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Multimedia metaphors: The film and literature hybrid of videopoetry

Anne Binder and Nancy West

My research examines both the creation of and theory behind the widely neglected art of videopoetry. Videopoetry is a filmic form of poetry that combines a written or spoken text with visuals and multiple audio tracks to produce a multi-sensual approach to a poetic work. The idea of film as a poetic medium has long been explored; early avant-garde artists and filmmakers of the 1920's through the 1940's created film poems, films that did not necessarily contain a poetic text but that could be recognized as containing poetic images and relationships. Videopoems borrow many of the filmic techniques and rhythms pioneered by these modernist film poets, but include a poetic text as the film's focus. Currently, increasing numbers of poets and media artists are able to use inexpensive digital technology to create videopoems, some of which are showcased annually at the Vancouver Videopoem Festival. In my research, I review the art form's evolving role and, drawing from Scott MacDonald's recent article on the development of videopoetry, reconsider his view of videopoems as new "editions" of the original poem. By applying recent novel to film adaptation theory work by Robert Stam, Linda Hutcheon, and other scholars to videopoetry, I construct another lens for videopoems, suggesting that they be viewed not as the same poems simply "re-published," but as adaptations: intentional revisitations of works modified to suit new conditions. Thus, these works are not replications of the original texts, but visual and audio representations of poetic constructs and re-presentations of the adapted texts in a new medium. In order to understand the role of videopoetry from both academic and creative angles, I have also filmed and edited a few short videopoems of my own based on the poems of W. S. Merwin and Kathleen Flenniken.

