From Film to the Web: Presence and the Medium

Kimberly A. Neuendorf
Cleveland State University
{k.neuendorf@csuohio.edu}

Abstract

This presentation lays a foundation for the development of a model of presence that considers the form and content characteristics of a medium, the various types of presence, and the range of outcomes of presence.This model development process relies on five assumptions:

1. Media form has influenced presence potential, and differentially across the types of presence (e.g., Lombard & Ditton et al.'s six types [1]; or, Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon's work toward three "orders" of social presence in mediated communication [2]).

Film has been called "the original immersive medium" [3]. It includes many unique presence-inducing characteristics, especially when experienced in the darkened environment of a movie theater [4]. Other media to follow have featured sensory channel capabilities that have enabled or limited presence potential. Radio, recordings, and pod-casting have capitalized on the auditory capacity, while print media have emphasized the pictorial. The evolving online environment has introduced new modes of presence induction, such as the immediacy of both visual and auditory cues. Gaming has adopted much of the "language" of film to ensure a level of familiarity that may be presence-invoking [5].

2. While the importance of considering content as well as form has been acknowledged on occasion (e.g., Bracken & Botta's inclusion of TV genre type [6]; [7]), the majority of presence studies have emphasized form over content. Further, although content factors are ostensibly those that may transcend medium, there are clearly medium/content patterns that have influenced presence potential.

3. Possible interactions between form and content should also be considered. For example, a study of reactions to presidential candidates during the 2000 debates indicated that large-screen presentations may lead to decreased presence evaluations [8]. Here, the content (i.e., faces of politicians) and form (i.e., large-screen closeups) may have interacted; large-screen closeups of other content types (e.g., sports footage, nature scenes) have tended to result in higher presence outcomes.

4. Existing theories from media and communication literatures need to be accessed to help identify "critical variables" [9] in the study of presence. While some attempts to incorporate existing theories may be found (e.g., Lombard & Ditton et al.'s invocation of parasocial interaction with TV characters [1]), such integration attempts have been limited.

An examination of classic film literature is illustrative for the investigation of form attributes of film, including Hugo Munsterberg's [10] analysis of film form as mirroring mental activity; Sergei Eisenstein's work during the 1920's that considered precise filmic techniques that generate cross-modal (synesthetic) sensations; Pudovkin's contention that sound reproduction has greater veracity than pictorial reproduction.

Other media and communication theories may be accessed— e.g., genre theory, expectancy theory, and uses and gratifications may aid in an understanding of the contribution of content elements in the cases of film, radio, television, gaming, and recorded music.

5. Efforts should be made to develop a more comprehensive approach to modeling presence types, media form and content, and theory and effects. Seminal attempts to typologize media by presence potential have maintained a narrow focus on particular presence types (e.g., Short, Williams, & Christie's treatment of social presence [11]) or on specific applied contexts (e.g., Rice's exploration of media in organizational task settings [12]). Thus, a model of (a) both the main effects and interactions of (b) form and content in (c) producing various types of presence, and (d) leading to presence profiles that moderate communication effects in different ways, ought to be considered.

References

[1]   M. Lombard, T.B. Ditton, with D. Crane, B. Davis, G. Gil-Egui, K. Horvath, J. Rossman, S. Park. Measuring presence: A literature-based approach to the development of a standardized paper-and-pencil instrument. Paper presented at the 3rd International Workshop on Presence, Delft, The Netherlands. 2000.

[2]   F. Biocca, C. Harms, J. Burgoon. Guide to the Networked Minds Social Presence Inventory (Version 1.2): Measures of co-presence, social presence, subjective symmetry, and intersubjective symmetry. Retrieved October 26, 2005 from *http://mindlab.msu.edu/networkedminds*.

[3]   K.A. Neuendorf. Presence and film: The original immersive medium. Presentation to the Central States Communication Association, Cleveland, OH. April 2004.

[4]   J. Steuer. Defining virtual reality: Dimensions determining telepresence. In F. Biocca, M.R. Levy (Eds.), *Communication in the Age of Virtual Reality,* 33-56. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 1995.

[5]   L. Manovich. The Language of New Media. MIT Press. 2001.

[6]   C.C. Bracken, R. A. Botta. Presence and television: Form versus content. Paper presented to the 5th International Workshop on Presence, Porto, Portugal. 2002.

[7]   M. Lombard, T.B. Ditton. At the heart of it all: The concept of presence. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13 (3).* 1997.

[8]   C.C. Bracken, K.A. Neuendorf, L.W. Jeffres. Source credibility, presence, and screen size. Paper presented to the Visual Communication Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, MO. July 2003.

[9]   K.A. Neuendorf. The Content Analysis Guidebook. Sage Publications. 2002.

[10] H. Munsterberg. The Film: A Psychological Study. D. Appleton & Co. 1916.

[11] J. Short, E. Williams, B. Christie. The Social Psychology of Telecommunications. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. 1976.

[12] R.E. Rice. Task analyzability, use of new media, and effectiveness: a multi-site exploration of media richness. *Organization Science*, *3*(4), 475-500. 1992.