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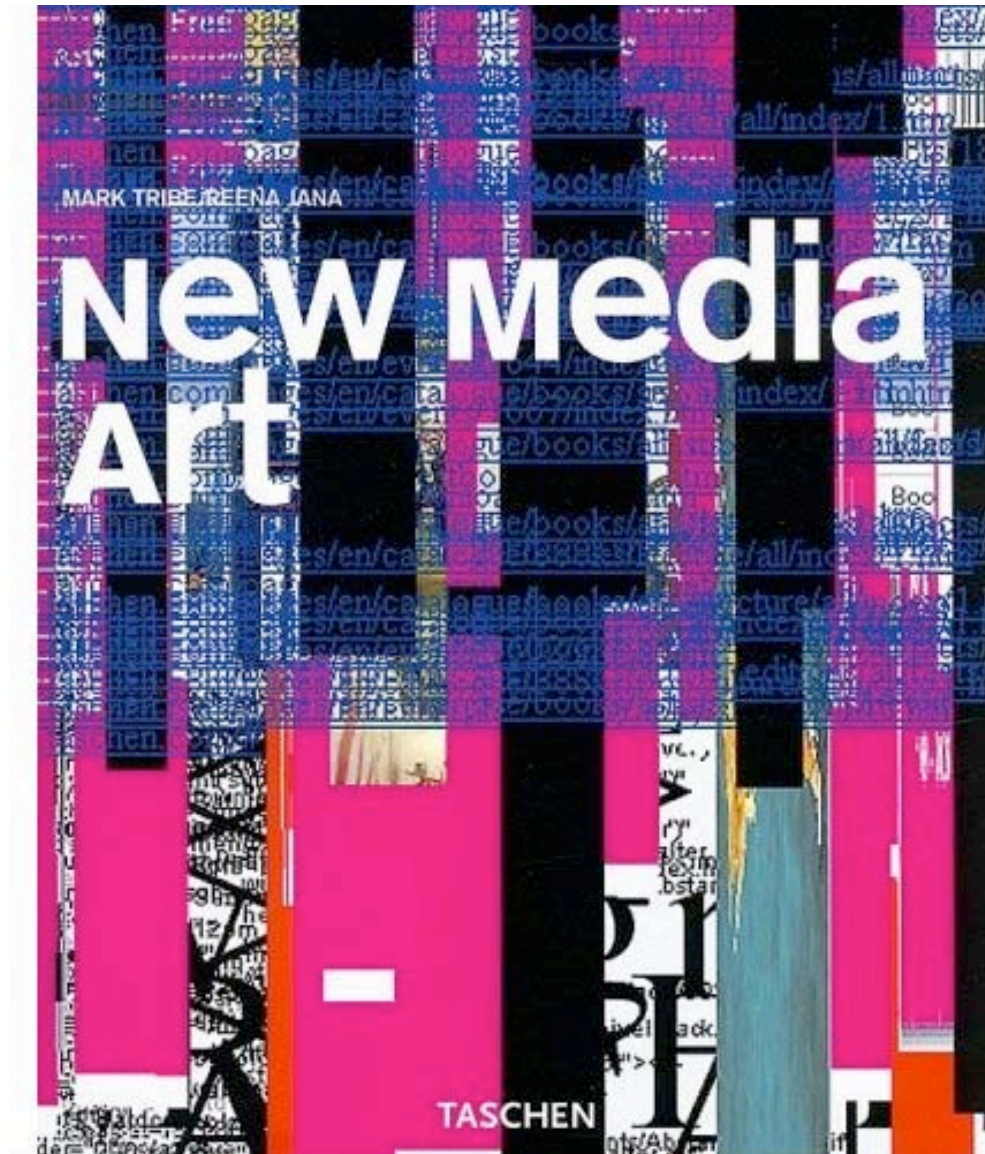
New Media Art (Taschen Basic Art Series)

, [Reena Jana](#) (Editor), [Uta Grosenick](#) (Editor)

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new media art

MARK TRIBE/REENA JANA
UTA GROSENICK (ED.)

TASCHEN

HONG KONG KÖLN LONDON LOS ANGELES MADRID PARIS TOKYO

Art in the age of digital distribution

"we explore the computer from inside, and mirror this on the net. when a viewer looks at our work, we are inside his computer... and we are honored to be in somebody's computer. you are very close to a person when you are on his desktop. i think the computer is a device to get into someone's mind."

Dirk Paesmans, Jodi

1. JODI

1995, website

2. HANNAH HÖCH

Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche
1920, collage, 114 x 90 cm
Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie

In 1993, at the start of the "dot com" boom, two European artists, Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans, paid a visit to California's Silicon Valley. When they returned home, they created *jodi.org*, a Web-site-as-art-work whose scrambled green text and flashing images seem to deconstruct the visual language of the Web. Heemskerk and Paesmans remixed found images and HTML scripts much as Dada artists played with the photographic imagery and typography of magazines and newspapers. *Jodi.org* changed the way many people think about the Internet, demonstrating that it didn't just provide a new way to publish information; it could also be an art medium like oil painting, photography, or video. Like other works of New Media art, *jodi.org* exploited an emerging technology for artistic purposes.

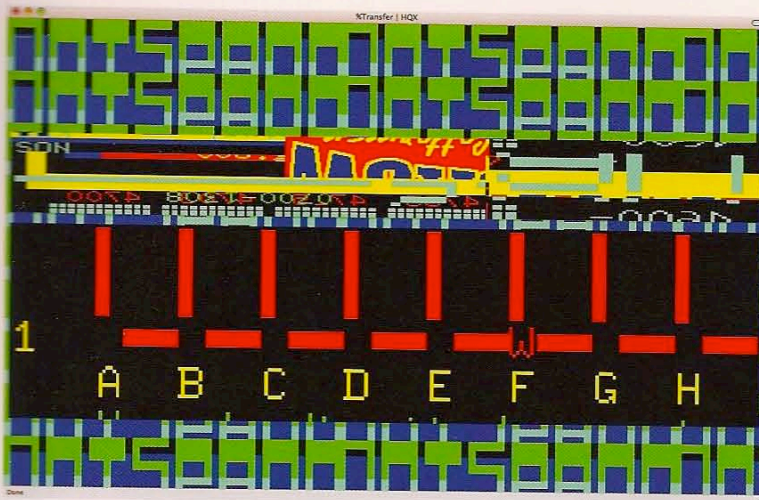
1994 was a watershed year in the linked histories of media technology and digital culture. The Netscape Corporation introduced the first commercial Web browser, signalling the Internet's transformation from a network used primarily by computer and academic researchers into a popular medium for personal communication, publishing and commerce. Terms like "the Net", "the Web", "cyberspace" and "dot com" soon became part of the international vernacular and a major societal shift appeared to be underway – from industrial production to information economies, from hierarchical organizations to distributed networks, from local

markets to global ones. The Internet meant different things to different people: to entrepreneurs, it was a way to get rich quick; to activists, it was a means of building grassroots support for political causes; to media magnates, it represented a new channel for distributing content. This last group used the term "new media" to describe digital publishing forms like CD-ROMs and the Web. To "old media" companies, these nascent technologies indicated a move away from traditional outlets, such as newspapers and television, to emerging forms of interactive multimedia. In 1994, major media companies – including the Hearst Corporation, which owned numerous American periodicals and television networks – formed "new media" divisions and trade groups such as the New York New Media Association were first organized. Around the same time, artists, curators and critics started to use the term "New Media art" to refer to works – such as interactive multimedia installations, virtual reality environments and Web-based art – that were made using digital technology.

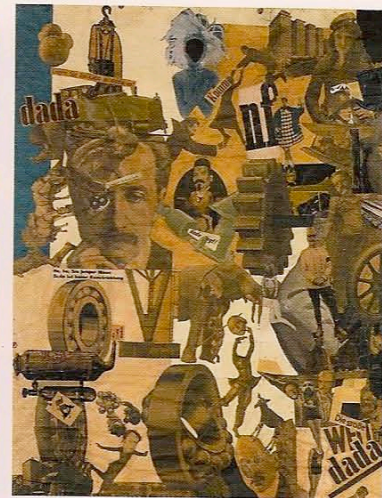
New Media art and older categorical names like "Digital art", "Computer art", "Multimedia art" and "Interactive art" are often used interchangeably, but for the purposes of this book we use the term New Media art to describe projects that make use of emerging media technologies and are concerned with the cultural, political and aesthetic possibilities of these tools. We locate New

1950 — Engineering Research Associates of Minneapolis built the ERA 1101, the first commercially produced computer

1954 — First meeting of SHARE, a group of IBM users



1



2

Media art as a subset of two broader categories: Art and Technology and Media art. Art and Technology refers to practices, such as Electronic art, Robotic art and Genomic art, that involve technologies which are new but not necessarily media-related. Media art includes Video art, Transmission art and Experimental Film – art forms that incorporate media technologies which by the 1990s were no longer new. New Media art is thus the intersection of these two domains. We chose to limit the scope of this book to work that was made after the term New Media art was broadly adopted in 1994 and to focus on works that are particularly influential, that exemplify an important domain of New Media art practice and that display an exceptional degree of conceptual sophistication, technological innovation, or social relevance.

Deciding what counts as media technology is a difficult task. The Internet, which is central to many New Media art projects, is itself composed of a heterogeneous and constantly changing assortment of computer hardware and software – servers, routers, personal computers, database applications, scripts and files – all governed by arcane protocols, such as HTTP, TCP/IP and DNS. Other technologies that play a significant role in New Media art include video and computer games, surveillance cameras, wireless phones, hand-held computers and Global Positioning System (GPS) devices. But New Media art is not defined by the technolo-

gies discussed here; on the contrary, by deploying these technologies for critical or experimental purposes, New Media artists redefine them as art media. In the hands of RSG, for example, data surveillance software, similar to that used by the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), becomes a tool for artistic data visualization. In addition to exploring the creative possibilities of this software, RSG develops a critique of surveillance technology and its uses.

art-historical antecedents

Although New Media art is, on one level, all about the new – new cultural forms, new technologies, new twists on familiar political issues – it did not arise in an art-historical vacuum. The conceptual and aesthetic roots of New Media art extend back to the second decade of the 20th century, when the Dada movement emerged in several European cities. Dada artists in Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Paris and New York were disturbed by what they perceived as the self-destructive bourgeois hubris that led to the First World War. They began to experiment with radically new artistic practices and ideas, many of which resurfaced in various forms and references throughout the 20th century. Much as Dada was in

1954 — Early computer music performance at MoMA by the founders of Computer Music Center at Columbia University
1963 — ASCII is first used
1964 — Marshall McLuhan's book "Understanding Media" is published

3. RSG

Prepared PlayStation

2005, manipulated commercial video game

4. ROY LICHTENSTEIN

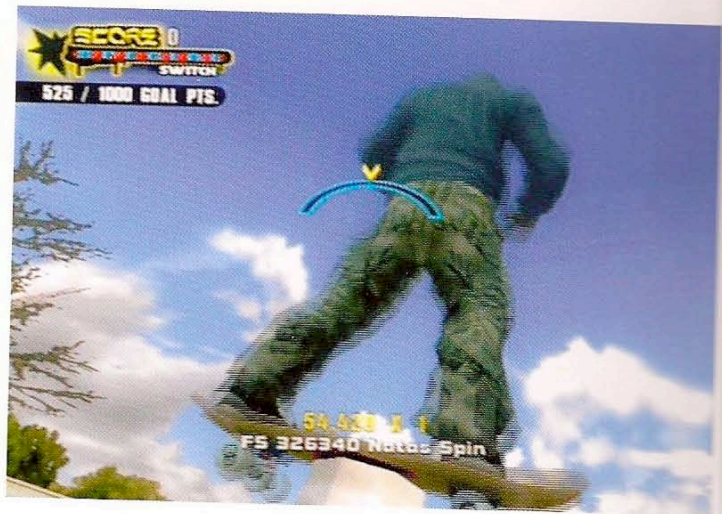
M-Maybe

1965, magna on canvas, 152 x 152 cm
Cologne, Museum Ludwig

5. THOMSON AND CRAIGHEAD

Trigger Happy

1998, web-based video game



part a reaction to the industrialization of warfare and the mechanical reproduction of texts and images, New Media art can be seen as a response to the information technology revolution and the digitization of cultural forms.

Many Dadaist strategies reappear in New Media art, including photomontage, collage, the readymade, political action and performance – as well as Dada artists' provocative use of irony and absurdity to jar complacent audiences. Fragmented juxtapositions of borrowed images and texts in works like Shu Lea Cheang's *Brandon* and Diane Ludin's *Genetic Response 3.0* (2001) are reminiscent of the collages of Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch and Francis Picabia.

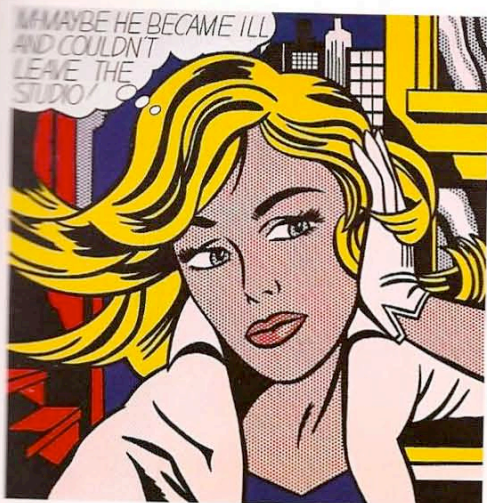
Marcel Duchamp's readymades prefigured countless New Media art works involving blank appropriation, from Alexei Shulgin's *WWWArt Award* to RSG's *Prepared PlayStation* (2005). The work of George Grosz, John Heartfield and other Berlin Dadaists who blurred the boundaries between art and political action serve as important precedents for activist New Media art projects like Electronic Disturbance Theater's *FloodNet* and Fran Illich's *Borderhack* (2000–2005). The performances of Emmy Hennings, Richard Huelsenbeck and others at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich set the stage for New Media performance artists such as Alexei Shulgin and Cary Peppermint. And echoes of Hugo

Ball's absurdist sound poems can be heard in radioqualia's *Free Radio Linux*.

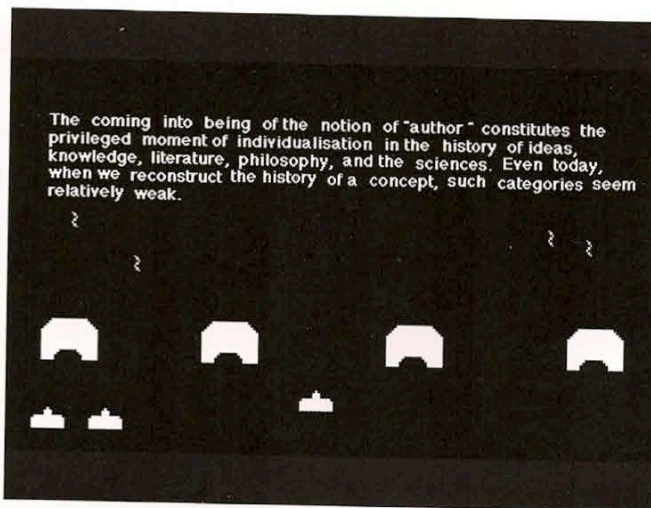
Pop art is another important antecedent. Like Pop paintings and sculptures, many works of New Media art refer to and are engaged with commercial culture. Much as Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein reproduced comic book images in his paintings, the New Media artist duo Thomson and Craighead sampled a video game (*Space Invaders*) in *Trigger Happy* (1998). Lichtenstein's meticulous emulation of the Benday dots used in comic books and other contemporary print media anticipates the work of artists like eBoy, who painstakingly construct images pixel by pixel. By reproducing images from comic books, advertisements and magazines in "high art" media like oil paint on canvas, Pop artists ultimately distanced themselves from the popular culture that inspired them. In contrast, New Media artists tend to work with the very media from which they borrow (e.g. games) rather than transposing them into forms that fit more neatly within art world conventions.

Whereas Pop art was strongly invested in the craft of making paintings and sculptures, Conceptual art, also a significant precursor to New Media art, focused more on ideas than on objects. New Media art is often conceptual in nature. John F. Simon, Jr.'s *Every Icon* (1996), for example, includes a Java applet

1966 — E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology, Inc.): performances by Robert Rauschenberg and Billy Kluver, e. g.
1967 — Sony releases the PortaPak, the first portable video camera



4



5

(a small programme that runs in a Web browser) that is programmed, over the course of many trillions of years, to run through every possible image that can be formed within a 32 x 32 grid. Much as Lawrence Weiner's "Indefinite Material Descriptions" (e.g. *One Quart Exterior Industrial Enamel Thrown on a Brick Wall*, 1964) don't need to be realized to exist as art works, Simon's *Every Icon* doesn't need to be seen (or completed) to be understood.

New Media art has strong parallels to Video art as well. The emergence of Video art as a movement was precipitated by the introduction in the late 1960s of the portable video camera, or PortaPak. Previously, Video art had been practiced by a few pioneers (most notably Nam June Paik). The availability of relatively inexpensive video equipment caught the attention of artists like Joan Jonas, Vito Acconci, William Wegman, Bill Viola and Bruce Nauman. A generation later, the introduction of the Web browser catalyzed the birth of New Media art as a movement. New Media artists saw the Internet much as their predecessors saw the portable video camera: as an accessible artistic tool that enabled them to explore the changing relationship between technology and culture.

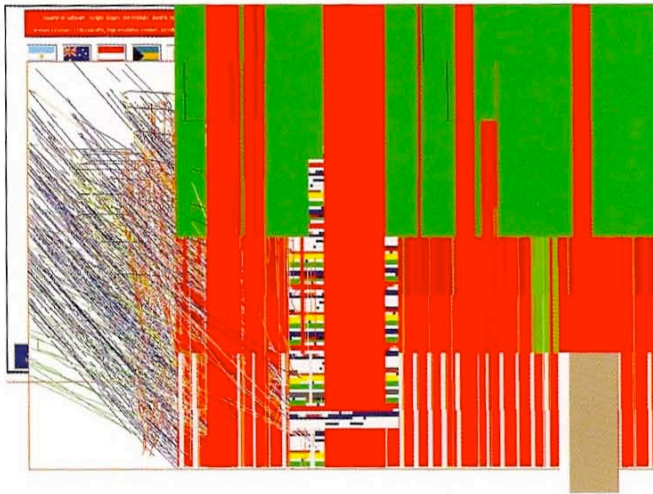
new media art as a movement

While the art of the 1970s was defined by distinct movements (e.g. Conceptual art, Feminist art, Land art, Media art, Performance art), the 1980s gave rise to an overheated art market and a plethora of micro-movements. Many of these, such as Neo-Expressionism and Neo-Conceptualism, were postmodern recuperations of previous moments in art history. After the art market crash that followed "Black Monday" (October 19, 1987, the day the United States' stock markets collapsed), these micro-movements lost their momentum and, by the early 1990s, had largely run their course, leaving a conspicuous void (although trends, such as identity politics and large-scale photography, could be identified). Fed by the growth of Masters of Fine Arts programmes and supported by the expansion of museums, contemporary art continued to thrive, but artistic practices did not cohere into definable movements. Painting was declared dead by critics, collectors and artists alike, as video and installation came to dominate international museum and biennial exhibitions. It was against this background of extreme fragmentation that New Media art emerged at the end of the 20th century.

From 1994 until 1997, when Net art was first included in the documenta X exhibition in Kassel, Germany, New Media art

1968 — "Cybernetic Serendipity" exhibition on view at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London

1970 — The exhibition "Software" at the Jewish Museum, New York, treats computer programming as a metaphor for conceptual art



**“software design
has a very sculptural
quality.”**

Mark Napier

6

existed in relative isolation from the rest of the art world. Email lists and Web sites served as alternative channels for the discussion, promotion and exhibition of New Media art work, enabling artists to form an online art scene that straddled the worlds of contemporary art and digital culture.

Because of its close connection to the Internet, however, from its inception New Media art was a worldwide movement. The Internet facilitated the formation of communities without regard for geography. The international nature of the New Media art movement reflected the increasingly global nature of the art world as a whole, as evidenced by the proliferation in the 1990s of international biennial exhibitions, including the Johannesburg Biennial and the Gwangju Biennial.

This shift was part of a much larger historical trend: the globalization of cultures and economies. Globalization was both a cause and an effect of the widespread use of the Internet, wireless telephones and other information and communication technologies. The emergence of a “global village” of the sort that Marshall McLuhan predicted in his 1962 book “The Gutenberg Galaxy” created unprecedented demand for these technologies, driving their rapid development and deployment. They also enabled globalization by facilitating international trade, multinational partnerships and the free exchange of ideas. New Media art

reflected these developments and explored their effects on society, much as video art served as a lens through which to understand television and its role in an increasingly media-centric culture.

Advances in personal computing hardware and software also played a significant role in the emergence of New Media art as a movement in the 1990s. Although personal computers had been on the market for more than a decade (the popular Apple Macintosh was introduced in 1984), it wasn’t until the mid-1990s that affordable personal computers were powerful enough to manipulate images, render 3D models, design Web pages, edit video and mix audio with ease. Equally important, the first generation of artists to have grown up with personal computers and video games (in the 1980s) was coming of age. These young artists were as comfortable with new media as they were with more traditional cultural forms.

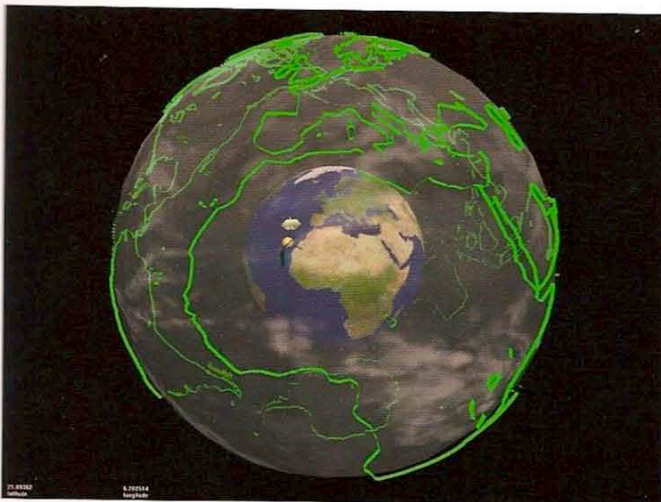
beginnings

For all these reasons – the emergence of a global art scene, advances in information technology and the familiarity of computing to a rising generation – artists were drawn to New Media art from other disciplines. Previously, computer-based art had been a

1971 — Floppy diskette invented by IBM

1972 — Atari video game company debuts with Pong

1974 — Nam June Paik coins the term “information superhighway”



6. MARK NAPIER

FEED

2001, website

7. JOHN KLIMA

Earth

2001, website

7

marginal field practised primarily by a small cadre of dedicated pioneers. The confluence of factors outlined above, along with a general sense of excitement and fascination with the potential of new technologies, created an unprecedented level of interest in new media on the part of painters, performance artists, activist artists, filmmakers, conceptual artists, etc. Whether fuelled by dot-com era enthusiasm or critical of what media theorist Richard Barbrook called the "California Ideology" (a heady cocktail of libertarianism and technological utopianism exemplified by the editorial voice of "Wired" magazine), artists around the world started to work with emerging media technologies in ways that were informed by the conceptual and formal qualities of their former disciplines. The painter Mark Napier, for example, who worked by day as a database software programmer for Wall Street financial firms, demonstrated his compositional sensibilities and his interest in colour in such early Internet-based works as *Shredder 1.0*.

For many artists, the advent of the Internet meant that computers were no longer merely tools for manipulating images, designing invitations to gallery shows and writing grant applications. Suddenly, computers became a gateway to an international community of artists, critics, curators, collectors and other art enthusiasts. Although some artists used the Internet as a way of disseminating documentation of work made in other media (e.g.

by putting a portfolio of scanned photographs on the Web), others approached the Internet as a medium in its own right or as a new kind of space in which to intervene artistically.

In 1995, a Slovenian artist named Vuk Cosic encountered the phrase "netart" in a garbled email message. Although the period, or "dot", was eventually dropped, the term "Net art" quickly caught on among artists and others in the nascent New Media art scene and became the preferred label for Internet-based artistic practices. It was not a coincidence that the term originated in Eastern Europe; many important artists in the early history of Net art were located there, like Alexei Shulgin and Olia Lialina, both based in Moscow. After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet Union, artists in that region had a unique perspective on the Internet's dot-com era transformation — they were living in societies making the transition from Socialism to Capitalism, a phenomenon that in many ways mirrored the privatization of the Internet.

Compared to other forms of New Media art, Net art was relatively inexpensive to produce, and therefore more accessible to artists with limited financial means. Many of the core technologies, such as the Apache Web server and Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), were available for free. All an artist needed to make Net art, besides ideas and technical skills, was a computer (even an

1976 — Steve Wozniak and Steven Jobs form the Apple Computer Company

1977 — Apple II is released, as is Tandy TRS-80 (which sells 10,000 units in first month on market)



“in the wake of sept 11, are games too ‘real’? or is the real converging with the simulation?”

Anne-Marie Schleiner

8. ALLAN KAPROW

18 Happenings in 6 Parts

1959, Reuben Gallery, New York

9. MARCEL DUCHAMP

Fountain

1917/1964, porcelain urinal, 33 x 42 x 52 cm
Stockholm, Moderna Museet

10. MICHAEL MANDIBERG

AfterSherriel.evine.com

2001, website

8

old one would do), a modem and an Internet connection. Although such connections were expensive for those who lived in countries where local telephone charges were high, many New Media artists found ways to access the Internet for free through public libraries, universities and corporations. For many New Media artists, like John Klima, day jobs as programmers or Web site designers provided access to the tools of production (computer hardware and software), speedy Internet connections, and, in some cases, valuable training.

Because it dovetailed with the rise of the Internet and concomitant cultural and economic shifts, Net art played a key role in the New Media art movement, but it was by no means the only type of New Media art practice. Other significant genres include Software art, Game art, New Media installation and New Media performance, although individual projects often blur the boundaries between these categories. Many works of Game art, for example, use Web-based technologies and are meant to be experienced online. Natalie Bookchin's *The Intruder* is simultaneously a work of Game art and a work of Net art, as is *Velvet-Strike* by Anne-Marie Schleiner, Brody Condon and Joan Leandre.

collaboration and participation

New Media artists often work collaboratively, whether in hoc groups or in long-term partnerships. Like films or theater productions, many New Media art projects – particularly the more complex and ambitious ones – require a range of technological and artistic skills to produce. The development of RSG's *Ca vore*, for example, involved the participation of several programmers, and numerous artists and artist groups have been invited to contribute to the project by building interfaces. Sometimes, however, the motivation to collaborate is more ideological than practical. By working in collectives, New Media artists challenge the romantic notion of the artist as a solitary genius. Eleven of the artists and groups discussed in the main section of this book identify themselves collectively. This is the case with *®™ark*, an artist group whose members used assumed names and a corporate identity as part of an elaborate critique of the special protections corporations receive under United States law. Other New Media art groups that work under a shared name include the Bureau of Inverse Technology, Fakeshop, Institute for Applied Automatic Mongrel and VNS Matrix.

The New Media art movement continued an art-historical shift from passive audience reception to active participation

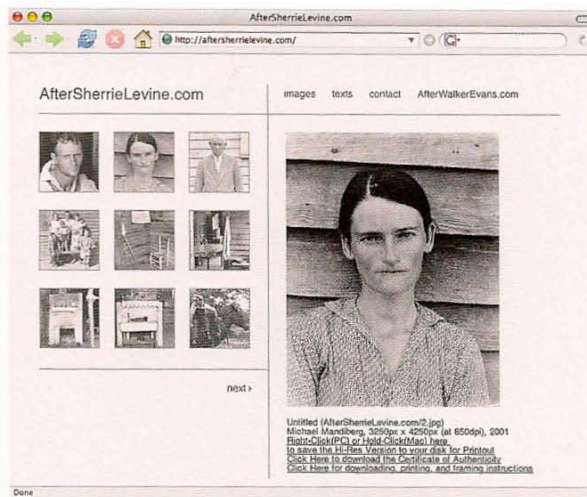
1979 — First Ars Electronica festival in Linz, Austria

1982 — “Time” magazine names “the computer” its Man of the Year

1981 — MS-DOS operating system debuts on IBM computers



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was previously exemplified by the Happenings of the 1960s and 1970s. In Allan Kaprow's seminal *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), for example, audience members were directed to specific seats in various rooms of the exhibition venue, where they followed strictly choreographed movements at particular times.

Many New Media art works, such as Jonah Brucker-Cohen's and Katherine Moriwaki's *UMBRELLA.net* and Golan Levin et al's *Dialtones: A Telesymphony*, involve audience participation. Other works of New Media art require audience members to interact with the work but not to participate in its production. Interactive New Media art responds to audience input but is not altered by it. Audience members may click on a screen to navigate through a web of linked pages or activate motion sensors that trigger computer programmes, but their actions leave no trace on the work itself. Each member of the audience experiences the piece differently based on the choices he or she makes while interacting with the work. In Olia Lialina's *My Boyfriend Came Back From the War*, for example, visitors click through a series of frames on a Web page to reveal images and fragments of text. Although the elements of the story never change, the way the story unfolds is determined by each visitor's own actions.

From appropriation to open source

Artists have always influenced and imitated one another, but in the 20th century various forms of appropriation, from collage to sampling, emerged as an alternative to ex nihilo creativity. Enabled by technologies of mechanical reproduction, artists began to use found images and sounds in their work. Hannah Höch's Dadaist photomontages, Marcel Duchamp's readymades, Andy Warhol's Pop art *Brillo Boxes*, Bruce Connor's Found Footage films and Sherrie Levine's Neo-conceptual remakes all reflected the changing status of artistic originality in the face of mass-produced culture.

In New Media art, appropriation has become so common that it is almost taken for granted. New media technologies such as the Web and file-sharing networks gave artists easy access to found images, sounds, texts and other media. This hyperabundance of source material, combined with the ubiquitous "copy" and "paste" features of computer software, further eroded the notion that creating something from scratch is better than borrowing it. In *After Sherrie Levine* (2001), New Media artist Michael Mandiberg takes appropriation to an almost absurd extreme. In 1979, Sherrie Levine re-photographed Walker Evans' classic Depression-era photographs of an Alabama sharecropper family. Mandiberg scanned images from a catalogue featuring Levine's photographs of Evans'

1983 — MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) debuts at the first North American Music Manufacturers show in Los Angeles

1984 — William Gibson's novel "Neuromancer" is published, coining the phrase "cyberspace"

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