

digital currents: art in the electronic age
margot lovejoy



Society of the spectacle

With roots effectively reaching back into the 1940s, television is no longer merely an activity of the culture. It is a powerful agent of culture – an electronic conduit via cable, network, and satellite services to a global public which is increasingly dependent on electronically communicated ideas and information.

The phenomenon of communications technology has created a different kind of meaning, not only in impacting on personal life but in the way culture as a whole is produced and experienced. A mass audience of millions participating collectively in powerful moments in real time, watching the same images – the historic moonwalk, the 9/11 attack, a world cup soccer final – before the perfectly regulated circuitry of television, is a major collective perceptual experience.

Guy de Bord, writing about commercial television in his *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967, spoke about it as part of a dark vision.

The spectacular character of modern industrial society has nothing fortuitous or superficial about it; on the contrary, this society is based on the spectacle in the most fundamental way. For the spectacle, as the perfect image of the ruling economic order, ends are nothing and development is all – although the only thing into which the spectacle plans to develop is itself.¹¹



Figure 4.16. Daniel Reeves, production still on location for *Smothering Dreams*, 1981.

In this powerful videotape based on autobiographical experience, Reeves weaves myth with the reality of organized violence as seen through the eyes of a soldier and the imagination of a child. In this production still, we see Reeves shooting on location. The work was broadcast on PBS in 1981.

(Electronic Arts Intermix; Photo: Debra Schweitzer)

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'Delineates the relationship between today's electronic technologies and cultural change, thereby formulating a comprehensive and forceful social philosophy of our technical civilization.'

**Dr. Joseph Nechvatal, artist, writer, and Professor,
School of Visual Arts, New York**

Margot Lovejoy's *Digital Currents* provides a much needed analysis of the art-historical roots and the larger cultural and social context for understanding art in the electronic age.'

**Christiane Paul, curator, Whitney Museum of
American Art**

'Provides a strong overview of electronic media artists, as well as images from their projects. Its mix of visual documentation and clear writing about the works in suitable depth is a great aid in providing a foundation for understanding digital art. Indeed, it could be called "the bible" of electronic art...'

**Mary Flanagan, Professor, Film and Media Studies,
Hunter College, CUNY**

Digital Currents: Art in the Electronic Age surveys the impact of video and digital technologies on visual culture and artistic practice, and examines the revolutionary changes taking place in the role of the artist as social communicator. Margot Lovejoy's richly detailed account traces how new media technologies have affected the way artists see, think, and work, and the ways in which their productions are distributed and communicated, from the discovery of photography to the present day.

Individual chapters address:

- the pioneering formal and aesthetic innovations of modernist artists such as Rodchenko, Moholy-Nagy, and Duchamp
- the major change in cultural consciousness with the arrival of electronic media and the shift to postmodern strategies of artmaking

- the interdisciplinary expanded works of artists of the postmodern, electronic era such as Matthew Barney, Robert Wilson, Christian Marclay, and Isaac Julien

Lovejoy goes on to describe new forms of representation and practice associated with art of the electronic age, including video and digital installations, net art, viewer participation, and virtual, augmented reality, discussing the work of a wide range of artists, including Nam June Paik, Bruce Nauman, Bill Viola, Jenny Holzer, Laurie Anderson, Shirin Neshat, Char Davies, Janet Cardiff, Jeffrey Shaw, and Krzysztof Wodjicko.

This third expanded and updated edition also features:

- a new chapter on the Internet and one on transaesthetics with new sections on sound, narrative, science, and art
- over 200 illustrations, including 12 in color
- extended captions that explain and contextualize the artworks discussed

Margot Lovejoy, Professor of Visual Arts at the State University of New York at Purchase, has received, amongst many other honors, an Arts International Grant and a Guggenheim fellowship for her multimedia work. She has exhibited internationally and was recently featured in New York's Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial. She has lectured widely on art and technology issues.

This book has a vital companion website designed by Margot Lovejoy and Jacques Tege at www.digitalcurrents.com

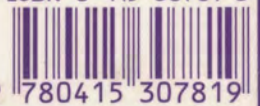
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