

News & Media

**The Visual Accomplishment of
Factuality**

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TV News

- Is **expected** to provide a “transparent window” to the world – **naturalised convention of representation**.
- However, a **complex process of mediation** (*involving many people and institutions, technology and artifice*) is required before it reaches the screen.
- Note that **identifying and evaluating claims to factuality** has become more complex – due to the **inextricable link between information and entertainment**.

Lesson Objectives

- To **account for** and **identify** the various visual elements in news reports – *i.e. the newly emerged cultural importance of the visual image* - required for the **establishment of truth and factuality**.

Practice Task

- **Compare and Contrast** the Effectiveness of the **Realist and Naturalist Traditions** in **TV News** in the following Videos.

MAS Plane Shot Down (17 July 2014)

- <http://news.sky.com/story/1302864/plane-shot-down-britons-among-295-killed>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yFgLI7X97k>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyxliW9m2mM>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZFATI8ORQ>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVTvpu9fMc8>
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- *Which tradition is most effective?*
 - *What does it tell you about the nature of factuality as portrayed in the news?*

Practice Task

- **Compare and Contrast** the Effectiveness of the **Realist and Naturalist Traditions** in **TV News** in the following Videos.

Massive wave flattens buildings in Japan (March 11 2011)

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3LCVU74bsY&feature=related>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_iKF34QBtE&feature=fvwrel
- *Which tradition is most effective?*
- *What does it tell you about the nature of factuality as portrayed in the news?*

Practice Task

- **Compare and Contrast** the Effectiveness of the **Realist and Naturalist Traditions** in TV News in the following Videos.

1. BBC News Report – September 11 Attack

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPh7ECq9sc0&feature=related>

2. Man running from tower

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2d1kLnSi6E&feature=relmfu>

3. World Trade Center September 11 2001 Attack Video

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbCENOWUQMo&NR=1>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3iKLz4oatY&feature=relmfu>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhROd7Jt3-w>
- *Which tradition is most effective?*
- *What does it tell you about the nature of factuality as portrayed in the news?*

Establishment of Factuality

- Note that the establishment of “**Factuality**” is a **complex semiotic system**.
- This provides for **varying degrees of authority, certainty and appropriateness** to be allocated to particular representations (*e.g. Newspapers vs. Tabloids, Journals vs. Novel*).

The Modality System

- **High Modality** – **definiteness, certainty, lack of ambiguity**.
- **Low Modality** – **less definite, possible rather than certain**.

Modality in TV News

- Refers to the **Social Construction** or **Contestation of Knowledge Systems**.
- **TV News** is both a **knowledge system** and a **genre**.
- Note that the **Authority**, **Quality of Sources** and **Interpretations** offered by TV news is always potentially contestable.
- Thus – It must always work hard **to maintain the security of its knowledge system** by using all the resources at its disposal to **achieve high modality in its presentation**.

Modality in TV News

Quick Discussion:

- What are the aspects of TV news that makes it a seemingly trustworthy source?
- In other words – what gives TV news the accomplishment of factuality i.e. high modality?

Modality in TV News

- Visual Modality in TV News needs to communicate **geographical and temporal immediacy** to **evoke emotional responses** from the audiences.
- It must simultaneously **entertain** AND **persuade** the viewers of **the authority and credibility** of the world which it portrays.

The Realist Tradition

The Dominant Narrative Technique:

- **An Omniscient, Narrative Voice** (an **Infallible Narrator** who **commands high modality** and, thus, requires less sophistication on the part of the consumer).
- A **Realist Narrative** in news **distances the reader** from the **viewpoints of characters with low modality** and **foregrounds the views of “reliable” and “sympathetic” characters with high modality**.

The Realist Tradition

- The **Camera** provides the **all-seeing narrative voice/ a privileged account** – and **takes up the perspective of the various voices** and accounts while **maintaining the belief in an objective world** due the high level of modality conferred.

The Realist Tradition

- The **Reliability of the Characters** is established using visual techniques.
- *What are some common practices in TV news in order to achieve this?*

The Realist Tradition

- **Examples of the Realist Tradition in News**
- **Sky News - First report of World Trade Center crash**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfYQAPhjwzA&feature=related>
- **South East Asia Tonight - Channel NewsAsia**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AftsCAy3hM&feature=related>

Tensions within the Realist Tradition

- **Realist Techniques** require the “re-creation” of **the world in fictional form** in order to represent it realistically.
 - ✓ E.g. note the process of “**scenario re-creation**” creates conditions of considerable abnormality for the participants in order to achieve its effect.
- **The ability to Show Effects and NOT Causes** (*Fixed Chronological Presentation*)
 - ✓ **The Visual** – *showcases Effects*
 - ✓ **The Verbal** – *exploits other modality systems in explaining the Causes..*

The Naturalist Tradition

- Refers to a presentation of the world **as it is directly experienced by the viewer** – this is the dominant representation in **actuality sequences**.
- Typically shows the point of view of a **stationary observer** – often **roughly at eye level** or **from a location** *e.g. the upper floor of a building*.

The Naturalist Tradition

- Some Key Features:

I. **Ambiguity in the Point of View** (*Reporter? Ourselves? We have no opportunity to form the necessary judgements*).

II. **Lacking in an Objective Voice/Narration**

III. **Directly embedded in the flow of events** (lacking in a visual technique).

✓ *Note that this can be a ideologically powerful technique that can achieve a high level of modality.*

The Naturalist Tradition

Examples of the Naturalist Tradition:

- **Massive wave flattens buildings in Japan**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3LCVU74bsY&feature=related>
- **World Trade Center September 11 2001 Attack Video**
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iGYVh7HZo8&feature=related>

Analysing the Features of a News Bulletin

- A Realist Narrative
- ✓ Viewers are shown a **variety of characters** with **differing viewpoints** with the **mediation of the newsreader**.
- Formation of clear boundaries to ensure the integrity of the genre
- ✓ Consistency in Timings/Choice of Distinctive Tune.
- ✓ Dramatic Music and Sound Effects to signify drama and urgency.

Analysing a News Bulletin

- **The Studio Modality System (to reflect corporate power and solidity)**
 - ✓ **News presenters** sit behind desks mirroring a position of power
 - ✓ Prominence of the **Corporate Logo**
 - ✓ **Designed to look fluid and high-tech** to handle the latest communications technologies and fast moving stories.
 - ✓ **High-key studio lighting** so the presenter's face is not cast in shadow which connotes ambiguity and untrustworthiness.
 - ✓ **High definition sequences signify high modality in terms of trustworthiness**, low definition sequences signify high modality in actuality sequences.

Analysing a News Bulletin

- The News Reader

- ✓ Note the **Fixed Social Identity** and **Accent** that inspires trust.
- ✓ Only certain **Voice Qualities** are allowed (*low in pitch, without nasality or hoarseness*).
- ✓ **Dressing** – middle-class, conservative
- ✓ Make-up to **mask imperfections** and perspiration stay within **the objective modality of the news room**.

Analysing a News Bulletin

- The News Reader

- ✓ The script is **read** rather than **spontaneously uttered**.
- ✓ The newsreader takes on the role of the **objective all-knowing narrator**.

Analysing a News Bulletin

- **The Reporter**
 - ✓ Plays the role of a **reliable character** – is *imbued with high verbal and narrative modality*.
 - ✓ Employs both realist and naturalist camera techniques – the **authentication of the reporter's presence** at the scene is a main source of modality, takes up **an authoritative relationship with the viewer** through eye contact.
 - ✓ Note the complex **triple narrator structure**: Newsreader, Reporter, Camera.

Conclusion

- **Factuality is a constructed entity** – entrenched in *cinematic editing, camera techniques, sound effects, non-verbal communication* – all used to provide an “**apparent transparency**” to portray fixed representations of the world.