NEW MEDIA ANXIETY:
ART HISTORY AND THE PROBLEM
OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY

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by
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New media forms intensify the effects of modern technology on both artistic production and its canonical scholarly reception. Indeed, advancements in computational technologies may have transcended the perspective of a mechanical era, ushering in new questions of aura and agency as regards new media versus high art. Both compelling and problematic for their largely military-industrial origins, electronics and the digital stretch the limits of art theory, criticism, and practice. This investigation considers the influence of modern technology upon contemporary artistic production, and how scholars assimilate that art into a cogent intellectual history.

Chapter One introduces a historical context for the canonical reception of advanced technological media. Beginning with the problem of photography and its split nature as both a mechanical tool for ‘scientific’ observation and an expressive medium for an artist’s unique vision, I identify the reverberations of this dualism on subsequent artistic movements and advanced technological forms. Surveying the reception of art and technology in the American academy, this chapter chiefly considers the significance of high art/low culture debates to prevailing canonical responses. Chapter Two brings the dimension of commercialism to this discussion, through an examination of its role in defining the artistic avant-garde. By analyzing the so-called collapse between aesthetic and commercial objects under the duress of capitalism, this writing elucidates the western canon’s theoretical apprehensions around electronics and the digital. Chapter Two also considers the impact of
postmodern identity politics and social reality of globalization, relative to the foregoing discussions. Chapter Three analyzes what ideological discord is stirred in the coming together of the socially-defined minority artist and media art, especially as it relates to global movements in contemporary production. Finally, it offers a model of embodied engagement with electronics and the digital that brings the intellectual vitality of new media studies to the rich legacy of art history.

This exploration offers a language for art that is deeply engaged with media technologies, and a theoretical bridge that links the resources of recent new media scholarship with dominant western art historical discourses. In analyzing the anxious interface of art and technology, this work acknowledges their symbiotic relationship.
Soraya Murray was born in Inglewood, California in 1971. She arrived at Cornell University with a bachelor’s degree in painting from Occidental College, Los Angeles, and a master’s in visual arts from the University of California, Irvine. Her writings have appeared in various publications including *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art, Art Journal*, and *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. In August 2006, Ms. Murray began teaching in the School of Art and Art History at the University of South Florida, Tampa.
This is dedicated to my parents

GERHARD BERNHARD FRANZ MUHLERT
GRETA GLORIA MUHLERT
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION:</td>
<td>TECHNOLOGY AS MONSTROSITY IN CANONICAL ART HISTORY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE:</td>
<td>ART, TECHNOLOGY, AND HIGH ART/LOW CULTURE DEBATES IN CANONICAL AMERICAN ART HISTORY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO:</td>
<td>GLOBALIZATION, MEDIA ARTS, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF AVANT-GUARDISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE:</td>
<td>EMBODIED DIGITAL AESTHETICS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION:</td>
<td>TOWARD AN ART HISTORY OF NEW MEDIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX:</td>
<td>ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1  Eadweard Muybridge, *Descending Stairs and Turning Around*, from series *Animal Locomotion*, 1884-1885. 236

Figure 1.2  Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, oil on canvas, 1912. 237

Figure 1.3  Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, oil on canvas, 1912. 238

Figure 1.4  A. Michael Noll, *Gaussian Quadratic*, computer-generated image, 1963. 239

Figure 1.5  Stephen Rusell with Peter Samson, Martin Graetz, Wayne Witanen, Alan Kotok, and Dan Edwards, *Spacewar!* , computer game, designed at MIT on DEC PDP-1 assembler, 1962. 240

Figure 1.6  Andy Warhol, *Self-Portrait*, photograph of image created on Commodore Amiga 1000 computer using Graphicraft software, 1986. 241

Figure 1.7  Nam June Paik, *Magnet TV*, black and white television with magnet, 1965. 242

Figure 1.8  Nam June Paik, *Zen for TV*, black and white television, 1963-1975. 243

Figure 1.9  Vito Acconci, *Centers*, performance on video, 20 minutes, 1971. 244

Figure 1.10  Joan Jonas, *Left Side, Right Side*, performance on video, 1972. 245

Figure 1.11  Dan Graham, *Present Continuous Past*, installation view, 1974. 246

Figure 1.12  Gary Hill, *Hole in the Wall*, installation at the Woodstock Artists Association, Woodstock, NY 1974. 247
Figure 1.13  

Figure 2.1  
Jodi (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans), www.jodi.org, screenshot.  

Figure 2.2  
Jodi (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans), map.jodi.org, screenshot.  

Figure 2.3  
Jodi (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans), 404.jodi.org, screenshot.  

Figure 2.4  

Figure 2.5  

Figure 2.6  
suek won, untitled photograph of mixing board with engineers.  

Figure 2.7  

Figure 2.8  
Film still from *Time Code*, directed by Mike Figgis, 2000.  

Figure 2.9  

Figure 2.10  
Chantal Ackerman, *From the Other Side*, installation of eighteen monitors and two screens, 2002.  

Figure 2.11  

Figure 2.12  
Steve McQueen, *Western Deep*, 8mm film transferred to DVD, color, 25 minutes, 2002.  

Figure 2.13  

Figure 3.1  
Lisa Leone, untitled photograph of DJ.  

Figure 3.2  
Figure 3.3  Lynn Hershman-Leeson, *Teknolust*, filmstill, 2002.  264
Figure 3.4  Martin Bruner, John Gerrard, Andreas Jalovec, Christopher Lindinger, Pascal Maresch, and Erwin Reitböck, *Networked Portrait*, touch screens, 2003.  265
Figure 3.5  Georges Seurat, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, oil on canvas, 1884-1886.  266
Figure 3.6  Georges Seurat, *A Sunday Afternoon on The Island of La Grande Jatte*, detail, oil on canvas, 1884-1886.  267
Figure 3.7  CAVE environment, Cornell University, 2005.  268
Figure 3.8  Jason Salavon, *The Top 25 Grossing Films of All Time (2x2)*, digital video projection with audio, 2 hours and 20 minutes looped, installation view, 2001.  269
Figure 3.9  John F. Simon, Jr., *Every Icon*, 1997.  270
Figure 3.10  Jeffrey Shaw, *The Legible City (Manhattan)*, digital installation, 1989.  271
Figure 3.11  Jeffrey Shaw, *The Distributed Legible City*, 1998.  272
Figure 3.12  Roy Ascott, *Change Painting*, plexiglas, wood, oil, 66x21, 1959. Two views.  273
Figure 3.13  Lee Bul, Partial installation view of *The Monster Show*, At Artsonje Center, Seoul, 1998, showing cyborgs in cast silicone, polyurethane filling, paint pigment, and monsters in fabric, cotton filling, silicone.  274
Figure 3.14  Lee Bul, *Monster Drawings: No. 1*, india ink on semi-translucent paper, 1998.  275
Figure 3.15  Lee Bul, *Monster Drawings: No. 3*, india ink on semi-translucent paper, 1998.  276
Figure 3.16  Lee Bul, *Monster Drawings: No. 6*, india ink on semi-translucent paper, 1998.  277
Figure 3.17  Lee Bul, *Sorry for suffering—You think I’m a puppy on a picnic?*, performance, 1990.  278
Figure 3.18  Lee Bul, *Cyborg Drawing (Red I)*, 1996.  279
| Figure 3.19 | Lee Bul, *Amaryllis*, hand-cut polyurethane panels on aluminum armature, enamel coating, 1999. |
| Figure 3.20 | Lee Bul, *Chrysallis*, hand-cut polyurethane panels on aluminum armature, enamel coating, 2000. |
| Figure 3.21 | Lee Bul, *Supernova*, hand-cut polyurethane panels on aluminum armature, enamel coating, 2000. |
| Figure 3.22 | Paul Pfeiffer, *Live Evil*, digital video loop, 2002. |
| Figure 3.23 | Robert Lazzarini, *payphone*, anodized aluminum, stainless steel, Plexiglas, and silk-screened graphics, 2002. |
| Figure 3.24 | Lilla LoCurto and William Outcault, *thinskinned_b6_b7_l2*, from *thinskinned*, pigment print 24x36”, detail, 2004. |
| Figure 3.25 | Lee Bul, *Live Forever*, installation view at the Fabric Workshop and Museum, 2001. |
| Figure 3.26 | Lee Bul, *Live Forever I*, karaoke pod closed, 2001. |
| Figure 3.27 | Lee Bul, *Live Forever I*, karaoke pod open, 2001. |