

# **Week 9: Dramatism, Narrative, and Symbolic Convergence Theory**

***COMM 2100 Introduction to Comm Theory***  
***SI Session***

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# Dramatism

A technique of analysis of language and thought as modes of action rather than as means of conveying information

- Symbolic action: words as intentional action, giving life to particular motives and goals.

*In a Murder Mystery Game, what would you want to know as a player?*

- *Clues about the murder? (act)*
- *Who committed the crime? (agent)*
- *Where is was done? (scene)*
- *With what instrument? (agency)*
- *Why did he/she do this? (purpose)*



Murder Mystery Game

# Language is the genesis of guilt

**Guilt: every form of tension, anxiety, embarrassment, shame, disgust, and other noxious feelings inherent in human symbol-using activity.**

- “Man is
- the symbol-using inventor of the negative
- separated from his natural condition by instruments
- of his own making
- goaded by the spirit of the hierarchy
- and rotten with perfection.”

However, dramatism is not only about language, but also about action.

# Guilt-Redemption cycle: a universal motive for rhetoric

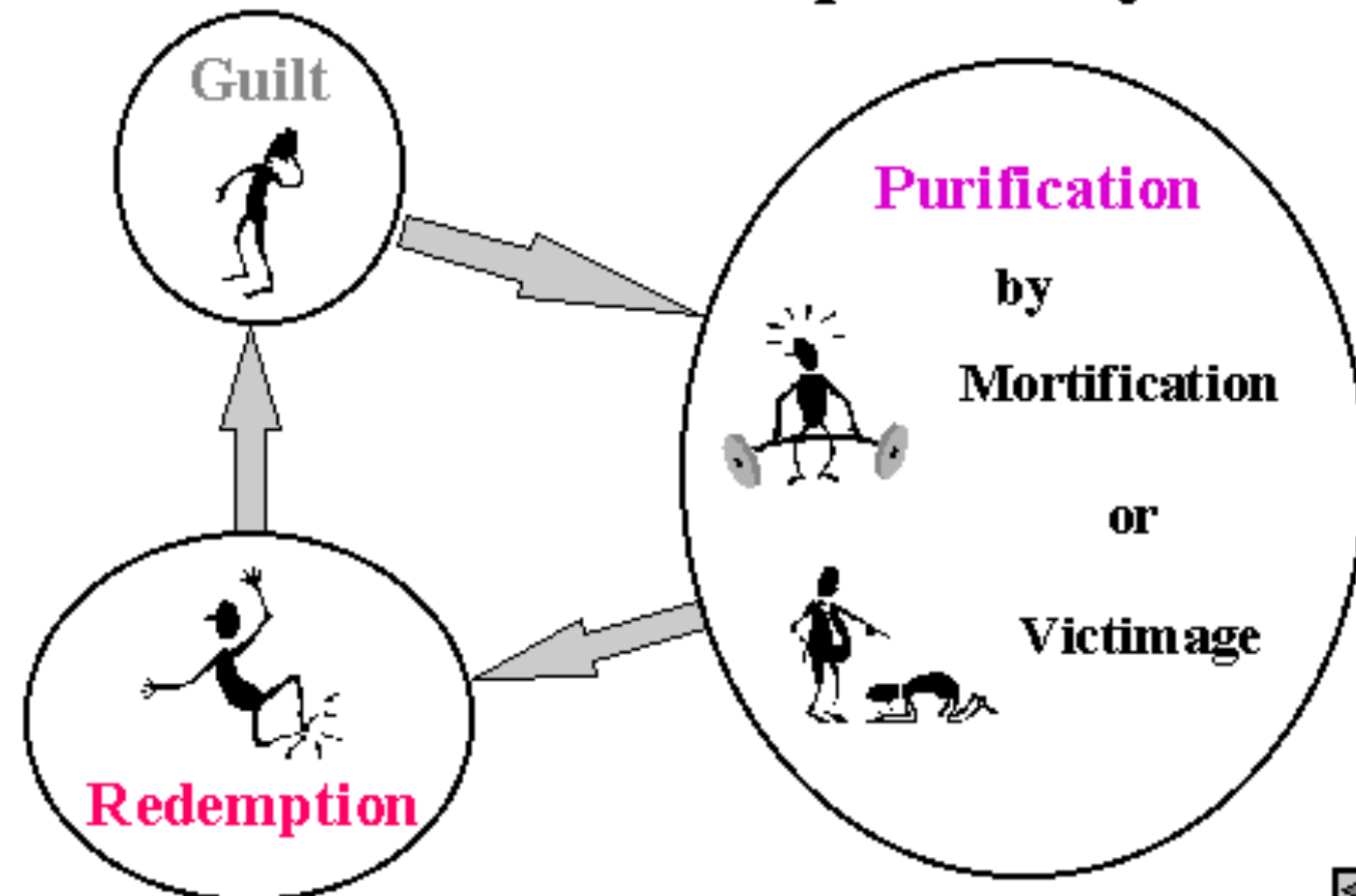
## Two off-loading guilt way

- Mortification: confession of guilt and request for forgiveness.
- Victimage: naming an external enemy as the source of our ills.



*Apology as a PR strategy*

### The Guilt-Redemption Cycle



*Scapegoating as a PR strategy*

# Identification: the common ground between speaker and audience

## Without it, no persuasion

- The key to persuasion.



*Fireside Chats*

# A lens to interpreting symbolic action

## Dramatistic pentad

ACT	What is being done
AGENCY	Mean by which an action occurs
AGENT	Person doing the act
SCENE	Setting/background for action
PURPOSE	Reason or rationale behind action

# Narrative Paradigm

**Narration involves symbolic actions that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them.**

- Assertion:
  - Narrative as the basis of all human communication.
  - People are storytelling animals. So narration is about storytelling.
  - We make decisions based on “good reasons”, which vary depending on the communication situation, media, and genre.
  - Rationality is determined by the coherence and fidelity of our stories
  - The world is a set of stories from which we choose and recreate our lives.
- Paradigm: a universal model that calls for people to view events through a common interpretive lens.

*Q: How is the narrative paradigm different from the previous paradigms? Like the paradigm in rhetoric theory?*

# Narrative Rationality

A way to evaluate the worth of stories based on the twin standards of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity.

- Narrative coherence: Internal consistency with characters acting in a reliable fashion. The story hangs together.
  - No contradictions in the story. Always internal consistency.
  - It convinces the audience that the narrator hasn't left out important details.
- Narrative fidelity: Congruence between values embedded in a message and what listeners regard as truthful and humane; the story strikes a responsive chord.



*Q: Using the two standards, how would evaluate this Modern Family episode?*



# Ideal Audience

an actual community existing over time that believes in the same values.

- They can be easily targeted!

*Q: In the era of TikTok/Youtube/Netflix/Hulu, do you think the ideal audience exists today?*

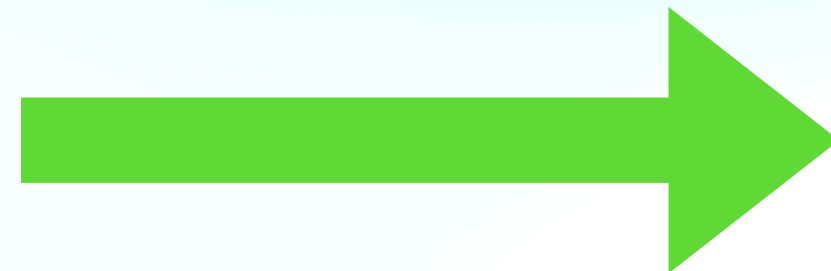
# Symbolic Convergence Theory

## We are entering group/organization communication!

- Sharing group fantasies creates symbolic convergence.

*A symbolic explosion of lively agreement within a group in response to a member's dramatizing message.*

**Dramatizing message**



**Symbolic convergence**

**fantasy chain**

*Imaginative language by a group member describing past, future, or outside events; creative interpretations of there-and-then.*

*Fantasy: not "not true"*

*Two or more private symbol words incline toward each other, come more closely together, or even overlap; group consciousness, cohesiveness.*

analogy

anecdote

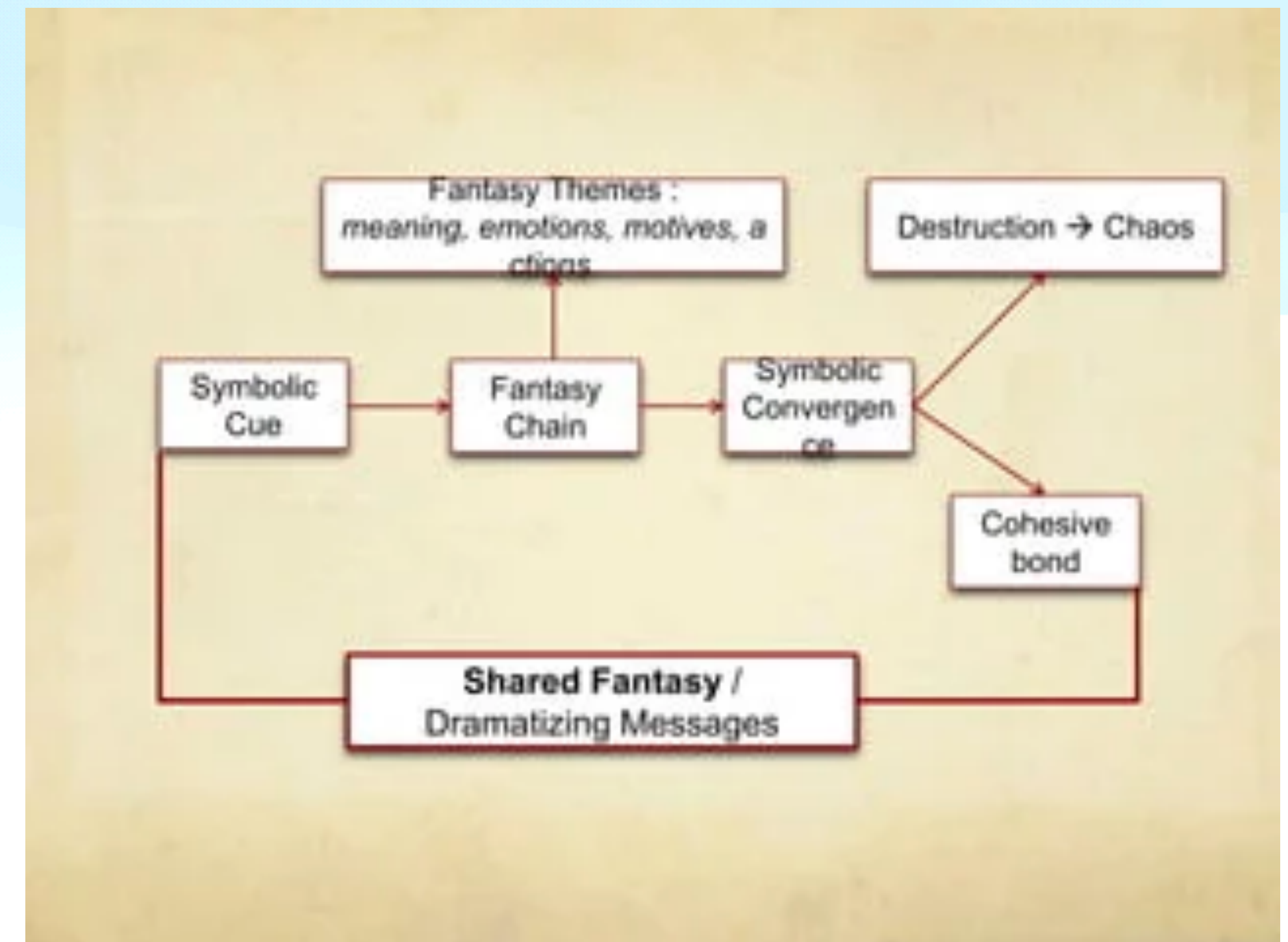
fable



# Fantasy theme

the content of the fantasy that has chained out within a group

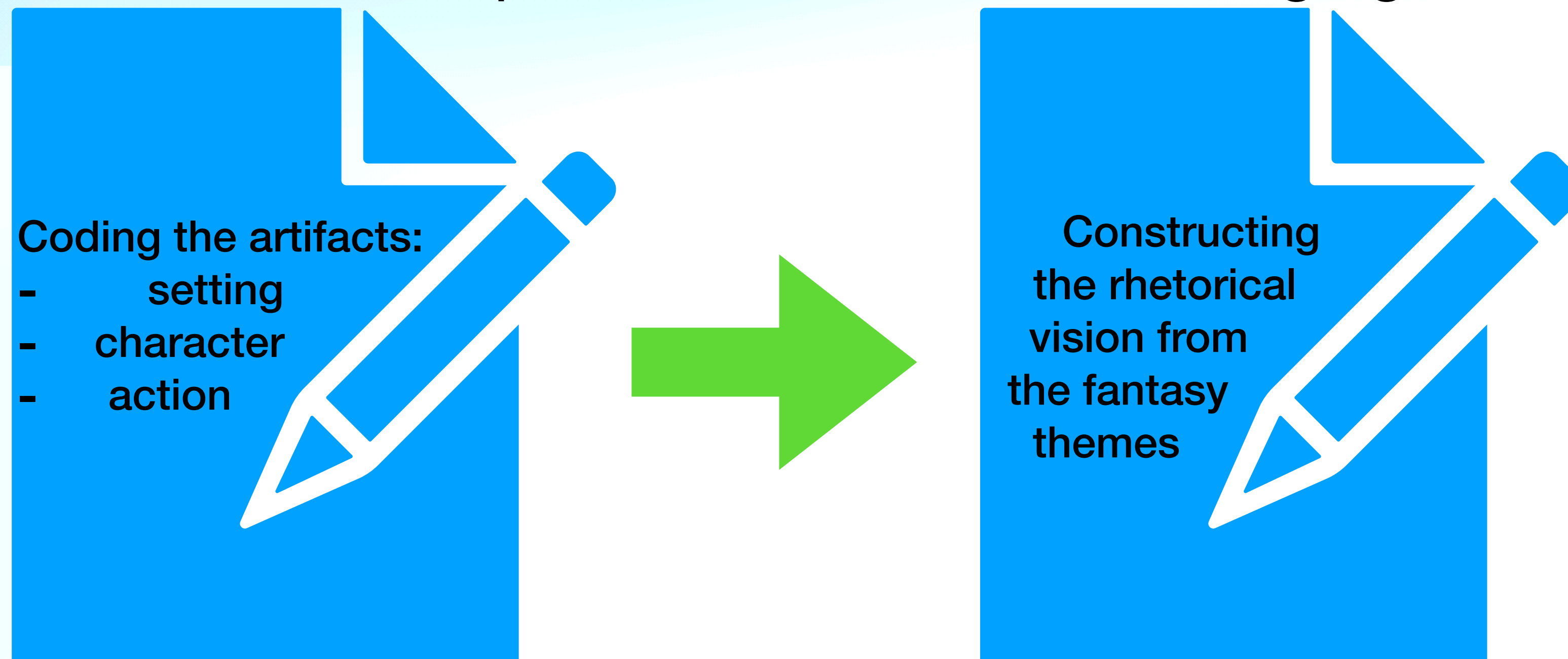
- Fantasy: “the creative and imaginative shared interpretation of events that fulfills group’s psychological or rhetorical needs.” (p. 276)
- The theme is SCT’s basic unit of analysis.
- Symbolic cue: an agreed-upon trigger that sets off group members to respond as they did when they first shared the fantasy.



# Step out of group communication

## Fantasy Theme Analysis

- Fantasy theme analysis is a type of rhetorical criticism used to detect fantasy themes and rhetorical visions; the interpretive methodology of SCT.
- Four features: characters; plotlines; scene; sanctioning agent.



***Thank you!***  
***See you next week!***