Design Terms: Roots & Etymology

In March 2018, Merriam-Webster's Dictionary added 850 new words to their online database, including "cryptocurrency," "microfinance" and "glamping." We thought we'd take a look at some of our most used words, and the roots and evolutions for common design and artistic terms.

Though they might seem static and solid, language and words are fluid and constantly evolving. In March 2018, Merriam-Webster's Dictionary added 850 new words to their online database, including "cryptocurrency," "microfinance" and "glamping." We thought we'd take a look at some of our most used words, and the roots and evolutions for common design and artistic terms - even where possible tracing their roots to the ancient Proto-Indo-European language (the theorized predecessor and parent of many modern languages)! The roots of the words give amazing hints at their past and how the way we use them has evolved.

Picture
We've heard "a picture is worth a thousand words," but where does the come from? Though there is debate, most likely the phrase comes from the original Chinese expression "Hearing something a hundred times isn't better than seeing it once."

The word itself has a long history:
Peyḱ (Proto-Indo-European, Neolithic Age) = "spot or color"

- Pingere (Latin)= To paint
- Pictura (Latin) = The art of painting, a painting
- Pycture (Middle English)

Photography
A "photograph" could have easily been known nowadays as a photogene, heliograph, or my personal favorites: sunprint or sun-picture.

> *"Hold up bae, I just want to take a sunprint of my avocado toast"*

The origin of the word goes much farther than the 1820's, when the first photos were taken (some say Robert Cornelius' Selfie, 1839, was the first photographic portrait ever taken and possibly the first light picture ever):

- Phōs (φῶς) (Greek) = Light
- Phōtos (φωτός) (Greek) = Photo

- Graphé (γραφή) (Greek) = Representation through lines, drawing
- Phōtos + Graphé = Drawing with light

Video
- Weyd (noun) & Widēō (verb) (Proto-Indo-European) - To know, to see
- Video (Latin) - I see (following the same form of "audio")

Pixel
A combination of either "picture element" or "picture cell"

I'm a fan of the current iteration. The other forms would be a mouthful: "If you increase the picture cell count for that sunprint that would be great."

Animation
Though some of the earliest forms of animation date back to 1908 (such as Émile Cohl's Fantasmagorie), they were originally called "cartoons," before their popularity elevating them to "animation" around 1912.

- Ane (Proto-Indo-European) = To breath
- Anima (Latin) = Life, breath
- Animare, Animatio, animationem (Latin) = Action of imparting life

Advertisement
> *"Yet doth he give us bold advertisement, / That with our small conjunction we should on, / To see how fortune is disposed to us"*

So remarks Hotspur in Shakespeare's Henry IV. In the modern world of marketing though, this word has taken on new meanings, and come a long way from its beginnings:

- Ad (Latin) = To, toward
- Vertere (Lattin) = To turn
- Advertere, advertiss (Latin) = To direct one's attention to, to turn toward
- Avertie, advertir (Old French) = to make aware, to call attention
- Avertissement (Old/Middle French) = A statement calling attention to or warning

Font
This word interestingly has stayed very close to its physical origins. Long before digital printing, letters had to be imprinted on the page with ink and pressure. Even with printers (another word with a connection!) and PCs, the language we use has stayed close to home.

- Fonte (Middle French) - something that has been melted, a casting

Design
This word has a long history, coming from the combination of two Latin words, de- and sign

- Sekw- (Proto-Indo-European) = To follow
- Signare (Latin) = To mark
- Signum (Latin) = identifying mark, symbol
- Signe (Old French) = sign, mark
- Sign = Gesture or motion of the hand (early 13th cent. definition). Possibly a shortening of "ensign"
- De- (Latin) = down, from
- Desegnare (Latin) or disegno, disignare (Italian) = designate, appoint
- Desseign (Middle French) = purpose, project

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And what about us?
The name Easle was inspired by the classic easel behind so many painters' and artists' work. Supportive, always there, they are something you can count on for whatever your project or idea. That is exactly what we work to do.

Thus, "Easle" was born. Who knows, maybe in a few years time Miriam Webster's will be adding us to the dictionary.