

## ***Art as research – a Glossary of terms***

Notes for presentation

NB this text only really makes sense when read in conjunction with the website pages – indicated in red. In the event, I didn't use the notes much, but spoke more informally – in essence the oral form was much the same as what follows, I think.

Go to home-page – [www.maryannefrancis.org](http://www.maryannefrancis.org)

### **Introduction**

My involvement in research:

Various

PhD – Goldsmiths, 2000

Research Fellow at Chelsea College of Art & Design, London since 2004

Research Supervisor at Chelsea, and at University of Brighton

Have been a member of a Research Cluster at Chelsea – Critical Practice

Received an AHRC award and other University Research Funding awards

Do research

But most importantly of all: my institutions define me as 'research active' (as opposed to... 'Research inert'? 'Research dead'!

So I thought I'd try to offer an overview of the territory via a glossary – a new work for Iceland:

Go to [www.maryannefrancis.org/Glossary.html](http://www.maryannefrancis.org/Glossary.html)

While this overlaps with Henk's paper, in terms of the key terms and areas of concern, I think it's sufficiently different in its approach to warrant presenting. Not the least, I speak from the point of view of someone with a background as an artist.

So why a glossary? Go to entry for:

#### **'Glossary'**

*A very English definition – with apologies: (see entry for 'Method').*

From 'gloss'. A 'gloss' is a shine. Think of paint. To paint something 'gloss' is to put a shine on it. And, in certain lights 'glossy' paint is all reflection and no substance. Sometimes, all you see is your own reflection. Let this be a warning for the 'gloss' of words, for in English the term does not just describe a type of surface, but an 'explanation' of a word.

Hence: 'Glossary' = 'glossy' (a shiny surface) on 'art (as) research' - 'ar'. Or 'R' for 'Research' – following Ian Gregory's distinction between 'research' and 'Research'.\* In which case, we have 'GlossaRy'. So: beware explanation - which etymologically, is to make something 'flat' (into a shiny surface).

\* Gregory makes a distinction between 'research' with a small 'r' and Research with a big 'R' to designate everyday finding out and enquiry conducted in 'a more serious and self-reflective manner' respectively.

See: Ian Gregory *Ethics in Research* (Continuum, 2003).

## **Rationale**

Yes: I wanted, on the one hand, to indicate the outline of the subject's territory – as I have experienced it - via judiciously selected 'key terms', on the basis that a subject's vocabulary defines the space that subject occupies. On the other hand, in using various ruses to question the 'naturalness' and indeed, authority, of definition, I wanted to emphasise that as much as a vocabulary may define a field, it can also be re-defined; not just the individual terms in that vocabulary, but the very outline of the vocabulary itself; what it includes and excludes.

So as much as this glossary is informed by the genre of Works of reference such as the Penguin *Dictionary of Critical Theory* it is also informed by more quixotic endeavours in the area of 'glossaries' such as Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*, and the more mischievous entries in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*.

## **Method for producing it**

- Choosing the entries: involved 'listening for the key terms'

In a very un-scientific way, I have tried to represent words that come up time and again in the discourse of 'art-research'. [! Note here] The number of aural 'hits'.

- To define the terms, I'm using 4 approaches (maybe more)

- Discursive – when that means 'of the discourse' and also, 'in discussion' – from different points of view; with the more 'important' entries, I've attempted to represent, albeit in compressed form, the 'debate' as it's been developed in what's often an extensive literature and ... ['oral / community' discourse?]

The issue with taking this approach is that the fruits of different discourses do not always sit well with one another – unlike pieces in a jigsaw, they overlap or sit outside one another's frame of reference altogether.

- Anecdotal / experiential / 'autobiographical'
- Bibliographic – providing a list of key texts in the area
- Pictorial – I've often found in teaching, that a picture is indeed worth 1000 words, which is not surprising, when your working in an art-school.

Ultimately, in compiling this, I've been guided by the question 'what would be useful for the purpose of this conference?'

## **Its status as it is now:**

- Not finished – appropriate, in that I see newcomers to the debate about research as having a generative role as much as an appropriative one.

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- Over the next few weeks, I'll be developing this collaboratively with research students and colleagues at Chelsea College of Art & Design.

We'll publish this via a Wiki – a piece of server-software that enables others to edit on-line texts... I will post the url of this new site to the Glossary page of this site, so that you too can join in. There is quite a bit of procedural stuff to work out here, so please bear with me...

### **How to use it, after this presentation**

By virtue of its hypertextuality, it's not a linear read and hopefully, the links will take you outside the site as much as circulating within it. Maybe you'll never come back. No problem.

### **How I'm going to use it:**

Not enough time to look at all the entries...  
And not going to do an alphabetical trot through:  
Want to flag some of the key terms and both read through them and talk around them (there is only so much you can put on a public site)...

No argument to my presentation – so I'll just stop when I've spoken for 40 minutes.

To: **'Research'** (on Glossary page)

Because – we could properly start at the beginning, but that wouldn't get us very far:

### **'Aesthetics'**

And anyway, it's the incursion of 'research' into art that drives the concern with 'art as research'.

Back to **'Research'**

And yet, when I first started doing 'research' as a PhD student, I don't remember using the word much. Rather, I referred to my work as my 'PhD', and my supervisor referred to it as 'your project'.

The issue of terminology is not a trivial one. Maybe, not because it matters that we get our definitions 'right'. But rather because it matters that in worrying about how we define the term, we're sure that it's this term we want to debate...

The term 'research' has become something of a buzzword within the art-world that, amongst other things, is used to confer status on those who use it. I'm reminded of a text that I once read on 'postmodernism', which ran – as I remember it - as follows:

'No-one knows what it means. Use it as often as possible.'

Which only goes to prove that 'research' is the new 'postmodernism' – at least in the academic art-world.

Or: to put it another way: every epoch has its master-signifiers.

I flag this aspect of 'research' in order to raise a question:

- Do we want 'research'? What does the term 'research' repress?

This is not just about the synonyms of 'research' – 'project', 'doctoral study', 'forensic investigation'... - but also more significantly, about the other couplings that art might make. Art and....? Art and 'art'...!

Hence ~~Research~~ = beware of the master-signifier or the term that is everywhere. The shibboleth or password. Do we need alternatives?

If you consult a thesaurus, there are lots of words related to 'research'”

459 Enquiry [...] research, Research 536 *study*; analysis, dissection; exploration, reconnaissance, recce, reconnoitre, survey

536 Learning [...] research, research work, field work, investigation

That warning aside, my glossary entry dutifully proceeds to some ways of thinking about 'research'. And first:

Some ways of thinking about 'research':

- **Research as a politics**

The question that everyone is asking here is 'what is research in art / design / etc.?' I define the 'what' that people are concerned with as the poetics of research (see below).

But the question that we should also ask is: 'how to understand the will-to-research?' What interests does research serve - even 'research in the arts'? How does 'art as research' supply and defy the Culture Industry?

- **Research as a cultural trope**

When part of the definition of research entails 'the discovery of new facts', we might want to ask how this resonates with notions of empire and a specific cultural sensibility that confers a negative value on staying still; stasis. What's so wrong with not finding (some) things out?

The nemesis of 'the researcher' is, perhaps, Melville's Bartleby, Scrivener, who refuses the tasks his master assigns him with the constant refrain, 'I'd prefer not to' - much to the latter's vexation and bemusement.

- **Research as a technology (a process)**

Here is an excerpt from the guide for post-graduate applications to the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK).

**Link**

emphases added:

What is the AHRC's definition of research?

52 The Council's definition of research is primarily concerned with the definition of research processes, rather than outputs. This definition is built around three key features and your application for funding must address all of these in full in order to be considered eligible for support:

- it must define a **series of research questions or problems that will be addressed in the course of the research**. It must also define its objectives in terms of seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the questions or problems to be addressed
- it must specify a **research context for the questions or problems to be addressed**. You must specify why it is important that these particular questions or problems should be addressed; what other research is being or has been conducted in this area; and what particular contribution your project will make to the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding in the area\*
- it must specify the **research methods for addressing and answering the research questions or problems**. You must state how, in the course of the research project, you will seek to answer the questions, or advance available knowledge and understanding of the problems. You should also explain the rationale for your chosen research methods and why you think they provide the most appropriate means by which to answer the questions.

As Michael Jubb notes,(1) this last requirement 'excludes research to provide content' - which is what most artists are referring to when they use the term 'research'...which, via Ian Godfrey is 'research' with a small 'r'.

See: [www.ahrc.ac.uk](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk) - link accessed 18 Sept 08 see also the AHRC's guide for post-doctoral researchers: link.

**Back**

The Greek work 'techne', which gives us 'technology', included, in its original use, a notion of art (as 'skill'). In this way, there's a mischievous sense in which 'research' as a 'technology' is not so far removed from 'art'...

#### • (Art as) Research as art

And yet, the idea of art as research (on its own) is for some (traditions), hugely problematic. Not a view I hold for reasons that we'll see when we come to looking at Practice-Inclusive Research) What follows are just two of the objections:

- a) 'Art is not a cognitive and / or 'knowing' enterprise
- b) 'Art is multivalent'

The expanded arguments are as follows: a) The idea of the non-cognitive experience of art owes much to the 18th C British empiricist philosophers (e.g. Hume), and to aspects of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. In the latter case, 'beauty' generates an 'antimony', as the judgement that a thing is beautiful both seems to make a claim to universality, and yet cannot point to a concept that validates that judgement. Kant's resolution of this paradox discovers a 'conceptual' element to beauty at the level of the 'harmony' between the free play of thoughts and feelings. But what is now a 'shared' conceptual aspect of aesthetic judgement is not to be found in the artwork as the site of communicable knowledge; rather the artwork is the trigger for this universal 'common-sense' (concept) of beauty.

A broadly related argument is proposed by Stephen Scrivener, who claims that 'knowing is not the primary or significant cognitive state when viewing artworks' contra traditional research practices. Rather, he claims, artworks are the source of 'deep insights' or 'apprehensions' which are of a different cognitive order: "'I think that'" rather than "I know that". It's not entirely clear from his text, however, if art as such can 'stand alone'. 'The art object does not embody a form of knowledge'.

b) In the transcript of an interview concerning 'studio doctorates and objective standards for studio practice as research', Christopher Frayling contends that: 'The best definition [of research] could be "an enquiry that leads to communicable knowledge" [...] and that word "communicable" for me is the key. Art is in its nature multivalent, can be read in a million ways. That's why it's great, people bring different things to it, see things in it, come away with different meanings. The range of meanings is potentially almost infinite. Whereas the punchline of research can never be that multivalent, it has to have limits and boundaries somewhere, and say "this is what I'm trying to put over"'. And he adds:

'Somewhere in that space is fine art research but I must say I find that incredibly difficult to locate.' From 'Nourishing the Academy' in *Drawing Fire* Vol. 1 No. 3 Winter 1996.

#### [Problems with his argument

*However, I find it difficult to locate art that is so radically multivalent. Frayling's reasoning is somewhat slippery, for if, as he proposes, 'multivalence' is a function of collective viewers' subjectivity, then this is only disingenuously, a distinctive mark of art. For all texts are thus multivalent. ('Multivalence' here, is a property of theory reader response theory – as it might be too with a number of others, Barthes' textual theory circa 1970, for instance.) However Frayling also argues that art is intrinsically multivalent, and this deserves some consideration.*

*'Multivalence' simply means 'many meanings'. 'Many' is not infinite (though maybe 'almost infinite'); nor is 'many' none. Multivalence is a bounded condition which therefore succumbs to the most naïve notion of 'communicable knowledge' as something finite. (In passing: there is nothing to rule out the undeniable as 'communicable'. If this is accepted then art as the sublime – or 'The Dumb Object' in its current incarnation may qualify to be research.)]*

And so Frayling proposes that there is a need for a '[...]text, the discussion on process, [that] could take the form of a research diary, or something that communicates what has happened such as the route map.' From 'Transcript of Research Seminar on Practice-based Doctorates in Creative & Performing Arts & Design' (Surrey Institute of Art & Design 1998) (Note that one of the seminar-speakers, Colin Painter, counters Frayling's objections to art-as-research via recourse to A J Ayer. Painter invokes Ayer's 'legitimate doubts about the status of all knowledge and about our capacity to communicate knowledge to one another'.

These prevarications tend to propose the need for art to find a supplement (a health-inducing vitamin). Hence the role of 'writing' (as the medium of 'theory') - which often overlooks the fact that writing in its literary forms returns to art in many of its conditions (e.g. multivalence, undecidability).

#### • Research as an epistemology

That research is an 'epistemology' or literally, a 'form of knowledge' is of course not problematic in most disciplines.

Hence, we may think about research as a form of knowledge very broadly via 3 schema that variously address the relationship between 'knowledge' and 'what is known'; the 'concept' and the 'thing'. (The schema are borrowed from Richard Rorty, and are best figured by a table):

		philosophy as 'realism' versus 'idealism'	relations of determination	
philosophy as 'representationalism' versus 'anti- representationalism'	Both realism and idealism can be referred to as forms of 'representationalism'	forms of 'realism'	object	→ thought
		forms of 'idealism': 'objective idealism' 'subjective idealism'	object	← thought
	'Anti- representationalism'			thought is not defined by a relation of determinacy to 'its' object: rather by what it is useful to believe in

Why does this somewhat abstruse abstract philosophy matter? Because it helps us to think about the relation between 'theory' (conceptualisation) and 'practice' (the thing).

(For a discussion of these schema, see: Richard Rorty, 'Introduction: Antirepresentationalism, Ethnocentrism and Liberalism' in *Objectivity, relativism, and truth, Philosophical Papers, Volume 1*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Or, my fictional-conversation version of this territory in 'In the Café Flaubert', *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* Vol 1.2 2008.)

For some, such as Soren Kjorup, art is already an 'epistemology' - via Baumgarten's aesthetics, that defines art as 'sensuous knowledge'; what Kjorup glosses as 'another kind of knowledge'. So, for him, art as research is not an oxymoron.

- **Research as a set of conditions (an ontology)**

from Stephen Scrivener's 'The roles of art and design in research', 2007

- **Research as a (Higher) Education - one comment**

Perhaps, as some contend, doctoral research is now, not so much about producing 'original' work, or one's magnum opus, more about an apprenticeship or training in research.

- **Research as a poetics** - to coin a phrase.

This is one way of defining what the debate about art as research is about. See Practice-inclusive research.

See also: Practice-based research; Practice-inclusive research, and Practice-led research.

We will now go to **Practice-based research** - via **'Professor'**.

- **Professor**

Helps you with your problems. All Professors are 'authors' – so to:

- **Authorship**

Yes, the British Library is not unlike a call-centre; everyone works in isolation and talking is forbidden. Which is to say: our great institutions do not encourage collaboration, and we might want to ask what this emphasis on individual authorship is about: individual property, in a society that isn't very good at holding 'things in common' – until that is the banking system starts to collapse.

Onto

- **Practice-based research**

to • **Practice-led research**

so to:

- **Practice-inclusive research**

Practice-inclusive research or: art as research ...to coin a term...

which then acts as an umbrella phrase, to include the terms 'practice-based research' and 'practice-led research'. I want to propose that, in art as research, the term 'practice-inclusive research' refers to all research that involves the production of art at some stage in its process.

Most - if not all - practice-inclusive research entails the production of a written text. (Hence one of the immediate issues is the role of this writing in the thesis as a whole. As the entry for research proposes, the relation between the thesis' two parts - writing and art - may be thought of as an issue of 'poetics'; of the shaping of a text - with especial reference to that text's formal aspects, and the affects of those.

While there are many ways of thinking about how this shaping might take place, the issue that has dominated the debate to date is the question of their inter-relationship as functional entities. • Table showing some of the ways in which the function of 'practice' and 'writing' have been conceived in practice-inclusive research and consequentially, their role in the final submission.

NB Stephen Scrivener writes 'In theory, there are 512 different complexions of research in which art and design might figure, one way or another' - according to his definitions of art and design in 'The Roles of...'

[see diagram in on-line version of this entry]

a. 'We [the AHRB] do not believe that a creative, performance, or practice-led output should be allowed to stand on its own as a record of research activity. Rather, we believe that any research output submitted to the RAE ['Research Assessment Exercise'] should have associated with it a record or route map of the research process. We further believe that researchers in the creative and performing arts should, like their colleagues in other subjects and disciplines, regard it as a scholarly obligation to reflect critically and review their research processes in this way, covering the four areas set out in the AHRB specification. (See research as a technology.) This would play the same role as the scholarly apparatus and contextual analysis by which conventional text-based research outputs enable the research to be situated and the research process to be understood.' 'Research in the creative and performing arts "The RAE and Research in the Creative & Performing Arts. Review of Research Assessment" – an AHRB Paper' re-printed in the Journal of Visual Arts Practice Vol 3 No. 1 (2004)

Technically, the 'scholarly apparatus' only describes the research process. However, the paper also argues that the 'apparatus' enables 'other researchers in the [creative] discipline [...] to assess the value and significance of the results of the research' - which assumes that the process describes the product and even more contentiously, that the creative work cannot be assessed without this apparatus.

b. University of Technology Sydney - definition of 'Differences between Practice-Based and Practice-Led research' - link - which are discussed below. The idea that the writing 'clarifies the basis of the claim for (the practical work's) originality' seems to imply a role for writing as 'explanation'.

c. Macleod, K & Holdridge, L 'Practice-based research: a new culture in Doctoral Fine Art practice'. Commenting on the functional relationship of the thesis' two parts, Macleod & Holdridge write: 'Research evidence has shown that the relationship between the written and visual work can be extremely productive. It is about the tension between the two, as each visits the other and constantly revises, rethinks and (re)presents each to the other.'

This is the 'tradition' of theory and writing informed practice that I encountered as a BA student, and which readily dispels the 'problem' of art as research. Writing, and theorising both for and in response to practice (but not 'explaining the latter, nor offering writing as a diary of the process) are simply things that artists do as aspects of their practice. (Throw the vultures an academic text.)

d. 'Critical Fine Art Practice' – the title of several degree courses in the UK - that regards the relationship between 'theory' and 'practice' as symbiotic. Ultimately, however, what distinguishes the CFAP take from Macleod & Holdridge's, is that for CFAP, the students write to sustain an art-practice. As a teacher on this course, I would like to argue that not only are both elements harnessed for the other, but are also ends in themselves. But I think this would impose my reading of the course over the institutional one, located as it is in a Fine Art programme.

e. Does this exist? Yes, at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK.

#### • 'Practice-based research' and 'practice-led research'

Most people in my experience use these terms to distinguish between types 2 - 5 (as above) and type 1, respectively. However, this is a conventional agreement, rather than one encouraged by the semantic distinction between the two phrases. Research that is 'practice-based' could well be 'based in practice' but end up in writing. Likewise, research that is 'practice-led' could well be seen to refer to research that is advanced through practice and for practice with writing taking an ancillary role. We need a mnemonic to remember the community-specific distinctions!

The University of Technology Sydney's paper defines 'Practice-based Research' as 'an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice.' One of the defining features of 'Practice-led Research' on the other hand is that its 'results' 'may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative outcome.'

Note that the AHRC uses the term 'practice-led' where others use the term 'practice-based'. This preference seems tendentious, in view of the Council's insistence on wrapping (up) research in a 'scholarly apparatus'.

Rather than distend this gloss even further with discussion of more models and more detail, it seems more useful to propose a bibliography of texts on research. Or in other words, an entry on research on research on research.

#### • Other issues for the practice-writing structure of Practice-inclusive research

- relative 'weighting' of the two parts i.e. the length of the written text; the 'volume' of the 'exhibition'

- the form of the writing - see 'What is an artist's writing?'

- the location of the exhibition (in the non-research art-world?)

### • **Method and Methodology**

For full text – see on-line entry.

Important point here is that 'art' (and related subjects) may have a problem with 'method' because of the contemporary failure to engage with (philosophical) Aesthetics as a way of understanding the internal workings of art.

The legacy of (post-)structuralism hasn't helped artists think about the art-ness of art – i.e. (post-)structuralism tends to put the emphasis on semantics rather than form, or the signifying properties of form.

### • **Pop-up**

Why this entry is out of order – see Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas...* entry for 'Matrix'

[End]