POINT OF VIEW

A media presentation can provide insight into the point of view of the media communicator.

Point of View in Print

Writers can present information from a range of perspectives:

- The *first-person* point of view presents the action as interpreted by one character. To illustrate, Herman Melville's classic American novel *Moby Dick* begins, "Call me Ishmael." The reader's understanding of this epic whale hunt is colored by the outlook of Ishmael, an obscure member of the crew.
- The *second-person* point of view makes the reader the primary participant in the story. This perspective makes use of the pronoun "you."
- The *third-person* point of view describes the activities and internal processes of one character. In the third person point of view, which commonly employs the pronouns "he," "she," or "they," the author is privy to the thoughts and activities of this character but retains some critical distance and is therefore not accountable for the behavior for the character.
- The *omniscient,* or all-knowing, point of view enables the author to enter the heads of any and all of the characters, so that the reader has a comprehensive exposure to the people and events depicted in the work. This point of view is used frequently in journalism, which creates the appearance of objectivity in news coverage.

While writers generally try to maintain a consistent perspective, they may occasionally adopt a *panoramic* point of view, in which the perspective is constantly shifting. For instance, during the climactic whale-hunting scene of *Moby Dick,* the novel suddenly shifts to an omniscient narrator. The audience somehow overhears Captain Ahab's dialogue, even though Ishmael is stationed in a different boat. Journalists may also adopt this panoramic point of view by incorporating their own (first-person) perspective into the "objective," third-person account through production techniques such as connotative words and images, space, and editing decisions.

Point of View in Film and Television

In video and film, the point of view of the camera determines what the audience sees on screen. A shift in camera proximity (i.e., close-ups or

POINT OF VIEW—*The Lady in the Lake*

In *The Lady in the Lake* (1947), a battered Philip Marlowe (Robert Montgomery) checks his wounds in the mirror with Audrey Totter (Adrienna Fronsett). In this experiment in subjective camera techniques, the camera assumes the perspective of Marlowe. This fleeting image in the mirror provides the only opportunity in the film for the audience to see Marlowe.

wide-angle shots) provides the audience with a new way to think about the subject.

Film and television can *approximate* the first-person perspective through use of the *extreme close-up* camera shot (XCU). Gifted actors can express their innermost thoughts and emotions to the audience through subtle facial reactions such as a lifted eyebrow or wry smile.

In addition, filmmakers and videographers can create a *literal* first-person point of view by employing a *subjective camera technique.* For instance, in *The Lady in the Lake* (1947), the camera assumed the perspective of the protagonist, Philip Marlowe (Robert Montgomery), so that the audience saw the world through the eyes of the main character. The only time that Marlowe appears in front of the camera occurs when he passes in front of a mirror, and his reflection is caught by the camera. This first-person perspective was effective—for a brief period. However, without a focal character to watch, the film was disorienting. For example, the fight scene degenerated into a burlesque in which the camera spun around (as "Marlowe" was hit). The effect was to make the audience dizzy.

Obviously, the second person ("you") perspective is nearly impossible to achieve in television and film, unless you actually appear on screen. However, TV and filmmakers can simulate the second-person perspective by selecting performers who are supposed to represent you. The "man in the street" approach in advertising casts normal, everyday people to embody your concerns and interests. In addition, audience participation programs encourage people (like you) to express their concerns.

The *medium shot* (MS) is analogous to the third-person perspective in print, in that it simply records the actions and interactions of characters. This shot frequently takes in several actors in the frame. A third-person perspective can also be attained by shooting over the shoulder of one participant and then the other. Herbert Zettl explains,

> Are we now using the camera subjectively, with the viewer alternately associating with the person not seen on the screen? Not really. Even if the person on the screen (A) speaks directly to the camera, we know from the context that person A's target is not us, the viewers, but person B. . . . We are not in any way involved in the exchange . . . and are, therefore, not enticed to participate in the event or to assume person B's role.[11]

Film and television employ several different production techniques to simulate the omniscient perspective employed in print. The *extreme long shot* (XLS) is frequently employed at the beginning of a scene to provide the visual context for the subsequent action. This shot takes in a wide expanse of visual information. The viewer can see a great deal within the frame and thus has a measure of control in terms of what to watch. In addition, the director can use the *omniscient* camera, which moves freely in time and space. This technique enables the director to focus on characters in different settings (unbeknown to the other characters).

In addition, "ultra-tram" technology enables viewers to see the world in entirely new ways. For instance, in televised golf matches, lipstick cameras placed near the ball give the audience an unfettered look at a Tiger Woods tee shot. Moreover, super slow motion provides intimate examination of shots. And "under the hoop" floor cams now enable the fans of TV poker to peek at the hands of all of the players.

Television news also employs an omniscient point of view. Media technology enables the television news industry to transmit reports instantaneously from around the globe. This omniscient perspective contributes to the impression that the broadcast journalist is all knowing, and that the information contained in the broadcasts is unimpeachable.

Another way to identify the point of view is to examine the *preferred reading* of the video or film presentation. The media communicator establishes a preferred reading, in which production elements establish cues and clues that dictate how the audience responds to the events and characters in the narrative. To illustrate, the music that accompanies the appearance of the hero is often warm and stirring, while the music associated with villains is often discordant and abrasive. Likewise, the choice of costume colors is different for protagonists and villains. In this way, audience members are encouraged to assume the point of view of the preferred reading.

Of course, audience members may choose to negotiate their own meaning, based upon their own experiences. But this perspective would be a

departure from the preferred reading of the narrative. (For further discussion of audience interpretation, see the discussion of "Audience" later in this chapter.)

The simplest way to determine the point of view in a film or television program is to ask: *Whose story is this?* In the romance genre, the main character generally is facing the camera when the couple embrace. The main character is the one receiving the attention from the other character, and the audience vicariously assumes the position of the subordinate character.

FUNCTION

A simple communication activity may be motivated by many purposes, or *functions.*

Media communicators have a clear understanding of the purpose(s) behind their presentations.

Examples of functions include:

- *Expression* occurs when speakers inform the listener of their frame of mind—what they are thinking at that moment, how they are feeling, or their attitudes toward people and issues. As E. H. Gombrich observes, "A speaker can inform his partner of a state of affairs past, present or future, observable or distant, actual or conditional."[12]
- *Description* can involve elaboration on general statements, providing concrete examples and details.
- *Instruction* refers to occasions in which the purpose is either 1) to inform others about a subject with which they are unfamiliar, or 2) to furnish *additional* information about a subject with which the audience is already acquainted. Examples include giving directions to the airport or watching the evening news on television.
- *Information exchange* refers to occasions in which all parties benefit by sharing knowledge.
- *Persuasion* is a function in which the communicator's objective is to promote a particular idea or motivate the audience to change specific behaviors or attitudes. The ultimate purpose of persuasion is *control.* Advertising attempts to persuade you to think positively about a product and, ultimately, to purchase the advertiser's brand.
- *Humor* is a social mechanism that brings people together. Jokes, stories, and gossip divert people's attention from the pressing matters of the day. Sharing laughter is also a time-honored way to break

down social barriers. Accomplished public speakers often begin with an amusing anecdote that makes the audience feel comfortable. And in political communications, humor is an effective strategy to attack a person or undermine an opponent's position.

- *Creative expression* is used by novelists, painters, and experimental videographers, who express themselves through their art and share their artistic vision with the audience. Thanks to digital technology, independent artists and nonprofessionals have the means to produce, edit, and distribute their works of art.
- *Exploration* may occur when a communicator is not clear what he/she wants to say. Stalling techniques (like interspersing "uh" and "you know" between words) gives the speaker a bit of space to figure out where he/she is going next. However, we still say things that we wish we could take back.

Mass communicators typically present polished information that has been prepared in advance. However, with many hours to fill and a limited amount of programming, media communicators are frequently forced to ad lib. Reporters remain talking on-air even when there is nothing new to report. Max Frankel observes that this reliance on "oral media" has altered the level of discourse in the media:

> In the oral media, thoughts fly from the top of the head, causing even smart people to sound ignorant. The camera permits no pauses, even for feigned reflection. To escape the gaps in their knowledge, television ad-libbers seek safety in mere opinion, speculation, and prophecy, which can be contradicted but not easily proved false.[13]

- *Ritual,* as it pertains to communication, is a verbal or written exchange that has an underlying social significance. As an example, international students often express bewilderment over Americans' habit of greeting people with, "How are you?" and then moving on without waiting for a reply. However, what the students have mistaken for superficiality is actually a cultural ritual, in which people are making a formal connection with one another. "Small talk" is a similar ritual intended to make social situations more comfortable.
- A surprising amount of our communication is devoted to performance. Think about the dynamics that occur in singles bars. Although the manifest function of a speaker may be informational

(e.g., "What's your major?"), the latent function is to impress the other person.

This function also carries over into the world of mass media. Production elements reinforce the themes, mood, or messages of the media presentation. All too often, however, media communicators include dazzling special effects and elaborate camera movements to impress the audience with their expertise.

- *Emotional catharsis* includes spontaneous expressions of love, passion, anger, pain, happiness, or the release of tension. These expressions may not be coherent or planned—what did you say the last time that someone dented the fender of your car? —but your outburst can be quite effective.

  Media figures—whether they are interviewers or interviewees—are trained to control these revealing outbursts. However, when people are under constant media scrutiny, restraint is not always possible. These moments provide brief but candid glimpses behind the images that are so carefully cultivated for public view.
- *Disengagement* occurs when you withdraw from communication. At times, your objective may be to *discourage* extended conversation. Perhaps you are in a hurry but find yourself in an awkward or tedious conversation. In this instance, you might adopt strategies designed to terminate discussion—by responding in monosyllabic answers or furnishing verbal cues intended to accelerate the conversation (e.g., "And then. . . ?")
- *Profit* is a major consideration in the construction of media presentations because the American media system is a market-driven system. At times, profit is a manifest function, but even when profit is not a manifest function, it is very likely to be a latent function.

  Because the principal function of most children's programming is to entertain, young audience members may be unaware that its underlying purpose (i.e., latent function) is to generate product sales. Media lawyer Chris Kelleher points out that children's programs on public television also has a latent profit function:

  > Once a show gets some traction to it, then they negotiate with toy manufacturers to make and distribute the characters. One of the biggest offenders in the "tie in" department is PBS, with Barney, Teletubbies and Arthur. Although PBS's roots are in "educational TV," these characters have generated millions in sales for the toy companies through never ending exposure on "non commercial" TV. PBS then gets a cut of the profits.[14]

Latent Functions

Latent function refers to instances in which the media communicator's intentions are not immediately obvious to the audience. For instance, we have all been involved in an information exchange in which it eventually becomes clear that the other person is not really interested in our opinions but instead is intent on converting us to his/her point of view. In this case, the latent function is *persuasion.*

In the digital landscape, it is often difficult to ascertain whether there is a latent function behind a particular communication. Journalist Nick Bilton provides the following example:

> Today, when celebrities and people with large followings on social networks promote a product or service, it's often impossible to know if it's an authentic plug or if they were paid to say nice things about it.
>
> Take Miley Cyrus, the 20-year-old pop star who was traveling around America last week promoting her new album. One morning she posted on Twitter: "Thanks @blackjet for the flight to Silicon Valley!" The details of the arrangement between BlackJet, a Silicon Valley start-up that arranges for private jet travel, and Ms. Cyrus are unclear. But Dean Rotchin, chief executive of BlackJet, said "she was given some consideration for her tweet." Ms. Cyrus did not respond to a request for comment.[15]

It is astounding to discover how frequently the manifest function is irrelevant—or at least, subordinate—to other, latent purposes, like impressing the audience or making a profit. As an example, *America's Army* is a popular online video game produced by the Army, in which players interact during the training stages of the game and watch videos about those soldiers' experiences in the real Army. But in addition to its entertainment function, the game doubles as a recruiting tool for the United States Army. Chris Chambers, the deputy director of the Army Game Project explains, "We are out there meeting young people on the Internet and introducing them to the Army. [The Web site pages, action figures and virtual characters] put a real face on what has been a generic story about the Army."[16]

And alarmingly, another latent function of this video game is the promotion of assault weapons. Indeed, popular video games such as the *Call of Duty* franchise belong to a genre that First Lieutenant John Selbert refers to as "gun porn."[17] For instance, the most recent entry in the *Call of Duty* franchise, Black Ops II, featured weapons made by Barrett and Browning.

Ryan Smith, who contributes to the Gameological Society, an online gaming magazine, declares, "It (is) almost like a virtual showroom for guns."[18]

Often, the manifest function is designed to *divert* the audience's attention away from the principal latent purpose behind a message. According to author Stuart Ewan, these latent commercial functions ultimately undermine the meaning initially ascribed to "sacred" images such as elected officials and the American flag: "All people make images sacred as a way of commenting on their world and ascribing meaning to culture. Now this has been transformed into merchandise—the general meaning is lost."[19]

At times, the latent function can be very subtle, escaping the attention of the young audience. To illustrate, Miranda Cosgrove, the star of the popular Nickelodeon program *iCarly,* was a featured "presenter" at the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards. The manifest function behind Ms. Cosgrove's appearance was her celebrity status, which added to the luster of the event. But at the same time, the latent function behind her presence was to introduce her to the MTV audience, which is generally older than fans of Nickelodeon (Nickelodeon, MTV, and Ms. Cosgrove's music label are all owned by Viacom International).

Multiple Functions

Multiple functions occur when a communications exchange serves more than one function at a time. Although multiple functions are often harmonious, at times the functions may work at cross purposes. For instance, shows that feature political satire like *The Daily Show* and *Bill Maher* encompass two functions simultaneously—to entertain and inform. However, efforts to accomplish both purposes can backfire, meaning that the program is not funny, while the content has been misrepresented to get a laugh.

Undefined Functions

The absence of a clearly defined function can result in a muddled, directionless presentation. For instance, we have all attended movies in which it seems the director could not make up his/her mind whether the film should be a comedy or tragedy. And as a result, it is neither.

COMPARATIVE MEDIA

Each medium is defined by a set of distinctive characteristics that make it uniquely well suited to present certain types of information. For instance,