Chapter 1

The Aesthetic of New Media and Communication Devices in Film and Television Language

Alberto Hermida
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4155-0108
University of Seville, Spain

ABSTRACT

The establishment of mobile media and the development of Web 2.0, in parallel to the current omnipresence of user interfaces and the multiscreen landscapes, have led to the consolidation of changes in all spheres of life. Subsequently, and due to the hybridization and remediation processes inherent to the digital environment, the more conventional media have been considerably affected by these transformations in the media ecosystem. Accordingly, this chapter examines the influences and formal loans in film and television language by analyzing the aesthetic transfers occurring in fiction and non-fiction.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction and consolidation of new media and communication tools in contemporary society have given rise to an important transformation not only in the production and distribution of audiovisual content, but also in its consumption and viewing. In a context marked by the omnipresence of mobile devices and dominated by social media and interface, multiscreen and connectivity dynamics, digital users have become accustomed to a series of resources and visual stimuli that have become part and parcel of their daily experiences and surroundings. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the aesthetic aspects of that reality have permeated the current media ecosystem, percolating into the language of the conventional media.

In light of the foregoing, this chapter focuses on the influences and most noteworthy formal loans assimilated by cinema and television in the midst of the expansion of the aforementioned technological resources, introducing them into their respective codes and narratives. To this end, it is first essential to review the basic concepts established in the context of technology and digital visual representation sys-

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tems, in order to contextualize and address the issues at hand with adequate theoretical rigor. Secondly, the aesthetics of new media and devices will be studied in depth, addressing their unique characteristics and the peculiarities of their transfers from a theoretical-analytical perspective. The analysis of the latter is, in short, the main objective of this chapter, in which case studies shifting between fiction and non-fiction are discussed. To this end, the corpus of selected works includes minor and experimental productions as high-profile examples drawn from the commercial television and film industries.

IN THE DOMAINS OF THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Over the past decades, many terms and approaches have been used to designate the hybridization capacity of the digital environment on the basis of assimilating and combining heterogeneous languages. This distinguishing trait, driving the convergence between different techniques and aesthetics, is doubtless particularly important for understanding the visual synergies discussed here. In point of fact, Le Grice (2001) already stressed the unique ability of the digital environment to blur technological boundaries using the metaphorical term “hydra-media” (p. 297): the branching of previous technological models into one sole integrating technology.

For Manovich (2013, p. 163), it is the progressive development of computers as metamedia that have allowed for the media hybridization defining their discursive essence. Specifically, through the “softwarization” of the biological meaning of the term “hybrid”, the author stress the way in which “media techniques start acting like species within a common ecology —in this case, a shared software environment. Once ‘released’ into this environment, they start interacting, mutating, and making hybrids” (p. 164). From a visual perspective, the aesthetics of hybridity are coupled with the emergence of a new language, a sort of “polygraphy” in which the discursive particularities of the different languages assimilated by digital technology are shared (Gómez Isla, 2005, pp. 710-711). In the process, moreover, Manovich (2013) underscores its capacity for “deep remixability”, namely, not only for remixing content coming from diverse media, “but also their fundamental techniques, working methods, and ways of representation and expression” (p. 268). Beyond mere addition, deep remixability triggers interactions between virtualized techniques, ultimately representing the aesthetics of contemporary audiovisual culture (p. 273).

Besides the juxtaposition of media, multimediality is moving towards the interaction between languages and the emergence of spaces in which remediation (visually) materializes (Scolari, 2009). Following the postulates of Marshall McLuhan, Bolter and Grusin (2000) define this phenomenon as “the representation of one medium in another” (p. 45), a feature that they believe is essential to digital media. For the authors, remediation is based on a double logic: the immediacy and the hypermediacy. If by the logic of transparent immediacy, the purpose of a medium is to disappear, conceal its trail in order to go unnoticed in the representation process, the logic of hypermediacy is due to opposing dynamics. Due to the fascination for the medium, this is shown and exhibited itself, instead of being hidden, evincing the reality of the device and generating a great deal of tension between that which is represented and the mediation itself during the contemplation of the text. As a result, versus the unified visual space deriving from immediacy, hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous and fragmentary space, multiplying the signs of mediation (pp. 33-34). In current digital media, hypermediacy is particularly evident, for instance, in the “heterogeneous ‘windowed style’” of webpages, desktop interfaces and interactive apps (hypermedia) (p. 31).