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Narrative and the News: The Permeation and Potential Propaganda of the Storytelling Style through Broadcast Media

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**Narrative and the News: The Permeation and Potential Propaganda
of the Storytelling Style through Broadcast Media**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Literary and Cultural Studies from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Preface

This project has been completed within the program of Literary and Cultural Studies at the College of William & Mary. The topic has been approached via a range of theoretical and ontological strategies which extend into and across a range of disciplines. While this exploration of a phenomenon in news media was molded with an interdisciplinary approach befitting the field, its intended audience is more precise. My argument challenges narrative conceptions and stylizing in the field of mass communication. The targeted audience is those involved in the reporting and production of media stories, and the educators and students of journalism and rhetoric programs who seek to better understand the process of and ethical issues associated with constructing the news.

While other fields have benefitted from integration of theory and practice, many still consider journalism and mass communication transmitted through television as an applied scientific and technological practice, void of a need for continued analysis and reformatting. Infused with research strategies from several areas of study, this paper specifically seeks to inform the industry charged with reflexively informing society about itself. Its premise, formatting, implications of consequence, and ethical probes are tailored toward those directly connected to the creation and study of broadcast.

However, this should not discourage an inquisitive mind seeking to achieve a better understanding of broadcast media and its potential effects. While the purpose of the project is to make the issues in producing news more visible

and intelligible to the industry and academia associated with journalism, the viewer is an inherent part of the process of narrative distribution through visual mass communication. Thus, it is imperative that both those who create and receive televised messages share a deeper understanding of the process of media's potential undue persuasiveness as well as a willingness to ask if what is presented as "the news" is in fact reminiscent of lived reality.

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Once Upon a Time: An Introduction to Narrative in Mass Media

The story began on the particularly dreary, rainy night of February 26th, 2012, in a quiet neighborhood in Sanford, Florida. But the story certainly wouldn't stay within the gated community. Self-appointed neighborhood watch coordinator, George Zimmerman, age 28, was on a personal errand that dark evening when he observed Trayvon Martin, 17, engaging in what he identified to a non-emergency police dispatcher as "suspicious" behavior. After Zimmerman placed the call, he and Trayvon were involved in an altercation--a violent one--which resulted in Zimmerman fatally shooting the teen in the chest at close range, in what he claimed to be a necessary and lawful act of self-defense (Stutzman). While the news stations would try to pick apart and report every discoverable detail leading up to and following the shot heard around the world, in the weeks following the event the media circus would also focus on another key factor: race. The public was made very aware that the deceased Martin was of African American descent, and that Zimmerman is of a mixed Hispanic heritage (Prieto).

In the hours and days following the shooting, the narrative surrounding the event spread to local stations, and then to national newsmakers. It garnered the attention of viewers and readers, as well as officials and representatives, all over the United States and abroad. While reporters hashed out the happenings and analysts attempted to frame the event within the figuring of society, audiences everywhere grew outraged over the authorities' failure to charge Zimmerman for what they believed had to have been murder. The broadcast

video and audio reportage itself seemed compelling enough to convict him, perhaps even of a hate crime. It wasn't until a substantial amount of time after the late February event that the public learned that the story blaring from the news channels and plastered across the front pages of newspapers may not have been completely rooted in the truth.

While the evidence and accounts reported were not fabricated, they were unquestionably constructed by media outlets. One of the primary audio sources provided via NBC newscasts was the recording of the call Zimmerman placed directly before the shooting. The track played by the station made it seem as if Zimmerman had volunteered information about Martin's race. After hearing conversation between the caller and the dispatcher, the audience only heard Zimmerman remark, as if unprompted, "He looks black." However, a vital question was left out. What the viewer couldn't hear was the voice on the other end of the line clearly ask Zimmerman what race the man walking through the neighborhood appeared to be (Wemple). When the public was informed of this omission, they were confused, and rightly questioned the network's motives. Why cut just a few seconds off an important piece of audio? NBC eventually apologized for providing this misleading evidence, but the network supplied no definite reason as to why the recording was altered for transmission (Wemple). In a similar case, multiple stations also played the clip from the call of the dispatcher telling Zimmerman that it was not necessary to pursue Martin. What these stations did not play was Zimmerman's response: "Okay" (Sowell). Because of these omissions, Zimmerman sued NBC for defamation, believing the station was trying to make his actions appear racially motivated and therefore alter the

outcome of the case (Martinez). But the court of public opinion was already in session.

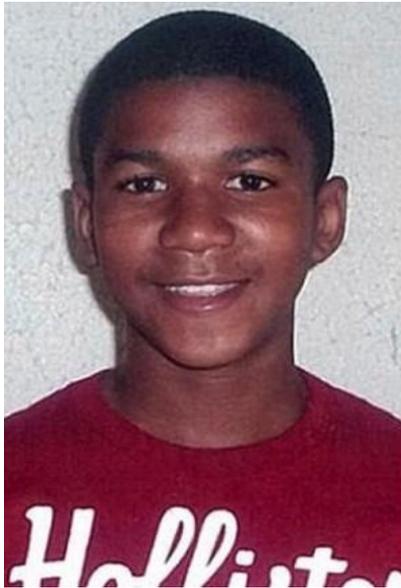
While the tape was selectively edited, the dialogue it contained was also selectively interpreted by broadcast analysts. CNN made multiple claims that Zimmerman uttered a racial slur during the 911 call-- “coon” (Graham). While the comment is very difficult to hear, experts were later called in to assay the dialogue. When they came to the scrutinized comment, they determined that Zimmerman was most likely saying “cold,” or potentially “punk” (“Expert: George Zimmerman did not use racial slur before shooting Trayvon Martin”). While a complete, empirical truth may be evasive, CNN’s initial coverage seemed to be certain in its original, racially charged interpretation. The station has since removed any evidence of coverage that implicates a racial slur on the tape and taken a big step back in what was once a confident assertion (Graham). These edits brought race relations to the forefront of this tragedy, and allowed for a preexisting, painful history and an emotionally charged racial dichotomy to resurface through the reportage.

While it is undoubtedly compelling, audio was not the only type of information used that mislead viewers; video related to the case was molded by news analysts to fit the perceived nature of the narrative. In response to Zimmerman’s testament that he shot Martin in self-defense, ABC aired blurry, low quality security footage of Zimmerman at the police station, captured after the shooting. Network commentators claimed repeatedly that the tape showed no sign of injury--to hear them tell it, he appeared to be in perfect condition. But later, enhanced footage displayed two lacerations on the back of Zimmerman’s

head, while other pictures illustrated additional injuries on his face (Gutman). What the audience was seeing, and believing, did not resemble a picture of the truth.

As the story was continuously covered, very different pictures were used to identify both of the individuals involved in the altercation. These images became

icons for the characters they depicted, but they may not have been the most accurate representations. As the Associated Press noted, both of the images were dated.



George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin / CBS/AP

The one of Martin was taken when he was much younger--a baby-faced boy just entering his teens. Media outlets' preferred photo of Zimmerman was a stark mugshot taken in 2005¹, when he appeared much bulkier than he did in 2012 (Sedensky). The conflict was further shaped for the audience by these images' juxtaposition. All the elements of the story as originally portrayed by the media perfectly aligned and painted a cogent picture: Zimmerman was guilty of a racially motivated murder.

Why would the media want to implicate Zimmerman in this crime? The answer is simple--it didn't. The intent of news networks was not to convict, but to

¹ All charges against Zimmerman were dropped in the 2005 case.

capture audiences through the most revered yet universal format of human communication: storytelling. By falling into ethical pitfalls in attempts to coerce the elements of the shooting into a compelling narrative arc richly embellished with controversy, media made the story larger than life and reigned in the attentions of viewers. What happened is a tragedy--a life cut short; whether or not Zimmerman is guilty or innocent is a different matter entirely. What matters to the study of modern broadcast media is the motivation behind and the process related to the creation of this narrative. Of concern to the public should be the influence of this narrative type reportage, because when the story first broke--and these manipulations detailed above were believed by most to be true--public opinion that Zimmerman was guilty spiked. When they were debunked, opinion neutralized (Johnson). The audience was highly influenced, and continues to be highly influenced, by the stories broadcast media spins.

With increasing frequency, mass media of all types selects and molds pieces of reality to comply with a narrative structure in order to bait audiences and bring them back to the news source for continued updates. This tendency comprises not only a habit of these varying news outlets, but a pervasive style that is beginning to sink through the news culture. These narratives become emotional enthrallments for viewers, and often lead the audience to adopt a consequential perspective; this subverts the quality of discourse and leads to manipulation. While this narrative formatting is certainly not restrained to broadcast media, the visual stimulation and capacity of the medium allows its effects to be especially poignant, and therefore potentially detrimental.

This paper seeks to analyze the prevalence and persuasiveness of narrative broadcast while establishing and exploring the elements of narrative enhanced by this form of modern reportage. It will begin with an analysis of the contemporary media culture at large as related to narrative, including the statistics and theory which seek to define and refine this cultural practice, and continue to provide insight into the inherent persuasiveness of the visual in mass media. Then, key elements of the narrative form--structure, character, voice, and theme--will be defined in the given context while their use to the broadcast style is evaluated. Finally, the paper will weigh the repercussions this added emphasis has brought about, then propose and support the need for a shift in ethical focus. Three sections are further subdivided into chapters to provide each area with a centered point of focus, yet each subject influences the other--just as elements of narrative in news work in unison. The conclusion will briefly touch again on the integration of these principles, and emphasize the importance of further research into the matter at hand.

The methodology of this paper relies on the integration of communication and mass media theory, statistical and scientific analysis, and the classical narrative structure reserved traditionally by English departments. It is not meant as a psychology based experiment, such as one conducted by a communication research department, but rather this work takes an interdisciplinary approach with the aim of more fully understanding an identifiable yet ignored trend in mass communication. By drawing on various disciplines, the paper seeks to provide a more complete picture of modern media and the effects current trends have on individual perceptions and society at large. The underlying purpose of

the paper is to expose the reader, who is almost invariably a consumer of mass media, and the journalist to a subtle yet powerful influence that could have lasting and dramatic effects in regards to perception and a culture that has built itself around media.

To the modern audience, these types of studies are essential. Because whether or not it is acknowledged, the media already has substantial control over the narratives which play out every day. If all the world is a stage, and the men and women are merely players, then in the modern world mass media holds the pen of the playwright.

Section I

Understanding Narrative's Position and Created Perspectives

Contemporary Media: Crossing Information with Entertainment

There's a rumor going around that "the news" will soon be no longer. The people who promulgate this myth cite closing newspaper printers, television station's profits slipping into the red, and the rise of the all-powerful and all-knowing internet as evidence that traditional forms of media are on the decline. Those with degrees in journalism from the hallowed halls of academic institutions fear their services will soon be replaced by information spouting from Twitter and Facebook users, and worry they face joblessness in a barren industry. However, recent and ongoing studies show that this supposed turn from the traditional mediums is not actually as prevalent as it's made out to be, because televised news ratings have remained steady. While hash-tagging and instagramming are undoubtedly popular, they are also not an ending blow to America's favorite form of mass media. The notion of "the news" lives on, because people continue to rely on it.

What one can argue, however, is that "the news" as we know it will soon be no longer. The current consumption of news media does not signify a decline, but rather, a shift in preference. Gone are the days of a simple line-up on the nightly news featuring talking heads running through popular headlines and brief tapes of footage sent in from a far-off land. These elements are still present, of course, but there is so much more to the story. Personalities and clips are just bricks in the grander structure of narrative, and narrative is what has become popular.

This transmutation of favor can be largely surmised by examining the style of the presentation--namely, the introduction of a fictional formatting to nonfiction substance. While this emerging trend has been tangled with preexisting structures, certain theoretical paradigms present within communication theory can be combined to examine, and further explain, the current and changing news media climate.

Data alone can speak volumes. The Pew Research Center spent the better part of the last two decades charting the news media consumption of Americans for the simple yet all important purpose of “determining who watches the news, and why” (Pew Research). The center surveyed a diverse population, asking for information on duration, purpose, and medium through which daily news was consumed. Their statistics crosscut the advent of the internet and extend to 2010, a year when almost 70 percent of Americans had broadband internet access in their homes (Pew Internet). Through the entire expanse of the study, television is listed as the single most popular way of obtaining news; as of the final year of data collection, 58 percent of the population stated they accessed television news daily while only 34 percent of those surveyed claimed to have gathered news from only the internet² (Pew Research). These numbers show that, while people may surf the internet or scan sites to glean information, the television is still a staple in the nation’s media diet.

In addition to revealing that television is still the most popular medium from which to receive news in the United States, the Pew media study analyzed how much time viewers took out of their day to watch broadcast news programs.

² This figure does not factor updates received from mobile phone applications

According to the research, Americans spend more time with TV news than any other source--showing not only the perceived usefulness of this medium, but a public devotion as well. Those who access televised news daily spent an average of 55 minutes watching in 2010 (Pew Research). While this statistic has fluctuated some throughout the course of the study, this figure is nearly identical to that of the surveyed time spent watching in 1994, when the internet was still a largely futuristic concept for most consumers. Also, traditional media outlets like television, print, and radio were still shown to reach the largest portion of the population (Stetler). Even as the internet has entered Americans' homes and smart phones have entered their pockets, media forms currently thought to be near obsolete still deliver their messages to the masses.

Television News Reaches More People for Longer

	Got news there yesterday %	Time Spent Among Users			
		Hour or more %	30-59 min %	Less than 30 min %	Average (minutes)
Television	58	56	30	14=100	55
Radio	34	40	26	34=100	45
Internet*	34	25	24	51=100	38
Print newspaper	26	19	38	43=100	37

PEW RESEARCH CENTER June 8-28, 2010. Q10, Q14, Q17, Q19. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.
* Includes online newspapers.

From Pew Research Center for the People and the Press

But why? Above all other forms, why has television kept its place at the top of the media totem pole? Although online formats can supply commercial-free

convenience and are constantly available, the reasons Americans seek news information reveals the means that television media has used to remain popular. When surveyed, most cited “breaking news and headlines” as their main reason for tuning into broadcast news, signifying that the urgency and up-to-date qualities of the medium had great appeal (Pew Research). However, a marked number of people (an average of approximately 11 percent across the specific televised news sources analyzed) stated they tuned into the news for the sole purpose of entertainment (Pew Research). This group found said entertainment not only in the lighthearted political satire news shows like *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*, but also in the more mainstream media programs. For instance, 18 percent of the population who frequently watched morning news shows said they did so only for entertainment value, and 13 percent of those who watched MSNBC stated the same purpose (Pew Research). An additional average of 17 percent of those surveyed stated they engaged in their preferred news sources for a broader combination of reasons, which included entertainment (Pew Research). The study did not collect information from participants in the past including entertainment as a reason for watching the news, but that alone is indicative of this rising trend in purpose. While the news media of television’s earliest days was meant to pass updates and opinions from the stations to the living rooms, modern televised news attempts to do this while grabbing the audience’s attention through introducing an added element of entertainment to information.

In an effort to further understand media trends, the Pew study analyzed contemporary opinions of news media coverage. A whopping eight in ten

Americans state they believe there is a bias in mass media (Pew, 2011). While those surveyed focused mostly on detecting a liberal or conservative slant, communication theory reveals that not only political leanings, but style as well, attach value to reportage. Bias comes not only through the pushing of agendas but also through the stylized narrative formatting of information dissemination.

Inarguably, the format of broadcast news has changed through the decades. Viewing clips from 1950s newscasts or even earlier news reels is a completely different experience from tuning into CNN today--this is not only because of the obvious technological advances. While simpler formats were once favorable in the media climate, television media is becoming much more complicated in its presentation.



ABC

In days gone by, news briefs were the ideal; the who, what, when, and where were laid out for the audience, and little else³. Only occasionally, a “why” with value implications might be provided (Hart 1). The emergence of the “new journalists” began to change this. The talking heads style reportage was booted, and “eye witness” news shows became the mode. These shows took a more active

³ This statement discounts the past usage of conventional propaganda in American and other forms of media, which unfortunately lies outside of the scope of this project. Resources for further research into these conventional forms of propaganda and their influence can be found in the bibliography.

role in news reporting, tracking down interviews and using on-the-scene reportage, and emphasizing the visual (Murray).

In multiple ways, this news form laid the foundation for the emotionally driven storytelling style seen today. “Action news” developed around the same time, using a stricter format to keep stories contained to short (usually 90 second) time slots, allowing the news programs to cover more events and entertaining the viewer with constant variety (Murray). From this form, we draw the current sense of urgency many news casts relate. Both action and eyewitness news emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and been continuously used in various local news stations’ names (as seen in the images on the prior page). However, just as these more complex methods replaced the elementary, another elaborate approach is coming into its own and drawing from both of these sources--narrative news.

This distinct genre has not quite replaced the former two; instead, it has evolved from them to create a unique format and effect. While the news has always been concerned with sharing stories in their most basic form (that is, answering what has happened), narrative news seeks to do this while delivering a compelling--and entertaining--account meant to draw the audience into the story elements more so than into the event’s facts. News may still be the name, but increasingly, intrigue is becoming the game. By combining the personableness and storytelling function of eyewitness news (compelling interviews, popular personalities) with the urgency of the action news style, narrative news gives us the “best” (or perhaps worst) of both media worlds. Although this “storytelling”

has been scrutinized for dramatization and sensationalization in the past, even the most stringent of judges in the field are beginning to accept the trend as a suitable media tradition. To provide just one example, Michelle Roberts and Jack Hart, the latter, an authority on narrative media, coauthored a narrative news package that garnered a Pulitzer for breaking news⁴ (Hart 2). What once might have been strictly declared an artistically driven essay can now be labeled as mass media news communication, as the differentiations between the two have been sufficiently muddled.

Of course, postmodern discourse has blurred many boundaries; in the field of media studies, these deconstructive principles can easily be applied to further examine the blurring of distinctions between information and entertainment (Tomascikova). No longer does one need to change the channel from a popular news station to a soap opera to switch from receiving information to accessing a riveting drama; broadcast media can provide the gamut. Tomascikova, a mass media theorist, argues that some of this narrative-centered focus is inherent based on the medium alone; she asserts that television is entertainment narrative in its very substance, and these stories are present whether a show is characterized as fiction or nonfiction. However, she further asserts that this narrative quality has been utilized to a greater extent by contemporary media, and that accounts of all types are increasingly offered to the western viewer in the form of a visual story. This storytelling function of the television is utilized to its full extent to draw the masses to newscasts.

⁴ The breaking news package in question related the story of a family lost in the mountains of Oregon and contained both print and online content.

Furthermore, she posits that these narratives structure our perceptions of reality. The type of narrative journalism currently privileged turns the daily life of the viewer into a story; narrative is not only used to retell the past, but rather, the news relies on its storytelling structure to explain and mediate present knowledge and practices, as well as to make future projections (Tomascikova). These statements are easily supported through relevant communication theory, and also, by turning an introspective eye to society via close reading.

Tomascikova extends her analysis into the business behind mass media as well. She further illustrates that narrative media is a way to make sales for the news industry. Compelling narratives bring in viewership, which in turn promotes the purchasing of advertising spots. Following the basic rules of capitalism, other news formats must then compete for those same advertisers, and thus resort to the same (or, accelerated) means to bolster viewership (Tomascikova). The questions asked by media companies become less about accuracy, and more about quality of narrative. Who can offer the best story? Who can entertain?

To constitute narrative media, information must be properly molded to provide a compelling story. First, news stories must have the fundamental cornerstones for the narrative arc---a beginning, middle, and an end (Hart 1). This strong internal structure is paramount because it allows for the building of dramatic tension and the acceleration of pace to course through a report which might otherwise lack these facets. Hart also advocates that the players and places in narrative news pieces must be relatable and vivid in order to create an acceptable narrative; in regards to crafting a media account, he states “instead of

sources, it would have characters. Instead of topics, it would have scenes” (1). He continues his claim by stating that accuracy must also be a goal, but that the primary purpose of narrative news is to reveal truths beyond the scope of the ordinary--or the other news stations (Hart 2). Thus, the goal must be to offer information not only based in reality, but based on a wider range of information--information formatted in a more compelling manner, information holding a greater interest value than other news formats. After all, polls show that the current population holds a rising interest in all formats of stories drawn out from reality (Hart 1). Doesn't it make sense that media stations should make stories out of reality?

The communication theory behind this research supports the former inquiry. However, as previously mentioned, not just one school of thought can attempt to explain this emerging trend. While communication theory has endured some devaluing from various institutions of the proverbial academy, where a more full-blown postmodern integration has allowed for the breakdown of binaries and fluid, varied thought patterns, many courses (in the somewhat limited number of universities which even offer these classes) still teach communication theory principle by principle, while ignoring how these assertions work in communion with one another. This remaining portion of this section will provide an application of three different theories to the current phenomenon, and end with an integration to further the ability for understanding narrative at work.

The primary theory behind the rise of narrative style can be identified as Narrative theory; the axioms it provides identify the reasons viewers prefer to tune in to fast paced, intriguing stories. Developed by Walter Fisher, the theory's

primary focus states that humans are natural storytellers and that--rather than just empirical facts--values, emotions, and aesthetic considerations ground behavior and reasoning (West and Turner). Fisher surmises that the essence of human nature is storytelling--everyone is engaged in narrative. Of course, there is more than just one version of a story or one set of facts; one must choose between different retellings, and the decisions made form the basis of beliefs (West and Turner). Stories are what individuals consume on a daily basis, and the narrations that one places faith within come to influence his or her opinion of what is reported.

“Knowing,” according to Fisher, comes not just from the basics of what is presented, but is determined by opinions and perceptions communicated in narrative as well. Aristotle defined the different ways ideas about reality are formed. He identified two: logos and mythos. Logos is defined as pure knowledge ($1+1=2$), while mythos rises from probabilistic knowledge (for instance, what arises from understanding the purpose behind a murderer’s motives as communicated through narrative) (West and Turner). While communication theorists and media researchers largely rely on a rational world paradigm, a system of logic fortified by research and observation, the average viewer utilizes a narrative paradigm. This latter paradigm relies more heavily on mythos; reporters and witnesses are judged on coherence and fidelity more than anything else (West and Turner). Thus, a news story is not judged solely by the facts⁵

⁵ “Facts” in this instance serves to signify evidence of an event, or items presented that are widely believed to be true.

presented, but rather the *way* the facts are presented. “Does the story make sense?” becomes the primary question the viewer asks of media.

This theory is vital to reportage because it indicates how formatting and aesthetics, and not just political leanings, can sway an audience. Fisher tells us that viewers aren’t just listening for the basic elements of inquiry when they watch the news--they’re listening to how those elements are strung together. As audiences see different parts of the story unfold, they are influenced by how the storyteller presents these elements--in regards to broadcast media, one calls this process of making sense of the facts news analysis. Through news analysts, the audience reaches a richer, more complicated state of understanding through the story elements and explanations the broadcaster provides and accentuates.

A different type of analysis, Cultivation Analysis, developed by George Gerbner and Lawrence Gross, expands on what narrative theory posits by further translating what happens on the screen to what occurs in the viewer.. The theory makes the causal argument that television creates conceptions of social reality; members of the viewing public form knowledge through broadcast narrative and by this create hypotheses regarding their surroundings (West and Turner). Thus, the narrative shaped and presented by mass media permeates the viewer’s psyche to form patterns of perception across a population. This translation is not automatic, but rather, as the title of the chapter suggests, it is cultivated over time by the continuous transmission of narrative themes (Gerbner, Gross, et al).

Cultivation comes in small doses. Gerbner and Gross used the “ice age analogy” to illustrate its effects. While there were only subtle temperature changes during the thousands of years preceding what modern science has called

the ice age, the earth eventually grew drastically colder, oceans froze, and the overall climate changed. Likewise, while media does not instantly brainwash viewers, it delivers perceptual alterations that amass over time within minds and within societies like slow moving propaganda (West and Turner). This cultivation results in mainstreaming, which is the application and forming of a common world view across varying subgroups of a population (Griffin). This shift in world view is not due to the heavy-handed effects of conventional propaganda--it's a subtle seeping of a homogenized ideology that comes from the continuous transmission of narrative.

The theorists behind Cultivation Analysis were also concerned in particular with television as a means of narrative transmission. Gross and Gerbner asserted that the realities television constructs are founded on assumptions and values rather than concrete evidence alone, agreeing with primary concepts of narrative theory (Gerbner). The visual medium is able to paint a convincing picture of the world the viewer occupies; this picture then becomes a tool for socialization and enculturation as it establishes a shared experience based in the embellished narrative surrounding an event rather than actuality itself (West and Turner). When the theory was first tested in the late 1960s, and when it has been retested in the early 2000s, surveys have shown that those who are exposed with greater frequency and duration to television are more likely to perceive the world as violent and crime ridden--the way many dramas and news shows portray it to be (West and Turner). With added exposure, the narrative's effects amount.

Stuart Hall's work in laying the foundation for the Cultural Studies school of thought elaborates on how media can change not only individual perceptions, but entire cultures through the transmission of narrative messages. According to this theory, the very culture of the United States relies on media; however, media can be influenced by various sources. Thus, when the news is affected by bias--a hidden agenda, dominant ideologies, persuasive styles--it is able to influence the culture as a whole (West and Turner). What begins on the screen eventually transforms into reality, along with its repercussions.

Hall contends that culture spreads its influence to every intricacy of human existence; its inherent practices and assumptions seep into the mental frameworks that come to structure perceptions of the greater world (West and Turner). Ipso facto, it is through entering minds that media's message is able to make its way into a culture. Media has more than just the power to inform--it has the power to create a lexicon of common terms, a shared understanding and recognition, and connective meaning. It may be produced by humans, but it creates human societies.

The aforementioned influence is inherently connected to the power structure that operates on all levels of a media-based society; the quality of this power is cause for further study (West and Turner). The neo-Marxist school often characterizes mass media as a method for the powerful to exploit the powerless, thus the masses have little control. Theorists of the Frankfurt School emphasize that media's primary power comes from its ability to amass income rather than distribute information (West and Turner). Although these ways of thinking are slightly different in focus and occupy more extreme ends of modern

thought, when it comes to narrative, the motives for using its stylistic persuasion could lie between these two crosshairs of neo-Marxism and the Frankfurt School.⁶

While the discourse regarding the nature of power associated with mass media differs, academics within cultural studies have researched and highlighted several of its notable effects. The first is the Marxist depiction of false consciousness, which states that a large percentage of the viewing audience is unaware of the sway media has in regards to their perception formation and experiences (West and Turner). According to this theory, media controls the masses while it is controlled by an elite. Thus the system of power between groups is obscured, creating a chain of command that incites multiple reactions, leaving each agent seemingly fully independent (Pomer). Further neo-Marxist studies posit that media provides a “theater of struggle” between ideologies--in other words, a platform for proponents of different issues and ideologies to compete through the means mass broadcast provides and by fomenting various narratives which vie for the dominant position (West and Turner). These concepts are similar in theme: they require the audience to take a position within their society based off a transmitted narrative (West and Turner). Opinions--while not completely controlled through broadcast, are fomented by and altered by information presented in mass communication. Regardless of who controls the media, the narrative eventually exerts its own control over the masses.

⁶ The first theory derives from a more traditional Marxist thought, and the second from the Frankfurt School is based in neo-Marxism. Although they have ideological similarities, their variances represent different paradigms from which media is analyzed.

By analyzing these theories in concert one can see how, through shaping the information within even the smallest news segment, influencing multiple levels of society becomes possible. The average viewer flips on his or her television to their preferred medium of news getting--the television. They watch for the weather, sports updates, and then they come across a feature. Just as narrative theory predicts, they are drawn into the story. Reporters provide them with a setting, characters, and sound. Audiences believe what they see for multiple reasons-- the account is coherent, and displays a strong sense of mythos. The viewer senses the strong emotions resonating in the story and recognizes the promoted values; the account must then be true because it *seems* true. The story hangs together in a logical and compelling fashion.

The same narrative is repeated on different popular news channels, it appears in a current events magazine, and is featured on the home page of MSN. Slowly but surely, the “knowing” the viewer took from the first recounting is fortified, cultivated. The news piece becomes more than a brief clip featured during prime time. It becomes reality-- a theme that courses through the present.

Of course, the piece was seen by more than just that one, solitary viewer. American culture depends on the media, so millions were watching the national broadcast, picked up the same magazine, saw the same website. The initial story evolves to become a part of the contemporary culture. It is talked about over water coolers, fretted about over phone lines, and analyzed by academics. The story has gained power by infiltrating the viewer and the world that produced it.

The analysis of these theories provides not only an explanation of how a story in the narrative style can “travel” into society. Perception, according to the

theories mentioned, is inherently tied to narrative delivery. This same perception extends its prowess past individual accounts and into the culture as a whole. As the lines between information and entertainment are blurred, what is acknowledged as “reality” also has the potential to be drastically altered. And further, because journalists and stations may be (as discussed in the first section) tempted to report the most compelling narrative as opposed to the most accurate account, a host of ethical questions present themselves.

This paper focuses mainly on televised narrative--this is not because the narrative style is not popular in other mediums, nor is it that these theories are not applicable to other areas. Rather, the center of this paper lies within the visual because of the power of persuasion it possesses. The next section will further delve into the reasons why the visual has an augmented power through the use of neurological communication studies and further utilization of the theories outlined and applied to the viewing public in this section.

Why We Believe: The Visual Art and Technology of Media Narration

As the old adage goes, “seeing is believing.” But how reliable is that saying when it comes to broadcast? Narrative comes in a plethora of varieties; as Hart stated, “We do not only hear stories, we see them unfold directly and indirectly through multiple mediums (3). Naturally, this statement has its own implications in regards to cultivation analysis. However, not all mediums are created equal. To the human mind, seeing is above all others. Broadcast relies on this sense of sight to tell its stories.

Broadcast provides not only narrative, but a more complete narrative. While newspaper reports must chronicle events with their text, and photojournalists must relate a feature with only stills, broadcast has the innate ability to tell a story in a way that can be taken in through multiple senses (West and Turner). It can call

upon witnesses, text, immediate updates, scientific imaging, added visual aids, and real time footage and audio--or any combination, to report an event.



Furthermore, there is also a direct capacity for editing; while each medium must select what is to be included in a report, the ability to edit and juxtapose various visuals afforded to broadcast has the effect to greatly enrich or alter

narrative; this medium has the direct and literal power to expose or obscure news items (Abramson 82). By controlling what can be seen on the screen, the media can control and frame what we see within society. The editing used (like cutting 911 tapes in the Zimmerman/Martin case, for instance) can further shape or distort these perceptions. Broadcast has the power to control what is seen, and how it is seen.

As the entertainment style of reporting has emerged, broadcast has undergone notable and unique changes as well. These reforms have both influenced narrative and been brought about by viewer preference for narrative. The rise of 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year news stations⁷ and improved technologies have facilitated an expanded scope of broadcast, but shifting focuses and reallocated resources have brought about diminished depth of coverage (Abramson 89). According to media analysts, what has resulted within the average newscast is a series of more linear and less inclusive story lines organized around one or two main narratives. While financial backing and in-depth reporting can still be found in the modern media climate, these limited resources are devoted only to the stories with the most potential for compelling narrative, or in other words, the most potential for increased viewership and interest (Cramerotti 71). As broadcast has expanded, narrative has become essential to filling time slots and drawing crowds. Its need for expanded resources and coverage to be fully developed has in turn altered the pattern of the broadcast show by blocking out other items of information.

⁷ This is commonly referred to as the “CNN effect.”

Marshall McLuhan once said “medium is the message.” Whether or not he truly meant this assertion aside, it provides an interesting angle from which to examine the captivating effects and powerful implications of broadcast (West & Turner 432). As stated, television news selects and interprets what is deemed worth seeing; given its popularity, broadcast makes this choice for millions of viewers. While once upon a time it was the winners who wrote history, those who hold the microphone in front of a camera are now given the power to construct the overarching chapters of narrative by packaging 90-second pieces; this constitutes a new order for the franchising of power over recording events (Cramerotti 72). And these televised broadcasts don’t just record--they interpret. Commentary provides the audience with a structure from which to rationalize and contextualize happenings (Mody 47). Through the medium’s coupling of audio, visual, and textual narrative, along with the combination of reporting and analyzing, broadcast creates a completed message for transmission (Effron). Because a story is presented through television, it is deemed important, formatted for the viewing society, and given a “totalized” packaging by being transmitted through multiple senses. Television augments narrative power.

The medium is the message, but that is not to say this message is all consuming. It is, however, a strong one. Past research regarding the persuasiveness of mass media has been hindered by perceptual binaries. From the dawning of audio and visual news-making, theorists and pockets of the public alike have been concerned with sensationalism and increased effects of influence (Beckett 67). Communication theory regarding news transmission and perception constructs has been previously split along a sort of all or nothing dividing line. On

one side of the schism, scholars advocated the “limited effects” principle and reasoned that media influence was near nonexistent; on the other, researchers hypothesized that media had the potential to completely brainwash viewers. Modern thought finds the pull of mass media to lie somewhere in the middle of these two extremes (Mody 51-52). The viewer, with a unique background and individual reasoning structure, is still an active agent in consuming media, but the influential pull of media and its ability to compound is undoubtedly tangible in modern democratic reporting. As Cultivation Analysis explains, the “ice age effects” of propaganda occur over a long expanse, not during a single primetime.

Through the use of visual media, news stations take fragments of what has occurred and create a modified reality to distribute to its viewers. A report is processed through a network constructed by numerous voices and viewers; the multifaceted and industrial process of reporting takes tips and witnessed accounts, and through the system of reporting, relaying, and restructuring, builds a new reality (Singer 89). Through this chain, meaning is created on micro and macro levels through society via transmission of a narrated reality. It begins with a single viewer, then spreads horizontally and vertically through the layers of society. In the contemporary era, it happens faster than ever before. An event can take place a thousand miles from the United States and be reported on every major station within minutes. The construction of meaning happens more fluidly, and its reach extends further than ever before (Singer 89). Business people, congressmen and women, shopkeepers, economists, academics--this creation affects everyone. The advent of narrative has given media a greater say in this

creation (Singer 89). By pushing information into narrative structure, mass media meets the viewer halfway in the creation and proliferation of this meaning.

The first level of the creation, micro, matches most precisely with the perceptual formulation cultivation analysis provides. By analyzing individual intake of information presented by mass media, we see the outlines of its powerful place in the modern society. As broadcast blares from the television, its first course of action is to be taken in by the mind watching on the other side of the screen. Perceptions of meaning are borne from this process.

Opinions are formed and molded by narrative broadcast in three different ways. As touched upon previously, visual media can alter meaning through creating visibility. When mass broadcast chooses the topics to which it will devote its air time, it fosters large scale audience awareness; a viewer can only have an opinion if he or she is aware of the topic the opinion regards (Mody 12). By shaping the issues, the media tells the viewer about an event, providing a basis for meaning formation and perhaps expanding on preconceived notions of meaning.

Secondly, media has the potential to prime viewer response through time dedicated to a particular issue or story. According to past studies, time spent covering topics directly influences the viewer's imagined importance of the happening (Mody 13). Thus, mass media's power over perception lies not only in choosing what to cover, but for how long to cover a news story. A thirty-second clip regarding a current event pegged on at the end of a news piece might not even stick in a person's memory; however, a news item slotted near the front of the broadcast to which a substantial amount of time is devoted almost certainly

will. If the viewer sees the topic covered again the next day, or perhaps on another channel as well, the perceived importance of the event will most likely rise. The cultivation of perception continues.

Of course, how a story is reported also holds a considerable amount of sway. The media must assist in framing stories. If it did not provide a shred of background knowledge, how would one understand what led up to the event? Or the way it affects other elements of society? How would one know how to contextualize a happening? However, this framing also allows for the perhaps unavoidable attachment of a spin (Mody 13). The expert analysts who are brought in via Skype, the reporters, the witnesses they interview, the news show's director--everyone aligns with a certain ideology to some extent. Broadcast creates an influential platform for promoting such ideologies. Some news personalities reveal their bias and make their personal voice and politics clear in their reporting. But in other cases, when the reportage at hand is supposed to be value free, a heightened potential for media sway is introduced. Previous global studies have linked public support regarding current wars in various populations to decidedly ideological leanings in the broadcast media to which they were exposed (Mody 14). As the creation of meaning occurs and opinion changes, lived reality and perceptions regarding the world as a whole change in the viewer's mind.

Cramerotti wrote that, in regards to the media consumer, "the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is false [...] there is only narrative" (17). This is not to say that the average viewer is without agency, but instead it emphasizes that while audiences can choose their media sources, they are also subject to the

principles outlined in narrative theory. When they are delivered coherent, and seemingly reliable narratives, they are wont to form their opinions from these accounts. It is not only a true or false depiction of reality which meets the eyes, instead there is a facilitated and specific understanding within narrative that helps the viewer make sense of current events (Singer 91). What is displayed and advocated for through narration by the mass media, be it closely aligned with the truth or contrived with factors of fiction, becomes fragments of individual realities because it is internalized by the eyes watching on a micro level and made into opinion.

Naturally, the term mass broadcast implies this medium reaches, hence affects, the masses. Because of this, narrative's hold spreads into the macro creation of meaning as well. Of course, media influencing the world it serves is not a new topic. Through the history of broadcast, society has been captivated, informed, and persuaded by the medium (West & Turner 33). However, further examination is needed, because in a globalized and entertainment-driven environment, broadcast and mass media have come to be more influential than ever before.

While media contributes to understanding out groups⁸, it allows viewers to see their own place in the story as well. The collective audience comes to understand the international climate and their particular roles in the greater narrative arc through media (Mazzarella, 357). What is seen and what is experienced fits in to the greater schema. Self-structuring through the aid of

⁸ "Out group" is used here to identify social and political groups to which the viewer does not belong

broadcast is labeled as “social envisioning” and has comparable effects on large groups of society--the macro level (Mazzarella 358). Because broadcast narrative is reflexive and reifying technology, it makes society imaginable, intelligible, and tangible to itself through external representation (Mazzarella 346). It is not only a camera, but a mirror.

“Art and journalism don’t transform the world, they transform the meaning of the world,” is a valid paradigm from which to examine the process of social envisioning (Cramerotti 28). Media doesn’t change the world in a direct, physical way. It instead creates meaning on a macro level, which in turn creates, challenges, and alters broader perceptions of what is “reality.” However, these perceptions in turn translate into more concrete forms.

A way in which broadcast holds the potential to directly change the world in a more literal sense is through its contribution to political discourse. Broadcast informs the average viewer, but it also informs their leaders. The same microlevel effects that take hold of the individual influence governments in a similar, yet perhaps more substantial way. News media--through selecting what is to be broadcast, creating a perception of local, national or international importance, and through framing--influences the political agendas of nations. These agendas can become lived experiences for populations (Mody 52). Additionally, the same metaphysical influence of envisioning yields importance; broadcast oratory influences a nation’s perception of the global climate and its own place in the construct. (Mazzarella 346). People see themselves in a society, countries see themselves within a global context.

Just how exactly these factors come to play via broadcast news in the modern globalized climate may be illustrated by examining a case study focusing on media reportage regarding the ongoing conflict in Darfur. While there are numerous print sources relating the unrest, there has been a dearth in broadcast material. It is evident that a high level of narrative, emotional intensity is present in the media's accounts of the Darfur conflict-- one study characterized 41 percent of news pieces relevant to the Darfur conflict available on BBC.org as having a "high emotional media impact" (Mody 289). But, these stories had no footage to accompany them and few substantial images. Restricted broadcast. The limited amount of visual narrative material that can be drawn from Sudan can be attributed to danger and censorship, as well as a lack of media influence in the region (Mody 323). Perhaps the limited action of governments and nongovernmental organizations can be attributed to the same reasons. While the correlation between low visual coverage of the Darfur conflict and its lack of position or absence on the agendas of policymakers may indicate causation, further study is needed. However, it still poses a compelling question that fuels the notion that medium is truly the message, and that the visual holds distinct power in macro meaning creation.

This is but one indication of the importance of visual--the pull of television. In junction with providing a more complete narrative, broadcast has several technological factors which make it an important cite of study. As noted, television reportage can insert "breaking news" updates into its newscast to provide intrigue, urgency, and develop stories--which is identified by audiences surveyed as highly stimulating (Cramerotti 71). Furthermore, it can cultivate

interest through the presentation of visual stimulation; the television screen interprets events and allows us to experience them in a more stimulating way (Naremore 58). As entertainment has become an increasingly important factor in news getting, television has been able to further use these benefits to draw in audiences. Both factors allow broadcast narrative to be spun with excitement, making it an up-to-the-minute real life drama.

The visual contributes to substance as well as to the entertainment factor. Different applications of the “lexes,” or styles of coverage, of broadcast media allow the public to see happenings in different lights; the past is uniquely conceptualized and the future is imagined (Mazzarella 359). Broadcast can utilize documentary methods to persuade audiences; the story’s visual aspects are restructured to highlight areas of interest and to persuade. What the camera captures (style of image, selection, orientation of visual) may subconsciously alter perceptions or actively reshape narrative; the formation of narrative through the capture, editing and presentation of the visual allows for another plane of stylizing (Cramerotti 28). This can make the message more attractive and seemingly more whole. Just like the narrative is more complete, the formation of perception is more thorough.

While the theory is compelling, neurological and psychological research also supports these claims. Visual narrative creates meaning regarding the outside world, but broadcast also has unique effects within the very brain of the viewer as well. The medium’s contribution to the creation of meaning has been discussed, yet the fact that visual news has distinct, scientifically documented effects that can contribute to an enhanced involvement and credibility associated

with narrative displayed on the television screen must also receive attention. To the mind, the opening statement of this segment is true: Seeing is in fact believing. Studies show that the brain is inclined to place more trust in what it can visually experience because it recognizes the optical channel as the most accurate; therefore, the viewer assigns greater weight to information in messages delivered from a visual medium (Cramerotti 71). While the viewer most likely realizes that what is displayed by news programs has been edited and altered from what was actually captured, the mind is more likely to register what is displayed as true, given that the clip is assumed not to be staged.

Further research shows that perception is tightly tied to broadcast because visual experience is more closely related to lived experience in the mind than other types of stimuli. When the viewer sees something unfold, they are vicariously living through the image; they can empathize with the characters displayed because they themselves now have experienced similar optical stimuli (Berry 47). Visual media is just as real to the emotional brain as any other visual experience; watching a news show has been shown to contribute in the same manner to synaptic wiring as seeing an event unfold in person (Berry 47). Images drive emotion as well as intellect, and when used effectively with narrative, they have the potential to resonate deep within the psyche (Berry 53-55). In addition to believing what is shown, the viewer feels it as well.

Just as the premise of the cultivation analysis theory focuses on the storytelling function of media through narrative that is relayed to a viewing audience over time, repeated visuals delivered through television further compound this “ice age” effect in the brain. Neurological researchers have found

these instances of repetitive imaging to be the basis of unconscious emotional learning (Berry 59). These studies show that the repetitive pattern of TV's mass produced messages and images unite to form the mainstream of the common symbolic environment that cultivates a shared reality. The stories, repeated again and again, come to influence the viewers' learning in a distinctly detectable manner.

Further, contemporary research has provided a clearer picture of how the brain and vision work together. Human minds were not meant to read--this is a symbolic language developed differently through time and space that must be instructed. Rather, the human mind is built to see. Studies of the brain have shown that emotional information related through narrative engages both hemispheres of the brain (Berry 56). As one experiences a story, even if they do not actively intend to internalize it, the brain ties emotions and memory together to facilitate learning (Berry 56). Furthermore, the brain perceives images as unified along a narrative arc, even if reality does not inherently suggest this. These connections allow the brain to better transmit information and to resolve conflicts between cells and synapses. When the emotional information is spread through the amygdala⁹, it allows data to prime the body to act or respond before the mind makes the conscious effort to do so (Berry 57). Because narrative can visually pull heart strings, it can spark minds quicker than other sources; what conveys emotion captures space in memory.

Fittingly, stories can also influence audience behavior and choices through direct neurological means. It was formerly believed that experienced emotion

⁹ This is the center of the brain known to regulate and process emotions.

needed to come after conscious recognition of said emotion (Berry 56). However, recent investigations in psychology have disproved this hypotheses and unearthed several principles of the brain that could very well contribute to communication and mass media fields. A study was done on a patient who suffered a severed connection between his amygdala and his frontal cortex¹⁰ after surgery to remove a tumor. After this, he was unable to plan, make decisions, or easily form opinions about different subjects because his reasoning and emotional response centers were separated. This case and the research of others has been combined to show that cognitive faculties' true role is to rationalize what has already been emotionally decided (Berry 57-58). After feeling, humans analyze evidence to expand upon what is already being experienced and add it to an ongoing, internalized narrative (Berry 59). If there is no emotional charge interwoven in the rhetoric, the viewer is less likely to have a substantial reaction.

This complex system of intake occurs every time a human processes just one narrative, one image, one instance. Yet in the modern media climate the viewer is more than likely to see similar coverage reiterated and stories retold across time. This reoccurrence of thematic activities causes the narrative to become deeply embedded in what is called the “unconscious memory system” (Berry 59). Even though one might not actively make the decision to adapt in response to certain stories, these accounts can become a part of an existing mental framework built around a subject. The emotional responses experienced are held tightly, and often form a permanent part of response repertoire (Berry 59). For instance, even though the shootings in Aurora, Colorado, in the summer

¹⁰ This is the portion of the brain reserved for reasoning and decision making.

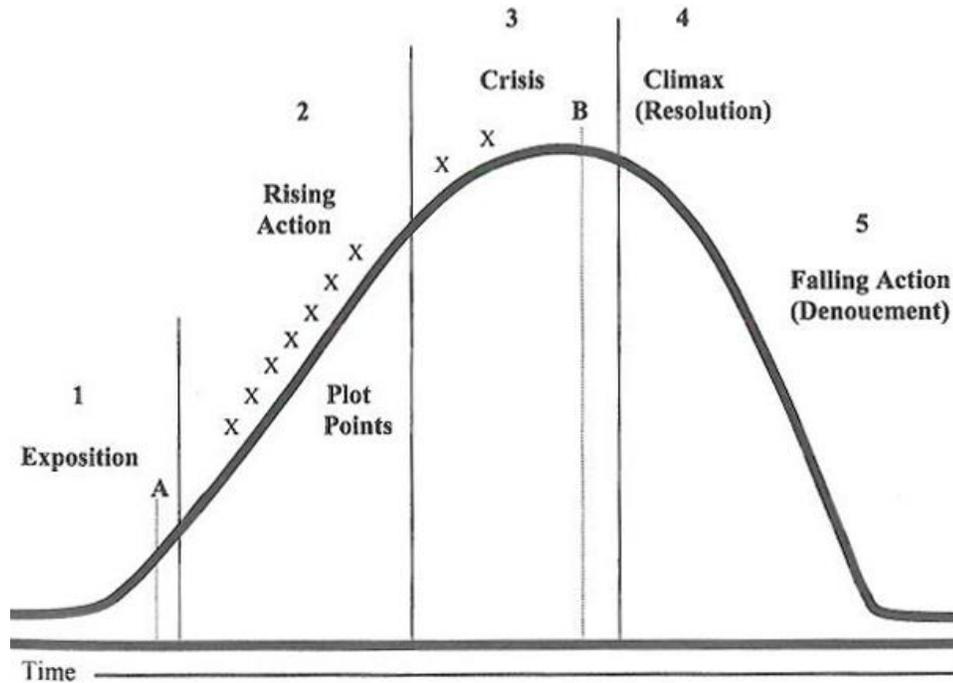
of 2012 and the Sandy Hook massacre in December of the same year were very different events, the reportage and news analysis of the latter triggered memories of the former instantly for the viewer. Because emotional information is internalized, the potential to dig it up again is always present.

Visual narrative forms reality through use of several traditional narrative functions. The next section will outline how stories influence perception through structure, character and the introduction of voice and theme.

Part II

Breaking Down the Elements of Narrative

Structuring Story: What Was Old is News



Hart, *Story Craft*

Narrative news requires one obvious thing: a narrative to report. While news items are found everywhere from the city streets to courtrooms, from local jails to Capitol Hill, the narrative does not come neatly bundled and ready to be wedged between the traffic and extended weather reports in the eight o'clock news program. What one might call "reality" unfolds in unexpected patterns, lacking foreshadowing or dramatic emphasis, and without fully developed characters or a prominent theme. To accomplish the narrative style, a narrative

structure has to be presented. To accomplish this, news information is molded to conform with the narrative arc. This traditional unfolding of events probably brings back memories of middle school English classes for many. In most cases, this arc is usually used to trace the fictitious plots of short stories, novels, or films. However, Hart writes, “Clearly, story is story. The same underlying principles apply regardless” (7). Narrative theory assumes the appeal of storytelling is universal, and an understanding of the arc is nearly as widespread as its allure. Narrative news capitalizes on this truism.

By packaging news tightly into this narrative arc, a news show can reach a wide span of the potential audience, who are informed and potentially entertained with story as well. It is invaluable in unlocking increased interest and participation in broadcast. The brain’s inferior frontal gyrus, so dubbed the “the storytelling area,” is linked directly to the visual cortex; unraveling story through visual newscasting provides a direct link to the mind from the eyes (Hart 9). In the television medium, audiences have become accustomed to being entertained by comedic and dramatic shows which rely on narrative to convey their stories, and they are primed to receive stories through optical means. To package a factual account in the way viewers have grown accustomed to receiving visual narrative, the focus of reportage must lie in bringing a character, a group of characters, or the characterization of an event through this arc of events (Hart 7). The viewer has certain expectations regarding how a story should unfold, and the arc format allows news media to fulfill these preconceptions in certain regards.

Rising action, climax, denouement: these terms, often associated with literary fiction, are no stranger to visual mediums and nonfiction as well.

Whether the story is fabricated or grounded in real events, these elements provide a compelling and interesting storyline. While some variation in structure is possible, a reporter must form a basic schema for the receiver to recognize what is unfolding as story. If a report strays too far from this anatomy, the narrative will crumble into a cacophony of voices and happenings that cannot be properly related (Hart 10). This formula allows for facts to be arranged in a familiar and accessible manner, yet the style makes demands on the information in return. Namely, narrative news requires a climax, which is an event that ultimately resolves the reported crisis or event (Hart 38).

Reaching the peak of the story can be accomplished in different ways. At times, this climax can be foretold and the media is able to build up to it for days or weeks--such as the federal budget sequestration deadlines or the possibility of taking a swan dive off the "fiscal cliff." Other times, such as after a catastrophe, the primary climax of the news event has already occurred and therefore the narrative must take a turn towards the epideictic; it has to contextualize and



reason with what has already happened, which in times of emotional impact becomes a very difficult task. The climax is reached through taking the viewer back to the beginning--before the happening--and reinventing the climax . For instance, the infamous visuals

surrounding September 11th, 2001, are easily remembered by Americans who lived through the terror attack. For weeks, broadcast stations repeated clips of the hijacked planes crashing into the World Trade Center and the buildings' eventual collapse. The visual narrative was rewound to before the crisis, and then the viewer was taken through the climax of the event again and again. While the audience was provided with exposition of the event through an explanation of how it happened and shown various instances of recourse, they were returned to this unbelievable and horrific climax, as ground zero became the center for the narrative of destruction, and later, rebuilding.

Apart from the climax of the story, a resolution is also sought. Some sort of resolve is the target of every narrative, as it releases the dramatic tensions which have been built throughout the arc (Hart 13). After a tragedy, the narrative shows how life has changed or how the survivors have continued. Following a change in government policy, the story explores the effects. News is grounded in actual happenings, however, and unlike Hollywood narratives, a "happily ever after" can be hard to come by. In fact, stories may not "end" in the traditional sense of the word. Events tend to occupy the focus of media attention until they are in some way resolved or they no longer amass significant viewer interest. Perhaps nothing further can be done, or perhaps the audience is simply bored. Media moves on. News must be current, and regardless if the story has concluded or not, attention shifts over time.

However, finding some kind of closure within media narrative is beneficial to the development of the narrative style, because it fulfills the expectations brought about by the arc (Hart 14). The typical fictional narrative ends in a

“closed” fashion; an absolute and irreversible change sweeps through the story, answers all questions that remain, and ideally leaves the viewer satisfied. This simple tying up of loose ends is usually limited to the fiction section, however. In regards to narrative news, something called a constructive resolution must be sought (Hart 15). The news story doesn’t end, per say--it becomes something new. Perhaps a new policy is implemented to address a need, or maybe a war is started to provide recourse. There is some form of catharsis, but rather than a narrative stopping, it simply morphs. Instead of closing a book, a new chapter is presented. Major stories turn into other major stories. September 11th became the War on Terror. Mass shootings often spill into the national gun control narrative. These resolutions aren’t really resolutions-- they are more in-fitting with a “to be continued” heading, which contributes to the ongoing practice of narrative style.

In addition to these crucial elements, an emphasis on action is also imperative to the progress of a successful news narrative. This goal surpasses the aims of the action news format, which sought to instill urgency and boost excitement through timing and editing, primarily. Narrative seeks intensity through its subject focus as well, which must be on some type of crisis (Hart 107). After all, climax and resolution cannot exist without an issue that seeks to be resolved. Storytelling needs a complication, and the viewers are more likely to be engaged if this complication is interesting (Hart 13). This emphasis is a primary contributor to the selection of story. Producers who are narrative focused may not only ask if the story is relevant, but also if the crisis holds the potential for action; whether or not this action can be visually brought to the viewer is also an

imperative inquiry. As Hart states, “Motion is the beating heart of story. Narrative strings events together through time” (110). Through highlighting the motions spawned by crisis, the news station uses the narrative style to capture stories which are not only important, but exhilarating to the viewer.

Jimmy Breslin once remarked that “news is a verb.” To retain this quality in narrative journalism, action must be the predominant focus, and any and all exposition must be limited. Framing is a fundamental role of the media, of course, but when it comes to the narrative style, reporters are restricted in the time they can spend setting up a story before the viewers lose attention and change the channel. While some exposition is necessary to provide a basis of understanding, it is the enemy of narrative because it chokes action from the screen (Hart 121). Exposition lacks entertainment--it is built using only the relevant information that surrounds the narrative. Because of this, narrative-style news programming minimizes setup in order to dive into the heart of the account. Audiences still draw social understanding from these news stories, but the facts available to the viewer are restricted in favor of progressing along the arc. Entertainment trumps information.

Not every newsworthy happening that occurs lends itself effectively to this structure. In order to provide compelling narrative in the news room, the story must be built. A crisis must be created and contextualized, action must be augmented; the potential for progression along the arc is paramount. In the creation of a successful narrative, picking an appropriate news topic is just as important as any other point. After the selection of story for broadcast, the stylization occurs. While it is rare that one account possesses every element of the

arc, reality is framed in different ways to highlight climax, crisis, closure, etc (Hart 7). However, some stories simply cannot provide a foundation for good and substantial narrative. For example, Hart regrets working on a news piece about a prisoner who made a failed suicide attempt leading to his brain death. The prisoner's extremely limited existence was fully dependent on state funding and life support machines, which cost taxpayers a great amount of money. However, nothing could be done. There was no climax, nor a way to reinvent it. There could be no resolution, no change. There was nowhere to go on the narrative arc. While a subject of interest, the narrative was sad and empty (16). This story illustrates the difference between news worthy and narrative worthy. Although structuring can accomplish much, certain reports fall into blind spots because the account can't be applied to the arc, and the story sought cannot be drawn out from the event.

As well as being applied to the narrative arc, news stories are often applied to different and more specialized templates. These narrative structure forms provide the basis for different sub-genres within the broadcast medium; they are different structural patterns through which the bulk of public communication is spread (Carr 54). Even within mass communication's narrative style, these stories come with their own, identifiable and specialized structure patterns. These "organized clusters of elements" are repeated in various contexts, and provide a model to shape not only specific narratives, but the greater purposes stories fulfill¹¹ (Carr 55). Carr cites the menace to society, youth gone wild, hopeful medical breakthroughs, and new fad diets, just to provide a few examples of these

¹¹ More will be devoted to this topic in the section focused on the analysis of theme in narrative.

reoccurring reports (58). These topics indicate what narrative society wants to hear, due to their popularity in programming, but also in turn tell the audience *what* to hear. The reiteration of themes in similar style provides a strong echo which ripples through a viewership. In narrative media, structure becomes a key factor of substance.

The shaping of these stories comes largely from resources unique to the visual medium. While print has its transitions, broadcast has editing. As nonfiction films often apply Hollywood film conventions such as persuasive formatting to their works, visual mass communication is privy to the same optical resources; the story is not invented fully, but it is recaptured, highlighted, and streamlined in narrative (Cramerotti 69). The visual is not limitless, the viewer can only see what was captured within a certain span and played back on the television screen (Cramerotti 59). The scenes shown during a news cast become memory, and everything else is forgotten on the cutting room floor. Additionally, text can be added to the visual to create a multimedia effect. If visual provides the truth of a moment, a fragment of reality, the caption written and tagged onto it frames this for the viewer (Goodnow 353). Though what is seen may be taken as the truth, this seeing does not come without external structuring.

Film is, in its essence, many still images strung together and played rapidly in succession. Narrative style brings these visuals together and makes stories out of the conjoining of these individual images into story, be it in one clip or through combining a series of happenings that have been captured by the camera. Individual photographs are more difficult to process because they lack structure and exist without beginning, middle, or end. Narrative creates these

elements for the visual; the visual, in turn, provides tangible evidence for the narrative to challenge or comment on current cultural myths (Goodnow 351). They work together, and allow for the visualization of the world through story and supply a context to examine society as the camera sees it.

From what is shown, the public has the opportunity to interpret the elements of the visual narrative and to ensure that the standards for narrative probability are fulfilled. Even the visual is subject to these judgments, and if the images are not coherent the story may not ring true to the audience. (Goodnow 352-353). The viewer is the ultimate adjudicator, their agency lies within their individual scrutiny. Through the visuals, the chance for challenging, affirming, or reconfirming the viewer's individual social narrative is presented (Goodnow 353). The manner in which the stories are structured and the templates used provoke a set of expectations in the viewer and provides a quality of influence related to the visual. The audience makes informed assumptions regarding what type of narrative they will soon encounter from the very beginning of the broadcast--the tone of the newscaster's voice, the first frame presented. From these, they enter whatever emotional state is necessary for whichever type of narrative dispersal. Through this, the story reaches receptivity and resonance (Carr, p. 57).

Within this narrative structure, the audience sees current events, their society, and themselves. While events are not created by the narrative arc, stories are defined through it and its various sub-genres. Narrative news does not invent the world, but it does provide it structure.

The Creation of Character: The Supporting Pillars of Narrative

If the structure of narrative is dependent on anything, it is most certainly the characters that act within it. They are the single most accessible and the most important elements of any story (Gorman 165). Without the human element in news, there is virtually no element of importance at all. Even notable events which can stand alone in historical memory are characterized by the people who cause them, experience them, or by those who sift through their repercussions. There are witnesses, victims, survivors, the suspected, the convicted, the accused, candidates, victors and more. These people drive action, illustrate a scene, and hold the narrative arc up (Hart 75). Visual mass media is based on people watching people, and many of narrative's effects can be tied back to this principle.

While news is said to cover current events, the people who surround the events occupy equal area in the spotlight. The happening and the character are so interdependent in visual narrative that they blend into one another (Phelan 112). Individuals are defined by their actions, and the actions that are reported to the masses distinctly "characterize" these people. This shaping contributes not only to the bare bones plot, but to the narrative dynamics as well. From the personalities presented, archetypes are formed--heroes, opposers, love interests, villains, so on (Carr 56). There are roles to be filled, and narrative creates them for the media. In the same way plot can be tweaked, and video can be edited, indirect characterization is used to present people in narrative roles. Through commentary from broadcasters and selection of images, individuals are brought to narrative roles to further the format selected by the presenter (Hart 82).

Lived reality isn't seen through long shot, close up patterns. Actuality doesn't come split between real time and historical summary (Hart 43). How then does the viewer find authenticity in the augmented? The points of view characters in the news provide for the viewer bolsters perceptions of validity through this edited scrim. For those interviewed, the narrative they portray and advocate is very real. Their point of view adds authenticity in addition to pulling action through the arc. Their voices allow for concreteness, as witnesses and actors explain what has unfolded in a place, and perspective courses through real time and employs dialogue. The reproduction of experience is facilitated by bringing specific figures to the narrative (Hart 58). The audience becomes closer to the reports of fellow citizens as it observes their individual reactions.

The use of dialogue is primary in establishing character. While quotes cannot be fabricated any more than events can be staged within proper reportage, they can be edited. Selections of sentences and sound clips strung together define players and the overarching ideas surrounding an event. Of course, journalism has always made use of recording words, but in the past, the emphasis was placed on interjecting direct quotations to stories to provide support. Characterization through dialogue in narrative journalism seeks not only to provide words which supplement the credibility of the piece, but those which fit into the narrative concept of the story (Hart 99). In the narrative style, they must fit with the characterization, any tangential comments may be cut out. What is left is what is deemed useful by the creator of news.

Characters can also serve as representative signs which extend their realm of meaning far beyond their individual body. The personalities captured on

camera mediate between the external world and the internal world of the viewer; they characterize and symbolize the ideas or concepts with which they associate or disassociate themselves (Kenney 99). They become indicative of something more in the narrative--be it an organization, a socioeconomic grouping, or a caste of other characters. As often times characters within literary works allude to greater social problems or truths, the people seen during the nightly news can do this as well (as Zimmerman was used to allude to racism). In the visual medium, the very likenesses of an image or action can become a label for something beyond the individual.

This representation is accomplished largely through the notion of transparency. Because viewers believe the visuals are transparent, they feel as if they are given a direct access to reality. Audiences see and cope with the world through the visuals they come in contact with in their daily lives; the cameras of mass media simply provide them with another source of stimuli (Kenney 99). A picture of a character represents a phenomenon because it was automatically and mechanically caused by the existence of said phenomenon-- the picture looks exactly like it is supposed to. In regards to images and character, both psychological and communication theory place most of the agency with the controller of the image (Kenney 100). The distributing news source has the ability to frame, edit, and recapture--because of this they can alter perception with the narrative. Audiences can only see what is put before them, and they can only know the characters they are introduced to.

The mind is meant to receive visuals, but not all visuals are instantaneously understood. Picture is generative, however. One does not have

to learn the meaning of unfamiliar images in the same way we do words. Instead, a “knowing” of almost any unfamiliar object can be generated at a glance provided one has some mastery of the pictorial system (Kenney 104). When a visual is interpreted, it is juxtaposed against a repertoire of previously analyzed material. Therefore, these pictures of people that flash across our screens represent various characters by virtue of their similarity to other principles or persons; they allow us to see both what is captured and what is compared by implication (Kenney 105).

Because of this concept, the characters encountered in the media aren’t unique. Instead, they most often rely on people reported on in the past to provide a fully developed characterization. In the narrative style, characters portrayed by media often depend on stereotypes to enrich understanding and may in turn proliferate preconceived concepts of character. As the actions, thoughts, and

words of people are communicated, they are often intertwined with those who have held



similar positions in past narratives (just as the image below groups the perpetrators of various mass shootings under one heading) (Gorman 171-173). The accused murderer is related to a person convicted of the same crime a year earlier, the struggling politician is juxtaposed with another who has fumbled with

a similar issue in the past. These characters are molded from a set of predicated qualities that are united under a label, which provides narrative media with resounding archetypes. From these archetypes, individuals can be further linked with their actions in the narrative and the viewer can make additional implications in perception (Phelan et al 111). The character in narrative is meant to be understood only in the context of the story, and often these archetypes have universal weight. By pegging someone as the victim, the thug, or the psychopath, a set of connotations come tied to the label (Phelan et al 127). These allow for characters to bear a deeper weight within the story which is communicated through the use of individual archetype labels, whether or not that archetype is fully applicable.

Just as characters moving along the narrative arc in literature are often split along the good vs. evil binary, characters in narrative media are often grouped into these two pools. News tends to focus on the negative; numerous media content analyses conducted have shown that the incidence of bad news far exceeds that of good news (Zillman). News of all types tends to find its focus in scandal, crime, and war. These topics lend themselves to certain casts of characters that the media often attempts to identify before the story has been completely developed. Even before a court of law or other ruling bodies have processed a case or an incident, news often assigns the roles of victim and antagonist as agents of narrative character function. Because the news is usually negative (a story involving the bad taking over the good, or a story regarding negative events happening to positive characters) this binary is usually central to the reportage.

Unsurprisingly, perception comes to be shaped by the “good guy”/ “bad guy” divide. Just like one might in a dramatic film, the viewer often roots for the individual labeled the “good guy.” Characterization through media creates and heightens this effect. Highlighting favorable dispositions surrounding an individual leads to increased enjoyment experienced by the viewer when something positive regarding their fortune is reported. Likewise, viewers respond with dissatisfaction when something negative happens to a favorable character. On the inverse, in regards to characters with assumed unfavorable dispositions, audiences are pleased when they meet a negative fate (for instance, jail time) and upset if they encounter positive circumstances through the course of the arc (Zillman). This effect can be seen in the Casey Anthony trial. The media and many others suspected that she was in fact guilty of murdering her daughter. When she was acquitted based on a lack of evidence, audiences were outraged that something “positive” had happened to a very negatively portrayed character.



Disregarding Anthony’s actual role in the death of her daughter, one can observe how the good and bad of characters can be shaped by newscast and reporters, which prime or inhibit empathy. Research on neurological empathic reactivity provides additional compelling evidence that affective reactions are a

function of affective dispositions toward the agents to whom good or bad things are happening, and who express positive or negative emotions in response to these happenings (Zillman). Much of the emotional investment that accompanies narrative comes from the positive or negative attributions of characters. The creation of such characters by the media goes a long way in facilitating the development of feeling and opinion regarding individuals and the progression of the story as a whole.

As newscasts surrounding a particular issue continue, characterization continues. Stories often grasp national attention for weeks at a time, and through this course new visuals are connected and more information and analysis of characters are dispersed by the media. However, some characters do not have the chance to be properly developed by popular means. If a character cannot be constructed in a compelling manner, news audiences can be left with indifferent reactions, even if the story has a potential for an emotional impact. This occurs namely, according to Zillman, in the reportage of “accounts of massacres in Algeria, epidemic diseases in Ecuador, or religious persecutions in Tibet.” In the terms of narrative, a response is not evoked because the characters are underdeveloped by the media, and the groups they represent are forgotten as the news shifts to another story. There is not enough insight into these individuals to feel a connection, to understand the good or bad. The drama in these narratives can fail, because viewers aren’t pulled into the plight of the individuals (Zillman). Many have heard the quote, “One dead is a tragedy, a million dead is a statistic.” Without characterization, the narrative dissolves to only numbers--figures.

From the opening credits of the nightly news to the last feature, visual media focuses on people and the events they experience. While the audience sees a human likeness on the screen, what they experience is a deep characterization which extends its reach into every other narrative the audience has experienced. Conceptions of “good” and “bad” come to play because the media beckons them forward; without a cast of heroes, villains, and damsels in distress to carry the viewer through the narrative arc, there would be no narrative at all. As broadcast facilitates characterization, it further primes a constructed perception of an event.

The Voice, The Story Teller

In broadcast, the audience is both shown and told news stories. In this telling, one finds the voice that allows the narrative to unfold for the masses. The people who bring the news to narrative invariably and unavoidably add their own spin to the work; the story takes different forms because of individual styles of those who tell it. While images constitute the bulk of visual narrative, the voice is given the task of stringing these different moments together and guiding the viewer through the narrative arc. Because of the power it is afforded, the voice is imperative in understanding exposition and the overall implications of a narrative.

As a story is told, the personality of the writer bleeds in to the report (Hart 64). If one watches the same story reported by FOX News, CNN, and then MSNBC, the viewer will most likely be able to determine a difference just in the manner in which the story is presented. This may be a difference in station bias, but also in particular voices used to appeal to an audience base. If one watches the same story reported by two newscasters working for the same program at separate times, there is also bound to be a notable degree of modification; this is a more precise indication of variance in voice alone.

The style many students become accustomed to in academic writing discourages the use of a familiar voice. Most institutions advocate (or have advocated in the past) an impersonal style in scholarly writing to dissuade the reader from adopting any sort of bias simply because the author holds the opinions. The personality is removed, even from potentially personal issues. Past journalists have followed these rules as well, and even new journalists retained a

relatively balanced style as they emerged. The focus of the news item, the narrative, and perceptions therefore associated with it were directed toward the audience--little was deciphered by televised personalities (Hart 64). The studio reported what happened without capitalizing on narrative's influence and its perceptual hold over the viewer.

However, modern news is focused on persona. When eyewitness news came to be, personalities became popular--a family-like dynamic was created between anchors and reporters on the set, and viewers took a vested interest in these personalities who presented the news to them as if they were all close friends. Women and men who report the news through narrative style usually replicate their colloquial manner in speaking, while also often taking a stance toward the material in a newscast--bringing about an identifiable opinion on the story (Hart 67). It may not be as clear as taking a side on a political election, but by divulging emotions or assessments, broadcasters contribute to the overall mood of the narrative.

The dilemma inherent in this shift to a more personal voice is that biases have the potential to influence the communication of hard data, and news reportage has the opportunity to switch from a focus on the event to a focus on the voices surrounding the event (Hart 68). Past studies in narrative theory have also found that speech patterns in media reflect the dominant power in society's vocal projections, and imply that this voice could also align with the proverbial middle-class, white male and ignore the marginalized. Foucault identified an underpinning of discourse and knowledge as a primary manner of preserving power relations, and with the voice assuming a more important role in broadcast

through the present style, these power relations become more concrete rather than more progressive as time continues. (Carr 64). As a personal voice comes to be more significant, there is a fear that those whose perspectives are less often heard will become further removed from the mainstream.

Voice additionally has the potential to create the significance of a story. Through adding urgency or touting importance, there lies the potential to create what is termed “megaspectacles.” By adding vivid narration, broadcasters can attract audiences by making the story seem more important to their society, therefore worth added viewership (Carr 62-63). As the voice continues to have a hand in shaping narrative, the audience is primed to have certain expectations regarding the story based on the broadcaster’s tone. Carr uses the term “protension” to describe the manner in which audiences engage in a text. Lead by the voice, viewers form a schema of assumptions from the styling and patterns of narrative previously cultivated (57). As the voice serves as a guide, the expectations projected become garnered by the audience for use in navigating the news territory. From the tone of the first words in a newscast, the receiver begins to forecast predictions regarding how the narrative arc will progress.

These voices’ interpretations can alter or shift the culture for which they broadcast. A culture, as it is defined, is comprised of the actual practices and customs, languages, beliefs, forms of representation, and systems of formal and informal rules that tell people how to behave most of the time (O’Donnell 523). Media voices are at the forefront of defining and interpreting these rules. The culture as it exists, a system of constructed meanings, can be reconstructed in relation to variant cultural objects, like technological developments and economic

practices, or other social processes like accommodation and conflict (O'Donnell 523). The media makes sense of these varying inputs to the overall, social narrative. While many people constitute a community, actual culture is borne through a concentration of voices--the media voice becomes representative of the others (O'Donnell, p. 524). This hegemony defines the culture for the viewer.

In regards to finding meaning in images which construct the visual narrative, the voice is imperative in visual analysis. If images are the building blocks of broadcast narrative, the voice is the handrail which guides the viewer towards meaning. Hall contends that there are two major premises in the deciphering of images: the first is that images are always associated in some way with power, and the second is that images have varying meaning or they have no meaning at all (O'Donnell 524). Varying interpretations, and thus varying voices are entirely possible in the presentation of a single image; the medial words from the news station have the power to bring the viewer to one, or a plethora, of selected interpretations. Images may not assume the same definition through the progression of history, this polysemy of interpretations (and certainly, the cultures which create and interpret them) can coincide through time (O'Donnell 522). It is indeed favorable to avoid reducing these interpretations to a common mean to allow for the free flow of discourse, but in an attempt to create representations for the narrative structure, the voice often picks one interpretation of the image and champions it (O'Donnell 522). This interpretation derives from the voice's position within society--the position of broadcasters is often very similar, providing a main-streaming of meaning. In an ideal world, the viewer would not readily accept a message unless it is preferred

by his or her own schema and social constructions, but this homogenization can greatly quiet competing interpretations (O'Donnell 527).

The voice links the elements of narrative together, but most importantly to the visuals which give a story added life. A visual in itself is not sufficient to broadcast, nor is the presentation of visual enough to convey meaning of narrative to an audience. Instead, what occurs between the viewer and the viewed must be directed by voice. The viewer takes on an identity as the other, one who doesn't have access to the story behind the image; the voice provides linkage between two elements which may not be determined, essential, or inherent, but nevertheless identifies the visual's place in the narrative and the viewer's place in regards to the visual (O'Donnell 526). Meaning is expressed and joined in context--the news item's narrative transmits this. As old meanings are deconstructed and new information is presented by the voice, culture continuously comes to be constructed and reconstructed (O'Donnell 526). As mentioned earlier--meaning is in transition, and by structuring narrative, the voice continues to hold rights over the transubstantiation of the image.

The pictures seen during a local broadcast are largely indicative of who exactly is represented and who is not. Power lies with those who have dominance over these depictions--those whose images and voices gain air time. From this, one identifies the primary ideology and the marginalized (O'Donnell 524-525). The image and discourse around the advocated norm have the potential to "hail" a viewer to this set of meaning. In response, the viewer may recognize the social position behind the message. In regards to this stimuli, Hall's theory dictates that there are three social positions of meaning possible--the dominant, oppositional,

and negotiated. The dominant meaning of the message is that intended directly by the voice. The oppositional is something completely variant from the message the transmitter wishes to send. The negotiated lies between these two extremes; it extends from the dominant ideology, but includes some differences (O'Donnell 527). However, the voice continues to foster a sense of cultural hegemony by drawing viewers closer to the dominant meaning. Because it is the authority, what the voice says remains in the minds of the audience members to at least some degree (O'Donnell 525). Whether the adopted meanings are labeled dominant, oppositional, or negotiated, they all share the voice's message as their foundation and are generated from its broadcast.

The meanings behind images shown via television constitute the most preeminent and popular form of visual representation that society has to offer. Three-dimensional images are transposed onto a two-dimensional plane, produced by technical means, and edited. However, they are still very real to the viewer (O'Donnell 528). An image's effects are real, and the meaning it advocates becomes real. Because of the visual aspects of the narrative told, the voice can claim its credibility. The validity associated with vision extends to subtle qualifications of what is seen. What finds its way to the center of the audience's focus becomes the most important aspect in terms of media reportage, and thus the cycle continues. Because narrative interprets the visual, the voice can interpret the culture which produces it for all who watch and listen.

Exploring Theme: What Does it All Mean?

News narrative does far more than simply explain what has happened. It explains why it happened, and just as characterization does, it accomplishes this by reaching out into other narratives as well. As emphasized, stories do not exist in isolation. Instead they are linked together, to provide an interlacing and interacting web of narrative. Theme draws upon this interconnected realm of story.

Narrative is more than facts, and the narrative style allows broadcasters to do more than relate simple observations or reported items. Visual mass media can now deliver stimulus in such a way that people may be moved toward a deeper or more thorough understanding of the topic (Hart 136-137). For example, instead of just experiencing a report about a shooting, viewers see a story about gun violence in the United States as a whole. Audiences turn to broadcast for an understanding of events that have occurred, but they also ask “what does this all mean?” (Hart 136). Everything in the narrative--the characters, the structure, the plot, the voice--comes back to answer this question through use of theme (Hart 137). From media, one draws an understanding, of the other and self, and from the universal principles that govern both forces.

While narrative style may be a recent advent, the themes it reports are as old as time itself. Claude Levi Strauss analyzed the many myths of cultures that stretch across the globe and found imbedded within them evidence of the same themes, as well as a repetitive structuring. These narratives that have withstood the test of time were centered around the same underlying concepts; the folklore and stories told through oral traditions of various peoples show a shared

preoccupation with themes one will undoubtedly face, like conflict and death (Carr 56). These stories once prepared those of the past to confront these inevitable elements of life, and the themes they embodied were of interest across the board. Narrative media draws on the concerns of life and death for the same reasons--to prepare the viewer and because these themes supply what the viewer seeks to know.

Themes add even more to narrative; the fables which course through them provide another port of access for the viewer. The underlying, common messages bring stories together to make them more relatable and better understood, and they allow for the easy juxtaposition of various narratives through reportage (Carr 58). The links which are made between the narratives allow for a deepened sense of importance, and allow for a generalization across similar pieces. Through theme, stories can access different templates of understanding, which provide analogies for the receiver through models of existing knowledge (Carr 58). In this way, what is reported as breaking news actually calls on vast supplies of the viewer's understanding of meaning when the narrative is related.

Many believe that what has been lacking from journalism in the past is a humanistic centering. Those who advocate this stance would contend that value is inherently a part of the human condition, and thus reportage cannot be value free. Connected with these values are themes, ideas of "truth" which cannot be proven-- they are only supported with narrative. Hart contends that theme has been another ingredient missing through much of journalism's history, which has previously only aligned itself with subjects and declined to bring "meaning, emotion, and inspiration to the nightly news" (137). This aspect of narrative also

cloaks itself in universality, implying that the “truth” behind the story is true across all subsets of the population. Theme ties the characters to the viewers by bonding the respective situations; the theme is inherently connected to the writer’s personal values as well, because the voice colors the theme and brings it to life (Hart 140). The theme unites all elements of the transmission and reception of narrative.

These themes unite to fortify the sub-genres of news outlined by narrative structure. Templates reoccur and are reinforced by the principles which motivate them. For instance, Carr identifies five major reoccurring, generic stories. They are the David vs. Goliath story, tales of transformation, “just desserts” accounts, reassurance meets comfort, and last, the moral drama (58). All of these topics come with connotative themes, but perhaps none so much as the moral drama. It is the favorite of rating-conscious producers who want to attract continued viewership by harnessing the passion and negative emotions of the viewer. These stories often paint the truisms society upholds as being in danger, and thus spark panic (Carr 59). Because the audience sees the truths they believe in to be jeopardized, they too feel the danger of moral destruction and are inclined to engage in the story.

Societies define and redefine their beliefs through these moral dramas. When they are provided reportage centering on a divide between promoting a concept previously accepted or a new order, they must question the values their society believes. Their mentality changes to accommodate or reject the rise of the contemporary theme (Carr 60). This process is formulaic. A breach of normalcy takes place first. An event, a catastrophe, a bill being passed, something out of the

ordinary. News involving some sort of change, proposed or real, occurs. The balance is shifted and the viewer watches. Some sort of redress then takes place. Emotions are poured out, support is rallied. Then, ideally, some sort of resolve comes about (Carr 61). This is not always the case. Sometimes the event fades away, and the themes remain unfulfilled. But narrative news strives to make the perfect connection between the story and the viewer, and search for events which can be brought full circle. Ideally, broadcast brings the news piece through the course; something happens, the story which surrounds it makes its way through the arc, and into the homes of the viewer. The theme is, once again, repeated through narrative; it continues to hold its place of importance within the society that believes in it, and watches it play out through narrative again and again. The status quo of the story lives on.

Part III

What Happens Next: Continuing the Narrative

The Effects of Storytelling, From Mass Media to the Masses

It starts at the beginning: action. The narrative rolls down the teleprompter, and the broadcaster reads it for the millions who--despite the rumors--are still watching television and dependent on this information to shape the opinions they will adopt and change. Cue the clip--visuals surrounding the story reaffirm what the newscaster has already said. Bring up the audio. Witnesses rattle off their own realities, they let the viewer understand what they have seen. The narrative develops, as the story takes structure and the characters present themselves. Cut to commercial. For a moment, the narrative is gone from the screen. A cheery advertisement takes its place. But the story, and its implicit themes, carry on. The effects of the narrative cross the screen and take root in the viewer.

Media is an institution of power; the ability to disseminate this narrative is indicative of its continued reach. This influence affects the overall social organization of power, as well as throwing this media's own unique weight around (Thompson 3). By making events observable and identifiable through narrative, the media can politicize the everyday and shift authority from other realms into its own (Thompson 248-249). Viewers see themselves in the story, and react accordingly. While variant discussions focused on the narrative aspects of journalism have swayed towards diagnosing yellow journalism or sensationalism within pieces, the effects cannot be written off to a difference in

quality. What the viewer experiences in the greatest quantity is story, and from this the implications arise.

As media has continued to develop, its narratives have continued to spread, redefine audience existences, and undermine mass communication by allowing a refined style to capitalize on what is perhaps the most rudimentary means of relating information (Thompson 6). By uniting the tendency for oral history with mass communication and production, broadcast narration allows for new forms of interaction and relationships between viewers, subjects, and transmitters, and provides each group with new tools, through which to relate to the world around them (Thompson 4). This network, a highly familiar and comfortable means of communication, stretches across groups and turns the viewer's eye towards the mainstream narrative. The story reported by the media becomes the only story known to the masses, and through this the viewer makes sense of what has happened and can make predictions on what will happen.

While this connectivity can be perceived as a positive factor (disregarding the implications of mainstreaming), it comes at a cost. This story does not equate to reality; narrative media can often come to embody an entirely different version of media's intended, traditional purpose. As an edited picture is to the actual visual it frames, narrative news can be made of a photoshopped, airbrushed, and otherwise altered reality. This can unduly change not only perceptions, but the organization of power as it has existed in the modern era (Thompson 7). As media turns towards providing an augmented information/entertainment fusion, there lies the possibility for the institution to turn away from its core values. The return to an oral tradition could spell a deviation from a motive for accuracy,

objectivity, transparency, empowerment, symmetrically, inclusiveness, and the provision of an adequate and efficient platform for reasoned moral deliberation, as entertainment moves higher on media outlet's agendas (Carr 64).

Narrative may draw viewers; a seemingly urgent, and exciting storyline may bring pairs of eyes to the television and better maintain audience interest in a world with competing technologies. But, it may serve to inhibit the purpose of media, which is ultimately to serve and inform the public of its discourse. Media has always and will continue to have serious consequences in the realm of social and political talk (Thompson 6). As the first half of this work illustrated, these consequences run the gamut of levels within society. The bolstering of narrative story lines has come out of a desire to give these audiences what they want, but mass media may not be giving the viewers what they need. Narrative structural patterns underlie the scripting of news and current affairs reports and is premised on the simple and obvious notion that much of what is presented in the news panders to what the public *wants* to view, know, and experience, rather than what it might *need* to know (Carr 54-55) If broadcasters only tell the stories deemed the most attractive, the quality of public communication is bound to be subverted (Carr 54). A proper and informed discourse relies on having a broader range of knowledge than simply being loosely educated on the hot button topic of the moment, or the most outrageous new scandal. Broadcast should be broad in focus, but narrative has narrowed.

There is the continued fear that media outlets are no longer "transmitters of truth, but purveyors of performance" (Carr 63). These shows are also scheduled for repeat showings; the same characters, themes, and structures are

told by the same voices over and over again. This limits information and denies a wide range of topics. Carr states, “The public is too often being told old stories, with new events wrapped around and at times submerged with older reoccurring narrative themes” (55). This highlights the belief that even though technology is new, the stories transmitted are old. If these same premises are reiterated again and again, media cannot grow with society. Narrative news in its more elaborate and unchecked forms may be eluding the communication qualities that support and sustain democracy, but it is no longer provides an open market place of ideas (Carr 63). To model this deviation as such is invalid.

However, the media on a whole *is* modeled as an open and unlimited institution in many regards. The development of communication media has not only rendered power visible in new ways, but it has done so on an unprecedented scale: today’s mediated visibility is global in scope (Thompson 5). Visual communication implies in itself a new type of democratic publicness, given that it makes many functions of government and society literally visible to the masses (Thompson 236-238). While seeing may be believing for the viewer, this belief is not always valid. The narrative style’s limitations over what is incorporated into a newscast is similar to putting blinders on an audience. While they may be able to see the focus of the story, their perspective is greatly limited. The media chooses what and how to relate events, and the audience must view it or be otherwise completely in the dark.

If news, as society at large has known it in the past, served to generate factual and informed discussion, what does it do now? News may not be new at all, instead it has become a recycling of narratives--theme in and theme out,

played out for the audience which accepts what it has already accepted with passivity (Carr 65). If they have already engaged in the same story, there is already a precedent for their enjoyment. The Frankfurt School identified the modern media as “the culture industry,” citing that media is an integral part of forming societies and facilitating the spread of public opinion as its reasoning (Thompson 7). However, media is also an industry that creates news from a preplanned structure, by manufacturing it through the narrative arc. Through doing this, mass communication mass produces effects in the viewer. Watching and partaking in these narratives turns to provide viewers with a “tranquilizing substitute to action” (Carr 62). The engagement comes from feeling as if one is part of a narrative rather than actually engaging in a “real” process. Because of this, the narrative is unchanged. It lives on in the cycle, only to be reported on again in the next newscast.

Narrative continues. Its effects continue. While storytelling is implicit in all communication, this unique and ubiquitous style can be reined in through the input of a moral standard. Only through an actual change in society can the appropriate media structure and purpose be reserved for the country that still relies greatly on its integrity.

Answering a New Style with a New Ethical Code

Just like reportage never left society, ethics never left reportage. While the platform of mass communication may have faltered in its supposed service to society, the institution in its own right never fully lost its moral compass. However, there has been a shift, and as with any movement, a proper analysis is needed to refocus and reexamine ethical intent. A realignment is called for to prevent reportage from inventing or forcing narrative into a news event. For mass media to continue to serve the public, it must be ethically sound. To continue progress in the democratization of media, the accuracy and depth of broadcast must be bolstered (Singer 89). Narrative need not be a negative influence, but it is of the utmost importance that it be examined. Free society depends on free media; without it, there is no line of communication.

Hart states that there is a dark side of the reporter. The desire to create a compelling story comes not from ill will, but from a desire to do what is necessary to sell a story in a difficult industry. The reporter (or director, or producer) may want to make slight changes to augment what has occurred. Perhaps he or she wants to give the protagonist more credit for resolving a complication than she or he might deserve. Maybe the climax is exaggerated. The reporter might be tempted to make small inferences or fibs to tie up loose ends, providing an ideal constructive ending (Hart 221). These changes are small, but they are nevertheless important. Every time a journalist (or anyone else involved in the production of news media) alters data in a news piece, it is an ethical choice (Hart

220). The ripples which span from this editing remain unseen to the creator, but they stretch the extent of the piece's circulation.

Audiences turn to nonfiction narrative to understand the world. Its power is felt when the viewer senses that it reveals the secrets of successful living by showing just how fellow human beings master the challenges shared by all of humanity (Hart 240). But can media reveal the truth through story? Every narrative is reconstructed. The eyewitness who saw the accident occur reports the situation as he or she saw it from her car. The reporter has his or her inherent bias. Together, the media and those who supply its stories can only piece together an approximation of what really happened under the best circumstances. If in a postmodern world no single version of an external reality exists, how can what is “more true” be determined? Because of this question, the purpose and ethics behind mass communication are changing (Hart 238-239).

Hart posits that in the new environment, riddled with postmodern pondering and overtaken by the allure of the narrative style, the reporter must ask the following questions when assigning his or her name to a story (Hart 239):

-How do I know what I have presented really happened the way it did? Is it true? According to whom?

-Do I not only have the facts right, but also the right facts?

-How complete is my reconstruction?

-Have I sought independent verification from documented sources?

-Do I have a high level of confidence in my sources?

-Is my purpose legitimate? Am I trying to convey an event or just interest people?

- Does a lack of attribution--a hallmark of reconstruction--diminish credibility?

-Am I willing to fully disclose and explain my method to my editor? To my readers?

These questions focus not just on the basics of reporting, but also on the construction of narrative. By prompting thinking in regards to source collection, the journalist must ask who the story is being told by. While absolute truth is no longer the goal, the transmitter of the message must ask how complete it is.

These questions can help ensure that the narrative related is born of reality, and not a need to create story--the goal is to convey, not to interest alone.

Of course, there are certain concerns for mass media at an institutional level as well. As the research becomes more and more indicative of an identifiable pull in the viewer's perspective, media outlets should consider the range of these effects and the play they have within power relations of the society it supposedly serves. Thompson provides two questions for news-making companies (p. 235):

- How should media be organized at an institutional level?

-What contributions should it make to social and political life?

By addressing these inquiries, media companies can better envision their effects. By acknowledging the role media has, it can be altered or protected.

Furthermore, the dichotomy between what is public and private, the invisible and the visible can be revised (Thompson 235). What should be seen by the audiences? Should witnesses of crimes be interviewed by media representatives right after the event? What about victims? What if the witnesses are children? Inversely, these questions allow media companies to examine who wants to be

visible and what their motives are (Thompson 247). Just because a narrative is presented and is seemingly enticing to the audience, it may not be brought forth by credulous sources or for just reasons. Through these efforts, the media may be freed of antiquated ways of thinking about public life and the political approaches which define it and further focus on the strengths and characteristics, limits and risks, which await it in the modern era (Thompson 245).

This ethical focus must not be forgotten from the academy as well. Thompson argues that a greater focus should be devoted to media studies, as relatively few social theorists have concerned themselves directly with mass media (although the Cultural Studies theorists could serve to remedy the problem) (3). He further states that the poststructuralist and postmodern perspective has brought about a new way of thinking regarding this institution that has rendered previous structures of thought inadequate. A simple theory to sum up a new age is not what modern media studies needs, but rather the theories must work together to shape a new understanding of an age that has not appeared, but evolved (9).

For these reasons ethics must continue to be a focus of all those involved with the creating and reception of the broadcast message. Narrative is too powerful to go unchecked or to be used unethically, and the only way to justly control a free market of mass communication is for academia, society, and the industry that surround it to ask the important questions.

Turning the Pages, Coming to Conclusions

Narrative is everywhere. But it always has been. The oral tradition is nearly as old as humanity itself. Television, print, radio--every medium has its stories to tell. The advertisements posted on billboards, YouTube videos, tweets--every form of communication has its own account to share. The danger lies not in its transmission, but in its acceptance. Because news media has been revered as a more pure source of information in the past, its potential manipulation with undue narrative paves the way for perceptual problems in the present.

Entertainment and information in broadcast media are becoming increasingly fused--this is both a positive and a negative trend. Naturally, drawing the public to news is beneficial; it allows for the population to be more informed and for the industry to survive. However, when the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction are blurred, the issue tied to storytelling mass media presents itself. When the narrative structure, convincing characters that build off of preexisting archetypes, influences of voice, and weight of themes collide, it's hard for the unsuspecting viewer not to place validity in what's being said. For that reason, narrative has the potential to be the 21st century's more subdued version of propaganda. This subtlety could prove to be its most pervasive power.

Of course, this isn't the end of the story. It is only the beginning. The lack of recent interdisciplinary research of the media climate has led to a fractured understanding of its style and effects. Further empirical evidence is needed, such as that collected through communication research programs, to fully comprehend and weigh the overall implications of narrative. There is also significant room to explore the effects of narrative media in further sub-genres of reportage and

mediums. This paper is far from a completely inclusive source--it is a start, a compilation and foundation for further research and examination.

The marks of narrative won't go away; just like the stories being drawn upon and retold by the media, they will only continue to build. If the modern audience doesn't seek to understand the facets of this style and ask for facts beyond the façade of narrative elements, the viewer risks becoming just another character in the arc that broadcast media uses its vast power to tell.

This story is just beginning. Where will it go next?

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