

# Event Summary

Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre

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## Introduction

'Ways of Working: Placing Artists in Business Contexts' was a study day held in London in November 2001. This aim was to bring together people involved in artist residencies in commercial contexts and to identify some of the themes emerging. Speakers' contributions included personal accounts of artists residencies; some self-initiated, some organised through public funding. These hands-on experiences were combined with presentations that gave an overview of the contemporary business context and reflected on the nature of the creative process, from the point of view of education and of running a business.

The artists contributing to the day used a range of models for engaging with the commercial organisations they have worked with and within. The artists talked about *how* they have worked as artist in residence, rather than what they have made. They described their intentions, and explained how they understood the engagement with the host organisation. They discussed the nature of collaboration and the role of the artist. And they reflected on the value they created for themselves, the contexts they worked within and for the wider world and what success means if you work in this way.

As a study day, 'Ways of Working' contributes to a wider conversation about how art and artists engage with the wider world,

including business. Speakers and delegates helped define the main issues around this type of practice:

- The value of the exchange is different for businesses and for artists. There is a need to clarify the gains for each side; to critically evaluate where this kind of work fits within the arts; and to develop ways to measure and communicate effectively the impact artists' work has on commercial environments.
- Some areas of business welcome collaboration with artists, but the exchange is still dominated by business language and priorities. Artists need support to help develop more effective ways of engaging with businesses, if this is what they want to do, and for businesses to understand what role artists can have.
- There is a clear role for intermediaries familiar with both art and business sectors to act as 'bilingual' interpreters, helping to negotiate placements, work conditions and expectations of outcomes.
- Funding bodies and art education institutions need to find ways to support the professional development of artists wanting to work in this area.

## **Setting the scene**

*Lucy Kimbell, artist and study day organiser, Collaborative Arts Unit, the Arts Council of England*

'When you mention "business" and "the arts" in the same breath, people usually think you are talking about sponsorship. However

there seems to be a trend away from artists and arts organisations wanting sponsorship – business giving money or goods in kind to the arts – and for artists and artist organisations to develop new ways of working with commercial partners. The focus of this study day is on one possible activity — artist residencies or placements involving an artist working as an artist for several months or more within a host business organisation.’

In her introduction, Lucy Kimbell described the ongoing change in art and business as the background for the event. There are a number of past initiatives that are precursors to the current trend of artists contributing their skills to commercial organisations including:

- Collaborations with engineers at Bell Labs by artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage.
- UK placements in industry and government by the Artist Placement Group, working today under the name O + I (Organisation and Imagination).

More recent research projects and events have addressed similar issues:

- The Centre for Cultural Policy and Management’s report on artist residencies.
- The Teambuild weekend in Newcastle, facilitated by artist Anna Best as the culmination of her residency at *Artists’ Newsletter*, focusing on socially engaged practice (November 2001).

In planning the event, the Collaborative Arts Unit identified speakers who would be able to use their own experiences to reflect on the following questions.

#### Vision and intention

- Are there new opportunities for artists to work with or within businesses?
- Are residencies in commercial contexts significantly different to those in other types of context, and if so, how?
- How do artists feel about seeing their ideas and creativity impacting on a commercial organisation?

#### Outcomes

- What might be the results of having artists involved in the early development of new products and services, or in the way a business organises itself?
- If a residency results in new art works or new products, who benefits? Who gets to exploit the value of these new ideas?
- What models allow artists and host organisations to get the best out of a residency or placement?

#### Support and professional development for artists

- How does the work produced by an artist in residence relate to work of artists working in other ways? How do we critique it?
- What support, if any can or should the arts funding system provide to facilitate this way of working?

Artists contributing to the event had been asked to:

- talk about how they work and not about what they make
- describe their intention and the nature of their collaboration with businesses
- reflect on the value they created for themselves and for the contexts they worked within
- attempt a definition of what success might mean for this type of art practice

## **How it's worked for me (1)**

### **Art and innovation: working as an artist in and out of business contexts**

*Michael Naimark, artist and researcher*

US artist Michael Naimark has extensive experience of working both as an independent artist and within the context of research organisations, including several years at Interval Research Corporation, an independent research lab founded by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen. His presentation included both personal reflections on making his own work and on the wider context of artist-led research, including the work of ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax.

Interval Research's charter was to look five to ten years ahead into the future of computing and media, in a general way, thinking about possible commercial outcomes. In Michael's words, 'the whole

project was about diversity'. It employed 100 people from computer scientists and engineers to musicians, designers and artists.

For Michael, the Global Jukebox was one of the first successful multimedia experiments, but it was an ongoing struggle to secure financial support for the project. When looking for an explanation for the lack of interest from multimedia corporate enterprises for other arts-led projects, Michael recalled being told by an Interval director that 'your artist friends are always struggling; maybe nobody wants what they do'.

Based on his experience at Interval, Michael volunteered six reasons why art might have value in a technology research lab:

- Offering stimulation and provocation to the research community, adding meaning, entertainment and emotional resonance to their work.
- Art bringing together unconventional combinations of skill and talents.
- Providing content to test tools, sometimes also providing tools to test content.
- Art projects as a means for collecting data, both through exclusive query as well as through observation.
- Leading researchers down unforeseen paths, and result in new discoveries and intellectual property.
- Providing another way of working, since external deadlines and public scrutiny serve as forcing functions for decision-making, rigour and completion.

In 2000, Interval was suddenly shut down without warning. This happened against the backdrop of the dot com explosion, and although there was some confusion as to the reasons for closure, it was generally agreed the main reason was that it was not making enough profit.

For Michael, Interval contained possibly the first experiment in sustainability for art and technology research — ‘an extraordinary initiative by people interested in lateral thinking.’ He felt the time might be now ripe for a new model of collaboration, giving an opportunity for artists to make a real contribution to society without having to compromise their integrity.

## **How it’s worked for me (2)**

### **‘They valued me so much they gave me a job’**

*Richard Layzell, artist and visionary, AIT plc*

Richard Layzell began by presenting some of his earlier performance work in which he used the figure of a businessman engaging in absurd or unconventional activities in public spaces. These pieces acted as a critique of Thatcherism and as a reflection on conflicting ways of evaluating professional success in the arts and in the business world. He was also commenting on the suit as 1980’s business dress code and how artists can be read by adopting this uniform.

As well as his work as an artist, Richard has other professional involvements that helped him create the conceptual framework for his current work for AIT, a UK company that develops software for financial services. He was part of the steering group of O+I (formerly APG) in the mid 90s. He has also run workshops, done residencies, worked in the public sector, and taught on a Creative Management Course for the Open University. His relationship with AIT has been built over several years with no input from public arts funding. Richard has also been engaged to work in a similar way by two other companies.

The common thread running through all these activities is Richard's interest in working with people, community and audience. Engaging professionally with a business has meant having his pre-conceptions challenged, and has led to the ultimate realisation that as an artist his work is about being collaborative, open to change, and able to adapt to new environments.

Richard felt that the term 'artist residency' does not reflect all the different engagements he has in AIT. 'I decided that the term artist in residence wasn't relevant any more because I was involved in many initiatives in the company. I decided to call myself a visionaire (sic), spelt with one "n". I didn't want to be an Artist with a big "A".'

In Richard's opinion, people are deeply confused by the term 'artist', with further difficulties created by public and media opinions about contemporary art, but agrees that his role is of considerable value to AIT. "An off-beam approach or someone looking at the gaps between

things can be extremely valuable. As artists we are wide thinkers. We're not afraid to look across boundaries.”

He sees himself as someone with the time and ability to think about things that other staff in the company cannot. Over a period of five years, his position within AIT has consolidated to the point where he is now an integral part of the organisation. When a new member of staff joins the company they already find him there, ‘sometimes doing useful things, sometimes doing confusing things (to them)’. His main task is to help build a sense of community across the company.

Besides his work for AIT, he continues making performance and installation work, and is one of six practitioners who make up RESCEN, a performance research unit at Middlesex University.

### **Where opportunities lie in business contexts**

*Nick Jankel-Elliott, co-founder and chief strategy officer, Happy Dog Group*

Nick Jankel-Elliott began by introducing Happy Dog, an innovation, insight and strategy group, offering a range of services to companies from brand management to product evaluation and proposition development. They began their creative consultancy in 1999, never having run a business before. Their motivation was to create an innovative business for the ‘new economy’, without hierarchies and where commitment and happiness were measures of performance and success.

Nick focused most of his presentation on giving practical advice to artists and arts organisations on effective ways to work in commercial contexts. The main barrier is miscommunication, partly created by the language, terminology and structure of business, which he set out to explain. For Nick, a key thing to understand is that ‘Creativity is as much alive in an entrepreneurial business as it is in art.’

One definition of commercial enterprise is profit-seeking activities and organisations that offer goods and services to customers. A more positive view, he argued, understands business as ‘the exchange of ideas and creativity for the mutual benefit of the receiver and the creator – which is not that different to what artists do.’

Artists need to find the right person to talk to in a company, and understand where they fit in within the organisation’s context. Nick encouraged people wanting to work within business to find a company with powerful and visionary leaders, and to develop strong personal relations with senior managers. Particularly good partners are companies who thrive on challenges and have a commitment to surpass industry expectations. Possibly the most important thing is to find a senior member of staff who is able to translate the value of your work into a language of value that business understands.

Nick argued that companies understand value in the following ways:

- the selling of it (value propositions)
- the creation of it (revenue)
- the adding of it (brand loyalty and goodwill)
- the purchase of it (effective agencies, suppliers)

The bottom line for a business is value for money but there are many ways to measure value, from impact on sales, staff retention and profits to intangibles such as staff satisfaction and impact on the company's culture.

Nick felt there were opportunities for artists to work with companies as long as there are individuals within them who are 'enrolled into your vision.' If they think you can bring some excitement to their work, or management is encouraging them to develop creativity within the organisation, there may be opportunities for artists but the language remains the language of business.

## **Collaborative Models**

### **Models of engagement with business organisations**

*Orit Azaz, theatre artist, THE COMMON SENSE*

As a theatre artist and director Orit Azaz began to work in a business context around 1993, when she founded THE COMMON SENSE to integrate new media and new disciplines into her theatre practice, and to generate outcomes that reflected and challenged current issues and ways of engaging with the world.

She was approached by a conference production company to write and direct a 10-minute piece about teamwork as part of Honda's Annual Staff Conference. While being strictly a service provider, the experience opened up new set of possibilities in terms of new contexts and audiences. The Common Sense was then hired by

insurance company Sun Life to create a full-length drama which would provoke and challenge senior managers to think about the long-term future in new ways. ‘The brief was to provoke and challenge 300 senior managers to view the possibilities and reflect on their present in a different way. I felt very comfortable with the brief of provoking, challenging and stimulating thought. I thought that was an appropriate goal for a piece of theatre.’

Orit then described some projects she carried out for Post Office Counters Ltd. Each successive project was higher in risk and involved a close collaboration with key senior staff. This was possible because of the shared understanding and the trusted relationship developed through the history of their working relationship.

Customizing projects to her own brief and interests was suddenly an option she felt confident to explore. The Common Sense was approached by Pearl Assurance to develop ideas for a change management programme across the whole organisation. Inspired and supported by Barbara Steveni and John Latham from O+I, she suggested a cheaper and possibly more effective alternative could be to try a pilot artist residency. She proposed working with them as an artist, developing project and interventions in response to themes and issues identified through a preliminary R&D phase.

Orit described the following points as the lessons learned through all these engagements:

- the need to understand the context in depth
- the need to agree clear aims, goals and desired outcomes
- an emphasis on process rather than (or equal to) product

- the need to involve people in the creative process at all stages
- the need to agree appropriate modes of evaluation
- the significance of trust, and what it makes possible

### **How the interdisciplinary organisation FoAM works within research & development contexts**

*Maja Kuzmanovic, artist and researcher, FoAM*

Maja Kuzmanovic introduced the work of FoAM, an interdisciplinary association of artists and technologists based in Brussels, whose aim is to explore new models and resources for creative expression and practice, lead by the group's motto 'Grow your Own Worlds'.

Based on FoAM's members' previous experience as artists in residence within commercial organisations and research institutes, Maja outlined some of the problems they encountered as artists in the above mentioned contexts:

- In research institutes: lack of peer review, while working on low priority projects within the institutions, as well as struggling for the acceptance of artistic research methodology.

- In commercial companies: often lacking broader social and critical thinking, the artist is confronted with restraining IPR policies and market driven implementation work, where artists do not often have any strategic impact: ‘My work is based on the principles of Open Source and Copyleft. Often while working for commercial companies, you’re not even supposed to talk about your work outside the office, and sharing it with other artists, technologists or organisations is out of the question.’

However, Maja recognised that engagement of artists in businesses and research institutes also had some advantages:

- access to multidisciplinary human resources
- access to technological infrastructure
- access to professional support for marketing and management
- wider adoption of ideas, services and products inspired by the artists’ work
- higher living standards

The lack of people or organisations acting as mediators between artist, research and business has lead Maja to found FoAM, an organisation collaborating with business and research, but also employing artists and helping them to come in contact and collaborate with the larger institutions.

FoAM originated from a residency at Starlab, a scientific research initiative looking at ways to make science research more profitable through patents, spin-off companies and products. In response to the problems she encountered working as an artist in residence, Maja proposed creating FoAM as a non-profit organisation working in

partnership with Starlab. A problem that remains is the perception of the value of arts-led research. 'Arts research is not really regarded as research and for your work to be accepted you have to use scientific methodologies.'

FoAM is now an independent organisation. The group is interested in expanding and developing the scope of the work they do, while remaining small, mobile and flexible.

### **'What's the issue?'**

*Alastair Creamer, producer, Catalyst Project, Lever Fabergé UK*

For Alastair Creamer, it is his work in the Catalyst project that has proved the most inspirational of a career that includes many years working within the arts. Business, he says, has given him more freedom and space to develop ideas and projects. In a world where culture equals behaviour, Alastair argues that artists can make a massive difference to what business does and the ways that it does it. 'Everything these days is about culture. Culture equals behaviours, atmospheres; it's how you get the job done. This is now pivotal in business. Catalyst is about shifting the culture at Lever Fabergé.'

The Catalyst project started when he was invited to work with Unilever for two months to start a dialogue about possible ways of collaborating. The company was in the process of bringing two separate businesses together and wanted to do this quickly and effectively.

The driver for the Catalyst project is the fact that business is getting more emotional. More powerful personal relations create more powerful business partnerships. Companies are interested in trying to understand the emotional dimensions of human performance. In this context, creative activities can help identify areas of dissatisfaction and provide alternative ways of engaging staff attention and commitment.

Alastair's role as producer of the Catalyst project is to be a mediator between two worlds – art and business. He facilitates partnerships between artists and the company's staff via a number of collaborations. The exchange between business people and artists has pushed each other's perception and expectations. Example projects include the following:

- 1 Jugglers and circus practitioners were engaged to explore issues of how to deal with risk and failure. Business can look at the way artists deal with specific problems and try to apply or to adapt these models to business needs.
- 2 The company has an art collection that is selected, curated and written about by the staff. The collection refreshes the environment – it is placed in public spaces, corridors, and foyer – and creates a sense of ownership and belonging amongst staff.
- 3 Catalyst has developed a close engagement with the Hayward Gallery. Staff go regularly to see shows, and have access to the internal working practices of the gallery.

- 4 Business activities have included inviting in poets and scriptwriters so that staff can develop their communications skills directly from writers, who are experts in how to edit, condense and distil language. Two scripts from a project with staff from Unilever are being considered by the Royal Court Theatre to be performed on stage.

Alastair concluded by outlining some measures of Catalyst's success:

- the project's budget has not been touched despite the recession
- they get excellent media coverage
- staff are proud of the project and disseminate the message through the business community
- there is measurable behavioural change
- they have provided individual value to the people and artists engaged

## **Perceptions of value**

### **Residency at the Guardian**

*Michael Atavar, artist*

Michael Atavar defined his experience as an artist in residence as inconclusive. 'In my work I create atmosphere, perfume, presence, being there ... but my experience is that business sees this as too erratic, too dangerous, too problematic, and too worrying.' This is valuable in itself, and in all contexts. However, for businesses the experience of engaging with an artist can be erratic and problematic.

During his Year of the Artist (YOTA) residency at the Guardian newspaper, he was continually questioned about his reasons for wanting to work within the organisation. Why was he engaging with business, when he is just happy being an artist? Michael is not convinced there is much common understanding between artists and business people. ‘The business environment does not completely understand artists and conversely we don’t often fully understand the demands of business. It’s great to get an artist into the building but what on earth do you do with them?’ And it is unclear what the value is to the business, or the value of the residency to the artist. If companies want to engage an artist, then they have to be prepared to deal with changes to the way they usually do things.

Michael is still interested in working within business contexts, but said in future he might not call himself an artist when working within an organisation. In that way he would be able to link to other creative people in the business, without generating hostility and competition. It’s particularly difficult for artists who do not make things and sell them in the art market – who have other ways of working and other contexts in which they work.

A basic principle in the exchange between artist and business is equality, and it can’t be separated from the issue of value. Michael suggested some ways to create equality and value for artists’ work:

- pay artists equally to other professionals in the company
- insist the host pays for the wages not public money
- involve advocacy from outside
- call yourself a consultant – you can charge more

- encourage business hosts to sustain the residency for at least one year

## **Value and measurement**

*Lucy Kimbell, artist and management consultant*

Value is critical to the relation between artists and business. Value can be measured by easily quantifiable, tangible indicators, but intangibles are harder to pin down and are currently fashionable in management theory. Art delivers value that is not just about profit. 'I've become increasingly interested in value and measurement and thinking about the value I create. Like Michael Atavar, I have this disjuncture between when I'm calling myself an artist, when I create one sort of value, and when I'm calling myself a consultant creating another sort of value, when I get paid five times as much.'

Examples of current thinking and practice about how to think about value include the following:

- Balanced Scorecard, a conceptual framework for evaluating different tensions within an organisation.
- *The Attention Economy*, analysing what it calls human bandwidth and arguing that attention is the real currency of business, how you get the attention of your customers is what counts.

Lucy is interested in exploring the different kind of value she creates in different kinds of context, whether she is working as an artist or as

a consultant. She presented some of her art projects exploring these issues, including:

- The *LIX Index*, a financial index that tracks her own performance.
- *Audit*, an ongoing project in which the artist invites a number of people to fill out a questionnaire that explores the idea ‘What am I worth?’

## **The role of the artist**

### **Soda’s residency at the pharmaceutical company, Pfizer**

*Neal White, artist and creative director, Soda Creative Technologies*

Neal White shared his experience of working with business both as an individual artist and as a director of Soda, a company of artists combining research and practice working with different commercial models. Soda was commissioned to undertake a Year of the Artist residency at Pfizer, a large pharmaceuticals company. The brief involved talking with the company’s research biologists and chemists and using elements of their different practices within a final piece of visual software, displayed within Pfizer.

The context for Soda’s residency was a new building in which Pfizer’s biologists and chemists are working side by side for the first time – a new way of working. Soda had experience working in change management in the commercial sector, and a good understanding of technical research issues.

During this project Soda worked with an arts consultant, who helped the group communicate with the company. In theory, said Neal, they had open access to everybody, but not in practice. ‘The reality is you are working in a large institution. There are five and a half thousand people working at Pfizer. Eighteen months was a pretty short time to get anything out of them.’

The final piece of software Soda produced is displayed in spaces called nodes around the building – common areas for discussing work developments between chemists and biologists. The software was in effect decoration, and it included images sampled from both chemists’ and biologists’ work, which may serve to stimulate creativity and discussion.

Neal said there are limits to the role an artist can play when working within the context of business or any large organisation but good artists will find a way to use these within the work. During an earlier residency at the Human Genome Mapping Project, Neal used a personal story about his mother’s adoption to raise personal ethical issues with the researchers. This project tested these limits as the exposure of the personal lives of the researchers and scientists were implied in the work.

Neal said clarifying the following would make the collaboration more fluid and fair for both sides.

- In some particular contexts a consultant would be a better description of the artist – especially in order to get a business to pay you more and further value your input.

- When it comes to producing an outcome, both sides should agree the need and the role for the final product.
- Documentation needs to be discussed beforehand; who owns it and how it should or should not be used.
- Responsibilities need to be negotiated; who is responsible for the production of the work? Is it really the responsibility of the artist to affect the working practice of the company? Who is responsible for the project after the artist has gone?

### **Value and integrity in the creative process**

*Christine Atha, lecturer in cultural studies at St Martin's School of Art and consultant*

For Christine Atha, we are all already converted to the idea of art and business interacting for mutual benefit, but there are still issues that need to be resolved. Artists should start by placing value on their own work. There is considerable evidence that artists are not only good at what they do, but at lots of other things as well. 'Artists, because of the ways they think and the ways they behave, can approach problems in ways that other people can't even attempt.'

Artists are by definition multidisciplinary practitioners, used to exploring disciplines that are not conventional subjects for art and that fall outside their own area of expertise. Christine's personal experience of working with artists suggests they are very entrepreneurial, very well positioned as producers and consumers to make a real change in perceptions of art and culture in society.

The days of placements in manufacturing or industrial settings are over, and a whole new area for collaboration has emerged, prompted by the growing need for creativity in management and business. As the agendas of art and business seem to merge, so their possibilities to cooperate grow. Artists and businesses have similar concerns, but approach them from different points of view. ‘The management of innovation bears close resemblance to the working methodologies that artists ordinarily employ without even thinking about it.’

## **Response**

*John Howkins, author of *The Creative Economy and Executive Chairman of Tornado Productions**

‘Don’t call yourself an artist. If you do, you are just making life harder for yourself.’ John Howkins chose this as the message he would take away from listening to the artists presenting at the study day. He was invited to give a business perspective to the issues under discussion, and he centred his comments on the reasons he would not hire an artist – or, more precisely a person who wanted to work as an artist – for his business projects.

For John, there is a fundamental flaw in the idea that you can translate pure artistic practice to the business context without losing artistic integrity. For artists, he argued, the priority is to make great work; but if artists engage with businesses they have to take account of the businesses’ commercial aims.

There is a conflict of interest between artists and business people, specifically on matters of loyalty and integrity. People in business put loyalty to their company first, while artists must remain loyal to their ideas and their peers. Freedom in business takes a long time to win, and means operational freedom; artists want freedom from the beginning and essentially want freedom of expression. Business cares less about truth than about accuracy. Artists are concerned with absolute truths, businesses about data and verification.

The seemingly undisputed link between art and creativity also needs to be challenged. Some artists are not very creative, and some people who are not artists are yet extremely creative. Artists are trained in how to exploit whatever creativity they might have; but so is the scientist; so is the entrepreneur. Since knowledge is the new currency of our societies, people in all walks of life are required to be creative.

Businesses already have many people fulfilling the role of being creative, of having a different way of thinking about things. Today, business needs such people throughout the company – not only in so-called ‘creative’ areas like design and research – but also in general management. They might be staff or advisors such as consultants, or non-executive directors. The real issue is how you actually put people’s suggestions into practice. Even if you identify problems and have the knowledge of a better way to do things, change is difficult to implement.

For John, what is important about artists is their vision, and how they present it, but that isn’t necessarily of value to a company. Of greater importance for businesses is how they can translate creative

thinking into creative products. This requires not an artist but someone that has insight or knowledge about businesses and how they work.

John said that, within the context of a business, he would not want to work with an artist who was not prepared to compromise his or her freedom for the business' objectives. And since, almost by definition, artists want artistic freedom, and he completely respects their freedom, his advice to the artist is probably 'stay away and keep your integrity'.

## **About the event**

'Ways of Working: Placing Artists in Business Contexts' was held in London in November 2001. It was organised by the Collaborative Arts Unit of the Arts Council of England. It was chaired by Antonia Payne, Associate Dean, School of Art and Design, Wolverhampton University.

Arts Council of England

14 Great Peter St

London SW1P 3NQ

T 020 7333 0100

F 020 7973 6590

Minicom 020 7973 6564

[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

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This summary was written by Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre for the Arts Council of England.