

Introduction

Why “What Is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter”?

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With Michael Ann Holly, I programmed the Clark Conference “What Is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter,” held on 27 and 28 April 2007. The proceedings of that conference appear in this collection. My opening remarks for the conference, and now for this collection, are entitled “Why ‘What Is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter?’” I’m going to circle around that question, and the questions it raises, in the following pages.

Overall, the Clark Conference and this resulting publication foreground and investigate the subject of “research” as a legitimate topic in its own right. It is, after all, an integral, necessary, ubiquitous, and yet frequently unacknowledged or undeclared component of the activities of all scholars, academics, curators, and artists. This collection is, then, interested in a shared commitment to the problems, the challenges, and the delights of research in art history, visual culture studies, and curatorial and visual arts practices. It seeks to delve into the remarkable nature of our personal, political, aesthetic, creative, and emotive curiosity with and attention to the process of doing research in the archive, the library, the studio, the gallery and museum, in alternative environments of cultural praxis, the street, and beyond. As such, it considers critically the pleasures and dangers of our obsessions and encounters with the incoherence, chaos, and wonder at the heart of the process of doing research, the act of searching for the not-yet-known, and how this “doing”—the encounter with and the enactment or performance of research—is itself a thinking, a writing, a teaching, a curating, and a making.

This collection exposes both the limitations and possibilities of such practice, and in so doing draws attention to the fact that the idea of research has about it “the invisibility of the obvious,” as the sociocultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes in his article “Globalization and the Research Imagination”:

What do we mean when we speak today of research? . . . Like other cultural keywords, [research] is so much part of the ground on which we stand and the air we breathe that it resists conscious scrutiny. In the case of the idea of research, there are two additional problems. First, research is virtually synonymous with our sense of what it means

to be scholars and members of the academy, and thus it has the invisibility of the obvious. Second, since research is the optic through which we typically find out about something as scholars today, it is especially hard to use research to understand research.¹

The Clark Conference, and now this collection of essays, submits the idea of research to some *conscious* scrutiny, makes its practices *visible*, and thinks about what it means to *use* research to *understand* research.

As a convener of that conference, along with Michael Ann Holly and Mark Ledbury, and now coeditor of this collection, I offer these opening remarks as some background information into the development of the event. For me, the conference had three convergent points of origin that brought it into being. These three beginnings occurred over the last fifteen years, so it was really wonderful to be at the Clark and to see these disparate albeit interwoven personal and intellectual threads spun into that very public conference. These three beginnings (certainly not in chronological order) were: (1) an unanticipated and perhaps even opportunistic conversation with Michael Ann Holly in 2004; (2) the institutional implications of the question of practice-led research as it circled around a singular work of art assembled in 2005; and (3) being introduced back in 1992 to the very idea of “research” as a subject of critical consideration, and in particular to the idea of research itself *as method*.

Conversations

The first of these three beginnings, the thing that actually brought the conference and now this collection into being, was a serendipitous conversation via e-mail. In 2004, in my capacity as the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Visual Culture*, I approached Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey to conduct a three-way dialogue on their edited collection *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, published in 1998 by Cambridge University Press.²

The Subjects of Art History is for me a terribly important collection for two reasons. First, the quality and range of the material therein gives us a chance to reassess the role that philosophies of history, and other philosophical, semiotic, queer, postcolonial, psychoanalytic, and museological traditions concerned with “history” have played and continue to play in art history in an expanded field. Second, the collection itself both identifies and marks a historical shift: it proposes that “art history, like many other fields in the humanities, has entered a postepistemological

age.”³ What this means for the editors is that the discipline of art history is in a moment of self-consciousness vis-à-vis its modus operandi, that art historians are more self-reflexive about their own practices and are acknowledging their own subjectivity as an inescapable and even welcome element in any historical and critical narrative. Further, this is a context in which, as they write, “the idea of universal aesthetic value and the validity of historical research are open to question”⁴ and the discipline of art history no longer offers its students (and, I would add, any of us) “a unified field of study” or a “time-tested methodology for analyzing visual images.”⁵ This, the editors wrote back in 1998, is what at that time made the discipline of art history so intellectually exciting and enabled them to present that collection as a “celebration of the diversity of mind, method, and material that has come to define the supple and shifting parameters of the history of art at the end of [the last] millennium.”⁶

Knowing that many of us are terribly comfortable with all this, but that others are not, realizing that any and all of these matters are “in the air” at any given time, and discerning over the last few years what I would call a particularly virulent “conservative turn” in disciplines across the arts and humanities away from something we might broadly call “theory,”⁷ I was intrigued by the idea of having Cheetham, Holly, and Moxey continue their conversation almost a decade after the conceptualization of that collection. I wanted to hear what they had to say about the issues raised in the collection itself, but also their sense of the changes in art history, visual culture studies, and visual arts practice since then.

The three editors generously agreed and crafted a dazzling exchange that was published in the *Journal of Visual Culture* in April 2005.⁸ Toward the end of that exchange, as the conversation began to gear up to its crescendo, Michael Ann Holly began to speak on the subject of “research” itself. In the context of her role as director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark she asked: “What does *research* in art history today mean anyway?”⁹ Holly went on to state that “the concept of *research* needs some investigation so as to elicit its philosophical implications and commitments.”¹⁰ At the same time, in the same breath, she expressed her concern that with all the dashing about in the name of research that goes on in art history and visual culture studies, something was lost. And here she self-consciously echoed a question posed by Martin Heidegger in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” drafted in 1935–36 and first published in 1950: “Art-historical study makes the works the objects of a science. . . . In all this busy activity do we encounter the work itself?”¹¹ Holly then went on to ponder that “[t]he manipulations and ma-

neurs of any research paradigm can contribute to the process of stripping the work of its awe, the awe that makes art still matter.”¹² She concluded by saying that she was “still troubled by . . . the loss of wonder in the writing about the visual” and that sometimes she yearns “for something that is ‘in excess of *research*.’”¹³

I was fascinated by this tension between the need to investigate the concept of research—and our own research practices—to elicit its philosophical implications and commitments *and* the awe and wonder (perhaps lost, perhaps not) engendered or provoked by our encounter with the work of art that, because it is at the heart of the aesthetic experience, may somehow be “in excess” of research itself. It was after reading these lines for the first time that I approached Michael Ann Holly to propose that we convene an event on this exact topic at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. She agreed. The conference took place. This collection is the record of that event.

Practice-led Research

For me, the second beginning for the conference was pretty much synchronous with the exchange between Cheetham, Holly, and Moxey. If theirs was an exchange of an intellectual nature, this other exchange had a more academic or institutional bent—although it was an exchange that came to be thought through or thought over an encounter with a work of art itself.

This exchange concerned what in academia have come to be called variously Ph.D.s by practice, practice-based Ph.D.s, or practice-led Ph.D.s (which is my preference), and it developed into a broader conversation about practice-led research in general. My division of art, design, and architecture at Kingston University in London has been discussing practice-led research for years; we’ve supported practice-led Ph.D. students; and many studio-based students from across the division have successfully earned their Ph.D.s. (It is also worth noting in passing that this is nothing new, and that numerous practice-led Ph.D. students from universities and art and design colleges across the United Kingdom have graduated over the last fifteen years or so.) Currently, in our division at Kingston we have practice-led Ph.D. students conducting research by fine art, by curating, and by art writing. What we don’t have are any specific university regulations or guidelines for practice-led research degrees. This is a worry. That is to say, we do not have any specific regulations or guidelines for practice-led research degrees that in any way differ from the regulations and guidelines that are already available for every other Ph.D. student in the university, whether these students

are from the humanities and social sciences, medicine, technology and engineering, health care, and so on. (It has to be said that this is largely because the Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE] and the Arts and Humanities Research Council [AHRC] who fund all research in the arts and humanities in the United Kingdom are still formulating the regulations and guidelines.) A section of our existing draft division regulations at Kingston University states that:

The standard of the Ph.D. is that expected of a good honors graduate who:

- has satisfactorily completed an agreed program of research training;
- has critically investigated and evaluated an approved topic, resulting in a substantial independent and original contribution to knowledge, commensurate with the normal period of registration;
- has presented and defended a thesis to the satisfaction of the examiners.¹⁴

The draft regulations end with a note, stating that “a thesis can be any approved form of submission for assessment.”

The absence of definitive university guidelines on practice-led research means that the terms of reference and criteria for assessment are up for discussion. Such elasticity allows for a whole series of fundamental, pressing questions to be asked: What is practice-led research? What is a practice-led Ph.D.? How to conceive of such a project? What kind of research training is useful and appropriate for a project such as this? Should an artist or designer be familiar with existing published academic research that pertains to his or her practice, and why should he or she need to demonstrate this familiarity? How and why should *his or her* practice develop a position in relation to *that* research? What counts as “investigation” and “evaluation” and an “independent and original contribution to knowledge”? How is this project meant to “demonstrate” its original contribution to knowledge—can it or should it have to, even? (And is this knowledge as a means to an end, or knowledge as an end in itself?) Should the practice-led Ph.D. be accompanied by some kind of written supplement? And, if so, should it be a commentary, an explanation, or a contextualizing that enables it to “demonstrate” the research? Or should it have another kind of written accompaniment that is somehow “along-side” or “in dialogue” with the practice?¹⁵ All of which is to say, how does practice-led research make explicit—if it should even have to—the process of research that is integral to its practice?

And then, of course, we get to the question of judgment: How do we conceive of the criteria for awarding such a contribution? How should such a project be presented and defended to “satisfy” examiners? And who would these examiners be, anyway?

When it comes to judgment, I’d hope personally that the point is not for the examiners to judge the extent to which the practice-led research confirms the preexisting regulations and guidelines but rather that they imagine how it is an opportunity to rethink what the university is capable of supporting, of doing, and of being, what its role is as a site of education within the context of a critically reflexive pedagogy.¹⁶ Here, we as a faculty should be asking not “how can we grade this?” but “how can we change to meet this?”¹⁷ We should be asking the practitioner, as Adrian Rifkin put it in October 2006 during a conference on research at Tate Britain, “What kind of a practice is yours?”¹⁸

In the absence of university guidelines on practice-led research, things are of course open to interpretation. And interpretations may vary—especially given the breadth of practice in the visual arts, which makes it all the more difficult to police and enforce regulatory and bureaucratic boundaries. Which I like. But some people do not. So, as so often happens in situations such as this, a division-wide, and in fact in this instance, cross-divisional, working party (or committee) was set up in October or November 2005 and charged with “recommending more specific and appropriate terms of reference and criteria for practice-led research projects.”¹⁹ The working party was made up largely of members of staff in our division: artists, curators, designers, and scholars of the history of visual, material, and spatial culture, as well as a sprinkling of staff from other divisions, including a theater director, a creative writer, and a scientist.

As a member of that working party, I proposed that instead of beginning our efforts to recommend more “specific” and “appropriate” terms of reference and criteria for practice-led research projects by having a meeting at the university, to get us in the mood we might hold our first gathering at Tate Britain, which is only a twenty-minute train ride from our campus.

I thought this was a good idea in principle, but I also had a very specific reason for making the suggestion: the nominees for the 2005 Turner Prize, Britain’s premier visual arts award, had recently been announced, and at the time all of the nominated artists had exhibitions at Tate. One of those nominated, and the artist who went on to win the Turner Prize that year, was Simon Starling. This is why I wanted the working party to convene at Tate Britain: I wanted us to hold

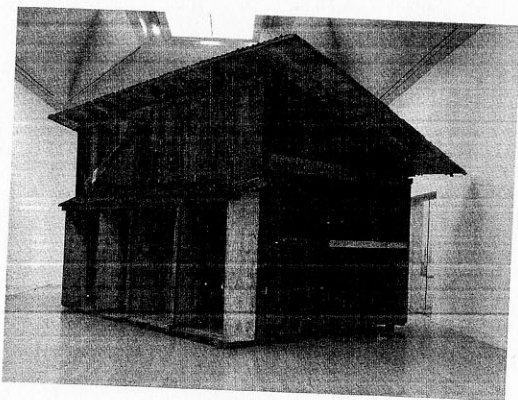


Fig. 1. Simon Starling (English, born 1967), *Shedboatshed* (*Mobile Architecture no. 2*), 2005. Tate Britain, London, 2007

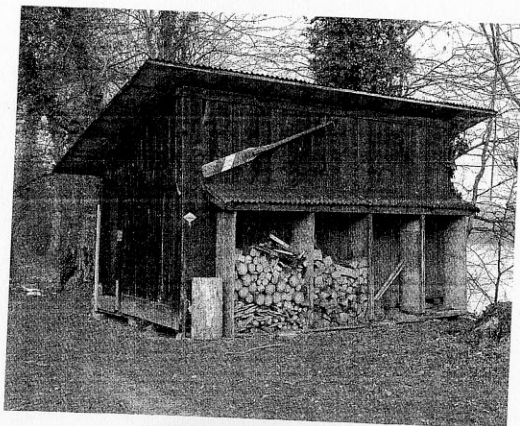


Fig. 2. Wooden shack for Simon Starling's installation *Shedboatshed* (*Mobile Architecture no. 2*). Image courtesy the artist. The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow. Kunstmuseum Basel

works are also, says Starling, “the physical manifestation of a thought process” and, says the architect and writer Paul Sheppard, “evidence of action having taken place.”²⁰ This material and conceptual “transforming” takes a long time to figure out. These works speak of that figuring out: they speak of the time of research, the time of making, the time of contemplation—and of the power of chance, accidents, and luck. Because of this, for me, more than any other artwork of late, Starling's *Shedboatshed* as a work of art somehow both *embodied* and *evidenced* its research,

our conversation in the same room as Starling's installation entitled *Shedboatshed* (*Mobile Architecture no. 2*) (fig. 1).

The story of the genesis of *Shedboatshed* is that the artist Simon Starling was in Basel, Switzerland, for his forthcoming exhibition at Kunstmuseum Basel's Museum für Gegenwartskunst and went for a bicycle ride. Along the banks of the river Rhine, in the Swiss town of Schweizerhalle, he spotted a shed or wooden shack (fig. 2). He dismantled the shed and used the wood to construct a traditional Wiedling boat (figs. 3 and 4), filled the boat with what was left of the shed, had it paddled ten miles up the Rhine to Basel (fig. 5), dismantled the boat, and rebuilt it in situ as a shed for his exhibition.

For Starling, *Shedboatshed*, like many of his other artworks conceived over the last decade or so as an artistic and poetic response to globalization, involved a process of transforming or translating one object or substance into another. His

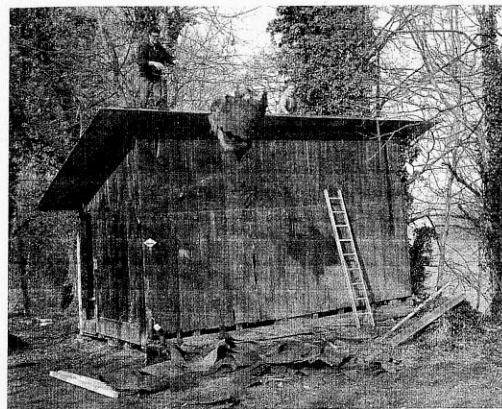


Fig. 3. Dismantling the wooden shack for Simon Starling's installation *Shedboatshed* (*Mobile Architecture no. 2*). Image courtesy the artist. The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow. Kunstmuseum Basel

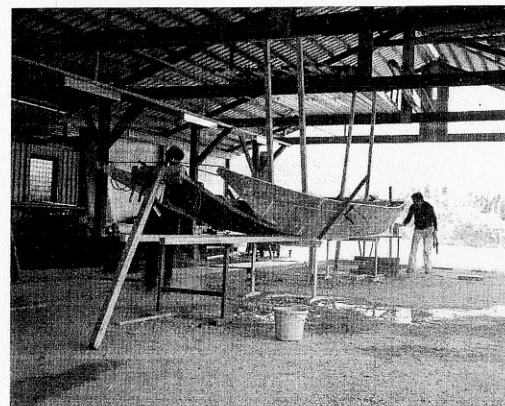


Fig. 4. Construction of Wiedling boat for Simon Starling's installation *Shedboatshed* (*Mobile Architecture no. 2*). Image courtesy the artist. The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow. Kunstmuseum Basel

its process, its research methodologies, the morphologies of thinking around it, the economy of its labor, the ecology of its un-making and remaking, the recycling of its materials, the circuitousness of its journey, and the site-specific and site-responsive nature of its display. For these reasons, I felt that the gallery at Tate in which *Shedboatshed* had been installed was a perfect place to debate the nature of practice-led research.²¹

About a dozen members of the working party went to Tate Britain to see Starling's *Shedboatshed*, to encounter the work of art itself. We set ourselves a straightforward (and, given the context, hopefully the right) question: Considering this as an instance of practice-led research, would, *could*, we award Simon Starling a Ph.D. for his *Shedboatshed*? We were there for around three hours. From start to finish I'm afraid to say that the debate was polarized, the line was drawn: historians and theorists on the one side, practitioners on the other. The art historians argued that it was a fantastic work of art and

that it *was* a substantial independent and original contribution to knowledge, but it couldn't be awarded a Ph.D. by an academic institution because it lacked two key and necessary legitimizing factors prescribed by a university *before the fact*: that is, accompanying documentation and an “evidencing” of the research process. The practitioners argued that it *should* be awarded a Ph.D. because it had been legiti-

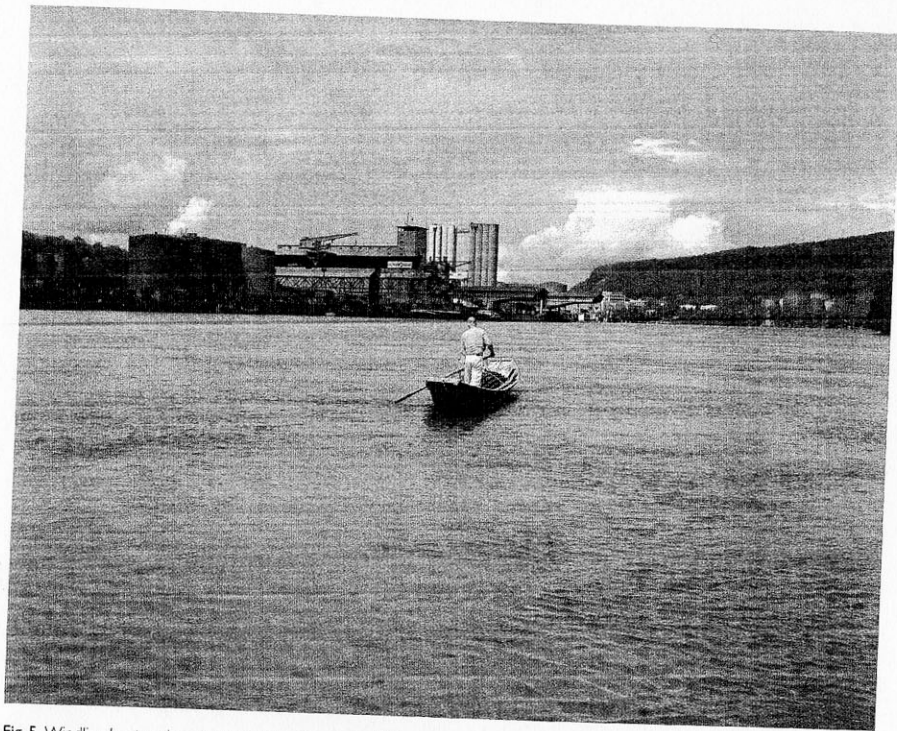


Fig. 5. Wiedling boat on its way to Basel for Simon Starling's installation *Shedboatshed* (*Mobile Architecture no. 2*). Image courtesy the artist. The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow. Kunstmuseum Basel

mated as a work of art *after the fact* by the museum and gallery system, the Kunstmuseum Basel, and by the art press. We talked. We debated. We argued. We had conversations that would have been impossible to have back on campus. After three hours, we stopped. And took a vote. The practitioners won, but only because there were more of them there.

Almost two years later the matter remains unresolved. At present, in our division there are two draft documents in circulation on the subject of practice-led research. One is written by an art historian, the other by an artist. So much for "recommending more specific and appropriate terms of reference and criteria for practice-led research projects." Such is the irreconcilability of things, the difficulty of anticipating and legislating for the not-yet-known.

Research as Method

The third beginning for me of the conference that preceded this collection was being introduced to the very idea of "research" itself as a subject of critical concern, and specifically to the idea of research *as method*. In a reading group in 1992, I first became familiar with an article by the Italian historian and anthropologist Carlo Ginzburg entitled "Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method," published in *History Workshop Journal* in 1980.²²

Overall, as many of you will recall, Ginzburg's article is interested in how we acquire and organize knowledge, and how this information, these beliefs and observations, in turn shape our understanding of the world. Taken as a whole, Ginzburg is gripped by a concern, as the article's translator Anna Davin writes, with "historical epistemology, the history and theory of the construction of knowledge."²³ One of his preoccupations in the article is the relationship between formal and informal knowledges—for instance, the relationship between "high" scientific knowledge and "low" scientific lore. For Ginzburg, informal knowledge can be born of everyday experience and the careful observation that allows, as Davin writes, "the observer to understand more than can be directly seen."²⁴ He characterizes this informal knowledge as "conjectural" knowledge. Specifically, Ginzburg uses the idea of such conjectural knowledge to foreground the interpretive methodologies, all emerging in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, of the three figures identified in his article's title: the Italian art connoisseur Giovanni Morelli; the writer of detective fiction and inventor of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; and the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud.

Ginzburg's article, among many other things, draws an analogy between the methods of Morelli, Holmes, and Freud. He writes: "In all three cases tiny details provide the key to a deeper reality, inaccessible by other methods. These details," he goes on, "may be symptoms, for Freud, or clues, for Holmes, or features of paintings, for Morelli."²⁵ This appreciation of minor or marginal or irrelevant details—which are followed and presented *as clues*—highlights how conjecture as a paradigm of research, a different way of discovering, led to an interpretive methodology that acquired a degree of academic respectability in the late nineteenth century. Ginzburg goes on to point out that Morelli, Conan Doyle, and Freud were all under the sway of the semiotic paradigm, or the interpretation of clues, that had come to prominence in the field of the human sciences in the decade from 1870 to 1880. (With their interest in medical semiotics or symptomatology, it is worth recalling

that etymologically the Greek word for symptom is *semeion*, hence our semiotics.) For the connoisseur, the writer of detective fiction, and the father of psychoanalysis, as well as for the doctor and the figure of the historian, knowledge is, writes Ginzburg, also often “indirect, based on signs and scraps of evidence, conjectural.”²⁶ Through Ginzburg, we come to see how understanding percolates to the surface, then, not only from formal knowledge but also from the informal knowledge that comes of experience, that comes from the experience of listening, doing, and watching.²⁷

I don’t hold with everything in Ginzburg’s article. Nonetheless, it has been an inspiration for me time and time again, and for many of my students, because it offers the prospect and possibility of (1) experience, (2) scraps as clues, and (3) conjecture as legitimate research paradigms, as legitimate starting points for going about doing research and actively making new knowledge. Equally importantly, it has encouraged me, and continues to encourage me, to keep my eye out for novel and creative ways of thinking about research and the pleasures, practices, and protocols of doing research. On this front, wonderful scholarly examples of this use of “research to understand research”²⁸ (as Appadurai put it)—and these are just a few instances—include: film theorist Laura Mulvey’s writings on *curiosity* and the pleasures and dangers of discovery; cultural phenomenologist Steven Connor’s considerations on the enthralling and enchanting power of *fascination*; disabilities studies scholar Lennard J. Davis’s untangling of the repetitive and paranoid disposition of our *obsessive* consciousness; and queer theorist Simon Ofield’s writings on research as *cruising*, that is to say, research as a particular kind of search or browsing in which you can “never be quite sure if you will find what you are looking for, or if you will come across something you never knew you wanted, or even knew existed.”²⁹

Conclusion

These are my three beginnings to the conference at the Clark, and thus some of the impetus to this collection. As far as the conference itself and now this collection are concerned, there are a whole series of epistemological, methodological, and even pragmatic overarching questions that we’re hoping to raise in the following pages. These questions might include: Why does the idea of research obsess us? How might we think of the activity of research, the “practice” of doing research? How does the process of research make meaning and misunderstanding, furnish belief and disbelief, knowledge and faith? Why do artists, philosophers, historians, curators, and theorists continue to imbue the objects of research—be they archives, documents, paintings, artifacts, displays and cabinets of curiosity, collections, li-

braries, living rooms, and so on—with animistic qualities, giving them powers of autonomy, animation, life itself? And how do we reconcile our belief in the intrinsic properties and capabilities of such meaning-making objects—encountering the things themselves—with the very impossibility of this? Does this have something to do with their being imbued with aura, because they function as markers of authenticity, uniqueness, and novelty, or are filled with possibility because of the idiosyncratic and eccentric ways in which they are or can be arranged, displayed, and mobilized?

How exactly does the process of research make it possible for archival material to function as openings to interior worlds? What of such intimacy? How do archives function as mnemonic devices, emotional triggers that conjure up memories, mark the passing of time, strike chords, and invoke feelings of nostalgia and sentimentality? How are they determining of our experiences or feelings of desire, craving, longing, melancholia, loss, and mourning? And, for all its persistence, what of the archive’s transience, ephemerality, its process of perpetual deterioration, decay, and disappearance? And, by extension, how are questions of storage and retrieval reframed in our digital culture? What implications does this have for the archive of the future, for its use, and for the very process of research itself?

And the questions continue: How might other models of research from other fields and disciplines influence and shape the future of visual arts research? How are we to view the awkward arrangement of histories, ideas, taxonomies, images, objects, and environments in interdisciplinary projects such as Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Walter Benjamin’s *Passagenwerk*, André Malraux’s *The Voices of Silence*, Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas*, or Jorge Luis Borges’s *Chinese Encyclopaedia*, referred to in the introduction to Michel Foucault’s book *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*? What do we make of such arrangements—or living methodologies, as I like to call them? And who is responding to and building upon such projects, such traditions? Or initiating alternatives? Can art history, visual cultural studies, curatorial strategies, and fine art practices themselves initiate new strategies for doing research? How might they change our notion of what actually constitutes research? How do our encounters with art and visual cultural practices provoke the emergence of new objects and subjects of research, thereby forcing us to return to the question of research anew? In light of recent curatorial activities and fine art practices, aren’t they already doing this?

So many questions! This is a crucial point to note. For underpinning this whole endeavor is the belief, following the cultural critic Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak, that, “[i]t is the questions that we ask that produce the field of inquiry and not some body of materials which determines what questions need to be posed to it.”³⁰ Asking questions of the subjects, objects, media, and environments of our visual cultures, and the particular kinds of questions we pose, produces, as Spivak remarks, the field of inquiry, whether that field of inquiry is grounded and well established, like art history, or still emerging, like visual cultural studies. As Spivak declares, there is no body of preexisting materials that shapes wholly the questions that might be put to it. To raise questions, then, is also to demonstrate a commitment to a questioning of the politics of knowledge and the conditions of the production, dissemination, and utilization of that research.

The subject of research, the idea of research itself, is thus a key issue for those working in art history and visual culture studies, and curators, educators, and artists in the visual arts. This is the case because—as I hope I have begun to make clear—research, and the process of “doing research,” is that essential point at which we begin to ask—in discursive and self-reflexive ways—certain sorts of questions. In so doing, we begin to mold the future shape (as well as the past) of a discipline, interdiscipline, or area of study, subjects and objects of study, and even new types of curatorial and art practices. It is also in doing research that we begin to critically interrogate and find new ways of thinking about our visual, textual, and sonic cultures, our archives, historical documents, and cultural practices themselves, as well as our encounters with these archives and our own obsession with and investment in such materials.

Last question: What kind of a practice is yours?

For all academics, curators, and artists, research involves doing: seeing and looking, knowing, unknowing, orchestrating, and making—even if there is often uncertainty in such doing. When we all speak today about the idea of research, we are becoming *all that much more aware* that it is the ground on which we stand, the air we breath, and that it can be submitted to conscious scrutiny, that it is a little less invisible, and that there are just so many ways to use research to understand research.

Many thanks to the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute for hosting marvelously the conference “What Is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter.” I would like to express my gratitude to all the staff and helpers there, in particular to those working in the Research and Academic Program, including Gail Parker, and especially to Michael Ann Holly and Mark Ledbury. Thanks also to all the wonderful contributors for their presentations, versions of which appear in this collection. Special thanks to Joanne Morra.

1. Arjun Appadurai, “Globalization and the Research Imagination,” *International Social Science Journal* 51, no. 160 (1999): 229–38, 233. See also Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1–19.
2. Mark E. Cheetham et al., eds., *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
3. Cheetham et al., *The Subjects of Art History*, 2.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 1.
6. *Ibid.*
7. This is not the place to begin a debate about the humanities in a postepistemological age, or whether at the time of writing (2007) we now find ourselves in a post-postepistemological age. Nor is this the place to debate a perceived turning away from “theory,” nor to debate the connection between epistemology and theory and (1) the recent resurgence of or return to post-Kantian aesthetics (especially as it is tied to ethics); or (2) an end to the “end of history” paradigm or of *posthistoire* in a climate in which, for many, the events of 11 September 2001 have brought about a return to/of history, starting from “Year Zero”; or (3) any connection between (1) and (2), keeping in mind of course that (1) and (2) emerge from very different (although occasionally overlapping) schools of political thought.
8. Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, “Visual Studies, Historiography and Aesthetics,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 1 (Apr. 2005): 75–90.
9. *Ibid.*, 88.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.* See Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975), 17–86, 39.
12. Cheetham et al., “Visual Studies, Historiography, and Aesthetics,” 88.
13. *Ibid.*
14. “Regulations for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.),” Kingston University, London. For information on HEFCE and AHRC, see http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/ahrb/website/images/4_96361.pdf and www.rae.ac.uk/Pubs/2005/04/docs/l.doc (accessed 9 Apr. 2007).
15. HEFCE proposes that applied, practice-led, and creative projects should be accompanied by a “route map of the research process presented in textual form.” See www.rae.ac.uk/Pubs/2005/04/docs/l.doc

(accessed 9 Apr. 2007). The AHRC proposes that the written component “providing an articulation of the research process and demonstrating critical reflection should be a key element of the doctorate.” See http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/ahrb/website/images/4_96361.pdf (accessed 9 Apr. 2007). Interestingly, the AHRC does say that there is a central role played by “practice as research methodology and by creative work within research outcomes.” But there is no further explanation of what this actually means . . . in practice. See http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/ahrb/website/images/4_96361.pdf (accessed 9 Apr. 2007).

16. These questions and others have been put differently by Fiona Candlin and Mick Wilson. See Fiona Candlin, “A Proper Anxiety? Practice-based Ph.D.s and Academic Unease,” *Working Papers in Art and Design* 1 (1 Nov. 2000), <http://herts.ac.uk/artdest/research/papers/wpades/vol1/candlin2full.html>: “[H]ow do you produce or examine a Ph.D.? . . . Should the artwork be assessed in relation to contemporary art practice or should it be viewed as a thesis in images? Does the theoretical or intellectual investigation take place in relation to practice, or through the accompanying text? Does the artwork, like academic research, put forward a hypothesis and demonstrate a mastery of a canon or should the emphasis be placed upon technical ability and if so, how is technical ability judged? Should practice-based doctoral students be expected to write theses of the same proficiency as conventional Ph.D. students?” See also Mick Wilson, “Four Theses Attempting to Revise the Terms of a Debate” (transcript of a lecture given at Kingston University on 11 July 2006).

17. This is a question asked by Mick Wilson in his presentation.

18. Adrian Rifkin asked this question at a two-day conference I programmed at Tate Britain, 26–27 October 2006. The conference was entitled “Encounter, Curiosity, and Method: The Making of Practice,” and its contributors were Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller, Caroline A Jones, susan pui san lok, Molly Nesbit, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Peg Rawes, Adrian Rifkin, and Jamie Shovlin. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/eventseducation/symposia/6921.htm> (accessed 9 Apr. 2007). Thanks to Heidi Reitmaier, Gemma Nightingale, and Vicky Walsh at Tate Britain for their hard work in the lead up to and during the conference. Thanks also to the British Academy for supporting the conference with a conference grant.

19. “Guidance Notes on Practice-Led Research Degrees,” Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, Kingston University, London (ongoing).

20. “Paul Shepheard—Champion—Simon Starling,” Tate Britain Audio Guides, transcript at http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/2005/transcript_simonstarling.htm (accessed 15 Apr. 2007).

21. It is worth mentioning that I was certainly not alone in thinking about Starling’s work in this way. In fact, a few months later, when he was awarded the Turner Prize in a televised ceremony at Tate Britain, Channel 4 host and art critic Matthew Collings also noted that Starling’s work was considered “practice-led research,” and then—with, to my mind, unnecessary disingenuousness—went on to express uncertainty about the meaning of this term. But this phrase, or variations of it, have

been used for some time and regularly in art history, visual culture studies, art criticism, and curatorial discussions in relation to the practices of a disparate cluster (or elective affinity) of contemporary artists and collectives involved in visual arts practices whose work is caught up in and exposes mechanisms of research and the process of doing research that both underpins the work and is, often, actually the work itself. To this extent, if there had been an exhibition on view somewhere in London by Christian Boltanski, Gerhard Richter, Sophie Calle, Mark Dion, Jimmy Durbin, Susan Hiller, Fred Wilson, or any number of younger artists such as Jeremy Deller, Thomas Hirschhorn, susan pui san lok, Multiplicity, The Otolith Group, Uriel Orlow, Olivia Plender, Walid Raad, Media Collective, or Jamie Shovlin, that would have done, too.

On the question of the archive, a matter close to the question of research, see, for instance: I. Blazwick and Janna Graham, eds., *Gerhard Richter Atlas—A Reader* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2004); Charles Merewether, *Archive* (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas*: An Anomic Archive,” *October* 88 (Spring 1999): 117–45; Mark Godfrey, “The Artist as Historian,” *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 140–72; Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3–22; Alan Sekula, “The Body as Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3–64; Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen, eds., *Deep Storage: Collection, Storing, and Archiving in Art* (Munich: Prestel, 1998); Marquard Smith, “Journeys, Documentation, Indexing, Archives, and Practice-Based Research: A Conversation with susan pui san lok,” *Art Journal* (Winter 2006): 18–35. See also Hans-Ulrich Obrist’s Agency for Unrealized Projects (<http://www.pentinegallery.org/projects/>) (accessed 24 June 2007).

22. Carlo Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method,” translated by Anna Davin, *History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist Historians* 9 (Spring 1980): 5–36.

23. *Ibid.*, 5.

24. *Ibid.*, 8.

25. *Ibid.*, 11.

26. *Ibid.*, 16.

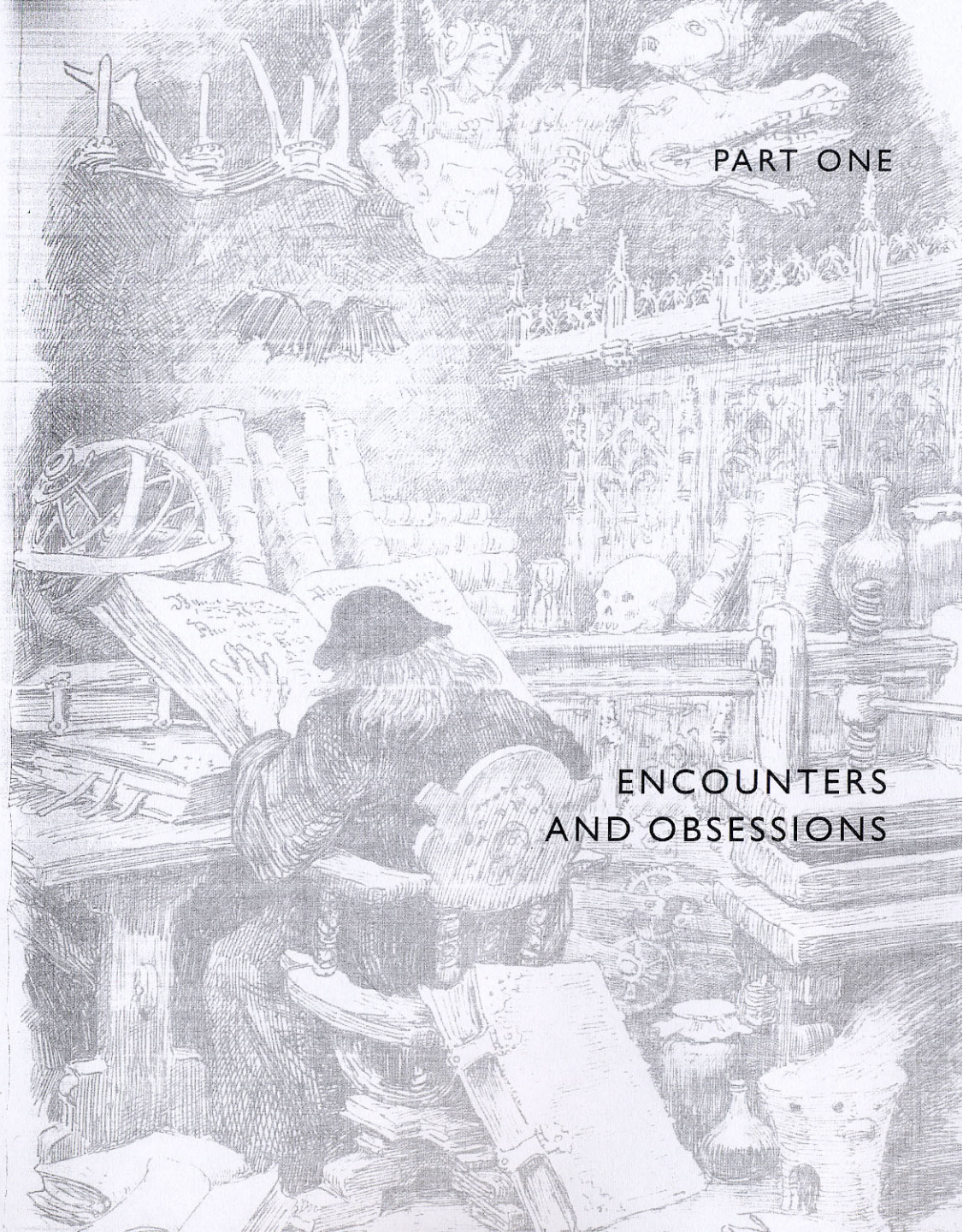
27. *Ibid.*, 21. Michael Ann Holly’s yearning for wonder, something in excess of research, finds an analogue in Ginzburg’s conjectural paradigm that includes factors that cannot be easily measured, such as whiff, a glance, an intuition (28). Ginzburg also speaks of “Ancient Arab physiognomy [which] is based on ‘frasa’: a complex notion which generally speaking meant the capacity to leap from the known to the unknown by inference (on the basis of clues)” (28–29).

28. Two exhibitions that exemplify this as curatorial strategies—they are equally suggestive, although in very different ways—are *Deep Storage* (Berlin, 1998) and *Utopia Station*, which premiered at the 50th Venice Biennial in 2003 and is still ongoing.

29. See Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: BFI, 1996); Steven Connor, “Fascination, and the Screen,” *Critical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1998): 9–24; Lennard J. David and Roberto De Romo,

"Introduction," *Writing and Obsession, Fictions: Studi sulla narratività* (Pisa: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali 4, 2005); Lennard J. Davis, "Play it Again, Sam, and Again: Obsession and Art," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 2 (Aug. 2006): 242–66; Lennard J. Davis, *Obsession* (forthcoming); Simon Ofield, "Cruising the Archive," *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 3 (Dec. 2005): 351–64. On gossip, queer acts, and flirtation, respectively, see also Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Gossip and Science: A Conversation on What I Love According to Truth," in Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 67–70; José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women and Performance* 8, no. 2 (1996); and Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Discourses in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

30. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, comment at a lecture at Harvard University's Center for Literary and Cultural Studies, 1987, paraphrased in Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 31.



PART ONE

ENCOUNTERS
AND OBSESSIONS