New Media Art

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New Media Art

- Older names like "Digital art," "Computer art," "Multimedia art," and "Interactive art" are often used interchangeably.

- New Media art = 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.
Banksy piece auction
Historical roots

- 1920’s - the Dada movement emerged in several European cities (Zürich, Berlin, Cologne, Paris, and New York). Artists 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.

- Dada was 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.
Old and new

- Fragmented juxtapositions of borrowed images and texts in works like Shu Lea Cheang's *Brandon* and Diane Ludin's *Genetic Response System 3.0* (2001) are reminiscent of the collages of Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, and Francis Picabia.
Old and new

- New Media art works involving direct appropriation, e.g. Alexei Shulgin's WWWArt Award or RSG's Prepared PlayStation (2005) – inspired by Marcel Duchamp's readymades.
Old and new

Activist New Media art projects like Electronic Disturbance Theater's FloodNet and Fran Illich's Borderhack relate to 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.
Old and new- Pop Art

- Many works of New Media art refer to and are engaged with commercial culture. The New Media artist duo Thompson and Craighead sampled a video game (Space Invaders) in *Trigger Happy* (1998), very much like Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein reproduced comic book images in his paintings.
Conceptual art focused more on ideas than on objects. John F. Simon Jr.'s *Every Icon*, for example, includes a Java applet (a small program that runs in a Web browser) that is programmed to run through, over the course of many trillions of years, every possible image that can be formed within a 32 x 32 grid.

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.
New Media art and Video art

- The emergence of Video art as a movement was precipitated by the introduction in the late 1960s of the portable video camera, or PortaPak.

- 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

- 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, such as Neo-Expressionism and Neo-Conceptualism, were postmodern recuperations of previous moments in art history.
- by the early 1990s, these micro-movements lost their momentum and had largely run their course, leaving a void; contemporary art continued to thrive, but artistic practices did not cohere into definable movements.
- From 1994 to 1997, New Media art used E-mail 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.
- 1997- Net art was first included in the Documenta X exhibition in Kassel, Germany.
New Media art

- from its inception, it was a worldwide movement. The Internet facilitated the formation of communities without regard for geography; increasingly global nature of the art world as a whole.
- 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. New Media art reflected these developments and explored their effects on society.
- Mid-1990s - affordable personal computers were powerful enough to manipulate images, render 3D models, design Web pages, edit video, and mix audio with ease; the first generation of artists to have grown up with personal computers and video games (in the 1980s) was coming of age.
Beginnings

- 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 color in such early Internet-based works as Shredder 1.0.
- 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.
- computers became a gateway to an international community of artists, critics, curators, collectors, and other art enthusiasts.
- Many 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 in a garbled e-mail message. The term "Net art" quickly became the preferred label for Internet-based artistic practices. Many important artists in the early history of Net art were located in Eastern Europe, like Alexei Shulgin, and Olia Lialina, both based in Moscow. After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of 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.
Net art

- relatively inexpensive to produce
- many of the core technologies, such as the Apache Web server and Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) available for free.
- All an artist needed to make Net art, besides ideas and technical skills, was a computer (even an old one would do), a modem, and an Internet connection.
- many New Media artists found ways to access the Internet for free through public libraries, universities, and corporations.
- For many New Media artists, 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.
Other significant genres

- Software art,
- Game art,
- New Media installation,
- New Media performance,

Individual projects often blur the boundaries between these categories.

- many works of Game art 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.
Themes & Tendencies
1. Collaboration & Participation

- many New Media art projects require a range of technological and artistic skills to produce.
- **Carnivore** by Radical Software Group involved the participation of several programmers, artists and artist groups. By working in collectives, New Media artists challenge the romantic notion of the artist as a solitary genius.
- ®Tmark is 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 Autonomy, Mongrel, and VNS Matrix.
Many New Media art works involve audience participation, (see UMBRELLA.net by Brucker-Cohen et al.; Dialtones: A Telesymphony by Golan Levin et al.)

Other works require audience members to interact with the work, but not to participate in its production.

the work 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 programs, 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 as while interacting with the work (see My Boyfriend Came Back from the War by Lialina (1996), where visitors click through a series of frames on a Web page to reveal images and fragments of text).
2. From appropriation to open source

- Artists have always influenced and imitated one another; in the twentieth century various forms of appropriation, from collage to sampling, emerged as an alternative to only creativity.
- 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.
2. From appropriation to open source

- 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's classic Depression-era photographs of an Alabama sharecropper family.
- Mandiberg scanned images from a catalogue featuring Levine's photographs of Evans's work, and posted them on the Web at *AfterSherrieLevine.com*. As part of an "explicit strategy to create a physical object with cultural value, but little or no economic value," Mandiberg invited visitors to print the images along with certificates of authenticity and specific framing instructions.
2. From appropriation to open source

- New Media artists who adopt open source principles tend to appropriate found material, to collaborate with other artists, and to make their own work available to others on a share-and-share-alike basis.

- Examples of this approach include Cory Arcangel's *Super Mario Clouds* and Radical Software Groups (RSG)'s *Carnivore*.

- Some New Media artists even go so far as remix their own work. In *BUST D0WN THE D00R AGAIN! GATES 0F HELL-VICT0RIA VERSION*, the Young Hae Chang Heavy Industries collective replaced the original work's background, altered the text color, changed the soundtrack, and added a Korean translation.
New Media art’s convergence with popular music was explored by Paul Miller aka Dj Spooky, That Subliminal Kid, an influential DJ, writer, and artist.

Miller exemplifies the remix sensibility in Rebirth of a Nation (2002), a series of live performances in which he reworks D.W. Griffith's controversial 1915 film Birth of A Nation while assembling an improvised soundtrack out of layers of sampled sound.
3. Corporate parody

- New Media artists often produce online presences that convincingly mimicked the aesthetics and rhetoric of corporate sites, complete with logos, brand names, and slogans.

- **Airworld** (1999) - Jennifer and Kevin McCoy created an ersatz corporation, complete with a logo, Web site, and uniforms. They built a software bot that crawled the Web looking for corporate marketing jargon, and used the text it found as fodder for an audio Web cast and a low-power radio transmission.
4. Hackers and hacktivism

- A hacker= "someone who lives and breathes computers, who knows all about computers, who can get a computer to do anything. Equally important... is the hacker's attitude. Computer programming must be a hobby, something done for fun, not out of a sense of duty or for the money... A hacker is an aesthete." (Harvey, Computer Hacking and Ethics). A hacker is actually more like an artist than a criminal.

- In the hacking community there is a widely recognized moral code, the "hacker ethic," which holds that the sharing of information is an overriding good, and that hackers should contribute to the advancement of their field by writing open source software and enabling access to knowledge and computer resources.

- In his 2004 book A Hacker Manifesto, McKenzie Wark extends the notion of hacking to other domains, including the realm of art, and likens it to innovation.
McKenzie Wark wrote: "Whatever code we hack, be it programming language, poetic language, math or music, curves or colourings, we create the possibility of new things entering the world...” (A Hacker Manifesto)

Many New Media artists see themselves as hackers, or use hacking as concept or content in their work. These include Cory Arcangel, Knowbotic Research, and Critical Art Ensemble, whose project Child as Audience (2001) included a CD-ROM with instructions on how to hack into and alter GameBoy video games.

This blend of hacking and political activism is often called "hacktivism.”
5. Interventions

- For many, the Internet is an arena in which to intervene artistically, an accessible public space similar to an urban sidewalk or square where people converse, do business, or just wander around.
- This space is outside the museum-gallery complex, and thus gives artists access to a broad, non-art audience.
- In *Velvet Strike*, for example, Anne Marie Schleiner, Joan Leandr, and Brody Condon staged interventions within Counter Strike, a popular networked computer game in which players engage in urban battle. Velvet Strike's audience includes both members of the international New Media Art community and the players of Counter Strike, many of whom resented the intervention, which involved manipulating onscreen characters to act in nonviolent ways rather than engage in conflict.
5. Interventions

- Many artists have intervened in eBay, the massive online auction site, by offering unusual things for sale. In 2000, Michael Daines, then a 16-year-old high-school student in Calgary, attempted to sell his body under eBay's sculpture category.

- The following year, also on eBay, Keith Obadike put his African-American racial identity up for auction in Blackness for Sale (2001), echoing the slave auctions of previous centuries.

- The hacktivist art group ®TMark (p.) also used eBay to auction off their individual tickets to an exclusive party connected with the 2000 Whitney Biennial exhibition, both to raise funds for future projects and to make the point that, in the art world, money can buy access.
5. Interventions

- Other New Media artists intervene in physical public spaces.
- In *Pedestrian*, Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar project computer-generated animations onto urban sidewalks and public plazas.
- In *BorderXing*, Heath Bunting and Kayle Brandon document their attempts to cross international borders illegally by posting digital photographs and diaristic texts on a Web site.
- *Torolab's* Vertex Project is a proposal for a foot bridge across the Tijuana/San Diego border. Equipped with billboard-sized screens, the bridge would serve as a public gallery for images, texts, and other media submitted via a nearby computer.
Many New Media artists have used the Internet as a tool to explore the construction and perception of identity. The Internet makes it easy for an artist to create a fictive online persona merely by setting up a free e-mail account or home page. Race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and nationality can all be invented, undermining the notion that art works are authentic expressions of their makers' identities.

Mouchette.org, a Net art project that claims to be the work of a thirteen-year-old girl named Mouchette (after the protagonist of 1967 film by Robert Bresson about an adolescent girl), demonstrates the pliability and uncertainty of online identity. As visitors explore the site, it becomes clear that Mouchette is a fictional invention. Yet the character's presence, the sense that there really is a girl named Mouchette behind the project, remains convincing. As of this writing, the true identity of the artist responsible for Mouchette has yet to be revealed.
Some New Media artists address issues of identity in more straightforward ways. Shu Lea Cheang's *Brandon*, for example, explores the true story of Teena Brandon, a young woman who was murdered for passing as a man.

In *Bindigirl* (1999), Prema Murthy represents herself as an Indian pinup girl in a critique of the Internet pornography industry and the Orientalism found in Asian pornography.

The artist group Mongrel has explored issues of identity, particularly race, in several projects, including *Uncomfortable Proximity* (2000). Harwood, one of the group's members, altered images on the Web site of Tate Britain, one of England's leading art museums. Harwood combined portraits by British painters, including Thomas Gainsborough, William Hogarth, and Joshua Reynolds, with images of Harwood's friends and family to create his own version of art history and, through the process, conjure an alternative vision of British identity.
7. Telepresence and surveillance

- The Internet and other network technologies both bridge and collapse geographical distances. This is particularly evident in the use of devices such as Web cams and remote-controlled robots that produce the effect of telepresence, or experience at a distance.
- Ken Goldberg's Telegarden enables people from around the world to tend to the flowers and plants of a garden by controlling a robotic arm via online commands.
- Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's Vectorial Elevation allows Web site visitors to maneuver robotic spotlights from afar, creating patterns in the sky above public plazas.
- Eduardo Kac Rara Avis (1996) - a robotic parrot with a camera behind its eyes is placed inside an aviary along with real birds. Gallery visitors control the parrot's movements via remote controls, experiencing an avian point of view on a small screen fitted within a headset.
Since the mid-twentieth century, surveillance has been an increasingly significant subject of literature, cinema, and art.

For example, in George Orwell's novel "1984" first published in 1949 and; Francis Ford Coppola's 1974 film "The Conversation" surveillance appears as a menacing specter of government or corporate power.

By the end of the twentieth century - cultural attitudes toward surveillance had become more ambivalent. Surveillance is also seen as a necessary evil.

Surveillance began to appear also as a form of entertainment-see reality television shows like "Big Brother".
7. Telepresence and surveillance(3)

- The topic has been widely explored by New Media artists.
- Ken Goldberg's **Demonstrate**, for example, uses a telerobotic video camera and an interactive Web site to allow people to observe activity at the University of California at Berkeley's Sproul Plaza, a birthplace of the Free Speech movement in the 1960s.
- Marie Sester's **ACCESS** (2003) casts a beam of light on those who pass beneath its electronic eye. ACCESS evokes both the searchlights trained on prison escapees and the spotlights shone on theatrical performers.
Your take on New Media Art

1. Awesome. I want to learn more!
2. Sounds interesting, but why do I have to learn about this?
3. Is this really art? Can we talk about Michelangelo instead?
4. This is just navel gazing and random experimentation and it doesn’t belong in an art gallery!
In the early 1970s, around the same time that Video Art was beginning to gain critical and curatorial support, a handful of exhibitions of computer-based art work appeared in mainstream museums on both sides of the Atlantic. This brief curatorial trend came to an end in the mid-1970s as members of the counterculture (many of whom were artists and curators) came to associate technology with corporate capitalism and the Vietnam War. By the early 1990s, New Media Art had begun to attract the interest of museums, galleries, funders, and other art institutions.
The institutional embrace

In 1990, Robert Riley, a curator in the Media arts department of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMoMA), organized "Bay Area Media," an exhibition that featured several works of computer-based art.

- Deep Contact (1990) by Lynn Hershman- an interactive installation about seduction and illusion in which viewers navigated through a series of video segments via a touch-sensitive screen

In 1993, Jon Ippolito, an associate curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, organized "Virtual Reality: An Emerging Medium," an introduction to artistic uses of a technology that was the focus of much attention both in the mainstream media and in the Art and Technology world at that time.
Becoming mainstream

- In the mid-1990s, support for New Media art broadened as curators responded to the dotcom-era enthusiasm for new media and to the quality and quantity of the work that was being produced.

- In 1995, the **Whitney Museum of American Art** became the first museum to acquire a work of Net art: Douglas Davis' *World's First Collaborative Sentence* (1994), a Web site where visitors could add to an endless string of words.

- In 1996, the **Walker Art Center** in Minneapolis launched Gallery 9, an ambitious commissioning program and extensive online gallery of New Media art, under the guidance of the influential curator Steve Dietz.

- In 1997, the international contemporary art exhibition **Documenta** featured Net art prominently in a separate "Hybrid Workspace" section.
While many New Media artists sought and received the institutional imprimatur of museum exhibitions, others were indifferent to the art world and its power brokers. This latter group preferred to work outside of the mainstream contemporary art world.

Festivals and conferences devoted to Art and Technology had long existed in Europe, thanks mainly to a tradition of generous government support for the arts. The most notable of these are the Ars Electronica festival in Linz, Austria, which was first held in 1979, and the Inter-society for the Electronic Arts (ISEA), which organized its first symposium in 1988.

In 1997, the ZKM Center for Art and Media, a major New Media art museum and research institute, opened in Karlsruhe, Germany.
Communities and galleries

- In the United States, a number of small, not-for-profit organizations sprouted up in New York and other cities, starting in the mid-1990s.
- Online communities formed by New Media artists, such as artnetweb, Rhizome.org, and The Thing (all headquartered in New York), were established as virtual spaces for the display, discussion, and documentation of New Media art, playing a key role in the international movement's evolution.
- Physical spaces for New Media art followed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These included Eyebeam Atelier and Location One in New York, and Art Interactive in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Smaller New Media art organizations appeared in Europe as well. Notable examples include Internationale Stadt and Micro in Berlin, C3 in Budapest, Ljudmila in Ljubljana, and plugin in Basel.
Independent initiatives

- many artists continued to operate independently, in essence carrying on in the initial, anti-establishment spirit of the New Media art movement.

- Artists working with emerging technologies often used personal Web sites, e-mail lists, or other forms of media dissemination to establish and maintain an international presence and a global audience without the help of galleries, museums, or other institutions.

- Many New Media artists were profoundly skeptical of the art market, the notion of commercializing art, and market economies in general.

- Left-leaning artists also saw in the Internet an opportunity to realize progressive, anti-capitalist ideals that seemed threatened by the collapse of Communism. In the early years of New Media art, critics, curators, and artists used the term "gift economy" to describe the way in which New Media art was circulated.
Collecting and preserving New Media art

- The inherently ephemeral nature of much New Media art, as well as its often unfamiliar aesthetics and technologies, posed a challenge to gallerists and collectors.
- Some artists provide a CD-ROM or other storage device containing a copy of the work (e.g., the sale of a floppy disk containing The World's First Collaborative Sentence to collectors in 1995).
- Others produce works that take the form of physical objects, such as John F. Simon, Jr.'s wall-mounted "art appliances," (p.), which recall framed paintings.
- Despite the anti-commercial attitude of many New Media artists and the technological hurdles of presenting their work in galleries, some dealers have sustained significant New Media art programs.
Collecting and preserving New Media art

- Because of its often immaterial nature and its reliance on software and equipment that rapidly becomes obsolete and unavailable, New Media art is particularly difficult to preserve.

- In 2001, a consortium of museums and arts organizations founded the Variable Media Network. These included the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives in Berkeley; Franklin Furnace, the Guggenheim Museum, and Rhizome.org in New York, the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology in Montreal, the Performance Art Festival + Archives in Cleveland, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

- The Network has developed a number of case studies and publications, and a questionnaire that organizations can use to gather preservation-related information from artists. Notable strategies for preserving works of New Media art include documentation, migration (e.g., replacing outdated HTML tags with current ones), emulation (software that simulates obsolete hardware), and recreation (reproducing old work using new technology).
Collecting and preserving New Media art

- Where the curator once was the custodian in charge of acquisitions, care and display of a museum’s collection, this shadowy figure is now a producer of meaning, a task best accomplished by juxtaposing artworks, artists and contexts.

- Curators found themselves faced with the responsibility of having to acquire, care and display found objects, installations and performances.

- As a practice, curating is dependent on art’s changing nature and it rests on the premise that it should change to accommodate new media developments.
Read more:

- [New Media Art article](https://wikiversity.org/wiki/New_Media_Art) on Wikiversity