

2015 Vol 15 Issue No. 1 — Thinking in the Arts-Science Nexus

> EDITORIAL

The arts and the sciences have a complex history of both conflict and entanglement. As C.P. Snow's controversial writings regarding the "two cultures" demonstrate, disciplinary fiefdoms in education curriculum and research, not to mention the strictures of grant funding bodies and the research priorities of universities and governments, often seek to keep the sciences separate from the arts and humanities.

To take a small example; current debates over "STEM vs STEAM" in education curriculums – that is, the question of including the Arts in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics cluster – reflect just one facet of the broader disciplinary struggle, but they clearly signal the political and economic weight that is brought to bear on the relation between the arts and sciences. Here in Australia, the office of Australia's Chief Scientist has for a number of years strongly called for increased attention to the STEM disciplines in curriculum design, on the basis that Australia's future as an innovative nation hinges on such attention. Understood within this context, the question of the relation between the arts and the sciences is not simply an issue of disciplinary boundaries and abstract categories because it is frequently highly politicized, and posed for strategic rather than philosophical purposes.

Despite this political and economic dimension however, the immensely fruitful exchange currently happening in the space where art meets science suggests other possibilities. The art-science nexus has been revitalised by new thinking in neurobiology and biotechnology as well as quantum physics, sweeping away mechanistic ideas of isolated subject-object encounters, and replacing them with force fields, immanence, events, affect and becoming. The prominence of artists like Eduardo Kac and Tissue Culture and Art (Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr), whose works use genomic and biological sciences to pose ethical questions of global importance, testifies to the relevance, and value, of contemporary enquiry into the art-science nexus.

The papers in this issue of *Transformations* address this enquiry in many ways. Concerns regarding how science may appear to employ art as a kind of "aesthetic science communication," or how art may appear to use science to "legitimize" its concerns, are addressed and problematized as artists and theorists explore the richness of a middle path where neither pole is prioritized. From jeweller-physicists to plant-thinkers, and via x-ray

scans and nano-particles, the authors in this issue explore not just the points where artistic and scientific knowledges and practices have intersected, but what this means in terms of finding new methodologies, ontologies and epistemologies for the hybrid forms that emerge when art and science commingle.

Editors: Grayson Cooke, Erika Kerruish, Warwick Mules, Elizabeth Stephens.