

PEER REVIEWING IN THE 'JOURNAL FOR ARTISTIC RESEARCH'

MICHAEL SCHWAB

Although 'artistic research' is by now a relatively well-established paradigm, opportunities for its publication in journals remain sparse. If, as in other fields of research, outputs in peer-reviewed journals are expected, this may have led to a situation in which artistic researchers are disadvantaged. While it is important not to blindly follow real or perceived expectations (Biggs & Büchler, 2014), publishing in journals can still be important to some artists and researchers.

Many factors may have contributed to this lack of opportunity, some of which concern the particularities of artistic research and others its comparative novelty. Regarding the former, one key problem lies in the general difficulty of integrating propositional (e.g. text) and non-propositional components (e.g. artworks) into a meaningful whole; journals, due to publishing formats and copyright legislation, still struggle to engage with 'enhanced' media content and emphasis on aesthetics. Regarding the latter, it must be said that artistic research's precarious status between academic and professional practice – expressed by Henk Borgdorff (2012b) as 'The conflict of the faculties' – has made it difficult to presume the pre-existence of a community in whose service such journals can operate.

The *Journal for artistic research (JAR)*⁹ was conceived to support the academic publishing of artistic research and to respond to some of these challenges.¹⁰ Now, six years into the project with ten peer-reviewed issues published, it may be a good moment to recapitulate how *JAR*'s particular approach, which focuses on the *exposition of practice as research*, defines its peer-review process. Before going into a more detailed explanation of what we understand by 'exposition', I would like to describe briefly what *JAR* is.

I The journal

'*JAR* is an international, online, open access and peer-reviewed journal for the identification, publication and dissemination of artistic research and its methodologies, from all arts disciplines.' This sentence – often featured in our communications – describes the cornerstones of the project. Unpacking some of the terms will allow me to sketch the ground that *JAR* aims to cover.

JAR is explicitly international. The journal is published by the Society for Artistic Research (SAR), a non-profit association of a growing number of individual artists, researchers, and supporters,

⁹ <http://www.jar-online.net>

¹⁰ See (Borgdorff, 2012b chapter 11) for a description of the process that led to *JAR*.

as well as public and private (art) institutes from around the world.¹¹ While some continents are under-represented or not represented at all, it is SAR's aspiration to extend its membership base and to represent artistic researchers in all their diversity. The focus on diversity is also important for *JAR*, since even on a small scale – for example, in Europe – there are substantial differences between countries and fields of practice. A call for diversity and openness seems particularly necessary in the context of a contemporary art that resists any form of foreclosure. Thomas McEvilley, for example, traces this aspect through the importance that the tradition of 'anti-art' plays in contemporary art, where anti-artists attempt 'to deny or break with every conceivable canon of style, taste, or convention that may have been established by the practice of artists in the past' (anonymous 1953 author quoted in McEvilley, 2005, p. 17). Thus, in our introduction to *The exposition of artistic research: Publishing art in academia*, Henk Borgdorff and I elect two fundamental values that we believe need respecting in all cases concerning art:

- 1 Art is self-determined and suffers when it is told what to do.
- 2 Art challenges existing forms of practice. (Schwab & Borgdorff, 2014, p. 13)

Limiting *JAR* by, for example, discipline, practice, or geographic region would disconnect the project from precisely those contemporary artists who work inside these disciplines, practices, or regions while refusing to be determined by them. This often results in interdisciplinary projects, which bring together expertise from different disciplines, and transdisciplinary projects, where practices are appropriated for the project and where researchers work *across* disciplines (Nowotny, 2011, p. xx). This aspect has been highlighted in the introduction to *Intellectual birdhouse: Art practice as research* where 'artistic research' is seen as 'an activity for border-crossers' (Dombois and others, 2012, p. 11) that may be engaged with 'boundary work' (Borgdorff, 2012a). The importance of transdisciplinarity and boundary work is one of the reasons why artistic research is full of 'tensions which both frame and undermine the institutionalization of artistic research' (Steyerl, 2010, p. 35) pointing to the formation of research cultures not based on shared belongings.

JAR is only available online. Opting for an accessible, digital mode of dissemination is particularly important to *JAR* because having to lay out their submissions online using the Research

Catalogue (RC)¹² software platform engages researchers in the mode in which they communicate and not simply in what they say. The RC supports media-rich and non-linear submissions, although researchers are free to use more conventional – that is, text-heavy and linear – academic formats. The RC is conceived to allow 'complete' ownership of a web page by its authors, which is underlined by the absence of any *JAR* branding or other recognizable elements on the page itself. This technical and editorial choice has two substantial implications. First, the authors are given little or no framework dictating how they should write, thus exposing them to the kinds of decisions usually made by publishers, designers, curators, or managers – that is, people who are not deeply involved in the research itself. Second, these decisions become part of the submission and are consequently reflected in the peer review.

JAR is Open Access. This makes the journal very accessible, in particular to those artists and researchers not affiliated to an institution that would usually cover the subscription cost. *JAR* also does not charge a fee to its authors, since it is in the fortunate position of being supported by SAR and its members, as well as receiving in-kind contributions from peer reviewers without whom the project could not survive. This economic framework not only supports those who are not affiliated to institutions but also those who are early-career researchers with little access to funding. If artistic research is comparable to forms of 'mode 2 knowledge production', as Borgdorff (2008) to some degree suggests, economic perspectives for the integration of the 'context of application' outside academia are crucial.

JAR is peer reviewed in a standard single-blind manner. That is to say, during the review and for those submissions that are rejected, the names of the reviewers are kept confidential. However, during the publication of a submission and after the final copy-editing has taken place, reviewers are invited to leave a public comment, at which point they can opt out of the disclosure of their name, which is *JAR*'s standard and desired mode of operation. I will discuss the implications of this and the specifics of the *JAR* review process in more detail later. However, it is important to emphasise that *JAR*, being positioned on the border between art and research, engages in traditional peer-review processes, which is an exception in the professional field of contemporary art publishing where critics and, increasingly, curators dominate (Lowry, 2014). Adding to this is *JAR*'s open-submission policy, which allows anybody to submit

11 <http://www.societyforartisticresearch.org/>

12 <http://www.researchcatalogue.net>. In Schwab (2014), I discuss questions of technology in more detail, a discussion that in the context of this chapter on peer review is perhaps less relevant.

research and to be treated in a transparent and neutral way. Peer review and open submission run counter to most publishing activities in the art world, where artists are usually invited to contribute, where reasons for acceptance or rejection need not be given, and where those who are invited are rarely challenged to alter their work substantially. How artistic research is peer reviewable is one of the questions that *JAR* was set up to help answer.

While the *exposition of artistic practice as research*, which I will discuss in the next section, is not explicitly mentioned in the above statement from *JAR*, it is highly relevant in a more general sense. When we ask to identify artistic research, we imply that it is not by any means clear what counts as artistic research in a given context. In other words, with their submissions, researchers need to make the case that what they submit counts as research. Thus *JAR* opens up the register of artistic practices that can be identified as research by giving artists the opportunity to engage with modes of production, research methodologies, and strategies of identification beyond what may already be considered as 'research'.

Finally, just as 'international' is used in *JAR*'s descriptive statement above to emphasise geographic diversity, 'all arts disciplines' suggests that there is no bias for or against any particular artistic context and that transdisciplinary questions of artistic practice and research drive the journal.

JAR insists on the possibility of the academic, peer-reviewed publishing of artistic research. In order to do so in a manner that makes sense to artists and researchers, it opens up how a journal article may look, how it may operate communicatively, and how it may be assessed. The following section describes what *JAR* seeks: namely, *expositions of practice as research*.

II Exposition

From the outset, the still-emerging field of artistic research has been plagued by what can be described as 'practice-theory deadlock'. By this I mean the assumption that the extension of notions of research into tacit, experiential, or material domains is *at the same time* an extension of research into the field of the arts, as if the arts were identical with those domains. Notions such as 'practice-based' or 'practice-led' research that are still often used for research in the arts inscribe a practice-bias into the research activities of artists (e.g. Biggs, 2004).

From its beginnings, and as expressed in its name, the *Journal for artistic research* speaks only of 'artistic research' and refuses

to identify artistic work as either practical or theoretical. By taking this stance, the journal can be credited for having left its mark on the overall debate around research in the arts. Malterud (2012, p. 3), for example, credits *JAR* for having 'strengthened' the international trend to develop notions of 'artistic research', which relates to the 'new impetus' within the 'overall discussion' that Mäkelä and others (2011, p. 5) associate with the journal. To my mind, it is no coincidence that a serious, bottom-up academic journal for research in the arts did not exist before the 'practice-theory deadlock' was challenged, where 'practice' could never be made present and 'theory' was always removed. Needless to say, when reading the first issues of *JAR* critically, it is apparent that the field still needed to develop, since the more than twenty-year history of artistic research in academia that has been dominated by the practice-theory deadlock has influenced the habits and expectations of most researchers, who in many cases could improve the ways in which they critically negotiate textual and medial passages in their submissions.¹³

Deciding between the terms 'practice-led research' and 'artistic research' is not simply hair-splitting. As I argue at length elsewhere (Schwab, 2009), notions of the 'practice-led' *accept* processes of supplementation of the kind that Jacques Derrida (1997) describes and critiques without making *supplementation itself available to creative processes* (see also Öberg, 2010). In other words, it is only with the shift to 'artistic research' that artists can engage directly with often very specific processes of knowledge formation, whereas previously little space was given to the complex negotiations and mediations that Bruno Latour (1999), for example, describes as crucial even to the formation of scientific knowledge. Thus, in my understanding, any particular case of artistic research must essentially be seen as self-determining – that is, autonomous research that by engaging with supplementation creates its own registers of knowledge. It is research *avant la lettre*.¹⁴

The possibility of such a form of 'artistic research' results in a problem of communication, for example, in a journal article, where it cannot be assumed that it is clear to a reader (or reviewer, for that matter) *how* what is presented can count as research since registers of knowledge are not fixed (Schwab & Borgdorff, 2014). As a consequence, in a communication the case needs to be made that *exposes what is presented* – be it practice, an aesthetic idea,

13 In many countries, doctoral programmes continue to educate researchers to produce 'practice' and 'theory' components during their course of study.

14 This is also the reason why many voices in the field question whether it is possible to speak of a 'method' for artistic research (cf. Slager, 2009; Miles, 2012).

or a proposition – *as research*. Furthermore, the mode in which such an exposition takes place must not be predetermined so as to allow artists to mobilise – just as they do in the studio – all possible media and materials in a manner that makes (artistic) sense and supports the epistemic proposition.

‘Exposition’ represents a double, reflexive element within a research communication bound together by artistic research practice. On a first level, through documentation or demonstration, elements that serve to constitute an artistic research case are prepared, which on a second level are being assembled in such a way as to reflectively maintain the research practice and put into epistemic perspective the material on which the communication is based.

This complex description becomes instantly clear when it is applied to conventional research communications: for example, an art history text, where we are often given images of artworks together with a piece of academic writing discussing those artworks. Such texts function well as a medium for research communication because they present on a first level materials (such as photographs of artworks) that on a second level (the writing) are being discussed, interpreted, compared, and so forth, shedding new light on and providing new understanding of the materials presented, as well as, in some cases, further developing art-historical methodology – that is, how the research has arrived at this particular understanding.

From an artistic research point of view, this conventional model for a research communication does not need to be overthrown but rather radically extended, predominantly along two axes. First, for artists, there cannot be a predefined hierarchy between means of communication. *Sometimes* the best medium for reflection, interpretation, or exposition may be an image or a video, *sometimes* it may be writing; *sometimes* materials that are reflectively engaged with may be works of art, *sometimes* they may be text. In my understanding, enhanced journals, as they are currently being developed in all fields of research, need to allow for different engagements with media as long as those engagements deliver understanding; media use should not be limited to cutting-edge, interactive data manipulation at the margins of a text. Second, and more specifically in response to artistic demands, the form that is chosen to deliver an exposition should relate to the artistic practice that is presented in the first place. This means that an exposition can be an engagement of artistic research practice, *using a practice to present its own representation*.

This approach challenges the conventional technical frameworks that are used to prepare and process submissions.

With the Research Catalogue, *JAR* uses a software framework that allows one to place any content (text, image, audio, video, etc.) in a rectangular tool anywhere on a web page, enabling all possible types of relationship between the materials used. This approach also challenges conventional processes of peer review, since both the object and the form of assessment need to be adapted once the presentation ceases to offer a transparent view of the content to be assessed. For example, if a submission is not linearly organized, a reviewer, like any reader, will need to make choices as to what is read, heard, or watched, and in which order. The order in which such ‘reading’ takes place may crucially affect a reviewer’s understanding. In artistic contexts, in particular when exhibitions are curated or concerts are programmed, it is very clear that both the way in which things are presented and the order in which they are experienced matter to the appreciation of the event.

Focusing the publishing of artistic research on *expositions of practice as research* also addresses another fundamental problem. Whether one chooses print or digital formats, works of art can rarely be experienced first-hand when they are transposed into such academic contexts. Artworks are usually represented through documentation, and one needs to assume that particular sets of – often material or experiential – qualities are lost as an artwork enters publishing and becomes data. To be sure, the published work still represents an aesthetic site; it is only that a transformation of the aesthetic has taken place that, one assumes, must affect the aesthetic appreciation of the work – as when, for example, the colours of a painting are reduced to those that fit the RGB colour space of a computer screen. While the problem may be minimised through better, more targeted documentation strategies, in principle we have to assume an absence by degree and not the presence of the artwork or practice in its documentation. Further expositional material, ranging from process descriptions to contextualizations facilitated through text or media, can compensate for this aesthetic loss and re-create if not an experience of the work at least the artistic proposition. This re-creation is a scholarly *and* creative act that may radically alter our understanding of that which is re-created or even found – the ‘thing’ that may without expositional identification not exist.

At this point, it is important to stress that *JAR* will not and cannot compare the artistic idea that is evoked in the pages of the RC with the material reality from which the process started. In fact, the works or practices that emerge from the pages of the RC could be completely fictional or run counter to ideas that would otherwise be associated with the material works. In other words, to *JAR*, it is only the encounter with artistic practice through an

exposition that matters and not ‘something else’ that one needs to have seen or heard outside the pages of the RC. While this may be more difficult to do for some artworks or practices, *JAR* assumes that the part that matters for an *exposition of practice as research* can be produced in virtually all cases. As Andrew McGettigan suggests in his article ‘Art Practice and the Doctoral Degree’ (2011), the absence of original artworks or their quality may not be detrimental to the research, since ‘it is the originality of the claims that is at stake rather than the originality of the work submitted – derivative work may support an original thesis.’

Naturally, ‘the part that matters’ cannot be the original experience that I have just described as necessarily absent by degree; rather, what matters in the context of *JAR* is the epistemological dimensions of such an exposition of practice – that is, that meaning or significance is created as the practice is exposed as research.

56 If we relate this conceptual framework to some of the questions that reviewers are asked during the review process, it should be possible to get a better picture of the kind of assessment that *JAR* is after. For example, when we ask ‘Is the exposition of artistic and/or intellectual interest?’, the reviewer should assess the interest that is produced by the exposition and not some form of general artistic quality. This distinction is important, since occasionally the artworks that are documented in a submission look less interesting than the particular and often quite intricate artistic propositions that become clear when one has worked through it. One may remain unexcited by the artworks, but one can, despite this, value a thinking that may otherwise have been missed.

The question ‘Does the submission expose artistic practice as research?’ more specifically asks the reviewer to assess the epistemic dimension of a submission. Here, the reviewer is asked to differentiate between a simple presentation of artistic practice through a documentation of works of art and an exposition that engages the reader with questions of knowledge. However, it is important to stress that epistemicity – that is, issues of knowledge and knowing – may already be touched upon by the artwork and its documentation. In this case, where the exposition of practice as research has already happened before something like a journal article is conceived, there is little extra work required, while in other cases, where there is less engagement to be found, the exposition of practice as research needs to be made in the context of the submission to the journal.

The exposition of artistic practice as research is not a question of ontology. Knowledge may, but need not, be engaged in works of art; the quality of artworks is not dependent on

their expositiveness. At the same time, historically, there has been a trend in contemporary art towards what may be called expository formats for art making, that is, artistic practice that proactively engages with discourse and questions of art, knowledge, and identity. In Schwab (2012) I argue for the importance of what I call ‘second-order art-making’ for contemporary art, where art making is understood as (very general, often non-textual) writing practice and where the ‘gap’ between art and text is already negotiated in the practice itself.

The concept of ‘exposition’ that I have tried to sketch in this section requires a good deal more development, in particular with respect to art criticism, in investigating links to contemporary art, and to epistemology, in creating relationships with the sciences. While research on expositiveness in contemporary art is not yet conclusive, appearing in various guises in the debates around art and knowledge – often without reference to notions of ‘exposition’ or ‘artistic research’ – *JAR* has opted for a pragmatic solution that tries to establish on the ground a working model for the archiving, assessment, publishing, and dissemination of artistic research.

III Assessment

A focus on the *exposition of artistic practice as research* allows for a comparatively radical approach to peer assessment of submissions to *JAR*. Given that a submission needs to make a case for itself as research by using an arrangement of media and/or text, it is difficult, if not impossible, to regulate how this is made, in particular in the context of modern and contemporary art where the transgression and/or negotiation of boundaries on all levels is very much part of professional practice. That is, stable criteria for the assessment of artistic research must be counter-productive, since it has to be assumed that those criteria are not so much fulfilled but targeted by the most relevant contemporary artists and researchers.

One can find ample examples in the history of art, in particular in the first half of the 20th century, where sets of criteria have been erected and challenged, often in close succession. Iconic examples include ‘The Richard Mutt Case’, Marcel Duchamp’s challenge to the ‘open’ exhibition format of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, or Clement Greenberg’s ideas about painting, which were soon confronted by the art of, for example, Robert Rauschenberg. Examples such as these remain very much part of the historical memory of contemporary art. Although contemporary gestures may have ceased

to be avant-gardist in nature – in the sense of the production of a new Art – frames of reference that define what art should be are still challenged by contemporary artists.

When it comes to artistic research, those critical and emancipatory tendencies in contemporary art have been strangely ignored when notions of research from the humanities or the sciences have been applied to – if not imposed on – the emergent field of artistic research. This is not the place to discuss how this has happened in any great detail. Suffice to say that clearly formulated research questions, explicit methodologies, and expected modes of (academic) writing are just some of the reasons why much professional research in contemporary art has not engaged with academia and why fears have been raised that ‘research’ may be one of the ways in which art schools can be more tightly regulated.

In other words, it is also part of *JAR*’s mission to prove to academia that interesting and relevant research, of the kind that is carried out in contemporary art, can be identified and championed without fixed criteria by relying on the expertise of peer reviewers who, through the conceptual framework of ‘exposition’, can pass judgement on the basis of a submission’s own terms.

Biggs and Karlsson (2011b, p. 423) also place artistic research between academic and professional practice and suggest that, once better defined as a ‘third professional category’, ‘the [new] community can identify criteria for determining significant production.’ While I accept that under these conditions criteria can only be provisional and perhaps even limited to subgroups within that community, my sense is that there will always be a *significant* element of assessment not covered by criteria, for which conceptual and institutional frameworks need to be found, which may – for lack of a better word – be rooted in ‘trust’.

When I challenge criteria, I do not mean to suggest that reviewers are left without a framework to support their judgement – the absence of such overriding criteria only means that reviewers are free to support submissions that would otherwise have to be questioned. To take ‘contextualisation’ as an example, which may be seen as one criterion for the assessment of a research project, we prompt reviewers in our peer-review form to think about issues of ‘contextualization’ in a submission, but a reviewer might pass a submission with no contextualization if he or she thinks that this lack is not detrimental. Experience shows us that in some cases reviewers insist on contextualization, while in others it is not deemed an issue. This may be explained by going back to notions of exposition. If the logic of an exposition of artistic practice as research bypasses registers

of contextualization when, for example, a very particular aesthetico-epistemic space is produced in a set of videos, reviewers may not experience a lack; if, on the other hand, a submission describes a particular, unique approach without discussing other, related approaches, reviewers may question the claimed uniqueness of the research and demand more explanation.

As this example demonstrates, ‘criteria’, if understood as ‘checkpoints’, are very important, since they prompt reviewers to inspect particular aspects of a submission. At the same time, there must be the possibility to support more artistic and less scholarly submissions where, after such an inspection, problems with the submission do not emerge. This approach to peer reviewing gives much more freedom to artist researchers to communicate their practice as research on their own terms.

Since *JAR3*, we have added the question ‘Does the exposition fulfil its potential?’ to the peer-review form, realizing that some reviewers had reported disappointment with the expositional choices that were taken while remaining very supportive of the practice that was presented. In other words, reviewers saw something in the submission – and very often in the artistic practice that the submission presented – that they did not see sufficiently recognized in the exposition of the practice as research. It is in this section that we often find suggestions for improvement, but also expressions of excitement with the research, both of which form an important part of the feedback that the author receives from us and which I will describe in more detail in the next section.

However, before I do this, I would like to explain in a few words our peer-reviewer selection process and the way in which the editorial board assesses the peer reviewers’ opinions. To start with, it has to be said that we treat each submission as unique – that is, that we assume it to consist of very particular combinations of known and/or novel approaches to artistic practice and research. Consequently, we cannot assume that a single reviewer will have all the knowledge and skills required to assess the *complete* submission. In our reviewer selection process, we thus need to make sure that we cover all relevant aspects of a submission across a group of reviewers, which consists of at least three or often more individuals. The key dimensions that we aim to cover are: (1) contextual/critical/historical knowledge, (2) artistic expertise, and (3) knowledge of artistic-research methodologies and epistemologies, as well as a detailed understanding of the concept of ‘exposition’ that we employ. Ideally, now that we can look back on our history, albeit short, we would like at least one reviewer to have already been published in *JAR* or to have experienced the RC workspace. On the peer-review form,

we ask individual reviewers to assess their own level of expertise with regard to a particular question to support our evaluation of the reviewer's comments. Sometimes, we need to find further reviewers to arrive at a combination of skills and knowledge that can do justice to a submission.

The group of reviewers assigned to a submission can best be described as transdisciplinary in at least two senses of the word. When it comes to academic or artistic disciplines, we look for representatives who are best able to utilize the resources of their discipline to evaluate what is presented, while the mode in which disciplines may regulate themselves matters much less. For example, an art historian may add much valuable criticism to the historical contextualization given in a submission, which, at the same time, may not be art-historical in nature, and thus may be free to use the history of art very differently, for example, as part of a personal narrative. The transdisciplinary character of *JAR*'s reviewing process therefore requires a certain openness from reviewers as to what may be seen as unorthodox research practices. In a second sense of 'transdisciplinary' we aim to integrate academic and professional research in what is known as 'extended peer review' (Borgdorff, 2012b, p.90), which is particularly important when it comes to the assessment of the artistic and/or intellectual interest of a submission. Unfortunately, to date, we have not been able to achieve this aim consistently, which in my opinion is due to the different economic pressures, habits, and interests across academic and professional research. For example, it may be assumed that academic researchers are paid by their institutions to carry out tasks that support the academic community at large. Professional artists, on the other hand, do not have such income and may find it – for very good reasons – more important to engage in the production of work. How professional artists can better be integrated in review processes remains an important issue.

After we have received the peer reviewers' recommendations, the editorial board evaluates and compares what we have received and either accepts a submission (often with a list of mandatory changes that the author has to address) or rejects it (sometimes with the suggestion to resubmit after revision) on the basis of informed judgement of both reviewers and editorial board. In most cases, and despite the lack of fixed criteria as discussed above, there is wide agreement between reviewers and editors. I find it very important to recognize that *JAR*'s radical peer-review process, which does not force external criteria onto submissions, has not led to constant disagreement or made considered judgement impossible. However, there are cases where the self-assessment of the reviewers becomes important

and where additional reviewers may be called upon to support a final decision. This means that it is actually possible for *JAR* to publish a submission that is not supported by one or more individual reviewers. To explain if and how disagreement matters, I will first sketch *JAR*'s editorial process.

IV Understanding

JAR's approach that seeks *expositions of artistic practice as research* also challenges the editorial process. Its editors often spend a considerable amount of time talking to authors about their research, its meaning, and the expositional options that they may want to consider. While such discussions are not always necessary, in particular when submissions are well prepared and considered, it is important to us that we enter peer review with a discursive mindset rather than a judgemental one. In other words, while peer reviewers are asked to approve or disapprove publication, their other important function lies in the extension of a critical and discursive space within which opinions are formed. This is particularly important following my remarks above, according to which transdisciplinarity has to be established across the different disciplines that are touched upon but which in themselves cannot evaluate the complete submission.

After peer review, each submission is evaluated within an extended discursive space, where the opinion of a specialist reviewer represents one voice amongst other, sometimes contradictory voices. All these have to be taken together to gain an understanding of the particular angle that a submission takes in a discursive space, what strengths and deficits there may be, and what issues may need to be negotiated. It could be that a single reviewer's endorsements are deemed less important in the context of the complete submission and that we reject it for publication regardless.

However, the judgement 'publishing yes/no' is only one part of the feedback that *JAR* provides to the authors and eventually to readers. We send a compilation of all the reviews as an attachment to our letter that informs authors of our decision and our reasons, enabling them to trace what are often very specific arguments. Sometimes, the changes we request relate directly to points made by individual reviewers. While it has happened – as one would expect – that an author is unhappy with a rejection, *JAR*'s peer review is overwhelmingly perceived as a positive process by authors; they seem to appreciate the constructive criticism we attempt to provide and for which the expertise of peer reviewers is crucial. This is to say that *JAR*'s peer

review provides a space for reflection and access to international specialists, which may often not be so easy to find in the local environments in which artist researchers usually operate.

Given the transdisciplinary character of the review, the feedback authors receive will often contain a tension between the different approaches, knowledges, experiences, and also personalities of the reviewers. While authors are sometimes asked to make very specific changes to their submission, it may also be that we ask them very generally to 'improve' a particular section in the light of the feedback. Such requests do not mean that something was 'wrong' with the submission; they are an invitation to engage with the kinds of complexities that the feedback indicates so as to strengthen the expositional case. An improved submission, which is later published, should thus contain as few factual errors as possible and should also represent a more reflected, intense, or potent *exposition of practice as research*.

Once an author has adequately responded to the requests that were made, and the submission has been finalized, it is the public comments that the peer reviewers, authors, and readers leave that add the most value. Reading a submission together with these comments allows for an understanding of the exposition within a discursive space, and for potential disagreement regarding the choices that were made. For example, Vincent Meelberg, author of 'Moving to Become Better', published in *JAR1*, responded in the comments section to the reviewers' feedback with further reflections, but also with a challenge regarding a point made in the review.¹⁵ Lucy Cotter, who reviewed Ruby Wallis's 'Unfixed Landscape', published in *JAR2*, remarked in her comment that while the submission may have been improved, 'the artist's voice is now at times drowned out by or buried under the academic.'¹⁶ Being public, the comments section also allows for additional voices, which are neither those of the authors nor the reviewers but which add to the process of understanding. Carrie Ida Edinger's comment on Carolina Goradesky's 'Innerground' (*JAR3*) may serve as an example; here she relates to

both a reviewer's comment and the exposition itself, opening up additional avenues for consideration, in this particular case the question of research and sound.¹⁷

These examples illustrate the kind of spaces for discourse and critique that *JAR* aims to open up. This process is still very much in its infancy, but I envisage increased discursive activity not only in the comments section but also in the submissions themselves, where authors may potentially refer to expositions that are already online on the RC and artistically engage with the material that those expositions provide.¹⁸ In future developments of the RC software, it will be important to pay attention to the ways in which publishing and discourse formation can be integrated better.

If we assume that artistic research engages with knowledge of a kind that is neither 'true' nor 'false', a peer-reviewed publication needs to provide space in which relationships to that knowledge can be created. Otherwise, we would run the risk of suggesting that what is published in a journal such as *JAR* represents something 'true' outside the discursive space within which understanding is negotiated. In other words, failing to open up review processes suggests that agreement regarding the understanding and relevance of a particular piece of research was possible and that disagreement may indicate a failure and not a choice on the part of the artist or researcher. To artistic researchers, a model based on agreement may be problematic since it can level off important edges. If, as I suggested above, contemporary art and research operate across boundaries, there has to be a place for disagreement, even in peer-reviewed publishing. We at *JAR* believe that the ability to engage with disagreement adds to the quality of artistic research and should not be construed as a sign of either inferior modes of knowledge or of failures on the part of the artists or the editorial process; rather, it is a sign of the maturity, seriousness, and exactitude with which all types of epistemic phenomena can be integrated into the complex and discursive space of an *exposition of artistic practice as research*.

15 <http://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-exposition?exposition=11612>

16 <http://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-exposition?exposition=959>

17 <http://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-exposition?exposition=30418>

18 RC account holders are allowed to reuse material in the context of the RC. See the RC 'Terms of Use' at <http://www.researchcatalogue.net/portal/terms>