

## NARRATIVE AS A WAY OF COMPREHENSION AND STRUCTURING A LIFE EXPERIENCE

**Svitlana Amelina,**

PhD. student

Philosophy Department

Ivan Franko National University of Lviv

Ukraine



*Abstract:* In this article we analyze a concept of narrative as a manner of understanding and grasping a human life and social realm. We answer the question about special nature of narrative construction and how it is explicated in cultural artifacts. Also we contemplate a problem why are the narratives of mass culture marked as misleading, harmful and ideology-driven. Author states, that when we analyze narrative structures of mass culture products we may observe a presence of meaning inversion. Fictitious construction is necessary foundation of grasped life events and experience. The art is dehumanized formation, because its works don't direct on the hypercorrect imitation and duplication of life (and from our point of view it is not possible).

*Keywords:* narrative, mass culture, incarnation, explication, ontological illusion, dehumanization, vitality, selfishness, aesthetic act.

### 1. Introduction

According to researchers, one of the fundamental functions of mass culture is producing a space of "illusive complexes". This space is ubiquitous, that's why we may say, that in its paradigmatic frameworks mental and behavioral stereotypes are formed. And then they penetrate the consciousness in the quality of introjects. Narrative form is the most effective form for adoption and introjection of externally imposed standards and any opinions. Narrative form is not the invention of modern or postmodern culture, it existed in previous eras. It was pertinent to various artifacts of culture and it contained a powerful suggestive potential.

The theory of narrative or narratology investigates a structure of storylines and common patterns of plot building. The dominant idea of this approach is idea of subjective predetermined outcome of meaning. It means that events and its priority will always conduct to specified final.

### 2. Materials and methods

We may examine narrative as an object of literary theory (narrative as a way of arrangement of some meaning). However in the enlarged sense of the word narrative is defined as important mechanism of human experience ordering, as a way of comprehension and explanation of reality. If we consider this mechanism from this perspective, we may suppose existing of life narratives and narrative identity.

In this article our task is to answer the question: what is the specificity of narrative construction in cultural artifacts? And another question is why are the narratives of mass culture marked as misleading, harmful and ideology-driven.

The thought is always directed on own expression, explication in verbal form. It acquires a fullness of its sense only in case of the embodiment in this form.

### 3. Results

A French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his work "Phenomenology of perception" assumes that the man

as thinking subject don't know his own thinking for as long as he formulates, writes and say his thinking for himself. We may imagine a situation when thought is released from the shackles of speaking and communication. But if thought satisfied by existence "Being-For-Self" (if it is possible at all), it would have been absorbed by the unconsciousness and "Being-For-Self" would be impossible. It means that thinking subject in the process of speaking transmits not finished and not final idea, but he realized this idea, in this activity we catch the moment of procedurality [6, P.233].

In work "Vita active", written by Hannah Arendt, this outstanding problem also arises. The thinker guess, that thought, word, act are able to enter the world substantively only in the case if they will be seen, heard, said and thereafter they will appear in a modified form. They will be materialized in form of written poem, print book, paint picture, modeled sculpture [1, P.122]. We understand, that human thought is always ephemeral and hard perceptible. In order for human thinking to be grasp and fixed in memory (individual or collective memory), it have to take shape substantively. Hannah Arendt takes note that such altering objectification is a price, which pays "all living to be able to remain in the world".

We may define an objective formalization or in another words – incarnation – as a process of energy embodiment. This embodiment has some defects, because the energy embodied imprecisely and perversely, to a greater or a lesser extent [9]. The consciousness appears and incarnate in material world by the shape.

Human life per se, when it expands in the world and shapes this world, stay in the permanent process of objectification and incarnation. The nature of individual and collective narratives is biographical. As Kuno Fisher says, the man is always being a storyteller and not only "thinking machine".

The human life is always restricted beginning and the end, birth and death. It consists of events, which summation

has an ability to take shape of story, life tale. This story exists as thing of the world even after subject's death, for example it can be grasped in form of biography [11, P.125].

Jerome Bruner is confident that narrative form is the only possible way of description of "lived time". We know about existing of another temporal forms (for example it is time, which is segmented on the hours and days; calendar time, periodical and cyclic progressions). All this temporal forms take part in time perception. However they are not successful in the task of "capturing" a sense of lived time [10, P.20].

Only narrative form is a relevant way of grasping and explication of that particular human life, which is not the same as other forms of life, for example life of generation, biological rhythms of nature or in another word - life per se. The process of capturing a life in conceptual and artistic form constitutes a human selfishness.

J. Bruner comes to the point, that any narration about your life is always a result of cognitive operations primarily. It is not a story about something as "through-clear-glass". From the perspective of human life and time there is not such a notion as "life on its own", because any attempt of verbal, symbolic arrangement is always will be a result of psychics activity and selective memory work. The manner in which we construct a life narrative is always a result of cognitive and linguistic processes, which are formed by present cultural paradigm. This processes also constitute a perceptive experience, they organize a memory work, which segments and sets target to life's events [10, P.21].

Narrative construction is inherent not only to art works or life stories. It is inherent to the internal processes of human intellection, activities structuring and experience adjustment.

Then, in our opinion, the belief about existing of some concealed level of "non-discursive meaning structures" is unworkable. This belief is deprived of heuristic potential.

Jens Brockmeier and Rom Harre write that this belief is linked with so called "ontological illusion" (or mistake). Ontological illusion means trust in existing of some real story, which must be disclosed, explicated. This story seems devoid of analytical construction and exists before the start of narrative process.

That author also describes so called mistake of representation: it is assumption, that there are some exclusive intrinsic reality, which is the basis of narrative and which must be presented in narrative description [3].

We suppose that ontological mistake as surely as mistake of representation underlying some receptive strategies in the process of creation of mass culture artifacts.

Let you and me try now to adduce reasons for this thesis.

Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset in his acclaimed work "The Dehumanization of Art" (1925) raises a question what regularities we may see in the basis of aesthetic feeling of recipient, which collides with newly creations of mass art. The philosopher makes a conclusion, that recipient like creation of newly art only if its fabula can convey a feeling of vitality. Therefore aesthetic pleasure

is replaced by emotional upheaval and feelings, which are the part of human everyday life and are not a special. The creators reduce their art to the summation of devices and methods, which help to acquire a contact with daily living.

Ortega y Gasset writes that the presence of "human core" in culture products is the central demand of average mass man. From this pop culture point of view "the nine sisters" (muses) polish this "human core", so the art is reduced to beauty craft [7, P.223].

If we consider the situation from this perspective, we have as a result some "scale of realities". So-called "living reality" always plays the first fiddle in this gradation and we must estimate it as "the very same reality" (which exists before narrative process, before discourse practices).

But sure enough we are not sharing such views. The individual always have dealings with human reality, which is comprehended, grasped in notion or artistic vision. Nevertheless a fictions construction may be more or less accomplished. It may carry the more or the less subject matter.

Ortega y Gasset designates the life, which finds its conceptualization in art works, a "new life" or in another words it is contrived life. This fact makes provision a neutralizing and depreciation of immediate life [7, P.226].

At the heart of understanding of contrived life we may spy an artistic comprehension and artistic pleasurable. The many philosophers divide in its discourse the notion of everyday life feelings and feelings, which are the results of art perception, meeting with artwork.

Susceptibilities and passion, which originate in such condition of life, belong to another psychic domain than those feelings, with which we collide in "primeval" human life. When we speak about everyday life activity, we understand, that the feelings, which arise in this space are based on satisfaction and dissatisfactory, which in turn are caused by vital events. Such psychic "contamination", which we observe in everyday life, is unconscious instinctive phenomenon. It can't be in the core of aesthetic processes, which is in words of Ortega y Gasset a "noon of comprehension".

So we may to do the conclusion that realness and sense may germinate only in the extension of fictitious construction.

The vision of some things, which we like or dislike on this concrete moment can't define what is benefit or iniquity per se.

When we analyze narrative structures of mass culture products we may observe a presence of meaning inversion. As we notice earlier, fictitious construction is necessary foundation of grasped life events and experience. The art is dehumanized formation, because its works don't direct on the hypercorrect imitation and duplication of life (and from our point of view it is not possible).

But in the products of mass culture is observable request for "viability" of story. The art work is evaluated in the diapason of sensuous feelings "satisfaction-dissatisfactory". In this scale of evaluation successfulness of artwork is determined by question: how well, on the recipient's point of view a concrete creation depicts life events and reality.

That's exactly why great masses of population at the start of twenty century blame the avant-gardes artworks in lifelessness, inhumanness, abstractedness, in another word – in incoherence with reality.

Verisimilitude, vividness is the necessary attributes of culture product success in the meaning field of popular culture. However the attempts of duplicate a real world as much as possible bring to incommensurate explication of symbolic world. In creation with such intension we observe simulation and deficiency of subject matter, sense volume. Such creation doesn't contain potency, which make sense. We can't find in it that exertion or "fixed points of intensity" (the notion of M. Mamardashvili), which is destined to constitute a human selfishness.

The famous Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev in his work "The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar" (1949) writes that the primary creation activity takes place out of objectified world. In deed and not in name it takes place in existential time, this time doesn't know neither past nor the future [2, P.252].

Creator can't stay "Being-Within-Self", he must at some moment become of itself. This escape also is called "embodiment". The creating act is aspiration to infinite; by comparison the form of creation product is always terminatory. The question is if "infinite" has possibility to "shine through finite image".

Berdyaev supposes that cognition is not a written book or something like demonstration, which is opened into external world [2, P.253]. Actually the cognition is internal "irradiation", housel to infinity, transcending.

When we say about human creative work we don't restrict it. The creation work is manifesting itself not only in art activity. The man must be ingenious in all kind of activity: in science, in social life, in ethical principles and globally speaking – in technique of living.

In the history of philosophy we may find a many similar theses about real, transcend emotions, which is caused by perception and contemplation a creations of high art. It is telling that similar views on this question we can find in works of philosophers, which represent pretty much different philosophy approaches and even different religion affiliation, as well as philosophers-atheists.

Jacques Maritain, a French Catholic philosopher, conceives that the beauty, which is a subject of art aspiration, must give pleasure to mind in the first instance [5, P.484]. At the same time this pleasure has nothing to do with things, which are usually called a pleasure, in other words – a pleasant "vellication" of sensuality.

These data indicate that if art wants to please, it betrays oneself, become mendacious.

So one of the results of art is emotional excitement, but we want to emphasize on the word "result". Emotional excitement is one of results, but not the goal of art.

What's the difference between creations of high art and mass culture products?

We suppose that first of all it is accessibility of sense perception. For example kitsch is an art of immediate accessibility. The depthlessness of new art is a stipulation of

successful perception. The first and the general reaction on the mass culture product is emotional inflammability. Mass culture creators often take the material for their creation from the artifacts of folk culture, inter alia – memorable narrative constructions. That's why this form of culture is a secondary, inauthentic. If we say about folk culture we recognize, that this kind of culture lost its creating subject (ethnic as a collective personality). The reason is that this kind of culture existed in quite different circumstances, social organization then we are living now. The specificity of folk culture is anchorage of (oral) tradition and reconstitution of traditional patterns of vital activity in the sphere of behavior and in the sphere of thinking.

But at a certain point of history, in Enlightenment epoch folk culture as homogeneous formation began to mortify. It was a result of grandiose shifts in European cultural and social life. The ethnic as a collective creative subject undergoes a destruction. Mass culture appeared that real alternative, substitute, which began to perform the function of folk culture: the function of adaptation to new social and cultural circumstances, orientation in the extent of new meanings. This is reflected in absorption a new suggested patterns and stereotypes. Whereas the artifact of folk culture fit under process of museumification, they start to do only exponential function.

Let me return to before-mentioned ideas about art creation. We considered aesthetic act as one of the ways of being. The many philosophers prefer to distinguish vitality per se and anthropic, human vitality. What's the difference between human anthropic vitality and vital process as a life of race, filo genesis? The real human activity is a production of meanings, symbolic world; the man is available to grasp his life in notion or artistic fiction. Marcel Proust called this "retrieve a lose time". This is a significant theme of personalism as philosophy approach. It appeal human to comprehend, creative, humanistic acquittal their mission on the Earth [4, P.4].

The idea of vitality (will to live) is a general keynote, which passes through all mass culture products. Zbigniew Brzeziński, the American political analyst writes that the idea of vitality in American pop culture makes it so popular all over the world. In itself such life-affirming position is not adversarial phenomenon. Many apologists of pop culture in their arguments often appeal to this peculiarity. The concept of vitality presents in many more or less successful embodiments. Thereby it comes to stay in mass consciousness as unconditional postulate.

The idea of real anthropic vitality (aesthetic act as way of being) was appear on the level of elite consciousness. But then it comes into everyday practices, affirmative discourse and lose its innovative potential, was reduced to suite of clichés and common automatisms. As many researchers says, in the context of devaluation of necessary minimal culture standard the factual vitality lie in place of lead attribute of human.

To be alive is indispensable and sufficient feature of human nature in contemporary social and cultural circumstances, public view.

Many scientists and philosophers of new humanism approach often evangelize an unconscious love to animal biological basis of human nature. They chant the praises a desire to save the life even in a way of freedom from all anthropic, in the other words from all what separates a human from the nature world. The philosophy of humanism as proclamation a human life as highest value on the level of mass conscious is reduced to extreme forms of hedonism and intension to permanent pleasure. From this point of view the human body is comprehended as a general instrument of achieve this pleasure.

The domination in contemporary social life a mass culture's principles and consumption values is stated straight by Brzezinski's notion "tittiteinment" (from English words "tits" – feed tits and "entertainment"). Tittiteinment is a way of activity in Internet setting, which remind a child age, when the human behavior is primarily under the control of animal reflexes: neither ethic beliefs, nor rational way of evaluation is formed yet [8, P.341]. The result is a permanent growth of number of porn sites, recreational portals and game programs. As we said mass culture has a function of adaptation to given life circumstances and making a primitive reflection about orientation in given meaning space. Inasmuch as there is not a transcendental extension in this form of culture, it proclaims looking after the body as a general life waymark. In such a manner the body becomes a goal in and of itself, as surely as continuation of human race.

The body and especially a female body run into cabala of new aesthetic demands. It begins to functioning on the level of "image market" and is defined as competitive or no-win (the body image, which hasn't demand). The real living body with its imperfection estrange oneself for the ideal model, simulacrum.

There are two general popular themes in the mass cultural industry: it is love and violence. The many mass culture narrative focus round this themes because it's animal vitality intention. The motive of violence is always links with the motive of providential rescue and repayment in the form of justice establishment. Psychological exertion, which accompanies a watching gangster films, or thriller, removes by advent of well-known "deus ex machina". When the person feels the emotions of "real" meeting with deadly threat, he is reinforced in the view about value of own vitality, notwithstanding the above if he have a goal which is underlies abroad of this vitality per se or not.

#### 4. Conclusions

The love motive was presented in mass culture creations from the beginning of existing of this form of culture. We even may call the cultural industry "an industry of love". As American sociologist S.M. Greenfield writes, the love is maintained by contemporary capitalism in a climate of absence another tools of motivation to play a role of husband

and wife-mother and form a core of society. Also the love topic promotes approval of exist social order and expansion of consume production [12, P.365].

Mass culture discourse advocates the concept of vitality and this is especially timely in the context of social and economic crisis. People often can't a possibility to realize they self in spheres of activity, which meet the demand of their interests and skills. Impossibility of realization of own creative skills is balanced out by realization in family life as a women-mother and man-father. But often there is not enough for person. Our understanding is that affirmation of family values must be accompanied with affirmation of self-actualization values, acceptance person as an active subject of social and cultural life. A person must have a real, not simulative choice of life strategy. We must take farewell with illusive view on the human vitality as animal, phylogenetic formation.

#### References:

- [1] Arendt H. (2000) Vita activa ili o dejatel'noj zhizni/per. s nemeckogo i anglijs'kogo V.V. Bibihina; pod red. D.M. Nosova – SPb.: Aletejja, 437 p.
- [2] Berdjaev N. Opyt jeshatologicheskoy metafiziki: tvorchestvo i obektivacija. Retrieved from: [http://krotov.info/library/02\\_b/berdjaev/1941\\_38\\_00.html](http://krotov.info/library/02_b/berdjaev/1941_38_00.html)
- [3] Brokmejer J., Harre R. (2000) Narrativ: problemy i obeshhanija odnoj al'ternativnoj paradigmy // Voprosy filosofii, №3, pp. 29-42.
- [4] Vdovina I.S. (1990) Francuzskij personalizm (1932—1982): Ucheb. posobie dlja filos. fak. un-tov.— M.: Vyssh. shk., 151 p.
- [5] Mariten Zh. (2004) Izbrannoe: velichie i nishheta metafiziki. – M.: ROSSPJeN, 608 p.
- [6] Merlo-Ponti M. (1999) Fenomenologija vosprijatija /per. s fr. Pod redakciej I.S. Vdovinoj, S.L. Fokina. – SPb.: Juventa, Nauka, 608 p
- [7] Ortega-i-Gasset H. (1991) Jestetika. Filosofija kul'tury/ Vstup. st. G.M. Fridlendera; Sost. V.E. Bagno. – M.: Iskusstvo, 588 p.
- [8] Skorodumova O.B. (2009) Vlijanie nacional'noj identichnosti na formirovanie tipa informacionnogo obshhestva // Kul'tura na rubezhe HH-HHI vekov: globalizacionnye processy. – SPb: Nestor-Istorija, 632 p.
- [9] Frumkin K. (2011) O ponjatii «voploshhenie». – Literaturno-filosofskij zhurnal «Topos», Retrieved from: <http://www.topos.ru/article/7574>
- [10] Bruner J. Lifeas Narrative. – Social Research, 54(1). – P.11-32.
- [11] Caldiero C. (2007) Crisis story telling: Fisher's narrative paradigm and new reporting. – American Communication Journal. Vol.9, Issue 1.
- [12] Greenfield S. (1965) Love and Marriage in Modern America: A Functional Analysis// The Sociological Quarterly. - Volume 6, Issue 4, pp. 361–377.

#### Information about author

*Svitlana Amelina*, PhD. Student, Philosophy Department, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Universytetska St., Lviv, 79000, Ukraine, e-mail for correspondence: [lumencoelum@gmail.com](mailto:lumencoelum@gmail.com)