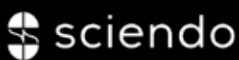


Commentary

Perspectives on the future of film education in Europe



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores potential avenues for the future development of film education in Europe, emphasizing how ongoing technological, social, and institutional transformations affect both the medium of film in itself but also the pedagogical approaches implemented within film schools. Acknowledging rapid advancements like virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and shifting audience behaviors, the paper argues for a paradigm shift toward educating through film, rather than merely about it. The authors present FilmEU – one of the new “European Universities” Alliance – as a model for the future development of film education, highlighting its interdisciplinary and trans-European approach to creative arts. Additionally, the “Samsara” pedagogical framework is introduced. This is a pedagogical framework designed to foster a holistic learning experience that balances technical training with a broader media literacy and critical thinking focus. The paper advocates for innovative, project-driven approaches that enable film schools to remain relevant and impactful in the cultural and creative industries in the midst of the profound ongoing transformations.

KEYWORDS: film education, Samsara framework, FilmEU Alliance, artistic research, interdisciplinary learning

INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with ongoing transformations that have a profound impact in film education and research practices. These transformations take different and variable forms, from changes in technology to consumer patterns and audiences' behavioural traits. We intend to reflect upon some of these changes and discuss the opportunities they also entail in view of allowing us to benefit from the immense potential film has, as a research and educational resource. More precisely, we want to dis-

cuss how the multiple affordances film has as a medium, a social construction, a meaning making apparatus or an educational asset, can be further explored in educational and research contexts. Our argument is that although film is “still” a core medium in our society, representing one of the main driving forces behind the increasing importance of the so called cultural and creative industries, its societal relevance will only continue to increase in the future in educational and research related terms if we move from a focus on talking *about films*

to a focus on *doing education and research through film*. Our argument assumes that the many challenges film as a medium and art form currently faces call for a rethink of existing educational models and related institutional settings. In this text we will argue that for that to be possible we need both proper structures and proper pedagogies. We will present a concrete proposal for such a structure and pedagogical model based on our ongoing work in the context of FilmEU – The European University of Film and Media Arts.

In this paper we will not discuss the many folded transformations the film medium is going through in face of a fast-changing technological environment. Although these transformations are at the centre of some of the challenges we have already mentioned, our argument implies it is more important to analyse what they entail for educational and research practices, instead of discussing the myriad of concrete technological details these transformations involve. Technological advancements have had a profound effect on the film medium, with impacts across the value chain, from production to distribution (i.e. Kehoe & Mateer, 2015). The impact of technological advancements on film can be observed in several areas, from production techniques, where innovations such as digital cameras, computer-generated imagery (CGI), and advanced editing software, have transformed the way films are produced; to post-production and editing, where new domains, such as data management, digital workflows, or archival preservation, have become essential to post-production practices.

The emergence of several new outlets for film distribution and consumption also calls us to rethink digital marketing strategies, audience engagement through social media, and the monetization of online content as emerging key aspects of the film business (Finney, 2022). And, last but not least, the rise of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies (Mateer, 2017), and more recently the virtual production hype, all have opened up

new possibilities for immersive storytelling and the adoption of new production pipelines and approaches.

All these transformations are obviously reshaping the film medium and force us to rethink its future status, namely when one considers the very complex and multifaceted sum of elements they entail. Here we want to focus on a very specific aspect of this much broader landscape: how can we continue to teach and research *about and through* film and what should be our future educational and research approaches in view of this changing environment? Our focus is on the future of education and research *through* and *about* film and how it should be framed and developed.

FILM EDUCATION AND FILM SCHOOLS

Film education plays a crucial role in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the multi-dimensional nature of film as both an artistic practice and a form of entertainment. However, as we look towards the future, it is important to acknowledge the challenges that film education will face in order to capitalize on the opportunities presented by this evolving medium. We have already mentioned how rapid advancements in technology, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence (AI), are reshaping the medium and clearly present numerous present challenges for film education. Of particular relevance is the disruptive impact that AI is having upon all creative practices. In the face of technological change, creativity is often held up as a uniquely human quality, less vulnerable to the forces of technological disruption and critical for the future. Today, however, generative AI applications such as ChatGPT and Midjourney are threatening to upend this special status and significantly alter creative work, both independent and salaried. In a recent paper (April, 2023 edition) in the Harvard Business Review, authors David De Cremer, Nicola Morini Bianzino, and Ben Falk argue that it is up to business and society to

decide how much impact AI will have on creative work. In the face of generative AI's tremendous disruptive power upon creative work, the authors talk of three different scenarios. They call the first one "AI-assisted innovation", and we could label this as an intermediary level where AI essentially plays a supporting role, simply allowing humans to perform creative work in a faster and more efficient manner. A second possible scenario is that unfair algorithmic competition and inadequate governance leads to the crowding out of authentic human creativity. Here, human writers, producers, and creators are drowned out by a tsunami of algorithmically generated content, with some talented creators even opting out of the market. If that happens, then an important question that we need to address is: How will we generate new ideas? In this scenario, generative AI significantly changes the incentive structure for creators and raises risks for businesses and society. For educators the key issue that arises is quite simple: with no need to educate and train creators will film schools and related educational institutions simply disappear or should they focus on novel ways of generating and exploiting creative ideas and knowledge?

The third potential scenario that we could see develop is one where the "techlash" resumes with a focus against algorithmically generated content. One plausible effect of being inundated with synthetic creative outputs is that people will begin to value authentic creativity more again and may be willing to pay a premium for it. Under this scenario that authors label as "Human-made commands a premium", the role of film and artistic education would gain tremendous importance by focusing precisely on those skills and competencies that signal "the human touch" in content creation.

In response to these three scenarios, the authors claim that codifying, digitizing, and structuring the knowledge we create will be a critical value driver in the decades to come, in view of ensuring one is able to turn generative AI into a source of inno-

vation and not one of destruction. These authors understanding of the technological landscape can be summarized as a) AI challenges the creative value chain in two contradictory ways: by shifting some services performed by humans to algorithms and by empowering the individual creator. The first aspect points to the risk of job destruction while the other highlights the need to train and educate professionals to profit from the technology and be inspired by it. b) AI-generated content challenges the transparency of creative processes including the accountability of creators as well as their agency (Joshi, 2023). At the same time, this "business" oriented perspective neglects a number of opportunities: new algorithm training tools and data governance methods are needed to achieve improved transparency and avoid discrimination (Chun, 2021); new exclusive rights on datasets must be designed in order to incentivise creative work, innovation and research, particularly at national and local level; cultural institutions have rich datasets of cultural heritage that could be made accessible to a larger audience as well as for training machine learning models and this requires novel ways of navigating through this content (a new form of media literacy?) while securing access to the desired cultural heritage in order to empower place-based innovation systems. The core issue is that the use of AI for media content raises problems but also opportunities regarding cultural and linguistic diversity (Kulesz, 2018) and the training of less centralized models (Iliadis & Foerd, 2023), that open opportunities for other scenarios, namely one where the intensive training of models in diversified cultural content and human exploration of this cultural content foster unforeseen links and cultural innovations through AI. This human-centric innovation (Ibrus, 2019) approach seems an interesting one in view of turning AI into a source of innovation and clearly one where schools and educational institutions can play a role.

When we look at all these scenarios and the implications they have for film

schools and film education, one cannot cease to either be in absolute panic or complete excitement with all the developments rapidly unfolding before our eyes. These processes considerably affect how knowledge is constructed and shared in a networked society, and as educators we are now more than ever in the past, called to adapt our pedagogical approaches in order to incorporate these emerging technologies while maintaining a balance between traditional filmmaking techniques and modern digital practices.

When discussing film education today, it is highly relevant to understand that not only do these technological transformations call for new methods and pedagogical approaches, but also a number of other elements dictate a need for change. Audiences are in turmoil and their preferences and viewing habits are constantly evolving, namely in response to shifts in delivery methods. Streaming platforms and online content consumption have transformed the way films are accessed and consumed. Film education must adapt to these changes by embracing new distribution models and exploring alternative platforms to engage and educate students effectively.

When talking of consumption habits and patterns, one must be aware of the need to take cultural and diversity into consideration. Film education must address these concerns by incorporating diverse perspectives, narratives, and voices into our curriculum. This involves reevaluating the canon of film history, exploring films from different cultures, and championing under-represented filmmakers, while also including a business and economic perspective in our teaching since students need to be aware of the business and economic context where these activities occur and how limited resources can hinder a production.

Changes in film education pedagogical and didactic approaches are closely tied to the transformations film schools are also going through. A film school is a generic term for a Higher Education Institution dedicated to teaching the practical skills of filmmaking, and many, if not all,

usages of the term “film school” now refer to audiovisual as well as film, frequently including animation and/or digital media as well. One of the main drawbacks of these educational institutions has been their difficulty in integrating research activities and high-quality theoretical reflection into their curricula and activities, a problem that has often been addressed via a process of “academicisation” we will later return to. In past decades, the programmes offered by most traditional film schools have changed in order to cover the broader curriculum. Graduate and Undergraduate courses that were once titled: “Film Production”, “Film and Television Production”, “Film and Video Production”, “Film and Moving Image Production”, “Film and Multimedia”, and “Film and Video”, are now transformed to “Screen Arts”, “Media Arts”, “Cinematic Arts”, and “Moving Image Production”. In addition, traditional programmes tend to favour the hands-on element to the exclusion of theoretical media studies and analysis. This precisely constitutes a second drawback of this model, since most of these schools do not include such type of content in their offer and do not supplement it by offering second-cycle or master education, and in those cases where they do, it is strongly focused on technical specialisation. Such a tendency might be related to the longstanding debate within film industry circles as to the importance of film school training, as opposed to the traditional hierarchical apprenticeship system of learning “on-the-job” from experienced professionals in the relevant department. In the digital age, this lack of apprenticeship has dropped for the post-production crafts as well, like editing and sound.

Historically, the role of the film school has changed. The first film school in the world was VGIK (Vsesoiuznii Gosudarstvennii Institut Kinematografii/All-Union State Institute of Cinematography), which was founded in Moscow in 1919. A number of major international film schools are state-funded but generally self-standing, that is, partially independent from other third-level universities, institutes and colleges. Film

schools in this category include those in countries formerly part of the Soviet bloc, such as FAMU (Filmová a televizní fakulta Akademie múzických umění/Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts Prague), a faculty of the AMU (Akademie múzických umění/Academy of Performing Arts) University; PWSFT (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Filmowa, Telewizyjna i Teatralna/Polish National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Łódź), founded in 1948; and Színház – és Filmművészeti Egyetem-University of Theatre, and Film Arts Budapest, founded in 1947. These film schools were designed for state-funded film industries, where graduates who completed their courses were guaranteed employment for life. Elsewhere, other national (and usually independent) film schools, which tend to have a relatively small number of students, include the Nederlandse Film en Televisie Academie (the Netherlands Film and Television Academy) in Amsterdam, which was founded in 1958; Den Danske Filmskole (the National Film School of Denmark); IADT in Ireland and in the UK the National Film and Television School (NFTS), which opened in 1971. National film schools are not only situated in Europe: the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), founded in 1973, is a good international example, as is the Beijing Film Academy, established in 1950. However, many film schools can be found within art colleges, Universities, and institutes of technology. These would include the leading examples in the USA, such as UCLA, NYU, and the University of Southern California. In Europe, Aalto University in Helsinki (Finland); the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia); BFM – Baltic Film and Media School at Tallinn University or the Film Department at Lusófona University in Lisbon, all fall under this distinction since they all are film schools which are faculties, schools, or departments within the overall institution in which they are based. The representative body for film schools is CILECT (Centre Internationale de Liaison des Écoles de Cinéma et de Télévision), the International Association of Film and

Television Schools, and there is no world-class film school that is not a full member. CILECT includes more than 160 institutions from 61 countries on five continents and has a Europe section named GEECT – The European Association of Film Schools. As film schools have increased exponentially and mushroomed around the world – particularly in the past 25 years – there is now a higher percentage of industry professionals than ever who have studied at a film school.

The core values inherent to the discipline of film on which most of these schools are focused are creative storytelling and the development of the visual imagination, whatever technology is used. The use and meaning of images and sound are relevant whether the style or genre of the content is highly commercial in intent or experimental in form. Many of these schools follow highly specialised approaches with a focus on the training of creative artists in the areas of writing, production, and directing and highly specialised creative technicians in the areas of cinematography, editing and sound.

This focus on specialisation directly stems from these schools' original focus on primarily educating auteurs, that is, writer/directors. This was the so called "Triangle" system, which was promoted by CILECT from the 1990s and that has been highly influential in framing film education, namely in Europe. Up until the introduction of the Triangle, there was very little training for the film producer, but that changed in the late XX century and also in the period, the curriculum in many graduate and undergraduate film courses also started to give more space to technical creative specialities such as cinematography, editing, design, and sound. With the digital tsunami in the XXI century, these specialisations were further enriched with new areas such as visual effects or virtual production and a new trend emerged whereby film schools started developing degrees in complementary areas, such as animation, videogames or transmedia production, where film creative and conceptual affordances are also

highly relevant. These trends in the sector have meant that, apart from those that work in traditionally-crewed large-scale feature films made for the cinema or television, there is an increasing demand for graduates with a wider skill set and a reasonable competency in the basic specialties, as above. This quest for a wider range of competences follows both industry and market demand and a recent trend towards the emergence of more cross-disciplinary competencies associated with the arts and the moving image. This has happened at the same time that there has been a so-called “democratisation” of the media, with the advent of reasonably-priced cameras, mobile phones with high-res capacity, free computer editing programs, and platforms such as YouTube or VIMEO. However, this “democratisation” has shown to be largely illusory, frequently promoted by manufacturers of digital technology or promoters of websites, who have deliberately fostered the impression that anyone can be a filmmaker overnight as long as they are in possession of the equipment. Platforms and AI solutions with the promise of the hyper-individualized filmmaker, only exacerbate this discourse (Iliadis, 2023). Nevertheless, the advantage of developing more overall technical skills, at the expense of training only writer/directors, has been beneficial as far as broadening employment opportunities upon graduation and enlarging the scope of the discipline itself. Following this, a new model has emerged labelled “Pentagon” system that includes the Writer/Producer/Director/Creative Technician and the Creative Programmer, as a transversal competence that includes parts of all others. This model was developed in the context of the already mentioned FilmEU and it represents the state of the art in terms of film schools’ curricular models. Although film schools have tried to adapt their curriculum and programmes, the fact is that the need clearly exists for the definition of pedagogical models that allow film education to surpass the focus on specialisations and include more cross-disciplinary and transversal competencies.

One of the key aspects of the development of such approaches is the integration of film and media literacy as a valuable and necessary skill along with a focus on transversal skills such as entrepreneurship and communication. In promoting the integration between technical, artistic and creative skills, new pedagogical models will reinforce and further explore the academic focal topics of most film schools, while also increasing employability and allowing for the exploitation of a rich and diverse European film tradition in new creative and business contexts. Film schools in Europe hold significant importance in shaping the film industry and nurturing aspiring filmmakers. Europe has a rich cinematic heritage, with several iconic filmmakers and influential film movements originating from the region. Film schools in Europe serve as custodians of this legacy, imparting knowledge and techniques developed over decades to new generations of filmmakers. Their teachings often draw inspiration from the artistic and cultural traditions that have defined European cinema. At the same time, film schools in Europe are renowned for their high standards of education and distinctive curriculum as already described. They provide aspiring filmmakers with a structured and immersive learning environment, equipping them with the craft-related skills, theoretical knowledge, and practical experience necessary to excel in a professional context. The emphasis on craftsmanship and storytelling nurtures the development of well-rounded filmmakers.

Film schools in Europe play a pivotal role in shaping the film industry by imparting knowledge, nurturing creativity, fostering collaboration, embracing cultural diversity, and preserving film heritage (Bondebjerg & Novrup Redvall, 2015). They serve as vital institutions that inspire, educate, and empower aspiring filmmakers, contributing to the growth and evolution of European cinema and its global impact. But nowadays European film schools are challenged by complex institutional alterations. In Europe, film schools are traditionally tied to the educational models of the conserva-

toires which are, for the most part, still distinct from the wider academia. This long-standing focus on the elements of craft and art-making results in an orientation that was, and still continues to be, practical, placing the master/disciple relationship at the heart of the educational process. In the last decades, these institutions have been under a great deal of pressure. The reforms of the Bologna process had far-reaching ramifications for these institutions by replacing some training regimes of flexible length with ones that could accommodate the ordered cycle of degrees proposed by the reform. Further faced with the need for European Standards compliance, namely those articulated in the “Dublin descriptors” of 2004 and more recently in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), many of these institutions started transforming themselves by engaging in a process of “academicisation”.

This resulted in great tension between the original nature and focus of these institutions on professional-level training and the much wider mission to which academic institutions are nowadays ascribed. The result was that many film schools went through a period of turmoil that has greatly hindered their ability to build alliances or experiment with structural changes. Throughout this period, these institutions, and many other programs that have emerged inside universities based on similar educational models, have continued to pursue progressive pedagogical approaches supported by their special heritage, their pragmatic response to individual working methods, and their close connections to students and their work. Yet, many impediments to these HEI activities remain, like legal or institutional constraints that disallow the introduction of the subject as a self-sufficient element of a doctoral degree, or concerns over financial viability due to the costly nature of teaching, resulting in pressure for greater massification and a decrease in the intensive use of expensive state-of-the-art technologies.

This means the vitality and relevance of film schools is hampered by their rela-

tively small size, which creates constraints in terms of critical mass and investment capacity, but also by their difficulties in adhering to the full scope of contemporary higher education institutions’ mission, in particular when research is at stake.

In the midst of all the transformations and challenges we have mentioned, we also identify a large number of opportunities for film schools and Film Education:

- a. **Multi-Dimensional Learning:** Film education offers a unique opportunity to explore multiple disciplines and areas of study. Integrating elements of visual arts, literature, history, sociology, and psychology into film education programs can foster interdisciplinary learning, enabling students to develop a holistic understanding of the medium.
- b. **Technological transformations:** Despite the challenges, technological transformations also present exciting opportunities in film education. Virtual production can provide immersive learning experiences while also allowing students to produce at a lower cost. Artificial intelligence can be utilized to analyse and understand the language of cinema, enhancing film analysis and critique. If properly mastered, namely via codifying, digitizing, and structuring the knowledge, AI can be very useful in terms of including in the student or critic broader and new perspectives outside of its terms of reference.
- c. **Collaboration and Networking:** Film education provides a platform for collaboration among students, educators, and professionals. By fostering partnerships with filmmakers, film festivals, and production companies, film education programs can offer students

valuable networking opportunities, internships, and mentorships, which can greatly enhance their career prospects.

- d. Cultural diversity: Film is a language that transcends borders and cultures. Film education can provide students with a global perspective by exposing them to international cinema, enabling cross-cultural understanding and promoting empathy. By incorporating films from diverse cultures, film education can contribute to a more inclusive and interconnected society.

Film education and film schools face both challenges and opportunities in the future as they navigate the multi-dimensional nature of film as an artistic practice and a form of entertainment. Overcoming the challenges of technological advancements – particularly AI, changing audience preferences, diversity considerations, and structural institutional constraints is crucial to ensure a relevant and inclusive film education offered by film schools apt to deal with this changing environment. Embracing the opportunities presented by interdisciplinary learning, technological advancements, collaboration, and cultural diversity will enable film education to thrive and prepare students for the dynamic landscape of the cultural and creative industries, where artistry and entertainment converge. For this to occur we need three things; proper institutional structures; proper pedagogical models and adequate approaches to R&D that suit film and media affordances and potential.

FilmEU: AN INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO “FUTURE FILM” NEEDS

FilmEU brings together several European Higher Education Institutions: ULusofona – Lusófona University from Portugal, LUCA School of Arts in Belgium, IADT – Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Tech-

nology in Ireland, TLU – Tallinn University, in Estonia, VŠMU – Academy of Performing Arts, Slovakia, LMTA – The Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, VIA University College, Denmark, and NATFA – The National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts “Krustyo Sarafov”, from Bulgaria. Together, these institutions collaborate around the common objective of jointly promoting high-level education, innovation and research activities in the multidisciplinary field of Film and Media Arts and, through this collaboration, consolidate the central role of Europe as a world leader in the creative fields. Together, these institutions formed the FilmEU Alliance (The European Universities Alliance for Film and Media Arts European) that has been implemented in the context of the European Universities initiative, a new European programme that intends to foster the European Universities of the future in the form of Alliances that jointly promote trans-European innovative educational and research endeavours. FilmEU fully represents Europe's geographical, cultural, and linguistic differences, combined with the diversity and richness of its European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and its Research Area (ERA).

The Alliance name stems from the concatenation of the terms “Film” and “European” and signals the ambition of contributing to the positioning of Europe as a key provider of top-level education and research in the creative disciplines, namely Film and Media Arts, and position itself as a leader in this field. The alliance pursues this via the implementation of original challenge-based pedagogical methods, the development of joint and rigorous academic programmes with a strongly embedded mobility component; innovative research activities that span across all the areas of the knowledge triangle; the sharing of physical and digital infrastructures, administrative services and human resources at all levels; the development of common recruitment, student support and quality assurance policies; the sharing of digital services that facilitate cross-disciplinary educational activities, and the implementation of a

common governance and management structures that allow the Alliance to better capacitate its members and involved students and staff and act at a local, regional and international level positioning itself as a model of collaboration and innovation in the arts and creativity domains.

FilmEU believes Europe has all the right leads needed in order to play in the future a key role at an international level in the area of Film and Media Arts. These include the relevance of Europe's historical filmic cultural heritage, the dynamism of its production sector, which services all creative outputs from pure entertainment to the highest artistic formats, and the unique educational offer already in place in the form of the Erasmus Mundus EJMD promoted by the members of the FilmEU Alliance. These are but some of the elements that highlight the potential impact of the proposed Alliance and its relevance in the European context. The institutions that integrate FilmEU share the belief that cinema and media arts lay at the centre of social transformations and economic growth which the creative sector can potentially impel if proper collaborative networks are successfully erected in Europe. Building on more than a decade of successful cooperation, these institutions envision positioning themselves as key players in driving education, innovation and research in Film and Media Arts within the European Higher Education Area and in promoting the central role the creative and cultural industries can, and should have, in our societies. FilmEU was built around the common objective of jointly promoting high-level education, innovation and research activities in the multidisciplinary field of Film and Media Arts and, through this collaboration, consolidate the central role of Europe as a world leader in the creative fields. FilmEU represents a transformative process towards the set-up of a united institutional, pedagogical, cultural and research endeavour, a European University with campuses across eight different locations in Europe that bolster up a collaborative network that, via creativity and innovation,

promotes social transformations, economic growth, and cultural blossoming.

FilmEU institutional model not only fosters these institutions' ability to act locally, regionally and globally in the cultural and creative industries and across other societal areas they impact but, more importantly, surpasses most of the problems we have previously mentioned since it both represents a key increase in these schools critical mass as it also ensures the complete integration of all domains of academia's mission. More importantly, FilmEU strategy integrates both a concrete pedagogical model and a research agenda, that both respond to the challenges and problems we have previously enunciated.

FilmEU is based on a set of common values and agreed principles, which aim to achieve sustainability of the cooperation between all participants and materialize an institutional model fit for the future of film education we are proposing in this paper. FilmEU pursues interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary education as core values to contemporary educational and research practices. It regards the Arts as a theoretical and practical field in which different knowledge and competences, that are central to contemporary societies and their sustainable development, meet. FilmEU is supported by a community built upon collaboration and a common mission, based on the agreed shared values of creativity, diversity and inclusion, openness, empowerment and enabling, collaboration and trust, community, sustainability and the linkage between education and research. By grounding the model in these eight values, the European HEIs that constitute the Alliance can fully contribute to a better, richer and more humanistic society. FilmEU institutional values are:

Creativity. FilmEU sets creativity as the core value of the Alliance since it regards creativity as a driving force behind innovation, change and culture.

Diversity and inclusiveness. FilmEU defends and promotes the core European values of respect for diversity and human rights. It promotes equity, inclusion, and

diversity while (and by) pledging to eliminate barriers to higher education access, and hence to knowledge and the opportunities it creates.

Openness. FilmEU is committed to the promotion of open, collaborative science, as well as to providing open access in most of the outputs it produces – this includes open access academic journals and platforms where creative work can be freely shared.

Empowerment and Enabling. FilmEU puts the students, academics, and administrative staff at the centre of its activities. The Alliance not only provide them with ownership of their duties, projects and tasks (which are the reflection of their own ideas and aspirations), but also regards staff development, student engagement, and scholars' empowerment and independence as some of its key components.

Community. FilmEU believes that the performance of the Alliance is greatly strengthened by its community, and the embeddedness they assure of its activities in institutional, local and regional contexts.

Collaboration and trust. FilmEU is based on the conviction that active collaboration, in the form of alliances between complementary higher education institutions from various small and medium-sized European countries, is the only way to attain strategic, long-term goals with an international ambition and meaningful societal impact.

Focus on education, research and innovation. Education, research and innovation are at the core of what the Alliance does. FilmEU values and engages with innovative pedagogical models and an original research agenda, and uses them to the advantage of the common University and its shared mission and projects.

Sustainability. FilmEU incorporates sustainability as a central value and is committed to examining and implementing sustainable good practices at all levels of design and implementation. FilmEU identifies the UN Development Goals 2030 as priorities and as a "Partnership for the Goals" is aligned with the SDG 17.

Following this, one can claim that FilmEU, or similar initiatives, represent an apt model for the future of film education and the development of film schools in view of a multicolour film future. For this to become a reality, the institutional model must support innovative pedagogical and research models. We will now look into these two aspects in more detail. A pedagogical response: teaching *through* film with the Samsara model.

Nowadays, the construction of the cinematic discourse must be understood not only as the use of discursive language in a film (dramatic dialogue, fictitious conversation, script- defined interaction), but rather as the expressive audio-visual discourse which underpins the very construction of the film: the discourse of the stage direction, cinematography, sound editing and design, used in the cinematic narrative (Janney, 2012). This is what constitutes the difference between teaching *about* film and teaching *through* film that we have already mentioned. Our argument is that teaching *through* film implies we have as a starting point precisely the use of the means and processes of the cinematic discourse in the context of teaching creative processes in the arts in general and in cinema and audio-visual in particular. Any pedagogical model in this domain should focus on the competences and skills implied in the construction of meaning through the language of film narrative. This is a process that has long been debated in the history of cinema (Barthes, 1972; Jost, 1983; Genette, 1983; Metz, 1990; Stam, 1992) with different methods and approaches. From Barthes's (1972) structuralist and semiotic approach, with its signification systems supported by the theory that generating meaning in a narrative rests on pre-existing structures, to Genette's (1983) narratology, which associates the creation of meaning to the presence in the narrative of a key set of textual elements that facilitate the understanding of the narrative by an audience (Jost, 1983), the theorists of the moving image never ceased to struggle with considerable difficulty whenever they wanted to define the

specificities of cinematic language and its sense making processes.

Investigations into the construction of meaning and aesthetics through procedural (Seamen, 2007), interactive (Kwastek, 2013), participatory (Kester, 2004; Bishop, 2012) and immersive mechanisms (Jarvis, 2018) continue to add new layers of theoretical complexity. One of the reasons why theories are so diverse, and the forms difficult to learn and teach, stems from the fact that film and media art communicate simultaneously through patterns, events, and procedures that are made up of text, image, sound, and time. As such, the work is polysemiotic, a locus of meaning, read within a cultural framework provided by the filmmakers or artists and received, experienced, and sometimes even created, by multivarious audiences.

The complexity of the relationship between the formal elements and its whole requires that the future filmmaker or media artist not only deeply understands how manipulative processes generate meaning but also comprehend how meaning arises from the narrative and discursive structures of the medium and the connection of meaning with the multiple contextual frameworks of the “real world”. This is why we claim a future multicolour film education both requires teaching *about* and *through* film. In other words, the development of a broad literacy alongside the development of technical and artistic skills is required.

The separation of art institutions from academia, as already discussed, means that few attempts have been made in film schools to include a broad literacy capable of addressing cultural experience, aesthetic appreciation, critical understanding, and creative production along with the mandatory acquisition of technical and artistic skills. Yet, a filmmaker or media artist’s ability to construct meaning depends not only on creative and technical skills but also on the ability to look at the world and from it to produce a discourse. In narrative cinema, for example, writing and conception are intrinsically linked; they imply defining a theme, having a voice, organising

the gaze, imagining the action, envisaging visual and sound aesthetics and so on. In general, film students demonstrate difficulty in defining themes or developing a critical stance vis-à-vis what surrounds them. The recurrent use of formulas or a certain idea of film genre, for example, may result in stereotyped and emptied-out films disconnected from a relationship with the reality and experience of the world. Accordingly, film and media art teaching are different from the teaching of mere techniques and technology. Its objective must be focused on the development of methodologies and processes that stimulate knowledge, curiosity, and creativity and which explore the relationship between critical thinking and creative production.

In building the cinematic discourse, there is no one easily discernible basic unit of meaning, since the moving image communicates simultaneously through communication patterns made up of text, image, sound and time (editorial). The basic expression structures of an image or a shot cannot be used as basic units of meaning, although they are part of the process of sense making proposed by film. The shot made of moving image is an objective structure which derives directly from the construction by an audience of the perception of moving image (Jost, 1983), since each shot is a static image which, when projected in a sequence, produces the perception of movement. This still image is the basis of the very moving image and, as such, it is the mechanism that produces structures of meaning, although it is not the only element of the very structures of meaning, in that they comprehend many other elements, such as, for instance, sound or editing. The cinematic communication then takes place in this interaction between image, sound and time, thus producing multiple meaningful expressions (Kaplan, 2010).

The issue we address with our proposed model is precisely how to support pedagogically the process of teaching this cinematic communication of meaning. The complex web of meaningful elements,

structures and processes, which come together within the process of cinematic communication process which the shot, the scenes, the sequence and the narrative, transform throughout time in the accumulation of patterns of meaning, is not easy to grasp and neither is it easy to explain.

The construction of meaning through the moving image is one of the key tasks of the filmmaker. Anyone who starts to study film, must first of all be able to learn how to use the multiple modes of expression of the moving image, with their ability to express and construct meaning through text, image, sound and time (Wollen, 1998).

We already expressed our argument that the teaching of cinema and the audiovisual medium is changing in a context where the nature and unique potential of the cinematographic language for the production of meaning never ceases to transform and evolve, namely as consequence of how the new technological media and intertextual transformations continue to influence film expressive processes.

Those who undertake the study of film or media art must not only master multiple artistic and technical skills but also learn how to create processes and sequences that construct meaning through text, image, sound, time, and interaction and then culminate these skills to express themselves (Wollen, 1998; Kaplan, 2010). We have already mentioned how the exploitation through AI of diversified cultural content adds another layer of complexity to this. The technical complexity of understanding these structures and elements means that film and media art students are predisposed to learn techniques, often limited to technology and equipment. The teaching of film production, for example, including the use of a camera, editing tools, programming languages, digital technologies, and so on are all skills to which students quickly adhere and relate naturally.

However, learning how to construct meaning, although one of most important tasks that filmmakers and media artists must master, is neither easily apprehended nor easily explained. The starting point for

our model is the acknowledgement how complex understanding the process of constructing cinematographic narratives can be for film students. The intricacy of the relation between the narrative elements and their whole, as well as the connection of both with the “real” world, requires, as per our proposal, that the would-be filmmaker not only is able to understand the medium and its narrative and discursive structures, but above all is able to understand and use the manipulative processes needed in order to create meaning for an audience. In other words, our proposal is grounded on the basic premise that a pedagogic methodology that seeks to facilitate the understanding of the cinematographic narrative through the exercise of manipulating the structures and processes for creating meaning made available to us by cinematic expression is the best suited to an approach to teaching film that places at its core the cinematic communication and the exploration of the expressive potential of cinematographic narrative.

As we have already mentioned, throughout the last decades, film schools have been facing the challenges of integrating in their curricula and didactical approaches the new affordances derived from the rise of digital film and the new consumption, production and distribution environments it allows for (Atkinson, 2018). Our model – named “Samsara” – departs from the use the word “creativity” as reference to technical as well as artistic creativity, well aware that this overlaps what others define as innovation (Mietzner & Kamprath, 2013). The notion of creativity is important, because there is a close relationship between temporality and creativity; and between permanence and routine. This relation is crucial to constructing the expressive process and of cinematic communication, but also to understanding the structures that support this process. Most temporary organizations, such as, for instance, a film production team, exist to develop an idea, a shot, a product or a service. The main goal of these structures is to “make something happen” and this has a

strong influence in the educational profile that the institutions must develop in order to ensure those future professionals appropriate training (Livingston, 2010). Thus, the production teams are temporary creative systems, where teamwork plays a key role. A pedagogic process that suits this context must therefore be focused precisely on this collective unit of creative production. Interestingly enough, though, that is not what we find in the European tradition of teaching film.

As already mentioned, in Europe, film schools are traditionally linked to the educational models of the conservatories which for the most part are still separate from academia in general (Maassen & Olsen, 2019). The focus of these schools, namely film schools, has always been on the technical and artistic aspects of the craft, which results in an orientation that was, and continues to be, predominantly practical, placing the master/disciple relationship at the centre of the educational process. Besides the individualizing nature of this model, which clearly goes against the collective nature of the creative process mentioned above, this approach doesn't comprehend the articulation between theory and practice – understanding the narrative complemented by the acquisition of operational skills – that we put forward as central for our pedagogical model.

Individualized approaches not only do not respond to the needs of the collective creative process that underlies the cinematic communication, but they do not allow the potential of the medium to be fully explored either, a medium which has increasingly become a tool for activism with the potential to promote social change through creative activities that correspond to social and cultural achievements (Carpentier, 2020).

Each European country has its own tradition of cinematographic education, with programmes taught by different institutions in different countries. Although the need and the potential of cinema education have been recognized as part of an effort towards the reinforcement of film and

media literacy among the young, very few attempts have been made to include in the higher education curricula in these areas a broader literacy that integrates knowledge that covers cultural experience, aesthetic appreciation, critical understanding and creative production, together with the acquisition of technical and artistic competencies. This film literacy must be understood as a subset of a broader concept of media literacy, and the concept draws attention to two different notions of film education: as (a) a right for all, a social and cultural good (similar to the right to universal education) and (b) as an instrumental medium to improve the public but also the creative skills of all those who study these fields.

Our approach incorporates this comprehensive notion of film literacy, and the relation between critical appreciation and creative production it entails. Our model sees cinema as a system to create meaning, with its multimodal mode of constructing meaning that operates as a bridge between different cultural practices and is therefore a central element of expression and construction of meaning.

The methodology we advocate combines the competency of seeing a film critically and analysing its content, cinematography and technical aspects – the *about* – with the ability to manipulate the language and the technical resources in the context of the creative environment of producing moving images – the *through*. It is our belief that this approach allows the tensions mentioned above regarding the teaching model of conservatories to be overcome by focusing on this broader concept of film literacy, seeing the teaching of film as a creative process and cultural practice centred on the construction of meaning grounded on reality.

Following the proposition of the idea of a “rhetoric of creativity” (Banaji, Burn & Buckingham, 2010) our model integrates different understandings of this concept and strives to make it formal as an emerging structured model which implies the notion that creativity does not concern

merely the consumption or production of artistic products, be they popular or elitist, but rather involves the ability to respond to problems and changes in the world. From this perspective, creativity is not inherent to the human mental processes, but is indeed social and situational. It is in this sense that our model incorporates the constructionist approach initially conceived by Papert (1972) and also challenge and project-based approaches. Descending from constructivism, constructionism is an educational method in which, according to Papert, students need to create artifacts to practice what they learned and experience results in a tangible manner, thus taking an active role in the production and construction of knowledge. Constructionism can be considered a methodology grounded on the principle of “learning by doing”. In constructionism, the results of learning can be seen, evaluated and used by others, and that knowledge is built through actual practice. Knowledge becomes built through the approach to complex real problems in the context of the learning environments in which the students are involved. For Papert, knowledge is a key element, grounded on the context of learning and shaped by the design of products (Alazani, 2016).

The pedagogic approach advocated by constructionism is highly suited to our methodology and was complemented by two other pedagogic approaches: challenge-based teaching (Johnson, Smith, Smythe, Varon, 2009) and project-based teaching (Dole, Bloom, & Kowalske, 2016). Challenge-based teaching is an approach that aims to improve learning by promoting experiences that foster students to leverage learning, in this case of cinematographic narrative, in their experiences of daily life. Project-based learning is a pedagogic approach centred on the student, which aims to encourage the exploration of challenges and problems rooted in the real world through the collective seeking of solutions. From a set of initial questions, the goal is that students develop projects, not as the apex of the learning process but rather as the central part of the process in

which teaching and learning occur.

Our pedagogical approach is activated primarily through Samara’s Challenge Based Learning (Johnson, Smith, Smythe, Varon, 2009) and Design Thinking as well as its student-Centred, team-based, project-based approaches (Dole, Bloom, & Kowalske, 2016). These constructionist practices allow students to construe their views and relationships with the world, to acquire knowledge, research, and criticism that help them develop and construct film and media arts projects. Teachers can view arts pedagogy as a creative process and cultural practice joined together to construct meaning firmly anchored to the real. Samara thus addresses both the challenge of teaching the construction of meaning and the tensions arising from the apprentice model of conservatories, especially the separation of theory from practice, the lack of disciplinary diversity, and individualizing practices.

Our model is thus developed from the combination of these three pedagogic approaches. It is a teaching-learning model of cinematic communication as a discursive and communicational process which integrates the different elements of the film narrative and associated expressive forms. We ground our model on different pedagogic approaches we deemed suitable to a collective creativity-oriented learning process. From the pedagogic models of constructionism to challenge-oriented teaching and project-based teaching, we sought to develop a methodology suited to the present circumstances of the film schools and the compelling need to seek teaching which will increasingly “defy” students and relate the creative process to the reality around us and the problems of the world where we live.

The Samsara framework has been designed to foster excellence, innovation, and collaboration in providing artistic higher education in audio-visual and film fields. The methods selected and the goals we hope to achieve with Samsara emerged from an investigation into the conditions and practices underpinning contempo-

rary film and media arts higher education generally and in our own institutions as already described. We already mentioned that film and media arts higher education have been profoundly impacted by the way arts education has historically been crafted and delivered in Europe and by the increasingly complex and unique ways in which cinematic communication both embodies and generates meaning. Furthermore, the rapidly changing technological and ethical environment in which audio-visual culture is produced and consumed has had a profound effect on the creative industries, higher education, and society.

As such, the historical and theoretical context of arts pedagogy is highly relevant to the genesis of the Samsara framework. We orient Samsara in relation to the continuing evolution of European higher edu-

cation in the arts and assume Samsara addresses these challenges, embraces European values, and contributes significantly to advancing European cinematic arts education in view of its reform.

The Samsara pedagogical framework seeks to facilitate the transition of existing film schools into new institutional models such as FilmEU while also allowing for the contextual flexibility and respect for tradition that contemporary higher education requires. The aspects of Samsara that specifically address the challenge of reforming the conservatoire model include practice-based, team-based, and discipline-diverse approaches as well as its Challenge Based Learning, Design Thinking and Practice as Research methodologies.

Figure 1 depicts how all these features are integrated into the model.

FILMEU PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK SAMSARA

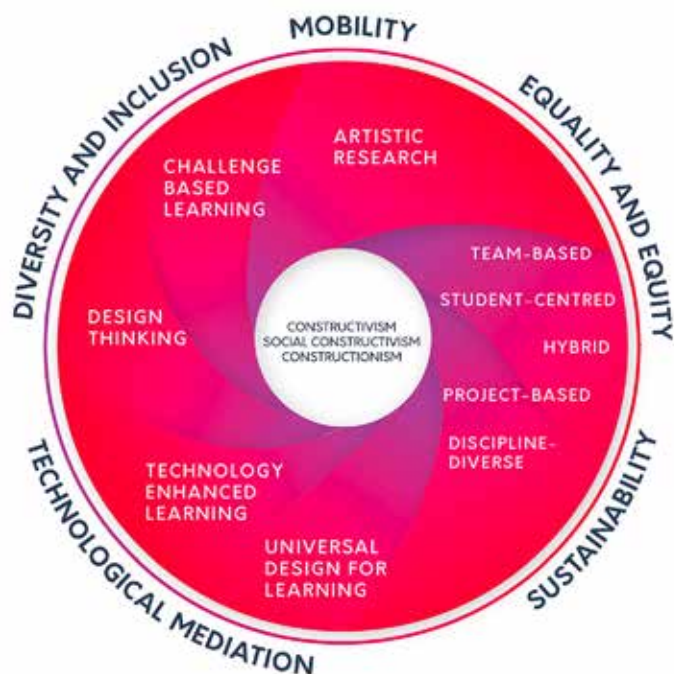


FIGURE 1. The samsara Model (source FilmEU website)

Samsara pedagogically supports the process of teaching students how to construct meaning through cinematic and audio-visual communication while also considering emergent digital practices.

Throughout Europe there is a call for creative industries and educational institutions to become more aware of their role within the world both culturally and environmentally. Samsara's core principles of Equality and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and its Universal Design for Learning methodology and student-centred learning approach all answer this call.

But in order to fully respond to the challenges film schools and film education face, one must also define a research approach that operates alongside this pedagogical model and integrates both a critical approach derived from the literacy concept we have just espoused and a practice-based approach that facilitates the meaning construction process at the centre of the Samsara model. Our proposal is that the concept of artistic practice-based research responds to this need.

We understand Artistic Research (AR) as practice-based, practice-led research in the arts, through means of high-level artistic practice and reflection. It is an epistemic inquiry, directed towards increasing knowledge, insight, understanding and skills. Artistic research is aligned in all aspects with the five main criteria that constitute Research & Development in the Frascati Manual (OECD, 2015), and through topics and problems stemming from and relevant to artistic practice, AR also addresses key issues of a broader cultural, social and economic significance. AR also integrates basic, applied and experimental levels: basic research in artistic research is a type of research with the aim of seeking new insights/knowledge through critical and explorative artistic practices; applied research in artistic research is the application of artistic practice with the aim of achieving new insights/knowledge in the form of material and immaterial products, with a social, cultural and/or political dimension; experimental development in

AR stands for the production and testing of tangible and/or intangible entities that are based on fresh insights and open up new possibilities to test the potentially beneficial impacts of such developments.

Artistic research has a unique focus on innovation, experimentation and transferability, and can support disciplines in the creative domains to share and adjust knowledge, speak with a united voice, think outside silos, and identify collaborations within and outside their sectors while providing overarching methods to address societal problems in an innovative manner. All considered, artistic research represents in our view a unique opportunity for film schools to include research in their mission and with that surpass the "academicisation" challenges we have previously mentioned.

CONCLUSIONS

In this text, we have presented a number of perspectives on the future of film education and research. Our proposals are built on three pillars: a) the need for original institutional models, here represented via the example of the ongoing construction of FilmEU, the European University of Film and Media Arts, that allow for place-based innovation, and b) innovative pedagogical approaches, here exemplified with the "Samsara" pedagogical model, that go in pair with practice-based research approaches such as the ones fostered by artistic research. We are convinced this approach allows film schools to strike a balance between traditional techniques, their heritage and the need to cope with a digital environment marked by the emergence of AI. Here are some considerations for achieving this balance:

- a. Core Curriculum: Film schools should maintain a strong emphasis on teaching traditional techniques such as cinematography, screenwriting, directing, and film theory. These core courses provide students with a deep understanding of storytelling, visual composi-

tion, and narrative structure that remain fundamental to filmmaking regardless of technological advancements.

- b. **Hands-on Experience:** Practical exercises and projects should incorporate a combination of traditional and digital techniques. For example, students can shoot on film to learn about the intricacies of exposure, composition, and lighting, while also exploring digital cinematography and post-production workflows. This balanced approach helps students appreciate the nuances of both traditional and digital methods. The Samsara model allows for this in a challenge and project based unique manner that puts teaching through film at the centre of the educational process while boosting interdisciplinarity.
- c. **Critical Thinking and Adaptability:** Film schools should encourage critical thinking and adaptability in their students. This includes promoting an understanding of the historical context of filmmaking, the aesthetic choices made by filmmakers of different eras, and the ways in which technology has shaped storytelling. By fostering adaptability, students can effectively navigate evolving technological landscapes throughout their careers. Teaching *about* film must not be neglected but it should be supported by original forms of literacy as we suggested.
- d. **Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Learning:** Film schools can promote collaboration between students specializing in different areas, such as cinematography, editing, sound design, and visual effects. This interdisciplinary approach encourages students to

integrate traditional and digital practices, learn from each other's expertise, and collaborate on projects that incorporate a wide range of skills and techniques.

We live in daring and dangerous times. Our schools are required to adapt our curricula in view of technological change and the need for new transversal skills to be considered while balancing tradition and the fundamentals of our creative arts. By embracing these changes, film schools can prepare their students to excel in the ever-evolving world of cinema.

In this text we discussed how European film schools encourage creativity and experimentation, fostering an environment that nurtures new voices and perspectives. This implies they promote artistic exploration and unconventional storytelling, enabling students to push boundaries and challenge established norms. By providing the freedom to explore and innovate, film schools in Europe contribute to the evolution of filmmaking as an art form.

Europe is a diverse continent with a multitude of cultures, languages, and histories. Film schools in Europe recognize and celebrate this diversity, incorporating it into their curriculum. They provide platforms for students to explore various cultural perspectives, promoting cross-cultural understanding and fostering a global outlook. By embracing cultural diversity, European film schools contribute to the richness and inclusivity of the global film landscape. At the same time, they face a large number of challenges and problems, from profound technological change to deep transformations in the legal, regulatory and social environments they operate in. If these schools want to continue to fulfil their mission and to contribute to film education and in general the critical appreciation of film as an art form with strong societal relevance, they need to change. We propose that in order to address this need for transformation, European film and Media schools embrace change and adopt new models and strategies such as the ones we have described.

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