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New Media Dictionary

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Leonardo, Volume 34, Number 1, February 2001, pp. 41-44 (Article)

Published by The MIT Press



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NEW MEDIA DICTIONARY

The New Media Dictionary project was born out of the desire to name and define the many and varied forms of art that have developed in conjunction with technology. A whole lexicon is being created to describe the many processes, techniques, instruments, critical and aesthetic concepts—in short, the entire emerging culture—of this immense laboratory workshop.

The original electronic version of this dictionary (in French) contains about 2,000 entries, illustrations, examples of works, references and comments from artists and experts (URL: <www.comm.uqam.ca/GRAM/Accueil.html>). English translations of selected dictionary entries can be found at the following Web site: <<http://mitpress.mit.edu/e-journals/LEA/NMD/nmdhome.html>>.

The terms selected for this installment of the New Media Dictionary come from the field of video. The original group of terms and definitions have been selected by the Groupe de recherche en arts médiatiques (GRAM). However, interested artists and researchers are invited to submit additions and comments to Section Editor Louise Poissant [1] for possible inclusion in the electronic version of the dictionary; credit will be given to all contributors. In this way, the New Media Dictionary will gradually become a collective project in which each significant contribution will find its place.

These definitions were prepared by Chantal duPont and Monique Langlois. Project director: Louise Poissant. Translator: Lou Nelson.

DICTIONARY TERMS—PART II: VIDEO

ARCHITECTURE-OPERA—An exhibition/show composed of a walk-through installation and a live opera presented on a set with video sculptures. During the show, the video equipment is used to synchronize images and sound and acts as an intermediary between the singers, who can affect what is being shown live or on the video displays exhibited. The term was created to describe a work by French video artist Catherine Ikam and American music researcher and computer scientist Tod Machover. The two co-produced the first architecture-opera, entitled *VALIS-opéra*, in December 1987 at the Centre Georges-Pompidou in Paris. VALIS is an acronym for Vast Active Living Intelligence. The libretto for the work is taken from a novel by Philip K. Dick and tells the story of an initiatory journey through a place inhabited by simulacra and seductive traps.

AUDIO-VIDEO ENVIRONMENT—1. Video installation that involves sound and requires visitor participation. 2. A category of video art installation distinct from video sculpture, trap devices, video environments or video painting.

CORPORATE VIDEO—A video produced by a company to inform or educate its employees. Corporate videos are sometimes confused with commercial videos, particularly when several groups produce the video jointly.

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Leonardo Editorial Advisor*

DOCU-FICTION—Video work in which actual recorded events are combined with recreations or imaginary scenes in order to provide information on a specific topic. Docu-fictions also exist as movies. In video, Jean-Pierre St-Louis, member of the Coop Vidéo (Montreal), described his video *Elle remplace son mari par une TV* (1983–1984) as a docu-fiction. The term was used frequently thereafter, and Vidéographe, a Montreal distribution, production and post-production company, added it to the glossary in its catalog in 1994.

DOCUMENTARY—A radio or television broadcast or a film of actual events that investigates an issue using documents and facts. The short recordings of reality (*actualités*) by the Lumière brothers in 1896 could be classified as documentaries, because they depicted real events, not fictitious ones. But it was not until 1922 and the appearance of Robert Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North* that the history of documentaries truly began. The English word “documentary” itself first appeared when used by John Grierson in an article in the *New York Sun* to describe *Moana*, a film produced by Flaherty in 1926. Grierson associated “documentary” with the French word *documentaire*, meaning travelogue, a lecture on a trip or an expedition accompanied by a film or slides. In the 1930s, Dziga Vertov in the Soviet Union produced newsreels in the *Kino-Pravda* (“film truth”) series. Vertov subsequently used his documentary technique to film the changes taking place in his country. John Grierson is considered a documentary pioneer, despite the fact he produced only one film. Entitled *The Drifters*, this 1929 film was about Scottish fishermen. During the 1930s, due to the fact that he held positions in various government ministries in England and subsequently obtained funding from private interests, Grierson became the de facto leader of a movement that produced over 300 documentary films on life in England. At the same time the United States government was also funding documentary films, including two films by Pare Lorentz: *The Plow That Broke the Plain*, produced in 1936, and *The River*, in 1937. Then, in 1939, no doubt due to World War II (WWII), Grierson was sent to Canada by the Imperial Relations Trust to develop his film concepts in another part of the British Empire; the National Film Board of Canada was born out of this initiative. In other developments, several documentaries about WWII were produced in England and the United States. More significant advances occurred in France and the U.S.A. in the 1960s, with *cinéma-vérité* and live cinema. In Canada, the National Film Board's Challenge for Change program promoted citizen participation in solving social problems. The culminating point was *You Are on Indian Land*, produced in 1969. Since then, the documentary has continued to develop throughout the world, both in film and on television.

INDEPENDENT VIDEO—Documentary, fictional or experimental video in which the author or main contributor controls the artistic choices and editorial content of the work through all stages of production.

INTERVENTION VIDEO—Fictional or documentary video produced to raise awareness through a specific social or political critique.

TRAP DEVICE—Video installation in which the broadcast conditions and tape contents are designed to create a non-traditional relationship with the viewer. Any number of TVs may be used in such an installation. This is a sub-category of video art installations, separate from video sculpture, video environment, video painting and audio-video environment. One of the first trap devices was *TV as a Fire Place* (1969) by Dutch artist Jan Dibbets, in which the filmed images of a fire in a fireplace were broadcast on the television sets of German families. Another example was *Télépathie* (1975) by French artist Roland Baladi, in which the viewer watched a close-up of the artist and was asked to read his thoughts and then write them down on a form beside the monitor. In *Le Baiser sous la Véranda* (1981), Frenchman Hervé Nisic played with manipulation by seduction. The video artist constructed a virtual space, a porch where everything was electronic (plant, rain, etc.). The screen showed glimpses of the movements of a couple kissing. In Paris, during a night-long rock concert, the installation was shown in a small studio in which the essential element was a couch. Couples were asked to kiss in front of the camera.

VIDEO AUTOBIOGRAPHY—Video work in which the author tells his or her life story. This genre is not that common; however, several videos by the same author may have autobiographical value. This is true, for example, of American artist Bill Viola's work.

VIDEO BIOGRAPHY—A video work in which the author tells the story of an individual's life. This genre is practiced relatively little compared with the video portrait.

VIDEO CLIP—A short video produced to promote a song. Video clips are produced using advanced technical methods, which permit a host of special effects.

VIDEO CREATION—A video work that involves creative reworking of conceptual and structural borrowings from artistic disciplines, literature, etc. In France, the term *vidéo création* was first used in late 1985, when a few video artists began experimenting with television in an effort to rejuvenate it. The television program *Juste une image*, which showed video clips and very short pieces (advertisements by Wilson, Video Flashes and, later, pieces from the Jim Tracking series by Michel Jaffrenou), was associated with these efforts. But the issue of video creation had already arisen at the Festival de Montbéliard in 1980, where the works presented did not fit the definition of video art. Three men were responsible for spreading the concept of video creation: Thierry Garmel, Patrick Sobelman and Jean-Marie Duhard. Thierry Garmel created the magazine *INA sur Antenne 2* and then moved on to the competing network, La Sept, which was and still is dedicated to broadcasting video creations. Rather than reduce video creation to a video clip, he presented *Crossing and Meetings* by Ed Emshwiller (30 minutes), *Le Géant* by German artist Michael Klier (75 minutes), *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like* by American artist Bill Viola (90 minutes) and *Grimoire magnétique* by Belgian artist Joëlle de la Casinière (30 minutes). Patrick Sobelman and Hervé Nisic founded the company Ex-Nihilo, which has produced and continues to

produce a large number of video creations. Jean-Marie Duhard had a hand in founding the Festival vidéo de Montbéliard, and his activities at Canal + and at Hérouville Saint-Clair have made him one of the most active promoters of video creations.

VIDEO DANCE—Video work that combines dance with electronically recorded images (video), digitally produced computer images and sound produced using video and/or micro-computers. In 1969, American James Seawright reworked the images of two dancers using special effects in *Capriccio for TV*. For example, he superimposed a reversed image of the dancers on their negative image. He also split their images using three cameras, each of which corresponded to a primary color, so he could then remix these chromatically split forms by causing a delay in the transmission of the images.

VIDEO DIARY—Video work in which events are related in a coherent manner. Inspired by written diaries, the video diary can be a personal diary, a travel diary or a diary that tells about a specific event in the author's life. A fictional work can also be filmed in the form of a diary. American artist Lynn Hershman produced a video diary called *Electronic Diary*, in the autobiographical style of American artists Vito Acconci and Linda Beglis, who placed themselves in front of a camcorder and talked about personal issues, as if the camera had replaced the psychoanalyst. Hershman's *Electronic Diary* was composed of three tapes: *Confession of a Chameleon* (1986), *Binge* (1987) and *First Person Plural* (1989). The first part of the diary is the story of Hershman's childhood, of her marriage at the age of 15, the disappearance of her husband, etc.—in short, the story of events that made her what she is today. The second part deals with her efforts to improve her appearance by losing 45 pounds. In the third part, she revisits her memories of sexual abuse, deals with her obsession with the movie *Dracula*, and composes a psychobiography of Hitler that purports to explain the fate of the Jews in the Second World War. Hershman maintains she has always told the truth, based on the person she was at different points in her life.

VIDEO DOCUMENTARY—A video work whose purpose is to educate, with a subject matter based on factual documents. In the United States, Nam June Paik produced the first publicized video documentary in 1965. On October 4, armed with a ½-in video recorder, Paik taped the visit of Pope Paul VI to New York City; the tape was then shown that evening at Café 60-60 in Greenwich Village as part of the Electronic Video Recorder exhibition. One of the first artists to use a video recorder was Lee Levine, who produced *Bum*, one of the first street tapes. During the summer of 1968, Frank Gillette also produced a 5-hour documentary on life on the streets at St. Mark's Place in New York City. In Great Britain, the first video documentary was *The Entertainers*, produced by Dennis Mitchell and John McGrath, who worked for Granada Television. The National Film Board of Canada was also a pioneer in this field. One of its first projects was *VTR St. Jacques*, produced in 1969. Part of a series aimed at promoting citizen participation in solving social problems, *VTR St. Jacques* came out of efforts to get the inhabitants of a poor neighborhood to talk about their problems on video. The collected accounts became a way to put pressure on the local authorities. This type of documentary was also developing in the United States at about the same time: Guerilla Television worked with it, as did the Downtown Community Television Center

(New York), which produced a tape on the problems faced by taxi drivers. In Great Britain, groups were formed to produce alternative television programs. Channel 4 created a program in 1981 to air videos that generally would not be seen on television. During a miners' strike in 1984–1985, several production studios collaborated on the production and broadcast of *The Miners' Campaign Videotapes*, ten 20-minute tapes whose purpose was to expose the viewpoints of the miners and to examine police and media activities surrounding the strike. On the whole, the first video documentaries emphasized the democratic potential of video technology.

VIDEO ENVIRONMENT—Originally, a video installation that required the participation of the spectator, through the recording of his or her image. Later, video environment came to mean any video installation with a device that required the spectator to identify his or her point of view in relation to the artist's arrangement of images and sound in a defined space. (This sub-category of video installation is distinct from video sculpture, trap device, audio-video environment and video painting.) In 1968, American artist Lee Levine, in *Photon: Strangeness 4*, arranged metal wires, moving mirrors and TV cameras in such a way that the spectator was captured within images of him/herself, recorded from various angles. *Video Corridor* (1974), by American artist Bruce Nauman, is another example of a video environment. The participant walks down a straight corridor. Contrary to expectation, the farther the participant walks toward the end of the corridor, the farther away he/she seems to be from it. American artist Peter Campus is another artist who, starting in 1972, produced many installations that confront the spectator with his/her own image; in *Shadow Projection* (1974), the image of the spectator was placed alongside that of his/her shadow, with one shrinking while the other grew larger.

VIDEO ESSAY—A video work that explores a topic using various sources of information and that experiments with form and content. This genre combines various art forms (painting, music, opera, etc.) and disciplines (sociology, history, philosophy, etc.).

VIDEO FICTION—Imaginary events related in a video through a fragmented, non-linear narrative.

VIDEO GENRE—Video works are classified into genres, in accordance with the tone and style of the work. Because video is audio-visual in nature, video genres owe as much to the arts (literature, music, painting) as to the social sciences (history, sociology, philosophy) and media (film, television). Other artistic fields, such as dance and theater, have also given rise to genres in video. The adjective *vidéo*/video either precedes or follows the actual genre designation; examples include video autobiography, video self-portrait, video dance, video essay, video biography, video documentary, video fiction, video diary, video letter, video landscape, video portrait, video opera, video-operetta, video poetry, video theatre. Because a single videographic work may fall into more than one genre, hybrid terms have also developed: VideoPoemOpera, video-operetta, etc.

Classification of the fine arts began in the sixteenth century. Originally based on distinctions between religious paintings, the development of classifications became widespread and continued until the nineteenth century, when the distinctions began to disappear not only within the same disci-

pline, but also between different artistic disciplines. Then "total artwork" (*gesamtkunstwerk*) made its appearance, an idea that for the romantics and the post-romantics meant the fusion of all the arts. This vision, which originally seemed utopian, was borne out in the twentieth century and, with the contribution of technology, is becoming more entrenched.

VIDEO INSTALLATION—1. Work displayed in an exhibition space using video and other equipment (camcorders, video cassette recorders [VCRs], monitors, movie or slide projection equipment), in which viewers participate and take a position vis-à-vis the work. 2. A sub-category of video art, distinct from video tapes and other categories such as video sculpture, trap device, video environment, video painting or audio-video environment. Video installations fall under the general history of video art. Video sculptures, trap devices and video environments appeared in the early 1960s, along with interactive video (if feedback is considered an interactive element). Video painting started in the late 1980s.

VIDEO LANDSCAPE—Video that presents nature and/or the urban landscape as its subject matter. Technology has extended the scope of this genre by making it possible to fragment an image of the human body and construct a landscape from it. Video landscapes can be videotapes or installations.

VIDEO LETTER—Video in which an audio-visual message is addressed to one or more recipients. The video letter is composed live or is taped and then edited. Some of the first video letters were *Video Letter* (1982–1983) by Japanese artists Tanikawa and Shuji Tereyam and *La lettre à Freddy Buache* (1982) by Swiss artist Jean-Luc Godard.

VIDEO OPERA—A genre of video that combines opera with electronic experimentation (video, computer graphics, etc.). A video opera may be in the form of either a video or an installation. In the video form, analog images or images altered by special effects are combined with other types of images, including computer-generated images that play with the laws of space and time. This is also true of video opera installations, which in addition permit the use of live and prerecorded images simultaneously, in a performance in which televisions are used as props. In 1969, in the videotape *Electronic Opera 1*, Nam June Paik presented a sequence of distorted images of the face of U.S. President Richard Nixon, which he juxtaposed with psychedelic images of a nude go-go dancer.

VIDEO PAINTING—Video work reminiscent of painting, in that the framed or unframed screen is placed at eye-level and invites contemplation. One or more monitors may be used. A video painting becomes an installation when there is a clearly visible display unit or a monitor recessed into a wall. In some cases, the screen displays a fixed image, which may be continuously projected for varying lengths of time. In other cases, the content of the shots or sequences emphasizes the painterly aspect, through the form or content of the images. Tapes used in an installation may last a few minutes or an hour and are edited into a loop. (Video painting is a sub-category of video installations, distinct from video sculpture, trap device, video environment and audio-video environment.)

VIDEO PERFORMANCE—Performance in which the artist incorporates a camcorder or video equipment and in which the technology is given as prominent a position as the human

body, as a complement to it. *TV Camera/Monitor Performance* was produced by American artist Dan Graham in 1970. In *Nourriture, feu, actualité* and in *Psyché* (1974), French artist Gina Pane was one of the first artists to use video in her body-art performances. Other seminal works include *Salto Mortale* (1980) by German artist Ulrike Rosenbach and *Rituels* (1980) by French artists Nicole Croiset and Nil Yalter.

VIDEO POETRY—Video featuring poetic elements (rhythm, harmony and imagery) combined with the use of electronic media (video, computer graphics, etc.). Term coined by Gianni Toti in 1980 to describe his video work *Per una videopoesia*.

VIDEO PORTRAIT—Video work in which an individual is represented physically or figuratively at a specific moment in his/her life. A video portrait can be a videotape or an installation. Some video portraits are interactive, in that the artist programs a series of questions and answers with the model, making it possible for the user to interact with the electronic representation.

VIDEO SCULPTURE—Video installation involving one or more TVs. The spectator moves among the TVs or stands in front of them. A video sculpture formed of several TVs may broadcast a single program or may simultaneously broadcast different interconnected sequences on several channels. There are many ways in which the TVs can be arranged. Televisions can be on the ground, with the screen facing the viewer or the wall; suspended from the ceiling; aligned and stacked to make a wall; or even randomly stacked on top of each other. In some cases only the cabinet is displayed. In others, the television cabinet is emptied of its contents and displayed with something else inside. (A sub-category of video installation, distinct from trap device, video environment, audio-video environment and video painting.)

In 1959, German artist Wolf Vostell organized TV happenings and in 1961 American artist Edward Kienholz used television cabinets in his assemblages. These experiments were followed in March 1963 by Nam June Paik's *Exposition of Music/Electronic Television* at the Parnass Gallery in Wupertal, which used 13 doctored televisions, and in May of the same year by Vostell's *6 TV-de-coll/ages*, at the Smolin Gallery in New York, in which six televisions were used, each with an anomaly (bad tuning, blotches of paint, bullet holes, etc.).

VIDEO SELF-PORTRAIT—Video work in which an author presents him/herself or a personal point of view on certain subjects at a specific point in time. The video self-portrait is a genre in the tradition of self-portraiture in literature, painting and cinema. In 1989 Philippe Dubois identified three periods in which self-portraiture had an impact on the short history of video art. The first was in the early 1970s, when artists produced pieces in which they interacted with images of their own bodies projected on a monitor or television screen, which became their mirror. The second, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, occurred when video artists turned to language, incorporating texts and talking. The third, in which an author takes the position of witness before images that represent the world's knowledge, began in the late 1980s and continues today.

VIDEO THEATER—Video work that combines theater with experimental electronics (video, computer graphics, etc.). Video theater can be in the form of a videotape or an installation. In either case, the works are characterized by the co-

existence of different spaces and times and by the virtual nature of the characters. The technology allows for live or pre-recorded exchanges between on-stage characters or characters in another location.

VIDEOPERETTA—A category of video that falls somewhere between an opera, a TV show and a video installation and uses a narrator, actors (singers, dancers, etc.), composers and the equipment needed to provide and adjust lighting and special effects: computers (controls, recording of sound effects, sound spatialization), VCRs, video projectors, hi-fi speakers, computerized consoles. The equipment is used in such a way as to create confusion between real and virtual time. This term was coined by Michel Jaffrenou to describe a work he produced in 1989.

VIDEOPOEMOPERA—Video that combines a poetic style (rhythmic language) and opera with electronic media (video, computer graphics, etc.). Term coined by Italian poet and video artist Gianni Toti to describe his video work *Squeezangezaum*, produced in 1988.

WOMEN IN VIDEO—Production and distribution groups or centers devoted exclusively to videos produced by women or dealing with feminist issues. In Western society, the first videos by women were produced by individuals or in mixed female-male collectives. In France, one pioneer was Carole Roussopoulos of Vidéo Out, a group of female and male activists. The first video group made up strictly of women, Vidéa, was formed in 1974. In addition to producing videotapes, its mission was to set up an information network and an international video library, and to organize training workshops, festivals, etc. Another major distribution center for women's video is the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, founded in 1982 in Paris. The development of women's video in the United States followed a similar path. The first female video artists participated in mixed male-female exhibitions, but starting in 1972 the first women's video festivals were organized. One was at the University of Illinois in Chicago; another, the Kitchen, was at the Mercer Art Center in New York. The Kitchen festival, organized by Suzan Milano, brought together the works of Steina Vasulka, David Sasser and Queer Blue, Jacquie Cassen, Suzan Milano, Elsa Tambellini, Judith Scott and members of the group Under One Roof. In Canada, the event Women and Film was organized in several cities across the country in 1973. In Quebec City, the group La femme et le film organized the French-speaking section of the festival. After the interest shown by the public, that same year the organizers set up Vidéo Femmes, which produced and distributed films and videos produced by women. In Montreal, Groupe Intervention Vidéo was formed in 1976.

Acknowledgment

The editors wish to thank the Fondation Daniel Langlois (Montreal) for funding the translation of this text from the original French.

Reference

1. Interested individuals are invited to submit dictionary definitions and comments to: Louise Poissant, Groupe de Recherche en arts médiatiques (GRAM), Département d'arts plastiques, Université du Québec à Montréal, C.P. 8888, Succ. Centre-Ville, Montréal (Quebec), H3C 3P8, Canada. E-mail: <poissant.louise@uqam.ca>.

Manuscript received 31 August 2000.