



The Language of New Media

Lev Manovich

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A stimulating, eclectic account of new media that finds its origins in old media, particularly the cinema. In this book Lev Manovich offers the first systematic and rigorous theory of new media. He places new media within the histories of visual and media cultures of the last few centuries. He discusses new media's reliance on conventions of old media, such as the rectangular frame and mobile camera, and shows how new media works create the illusion of reality, address the viewer, and represent space. He also analyzes categories and forms unique to new media, such as interface and database.

Manovich uses concepts from film theory, art history, literary theory, and computer science and also develops new theoretical constructs, such as cultural interface, spatial montage, and cinegratography. The theory and history of cinema play a particularly important role in the book. Among other topics, Manovich discusses parallels between the histories of cinema and of new media, digital cinema, screen and montage in cinema and in new media, and historical ties between avant-garde film and new media.

The Language of New Media Details

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Lorena says

confusing!

Andrew Miller says

Manovich discusses the language through which we engage digital technologies (New Media). The way we interact in a digital environment is inherited through language. For example, we read web pages and bookmark them, all the while exploring them through windows. The digital world that has been created could not have been created from nothing, but needed to use the structure that existed in culture. This culture is not limited to language, but includes the visual as well. Currently you are looking at this on a screen, it may be a portrait or a landscape setting, even the ideas of portrait and landscape are artistic terms for types of paintings. I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in technology, as his work requires you to deconstruct the ways in which you interact with "New Media."

David says

A simultaneously inspiring and depressing read. This book is full of wonderful theoretical frameworks, as well as several near-misses that are still interesting and instructive, and a very few full misses that aren't any fun at all. (Also a few blind spots due to the author's fully disclosed visual media bias.)

The author spent the first five chapters building an argument as well as a useful theory of new media, piece by piece. A lot of it worked very well; even when I disagreed with the argument, I often found the theory sound.

It all completely fell apart for me in the final chapter, so it was quite a bummer to end on that note.

The author approaches the creation of a theory of new media from the angle of the visual arts in general, and film theory in particular. This produces many solid ideas with accessible examples. Still, one can't help thinking of the many other disciplines that could provide alternative theoretical models for some of the ideas with which the author engages.

In his defense, the author says as much several times in the text. He presents absolutely no illusion of the production of the definitive theoretical model for new media. He's very clear that he's presenting a single theoretical framework, and that others are very much possible.

And that is a major weakness of this book, if one can call it weakness: it is good enough, complete enough, and smart enough to give an inkling of how much better a more interdisciplinary framework might be. It reveals its limitations and shares them freely. It helps you form a clear articulation of what it lacks, leading you to want exactly that.

Warning: Liberal usage of, and references to: hypermedia, QuickTime, VR, and VRML. Also occasionally

refers to computer games as "CD-ROMs". Gotta give him a break, it was ten years ago.

Highly recommended for anyone interested in media studies.

Aimée says

Manovich seeks to investigate the effects of digital media (what he calls “the computer revolution”) on visual culture at large. Manovich draws from art history, literary criticism, photography, design, and most importantly film studies to ask the question: what is actually new about new media? To answer this question, Manovich engages a set of sub-questions: 1) How does the shift to computer-media based media redefine the nature of static and moving images? 2) What is the effect of computerization on the visual language used by our culture? 3) What new aesthetic possibilities are available to us? In *The Language of New Media*, Manovich drives home the telling fact that “today’s digital designers and artists use only a small set of action grammars and metaphors out of a much larger set of all possibilities” (Manovich 71).

Developing the possibilities of a new language for new media, Manovich develops the idea of a newly fashioned cinematic language, which builds on the aesthetic strategies of previous cinematic languages. These previous aesthetic strategies exhibited: “a particular configuration of space, time, and surface articulated in the work; a particular sequence of the user’s activities over time in interacting with the work; a formal, material, and phenomenological use experience” (66). Working toward building a new cinematic language, Manovich suggests: “If there is a new rhetoric or aesthetic here, it may have less to do with the ordering of time by a writer or orator, and more with spatial wandering” (78).

Manovich observes that communication or telecommunication as social, cultural activity can drastically change the “paradigm of the aesthetic object.” He asks the following questions of the aesthetic: “Is it necessary for the concept of the aesthetic to assume representation? Does art necessarily involve a finite object? Can telecommunication between users by itself be the subject of an aesthetic? Similarly, can the user’s search for information be understood aesthetically? In short, if a user accessing information and a user telecommunicating with other(s) are as common in computer culture as a user interacting with a representation, can we expand out aesthetic theories to include these two new situations?” (164).

While Manovich never answers these questions outright, he does develop several elements of the “new cinematic language” which can help point toward answers—elements which can cope with our data-rich, data-demanding lives. These elements include hypertext reading, montage, simultaneity, and the aesthetics of density. According to Manovich, the aesthetics of density is about representation of “contemporary information displays such as web portals, which may contain a few dozen hyper-linked elements or the interfaces of popular software packages, which similarly present the user with dozens of commands at once. Manovich ends by with more questions: “Can contemporary information designers learn from information displays of the past—particularly films, paintings, and other visual forms that follow the aesthetics of density?” (327).

Nissa says

Lev Manovich is my hero since I read this. it inspired 3 independent studies my last year in college. and it's

helped shape a lot of my in progress plans to revolutionize the world ;-)
it'll (probably) change the way you see and analyze what goes on in the increasingly technologized world.

but just so i don't sound like **too** much of a fanboy, it has a definite idealistic slant to it, and I highly recommend reading it along with "Control and Freedom" because the two books complement each other well.

Mark Schomburg says

The trouble with writing about new media is that everyone has their own ideas. Manovich lays down historical connections on which to base his theory. I did enjoy the trip back to Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* and early cinema, though honestly I wasn't expecting this kind of entrenching content. The book is beautiful, and that physical aspect makes it more readable, despite some difficult passages where the words just didn't flow.

Vanessa_Lin says

though some opinions have been out of date ,it's still worthy of reading
A helpful book in writing the review for the new media art in current China

Michael says

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2001.

In *The Language of New Media* (2001), Lev Manovich draws on the history of cinema, photography, art, design, and telecommunications to theorize about new media. Primary to my concerns are his five "principles of new media," which he characterizes as what makes new media different from "old media":

1. Numerical representation: new media objects exist as data (27)
 2. Modularity: the different elements of new media are discrete samples (30)
 3. Automation: new media objects can be created and modified automatically; there is less human intentionality necessary for the creation and modification of media (32)
 4. Variability: new media can be copied and created into a wide variety of versions (36)
 5. Transcoding: new media can be converted into other formats (47). This he sees as "the most substantial consequence of the computerization of media" (45).
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Marius says

Manovich makes a good argument for the understanding of interfaces as cultural artifacts, but the book is often a little dry. I've found his other texts to be more useful, this book seems to much like a basic introduction and didn't go as much into detail as I had hoped. Nevertheless, it's great for an introduction for

readers new to the field of media art.

Zacas_puntas says

Amazing book.

GONZA says

In summary, today strategies used by social media companies often look more like tactics in the original formulation by de Certeau while tactics look like strategies. Since the companies that create social media platforms make money from having as many users as possible visit them (they do so by serving ads, by selling data about usage to other companies, by selling add-on services, and so on), they have a direct interest in having users pour as much of their lives into these platforms as possible. Consequently, they give users unlimited storage space for all their media and the ability to customize their online lives (for instance, by controlling what is seen by whom) by expanding the functionality of the platforms themselves.

This, however, does not mean strategies and tactics have completely exchanged places. If we look at the actual media content produced by users, here the relationship between strategies and tactics is different. As I already mentioned, for many decades companies have been systematically turning the elements of various subcultures into commercial products. But these subcultures themselves rarely develop completely from scratch; rather, they are the result of the cultural appropriation and/or remix of earlier commercial culture.

Esther says

My boss once said: "Manovich is like the Rolling Stones of media studies. His older work is better, but he's still the Stones." Now, I'm not exactly familiar with his older work (yet), but I do have to agree on the "Stones" part of the sentiment. Must read.

lou says

Lev Manovich's 'The Language of New Media' is one of 2 main texts we're using in The Dynamic Media Institute's coursework, research and discussion for Design Seminar 1. Fantastic read, great insight into the field and history of new media art. I have owned the book since 2004, read bits and pieces, but now I have a fantastic excuse to dig in and really live in the subject matter.

A great place to start. Well-written.

Zack says

A bit dated in its examples, Manovich's descriptions and even conjecture about society's transition to a

digital basis is prescient and persuasive for even contemporary readers. Some of his verbiage gets to be a bit much and things that he emphasizes turn out to be not as important today as he thinks they will be, but Manovich really can't be blamed for such shortcomings. What does become somewhat frustrating is his relatively consistent reference to works that few readers then and even fewer now will ever be able to access. Using these for examples may be quite accurate in illustrating his points, but I'll never know, unfortunately.

All around an excellent examination of some rather pressing topics regarding how the digital influences our thinking and our daily lives. While maybe not quite as applicable to today in some respects, there's still certainly a lot in here to chew on and think about: the problems he addresses and identifies aren't going away anytime soon.

Chris Friend says

What started out very, very tediously eventually built to an interesting discussion, then receded again into tedium only to stop suddenly without a rewarding or insightful conclusion.

The author's fixation on cinema was obsessive to the point of distraction: I often felt that the book's title should more appropriately have been "Manovich's New Language of Cinema"; however, this predication was out of necessity for his argument. Manovich suggests that the way we've viewed, analyzed, and critiqued film (and the creation/digestion/exhibition/reproduction thereof) is relevant to new media, as well.

With painstaking detail and thoroughness, this text catalogues the ways in which we can study and interpret new media, providing context, category, and connotation for the various terms used in discussing it.

While this was an extremely difficult (as in dull, tedious, and repetitive) read, it provides a foundation of vocabulary for a field of study. As such, I suppose it serves a purpose. Do I think that makes it good? :-) No, not really.
