

Introduction: Why Transdisciplinary Digital Art?

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1 Why Transdisciplinary Digital Art?

We have entitled this volume *Transdisciplinary Digital Art* to distinguish it from the older term *Interdisciplinary Art*. Interdisciplinarity implies a certain level of detachment across the mediums: the artist, the engineer, the musician and the dancer may collaborate with each other but in much interdisciplinary work there is a sense that they are separate entities performing their own expert functions without more thorough knowledge of the other's technical or artistic processes.¹

Transdisciplinarity implies a level of direct connection and cross-over between mediums: the artist also becomes the engineer, the engineer becomes the artist, and when they collaborate they actually have enough expertise in the other's field to be able to address concerns across the mediums and even across disciplines. This is not to say that there are not varying levels of expertise within transdisciplinary work, but rather that transdisciplinary art in its best sense makes the *effort* to understand the medium of the *other* in more than superficial terms. Here science is no less important than art, art no less than science. The elitism of the isolated *discipline* is broken down to a degree.

The papers in this volume represent varying degrees of transdisciplinarity, but as a whole the volume itself represents a remarkable breadth of work in digital art and science. From the technical to the philosophical to the poetic, the essays cover a wide range of topics related to digital media art and related areas. Many papers cross unusual divides (Will Pappenheimer's *Tuning in Rorschach Maps* covers inkblots, musical tunings and Situationist aesthetics in equal measure), while others introduce areas of research not commonly associated with the digital (Marcin Ramocki's *DIY: The Militant Embrace of Technology* introduces a Marxist analysis of digital culture). In *Transdisciplinary Digital Art* each paper in its own measure contributes to our collective understanding of the *other*. By the very notion of incorporating such varied approaches this volume aids and abets the furthering of our transdisciplinary future.

¹ A perfect illustration of this is the modernist notion of interdisciplinarity as exemplified by John Cage's *Variations V* in which the composer, the film artists (Stan VanDerBeek and Nam June Paik) and the choreographer (Merce Cunningham) worked in relative isolation, only meeting for the final performances [1]. While not all art termed *interdisciplinary* is this radical in its separation of roles, there is a general tendency to accept a distinct line of expertise between mediums in *Interdisciplinary Art* and interdisciplinary work in general.

2 Why Digital Art?

Digital art as a medium has enjoyed considerable strength in the new millennium. This strength has endured despite the uncertainty engendered by the dot-com bust and the subsequent attempt to portray the digital as ultimately a shallow medium. While it is hardly a unified medium and covers an enormous amount of territory, digital art certainly has grown substantially as an artistic medium (partly due to rapid technological advances combined with lower prices for those technologies). The digital is close to establishing a form that is generally recognizable by a broad range of the general population and therefore it is safe to say that it is here to stay.

Digital art has certainly received thorough coverage in Christiane Paul's excellent book, appropriately entitled, *Digital Art* [2]. *Transdisciplinary Digital Art* expands on Paul's history and theory of digital art by including the direct words and insights of the artists, programmers, musicians and theorists of the digital medium. The volume seeks to present the idiosyncratic and wildly varied concerns of artists, scholars, writers and scientists who are working digitally. As such it provides a wonderful insight into the continued vitality of the computer-based arts and is a testament to the persistence of artists who choose to use the computer as their primary medium for expression.

3 A Note on *Digital Art Weeks* and *Interactive Futures*

Digital Art Weeks and *Interactive Futures* are annual festivals of digital art and symposia on topics related to digital art, technology and computer science. *Digital Art Weeks* has been in existence for the past three years and *Interactive Futures* has had six iterations. For more information of these events please visit the following links.

Digital Art Weeks 2007: <http://www.digitalartweeks.ethz.ch/web/>

Interactive Futures 2007: <http://cfisrv.finearts.uvic.ca/interactivefutures/IF07/>

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References

1. Packer, R., Jordan, K.: Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality. On-line version (2002), <http://www.artmuseum.net/w2vr/timeline/Cage.html>
2. Paul, C.: *Digital Art*. London: Thames and Hudson (2003)