New Media: the 'First Word' in Art?

There has been a significant increase in academic research within the creative arts. There are a number of drivers behind this which have been documented in an increasing number of books (Gilman, 2006, et al), journals and conference proceedings[1]. Many practitioners working at this cutting edge are new media artists. The question arises whether the characteristics of new media art encourage its practice as research?

Before addressing this it would be useful to clarify what is meant by 'new media art' and 'research'.

Terms

New media art can be defined as creative arts practice that involves the development and/or application of emergent mediating tools and systems. New media art necessarily researches novel means and reflects upon them in its outcomes. The processes and outcomes of new media art may suggest that it be regarded as qualitatively distinct to conventional artistic practices as the artwork embodies novelty within an expanded set of criteria.

If new media artists develop and/or employ emergent and novel media in the production and dissemination of their artwork then they will, as a matter of course, be required to undertake research into the media systems they employ. This leads to the question; what is research and how might artists do it?

Research can be defined as original investigation seeking to create new knowledge. However, there is no single definition of what methods or subjects might be valid as research. Different disciplines conceive research differently. Conventionally research has been defined as 'basic', 'scholarly' or 'applied' and comprised of varying quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

In practice research cannot be so clearly defined. Various knowledge domains employ distinct combinations of fundamental forms of research and associated methodologies. New research modalities are constantly emerging as new problems demand novel solutions. Thus 'translational', 'strategic', 'clinical' and other forms of research exist in the literature. A recent form of research is 'practice-led'. This has emerged as a research category due, in part, to the demands of a Higher Education sector where creative arts subjects now offer research degrees and are thus subject to a rigour similar to the sciences.

Practice-led research has developed within a number of academic contexts, including the creative arts. However, other established subject areas have been instrumental in defining practice-led research, notably the health related sciences. As its name suggests, practice-led research employs professional and creative practice methodologies and evaluative criteria. As an evolving area practice-led research is still developing its methodologies. They are often characterised by hybridity, appropriating methods from other research domains.

The UK's Research Assessment Exercise guidelines define research as follows:

> ''Research' for the purpose of the RAE is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry, as well as to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts, including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction.' (RAE, 2001)

What is clear from this definition is that artworks can be valid research outcomes, whatever their form or media, so long as they are regarded as embodying new knowledge or improved insights. Thus it is accepted that artists can undertake the production of art and, at the same time, be undertaking research that will ultimately be embodied in the final artwork.

Stephen Scrivener has observed that the idea of the artwork embodying research can be problematic:

> 'The visual arts community places great significance on the art object and the art making process. Consequently, many visual artists wish to see a form of research in which art and art making are central: that is to say, the art making process is understood as a form of research and the art object as a form of knowledge. If one takes this position and accepts the common understanding of research then one must be able to explain how visual art contributes to knowledge.' (Scrivener, 2002)

Scrivener asserts that the 'proper goal of visual arts research is visual art' and observes that understanding the art making process as yielding new knowledge, independent of the art object, may risk relegating the artwork to the status of a by-product. To expect the artwork to primarily embody knowledge would, in the eyes of many, lead to a utilitarian view of what art can be.

In Scrivener's view the generous ambit of the RAE's definition of research is not sustainable. He proposes a problematic of how research and creative practice might operate together and seeks to redefine what research can be, proposing 'that we should not attempt to justify the art object as a form of knowledge and should instead focus on defining the goals and norms of the activity that we choose to call arts research.' Although he is not seeking a definitive answer to this problem Scrivener has opened the door to an alternate view of what research can be for and proposes this might include, along with knowledge, other outcomes. He argues that apprehension can be considered the objective of art and that this can be a research outcome, and thus a justification of research, if the '…researcher intends to generate novel apprehensions (by novel I mean culturally novel, not just novel to the creator or individual observers of an artefact) by undertaking original creation, and it is this that separates the researcher from the practitioner.'

Scrivener's argument echoes the earlier observation concerning new media artists and the research they are obliged to undertake to produce artworks that employ emergent media. In this respect new media artists are engaged in research that appears, in many ways, to resemble research as it is undertaken in other fields. New media artists almost routinely undertake applied research, seeking to develop novel mediating systems or new applications for existing media. As artists they also have to satisfy the conventional demands for novelty associated with creative practice. They may seek to do this in terms that Scrivener would recognise as compliant with his definition of creative arts research, or they may seek to satisfy only the conventional art world's expectations. However, the new media artist is free to do either and still be considered to have satisfied demanding definitions of what research is. In this we begin to see a possible answer to our question: why new media artists seem to have been successful in adapting to working with research?

Research environments

Research is undertaken within a research environment. It might prove useful to look at how some new media arts research environments have emerged.

Although there are earlier initiatives[2] an early example of artists' engagement with formal research environments was the 1967 to 1971 Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Tuchman, 1971) involving, at that time, emerging artists Robert Irwin, James Lee Byars and James Turrell. This project has since served as something of a model for other initiatives, such as the Australia Council and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) Artists Fellowship program[3] of the 1980s and the more recent UK Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) and Arts Council England (ACE) Art and Science Research Fellowships initiative[4].

The Los Angeles County Museum's program was focused on facilitating artists access to the resources and working methods available in corporate research environments. The Australia Council and AHRC's initiatives were distinct in that the first placed artists within the purely scientific research context of the CSIRO whilst the AHRC program placed artists within academic research contexts. In this respect the AHRC program most closely matches the focus of this essay. Other initiatives, such as Xerox PARC (Harris, 1999) and the Interval Research program[5] were also important and distinctive examples of artists being engaged in research within corporate research environments.

What is notable about these examples is that they involved artists undertaking their work in what were, for them, alien environments. In more recent years (in the UK since 1996, when the AHRC – then AHRB - was created) there has been a move to a model where the research environments artists work within are determined and staffed by artists who are also researchers. We have seen emerge and gain credence the idea that creative arts practice is itself a research domain involving research criteria and methods that derive from the characteristics of creative arts practice.

Artists' experiences

The objective here is to inquire into new media artists practice as research and the diverse forms this can take, asking whether new media artists are especially well placed to integrate creative practice with formal research. This task has been informed by primary research surveying new media arts practitioners working in research environments. The practitioner/researchers involved come from varying demographic contexts covering a number of countries and cultures, stages of career progression, gender and diverse social circumstances. The data has been evaluated in order to help determine whether new media art practices do promote ways of working that afford a particularly amenable relationship to formal research methods and objectives. The highly internationalised field of new media arts practice and related research activity is contextualised within the varying characteristics of the geographic, political and social circumstances in which such work is undertaken.

Questions include how the relationship between practice and research can evolve during a professional career; how artists with primarily practice-led careers differ from those pursuing more academic roles; whether certain creative practices are better pursued within formal research contexts; what research methods seem to be most commonly employed in new media arts practice and how the relationship between practice and research functions in a number of different contexts.

One issue to emerge amongst the respondents concerned is whether they perceive themselves as artists. Most appeared happy to be defined as artists but a number were clear that they saw themselves as having hybrid professional identities and, in some cases, questioned whether being identified as an artist accurately reflected what they did.

Mexican artist Eugenio Tisselli articulated this when he stated:

> 'At one point in my life I realised that some of the creative work I was doing could be seen as being artistic in quality...I landed on the artistic world by mere convenience. I have also abandoned this world just as easily.'[6]

Although Tisselli has worked in higher education he has most recently been working within the industrial research environment of Sony's Paris-based Computer Science Laboratory. A number of well known new media artists have worked at this facility. Like many of the artists discussed here, Tisselli actively engages in the development of the technologies underpinning his work, researching and developing new applications and systems. As he observes:

> 'My creative work is largely based on programming, the discipline which I have followed since I was ten years old. Programming creatively is a highly experimental activity and is always tightly linked to research, whether formal or informal. So, for me, research has been a significant aspect of my work from the very beginning.'

UK artist/writer John Cayley articulates ambivalence about his professional identity when he states:

> 'I started working full-time in academia only six months ago (Brown University, Rhode Island, USA). I am trained in another field - Chinese language and civilisation - and was a curator (1986-89) in the British Library, Chinese Section. My 'career' in writing digital media has run parallel and unsupported, until now, to my academic involvement.'

Although ambivalent, it should be noted that Cayley's artwork explicitly reflects the hybridity of his professional interests, engaging as it does with generative poetics, poly-semic writing and multimedia combinations of text, image and sound.

The artists engaged in this survey present from a wide range of media practices. This diversity is a characteristic of new media arts practice, where the novelty and motility of media is more a concern than media specificity. These artists work across many media and approaches. Nearly all are familiar with and regularly work within collaborative contexts, working with artists and non-artists in teams engaging a range of technologies.

Nevertheless, whilst a particular artist may work across a wide range of media, they might identify themselves very clearly in disciplinary terms, as Johannes Birringer exemplifies when he states 'I am a choreographer', continuing:

> 'I work in theatre, dance, moving (and still) images, site specific installations, exhibitions, digital works, telematic works (online performance), interactive design, screen based installations, poetry/music. My work has been shown in theatres, concert halls, museums, galleries, at festivals, outdoors and site specifically, at film festivals, art exhibitions, photography exhibitions and online.'

What is clear here is that whilst Birringer considers himself a choreographer the forms his work takes and the contexts it might be encountered in engage many arts. Birringer's comments evidence ease in working with hybrid practices which derives from the strength he acquires from a clearly defined disciplinary foundation in his practice.

This hybridity and ambiguity in forms of practice is reflected in the diverse contexts in which many of these artists undertake their practice and research. These range from the academic to the industrial, engaging the physical and social sciences and involving collaborations across numerous disciplines. This complicates what forms knowledge might take in different circumstances and how value accrues to it. Atau Tanaka observes:

> 'I have worked in various contexts – as an independent artist, in an industry-sponsored lab and in academia. Knowledge is available everywhere, especially in today's era of democratised knowledge. Resources differ in each context, but it is not simply a question of magnitude – it is also a question of process and procedure to obtain

resources, and the politics of compromise inherent therein that shifts from context to context. This determines the liberty and freedom of research, and alongside that the criteria and rigours of evaluation.'

Further reflecting such pragmatics Maria Mencia states:

'I have pursued the production of my artwork and research within an academic environment as this provides me with the production, network and dissemination platforms needed for the development of the work. I don't think this is the only environment which would allow me to develop my work as there are many other avenues in the art world but it has been my choice to select the academic as opposed to the art world.'

Mencia contextualises this and the value derived from this approach when she says 'I am interested in the art scene when exhibitions expand into other dialogues such as seminars, talks and workshops; otherwise I find the art gallery a bit sterile and contained'.

Miguel Santos amplifies Mencia's observations on the value of expanded creative environments when he states:

'The (art)work is developed within an academic/research environment. The reasons (for this) are wider than accessibility to resources and knowledge but accessibility is a crucial element. The academic/research environment demands a specific form of rigour and freedom, a sort of frame for the artwork, that I do not find within an art environment.'

Johannes Birringer observes that seeking to undertake creative practice and research in an academic environment can be a mixed experience. He notes:

'Most institutions are not equipped to do sustained experimental multimedia work. I would require a lab and laboratory conditions as they exist in the sciences but most art or humanities programs do not understand this and expect me to set up (a lab) and strike it every night, set up again the next week, for 3 hours, strike the 'set', beg for open network connections, and bring my own laptops.'

On the other hand he also identifies the benefits of:

'…using university theatres with lighting and bringing performance students and art students together with computing science, design and engineering, connecting dance and music technology, allowing ourselves the luxury of using a new motion capture system installed in an advanced computer centre, making friends in biology and life sciences, learning new things, meeting other scientists, hearing the new discourse, attending lectures and conferences.'

This suggests he finds the hybrid and expanded nature of interdisciplinary work more rewarding than the contexts afforded by conventional artistic practices.

Birringer's experience evidences that the creative arts as a research area within academia is an emergent phenomena that is not entirely comfortable within an institution that often does not understand the particularities of creative practice as research. Anne Sarah Le Meur observes that:

> 'In France art departments in universities rarely have money or computer laboratories. So my practice is made outside the university. I have to work on my own, with my own materials or find and pay other people to work for me. The theoretical part of my research gains more advantage from my academic position'.

This suggests that in some contexts the idea of the creative arts as research is not yet established and the artist can only expect support when it resembles conventional research. Kai Syng Tan, within the context of Fine Arts education in Singapore, observes:

> 'Since the environment for my professional work as a teacher does not sufficiently support my artistic work I separate the two. I conduct research for my artworks on my own, outside and independent of my teaching in college. Sometimes I do bring into the classroom what I have investigated to share with the students, but I consciously try to separate the two.'

Kirk Woolford echoes this when he states '…my relationship to academia has always been secondary to the creation of (art)works themselves.'

Michael Naimark has worked as an artist and researcher in diverse contexts: academic, corporate, industrial, non-profit and freelance. He notes that the perception of the artist in these varying contexts can function problematically, for both parties. 'If you are a good artist in a commercial environment then people worry that you will waste money. If you are a good producer in an arts research environment people think you can get things done.' Naimark is observing that such perceptions function to ingrain the misapprehension that artists only work in research environments so as to gain access to resources and, the obverse, that artists are poor managers of their own and others resources.

Kirk Woolford observes, tellingly, that 'I had better access to people and resources through my own (private production) company than I do through the university', suggesting that, on the one hand, the university might not always present the opportunity it appears to from outside and, on the other, that artists can be very capable managers.

Sustaining Woolford's observation that the university might not offer the sort of support that the artist hopes for, Garth Paine notes that:

> 'The university sector in Australia does not recognise practice driven research in terms of research workload - this is calculated using a science model, accounting for competitive research income, books and journal articles only. Therefore if one is to maintain a research practice within the institution it needs to address these criteria.'

It is clear that experiences in the UK, USA, France, Singapore and Australia are distinct. However, it is also evident that within a single country's higher education sector (the UK) there are also big differences (Birringer and Woolford) and even within a single institution and department (Birringer). These differences are possibly due to variations in how successful departments have been in attracting research funding and how they have negotiated the relationship between research and teaching.

Whatever the challenges working contexts present, all of the respondents agreed that research and practice inform one another. Tanaka simply stated 'My practice emerges from research' whilst Le Meur observed 'both are completely melded.' Miguel Santos noted that 'My working methods require research and practice and I only find problems when I start to make a distinction.' Florian Cramer responded with the nuanced comment that 'My research attempts to be led by artistic practice' whilst Mencia problematised the relationship between practice and research by observing that 'My working methods are both practice-led and research-led but I would argue this distinction is understood differently by artist/researchers and academics', illustrating the discomfort academe feels in accommodating creative practice as research.

Given this evidence of how research active artists interface to their immediate working environment, it is also useful to seek an overview of how they engage a broader creative research community. The experience of Stuart Jones may echo that of most creative arts professionals employed in higher education when he states that 'the community of my practice is largely different from the community of my research.' Jones is reflecting upon how distinct pedagogy and research are to practice, and how exclusive professional communities are formed around each area of activity. Whilst some of the survey respondents differ what emerges is that many have encountered difficulties in reconciling their roles in their research environment and their professional practice, even when they find them methodologically complementary and mutually dependent.

Reflecting the problems that can emerge if cultures collide, when the art academy and the university meet, Anne Sarah Le Meur responds:

> 'Most of the time, colleagues discuss or work together because they are already friends; they studied together or met outside the university. You don't generally speak to colleagues about research. Academe is reserved and this is a way to avoid conflict'

Maria Mencia observes:

> 'There is not a place for me in my institution as a researcher. Although my research is acknowledged, there is not a research culture or centre recognised as part of the RAE where my work can be placed. Therefore, it makes things difficult in terms of getting time and funding for research.'

However, other respondents had a different view of their environment and community. Michael Naimark observed that 'new media arts is a larger territory than we know and most of it has not yet been explored. There is a lot of space between the different media involved and many different cultures associated with this.' Naimark is identifying not only the diverse contexts and interests that constitute interdisciplinary art practices but also the space between disciplines where opportunities for novel work are most profitably pursued. He notes '...those artists who can move between these research communities will discover new areas of practice. Thus much of the (artist's) time is spent on bridge building and learning new disciplinary languages. The challenge is to move beyond your comfort zone.'

Eugenio Tisselli similarly states 'I see myself as part of a dispersed community. It is a community that draws its potential from its fragmentation and that communicates across digital networks.' Tisselli goes so far as to suggest that 'this fragmented community is some sort of global mind that transcends space and time.' Tisselli is commenting upon the global nature of contemporary culture, and its associated research communities, and the instrumentality that underpins it – the emergence of a networked communications system that is not based on hierarchies or structures predicated on the centre serving and controlling the margins. The key here is the internet and, not surprisingly, new media artists find themselves well placed to employ the technologies involved.

We have looked at the contexts research active new media artists work in, the media and resources they work with, the environments that facilitate such work and how these factors impact upon both research and creative practice. We have inquired into how such artists perceive the relationship between research and practice, what the implications of working in one mode are for the other and whether they can balance them in a productive tension. Diverse experiences have been exposed, depending on context and the nature of the work the artists undertake. Perhaps it is now useful to turn our attention to how they go about doing their work in each of these domains.

The question, in terms of how it informs our hypothesis, is whether there are any common characteristics in how new media artists undertake practice-led research or whether heterogeneity is default? Do they employ the same means in their practice as they do in their research? Do they distinguish between these two modalities? An artist/researcher such as Paul Sermon might appear to confirm our expectations of what appropriate research methods in the creative arts are when he describes his approach as 'practice-led, action research, ethnographic research'. However, is this expectation supported by the evidence of our inquiry?

What emerges from the respondents is how many see practice as both the justification for the research and as a means for evaluating it. Michael Hohl observed that research 'begins with an idea for a project and an investigation of the tools, resources and skills necessary to realise it. Practice and research inform each other.' Naimark suggests he employs 'practice and research in an iterative' relationship. He notes that by these means you 'surprise yourself' and move towards a paradigm shift in the work, this being the measure of novelty

and value. Kai Syng Tan sought to include the art audience in a discursive relationship, as active partners in the research and creative process, stating 'creative outcomes are but means through which the artist and audience engage in collective reflection, contemplation, dialogue and perhaps reconciliation.'

Many of the artists admitted they are opportunistic regarding methodologies, adapting and employing methods from diverse disciplines as a function of the demands of project objectives. They also observed that they employed strategies that artists have long used, such as intuition, arbitrary constraints and contrariness, alongside more conventional and rigorous methods recognisable from academia. Maria Mencia noted:

> 'I pick and use approaches according to the issues, enquiries or concepts I am pursuing in my research. In some projects the methodology is more specific, and sometimes I use an ethnographic approach; but I wasn't aware I was using this methodology before I set out to do my work',

Mencia continued, 'Intuition is not considered a research methodology but, as I mentioned above, the unknowable does take a part in my process of investigating'. Mencia articulates the potential for conflict when she states:

> '...having to link (creative practice) to academia we have to find a way to describe research methodologies but I wonder if it would be more appropriate to call it processes of research and creative practice.'

Stuart Jones similarly reflected upon how he employs a combination of artistic and academic methodologies, stating

> 'I tend to do a lot of contextual research, whether this may be about the particularity of a place, the subject matter I am working with, a particular art-historical context I am referencing: sometimes a particular project will involve technical or scientific research. Much of my practice methodology derives from musical practice, which thrives on practical constraints. I like constraints and experience them as stimuli; I will sometimes deliberately impose them in situations where they are not strictly necessary.'

This is significant as it evidences an artist's use of what could be considered arbitrary processes as essential in their practice. One might ask whether this contrariness is common in formal research contexts?

Miguel Santos articulated quite a different position, stating that:

> 'My practice and research methodologies are the same. My methodologies are developed from an ontological perspective in which the use and the relations developed between objects, subjects and systems are as important as the objects, subjects and systems of those same relations.'

Santos is in the process of completing a doctorate and he may feel more acutely the need to reconcile practice and research. Michael Hohl, who recently completed his doctorate, firmly situates practice as instrumental to research:

'Practice could be described as a research instrument (a method) and part of the methodology. I have a theory, idea or hypothesis - and make the tool to investigate it. The result is my practice.'

When asked for a description of his research methods Paul Sermon responded:

'Embedded methods in practiced-led research - monitoring user interaction and perceptions through software systems in interactive artworks. Site-specific residency projects, action research used to monitor self progress in the creative process. Participating in online communities, 'going native' in order to obtain informed ethnographic records of responses and reactions.'

Chris Meigh Andrews described his methods as the complete integration of practice and research, clearly stating 'action research, practice-led' and further articulating this as 'historical, philosophical, phenomenological.'

The respondents employ a diversity of formal research methods, including contextual reviews, case studies, interviews, practical experiments, scenario building, action research, user monitoring and evaluation, external assessment through structured audience engagement, version control systems and ethnographic observation/analysis, amongst others.

To a large extent it was clear that most respondents were comfortable with employing such formal research methods and they regarded these as aspects not only of research but their practice. However, serendipity was identified by several as central. Anne Sarah Le Meur stated that 'poetic writing can help/reveal as much as analytical (writing)', suggesting that methods familiar from the creative arts can be profitably employed alongside formal academic methods without concern that this might compromise rigour.

Nevertheless, Garth Paine noted that research and practice can be divergent:

'In my creative work I am always exploring. This is often a more experiential exploration, not focusing on a formal hypothesis but seeking new qualities in the materials I am working with. This subconscious approach to engaging with materials is critical to creative practice, is very difficult to quantify or qualify and is, I think, one of the main reasons that practice driven research is so poorly respected as research.'

The artists involved in this inquiry appear comfortable with working in research environments and subsuming related methods into their practice. However, a tension clearly exists between creative practice and research, and to seek to avoid or eradicate this tension could be counterproductive to both practice and research. Stuart Jones notes that 'I have a background in mathematics and physics (and) the lack of rigour often found in arts research, both in terms of method and language, appals me'.

Following on from this, a number of respondents echoed what have been frequent calls in the new media arts community for a greater quantity and better quality of critical writing. It is commonplace to hear that new media art remains under-theorised. Johannes Birringer notes that there is a need for:

> 'more good writing on our artistic practices and thought (concepts and ideas articulated in works and in different ways of working). It is incredibly important to develop a more acute critical and historical awareness of the frameworks of art practices (performance, art, media) of the last 100 years. It is very important to think through the history of technology and the political history of science, technology and art.'

If one of the objectives of research is to ensure that we are not constantly re-inventing the wheel then Birringer's observation that 'students repeat the same stuff and some of the bad experiments and practices I thought we had already abandoned 15 years ago' is a sobering reminder of the lack of rigour in the sector and evidence of why its is important in both research and practice.

As Miguel Santos observes, echoing Stephen Scrivener's arguments about the problematic relationship of creative practice to research:

> 'Research within the creative arts suffers from an inferiority complex in relation to other established academic areas of knowledge.
> That inferiority complex is not the result of a less valuable knowledge or the novelty of creative arts research but the result of a constant need to justify that research/practice through aims, methods and outcomes that are external to the creative arts.'

Whilst creative practitioners are evidently comfortable with addressing the problems that pervade notions such as novelty and rigour they are in no better position to reconcile and resolve them than professionals in any other field, including academic, scientific or industrial researchers.

Michael Naimark usefully differentiates the concepts of 'first word' and 'last word' art. He notes that:

> 'With first word art, rules and terms are not defined whilst last word art is where you work within established traditions and known terms. First word art is difficult to compare or theorise. Haydn was a first word artist in developing the symphony. Beethoven's much later Ninth blew people away. Paik said if it has been done before he is not interested. Some artists think novelty and art are mutually required. Others that art does not really start to get going until an area of practice is established (for example, Beethoven). Nevertheless, people who work with new media are, by definition, first word artists.'

He concludes this argument:

> 'In the age of Google there is no excuse for not knowing what has gone before. Being ignorant of other's prior practice is not good enough. It is

OK not to be totally innovative but if you make work and then claim it is novel that is not OK. However, in research this is not permissible. In industry you need to know that what you are doing is original or, at least, not know that there might be precursor technology. You need to be able to look a patent judge in the eye and say you had no knowledge of the prior work.'

Conclusion

This text has asked whether the character of new media arts allows its creative practitioners to better engage formal research. Essential concepts were defined. Novelty in new media art and how this might relate to research was questioned. The emergence of practice-led research was described to enable us to see how new media artists, as creative practitioners, are contextualised relative to formal research paradigms.

The contexts within which new media artists are likely to find themselves engaging with research were reviewed so that an understanding of the working challenges they face could be developed. A range of environments were discussed, with a particular focus on the academic research environment. As was observed, there is an increasing number of research centres being established which are led and staffed by creative practitioners, their research focus being, and their research methods deriving from, practice.

A survey of new media artists' experiences of a number of questions concerning creative practice and research was employed in order to gain insight into how artists work in research environments and apply research methodologies. Insights were gained that informed our inquiry.

It was observed that new media artists are able to satisfy quite demanding definitions of research being assimilated within their practice through two routes. Firstly, through the demands of their discipline; that in order to satisfy the demand for novelty and critical reflection in their technical means such practitioners are obliged to undertake applied research to produce their work. Secondly, in order to satisfy the conventional demands of the artist/researcher, that their outputs embody originality determined according to values and methods associated with formal research (as defined by Scrivener). It was proposed that the new media artist is doubly obliged to engage research and is free to do either and still be considered to have satisfied demanding definitions of what research is. This argument was supported by the opinions of the surveyed artists, where they articulated how they employ methods associated with formal research as part of their creative work and apply academic and scientific criteria in the evaluation of the outcomes.

We can answer our question; yes, new media artists do seem to be well placed to engage formal research. However, from the evidence presented here, this remains problematic. In some instances individual artists have articulated discomfort with, and resistance to, certain of the methods and values associated with formal research. Given that the advent of artist led research within academic environments, employing practice-led methodologies, is relatively

recent we are not yet able to determine conclusively what the outcome of this development will be nor what its implications may be for professional academics and creative practitioners.

It may have been valuable, in this context, to address the modalities of diffusion that artists who engage research contexts employ and how these differ from conventional strategies in the creative arts. The modalities of exhibition, performance and broadcast function to define the characteristics of art disciplines, but this has not been the focus of this inquiry. The key question remains as to what distinguishes a research output from an artwork? This distinction, between artwork and output, is important (even if it is artificial) as it is an expression of a commonly perceived distrust amongst creative practitioners of research. Why do some artists fear research?

Many artists working within academia do not wish to be perceived as researchers. They argue that to be identified as such dilutes their artistic identity, a social role evolved over centuries with an entire apparatus of expectation constructed around it. Central to this is the value attached to the uniqueness of the artist's 'voice', where novelty is regarded as a function of the self-differentiating individual rather than the collective dynamics of rigorous peer review. The art world replicates and promotes this 'myth of the artist' as it seeks to satisfy a market demand for artefacts which embody this mythic individual. If the artist is seen to be a researcher, subject to a system of peer review and the transparency of methods and criteria this demands, they risk seriously compromising this model of the artist, with profound effect on the reception of their art in its traditional domain, the art world. The practical difficulties associated with this likely justify many artists discomfort with research.

Is it contradictory to employ artists within an institution that then requires them to submit their creative practice for assessment as research? As Scrivener observes, this may render their art practice utilitarian. However, we need to look beyond this if we are to find a solution which will ensure creative practitioners remain at the heart of art and design education and are facilitated through their institutional role, beyond drawing a salary, as practicing artists and mentors of the next generation. The question here, therefore, asks what value artist led research contributes to art and, indeed, whether it might function to compromise those things we esteem most in artistic practice and its artefacts? The answer to this question will become apparent through further study of the emerging practices and actual outcomes of research active creative practitioners.

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Naimark (2001): The title of this chapter refers to Michael Naimark's essay *First Word Art / Last Word Art*, Fine Art Forum, vol.15, issue 8, August 2001. Accessed at http://www.naimark.net/writing/firstword.html on 09.04.2008. Naimark describes first word art as predicated on creating novel form and last word art as exploiting known form in pursuit of excellence within the form. Wisely he does not seek to assign value.

RAE (2001): *Panel criteria and working methods guide*, Higher Education Funding Council for England, December 2001. Also accessible at http://195.194.167.103/Pubs/2_99/ (accessed 09.04.2008).

Scrivener (2002): *The art object does not embody a form of knowledge*. Working Papers in Art and Design 2, Retrieved 13.05.2008 from URL http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes/research/papers/wpades/vol2/scrivenerfull.html.

Tuchman (1971), *A Report of the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, M. Tuchman, New York: Viking.

Notes:

[1] The website 'Working Papers in Art and Design' extensively documents UK practice-led research http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research/papers/wpades/index.html (accessed 08.04.2008).

[2] In 1956 at Bell Laboratories Billy Kluver founded Experiments in Art and Technology, involving artists Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and Jasper Johns and culminating in the historic Nine Evenings: Theatre and Engineering event at the Armoury, New York. Other artists included Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, Robert Whitman and David Tudor.

[3] The Australia Council funded and placed artists at the CSIRO's National Measurement Laboratories, in Sydney, for periods of several months, allowing them to pursue defined research agendas with specific research scientists.

[4] Information on this program can be found at http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/apply/research/arts_science_research_fellowships.asp (accessed 08.04.2008). A report on the first round of awards was published in Leonardo, October 2006, volume 39, number 5, MIT Press.

[5] Michael Naimark, a respondent for this essay, was a key researcher at Interval in the 1990's, a long-term lab, funded by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, which emphasised the importance of the role of artists in research environments.

[6] This and following quotes derive from research carried out by the author during early 2008, when artist/researchers were asked to reply to a questionnaire.. Seventeen artists from the USA, UK, Australia, Germany, France and Singapore responded.