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EDITORIAL

ARTISTIC RESEARCH NOW:
STATUS QUO BASED ON THE RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION INITIATIVES
OF FILMEU_RIT AND BEYOND

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Editorials typically start with discussions on emerging debates that may later establish new fields, often including future predictions and outlining potential roadmaps. *Qua Vadis* is a genre in its own right, as a result. This does not appear to be necessary or appropriate any longer when discussing artistic or practice-based research (from hereafter "artistic research"). Firstly, several opinions have already mapped out the potential future trajectories of artistic research. More importantly, a decade or more has usually passed since their original publication. Fifteen years have passed since an important issue of *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* (Birell, ed. 2009: 1–2), which explored the emergent field from a myriad of angles, and just short of fifteen years ago, a seminal collection – *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (Biggs and Karlsson, eds. 2010: xiii–xvi) – was published that aimed to start the discussion from first principles.

Secondly, from the first principles, we have arrived at a wealth of regular theoretical and critical output on artistic research, with vast pantheons of experts often proudly on display, emphasising the accumulation of cultural capital (see, for instance, the current and past editors and reviewers section for *JAR: The Journal of Artistic Research* <https://www.jar-online.net/en/journal-artistic-research>). Thirdly, there are now manifests (Henke, et al. 2020) and book-length studies of various sorts (Wilson 2018; Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén 2014; Borgdorff 2012) defining, defending, and promoting a particular approach to artistic research. In sum, artistic research is clearly not an emerging field any longer but a full-fledged

discipline with a history, sizable theoretical corpus, and expectations for authors to carve out their own space when straying from the main road.

The following fall to the latter camp as this special issue of the *International Journal on Stereo and Immersive Media* consists of articles and think pieces that are primarily written by several authors, and in most cases, these articles discuss artistic research that a group of artist-researchers has conducted. Therefore, this issue of the *International Journal on Stereo and Immersive Media* addresses the collective aspect of artistic research and advocates for the benefits of collective artistic research outputs, which most often adopt an inter-, multi- or transdisciplinary approach. The mixture of approaches and expertise needed to foster the creative and intellectual ambitions of such groups of artist-researchers expands beyond any single mind's vision.

Before introducing the articles on this issue, it should be pointed out that despite the considerable history and wealth of debates on artistic research, there is still a lot of advocating and communication left to be done. From getting the discipline adequately recognised by the Common European Research Classification Scheme (CERCS) to solving the continuing ill fit between artistic research and the current version of the Frascati manual, something that the famous Vienna declaration sponsoring artistic research also addresses¹. Moreover, in many states, the field is often uncomfortably wedged between education and cultural ministries, regularly leading to its exclusion from funding

1. <https://societyforartisticresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Vienna-Declaration-on-Artistic-Research-Final.pdf>

associated with one or the other ministries' grant schemes. Artistic research is also not a universally recognised discipline across Europe and, at times, is still missing official approval in some EU member states, making trans-European artistic research collaboration more challenging. Artistic researchers at higher education institutions (HEIs) and as independent researchers have a much harder time getting their research recognised or 'published' than more traditional article-based researchers, and there are far fewer venues available for them. In addition, anyone who has had their art or film department – where a wealth of artistic research is conducted on daily basis – recently evaluated by external experts from different disciplines and academic contexts might have felt first-hand that artistic research is far from being a self-evident area of study and from being equally and uniformly accepted all around academia. To avoid falling back to educated guessing about what future lies ahead for artistic research regarding these specific roadblocks, it might be more advantageous to assess where we are and what are the bases on which we can already build.

A good place to start assessing the *status quo* of artistic research is to take guidance from some of the earlier future-facing roadmaps and evaluate whether what was considered principal for the development of the field fifteen years or more years ago still resonates in contemporary setting, or to what extent has the artistic-academic community already established the earlier milestones. Both forewords to *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* emphasise the importance of innovation and the return to the "humanistic spirit of the Renaissance" of bridging disciplines and embracing hybridity that emerges from the liminality of artistic research (Nowotny

2010: xvii–xxvi; Schwarz 2010: xxvii–xxx). In contrast to the focus of this special issue where the "spirit of Renaissance" is accomplished via collective creative endeavours, the bridging of disciplines that artistic research fosters is discussed in the Routledge Companion still more in regard to the individual (PhD studies) career track. Hans-Peter Schwarz importantly adds that the being in-between art, music, and theatre (and, I would add film-TV and new media) studies and the practical arts, and being open to a myriad of approaches from both sides does not mean that there would not be a need for drawn-out art-based research. (Schwarz 2010: xxvii–xxviii). My earlier remarks about the difficulties that artistic research still faces today and the ordeals of funding (PhD) research, when a discipline falls between two ministries, echo the call for artistic research to continue defining (and defending) itself as a separate field of study. Retrospectively, we can claim that doubt over artistic research's independence has largely ceased to exist within collectives and departments engaged in artistic research. Yet, the European education and research area still needs more convincing about the epistemological and practical value of separating artistic research from the study of arts and art practice.

Torsten Källemark (Källemark 2010: 7–10) states that education reforms – such as Erasmus mobility and its joint cross-European educational offers, Bologna process (resulting in the greater harmonisation of higher education in Europe), and specialised networks on higher arts education such as ELIA (<https://elia-artschools.org/>) – have contributed significantly to raising the European dimension of higher education and increased the competitiveness of artistic research. This is certainly still the case today, with Erasmus

being Europe's largest education funding scheme and the Bologna process, while not being uniformly adapted, having a continued effect on shaping the region's higher education. Likewise, the visibility and impact of ELIA, CILECT (<https://cilect.org/>), GEECT (<https://geect.org/about/>), etc. has only grown with time.

To this list of higher education initiatives, one can add from the present perspective European Union's new flagship initiative in the higher education space, the European University Alliances initiative. The European Commission's support for the European University Alliances, together with increasing state and local governments' co-funding (not to mention the HEIs' co-funding), is likely going to cause a seismic shift equal in scale to the Bologna process, which will permanently transform Europe's higher education landscape. The first alliance of higher education institutions to follow the novel framework and to focus primarily on the creative and cultural fields is FilmEU (<https://www.filmeu.eu/>). The Alliance's accompanying research capacitation project FilmEU_RIT: Research, Innovation, Transformation (<https://rit.filmeu.eu/>) provided it with the financial means to establish funding schemes allowing (artistic) researchers from the different HEIs to network. The Alliance facilitated truly bottom-up grassroots networking initiatives and provided absolute academic freedom to its researchers regarding content (see the results of the pilot funding here <https://rit.filmeu.eu/pilot-projects>). The only formal requirement was that researchers from at least three HEIs, from the four HEIs until 2023 (now FilmEU has grown to a network of eight full partners), should be included in the projects and that the means of research would be artistic research. Many authors of this special issue of the *International*

Journal on Stereo and Immersive Media have collaborated around the FilmEU_RIT research clusters.

Schwarz importantly also states that 'in order to guarantee innovation, innovative and therefore trans-disciplinary research infrastructure has to be developed at the universities of art' (Schwarz 2010: xxix). The FilmEU_RIT projects, expanding beyond anyone's imagination in terms of technological and technical complexity, are a testament to Schwarz's vision from fifteen years ago. However, back then, likely very few, if any, could accurately envision the role that new technologies were to play in the creation of artistic research. While the metaverse remains in its infancy and is yet to live up to its expectations, the creative community and society more broadly has been more eager to embrace AI, with generative artificial intelligence chatbots such as ChatGPT becoming a household name and aiding anyone from students doing their homework to people filling in their job applications. Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), Internet of things (IoT), big data, and robotics are increasingly used by the cultural and creative industries and by artistic researchers alike. The technical framework guides our creativity, and, at the same time, technological solutions require substantial investments, which HEIs often do not have. This is where public and private funding have to come together, and thinking has to become truly cross-disciplinary – as such infrastructure is not required solely by artistic researchers – if HEIs are to continue being the breeding ground for human curiosity.

Academia does not become redundant in such a collaboration with the private sector and industry, for it continues to provide not only expertise and knowledge but also space

for academic freedom to try out new ideas and fail as a vital method of creating new knowledge – a luxury that a competitive economic context does not afford to many businesses. Schwarz similarly reasons that “it may take some time before it is understood that only universities can provide the space required for experiments” (Schwarz 2010: xxx). Perhaps enough time has already passed since Schwartz wrote these words, as it appears that established artists and filmmakers are increasingly seeking to explore their interests, complete projects, and operate within universities.

Turning to the contributions of this special issue of the *International Journal on Stereo and Immersive Media*, it is apparent that the innovative use of new technologies is omnipresent in contemporary collective artistic research. Combining highly technological solutions with longstanding traditions in arts, Gert Wastyn, Steven Malliet, Guido Devadder, and Bart Geerts discuss in their article, “Artistic Experiments in Expanded Animation: Combining 3D Printing with Virtual Reality to Create Anamorphic Shadow Animations”, how virtual reality and 3D printing can be combined with proto-cinematic anamorphic shadow techniques. The latter, in one form or another, dates back to the time when the human race was living in caves. In a similar vein, Tobias Frühmorgen and Dirk Hoyer in their article “The Penned Parrot in the Writers’ Room: Four Stage Story Generation in Collaborative Screenwriting with AI”, provide a novel approach to the age-old art of scriptwriting by attempting co-authoring with a generative artificial intelligence. Elen Lotman discusses breaking new ground from a different perspective, namely in the higher education system and exemplified in the context of film education. As an established cinematographer and an associate professor of film,

Lotman scrutinises the trials and tribulations of being a pioneering PhD candidate in an artistic research programme in a film school to becoming one of the lead architects of such a programme. Learning first-hand from her own experience, Lotman guides her students to use their tacit knowledge for artistic research praxis.

Carlos Lesmes Lopéz uses his personal experience as a filmmaker in a different way by exploring the vague border between fact and fiction in documentary genre, particularly when the film form focuses on the filmmaker’s own life and his close ones. Lesmes exemplifies how the fictional can do very real emotional and affective work around the gaps in personal or cultural narratives, specifically when dealing with trauma, while not having the intention to close such gaps with rational explanations or interpreting them away from existence. Rowena Chodkowski, Richy Srirachanikorn, Annie Harrison, Derek Pasborg and Muhammad Shahrom Ali not only break way but also break down barriers with their article – “Designing for Meaning: Uniting Creative and Scholastic Research through Collective Practices in Event Design” – arguing for exhibition to be treated as artistic research in its own right. Despite the infancy of artistic research, it has often already begun erecting hierarchies of its own, regularly treating exhibition as something that falls outside the pantheon of artistic research “proper”. Chodkowski et.al. state that even where intentions are good and exhibition organisers are open towards creating a more inclusive academia, barriers may emerge inadvertently due to technical and financial limitations regarding the complex nature of presenting artistic research works that can take on a variety of forms. The problems related to exhibition can be particularly pronounced in an academic

context, which is not traditionally associated with exhibition practices. In addition to modernising contemporary European universities' exhibition capacities, which often are lacking even concerning the more traditional audio-visual projection capabilities, HEIs infrastructures, as emphasised earlier, need to be updated on several fronts if they are to foster innovation and keep pace with the creative industries and higher education developments in other parts of the globe.

Xiaoou Ji, Steven Malliet, and Ekaterina Muravevskaia's article "Promoting Empathy through the Design of an Embodied Installation Game" is a clear example of the technological requirements of contemporary HEIs in terms of both production and exhibition, as the article discusses game design in the context of embodied experience. Such a game challenges researchers because of the complexities of programming a computer game and expects specialised venues and technology for experiencing the finished product. Ji, Malliet, and Muravevskaia's work discussed in the article is, however, a fine counter to the vision of contemporary academia as an ivory tower setting far removed from people's daily lives. Far from being an oblique artistic experimentation, the embodied installation game under discussion tackles embodied emotions such as empathy and mood disorders. CongoVR is another project being discussed by Victor Flores, Leen Engelen, Linda King, and Ana David Mendes in the article "The Panorama of Congo: Decolonising Heritage through Artistic Research", which is an example of how contemporary universities' technical capabilities are challenged to foster its staff and students' talent². The latter group of artistic researchers

recreated a Panorama – a large-scale installation that was particularly popular form of entertainment in the 19th century – for the contemporary audience in a VR setting. Not only does such an endeavour again require high-level coding for creating the VR experience, but it also expects special exhibition venues to experience it. CongoVR is another example of using traditions of the past and contemporary technology to innovate in a new hybrid form, this time to critically interrogate the biased colonial heritage of the original panorama. The large-scale project, furthermore, encompasses an archival dimension as the team had to digitally capture the entire panorama – the original panorama painting that is 115 meters in length had been rolled up and not accessed in several decades – before it could be recreated in a VR environment, thus posing several serious technical challenges for the researchers.

As the selection of articles in this special issue – discussing collective artistic research from a variety of angles – and the range of authors coming from different academic and artistic contexts testify, artistic research is moving on at a rapid pace. As illustrated, a decade and a half has allowed the discipline to develop from defining its first principles to becoming a common practice in most HEIs. From being primarily the result of a PhD research in a sole department and being conducted by a single person, artistic research today is increasingly multidisciplinary. It engages ever-larger groups of artist-researchers to conduct increasingly more ambitious and complex projects. As the authors of this issue of the *International Journal on Stereo and Immersive Media* exemplify,

2. See also <https://www.flickr.com/photos/luca-schoolofarts/albums/72177720316428114/>

the “spirit of Renaissance” of curiosity and creativity reaching beyond the apparent and habitual is well alive. It is not held back even by the often rudimentary technological infrastructure available in HEIs. While this editorial set out to examine which milestones artistic research has achieved today when compared to past predictions, rather than making estimations of its own about the future, it is certain that by investing in higher education infrastructure, (artistic) researchers can achieve ever-greater projects. Curiosity, creativity, ambition, and responsibility for society are indeed already represented there.

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