024** **through Present**

I'm not saying anything I haven't said before.

It's just more urgent now.

We are swimming in bullshit, and we need bullshit detectors to sort through the malicious flotsam and jetsam to negotiate through the real, paradoxical transcendences.

What are these transcendences? They are spectral admixtures that cannot be reduced to one or the other.

Good and evil, the physical laws of unintended consequences. All gains require losses.

Beauty and ugliness, the psychological rules of resonant dissonance. All attractions require repulsions.

Truth and falsity, the metaphysical principles of coherent conjecture. All certainties require unprovability.

Authenticity and inauthenticity, the holistic dynamics of manifest identities. All actions require performances.

What do the four transformations have to do with it? The four transformations empower higher order negotiation of the four transcendences.

Conceptually, transformation is a pretty straightforward process to understand.

Here's the macro version. Just three phase-shift steps generate the simplest behavioral complexity.

Beginning: I behave one way to get something.

Middle: An event happens as a result, which encourages (it works, and I get what I want) or discourages (it doesn't work, and I don't get what I want) my behavior and then-

End: I behave differently.

The beginning, middle, and end are the phase shifts.

Let's drill down to the meso level. Just six threshold-crossing steps generate behavioral novelty.

Origin: an originating desire to attain a goal, like authoring a story, to-

Incitement: the inciting birth of skill acquisition (deliberate practice, writing small stories, and getting feedback on them) to-

Criticality: ever more critical suffering from obstacles and failures to attain those skills (lots of failures, like so many it can feel impossible) which reach a turning point, a revelation/realization/insight in which-

Crisis: a crisis sacrifice of a tightly held previously adaptive habit must be chosen (like insisting that you don't have to think about your life to write compelling scenes) to-

Climax: the climactic death of that old way of being (you begin to map your life to your fiction) and lastly, inevitably-

Resolution: the becoming of a new form, the resolute rebirth of a fresh desire to attain a new goal (string together a sequence of scenes that become greater than the sum of their parts).

The threshold crossings are original desire, inciting birth, critical suffering, crisis sacrifice, climax death, and resolution resurrection.

The micro level consists of nine transition-bridging steps that generate complex behavioral simplicity.

Locality: Establish "where you are" in the process, your position learning about the work. Are you in the early "know-nothing" stage, the middle "know-a-little" stage, or the upper "know-a-lot" stage? Are you willing to rethink your position?

Temporality: Establish the "when you are" in the process, your momentum state doing the work. Are you flustered and want to move slower, frustrated and want to move faster, or in a Goldilocks flow-state momentum? What are you willing to do to rethink your momentum?

Modality: Establish the "how you are" in the process. Are you receptive to feedback, critical of feedback, or overwhelmed by feedback? What are you willing to do to rethink your approach to feedback?

Content: Establish the "what is in play" in the process. Are you attracted to particular kinds of material and repulsed by others? What are you willing to do to rethink your approach to what you work on?

Context: Establish the "where and when" of your process. Are you attracted to particular arenas—settings, situations, constraints—and repulsed by others? What are you willing to do to rethink your approach to the worlds you choose?

Conduct: Establish the "how it acts" in your process. Are you attracted to particular patterns of behavior and repulsed by others? What are you willing to do to rethink your assumptions about how things move and act?

Identity: Establish the "who you are" in the process. Do you define yourself as a particular stylist (literary, bare-bones, commercial, etc.)? What are you willing to do to rethink your approach to your style?

Intention: Establish the "why you are" in the process. Do you have a particular cause or no cause to communicate? What are you willing to do to rethink your approach to controlling ideas?

Significance: Establish the "what you are" in the process. Do you have a coherent world-

view to rely upon, or do you rely upon others' worldviews? What are you willing to do to rethink your approach to essences?

Transition bridges include locality, temporality, modality, content, context, conduct, identity, intention, and significance.

Knowing about the three phase shifts, the six threshold crossings, and the nine transition bridges seems enough to generate believable simulations of macro, meso, and micro transformations.

Are they enough, though?

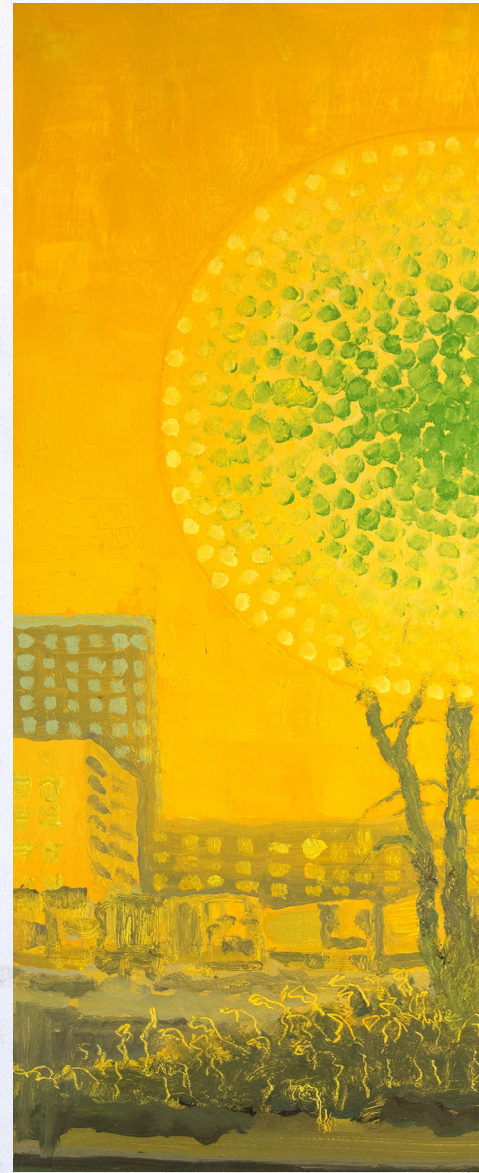
While extraordinarily helpful in identifying particular story problems, what I've described above cannot reliably convey the essence

of transformation. The nine micro transitions are akin to organization, the six thresholds are akin to the structure, and the three phases are akin to the function, but without an essence, they do not produce real change.

Huh?

When we practice transformation, changing one's behavior—growing oneself—hurts in every way imaginable: physically, psychologically, metaphysically, and especially publicly. As George Bernard Shaw wrote, "Hell is full of musical amateurs."

As someone who has spent much of my professional life in the company of storytelling amateurs, I can assure you that transforming from an amateur to an author is as difficult, if not more so, than learning an instrument.





We need to recognize that extreme difficulty and encourage our students to keep at it, especially when it begins to hurt publicly. We also need to make the process more enjoyable, less serious, and continually remind everyone that what we write when we're practicing is not precious.

Let me be more specific regarding the four transformational skills necessary to become a storytelling authority.

Physical transformation is about reading and describing how changes occur in the environment. It involves transmitting motion information with micro efficiency. It is about improving one's on-the-surface,

line-by-line sentence generation with minimum viable wordage for maximal energetic effect. The micro conveyance of locality, temporality, modality, content, context, conduct, identity, intention, and significance of a single event resides here.

Psychological transformation is about writing and explaining how change occurs in the real world. It involves meaningfully translating emotion with meso empathy. It is about improving one's beyond-the-surface conveyance of the six must-haves that connote meaningful change: (1) originating desire (2) inciting interaction (3) critical turning point (4) crisis choice (5) the climactic action (6) resolution response in a single event that can eventually

scale into a higher-order meaning as a sequence of events.

Metaphysical transformation is about editing and defining how change occurs in the ideological world. It involves representing symbolic behaviors that order commotion with macro anticipation. It embeds one's above-the-surface ultimate relative concern via beginning, middle, and ending conventions and obligatory moments (story constraints) with specific emphasis on one of the six general blueprint genres in all complex stories: (1) Horror (2) Love (3) Action (4) Status (5) Morality (6) Worldview.

Holistic transformation is about authoring and demonstrating how change occurs in real life. It involves the pragmatic realization of a new behavioral pathway the creator has authentically undergone in their personal history. It requires mapping one's personal experience as a traumatized and persistent presence in the existential universe onto the imaginal avatars at play in the author's transcendent (mythic-more real than real) story.

I realize now that the ominous feeling ten years after my launch of www.storygrid.com, the hour of darkness presaging the light, was about this final holistic transformation.

Should Story Grid insist that our students undergo this final holistic transformation before declaring them capable and powerful authors who authentically present the truth as they know it?

That is, should we insist that all Story Grid graduates become authors who write complex mythic stories and not bullshit ones?

To find out whether this Story Grid way of seeing transformation was real and reliable, I had to test it against the best stories told in science, spirituality, philosophy, and narrative theory.

Authority Song

**New York, New York November 9, 2024
through Present**

The past years since stepping away from the day-to-day operations of the company, I've synthesized my global narrative theory, **Story Grid Universe Theory**, testing its convergence with a slew of scientific, spiritual, philosophical, and storytelling frameworks. To say the work has been fruitful would be an understatement.

My goal was to align my work such that it converges with the preeminent works of contemporary and classical cognitive science, depth psychology, theology, and systems thinking, including:

John Vervaeke's
Relevance Realization
Theory.

Karl Friston's Free
Energy Principle and
Predictive Processing
/ Active Inference
Theory.

Chris Fields' quantum-information-theoretic interpretation of Friston's work, Chris Fuchs's Quantum Bayesian framework, and John Archibald Wheeler's Participatory Universe Theory.

Carl Jung's Depth Psychology and Individuation Process.

Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* / Ultimate Concern framework.

Michael Levin's Cognitive Light Cone Theory.

Claude Shannon's Information Theory.

John von Neumann's Automata Theory.

Alicia Juarrero's Complex Dynamical Systems Theory.

Norbert Wiener's Cybernetics Theory.

Newell and Simon's Search/Inference framework.

Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey* framework.

And, the inspiring work that started it all, Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Story Grid Universe Theory is a convergence argument that presupposes that there is **natural truth** (a leveled ontology) and **reality**, and that we can get closer to both by probing (a conformity epistemology) the universe, world, and cosmos with broad and deep relational exploration—finding the connections between one pattern and another. That is another way of describing what I mean by **mapping personal experience to universal patterns**.

I'm currently writing up my findings. *Mentoring the Machines*, which I'm coauthoring with John Vervaeke, is close to completion.

Once I've wrapped that project, I'll begin what I'm tentatively calling *Principia Mythica*, which will build the entire Story Grid theory and methodology from first principles.

These past few months have completely transformed the way I see the world. I'm convinced my work will aid other meaning-makers too.

What's the gist of my findings?

Fragmented thinking, as represented by the tyrannical stories told today as ultimate truths, is causing us as a collective post-modern culture to fundamentally misunderstand reality. We've lost the through-line meaningful whole and have fallen prey to incomplete particulars.

That is, the majority of scientists, spiritualists, philosophers, and storytellers mistake **parts** of manifest reality for the **integrated whole** of reality. They fall in love with their theories, doctrines, paradigms, and

**"They must be considered
strangers to the truth,
who do no more than
daydream about the nature
of truth, fashioning it
more to their own fancy
than according
to knowledge."
— Clement of Alexandria**

pragmatics and find themselves cognitively straight-jacketed. Their commitment to their particular investigative channel blinds them to other valid perspectives and undermines their innate capacity to change their minds.

Thus, we are besieged with physical reductionists, psychological dogmatists, philosophical idealists, and storytelling absurdists who vehemently insist on their certainty and fundamental unconditional correctness. Their demanding our adoption of their conclusions as sacrosanct and incontrovertible is tearing apart the civility of society. To disagree or even to question these authorities is verboten.

After exhaustive research and consideration, I've come to the following conclusions:

No single **theory of everything** can be derived from scientific investigation. Kurt Gödel and Karl Popper settled this notion quite some time ago using the very methods of science to do so.

No single **doctrine of everyone** can be derived from spiritual investigation. Carl Jung's investigation of spiritual traditions through the ages resulted in his recognition of recurring patterns across civilizations he called archetypes. These archetypes fluctuate within and without our worlds vying for our attention and manifestation. There is no single archetype but a dynamic of contradictory polarity—anima/animus or dissipation/conservation—in all systems. John Vervaeke describes these as opponent processes.

No single **paradigm of every agent** can be derived from philosophical investigation. Each agent's model of reality is uniquely theirs. No two observers "see" the same way, but that doesn't mean they're not seeing anything. There is no ideal form, no "view from nowhere," as William James and Thomas Nagel elegantly argue.

No single **behavior of every actor** can be derived from story investigation. Each actor's way of being is uniquely theirs and can only be described, explained, defined, and demonstrated as their particular procedural performance. There is no perfect set of actions, as there are no perfect actors. There can

be no perfect action because of the invariance of variance as a fundamental first principle of manifest reality.

What Story Grid Universe Theory proposes instead is that none of these three parts of experience—the physical universe, the psychological world, and the metaphysical cosmos—is more real than the others. The whole of reality emerges from their synoptic integration into a complex story that is greater than the sum of its parts, and storytelling is the way we participate in, perceive, and perform that whole.

IX

We Used to Wait

New York, New York March 17, 2026

The Story Grid Universe Theory proposes—in its implicit essence—that storytelling is not a magical gift that only a select few possess but a deeply patterned formal faculty that anyone who dedicates themselves to recognizing and practicing those patterns can master.

The core proposition remains that once an aspiring storyteller understands the universal forms of the patterns, and they can clearly signal their own particular pattern in tune with those universal forms, they have the potential to compel a reader to sense, feel, think, and become transformed. That is, they can change the way they sense things, feel about relationships, and think about ideas to become their authentic selves.

Again, I still stand by that simple complexity.

Storytelling is a deliberate skill acquisition process, not a genetic predisposition.

In other words, storytelling is learned.

And just as scientific theory, spiritual doctrine, and philosophical paradigm can be studied and understood, so can storytelling pragmatics. In fact, it is the "one practice" science, spirituality, and philosophy all have in common. Without storytelling, we wouldn't have science, spirituality, or philosophy. It's the boot-strapping process for all of the parts of the whole.

The very good news is that you don't either "have storytelling capacity" or "don't have it." The innate potential within all beings can become actualized. And—ask any scientist, spiritualist, or philosopher, who will all tell you the same thing—the way potential becomes actualized is via emergent transformation.

Just as one undergoes a transformation from a fertilized egg to a newborn being to a child and then to an adolescent, an adult, and hopefully a sage, so can one transform from an incoherent and noisy storyteller to a coherent and clear one.

You have already seen this transformational pattern in outline. Here is the more complete version and how it converges with science, spirituality, and philosophy.

I argue that transformations of our observational species (as well as all other observers in the universe) mirror Story Grid Universe Theory's three-six-nine, macro-meso-micro structure.

Here's the abstract cheat sheet, which I've adapted from the earlier narrative version.

There are three phase shifts, macro stages of a system's internality, understanding, and solving commotion—problem solving.

Complexity.

Chaos.

Order.

There are six threshold crossings, meso states of mediating between the internal and the external, knowing and managing emotion—game playing.

An originating desire to change the game.

The birth of the process to actualize the change.

The suffering of doing what's necessary to make the process a habit.

The sacrifice of other possibilities to enable the prioritization of that habit.

The death of parts of the system's former self (old habit/s) when the system enacts the new habit/s.

The resurrection as transformed systems who have become something they'd never been before (a new habit) at the

expense of what they once were (an old habit).

There are nine transition bridges, micro scales of externality, sensing, and directing motion—noise navigating.

Locality: Where is the motion?

Temporality: When is the motion?

Modality: How is the motion?

Content: What kind of agent is in motion?

Context: What kind of arena surrounds that agent in motion?

Conduct: How does that agent typically move and act within that arena?

Identity: Who is the motion—what archetypal "who" is being enacted?

Intention: Why is the motion—what archetypal aim is driving it?

Significance: What does this motion ultimately mean—what archetypal pattern does it realize?

I call the macro structure above-the-surface. Scientists, spiritualists, and philosophers have other names for it. The scientist refers to the macro realm as cognition. The spiritualist calls it the transcendent cosmos. And the philosopher calls it

conditional reasoning. Everyday people call it thinking and problem-solving.

I call the meso structure beyond-the-surface. Scientists, spiritualists, and philosophers have other names for it. The scientist refers to the meso realm as consciousness. The spiritualist calls it the experiential world. And the philosopher calls it rationality. Everyday people call it feeling and game-playing.

I call the micro structure on-the-surface. Scientists, spiritualists, and philosophers have other names for it. The scientist refers to the micro realm as sentience. The spiritualist calls it the existential universe. And the philosopher calls it intelligence. Everyday people call it sensing and noise-navigating.

Just to tie off this bundle of concepts, Story Grid Universe Theory proposes that the three meta-parts, which we can think of as macro philosophy, meso spirituality, and micro science, are

**"I am not cruel —
only truthful."
— Sylvia Plath**

consistent and convergent with my concepts of above-the-surface, beyond-the-surface, and on-the-surface storytelling.

The kicker, as you may have already surmised, is that a whole story is the simultaneous distillation and synthesis (synoptic integration) of these three parts into a whole greater than their sum. It's the higher order union of simple complexity, medial novel co-creation, and complex simplicity.

Previously I've labeled this analytical realm over-neath-the-surface, but I'm leaning toward changing that name to **through-the-surfaces**. This final cause can be understood as reality writ large, or shared reality. Shared reality is what actually happens that is observed as a manifest event by multiple observers.

My coauthor John Vervaeke describes my on-the-surface plane of reality as participatory knowing, beyond-the-surface as perspectival knowing, above-the-surface as propositional knowing, and my through-the-surfaces as procedural knowing.

Thus, we need to understand the totality of experience (the individual and the whole) in terms of a whole made up of three parts (these are the levels of ontology), and not as a single part (that is an individual epistemology) that is the whole. This is what I mean by mistaking a part (one epistemology) of the whole for the whole (the path integral of all epistemologies that comprise ontology).

What do all of these egg-headly abstractions have to do with Story Grid and my dark night of the soul?

A lot.

You see, another way of thinking about these big concepts is:

Science is about reading the physical universe, or indexing observations, making sense of good and evil, and the axiom "All gains require loss."

Spirituality is about writing the psychological world, framing measurements, making meaning of beauty and ugliness, and the axiom "All attractions require repulsions."

Philosophy is about editing the metaphysical cosmos, modeling predictions, making understanding of truth and falsity, and the axiom "All

certainities require unprovability (faith)."

Storytelling is about authoring the manifest reality, shaping transformations, making behavior of authenticity and inauthenticity, and the axiom "All actions require performances."

Let's circle back to what I wrote earlier about those four kinds of transformations a cohesive storyteller needs to undergo to discover, explore, operationalize, and express how to show someone else what they've been through.

Physical transformation is about reading and describing how changes occur in the environment. It involves transmitting motion information with micro efficiency. It is about improving one's on-the-surface, line-by-line sentence generation with minimum viable wordage for maximal energetic effect. The micro conveyance of locality, temporality, modality, content, context, conduct, identity, intention, and significance of a single event resides here.

Psychological transformation is about writing and explaining how change occurs in the real world. It involves meaningfully translating emotion with meso empathy. It is about improving one's beyond-the-surface conveyance of the six must-haves that connote meaningful change: (1) originating desire (2) inciting interaction (3) critical turning point (4) crisis choice (5) the climactic action (6) resolution response in a single event (and, by extension, a sequence of events).

Metaphysical transformation is about editing and defining how change occurs in the ideological world. It involves representing symbolic behaviors that order commotion with macro anticipation. It embeds one's above-the-surface ultimate relative concern via beginning, middle, and ending conventions and obligatory moments with specific emphasis on one of the six general blueprint genres in all complex stories: (1) Horror (2) Love (3) Action (4) Status (5) Morality (6) Worldview.

Holistic transformation is about authoring and demonstrating how change occurs

in real life. It involves the pragmatic realization of a new behavioral pathway the creator has authentically undergone in their personal history. It requires mapping one's personal experience as a traumatized and persistent presence in the existential universe onto the imaginal avatars at play in the author's transcendent (mythic-more real than real) story.

So this kind of pragmatic transformation can be thought of in mythic storytelling terms because mythic storytelling is about authoring the manifestation of reality and shaping transformations-behavior-making.

In other words, the Story Grid Way is not an outlier but a through-the-surfaces integration of science, spirituality, philosophy, and storytelling—a way of seeing reality that is commensurate with, and capable of coordinating, all of their siloed insights.

X

I Believe in You
September 19, 2024, 8:57 a.m.

Ten years after its founding, Story Grid released a novel called *The Shithead*, the proof of concept for *The Story Grid Methodology*. A ten-year project requiring multiple cycles of transformation from both the author and the editorial mentor, the results are emblematic of a **reader-to-writer-to-editor-to-author transformation**. In Story Grid Universe terms, that means he traversed the full three phase shifts, six thresholds, and nine transition bridges, culminating in a through-the-surfaces, holistic transformation.

I advise anyone interested in *The Story Grid* to read that novel. If you don't find it has compelling narrative drive, complex emotional breadth and depth, or a cathartic resolution, you will likely not buy into my four-transformation proposal.

That doesn't mean you must think it's the best story ever written or an irresistible bestseller. Those are not Story Grid indexes. As stated earlier, mythic stories are concrete examples of laser-focused universal human behavioral patterns. One person's difficulty recognizing a particular pattern may not be another's. So one person's definition of a masterwork is

another's "I think it was good but not as good as X, Y, or Z." This phenomenon is simply because the paradox at the story's center isn't something that confounds you personally. In this way, and only this way, is storytelling subjective.

What's essential, though, is to recognize the craft and the care the author has embedded in the narrative. If you don't think the author truly cared about what they were writing and authentically pursued a clear vision for the story's intended core audience—which, again, you may not be a part of—the process they used to create the story will likely not resonate with you.

You just have to recognize the story's singularity as a clear expression of the singular author's vision. The bottom line is what I call the **"Category of One"** feature. Is there any other book like it? Or is it uniquely the work of the author? Is the author's voice singular, or is it generic?

The critical litmus test is simple. Did you find yourself compelled to read the whole thing? If you did, that would mean you spent at least four hours of your life, depending upon how quickly you read, caring about the plight of an imaginary person. That is meaningful.

In fact, it's the core of meaning itself: caring about another being and wishing them the best or the worst, as the case may be. As Aristotle would say, those who can induce pity and fear for imaginary beings are poets. Spending four hours thinking about someone else, even someone who does not physically exist, is life-changing.

**"A lie is profanity.
A lie is the worst
thing in the world.
Art is the ability
to tell the truth."**

— Richard Pryor

The Shithead is a novel that works on all three communication levels (Story Grid's **on-the-surface**, **beyond-the-surface**, and **above-the-surface**) and pays off as a dynamic whole greater than the sum of its three parts. This is what I call **through-the-surfaces** communication, a unique totality of experience. To tie these concepts back to our four transformations:

On-the-surface concerns **physical transformation**, a sense of motion.

Beyond-the-surface concerns **psychological transformation**, a meaningful emotion.

Above-the-surface concerns **metaphysical transformation**, an insightful commotion.

Through-the-surfaces concerns **holistic transformation**, a coherent promotion.

With time, reflection, and open intellectual curiosity, readers will eventually discover precisely what I mean by all of that. And with time, *The Shithead* will be one of those books, like *The War of Art*, that will bind strangers together in a shared worldview.

Even though a lot of people don't appreciate stories like *The Shithead* as I do, that's okay. Every mythic story isn't for everyone. But I care so deeply about the existential necessity of generating mythic complex storytelling that I will spend the rest of my professional life helping aspiring storytellers write more categories-of-one books like it. Their stories will capture the hardship, humor, and gravity of their particular ultimate concern. No one else could have written *The Shithead* but the author.

Anyway, what's important about the novel isn't just that it is our proof of concept.

It's the identity of the author.

The author is the same guy who, ten years ago, charged me 917 dollars to learn how to start the website www.storygrid.com. He was the stranger I'd put my faith in to tell me the truth about how to start Story Grid. And in turn, he put his faith in me to teach him how to write a meaningful and compelling novel. Let me explain.

Nine months after I launched www.storygrid.com, I got an email from Tim Grahl, the author of *Your First 1,000 Copies*, the book I read in the summer of 2014 that encouraged me to launch a website dedicated to my theories. What I appreciated about that book was the specificity Grahl presented to actualize editor Kevin Kelly's seminal "1,000 True Fans" philosophy. Kelly is an influential and prophetic figure in digital publishing and commerce. He proselytized the long-tail marketplace as the future for individual intellectual property owners since the 1980s. As one of the beneficiaries of the long tail, he was absolutely correct.

According to his email, Grahl confessed that book marketing was his shadow career. What he really wanted to do was write novels. He explained that he had tried every "learn how to write" method, but none had transformed his prose. No matter how intently he followed writing advice, he couldn't write compelling fiction. He'd now read *The Story Grid* and thought that, at last, he'd found a way to reach his ambitions. But more importantly to me, he felt his idea could simultaneously expand *The Story Grid*'s audience. Would I be willing to speak with him for half an hour?

Here's the thing. By the time Grahl emailed me, I'd sold close to five thousand copies of *The Story Grid* in just a few months, a very good start. As a result, I received many emails from people who read the book and wanted me to be their mentor. I begged off. At that point in my career, I'd had at least four experiences working with writers who could craft compelling sentences but couldn't tell a story with any facility. They falsely assumed that the storytelling part was an add-on to fluid line-by-line writing. But when push came to shove, they couldn't get over that whole "everyone knows that writing is subjective" meme they'd assumed to be accurate but never really examined. Ultimately, my arguments failed to convince them otherwise, and they abandoned their projects.

I didn't know what Mark Twain meant when he said, "Don't try and teach a pig to sing. It's a waste of your time, and it annoys the pig," until after

those painful experiences. The thing is, though, we aren't pigs. We are human beings who, with time, can understand transcending ourselves via transformation. I'm betting on it.

Grahl was the only emailer who offered to help me in exchange for helping him—a reciprocal partnership. All the others simply focused on their desires and how I could help fulfill them, as if all editors are on Earth to serve writers. The other emailers asking for my help weren't interested in expanding the audience for *The Story Grid*, just their own.

And, of course, I knew Grahl as the guy I'd somewhat anonymously paid to help me launch the site, however tangentially.

We had our call, and his offer was simple. If I agreed to speak with him for an hour a week about writing, and if I would read his stuff that I would assign him to write and give him feedback about making it work, he'd create a podcast called *The Story Grid Podcast*. I would own and control the podcast. He'd do all the technical work. All I had to do in exchange was incrementally teach him how to write a novel.

I agreed under one condition. He had to do exactly what I told him to do. I was not interested if he half-assed the work or if he argued with me about concepts it had taken me twenty-plus years to formalize.

We launched the podcast in the fall of 2015, and it quickly became popular and a must-listen in aspirational writing circles.

The sales of *The Story Grid* book climbed. However, I discovered that while Tim understood the concepts in *The Story Grid*, he had trouble executing them. To put it bluntly, and I often did, he couldn't write coherent sentences. They were grammatically and syntactically "correct," but reading his work required tremendous energy. They were so dull and generic it was excruciating to get through them.

Evaluating it was painstaking, and I found myself writing more commentary about his work than the work itself. He just wasn't getting better.

Not a good sign.

But I'd made him a promise. I'd agreed to do my best to teach him how to write

compelling stories people would read and tell their friends about. I arrogantly didn't think doing that would be so difficult.

Boy, was I wrong. What I thought wouldn't take longer than a couple of years took a decade. The good news is that we captured everything we learned about teaching storytelling, and we continue to improve the process. What took Grahl ten years we estimate will take other aspiring authors three and a half. Maybe eventually less. We're still working on it!

You see, I had no intention of transforming my life's work in the "marketing" process of selling it, but it soon became apparent that I'd have to.

My top-down thirty-thousand-foot viewpoint—while sensible, reasonable, and coherent as an analytical tool for those who desired to become professional editors—was not all that effective for aspiring writers.

And if the editor cannot explain and mentor the writer from a "nonworking story" to a "working story" with grace and a clear, proven pathway for success, then editor/writer relationships are bound to remain fragmented and mercurial. After all, if the editor couldn't understand the writer's experience, and the writer couldn't understand what the editor was asking them to do—like two caring adults who spoke different languages but wished to help one another—they'd never truthfully integrate into a cooperative, coherent whole.

I was used to receiving manuscripts that were "close to working" or unsalvageable but well-written. Still, the writers who'd made it to my inbox certainly knew basic scene-writing skills. Some of their scenes didn't work, but many of them did.

What was troubling was that I wrote *The Story Grid* to present my methodology not just as an editing tool but as a reverse-engineering tool. In other words, I believed it could empower writers to transform a juicy narrative idea into a working story. Once they understood story structure—the recurring patterns of real intelligibility—they'd be set, I naively proposed.

I know now there is a vertigo-inducing chasm, a significant and vital difference

between being a "writer" and a "story-teller." It's like standing on a ledge and wanting to reach another higher level that seems impossibly far away. The first three transformations we teach at Story Grid (the on-the-surface, beyond-the-surface, and above-the-surface) get you to the edge of the ledge, but the only way to make it to the higher level is through-the-surfaces. And while I can easily tell you what to do to get there—mapping your personal story patterns to the universal story patterns—only you can make it happen. It's the throughline meta-threshold. And the only way across it is to take a running start, leaping, falling, getting back up and doing it again. And again and again, until you make it. You will make it. And when you do, you'll know what I mean about bullshit stories and mythic authentic ones.

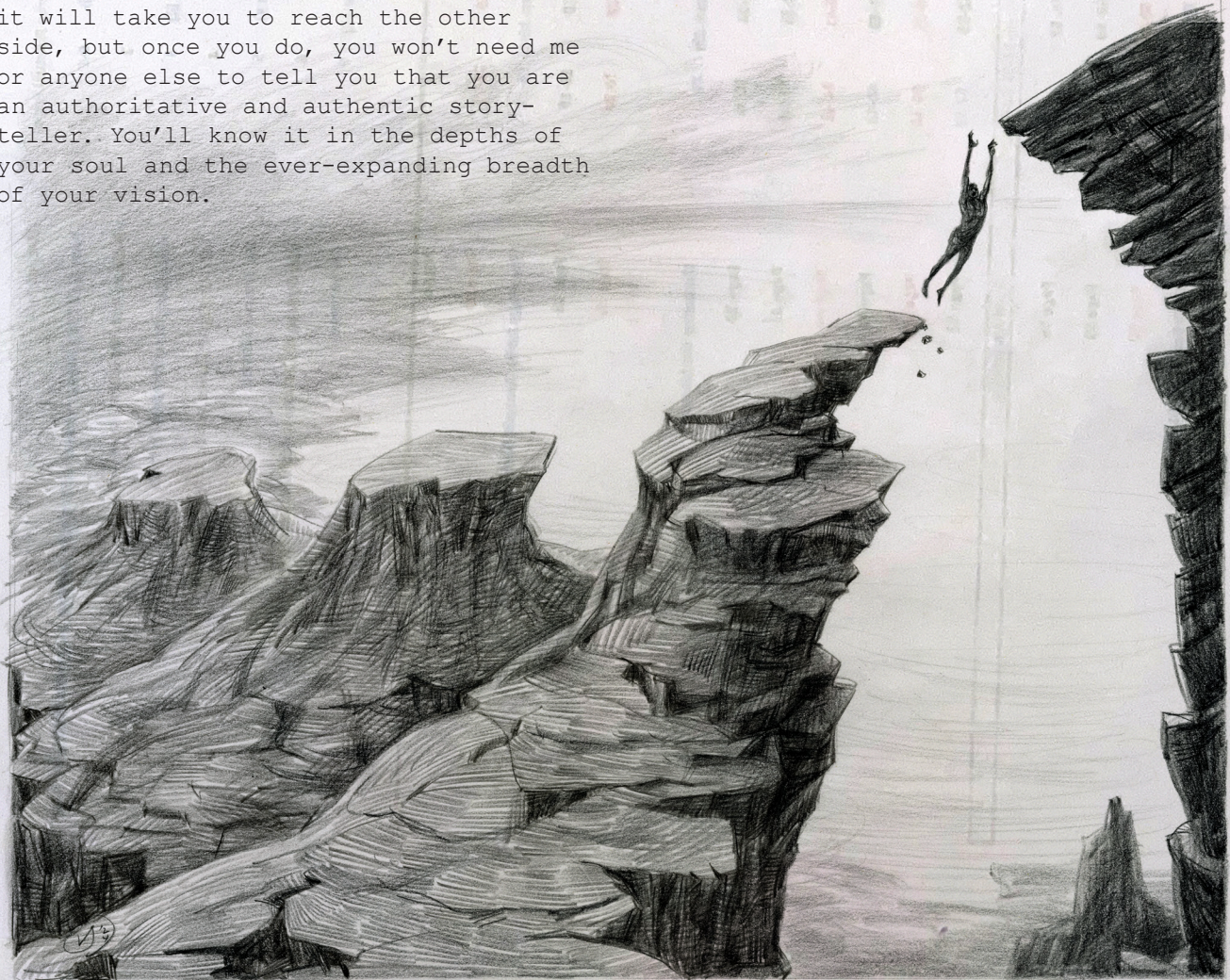
Again, you'll inevitably fall, and you'll have to dust yourself off and climb back up the mountain to try again and...fall again. Who knows how many leaps it will take you to reach the other side, but once you do, you won't need me or anyone else to tell you that you are an authoritative and authentic storyteller. You'll know it in the depths of your soul and the ever-expanding breadth of your vision.

This is the **holistic transformation**, the threshold of thresholds. We who care about communicating truth know it is the one you must cross to attain meaningful commercial success. We want that for you, and we will continue to pursue the best practices that empower you to seize it yourself.

Now that I know the differences between readers, writers, editors, and authors, it is clear that our world does not need more verbiage. It requires more authoritative and authentic storytellers.

To be a complex storyteller certainly relies upon the reader, writer, and editor skill sets. However, having those three as separate truncated operations is insufficient to become a complex, path-integrated storyteller.

Faith and empathy are required to make the final holistic transformation. Faith and empathy for oneself first and then extending that faith and empathy to fictional avatars via mapping a personal experience onto a contrived scenario.



Let's unpack this idea a bit more.

A skilled writer can make a compelling argument and often convince an audience that they have a unique and "special/more enlightened" worldview. They are, in essence, "better" or more attuned and sensitive than the reader, that their writerly point of view is "right," and the reader—until they've been enlightened by the brilliant presentation of the writer—is "wrong."

These writers wish to be placed on a pedestal and considered magical "artists" who can transport readers to other worlds and show and tell them things they, the reader, could never have imagined.

These writers are not so interested in conveying a deep, meaningful human experience as they are in presenting themselves as "above the fray" with a "god-like" vision that can see through human comedy and tragedy. They are the knowers. And their readers are the not-know-ers.

These writers are above it all and can enlighten only those with the intellectual or visceral capacity to appreciate their genius—their subjects. Do you see how the whole "storytelling is just subjective" proposition we were taught in school contemptuously bottoms out? It's a contempt for the reader as a sentient, conscious, cognitive, and creative being. They are simply the "consumer" of the writer's magic.

It's been my experience that these writers, once they've made their mark, resist recognizing the meaning of recurring multifaceted universal/worldly/cosmological patterns. Instead, they mistake one part of that trinity—the physical universe, the psychological world, or the metaphysical cosmos—for the whole of it. And then they mine that one idea story after story, changing the characters' names and places but generally telling the same story repeatedly.

They don't grow. They stay the same.

They choose to do so because they are interested in something other than self-exploration as a means of expression. They're more interested in self-expression as a means to make an impression. To be a "#1 Bestseller" and be seen as an important figure in the culture by that designation. To be recognized as better than your average bear. And to get rich, too!

And we readers are the ones they are interested in impressing, not as individuals seeking a resolution to an unsolvable problem but as a mass of consumers who run out and buy their bullshit the second it launches on amazon.com!

We don't need any more of those kinds of writers. All we learn from them is how much we aren't like them.

Story Grid requires writers to grow up and become **mythic storytellers** who remind us that we all face difficult choices, and that there is no winning without loss or loss without win.

So what is a story?

It begins with an originating desire.

Whose desire?

The storyteller's desire.

The storyteller's desire for what?

This is the crux of what I'm getting at.

Why are you investing your energy to transform from an aspiring writer into an author? Are you doing so to:

Win an argument?

Prove yourself worthy of attention?

Show off your way with words?

Become the next J.K. Rowling?

Etc.?

These desires will not reveal the truth of what's inside you. And it's my contention that they are **shadow desires**. Writers tell themselves that these are why they want to tell a story.

But the seasoned author knows truth is a much more powerful goal state than "instant bestseller."

The deep desire to write a short story, a novel, or a nonfiction is an internal yearning to share an understanding of a traumatic/euphoric personal experience. And this deep desire is the substance of the fourth holistic transformation.

Here's the thing about traumatic and euphoric experiences. They mirror one another and are inseparable. To experience trauma and to "move forward" despite the allure of surrendering to despair is a triumphant achievement that aids the person who has come through the other side, wounded and scarred but still standing.

To survive a clash with mendacity or contemplation of death is life-altering.

The value attained is immeasurable. Trauma comes in all sizes and kinds of packages, and thus, so do the variational values associated with it.

Euphoria, oddly, can prove traumatic too.

Why does achieving a hard-fought goal and standing at the pinnacle of success prove fleeting? I'd suggest it's because the "winner" has pulled away from the rest of the pack and finds themselves alienated from the ones she's left behind. To win then requires losing connection to friends, family, and tribe. It's not what it's cracked up to be.

Being the center of attention is undoubtedly exciting, but the dark side is that you find yourself alone. Just as trauma alienates the experiencer, threatening their life, their emotional stability, and their sanity, so does euphoria alienate. It's just that the trauma survivor has experienced the direct threat while the euphoric performer experiences a veiled threat.

What's my point here?

The storyteller wishes to explore the trauma and euphoria of their own personal experience, to mine the sorrow or ecstasy of that memory via simulation of another being undergoing a parallel experience. This is an example of what psychologists call the **Solomon effect**, which empowers problem-solving and meaning-making via empathetic dissociation. It's far easier to discover the paradoxical truth of experience if one takes on another's problem, and if the other is an imaginary presence, all the better. Seeing a trauma or triumph from a wider angle proves an effective strategy to find a meaningful resolution. That is, by using the Solomon effect via imaginal pretense, we can take a misunderstanding in our life and transform it into understanding.

This is precisely what Tim Grahl accomplished in his novel *The Shithead*. And I'm pleased to report that many others in our programs are doing the same thing. It's important to note that the works crafted by these other storytellers are absolutely different

experiences than Grahl's. They use different genres, and one would be hard-pressed to find their similarities without understanding *The Story Grid Universe Theory* and methodology. What they all are, though, are categories of one.

Unlike a propagandist writer, a story-teller doesn't make an argument. They do not persuade an audience that they are more enlightened. They don't create an artful proof. They generate **novel truth**.

They show and tell the reader that they are not alone,

that the world is very discomfoting, and that the slings and arrows of circumstance befall us all. There is no privileged vantage point that only a select few can reach where suffering, sacrifice, and death do not touch.

The result of this showing and telling is what Aristotle was getting at with his concept of **catharsis**. Bringing an audience to catharsis brings them to a shared realization of transcendent truth. Being an authentic storyteller capable of poetics and myth-making is all about truth.

Thus, I contend that "writer artists" who narrate from lofty "check me out" perches are, in essence, bullshitters. That doesn't mean they aren't sincere; many, if not most, are heartfelt. They just don't know any better. They have accepted an incorrect paradigm. If I've learned one lesson, it's that the way writing is taught damages the pupil's ability to care for their audience. Thus, the audience is regarded as something to exploit rather than encourage.

As absurd as it sounds, most writers don't consider their audience as other human beings but as a number. They just want a big number, as they believe the more significant the sales of their works, the more they are "measured" as artists. There is far more to life than quantity, namely relationship, quality, and reality.

To desire to be seen, known, and valued; the dream of becoming someone worthy of admiration; to navigate the obstacles and opportunities present; to play finite and infinite games with grace and care for your fellow living and

"Everything is copy."

— Nora Ephron

nonliving beings; to problem-solve best bad choices and resolve irreconcilable goods; to perform and behave authentically—these are the truths we at Story Grid endeavor to inch closer to.

Not sales numbers and social currency at all cost. We're not for everyone, and we recognize that as our strength, not our weakness.

"Art invites us to take the journey beyond price, beyond costs into bearing witness to the world as it is and as it should be."

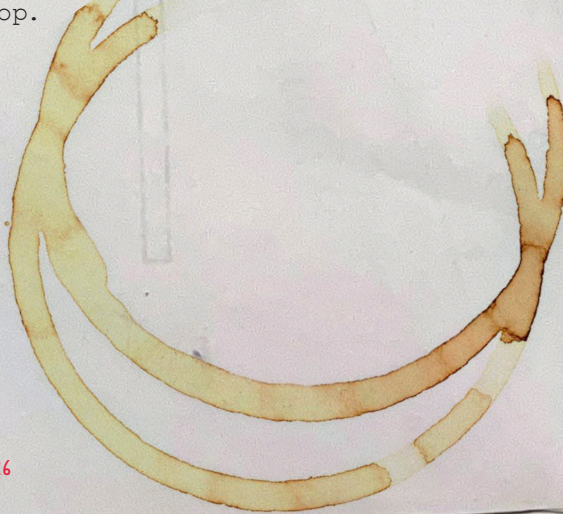
— Toni Morrison

The beauty is that if we get close to attaining our meaningful goals, the sales numbers take care of themselves. Maybe not immediately, but over time, word of mouth is unstoppable, and the mythic stories are the ones that last, not the bullshit ones.

As Martin Luther King put it, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Obviously, there is no justice without truth.

The storyteller tells the truth as best as they can at the moment in their life that they've chosen to represent as universal.

Story Grid's mission is to empower and propagate **authentic narrative truth**. Full stop.



Public Playlist











Mission Statement

shawncoyne • 10 songs, 44 min 35 sec



The Story Grid

Mission Statement Playlist

- | # | Title |
|----|--|
| 1 |  The Boxer
Simon & Garfunkel |
| 2 |  Ten Years Gone - Remaster
Led Zeppelin |
| 3 |  Middle of the Road - 2007 Remaster
Pretenders |
| 4 |  Changes - 2015 Remaster
David Bowie |
| 5 |  (What A) Wonderful World
Sam Cooke |
| 6 |  Wake Up Time
Tom Petty |
| 7 |  Everything I Am Is Yours
Villagers |
| 8 |  Authority Song
John Mellencamp |
| 9 |  We Used to Wait
Arcade Fire |
| 10 |  I Believe in You
Bob Dylan |



List ☰

Album



Bridge Over Troubled Water 5:12

Physical Graffiti (Deluxe Edition) 6:34

Learning to Crawl (Expanded & R... 4:14

Hunky Dory (2015 Remaster) 3:37

The Man Who Invented Soul 2:05

Wildflowers 5:19

Darling Arithmetic 3:30

Uh-HUH! 3:49

The Suburbs 5:01

Slow Train Coming 5:10

THE STANDARD

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