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INTRODUCTION
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New Media, Art-Science, and Contemporary Art: Towards a Hybrid Discourse?

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Since the mid-1990s, new media has become an important force for economic and cultural development, establishing its own institutions, such as the ZKM, Ars Electronic Center, and Eyebeam. Research at the intersections of art, science, and technology also has gained esteem and institutional support, as demonstrated by the Artists in Labs program, Switzerland, and the proliferation of interdisciplinary PhD. programs around the world. During the same period, mainstream contemporary art experienced dramatic growth in its market and popularity, propelled by economic prosperity and the proliferation of international museums, art fairs and exhibitions from the Tate Modern to Art Basel Miami to the Shanghai Biennial. This dynamic environment has nurtured tremendous creativity and invention by artists, curators, theorists and pedagogues in all branches. Yet rarely does the mainstream art world converge with the new media and art-sci art worlds. As a result, their discourses have become increasingly divergent. The goal of my research on this topic (Shanken, 2009- and 2010) and of the essays included in this issue of *Artnodes* is to map the discourses of MCA and NMA onto each other to identify points of convergence and divergence. I take as a primary premise that the two are not as dissimilar as is commonly believed and that each can learn a great deal from the other, which will benefit contemporary art in general.

Mainstream Contemporary Art (MCA) is remarkably rich with ideas about the relationship between art and society. Indeed, they are frequently engaged with issues that pertain to global connectivity and sociability in digital networked culture. Given the proliferation of computation and the internet, perhaps it was inevitable that central discourses in MCA would employ, if not appropriate, key terms of digital culture, such as "interactivity," "participation," "programming," and "networks". But the use of these terms in MCA literature typically lacks a deep understanding of the scientific and technological mechanisms of new media, the critical discourses that theorize their implications and the interdisciplinary artistic practices that are co-extensive with them. Similarly, mainstream discourses typically dismiss NMA on the basis of its technological form or immateriality, without fully appreciating its theoretical richness, or the conceptual parallels it shares with MCA.

New media not only offers expanded possibilities for art but offers valuable insights into the aesthetic applications and social implications of science and technology. At its best, it does so in a meta-critical way. In other words, it deploys technological media in a manner that self-reflexively demonstrates how new media is deeply imbricated in modes of knowledge production, perception, and interaction, and is thus inextricable from corresponding epistemological and ontological transformations. To its detriment,

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NMA and its discourses often display an impoverished understanding of art history and recent aesthetic and theoretical developments in MCA. Due to the nature of NMA practice and theory, as a matter of principle, it often refuses to adopt the formal languages and material supports of MCA. This is one of many reasons why it frequently fails to resonate in those contexts.

The perennial debate about the relationship between art and technology and mainstream art has occupied artists, curators, and theorists for many decades. Central to these debates have been questions of legitimacy and self-ghettoization, the dynamics of which are often in tension with each other. In seeking legitimacy, NMA has not only tried to place its practices within the theoretical and exhibition contexts of MCA but has developed its own theoretical language and institutional contexts. The former attempts generally have been so fruitless and the latter so successful, that an autonomous and isolated NMA art world emerged. It has expanded rapidly and internationally since the mid-1990s, and has all the amenities found in MCA, except, of course, the legitimacy of MCA.

At Art Basel in June 2010, I organized and chaired a panel discussion with Nicolas Bourriaud, Peter Weibel, and Michael Joaquin Grey (Shanken, 2010). That occasion demonstrated some challenges to bridging the gap between MCA and NMA. One simple but clear indication of this disconnect was the fact that Weibel, arguably the most powerful individual in the world of NMA and Bourriaud, arguably the most influential curator and theorist in the world of MCA, had never met before. Although many artists, curators, and scholars see significant parallels and overlaps between MCA and NMA (Paul, 2008; Shanken, 2009-; Graham *et al.*, 2010; Quaranta, 2010), these worlds do not see eye-to-eye, no matter how much they may share the rhetoric of interactivity, participation, and avant-gardism. Indeed, Weibel took issue with Bourriaud's distinction between direct and indirect influences of technology on art. The inconsistency of Bourriaud's rejection of the former and his embrace of the latter Weibel provocatively labeled, "media injustice."

This scenario raises many questions that establish a fertile ground for discussion and debate. The essays here interrogate the extent to which the discourses of art-science, new media art and mainstream contemporary art are commensurable. What are the central points of convergence and divergence between MCA and NMA? Is it possible to construct a hybrid discourse that offers nuanced insights into each, while laying a foundation for greater mixing between them? How have new means of production and dissemination altered the role of the artist, curator, and museum? What insights into larger questions of emerging art and cultural forms might be gleaned by such a rapprochement?

In a global digital culture, where the materials and techniques of new media are widely available and accessible to a growing proportion of the population, many of the most profound challenges for contemporary art push well beyond the MCA/NMA debate. Millions and millions of people around the world participate in sociable media, and have the ability to produce and share with millions and millions of other people their own texts, images, sound recordings, videos and GPS traces. A YouTube video, like *Daft Hands*, can delight and amaze 45 million viewers (Feb. 2010), spawning its own subculture of celebrities, masterpieces, and remixers. In this context what are the roles of the artist, the curator, and the critic? Regardless of medium what do professional artists and theorists have to offer that is special, that adds value and insight to this dynamic, collective, creative culture?

The contributors to this issue of *Artnodes* come from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds, including art practice, art history and criticism, curating and curatorial studies, design practice, film theory, media studies, and other fields. They are broadly international, representing North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. The papers appearing here were presented at a panel discussion sponsored by the Leonardo Education and Arts Forum (LEAF) at the Annual Conference of the College Art Association of America (CAA) in New York in February 2011. The response to the call for papers was so strong and the diversity of approaches so rich that I, as chair, elected to include nine panelists for the 2 ½ hour session in order to have as many voices represented as possible. Tremendous discipline on everyone's part was required in order to accommodate twice the typical number of speakers in a CAA panel, and the authors are to be commended for condensing their ideas into the short form demanded. The success of their talks in that context has prompted their publication as short essays of approximately two-thousand words in English and Spanish in *Artnodes,* under the same title, "New Media, Art-Science, and Contemporary Art: Towards a Hybrid Discourse?". We hope that these texts will spark ongoing dialogue about these issues and contribute to a bridging the gap between the discourses of MCA and NMA.

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