

Impact of networking





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a-n Collections: Reflections on networking March 2006

Edited and introduced by Jane Watt, as the first half of her review of NAN, *Reflections on networking* is a collation of material presenting artists' first-hand experiences of NAN. It includes interviews with and articles by artists involved in NAN events, trips and bursaries: Mark Gubb on how to make friends and influence people; Chris Brown and Louise Short on the Quo Vadis event in Bristol and Cardiff; Paul Glinkowski on breaching cultural barriers; Jane Watt on the Critical space event; Susannah Silver catches up with artists who attended Cove park NAN event; Miranda Whall and Graham Dolphin discuss the NAN research trip to Berlin; Alison Unsworth on taking part in the NAN North East trip to Glasgow and Mark Gubb on the first year of the NAN bursary scheme; NAN timeline and NAN map.

With Vox Box interviews: Kwong Lee, Stephen Beddoe, Emilia Telese, Michael Forbes, Caroline Wright, Juliana Capes, Guyan Porter, Hilary Thorn, Marjolaine Ryley, Catherine Bertola, Tony Charles, Aaron McCloskey, Christine Duff and Jonathan Waring.

Cover image: *The Bouncy Boxing Championships* hosted by Sports Day as part of the NAN-NANA event held in Nottingham on 28 – 30 April. The image shows delegates watching runner-up Tom Godfrey (Stand Assembly) triumph in the semi finals with referee Ellie Harrison and compare Adele Prince. www.sports-day.net

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

Foreword

Impact of networking is the second half of my review of Networking Artists' Networks (NAN). It aims to qualify NAN's key principles, identify examples of outcomes, and highlight possible areas for future development. Whilst *Reflections on networking*¹ concentrated on interviewing artists who had been involved in the NAN initiative to find out about their experiences and opinions of what NAN does and how it relates to their practice, *Impact of networking* is a result of my reflection on these conversations, together with other unpublished material such as reports, and event records.

The overwhelming response from artists, organisers and funders to questions about NAN has been positive. As the following pages will testify, NAN is now an established initiative that has a valued role in supporting and developing artists' practice. However, like any network, NAN's future depends on both maintaining some of its existing connections, and attracting new individuals, groups, partners and approaches.

Whilst the development of NAN has coincided with a wider awareness and discussion of networking across many professional fields, NAN has been careful to listen to artists first and foremost, in terms of their experience, ideas and perceived needs to discuss, meet, exchange, challenge and support each other. It has not imposed a model from the outside, but has created an ethos of its own that can be applied across a number of different activities and projects. NAN has been, and continues to be led by the artist's voice, or rather, a chorus of artists' voices.

This publication will make an important contribution to the ongoing discussion about NAN's work, its place in networking artists in the UK and abroad, and stimulate new debate about how and why artists support and challenge each other through network exchanges.

Jane Watt

Note

¹ *Reflections on networking*, published March 2006, is a collation of material presenting artists' first-hand experiences of NAN. It includes interviews with and articles by artists involved in NAN events, trips and bursaries. See page 2 for full details.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for researcher Charlie Fox's assistance with conducting and collating interviews with artists who have taken part in NAN events, bursaries and research trips, as well as the contributions that Sophie Cameron, Ben Coode-Adams and Richard Layzell have given him. This publication would not have been possible without the generosity of time and experiences of Stephen Beddoe, Catherine Bertola, Juliana Capes, Polly Carter, Paul Clark, Tony Charles, Christine Duff, Graham Dolphin, Tim Eastop, Michael Forbes, Wendy Law, Kwong Lee, Aaron McCloskey, Guyan Porter, Susannah Silver, Emilia Telese, Hilary Thorn, Jonathan Waring and Caroline Wright. I would also like to thank Susan Jones and Louise Wirz for providing valuable information and insight into NAN.

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Notions of networking

Jane Watt examines NAN's characteristics and its relationship to the current networking climate.

Although the desire to join a network might be deeply rooted in a basic human need – to share experiences with others and look for support and affirmation – the type of network, and modes in which engagement is encouraged are manifold. The need to network has been around for millennia, but in the last ten years the landscape for methods of networking has changed dramatically with the widespread use of computer networks. Everything and everyone can be 'networked' no matter whether you work in the same room, building, or on the other side of the globe. Along with this surge in 'networkability' there has been a debate in the last five years amongst social, political, economic and technology theorists and practitioners about what networking means in this day and age. NAN has germinated and developed at the same time as this debate, and, in its initial brainstorming days did, indeed, look at some of these debates. Therefore, it is appropriate to examine the characteristics of NAN as a network and how it sits in this climate of recent network knowledge.

The NAN artists' advisory group was formed in 2003 to explore ideas of what a network of artists' networks could or should be, and it identified qualities and characteristics of successful networks as:

"Access into other networks, alliance (rather than membership), aspirational, capacity for change, constantly updated, dynamic, challenging stereotypes, focused on activity, 'give to get', informal/organic, knowledgeable, mutual respect, openness to change, pooling resources, practical and artistic support, proactive, quick information exchange, self-managing, social and professional, trust and generosity."¹

In network-speak, this approach is called 'social capital' a phrase which the American political scientist Robert Putnam used in his book *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) which, by the inclusion of the word 'capital' implies that the resource, in this case 'sociability', has value. As the iSociety points out in their research publication *You don't know me but... Social Capital and Social Software*, social capital "refers to those social networks that go beyond our families, workplaces or official bodies and connect us to friends, associates and strangers for mutual benefit. It is the basis for much collaborative behaviour".² It goes on to point out that:

"As our economy has become more orientated around intangible goods – ideas, skills, effort, information – so social capital has become more valuable. We need to trust the people whose advice we receive... Social and professional networks circulate such valuable information quickly and efficiently."³

Although the language used here is rooted in socio-economics, this assertion is backed up by a-n's own research in the sphere of art practice:

"Since 2001, a-n The Artists Information Company has tracked the growing trend for artists to collaborate and network, and to create professional infrastructures and clusters that serve to enhance their artistic development. This approach is visible not only within artists' building-based organisations but in the breadth of visual arts interest groupings including virtual communities that operate on a UK and international basis."⁴

Several factors appear to be at play that have contributed to the timeliness of a-n's recognition of the importance of networking for artists, as well as a strong will to do something about it. The basic premise was to network artists' networks. The rich resources on which a-n would focus would be "ideas and knowledge; people (members) being a resource themselves; levels of involvement from individual to large organisation..."⁵

These ideas developed at a time in which there was a growing shift, across many professions, not just in the arts, of a knowledge-based economy. In addition there was increasing availability, and affordability, of technology that could assist in quick and flexible communication – mobile phone, email, and online networking. Thirdly, there was an increase in awareness of the importance of initiating and developing opportunities alongside reliance on existing opportunities, and established organisations and support.

There has been recognition of the need to support more traditional physical, space-based networks where artists develop work, ideas and a support network of other like-minded individuals through the development of studio groups through schemes such as Arts Council England's (ACE) Art Time Space Money initiative.⁶ However, a-n found through their own research, that the identification and development of sustainable, physical environments for artists, although important, only provides one way for artists to collaborate, share and support each other.⁷ Building up a physical base is a costly and a lengthy process that requires substantial investment in time and money. Something that organisations, like ACE, are better placed to instigate and oversee.

Individual artists' needs and experiences can change at an astonishing rate. How many artists know what they will be working on, with whom they will be working, or where they will be working, in eighteen months time, let alone five years time? As artist and a-n's Artists' Networks (North East) coordinator Catherine Bertola points out, "networks continually shift anyway, they evolve and they grow and sometimes they fall apart". This identification, and acceptance of the shifting nature of art practice, and indeed the reasonable short-termness of many individuals and groups is paramount to understanding the nature of networking and the nature of functioning as an artist. It is the basis on which NAN has been built. The acceptance of experimentation, shift, change, and cessation is as important for the life and development of the scheme as a whole. It has been key to NAN's philosophy of encouraging other groups and individuals to run networking events in their own

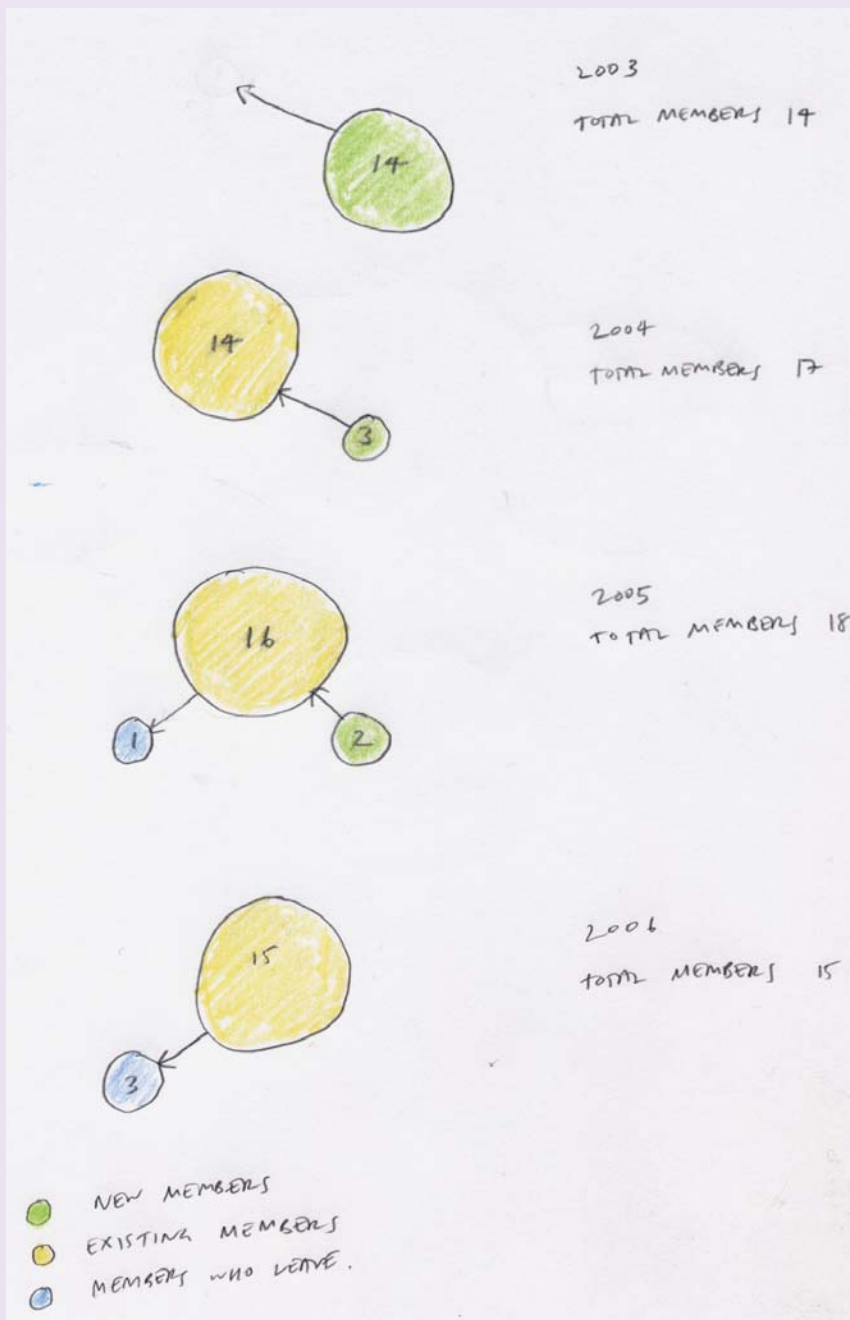


Fig 1 Flow of advisory group members. Diagram: Jane Watt

way, such as the recent Sideshow event, NAN-NANA, in Nottingham to coincide with the British Art Show 6. This type of involvement encourages new ways of thinking and approaching projects and, at its best, allows a dynamic momentum to build up. However, it is equally important to create space for mistakes, to learn from those mistakes, to embrace change and to encourage fresh blood to enter the mix. Juliana Capes, former Artists' events coordinator in Scotland, points out that part of her decision to step aside from her NAN role in autumn 2005 was that:

"I cared about the project enough to want fresh blood to come in and wanted NAN to continue to change and regenerate and have new ideas. I didn't want it to stagnate... It's good to pass it on to keep up the energy levels, so I'd really like that to continue to happen to NAN in general."

Capes echoes the physicist and system theorist Fritjof Capra's assertion that:

"Living networks are self-generating. They continually create or recreate themselves by transforming or replacing their components. In this way they undergo continual structural changes while preserving their web-like patterns of organisation."⁸

The 'capacity for change' that was identified early on by a-n is an important one, but one which is not necessarily easy to put into practice. Another, often conflicting aspect of human nature – the need for stability, routine, familiarity – can be at odds with this more open outlook, resulting in entrenched practice and attitude.

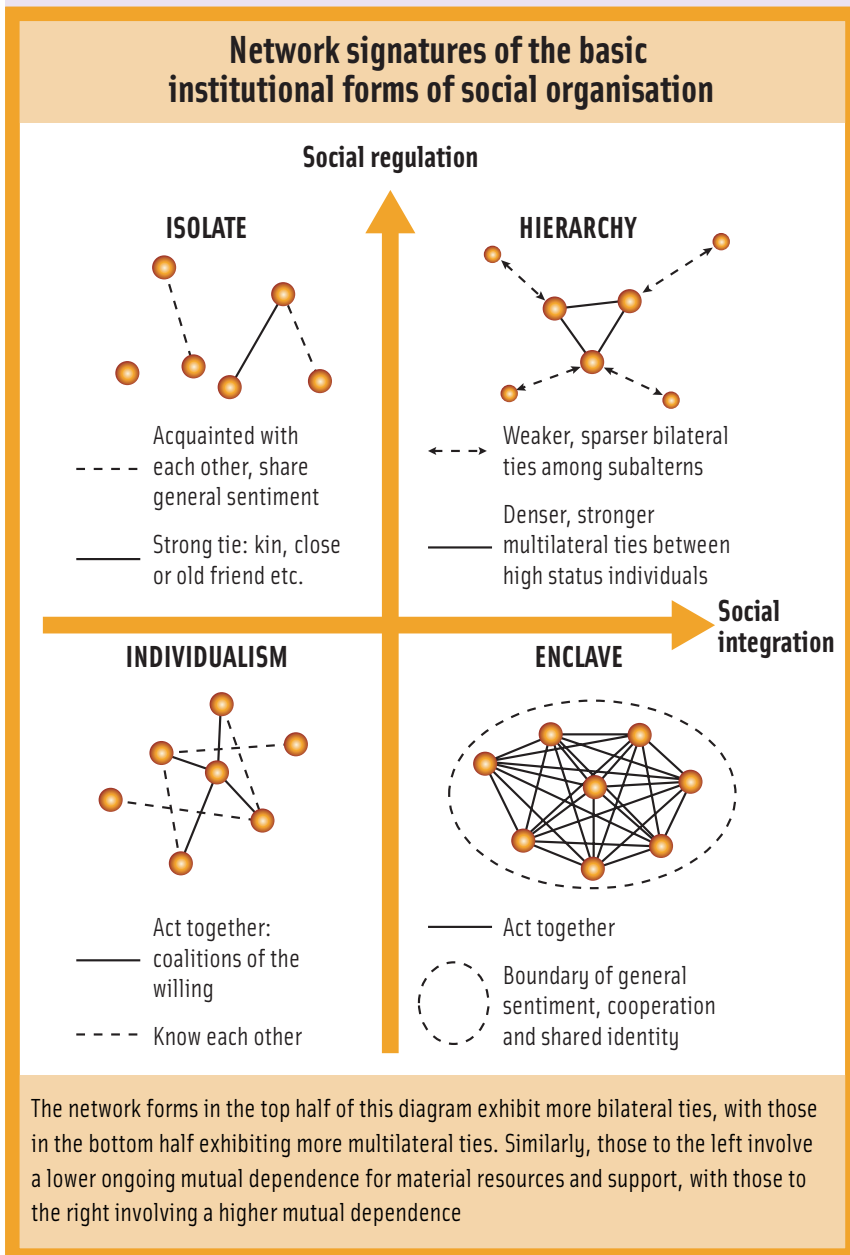
The fact that NAN has evolved from a strong knowledge-base of initial advisory meetings, together with field observations of artists' actual practice in small groups and networks, as well as an awareness of larger arts funding and professional organisational bodies, has meant that it has been, and continues to be, able to draw 'on-the-ground' expertise, with a bottom-up approach.

Again, this strikes a chord with Capra in his description of social networks:

"As communications continue in a social network, they form multiple feedback loops, which eventually produce a shared system of beliefs, explanations and values – a common context of meaning, also known as culture, which is continually sustained by further communications. Through this culture individuals acquire identities as members of the social network, and in this way the network generates its own boundary of expectations, of confidentiality and loyalty, which is continually maintained and renegotiated by the network of communications... The social network also produces a shared body of knowledge – including information ideas and skills – that shapes the culture's distinctive way of life in addition to its values and beliefs."⁹

The importance of 'multiple feedback loops' is important to the nourishment, as well as the development, of the organisation as a whole. This can be seen in NAN through the involvement of individuals through, for example, initially attending an organised event, and/or applying for a bursary, and later going on to become more involved through organising an event of their own that brings in more people, or who then become more involved in the advisory group with further discussions about the present and future scope of NAN. In this way, a sustainable supply of new and varied blood mixes with the longer-term, more established group, injecting new ideas and energy, as well as building on what has been successful before.

Notions of networking continued



Susan Jones, one of the founding forces behind NAN, is well versed and aware of the socio-political debate around networking, she is equally aware of artists' different practices, modes of engagement and is sensitive to their changing and unique needs. So, through knowledge of possible models in professional art practice, business, sociology, and technology, NAN has evolved from the ground up, through trying and testing ways to network artists and artists' networks. There are echoes of networking models such as public policy researcher, Dr Perri 6's model [Fig 2] in the way that NAN operates [Fig 3] which evolved from initial structural ideas that were identified as:

"early innovators gather in others through induction process; equation of what's put in/taken out; lots of small clusters sharing ideas; membership by ownership/involvement and financial/in-kind contributions; ...responsive/dynamic according to the situation/environment; rolling membership; room to grow."¹⁰

An ethos emerged through initial discussions at pilot meetings in 2003 about the potential aspiration and role of NAN and was identified as:

"act local, think national and global; avoid formal structure by passing on admin responsibilities; core of high-value input, but still needs critical mass; empowering artists/enabling them to travel; engagement through history and recommendation; people can pick and choose what they want/need out of it."¹¹

This has developed into a very real working practice through NAN's ongoing, and very live, projects which include nationwide events, research trips and bursaries (Go and See, Re-View and New Collaborations) and are deeply rooted within researching, listening to and responding to the artist's perspective.

JW

Fig 2 Dr Perri 6's diagram showing network signatures of the basic institutional forms of social organisation. Ref: Dr Perri 6 (2004) 'Your friendship networks' in Helen McCarthy, Paul Miller and Paul Skidmore, (eds) (2004) *Network Logic: who governs in an interconnected world?* London: DEMOS.

NAN in numbers

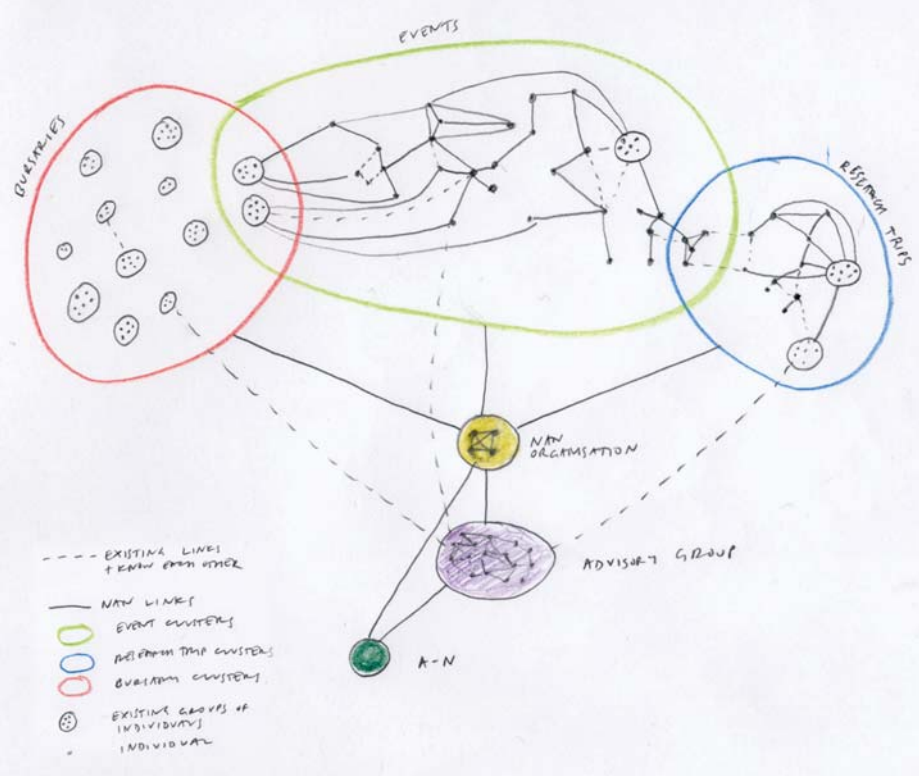


Fig 3 Networking Links and Clusters in NAN. Diagram: Jane Watt

Notes

- 1 a-n (2004) *Networking artists' networks: strategic approaches to artists' coordination and collective action. Report on research and pilot programmes 02-04*, Newcastle: a-n The Artists Information Company, p5.
- 2 iSociety (2003) *You don't know me but... Social Capital and Social Software*, London: iSociety, p4.
- 3 *ibid*, p13.
- 4 *ibid*, p4. See footnote 1
- 5 *ibid*, p16. See footnote 1
- 6 Artists' Workspaces is one of six new initiatives in Arts Council England's Art Time Space Money scheme which aims to, "increase opportunities for artists to occupy affordable and sustainable working places that are dynamic places for creative risk, critical engagement, community interaction and the production of ideas and work". See Arts Council England (2006) *Artist Time Space Money*, London: Arts Council England, p2. See also www.artistsineastlondon.org/essay/index2.htm for Michael Archer's essay 'Oranges and Lemons and Oranges and Bananas' commissioned by ACME Studios for a history of artists' studio instigation and provision in East London from 1960-2000.
- 7 See *Future forecast: Future space* on www.a-n.co.uk for research into artists' perceptions of changing and future studio needs.
- 8 Fritjof Capra, 'Living networks', Helen McCarthy, Paul Miller and Paul Skidmore, (eds) (2004) *Network Logic: who governs in an interconnected world?* London: DEMOS, p27.
- 9 *ibid*, pp29-30.
- 10 *ibid*, p17. See footnote 1
- 11 *ibid*, p18. See footnote 1

- 697 individual artists have attended NAN events and research trips to date.
- 75 artists within networks or groups have received Go and See grants to extend their networks and practice in the UK and beyond.
- 5 artists and 3 artists' groups received Re-view bursaries in 2005/06.
- 6 collaborations involving 16 artists or artists' groups received Artists' new collaborations bursaries in 2005/06.
- 54% of the NAN budget provides direct benefits to artists including events, bursaries, research visits and advisory group meetings.
- 50% of NAN's budget derives from a-n's earned income and revenue funding streams
- 34% of the budget comes from other sources including Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Northern Rock Foundation, European Union and Scottish Arts Council.
- 22% of the NAN budget is spent on administrative, financial and marketing services.

Networking – the artist without the studio

Charlie Fox on what networking means to artists.

What does the notion of networking suggest to an artist practitioner? The lifeblood of their practice or a terrifying round of speed dating, socialising and contact exchange. Undoubtedly networking has become one of the shibboleths of a successful life; for a vital career an artist like any other 'professional' needs and requires an effective and expanding network. Success comes with exposure: whom you know and how you present yourself are not minor preoccupations for the new professional artist.

Recently opportunities for artists to network professionally have multiplied, provided by an increasingly sophisticated number of artist networks, tempting the practitioner out, from the safety of their studio, into the world without. As Lucy Day comments:

"The somewhat sanitized term 'networks' is used by many to describe a combination of information gathering, social enhancement and sharing of good practice that is fundamental to artistic activity. From monthly peer critiques initiated and facilitated by arts organizations, supported programmes such as a-n's NAN initiative to self-determined projects and global networks artists have the ability to create important allies and disseminators for their work."¹

However artists are not always comfortable operating within these situations, where ideas of professional practice rub up against their hard-won creative independence. Indeed, artists often actively resist the received notions of professionalism, taking up positions ranging from the amateur to the 'post-professional' practices described by Ernst Fischer in his descriptions of Living-Room Theatre. An individual artist's practice may not fit easily into the current social, political and economic agendas. Artist Tony Charles, who went on NAN research trips to Glasgow and Liverpool, expresses these misgivings:

"The idea of a network can be off-putting to artists. I mean artists can enjoy the experience but when it turns into more of a club or clique, then you might not want to be in that".

NAN has attempted to overcome these misgivings by offering parallel structures (artist research trips and networking events) by encouraging and supporting active collaboration across artist-led groups. There are subtle but clearly evident differences between what NAN set out to do and how a business network operates. The NAN structure is hands off (a light touch approach), initiatives are designed and delivered by the groups involved and there is no set formula for events or trips. But artists have obviously been attracted to networking events for particular reasons. Sophie Cameron co-ordinator of New Work Network² comments:

"I think that artists look for a range of things depending on what the networking opportunity/event was trying to achieve... some of these things may sound contradictory – but I think that they can have different weight and

therefore 'pull' depending on what the event is for, the reason you are going and who is inviting or who it is targeted at."

Cameron's list of what an event might include or attempt to achieve echoes many of NAN's networking approaches and include a wide range of possibilities:

- introductions
- challenges
- safety
- connections old and new
- inspiration
- a structure
- a party
- information
- a platform
- some nice food and drink
- a follow-up
- an opportunity to re-connect
- a clear idea of why you are there and what this is for
- a space where there is no agenda
- a space where you are not being 'selected'
- a space where you don't have to sell
- a space to be you
- feedback
- feeding in
- creativity outside of your own practice
- reassurance
- redirection
- out of your comfort zone
- creating a comfort zone
- new friends
- new opportunities
- meeting with other artists
- meeting your heroes
- meeting a new 'generation'
- a refresher
- no pressure
- a chance to talk
- a chance to show work
- a chance to test things out
- a chance to fail
- a chance to inspire and be inspired
- top tips
- insider info

Adrian Piper writing in the 1970s, another period of technological advance and shifting practice, claimed that the fundamental structures of being an artist are:

“how we therefore live, think, what we do as artists; what kind of social interactions we have (personal, political, financial); what injustices we are victim of, and which ones we must inflict on others in order to validate our work or our roles as artists; how we have learned to circumvent these, if at all, i.e. how highly developed we have had to become as political animals; what forms of manipulation we must utilize to get things done; what compromises we must make in our work or our integrity in order to reach the point where such compromises are no longer necessary; whether, given the structures of this society, there can be such a point.”³

Artists are constantly negotiating the tensions between their practice and their own, often precarious, position in society. Though many artists participating in the NAN programme are not necessarily focused on the nature of their social position or the motives behind their social interaction, they are grappling with the underlying experiences of being an artist and sustaining an art practice within a shifting political and economic landscape; that sense of isolation, frustration and loneliness that still makes up a large part of the artists’ professional experience. As artist and co-director of Artefact Projects Ben Coode-Adams comments:

“Networking is really useful for working out what or who you are in relation to the world, especially talking with non-artists, people outside the art world.”

So, is this new model of artist networking the best method to cut across this sense of isolation? Artist Richard Layzell remarks that:

“In general I would say artists can often become isolated and despondent. Art production by its nature may become a lonely activity. As self-confidence is so pivotal it doesn’t take much for people to feel they are not going anywhere. Networking events can offer up approaches, opportunities and contacts, and a space to be.”

The NAN events programme provides artist groups with a number of different networking models and opportunities. Within all these events and trips there remains the question of how the artist operating within an artist-led network sustains and builds from these initial exchanges. Again there appears to be a contradiction between the professional and the ad hoc; is it important, and possible, to maintain a balance between the critical, consciously developed model and the more open approach that defies clear definition.

Layzell reveals there is always going to be a contradiction in networking, between the expectations and the reality:

“I like to know what I might get out of it, so the more information the better, but I also like things that are open-ended. I think networking often works best when it’s least expected or predicted. I often find that I’m presenting at a networking event and I find this hugely enjoyable as it’s about setting up strategies that may create meaningful interaction.”

Feedback from the artists involved in NAN suggests that they want to find ways to extend and sustain the experiences offered by NAN. There is a desire for something more substantial, a follow-up programme that might provide more sustained support. As artist Marjolaine Ryley, who attended the Berlin and Manchester research trips, asks:

“Are those activities ongoing? If you’ve been on three trips are you going to be excluded or is there going to be a conscious effort to actually keep people involved? Because if you’re talking about building a network there’s got to be something ongoing – you’ve got to find ways to facilitate that.”

There is an acknowledgment here of the tension between the desire of an artist to make and disseminate their own work and the artist’s sense of collective, group activities. After all collaboration, exchange and dialogue bring their own set of problems that relate to the core idea of the ‘professional’ artist: a tension between the expectations and aspirations of individual artists (within and without an artist-led group).

Are networking events and trips merely a welcome break for artists struggling to position themselves in the wider world? Or are networking activities a vital and increasingly accepted part of the professional development of artists? Your network can be everything, but to put it at the front of your practice may seem far too mercenary, even promiscuous. This is the balance that is constantly negotiated in any artists’ networking programme – to be open, non-critical, inclusive and hands-off – while remaining focused on the need to provide a professional service to artists. NAN is beginning to demonstrate to artists, and others beyond the community of participants, that the artistic community, though highly diverse and often fragmented, presents a certain unified and unique set of agendas; a collective voice specific to artists and the way they work, which relate, but do not necessarily mirror the socio-political and corporate networking models.

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Notes

1 Lucy Day (2006) ‘After art school’, *2006 Degrees unedited* supplement to *a-n Magazine*, March 2006, p3.

2 New Work Network is a national artist-led support organisation bringing together people working in live art, contemporary performance and interdisciplinary practice. For more information see www.newworknetwork.org.uk

3 Adrian Piper, ‘In Support of Meta-Art’, *Artforum*, October 1973, pp78-81.

49 AND RISING AAS PAULA ADAMS MALFRIDUR ADALSTEINSDOTTIR CAROLANN ALEXANDER ALIAS MARTIN AL
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The NAN way

Jane Watt outlines the core strengths of NAN and looks to the future.

Over the last three years NAN has developed into a well-established organisation that facilitates networking artists' networks. It has done this through clear vision that was based on research findings¹ and pilot meetings that involved 'blue sky' thinking with a lively group of artists from a range of disciplines and career stages, who practice as artists in their own right, as well as being involved in a variety of artist-led groups and activities nationwide. Now, three years on, it is important to recognise the core strengths of NAN – what is important to its success in terms of practical working solutions, as well as its approach and ethos to supporting and facilitating artists' networking, professional and critical development. This is crucial in order to examine the future direction, scope and sustainability of NAN.

Distinctive characteristics of NAN

- Developed, initiated and run by artists for artists.
- Using tried and tested, as well as innovative, approaches to create opportunities for professional artists to meet and stimulate debate, eg: speed-dating, small group discussion, one-to-one discussions, dinner gatherings, presentations by artists and non-artists, advisory sessions, round table discussions, gallery trips, studio visits.
- Nationwide events and projects from north (Shetland) to south (Devon) that encourage both local and national artists to meet and discuss work, projects and professional practice issues.
- Encouraging work and debate between emerging, mid-career and established artists. Newly graduated students sit side-by-side with directors of established artist-run galleries on the NAN advisory group as well as take part in events and trips. Artists of a diverse age range meet and are involved in NAN, from early twenties to over fifty.
- Not medium specific – NAN is open to artists of all disciplines.
- Artists are not involved through judgement of specific work, but instead a holistic view of their practice is encouraged. Specific projects and collaborations may arise through subsequent discussions between artists.
- Awareness of diverse geographical issues – events and bursaries have taken place in urban centres such as Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Cardiff and rural locations in Norfolk, Berkshire, Shetland, Argyll and Bute.
- International organised and self-initiated visits to artists and organisations in Europe including Spain, Belarus, Germany, Estonia and North America.
- Using artists as coordinators, researchers, and speakers as well as attendees in order to promote active participation and ownership of the events and NAN project.
- Responsive and light touch administration procedures so that artists become involved more immediately and can react to new ideas and events more quickly. This creates a dynamic model for engagement and generation of new ideas. Bursary applications are processed within six weeks from the application deadline.
- Value for money across NAN from the organisation of NAN: the team of part-time coordinators, who are all practising artists, use other artists and artist-led groups as host partners for projects; artist groups applying for bursaries budget for direct and cost-effective means in which to travel and meet other artists.
- A willingness to trust artists through light touch approaches to organising events and bursary trips promotes an openness to new ideas, approaches and people.

Thinking about future directions

Perhaps one of the key characteristics of NAN that has been recognised by artists, artists' groups, NAN coordinators and funders is that NAN is not an institution; it is not a hierarchical organisation. Artist's Networks Coordinator Emilia Telese points out that:

"Sometimes there can be an expectation, or perception, of wanting things put on a plate. I think that this derives from how artists are used to dealing with other larger organisations and sometimes curators and university tutors perpetuating the idea that the only thing an artist should do is make the work, and fame will knock if it's meant to be. Artists can perceive this as an 'us' and 'them' situation, where artists solely create and 'they' make artists' careers happen. As soon as there is an 'us' and 'them' perception, they tend to stop doing things and start expecting. That's why I always try with the NAN events to make it less 'us' and 'them' and more 'us altogether'."

In order for NAN to remain as an initiative, or catalyst, for new opportunities for artists to network and collaborate, it must retain this position that maintains a solid foundation of knowledge and respect for artists' practices and modes of engagement, as well as be open to new developments and initiatives. This is a tricky balance, as many NAN participants have recognised in the course of interviews that have been undertaken for this review. Guyan Porter, current Artists' events coordinator in Scotland remarks that:

"People often question what it is that NAN does, and what else it needs to do... I think that it is pushing forward in new directions all the time: that it just needs to do more, that there needs to be more of it. Although we've got formats, the events are always different, simply by the nature of them being in different places and with different people. They also all happen at different moments in time, so there are different issues to speak about and different topics to look at."

Others point out that NAN may reach a critical point in the future where it has reached as wide a group of artists as is possible, and that the same people, the same outcomes occur. Stephen Beddoe an advisory group member notes his experience as Director of Artquest:

"At Artquest there has been a change over the past four years in the kind of projects that we've done. Increasingly it's been more to do with social and professional networks, and less to do with orthodox training. This change of focus occurred when we began to realise that you see the same faces turning up to the sessions, so it's not actually the training that artists necessarily want, it's about the gathering and the social networking. Of course there'll always be the small group of recent graduates that want training sessions. But now there's a generation of artists who have had enough of training and they simply want to meet and do."

This recognition of reaching a critical mass where the same individuals, groups and ideas reoccur is a crucial one. Whilst NAN is still a young project, it has been pointed out by several individuals that there will come a time, in the not too distant future, where longer-term relationships, networks and working processes need to be encouraged and sustained to

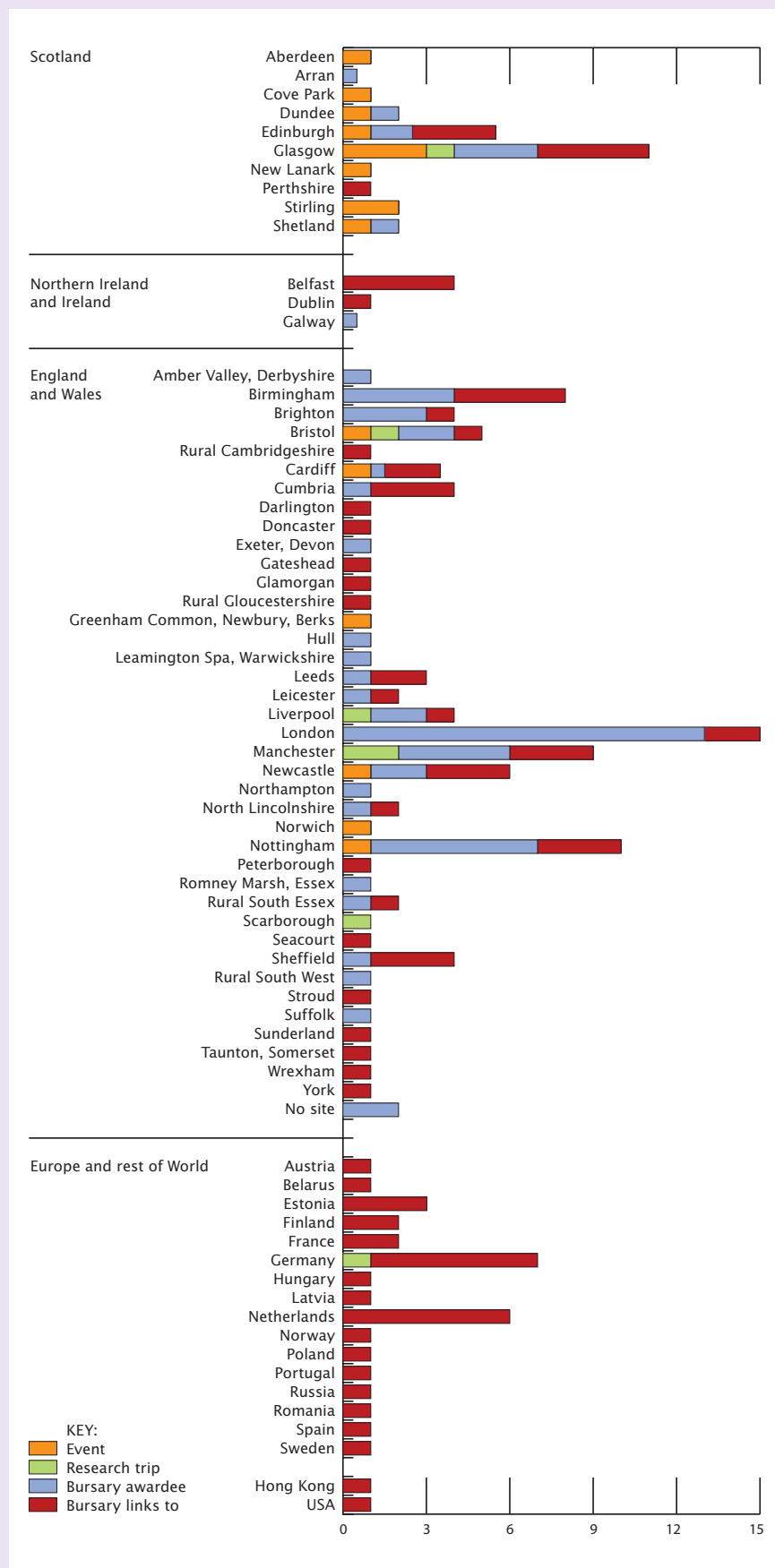
compliment the new, short-term, responsive NAN initiatives. Hilary Thorn, artist and NAN advisory group member talks of “adding value”. This might be in continuing a forum for discussion beyond initial meetings at events, or on trips. It might be that a follow-up trip is needed to build on an initial Go and See Award trip. This is where a link with a more established and larger awarding body, or grant, may be appropriate. The quick, responsive, easily accessible, small grants and opportunities that NAN delivers begin to lay down real foundations based on experience and face-to-face meetings, rather than on pure speculation. This initial ‘research’ by the artist is a very good indicator of testing the water through a small amount of money, which potentially can then be used to justify tapping into larger, more complex funds. This is where dialogue between the artists, NAN and larger bodies such as Arts Council England and Scottish Arts Council needs to take place to see where potential links can be made that allow stepping stones between these islands of support that can be perceived to be disparate, or exist in too deep, and unknown waters.

The NAN initiative enables artists nationwide to meet, communicate and become informed through visiting, seeing, speaking, doing. This means that more of these artists are beginning not only to think about instigating a project in, for example, Estonia, but are actually doing something to make it happen. What seems increasingly important in an age of being able to access raw information about people, places and ideas across the globe, is that in order for the initial excitement of discovering that there is an apparently like-minded and interesting looking artist group in, say, Stavanger in Norway, remote communication can only work up to a point. Whilst the iSociety champions new ways in which individuals and groups can network through email, emessaging, chatroom discussions and online forums, it still recognises that “face-to-face contact is the glue which binds people together”.² Kwong Lee, advisory group member and Director of Castlefield Gallery, Manchester describes an early NAN meeting:

“I was in this room with loads of people I didn’t know, and we were all asking: where are you from? What are you doing? So from meetings like that you know a lot more of what’s going on than you know if you’re reading about projects, or looking at people’s websites. Talking to people face-to-face is a very valuable kind of experience.”

NAN has been extremely successful in terms of getting individuals and groups together, face-to-face: 697 individuals have attended NAN events and research trips; 75 artists’ groups have been awarded Go and See bursaries that have enabled them to visit, or meet with, other artists and groups in Britain and abroad. Whilst these are raw figures based on NAN records and reports, what is more difficult to quantify, but perhaps more significant, is the ripple effect, especially in terms of the Go and See bursaries where the range of engagement has been from one-to-one, to one-to-fifty. Qualitative evidence through interviews and bursary reports³ testify that this is happening.⁴

Fig 4 Demographics of artists taking part in NAN events, trips and bursaries and links to other areas.



From these figures, we can see active artist-based cluster areas emerging, especially in the self-initiated trips funded by the Go and See bursaries. Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester and London have had four or more groups awarded bursaries. Perhaps unsurprisingly, London far outstrips the rest of the country in terms of the number of artists' groups that have applied and been awarded bursaries (thirteen to date). What is interesting is that there has been reciprocity in terms of visits in the other centres, such as Birmingham, Nottingham and Manchester, but only two artists' groups have made links to other London-based artists' groups. Whilst the majority of artists' groups awarded bursaries have visited UK and Ireland venues, there has been a large take-up of international travel to artists and groups in Europe and beyond. Many artists who have been interviewed as part of this review have remarked about the importance of the development of more international links and networks. Although town and city locations predominate in terms of where events, research trips and artists' groups are based, or visit, it is encouraging to see that a third of the cited locations are in non-urban centres.⁵

Wider connections

NAN is very clear that it is about bringing together artists and artists' networks. It encourages these artist-led initiatives to talk to one another, collaborate and demonstrate that artists' networks are numerous, resourceful and creative forces that are thinking about, instigating and operating artist-run spaces, studio groups, discussion groups, exhibitions, festivals and projects. The NAN pages in *a-n Magazine* and on a-n's website, regularly list artists' groups and networks, enabling dissemination about the groups to other artists. It is clear that artists find this resource, as well as the support and opportunities to meet very valuable, but here they are operating in a largely artist world: artists are talking to other artists; reading about other artists; learning and collaborating with other artists. In an essay called 'Your friendship networks' Dr Perri 6 points out the limitations of only connecting with people in a similar situation to you. The example he gives is perhaps not the most uplifting one, especially in relation to artists and their professional activities, but, nevertheless, he makes an important point:

"When government offers job clubs and special training programmes to unemployed people to help them seek work, they tend to meet mainly other unemployed people, who may be the least useful to them in seeking work by informal means."⁶

Whilst I am not equating artist groups, or indeed NAN, to job clubs, the point that he makes is that speaking and working with people in the same position as yourself can be limiting. Artist-led activity is extremely important in terms of critical debate, experimenting with new spaces and modes of engagement. However, it is equally important to have access to, and to operate in, a wider sphere. Many artists do. But if we return to Telese's point that artists may think that by making work (whether in their studio, or in an artist-run space) "fame will knock if it's meant to be" this could mean that whilst many artists are active within an artist-run circuit, there still may be an attitude that the wider art world – critics, regional, or international curators, and galleries – will come to discover them, or that they operate in a totally different, or unconnected, arena. This perpetuates the 'us' (the artists) and 'them' (the curators, critics, commissioners, funders, art establishment) syndrome and can produce hostility and hierarchy. The power relation returns to the 'wait and see' mode, making the artist the passive recipient, rather than the active initiator.

In order to try to open up and link these sometimes disparate spheres, dissemination is key to widening the awareness of artist-led activities, to publicise the rich artist-led activities, of which NAN is part, beyond the parameters of artist practice and discussion. NAN has been successful in terms of creating trust and a place for genuine exchange between artists, who after all, can be hostile to fellow artists. Creating opportunities for real exchange to take place between artists and arts professionals on a more level playing field is also of paramount importance. The new Re-View bursary scheme supports artist-to-artist, or curatorial critique and professional development at a strategic point in the artist's career. It was launched at the beginning of 2006, had its first round of recipients announced in March 2006, and is a small step towards including non-artists in the networking dialogue.

This is an area that should be closely monitored in order to instigate more debate and instigate cross-pollination in the future.

Money matters

Rather like individual artists and artists' groups, NAN has a number of funding streams that allow it to initiate and develop new projects, as well as sustain tried-and-tested methods. Just under ten per cent of funding comes from in-kind support, for example provision of venues, publication and publicity costs. Some thirty-four per cent of funding is through grants. Like most grants, the awarding bodies are specific about what funds can and cannot be used: the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation grant is for bursaries; European Social Funding (ESF) is for North East artists' programme; the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) grant for NAN Scotland events and research trips for Scottish artists.

Just over fifty per cent of NAN's budget comes directly from a-n's own resources and income. Whilst a-n has revenue funding from Arts Council England and Scottish Arts Council, thirty-three per cent of income is generated through subscriptions to a-n.⁷ Consequently, a large share of NAN's funding comes from artists. NAN events and trips are largely free, and artists are encouraged to be subscribers in order to benefit from NAN events, trips or bursaries. However, as NAN is mainly publicised through a-n's existing network – the 32,000 artists and arts professionals reading *a-n Magazine* monthly and 425 daily users of www.a-n.co.uk – the majority of artists who become involved in NAN in any way have heard of NAN through this route, or through word-of-mouth from another artist.

Issues of membership and inclusion

Many artists have noted the importance of NAN being (and remaining) a non-membership organisation. Tony Charles, an artist who went on NAN research trips to Liverpool and Glasgow remarked that:

"I like the fact that NAN does not publish any strict network list. So it is quite loose and you can dip in and out as you need to. There's no one looking in from the outside. For instance, my studio group is defined by its members; the beauty of NAN is that it doesn't seem to have a membership. With NAN I don't feel on the outside, and I know other artists feel the same. NAN is open about what it does."

Charles points out that NAN's strength is that although it is a network of networks, the fact that involvement in NAN does not rely on a judgement of membership is an extremely important one.

In addition, it doesn't make selection on any judgement based on the type, or quality of individual work or practice which artists, or artists' groups produce. In this sense, the mix of artists who attend the events and research trips is extremely rich in terms of practice and work. For example at the Critical Space event in Norwich in March 2005, organised in collaboration with

Making Art Work, artists who defined their disciplines as painting, photography, installation, performance/ live art, multidisciplinary, ceramics, sculpture and film-making all came together for a weekend of discussions about practice. During the weekend there was no 'judgement' on the quality of the work by any of the organisers, speakers, or attendees, which resulted in an apparent openness and tolerance of practice and approach. The potential downside of this meant that there was, at times, a sentiment, voiced after the event, that deep and meaningful critical debate was lacking and difficult to attain in such a short period of time (two days) when no immediate common ground was obvious.⁸ This could largely be attributed to the fact that the levels of trust that are required in order to allow frank and far-reaching criticism could not be attained. As Karen Stephenson remarks in her essay 'Towards a Theory of Government' which looks at more formal types of institution and network organisations that:

"Reciprocity is a key to the power of networks, exerting a governing logic over them – the alchemy of mutual give and take over time turning to a golden trust. Primordially, trust was determined through face-to-face interactions, and to a large extent is still today. Therefore one needs to appreciate the profound truth that the face of trust is still a human face."⁹

She points out that reciprocity must take place over time, something which a one-day, or weekend event does not allow for. Therefore, in order to build up the level of trust that is necessary for individuals to be honest, dig deeper, reflect more critically with other unfamiliar companions, a more long-term and sustainable engagement is necessary. What an event such as Critical Space might do is stimulate an awareness of other ways of working, other individuals and groups with whom the participants may wish to develop future dialogue.

Sustainable and future connections at events and trips

An advisory group member who was interviewed for this review suggested that one important developmental factor of NAN in the future could be to encourage sustainability of connection and deeper debate through support for follow-up meetings, events or debate. This has already happened with a number of artists who have participated in NAN and who have established new connections and contacts. For example artist Caroline Wright who attended the Critical Space and Close Proximity events notes that:

"The NAN events have enabled me to place myself in the wider context and in turn to be more accurately aware of the potential that exists for my work/role. I have a new collaborative work with a contact from the NAN Greenham Common event in progress."

But the main emphasis at the events is on widening awareness and knowledge of other individuals,

groups and centres outside one's own known geographical and practice base. These events and trips allow artists to be stimulated by new people, sites, sights and sounds. The result can often mean that sustainable connections are not necessarily appropriate, nor always attainable. They can be one possible outcome, just as a re-evaluation of one's own practice and position is another. Marjolaine Ryley, who attended the research trips to Berlin and Manchester points out that:

"NAN's strength is that it creates an opportunity that doesn't perhaps have specific outcomes. It's simply about meeting other artists. It's quite unique in that sense unlike other projects, such as residencies, that you have to apply to and where it's about your work. The NAN events are not like that".

However, she also points out an element of frustration about the lack of focus:

"It is kind of creatively chaotic in that you're not entirely sure why you're there. And sometimes I did feel that it was a little unclear as to what the purpose of the trip was. Is it just a fun trip for everyone? Is the trip about promoting your art, or artists from the North East [of England]? Or is it just about meeting other artists?"

The openness of the events and trips (although rigorously researched, planned and executed) means that artists may not have a specific 'reason' for going to the event or on the trip, other than wanting to experience a new place and/or new people. As Riley points out, this can be both a strength and a weakness, depending on your point of view. What they do allow is an openness and 'creative chaos' in a largely regulated, and outcome-driven environment. The vicious circle of entrenched expectations of 'proposals' and 'accountable outcomes' has been side-stepped by NAN in an openness of approach, as well as informed understanding of how funding systems work. Their funding from SAC can be used for events¹⁰ which have softer outcomes such as meeting new people, gaining awareness of, and insight into, galleries, artists' studios and the art scene in unfamiliar and new environments, as well as a self-awareness through being in a new context. Alison F Bell, an artist based on the island of Arran remarked that:

"[taking part in] the Cove Park event was inspirational in that it was the first talk I'd given about Arran and my work, so it gave me confidence. Really the best thing to come out of it was an attitude of mind; positive, confident, no longer insular and apologetic."

Funding this type of artist development is crucial, and does reflect a change in institutional and government funding where there has been a gradual shift in some funding being available to support artist's process and professional practice forums and debate.

Bursary outcomes

NAN has complimented the event and research trip programme with the bursary scheme that is funded largely by an award from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The Go and See and the New Collaboration bursaries are specifically designed in order to directly encourage more focused networking with more tangible outcomes. Digital Art Projects were awarded a Go and See bursary in December 2004 which allowed them to visit the Institute für Neue Medien in Frankfurt, as well as Humboldt University in Berlin in order to have face-to-face dialogue with artists and organisers there to explore possibilities for future collaboration. Their feedback states the direct outcomes from this visit:

"Thanks to the NAN Bursary the whole project in Frankfurt has become a reality. Not only do we have a location and concept for the next field of vision – we also have accommodation, publicity and permanent technical support. A further exciting development that we could not have anticipated was the artist residency programme and this was a direct result of my visit there and will extend the activities of our group."

Aaron McCloskey an artist based in Edinburgh and member of TotalKunst remarks on his Go and See Bursary that:

“I got a NAN bursary to go to Berlin to research and develop an event-as-exhibition, ‘Transit Station’. I applied for the bursary to increase my networking possibilities. Nothing is better than face-to-face meeting and seeing the actual event, and taking part in its future production. I needed to get to Berlin and the bursary money made that possible... As a result of being involved in NAN, it’s taken networking for me to a new level. I’ve co-curated ‘Transit Station’, a 24-hour non-stop, high energy event-as-exhibition, in Ocean Terminal, Leith. The exhibition will go to Krakow, Poland. The bursary has allowed me to establish new links and new partnerships in my own practice, as well as bringing other artists on board. It has provided some sustainability in programming because often with these things there’s not a follow up feature, and it has expanded the way that the group [TotalKunst] works.”

These particular examples show direct, as well as more immediately sustainable outcomes that have been achieved through relatively small financial investment: £500. Whilst some Go and See bursary applicants have applied for the maximum award (currently £500) as part-funding towards a project, the majority of applicants to date have used the NAN bursary as the sole accounted source of income for the trip, or project. As Stephen Beddoe, Programme Manager of Artquest and advisory group member points out:

“NAN gets money easily and quickly to good practitioners who are doing interesting, value-for-money projects. You can’t underestimate how much five hundred quid can be stretched by a group of artists. It’s incredible.”

Part of the reason why artists are able to propose a trip abroad to Germany, Estonia, or Spain, is largely thanks to the boom in cheap fares. In addition, artists’ lateral thinking, and experience of working on very tight budgets means that they try to get as much as they can for a small sum of money. In this sense, they offer extremely good value for money from the funder’s point of view, but importantly, the fact that the artist can access this money quickly and relatively easily means that they can respond to ideas and contacts. The result is that the artist gains a funded trip abroad, or to another part of the country, but also receives investment in, and encouragement of, the development of their practice and work. In addition, it opens up future projects, collaborations and networks for the reciprocating artists’ groups and spaces that the NAN bursary recipient visits.

Dissemination and links with a-n

One of the main resources that NAN relies upon from a-n is the dissemination of past, current and future events through *a-n Magazine* and www.a-n.co.uk. Whilst this has the advantage of a ready-made catchment group, many advisory group members who have been interviewed as part of this review have remarked that this may limit the potential demographic make up of NAN’s participants. Emilia Telese, Artists’ Networks Coordinator remarks that:

“What I’ve noticed is that with very few exceptions, geographically NAN has had an impact on the same proportions of artists that make up a-n’s UK subscriber base: clusters of artists involved in NAN, either applying to bursaries or attending events, have coincided with the same clusters that historically have made up a-n subscribers. I don’t know what the best route is but I think definitely we should have some way of creating awareness of the NAN initiative in other ways rather than just on a-n. I go to lots of other events as well as a-n and NAN events, and if people are not familiar with *a-n Magazine* they don’t really know about NAN. Diffusion of knowledge is important as NAN aims to benefit artists whatever their location and career stage.”

However, Guyan Porter, remarks of his experience as Artists’ events coordinator in Scotland that:

“NAN is advertised through *a-n Magazine* but it’s also being advertised through artists’ networks so there’s a word-of-mouth aspect. I think email is one of the key things. What we do is we connect up with artists who have their own small networks. So information gets shared that way, and it’s a kind of snowballing effect. So it is actually a network of networks.”

In this sense, a-n acts as a solid base in which to advertise and disseminate NAN’s activities, but this is being continually added to through a word-of-mouth economy of information and recommendation, which in turn feeds back to a-n as an organisation. The participants and organisers of NAN do not only operate in an a-n, or NAN world, although as Janie Nicoll noted in ‘Nan Veteran’ she, like a minority of others are “NAN veterans”,¹¹ they have many connections to other organisations, individuals and platforms. They are ambassadors, as well as disseminators, of NAN. Kwong Lee, Director of Castlefield Gallery and NAN advisory group member points out that this is a reciprocal exchange:

“Our main concern at Castlefield Gallery is to support artists in various and appropriate ways, and one of the ways is to get connected with other artists to encourage critical debate. There are quite a few artists’ groups here in the North West [of England] that perhaps have known about the NAN scheme through us, so I think that has enforced the idea that we are all part of a national network of artists. Through my involvement in NAN, I’ve met up with people from places like Nottingham, Cardiff and Bristol, centres that I may not have known so much about otherwise. So it’s helped me to understand the national picture of artist-led activities, groups and networks. I think that is very important because if I’m facilitating or programming something at Castlefield, other people and groups spring to mind. We can either employ people in that capacity or ask for people’s advice, share information, promote what they do, and in turn people promote what we do. So it’s that exchange mechanism that goes on through the networks. It makes us, at Castlefield, more outward looking, as well with trying to develop local initiatives.”

As Lee points out, it is this ‘exchange mechanism’ that is at the heart of networking and it is important, for the life and health of NAN that they maintain a two-way exchange and as cited earlier, Capra’s notion of ‘feedback loops’.

There are obvious financial, as well as social, advantages of using an existing, extremely strong and large network such as a-n as the main dissemination and public platform for NAN. However, it means that in terms of critical debate, peer review and dissemination, it is preaching to the converted. Perhaps the wider issues about what, why and how NAN does what it does, and how this is effective, need to be debated in wider forums, for example through writing in other publications and through meetings and conferences in the UK and abroad. This has begun to happen with a-n’s presentation at the N-Ten annual networking conference in Chicago in March 2005¹² and Emilia Telese’s paper for the Sensi/able Spaces conference in Reykjavik in June 2006¹³. These appearances begin to make a valuable contribution to the debate of networking and, in particular artists’ networking, through presenting evidence of NAN’s action-based research, as well as beginning to place NAN in a wider context of current networking and professional art practice. The strength of NAN, both as the initial pilot-stage project and then in the

current early years of its development as an idea and programme, mean that it is 'live' research which is trying and testing new ways of working with artists. Telese points out that:

"NAN is not just a research body it also does things at a grass-roots level. There are so many pieces of research about networks, and I think that sometimes the main beneficiaries tend to be only those who make and commission the research. Pure research projects can be a big buzz when they happen but then what do they change in terms of artists' lives and practices?"

It is important that the research element of NAN is through action. This forms the following circular activity [Fig 5].

This simple model is central to the whole of NAN's approach and can be applied across all of its activities, whether in the development of NAN as a project, or at an individual level of artists' and artists' groups' bursaries. Similarly, a circular model can be applied to the way that NAN's use of funds is ploughed back into artists' work (and practice), and creates a further economy and funding stream for artists through the employment of artists in NAN organisation and projects. Almost without exception, the coordinators, advisory group members and administrative support at a-n are practising artists. This is obviously significant, in terms of skills-base, knowledge and understanding of artists' particular concerns, but also means that as professionals, they are being employed for these skills and, importantly, being paid for them, reinforcing acknowledgement of the multifaceted nature of artist activity and practice. Flexibility of working locations and patterns are also recognised through the Artists' Networks Coordinator and Artists' events coordinator in Scotland roles both being carried out remotely (Emilia Telese is based in South East England and Guyan Porter in Glasgow) through internet remote access and file-sharing networks, as well as conference calling. Whilst this has obvious advantages for the individuals involved, such as convenience and flexibility of workplace, it also means that organisationally, NAN is not tied to any one geographical area.

In addition, the relatively small proportion of central organisation is maintained through working in partnership with artist-led groups and organisations on specific projects; thereby, using existing venues, resources and knowledge, as well as ploughing money back directly to artists. Juliana Capes remarks that:

"...the [NAN] money hasn't been siphoned away and given to people to sit and think. I have tried my hardest to make sure the money goes to artists and artist-run spaces."

She goes on to say that:

"Some events that are available to artists are taken from business conference models and I don't think that is necessarily always relevant... I don't think artists need to be put up in a hotel for a weekend away from everybody, given lots of tea and coffee and food and spoken at... that money's a lot better spent on taking [artists] to Berlin for a weekend and seeing lots of galleries and meeting artists and networking there."

Therefore, as Capes points out, what NAN is doing – and this falls in line with a-n's approach as a whole – is to recognise artists as professionals, but not necessarily through a strict business model which is not necessarily appropriate to apply to artists.

JW

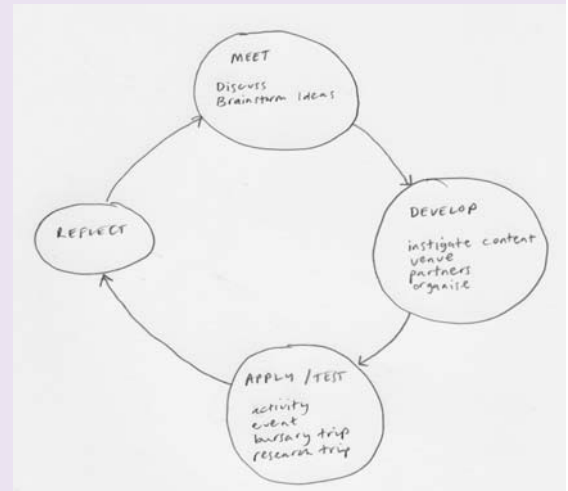


Fig 5 Action research model of NAN activities. Diagram: Jane Watt

Notes

- 1 a-n (2004) *Networking artists' networks: strategic approaches to artists' coordination and collective action. Report on research and pilot programmes 02-04*, Newcastle: a-n The Artists Information Company.
- 2 iSociety (2003) *You don't know me but... Social Capital and Social Software*, London: iSociety, pp20-21.
- 3 Out of the 54 Go and See bursaries to date, 20 have submitted the final reports necessary to secure the last stage of payment. Most of the bursary recipients from the 1st and 2nd rounds submitted reports, but this has tailed off since the 3rd round.
- 4 See 'Bursary Outcomes' for examples.
- 5 These figures are based on registered attendees at NAN events, research trips and bursary records. Individuals who attended more than one event are therefore counted at each event etc. However, evidence from Scotland and UK event organisers Emilia Telese and Guyan Porter testifies that most events attract new attendees. These numbers do not include the number of individuals at the Sideshow event, NAN-NANA in Nottingham in April 2006 as these figures were not available at time of print.
- 6 Dr Perri 6, 'Your friendship networks', Helen McCarthy, Paul Miller and Paul Skidmore (eds) (2004) *Network Logic: who governs in an interconnected world?* London: DEMOS, p132.
- 7 According to published Key Facts about a-n, £320,000 was raised in a-n subscriptions in 2004/05. £220,000 was returned to artists involved in a-n work in 2004/05 through employment, freelance contracts, commissions, fees as speakers and writers. See www.an.co.uk/an_docs/284129.pdf for more details. Current readership of *a-n Magazine* stands at 32,000.
- 8 One comment was that: "people have been nice and anxious not to offend". See 'Critical Space' report published in *a-n Magazine*, June 2005.
- 9 Karen Stephenson (2004) 'Towards a theory of government', Helen McCarthy, Paul Miller and Paul Skidmore (eds) (2004) *Network Logic: who governs in an interconnected world?* London: DEMOS, p40.
- 10 SAC funding cannot be used by NAN to give out bursaries or awards as this is perceived by SAC to double up with their own award funding schemes.
- 11 Janie Nicoll 'NAN Veteran', *a-n Magazine*, March 2006.
- 12 See 'Networking Beyond the Arts', *a-n Magazine*, May 2005 and www.Nten.org for more details.
- 13 See www.sparten.com for details.

About NAN

NAN: Networking Artists' Networks

a-n The Artists Information Company has been proactive since 2001 in researching, championing and supporting artists' networking, as a key element of their practical and professional development. a-n's research in 2002 identified that "78% of UK artists surveyed recognised the value of networking and saw it as a vital aspect of progressing their careers".¹

In developing the NAN (Networking artists' networks) initiative, a-n's intention has been to create an infrastructure and communications mechanism for visual artists across the UK that supports their professional activities and practices, enabling them to make meaningful contributions to the development and understanding of contemporary visual arts within national and international arenas.

NAN's mission is to provide a 'place' for UK artists that supports and enhances artists' networks and interest groups and by doing so:

- enables artists to feel part of a profession
- generates and supports artists' professional exchange in the UK and internationally
- provides a focus for the development of artists' collaborative projects
- raises awareness of the value of artists in society.

NAN has been researched and developed since 2003 by artists' advisory groups in England and Scotland, that was drawn together to form a UK NAN advisory group in 2004. From the outset, artists have identified the initiative's infrastructure and programme. The core programme now includes:

- Events and activities developed in collaboration with artists' networks and groups across the UK.
- Peer assessed bursaries to support research, professional review and development of collaborations in practice.
- Mapping and networking UK and international artists' initiatives to increase their visibility and highlight their value.
- Presentations and seminars at UK and international conferences, at artists' events and within HE professional practice courses on the value and impact of artists' networking.
- NAN publications and reports that provide evidence on the impact of artists' networking through writing by artists concerned.

About the bursaries

NAN bursary strands are Go and See (offered since 2004), Artists' new collaborations (first awards in 2006) and Re-View (first awards in 2006, the latter two strands enabled by a three-year grant from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation).

Go and See – designed to support exchange between artists' groups and networks, in the UK or elsewhere, in order to explore new projects and provide a focus for critical exchange.

Eligibility: Artists' groups and networks with an 'open' approach to new members. Exclusions: individual artists, applications for production, training or mentoring.

Awards up to £500, bursary fund £11,000 in 2006, £10,000 in 2007.

Artists' new collaborations – to enable two or more professional artists (or other professional collaborator) to spend time together to explore notions and issues around collaborative working and research the development of a specific project.

Eligibility: Artists with an existing interest in collaborative working who are permanently based in the UK. This bursary may be used for research time towards a larger grant application such as Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts. Exclusions: Students undertaking an undergraduate course; artists within twenty-four months of graduation; artists who have received a substantial research bursary or award from another source in the last twelve months. Awards between £1,000-£2,000 to buy the artists' time, at their chosen rate, to explore a collaborative project, including incidental travel or other expenses, bursary fund £11,000 in 2006, £11,000 in 2007.

RE-view – designed to support artist-to-artist or curatorial critique and professional development at strategic points in artists' careers, providing opportunities to take stock, and feed the development of future work.

Eligibility: Emerging and mid-career visual artists proactively involved in an artists' network(s) or collective activities, who are permanently based in the UK. Exclusions: students undertaking an undergraduate course, artists within twenty-four months of graduation, artists who have completed a mentoring scheme (or similar) in the previous twelve months; artists who have received a NAN Go and see bursary in the previous twelve months. Awards of £1,000 to enable an artist to contract a series of discussion/critique sessions, either all with the same designated artist, curator, adviser or other expert of their choice, or each with a different artist, curator, adviser or other expert of their choice, bursary fund £7,000 in 2006, £10,000 in 2007.

At the heart of NAN is an ethos of allowing creative thinking and openness to new approaches for artists to meet, exchange and develop experiences, information, ideas and action. NAN is not a membership body. It works in collaboration with artists' networks and organisations that support artists' professional development including Artquest, ALIAS, New Work Network, Perthshire Visual Arts Forum and SCAN.

NAN has monthly coverage in *a-n Magazine* including listings of groups and networks, reports on events and announcements of bursary recipients. Publications and background to the NAN initiative is available on www.a-n.co.uk > Networking.

NAN's development as a UK-wide initiative has been enabled through a combination of Arts Council England revenue funding and earned income streams at a-n The Artists Information Company, where artists form the company's major stakeholder group, contributing some £340K annually through subscriptions to a-n. During 2003-2006, the programme in Scotland was supported by Scottish Arts Council and the programme North East England by the European Union (through the CSDI programme). The bursary programme is supported Esmée Fairbairn Foundation 2005-2008; in 2005/06 Northern Rock Foundation supported a feasibility study into Artists' Day, a core element in NAN's aim of raising awareness of the value of artists and their practice to society.

Note

¹ *Networking the networks*, a-n The Artists' Information Company, April 2002 and *Strengthening the artists' infrastructure: strategies and mechanisms*, commissioned from a-n by Scottish Arts Council, August 2002.

Timeline

NAN development highlights

2006	July	<i>Impact of networking</i> published Artists' research trip: Dublin	
	June	Artists' research trip High Tides and Low Lights: North West of England	
	April	Artists' event NAN-NANA, Nottingham, with Stand Assembly and Reactor	
	March	<i>Reflections on networking</i> published Artists' research trip: Scarborough Artists' event 60° North, Shetland, with Veer North	
	Feb	Re-view and Artist's new collaborations bursaries launched	
	Jan	Artists' event Art and Technology Stirling	
	2005	Dec	Artists' event Import/Export, Newcastle upon Tyne
Oct		Artists' event New Contexts, Glasgow Lucy Newman-Cleeve appointed to do Artists' day feasibility study Guyan Porter succeeds Juliana Capes as Networks Coordinator Scotland	
Sept		Go and see bursaries awarded to seven artists' groups. UK artists' advisory group devises framework for new bursary streams Jane Watt appointed to review the impact and potential development for NAN	
July		Esmée Fairbairn Foundation awards three-year funding to artists' bursary programme Artists' research trip: Berlin, North East England and Scotland artists	
June		Go and see bursaries awarded to six artists' groups	
May		Artists' event Close Proximity, Newbury, organised with SCAN.	
April		Scottish Arts Council awards project funding for artists' events and visits	
Mar		Go and see bursaries awarded to nine artists' groups Artists' event Critical Space, Norwich, partnership with Making Art Work Artists' research trip: Manchester, North East England and Scotland artists	
Jan		Artists' event Edinburgh/Glasgow, with Totalkunst and Something Haptic	
2004		Dec	Go and see bursaries awarded to ten artists' groups
		Nov	Artists' event Quo Vadis, Cardiff and Bristol, organised Chris Brown (g39), Louise Short (Station)
		Oct	Artists' research trip: Liverpool Biennial, North East England and Scotland artists
		Sept	UK advisory group commences quarterly meetings schedule Go and see bursaries awarded to four artists' groups
		July	Artists' research trip: Glasgow, North East England and Scotland artists
	May	Brighton-based Emilia Telese appointed as Artists' Networks Coordinator	
	March	UK NAN launch event Amorphous Combustion, New Lanark, Scotland, organised by Jason E Bowman Artists' event Dundee, with Generator	
	Jan	Artists' event Cove Park, Scotland Artists' event Aberdeen, with Limousine Bull	
2003	Nov	NAN Scotland: pilot artists' events, coordinated by Juliana Capes	
	Aug	First UK NAN Development Group meeting	
	July	First NAN Scotland Advisory Group meeting	
	April	Scottish Arts Council awards project funding for pilot events and consultation	
	March	Artists' event Self Assembly, Manchester with invited UK and European artists organised by Paul Stone and Jason E Bowman in partnership with Castlefield Gallery, supported by Artquest and Scottish Arts Council	
2002	Oct	North East England pilot project begins including debates, advice, consultation	
	Aug	Strengthening the artist's infrastructure: Strategies and mechanisms, commissioned from a-n by Scottish Arts Council	
	April	Networking the Networks, commissioned from a-n by Northern Arts	

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Related reading on www.a-n.co.uk > Networking

NAN publications:

Specially commissioned article sets around themes and outcomes of NAN events:

- Amorphous Combustion** | June 2004 | Presentations by Stewart Noble, Professor Dennis Tourish, and Heidi Campbell. Discussions by John Beagles, Michelle Cotton, Gair Dunlop, and Luke Fowler.
- Quo vadis** | February 2005 | Texts by: Chris Brown and Louise Short, Carolyn Black, Philip Babot, Paul Glinkowski and Sarah Jane Pell.
- Close proximity** | September 2005 | Texts by Jonathan Swain, David Thomas, Polly Carter, David Cotterrell, Helen Sloan, Poet Markus Lloyd and Emily Collins.
- Import/export** | February 2006 | Texts by Catherine Bertola and Emilia Telese, Samuel Dowd and Hayley Skipper, Elaine Speight, Janie Nicoll, Isabella Streffen and Gillian McIver.

NAN reports:

- Transformation in South Africa** | April 2006 | Susannah Silver
- Paying respects to Mickey Mouse** | April 2006 | Yuen Fong Ling
- Sixty degrees north** | May 2006 | Emilia Telese and Roxane Permar
- Shaping artists' spaces** | May 2006 | Emilia Telese
- What is 'networking' anyway?** | June 2006 | Tristan Hensing
- Cross-pollination** | June 2006 | pollengroup
- Art & Technology** | March 2006 | Dan Miller
- New contexts** | December 2005 | Anna Gray and Polly Verity
- Have NAN, will travel** | October 2005 | S Mark Gubb
- Approaching Berlin** | August 2005 | Miranda Whall and Graham Dolphin
- Glasgow weekend** | September 2004 | Alison Unsworth and David Stamp
- Networker** | July 2003 | S Mark Gubb



Collections:

Collaborative relationships

Edited by Rohini Malik Okon, alongside her introductory essay, this contains interview-based articles first published in a-n Magazine between 2003-5, with contributors including Libby Anson in conversation with Juan delGado, Giles Sutherland on the relationship between Keiko Mukaide and Edinburgh School of Art, Rohini herself in conversation with Faisal Abdu'Allah on his work with The Agency Contemporary, Edith-Marie Pasquier talking to Gilane Tawadros and Alia Syed about working together, Hilary Williams talking to Mah Rana, and Bruce Haines' profile of the partnership between Johannes Phokela and Gasworks.

Shifting practice

Edited by John Beagles and Paul Stone, this takes the artist-led initiative as a starting point for commentary and analysis of the outcomes and issues. Includes writing by Ruth Caxton on LOT, Outpost, Static and Workplace, Deborah Jackson on Glasgowbased Circus Circus, Susannah Thompson on critical engagement, Springhill Institute's Karin Kihlberg and Reuben Henry on Stockholm's artist-led scene and Peter Suchin on artist-led spaces in London's East End.

Ten two zero zero five

Edited by Deborah Smith, this is an exploration of modes for the dissemination for contemporary practice. Essays by William Davies on innovation in communications, Maria Fusco on artists' books, Adam Sutherland on art and contemporary music, Sally O'Reilly on performativity, Sacha Craddock on art in the public domain and Rob Wilson on art and architecture.

Beyond the UK

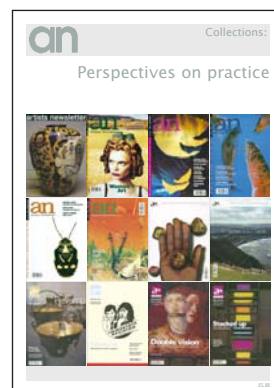
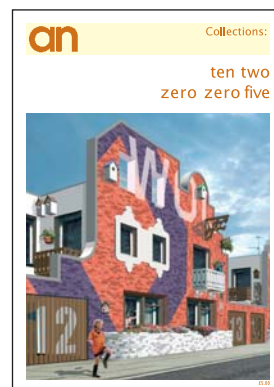
Edited by Chris Brown, this addresses the intentions and impacts of artists' work outside their home territory and notions of being an 'international artist'. Includes an interview with Neeta Madahar, Graham Parker on the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003, Alan Rogers on being in Italy, Graham Taylor on living in Southern Africa, Jen Southern and Jen Hamilton on a collaboration in Canada, Joanne Lee's profile of Flasch, and Paul Glinkowski on the experiences of John Keane and Frauke Eigen.

Perspectives on practice

Edited by Tom Burtonwood, this survey of writings spanning six years illustrates the impact a-n has had as a vehicle for foregrounding developments in artists' practice and strategies. Includes texts by Nina Edge, Susan Jones, Susannah Silver, John Kippin, Malcolm Miles, Brian McAvera, Mike Stubbs, Rosie Millard, David Briers, Sunil Gupta, Simon Herbert, Simon Grennan, Godfrey Worsdale, David Butler, Jenny Saville, Francis McKee, Grayson Perry and David Macintosh.

Reflections on networking

Edited by Jane Watt, the first half of her review of NAN is a collation of material presenting artists' first-hand experiences of NAN. Includes articles by artists involved in NAN events, trips and bursaries: Mark Gubb; Chris Brown and Louise Short; Jane Watt; Susannah Silver; Miranda Whall; Graham Dolphin; and Alison Unsworth. Vox Box interviews with: Kwong Lee, Stephen Beddoe, Emilia Telese, Michael Forbes, Caroline Wright, Juliana Capes, Guyan Porter, Hilary Thorn, Marjolaine Ryley, Catherine Bertola, Tony Charles, Aaron McCloskey, Christine Duff and Jonathan Waring.



a-n Collections are £5 each or £25 for the set of six, available from:

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