

24

Narrative Paradigm of Walter Fisher

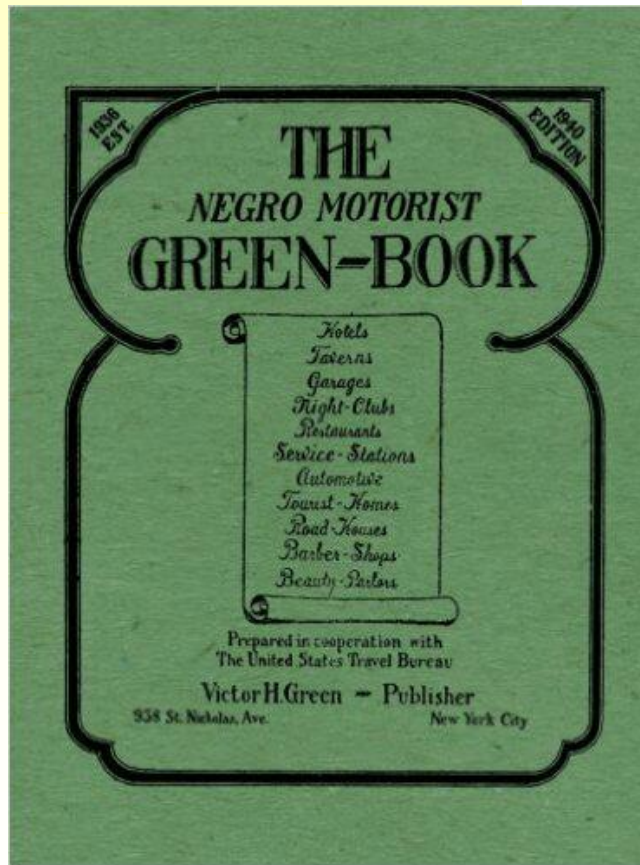
A First Look at Communication Theory

9th edition

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Sparks**

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Narrative Paradigm



Travel guide to help African American motorists avoid obstacles during the time of Jim Crow (1936-1966)

Narrative Paradigm

Fisher believes we are storytelling animals who “experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives—as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends.”

Narration and Paradigm: Defining the Terms

- ❑ **Narration** – symbolic actions (words and/or deeds) that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them
- ❑ **Paradigm** – conceptual framework; universal model that calls for people to view events through a common interpretive lens

Characteristics

- Narrative occurs in a natural time-line.
- Narrative includes characterization.
- Narrative presents detail.
- Narrative is primitive.
- Narrative does not argue ... obviously.

Hart, R. (1997) *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, p. 92.

Paradigm Shift: From a Rational World Paradigm to a Narrative One

Rational world paradigm

- ❑ People are essentially rational.
- ❑ We make decisions on the basis of arguments.
- ❑ **The type of speaking situation (legal, scientific, legislative) determines our arguments.**
- ❑ **Rationality is determined by how much we know and how well we argue.**
- ❑ The world is a set of logical puzzles that we can solve through rational analysis.

Paradigm Shift: From a Rational World Paradigm to a Narrative One

Narrative paradigm

- ❑ People are essentially storytellers
- ❑ **We make decisions on basis of good reasons, which vary depending on the communication situation, media or genre**
- ❑ **History, biography, culture and character determine good reasons**
- ❑ Rationality determined by coherence and fidelity
- ❑ World is a set of stories from which we choose

Narrative Rationality: Coherence and Fidelity

Narrative coherence – internal consistency with characters acting in a reliable fashion; the plot unfolds in a predictable fashion

Narrative fidelity – congruence between values embedded in a message and what listeners regard as truthful and humane; the story strikes a responsive chord

Narrative Coherence

PLOT LINES

Rivalry

Underdog

Sacrifice

Love

Discovery

Quest

CHARACTER

Protagonist

Antagonist

Round

Flat

Stock

Foil

Narrative Coherence

- Stories “hang together” when we are convinced that the narrator hasn't left out important details, fudged the facts, or ignored other plausible interpretations.
- We tend to trust stories of people who show continuity of thought, motive and action.

Narrative Fidelity

- When we judge a story to have fidelity, we are opening ourselves to the possibility that those values will influence our beliefs and actions

Narrative values = Our values

Narrative Fidelity

- ❑ **Theoretical**—Americans think everyone should have a college education.
- ❑ **Economic**—Americans respect efficiency.
- ❑ **Aesthetic**—Americans respect neatness and cleanliness.
- ❑ **Social**—Americans admire fairness and justice.
- ❑ **Political**—Americans think government ownership in general is undesirable.
- ❑ **Religious**—Americans tend to judge people and events moralistically.

Hart, R. (1997) *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, pp. 238-239

Narrative Fidelity

More than just aligned values

1. The values embedded in the message
2. The relevance of those values to decisions made
3. The consequences of adhering to those values
4. The overlap with the worldview of the audience
5. Conformity with what the audience members believe is “an ideal basis for conduct”

So What?

A good story is a powerful means of persuasion.

When someone chooses to tell you a story rather than present you with facts and figures, he/she is attempting to seduce your mind.

Let's Play a Game

IWO JIMA MEMES

What is the Story?

- ☐ Sign in to Top Hat
- ☐ Review the homework for Chpt. 24
- ☐ DECIDE—How does coherence influence fidelity?

Iwo Jima Meme

Coherence elements



- Who are the people in the image?
- How are they positioned?
- What are they raising?

Story—American values are worth the struggle.

Narrative Analysis

Lived stories—*what we actually did or are doing*

Unknown stories—*information that's missing*

Untold stories—*what we choose not to say*

Unheard stories—*what we say that isn't heard or acknowledged*

Untellable stories—*stories that are forbidden or too painful for us to tell*

Story Telling—*the manner in which we communicate*

Stories Told—*what we say we are doing*

Critique: Does Fisher's Story Have Coherence and Fidelity?

- Fisher's definition of narrative may be **overly optimistic**
 - Kirkwood: **standard implies good stories cannot go beyond what people already believe and value**
 - McClure: argues probability and fidelity are too tightly linked with normative concepts of rationality