

EDITED BY
VICTORIA BRADBURY
AND SUZY O'HARA

ART HACK PRACTICE

Critical Intersections of
Art, Innovation and the
Maker Movement

A Focal Press Book

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ART HACK PRACTICE

Bridging art and innovation, this book invites readers into the processes of artists, curators, cultural producers and historians who are working within new contexts that run parallel to or against the phenomenon of ‘maker culture.’

The book is a fascinating and compelling resource for those interested in critical and interdisciplinary modes of practice that combine arts, technology and making. It presents international case studies that interrogate perceived distinctions between sites of artistic and economic production by brokering new ways of working between them. It also discusses the synergies and dissonances between art and maker culture, analyses the social and collaborative impact of maker spaces and reflects upon the ethos of the hackathon within the fabric of a media lab’s working practices.

Art Hack Practice: Critical Intersections of Art, Innovation and the Maker Movement is essential reading for courses in art, design, new media, computer science, media studies and mass communications as well as those working to bring new forms of programming to museums, cultural venues, commercial ventures and interdisciplinary academic research centres.

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ART HACK PRACTICE

Critical Intersections of
Art, Innovation and the
Maker Movement

*Edited by Victoria Bradbury
and Suzy O'Hara*

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FOREWORD

Rethinking Art Hacks for the Future

Beryl Graham

... the values are created by the people that we work with, you can't jump in with a template [...] you have to experience it to know what it is.

Marc Garrett of Furtherfield, London, during *Curating Art After New Media* short course

A long time ago, in a Britain far, far away, I was curating an exhibition of participatory art, titled *Serious Games*, for two art galleries/museums. At one point both organisations had doubts about one word in the title, and my challenge was in resolving the interesting fact that they objected to *different* words, and hence revealed the problematic boundaries between them. In putting 'art' and 'hack' in the title of this book, Bradbury and O'Hara have bravely challenged some borders of their own, as even the arts within themselves are currently removing some bricks from the hierarchical wall between craft, design, participatory practice and art. This approach, to me, seems entirely fitting to the exciting nature of new media, and to the interesting times in which we live.

This tension between territories, disciplines and sectors is way too important to be resolved in purely academic ways, and I'm very impressed at the editors' determination to select authors who are leading in the field right now, whether as makers, critics, activists, curators or theorists. This means that *how* to art hack is very thoroughly covered, as well as *why*. I'm hence very proud to see their rigorous doctoral research applied and communicated in such an accessible, useful and lively book. Despite much current rhetoric about cross-disciplinary research and cross-sector production, these things are much easier said than done. This book has clearly succeeded in doing so: critically pinning down the rhetorics into defined arguments that can be translated between fields, and in respecting the values of the very different disciplines. Admirably, readers from

the arts need not fear being faced with uncritical hyperbole about Blockchain, and coders need not fear uninformed meanderings about Open Source.

These authors are also well informed on politico-economic contexts: the where and the who of art hacks. As Mugundi K. M'Rithaa points out, the “manufacturing base” of a country is inextricably linked to all kinds of systems of making and is of course very variable in different countries. I am writing this in the UK, where manufacturing or making skills are inextricably related to values of class, and specifically, in post-industrial Newcastle, where the remaining heavy engineering skills have had to become increasingly specialist (oil rigs and pedestrian bridges for example). In visiting China, India and South Africa, I have been struck by the decidedly different values attached to manufacturing, the very visible making skills, and the inventive flexibility of changing systems to make things work, from paying individuals to use their mobile phone for a call, through mapping DIY border crossings, to hacking electrical cables. These hacked systems are joyfully different to bland ‘globalisation’ and can be applied to social systems, electronic systems and to specific local production such as Palestinian ceramics.

In appreciating these hacked systems as possible futures, I’m keen to avoid the relentlessly futuristic discourses of speedy technological ‘progress.’ As Irini Papadimitriou points out, museums tend to change rather slowly, which helps them avoid foolishly half-baked early adoption of newer technologies. Like this book, I’m much more interested in what skills people might need for the future, and as an educator I’ve been lucky enough to see these art hack skills illuminate the practice of people coming from fields as diverse as engineering, activism, face-painting, coding and art history.

The opening quote from Marc Garrett, co-director of Furtherfield (the arts, technology and social change organisation) comes from a visit during the one-week short course *Curating Art After New Media*. By visiting places of production such as Machines Room, the course aims to add to the understanding of new media systems and hence enable participants to be able to change them in the future. Knowledge has been shared by attendees from India, Hong Kong, Bahrain, USA, Canada and Europe, and even traditional museum curators have been able to affect their organisations’ systems of production, exhibition, collection, repository, education and distribution. This book presents such a gleeful array of inspirational modes of art hacking, whether the participants are jesters, prototypers or Afronauts, that I’m cheered at the prospect of creatively hacking our way into the future.

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