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Theorizing media art in light of STS

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The aim of this special issue is to encourage theorization of technological arts as an open-ended, speculative, and experimental practice bridging the fields of ASTS and media studies. The guests' editors of this node are Ksenia Fedorova and Silvia Casini.

Throughout history and particularly in recent decades, art has developed unique media-specific characteristics to address the impact of the techno-scientific paradigm on culture and society. Parallel reflections have taken place in the social sciences, particularly within science and technology studies (STS), which have been grounded in empirical research and eager to experiment with new methods. Some of the influential methodological insights and concepts from STS include actor-network theory, nonhuman agency, boundary objects, scientific trading zones, the mangle of practice, and material heterogeneities of knowledge.

Art, science, and technology studies (ASTS) have been framed as a specific field of inquiry, signaling a need to bridge the gaps between social sciences and artistic approaches (Rogers et al. 2021; Salter, Burri, Dumit 2017). STS have also been linked to artistic research / research creation (Borgdorff, Peters, Pinch 2020; Sormani, Carbone, Gisler 2019; Daniels, Schmidt 2008) and critical design (Dunne, Ruby 2013; Ginsberg, Calvert, Schyfter, Elfick, Endy 2017). The key lines of comparison explored in these volumes include an emphasis on socio-material assemblages, experimentation as an epistemic tool, non-verbal means of making claims, and embodied skills.

This special issue seeks to bring these developments into closer relation with media art studies and media theory. We welcome contributions analyzing a wide range of practices that involve technological processes in some way. This may include experimentation with different forms of data (and the question of what counts as data), sensorial translations, original hardware and software tools, alternative modes of computing, and imaginary media. How can the concept of media in the hands of an artist be reconsidered through the lens of (A)STS methods and concepts? How does 'the work of art' (Jones, 2006) rather than artistic research contribute to the debate around ethical, cultural, and economic arguments for or against technoscience? This point is particularly relevant when considering whether and how media art can contribute to 're-enchanting the world', as Federici (2018) would put it.

The aim is to move through and also beyond individual case studies towards new theoretical insights bridging the fields of ASTS and media studies. We want to encourage a theorization of

media art as an open-ended, speculative, and experimental practice equipped with its own knowledge system. As cases of STS and critical theory more generally demonstrate, the journey of concepts across fields stimulates the emergence of new analytical toolsets. Examples include the attempt to rethink ontology and epistemology methods using scientific concepts to create new onto-epistemologies (e.g. Karen Barad's work with quantum mechanics) and the critique of the careless migration of abstract scientific concepts into other fields of knowledge that engage with perception, language, and experience (Burwell 2018). In relation to new theories, one can think of the concept of 'metabolic machines' put forward by artist Thomas Feuerstein (2020), the concept of 'relational data' theorized by the philosopher Leonelli (2015), or the method of 'the art of inquiry' theorized by the anthropologist Ingold (2013).

We encourage experimentation with the form of writing (e.g. in the style of Mol 2002), which in itself can instigate a new method or theory.

We also welcome perspectives on the forms of 'worlding' media art through its entanglements with the social structures and institutions of knowledge and technological innovation (including think tanks for policy-making and start-up incubators, or media labs, as explored in Wershler/Emerson/Parikka 2021). Finally, we invite contributions from scholars combining ASTS with the responsible research and innovation (RRI) framework to explore the role of artistic research in imagining alternative futures and in deliberative processes about technoscientific choices.

In scientific practice, any description of a phenomenon relies on some kind of language as the means of communication: how can media art studies and theory contribute to creating new languages and challenging existing ones?

Possible topics:

• Artistic thinking and scientific production: forms of liaison, categories of modal dynamics
• Traveling concepts and openings for new theories and analytical toolsets coming from different disciplines and backgrounds
• Human/Nonhuman agents and process-based enactment
• Roles of institutions (production labs, art centers, festivals)
• Artistic entanglements in innovation and their socio-political and economic structures
• DIY, 'critical making' and activist practices
• Entanglements of aesthetic, ethical, and economic values in the systems of art and technoscience
• A critical comparison of the concept of the 'regime of promising' (Audétat 2022), typical of emerging technologies, and other 'regimes' at work in media art research and practice

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More info: https://raco.cat/index.php/Artnodes/about/call-for-papers/STS