# Communications Theory in Television

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The television Christmas special *Doctor Who:* Voyage of the Damned (Davies & Strong, 2007) provides an excellent portrayal of the importance of a variety of non-verbal communication techniques. The director, J. Strong, incorporates the combination of groups, haptics, and power throughout the show in their primary purpose of further communicating emotion and interpersonal relationships with the viewer (Bull, 2008) providing a seamless addition to the entertainment aspect sought after by viewers. These subtle techniques result in less of a need to communicate the story to the viewer verbally for example through script or a narrative aspect. The underlying core material of the story itself and one of the most obvious of these non-verbal communication ploys is the use of group development (Love, 2012).

This technique demonstrated an almost textbook example for each of the key moments in the formation, performance, and adjournment of the group. The forming occurs after the opening scenes as the characters meet for the first time on the space cruise-liner Titanic when, following a visit to Earth, the Titanic is struck by meteorites. Dr. Who, Astrid, Foon and Morvin Van Hoff, Rickston Slade, Mr Copper and Bannakaffalatta are the only survivors in one particular section of the ship and band together to survive. The storming quickly occurs following this event and has a major focus on secondary group tension (Love, 2012) as the interaction between members becomes heated in particular between Rickston and Astrid. Following a previous interaction in the opening scene when Astrid accidently breaks some glassware after a collision with Rickston, the two flare into argument as Rickston comments about the deceased steward being “an idiot” (Davies & Strong, 2007) which upsets Astrid. Dr. Who is then forced to hurriedly interject, telling them to calm down, in order to begin the norming stage. This role of a peace-keeper initialises the view of Dr. Who as the leader of the group and helps ease everyone into norming with the shared vision of surviving the crash. As they make their way towards the ships bridge the group begins to perform and attain a sense of synergy and the risky shift phenomenon (Love, 2012) becomes evident, particularly in crossing the debris over the nuclear engines and as they take on their “heavenly” Host attackers. The adjournment of the group occurs at the end as following the deaths of Morvin, Foon, Astrid and Bannakaffalatta the surviving members say goodbye and part their separate ways, with Dr. Who and Mr Copper heading to Earth and parting while Rickston stays on board waiting for a rescue ship. The result of this group development and associated group attributes is Strong providing the viewers with an easily discernable storyline through an obvious introduction, general story content, and conclusion giving closure.

The second technique that occurs frequently throughout the show is the use of haptics (Love, 2012). Two examples that clearly employ haptics is the visit to Earth in which Astrid embraces Dr. Who amidst her joy of being on an “alien” planet; and also that of Dr. Who physically pushing Morvin Van Hoff through a gap in the debris in the “heavenly” Host chase sequence. The first example of the visit to Earth employs haptics in the form of a hug in order to visually show the viewer the change in the interpersonal relationship (DeVito, 2008) between Astrid and Dr. Who from that of mere acquaintances to a shift into flirtation and coupling that becomes more evident throughout the rest of the story. This addition of romance provides the viewer with an extra layer of emotional depth within the narrative creating increased character development. The example of control haptics with the push of Morvin in the Host chase sequence is used by Dr. Who to control the situation by saving Morvin and himself without the use of words. The addition of speech to accompany the action merely develops humor within the situation instead of directly affecting it. The use of physical touch in this manner creates an emphasis on the power of Dr. Who as he fills the leadership role within the group and forms the hero of the story.

It is this display of non-verbal communication in the form of power that visually shows Dr. Who as he assumes an assertive, expert power role (Love, 2012) through the story as he attempts to save the group from perishing on board the Titanic. This role becomes clear in the scene following the collision of the Titanic with the meteorites. Initially the steward demonstrates the dominant power role by ordering everyone else to be quiet. As the steward shifts to open the door in order to “ascertain the exact nature of the problem” (Davies & Strong, 2007) Dr. Who demonstrates his expert knowledge of similar situations by yelling “don’t open it!” (Davies & Strong, 2007). Failing to adhere to this the stewards is thrust out into space to die resulting in Dr. Who having to get the doorway sealed and assume the leadership role. The doctor is briefly challenged by Rickston for this role when asked “who put you in charge? And who the hell are you anyway?” (Davies & Strong, 2007). Dr. Who then explains his expertise, that he is a nine hundred year old time lord, and is going to save their lives. As the doctor goes about this task he demonstrates a great deal of assertiveness, firmly set on his goal of saving himself and the rest of the survivors however never putting his own needs before those of the rest of the group.

Singularly each of these techniques contained within the show may not greatly add mass effect to the story however the combination of them provide complexity, narrative and character development to what otherwise could have been a very low-engaging show. Group development and power demonstrate key focal points for Davies and Strong to add complexity, while haptics is a useful tool for character interaction without verbal explanation. In conclusion the television Christmas special *Doctor Who*: Voyage of the Damned (Davies & Strong, 2007) provides an excellent portrayal of the importance of a variety of non-verbal communication to both entertain and inform the viewer by the director.

References

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