

VERNACULAR VIDEOS IN THE PARTICIPATORY CULTURE OF WEB 2.0: THE CONTRIBUTION OF AMATEURS AND ARTISTS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUDIO-VISUAL LANGUAGE

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Abstract: The revolution in communication technologies is changing language and this, in turn, will change human thinking. This statement can now be taken for granted. The fact that it is supported by many authors, including Marshal Mc Luhan (1964), Neil Postman (1992) and Lev Manovich (2002), is already evidence of it. The issue of information in the public sphere of Web 2.0 is controversial and much debated. The democratization of cyberspace brings with it the chance to develop a complex audiovisual grammar that anticipates video art and experimental films. The online environment features both to audiovisual experiments undertaken by amateur videographers and professional elites. In this place of extremes, there is room for developing both narrative and non-narrative expressions of self-reflexive audiovisual products. Whereas Lev Manovich (2002) states that the avant-garde becomes legitimised in the cut and paste era of digital filmmaking, which replaces the sequential narrative, this article sets out to determine the contribution of amateur videographers and artists to the development of the new audiovisual grammar of web 2.0. My case studies focus on the two main tendencies of home-made audiovisual products, both of them leading to the effectiveness of audiovisual communication. The video-confession replaces the visual narrative illustration with a form of orality that increases the audience's imaginative participation. The DIY-videos, non-narrative metaphors in essay form, complement abstract comprehension. These new forms approach Astruc's concept of *caméra stylo*, enhancing the audiovisual communication of the mass audience. Thus, the audience is able to comprehend a richer and more sophisticated cinematic language.

Keywords: Vernacular-videos, Video-essay, Film-essay, Audiovisual language, Video-confession.

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1. The concept of camera mirror: video technology from narcissism to interactivity

As an expression of postmodernity, the juxtaposition of differing aesthetics and purposes leads to a blurring of boundaries between grassroots creators and media professionals and is a much-debated issue in media theory. In her article, Marsha Kinder (2008) recalls a conference held in 2008 by the Institute for Multimedia Literacy at the University of Southern California on the issue of 'Do-It-Yourself' video

as social practice. Participants raised the question "if YouTube is merely going to celebrate the most popular amateur videos of the week – regardless of content or aesthetics, how will it enable us to move beyond the American Idol mentality and the current level of broadcast television?" While the answers varied, a connection was identified between the cultural shift that occurred in the seventies and the contribution of video art and the contemporary liberalization of the digital audio-visual medium. Since the early 1960s, the international scene of contemporary art has undergone a significant change. An



expanded cinema has consciously brought the cinematic experience to the spectator's space, through performances and video installations. The role of film structures is to trigger a reflective state in the spectator, thus specific locations or a certain way of involving the audience are directions that seek to change the relationship between artist and audience towards an interactive concept. All these changes are facilitated by video technology, which enables the artist/filmmaker to communicate directly via its ability to instantly project the recorded image. Artists have turned this new feature – the immediacy of the medium – into a dialogical space.

Many artists with a background in performing arts began to use the video camera, initially – in the case of Joseph Beuys – to document their actions, but later the video camera became an integral part of their actions, the crucial aspect of their practice. Joan Jonas, Vito Acconci, Bill Viola, and many others use the video camera as a mirror, causing Rosalind Krauss (1976) to declare this medium narcissistic. Vito Acconci was a poet and performer before entering a relationship with the video camera. He uses the video technology mainly to create connections: spatial, temporal and human. In his works *Centers* (1971), *Undertone* (1972), and *Air Time* (1973), Acconci performs in a confessional way in front of the camera, which is the sole silent witness of his actions. He “addresses his own reflection with a monologue in which the terms I and You [...] are markers of the autonomous intercourse between Acconci and his own image” (Krauss 1976, 54). Krauss underlines the fact that the whole corpus of video art has a dimension of “self-encapsulation.” Yet, this so-called “narcissistic” stage of video art was a milestone for the development of the self-reflexive feature of the film essay.

Acconci's works, as well as Bruce Newman's environmental installations establish the idea of interactivity. In *Seedbed* (1973) Acconci transforms a private gallery in two different spaces communicating with each other through a video camera. Aggressive in content, his work raises two formal issues: on the one hand, that of the interaction with the public,¹ and on the other hand, the very character and basic function of the television medium; thus, problematizing the live transmission of an action that takes place in different spaces.

2. New media and postmodern communication – a revolution in the media culture

The term new media now refers more to interactivity than to the digital medium itself. What theoreticians and philosophers of the postmodern era envisaged in the seventies now becomes a reality thanks to web 2.0 communication. This represents the materialisation of an a priori ideological aspiration in response to the crisis triggered by the media monopoly. Whereas Web 1.0 defines the infancy years of the Internet, between 1990 and 2000, and the transition from physical publications to digital publications, Web 2.0 embodies a cultural revolution. It was initiated by Google and then adopted by many other companies that develop web applications that allow users to share their own audiovisual content. The slogan

“Broadcast Yourself” heralded the advent of YouTube (2005). “The encyclopedia where anyone can write” is a phrase used by Wikipedia to describe itself. “If you're not on Facebook, you don't exist” claims this social medium. These are just a few expressions that seek to denote a connection to an ultra-democratic network that mirrors humanity neutrally, without “discrimination” (Keen 2007, 43). For Andrew Keen, (2007, 44), the revolution of self-publishing negates the need for a tutelary authority, capable of guaranteeing the veracity and quality of statements. This raises issues of lack of informational accuracy. The problem observed by Keen is how to manage the complexity in our transition to another paradigm. We still do not know what will happen next. Postmodernism embraces the advantages of the informational cyberspace, with the inauthentic, the superficial, the ephemeral and the artificial. The era of surrealist simulation, as Jean Baudrillard calls it, consists of rejecting any principle of credible intellectual reality. Harvey's (quoted by Dewdney and Ride 2006) opinion of the postmodern condition is that of a spatiotemporal compression, of an accelerated and volatile world, in which the values of instantaneity have become common. In a society that cultivates a minimal attachment to ideals or people, because permanence has become temporary, the consequence of accumulating fragmented data is a burdensome experience, to which individuals respond differently (Harvey quoted by Dewdney and Ride 2006, 276). The vernacular videos takes on the role of a visual synthesis becoming a necessity which captures the transitory complex times in our society.

3. Video platforms and participatory initiatives of vernacular newcomers

Each media platform has its own distinctive culture of use. Corporate business models are shaping media communication coordinating content and interaction in a specific way (Burgess and Green 2018). While Facebook or Instagram are more oriented towards social media (where the connection is based on personal profiles and ‘friending’), YouTube and Vimeo are seen rather as alternative broadcasters. YouTube's dynamic is based on cultural co-creation between professional production and vernacular creativity of the video-amateurs; meanwhile Vimeo is more focused on independent professionals' content. From Burgess's (2018, 17) perspective, YouTube embodies the convergence of the culture of the people, and commercial or industrial culture, and he observes that “the synergy between the two YouTubes has never been separate and are increasingly entangled.” Within this architecture, the aesthetics put forward by newcomers is especially concerned with experimentation on video as a technology. The result “frequently foregoes narrative and resembles something most akin to video art,” sustains Burgess (2018, 57). From Juhasz's (2008) perspective, the new features of You-Tube are based on three effective stylistics: “humor, spectacle, and self-referentiality-.” Self-referentiality, alongside non-linearity and mixed aesthetics –which makes those productions impossible to be categorized–, could be

considered hallmarks of the video essay.

The theorizing of the cultural phenomenon, triggered by the online environment and the new type of interactivity, is the subject matter of numerous Video Vortex conferences, which since 2007 have analysed the production and distribution of online video content on a yearly basis.² Among the many topics addressed in this network of artists, curators and researchers three important questions emerge:

- How are traditional forms of media, such as television, video, or cinema, affected by the ubiquity of online audiovisual practice?

- What kind of narrative aesthetics will the online video database contain?

- Will DIY video lead to a new cinematic experience? (Lovink and Niederer 2008, 303-305)

*Plugin Manifesto*³ launched by Ana Kronschnabl in 2001 (MacKenzie 2014), remarkable for its time is addressed not only to artists, but also to 'geeks,' who are, in fact, amateurs, who together with professionals are called to occupy a new territory, untarnished by the mass-media. Network distribution has allowed this type of creative adventure to find its audience. Kronschnabl promotes alternative video structures, such as those of avant-garde artists, which had been hitherto marginalised as examples for future online video practices. She calls on us to consider that narrative evolved as an intrinsic part of Hollywood filmmaking. "Examine other filmmakers such as Deren, Vertov, Godard and Brakhage to see how they structured their films outside the Hollywood narrative tradition." Thus, we can observe how non-narrative structures lie at the basis of poetic films, which Maya Deren (quoted by Maas 1963) deems to be a vertical inquiry into the situation at hand. In contrast to the horizontal construction of a drama, made up of chain events, non-narrative film poems dwell on the meaning of actions, on feelings or abstract notions, which can appear as associations of shapes or as audio effects rendering that which cannot be seen. Kronschnabl's manifesto was launched at a time when the internet 2.0 had achieved semi-official status, acquiring for the publisher a curatorial function in selecting video productions. However, this call by the founder of the publishing organization can act as an invitation to a form of audio-visual dialogue between filmmakers. This recognition of the video phenomenon and its unconventional manifestations, either via freedom of artistic exploitation or amateurish innocence, opens new pathways for audiovisual expression.

The following case studies focus on amateur videographers, those new media stars whose varied practices have attracted old media attention. Gaining popularity by distinguishing themselves from the mass of market-oriented influencers or computer game bloggers, the topics they explore reflect a discernable social need and provide creative, alternative ways to foster audio-visual educational content. As the authors are self-taught newcomers in the audiovisual field, their initiatives are analysed primarily according to the video language they use and the efficiency of the means they employ in conveying their message. The five cases analysed, emerge

from two distinct tendencies in the form. The first trend uses the video camera in a direct, unarticulated way and without artistic or manipulative pretensions, as a form of *video-confession*. A second trend is a form of *DIY video*, in which the author intuitively tries to articulate visual content to evoke clarity and understanding.

3.1. The video confession- a new form of orality

The video confession (a monologue delivered directly to the camera) is a formula used primarily by amateurs and influencers as "an instrument for framing existence and identity" (Sherman 2008, 161). The impact of this kind of content is based on the power of the spoken word, a form of re-evaluation of orality as a primary mode of communication. This video tendency is an embodiment of the post-structuralist language theories of the sixties, which approach language as a more complex communication system, which, apart from providing information, also brings intimacy and emotional response. Derrida (2008, 247) posits that spoken language text takes precedence over the written text, considering the latter a supplement, speech being born out of passion and not out of necessity. Derrida shifts the focus of semiotics from logocentrism to phonocentrism and, at the same time, removes the function of language from the fixed and logical grid of structuralism. We now turn to three examples of the video confession to ascertain the novelty brought by this form to the medium of audio-visual expression.

Geriatric 1927. Telling It All

Peter Oakley is a British engineer who, a year after the release of the YouTube platform, at the age of 79, under the pseudonym "geriatric 1927," launched a series of autobiographical audiovisual episodes titled *Telling It All*. Enthusiastic about the opportunity provided by the media network to make his opinions known, he adopts the simplest, most direct and *cleanest way* of using the camera. Placing the camera in front of him, he tells a presumably young audience about his experiences of World War II, or his passion for motorcycles, thereby building a bridge between generations. At the same time, he expresses his enthusiasm for the YouTube community, addressing them with "Hello YouTubers!". The response from the audience translates to around 20,000-30,000 views and gained the attention of the *BBC* and *Washington Post*. However, Oakley turned down offers to contribute to the established media, thus remaining loyal to the 'community' that made him famous. He was active online for eight years between 2006-2014 continuing his stories about sex, music, or answering questions from his fans in over 400 YouTube posts.⁴

Jean Burgess (2018, 77) refers to Geriatric 1927 as an evangelist of computer techniques among elders. Oakley was one of the first to explore the potential offered by of the new YouTube platform in the creation of a peer learning community. In one of his episodes, *Computer for Terrified*, he invites his 'followers' to learn digital skills through play, revealing his own process



of experimenting with technology. Bjørn Sørenssen (2008) theorised the *Geriatric1927* case as a new form of online documentary, identifying it as a form of digital, audio visual narrative that “gets away from the burden of representation.”

Leslie Jordan, The Quarantine Uncle

Another, much more recent example certifies that video confession is a viable and proliferating formula. Jordan, a 65-year-old American actor has become a star on Instagram, being currently followed by half a million followers. In September 2018, with the help of his friends with whom he worked on the sitcom *The cool Kids*, the actor joined Instagram. A year later, he had acquired 80.000 followers. However, he only gained online stardom at the beginning of the SARS-COV 2 pandemic, with the launch of the online diary *You & Your Quarantine*, detailing amusing anecdotes from his life during the lockdown. While the disasters of the pandemic covered by most television channels are anxiety-inducing, online jokes help people overcome the boredom of inactivity. Along the same lines, Leslie Jordan talks about his relationship with his 94-year-old mother or makes fun of boring moments by singing and dancing in front of the camera in order to entertain his followers. Within just one month, his posts went viral on social media and his name was mentioned in the press. The *New Yorker* called him “the ideal quarantine companion” and he was interviewed by Anderson Cooper on CNN online. In *The New York Times*, the comedian stated that the kind of fame obtained on social media was more important to him than the Emmy award he was presented with in 2006.⁵ Thus, non-mediated responses from the audience are taken as proof of an authentic, unquestionable veracity. His statement actually highlights the superior quality of communication through social media. Direct communication with his fans through the mobile phone camera, without the formal rigors of film or television, ‘reveals’ a spontaneous and creative ‘Leslie Jordan,’ while the free confessional content draws in the audience.

Ioana Mischie and Ioana Flora, Fragile

Fragile is an online documentary series, launched in 2021, by young film director, trans-media artist and researcher Ioana Mischie, and the actor and scriptwriter Ioana Flora. Their project aims to share true stories of Romanian women who find themselves in situations of vulnerability as a result of abuses or misconceptions. While the short films are made in the same confessional style as the above example, in this case, actress Ioana Flora plays a different role each episode: a woman looking for shelter, a mother against the system, a prostitute on her way to finding faith, a woman politician fighting prejudice, etc. The novelty of the series lies in its format, which divests itself of all the old media practices (such as providing an illustrative content) and in appearance is closely related to the video-confession visuals made by amateurs with its one take, medium shot, of the actor directly

addressing the camera with no cuts, no set design, no re-enactment or other illustrational content. This contributes to a sense of authenticity of the content while at the same time protecting the anonymity of the case sources. This example speaks to the efficiency of the amateur’s contribution to the innovation of the new language of web 2.0, which has in turn been adopted, improved and used by artists.

3.2 Creative editing in do-it-yourself videos and the thinking cinema

We now turn to the second trend, the *DIY video*. Differing from the *video confession* while approaching the notion of *video-geeks*, it provides a spontaneous and intuitive use that develops a direct, subjective language, perhaps less precise, but much more intuitive, close to the concept of mentalese found in the theories of Noam Chomsky (2006) and Jerry Fodor (2008). In the following examples, we will see how those who, beyond oral narration, seek to express themselves by editing images and creating short visual stories in a *DIY video style*.

Marina Orlova, HotForWords

A philology graduate, Orlova studied etymology and taught English in Russia. In 2007, after moving to the United States, she set up a YouTube video channel called *HotForWords*. In each episode, based on questions from the users, she discusses the meaning and origin of English words in a consciously sexualised and provocative way, *HotForWords* has now over 700,000 followers (This is Money 2010) and Orlova has earned over one million dollars from her You Tube fame. Deploying the tagline “Intelligence is sexy,” Orlova has turned her unique, alternative pedagogy into a brand, beginning each episode with: “My dear students” and ending it with “Do your homework!” In her videos, she draws attention to a rather sterile didactic content, intuiting that the contemporary pupil or student wants to acquire knowledge easily and in a ‘pleasant’ way, perhaps in the guise of a game. What distinguishes Orlova from Oakley (*Geriatric 1927*), however, is the first step she takes towards articulating an audiovisual language, by creating a *mise-en-scene* for each episode. For each theme, she creates an illustrative scenario using a montage of various video scenes, photos and texts. The filming of the *HotForWords* series started unprofessionally, in an apartment. Once successful, it acquired a neater, more formal look with appropriate lighting and well-chosen props, denoting a more generous budget and the acquisition of filming techniques. Nevertheless, she seeks to preserve the innocence of amateur video production. The eclectic graphic style and special “home-made” effects, along with a high-definition image, place this production in the realms of postmodern pop culture.

Tatiana Sunbotina, Russia’s green-screen Queen

In 2017 under the name of *Russia’s green-screen Queen or Green-screen Grandma* at the age of 62, Tatiana Sunbotina

became famous in the YouTube world. Launching her YouTube channel in 2013, within four years she was internationally famous, attracting the attention of CNN and BBC and 30,000 subscribers.⁶ A recently retired former engineer, Sunbotina explores the world of special effects from the point of view of a self-taught person who learned the Adobe Premiere Pro video editing program from tutorials. Then, she addressed the green-screen technique by posting short videos explaining the methodology using home-made examples. Her comedic unveiling of an image manipulation technique demystifies an area normally dedicated to the elite of film professionals. She does not claim to be VFX professional, and her posts are not categorized as tutorials, but rather fall into the realm of entertainment. With an unpretentious content and a homemade look, the fantastic world of the “*Green-screen Grandma*” is a social media version of Georges Méliès’s films, made in the spirit of a creative adventure and knowledge of a field, until recently, taboo.

As can be seen from the previous examples, depending on the type of content, the authors intuitively choose the appropriate audiovisual language, using a minimum of means. In Case Study 1 (Geriatric 1927 or “The quarantine uncle”), we can see the redundancy of illustration in the video-confession format as it is replaced by oral micro-narratives that leave more room for imagination. Each listener can create his/her own unique story based on the spoken word. A cosmeticized fiction, built according to clear rules, is replaced by a flesh and blood narrator, capable of answering questions and establishing a dialogue. By contrast, for more abstract topics, an illustrative audiovisual fictional content – a non-narrative – is created by freely editing the images. *Hot for Words* or *Green-screen Grandma* makes use of visual illustration as a “conceptual metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003) whose purpose is to make the content more comprehensible. Early *Hot for Words* episodes are reminiscent of Dee Dee Halleck’s alternative television, in the playful use of a combination of cardboard cut-offs and improvised visuals. *Green-screen Grandma* recalls late 19th century vaudeville, a YouTube vernacular video feature underlined by Burgess (2018).

The tendency to turn any subject into entertainment, however, remains a particular feature of social media consumption. In the analysed cases, the earlier productions retain the traces of a prior media practice with its impulse to structure information in the deployment of structuring techniques (for example, the fixed camera and certain care for a correct framing). By contrast, the case study *The quarantine uncle* illustrate that filming with a smartphone and uploading to an Instagram platform brings with it the spirit of cheer up regardless of form.

Despite its superficial nature, this Agora of diverse information creates communication networks around an audience grouped by their areas of interest. The “amateur revolution,” as Abigail Keating (2014) calls it, refers to the paradigm shift that changes the media spaces from mere broadcasting to participatory creation and peer learning. In the process of natural self-regulation generated by

the success or failure of some topics or characters, it is anticipated that this dialogic space will reveal solutions for real needs. For instance, deploying social networks to bridge the gap between generations reveals that family relationships rarely find ideal conditions in the current socio-political context. The fame of online surrogate uncles or grandparents who share their experience and their humour is perfectly justified as long as real grandparents are less present. Another example of social dysfunction is to be found in the field of education. *Hot for words* advances a new way of understanding abstract concepts through visual storytelling, which is a more familiar environment for the new generation of students. This approach completes the classical pedagogy based on the rigors of the written word. Given the aesthetic experience which takes place during the creative process that has a great influence on education and personal development, the effectiveness of understanding is achieved by using different languages and through different means (Stănescu 2017). This social responsibility is the reason Schleser (2014) considers amateur-media the model of twenty-first century citizenship, transcending the area of video, film, and moving image.

Conclusion

In her 1965 essay, “Amateur Versus Professional” Maya Deren (quoted by Max Schleser 2014) rehabilitates the term “amateur” from its pejorative sense, stressing the freedom of creativity inherent in that state of being. The *raison d’être* that both independent artists and amateurs have is the pure desire to communicate on various topics using one’s own means. Farber (1962) further valorises the independent practitioner, introducing us to the concept of *Termite Art*—subversive in its nature, undermining normative strictures, and contrasting with the *White Elephant* world of the creative professional bounded by an economic imperative and its concomitant constraints.

Using 5 case studies, this article interrogated the analogies between the *Termite*-like practices of avant-garde filmmakers and those of the web 2.0 video-amateurs, by exploring the 3 key issues raised at the 2007 *Video Vortex Conferences* and concludes as follows: *How are traditional media affected by the upcoming new narrative aesthetics?*

Disavowing a desire for normative audiovisual literacy these social networks use their own free and unarticulated language, not respecting any pre-established rule of visual grammar. To some extent, social media newcomers have rediscovered the meaning of audiovisual means by (quoted by ‘playing’ with technologies, thus mirroring the path of the *avant-garde* artists. They embrace the possibilities of the web 2.0 context via which they are able to reach more audiences without having to engage with the formal distribution sector. This choice of direct expression, available to any individual, serves as a contrast to the constraints and advantages implicit in the machinery of traditional film and TV production involving large budgets and the coordination of teams of professionals. The potential for mass consumption and



distribution imbricated in the very concept of the ‘viral video’ phenomenon so characteristic of homemade productions demonstrates that audiovisual language can be consumed and understood in any form.

Lev Manovich starts his book *The Language of New Media* (2002) with a prologue that draws a parallel between Vertov’s *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), one of the first film essays in cinema history and the audiovisual practices of New Media. In his opinion, “the computer fulfills the promise of cinema as a visual Esperanto which pre-occupied many film artists and critics.” It has become a thinking medium now, after one century due to the fact that before “users were able to understand cinematic language but not speak it” (Manovich 2002, VII).

The contribution of newcomer ‘geeks’ in the dialogical space of web 2.0 pushes the boundaries of audiovisual language beyond sequential narrative constructions, which keep the logic of spatio-temporal continuity and beyond the formal professionalism used in television. The audiovisual practice in social media does not compete with that of professional productions and is not a direct threat to the concept of cinema. However, the existence of a widespread practice of deploying audiovisual language will in itself form an audience capable of decoding several types of cinematic languages.

What kind of narrative aesthetics will the online video database contain? Non-narrative editing, and the occurrence of a new grammar specific to the ‘database’ type medium is shaping the new forms of narrative. While cinema in general is associated with a type of storytelling built on a cause-and-effect sequential narrative, Manovich (2002) holds that the new media is a medium incompatible with this type of chronological storytelling. Giving up the conventions that previously were adopted by to guarantee perceived mainstream success, the new language used in cyberspace is oriented towards intuitive, free associations made in a playful spirit- values promoted by artists, philosophers, and critics ever since the *Futurist Cinema Manifesto*. The unpolished character of these unpretentious small-scale productions that do not aspire to some ‘noble ideal’ brings them closer to the spirit of the avant-garde.

The space of web 2.0 facilitates a conjunction between professional and vernacular videos in a participatory culture of peer learning, while the YouTube platform is particularly associated with these two voices that play an equal part in finding a medium-specific audiovisual grammar. *Self-referentiality* is, for the moment, the hallmark of the network video channels. What can be more narcissistic than the slogan “Broadcast Yourself” becoming “Broadcasting to yourself”? Gert Lovink (2008), one of the Video Vortex conferences editors, underlines the mirroring behaviour of the millions of YouTube users, however, similar practices were associated with the infancy of video art, with different purposes obviously. But just as the corpus of the video art evolved, so did the confessional vernacular video. The analysis of the case studies shows that in the space of a decade unique people reveal their stories with a clear purpose, or healthy pedagogical initiatives can enter a dialogical space, while the

interactivity dictated by the platforms’ business models serves to ensure the self-regulation of the online video medium as a living social organism.

In his philosophical postmodern thinking in the seventies, Gene Youngblood foreshadows the complex relationships that the video environment has with society and the importance it holds in the shaping of the new human consciousness. “Humanity extends its video Third Eye to the moon and feeds its own image back into its monitors. ‘Monitor’ is the electronic manifestation of superego.[...] We become aware of our individual behavior by observing the collective behavior as manifested in the global videosphere.” (Youngblood 1970, 78).

Will DIY video lead to a new cinematic experience? Poetic films, docu-fiction, essay-films as well as other hybrid genres can now be found on on-demand film channels in the online environment, which present themselves as the arena of some for the most diverse visual narratives. The existence of such communication channels helps the niche audience not only to find their identity but also to have an influence. Low-budget films have entered the world’s cinema circuits, and films that break down the classical fictional patterns are now promoted in festivals. The culture of diversity is replacing the uniformity of Hollywood stories. Eastern European, South American, African or Asian Countries do not have sizeable film industries, but they do have powerful stories to tell.

I suggest that the *vernacular video* aesthetic, so prolific in the online environment, has already influenced mainstream circuits of consumption. Film festival programming and policies in Europe skew towards films that reflect features of the essay film. Some examples, almost randomly picked, will show the variety of storytelling appreciated at the prestigious Berlin Film Festival. In 2021 the Golden Bear was awarded to *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* a composite of a nonlinear story and a cut-and-paste essay style aesthetics by the Romanian director Radu Jude. *Last and First Men*, which premiered as a special gala at the Berlinale 2020, is an Icelandic film poem directed by Jóhann Jóhannsson as his posthumous directorial debut. It is deemed to be a “a ravishing 70-minute audiovisual essay on human mortality, extinction and legacy – all the more poignant for being its maker’s final creative statement” (Lodge 2020). *Touch Me Not* directed by Adina Pintilie, the winner of the Golden Bear in 2018, is a docufiction film in which confession is the key element of the story. The director’s self-reflexive opening statement sets the key to decoding “a space for (self) reflection and transformation, where the viewer is challenged to deepen their knowledge of human nature and to re-evaluate their experience and ideas about intimate human relationships.” (Pintilie 2018)

Cinematic trans-media projects is the way cinema encounters the culture of web 2.0 in its ongoing quest for interactivity. Many film projects are especially designed for a web cinematic experience, which includes the audience’s responses. Even traditional films continue their life online, creating different ways to engage the audience. Web series are proliferating, as well as essay films channels, for example, *Nowness* (www.nowness.com). This channel was launched in 2010 as a fashion

professional blog, has changed into an essay film channel that portrays the contemporary culture globalization, equality, sustainability, the queer culture, or war and conflict zones, all of which are unsolved problems facing contemporary society.

Contemporary communication involves a complex intermingling of sound, motion images, written texts and spoken language, in narrative or non-narrative grammar. We have seen how the newcomer vloggers or videographers find direct audiovisual methods to communicate on the most diverse topics, from spoken stories to abstract issues. Thus, we can see how the in-built self-regulating process of the web 2.0 environment contributes to the enhanced effectiveness of communicating languages.

In the context of the democratization of the audio-visual world, social media has become a dominant force as an arbiter of taste, value and judgment. The small scale non-narrative

DIY productions reflect the post-modern vision of Lyotard and demolish the myth of linearity. But this fragmented world can no longer be contained in a coherent formula unless we understand its complexity. As Paul Cilliers holds, our postmodern complex society can be understood only if we analyse its communication language (1998). If the printed word highlights logic, objectivity, discipline, history, and brings with it individualized learning and personal autonomy, “orality induces group learning, cooperation, and a sense of social responsibility” (Postman 1993, 17). In this respect, our language of communication has been advanced thanks to the artists who ideologically foreshadow the broadening of the audiovisual means of expression and the video-amateurs who, instead of copying the old media solutions, unwittingly applied the alternative, creative methods of independent filmmakers.

Notes

1. He uses the space to masturbate and express his fantasies about the visitors entering the gallery, who are able to see him on a screen placed in the corner of the room and hear him fantasizing about them through an amplifying station.
2. Video Vortex website <https://networkcultures.org/videovortex/>. Accessed 9 May 2020.
3. *PluginCinema.com* is a cultural project that promotes the distribution of experimental films online, encouraging digital productions by attracting both professionals and newcomers in this field. The organization was established in 1999, by the artist Ana Kronschnabl who introduces in the pages of the site the philosophy and motivation for the existence of this web address through an article called “Manifest”. <http://www.pluginCinema.com/> Accessed 2 April 2011
4. Youtube channel of *Geriatric 1927* <http://www.youtube.com/user/geriatric1927>. Accessed 2 July 2020.
5. “I’ve loved attention, wanted it my whole career, and I’ve never gotten this kind of attention. I mean, even on *Will & Grace*, winning an Emmy, it wasn’t anything like when you have social media. When you’ve become a success there, it’s unbelievable.” (Underwood 2020)
6. CNN website <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/tv/2017/06/27/gbs-grandma-green-screen.great-big-story>.

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