University of Brighton **Faculty of Arts**
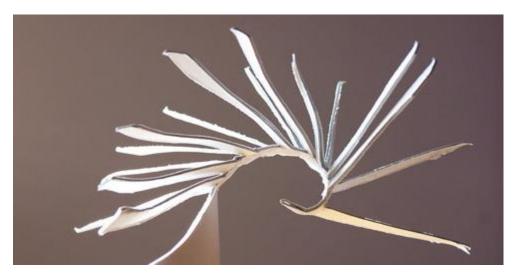
- ## Issue 18: July 2012

- Issue 17: April 2012

- Issue 16: January 2012

- Issues 1-15: 2007-2011

- Submissions

- About us

Storytelling, Advertising and Paradigm Fusion

Keywords: creative advertising, paradigm fusion, creative writing

Abstract

'The art of storytelling in the modern age is fundamentally important. So, how we create stories for a screen-based culture is vitally important to master' (Hegarty, 2011, p.96-97).

This paper explores the potential benefit of fusing aspects of creative writing with the curriculum of the BA Creative Advertising programme (BACAP) at Leeds College of Art (LCA) in order to address Sir John Hegarty's assertion. In particular it will focus on the characteristics of the 'classical paradigms' used in creative writing. A questionnaire was conceived to draw opinion from some of the world's leading authorities/practitioners in advertising and colleagues in Higher Education at both undergraduate and postgraduate level delivering similar programmes. A review of the theoretical literature will also provide the debate and dialogue to inform and determine the outcome.

Introduction

The paradigm is a model, an example, or a conceptual scheme, it is what a well-structured screenplay looks like, an overview of the story line as it unfolds from beginning to end (Field, 2005, p.29).

The paradigm Field refers to has its roots in *Poetics* (335 BC) written by Aristotle. It is structured in three parts: a *beginning* - 'exposition'/'set up', a *middle* - 'confrontation' and an *end* - 'resolution', and is better known as the 'classical paradigm' for narrative structure. The narrative will include a 'protagonist' (main character) with a 'dramatic need' (to achieve something) who will experience 'conflict' (external conflict – physical obstacles or / and internal conflict / psychological obstacles) driven by a 'plot' (storyline). The classical paradigm isemployed by renowned playwrights and screenwriters, and is taught to under-graduate and post-graduates studying creative writing on any number of programmes.

Writing stories for screen is not a component of the BACAP. As a vocational programme, it was validated in 2005 and 2011 following consultation with the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) and a number of leading Creative Directors throughout the UK. There was no mention of storytelling throughout either consultation.

The BACAP's pedagogic paradigm is, philosophically, founded on the principles of structuralism and influenced by Gestalt psychology, with particular emphasis on visual, written and verbal language and the relationship between sender and receiver.

Students studying creative advertising at LCA learn to create (in part) by using a variety of theories including: semiotics, linguistics, semantics, content analysis, gaze theory and identity theory. They also deploy a number of 'strategic' paradigms/models:

- 'When thinking is of high importance'   logical and informative model
- 'When feeling is of high importance'   self-esteem model
- 'When thinking is of low importance'   habitual model
- 'When feeling is of low importance'   self-satisfaction model

These models relate directly to consumers and how acquisition decisions are made. Some decisions are founded on logic, whilst others are based on emotions, some acquisitions may involve considerable deliberation, while others are made with little or no considerations.
Furthermore, the creative process employs the 'emotional and rational rewards' strategy. They translate as 'sensory', 'egotistical', 'practical' and 'social' rewards realised when purchasing a product or service.

Collectively, these paradigms and strategies can contribute to the conception of an 'endline' (known also as a tagline or slogan). The 'endline' acts as a trigger for recall, encapsulating the primary message of a campaign. Indeed, many endlines express a brand philosophy, reflecting a brand attitude: 'Just do it' for Nike and BT's 'It's good to talk' are excellent examples. Furthermore, there is a semblance between an endline and the 'psychological archetype' in that they can relate to – in particular - a 'behaviour' or personality.

Paradigms, constraints and creativity

Many highly acclaimed writers employ the 'classical paradigms', referred to in the introduction. However, it is important to remember what Field wrote: '…Just because [your] screenplay is well structured and fits the paradigm doesn't make it a good screenplay, or a good movie. The paradigm is a form, not a formula' (Field, 2005, p.28). However, creativity can evolve from structural constraints. Stokes, a former copywriter and now a psychologist, wrote: 'constraints help develop creativity in beginners and help experts solve creative problems… clarifying and directing the creative process' (Stokes, 2006, p.131), as is evident in the paradigms and strategies employed at LCA.

Dave Trott, Internationally renowned copywriter, says: 'basically, you have to reinvent the wheel every time [one creates an advertising campaign]. That's why, in true creativity, there are no rules or formulas.' Trott appears to suggest that to be creative one requires freedom of expression, as many would agree. However, Steve Westbrook, Assistant Professor in English at California State University, questions the 'Just Do It' ideology and argues that we might as well 'ask Umberto Eco to stop fussing with semiotics and history' (2004, p.143). Westbrook is referring to *The Name of Rose*, Eco's first novel written in Italian in 1980 and translated by William

Weaver in 1983. The constraints and paradigms are not rules; they contain themes and questions that are integral to the creative process.

McKee, in his book *Story* (1999),appears to echo Trott and Field in asserting that there is no prototype nor is there a formula for writing great screenplays. Nevertheless, both McKee and Field highlight the importance of using the classical paradigms, suggesting they also support Stokes' views regarding constraints. Which is to say that the paradigms and structures create the constraints.

The questionnaire distributed to advertising practitioners and colleagues in advertising and related higher education was revealing: three of the World's top Creatives in Advertising agree with the deployment of Field's paradigm [set-up, confrontation and resolution] saying that most ads conform, in some way, to these paradigms and structures. It is also supported by Julie Wright, the BA Advertising course Leader at Buckingham College. Mike Sheedy, programme leader of the MA in Advertising at University of Leeds, says '…to create anything that is engaging, memorable and persuasive you have to employ all manner of methods, techniques and strategies.'

Cowgill suggests that 'every successful film, short or long, gives the audience an emotional experience… [as a consequence] we connect with it' (Cowgill, 2006, p.7). Echoing this statement, in part, Du Plessis, author of *The Marketing Mind*, says: 'Advertising does not first get attention, and then create an emotion. Advertising creates the emotion, which results in attention' (2005, p.84). Du Plessis goes on to say: 'emotion not only shapes our unconscious reactions to advertising; it also feeds into, shapes and controls our conscious thought about brands, products and services' (Du Plessis, 2005, p.106). Film and advertising appear to connect with their respective audiences through emotions.

The importance of storytelling

A great author, Julian Barnes, once said: 'you could look at human beings as machines designed for storytelling. From body language to syntax, from inflection to timing, we're the perfect shape and form for utilizing this amazing art form.' We explain ourselves through this medium. Who we are, what we like, do, love, hate, our ambitions, fears and yearnings are all communicated through this device (Hegarty, 2011, p.96).

Storytelling and stories have a value that cannot be quantified. They are social phenomena deep rooted in human experience and storytelling naturally employs the language at one's disposal, both visually and verbally. 'And of course when employed correctly, storytelling can make things incredibly memorable, especially for brands' (Hegarty, 2011, p.96). Storytelling brings people together, develops friendships, loyalty and can be unforgettable. It is these attributes, when linked to a brand that can position it firmly in the minds of a consumer.

At one point at BBH we thought we would define our creative approach as storytelling. We eventually backed away from the idea, reasoning it was too prescriptive. It wasn't that we didn't believe in it, but that defining our creative output via one means of expression was too limiting (Hegarty, 2011, p.97).

As the millennium approached, the .com revolution and the emergence of new technologies made advertising agencies nervous, and BBH was equally concerned, as Hegarty revealed in an interview with Stephen Armstrong in the Guardian (Monday 13 June 2011). Subsequently, advertising agencies created a number of 'On Demand' models, based on consumers' ability to select and choose a particular brand and how they interact with it. Effectively, the consumer could *now* manage the advertising viewed. The need for storytelling through television and cinema, the cost of production and air time was slashed in favour of the cheaply produced 'instructional

advertising' for the Internet. It's conceivable that this was influential when consultation took place in 2005 and 2011 with respect to the curriculum for the BACAP. However, in real terms, different technologies merely present different creative and communication problems.

A paradigm shift and the influence of 'YouTube'

The Internet and in particular 'YouTube' has become a playground for storytelling. Advertisers recognise the potential for 'viral' advertising – short stories intended to be passed from one viewer to the next, as storytelling has as long as can be remembered, although stories now have the potential to go around the world in seconds. Behaviour may well have changed, the conduit may well be different and the audience beyond anything experienced. Nevertheless, the 'need' to share stories has prevailed. This has prompted the need to secure informed opinion and review the curriculum as it stands in 2012.

The need for change

As a vocational programme it would be folly not to integrate current practices employed by leading advertising agencies in London with offices throughout the world. In advertising the character [protagonist] can take different forms, as indicated in this response to the questionnaire: Waites says: 'A character can play the part of the audience – ask all the questions they may have.' This may provide opportunities to create an antagonist or a second protagonist that would 'journey' through the campaign within a 'classical paradigm'. Beattie writes: 'The protagonist plays a vital role: it's often the brand itself. Or the brand personified.' This is particularly true of car advertising, where the car is the hero, confronted with wet roads, dangerous bends, etc. Cleaning products and services are heroes too, cleaning dangerous kitchen worktops, destroying dangerous germs lurking in the toilet.

Dramatic structure

The nature of the screenplay deals in pictures, and if we wanted to define it, we could say that a screenplay is a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure (Field, 2005 p.19).

It is worth noting that many 'big budget' commercials appear to contain some of the classical paradigms, consciously or unconsciously. Many of the characteristics associated with Field's paradigm are exercised in the Guinness commercial *The Surfer,* directed by Jonathan Glazer (2007). *The Surfer* follows the archetype of David and Goliath – the underdog confronting a far more powerful opponent – nature. The protagonist, 'a surfer', is waiting for *his dream* wave (*Dramatic Need)*: 'He waits, that's what he does' (*set-up). The* *Confrontation* is both in the waiting (internal conflict) and surfing the 'dream' wave (external conflict). *The Climax* is the surfer surfing his dream wave. *The Resolution* is the Guinness glass. Perhaps, for advertising purposes, 'conflict' could be replaced by 'deficiency' as this would create the 'need'.

Empathy, audience and character

…Unless characters are conceived in three dimensions, the audience won't fully relate to them or the story. Your characters must have emotions, attitudes and beliefs, and actions that represent them. They need a history, personal traits and quirks, to come alive. How do we create these? Where do we start? (Cowgill, 2006, p.44).

In advertising, lifestyle boards are created and characters are brought to life. By 'lifestyle' we mean a reflection on the lifestyle habits of the potential consumer as it deals with their 'exterior life'. The characters, very often,

demonstrate the benefit of the product, service or event by appealing to the audience's ego, sensory perception, practical need or social want. However, audience awareness of how advertising works has resulted in an ever-increasing cynicism of advertising. Perhaps the 'exterior life' of characters in advertising is no longer enough to capture the emotional response of an audience.

Within dramatic writing, however, writers are more concerned with creating an 'interior' life for their characters. They explore the character they are creating in depth and in far greater detail, resulting in a 'biography'. The benefits are obvious – the characters are believable. They are created in such a way that we, as the audience, come to know them, and like or dislike them.

The benefit of fusion

The fusion of advertising and creative writing curriculum would fashion 'constraints for creativity [that] preclude reliable, already recognized responses, and [would] promote novel, surprising ones. What gets precluded and what gets promoted are quite specific' (Stokes, 2006, p.131). This idea is reinforced by Monahan who suggests 'rather than going to a zone of thought outside of the area you are working in, instead go to a mind other than your own… you can be inspired by people outside your category' (Monahan, 2002, p.127). Indeed, it is conceivable that 'creative writing' would be an asset to any discipline within art and design. It would provide an alternative method for creating. For example one could write a story relating to an imaginary garment for fashion, an environment for printed textiles, the interior of an imaginary building, an imaginary product, etc, the list is endless.

The when and how

The fusion of classical paradigms for dramatic writing and the creative and strategic paradigms currently employed at LCA would occur in the second semester of the second year of the BA (Hons) programme. It would be integrated into the modules for both copywriting and art direction, the pathways offered at level 5 (2nd year). This would complement the experience attained from Level 4, in particular deconstructionism, where students are introduced to a variety of interrogative techniques and apply them creatively. Clearly, students on both pathways would benefit from exploring the 'classical paradigms' as it would afford them the opportunity to be creative, and imaginative, whilst consciously retaining a sense of the classical paradigms; used to *construct*. And, it could be carried through into level 6: Dissertation and case studies within the context of advertising, storytelling and screenwriting.

There may well be opportunities, for art directors in particular, to collaborate with peers studying 'creative writing' at level 5 from other institutions, as this would enable students from both disciplines to develop their understanding of differing viewpoints. Writing for screen, in particular, involves an awareness of visual language - what can be said through action, environment and body language? And one can only assume that both would benefit from such an experience. The understanding of visual communication that the creative advertising students would bring to the collaboration could only help the writer, as is the case in advertising (copywriters work with art directors). Equally, the writer's use of structure would focus the art director to synthesise. Indeed this may result in exchanges between lecturers through workshops or seminars.

Conclusion

Cooper and Dancyger say '…Screen stories for both short and long films often share characteristics with other kinds of storytelling' (Cooper and Dancyger, 2005, p.90). Sources for inspiration can be found in articles, jokes, poetry, idioms and anecdotes, all of which are used in advertising. By introducing students to workshops in creative and 'dramatic' writing, students would have the opportunity to move towards 'mastering' some of the aforementioned paradigms, strategies, structures and principles. As aforementioned, it would benefit any number of the creative disciplines to partake in creative writing as a means of stimulating concepts and ideas. Behaviour patterns will inevitably change, but storytelling is and will remain at the heart of all cultures so long as there is a shared language, a sender and a receiver.

Contact information

david.anderson@leeds-art.ac.uk

Biography

As a graduate of Glasgow School of Art, currently undertaking an MA in *Writing for Performance and Publication* at the University of Leeds, David Anderson was a creative director in advertising and enjoyed nine successful years as an art director. Recently, he has written and had one play performed and one short story on radio.

David is now the leader of a very successful BA Creative Advertising Programme at Leeds College of Art. It has enjoyed success with students gaining employment in London's top advertising agencies, winning D&AD and alumni winning the silver lion and global awards at Cannes.

References

Armstrong. J.S. (2010) *Persuasive Advertising, Evidence-based Principles*, UK, Palgrave MacMillan.

Armstrong. S., (2011) 'John Hegarty: Why television is the place advertisers want to be again' The Guardian 13 June [online] http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/jun/13/interview-john-hegarty-bbh

Cooper, P. and Dancyger, K. (2005) *Writing The Short Film* (3rd ed), USA, Elsevier Focal Press.

Cowgill, L. J. (2006) *Writing Short Films* (2nd ed) New York, Watson-Guptil Publications.

Crotty, M. (2003) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, London, Sage.

Dawson, P. (2005) *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*, London, Routledge.

Du Plessis, E. (2005) *The Advertising Mind,* United Kingdom & USA, Millward Brown.

Dyer. G. (2005) *Advertising As Communication*, Oxen, Routledge.

Edgar, D. (2009) *How plays work*, UK, CPI Antony Rowe.

Field, S. (2005) *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, New York, Delta.

Gettins, D. (2000) *The Unwritten Rules of Advertising,* London, Kogan Page.

Glazer, J. (2007) Guinness - *The Surfer.* YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zff9hVH3ptY.

Hegarty, J. (2011) *Hegarty on Advertising - Turning Intelligence into Magic.* London, Thames & Hudson.

Holt, D. and Cameron, D. (2010) *Cultural Strategy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Hudson, H. (1989) British Airways –

 Face YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yxbgm9Bmkzw&feature=related.

Jameson, F. (1983) *Postmodernism and Consumer Society,* New York, Bay Press.

Leitch, V. B. et al (2010) *The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism.* (2nd Ed.) New York, Norton.

Lennard, J. and Luckhurst, M. (2002) *The Drama Handbook: A guide to reading plays,*Oxford, Oxford University Press.

McCutchen, J. (2004) *The Writer's Journey*, UK, Firefly Media.

Marcantonio, A. and Riley, T. (2011) *The Copy Book*, China, Taschen.

McKee, R. (1998) *Story, Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting,*London, Methuen.

Monahan, T. (2002) *The Do-It-Yourself Lobotomy,* New York, John Wiley & Sons.

Morley, D. (2007) *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Ogilvy, D. (1963) *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, New York, Atheneum.

Pricken, M. (2001) *Creative Advertising*, Thames & Hudson, London, UK.

Sapir, E. (1985) *Selected Writings in Language, Culture, and Personality,* Los Angeles, University of California Press.

Sharp, B. (2010) *How Brands Grow*, Australia & New Zealand, Oxford University Press.

Sigh, T. (2007) Levi - *Swimmer* YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c8NSljbw8M.

Spencer, S. (2002) *The Playwright's Guidebook*, London, Faber and Faber.

Westbrook, S. (2004) 'Just Do It™: Just Do It: Creative Writing Exercises and the Ideology of American Handbooks', in *New Writing*, Vol 1:2, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

Williams, E. (2012) *How 30 Great Ads Were Made From Idea to Campaign,* London, Laurence King.

Williams. R. (1980) 'Advertising: Magic System', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London, Verso.

Williamson. J. (2002) *Decoding Advertisements, Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, London, Marion Boyars Publishers.

Wisker, G. (2008) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook* (2nd Ed.) China, Palgrave Macmillan.

Acknowledgements

Listing and header image: sourced from morgueFile.com