

”HAPPY END OF THE WORLD — FINAL EDITION”¹

Religious and apocalyptic narratives in the Lynx commercial “Final Edition 2012”

Lisa Kienzl

Religion and Advertisement are central elements in our everyday life. Especially Television commercials reveal the transformation of religious elements as well as the changing approach towards religion in our society. Advertisements in general are part of our daily life and express various cultural trends. The prior goal of advertisement is to transmit information about a product and convince the audience that this product or brand represents the fulfilment of their desires. Religion in advertisements or commercials is portrayed in many different ways. Firstly religion can be depicted as part of the commercials cultural narrative, secondly religious symbols just emerge within the audio–visual layer and thirdly explicitly religious messages are conveyed. In general, religious elements or symbols are embedded into a secular narrative of commercials and don’t transmit a religious idea per se.

It is important to differ between the intentions of Religion and Advertisement. The products sale — and not the viewer’s salvation — is in the corporations’ centre of interest. Despite that, advertisements and commercials enhance religious traditions to get the audience’s attention and to trigger positive emotions with these well–known elements. Notwithstanding that the use of these religious elements could generate a salvation narrative in the audiences mind. To be clear: There is no religious salvation in a commercial; however, the usage of religious symbols within the commercial creates exactly such expectations. The product itself is going to be designed as a myth in a sacred context. The distinction from the everyday life should represent the products uniqueness. In particular appearance und consolidation of a brand as well as the customized product are important. The brand as an overall mechanism depicts mythical and religious influence on the narrative and should ensure the sales value. Authentic religious symbols and themes like

1 Lynx/Axe slogan for the “Final Edition 2012” deodorant, in: <http://www.lynxeffect.com/uk/lynx-products/2012>, [20.08.2012].

heaven, angels or the apocalypse are nowadays transformed into modern secular commercials or advertisements.

The designed myth within the commercials narrative is not the object itself, but the way of its expression.² A myth is not textual confined therefore a transformation into television commercials is comprehensible. In the end the need for mythical and religious storylines is crucial, especially in the Western societies. Essential in this depiction, however, are the different conveyed cultural codes. These codes represent the society's norms and values and serve as regulation to social and cultural developments.³ They combine with well-known societal ideas as well as collective symbols and are then used to promote a product or a brand. The key element of advertisements' success lies in the transformation of religious and mythological symbols as well as the modification of narratives structures.⁴

Transformation of religious elements

Today the change of religion within the society is a main interest in the scientific community, but religion in popular media is often not within this focus. However, the study of the transformation of religious elements in Television, especially in commercials, is worth of being observed, too. The change of the perception of religious elements in the society could convey the impression that religion is not important any longer — however, this is not the case. The change in the approach towards religion and its transformation into modern narratives show that no decline but a change in the access towards it can be recognized.⁵ The need for mystical, religious and spiritual storylines still exists. Within the narrative's context it is clear that religious rituals, symbols and elements are now transformed and passed on into the society in a modified way.

Within the depiction of religion in commercials symbols and language are significant layers. In addition to this we have to keep in mind that the cultural–narrative layer reflects social norms and values as well as traditional religious symbols. However these narratives — even though they include religious elements — are built for economic interests. But it is not only about sell-

2 Barthes, Roland: *Mythen des Alltags*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1974, 86.

3 Cf. Lévi–Strauss, Claude: *Mythologica 1 — Das Rohe und das Gekochte*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1976.

4 Cf. Clark, L. S.: *You LOST me. Mystery, Fandom, and Religion in ABC's LOST*, in: Diane Winston (Ed.): *Small Screen, Big Picture. Religion and Prime Time Television in a Post 9/11 World*, Baylor: University Press 2009.

5 Cf. Knoblauch, Hubert: *Qualitative Religionsforschung. Religionsethnographie in der eigenen Gesellschaft*, Paderborn/Wien: Schöningh 2003, 8.

ing a product, it is also a possibility to express a certain way of life and enhance specific societal values. Advertisements and commercials could therefore be seen as an element of communication between a product (a brand) and a desirable state of mind. Especially using aesthetic codes to gain the audiences' attention grant the sale of a product. To demonstrate the use of religious elements — particularly the apocalyptic narrative — in Television commercials we now turn to the brand Axe respectively Lynx.

Lynx was established in 1983 and is a part of Unilever, one of Europe's largest corporations. In Central Europe the brand is on the market since 1985 and advertised with a slogan that promises you to make you sexy.⁶ It ensures men to increase in popularity with women, the so-called "Lynx effect".⁷ As a result of this almost mythical representation of this product, religious elements are used to increase this idea. In 2011 the slogan to the current fragrance was "Excite, the new fragrance from Lynx. Even angels will fall"⁸, and in the commercial angels depicted as women fell from heaven, because they couldn't resist the "Lynx effect". This commercial created heavy resistance in Christian groups in South Africa. They criticized this depiction: "As such, the problem is not so much that angels are used in the commercial, but rather that the angels are seen to forfeit, or perhaps forego their heavenly status for mortal desires"⁹.

Example: Final Edition 2012

Obviously, central religious elements such as Angels, Armageddon or redemption are popular themes in modern media. Also in 2011 Lynx started another promotional campaign with religious key elements: This time it was an apocalyptic narrative about the End of the World and Noah's ark combined with the Mayan myth of the End of the World in December 2012. Outstanding in this commercial are the authentic Christian-biblical metaphors and symbols that have been transformed into a secular narrative and combined with the broad cultural apocalyptic myth of 2012.

6 Cf. Bowdery, Rob: Copywriting, Lausanne: AVA Academia 2008 (= Basics advertising 1), 137.

7 Cf. Feasey, Rebecca: Masculinity and Popular Television, Edinburgh: Univ. Press 2008, 143–145.

8 Lynx Excite, in: <http://www.lynxeffect.com/uk/lynx-products/excite> [24.08.2012].

9 Laing, Aislinn: Deodorant commercial banned for offending Christian, in: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/8850294/Deodorant-commercial-banned-for-offending-Christian.html> [20.08.2012].

In the audio–visual layer we see a young man driving down a road in his car. The streets are abandoned, a chair is burning; flashlights are blinking; not working. A family hurry up to pack their car and leave. A shattered globe is lying in a puddle of water. Obviously, the end of the world is near. So, this young man starts to build something out of wood — at first it is not totally clear what it is going to be. But then we see that he is building a boat and — because of our cultural and religious habitus — we know that it is the Ark. Why is this a logical consequence for us? There are a few answers to that.

At first it is plausible because of the shape of the boat. The cultural determination about the construction and aesthetics of Noah's Ark is very specific and clear. As we see in different portrayals from the last 500 years — throughout time the depictions of Noah's Ark orientated strongly on the biblical narrative. One very popular example is the depiction in Schedel's *Nuremberg Chronicle*¹⁰ from the late 15th century but also nowadays we find the same imagination in a postmodern full-sized replica in a museum in Turkey.¹¹ Second the narrative reveals itself in the commercials' setting. We see a pre-apocalyptic environment with deconstruction and people leaving in a hurry. There is an upcoming thunderstorm and the first raindrops are falling. Moreover a flock of birds is alarmed at these circumstances and supposedly leaving in the first scene of the commercial. The third element in the audio–visual layer is the man himself. In many historical depictions Noah is directing the construction process and his closest are building the Ark. The commercial is changing this storyline but still referring to the cultural embedded metaphor of one man building a boat.

Back to: What do we see? This one man is building an Ark. We clarified this. How does he look like? Is he from Scandinavia? He could be! But does his aesthetic appearance correspond to the stereotypes of a Northern European? No, the man we see has dark curled hair and a dark beard as well as dark coloured eyes — apparently and according to stereotypical attribution he is from a Mediterranean region. Thus, also the aesthetic depiction of the male body refers to the biblical roots. Therefore the brand relies not only on the cultural and religious knowledge of the audience, they are playing with ethnical stereotypes, too, to intensify the narrative on an aesthetic layer.

In the next scene we see the inside of the Ark with a fitness centre and a lounge. So, the commercials narrative clearly modifies well known cultural depictions and religious storylines and transforms them into a modern day perceptions. Despite the cultural adaption of the narrative within the

10 Cf. Reske, Christoph: *Die Produktion der Schedel'schen Weltchronik in Nürnberg*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2000.

11 Cf. Mount Ararat Discovery. Is this Noah's Ark?, in: <http://araratdiscovery.com/> [22.08.2012].

storyline, traditional Judeo-Christian elements are central in this commercial.

These Judeo-Christian elements refer to the story of Noah and his Ark in the Genesis flood narrative. God saved the Patriarch Noah and his family as well as a pair of all of the world's animals by giving Noah detailed instructions for building the Ark. Because of this detailed biblical depiction there is also a very specific artistic depiction in Western European art history. Consequently this is also visible in the visual layer of the commercial. Beside the Judeo-Christian elements, there are parallels between Noah's ship and that of the Babylonian flood hero Atrahasis¹² — but this interpretation was not that important for the commercial narrative. The main areas of broadcast for this commercial were Christian influenced regions so therefore the Bible and its religious narratives were essential for the connection with the society and audience.

The lyrics of the music in the background "No man can walk alone"¹³ do not really refer to the visual layer of the commercial regarding the religious narrative. But they reflect the cultural implementation of gender roles as well as the depiction of the human body within the commercial. Above all, the audio layer refers to the marketing and media strategies of Lynx.

"Oh no, oh yes this is critical/ Oh no, oh yes this is chemical/ No man can walk alone/ Oh no, oh yes this is critical/ Oh no, oh yes pretty chemical/ No man can walk alone/ [...] The whole world wants to see/ How crazy this can be/ [...] No man can walk alone!"¹⁴

Societal discourses

The central question here is: What is the brands' marketing and media strategy? The motivation behind the commercial is clearly neoliberal capitalism — the company wants to sell a product. The brand takes very simple elements (a young man, a boat) and relates them in the way of storytelling (especially in the visual layer) to a specific biblical well known story. In that way the commercials' narrative strengthens Christian religious elements and traditional gender roles. The male part consequently is depicted as active dominant one, who is building and preparing respectively rescuing the passive women who are just walking towards him. This shows a patriarchal depiction of a white

12 Cf. Lambert, Wilfred George/Millard, Alan R.: *Atra-Hasis. The Babylonian story of the flood*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1970.

13 Commercial "Final Edition 2012", in: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEpkuvPzYF0> [22.08.2012].

14 Ibid.

male as religious or spiritual leader versus inferior females that are walking towards him after his “call” (using the deodorant). However beyond this first impression of mainstream gender implementations a second way of interpretation emerges looking at these women walking in pairs: That they are matching pairs — couples. It is questionable that this way of interpretation is in the sense of the brand, but regarding the societal discourse about sex and gender it is possible from a specific societal point of view.

Gender depiction

Besides the religious elements, the depiction of gender is very interesting in the brands advertisement campaign in general. At first we have a look at the product itself. On the back of the shower gel “Final Edition 2012” is a reminder to enjoy every second of the remaining time (until the apocalypse starts and the world is ending): “Don’t leave anything to chance! If the world is ending nothing should be left undone. Make your last days count with Lynx 2012 Final Edition”¹⁵. One may say that this request includes everyone — but it is a product explicit for men. This gender specific attribution is going to be confirmed in a comic strip with two pictures on the back of the Lynx shower gel. The first one is showing a man showering using Lynx with the outcome that a lot of women are surrounding him on the second picture. Secondly the advertisements main slogan in television, newspapers, radio was: “The End is nigh. Prophecy says that come 2012, we’ll be witness to the end of days. Well, if it’s your last day on earth [...]”¹⁶ Until this point of the advertisement if I read *we* (as a woman) I feel included. But if we read further it says: “[...] you’re going to need to be ready for the ladies.”¹⁷ So it is clearly a mythical narrative designed for a male audience. And even Kieran Danaher, the Lynx brand manager, made clear that: “Lynx believes that there is only one way for men to depart this land and that is to leave no stone unturned, to live every day as though it is your last.”¹⁸ So, obviously the brands main focus is on a male audience — the brands central sale promotion is to increase men’s popularity with women after using a Lynx product. But it is interesting to see that they started promoting their first fragrance for men and women (Lynx Attract) this

15 Slogan on the back of the shower gel “Final Edition 2012”.

16 Final Edition 2012, in: <http://www.lynxeffect.com/uk/lynx-products/2012> [24.08.2012].

17 Lynx slogan for the “Final Edition 2012” deodorant, in: <http://www.lynxeffect.com/uk/lynx-products/2012> [22.08.2012].

18 Macleod, Ishbel: Lynx warns about the end of the world with scantily-clad women, in: <http://www.thedrum.co.uk/news/2011/12/20/lynx-warns-about-end-world-scantily-clad-women> [24.08.2012].

year too. On one side the dominant male character within the brands narrative is changing but then again not within the religious influenced narrative of the last very popular commercial “Final Edition 2012”.

Conclusion

In conclusion postmodern secular narratives use religious elements — like the biblical story of Noah’s Ark — and combine them with mythical apocalyptic ideas — like the Mayan prophecy of the End of the World 2012 — within the storyline of a commercial to sell a product. The selection of different religious, spiritual and mythical elements enable a brand out of an economic system to reach into society and address a broad audience. Religion does play an important role in postmodern Western societies; the need for profound narratives and salvation still exists, but the approach towards religion has changed.

Topics and themes that have been taught previously by religious institutions are now being used as general spiritual and mythological structures within modern media to satisfy a general longing. In advertisement — like the Lynx commercial “Final Edition 2012” Religion is primarily used in a way of collective symbolism and metaphors to earn attention. However, this shows that these elements have not lost their importance and still respond to existential yearnings within the society.

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