

Quatermass I AAS

Some instructions for infecting naturalism by Dave Beech

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The essential thing is to disturb the smooth operation of naturalism, which always papers over the real fractures and schisms in a practice in order to present the appearance of continuity and wholeness. For instance, sound and vision operate separately in film and video, but naturalism makes them synch, so try to find as many ways as possible of pulling the sound and vision apart.

The autocue is a naturalist tool for convincing us that the presenter is simply speaking directly to the viewer (actually the camera) not from a script. A good slick presenter will read the autocue flawlessly, as if s/he was speaking off the top of her/his head. You can stop this operating by leaving gaps in the autocue, for instance. Autocues also contain instructions which can be used in a non-naturalistic way (eg. instead of [go to vt] you can have [slam fist down on desk] or [panic]). Also, since the autocue is written by somebody else, the autocue text could lurch into autobiography or confessional so that the presenter is telling someone else's story in the first person – this might be more obvious if the other person's story is of a different gender, race or something.

The interview is an interesting naturalist format. In the media today the two people in the interview are in a sort of combat. The interviewer wants to force the other person to say something that they'd rather not say; the interviewee wants to avoid the questions being asked in order to answer a bunch of safe questions that show her/him in a good light. There is real tension in this, so it shouldn't come across as if they are both ignoring each other. The key to it, I think, is to use all the familiar phrases of the interview (eg, 'I'm glad you asked me that question...' 'can I go back to the previous question?' 'can you give me a straight yes or no answer?')

The news anchor is also a compelling target for the critique of naturalism because their job is to keep all the diverse material together, in one continuous smooth operation. Try, for instance, restricting the news anchor to saying only technical things (eg 'over to our reporter on the ground', 'I'm sorry we seem to have lost that report, we will go back as soon as we can', 'I will be putting questions to the Secretary of State in 20 minutes. He is on his way to studio but is caught in traffic.', 'and now the latest from... I'm sorry we are experiencing some technical difficulties...')

I think you should accept or cultivate some technical cockups too. Cutting to reporters who are not ready or don't realize they are 'on'; signal failure which leads to static; anchor looking at the wrong camera; set wobbles in the studio; we see the make-up artist touching up the anchor; the mic doesn't work for the expert in the studio and a techie has to crawl over and fix it. That sort of thing.

Other ways of disturbing the smooth operation of naturalism could include: the use of video with someone else doing the monologue/commentary over so there is a fracture/schism between elements; camera phone footage with unrelated voice over; have interviews where the two parts are written by different people, or where the interviewee has not heard the questions in advance and has to try to avoid answering the questions directly; those bits when the local news goes to V.T. and they forget to turn the mic off; different people to make the voice over from those that make the videos; lots of repetition; interviewee who repeats two or three words only out of each question asked; people waiting for their cue; and finally, long pauses. Long pauses are very important.