Chapter 14
POV in XR:
How We Experience, Discuss, and Create the Virtual World

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ABSTRACT
This chapter will introduce and explain the applications of a taxonomy for discussing point of view (POV) in XR. The simple designations of first, second, and third person that are used to categorize books, movies, and video games don’t cover all the options and combinations available in immersive media. Accordingly, XR requires a new taxonomy that will allow for clear communication about content and experiences. This chapter will do three things: (1) present the four main POV tiers: narrative, visual, effectual, and experiential; (2) address less common tiers and how they might be incorporated and acknowledged in future XR experiences; and (3) show the taxonomy in action by using it to describe contemporary XR content.

INTRODUCTION
Literary point of view and its complications have been analyzed in detail by French literary theorist Gerard Genette (1983), and Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal (1997), each of whom has contributed significantly to the study and discussion of narrative. In film studies, many of their terms were taken up and expanded to include the complexity of image and sound. With virtual reality, new complexities, opportunities, and fields present themselves. The world of storytelling has expanded. With the development of immersive media—collectively known as extended reality (XR)—comes a need to extend the vocabulary we use to define and discuss point of view concepts. The simple designations of first, second, and third person used to categorize books, movies, and video games don’t cover all the options and combinations available in XR. Accordingly, the immersive medium of virtual reality requires a new

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taxonomy for discussing point-of-view. Having a taxonomy that specifically addresses what is possible in virtual reality will facilitate better and clearer discussion, analysis, and communication about this medium.

This chapter first reviews the existing terms for Point of View (POV) from traditional media. Next, it explores how these terms do and don’t apply to virtual reality. Then, to help facilitate clearer communication about the options available in XR, this chapter presents and explains applications of the taxonomy as used within virtual reality. This proposed taxonomy, represented in Figure 1, is a marriage of old and new ideas and includes four POV tiers: 1) narrative, 2) visual, 3) effectual and 4) experiential. The shared vocabulary that this taxonomy provides is both descriptive and prescriptive, serving as a way to describe existing work and also as a menu of options for what’s possible.

NARRATIVE POV

POV is most commonly thought of in terms of narrative point-of-view: first, second or third person, which is the point of view from which the story is being told. Before examining how narrative point-of-view intersects with the other tiers in virtual reality, it serves to have a brief review of narrative point of view.

In a first-person narrative, the narrator is telling you his or her own story. *Moby Dick*’s famous opening line, “Call me Ishmael,” is a classic example. First person narrative POV is also exemplified by Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One* (2012).

My mom once told me that my dad had given me an alliterative name, Wade Watts, because he thought it sounded like the secret identity of a superhero.

The words “my” and “me” in the passage above, along with the word “I” in general are excellent first-person indicators. From them, we can determine that Wade, the narrator, is telling us his own story, in the first person.

Second person narrative POV can be found in the Choose Your Own Adventure books. As exemplified by the following passage from R.A. Montgomery’s *The Trail of Lost Time* (2011), the narrator is telling not his or her, but your, experience.

You stare at the envelope with your name written in faded ink. The lawyer handed it to you an hour ago after he read your grandfather’s will.

And examples of third-person narrative POV are plentiful in books, from Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* to Michael Crichton’s *Jurassic Park*. Third person POV can be limited in scope or omniscient, knowing only one characters’ thoughts, everyone’s thoughts, or somewhere in between. An example follows below from J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter & the Deathly Hallows* (2007).

Harry’s mind wandered a long way from the marquee, back to afternoons spent alone with Ginny in lonely parts of the school grounds.

The key is that a third person narrator is neither telling his or her own thoughts or experiences, nor yours, and, rather, is recounting another, third person’s thoughts.