

metaMETA

Written by Jessica Gurd

We New Media students have a problem unique to our program: we are constantly being asked to define what our major is, exactly. Something to do with computers, right? Or maybe technology as a whole? I know; it's something to do with interaction. Perhaps it is a recent expression of the post-modern movement. Each of these well intentioned suggestions garners the response "...close, but not quite." New Media has many different and seemingly conflicting definitions depending on whom you ask. How can one polished exhibition even hope to scratch the surface?

Though our definitions may be contested, the terms are set, and that is nowhere more prescribed than in fourth-year projects. The META tradition is an unpredictable annual exhibition with an inevitable annual rededication -the name is not a suggestion. The tradition of holding the META exhibition is perhaps less significant than the tradition of holding an exhibition *called* META. 'Meta' denotes something going beyond itself. 'Meta' is information about information. 'Meta' is the aerial view. In many ways, the META exhibition is (and always has been) a platform for graduating classes of this misunderstood program to address and articulate what New Media truly is, if only for the moment. What is New Media? In short, we are glad you asked.

Our graduating class of 2010, despite coming from wholly different backgrounds, interests, and disciplines, has come together in an unplanned and perfect example of collective intelligence to create a tacit theme for the exhibition: a eulogy for bygone days we never knew. A quick scan of the program reveals recurring organic themes (mountains, leaves, feathers, eggs), organic materials (wood, glass), and organic performance. For a program wholly concerned with the cutting edge, META 2010 bleeds surprisingly retro-analog.

There are a few reasons for this.

Strictly speaking, New Media defines itself as production, distribution, and consumption of a product through the same channel. Strictly speaking, New Media is neither film, nor paper-based publication, nor radio broadcast but can comprise these media. Strictly speaking, the final product of a true New Media piece is not some multi-media arrangement to be cast off as merely interdisciplinary; it is something much more exciting; it is a convergent singularity which has its own message and place in the world.

The first problem occurs when New Media finds said place in the world. Once this happens, it cannot be said to be *new* anymore. (No one would dare refer to the Internet as *newfangled*.) The second issue is that not all New Media innovations are destined for long full lives. Many of them will miss their marks entirely and fail. New Media is necessarily prototypical and produces more swan songs than Swan Lakes. The institutional polytechnic pressure for work which is overcautious and hyperaccessible is an especially perilous paradox in a field intrinsically overambitious and hyperextended. Maybe New Media is the modern retelling of the Humanities' oldest stories: sci-fi mythology meets the myth of sci-fi, with the New Media artist qua graduate still, as always, torn in the practical and conceptual tension between fraud and failure. There's a lot of room for hubris in cyberspace.

New Media the field of study has become complex because *new media* is perpetually waiting to be explored. There's the idea of *newness* as a refreshing of medium -the innovative repurposing of a familiar fabric or tool- and there's the idea of *media* with its newness implicit in post-millennial modernity. Our showcase of fourth-year graduates seemed to sense this: the new revelation of New

Media as neither product nor process but as Progress.

For these students, New Media is art about the testing of limitations of available material. Everyone can surely agree on that point; the field is constantly dealing with the Internet -with virtual spaces -with the malleability of the human experience. The lessons we have learned by seeing the world in terms of feedback have compelling results when applied to daily life, as we start to expose not just the limitations of the material human being but of the state of being human. Traditional art forms rely on fixed data to enable appreciation, yet these New Media pieces allow persons to stand in front of them and have a personal, private interaction. They allow the experiences between artist, artwork, and public to extend far beyond the limitations of classical form. New Media art breaks the fourth wall. It goes META.