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Storytelling

Lecture Notes for Media Students
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I Motivation, communicative setting, definition	2
Chapter 1 The Storyteller: A powerful position	3
Chapter 2 The storytelling situation	4
Chapter 3 A story can be used for a purpose	5
II Narratological analysis	8
Chapter 4 Stories are about change (Herman: event sequencing)	9
Chapter 5 A story is about change in a <i>storyworld</i>	10
Chapter 6 A story is about <i>specific</i> people, things and events	11
Chapter 7 A story is a text: Histoire et discours	12
Chapter 8 Narrative modes	13
III Functions of Storytelling	14
Chapter 9 The use of stories in conversation	15
Chapter 10 Stories and speech acts	17
Chapter 11 The use of stories in culture	18
IV Analysing narrative advertising	19
Chapter 12 Who spreads the story? Who listens to it?	20
Chapter 13 Levels of analysis	22
Chapter 14 Branded entertainment	25
Chapter 15 An example	28
References	30

I

Motivation, communicative setting, definition

The following short chapters will explain why it can be rewarding to analyse narrative in a media studies context. We are not only interested in the content and structure of stories but also in the question what stories are good for.

We will give storytelling a meaning that is narrower than just "the telling of stories".

The kind of research we will be doing can be considered qualitative content analysis. But it should be clear that our approach makes only sense if we put our observations in relation with the social and cultural context – i.e. if we activate what else we know about communication in society.

Students often say that they are interested in the effects of narrative videos. But by analysing their content we cannot say anything about the effects they produce. This would require different kinds of empirical analysis. On the other hand being capable of describing narrative in detail is an important prerequisite for any further research.

Chapter 1

The Storyteller: A powerful position

Storytelling is a buzzword for almost every effort anybody makes in journalism, public relations or advertising. It is helpful to narrow it down to a clear concept that makes a difference between storytelling and (e.g.) argumentation, assertion, demonstration etc. etc.



**Ludwig Richter:
Einkehr**

Let's start with the basic situation:

There is a **storyteller** and there is an **audience**. Look at a picture of people listening to a storyteller. Nonverbal signals (posture, eye contact, gestures) will tell you at once which is which.

Why is this setting so important?

It helps us understand the dominating role the storyteller assumes. She is the one who leads the listeners through the whole process, informs, entertains and surprises them, maintaining their attention and preventing interruptions (besides their *ohs* and *ahs*).

Storytelling has many important functions (e.g. passing on wisdom from days of old). But one of its main goals is entertainment.

The audience is supposed to follow and be enthralled throughout the story. It is possible, but not necessary, to end it with a moral or imperative conclusion. A storyteller may tell a story and add an appeal to his listeners to follow him, vote for him, murder the king etc. But the story itself has a life without any addition of the kind.

This can be observed in persuasive contexts (advertising, preaching etc.): The story is told in order to entertain; the further effects (of going to McDonald's or buying a truck or praying for redemption) are supported, but not asked for by the story itself.

The tempting role of the storyteller

Continuous contact with the reader/listener is one of the prerequisites of storytelling. In some cases this can even be demonstrated in terms of interaction (eye contact, turn-taking patterns). The storyteller is a dominating figure whose authority is accepted by the audience because of the story itself (and not because his social position forces them to listen). It is a powerful position. I see it as a reason for the popularity of storytelling.

Chapter 2

The storytelling situation

This is *Media studies*. We are interested in communication. In analogy to the traditional Lasswell Formula

Who says **what** in which **channel** to **whom** with what **effect**? (Lasswell 1948)

we may ask:

Who tells **which story** in which **channel** to **whom** with what **effect**?

Of course this phrasing has similar flaws as the old Lasswell formula, but let us accept it for the moment because it reminds us to consider not only the story but also the producer, contractor, distributor, medium and the functions of storytelling.

Situatedness

The first feature David Herman includes in his characterisation of storytelling is *situatedness*:

"A prototypical narrative can be characterized as a representation that is **situated** in – must be interpreted in light of – a specific **discourse context** or **occasion for telling**." (Herman 2009, XVI)

From a Media Studies point of view this means that it is fitted into a communication model, which comprises

- one or more storytellers (which can be a single person/a group of people with different tasks/a combination of sponsors and authors etc.)
- genres (comedy, crime, fantasy...) and formats (book, blog entry, TV ad...)
- media (of production, distribution, reception)
- one or more recipients (listeners, audience)
- functions (aims and goals – "illocutionary forces") and effects
- context (actions that take place before and after the act of storytelling)

(Herman and other narratologists take their prototypes from person-to-person discourse or literary texts. Their look at the context (situatedness) is often less differentiated than ours. But it is worthwhile to study some more traditional examples first (storytelling in face-to-face contact), because this makes it easier to have a view of the whole process.)

In other words:

1. There is somebody who has a story to **share**.
2. There is the **story** itself
3. There is somebody who is expected to **receive** (hear) the story.
4. There is a **way of communicating** for the two (medium, modes...)
5. There are things the story is **used** for (goals of the storyteller, functions of the story, reactions of the recipient...).

Each of these aspects can be described in detail. And you can find the most complicated and sophisticated examples in literature, film, comics etc. etc. (Especially aspect number 2, the story, has been studied in depth for decades.)

Chapter 3

A story can be used for a purpose

A story is a text with a beginning and an end. You can do things with it. We will find stories embedded in a context, and the context will tell us what it is used for.

It is important to keep in mind that in the media a story is never told without a purpose. An example for this is the rather bombastic story of a bottle in the Coca-Cola video [A Generous World](#).¹

A story is a sequence of words (a text) and it can be used for something. Its purpose can be recognized by the context, which may be linguistic or extralinguistic.

When a video tells the story of people offering each other a drink, only the Coca-Cola logo is needed in order to understand the advertising purpose.

By saying, "Drink Coca-Cola!" (a slogan from the 1880s) the company invited customers directly to perform an action. By telling a story about people who handle each other a bottle of Coke in disastrous situations, no direct action is called for. Stories are used to entertain; they maintain the audience's attention and provoke understanding, emotions etc. They have no explicit directive function. But they can be combined with other communicative acts, e.g. with a request to follow the example of the story's protagonist.

This is why stories are so interesting for communication and media scholars: Although no pragmatic function (such as a moral) might be manifest in the text, it is most often used for something. What is said or done before or after the story can make this purpose clear.

This combination (non-directive, but ready for being used in a directive context) is one of the secrets for the effectiveness of stories. Listening to the story we tend to forget the context.

The context tells us what the story is used for

We all know that a story can be told as a ritual, embedded in the process of putting a child to sleep. So the purpose is rather complex: to strengthen the bond between parent and child, to educate, to soothe, to lull, to entertain... This is an example for extralinguistic context, which is rather complex.

In other cases the context is strictly linguistic. The story is preceded and followed by words that make its purpose clear. A very simple example can be found in author John Green's [commencement speech](#) at Butler University, Indianapolis:

[15:58] (And lastly I want to encourage you to be vigilant in your struggle toward empathy.)
A couple years after I graduated from college, I was living in an apartment in Chicago with four friends, one of whom was this Kuwaiti guy, Hassan, and when the U.S. invaded Iraq, Hassan lost touch with his family, who lived on the border, for six weeks. [...] So my friend Hassan responded to this stress by watching cable news coverage of the war 24 hours a day. And the only way to hang out with Hassan was to sit on the couch and watch the news with him. So one day we were watching the news and the anchor was like, "We're getting new footage from the city of Baghdad," and a camera panned across a house that had a huge hole in one wall covered by a piece of plywood. On the plywood was Arabic graffiti scrawled in black spraypaint. And the news anchor started to talk about the anger on the Arab street, and Hassan started laughing for the first time in weeks. I said, "What's so funny?" He said, "The graffiti." I said, "What's funny about it?" And he looked at me and he smiled and he said, "It says, Happy Birthday, Sir, Despite the Circumstances."

For the rest of your life, you are going to have a choice about how to read graffiti in a language you do not know, and you will have a choice about how to read the actions and intonations of the people you meet. And I would encourage you as often as possible to consider the Happy Birthday Sir Despite the Circumstances possibility, the possibility that the lives and experiences of others are as complex and unpredictable as your own, that other people, be they family or strangers, near or far, are not simply one thing or the other, not simply good or evil, or wise or ignorant, but that they, like you, contain multitudes (to borrow a phrase from the great Walt Whitman).²

This story is used as an argument: It supports a statement, which is made before and repeated after the story. Other purposes may be:

¹ http://coca-colacompany.com/videos/happiest-bottle-generous-world-ytpym_pnf4yoe/

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLQ4Tswr1Ss>

- instruction (a technician tells his colleague how he solved a certain problem)
- explanation (instead of giving a reason for fighting against fascism you tell the story of the German Nazis)
- moral (a fable is told in order to teach a certain behaviour)

A definition for "storytelling"

I propose the following definition:

Storytelling is the practice of using narrative to support or substitute a linguistic statement. In Media Studies, we do not analyse stories, we analyse how stories are used. We will often find that a story is used for argumentation. Let us look at the two following functions: narrative in support of a statement and narrative instead of a statement.

Two examples:

(1) Narrative **supports** a statement in the following example (*Handy Andy*). The story illustrates the claim in the centre of the ad: *Handy Andy shifts dirt like nothing else can!*



* Taken from the famous Handy Andy Kindergarten Cleaning Test Commercial — seen on TV

Handy Andy shifts dirt like nothing else can!

In Stafford, Brisbane, sixteen kiddies were invited — yes, *invited!* — to make a mess of their kindergarten wall. And *what* a mess they made, with grease, jam, finger-paint — even mud pies. The kiddies went home, and the dirt was allowed to dry hard. The object? To test Handy Andy with ammonia, the white liquid that shifts dirt like nothing else can! Just a little Handy Andy in water and — *whoosh!* All that dirt was wiped off in next to no time. For all *your* tough cleaning chores try white Handy Andy, the first liquid cleaner to combine powerful cleaning agents with ammonia. Shifts dirt like nothing else can!



HANDY ANDY
Now in a bright, new, easy-grip bottle

Page 2 H.A.S. WYK 68

Here, a story is told in the manner of a news report. It has all the elements of a „true“ story and at the same time appeals to the readers‘ feelings and experiences:

In Stafford, Brisbane, sixteen kiddies were invited — yes, invited! — to make a mess of their kindergarten wall. And what a mess they made, with grease, jam, finger-paint — even mud pies. The kiddies went home, and the dirt was allowed to dry hard. The object? To test Handy Andy with ammonia, the white liquid that shifts dirt like nothing else can! Just a little Handy Andy in water and — whoosh! All that dirt was wiped off in next to no time. [,,,]

The story illustrated the claim in the centre of the ad:

Handy Andy shifts dirt like nothing else can!


The Australian Women’s Weekly,
19 June 1963

(2) Narrative **substitutes** a statement („Drink Bacardi rum“) in the following example (from LIFE magazine, Atlantic Edition 10 June 1968): A Bacardi fan (supposedly one of the two people behind the masks in the picture) tells this story:



„Of course we've been to the Bal Masque on the Continent. Everybody who is anybody goes. But this was our first time at a local function. It was just great. We had a choice of drinks that were either as exotic or as classic as the costumes! And somebody told me that that was why light and dark Bacardi are so popular. They mix perfectly with just about everything. So I tried Bacardi rum several ways – with soda, tonic, juice. And suddenly I found myself big on Bacardi rum. Funny ... now that I'm drinking Bacardi, it seems everybody is.“

This is a testimonial from an unknown person, who claims to „be somebody“. No slogan is added. Just one sentence from the story is used as a title. But the purpose is clear all the same.

“Suddenly I found myself big on Bacardi rum.”



“Of course we've been to the Bal Masque on the Continent. Everybody who is anybody goes. But this was our first time at a local function. A Mini Bal Masque, you might say. It was just great. We had a choice of drinks that were either as exotic or as classic as the costumes! And somebody told me that that was why light and dark Bacardi are so popular. They mix perfectly with just about everything. So I tried Bacardi rum several ways—with soda, tonic, juice. And suddenly I found myself big on Bacardi rum. Funny...now that I'm drinking Bacardi, it seems everybody is.”

II

Narratological analysis

Narrative has been a central object of study for literary criticism. Narratologists have developed sophisticated theories and analytical approaches.

In the following chapters we will have a look at some categories that are fundamental also for analysing narrative in the media.

Chapter 4

Stories are about change (Herman: event sequencing)

Since the term "storytelling" is being overused, especially in discussing advertising, we are often forced to ask: Is there a story? So we need to refer to the basic elements of narrative as established by narratologists.

Our first observation is: Stories are about change.

This, e.g., is not a story:

„In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth“ (Gen 1,1)

It is just a sentence that reports a fact. But if one adds one more action it may become a story (= narrative):

„And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.“

A text is called a story if there is a **development** from state A to state B.

The change, the development, is represented by the structure of the story. This means that there are in general at least two verbs in the text. It is true, the sentence „God created heaven and earth“ *alludes* to change (that first there was nothing and then there was something). But it does not *tell*. It is a phrase that can be inserted in any other context, as e.g. in a prayer:

And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said: “O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; **you have made heaven and earth**. Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.(2 Kings, 19, 15-16)

On the other hand, we know at once that a story is being told if we hear Don McLean singing:

In the beginning there was nothingness and God but waved his hand / And from the endless void there sprang the beauty of the land... (Don McLean: Genesis, from the album *Chain Lightning*, 1978)

In PR contexts you will often hear people say somebody has a powerful story. Often it is not about stories at all but about facts or beliefs...

In the New York Times a supporter says about Marco Rubio, a Republican Presidential Candidate,

[Mr. Rubio “is a powerful speaker. \[...\] He is young. He is very motivational. He has a powerful story.”](#)³

What she means is, Rubio has a powerful *message* – or several messages. His problem might exactly be that there are no interesting stories he might want to tell ([but others would](#)).⁴

³ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/23/us/politics/prospect-of-hillary-clinton-marco-rubio-matchup-unnerves-democrats.html?_r=0

⁴ <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/ct-marco-rubio-family-drug-smuggling-20151213-story.html>

Chapter 5

A story is about change in a *storyworld*

In fictional narrative we are confronted with "more or less richly detailed storyworlds" (Herman 2009, 21). "Disruptive" events are crucial to the "storyworthiness" of the the content.

In fictional texts it is easy to understand that the storyworld is a place apart from our (the reader's) world. In factual texts the events happen in *our* world. But we are often confronted with intermediate cases where the borderline between the story's world and our (the reader's) world cannot be clearly drawn. (Are the events and characters of *The Ugly American* real or are they not?⁵ Is Liam Neeson in the 2013 Superbowl ad really playing the game and could we challenge him?)

The storyworlds created by many advertising videos are special cases of combining fiction and facts.

A striking example is Liam Neeson in the bakery (disguised as "Pekka Café" for the shooting).

He parodies his role in *Taken*. He acts as a player of *Clash of Clans*. He is addressed by his real name. He acts together with real *Clash of Clans* fans, who were recruited for this video.

The storyworld extends to Facebook, Youtube etc., being discussed in chats and continued to be played with additional pictures, stories etc.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ugly_American

Chapter 6

A story is about *specific* people, things and events

A representation of generalised events is not considered a story/narrative.

Compare these two sentences:

(1) [Twenty-three percent of all people who meet online get married.](http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/10/21/online-dating-relationships/)

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/10/21/online-dating-relationships/>

(2) My sister met Malcolm online and they got married.

The first is about people in general, the second is about two specific people. The fact that stories about specific people, things and events contributes to their persuasive power. This diagram is from a report about online dating published by the Pew Research Center. It is important to keep in mind that a story is about *specific* people, things and events. It tells what happened to particular people at a given time. In his *Basic Elements of Narrative*, David Herman includes

a structured time-course of particularized events.

in his description of a "prototypical narrative" (Herman 2009, p. XVI).

So an instruction manual is not a narrative or story. It does describe events, but in a general way. A manual is an entirely different type of text compared to the what a user says then she tells you how she first assembled her bicycle.

You will grasp this difference by comparing videos entitled, "How I made..." (story) and videos entitled, "Hot to make..." (instruction), e.g.:

[How I assembled my steampunk costume](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCbUaWXzepE)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCbUaWXzepE>

vs.

[How to assemble steampunk clothing and costumes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2qLZOa2E0Y)

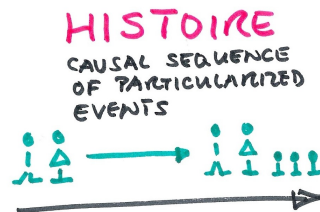
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2qLZOa2E0Y>

Chapter 7

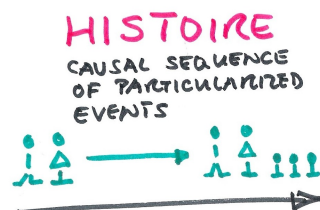
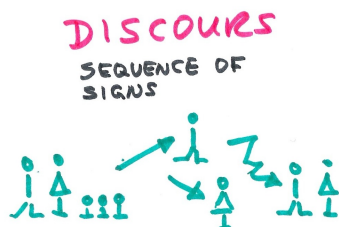
A story is a text: Histoire et discours

A story is a sequence of particularized (and causally connected) events, recognizable characters, a beginning and an end. According to a structuralist tradition we can consider two aspects: *histoire* and *discours*. This is important for describing and analysing narrative:

The *histoire* tells us *what* is told, it is the story we reconstruct on the basis of the text.



But every time a story is told, it is shaped in a particular way. It might not start with the beginning of the events, it might be told in a special style (or even in verse). This is why we have the term: *discours*. Whereas *histoire* is a term for what is told, *discours* is a term for *how* the story is told.) When recounting the story in our own words we may find that the story was told in a special order, with ellipses, camera angles, light, music etc. etc.



Chapter 8

Narrative modes

Storytelling does not always follow "the standard way of evoking narrative scripts: telling somebody else that something happened." (Ryan 2005, 11) The following excerpt from Marie-Laure Ryan's 2005 article might help detect and name different *narrative modes*. I put it here because it might help some of the students in describing their examples. You may also skip it and jump to the next chapter.

External/Internal: In the external mode, narrative meaning is encoded in material signs; it is textualized. In the internal mode, it does not involve a textualisation: we can tell ourselves stories in the privacy of our minds (cf. Jahn 2003).

Diegetic/Mimetic: This distinction goes back to Plato's *Republic*. A diegetic narration is the verbal storytelling act of a narrator. As the definition indicates diegetic narration presupposes language, either oral or written; it is therefore the mode typical of the novel and of oral storytelling. A mimetic narration is an act of showing, a 'spectacle'. In forming a narrative interpretation the recipient works under the guidance of an authorial consciousness, but there is no narratorial figure. Mimetic narration is exemplified by all dramatic arts: movies, theater, dance, and the opera. But each of these two modes can intrude into a narration dominated by the other. The dialogues of a novel are islands of mimetic narration, since in direct quote the voice of the narrator disappears behind the voice of the characters; and conversely, the phenomenon of voiced-over narration in cinema reintroduces a diegetic element in a basically mimetic medium.

Autonomous/Illustrative: In the autonomous mode, the text transmits a story that is new to the receiver; this means that the logical armature of the story must be retrievable from the text. In the illustrative mode, the text retells and completes a story, relying on the receiver's previous knowledge of the plot. The illustrative mode is typical of pictorial narratives, for instance of medieval paintings of Biblical scenes. Halfway between these two poles are texts that offer a new, significantly altered *version* of a familiar plot, such as a modern retelling of a classical myth.

Receptive/Participatory: In the receptive mode the recipient plays no active role in the events presented by the narrative: he merely receives the account of a narrative action, imagining himself as an external witness. In the participatory mode the plot is not completely pre-scripted. The recipient becomes an active character in the story, and through her agency she contributes to the production of the plot. This mode has been practiced for quite a while in staged happenings, 'improv' theater, and scripted role-playing games (e.g. "Dungeons and Dragons") but it has flourished with the advent of interactive digital media. In many computer games, for instance, the user is represented in the game world through an avatar. By solving problems in the real time of the game session she determines whether the life-story of this avatar will end in success or failure, or how long the avatar will live.

Determinate/Indeterminate: In the determinate mode the text specifies a sufficient number of points on the narrative trajectory to project a reasonably definite script. In the indeterminate mode, only one or two points are specified, and it is up to the interpreter to imagine one (or more) of the virtual curves that traverse these coordinates. The indeterminate mode is typical of narrative paintings that tell original stories through the representation of what Lessing calls a pregnant moment. The pregnant moment opens a small temporal window that lets the spectator imagine what immediately preceded and what will immediately follow the represented scene. But a full-blown story normally covers an extended stretch of time, and every spectator will probably imagine the remote past and the remote future in a different way.

Literal/Metaphorical: What constitutes a literal or metaphorical narration depends on the particular definition given to narrative. While literal narration fully satisfies the definition, the metaphorical brand uses only some of its features. The degree of metaphoricity of a narrative thus depends on how many features are retained, and on how important they are to the definition. The great advantage of recognizing a metaphorical mode is that it enables narratology to acknowledge many of the contemporary extensions of the term 'narrative' without sacrificing the precision of its core definition.

Here are some examples of what I consider metaphorical types of narrative. If we define narrative as the representation of a world populated by individuated characters, and if characters are intelligent agents, the following relaxations of the definitions should be regarded as metaphorical: scenarios about collective entities rather than individuals (e.g. the 'Grand Narratives' of Lyotard, as well as their heirs, the 'narratives of class, gender and race' of contemporary cultural studies); narratives about entities deprived of consciousness (e.g. Richard Dawkins' exposition of biology as the story of 'selfish genes'), and dramatizations that attribute agency to abstract objects. Here is an example proposed by the mathematician Ken Devlin: 'Mathematicians deal with a collection of objects—numbers, triangles, groups, fields—and ask questions like, ›What is the relationship between objects x and y? If x does thus to y, what will y do back to x?‹ It's got plot, it's got characters, it's got relationships...a bit of everything you can find in a soap opera.' In other words, mathematics is a story! This is certainly an extreme case of metaphorical narrative. (Ryan 2005, 11-14).

III

Functions

We stated that stories are told with a purpose. In the following chapters we will therefore ask what stories can be used for – on the level of person-to-person conversation and on the level of cultures and societies.

Chapter 9

The use of stories in conversation

To entertain

[...] On the conclusion of the repast, the slaves cleared away the dishes, and brought long pipes and Turkish sherbet. The merchants sat silently watching the blue clouds of smoke as they formed into rings and finally vanished in the air.

The young merchant at length broke the silence by saying-- "For three days we have sat thus on horseback and at table without making any attempt to while away the time. To me this is very wearisome, as I have always been accustomed after dinner to see a dancer or to hear music and singing. Can you think of nothing, my friends, to pass away the time?"

The three older merchants continued to smoke, seemingly lost in meditation, but the stranger said-- "Permit me to make a proposition. It is that at every camping-place one of us shall relate a story to the others. This might serve to make the time pass pleasantly." "You are right, Selim Baruch," said one of the merchants, "let us act on the proposal." "I am glad the suggestion meets with your approval," said Selim; "but that you may see I ask nothing unfair, I will be the first to begin."

The merchants drew nearer together in pleased anticipation, and had the stranger sit in the centre. The slaves replenished the cups and filled the pipes of their masters, and brought glowing coals to light them. Then Selim cleared his voice with a generous glass of sherbet, stroked the long beard away from his mouth, and said-- "Listen, then, to the story of the Caliph Stork."

One fine afternoon, Chasid, Caliph of Bagdad, reclined on his divan...

[...]

As Selim Baruch finished his story, the merchants testified their approval thereof most heartily.

"Of a truth, the afternoon has passed without our knowing it," said one of them, lifting the curtain of the tent. "The evening wind blows fresh; we could put behind us a good stretch of road."

As his companions were of the same opinion, the tents were folded, and the caravan started on its way in the same order in which it had entered camp.

(from Wilhelm Hauff: The caravan)

To stay awake

They had become thoughtful whilst talking. It did not seem at all unlikely, that this forest inn, willingly or unwillingly, was in league with the robbers. Night to them therefore seemed dangerous; how many tales they had heard of travellers being attacked and murdered in their sleep; and even if their lives were not in danger, yet, so poorly off were some of the guests of the forest that a robbery of even part of their belongings would have been keenly felt. They gazed sadly and gloomily into their glasses. The young gentleman wished he were trotting upon his horse through a safe and wide valley; the compass-maker wished for twelve of his sturdy comrades armed with sticks as body-guards; Felix, the goldsmith, was more afraid for the ornaments of his benefactress than for his life; the carrier, however, who had several times blown away reflectively the smoke of his pipe, quietly said, "Gentlemen, they shall not surprise us at any rate in our sleep. I for my part will remain awake all night, if only one of you will keep me company." "So will I." "I too," exclaimed the other three; "I should not be able to sleep, after all," added the young gentleman. "Well, let us do something to keep us awake," said the carrier; "I think as there are just four of us we might play at cards; that keeps us awake, and whiles away the time."

"I never play cards," replied the young gentleman; so that I at least cannot join you."

"And I know nothing about cards," added Felix.

"What can we do if we do not play?" said the compass-maker. "Sing? that will not do, and would only attract those scoundrels; ask each other riddles and conundrums? that too does not last long. I will tell you what; how would it be to tell stories? Amusing or serious, true or feigned, it will at any rate keep us awake, and while away the time as well as playing at cards."

(from Wilhelm Hauff: The Inn in the Spessart)

(Of course they want to be *entertained* in order to stay awake. – Note that another function of storytelling is named on the first lines: *tales* that are used to inform listeners about possible danger and to scare them.)

To explain

Colleague to Lenny: What's the matter? You seem down.

Lenny: No, I'm fine.

Colleague: You're fine? – Something's on your mind, honey.

Lenny: Listen, last night, I was at one of those dinner parties again. Amanda, you know last week she took me the Cirque with the Dorians and then last night it was with the Grosebuds on Park Avenue. And then, after that, we were driving home and... (Mighty Aphrodite [Woody Allen, 1995], 12:45)

To prove

(Cf. the *Handy Andy* example above.)

To testify

When witnesses are asked to testify in court (or, like in the following example, at a congressional hearing), they will often tell a story.

In our seminar we watched a video showing a girl speaking about alleged atrocities committed by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait ("Kuwait Incubator Story"), a story which later was used as one of the reasons for the so called 2nd Gulf War.

"Nayirah al-Şabah (Arabic: **الصاباح نيرة**), called "Nurse Nayirah" in the media, was a fifteen-year-old Kuwaiti girl, who alleged that she had witnessed the murder of infant children by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait, in verbal testimony to the U.S. Congress, in the run up to the 1991 Gulf War. Her testimony, which was regarded as credible at the time, has since come to be regarded as wartime propaganda. The public relations firm Hill & Knowlton, which was in the employ of Citizens for a Free Kuwait, had arranged the testimony. Nayirah's testimony was widely publicized. Hill & Knowlton, which had filmed the hearing, sent out a video news release to Medialink, a firm which served about 700 television stations in the United States. That night, portions of the testimony aired on ABC's Nightline and NBC Nightly News reaching an estimated audience between 35 and 53 million Americans. Seven senators cited Nayirah's testimony in their speeches backing the use of force. President George Bush repeated the story at least ten times in the following weeks. (Wikipedia)"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmfVs3WaE9Y>

Chapter 10

Stories and speech acts

There are several possible ways to classify the uses of storytelling in conversation. Although for us it is more important to understand that storytelling *has* functions than to classify them, we can have a look at contributions from of speech act theory.

In terms from philosophy of language, every utterance can be used to express illocutionary acts. But if you look at the example of stories, they seem to be restricted to certain cases, like apologizing and warning, but not some other indirect illocutionary acts (like commissives and declarations). Norrick (2012) argues that this is because commissives are directed towards future actions and declarations are directed toward the state of the world as it is now.

But it seems that this is not true for stories that are used in advertising. By force of central passages they tell people what to do, how to do things, and they can also act as promises or prognoses etc.

Chapter 11

The use of stories in culture

From an anthropological point of view, narrative is an important part of any culture. People belonging to the same community use stories to establish values and moral rules, but also to cope with new kinds of behaviour and cultural change (cf. Nünning 2013).

Stories combine actions and events to a meaningful ensemble. They can be used to construct collective identities or to explain historical facts. "Narratives are especially good for representing contingency and accounting for contingent outcomes." (Beatty 2016)

For a culture it means the development of

- rites
- attitudes
- beliefs
- etc.

From a media studies point of view, it is a case of

- enculturation
- cultivation (cf. Gerbner 1967; Potter 2014)

On an individual level, they use it for

- making plans
- solving problems
- making decisions
- etc. (cf Boyd 2009)

On a level of everyday behaviour they may...

- pray to the characters of the stories
- find themselves in the stories
- disguise as characters from the stories
- tell the story
- invent alternative or new characters/episodes/endings

This means that they draw the line between the narrative/fictional/historical world and their own in many different ways, sometimes separating the two very clearly, sometimes bringing things from both worlds together, consciously or unconsciously.

IV

Analysing narrative advertising

After treating aspects of general narratological analysis in part II, we will now ask which categories can be useful for analysing narrative *advertising*.

Chapter 12

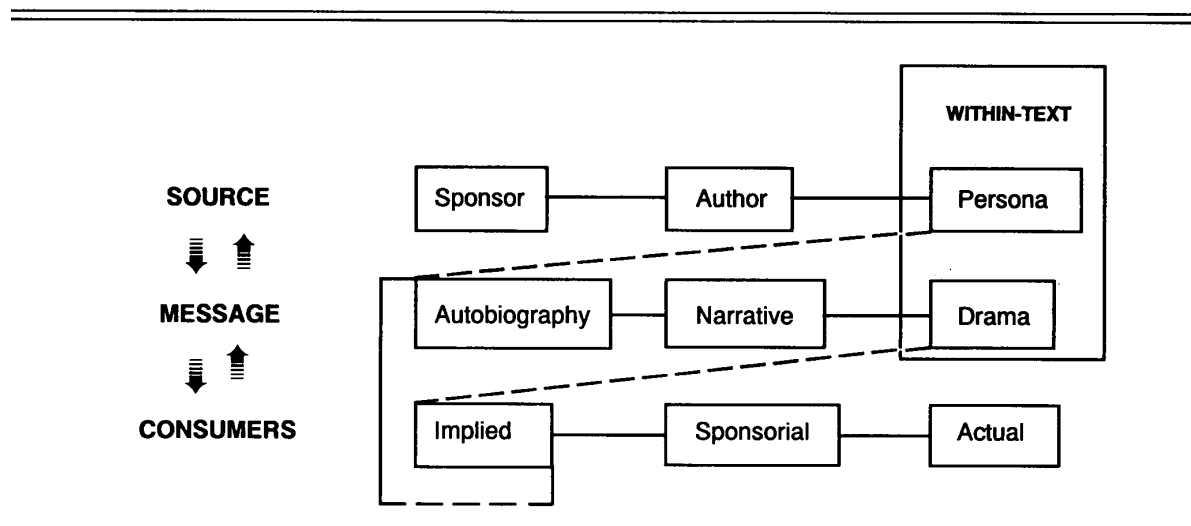
Who spreads the story? Who listens to it?

If stories are used with a purpose, it is important to ask, whose purpose it is.

A TV ad may be made by a film team, written by a scriptwriter, produced by cameramen, actors etc. etc. In many respects they can be taken as a collective author. But finally there is still another communicator: Coca-Cola, the sponsor that will add a logo and buy advertising space on television (or elsewhere).

Barbara Stern (1994) presented a model that is inspired by traditional narratology. It reminds us of the fact that different actors must be presumed on different levels of production and reception:

Figure 2
Advertising Model



This is a rather conventional model, which can be seen by the fact that it neatly distinguishes source, message and consumer.

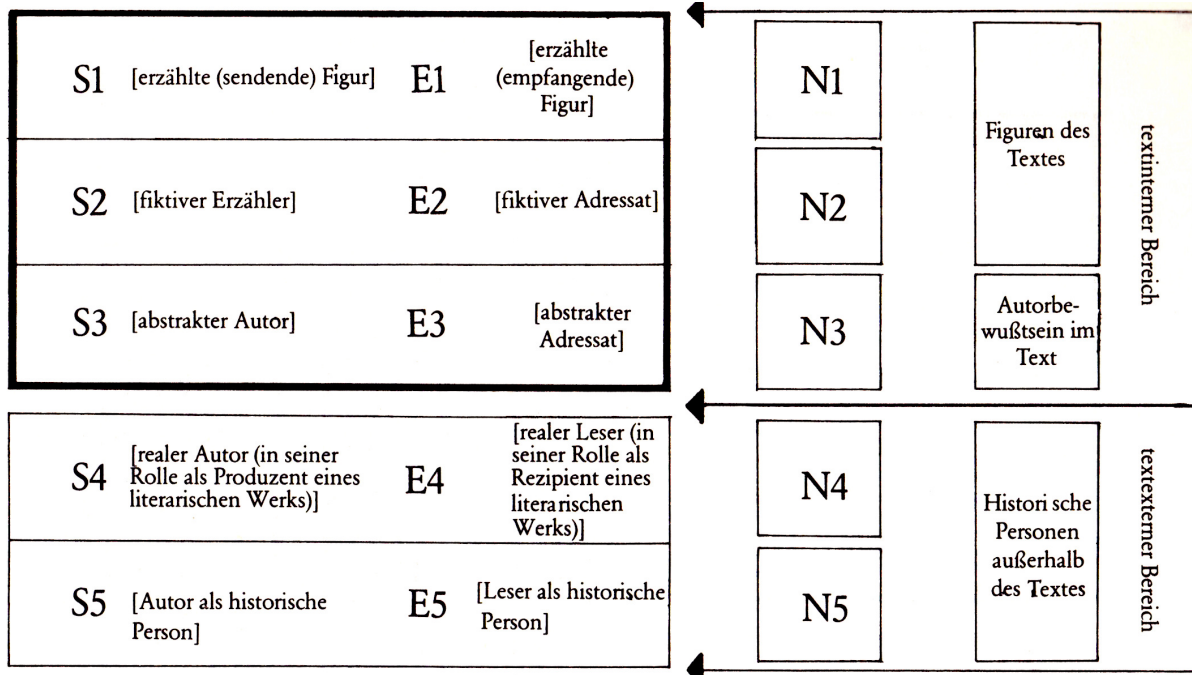
On the level of the "source" we find the people/institutions/characters that produce messages: the sponsor who commissions an ad, the agency that plans and produces it, and the character in the ad that might tell another character how pleased she is with the product.

The terms on the "message" level indicate that the utterances in the text make it belong to one of various genres. Autobiography (or testimonial), narrative or drama are ways of presenting information to the consumer.

The three terms for "consumers" correspond somehow to the three roles on the "source" level:

The "actual consumer" is the empirical audience, which might or might not react as intended by the producers. The "sponsorial consumer" is the recipient of the author: It is the one you must convince about your ad if you want it to be distributed. (The important role of sponsorial consumers is played on a meta-level: They criticise the ad and decide about its being used or not.) The "implied consumer" is the addressee that obeys the rules of the text (takes the context inside the text for granted; Stern 1994, 11: "... the audience for Goldilocks agrees to believe in talking bears...").

For comparison we can have a look at a rather complex model from literary studies (Kahrman, Reiß and Schluchter 1996, 46):



What should we adopt from these models?

For narratologists it is important to discern the similar agents on the different levels (e.g. to understand that the implied reader/consumer in the story and the actual reader/consumer are not identical).

For media students it is important to put the interactions depicted in the text in relation to the interaction known from everyday life (culture, politics, history) etc. This includes the roles of the communicator, recipient etc.

Chapter 13

Levels of analysis

First we must have a concept of the "message" (or "text") as an element within the empirical fact that sponsors and consumers communicate.

The empirical level of communication ("outside")

It is *one* of the messages the sponsor tries to get to the consumers. (Others are written on the packages of the products, still others are informations about them in the daily news, in magazine feature articles, in talkshow appearances etc.) And there are various ways of distributing it (e.g. the sponsor's website, traditional mass media, social media).

And there are several institutions, companies, individuals involved in commissioning, producing, distributing and receiving it.

This is where our general knowledge about media systems, and especially advertising, comes in: the interaction of sponsors, agencies, film producers, media companies, media technologies, etc. etc. etc.

Let's call this level of interaction the *empirical level* as opposed to the *text level*. (Stern 1994 speaks about the *inside* and the *outside*).

In simple examples (of tv ads, e.g.) we will find the sponsoring company, the agency team, the advertising divisions of television chains that show the ad and the individuals and groups that watch it on their tv screens on the empirical level, whereas the Flintstones exist only on the text level.

The text level ("inside")

Watch the Winston cigarette ad, in which Fred Flintstone buys a pack of cigarettes.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qfmWWZ9uSE&list=RD7qfmWWZ9uSE#t=23>)

Fred is a fictional character who lives in a Stone Age town, in which many inventions of modernity are available, albeit powered by animal labour (like the cuckoo clock in this ad).

A narratological analysis might describe aspects of narrating as presented by Genette, Stanzel and others: temporal and modal structures, roles of the narrating agent etc. We might here look for help in film studies, where several systems of detailed analysis have been developed.

But when analysing advertising we must keep in mind that one of the purposes of any ad is to establish a concrete connection between the text and the empirical levels (cf. chapter 5).

When the diegetic first-person narrator in Heinrich Böll's *Irish Journal (Irisches Tagebuch, Chapter 5)* talks about a shop in which you can buy *tea, bread, butter and cigarettes*, it is not meant as an advice for future tourists. But when the shop owner tells Fred Flintstone about the advantages of Winston cigarettes, it is meant to be an argument for prospective Winston buyers.

So we will focus on everything that helps us understand this connection. But in the Flintstone ad there are some less fictional traces of the empirical world. Let us take it for sure that this short episode is not only told to entertain, but also to convince the viewer – a consumer who might smoke Winston or switch to Winston (or start smoking).

This means that we will describe especially those features that reflect some interaction of sponsor and consumer. For this we use a text concept that is similar to the ones proposed by Cultural Studies theorists (Stuart Hall).

A model

As stated above, on the empirical level media communication can be described as interactions between a number of participants: sponsors, media professionals, politicians, consumers and so on. For the text level there are a number of concepts that describe media content as reflections of these interactions:

Les contenus des médias de masse peuvent être vus comme des traces des interactions qui les ont constitués, comme des plis condensant les rapports sociaux, les logiques d'action et les mouvements culturels.

(The contents of mass media can be viewed as traces of the interactions of which they are composed, as folds that condense social relationships, the logic of actions, and cultural movements.) – Maigret 2015, 255, quoted and translated by: Lick 2015, 221.)

So we analyse the ad looking at the two levels:

Empirical level:

economy sponsor agency video
producers media consumers economy arts science (etc.)

Text level:

economy sponsor agency video
producers media consumers economy arts science (etc.)

And we will see if and in what form representatives of the empirical level are present on the text level.

We will try and find out how the sponsor is represented in the ad (by a personal narrator? by a character, e.g. a factory worker or the founder of the company, by non-narrative elements like voice-over, or only by filmic means?) and to compare this with what we know about the "real" company on the empirical level.

We will also find that that it is interesting to compare how consumers are represented on both levels, "inside" and "outside" the text: Is there a character that represents the consumer? Does he/she play a positive or negative or neutral role?

In a classical narrative ad the roles of the **addresser** are clearly split into:

- narrator (tells the story)
- and sponsor (who informs about product, calls to action)

The content splits into two **levels**:

- narrative
- instruction (information/directive)

The **addressee** is addressed as:

- narratee (addressee of narrative)
- and consumer (addressee of instruction)

(Examples: *Handy Andy*, *Phones4U*, *Hornbach...*)

In examples of a more recent type, either the roles in the text or the roles in the production are not so clearly distinguishable.

The comparison between empirical and text levels will then lead us to interesting findings, such as the following:

- In some cases real consumers are invited to participate in the making of the video. So they appear on the empirical ("outside") and text ("inside") levels – and even in the role of recipient and producer.
- The characters using the advertised product may be depicted as negative or disagreeable persons. Why should the consumer identify with them and buy the product?

Intertextuality

If we sort out what we need to analyse narrative ads from a media studies point of view, we can always depart from the concrete level of sponsor and consumer, who interact through the ad, but who interact also in many other ways.

Often consumers are invited to participate in the making of the ad and its distribution. The borderline between sponsor/author and recipient/consumer is somewhat permeable.

So this is another field of analysis: the interchanging roles of producer and audience.

This all makes it clear that the ad is not the only product that carries the message of the ad. It has to be seen as one element in a larger context (fan fiction, merchandise, concerts etc.)

Narrative works because of traditional structures. In advertising it often relies on references to well-known films, singers and bands, news, sports, historical events etc.

Often the consumer is supposed to recognize these references. Often humorous or artistic statements are only possible through the comparison with the "original".

On one hand this is just another important level of analysis: How is the ad connected with texts (or images or music etc.) from other sources, other media, other cultural contexts?

On the other hand this often opens the barriers between the world of the ad and the outside world. This could be the case when a person known from sports participates in an ad (Gatorade) or when ads refer to "real" events that are covered by journalistic media (Red Bull) etc.

Narrative advertising can be a combination of messages in various media and various. One ad can even involve the consumer in several different layers of storytelling (Christoph Waltz and James Corden dialogue / story told / "real" game played by a real player).

For media students it is important to understand that a line between the levels and the roles cannot be clearly drawn (i.e. that that, to a certain degree, implied consumers and actual consumers can coincide with one another – or that the fictitious and factual worlds have some elements in common).

The role of the consumer

We live in an age of interactive media, and often the newest media are said to be participative, dialogic, even democratic. At least some of these claims are illusionary. It is therefore interesting to find how much participation, dialogue or democracy there is – especially in cases of consumers being invited to contribute to the production of media content.

In economics there a similar question is discussed under the term *consumer independence* (cf. Rinaldo 2012, 113, cites some texts from the field).

If I had to write a term paper about storytelling in advertising I would reflect on how my findings challenge ma picture of sponsor-consumer communication.

How to find literature

Of course you will not find any study with exactly the same goal as yours. But you will find help from various sources:

- General texts about storytelling
- General texts about advertising
- General texts about film/video analysis
- Texts about specific research

These latter, specific texts can prove very helpful because they

- give hints of empirically discovered effects
- demonstrate how a similar object was treated by someone else
- serve as an introduction to basic literature and important studies

So you might e.g. read the first chapters of a good study and find an overview of theories and previous research (e.g. Rinaldo 2012, cited above). Or you might find a model which the author used to analyse a certain type of ads and which you could adapt (e.g. Queensberry and Colsen 2014). Or some of the empirical results might be carefully used as argument underlining the importance of your topic (e.g. Adaval and Wyer 1998 and numerous others).

Chapter 14

Branded entertainment

Let's look at narrative forms of *branded entertainment*: videos that tell a story with no direct reference to the brand or product and without any comment that mentions the brand or product.

Here the non-narrative elements may contain a moral message but no traditional advertising content (claim, slogan). The consumer needs to understand the references/allusions to content from other sources (former advertising, other media etc.). He/she will also find information from the ad (e.g. the music) elsewhere (radio, games, social media etc.).

This means that the content is more open (has more possibilities to be connected with other content, outside the particular topic of the brand/product).

In order to describe a video of this kind we need a concept of narrative and a concept of *brand*.

- an interpretation of the production/distribution/reception context of the video
- an interpretation of its content
- information about the brand
- corresponding texts/images/sounds from other sources about the brand

We will describe the video the same way we describe any other narrative video: its genre, the narrative elements, the mood that is evoked by story, actors, music etc. – certainly with an emphasis on the part consumers and sponsors may play in it. And we will put it in relation to what we know about the context of its production, distribution, reception etc.

But then we must have a look at the brand, too: Is there a resonance between the content of the video and the values the brand represents? Do brand and video have anything in common and how should we call it?

What is a brand?

If you want to define brand you might refer to books about brand and branding. They will tell you in their simplest forms that a brand is a sign (Baumgarth 2014, 6 –Kastens and Lux 2014 define *brand* as an ever-changing system of meanings that is negotiated by at least two partners – Kastens and Lux [2014, 82]).

(They might also make it much more complicated because in marketing brands belong to a number of brand management processes. This reflects the fact that branding (like advertising in general) is partly a field of mass communication, partly of the economy.)

If we accept the conception of a brand being a sign, we might divide it into *signifiant* (form) and *signifié* (content), according to de Saussure and many others).

The "form" of a brand is its material representation – often the sonic and visual representation of its name, e.g.:



– either in this or a similar graphical form or spoken, sung... In a first apprehension we could say it is the phonetic or written form of a name. But of course in most cases this is not true. Consider the following example:



For most people this is the form of a cigarette brand called *Marlboro*. But for many this picture will do the same job:



The "content" of a brand, which is often called its image, refers to

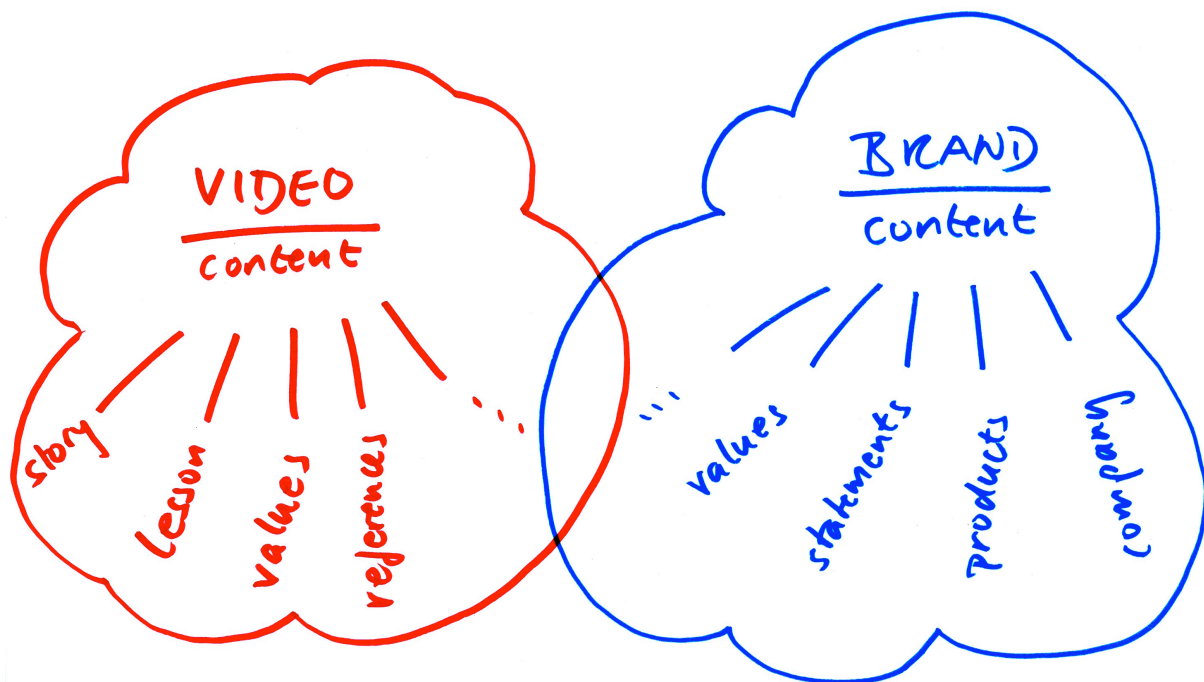
- a company
- its products
- statements, slogans, claims about the products
- values connected with the product
- values associated with the company

and so on

Roughly speaking it refers to some concrete and to some more abstract referents.

Brand and narrative

If we want to understand the relation between a narrative video and the company that authors and distributes it, we should look for similarities in the content of video and brand. The video may – in addition to the concrete story – teach a lesson or represent moral values. It may also refer to other texts/videos by using certain stylistic forms of expression or actors or places etc., which in turn are associated with similar messages. Brand and video may coincide in part due to similarities in these aspects. I will try to show this in the following sketch:



In this picture you can see that narrative (video) and brand share some common ground: They refer to similar values etc.

In some cases it is a well-known connection between brand and values. Coca-Cola, e.g., having built an image around happiness for decades, will not surprise us with another story that demonstrates that happiness is the real thing. On the other hand, in the case of the notorious Thai insurance company (TVC) we will not find this kind of correspondence at once. But we could speculate (and prove by reading about it) that the company is trying to adjust the image of the brand.

Chapter 15

An example

Here I will try to explain very shortly how I would analyse a video. I would mention all the following aspects but then go deeper into one of them. My personal preference is always the interference of narrative and the "reality" of the consumer because we are in an intermediate field between factual and fictional communication.

I have chosen a video that does not mention a brand but has a clear advertising purpose all the same in order to include a wide range of the students' interest:

My dad's story from *MetLife's* campaign *Dream for My Child*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bdm4NBYxII>

The story

A girl writes a short text (perhaps a composition for school) about her daddy. She describes him as a dedicated father who sacrifices everything to ensure she has a happy childhood and good education. She makes clear that she understands that he is not as rich and successful as he pretends to be ("He is a liar"). The film begins with the two walking in a park and her handing him the text. He unfolds it and begins to read (girl's voice-over). Short scenes illustrate her words – their common experiences and the father's struggle in several jobs. In the end the father is disappointed, but then the two embrace and demonstrate their love for each other. A final text, white on a black screen, says:

Pursue more from life. – MetLife [Logo]. – We all have a dream for our children. Share yours with us, and it could become reality. Find out more at www.MetLife.com.Hk.

Economy

What do I know about the economical context and how is it reflected in the video?

Since the sponsor is a multinational insurance company and the video is produced for the Asian market it would be helpful to have some data about that market and competition in the insurance business.

The family is poor – the father refuses even to eat when taking his daughter out to lunch. A striking fact is that it is not possible to place the events of the video in any specific country. So we do not know anything about the father's possibilities outside the episodes shown.

Sponsor-consumer relation

The sponsor is the Hongkong branch of a globally acting American insurance company.

The product, insurance and similar services, is not mentioned in the ad, nor are the company and its structure, or the fact that it sponsors various sports events.

Do insurers and customers appear in the story? – I would say no. The father in the story seems too busy to deal with an insurance company. But the text in the end encourages the viewer to go to the *MetLife* Hongkong homepage, possibly to find out how to invest in *MetLife's Educare* savings plan (a product to ensure a child's higher education).⁶

⁶ "Today, MetLife Hong Kong* unveiled the launch of its MetLife EduCare Program exclusive for customers of MetLife Hong Kong that enables parents to support their children's educational pursuits from birth through university graduation." (India Insurance News, January 12, 2016)

The ad is obviously produced primarily for consumers in Asia but watched by others as well (as the comments by European and American viewers demonstrate).

Addresser and addressee

The narrative is accompanied by the continuing reading of the girl's text, which is being read by the father (and can be read in parts by the viewer). So there are a personalised addresser and addressee inside the story. The text is, however, not a story in a traditional sense but rather a report. While the father is reading the video refers to various episodes (which, as combinations of sound and image, are narrative). But although the girl's text is not a story, the framework showing the interaction of girl and father is presented as a story (the girl handing the father the text – the father reading, pleased at first, then startled – the two looking at each other insecurely – finally hugging and walking away together).

In addition to the girl-father communication there is a narrator and an implied narratee: The camera follows the narrator's decisions (e.g. about when the narratee should read along with the text – and when not). There are facts, images, sounds that have to be decoded in a particular way (by an Asian narratee? by a Western narratee? by anybody? – The music might be chosen for a general/international audience).

There are several agents who communicate inside the text or in paratexts:

- the child as narrator in her written text
- the child as author/daughter communicating nonverbally with her father
- the narrating agent of the video
- a commentator (the sponsor?) in the moralizing (inter-)titles
- the sponsor in the logo and invitation to *find out more...* in the end.

Each of these positions can be understood as a different invitation to the viewer to focalize, to identify or to find a distance to the message of the text.

(Of course, this simple list can be criticized or refined, depending on the narratological theories chosen. But for us it is important not to forget the media studies and advertising context. – For more narratological details one might refer to Jongeneel 2006 [about the fate of the narrator in recent narratology] or Horstkotte 2009 [about focalization in film].)

Agency, producers

There is no information about the production of the video (no credits). But it is clearly a professional video produced on high standards, reminding the viewer of similar films (cinema or advertising). Little research would be necessary to find out more about the production.

Media

The video is distributed via social media (more than 12 million views on *MetLife Hongkong's* Youtube channel alone) and can be found on many personal websites.

For the function and importance of viral videos I would refer to recent empirical studies demonstrating mechanisms of sharing and quantitative results (e.g. Dafonte-Gómez 2014).

The medium itself is not reflected in the film. Unlike other videos, e.g. Huawei's **คลิปขอบคุณพ่อที่ไม่เคยซื้ออะไรให้** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XK6pKd1POI>), this one does not show the characters using any current communication device (smartphone, computer). The only exception is the pc on a possible employer's desk. The girl herself writes by hand on ruled paper.

Cultural context

The scenes are carefully shot in surroundings that could be in any large city in the world. The images are carefully chosen to show stereotypical situations (hard labour, success at school).

Intertextuality

The video could be compared with other, similar videos, but also with other texts published by *MetLife* or similar companies.

There is very much literature about intertextuality and intermediality. In order to describe my findings I would need a terminology (as to be found in classics from Genette onwards) and, above all, an analytic mind, which would help me to understand how different texts and utterances are related: Do the titles (*A child's future is worth every sacrifice. – Pursue more more from life*) function on a different level (opposed to the story)? Are they a message from the characters, the narrator, the author....? – Do they change the video's meaning? (Cf. e.g. Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013.)

Meaning

The film gets its special meaning only by respecting all its dimensions ("inside" and "outside" the text). If we accept the idea that *MetLife* wants to market its products, especially "Educare", we must ask how this fits the main characters of the video. This father is obviously not one of those who could spare enough money for a regular savings plan. He might be a target for public assistance, a solution that of course does not appear in the video.

There is a certain discrepancy between the fate of the main characters and the lives of the target customers. In this the video can be used to demonstrate differences between literary and advertising narrative: In literary (or cinematic) fiction a discrepancy like this might be considered bad taste (trivial, trash etc.) but never inappropriate. In advertising might be judged more severely because it tells consumers (directly or indirectly) to change their behaviour. So we are entitled to test the model presented in the story for its realism.

It would be interesting to read the numerous comments on social media and try to find what kinds of conclusion those viewers draw.

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