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EDITORIAL

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‘Immersive Horizons: Blurring the Creative Frontiers between Virtual and Material Worlds’: A special selection from *RE:SOURCE* papers

ABSTRACT

The special issue ‘Immersive Horizons: blurring the creative frontiers between virtual and material worlds’, presents a collection of articles from RE:SOURCE – The 10th International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology held in Venice in 2023. This edition focused on the intersection of media art history with the ongoing climate emergency, exploring new perspectives on resources and archival methods. In this framework, this collection focuses on the emergence of the virtual world as a significant force in contemporary society, blurring the boundaries between physical and digital realities. Authors have seized

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this opportunity to redefine perception and representation, challenging conventional notions of identity and connectivity. Through diverse approaches, ranging from telematic artworks to virtual reality experiences, the issue explores the transformative potential of immersive technologies in shaping artistic expression and cultural discourse, aiming to encourage experimentation and provoke meaningful conversations about art and technology.

This Special Issue, 'Immersive Horizons: Blurring the Creative Frontiers between Virtual and Material Worlds', is a collection of articles presented at *RE:SOURCE – The 10th International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology*. Held in Venice from 13 September to 16 September 2023, the conference aimed to celebrate the histories of media art and the role that its main agents have had in the multiple developments of art, science and technology over the past 60 years.

We proposed to focus this edition on the timely issue of the ongoing climate emergency, seen both historically and in connection with current environmental studies and methodologies applied to new media. Through this theme we wanted to offer a new way of thinking about *resources*, and look for new strategies, actions and approaches related to archival methods and different ways to create memories. We are strongly convinced that Media Art History is an active agent encouraging and facilitating new conversations about these timely issues, and bringing the conference to Venice was a prompt to activate small reflections of the bigger climate issues that are happening globally. Related to this, we can observe that, in this significant period in history, the virtual world swiftly emerges, providing a multiplicity of perspectives and proposing new ways of perceiving and interacting. This gives rise to a hybrid reality where the boundaries between the virtual and physical realms intersect, integrating the ambient and the humans into a unique perceptual and cognitive entity.

In this context, and over the last decades, artists seized this opportunity to explore new modes of representation, redefining the ways we perceive our environment. This Special Issue looks at some of these cases. In 'Vera Frenkel's *String Games: Improvisations for Inter-City Video*', Mikhel Proulx provides the historical analysis of the homonymous video-based telematic artwork staged in 1974 and delves into the roots of collaborative and co-operative projects within a virtual community. Connected to it, a reflection on the conventional notions of the self in relation to image manipulation and cultural responses is tackled by Monika Fleischmann and Wolfgang Strauss in 'Beyond Narcissus: Seeing the self in the other'. This article proposes a reorientation of the media Narcissus and the interactive, algorithm-based generative media of the 1990s art and science scene in Germany. In this case, the transition from the symbolic reflections to the participatory engagement forms the crux of the narrative, challenging perspectives on identity, connectivity and the dynamic interplay between the tangible and virtual realms. Reflecting on the perception of the natural environment, 'Atmospheric listening instruments: Art and science technologies for attuning to our natural environments' by Juan C. Duarte focuses on his media installation *Augury*. The article explores how environmental consciousness is elevated through the resonance of sound and techno-embodiment. Its objective is to align individuals with their surroundings by creating soundscapes derived from data and signals originating from the

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ambient weather conditions. A similar sensibility to the natural landscape is presented in 'The *Ice-Time* project: Tessering the space-time of climate change' by Clea T. Waite. Through her immersive media artworks, Waite addresses human perception of the earth ecosystem's precarious state, offering a four-dimensional hyper-view into both time and space.

In 'Exploring a digital art archive in mixed reality', Tiago Martins, Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau offer a notable contribution to the theme of the augmentation of the archives. Working on the technology embodiment, the artists' application of mixed reality explores the archives' digital artworks using body interaction and the intuitive understanding of a three-dimensional (3D) world of objects and people.

Aligned with it, Vanina Hofman Matusевич and Valentina Montero analyse the potential of virtual reality (VR) and 3D models in order to blur the boundaries of new, immersive realities. In their article, 'Creative, collective and divergent practices in the virtualization of cultural heritage', the authors explore the engagement in practices linked to digital heritage through the usage of digitalization and 3D modelling technology.

The full-circle potential of the point cloud aesthetics have been tackled by Lucija Ivšić, Jon McCormack and Vince Dziekan in 'The point cloud aesthetic: Defining a new visual language in media art'. In this article, the new digital aesthetic called 'point cloud' is discussed as a medium with high creative potential in artistic practices, seeing the artworks shifting the spectators' perception in a complex immersive data-based world.

Finally, 'The power of virtual reality performance experiences for education' by Emily Kirwan looks at how empathy and experience, existing within the VR performance medium, facilitate learning.

Far from being exhaustive, this Special Issue provides a glimpse into the application of immersive technologies in creative and artistic practice, as seen through the perspectives of artists and authors presenting a diverse array of approaches in the creation and re-creation of virtual and physical worlds. Through this exploration, we aim to inspire curiosity, spark innovation and foster a deeper understanding of the evolving relationship between technology and artistic expression. By delving into the diverse perspectives and approaches presented in this Special Issue, we strive to provoke thought, encourage experimentation, and ignite meaningful conversations about the possibilities and implications of immersive technologies and the transformative power of technology in shaping the future of artistic expression and cultural discourse.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Clio Flego is research fellow at the University of Genoa, working on human-machine interaction and AI application for cultural practices. She holds an EMJM in Media Arts Culture, and a graduate degree in visual and performing arts obtained at IUAV University of Venice. She has a broad international experience in project management, with expertise in cultural projects at the crossroads of art, science and technology. She has organized and programmed international conferences and events, such as *RE:SOURCE – The 10th International Conferences on the Histories of Media Arts, Science and Technology* (2023), *KiezSalon Adventurous music series* (2015–17), *Madeira Micro Film Festival* (2015–16) and *LEM festivals* (2014), curating exhibitions for institutions such as *Art_Inkubator* (2019) and *Paratissima* (2018). She has cooperated

as a creative and critical thinker with such universities and cultural institutions as ISAST Leonardo, Radio Web MACBA, EPFL, FACT Liverpool and Venice Biennale. She has been European Innovation Ambassador in 2019–20, and is an active board member of three cultural associations (RESOURCE, Amici del Festival della Scienza, MetaDiaPason) dedicated to advancing art and science across Italy. She is art papers juror at SIGGRAPH2024, *The Premier Conference & Exhibition on Computer Graphics & Interactive Techniques*.

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Francesca Franco, Ph.D., is a Venetian-born curator, art historian and producer based in the United Kingdom and Italy. From 2019 to 2023, she was co-investigator on the AHRC-funded project 'Documenting Digital Art: Re-thinking Histories and Practices of Documentation in the Museum and Beyond' at the University of Exeter. In 2022, she produced and curated *Vera Molnár: Icône 2020*, an exhibition centred on a new commission, 'Icône 2020', at the *59th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia*. In 2017, she was curator-in-residence at the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa Venice, where she curated *Algorithmic Signs*, an exhibition that explored the history of pioneering generative art. The central theme of Francesca's research is the history of art and technology and the pioneers of computer art. A major focus has been the history of the Venice Biennale, culminating in a series of publications that have been translated into various languages. Her first solo-authored book, *Generative Systems Art*, was published by Routledge in 2018. Her second monograph, *The Algorithmic Dimension*, was published by Springer in 2022. Her forthcoming book on the history of computer art at the Venice Biennale will be published by Springer in 2025. Her most recent exhibition, *Vera Molnár: Variazioni Icône*, was on view through March 2024 at the Accademia d'Ungheria in Rome.

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