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## GUEST EDITORIAL

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### INTRODUCTION

Our guest editorial of this issue takes the form of a conversation between the *JAWS* editorial team and Professor Joseph Heathcott. Professor Heathcott has been an early champion of *JAWS* and is part of our advisory board so it unsurprising perhaps that we should share so many core values, including a passion for widening participation in higher education and the public role of scholarship. In this conversation Professor Heathcott discusses accessibility and application of artistic research, never shying away from digging down into the terminology of our discipline, one that can often seem mystifying or exclusive to early stage researchers or those outside the academic community.

The *JAWS* editorial team (Robert Gadie, Frank Peschier and Ruth Solomons) first encountered Professor Heathcott at University of the Arts London in 2011 during his time there as the US Fulbright Distinguished Chair to the United Kingdom. Currently Associate Professor of Urban Societies at The New School in New York, Prof. Heathcott teaches a wide range of excitingly and intriguingly titled courses including 'Archive: The Design of Knowledge', 'The Everyday City' and 'Dynamic Metropolis'.

Professor Heathcott's writings and practice also reflect the diversity of *JAWS*' publishing and showcasing of a smorgasbord of works. Along with wide-ranging exhibitions including at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and in Stuttgart Germany, Prof. Heathcott has published across amazingly varied media from academic tomes, to DIY 'zines, visual essays, exhibits, radio and sound. We are thankful that he has taken the time not only to support the *JAWS* project but also to provoke interesting discussions among ourselves about what we do and why. We look forward to future conversations and hope this editorial will form the basis for discourse, and maybe just a little constructive dissensus, in many seminars and editorial meetings to come.



Figure 1: Joseph Heathcott, *Mattresses*, photograph, Tryon Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, 2012.

*At JAWS we are passionate about scholarship being public and accessible to all. Our whole ethos behind the journal was to create a safe space for these conversations to start, and to share without the fear of judgment or assessment. You have written extensively on this but could you summarise for us what you think is the public role of research?*

These are certainly issues near and dear to my heart, and I am very glad to hear of the commitment by *JAWS* editors to the public dimensions of research. In many ways the ‘publicity’ of research is a different question than the ‘accessibility’ of research, right? And both of these questions are crosscut by the problem of ‘authority’, that is, who is authorized to produce knowledge, and the problem of ‘effect’, that is, what happens to research once it is produced. It is worth lingering over these questions for a bit because artists have a lot to contribute to the conversation.

In my own work, I find it difficult to get clarity on the relationship between research and the public, so maybe you can help me puzzle through this. I think my confusion takes three forms. First, research is a very broad category of human activity – it is something everyone does in one way or another, any time we gather and process information to solve a problem, whether knapping a stone tool or evaluating an after-school arts programme. So we have to differentiate among all kinds of activities that come under the heading of research. Second, the conditions of research – that is, who does it, for what purposes, and to what end – unfold across an unfathomably diverse array of practices, locations, and institutions. Even within universities, research takes many forms, some open and public, some closed and proprietary. Finally, ‘the public’ that we imagine needs access is by no means a fixed, stable entity, but rather a shifting and contingent phenomenon, constantly negotiated through real practices in the world (a problem that artists have been engaged with for a long time). In some respects, we constitute publics through the very act of research.

*So how does this relate to the idea of accessibility?*

Scholarly research is engaged in the practice of knowledge production. All knowledge (tacit, embodied, vernacular, formal or otherwise) is subject to appropriation through structures of authority and circuits of capital. Over the last century we have developed many techniques for controlling research, shaping access to it, rendering it predictable. These include things like disciplinary conventions, laboratory and field procedures, managerial routines, professional standards, data flows, ethics and archival practices. But this phantasm of control belies the promiscuous nature of information and the fundamentally unpredictable outcomes of research.

We can look at this another way. Scholars and activists have spent decades working to pry open access to state documents – FBI and CIA records, national policy deliberations, White House email messages. We support the brave work of hactivists like Edward Snowden and Julian Assange. But what about access to personal documents controlled by the state, such as someone’s criminal record, or agency reports about welfare recipients, or a veteran’s medical charts, or a CIA field statement that names a local informant? Likewise, many scholars – myself included – have called for a glasnost in academic publishing, tearing down the Pay Wall so as to make the products of research accessible to all. But should all research be accessible? What about information gathered by an anthropologist regarding indigenous healing practices in the Amazon that make use of a particular plant? This information would be as open to a student as to a bioprospector from a pharmaceutical corporation, as both are ostensibly members of ‘the public’. Who has a right to that information? What are the responsibilities of the researcher in terms of reporting her findings to the public? When is knowledge production just another name for colonial extraction, however ‘accessible’ it may be?

All this is to say that, while open access and public responsibility are matters of utmost concern in a democracy, we cannot afford to see the matter in black and white. When we call for expanded public access to scholarship, or for an elevated public responsibility for research, it is worth thinking through our terms. Who is conducting the research, and under what conditions? Who decides what questions are worth asking? What happens to the knowledge created through research? What constitutes ‘the public’ that we imagine needs access? These are matters of pressing global concern that artists are well-positioned to explore.

*Then how should universities relate to the public?*

Most universities, at least in the US and UK, are corporations chartered by their respective governments to produce a public benefit. This ‘public benefit’ is construed broadly, which is proper. That is, scholars of Ancient Greek Literature might not generate immediate tangible gains for large numbers of people, but they add to the general fund of knowledge, and our universities would be much poorer without them. An installation by a conceptual artist will not make a claim to cure cancer, but the themes it explores can inform and inspire people. So while I am a strong advocate for university research as a public good, this should not compel us to instrumentalize knowledge. The university has to remain a haven for pure speculation, for abstract creative play, and for the production of knowledge without concern for immediate payoff. After all, it is seldom evident how or even when some avenue of research will contribute to the greater good, and in any case the public benefits of knowledge are almost always cumulative.

Another consideration is the locus of authority for the production of knowledge. Universities function on the ‘expertise’ model, a kind of black box where controlled admission, rites of passage, and rituals of access (we call it credentialing) imbue scholars with the authority to determine the conditions of research – that is, what questions should be asked, how we should ask them, and to what end. Many university scholars are working to dismantle this apparatus of authority, which is based on little more than the scarcity principle. As an alternative, many publicly engaged scholars call for a shift in how knowledge is valued and produced. They argue that university engagement with communities should be about more than scholars bringing a pre-determined set of questions to the table and seeking community input. Rather, they argue that communities should be involved from start to finish in the co-production of knowledge, from defining the initial ‘problem’ to advancing new ideas and solutions.

*Is this the approach you advocate?*

I am very much in favour of this as one among many approaches. The world is complex enough that we do not have to choose one mode over another; there is room for multiple approaches. Specialized knowledge itself is not a problem, and in fact produces great things, like symphonies and sculptures and films and software. I like driving a well-made car over a solidly engineered bridge. The problem, rather, is the political economy of information through which ‘expertise’ circulates as a cipher of control in the production of knowledge. The normative question for me, then, is not whether publicly engaged research is ‘better’ than traditional research, but rather, what are the varied roles of knowledge and expertise in a democracy?

*How do you think interdisciplinary research, such as art/social science crossovers, benefits arts research as a whole?*

There is little doubt of the value and importance of cross-disciplinary work in the production of new knowledge and understanding of the world. The partial unravelling of the disciplines has been an exciting thing to watch and to be part of. It is a process that began in physics in the early twentieth century and has wound through the natural and social sciences, humanities and professional fields. I was in college in the 1980s when translations of post-structuralist theory were becoming required reading for US academics. It was pretty thrilling to see history and literature departments hyperventilate over Foucault and Derrida – we could watch the implosion of the fields right before our eyes in real time. But its much more than that: the dissolution of boundaries has made it more and more possible for normative fields such as art and design to intersect with so-called ‘empirical’ fields like history and sociology.

At the same time, my views about interdisciplinarity have gone back and forth over time from unbridled enthusiasm to anxious concern. Disciplines apprehend the world through processes of constraint, minimization, taxonomy, segmentation and rule making. Disciplines control knowledge not by mandating content, but by agreeing on how content is generated – that is, what constitutes a legitimate ‘problem’ for enquiry, and what methods are sanctioned to examine the problem. We live in a world profoundly shaped by disciplines such as medicine, law, psychology, biology, design and history. But their limitations, and perhaps their fragility, have long been obvious. An engineer can build a superlative motorway through a city, with exquisite

care taken to define the fault tolerances of curves or the compression strength of stanchions or the velocity of rainwater runoff. But should the motorway be built at all? Is its route the most just and equitable? Who has to be dislocated to make it happen? Does it improve the aesthetic experience and environmental quality of its location? Engineers cannot answer these questions by themselves. We need artists and designers and anthropologists involved in such projects from the beginning, not to mention the communities affected on the ground.

*So disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity are both necessary?*

Yes, and in many ways they are mutually constitutive. In other words, the move toward interdisciplinarity has never been an 'either-or' proposition. What it has allowed us to do is to create new spaces for asking questions, for constructing new scaffolds for research. And not just by getting disciplines to talk to each other within particular domains of knowledge – like historians walking down the hall of the Humanities building to talk to literary theorists – but rather pushing for encounters across domains of knowledge, between the humanities and medicine, between art and natural sciences, between social sciences and design. Such cross-pollination can have the effect of simultaneously destabilizing and strengthening the disciplines.

Often the very physicality of universities militates against these kinds of encounters; the Enlightenment campus is a diagram of how knowledge is supposed to function under the sign of Modernity. Just think of a classically delineated campus quadrangle, surrounded by buildings singularly dedicated to 'mathematics' and 'language' and 'philosophy'. Then think of all the little animal paths worn into the grass that transect the quadrangle as people move between the buildings. These little paths are a kind of performative redesign of the diagram, thousands of little problem-solving moments that accumulate and reconfigure the map. Or think of the expensive build-outs and repurposing of campus structures required to create space for new collaborations. These reflect all the strange ways we have had to articulate the otherwise brittle physical and intellectual space of the university to make room for emergent conditions of knowledge.

*So what makes you anxious about interdisciplinarity?*

Well, disciplines are powerful, but have severe limits. Indeed, their power is premised on such limits, and this has always made them inherently unstable propositions. Biology is built on the notion of life, which is a shaky platform to say the least – an object into which we constantly project ourselves. Is history the past, or is it the story we tell about the past? Is the study of fields like mineralogy and agronomy premised on the notion of nature as input into civilization? Are humans really utility maximizers, as economists would have it? How can we possibly study artificial intelligence if we have hardly yet grasped what 'intelligence' itself means, outside of metaphors such as 'processing power' or 'neural networks'? Is 'intelligence' itself just a metaphor for a set of relational conditions we don't understand? The answers to these questions go to the heart of the nature of disciplines.

But that is rather well-trodden ground. What we sometimes overlook is the fact that the encounters between disciplines also have their limits, often based on path dependencies. I am not sure we have attended as carefully to these limits as we should. The most obvious limit is that of 'multi-disciplinarity',

where two or more disciplines join forces to approach a particular problem, but fall short of creating something new. Another limit comes with 'inter-disciplinarity', where disciplines merge far enough to create new conditions for enquiry, but lack cohesiveness in methods or results. And finally there is the tantalizing promise of 'trans-disciplinarity'. Transdisciplinary research attempts to pose questions and conduct enquiry unfettered by disciplinary frameworks. Unfortunately, such research seldom lives up to its claims, as the disciplines continue to exert a kind of fugitive control over modes of enquiry. This is particularly problematic because the disciplinary bases of claims go unacknowledged.

So my anxiety has to do with these limitations. That said, I am at heart a pragmatist, so have grown comfortable with the unsettled nature of this problem. As I see it, we are in a very exciting moment where disciplines remain powerful, but we have new tools to experiment with a wide range of alternatives. Sometimes this involves optimizing the disciplines themselves, sometimes it means articulating disciplinary frameworks with respect to each other, and sometimes it means cutting across and moving beyond the limits of disciplines. This inevitably creates new limits, but what's wrong with that?

*During your time as US Fulbright Distinguished Chair, how did you find (or did you find) much difference between the US and UK postgrad education/teaching?*

I had a wonderful experience teaching at the University of the Arts London, and learned so much from my colleagues and from students. I had the most contact with the Ph.D. in Art, M.A. in Curatorial Studies, and M.A. in Art Theory programmes. There is a long history of cross-pollination between the US and UK, with respect to higher education, so over the years I think we have moved closer on many important features. So in comparing the two systems, it is hard to generalize, but let's at least play with some ideas.

My experience is that the US postgraduate system places a heavier emphasis on sequential curriculum and coursework (what you might call modules). There is also heavy reliance on the seminar format, with its emphasis on collaborative knowledge building. The strength of this system is the step-wise, phased approach to learning, with lots of time for study and mastery of content. But this can also be a weakness: it usually takes two years of coursework for an M.A. and two or three years on top of that for Ph.D. coursework, not to mention several years more to produce the doctoral thesis. Another weakness is curriculum 'bloat', where required courses accrete over time. The US emphasis on content can also delay the development of independent research capacity.

Even in the 'taught masters' degrees in the UK, there is less emphasis on sequential coursework (or modules), and more on tutorials and independent work. Also, the taught masters only take about a year to complete. This has the advantage of fostering research capacity in a relatively short time. The drawback is that the diminished role for curriculum leaves less time for content mastery or to explore cognate fields.

Talking specifically of the Ph.D. in Art, the UK is well ahead of the US, of course. In the US, leading arts universities such as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago have resisted the Ph.D. They see the MFA as the only legitimate terminal degree for the arts. This is often the case in 'making' and practice fields, where people resist what they see as the 'over-intellectualization', drift of purpose, or even irrelevance of the Ph.D. They point out, quite rightly,



that the Ph.D. does not make one a better artist or architect or film-maker. But of course that is not what the Ph.D. is for – it is a research degree.

*This issue of JAWS is loosely themed around arts practice and research as maps and diagrams. Could you tell us a little about how you used your photography practice within the 'mapping' of your project 'The Known City'?*

That is a great theme for the journal! I would extend that to the obverse proposition: mapping and diagramming as methods for arts research. They provide artists with very handy tools for working out relations between things, whether spatially or in networks and genealogies. I can't think of a recent project where I haven't used maps and diagrams to one extent or another to illuminate some key aspect of the research.

How my art practice relates to my research is a much thornier issue, and one I have been grappling with for a long time. Much of my research is on cities, both real and imagined. I am particularly interested in the relationship between the production of urban imaginaries through discursive and representational forms (architecture, art, film, literature, photography) and the phenomenal experience of being in a city. How are our understandings of cities and urban spaces formed in the crucible of representation of those very spaces? How do our experiences of these places in turn shape their form and meaning? To pursue these questions, I do archival research, visual analysis of photographs and architectural drawings, textual analysis of planning documents, and site-specific studies of buildings and urban spaces.

The 'Known City' project is in this mold. It is a long-term attempt to understand the construction of urban knowledge, that is, what various practitioners feel they need to know about the city in order to intervene into it. By practitioners I mean city planners, architects, artists, civil engineers, reformers, social workers and similar fields. I argue that the ways in which these domains of practice perceive the city shapes the questions they ask about it, which in turn structures the nature of information they receive about it, which again in turn shapes their perception. So to take one instance, urban planners use maps, charts, ideograms, photographs, demographic data, and other modalities to 'apprehend' the city, to render it 'knowable' for the purposes of intervening into it – through slum clearance projects or zoning codes, for example. Photographs of so-called 'slum dwellings' become politically charged when incorporated into a planning document that describes them as a problem to be solved, or into a proposal that calls for the demolition of said dwellings.

*So how does this kind of research relate to your own photography?*

Well, this eruptive relationship between representations and reality has haunted my own practice as a photographer. Seeing how photography gets framed as a 'truth-telling' device and recruited into narratives of 'othering' keeps me wary and ill at ease in my own visual work. After all, 'making' is never innocent of such politics, however 'pure' we might wish our art to be. Like any practitioners, artists are always/already imbricated in a nested series of power relations: the big question is how we choose to represent, disrupt or intervene into these relations at any given moment.

I learned photography as a young kid from my father, using his 1966 Mamiya-Sekor 1000TL 35mm camera. He received the camera as part of his tour of duty in the Vietnam War, where he was attached to the US Army Signal Corps. So already the very camera on which I learned to shoot pictures

at age 10 or 11 was implicated in a terrible imperialist war. What's more, I learned photography in the context of a grim old Midwestern industrial city throttled by factory closings, which greatly affected my family. This sense of a world unravelling, of all the solidity melting into air, has certainly shaped my aesthetic practice, and in turn affects my research. I think it disposes me toward the bland and the mundane.

So while I draw on the techniques of architectural photography, it is not usually to extol elite or iconic buildings, but to explore the ordinary environments we live with. I also draw on the documentary tradition, but reject the presumption of photography as a transparent instrument of truth-telling, or as a mode of access to depth or interiority. In other words, I try to resist defining social realities or constructing closed narratives. Instead, I use the medium to explore the contingent relationships between photographer, subject, image and viewer in a wide variety of locations. 'Making' photographs under these contorted and unstable conditions has made me a much more careful researcher, and far more sensitive to the power of images to shape knowledge and experience.

*What do you think is the importance, if any, of academic publishing in arts research? Especially as you yourself have published across such a wide range of media!*

It is more than just important, it is crucial. Artists have so much to offer in the construction of new knowledge. And I don't just mean research *about* art, I mean research *through* art – artistic practice *as* research. There is something about the iterative process and tacit, embodied knowledge brought to bear in the 'making' of things, so common in art and design fields, that opens up huge possibilities for critique, exposure, and new approaches to research.

*JAWS* really is at the forefront of big changes in how art relates to research and scholarship. I can't wait to see where you take it!

### **CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS**

Prof. Heathcott studies the American metropolis and its diverse cultures, institutions, and environments within a comparative and global perspective. His main interest is in the public role of scholarship and teaching, and the civic engagement of students and teachers in the world around them. He is also a compulsive peripatetic, amateur archivist, and collector of LPs, post cards, old radios, books, and found objects. During 2010–2011, Prof. Heathcott served as the US Fulbright Distinguished Chair to the United Kingdom at the University of the Arts London, and as a Senior Visiting Scholar at the London School of Economics. His articles, photographs, maps, drawings, and exhibits have appeared in a range of venues, from books and magazines, to exhibits, blogs, 'zines, and journals of opinion. Prof. Heathcott has been awarded fellowships from US Fulbright, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Erasmus Institute, the Mellon Foundation, and the Brown Center for the Humanities. He has been invited to lecture, consult, and judge design reviews in a wide variety of venues both in the US and internationally. Currently he serves on the Board of Directors of the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and frequently volunteers his time with neighborhood groups and community organizations around issues of planning, preservation, and urban design.

Prof. Heathcott is a founding member of the *JAWS* advisory board and a much valued and vocal supporter.