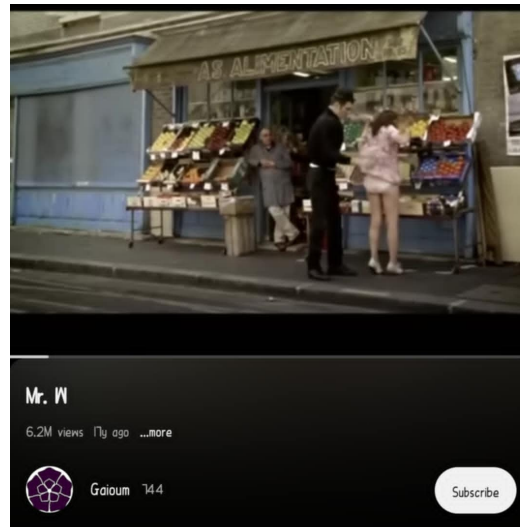


“His Potential is Ours”: A Semiotic Analysis on EPURON’s ‘Mr. W’



None of the physical legacy of the development of wind turbines during the Third Reich remains, yet the concept of self-sustainability did (Gipe & Möllerström, 2022). Following WWII, wind energy development was dominated by three nations: Denmark, France, and Germany. What differs Germany from the other two is its policy regarding decarbonization through means of wind and biogas (Büsgen & Dürrschmidt, 2009). In 2007, Germany was leading in wind energy and even had the world’s largest wind turbine installed (Weigt, 2009). To further increase foreign investments and the public’s acceptance of renewable energy, the German Ministry for the Environment and EPURON GmbH (a company that develops and finances wind energy farms) hired an advertising agency led by Lars Ruehmann.

17 years ago, an advertisement named “Mr. W” appealed to the viewers through clever storytelling and emotional relatability. According to Panofsky (1970), what all viewers from any time and culture would recognize from the depicted image is the denotative meaning. Diving into the literal meaning, the commercial starts with a giant French guy clad in all black being interviewed in an office with a mini wind turbine behind him. Throughout the interview, scenes where he interacts with people are shown. His actions are questionable (lifting skirts, throwing sand on a kid, messing with someone’s hair, dropping pots, destroying someone’s umbrella, etc.) as he expresses his emotions of being misunderstood, annoying, and useless, which intensify due to the slow and sad tempo of background music. Moments later he was bothering a guy reading the newspaper, where he received a card and thereafter a job. His loneliness disappeared, and he moreover felt useful and accepted. However, looking at it from a different perspective thanks to the ending, it turns out he’s portraying the wind—he personified the wind. No one seemed to notice or even bash his head after his bizarre

behavior because to them it's a natural occurrence. Meeting with EPURON (personified by the guy reading the newspaper) harnessed his annoying potential for good and eliminated his moodiness.

The first order of signification is denotative, that is a sign, consisting of a signifier and a signified (Chandler, 2019). Saussure defined signs as physical objects that characterize as signifiers and the concept associated with them as signified (Sebeok, 2001). In the commercial, the man is the signifier and throughout his bizarre actions paired with his melancholic articulated language and music, he signified the concept of the wind as it passes numerous people. Utilizing Barthes' textual analysis theory that categorizes signifiers, the narrative during the commercial can be interpreted using one of his five codes namely the proairetic code—defined as all the actions that lead the reader to construct the plot (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021). Due to the commercial's ambiguity, the viewers were in constant anticipation as they deduced the meaning of his actions and the overall plot even though it was right behind him—the wind turbine. It was only at the end where the ambiguity was cleared and the man's miserableness was resolved. In terms of relatability, the wind—a non-living thing—needs a person to paint the picture of what it might feel daily. The shown characteristics of the wind which are all negative were later utilized on renewable energy and therefore forward the idea of creating something good from bad. Moreover, it incorporates the notion that wind energy is advantageous and should not be put to waste. It entices viewers to join the green project by supporting the government's advent of sustainable energy or investing in EPURON's technological development.

Viewed through a culture-specific standard is the realm of connotation that refers to the personal and socio-cultural associations of the sign, where it further uses the first-order signification as its signifier to add another signified (Chandler, 2019). What's more, certain connotations are widely recognized within a culture. A German commercial intended for its people using a French actor speaking in English. A commendable commercial for its diversity and wide reach specifically for the English-speaking audience. However, this suggests that the priority of the commercial is not public acceptance due to the usage of English instead of German. Fishing for investors abroad seems to be the goal because the green project cannot proceed without funds even though the people are, let's say, hypothetically against it. The cost for installation and maintaining wind farms outweighs the intended effect both for consumers and creators (Engelhorn & Müsgens, 2021). For example, the German people, if they invested, will be at the same time paying for their electricity albeit higher compared to coal energy and it will take time for the investors to gain profit. Another noteworthy realization from the tagline—"His potential is ours"—is its creation of an illusion that a job fulfills a person due to the notion that companies provide the perfect

job that utilizes a person's skills or labors, which benefits the capitalist's profit-seeking and work culture.

Major culturally variable concepts when reflected showcase a particular worldview that, according to Barthes, serves the interests of the bourgeoisie (Chandler, 2019). At a mythic level, capitalism is a prevalent notion that maximizes profit at the expense of the laborer with regards to the commercial. For a short time, a job is indeed fulfilling until wages are slowly diminishing due to soaring inflation and the gap between the rich and poor is astronomical as they own the means of production which is either the factories/offices or the laborers themselves (Graßmann, 2024). Aside from the massive income disparity, capitalism and sustainability—like water and oil—are incompatible. The former is driven by growth, and the latter aims to maintain (Heilbroner, 2023). However, green capitalism acts as the common ground between the two. Bridging profit-driven enterprise and environmental sustainability, green capitalism emphasizes not only the ecosystems' economic value but the importance of its' services to society (Scales, 2017). Wind energy—while it addresses environmental issues—can still promote economic growth through investments and innovation as referred to by green capitalism.

In a nutshell, semiotics helps uncover the embedded dominant ideology that seems natural, common-sense, and timeless (Barthes, 1977). With the goal of revealing the naturalized ideology, an attempt to analyze the codes operating within a particular commercial 17 years ago has been found to be pretty prevalent and constituent in today's society. As Heijden argues (2007), capitalism appears to be the means for environmental sustainability. Wind energy can be deemed a mundane topic, but through clever storytelling of a misunderstood man personifying the wind, it showed the attractive prospects of sustainable energy to the public.

Words: 1075

References

American Psychological Association. (2014). APA Dictionary of Psychology. Apa.org; American Psychological Association. Retrieved from: <https://dictionary.apa.org/identity>

Asghar, M., & Zar, A. (2021). Effect of Humor, Fear and Emotions on Consumers Purchase Intentions in Advertisement: A Case Study of Peshawar City. 23, 15–22. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.9790/487X-2304101522>

Büsgen, U., & Dürrschmidt, W. (2009). The expansion of electricity generation from renewable energies in Germany. Energy Policy, 37(7), 2536–2545. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2008.10.048>

Chandler, D. (2019). Semiotics for Beginners: Denotation, Connotation and Myth. Visual-Memory.co.uk. <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem06.html>
Heilbroner, R. L., & Boettke, P. J. (2023, December 29). Capitalism. Www.britannica.com. Retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/money/capitalism>

Engelhorn, T., & Müsgens, F. (2021). Why is Germany's energy transition so expensive? Quantifying the costs of wind-energy decentralization. Resource and Energy Economics, 65, 101241. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.reseneeco.2021.101241>

Gipe, P., & Möllerström, E. (2022). An overview of the history of wind turbine development: Part I—The early wind turbines until the 1960s. Wind Engineering, 46(6), 0309524X2211178. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309524x221117825>

Jadou, S. H., & Ghabra, I. M. M. M. A. (2021). Barthes' Semiotic Theory and Interpretation of Signs. International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities, 11(3). Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v11i03.027>

Kgi-admin, GlobalData. (2022, January 13). Power plant profile: Wuerzburg, Germany. Power Technology. Retrieved from: <https://www.power-technology.com/data-insights/power-plant-profile-wuerzburg-germany/>

Scales, I. (2017, March). Green capitalism. ResearchGate; unknown. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315457340_Green_capitalism

Tulloch, L., & Neilson, D. (2014). The Neoliberalisation of Sustainability. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, 13(1), 26–38. Retrieved from:
<https://doi.org/10.2304/csee.2014.13.1.26>

Weigt, H. (2009). Germany's wind energy: The potential for fossil capacity replacement and cost saving. *Applied Energy*, 86(10), 1857–1863. Retrieved from:
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2008.11.031>

Wimmer, C., Graßmann, T. (2024). Karl Marx. In: Jodhka, S.S., Rehbein, B. (eds) *Global Handbook of Inequality*. Springer, Cham. Retrieved from:
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97417-6_76-1