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FUTURE FORECAST | SOCIAL SPACE | £5

The dynamics of artists' practice in the social realm



Claverton Rooms ↗

Reception

of
The Artist in Residence
Department of Social and Policy Sciences

CREDITS

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FUTURE FORECAST SOCIAL SPACE



To mark our 25th year, we're producing the *Future forecast* publications that focus on some of the key issues for artists and their practice as we move into the next decade.

Future space (May 05), *Social space* (Aug 05), *Curated space* (Nov 05) and *Outer space* (Feb 06) are about raising questions to stimulate and focus discussions on the pros and cons of future support frameworks and expectations for artists. Their aim is to keep artists' developing practice high on the agenda.

Alongside, we're holding invited think-tanks, involving artists, arts and cultural professionals, educators and others, to explore implications, and define or propose key actions and future directions. Findings are published on www.a-n.co.uk for consideration by all who are active participants in contemporary visual arts practice.

Social space addresses dynamics and divergences within artists' practice in the social realm. Devised and conducted by Becky Shaw, the artists' interviews are available in full on www.a-n.co.uk

We welcome written contributions in response to these issues and comments, for possible publication on our site, contact edit@a-n.co.uk

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INTRODUCTION



Being commissioned to explore the practices of artists working in social space is a tall order. It has become a well-rehearsed convention to talk of artists working in the 'social realm', 'in society' or in 'social space'. Even though the artists invited to respond to my questions are not intended to cover all positions, responses show that they may hold no more philosophies, positions or practices in common than would be found in a group of, say, 'painters'.

Whilst some consider the social realm to be the 'environment' of their work, others query whether social means 'community' and political means 'government'. There are others who claim their work 'objectifies society' or is 'anti-social'. A number suggest their practice only appears social through its medium and in reality isn't at all. Some describe the networks that validate the visual arts as their place of work, and others describe advertising, politics, finance and institutions as social spaces. Many state that the social realm is not particular people or a defined place but rather every aspect of life that human relationships have created, including the art world.

Finding this expansive position is not, of course, an accident. Amongst the selection were artists deliberately chosen who did not work in contexts sometimes casually defined as 'social', such as 'the community', but who, together with artists who do work in recognisably 'social' settings, make a significant contribution to the interrogation of what society or 'the social' may mean. It seems that the question is, then, not whether a practice is 'social' but whether, as Mark Hutchinson says, it is critical and self-reflective of contemporary social structures.

Some artists identify themselves as 'outsiders', so that negotiation of the distance between them and participants, collaborators or wider society, is part of their work's content. Others see their work as an attempt to be critical of society in a way that is not re-absorbed into what they consider to

be an ineffectual art world. At the same time some artists consider themselves to be 'inside', or part of powerful institutions. There are also those artists who see their role as creating visibility for people who are considered outsiders. Several talk about their work as a negotiation of 'belonging' for themselves or others.

Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in artists making work outside galleries, directly engaging non-artists in making work, and taking the social as subject or *modus operandi*. For a short while 'social practices', 'socially engaged art', 'relational aesthetics', 'new-genre public art' etc were the 'new black' affording marginal practices greater visibility, leading to a seeming homogenisation of practices, encompassing very different intentions and methods.

Government agencies and arts funders are accused of using the arts to ameliorate social problems when conventional politics have failed, raising questions about the impact this has on quality in the visual arts and the autonomy of artists. Whether the current situation has been government-led or whether the cultural strategies have been created in response to a contemporary society fixated upon the loss, or desire to reinvent, community, collectivity, cohesiveness and belonging is impossible to judge. Rather than unquestioningly delivering government objectives artists are in a position to explore and question issues of social cohesion and inclusion. It is valuable to begin to think now about the relationship between art and politics, what role the arts might fulfil in the strategies of successive governments and consider the impact that changes in policy may have on artists' practices and artists' lives.

Becky Shaw



Becky Shaw, *Reception*, University of Bath, 20 February – 19 March, 2004. Photo: Owen Bryant

"Becky's brief was to engage with and respond to the work of the Department of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath. She installed a reception desk in the then newly established ICIA Art Space 1. During her exhibition, she played the role of 'receptionist' to the artist-in-residence (even though in reality they were one and the same person). As the receptionist, she referred to the artist in the third person. People looking for the artist could ask the receptionist for her whereabouts and even make an appointment. By playfully querying the whereabouts of the artist, the art and even the exhibition space itself, *Reception* raised questions about work and the need for the employee's physical presence or some visible product. *Reception* responded to Becky's role in the department. She attended lectures, met staff and students, studied in the library and followed course reading lists. This caused her to ask what people's expectations are when an artist enters and engages with a 'social context'... She observed that like academics and students, artists have to balance their commitment to intellectual activity and ideals, with an awareness of their own visibility, reputation and output." Daniel Hinchcliffe, Visual Arts, ICIA, University of Bath. www.bath.ac.uk/arts/archive/exhibitionso4.shtml

PRACTICE: How does your practice explore social space and will it continue to do so in the future?



My work is situation specific, depending on where and/or with whom I am working. I am motivated by the areas of friction, pleasure, conceit and conformity that social spaces have to offer. How do we behave, why do we behave, and should we behave? **Sarah Cole**

'The social' and 'social space' are distinct categories. Both are liable to remain abstractions unless it is borne in mind that society (amongst other things) is constituted by the relationships between people... All art practice is constituted by the social: the material conditions of art practice are the relationships between people. And all space is social space: the product of human relationships. Art cannot help but be made in relation to the social and to social space. The question is whether (for any particular piece of art or art practice) this relation is explicit, critical and self-aware. This will continue to be the critical question as long as we continue to live in capitalist society, which masks its unfreedoms under the banner of freedom. **Mark Hutchinson**

My practice engages with the social because on a really basic level it explores communication, particularly how an artist or an artwork communicates in particular contexts. I am interested in how meaning might be amplified, distorted or even lost during the process of transmission and reception between artist, artwork and audience. The work is mediated through everyday technology such as FM radio. These forms already help construct the social (and private) domains we live in, so by using them as environments for art making the work is automatically operating within a social framework. **Kelly Large**

I often work with people in a way that interweaves with everyday life. Sometimes I 'work', do a job, or seem to. Roles are intrinsic and flexible: the artist as consultant, cleaner, waiter, planner, facilitator. Some are almost invisible, global projects. Others are about specific communities or architectural spaces. **Richard Layzell**

The dynamic of my practice is actually quite 'anti-social'. It objectifies the social and attempts to address the isolation of the individual and the difficulties and mechanisms of connection with the larger group. So, it contends with the social but is not involved in the creation of social capital. **Gareth Woollam**

...What interests me are the links between the physical body and its affective and sensorial layers – the subjective space of the individual as something visible and physical, turned to the outside (and not deep inside, not the deep ego). That means bringing attention to the interface of layers of relationship between people, looking for ways of keeping connections active between the subject and the other, the artwork/proposition and the participant.

What is proposed is a kind of game that implies some transformation, although I don't care if the becoming is actually reached or not – I leave to each one the responsibility for this extra step. **Ricardo Basbaum**

We are interested in working with patients, staff and visitors, exploring collaborative relationships in the development of new artwork whilst responding to the physical and the social situations within the psychiatric and general hospital environments. **Functionsuite**

Our recent work is concerned with exploring the functions of art in order to question why art so often reflects the dominant ideas of capital. And whether artists can create an interventionist response... to counter this and effect change. **Hewitt and Jordan**

Each film I make is the development of a film tactic, what I term a 'lived film', or 'filming my way to a film'. This tactic is not representative of a people but is rather a minor cinema, drift (in the Situationist sense). It occupies the space of the other. We wander and live a film. **Steven Eastwood**

I don't think my work does [explore social/social space] in any meaningful way as my audiences are generally required to sit down and shut up for an hour or so. So, along with my use of designated performance spaces, my work operates in a very undemocratic and anti-social way. **Robin Deacon**

For some time now we have been working with museums and galleries, on projects that directly intervene in how they function. This has enabled us to practice with the technologies these institutions use to designate objects and experiences as art – exhibitions, publications, education and development programmes, etc... Technologies that reproduce the work of the work of art are primarily constructed through social networks; so, we found ourselves working with the social transactions of art. More recently we have followed these networks as they mesh with other social spaces, of advertising, finance, politics and so on. **Chance Projects**

History and the vernacular have always been inspirations to my practice. I've been developing my own performative works whilst exploring vernacular Jazz dance (Lindy Hop, Charleston, etc) from a cross-cultural and technical perspective. For me, there's a link between moving to a new location on a residency and learning to dance. Being the newcomer is undeniably challenging, introducing a new language or vocabulary. You become a catalyst for change both on a social and internal level. **Lorraine Douglas**

We're interested in the conflict and negotiation between the informal nature/social networks of public space and the more formalised or institutional governing structures of those spaces. As part of our projects we introduce mechanisms (conceptual and physical) which allow us to understand and map the make up of a particular public space. **public works (Kathrin Böhm)**

My practice explores form and purpose in public speaking and public building. I understand the term 'public building' to include both civic architecture and social housing. I work with the presumption that both building and speech are active in creating social significance. My work typically takes the form of a performance or a postcard. **Rebecca Reid**

If a social practice means that it relates to communities and a political practice is one that relates to policy or governments my practice has been, for twenty-five years, political though I always believed that the audience for the work was Black. Now twenty-five years later that seems more than a little confused and confusing.

It is important that whatever communities strive to achieve for themselves, governments must be made to help maintain and sustain that development and creativity.

In the work... there is an underlying and constant desire to re-instate the invisible creative contribution of the other to its place at the centre and to try to understand the meaning of belonging. **Lubaina Himid**

All my practice is viewed as an evaluation of intervention in the present moment. This moment has a context – that context derives as much from a sense of a collective history, place and memory, as from a personal subjective reality. As such there is a direct correlation between the private and public... **André Stitt**

My current work involves an in-depth examination of the political, financial and administrative circumstances in which visual art was produced and disseminated in Belfast over a forty-year period from 1960-2000. This work evolved out of previous projects looking at brain-function and memory, and one element of the work is concerned with how this information has been conserved in private/public memory systems. **Una Walker**



Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie, *Bata-ville: We are not afraid of the future*, film still, 2005.

Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie live and work in London and Cumbria respectively. After studying together at Edinburgh College of Art they completed MAs in London and began their collaborative and solo careers in 1995. They launched their creative organisation Somewhere in 2002, and have led diverse projects with an emphasis on new audiences and innovative technology.

“*Bata-ville* follows forty-two passengers on a unique coach trip across Europe to the origins of the Bata shoe empire in the Czech Republic. Inspired by the contrast between Bata’s idealism and the more recent industrial decline of Bata sites, East Tilbury and Maryport, *Bata-ville* sees artist/filmmakers Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie immerse their passengers in an experience that begins as a free holiday but soon becomes an opportunity for a collective imagining of what Bata’s maxim ‘We are not afraid of the future’ means for them in twenty-first-century Britain.

As well as writing and directing the film, Pope and Guthrie adopt on-screen personae to orchestrate events and interviews. Wearing distinctive costumes, they perform the role of ‘travel hostesses’ throughout the film – a device that allows them to observe each passenger’s journey with poignant and unexpected results. The film also records Pope and Guthrie experiencing their own catharsis when out of role but still on-screen. Part travelogue, part documentary and part art work, *Bata-ville* marks a shift in Pope and Guthrie’s established practice.”

Extract from *Bata-ville* Press release, Pope and Guthrie, 2005.
www.somewhere.org.uk

See Pope and Guthrie’s profile on www.a-n.co.uk

CHOICE: How do you choose your projects? Where do they happen?



I prefer opportunities which are non-prescriptive. I like to respond to an environment in an intuitive way, having time and access to research before I define what the project actually is. Whether it be shed culture, rural location or heritage site.

Lorraine Douglas

As I see my artistic practice as a continuous time-based process – all work being inter-related – projects tend to present themselves.

Conceptually, one performance or set of interventions will lead procedurally to the next stage (or project). Freedom of choice is implicit and work can be directed to challenging and perhaps difficult contexts. These contexts can be viewed as conceptual (or imaginary) spaces. This space is then given a physical reality by placing it in a territory. **André Stitt**

Projects have tended to originate in one of two patterns: either I originate the project and go looking for a suitable space, for example when I was interested in military architecture and sought out military buildings; or I respond to opportunities or invitations to participate in projects initiated by others... Recently I've also been making digital work that increases options and stretches notions of 'space'. **Una Walker**

It's not set in stone, I haven't sat down and determined a definitive list of priorities, but I judge the pros and cons of each opportunity and whether one (sufficiently) outweighs the other. They're all compromised, but if the 'pure' opportunity providing enough headspace, dialogue, money, with an interesting context in which to work and publish does exist, it would no doubt prove disappointing. **Gareth Woollam**

The projects emerge and grow around and with the people we meet in four hospitals in Edinburgh and Lothian. Functionsuite projects that went into production were selected on the nature of the collaborative process as well as the area of the hospital environment/community being explored.

Functionsuite

Most of the time I work under invitation and try to adapt the proposition to the given conditions – invitations that come from the lines of the art circuit, from educational workshops or from the alliances of friendship. The spaces can be either the art gallery and museum or the outside space of the city and the field; I would say, anywhere... As in any art proposition, the work produces its own spatial pattern, which is not the same as the architectonic physical space nor the subjective personal space. **Ricardo Basbaum**

I pursue projects that afford me the opportunity to learn more about form and purpose in public speaking and public building. I consider myself to be working in my own interest. I generally access public funds or monies from private funders with a social conscience, that is, those that share something of my interests.

Rebecca Reid

It's a mixture of opportunities. Sometimes we are invited to work with art institutions and we accept if there is a possibility to research, explore and engage in how they function, and if they enable us to extend interests we are already developing. But quite often we initiate projects, like using a commission from Tate Modern to work with the Bank of England. Although most recently we worked outside of the institutions of art, for two years we researched amateur filmmakers active in Poland under socialism.

Chance Projects

It should be an instinctive process, but sometimes the project chooses you – such as when the framework of a project is over determined by the overarching vision of curators, organisers or funders. This can be in the form of given locations, themes or categorisations that are in place before the artist has stipulated anything.

Robin Deacon

I mostly work to commission – working in complex social situations demands a well-structured support system and an emphasis on process, if there is to be a responsive, responsible and critically ambitious product. My process could be considered a form of psychosocial archaeology. Work is mostly presented in the space in which it is made with the people who helped to make it, such as in a prison, hospital, a launderette, a youth centre... **Sarah Cole**

We are interested in how issues of 'public-ness' are described and discussed, therefore we choose to work in contexts and within projects that enable us to develop our understanding of what this might mean. **Hewitt and Jordan**

I usually work with what I find around me. I let myself be drawn by happenstance, and respond to the people I find to make a film with. So for instance, *The Film* (2004) was made whilst on a residency in Bridport, Dorset, and features a lot of waiting time in non-prescriptive sites. I teach in Buffalo, New York and so the next piece will be made there, an urban film game of Knock Down Ginger. **Steven Eastwood**

I continually investigate ideas and experiment with materials colours and patterns in the studio, then when I am asked by museums to do a project with them, their agenda has to fit mine. If it doesn't I don't work with them. Work usually happens and has happened in publicly funded galleries/museums in Britain, Bergen, New York and across the USA.

Lubaina Himid

I am committed to a political and self-reflexive understanding of what art might be and what it is to be an artist. Certain commitments follow from attempting a critical and political understanding of one's own position. It would be odd, thereafter, to describe what I do as an artist in terms of making choices (although obviously at one level this is what one is doing). Opportunities to do things arise out of

discursive and collaborative practice with others. You do what you can. Opportunities can be to write, to talk, to do things, to meet people, and so on. Types of space come with the particularities of any given situation. I take my task to be to enter into a critical and self-reflexive relationship with the totality of the relationships in a particular situation: to give priority to the spatial constitution of a particular situation over and against other aspects would seem to be to engage in a type of fetishism. **Mark Hutchinson**

The project has to enable me to explore my pre-occupations at that time. I am often attracted to projects that offer a particular context as a starting point (whether that be an actual geographical site or an idea) but it is important that these 'boundaries' are ones that enable ideas to be expanded rather than constricted. **Kelly Large**

Most cultural organisations are now seeking a real connection with the people they're living amongst. Increasingly local councils and other bodies are seeing the potential for partnership with artists. A social space can be almost anything outside a gallery. The parameters continue to dissolve... **Richard Layzell**

Most of our projects are by direct commissions, some self-initiated. We always work in relation to a social space itself and to its governing structure. The spaces vary from open public spaces, like a park, to the social spaces within cooperations, community spaces, etc. **public works (Kathrin Böhm)**

A text-only version of this publication is available on www.a-n.co.uk



Functionsuite, Jeanette Bell, Margaret McIntyre, Anne Elliot, *A knitting bee in the Pavilion at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital*, 29 April 2005. Photo: Anne Elliot

"Functionsuite aims to explore ways in which artists work with the community of a hospital to produce artwork which is collaborative, co-authored or involves co-operation with at least one individual from that community.

There are about 20,000-30,000 potential collaborators within the hospitals. This could be anyone from a patient to the domestics and porters or the medical staff. Here collaboration means bringing together the skills, enthusiasm and talent of different individuals to create ideas and artwork which all parties are happy to put their name and identity to.

When exploring collaborations in healthcare environments we are not hanging up our egos and walking away. But, we are finding new versions of ourselves and our practices just as we are asking others to look at themselves in ways which they may not have before; patients become architects, poets are doctors and nurses are landscape gardeners. And, maybe working together on a project together we become 'we' for a little while."

Extract from 'Wipe your feet, hang up your ego* and switch off your mobile phone', essay by Kate Gray and Anne Elliot for Static Pamphlet, www.static-ops.org/archive_march_04/essay_19.htm

* term used by Francis McKee when talking about the process of collaboration www.functionsuite.com

AUDIENCE: How would you describe your audience and how is your practice disseminated and validated?



Relatively speaking, I would have to describe my audience as either being small or tiny, and that my practice is validated by a small clique (of which I am part). Step outside of this clique (ie friends and colleagues in London), and often you find any supposed reputation is ultimately meaningless.

Robin Deacon

My audience is participant, collaborator, agitator, spectator, viewer, critic, subject, victim and conspirator. Each situation offers a new model of co-authorship, and makes me evaluate my own integrity as an artist and facilitator... I am not overly interested in the work's validation within the artistic community – if it is able to stand up to scrutiny by a non-art-going public then that is my intention and reward. **Sarah Cole**

Those giving audience to my work include the creative practitioner, the arts professional and the person on the street. My practice is disseminated by word of mouth and increasingly by illustrated text. **Rebecca Reid**

It varies for each project, and the work is usually developed with a specific audience in mind, as we are interested in the process of art practice from production to reception. In our most recent work *Three Functions* (of public art), the primary audience were those people who construct what art and public art is or might be, even though the works do appear in the public realm. **Hewitt and Jordan**

The audience is wherever the work finds itself... The work is validated by its existence and disseminated by the imagination of present observers.

André Stitt

Audience: those people who are not afraid to confront real issues of abusive invisibility, those for whom the struggle to belong is a fight for survival and those people prepared to take the issues of inequality right to the heart of policy making and governance. My work is seen in free spaces and continues through the distribution of free publications. **Lubaina Himid**

...Art galleries and museums are cultural institutions that have evolved to disseminate the experience of art, so we try and work with them to get access to their audiences. Although we have also produced books, we participate in opportunities like this one, we lecture and teach; dissemination and engagement across a whole range of social networks is important for us. **Chance Projects**

The main focus of my work has been site-specific installation which can present difficulties re both audience and dissemination. Some sites can attract new audiences but the primary audience who see the work in situ is always limited. A wider, and I imagine a mainly art-world, audience would know my work through documentation... I have been participating in festivals in unlikely places. I find it very liberating to mail works off into the unknown and let it make its own case without any further intervention from me. **Una Walker**

My audience includes my extended peer group and the people located in or connected up by the context that I operate in. Projects can take up to a year to complete therefore audiences encounter the work at different stages of development and in different forms that include lectures, conversations and publications. These forms are usually more far reaching than the actual 'art work' itself and create a longevity or permanence that the work itself doesn't have. **Kelly Large**

I used to think obsessively about audience. Like 'art' I'm not sure that the concept of 'audience' works for me any longer. I think it's about developing a relationship with people, place and ideas, like a kind of social architect, a performer who's not performing, a planner with soul, or a friendly face. I hope that my practice has generated some small shifts in perception and opened up possibilities for other artists. I'm a professional. I look like I know what I'm doing. To some extent the work validates itself through staking out its own domain... **Richard Layzell**

The participants at the location I'm working from are a vital part of the audience. Then there's also a wider audience who have no prior experience of the social space I'm working with. In terms of output, I favour the public talk, intervention, or publication. **Lorraine Douglas**

Distribution is a big problem for artists working with moving image who do not seek a gallery outlet. Cinemas are needed in the UK. I mostly rely on festivals or cinemas abroad. My audience consists of participants and people who have learned of my process, and critically engaged people interested in terms like 'becoming', or ideas around 'making do'. **Steven Eastwood**

The creation of dialogue is a concern (inter-audience dialogue as opposed to artist-audience). So an idealised audience would be receptive to that possibility. My dissemination and validation constantly develops against the prevalent model of 'self-promotion' (or 'career by numbers'), whilst continuing to make opportunities. **Gareth Woollam**

Our audience varies according to the projects but it is jointly healthcare and arts audience. Our practice is disseminated mainly through publications, newsletters, books and our website. Also there is a significant role for word-of-mouth dissemination throughout the hospitals. The project is validated through feedback from the participants, reviews from the art community, research projects from a social anthropologist and monitoring through the funding criteria.

Functionsuite

Our audience are on the one side the users of the space we work within, and on the other the institutions that are involved in running and governing those spaces. Our involvement on site normally manifests itself in a tangible outcome, that can be communicated further, ie with *Park Products* we developed a series of items that could be traded, or with *Layout Gasworks* we developed a catalogue of proposals that could be implemented.

public works (Kathrin Böhm)

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the term 'big other' is used to describe any external power or authority to which the subject looks for the guarantee of meaning. This can be seen clearly enough in belief in religion, history, nationalism and various forms of fanaticism. However, it is much more pervasive than that; to invert the formula, to manage without the big other is to manage with nothing: without the reassurances of history, philosophy and so on. In art, the idea of the audience is often an instance of the big other: an attempt to find validation, authority and meaning. My practice is the search for collaborators rather than the search for an audience.

Mark Hutchinson

The potential audience for my work is anyone: I like to have different reactions from whoever comes to interact with the pieces and structures. But of course the work functions as a kind of 'filter' and not everyone comes as close as they can... I came to a kind of self-sufficient strategy that operates in direct contact with the audience: the objective is to 'contaminate' the participant with a kind of 'virus' that would then circulate into one's body, producing the 'becoming effect'. It's necessary to produce an intensive experience as a sort of artificial memory. Therefore the work invests in a body relationship, using the other as its support, a means to be carried on and spread around.

Ricardo Basbaum



Steven Eastwood, *The Film*, 16mm and MiniDV, UK, film still, 2004.

Steven Eastwood is a filmmaker whose practice spans artists film/video, fiction and documentary.

"In the still, Roy White and Arrun Denman are sat in the old Palace Cinema, Bridport (now disused) imagining watching themselves and others on the screen in the final edited film. On the screen is Bernard Gale, one of a number of people the filmmaker met in his attempts to find strangers to make a film with. Together we used film as a way of coming at life. The only reason we were spending time together was the film. The Film was a means to think differently and be socially other than we are. We filmed our way to a new real life which was the film."

Personal correspondence, Steven Eastwood, 2005.

www.cinemaintothereal.org

www.ofcamera.org.uk

www.paradogs.org.uk

www.omsk.org.uk

www.backspace.org/maldoror

www.urbanfestival.hr

NETWORKS: Where are your networks and how important are they to your practice?



...If the relationships between people can be characterised by such diverse things as interests, solidarity, collaboration, conflict, exploitation and class antagonism, for instance, then to impose the sanitised term 'networks' upon these embedded social relationships is to misrepresent and mystify the material conditions of art practice in particular and society in general. There are no networks in my practice: there are collaborations, conversations and allies, and there are disagreements and enemies.

Mark Hutchinson

It is pieced together from fragments based on respect (not necessarily mutual), allegiance, interest, integrity, and is extended through better networkers than myself, on my behalf. This network is integral to my practice in defining the success of my communication, but once again as a mechanism for dialogue as opposed to self-promotion. **Gareth Woollam**

Last year I designed a three-day workshop on networks for DIY2 (a training programme for London artists), because I increasingly feel that analysing and building on your networks (rather than obsessive 'networking') is the most productive way to operate if you're working outside the commercial gallery system... There's a networking theory that almost any connection, however remote or seemingly disconnected (eg dog walking) can bear fruit. It's an attitudinal kind of thing. I'm also keen on calendar and local rituals like flower shows, raffles, free lunches, car washes, tea breaks and rush hours.

Richard Layzell

Although recently I have worked with sound and radio I position myself within visual art and socially-engaged networks rather than sonic art or experimental music networks because it is the formers' language that I communicate through... **Kelly Large**

I maintain professional relationships with creative agencies and artist-led initiatives. At the present time, the most important of these are with

Artsadmin in London, and Static in Liverpool... **Rebecca Reid**

...As part of the 'British Art Show 2005/06' we will map the existing and expanding networks of our practice alongside the touring show in order to explain the context we act within. Our partners and contacts vary from local authorities, community groups, art space and initiatives and of course very many amazing individuals. These networks are not only important in order to initiate and develop new projects, but they're an essential part of what our practice is about: new and existing overlaps between different networks. **public works (Kathrin Böhm)**

In terms of the dynamics of the contemporary art circuit I like to emphasise the importance of a 'politics of friendship', that creates an important allies' network which functions – in its best sense – as a kind of collective process of thinking... When an intervention touches a sensitive tissue in the social sphere it can trigger a truly energetic charged process. The intensive processes produce networks, with strong bonds between the participants. It is not a matter of the number of people involved in the process, but the quality of the fluxes that might run in between – its rhythm? and intensity... permitting the work to stand as a proper 'structure' outside of everybody, capable to move by itself. **Ricardo Basbaum**

Many recent projects have been temporary, time-based events and happenings. Audience and participants can become indefinable through the development of events such as the knitting bees in the gallery, the guests to a lunchtime discussion, the audience in the Cameo Cinema during the screening of *Crime of Uglyfication film*... **Functionsuite**

My networks stretch across immediate/national and international communities of artists but I have occasional strategic conversations with a national group of publicly funded programme and education curators, museum directors, funders and

cultural academics. All of these people have been vital to my practice.

Lubaina Himid

One of the most important networks for me is the smallish group of artists with whom I can discuss ideas, not only about our own work but also about the structures within which it is made. Some of these people I see often but most are scattered around Europe and email is the main form of communication.

Belfast has overlapping networks – the studio-groups, artist-run organisations, galleries, etc. Many of these groups have built up connections and networks with similar organisations not only into the south of Ireland but across Europe, North America and beyond. This creates a sense of being part of a 'community of interest', which is important in avoiding parochialism.

Una Walker

The French artist Robert Fillou introduced the term 'The Eternal Network' some decades ago. Networks are fundamental to life and the process of being and doing. The Eternal Network signifies the free flow of information, energy and creative effort. Networks are fundamental to art/life practice; through networks we maintain freedom, autonomy and community... Performance art practice over the decades has often been predicated on the notion of meetings: contact and exchange. This process has led to international networks of artists that form fluid amalgams and manoeuvres in and around existing art systems exemplified in dominant culture... As such, they draw our attention to the very nature and process of art making and the connection or exchange made in the moment of the encounter and its function as a social/communal activity. **André Stitt**

The social, economic, aesthetic and political networks of art are what we practice with and through; and they tend to congregate (although not exclusively) in institutions. No one is outside of these networks...

Chance Projects

Networks are essential but I have never negotiated them consciously or with deliberation. I meet people in a wide range of places, not necessarily within conventional art world circuits, and the potential for collaboration may be sparked by something as simple as shared sense of humour. Finding people with a similar ideological belief and artistic ambition is fundamentally important... **Sarah Cole**

The networks are highly specific and localised – a kind of self-perpetuating cottage industry. This has advantages and disadvantages – but as time goes on, I seem to experience a high level of déjà vu in terms of events, people and situations. **Robin Deacon**

The network begins with the people I meet. I don't make films about anyone anymore. It is important to me that the shoot and the screening are performative and as much the work as the final edited film object. When everybody involved in the film attends the screening event – especially found participants/collaborators – then the screening takes on a different value. Then we return to cinema's promise of transforming the everyday, not through spectacle, but through dialogism. **Steven Eastwood**

It depends on the project... individuals linked by their shared interest... or communities in locations I work. The networks grow and become more complex with my experiences. They are all important in terms of sharing information but these social spaces don't lend themselves to easy categorisation! **Lorraine Douglas**

Our most important network is other artists. We are interested in criticism and conversations in order to further discuss and develop our works. We always collaborate in some way or another with artists, curators, etc. In the exhibition catalogue for 'There is Always an Alternative' (curated by Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson)... they say "collaboration is education" – it sounds simple, but we really sign up to that. **Hewitt and Jordan**



Ricardo Basbaum, *me & you games and exercises*. Photo: Annette Krauss

Artist and writer Ricardo Basbaum makes installation and live work in a range of contexts.

"...I invite groups to wear shirts with the printed pronouns 'me' and 'you'... The proposal is always to perform games and exercises developed collectively (although sometimes prepared instructions can be used). It is a piece about group dynamics that I always refer to as 'person or group specific'. Every time the results differ, according to the people who take part and the groups that are constituted during the time we practice together... The results are brought about in two different directions: one record is established in terms of body-memory, accessible only to the ones who shared the intensity of the experience, being refractory to documentation; the other, its opposite, is constituted through the images and videos produced during the actions. Those images are conceived and managed without the compromise of depicting the action's reality and thus open terrain to fiction and narrative through video editing and photographic reframing... So, each me-you games and exercises proposal ends up in two resulting experiences: one for the participants, the other for the audience. Both mean to be intensive."

Extract from text by Ricardo Basbaum 'Differences between Us and Them', Static Pamphlet
www.static-ops.org/archive_october/pamphlet.htm

MATTERS ARISING



The social contract

While a significant number of artists describe their practice as developing from 'happenstance', many others regularly fulfil project and residency contracts. Andrea Fraser¹ points out that if artists are contracted to deliver defined outputs then they are obligated to satisfy them. However most artists interviewed here say that commissions are only acceptable if they suit their own interests. What then, is explicit and implicit in such contracts?

The idea of artists as 'autonomous' from society was undermined by 1960s artists and critical thinkers. Does the increase in contracted working mean artists' autonomy again becomes an important issue?

Should, or could, artistic practice offer more autonomy than other professions? By calling artistic practice a 'profession' are there consequences for artists' autonomy or criticality? Is it a contradiction in terms to expect public funds to commission artistic autonomy?

Do artists and commissioners inevitably hold oppositional positions? Is it possible or desirable to create a mutuality between the imperatives of practice and wider social and political issues?

Whether art contributes to social change is widely debated. Rather than delivering social objectives, many artists 'question', 'explore' or directly 'challenge' them. Can this heighten or change the perceptions and expectations of funders and government agencies?

Charles Esche² recently wrote that the word 'performance' means both a theatrical act and to carry out, or attain a target. He called for a greater recognition of the impact of art on its own terms, rather than for its instrumentality. However, by drawing attention to these dual meanings Esche doesn't close down the possibility that art remains influential.

Negotiating value

Although artists focus on their own interests (which may be political or social) rather than those of an external body, they must to some extent construct a sense of their own value or purpose. However, the continuity of their work (getting new projects, funding etc) depends on achieving some degree of value or recognition for their practice as determined by the wider world.

Can artists' work be validated by different sectors at the same time? While funding for discrete projects is often available, how do artists finance the essential work 'in between'? How much does the quality of contemporary art practice depend on artists' unresourced endeavour? Is it desirable or realistic nowadays for artists to aspire to full-time artistic practice? What are the cultural conditions that will enable artists to maintain a continuous, rigorous practice in the future?

While some practices in a social sphere have arisen from rejection of traditional systems of recognition and visibility, does work that is project-by-project essentially serve an art market that needs rapid turnover, high productivity and novelty?

Working project-by-project demands a kind of availability and mobility for artists that cuts across notions of family and commitment to location. Can these precarious types of practices be sustained throughout an artist's working life or will new forms naturally emerge as notable artists in this field mature and develop different expectations for social and family interaction? Does working from project-to-project heighten focus or fragment thought?

Critical networks

Mark Hutchinson points out that talking generally of networks may hide inequalities. Instead he describes specific relationships: "interests, solidarity, collaboration, conflict, exploitation and class antagonism".

Some artists describe a careful strategic use of networks of influence to build the effectiveness of their practice. Rather than describing their networks as a circle or 'professional' layer of activity, many artists see 'communities of interest' as essential routes for developing, critiquing and disseminating practice.

For some artists, the artwork itself causes a network, building a kind of structure or space which did not exist before. Rebecca Reid calls this 'public building'. For Chance Projects social networks, whether of artists or finance, are the subject of work rather than an additional layer. For André Stitt the medium of performance draws attention to how the work is made in the moment of encounter. It is apparent that many of the responses see the time and space of making and reception as inseparable. Steven Eastwood describes this as the "promise of transforming the everyday, not through spectacle, but through dialogism".

Although we tend to regard networks as positive, can they also be claustrophobic, overly self-referential and hierarchical?

Is it desirable for public resourcing measures to directly enhance critical networks? Does resourcing critical networks run the danger of mediating in private and fluid relationships?

Do networks form as a dynamic response to the problems of validation and visibility in artists' practice? If so, is it possible to address these issues directly, or is this what artists do anyway?

We welcome written contributions in response to the issues and questions raised in *Social space*, contact edit@a-n.co.uk

¹ Andrea Fraser, *How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction*, presented at The Depot, Vienna, October 1994 <http://adaweb.walkerart.org/~dn/a/enfra/afra1.html>

² Charles Esche, *Foreword, Afterall 9*, 2004.