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Mucking Out Augean Stables with Systematic Rigour:

Manovich's _The Language of New Media_

Lev Manovich

The Language of New Media

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354 pp

Lev Manovich's _The Language of New Media_ has been well received, and hailed by reviewers as, for example, 'the most rigorous definition to date of new media', and 'the first rigorous and far-reaching theorization of the subject'. [1] It is an ambitious project, (necessarily) broad in scope, as it attempts to provide, as the back cover tells us, 'a systematic and rigorous theory of new media'. Rather than retread ground and re-hail the rigour that has already been covered and hailed by others, I will identify here some of the aspects of Manovich's work that I feel don't quite work (whether that is due to my own subjective, stylistic preferences or prejudices, or due to what I consider to be omissions or oversights), as well as the parts which seem to make assumptions or which gloss over issues which might be explored in more detail than they are currently. This is not to say this will be a negative review -- far from it -- Manovich's book is interesting, useful, and, while it is already three

years old, still timely. Almost undoubtedly it will be revised for a second edition (updates of Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 have recently appeared on Manovich's website). Hopefully, some of the points identified here will be addressed in a future revision.

The book is organised in six chapters, which follow the Introduction: 'What is New Media?', 'The Interface', 'The Operations', 'The Illusions', 'The Forms', and 'What is Cinema?'. At the very beginning of the book, before the Introduction, we find a Prologue: 'Vertov's Dataset'. Over the course of twenty-three pages Manovich reproduces fifty-four stills from Dziga Vertov's 1929 film, _Man With A Movie Camera_, together with passages -- sometimes just a sentence, sometimes a lengthy paragraph -- from later parts of the book. The idea is that the Prologue 'thus acts as a visual index to some of the book's major ideas' (xiv). While this might have seemed a good idea at the draft stage, it only serves to point up the difference between old, linear, analogue media (such as books), and new, interactive, digital media (such as CD-ROMs and hypertext). A 'visual index' such as this would work better online than as the book's opening gambit. [2]

Manovich next provides us with 'a personal chronology' at the beginning of the Introduction, before reaching what might be called the introduction proper on page 6 (the reader has already turned some thirty-odd pages and feels that the book has still yet to begin). The overall effect of these irruptions is to slow down the pace of the book, to defer the beginning, and generally make the reader feel the very text itself is an impediment to progress. The book seems quite repetitive, due, I think, to the Prologue, the slow Introduction, and subsequent reiteration of ideas in the Introduction to each chapter. To borrow from new media-speak, the book seems to book provide a lot of 'cut scenes' or foreplay, but little in the way of game-play or action. Another example is where Manovich suggests that a way of refusing interactivity (selecting from menus, options, etc) is to make *no* choice: 'using Microsoft Windows exactly the way it was installed at the factory instead of customising it in the hope of expressing my 'unique identity'' (129). However, it should be noted that it takes Manovich some hundred pages to get to this position after it is first implied, which is another reason why the work can appear slow and repetitive.

However, even though the book seems to move slowly in places, in other places quite the opposite effect is achieved, as Manovich seems to move

too quickly over a point where more subtlety is required. Discussing the emergence of 'new media', Manovich blithely asserts: 'The ability to disseminate the same texts, images and sounds to millions of citizens -- thus assuring the same ideological beliefs -- was as essential as the ability to keep track of their birth records, employment records, medical records and police records.' (22) If 'the same ideological beliefs' really could be 'assured' as simply as this, there would be no dissent, no struggle over ideas or political views, and no change. However, Manovich cannot possibly mean what he appears to mean here (and later, on page 209). There is indeed a more sophisticated engagement with ideology in relation to the tendency toward self-reflexivity in advertising, which is both useful (useful for anyone teaching or engaged in the study of advertisements) and thought-provoking.

What is New Media?

Pontificating on the emergence of 'the new media machine' (the projector) Manovich declares:

'Film images would soothe movie audiences, who were facing an increasingly dense information environment outside the theatre, an environment that could no longer be adequately handled by their own sampling and data processing systems (i.e. their brains). Periodic trips into the dark relaxation chambers of movie theatres became a routine survival technique for the subjects of modern society.' (23)

It sounds marvelous -- a great sweeping statement about the impact of kino-technology as entertainment for the 'overloaded' consciousness of the masses -- but what does it actually mean? It's the kind of purple prose that tempts one to write in the margin 'Can you provide an example to clarify this point?' However, there is no clarification, and Manovich's text presses on like a juggernaut, as it does on more than one occasion. Another example of Manovich moving his argument too quickly occurs where he seems to take the Sapir-Whorf of linguistic determinism as given, although he doesn't say so in as many words, it is implied (on page 64).

The Interface

Manovich likens the interface to 'language' -- one can find no problem with that, there are 'rules' and 'meanings' to be gleaned for sure -- but he develops this to suggest that the interface structures what it is possible to think about computer data and, by extension, about the world.

'By organising computer data in particular ways the interface provides distinct models of the world . . . a hierarchical file system assumes the world can be organised in a logical multilevel hierarchy . . . a hypertext model of the WWW arranges the world as a non-hierarchical system ruled by metonymy. In short, far from being a transparent window into the data inside a computer, the interface brings with it strong messages of its own.' (65)

I have shortcuts all over my desktop and in my browser's links bar, to local data and online data (to material created by me, and to material created by others) but that doesn't impact upon my understanding of, say, the North American electoral system, or my understanding of the morality of invading a country to remove its head of state, or of the way one state can continue to occupy territories in another, impose curfews, launch air strikes, etc., without heed of international law or UN resolutions. Computer data *can* be manipulated and organised in certain ways, some of which I understand and some of which I don't -- who really uses Microsoft Office, or their powerful desktop computer, to anything like its fullest capability? -- but this really doesn't impact upon my understanding of the political, social, and economic factors that stop the world from being a better place. I find it rather disingenuous of Manovich to make extrapolations from 'the interface' to assertions about what and how it is possible to think about the 'the world' and the way it is organised. But again, as with the example regarding ideology (above), it must be a case of Manovich not quite meaning what he appears to mean.

More interesting and relevant (and, frankly, less irritating) is Manovich's consideration of the bluring of the boundaries between 'work' and 'leisure'. Another aspect to consider is the contemporary phenomenon of

traveling to and from work as an extension of work. Britain has the most over-worked labour force in Europe. [3] It is not uncommon to see a significant proportion of passengers on trains tapping away on laptop computers -- already at work whilst traveling to work, or still at work on the way home. The high penetration of personal computers in the home, equipped with the same software as office computers, provides workers with the means to 'just finish off' something that might have been left in the office. However, Manovich leaves this digital drudgery, one aspect of the collapse of the division between computer-work and computer-play, unexplored.

Again, the question of 'meaning' comes to the fore in Manovich's discussion of hyperlinks. One can *see* what Manovich wants to mean as he conceptualises the hyperlink as 'non-hierarchical':

'The two sources connected through a hyperlink have equal weight; neither one dominates the other. Thus the acceptance of hyperlinking in the 1980s can be correlated with contemporary culture's suspicion of all hierarchies, and preference for the aesthetics of collage in which radically different sources are bought together within a single cultural object.' (76)

There is, however, an idealisation in this conception (the same idealisation that perhaps inspired Ted Nelson to develop the cul-de-sac known as Project Xanadu [4]); hyperlinking is controlled by hierarchical order inasmuch as the page containing the link has primacy over the page or resource to which it links. Moreover, hyperlinking is not reciprocal, it is a 'one way' activity (Nelson wanted the web to be more than that) and authorship determines those links. While it is the case that 'individual texts are placed in no particular order' (77), one has to access them somehow, in some order. The page from which one clicks determines that order.

Cinematic conventions inform the computer's spatial representations, especially so in games. However, the 'cinematic code', the 'grammar' of Hollywood conventionality, is being challenged by the reconfiguration of cinematics in machinima. Machinima (a compound word made up of 'machine' and 'cinema') becomes possible due to several aspects of that computer game; the result is something that is not a game, but a hybrid, a genuinely new media form. Game manufacturers, notably Id Software, released games that could be modified (first _Doom_, and later

Quake). Players were able to become designers, using 'level editors' to create their own custom layouts and characters. Once created, custom levels (wads) could be shared via the internet. Taken to extremes, a game or a level can be a 'total modification' so that, for example, locations and characters might be based on _The Simpsons_ or _South Park_. As well as 'mods' based on most of the popular American television series, one can also find examples of layouts and characters based on schools (one pre-Littleton mod is known as 'School Doom') or on specific workplaces.

Multiplayer games allow groups of players to engage in competitive play or to work collaboratively. The key point here is that several human players control avatars simultaneously present in the same 3D space. Teams of players (called 'clans') can compete against other clans. Games like _Quake_ allow players to capture sequences of game-play, and even to control the point of view from which the game-play is captured. These sequences can then be replayed in the game as 'demos'. For example, clans can demonstrate prowess by finishing a level as quickly as possible (a 'speed run'). However, the possibilities presented by these features allow for more than game play. Once a level has been modified and characters 'skinned', players can do more than play the game in the conventional sense. The game engine can be used to provide a desktop CGI and characters can engage in improvised or scripted performances. The result can be, and often are, edited and converted to a more accessible format such as QuickTime video or AVI for playback in widely available software applications such as Apple QuickTime or Windows Media Player. [5]

Manovich discusses several 'projects' (generally examples of avant-garde film, or video installations) which refuse the standard conventions of cinema. But machinima is not so much a 'project' as a genuinely new hybrid form: not cinema, not animation, not puppetry, not computer game, but a narrative (or non-narrative) form which overlaps the interstices of all these. Far from a slavish adherence to convention, machinima constitutes a radical break from the conventions of production practices, narratives, and economics. [6] Perhaps a later revision might include some consideration of what is, in my opinion, a new media form that merits some analysis.

Discussing the Human-Computer Interface (or 'HCI'), Manovich states 'both cinema and the printed word eventually achieved stable forms that

underwent little change for long periods of time' (93). This assertion seems to assume that cinematic and textual forms are now static, somehow 'finished' or 'complete'. Manovich can't possibly know this and, even if these forms may seem relatively stable now, one cannot say with any certainty how long this apparent stability will remain in its current state.

Manovich discusses the concept of 'the screen', from renaissance painting to television; from what he calls the static or 'classic screen' to the dynamic screen of television, video, and cinema, and their 'viewing regimes' (the immersive form of cinema; the domestic form of television). For Manovich, the 'dynamic screen' has been disrupted by the newer computer screen which, with its multiple windows (not to mention dual-monitor set-ups) offers an experience akin to television 'zapping'. But how safe is Manovich's distinction between the television screen and the computer screen? Widescreen PC monitors and widescreen laptops are already widely available, as are TV tuner cards. Thus the computer screen is *already* a television screen. Televisions accept input from digital video as well as from game consoles and from computer 'TV out' cards. Some televisions offer multiple windows with PIP (picture-in-picture). Sony is currently advertising its Network Media Receiver, a device used for leisure and entertainment-based multimedia networking in a domestic environment, serving images, video, sound, and other content from computer devices to 'televisions'. [7] The television screen is already a computer screen. The television and computer screen are no longer as distinct as they were only a few years ago. The boundaries are blurred and remain fluid, as televisions also offer access to email and web browsing.

Manovich offers a potted history of the computer screen, from the radar screen in WWII to SAGE (a total 'homeland defence' security system) in the 1950s and proto VR in the 1960s. We remain in 'the era of the screen' which 'threatens to take over our offices and our homes' (115), and the example of Sony's range of domestic network devices shows one of the ways in which that is happening, but again a chance to discuss the sociology of the collapse of work and leisure activity into a continuous 'screen time' is not taken up. Rather, as he makes concluding remarks toward the end of the book, Manovich states 'we now use the same interfaces for work and leisure' and that 'we may . . . think of the information density of our own workspaces as a new aesthetic challenge' (329). Somehow, I think, that 'challenge' would not go down too well on the 07.35 to London Liverpool Street.

The Operations

In the chapter entitled 'Operations', Manovich discusses the software tools used by designers, and the operations performed, namely 'selection, compositing and tele-action' (118). Operations, he reminds us, are not software specific, but are ways of thinking, ways of working, used in cultural production. Manovich offers an interesting perspective on the notion that to navigate (e.g. through webspace or gopherspace) is tantamount to 'co-authoring' as the user weaves a unique path through data. This notion is often rehearsed in relation to post-structuralist ideas of textuality (in _S/Z_, for example, Roland Barthes distinguishes between the 'readerly' and the 'writerly' text, and the way in which the reader of the writerly text in a sense produces the text). However, Manovich makes this notion of 'co-authorship' much less contentious than it sometimes appears: for Manovich, the user doesn't so much create something new, as access only one subset of a much larger dataset (takes one of all the possible routes).

Considering Photoshop as 'postmodern' because it encourages users to select pre-defined routines from menus rather than create something from scratch, (selecting, combining, and re-using pre-existing content is one of the defining characteristics of postmodernism), Manovich declares: 'it is this software that in fact made postmodernism possible' (131). Photoshop, like many other software packages, allows filters and other effects (pre-written algorithms) to be applied to text or image files. Selection and compositing 'simultaneously reflect and enable the postmodern practice of pastiche and quotation' (141). Compositing is, in a sense, the opposite of the disruptive effect of montage (editing), where the joins are emphasised (e.g. Godard, Warhol). In compositing, the joins and discontinuities are 'airbrushed out' for a seamless effect.

Manovich argues the case for a new concept, a new form of montage, which he calls 'spatial montage'. This is achieved through using software to arrange elements to create a 'new space' (157). However, following a suggestion made by Erkii Hutamo in personal correspondence, Manovich restricts the term to what he calls 'strong cases' because to use the term too freely -- to thus describe any juxtaposition of elements -- would, apparently, render it meaningless. Manovich goes on to illustrate the

logic and aesthetics of the concept of 'spatial montage' using examples which, he points out, 'were [all] created before digital composting became available' (158). It's a shame Manovich could not draw on an example of digital compositing to illustrate the case. The examples -- Rybczynski's _Tango_ (1982); the use of juxtaposition in Konrad Zeman's films; Olga Tobreluts's _Gore ut Uma_ (1994) -- are all discussed without the use of images.

The Illusions

In chapter four, 'Illusions', Manovich discusses the way in which the computer has taken on the burden of producing representational images that were once the preserve of 'optical and electrical machines'. This process of replacement generates the economic turnover that drives the industry. He asks two questions: What effect does using computers to generate illusionistic representations have on our perceptions of illusionism? And how do illusionism and interactivity work together? Beyond the lack of an indexical relationship with its referent, a computer-generated image isn't so different from a photograph or a painting. For Manovich, the real difference comes with navigable 3D space, 'something one cannot do with an illusionistic painting' (184).

Manovich compares Bazin's discussion of cinematic realism, which he calls 'idealist' (186), with Comolli's 'materialism' (187) and Bordwell and Staiger's 'industrial model'. He then considers 3D animation in light of the preceding positions, noting that technical development was prompted by the needs of both Hollywood and Washington, although he 'is not concerned here to trace fully the history of these sponsorships' (193).

Discussing the construction of 3D worlds, Manovich returns to the theme of designers using pre-defined routines -- 'fractal landscapes, checkerboard floors, complete characters, and so on' (197). He distinguishes between the realistic image produced by computers, which is a form of photorealism, and experience, which isn't faked at all. For Manovich, the key point is that photographic and filmic representations are sometimes mistaken for their referents (or an equivalence is assumed). Virtual Reality isn't 'reality' at all, but a representation of space: 'the reason we may think that computer graphics have succeeded

in faking reality is that . . . we have come to accept the image of photography and film as reality' (200).

In the final section of the chapter Manovich asks: 'what effect does interactivity have on the reality effect of an image?' (205) Here, he discusses the shift between 'playing' and 'viewing' in games, and the 'juddering' effect experienced while moving in VR environments as 'a new kind of suturing mechanism' (208). For Manovich, this is a means ofinterpolation, a device to 'fully involve the subject in the illusion' (208). He suggests that the military simulation is the 'only mature form of interactive narrative' (208-209).

The Forms

In this, the longest chapter, Manovich identifies the database and 3D space as the dominant metaphors in both work-related and leisure-related applications. For Manovich, 'all new media design can be reduced to these two approaches', either creating the interface to give access to data of some kind, or 'defining navigation methods through spatialized representations', and he likens these two aspects to 'effects that before were created by literary and cinematic narrative (215). However, according to Manovich, the two might be thought of as polar extremes: 'often the two goals of information access and psychological engagement compete within the same new media object' (216).

While some new media objects may be databases, they are not always experienced as such by users: games, for example, can often be thought of as puzzles and, in order to solve the puzzle, the player has to figure out the series of tasks or discover the algorithm necessary to overcome a specific problem, finish a level, or complete the entire game. Players learn the algorithm during the course of the game, which works in two ways: the algorithm that is 'the rules that operate within the universe constructed by this game', which Manovich distinguishes from 'the algorithm of the game itself' (222-223).

Manovich considers the way in which the World Wide Web is also a database of sorts, with myriad interfaces, so many front ends, pages that

organise and provide access to content, that the same data is often indexed by (i.e. is accessible from) very many pages, to the extent that the indices are greater in magnitude than the data itself, a phenomenon that Manovich likens to the Jorge Luis Borges story of a map greater in size than the territory it represents (the story, for which Manovich doesn't provide a reference, is 'On Exactitude in Science' [8]).

Comparing the database to narrative, Manovich describes them as 'natural enemies competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world' (225). While he suggests narratives don't usually demand 'algorithm-like behaviour from their readers', Manovich finds narratives similar to databases inasmuch as the reader has to 'uncover the underlying logic' of the text (225). For Manovich, new media objects arranged as databases (he offers CD-ROMs and websites by way of example) 'correspond to the data structure whereas narratives, including computer games, correspond to algorithms' (226). Manovich suggests that in programming, both database and algorithm are needed (which makes his earlier assertion about 'natural enemies' all the more infuriating) each is as important as the other but, he asks, is it the same in computer *culture*?

Here, Manovich is attempting to distinguish between interface and content: in the pre-computer age, he avers, 'the interface and the work were the same; in other words, the level of the interface did not exist' (227). Manovich needs to establish a distinction because he wants to separate interface from content in new media objects. While such a distinction may seem straightforward enough, there is a risk in treating the interface as something other than the work, or something other than part of the work, of implying that the interface is *merely* a way to access something within, however the interface might be thought of as much more than mere interface alone, as demonstrated, for example, by csszengarden. [9] Although Manovich considers the interface to be an example of variability, it is difficult to concur with his assertion that 'the database is the centre of the creative process in the computer age' (227).

Manovich uses his distinction to create what he calls 'a new formulation', namely 'the new media object consists of one or more interfaces to a database of multimedia material' (227). This, he asserts, places the opposition between database and narrative in a new light. Here, Manovich posits the narrative user as one who effectively follows links between records in a dataset, thus an interactive narrative (or

'hypernarrative') 'can then be understood as the sum of multiple trajectories through a database. A traditional linear narrative is one among many other possible trajectories' (227). While this is an interesting metaphor, it is just a metaphor using the terms of computer science to describe that which has previously been the preserve of 'the arts' or the humanities. I'm not sure we need to go as far as Manovich, however, in marginalizing the interface in order to legitimise a metaphor.

In considering navigable space, such as that constructed in 3-D computer games, which he calls 'genuinely original and historically unprecedented aesthetic forms' (244), Manovich compares and contrasts _Doom_ and _Myst_. These are similar in that both require the player to navigate space in order to undertake a quest which requires exploration and discovery. However, while for Manovich navigable space 'is something that transcends computer games' (248) -- and fans of Odysseus and Gawain, or the road movie will no doubt concur -- it is also 'another key form of new media' (252).

Manovich draws on theory from art history (e.g. Panofsky's notion of space) to discuss examples of navigable space, which include MIT's _Aspen Movie Map_ and Jeffry Shaw's _Legible City_. However, because of the original date of publication, 2001, _The Language of New Media_ was unable to consider the genre of game which puts navigable space to the fore, such as _Grand Theft Auto 3_ and its sequel, _GTA Vice City_, which provide fictional spaces, or _The Getaway_, which is set in central London.

Discussing the cinematography of Tamas Waliczky's _The Forest_ (1993) in terms of its 'liberat[ion of] the virtual camera from its enslavement to the simulation of humanly possible navigation' (261), Manovich explains: 'the virtual camera of _The Forest_ neither simulates natural perception nor does it follow the standard grammar of cinema's grammar: instead, it establishes a distinct system of its own' (262). Because this exegesis is directly applicable to machinima, it is all the more disappointing that Manovich doesn't give any attention to this particular new media form.

Asking 'why is navigable space so popular in new media?', Manovich relates it to Baudelaire's notion of the flaneur, likening the flaneur to one who is 'traversing a crowd of strangers', this *Gesellshaft* being 'the psychological price paid for modernization' (269). For Manovich, the 'Data

Dandy loves to display his private and totally irrelevant collection of data to other net users' (270), a description ideally suited to the activities and, perhaps, motivation, of the blogger. [10]

We cannot however, know for sure the motivations of a user, or what satisfactions or fears they encounter. However, this doesn't prevent Manovich from offering suggestions that seem to embody certainties on his part. As he confidently reported on the 'survival techniques' of the early cinema audience, he tells us too how his flaneuese finds peace and comfort in the datasphere:

'If the subject of modern society looked for refuge from the chaos of the real world in the stability and balance of the static composition of a painting, and later in the cinematic image, the subject of the information society finds peace in the knowledge that she can slide over endless fields of data, locating any morsel of information with the click of a button, zooming through file systems and networks. She is comforted not by an equilibrium of shapes and colours, but by the variety of data manipulation operations at her control.' (274-275)

This flight of fancy is predicated on a very big 'if'. Manovich cannot know with any certainty what 'comfort' the flaneur/flaneuse may derive from surfing. The reader needs to be wary of his tendency toward hyperbole, that here presents an image of an idealized user 'zooming though file systems and networks' that owes something to the fictive representations of cyberspace from films like _Tron_ and novels like _Neuromancer_. Less contentiously, Manovich suggests 'computer spaces have a long way to go' (281) in terms of the continuing development of immersive environments.

What is Cinema?

The thrust of the first five chapters is a consideration of new media in light of ideas derived primarily from film studies. The final chapter looks the other way, asking: 'how does computerisation affect our very concept of the moving image?' (287) The chapter is divided into two sections. The first, 'Digital Cinema and the History of a Moving Image', considers the

relationship of cinema to animation, while the second section, 'The New Language of Cinema', looks at 'examples of new directions for film language' (292).

'Computer media redefine the very identity of cinema' (294) because, as Manovich explains, 'given enough time and money, almost everything can be simulated on a computer; filming physical reality is but one possibility' (295). However, pre-computer age cinema yields examples of options other than 'physical reality'. _Avant garde_ and experimental films aside, animation (such as _Snow White_, _Bambi_, _Fantasia_, as well as non-Disney animation) springs immediately to mind.

Manovich considers the implications for cinema 'now [it is] possible to generate photorealistic scenes entirely on a computer' (295), which is not entirely unproblematic, unless one accepts Manovich's starting point, that cinema is, at root, a realist (indexical) medium. For Manovich 'cinema can no longer be distinguished from animation. It is no longer an indexical media technology but rather a sub-genre of painting' (295).

Again, Manovich forces a distinction to make a point. It's not clear how, and nor does he make the case, that cinema is, should be, or can be distinct from animation; that the indexical possibilities of cinematic recording techniques should be emphasised or privileged over any other (such as animation or abstract cinema). It's difficult to talk as Manovich does, of 'traditional' film technology when the industry and the technology is still relatively new and continues to develop. There's an unstated teleological assumption at work that film has a direction and a purpose that Manovich is somehow privy to, and this is now changed somehow by digital technology 'destroying cinema's identity as a media art' (295). This appears to be at odds with the history of cinema Manovich sketches in, emphasising as he does the illusionistic nature of early cinema and the optical toys from which it developed, yet concluding 'once cinema was stabilised as a technology . . . all references to its origins in artifice [were] delegated to cinema's bastard relative, its supplement and shadow -- animation' (298) until, 'in the 1990s', computer technology causes 'these marginalized techniques [to move] to the centre' (300). The key, I think, to Manovich's reading of cinema lies in his sense that twentieth-century avant-garde filmmaking should be excluded from consideration because it is outside ''normal' filmmaking procedures and the intended uses of film technology' (306), until that is, avant-garde strategies are 'legitimised by technology' (307). Manovich

appears to see the problem with his argument and then attempts to gloss over it: 'in retrospect we can see that twentieth-century cinema's regime of visual realism, the result of automatically recording visual reality, was only an exception, an isolated accident in the history of visual representation, which has always involved, and now again involves, the manual construction of images' (308).

Manovich considers the way in which non-linear narrative and effects, such as those found in music video, and the 'new visual language' that evolved in CD-ROM design, has filtered through to cinema. Again, his discussion would be enhanced by an awareness of machinima. For example, his description of an effect in the game _7th Guest_ -- 'a camera follows a complex curve, as if mounted on a virtual dolly' (313) -- might not only be applied to the machinima film _Anachronox_, but also developed further in light of the distinct/ive narrative and non-narrative artefacts that are quite different from each other, yet which are all examples of machinima. [11]

Nonetheless, he does, however, offer a wide range of interesting and innovative examples (e.g. Olga Liliana's interactive narratives at www.teleporticia.org; and the 'ASCII films' of Vuk Cosic, although the URL Manovich cites for Cosic's work leads, in fact, into a site offering pornography with a torrent of pop-up pages and premium rate dialer-downloads).

The discussion of compression might acknowledge, if only in a footnote, the development and rapid spread of DIVX. Originally a hackers improvement of Microsoft code, it has, over time, been completely rewritten and is now a widely adopted and legitimate implementation of the MPEG-4 standard. This omission might be explained by Manovich's emphasis on QuickTime: while QuickTime allows video clips to be played on the two most widely used computer platforms, Apple Mac and PC, QuickTime doesn't support AVI which is the file type generally (but not exclusively) produced with the DIVX codec. [12]

In the final section of the last chapter, Manovich shifts emphasis to consider the way in which digital effects have helped to 'redefine' Hollywood cinema since the 1990s. Again, less contentiously, Manovich sees 'live action footage' as 'raw material to be manipulated'; in other words, 'production becomes just the first stage of postproduction' (302-

303).

In seeking to provide a critique of the whole work, I have identified some of the ways in which Manovich's prose doesn't quite (to me, anyway) yield the expected meaning. This may be a fussiness on my part over stylistics, as the anticipated meaning is usually to be found some time later. And while I have suggested that Manovich has undertaken an ambitious project, on a task akin to mucking out the Augean stables, at the same time I have suggested there are places where the book has not quite done enough: places where I would like to see some further discussion, some clarification in passages where, for me, the argument seems to move too quickly. Elsewhere, I have identified areas left unexplored that might usefully have been developed. This is not to, as Enid and Becky from _Ghost World_ might have it, 'accentuate the negative', but is simply a subjective critique of an ambitious work. Overall, Manovich's book *is* useful and thought-provoking, even if it does contain some irritations in style and pacing. I have already ordered a library copy, and I look forward to a revised second edition.

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Notes

1. Extracts from reviews of _The Language of New Media_ posted on Manovich's website <http://www.manovich.net/LNM>.

2. The website doesn't really function as a standalone resource, rather it is very much an adjunct to the book: <http://www.manovich.net/LNM_SITE_NEW/lnm_main.html>.

3. See, for example: 'Long Hours a National Disgrace', BBC News (Business), 4 February 2002 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/1799518.stm>.

4. See <http://xanadu.com>.

5. For a discussion of the form and some examples, see, for example, Katie Salen, 'Telefragging Monster Movies', in Lucien King, ed., _Game On: The History and Culture of Video Games_ (Laurence King: London, 2002) pp. 98-111.

6. See <http://www.machinima.com>.

7. See <http://applications.sony-europe.com/avit.html?lang=uk>.

8. Borges, _Collected Fictions_ (Penguin: London, 1999).

9. See <http://www.csszengarden.com>.

10. Blogs, or web logs, are online journals. See _The Guardian_, Special Report: Weblogs <http://www.guardian.co.uk/online/weblogs/0,14024,1076754,00.html>.

11. See, for example, the camera movement in the opening sequence of part one of _Anachronox_, but also compare the quite different artefacts below that are all examples of machinima: _Anachronox_ (2002) <http://www.machinima.com/films.php?id=231>; _Hardly Workin'_ (Ill Clan, 2001) <http://www.illclan.com/movies.htm>; and _Ozymandias_ (Strange Company, 2000) <http://www.strangecompany.org/Ozymandias>, or <http://www.planetquake.com/polycount/guplicity/3d_ozzy.shtml>.

12. See <http://www.divx.com>.

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Eddie Duggan, 'Mucking Out Augean Stables with Systematic Rigour: Manovich's _The Language of New Media_', _Film-Philosophy_, vol. 8 no. 19, June 2004 <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol8-2004/n19duggan>.

See also:

Michael Truscello, 'The Birth of Software Studies: Lev Manovich and Digital Materialism', _Film-Philosophy_, vol. 7 no. 55, December 2003 <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol7-2003/n55truscello>.

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