

Hans Christian Andersen – a Story of Experience

Discourse Analysis and the concept of Narrative Emotion as a new approach to the Hans Christian Andersen figure in a glocal context

Hans Christian Andersen – a strong brand

Hans Christian Andersen died 135 years but he is still key figure in several local, national and global narratives. The Hans Christian Andersen figure can appear in a narrative about the simplicity and magic in his fairytales as it is the case globally. Or the narrative can revolve around the statue of The Little Mermaid and other artefacts as seen in Denmark. In Odense, Hans Christian Andersen's city of birth, the Hans Christian Andersen figure can even take form as one of the authors own creative paper cuttings.

There can be no discussion about whether Hans Christian Andersen is a strong brand or not. He is. The topic of my Ph.D. project is how to revitalize Hans Christian Andersen as a cultural icon of Odense, his city of birth, with a new brand.

In this project brand is broadly understood as a certain symbolic value added to a product, a person or a phenomenon to create a specific identity for the trademark in question. The overall purpose of branding is to make the trademark relevant to the target audience. This is effectively done by attaching narratives to the trademark: narratives that the target audience can relate to. A more specific definition of brand in this project is that a brand contains a powerful narrative about a certain phenomenon and that narrative is powerful because it conveys values common to dominant values in the target audience. Thus, a successful future brand of Hans Christian Andersen as a cultural icon of Odense can only bring the author in an appealing dialogue with his audience if this target audience can identify with the symbolic value attached to the Hans Christian Andersen figure. As the new brand has Odense as centre, the primary target audience is the population of Odense. In order to identify the content of the local values related to Hans Christian Andersen and their function I will address this audience in my research to examine how they discursively construct their experience of Hans Christian Andersen as a cultural phenomenon.

The last time Hans Christian Andersen was branded locally, nationally and worldwide was in 2005 – the year of his 200th birthday. The brand in 2005 was Hans Christian Andersen as “the greatest story ever told” and the overall purpose in the communication strategy for the celebration was to create global attention to Hans Christian Andersen, and this global attention was then intended to draw attention to Denmark. To celebrate the author as the greatest narrative of all time many creative initiatives were launched, for example advanced stage art and theatre, celebrities co-branding Hans Christian Andersen and a gigantic opening show that had a massive economic scandal as a result.

The Hans Christian Andersen brand in 2005 definitely created global attention. One of the conclusions after the birthday year was that the global branding had been a success – and it still is. But the part where the global attention should affect the promotion of Denmark as the author’s home country and Odense as his city of birth did not have a positive outcome. Nationally the constant media attention and the economic mess after the opening show made the Danes tired, and locally the celebration of Hans Christian Andersen was perceived almost catastrophically. The Danes, and especially the population in Odense, did not accept the narrative offered to them about Hans Christian Andersen as some sort of global merchandise.

One of the most interesting questions in my examination is how to create a brand or a narrative about the Hans Christian Andersen figure that will be accepted by the population in Odense and in the rest of Denmark. I will examine how individuals sense and experience Hans Christian Andersen on a local, national and international level. My examination will evolve as discourse analysis centered on how individuals discursively construct verbal narratives about Hans Christian Andersen and how these narratives function. I will pay special attention to how the idea of national identity functions in the discursive construction of Hans Christian Andersen.

It is my expectation that an examination of how the local values are expressed and how they function in a national and global context can generate strong indicators on the possible content in a future brand of the author: A “glocal” brand where the global and the local level are not opposites but engage in a dialectic relationship based on reciprocal constitution according to Robertson’s sense of the concept glocal (cf. 1995: 25f).

While Hans Christian Andersen’s fairytales and other of his works are not dominating the field of empirical research (as in science of literature), narrative theory possesses tools that are very relevant

in the scope of promising new perspectives in the Hans Christian Andersen research. In this paper, I am primarily concerned with how theory and method from discourse analysis can achieve supplement from narrative theory, especially from the concept of narrative emotion.

Discourse Analysis in this project

There are many ways to approach discourse analysis. The approaches differ from one another in general focus: How much room there is for the discursive subject, how absolute the discursive structure is to be understood, how language is understood and examined. In my project I (schematically simplified) define discourse as a dialectic, dynamic process of negotiation, where *someone* (influential and powerful actors in society) *says* (talks or converses in a qualified concept- and context-fixed way, based on their knowledge in the language of discourse) *something* (not anything, but something relevant and therefore significant) *to somebody* (individuals in society, who are objects to the power of discourse).

Depending on to what extent the researcher wants to investigate the construction of discourse or the individual possibility to change the content of discourse, one must decide whether to fix the analytic focus on the top (the discursive structure) or on the bottom (the individual power to make discursive changes). I want to examine how individuals create narratives about their experiences of Hans Christian Andersen as a cultural phenomenon. Thus, an analytical approach starting from the bottom is necessary. Discursive psychology is such an approach, because its primary aim is to examine the subject and how it uses discourses and acts in discourses (Edwards and Potter 1992, Wetherell and Potter 1992) with focus on spontaneous language usage (Wetherell and Potter 1992:91).

However, one of the most frequent critiques of discursive psychology as a research method is its validity claims. It can be problematic to avoid a subjective and incoherent analysis and argumentation as the object of analysis is social practice. To overcome this problem it can be a solution to incorporate validity claims from other research methods. Thus, I will now draw attention to how discursive psychology and the concept of narrative emotion can be complementary approaches in my examination.

Narrative Emotion – an approach from narrative theory

Within narrative theory the concept of narrative emotion is understood as complementary to narrative rationality. Both approaches are thus concerned with the narrative's effectiveness and purpose. But where the narrative rationality approach "measures" the effectiveness and purpose from the exterior parts of the narrative, such as structure and narrator, narrative emotion evaluates the effectiveness and purpose based on the interior environment of a narrative: by examining emotions expressed by individuals when they percept and react on a narrative. Thus, the spectator's "actual experience of viewing or reading fiction" (Deslandes 2004:337) is at the core of the investigation. In her article "A Philosophy of Emoting" (2004), Jeanne Deslandes uses Robert J. Yanal's terms *emoter* and *emoting* (Yanal 1999) to investigate how individuals react on narratives: *emoter* signifies "the agent feeling a narrative emotion" and *emoting* describes the "state of being aroused by a fiction-generated emotion" (Deslandes 2004:337).

Today we all know Hans Christian Andersen through fiction: primarily through his own fairytales, but also through narratives created about his life and his work over time and through brands of him constructed for different purposes. On this basis I consider the emotions stirred up when individuals experience Hans Christian Andersen as *fiction-generated*, because no present person knew the *real* Hans Christian Andersen. Hence, individuals experiencing Hans Christian Andersen are understood as *emoters*.

Previous approaches to narrative emotion argue that the emotions felt by individuals confronted with fiction are not real, but *quasi-emotions* (Walton 1990) as they do not stir up any instinctive physical reactions or *motor reactions* (Scruton 1974). Deslandes seeks to settle with these approaches as she argues, that "emotion stirred up by fiction is just as real as real life" (Deslandes 2004: 345) and in real life the individual interprets a situation and decides to respond adequately - not necessarily with a physical motor reaction (ibid: 350). Hence, Deslandes argues that emotions and reactions are not isolated autonomous elements expressing a linear progress: the researcher cannot identify an emotion and expect a certain predetermined reaction from an individual, since the reaction is dependent on each individual experience. The analytic spotlight is thus aimed at the individual articulation rather than the narrative structure: a similarity between narrative emotion and discursive psychology.

Deslandes' rejection of a necessary motor reaction is also a rejection of the existence of a predictable and objective line between sender (the narrative) and receiver (the emoter). The non-existence of this straight line moves the focus of interest to what happens *between* the narrative and the emoter in a hermeneutical sense, because the form and outcome of this *between* is a result of individual interpretation, experience and articulation. In his article "Encoding/decoding" (1972-1979) Stuart Hall investigates the relation between TV-producers and the audience in mass-communication. Hall is specifically concerned with what happens *between* the sender-pole (encoder) and the receiver-pole (decoder). He thus abandons linearity between the two poles and instead he introduces their connection as a "complex structure in dominance" (ibid: 128), a circuit that can only have an "effect", satisfy a "need" or be put to "use" (ibid: 130) if there is discursive agreement between encoder and decoder. As Hall puts it: "Reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse" (ibid: 131). Thus, the connection between encoder and decoder is a construction based on discursive meaning. In my project, the symbolic value added to the Hans Christian Andersen figure must have a content that is common to values in the target audience: there must be discursive agreement between the encoders who create a new brand and the decoders (emoters) who perceive the brand.

How Narrative Emotion and Discursive Psychology can work together

As mentioned earlier, narrative emotion is in this project considered as a supplement to discourse analysis, especially to discursive psychology. Introducing the narrative paradigm to communication theory, Walter Fisher claimed, that "people are essentially storytellers" (Fisher 1984). A story is not automatically discursive, but it becomes discursive when the individual presents it. The link between story and discourse is in the "... distinction between (...) "story" –a sequence of actions or events, conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse –and (...) "discourse," the discursive presentation or narration of events" (Culler 2001:189). Using discourse analysis in the way I have presented above is to ask discursive questions to the "narration of events" in the empiric material. This combination of narrative theory and discourse analysis is often seen in discursive psychology, because the approach simultaneously uses socio-psychological and linguistic approaches to verbal and written texts (narratives) (e.g. Harré & Gillet 1994, Edwards 1997, Harper 2004). Within discursive psychology the researcher views discourses as multiple. The discourses

available for an individual are exposed in an *interpretative repertoire* (Wetherell and Potter 1992: 90) from which the individual can walk in and out of discourses in spontaneous speak as he pleases. The aim of discursive psychology is thus to identify the discourses available for the individual and examine how he uses them when he creates his own narrative about a certain topic.

The elements from narrative theory that are often borrowed by discursive psychologists are elements very similar to Fisher's narrative rationality where the researchers attend the respondent as a storyteller and use narrative theory to examine the structure and effectiveness of the story concerned. In this Ph.D. project it is my intention to elaborate the emotional dimension in the concept of experience. Thus, I believe that another possible fusion between discourse analysis and narrative theory can be the one between discursive psychology and narrative emotion.

Narrative discourse and the concept of experience

The psychological structure of experience is here perceived as consisting of two levels for individual processing of experiences: the *biological* level (where an experience is sensed) and the *reflexive* level (where the individual applies meaning to the sensed experience) (Jantzen & Vetner 2007). It is a thesis in this project that an emotional dimension encompassing national identity can be placed between the two levels and thus be constitutive to the way individuals reflect on and articulate meaning about their experience.

Emotionality has a historical tradition of close attachment to national identity in Western Europe as a consequence of National Romanticism. The theoretical basis of this part of my project is Colin Campbell's thesis about *rationalized hedonism* (Campbell 1989), where Campbell argues that modern consumerism finds its historical roots in the emotional Romanticism. With this starting point, I want to examine whether the Danish Romanticism can be understood as a historical context for the way individuals experience Hans Christian Andersen today and how this natio-emotional dimension affects the way individuals emote and apply meaning to their experiences. It is thus a thesis that the performative dimension of emotions illustrates cultural praxis because it is "through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made" (Ahmed 2004: 10). Hence, examining the emotional dimension in individual experiences of Hans Christian Andersen as a cultural phenomenon is simultaneously an examination of how national identity plays a role in the concept of experience. But it is also an examination of another possible level of

experience processing between the verbally passive biological level and the verbally active reflexive level: a natio-emotional level where individuals emote on basis of discourses from their interpretative repertoire as a consequence of their biological reaction before they apply verbal discursive meaning to their experience.

It is my intention to approach this examination using a form of narrative discourse as method. But instead of gathering inspiration from Fisher's narrative rationality, I want to examine the interior environment of the narratives by combining discursive psychology with narrative emotion. A similar approach appears in the article, "Experiences and construction of art: a narrative discourse analysis" (Stickley et al. 2007), where the authors show how narrative discourse analysis can be applied to an investigation concerned with individual experiences. According to discourse analysis, language is constitutive of experience. This view is the starting point from the narrative discourse analysis unfolding in the article, where the main purpose is to investigate "what is being said in the said" (ibid: 785) by using analytic tools often used within discursive psychology, such as variability, constitution and function. Inspired by Stickley and his co-writers (ibid: 785), questions in my investigation could be:

- How do the individuals construct the discourse of Hans Christian Andersen? (with analytical focus on the content of the interpretative repertoire)
- How do the individuals themselves think they experience Hans Christian Andersen? (with analytical focus on function and language use)
- What do the individuals say about and how do they express their thoughts, feelings and emotions related to Hans Christian Andersen? (with analytical focus on the expression of narrative emotion)
- How are experiences constructed?

To sum up: all discourse analysis focuses upon construction of meaning in language use.

Individuals construct meaning by creating narratives. When the narratives are understood and emotionally expressed by humans, they become discursive (Hall: 131, Wetherell and Potter 1992: 65). Thus, discourse and narratives engage in a dialectic relationship: the content of discourse is narrative, and the narratives interlink discursively. In my project narrative discourse analysis is understood as an approach that combines narrative emotion and discursive psychology.

Emoting and glocal identity

In this Ph.D. project it is a thesis that when the population of Odense and other Danes discursively construct their emotional narratives about Hans Christian Andersen as a cultural phenomenon they simultaneously express the traits of their national identity and thereby add elements to the discourse of their cultural heritage.

In her description of emoting Deslandes points out that “our specific cultural context” is pivotal for the way individuals experience and that their expression of emoting “calls for a culturally learned behavior in correspondence to cultural conventions”, and she characterizes “emoting as a highly ritualized form of behavior” (Deslandes 356). Her example is that it is culturally and socially accepted to shout at bad guys in South American cinemas (ibid). Behavior founded in cultural conventions can seem natural to members of the culture in question, but they are discursively constructed parts of what Hall calls *discourses in dominance* that constitute a *dominant cultural order* (Hall: 134). Hall emphasizes that this order is “neither univocal nor uncontested”, and thus, there is room for change in these discourses no matter how naturalized they appear to be.

Within discursive psychology it has been suggested that this dominant cultural order to a certain point dictate how individuals create narratives as a consequence of the *narrative conventions* they are assigned to (Harré & Gillet 1994:34). A very important point in my project is how national identity, as a part of cultural heritage, is expressed in the respondent’s emotive articulations of Hans Christian Andersen as a cultural phenomenon. As mentioned above, I investigate this question on three levels: the local (Odense), the national (Denmark) and the international.

My aim is to come closer to an answer of what a new “glocal” brand of Hans Christian Andersen could contain. To investigate the experience of Hans Christian Andersen in a glocal perspective is to understand him simultaneously as a local icon of Odense, a central part of the Danish cultural heritage and as a part of the international cultural heritage. In his Ph.D. dissertation *Glocal Nationalisms* (2006), Lasse Koefoed argues, that national identity is produced in relation to global and local identity (ibid: 29). This dynamic perception of national identity gives room to the individual articulation of meaning, closely related to the discursive psychologist Michael Billig’s concept of *banal nationalism* (Billig in Wetherell et al. 2002: 219) that draws attention to the individual experience and expression of Hall’s *dominant cultural order*. Hall emphasizes that even though the individual understands an encoded discursive message the way it was intended to by the encoder, the individual can still choose to decode the message in what Hall calls a *globally contrary*

way (Hall: 137f), where the encoded message for instance is framed in “national interest”, but the decoder, using an *oppositional code* (ibid: 138), frames the message in “local interest”.

Understanding national identity within this framework is thus to understand identity as simultaneously local, national and international. A future glocal brand of Hans Christian Andersen must be placed within this framework, and it is my expectation that the content of this brand can be found in the emotive narratives created by Hans Christian Andersen’s target audience.

Conclusion

In my Ph.D. project Hans Christian Andersen as a cultural phenomenon is the great narrative and the perception of this phenomenon is the object of investigation. Using Deslandes’ emoter/emoting approach, I am solely concerned with how the emoters interact with that narrative: how they respond to it (or how they emote), how the content and the expression of their emoting show traits from their national identity in their own creation of narratives about Hans Christian Andersen.

It is a thesis in this project that an important cause of some major failures in the celebration of 2005 was a break between the encoder’s creating a certain brand of Hans Christian Andersen and framing it in a *brand of global interest* and the decoder’s reading the brand operated with an oppositional code and reframed the brand in a globally contrary way as a completely failed *brand of local interest*. The connection between global and local was non-existent in discourse as well as brand in “Hans Christian Andersen as the greatest story ever told,” and thus, the population of Odense could not use the brand of Hans Christian Andersen as a global product in their local context. The discursive struggle between encoders and decoders resulted in a simultaneous break between the narrative (Hans Christian Andersen) and the emoters: The emoting expressed especially locally in 2005 was not individuals emoting on the actual narrative but on the global merchandise discourse in which the narrative was placed by the encoders. Based on this it is my expectation that a successful glocal brand of Hans Christian Andersen as a local icon of Odense must contain an almost perfect and unbroken line between the narrative and the emoters, where the emoters decode “the message in terms of the reference code in which it was encoded” (Hall: 136). To construct such a line the encoders must gain knowledge of how the decoders will emote to the encoded narrative, which is why I find it important to examine a possible third natio-emotional level of experience processing. The straight transparent line between narrative and emoter is, in my opinion, a possible way to

ensure that the audience actually emotes to the phenomenon Hans Christian Andersen and not more or less insignificant expressions from another more or less irrelevant discourse.

It has been suggested earlier that a future brand of Hans Christian Andersen should link the author closer to the narratives – his own narratives. An example of such a brand is the Chinese brand of him: a brand centered on the simplicity and magic in Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales. In China that brand clearly conveys values that are present in the Chinese target audience as Hans Christian Andersen is a big hit in China these days.

If elements from the Chinese brand is to be added to a future iconic brand of Hans Christian Andersen in Odense it all begins with the fairytales. These fairytales were born in Odense because Hans Christian Andersen was born there. But a brand of a Hans Christian Andersen figure primarily connected to his fairytales can only gain discursive power and be a great story if it's symbolic value reflects the local values in the target audience.

I want to examine how this target audience expresses emoting: how it refers to certain culturally determined narrative conventions and reflects the local values, and how these values function in a glocal context. Every time an emoter adds meaning to his or her experience of Hans Christian Andersen a new narrative is created about him. The common features in these narratives will joined together illustrate important indicators on the symbolic value that is to be added to Hans Christian Andersen in a future glocal brand of him.

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