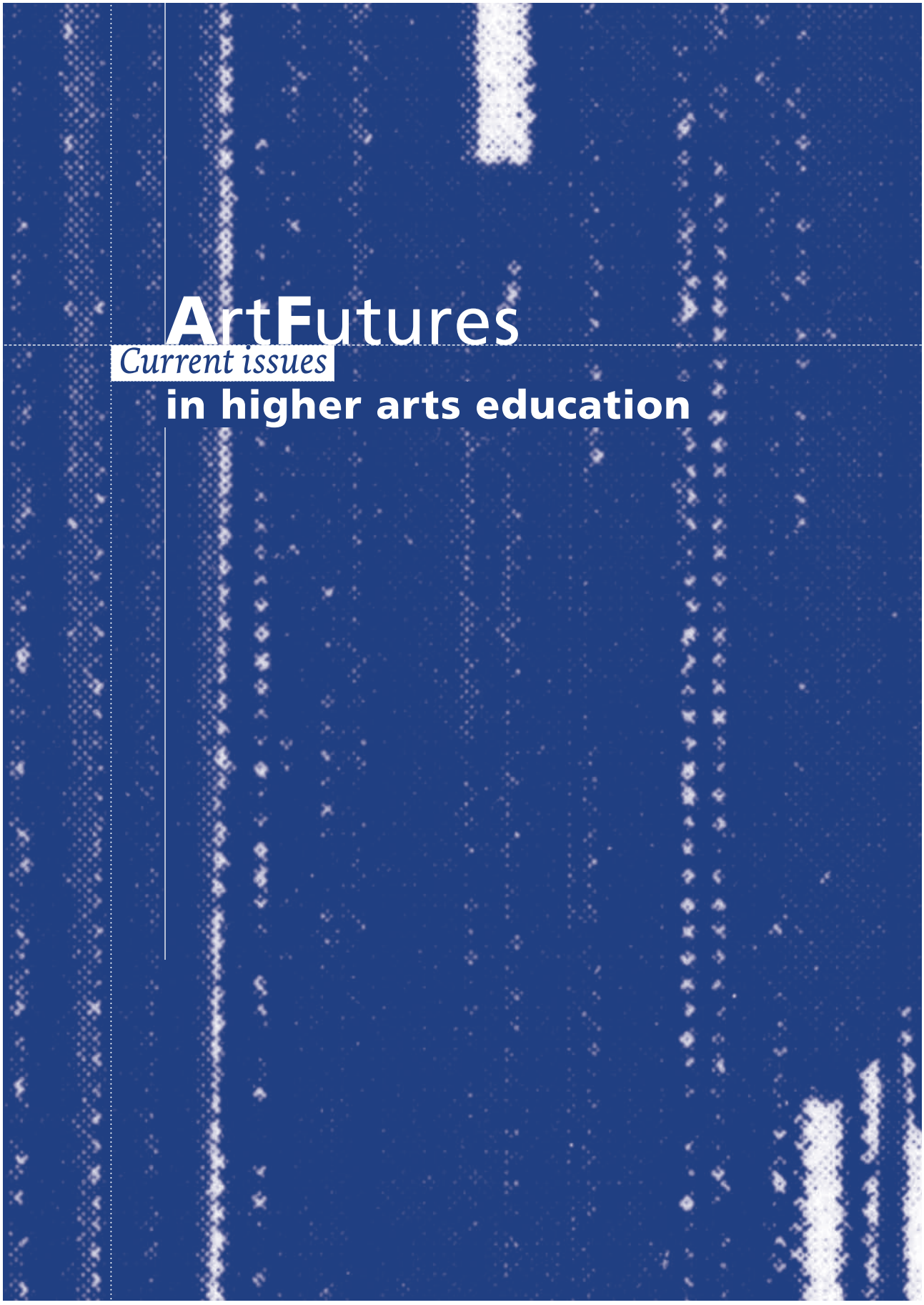
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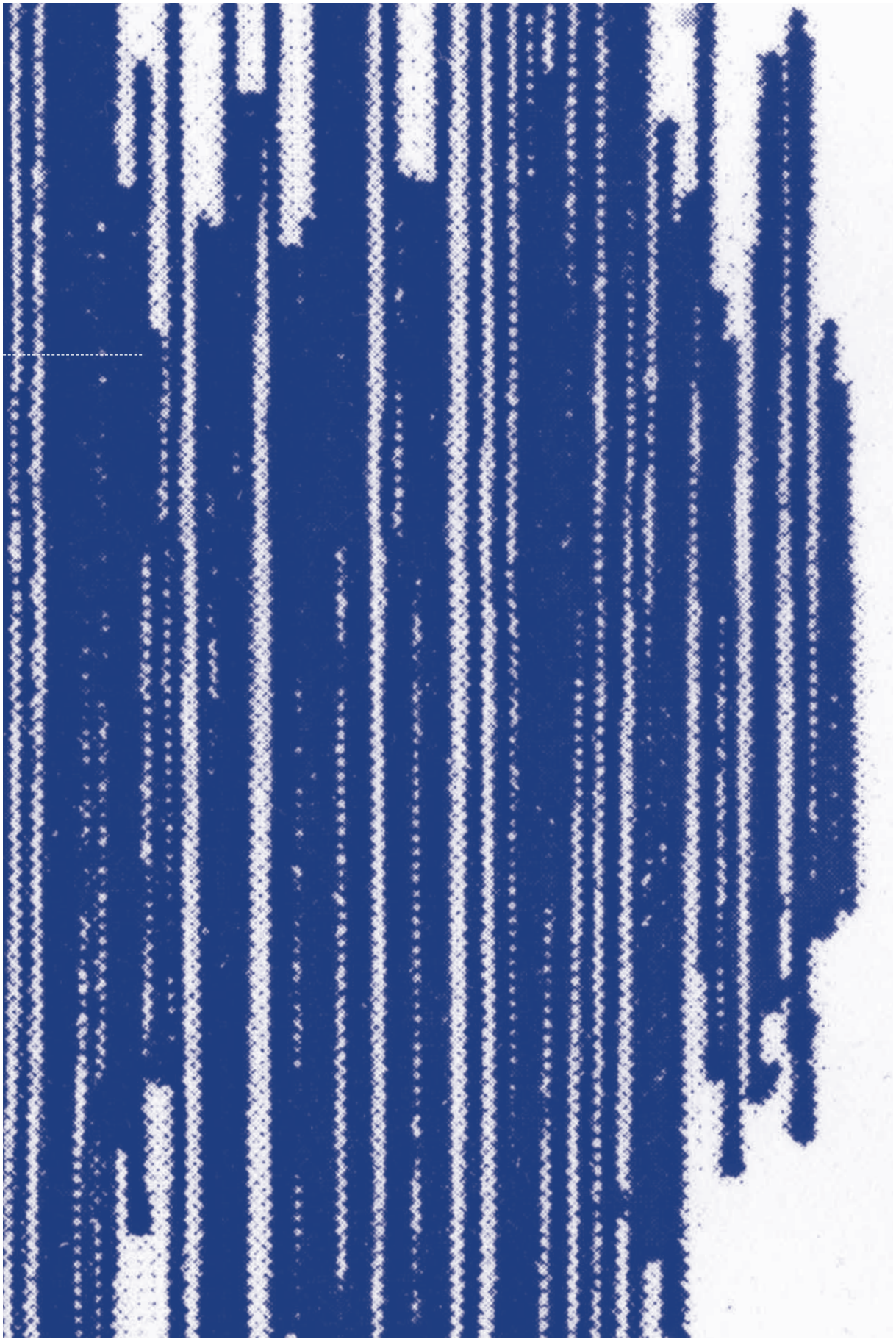

# ArtFutures

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**in higher arts education**

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# *The Contentious Cooperation of Artistic Research*

Since the 1990s, the discourse of 'artistic research' has expanded geographically from the Anglophone countries through Scandinavia and the Netherlands and recently into the German-speaking and Eastern European countries.[1] The discursive field first took shape in art academies, primarily under the heading Visual Arts, but has since come to encompass other arts as well: similar programs of study exist today in the areas of design, theatre, film, music, and dance.[2] The diversity of disciplines in which artistic research is being discussed necessarily entails a diversity of methods and objects of investigation. A clear definition of artistic research, applicable beyond individual disciplines, appears today all the harder to obtain.

Despite persistent attempts,[3] artistic research is hitherto barely defined in a generally accepted manner, let alone unproblematically recognised as a discipline. The fact is that the discussions of recent years have yielded neither a clear and lasting separation of artistic research from art nor a generally recognised conception of research. But another formulation is possible: the field is still open. In any case, the concept remains in motion and in process; this can be gleaned from the fact that new approaches continue to be tested, as recently evidenced in the conference theme "Artistic Research as Science of Aesthetics?"[4]

On the whole, then, the discourse of artistic research is marked by broad heterogeneity. To this day it progresses by way of a 'contentious cooperation', between attempts to hold it open and to pin it down. Whether and how the observer of a finished project perceives it as 'artistic research' or simply as 'art' remains correspondingly open; and it is unclear whether identifiability of that kind would be desirable in the first place.

1 For the historical and geographical development of this discourse, see Sarah Schmidt, "Künstlerische Forschung", in *Kritische Berichte* 35, no. 3 (2007): 50–53.

2 For music, see among others Bruce Brubaker: "Questions Not Answers: The Performer as Researcher", in *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 12, no. 1 (2007): 66–87; Huib Schippers: "The Marriage of Art and Academia: Challenges and Opportunities for Music Research in Practice-based Environments", in *ibid.*, 34–40; Huib Schippers and Liam Flenady, "Beauty or Brains?" in Corina Caduff, Fiona Siegenthaler, and Tan Wälchli (eds.), *Art and Artistic Research (Kunst und Künstlerische Forschung*, Zurich, 2010), 80–87. For dance, see among others Sabine Gehm, Pirkko Husemann, and Katharina von Wilcke (eds.), *Wissen in Bewegung: Perspektiven der künstlerischen und wissenschaftlichen Forschung im Tanz* (Bielefeld, 2007); Efva Lilja, "Throw the Stones Really Hard at your Target or Rest in Peace", in Caduff, Siegenthaler, and Wälchli, 122–131. For theatre, see W.B. Worthen, "Acting, Singing, Dancing and So Forth: Theater (Research) in the Universities", in *Theater Survey* 45, no. 2 (2004): 263–269; Maaike Bleeker, Lucia van Heteren, Chiel Kattenbelt, and Kees Vuyk (eds.), *De theatermaker als onderzoeker* (Amsterdam, 2006); Alfred Nordmann, "Experiment Zukunft – Die Künste im Zeitalter der Technowissenschaften", in Anton Rey and Stefan Schöbi (eds.), *Künstlerische Forschung: Positionen und Perspektiven*, Subtexte 03 (Zürich, 2009), 8–22. For film see among others the chapters "Visual Knowing" and "Practice as Theory", in Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (London, 2005); Diane Read, "Cutting Choreography: Back and Forth Between 12 Stages and 27 Seconds", in Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (eds.), *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London, 2007), 47–63.

3 See, among others, Henk Slager, "Nameless Science", in *Art & Research* 2, no. 2 (2009); Kathrin Busch and Dieter Lesage (eds.), *Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher: The Academy and the Bologna Process* (Antwerp 2007); Henk Borgdorff, *The Debate on Research in the Arts* (Bergen, 2006); Florian Dombois and Philip Ursprung, "Kunst und Forschung: Ein Kriterienkatalog und eine Replik dazu", in Kunst-Bulletin 4 (2006): 30–35; Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager (eds.), *Artistic Research* (Amsterdam, 2004).

4 "Artistic Research als Ästhetische Wissenschaft": this was the title of a conference held September 24–25, 2010 at the Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart.

## A Challenge for Theory-Formation

The volume *Art and Artistic Research* (2010) documents a conference held by the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) in 2009, under the auspices of ELIA.[5] It can be considered an exemplary measure of the current situation, giving voice to the aforementioned heterogeneity of positions. The individual contributions take thoroughly different approaches to the task of defining artistic research: the view that art is always already research is represented side by side with the view of research as an additional, supplementary function which may or may not join with art. In between are found conceptions according to which a continuum of mixed forms today extends between the arts on the one side and research on the other.[6] A good overview of the ongoing debate is also provided by the articles on artistic research in the online journal *Art & Research*.[7] In general, the existing edited collections and essays on this topic attempt to redefine artistic research again and again; yet few of these attempts are widely discussed, many indeed petering out with no discussion.

In the spring of 2010, a conference took place at the ZHdK on the theme *Evaluation and Canon Formation*, with which we attempted to react to a certain flaw in the discussions in recent years, namely the lack of common references and of a shared knowledge of projects, that is, the lack of paradigmatic works, the lack of a canonical body of artistic research projects. The absence of common references has consistently held back discussion. Hence we submitted for debate at this conference both the formation of criteria for determining the quality of relevant projects and the formation of a canon.[8] This choice of theme also proceeded from the assumption that common agreement on a canon entails a more specific form of communication, which in turn sharpens the profile of the scientific community. The conference presentations on this question were likewise heterogeneous and at times contradictory: a majority of artists, in fact, rejected the formation of a canon, while at the same time they articulated the desirability of a portfolio of works as an aide to orientation – less a selection of 'masterpieces' of artistic research than a set of case studies.

At times it seems the discourse of artistic research has reached an impasse. With this comes the fact that an unstable relationship makes itself felt in this field between the formation of theories and the projects of artistic research. Methodological and theoretical contextualisations generally function as permanent

5 Corina Caduff, Fiona Siegenthaler, and Tan Wälchli (eds.), *Art and Artistic Research* (*Kunst und Künstlerische Forschung*, Zurich, 2010). The ZHdK has held conferences in cooperation with ELIA regularly since 2007 (Kickoff-Meeting, ZHdK, September 20–21, 2007; ELIA Art Research Meeting, ZHdK, April 24–26, 2008; The Difference of Art and Art Research across the Disciplines, ZHdK, April 3–24, 2009); Artistic Research: Evaluation and Canon Formation, ZHdK, April 29–30, 2010; upcoming: Modes of Collaborations between Arts and Sciences, ZHdK, April 29, 2011).

6 For the first view, see the contributions in Caduff, Siegenthaler, and Wälchli (note 5) by Nina Malterud ("Can you Make Art without Research?", 24–28) and Marcel Cobussen ("The Intruder", 46–55). For the opposing view, see the contribution by Michael Schwab ("First, the Second. The Supplemental Function of Research in Art", 56–65). For the 'continuum' view, see the contribution by Johan Öberg ("Difference or Différance?", 40–45).

7 www.artandresearch.org.uk

8 http://www.zhdk.ch/fileadmin/data_zhdk/hochschule/Rektorat/Transdisziplinaeres_Atelier/Programm_Artistic_Research.pdf

elements of a discourse; thus the oft-criticised impermanence of artistic research projects is also connected to the fact that theory is still seldom referenced in this field. If a genuine canon is hardly able to emerge, it is not least for this reason. This manifests itself for one thing in the scarcity of citations in the field, as well as in the archival inaccessibility of projects, especially across regions. Here we can hope that the newly founded online *Journal for Artistic Research* affords assistance as a platform for publications.[9] The great and perhaps near-insuperable challenge for the formation of theory consists in the double demand that it do justice to the heterogeneous, transdisciplinary point of departure and, in order to be perceived and effective as theory, that it take steps in a normative direction.

## On the Freeing of the Discourse from the Institution of the Art Academy

The discourse of artistic research has been and remains closely bound to the institution of the art academy. It arose in the course of the Bologna process, whereby the task of research was assigned to art academies, and it likewise stands in close connection with the gradual establishment of PhD programs, first in Anglophone countries and then increasingly in northern, western, and central Europe as well (in this regard, the German-speaking countries are at this moment in the initial phase).[10]

In many places, the institutionalising impulse preceded artistic research itself. In Switzerland for example, a research role was assigned to art academies *before* an artistic research milieu worthy of the name existed.[11] In 1999 the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) instituted a specific program called DORE for the promotion of practice-oriented research at specialised tertiary institutions (so-called *Fachhochschulen*, including art academies).[12] DORE has its own fixed budget and sponsors the realization of practice-oriented projects in art, music, theatre, film, performance, and design. These projects most often last between one and three years, and the financial contribution ranges from 100,000 to 250,000 Swiss Francs (75,000–185,000 Euros) per project.[13] Over the last decade more than one hundred projects in studio art have received this support.

The evaluation of project submissions takes place via an international peer review in which members of research communities at art academies as well as representatives of universities and occasionally practising experts (curators or theatre directors) are involved. By the fall of 2011, DORE will be turned over to the general project-sponsoring division of the SNSF (division of Humanities and Social Sciences); as of then there will no longer be a specific support program for specialised tertiary

[9] www.jar-online.net

[10] Cf. Dieter Lesage, "The Academy is Back: On Education, the Bologna Process, and the Doctorate in the Arts", in *e-flux* 4 (2009); James Elkins (ed.), *Artists with PhDs*: *On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art* (Washington, D.C., 2009).

[11] Cf. the contribution by Arne Scheuermann and Yeboaa Ofosu ("On the Situation of Artistic Research") in Caduff, Siegenthaler, and Wälchli (note 5), 200–208.

[12] The SNSF and DORE work in close contact with the sponsoring agency KTI (Commission for Technology and Innovation), another federal agency that supports projects in the area of application and/or market-oriented research and development, and which is of interest to art academies for projects in the field of design especially.

[13] With regard to the SNSF, DORE, and the sponsored projects, see www.snf.ch/E/current/Dossiers/Pages/DORE.aspx.

institutions, but only a single, common source of funds out of which projects at universities as well as specialised institutions will be supported. For the evaluation of requests from the field of art, the SNSF plans to institute, as of Fall 2011, a special evaluation panel composed of representatives of both art academies and universities and charged with judging traditional requests from universities as well as practice-oriented requests from art academies. This means that the various forms of research in the arts – artistic research; research at art academies; university departments of music, theatre studies, etc. – will grow closer together; it means moreover increasingly close relations between traditional humanities research and the still-emerging artistic research in art academies.

The case for such a tightening of relations – conceived in this case in the programmatic context of a sponsoring institution – is also being made to some extent in the debate over artistic research. As Henk Borgdorff points out, the range of artistic research is restricted to art and music academies, and this restricted extent carries the danger of marginalization: "Artistic research is in danger of becoming isolated from the settings in which society has institutionalised thinking".[14] He thus calls for artistic research to move toward the humanities.[15] At the same time it must be noted that there is resistance to such a move in the artistic research community. Yet if the theory and practice of artistic research is to move forward and the marginalisation Borgdorff diagnoses to be opposed, it would seem indispensable both to engage actively and explicitly with art research in the universities and to bring artistic research more strongly into that context – perhaps by discussing it in university publications or, as is widely occurring already, through concrete institutional cooperation. This could contribute to bringing the practice of research into sharper focus – and thereby also, and not least, to a renewed effort to combat the 'fundamental deficiency' Borgdorff sees in the exchange between the arts and the university.[16]

## Artistic Research in the Public Sphere

The social relevance of artistic research is repeatedly emphasised, although it can take effect only if there exists a corresponding public awareness. In light of this it seems desirable to secure for artistic research a wider public attention beyond the context of universities and art academies. Such a promotion of artistic research is thinkable through the media or alternatively through cultural institutions such as theatres, museums, etc. This type of promotion is directed at individual, concrete projects.

A noteworthy Swiss example would be the research project *eMotion*, collaboratively realised by academics and artists and presented at the St. Gallen Museum of Art in the summer of 2009.[17] This project concerns visitors' experience of museums: prior to entering the exhibition spaces, participants were fitted with an electronic glove

[14] Henk Borgdorff, "Artistic Research and Academia: an Uneasy Relationship", in Torbjorn Lind (ed.), *Autonomi och egenart: konstnärlig forskning söker identitet* (Yearbook for Artistic Research, Stockholm, 2008), 85.

[15] *Ibid*., 86ff. See also Henk Borgdorff, "Artistic Research as Boundary Work", in Caduff, Siegenthaler, and Wälchli (note 5), 72–79.

[16] Borgdorff, "Artistic Research and Academia" (note 13), 87.

[17] eMotion: a project of the University of Applied Sciences, Northwestern Switzerland. Directed by Martin Tröndle. www.mapping-museum-experience.com/en

that precisely tracked their movements, providing information about where a person walked, which pictures she looked at and which not, how long she spent in front of a given picture, whether she read the accompanying text or not, etc. Other sensors measured pulse and skin surface conductivity as indicators of emotional excitation. The technological data collection was flanked by detailed interviews before and after the museum visit. Furthermore, the data collection was translated into sound in real time by a media artist.

The project aroused unusual public interest; a series of articles and reports appeared in print, on the radio, and on television as well as online.[18] Yet despite the fact that project leader Martin Tröndle consistently used the term 'artistic research' in all his interviews, it was not taken up in the media, which is hardly surprising in light of the vague content of the term. The heterogeneous debate over artistic research playing out largely within art academy communities is difficult to convey to the public. It would seem simpler, more concrete, and in the end more substantive as well – and this is also evidenced in the media coverage of *eMotion* – to use concrete projects as the occasion for discussing the mode of collaboration between academics and artists, which can serve as a possible way of specifying artistic research.

## The Heart of Research at the Art Academy

At art academies, the pecularities of both art and science, and their mutual relation, are often being probed in collaborative projects. The specialised capacities of each contribute, on the one hand, to a synergistic collaboration; on the other hand, collaboration brings to light similarities and differences in research mentalities and their respective methods, procedures, and epistemes. But the inquiries have hardly appeared which, with regard to the arts, would systematically present and reflect upon the various modes of this collaboration, at the same time profiling and comparing the corresponding modes of knowledge-gathering.[19]

Hence it seems advisable to give a central place to these collaborations and their developments, and to spend some time considering them, without letting ourselves be taken in by the need to endorse a general definition of artistic research and without being distracted by the question of whether some artistic research is left out in such collaborations – because it would be carried out, say, by artists alone, with no academics on board. For this collaboration,[20] whose substance and productivity remains to be fully explored, is truly the heart of art academy research.

*Translated by Stephen Haswell Todd*

[18] www.mapping-museum-experience.com/medienspiegel

[19] For the presentation of such collaborations see, for instance, the contributions by Hans-Peter Schwarz ("From Undisciplined to Transdisciplinary", 170–179) and Kirsten Langkilde and Stefan Winter ("New Morphologies", 180–189) in Caduff, Siegenthaler, and Wälchli (note 5); or Elke Bippus (ed.), *Kunst des Forschens. Praxis eines ästhetischen Denkens* (Berlin and Zurich, 2009).

[20] Cf. the upcoming conference on Modes of Collaborations between Arts and Sciences, ZHdK, April 29, 2011.

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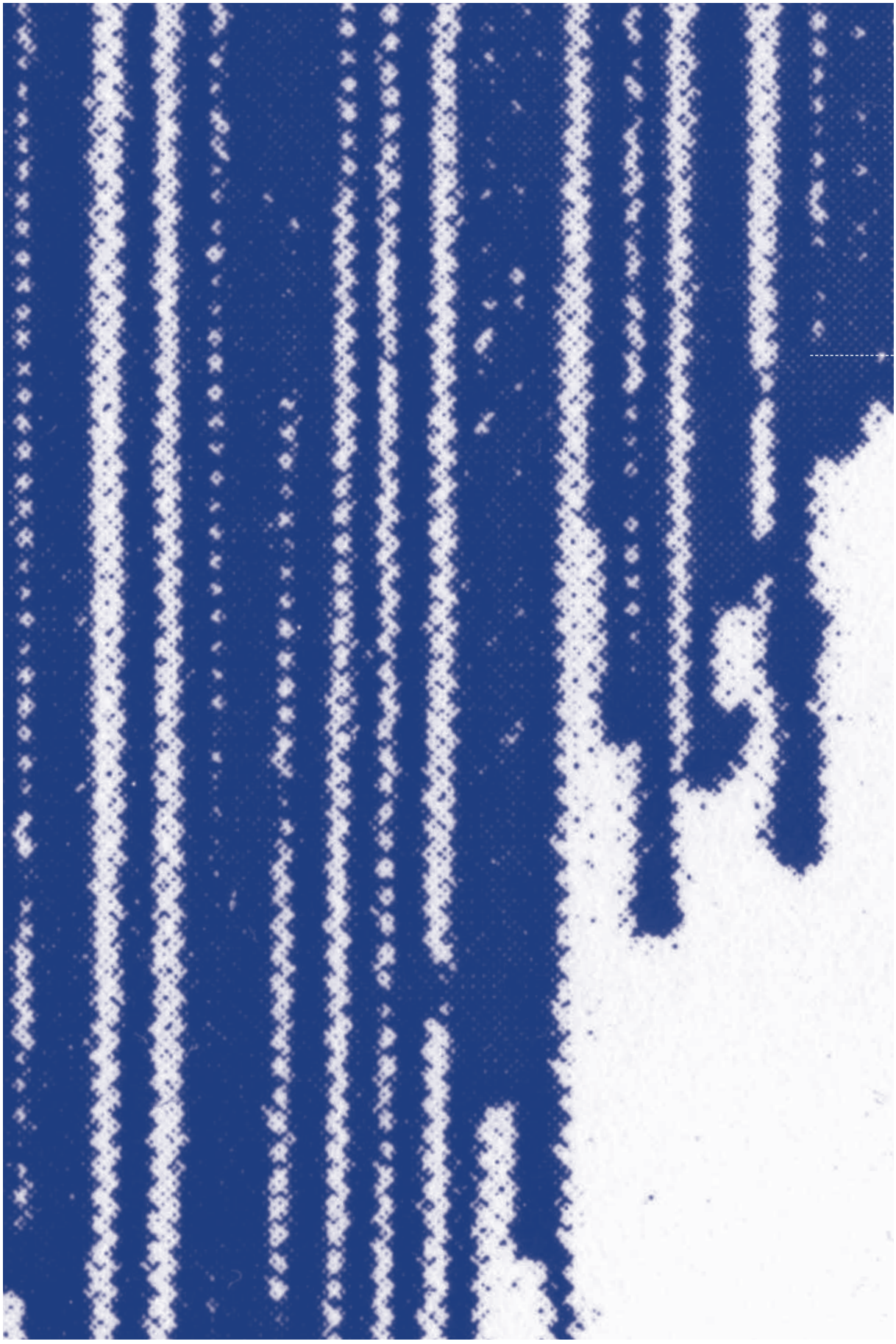

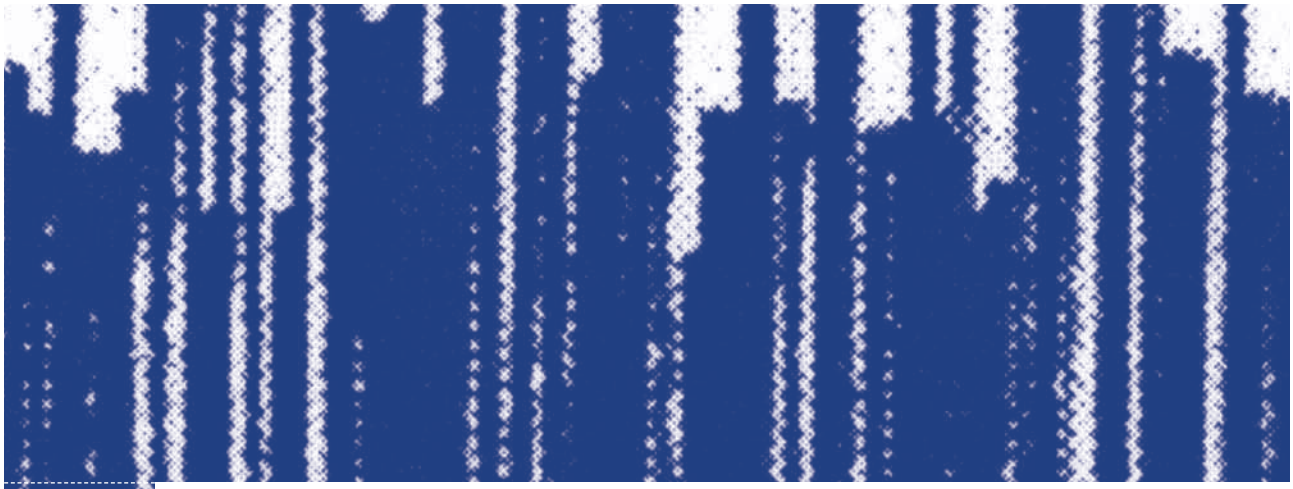

**A**rt**F**utures – *Current issues in higher arts education* brings together contributions by arts educators and thinkers from eight countries and a variety of disciplines. They cover a wide range of topics from post-consumerist art and activist design, via the public role of education and the creative economy, to documentary theatre and improvisation with live electronics. Together, these papers provide an insight into current debates in higher arts education and the role of ELIA within this field. They focus on a field in transformation, illustrate the many ways in which society and art schools interact, and show how art schools are engaged in preparing the ground for new artists and helping them face the challenges of contemporary life.

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