

Editorial:
Art in the Age of Institutional Data Collection

'Ideas start revolutions.' (Lee Lozano, July 16, 1971)

During the preparation of this inaugural issue of *Art and Research* certain core themes began to emerge from the dialogues with individual artists and their research practices; to differing extents the artists in question seemed to engage with the dynamic and unresolved relationship between image and text, vision and language, writing and research. For example: the integration of word and image in the collaborative work of Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan or in the sequence of paintings reproduced here by Alan Michael *The Invention of Birth Control*; the conjunction of the literal and the abstract in the series of paintings produced by Ross Sinclair for his *Real Life Painting Show* at CCA (19 April-3 June 2006) which formed the background to the GI symposium 'Painting as a New Medium' (CCA, 27 April 2006) which included presentations by David Batchelor, John Calcutt, Thomas Lawson and Barry Schwabsky (the proceedings of which are published here for the first time); the mobile narratives which inform the development of the research process and contextualize the resultant object relations in the elaborate schemes of Simon Starling, whose recent Cove Park Commission, *Autoxylopyrocycloboros* is the focus here; the constitutive function of text in articulating the research process as an artistic-life process in the work of Lee Lozano (1930-1999) and Melanie Carvalho. The confessional and diaristic modality of the text in each case are framed by a quasi-scientific methodology of strictly dispassionate experiment and report (in the case of Lozano's *Language Pieces* – a modest sample of which are included in this issue with the collaboration of Kunsthalle Basel which hosted her recent retrospective *Win First Dont Last Win Last Dont Care*, 15 June – 27 August 2006.¹ Lozano's *Language Pieces* are chosen in part because their self-deprecating humour undercuts any preconceived notion of the legitimate tenor of artistic research but also because they demonstrate, if such demonstration is indeed required, the spurious nature of any claims to novelty of the phenomenon of 'research-based' art practice. The answer to the question raised by John Calcutt towards the end of the Round Table discussion at the GI/CCA symposium was in many ways heralded by Lee Lozano several years previously when she wrote: 'WILL I "GO BACK" TO "JUST PAINTING"?' (Lee Lozano, 22 May 1969); and narrative accounts of journeys of scientific exploration (in the case of Carvalho's *Expedition*); as a result, the engaging strictures of scientific self-observation within a delimited and clearly articulated context (from the everyday to the outlandish) allow these artists to avoid accusations of self-indulgence and self-interest which such confessional modes of address might otherwise invite. This, perhaps, is the fundamental challenge of art as research, that is to say, that which we present and quantify as 'research' in art practice, is so often only the autobiography of a process. The correspondence between autobiography and scientific methodology is the space opened up for research itself by the ongoing work of Jacqueline Donachie whose exhibition and publication *Tomorrow Belongs to Me* is reviewed by Sam Stead, a graduate of GSA but who holds a previous degree in Molecular Biology. The proximity of artistic and scientific research methods will be returned to in future issues of the journal.

¹ The exhibition is also at Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 8 October 2006 – 7 January 2007.

The role of writing (fictional and/or theoretical) in relation to an artistic practice in general and its perhaps critical role with regard to assessment criteria for practice-based PhD submission is the context for the comprehensive interview with Joanne Tatham conducted by Susannah Thompson and the reproduction here of Tatham's text for Alan Michael's recent exhibition at GoMA. Thompson's interview provides insight into the role of writing in Tatham's artistic and academic practice not least in her use of Ezra Pound's distinction between the poetic techniques of Imagism and Symbolism to question the anti-allegorical function of language in the performative context of Tatham and O'Sullivan's mumming play, *The Slapstick Mystics with Sticks*. Conversely, the interview with Simon Starling attempts to open up questions on the potential role of allegory with regard to the relationship between practice and research in general. Important to this context is Brian O'Connell's text interventions into the traditional spaces of academic research: the library, the book and the archive. Are these modest interventions, such as the one he carried out in his *Flashbulbs* project in the twice-destroyed (1914 and 1940) Central Library in Louvain, allegories on the academic context and identity of art, or are they more eloquent artistic investigations which unfold psychological questions of our relationship to History and the function of the library as reservoir of individual and collective memory?

Integral to the institutional context of cultural memory are institutional claims to knowledge and truth, with knowledge production and transfer which increasingly frame and contextualise (both academically and economically) the outcomes of artistic research in an educational institution. This is the context of Dena Shottenkirk's 'Research, Relativism, and Truth in Art' - an intervention on the truth claims of artistic research as productive of knowledge, a claim which, in Shottenkirk's view, ultimately challenges the epistemological pluralism and ethical relativism aligned with postmodernism. Her conclusion, that the epoch of postmodernism is over is perhaps as contentious as it is accurate.

The wider institutional context of such claims regarding the truth procedures of artistic research emerge from the definitions of research published by the AHRC and the RAE 2001 and 2008. Debate continues as to the eligibility, suitability and desirability of submitting artistic practice and research to the scrutiny of such governmental funding and auditing bodies. Nonetheless, it is a fact that many artists who teach in Art Schools across the UK are supported in their research for at least 20% of contracted hours. In this context, it is pertinent to recall Foucault's reflections on the public presentation of research:

Given that we are paid to do research, what is there to monitor the research we are doing? How can we keep informed people who might be interested in it, or who might have some reason for taking this research as a starting point? How can we keep them informed on a fairly regular basis about the work we are doing, except by teaching, or in other words by making a public statement.²

Foucault's observation that 'the normal pattern of research' required 'reporting on it at regular institutional intervals' should not blind us to the distinction between the seen and the unseen - or should that perhaps be the auditable and the un-auditable -

² Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-1976*, edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, translated by David Macey, (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 1.

condition of research in artistic practice.³ In the same lecture, Foucault goes on to critique the appeal to scientific method employed by orthodox Marxism. Although the field of science has been consistently fertile for artists from Leonardo to Lee Lozano ('All states of being exist in a quantum-mechanical model of the universe. I am interested in ideas from science and I use them metaphorically, for art and even for life actions.'⁴) - a situation recognised by funds which support collaborative research projects between artists and scientists, such as the Wellcome Trust, NESTA and SciArt Fellowships - Foucault's remarks are more pertinent to the current context for the evaluation of artistic research and the concomitant establishment of universal standards of knowledge production. Arguably, it is just such an appeal to scientificity questioned by Foucault which is at the root of the definitions of research by the AHRC and accepted by the RAE and which are operative in the definition and expansion of practice-led PhDs in Fine Art. He writes:

The question or questions which have to be asked are: "What types of knowledge are you trying to disqualify when you say that you are a science? What speaking subject, what discursive subject, what subject of experience and knowledge are you trying to minorize when you begin to say: 'I speak this discourse, I am speaking a scientific discourse, and I am a scientist.' What theoretico-political vanguard are you trying to put on the throne in order to detach it from all the massive, circulating, and discontinuous forms that knowledge can take?"⁵

In contrast to the scientific method for determining the production of institutionally sanctioned and legitimised knowledge, Foucault anticipates an 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges', that is, 'a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity.'⁶ As HEIs in the UK prepare for the RAE 2008, we might do well to remember Foucault's questioning of scientificity and the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges'.

Foucault's comments are focused upon here because, to a certain extent, they relate to the antagonism which has often emerged in academic contexts as a result of the perceived sacrifice of artistic freedom and integrity to bureaucratic imperative hostage to an accountable language of scientific research.⁷ Further, these debates replay those arguments between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment thinkers which shaped and developed the very institutions in which such contemporary antagonisms are played out.⁸ The title of this journal, *Art and Research*, may simply recognise and seek to testify to a deep relationship immanent to all artistic practice or it may point to the twin terms of an institutionally sustained antagonism.

³ Ibid., p. 3. Foucault himself testifies to the alienating nature of such institutional representations: 'I felt a bit like a sperm whale that breaks the surface of the water, makes a little splash, and lets you believe, that down there where it can't be seen, down there where it is neither seen nor monitored by anyone, it is following a deep, coherent, and premeditated trajectory.' (Ibid., p. 4)

⁴ Lee Lozano, *Win First Dont Last Win Last Dont Care* edited by Adam Szymczyk (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel/Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Schwabe Verlag, 2006). p. 162. Lozano made this remark to students from David Askevold's class at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax.

⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷ For an incisive outline of this antagonism see Ken Neil, 'Institutionalised Fine Art Research as Stigmatised Knowledge', *Journal of Visual Arts Practice*/National Association of Fine Art Education 2003. NAFAE online: www2.ntu.ac.uk/ntsad/nafae/debate/item3_0.shtml

⁸ Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

The direction the journal takes will be determined not by its editors alone, but by its readers, contributors and subscribers. The hope is that, whilst the pages of *Art and Research* may testify to and inform the developing debates surrounding the interrelationship of art and research (whether it be considered practice-led or practice-based research, research-based practice, practice as research, research as practice, and so on), the journal will produce an archive which reflects the diversity of current research undertaken by artists in the production of new works of art or establishment of new forms of knowledge (including the various research methods employed by artists in a multiplicity of social, economic, medical contexts, etc. or which seek to engage, challenge or exchange with divergent research disciplines in the effort to translate or transform pre-established categories of experience). But this process of archivization aims to produce as much as to record events, in the enigmatic sense outlined by Derrida in *Archive Fever*:

... the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal or not at our disposal, *an archivable concept of the archive*. It is a question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.⁹

A journal has a responsibility to voice the contemporary concerns which shape the conditions of its production and reception, but as Derrida suggests, this is equally a 'responsibility for tomorrow'. In the current climate of research audit, this is perhaps simply to question the future of art in the age of institutional data collection. The 'spectral messianicity' which Derrida suggests is at work in the archive and which underpins any aspiration to be productive of the future life of art and research, is perhaps more modestly articulated in Derrida's simple conclusion: 'The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come.'¹⁰

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), p. 36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.