

Chapter XI

Subjectivity, Point of View, and Dreaming

In this chapter I continue to concentrate on media and the mind of the computer user and now turn to a psychoanalytic analysis of the viewing experience as it may apply to learners. Extending the focus of the second part of this book, I attempt here to understand psychological states and reactions to media through point of view, how viewing media is like dreaming, and the function of identification, as well as perceive overall how personal fantasies function in media.

POINT OF VIEW AND SUBJECTIVITY

Implied point of view is a main structuring device used in film editing, and also works to position a learner when using computer media. A subjective positioning of the viewer through editing has a long and complex history in film theory and criticism. Subjectivity is another way to talk about point of view. Hedges (1991) points out that the rise of the use of the camera occurred at the same time that psychoanalysis came to prominence. The end of the 19th century marked a turn towards subjectivity with the concentration on both trying to understand the individual's mind and in using a new photographic device that captured specific points of view. Camera shots are always taken from both a real and implied point of view. The photographer takes the pictures by looking through a viewfinder, and depending on the camera, the resulting photograph is a record of that point of view. Additionally, by using various techniques, the photograph can imply points of view

other than that of the photographer. Thus the point of view taken through film, video, still photography, text, and software is of central importance in the design of educational environments. We will see in this chapter that the research literature on point of view in film is particularly rich and has great application to educational software.

One of the primarily responsibilities of a film director is to control point of view by manipulating narrative logic, eye contact, and shot size. During the primitive years of film, the emphasis was on movement for movement's sake without a lot of consideration about narrative point of view (Brownlow, 1968). Silent film based itself on theatre for dramatic structure. Talkies used theatrical style dialogue and stories and as a result often positioned the viewers in the place of a stage audience (Mitry, 1997). However, it was quickly discovered that in editing, the most powerful cuing device is the sightline of an actor in close up (Katz, 1991). This sightline implies point of view and directs the viewer to understand from whose position subsequent shots should be understood. So even in early silent film, it was common to show a picture of an actor looking off-camera followed by a shot of what the actor was looking at. This example probably indicates the simplest form of the use of point of view positioning, but there are many more much complicated and subtle forms. Indeed, Katz (1991) points out that there are degrees of subjectivity in identification for any shot in a film. In the same way, educational computer environments often present various degrees of subjective experiences for the learner. Two examples of this show a lesser and stronger degree of subjectivity. In the *Madeline 2nd Grade* program, the user watches over the little girl's shoulder as she solves math problems with chalk on a sidewalk. A stronger form of identification is found in *Mavis Beacon*, an application that teaches typing skills by actually showing a real-time animation of the user's fingers as they move on the keyboard.

In the film criticism literature, authors often talk about "open" and "closed" compositions. Open means a documentary style with less and more transparent points of view, while closed means that the shot appears to be designed and arranged in a conscious effort to express the author's point of view. In this way, simple decisions such as the closeness of a shot to the subject imply degree of open or closeness. The tighter the shot, the more the intimacy with a subject is implied, making the audience identify more with the subject or with his or her specific point of view.

Christian Metz (1982) asserts that cinema lags behind verbal language in ability to portray the subjective viewpoint because of its phenomenological relationship to the world in physically making an impression of reality. There is a problem in film with finding physical correspondences for mental states. On a political level, Hedges (1991) points out that subjective film points of view tend to reinforce dominant

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