culture, and at the heart of these changes are velocity and volume; which is to say that ideas and information now circulate so quickly, and in such abundance, that there’s little chance that any of them will stick, will develop the traction, the constituency, to become influential, to become—and this suddenly sounds very last century—an ism.

Consider modernism—the ism that so fundamentally shaped twentieth-century theory and practice. As a movement modernism arose in the twenties (more or less); in the thirties it came to America via exhibition and emigration; in the late forties it emerged as the leading design idiom for the atomic age, and in the fifties and sixties it triumphed as our national style. For half a century, then, modernism functioned as an organizing idea, or set of ideas, providing a framework for practice, a narrative for history, a central ideology (and then orthodoxy) for the discipline.

What I want to emphasize here is that this large and long influence was due not only to intellectual weight or aesthetic merit. It was due just as much to a cultural context in which the preeminent medium of intellectual exchange was laborious to produce, costly to market and distribute, and tightly managed by professionalized networks of editors and publishers. In the Gutenberg galaxy, publication was a privilege and a prize, authorship a distinction; output was more limited, the pace more measured. Ideas and arguments, words and images, had time to circulate, incubate, gain momentum, take hold.

This context—this system—is now fast receding, and the question of what we are gaining, and losing as we move definitively into the digital age will doubtless be argued for years. But it’s not too soon to see that we are experiencing not just the end of print’s dominance but also the end of a certain well centered and clearly structured intellectual and literary culture. None of the movements that followed modernism, not pomo or decon, has lasted long. Modernism might prove to be the last powerful ism (which is maybe why it continues to fascinate). And print culture, for so long the indispensable agent of intellectual life, now seems to have been not inevitable and essential but contingent. As the eerily prescient Marshall McLuhan put it in *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964): “It is the framework that changes with each new technology, and not just the picture within the frame.”

**NANCY LEVINSON**
Editor
*Places Journal: A Forum of Design for the Public Realm*

---

**Benefits and Caveats**

We all recognize the broad outlines of the changes that digitality is imposing on print culture, and as American newspapers go belly-up daily, the inevitability of those changes and the urgency of our own adaptations become ever clearer. For publications dealing with modern and contemporary arts such as *Art Journal*, the online realm presents tremendous opportunities as well as some real challenges at the practical level. While discussions about digitization have been underway for many years at *Art Journal*, including conversations held jointly with *JSAH*, we have so far taken a cautious approach.

First, the obvious benefits for *Art Journal* of publishing in the digital realm include, among other things, the capacity to stream moving images and sound, which could potentially allow a more adequate demonstration of arguments about time-based or proprioceptive projects; the ability to hyperlink to other web-based information, including images, texts, and media clips, which could obviate permissions costs for our authors; and a refined and media-sensitive approach to online and digital art projects. These are significant formal benefits, and they dovetail with the massive cultural shifts from print to visuality, from reading to scanning, from linear to parallel or networked thought wrought by the digital era. Additionally, certain practical benefits would seem to emerge as well, from broader and more readily global distribution, to ease of access, to reduced printing costs, to (potentially) a greener footprint for the *Journal*. There is also the possibility of linking peer-reviewed journal content, which has at least a six-month turnaround time from submission to print, with more immediate and informal formats such as blogs, frays, or even, though I find it hard to imagine, tweeting. And sharing a platform with other peer-reviewed journals such as the *JSAH* provides for the very interesting possibility of real collaborative adventures in scholarship in the future.

Yet all of the benefits of fully entering the web-based realm do come with caveats. Among the broadest concerns are these: Membership-driven organizations like the College Art Association rely in part upon the draw of subscriptions to their journals for revenue. And access to the internet is hardly global; it should more properly be thought of as primarily urban (hence the Obama administration’s push for a relayed national connectivity); it is also subject to censorship (see China). And, as *Art Journal* unfortunately discovered in 2008, international distribution comes with its risks. While we might like to think there is a global legal climate in which human rights to expression and thought have at least some nominal protections, in fact nation-states have their own laws and values, many of which seem, in
comparison with U.S. First Amendment rights, prohibitive, not to say punitive. So some complex gatekeeping will be necessary. Additionally, archiving in libraries for the time being still requires print on paper, which represents at best a versioning if not a duplication of production effort. Digital archives are by no means stable; bit rot is a real issue, as is the intense rate at which technology becomes outmoded. *Art Journal* is already “digitized” via JSTOR, of course, though there is a built-in delay on archiving. Critics may lament the cross-platform sameness of digital data, with everything from Schoenberg to Kiki Smith rendered in bits, but pragmatically this informatic flattening is actually rather textured. How will a journal with moving or hyperlinked content be archived, for instance? And what happens when the source file of that external content is moved?

There are other concerns as well, related to the culture of scholarly inquiry. While certain fields such as medicine have successfully moved major peer-reviewed publications into online formats, in the humanities some very fine online ventures struggle to gain scholarly recognition—I think in particular of the excellent peer-reviewed online journal *Papers of Surrealism*, but also of other serious publications such as the UK-based *Variant* (paper and online), Rochester’s *In/visible Culture*, and the French *Multitudes*, and still other very valuable loci of discussion such as *–empyre–*.

Indeed, many publication processes have been digital for quite some time already. In the print world, design has traditionally been done for the stable medium of paper, of course, but whereas it used to require typesetting, photographing, and actual cutting and pasting, increasingly nearly every element of production is rendered in digital form even before the design stage. I learned typesetting on a lead type machine but put myself through graduate school dropping Word files into Quark. Hot type and the wax roller have gone into the odd bin of publishing history, along with the rotary phone; non-repro blue seems headed there, too. At *Art Journal* the vast majority of submissions arrive and are read, reviewed, edited, proofed as digital files; almost all peer reviewers are identified and contacted via the internet and receive anonymized portable document files to review; practically all communication with authors, reviewers, my editorial board, and even the CAA is conducted via email; pictures—and often the rights to publish them—are digitally acquired; and so on. There are only three parts of our process that I can think of that still rely completely on paper: contracting, design review, and actual printing. Design review is usually done in a face-to-face meeting, a novel pleasure these days, but can also in a pinch be done via PDF exchange.

All of which is to say that the advantages afforded by going digital, which circulate around issues of speed, distribution, and cross-platform exchange, come with greater implications materially and intellectually. *Art Journal* applauds our sibling’s great leap forward and commends *JS&H’s* leadership role among our peers. We are cautiously peering into the future, too, but keep the great scrap heap that history is making of print culture and its paper trail in the corner of our eyes.

**JUDITH RODENBECK**  
Editor-in-chief  
*Art Journal*