Preface

This collection of artist writings is a mix of personal memoir, digital poetics, spontaneous theory, fictional narrative, scholarly history, peer-to-peer conversations, and network-infused language art. It is also a playful and performative self-appropriation—a sampling of the writing traces that my creative self has left behind over the last fifteen years. I have come to realize that a creative self that precedes my own conscious thoughts and is already a manipulated version of itself as *something other* is *not really there*. At various times throughout the book, I refer to this *something other* as the ''not-me''—as when I look at the work I have produced over the past fifteen years, focus on the various media platforms that this work gets distributed through, and think to myself, ''That's just not me.''

   Isn't life funny that way? If it wasn't me, then who was it? And how on earth did I create this work when I clearly didn't know what I was doing? I don't necessarily answer that question directly in this book, but I do try to sketch, by way of example, one possible model of practice-based research for artists who are interested in taking advantage of the poetic license that comes with experimental creative writing. The writings contained herein are constantly remixing a highly selective group of electronic ideas that have been and are still forming around a cluster of prescient issues related to Net art, VJ/DJ culture, hypertext, avant-pop fiction, hactivism, new media theory, consciousness studies, and the like. This projective writing style is consistent with other artist theories of the recent past. These kinds of rhetorical drifts—

emblematic of an emerging generation of thought heavily indebted to the on-going history of consciousness—always seem to rise to the surface when new forms of art are being invented.

But more literal digital samplings and self-appropriations are also employed throughout this collection. For example, the penultimate work in the book ("What in the World Wide Web Is Happening to Writing?") contains the looping resonance of lines that come up in the articles, essays, and online columns that precede it and redeploys them to focus on some of the achievements of the *trAce* online network and the *trAce* exhibition I was curating while writing this text. The text appeared online at the *trAce* Web site, was featured online in different form at *Alt-X* and *Rhizome*, and made its way into print at the *American Book Review*. This is just one example of how electronic ideas get remixed over time, as do the texts that these ideas appear in and the various versions of the finished work that are then situated for different (although sometimes overlapping) audiences throughout the network.

Picasso once claimed that he didn't care whom he stole from as long as it wasn't himself. Well, I agree. I assume that it's really "not-me" who is writing these lines anyway, so I am thus able to sample and remix my own writing at will. I mention this because if you think you have read something in an academic remix or pseudo-autobiographical fiction work that sounds exactly like what you are reading in one of the Amerika Online essays located toward the end of the book, this is not an editorial oversight but a decision to let these works stand as they are. They help elucidate the fact that an artist's life, improvised thoughts, personal theories, and fictional narratives are all cut from the same cloth, especially when that artist fashions himself as a participant in an autopoietic network of threaded intellectual activity that I have come to call the *artificial intelligentsia*.

In addition to blurring the lines between digital poetics, new media fiction, artist memoir, and spontaneous theory, I hope *META/DATA* serves as an historical document of one artist's perspective on the emerging network culture that hit full steam in the 1990s. The collection is my take on the new modes of creative practice that grew out of this '90s network culture, particularly Net art, VJ culture, hypertext narrative and theory, blogging, and hactivism. Most of the early writings collected here are kept in the same form they were originally published in. Although with the benefit of hindsight I may have changed a few of the ideas contained in them, I am keeping them as-is for the sake of documentation. The two most recent writings, located in part I,

Spontaneous Theories, are extended-play versions as well as collage-styled mash-ups of the many keynote addresses I have given at media, art, literature, and creative industry festivals over ten years and five continents. These keynotes were composed as on-the-fly digressions within digressions and avoid conventional footnoting and referencing since the books, Web sites, and conversations I am using as source material were integrated into the work while traveling hundreds of thousands of miles and were often resourced from memory alone, which in the book I suggest is fictional and meant for spontaneous, unconscious remixing at the artist's will.

Throughout the book, you will encounter the kind of D-I-Y poetics usually associated with an experimental fiction writing style. In fact, part II, Distributed Fictions, is devoted to a selection of the distributed fictions I have been composing as part of my Net art lifestyle. These works show how Net art and VJ practice (and the research agendas that come with them) create ample opportunities for artists to lose themselves in mind-altering experiences that rarely get written about or discussed in more traditional art historical contexts. In this part, I tell tales that an academic remix or spontaneous theory just can't manage within the context of its limited parameters, even when those parameters are considerably loosened.

There's something exciting about watching the writing genres blur and feed off of each other. In many ways, all of the writings contained here, whether a peer-reviewed article for an academic journal or a free-form critifiction for an online art magazine, are bastardized variations of what is sometimes called the *personal essay*. In this case, the attempts conducted in the name of personal expenditure take into account the ways in which the artist is committed to developing a surplus of difference in his theories of an expanded concept of writing. These texts point to a parallel poetics that engages with what evolved over the course of a mini-era into an unexpected new media art practice. The so-called early history of Net art is now becoming part of documented art history, and this collection of artist writings can be read as the most recent iteration of that ongoing historical fiction.

In many ways, I am lucky that my interactive artwork appeared when both the mainstream art world and media outlets seemed to be waiting for it. Being a novelist and freelance writer before venturing into the digital unknown created opportunities for me to circulate the parallel poetics I was discovering while experimenting with new forms of Net art—and what better place to distribute these fresh Net art theories than the Net itself? At times, it felt like an-

other form of black magic, where an intuitive measure of creative writing was being teleported to the electrosphere as a medium of both readiness potential and (art) market prophecy. The more I found this happening in my day-to-day life as a citizen of Boulder, Colorado, and a networked navigator connecting to cyberspace, the more I felt the urge to fictionalize the experience in a hypermediated way. This led to the production of *GRAMMATRON* and my commitment to use the World Wide Web to investigate the "consensual hallucination" of cyberspace for experimental composition, publication, exhibition, performance, marketing, and distribution.

Many provocative scholarly books have been published over the last few years that focus on developing useful conceptual frameworks for new media artists to consider when thinking through many of the issues a digital art practice engages with, but instead of creating a theoretical justification for everything I have done *after the fact*, I instead share with my readers whatever happened to be floating through my mind as I investigated these new forms of hypermediated storytelling, Net art curating, Web publishing, VJing, and spontaneous theorizing—*while I was making it up*. The writing itself is often improvisational, nomadic, and surfing on the elliptical edge of its own possibility. It at times relates more to an Allen Ginsberg chant or a Gertrude Stein loop text than a proper new media theory treatise that gets all of the jargon right and makes all of the politically correct points I once had to go out of my way to make if I expected to steal a base in front of the umpire. For example, you will come across many repetitions, sometimes to the point of mantra-like redundancy—not because I can't find my thesaurus but because I see the writing more as a multitrack, textual performance that has various notes, phrases, and loops repeatedly running throughout its composition. If I use a quote from an artist more than once, it's because that particular phrase strikes a chord with my urgent need to continue the free-flow jam session I am having with my writerly drift. If someone's name often appears as a source of collaboration, it's because the person is an artist or a writer who makes it a pleasure for me *to play* with the work as I process it.

The book is divided into six parts—Spontaneous Theories, Distributed Fictions, Academic Remixes, Image *Écriture*, Net Dialogues, and Amerika Online. Many writings are extensions of thoughts that grew out of addresses I have delivered at conferences and festivals, including Ciber@rt Bilbāo 2004, Transmediale International Media Arts Festival (Berlin), Digital Arts and Culture (Bergen), the *trAce* incubation conference (Nottingham), the Adelaide Arts

Festival, the Sixteenth Annual Computers and Writing Conference (Fort Worth), the UNESCO World Summit Conference (Vienna), Digital Interconnection (Tokyo), the I Link Therefore I Am: Digital Design Literacies (A Research Symposium) (Melbourne), the Conference for the Council of Australasian Media Education Organization (Canberra), the Surf-Sample-Manipulate Lucerne Easter Festival, the Bath Literary Festival, the Overdose Festival (Rome), and the German Association of American Studies Conference (Freiburg).

Most of these writings have appeared in academic, art, literary, and computer journals and as chapters written for other books. I acknowledge these publications at the end of each separate work. The fact that these writings are collected over almost fifteen years means that the document as a whole is at times self-contradictory. It took great restraint on my part as the artist-writer not to change too many things. Besides, I have asked myself: Would I have written these works differently if I knew then what I know now? Well, if I knew then what I know now, I might have never made my way into this strange compositional field of media art. Besides, what you are about to read in these pages was not written by me, anyway (not the me I recognize), so why go back and pretty up some other figure's footprints in the sand when there is so much beach left to wander?

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