

Reflections on networking





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NAN: Networking artists' networks

a-n The Artists Information Company has been proactive over many years in researching, championing and supporting networking as a key component of artists' practical and professional practice. Early research identified that "78% of surveyed UK artists recognised the professional value of networking and saw it as a vital aspect of progressing their careers".¹ Informed by this, the Networking Artists' Networks initiative was developed in 2003 by artists' advisory groups in England and Scotland who identified the initiative's infrastructure and programme. The core programme includes:

- events and activities developed in collaboration with artists' networks and groups across the UK
- peer-assessed bursaries to support research, review and new projects
- mapping and networking UK artists' initiatives to increase their visibility and highlight their value.

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 and ideas. NAN is not a membership body, nor does it award production grants for individual artists. Ongoing coverage of the programmes and outcomes of the NAN initiative is maintained month-by-month in *a-n Magazine*. NAN publications, research and artists' networks listings are on www.a-n.co.uk > Networking

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Cover image: Artists on the NAN research trip to Berlin, July 2005. Photo: Amy Sales. See 'Approaching Berlin', page 16.

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

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Introduction

In September 2005 I was commissioned to undertake a review of the Networking Artists' Networks (NAN) initiative. A review, by its very nature, suggests contextualising and analysing achievements, shortfalls and presenting possible future developments. These elements all come under my remit as reviewer, but the first main outcome of this research – this publication – reflects a-n The Artists Information Company's continuing primary concern, as stated in my brief, to "create meaningful platforms for artists' voices to be heard and for their practices to be recognised as an important aspect of social change".

Therefore, the following pages do not represent an analysis of NAN (this analysis will be published in July 2006 as part of a-n Collections). Rather, they include a collection of reflections by some of the artists who have experienced NAN, whether it is through taking part in, or organising, an event, a research trip or a bursary. This material has been generated from a variety of sources and is laid out to encourage reading, and thinking, between different experiences and opinions. Mark Gubb's 'Networker' and 'Have NAN will travel', Chris Brown and Louise Short's texts 'About Quo Vadis', Paul Glinkowski's 'Surfing the Bore', Miranda Whall and Graham Dolphin's reflections on 'Approaching Berlin', Alison Unsworth's 'Glasgow Weekender' and my own 'Critical Space' are from a-n's published archive. Susannah Silver has written a new essay which catches up with several artists whom she met as Chair of the NAN Cove Park event in 2004. In addition to this written text, and in my view, most importantly, there are also a series of 'Vox Boxes' which are edited verbatim extracts of interviews that researcher Charlie Fox and I have conducted with artists who have been involved, or taken part, in NAN activities.

I hope that these texts give a more immediate voice to the variety of experiences and reflections that NAN has stimulated.

All of the people who have come into contact with NAN, or have been involved in NAN activities, are artists and know artists. This grass-roots, first-hand experience of how different artists operate and sustain their practice is recognised as NAN's unique characteristic by many including Wendy Law, Scottish Arts Council and Tim Eastop, Arts Council England. NAN is not an organisation. As Emilia Telese (Artists' Networks Coordinator) says, it is "an initiative" or, as Catherine Bertola (Artists' Networks – North East) describes it, "a catalyst". The light touch approach, which so many organisations aspire to but do not necessarily achieve, is largely sustained through a word which has been mentioned to me time and time again over the period of my research: trust. This five letter word could be an evaluator's (and indeed a funder's) worst nightmare: where is the evidence? where are the assessment forms and reports? where are the accounts? However, as I hope this publication will begin to show (and this is only a collection of the material that I have amassed), there is qualitative as well as quantitative evidence that the impact of NAN is continuing to grow and that the need and desire for it to respond and develop through artist-led networking projects is very much in evidence.

Jane Watt

Editor

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. This publication would not have been possible without the generosity of time and experiences of Stephen Beddoe, Catherine Bertola, Juliana Capes, Polly Carter, Tony Charles, Paul Clark, Christine Duff, Graham Dolphin, Michael Forbes, Kwong Lee, Aaron McCloskey, Guyan Porter, 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 Networking Artists' Networks.

Networker

Mark Gubb discusses how to make friends and influence people, highlighting some of the words and phrases that are sometimes associated with networking and that were used by Jason E Bowman, Chair of the Self Assembly conference in March 2003.

...autonomy, infiltration, collusion, covertness, multiple listening, 'inter', governance, failure, sharing, structuring, control and management, disguise, trickery, lies and honesty, deception, intrigue, curiosity, collaboration, parallel economies, malicious behaviour, anxiety, 'the cover story', personality, flexibility, targeting...

Use the word 'networking' and to many people yuppies, power dressing and business breakfasts spring to mind. The voracious 'get-what-I-want-then-I'm-all-right' type of networking that epitomised the 1980s is unpleasant, and often counterproductive, but to get anywhere in your field, networking on some level is required.

For networking, the dictionary definition of "an extended group of people with similar interests or concerns who interact and remain in informal contact for mutual assistance or support", sits more comfortably with structures we all have and use; and it becomes apparent that it's a necessary and integral part of artistic practice.

From attending conferences and going to exhibition openings, to having a drink in the pub with friends, all are ultimately part of building networks and support structures and are often how and why working relationships and opportunities come about. For all the slide banks and databases that exist actually and e-phemerally, talking to people about what you do is always going to be the primary way of getting your work about.

The opportunity to engage with someone face to face can't be underestimated. Whilst it is a chance to 'sell' your work and activities to a potentially interested party it also enables a dialogue to be entered into as opposed to the perusal of a faceless CV, slide sheet or video that can only represent any practitioner to a point. Exhibition previews perform this role providing an informal opportunity to meet a range of like-minded people. Three minutes to make yourself sound interesting, a great skill if you can do it. A name attached to a face is a lot more interesting than a name on its own.

...agendas, acts of faith, slippage, containment, unlocking, non-hierarchical, selection, motivation, translation, the mother-ship, committee, the ideological, absorption, the satellite, the cycle/re-cycle, metaphor as an economy, generational and intergeneration, the platform, strata, the directional, the lateral, sustainability...

In March this year at Self Assembly, an a-n organised conference dealing with the nature of networking, artist, academic and high class escort, Marie-Anne Mancio kicked off the event with her own peculiar brand of speed dating – speed networking. Referencing her activities as an escort in which she has three minutes to 'sell' herself to a potential client, every conference attendee had three minutes in which to introduce themselves – and find out about – another attendee.

This form of social engagement (and isn't that all 'networking' is?) is no different from any other. Any interesting dialogue is an exchange and, presumably, for this to be a worthwhile and fruitful activity it should be interesting for all parties

involved. Whilst both are potentially coming to the exchange offering different things, this offering of potential to the other is key. As with any other exchange of this type, lies, flattery and vanity are invariably used on one level or another.

Despite the obvious benefits of getting out there and meeting people, the romantic ideal of an artist struggling in their studio waiting to be discovered has still not been completely put to rest. On this, artist Matt Golden has to say,

"You can't be an artist in isolation, it doesn't work like that. I went for one approach, the get the studio, the naïve approach, worked everyday in the studio and rummaged in skips to find materials and then realised that this wasn't the way forward. If I was a tutor at college I would say to my students as they walked out the door, go and work for a gallery, work for the biggest institution in your town and work at an artist-led space and if there isn't one set one up."

What Golden raises here is the importance of interacting with people, with reference to, potentially, two different types of network: the formal network of the established institution, by its nature, can appear fairly impenetrable but, by engaging from the inside artists can benefit from the knowledge and experience of established artists and arts professionals. This, in itself, is a two-way street. Many artists spend their time chasing curators, when it frequently proves to be an introduction from a like-minded artist that is the key to opening certain doors.

Talking at the Self Assembly event, curator, Deborah Kermode, said that in programming and delivering Ikon Gallery's off-site programme she adopts the philosophy that 'artists know artists'. When working with an artist, she often asks them to suggest and introduce her to the work of artists they know and like, directly tapping in to the extended artist networks that an individual could only hope to build.

Kermode's is a job that she claims is entirely based on networking. Curating is about tapping in to a community, whether within, or outside of, a traditional arts community. Often the artists she works with may not be involved in the necessary local networks to source materials or people for the creation of a work. This is where she comes in, often having to engage and persuade people who may have no particular interest in art.

Also highlighted in Golden's statement is the less formal network of the artist-run space that by its very nature creates a community. These may be regional, national or both but the steady flow of artists who are both exhibiting and helping to run such spaces form a network of their own. Recognising a shared philosophy, they often interact with each other on a national and, sometimes, international scale increasing their personal and professional networks yet further.

...crisis of identity, usage, exploitation, colonialism, flattery and vanity, sustainability, capacity, legitimacy, the 'co-', description/interpretation, communal, the stereotype, public/private, the courtyard, collective intention, intentionality, extension, the dysfunctional, land, common facilities, decision making processes, affiliation...



It seems too clinical and, almost, anti-art to draw comparisons with the business world but businesses market themselves and their ideas, they wouldn't get work without it, and so why should artists be any different?

One group who very much use networks to their own ends is WochenKlausur. In brief, the aims of its projects are to identify and then find a solution for social and economic problems through the use of art. It describes its projects as 'interventions' in society and, as artists, frequently have to engage with non-arts networks, such as political and social support networks. Understanding the nature of these networks has helped them on more than one occasion.

When having no luck in trying to convince a city council to hire a doctor for a mobile medical unit for the homeless, the group convinced a high profile publication to phone the relevant councillor in the course of 'researching' the project for an article. Not wanting to be seen as the reason why such a worthy project failed, the council offered to pay for the doctor. Whilst some would say this is manipulative – quite obviously but for a worthwhile end – it is also a great example of using the networks you have around you.

...critical mass, circulation, identification/desire, geographies, invention, the wheel, structure, the leader, shared responsibility, cultivation, competition, energy, velocity, the learning curve, process, internal/external, public/private, inclusion/exclusion, implosion, explosion, undermining, dynamics, subtlety, sovereign bodies, the orbit, 'tapping' in, affiliation, initiation, 'on behalf of...'

Discussing the organic, fluid nature of networks, artist Karen Guthrie said:

"Successful networks are generated and sustained from within, by the people whose interests they serve. They may be extremely transient, they may last decades – and neither timescale nor number of 'nodes' dictates their success. I am encouraged that the funding and facilitating agencies in the UK recognise this, but their strategy should be directly funding and supporting individuals and artist-led groups to organise themselves."

This would appear to be key: the ability to organise ourselves. Our culture is built on this ability to organise and sustain networks, often completely irrespective of financial support. From music to football to any of the other multitudes of cultural networks, a common, though not necessarily shared, interest is what motivates people and the point to be made here is that you don't have to agree with someone to share an interest with them. Wouldn't it be boring if this were in fact the case?

One example of this is The Community Project in East Sussex: a massive undertaking involving bringing individuals together with the shared desire to 'move outside the anonymity of urban life'. This started as the dream of three couples who met through a networks of friends of friends, then the national press ultimately reached its goal when twenty households moved

Below, right and over page:
Self Assembly, Castlefield
Gallery, Manchester, 2003.
Photos: Jon Traynor



VB

Kwong Lee is an artist and the Director of Castlefield Gallery, Manchester and a member of the NAN advisory group.

At the initial artist networking meetings, we talked about the value of artists meeting their peers and discussing issues of the day, discussing how they can forward their careers, how to contribute to the art scene, which are all very self-developmental qualities. The idea of the network itself was a vehicle for us to enable artists to contribute to the art scene debate, but being very true to their own practice as well. So our ideas about NAN were about a concerted effort to come together and to learn from each other, and there was a certain energy about it.

I remember at one of the earliest networking artists' networks meetings there were about twenty or thirty people from different generations of artist-led initiatives in the room. I had thought that I'd been around a while, that I'd met quite a lot of people already. But 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.

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.

I suppose, in some ways, as artists, we still can be seen to exist within this artist-led bubble, which is all very good, but in a self-development way, strategically it can also be a lobbying platform. But I suppose the next stage is to ask: how does this quite contained sector communicate, and have a dialogue, with the other art sectors? The impact outside of the artist community is always a harder one to crack in terms of how the artists' networks infiltrate the rest of the artistic communities.

www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk

Networker continued



into a combination of a converted hospital and four new-build houses – the idea being not to recreate the hippy ideal of a commune but ‘a close knit neighbourhood’.

What we have to consider is what networking actually is and the purpose it serves. This can't be glibly reduced to a neat two-line answer as it is more of a philosophy and behaviour than an out and out activity. Wrapped up in the inherently incestuous art world, it is easy to forget that this practice is an activity happening the world over, in many walks of life. As we can see from these, understanding and inspiration can also be drawn.

Ultimately, networking is something that just happens. Unless you were to never leave the house, the places you go, either socially or professionally, will invariably throw up networking situations. By its very nature it's something we engage in both consciously and subconsciously and whilst we are wrapped up in our own agendas, we can't forget that we may be on someone else's. But just to turn everything on its head, a passing thought from, artist, Leo Fitzmaurice: “Is it better networking, not to talk to someone?”

S Mark Gubb is an artist living in Nottingham.
www.smarkgubb.com

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Self Assembly was initiated by Paul Stone and Jason E Bowman for a-n, hosted by Castlefield Gallery and supported by Artquest and Scottish Arts Council.

VB

Stephen Beddoe is Programme Manager of Artquest, London and a member of the NAN advisory group.

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.

At Artquest, like NAN, the way we do things is light touch, it's the best way to do things: you either trust people or you don't. If artists have submitted a good application to us, we trust them as professionals – and know that they won't just go to Torremolinos for five days! So as much as possible we direct support out towards the practitioners, not to administration.

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. The NAN bursaries take artists abroad and international connections and networking is of great benefit to artists. In my experience in London, artists who are emerging practitioners tend to get their first opportunities in group shows, not in London, but in the regions and abroad, such as in Scandinavian and Eastern European countries.

www.artquest.org.uk

About Quo Vadis:

Chris Brown of g39 and Louise Short of Station reflect on the motives, intentions and themes of Quo Vadis, a NAN event that they co-devised.

A tale of two cities

After an advisory group meeting for NAN in September 2003, Louise Short and I sloped off to an Italian café opposite the Arts Council England offices in London, for a requisite post-meeting chat. The meeting had finished with an invitation to members of the group to propose events of their own devising that would realise the new NAN initiative. We had an impromptu brainstorm around proposing a joint event between our respective artist-run organisations, Station in Bristol and g39 in Cardiff, which would involve inspiring talks and activities, cross-border travelling, and a lot of good simple food and drink.

After discussing and troubleshooting the nature of artists' networking with the NAN group for just over a year, it was enormously satisfying to put into practice what we had chewed over at length. Indeed, it's only through artist groups and organisations undertaking events such as Quo Vadis that gives the NAN initiative an identity or tangibility.

I used to consider the ability to network as being a vulgar and inappropriate aspect of a non-commercial art practice: networking is for 'suits' who delight in career climbing in an aggressive and anti-social manner; it's an unpleasant form of engagement reserved for the corporate sector. But the crucial difference here is that artists' networking relies on mutual support, not self-driven improvement, and without this competitive element, meeting new people in your profession becomes less an irksome chore and more a sociable occasion.

Although Quo Vadis was intended to provoke discussion about cross-border artistic activity, we devised the event to be largely experiential so that delegates were encouraged to respond first-hand to the notion of a mobile practice. So the intensive two-day event was launched in Cardiff with tea and cake (a specially commissioned floral tribute NAN cake to the organisers' grandmothers), and ended in Bristol with a cave tour, with several cross-border journeys in between by ferry, train and on foot.

We did not want to showcase the two cities to the delegates in a 'friendly match' of one-upmanship, but to demonstrate the possibilities in collaborating with one's neighbour. Station and g39 are similar organisations and have a good working relationship, but have not collaborated before for various reasons – among them were public funding restrictions, perceived distance, limited staff time. In NAN there was the incentive and means to put that right, and following the success of Quo Vadis perhaps future collaborations between us will now seem less impossible.

Chris Brown is a Cardiff-based artist and co-founder of g39.

The art of collegueship

In its early stages, the NAN initiative invited artists from each region in the UK to discuss how an artists' network might best be developed. Over a period of two years NAN has striven to improve on and facilitate meetings and events by and for artists who have an active interest in networking. It soon became apparent that artists most valued opportunities to meet each other with the view to explore current approaches to artists' initiatives. The form of these encounters is of vital importance. In order to get the most from the events we prioritised time and programmed an intensive weekend in Cardiff and Bristol for fifty artists. We were also determined to make the event free so we worked hard to gain funding for travel, food and accommodation. We also ensured that wherever possible we paid artists (as caterers, entertainers and hosts).

The Quo Vadis (translated from the Latin 'Where are you going?') weekend was aimed at artists with an interest in cross-city exchange. The event aimed to encourage networking activity between artists and artist groups in Wales and the South West of England, and beyond. The format has been devised to raise a number of issues relevant to artists and the effectiveness of their networks. Despite their proximity and similarity, the two cities are divided on a number of levels: by the physical boundary of the River Severn, the geographical border between Wales and England, differing social histories, and by a less tangible (but no less real) artistic boundary which attracts limited cultural traffic in either direction. While this is particularly relevant to these two cities it also raises several interesting discussion points about the ways in which different cities and artists groups operate throughout the UK.

In terms of evaluating the event we were aware that box-ticking questionnaires were not the answer. After the weekend I distributed my mobile number to the delegates and waited a few days before prompting a text response. My mobile was bombarded with messages about the value of direct and focussed contact between artists. Strangely it seems to be something of a rarity to have time for such necessary interaction. Whether the artists from the two regions will extend their activities further afield will be a question of time, but the opportunity to at least examine in depth each other's situations as artists and facilitators proved to be inspiring enough to warrant deep reflection on the art of collegueship.

Louise Short is a Bristol-based artist and director of Station.

First published: www.a-n.co.uk February 2005



A specially arranged visit to Redcliffe caves, Bristol, during Quo Vadis.

Surfing the bore

Paul Glinkowski reflects on the circumstances around cultural barriers and how they can be breached or transformed in response to Quo Vadis.

Like the tidal bore that surges up the Severn estuary which separates Wales from South West England, conversations and ideas during the Quo Vadis event eddied and swirled unpredictably as the weekend unfolded. A relative stranger in 'them thar parts', I reflect here, with interest and imagination rather than with any presumed authority, on the thoughts that have lingered longest. All the quotations used are based on contributions or references made by participants of Quo Vadis.

"The sea was so broad, the fame of the Bore of the tide so formidable, the wind made the water so rough, and which was worse, the boats to carry over both man and horse appeared so very mean, that in short none of us cared to venture: so we came back..." Such was Daniel Defoe's explanation – in a travelogue describing a *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* in the 1720s – of his failure to attempt a crossing of the river Severn from Gloucestershire to South Wales. Even in the eighteenth century then, artists could find it difficult to take the cross-border plunge.

Nearly three centuries later, the premise underlying Quo Vadis, that the cultural exchange between the two pre-eminent cities in south west Britain (Bristol and Cardiff) is unequal to their status and proximity, can hardly be explained either by the perils of the separating tides, or by the inadequacies of one of Europe's most dysfunctional transport systems. What, then, are the circumstances which lead to or explain the apparent presence of cultural barriers? And how can such barriers be breached, to turn what might formerly have been a boundary to be avoided or ignored, into an inviting threshold to be crossed?

"The only reason people came over to Bristol from Cardiff was for shopping, the zoo and IKEA. But now Cardiff has its own IKEA..."
Michael Manson, Bristol-based local historian.

The pursuit of commerce, exoticism and style have provided reason, it would seem, for the denizens of Cardiff and the South Wales valleys to be tempted over the Bristol Channel. But are there deep-rooted local cultural allegiances and, perhaps, long-standing suspicions or fears which set quite shallow limits to the cross-Channel engagement between the two localities?

"Two lands connected by a bridge so wide
And all the fares collected... at the English side."
Max Boyce, latter-day bard, comedian and Welshman, commenting on the unilateral toll system which operates on the major road bridge across the Severn.

Built on the proceeds of slavery, the prosperity of Bristol (and its promiscuous international trading links) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries set it apart from the Welsh capital. Did this lead, on the Welsh side of the border, to the beginnings of a resentment and distrust of the wealth, power and cosmopolitanism of its most proximate English city? In Bristol, were the seeds being sown of an attitude of

self-confident superiority which tended to regard the independent culture growing up in Wales as parochial and inward looking?

"Swansea is further away from Cardiff, and more expensive to get to than Bristol, but more traffic and collaboration happens there."
Chris Brown, artist (Welsh-based, English-born).

Current patterns of cultural exchange between England and Wales are, perhaps, defined and determined by historically entrenched ways of thinking and behaving which have become embedded in the structures of the respective societies. These structural determinants tend to override other kinds of influence. In the case of artist-led space g39, for example, the cultural roots of exchange continue to be defined, primarily, by the national boundaries of the host country despite the influences brought into the organisation by artists with roots in England. The respective national funding and policy-making agencies which support cultural activity help to perpetuate this. I worked for seven years in the national office at Arts Council England and never spoke to, let alone met, a representative of the Arts Council of Wales. We are all part of a political entity (dare we say 'nation?') called the UK, yet it is not generally possible to get funding to tour cultural work across the borders of the UK's constituent countries. You're part of us, we love you really, but don't expect to profit from our taxes...

"We *are* sheep shaggers, but we do show our work both locally and internationally; there's not a problem of parochialism here."
Philip Babot, artist (Welsh-born and based).

Does to be rooted (or rutted?) mean your horizons are necessarily limited or fixed? Clearly not. There is much cultural activity in Wales, particularly in the areas of live art and multi-media collaboration, which feeds on and contributes to international dialogue and exchange. The studios and project space tactileBOSCH, for example – an artist-led organisation which operates, without core funding, out of a residential suburb of Cardiff – has been highly successful in developing international projects, even with relatively out-of-the-way centres of production such as Sao Paulo and Havana.

Part of the reason for this may lie in the eagerness of a small country, with a recently devolved national parliament, to establish its credentials as a forward-thinking international player (Look at us! We too have artists who do weird and wonderful things!). Why invest in sending your artists through the tunnel or over the bridge to Bristol or London (from where they might not find their way back) when you can fund them to blow their artistic trumpet for Wales on a world stage?

In England, the issue is, perhaps, different (yet in some ways the same). The major challenge on this side of the border is to set up regional centres of culture from which international exchange can take place; to build the more robust foundations that are still lacking to enable a new artist-led federalism to flourish.

Boat trip from Spike Island to Station during Quo Vadis.



"Thinking of doing a project with LA is crazy. We should be more realistic about getting local things going that are more sustainable. Artist-led initiatives will come and go but, collectively, they will create a kind of artists' economy that will continue longer term."
Julian Claxton, Bristol-based artist and member of the Clean Collective that is planning a project with Los Angeles artists' groups in autumn 2005.

London has for long enough exercised a disproportionate influence on the cultural and economic life of Britain. Now, fuelled by the coffers of the National Lottery, it seems that the time has arrived for our cultural assets to be spread further and wider. In a New Labour landscape of RDAs (Regional Development Agencies) and devolved legislatures, each fragment of the national architecture must have its cultural keystones. And keystones only hold up when they have an infrastructure to support them. New buildings aren't enough; every Baltic and Lowry Centre needs its local scene of artists. Is it any coincidence that the Centre for Visual Arts in Cardiff came (September 1999) and went (November 2000) before g39, tactileBOSCH, Trace, et al had made an impact on the scene?

"You need artists who retain links to the locality but bring in people from outside: a home-grown scene but with continual external input and reach. You must have both internal and external focus and connections to allow a city-based scene to grow and develop."
Kwong Lee, artist and co-director of Castlefield Gallery, Manchester.

Some local scenes are getting there. Manchester is generally regarded as the English city outside of London which has travelled the furthest in recent years. It's partly a generational thing. The young and thrusting artists graduating (and staying) in Manchester today have an older generation to look up to (and rebel against), who in turn have another generation to look up to (and rebel against). Three generations and you're approaching a mature situation. The godfathers (and mothers) of the Manchester scene have built up their global networks but still look upon, and return to, Manchester as their cultural heimat. They don't need to go to London to feel they have made it.

"You need to be prepared to leave existing networks and to constantly reposition yourself within the arts and wider social infrastructure. It's not good enough to stay still; you must strive to position yourself at the top and on the inside."
Gordon Dalton, artist and infiltrator.

What though, of the cultural nomads whose allegiances and orientations instinctively shift as the tides of opportunity and energy ebb and flow; wandering minstrels, perhaps, of the cyber age? They too have their place in the story. And the boundaries they percolate are not just geographic. Increasingly, artists and artist-led organisations are positioning themselves as players in the development of localities. They are becoming savvy about the value to urban (and post-agricultural rural) planners of what is called 'culture-led regeneration'. They are on the doorstep of the corridors of power. Their task, if they make it across the threshold, should be to promote what curator Charles Esche calls "The condition of thinking differently or of imagining things other than they are".

If strangers are just friends that you haven't yet met, then maybe barriers are just bores that you haven't yet surfed.

Paul Glinkowski is a visual arts writer, researcher and consultant.

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Quo Vadis took place in Bristol and Cardiff, November 2004.
See www.a-n.co.uk>Networking for more on Quo Vadis.

VB

Emilia Telese is an artist in Brighton and Artists' Networks Coordinator at a-n.

I see NAN mainly as an initiative that helps artists to get out of their cultural bubble that they sometimes work in. I'm very aware as an artist, and also working with artists over a period of six years as an advisor, that a lot of artists' problems stem from not being aware of what's out there, not engaging with other artists and practices. 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'. So NAN tries to be a very democratic process. I think that artists don't see NAN as the same thing as larger organisations like the arts council, and that's really important.

In my experience, when artists meet at NAN events it enhances their awareness of what other artists are doing and other models of professional, or good practice. The NAN bursaries allow artists to travel and to see for themselves how other people operate.

The events are organised in collaboration with other partners, mostly artists' organisations. My role is as mediator between a-n and the people that work on the NAN events. I make sure that what they do is in tune with the spirit of the NAN initiative. I support them with any help that we can offer in terms of advice, staff, marketing, issuing contracts and payment.

NAN is not just a research body it also does things at a grass-roots level. People are investing in NAN, including artists because a lot of a-n's revenue comes from artists' subscriptions – the first beneficiaries of what NAN does has to be artists. 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?

Critical Space

Jane Watt reports on this event.

Professional art practice has become a mantra, and industry, for a large number of artists and arts managers/organisers over the last decade. As any reader of *a-n Magazine* will know, this has stemmed from a recognition by artists, arts officers and funding bodies that artists, at all stages of their careers, need support in terms of learning new (and refining old) skills, having someone with whom they can sound out an idea for a project, help in finding out what grants are available in their area, how to write a successful proposal, or plan the direction of their career. Artists are not just on the receiving end of this support; many, including myself, take an active role as advisors, trainers, or mentors. The list of schemes and opportunities is long; just look at a-n's website.

However, over the last couple of years, there has been a noticeable shift in awareness of what artists might need to develop their practice: critical reflection and peer discussion that is focused on the very subject of the artist's professional career – their work.¹ At the risk of stating the obvious, it is after all the work that should, and does, matter. Whilst it is undeniable that a well presented application may help your chances of being short-listed, any curator, commissioning agent, or arts officer worth their salt will easily see through a slick, all-singing, all-dancing presentation of slight work. A number of years ago a public art agent confessed to me that he is turned off by hyper-slick artists' applications that often concentrate more on the presentation, rather than the development of the ideas and work.

With these ideas in mind, Making Art Work, a professional practice scheme for Suffolk-based artists, teamed up with Networking Artists' Networks (NAN) to organise Critical Space, a residential weekend for twelve artists from Suffolk and twelve artists from elsewhere in the UK to engage in critical discussions about their work and practice. John Beagles, the lead artist facilitator, announced at the beginning of the weekend that he hoped it would be: "Stimulating, challenging and disturbing – maybe!"

This raises a key point about Critical Space that Jayne Knight and Candida Wingate from Making Art Work, and Emilia Telese, NAN's coordinator, were deeply conscious of when they planned the weekend; the need to create a supportive atmosphere in which artists, many of whom will be meeting for the first time and who are unfamiliar with each others' works, personalities and vulnerabilities, can speak openly, frankly and critically. The first point that was made at the welcome and introductory session on the Friday afternoon was that the weekend was 'closed'.² The presentation session that followed aimed to allow each of the artists and facilitators to gain a taste of each others' practice through a five-minute slot in which they each introduced themselves and their work. Although it had a marathon feel to it, the atmosphere was thankfully bereft of muscle flexing and competition.

The overarching themes of the weekend were to encourage artists to think about: the context of their work, both in terms of how their work is placed in relation to their peers, and their audience; how to expand and reflect on their artistic processes, in terms of practice and

philosophy; how to reflect critically on their work, and how to stimulate external critical debate. This was a weekend of talk. The only props that were available were what documentation material the artists had brought with them – slides, digital images and DVDs. This, together with the format and location of the weekend, the University of East Anglia Campus, gave the project a slightly academic atmosphere of a series of three-hour seminar sessions in which groups of four to six artists sat and discussed issues ranging from 'Unprofessional Practice' and 'The Importance of Doubt', to 'Spatio-Temporal Relations'.

The artists were all, understandably, hungry for critical discussion about their work. Nathalie de Briey's workshops directly addressed this. Each artist showed the other three artists in the group a selection of their work. The artists looking at the work discussed it in terms of how they, as viewers, interpreted it, the materials that were used, what ideas they thought it was addressing, etc. There then followed a series of questions such as: "What are you trying to say in your work?" "Why are you doing this?" "Who is your audience?" "Why are you using those materials?" This then shifted to questions about change and exercises that could be used in order to move the artist's thinking and practice on from the familiar, to challenge habits and assumptions. de Briey quoted Clement Greenberg's assertion that "If you want your work to change, change your habits".

A comment that was to recur time and time again over the weekend was: "It's very difficult to get real feedback about work. At exhibitions people usually just say it's 'nice'." There was also a strong feeling of "being starved of interaction with others about the critical nature of my work". Mark Beever's workshop 'Not What You Think of; Sketching as the Pushing of Ideas' attempted to stimulate discussion about what types of strategies artists could use to "challenge or upset the known, to move from our comfort zone". These included encouraging lateral thinking through a wide range of attitudes to sketching in the broadest sense of the word. The importance of feedback and dialogue about work – both in its developmental and finished state – was reiterated time and time again. However, the difficulties of politeness and niceness recurred, not just as problems at an exhibition opening, but also at Critical Space: "People have been nice and anxious not to offend."

So how do you generate an environment in which the participants can be sufficiently critical? Several artists stressed the need for rules and a rigid structure within a critical debate so that there is an arena for honesty and deeper reflection that goes beyond a gut reaction, and begins to dig deeper. Suggestions that were offered included a 'locked room' situation where focused discussions took place for at least a two-hour period. Another example that two of the facilitator artists Peg Rawes and Fiona Candlin gave was that they used to meet regularly with another colleague for several weeks in order to read and discuss the writings and ideas of Kant. They knew that they would find it difficult to do this individually, and so created their own structure and support group that was a type of "mental gym". These methods

involved either already formulated trusts – through friendship – or the development of trust through shared experience. This includes a commitment and generosity of time and consideration that Mark Beever sees as vital in that you need to "be generous with your criticism, but be critical".

The range of practices of the artists involved in the weekend was huge – ceramics, bronze casting, painting, installation and live art. It is therefore hardly surprising that there was diversity of opinion about the role of the artist and consequently the role of the audience. These issues were touched upon in several of the workshops. Many artists began by asserting that they were not aware of whom their audience was, or that their relationship to whatever audience they might have was not important. However, after analysing the place in which they positioned their work – whether in a commercial gallery, or in an agricultural college where a residency was being undertaken – a number of artists began to reconsider that maybe their audience was not a mass, faceless one, and they were in fact making specific decisions about who their audience might be and how they might be part of the work. For the outside this might not seem earth shattering, but for the individuals concerned, it marks a key shift and awareness that is fairly radical in the context of their practice.

Critical Space attempted to provide a space for reflection about present and future practice. The structure of the weekend was such that each artist experienced three different group workshops, generally with different facilitators and artists each time. This allowed a range of interactions, but also, at times, meant that focus on specific debate on individual's work did not always occur. At times discussions lapsed into more general debates and perhaps the need for more sustained and focused periods of time on individual work and ideas needed more emphasis. However, what Critical Space did do was to allow space and time for a diverse group of artists to meet, share and contrast their experiences and consider the importance of self and peer reflection on work and processes. This will certainly prompt a number of individuals to consider the place of critical reflection in their practice.³ However, perhaps more significantly, the weekend provided a testing ground for professional practice networks like Making Art Work and NAN to develop what I believe to be a much needed attempt to facilitate critical awareness and debate that is grounded within professional practice programmes. The weekend may well have marked a pendulum swing that will begin to subvert, dig deeper, and question not only the role of the artist, but also the role of professional practice.

Jane Watt

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Critical Space took place at the University of East Anglia, Norwich in March 2005 and was organised in partnership with Making Art Work.

¹ Peer critique schemes have been set up and supported by Space at the Whitechapel Gallery, as well as Artquest in London, and a number of self-initiated groups around the country.

² As an invited 'fly-on-the-wall' this means that any quotations in this article by artists involved in the weekend (except the artist facilitators) are not attributed.

³ In Making Art Work's feedback forms a number of artists commented that it was too soon to assess the potential impact that the three days would have on their practice.

VB

Michael Forbes is an artist in Nottingham and a member of Nottingham Studios who attended Critical Space.

I read *a-n Magazine* and some of the articles on NAN. I was interested in the Critical Space event in the terms of critical feedback especially for independent artists. You don't generally get that critical debate nowadays when you're working on your own: showing work to colleagues then discussing the work; discussing ideas about the work. That was quite challenging. It made me question the ideas I had in my head; to verbalise to another person can be difficult.

I don't think it's affected my work much, because projects always happen. Obviously the event I attended was good in terms of how I verbalise it to a wider audience. It gave me the confidence to talk about my work. I feel I was lacking in that and I wasn't particularly confident. I didn't feel that comfortable talking about my work. Sure, I did it at art college but I graduated about seven or eight years ago. Since then I haven't had the opportunity or space to do that. Attending Critical Space challenged me. So if I was to present my work to an audience again it's made me think about the way I'd do that.

I am involved in other networks in the East Midlands such as the Capital Network. All the capital building projects being funded by Arts Council England, they've got together and commissioned a consultant – Noelle Goldman-Jacob. She brought us together five times over the year. The idea was that we'd all learn from each other because we're at different stages of our projects. Our studio project is at a relatively early stage of the process so we're learning from other projects and their mistakes.

The NAN event was very much artist focused whereas Capital Network was more building and art management focused. Artists obviously have to talk to each other and there was a diverse range of ages at Critical Space. There is a danger that art projects and events pander to the younger artist, but it seems like NAN is age diverse. Still it has to maintain that and be conscious of that.

www.arttart99.com

Creative connections

Susannah Silver catches up with artists involved in one of the first NAN Scotland event at Cove Park, and finds out about networking in rural areas.

It was Harold Becker who first coined the phrase 'artworld' in 1982 in his sociological analysis of art as a sector of activity.¹ Although it is usually understood to mean the metro-centric elite network of galleries, museums, dealers and artists, Becker's model actually says there are many 'artworlds', intersecting each other, each with their own particular conventions of practice and operating as a network of collective activity and co-operation.

Any artworld consists of a network of three overlapping elements: resources, practitioners, appreciators. If one element is weak, then the network will not necessarily sustain the practitioners within it. On a micro level, one's own practice is a mini-artworld. What kind of resources can you access? What opportunities do you have to present your work? Do you have a peer group? Can you meet artists face-to-face to exchange ideas? If your answers are in the positive, I'll hazard a guess you are living in a city. Although the internet has transformed communication, for a variety of socio-economic and geographic reasons, artists in rural areas find it more difficult to make connections with other likeminded practitioners, to access professional development opportunities and training and to ensure that they achieve visibility and can promote their work – the main elements required for a viable artworld.

For rurally-based artists, finding ways to meet other artists face-to-face to develop professional possibilities requires effort, travel and organisation. In Scotland, there have been a number of pragmatic strategies since 2004 such as the Networking Artists Networks (NAN) events at Cove Park, Dundee and Aberdeen, the NAN bursaries for artists to travel to events, and the success of the Perth Visual Arts Forum (PVAF). These have started a domino effect of creative connections which are already flowering into projects and ought to contribute to a greater awareness of artists in rural areas.

The one-day meeting at Cove Park in February 2004, an arts residency centre near Helensburgh in West Scotland, enabled artists in the area to

1 Becker, Harold (1982) *Art Worlds*, University of California Press. For his latest definition, refer to www.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/CCT794/Sources/Becker-HypertextFiction-ArtWorlds.html

All images: Perthshire Visual Arts Forum, June 2005. Photo: Garance Warburton.



meet together informally to present work and to debate issues relevant to practice in remote settings: how to promote work, ways of accessing funding and resources, the relationship between rural artworlds and a metro-centric 'artworld'. Digital textile artist Alison F Bell, based on the island of Arran, said of her experience of presenting at Cove Park:

"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."

From a direct connection made at Cove Park, Bell has created a working relationship with Angus Digital Media Centre, exhibiting and holding workshops for children and for a local arts group who have subsequently been funded for their first exhibition of digitally printed textiles.

Su Grierson, another artist who presented at Cove Park, has made central to her practice opportunities for meeting other artists. On completing her Fine Art degree, Grierson took a sanguine view from her base in rural Perthshire of the options for practice and has turned what might seem impossible conditions for a contemporary practice into positive opportunities. As part of her commitment to creating opportunities for exchange between herself and other local and international artists, Grierson has been instrumental in organising the first Perthshire Visual Arts Forum event (PVAF1).

This event came about, itself, through an opportune meeting between Grierson and Kirsty Duncan, then recently appointed as Perth and Kinross arts development manager who wanted to make contact with artists in the area. Rather than carrying out conventional market research, they decided to set up an event that would combine interesting speakers, input from arts agencies and a way of connecting artists with each other through their work. The format of PVAF1 enabled delegates to see presentations by non-urban artists' groups from Shetland, Fife, Denmark and Japan. Participants also had the opportunity to

Photo: Yoshiko Maruyama.



talk to representatives of various organisations such as a-n and the Cultural Enterprise office at 'trade-stands' and to meet the groups making presentations. Equally importantly, several hours were set aside after a convivial picnic lunch for participants to meet together and talk informally whilst looking at each other's portfolios and documentation.

However, it is not as simple as it might seem to bring artists together given that there are very few funding schemes available to enable individual artists to travel internationally and to come to Scotland. Thanks to a NAN bursary, artists from the newly formed Veer North artists' organisation in Shetland were able to travel 320 miles to present at PVAF1. Presentations from international artists were made possible as artists from Denmark and Japan were already in Scotland as part of Grierson's ongoing project *LookLook*.² As Grierson says, 'It's difficult to make connections without an opportunity'.

Attended by 150 artists mainly from Fife and Tayside, PVAF1 received an enthusiastic reception from all the participants and has already been a catalyst for further action. The example of Fife Arts Coop's partnership with Wasps studio providers³ in the purchase and renovation of the Spire, Newburgh in Fife has stimulated interest in rurally-based studios from Perthshire-based artists. Fife Arts Coop also expanded its database through personal contacts with other Fife-based artists' groups at the event. Wasps themselves report that there is now a much stronger argument for setting up studio provision in Perthshire, as previously the level of demand from artists in Perthshire had not been known. Neighbouring Angus Council has awarded a small grant to assess the demand from local artists for professional development opportunities.

Following on from the success of PVAF1, Grierson is currently involved in organising PVAF2, to be held in Birnam Institute, Dunkeld, in early June 2006. This event will run over two days and will include professional development workshops.

2 *LookLook* was set up in 2005 with Diana Maclean and brings together artists from countries such as Lithuania, Estonia, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Iceland and Japan to make connections with other artists in Scotland.

3 Wasps Artists' Studios (Workshop and Artists' Studio Provision Scotland Ltd) providing studio space to over 650 artists each year at sixteen locations throughout Scotland.

Photo: Yoshiko Maruyama.



VB

Caroline Wright is an artist in Suffolk. She attended the Critical Space and Close Proximity events.

I attended two NAN events – Critical Space in Norwich and Close Proximity at Greenham Common. I got involved in networking with other artists in an effort to create wider links geographically both with other artists and for potential to show work. 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.

NAN allows artists to meet, visit places and each other. I am member of an artists advisory group and a studio group. These groups are good up to a point, but as they are fairly rooted in my rural area there are some limitations to the potential for a wide-ranging outlook. Networks give a feeling of belonging and for those in rural areas, dispel a sense of isolation, providing a framework for information exchange. However, a network is not necessarily restricted to artists only and can be an interesting and productive mix of many arts-minded individuals. It is also not tied to a particular framework or constitution or place and can be open in its approach.

The best thing NAN does is it brings people together and, of course, offers the opportunity for investigative trips. It acts as a broker for practitioners to find critics/audiences for their work. NAN doesn't get involved with funding for individual artwork and should never do so as this would impair the overall impartiality of the scheme.

www.linesofcommunication.co.uk

Creative connections continued



Photo: Garance Warburton.

Veer North in partnership with NAN is planning a networking event for island-based artists on Shetland. Roxane Permar, co-founder of Veer North, Shetland and international installation artist enthuses:

"Because everyone from Shetland felt the PVAF event was so good, it has encouraged me to pursue an event in Shetland... We are looking at supporting either ten or fifteen artists to come up." Kristi Cumming, another member of Veer North, agrees:

"I think the most beneficial thing from the event was the fact that Veer North are now getting underway a NAN event in Shetland. It's unlikely this would have happened without that initial funding for five members to attend the PVAF event."

For the artists involved, the best thing to come out of the recent events in Scotland such as PVAF, the NAN event at Cove Park and networking meetings at Generator in Dundee and Limousine Bull in Aberdeen, has been the opportunity for face-to-face contact with other artists and agencies. Kristi Cumming says:

"The NAN bursary provided Veer North the opportunity to meet other artists at PVAF and make links with some interesting people, and lovely packed lunches too! As an individual I met some familiar faces and talked to others whose work I found absorbing – no actual opportunities arose but I think with Veer North giving the slide

show the group members didn't have much time to actively network as individuals – rather, individuals approached us."

As member of Fife Arts Coop Tracey McConnell-Wood says:

"Meeting up face-to-face is key – because communication afterwards is easy with email and the internet. You need to get a feel for the other person and that you are thinking on the same wavelength."

These events have proved to be useful models for promoting networking amongst rural artists. Each of these events has provided the conditions for productive networking, for artists to meet face-to-face, to spend time informally together, and to learn and exchange professional information about strategies for creative practice. Connections made at these events are already showing results. Importantly, these events, organised by artists' groups for other artists, function at a grassroots level and respond to immediate professional issues. They take place thanks to hard work often given voluntarily by motivated individuals and groups, the value of which is not reflected in the amounts received from public funding. Funding needs to be made available from arts funding bodies, local councils and charities to enable artists to travel nationally and internationally to make connections and particularly to bring international artists to this country. The price of an airfare and bed and breakfast is surely a very economical way of stimulating creative projects, ideas and relationships in a viable rural artworld.

Susannah Silver is an artist in Angus, North East Scotland. She curates a digital media gallery at Angus Digital Media Centre and belongs to Limousine Bull Artists' Collective, Aberdeen. Chair of the NAN event at Cove Park, she is also a non-executive Director of a-n The Artists Information Company.



Photo: Garance Warburton.

Contact:

Su Grierson is an artist based in Perthshire, President of Scottish Artists Union and Chair of Perthshire Visual Arts Forum.
www.haresbreath.com/sugrierson

Perthshire Visual Arts Forum
www.pvaf.org.uk
info@pvaf.org.uk

Veer North Artists
www.veernorth.org.uk

Fife Arts Cooperative
www.fifeartscooperative.co.uk

Wasps Artists' Studios
www.waspsstudios.org.uk

VB

Guyan Porter is an artist in Glasgow. He is a member of the NAN advisory group and became Artists' events coordinator in Scotland in autumn 2005.

Being involved in NAN as an artist, an advisory group member and now as the Networks Coordinator for Scotland, has definitely influenced my practice, mostly through the number of people that I've met and spoken to. I've often met people that I later end up doing projects with, like commissions, or exhibitions. Again, just recently at the NAN Import/Export event in Newcastle, I met people I want to work with. When I went on the Berlin research trip, it came at a point where I really needed fresh energy and inspiration, so seeing so many shows and new work with a new group of artists was vital for me.

I think NAN is constantly re-affirming my ideas about what I'm doing, or changing my ideas about what I'm doing. I think it's really vital. It's easy for artists to live in a vacuum, and I think that's unhealthy. So everything we're doing where we're getting out, meeting people, speaking about what we're doing in a focused way is really crucial. And that's different from just meeting your artist mates in the pub. In that situation you're not necessarily going to be discussing developing new projects, or challenging your views.

It is challenging being put in that situation where you are thrown together with forty people that you don't know; you have to get on with it and you have to talk about what you do. But getting out there and being thrown into different situations is good for your confidence. The more you have these focussed opportunities, the more meeting people becomes a normal part of your practice.

As coordinator of the NAN Scotland projects, I've got a list now of over twelve NAN events that I feel all need to happen. They've all come through speaking with people right across the UK who want to organise or be involved in events. At the moment we've got money for three of them.

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 their 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.

VB

Juliana Capes is an artist in Edinburgh and was Artists' events coordinator in Scotland from 2003 until autumn 2005 when she handed over to Guyan Porter.

When I started working on the NAN Scotland pilot project, I didn't want to just come in and make some events that completely went over whatever was going on in Scotland at the time. I wanted the events to come from the people we'd been talking with already. So I talked with artists at Limousine Bull in Aberdeen and Generator in Dundee, and asked them what they wanted to do. I tried to be quite hands off, and say: "what are your ideas? what would you really like to do? what does your membership want to do? There's some money, there's some time for organisation". I still coordinated the events, but it was important that they were their projects and were generated from their interests.

I hope NAN has been transparent: the 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 the artists and artist-run spaces. I think people needed to see that, and I think a lot of the trust that has been

built up in 2004/5 when Catherine Bertola was doing a lot of really interesting research trips to Berlin and Manchester and the events such as Quo Vadis were beginning to take shape. I think all of a sudden the penny dropped as more and more people came to events in Scotland and had great days, they really saw the benefit and started talking to people about NAN. The artists groups that we worked with, like Something Haptic who organised a NAN events in Glasgow in 2005, are very vocal, very networked, very well respected. So NAN has been more successful working with networks and empowering and helping them to do what they do already.

I feel Guyan Porter's approach is going to be a lot more hands-off than mine. He's identifying groups of individuals and giving them advice, and access to the funds to put on events, whereas I was really trying to build things up and doing a lot more work on the ground than I hope Guyan will have to. That's the way the project's growing, now people are aware of what it is. When I handed over to Guyan in October, I passed on about half a dozen enquiries to do projects which is great because it means that he has half a dozen

projects to work on, instead of trying to convince people to do a project.

There is a real desire in NAN to try new things and take risks. So I think NAN should continue taking risks and seeing what works and what doesn't work, not just continuing to do it the way people expect. Some events that are available to artists are taken from business conference models and I don't think that is necessarily always relevant. Maybe they work in some respects but it's a different feel, and artists have different working practices. I don't think artists necessarily 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, even though they might like the experience, and it's nice to give artists the experience that other professions have. But when you think about it, actually, that money's a lot better spent on taking them to Berlin for the weekend and seeing lots of galleries and meeting artists and networking there. So I like the idea that NAN uses and experiments with different models and is moving forward all the time.

www.julianacapes.co.uk

Approaching Berlin

In July 2005 artists from North East England and Scotland spent a weekend “networking on neutral territory” as part of NAN’s research trip programme. Miranda Whall and Graham Dolphin discuss programming and participating in 48 hours and 50 minutes of “letting down barriers”.¹

Six months in Berlin

I have just completed a six-month Arts Council England, North East residency in Berlin. I was given a wonderful studio in the Atelierhaus Mengerzeile in southwest Berlin and a grant of £7,000. I was expected to live and work in the studio but chose to rent my own apartment in beautiful Prenzlauerberg, which is an area in the old east of Berlin.

The residency was designed so that I had two Berlin-based curators Helen Adkins and Heike Dander who worked hard with me to establish connections with eight galleries and curators operating in Berlin. With their help we located specific galleries and curators I wanted to be introduced to. This model would have been wrapped in gold if a gallery or curator had said “yes we would love to show your work”. I had some very positive feedback but the gallery programmes were all full and of course there is a one-in-a-million chance of anything resulting from this kind of introduction. I had difficulty locating a gallery or curator who I felt would be particularly sympathetic to my work. On the whole, although this is a generalisation, the work I have seen here generally lacks humour, provocation and poetry, the three prevailing aspects of my work. The experience has been very interesting and positive in that I now have a better understanding of the particular qualities present in my work. These introductions have added to my experience of talking to galleries and there is always the possibility of a direct or indirect result in the future.

Unfortunately there was little infrastructure to the residency – no host or network in place – so it took a while to find the opportunities where I could be introduced to the artist-led scene in Berlin. The Atelierhaus, although inspiring, was, like most studios, fairly unsociable, and so the experience was initially isolating.

It was the opportunity to programme the NAN artists’ research trip to Berlin that really helped to define and change my experience of the art networks operating in Berlin. The event forced me to focus on approaching curators and gallerists to speak at the event. My knowledge of organisations and networks in Berlin has accelerated rapidly over this last month. Being able to offer gallerists and



¹ From the artists’ comments on the research trip to Berlin 1-3 July 2005.

Left and over page: Berlin, 2005. Photos: Amy Sales.

curators an opportunity meant that I met them on a level footing which indirectly resulted in them being interested in my practice. Curators I met directed me towards interesting artists working in Berlin I’d been unable to access prior to programming the event. The event also gave me an excuse to reconnect with artists I had made contact with over the previous six months.

During the residency I made two new video/animations *Ladybirds* and *Nesting*, combining watercolour paintings, video footage and existing book illustrations. This six-month period of intense focus upon my work allowed me to take exciting new directions in my thinking and explore new technical approaches.

I am now interested in working on projects that link North East England and Berlin. I am also working on the first in a series of curatorial projects with two British artists based in Berlin, where we will exhibit work by UK- and Berlin-based artists on the premise of attempting to fill an aesthetic and critical gap that we identify as currently existing in Berlin.

Miranda Whall

VB

Hilary Thorn is an artist in Liverpool and was involved in developing artist-led initiative SPLICE. She organised the Liverpool research trip and has been on the NAN advisory group since 2004.

At the time I had organised a number of artists’ projects but not really anything like the Liverpool research trip. It was really interesting to devise an experience for people visiting Liverpool, to try and work out what I would want to know about if I was visiting the city. As the trip coincided with the 2004 Liverpool Biennial I was trying to give people some access to the debate that existed in Liverpool around the Biennial and the Independents [the Biennial’s ‘official’ fringe],

which, if you weren’t in Liverpool, you probably wouldn’t know very much about.

In hindsight I didn’t really have enough time or resources to programme the talks to the level that I would have liked. I also didn’t have the opportunity to speak to other people that had managed NAN events or trips to get some feedback about the kind of pitfalls to avoid, for example not trying to fit too much in to one day, it is very hard with a big group of people to visit lots of spaces because it takes so long to get anywhere! Emilia Telese has since compiled an information sheet for organising what you need to do and when which helps to alleviate these problems.

I learnt that you need to give yourself enough time to programme appropriately,

try not to do too much, be clear about what you’re trying to achieve and make it relevant to that. Be really focused about it and try to incorporate a way in which dialogue can be generated. The danger is that people go to events and become passive receivers of information because it’s difficult to generate dialogue in large groups. I think there was a feeling that no-one really knew each other and therefore no-one would speak up, so maybe it could be better managed if there were smaller groups of people.

However, I enjoyed the experience and people thought it was interesting; in fact I met someone in Newcastle recently who’d come to it and said he really enjoyed it!

VB

Marjolaine Ryley is an artist in Newcastle. She teaches at Sunderland University and has been on NAN research trips to Manchester and Berlin.

I found out about NAN through a contact and by looking through information in *a-n Magazine*. The NAN research trips enabled me to meet other artists. That affects your practice because it’s always encouraging. Some of the contacts I have made on the trips to Manchester and Berlin have been quite useful, in some ways more for my teaching because there are people who are going to do talks. For example, on the first NAN trip I went on, to Manchester, I met Catherine Bertola who is going to talk at Sunderland University, and Miranda Whall whom I met on the Berlin Trip. I also met Matt Hearn who curated the Shoebox Show, which was a direct outcome.

I wouldn’t say NAN’s specifically affected my practice as such, in a sense that’s fairly well established, but it has been a positive event. It’s hugely useful to make contacts and have those experiences.

I think 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.

One of the things flagged up from going on the Manchester trip, was that we never got to see anybody’s work on the trip. So on the Berlin trip they did decide we’d do a show reel to show everybody’s work. That’s important, otherwise you’re meeting people and you’ve not necessarily got any way of knowing what they do – you’re not necessarily going to know who you’d want to collaborate with, or whether you like their work, or if the standard of the work is good. I was reassured how many committed artists there are and, on the whole, through seeing what people were doing I was quite impressed by the work of the artists who came from the North East region.

NAN offers artistic opportunities, like trips to other locations that you might not go to – to find out about the art scene. That is fantastic. There’s no question about that. The best thing is meeting other artists, making friendships and the ongoing working relationships that emerge from that.

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 is it just about meeting other artists? If that is it, maybe you could do that anywhere, and it would even not need to be about going to see other art and art galleries.

www.re-tittle.com
www.irisphoto.org

VB

Catherine Bertola is Artists’ Networks Coordinator (North East) and was involved in the initial planning meetings for NAN.

I was very aware at the time of the focus group meetings in 2003 of a number of curatorial visits and trips that were being organised and how there were no artists, or very rarely were there any artists, included on those trips, and that they’re a very useful way of making contact with other people in other places. I also thought that artists would be able to make use out of that kind of model, or trip, especially as they often can’t afford to travel purely to meet people and see new places. So I started by looking at cities in Britain that had a very lively and active artist-led community. The idea was to use artists on the ground not necessarily to host, but to help structure the NAN research trips, so we were using their networks and connections to forge a way into their cities for artists from the outside.

The research trips brought together artists from the same region who’d perhaps never met before: it was a space that allowed networking. Actually I think the most beneficial part of the trip was artists from the same region spending time together and getting to know each other. Seeing things in other places was almost peripheral to the benefit of spending quality time with other artists, the conversations and dialogues that came about through that sort of informal shared time.

I think, for me, the research trips that have worked the best are where there has been a focused social element. On the Glasgow trip we had ten artists from Glasgow and ten artists from the North East and we organised a meal for everyone. In hindsight, I think it would have been better to maybe have created more of an opportunity to have an informal meeting before the meal and to have a show reel of work to introduce people’s work into the arena. But I think that the meal worked really well because it was very focused, concentrated, and also quite relaxed. I think it was very successful in terms of creating a dialogue. We used that model again on the Berlin trip, where there were fifteen artists – five from Scotland, ten from the North East, and fifteen artists from Berlin. We had a series of presentations (that time we did have a show reel) and some food. Again, I think that was very successful in terms of containing people in one space and giving them an opportunity to have a dialogue with each other. So I think that’s one of the most important things. The other really important thing is the travelling together, staying together, and having breakfast together – I think it creates a school trip dynamic, a sort of ‘all for one and one for all’ feeling.

On the Liverpool trip, I think the group was almost too big and because of that it lost that kind of dynamic. Just the logistics of it became difficult in terms of getting people from A to B. There were all sorts of problems with transport as well with people arriving late which had an impact on everything. So I think fifteen is the optimum number. I think what we’ve always tried to do is pack as much in as possible, so it’s really intense and really quite hard core. You want to expose people to as much as possible because they’re only there for two days, so it is about trying to saturate people with new places.

Approaching Berlin continued

500 words on my 48 hours, 50 minutes in Berlin with 17 artists

Berlin is huge. Looking at the S-Bahn map on our arrival, making our way around is going to be a daunting prospect. As a group of seventeen artists/curators on this research trip, we have two days to move both geographically and mentally through the city in search of its current artistic centre. Fortunately our host Miranda Whall has packed every one of our 2930 minutes here with seeing, hearing and meeting some of the city's artists, galleries and organisations.

Friday night is spent at two previews: Glue, located in a derelict warehouse, has a revolving programme of weekly exhibitions; and Zentralbeuro, a huge glass fronted space situated in Alexanderplatz. Both spaces are good examples of the non-commercial spaces that Berlin has become known for over the last decade.

Why cheese and cold meats is considered a good idea for breakfast has always baffled me, but the hotel certainly puts on a good spread. Saturday is spent on a whirlwind tour of the commercial galleries in Zimmerstrasse,



Holzmarktstrasse and Mitte. These incredible, perfect white spaces, often hidden in faded, old buildings, remind me of New York's Chelsea galleries. We visit sixteen spaces but it's hard to identify any current trends across their diverse programmes.

Miranda has arranged for some of the galleries to introduce their programmes. All are very open about their position and the current state of Berlin's artworld. A theme soon emerges of a city in economic recession, with lack of support from collectors and crippling unemployment. The nights' presentations from Laura Schleussner (RocketShop), Wulf Walter Boettget (Zentralbeuro), Asim Chughai (Glue), Boris Abel (Abel Neue Kunst) and Rudiger Lange (Loop) with food by Daniel Dembski of Fuschsundgans (strawberry and pear risotto!) expand on these issues.

We are shown an inspiring mix of activities, a small fraction of what has been happening in the city. But it feels like a summary of what has happened, not an ongoing scene.

Abel sounds a note of caution about how the initial spirit of community, of helping one another, is being replaced with a more individually focused, commercial approach. Lange, after working on an incredibly diverse programme over the past decade finishes his talk and the night ironically stating his need to formulate a business plan.

Sunday is a free day with a small group heading to a local flea market. It's reassuring that the British past time of buying worthless tat outdoors is universal. After trawling through strikingly familiar cultural detritus we all meet at KW Gallery, a former margarine factory. Ending the trip looking at the work of Rodney Graham and Edgar Arceneaux, amongst others, in this incredible space brings into sharp relief how important seeing, talking and sharing our experiences around the making and facilitating of art is. This shared experience allows a common bond, strengthened by being placed in an unfamiliar place. I realise the networking that has occurred between the group has been as important as those connections we have made within the city. Thank you to all the speakers, galleries, my fellow travellers and particularly Catherine Bertola and Miranda Whall for indulging me with the time to talk about, and see art in such a vibrant city.

Graham Dolphin

First published: a-n Magazine August 2005



VB

Tony Charles is an artist in Middlesbrough and a member of Platform Arts Limited.

The NAN research trips I took part in were to Glasgow then Liverpool. I'm a director of an artist-led studio group Platform Arts Limited and we are shortly going to expand, so I needed to go and look at other models of studio groups. The research trips provided the model for me to compare our studio with other groups. There were organised discussions that helped me to focus on what we wanted and what we didn't want. So that was very helpful.

The trips have been useful but the results haven't actually gone into practice yet, because we are not due to expand until mid 2006. But I have found them useful in terms of contacts. I can put names to faces and work to artists. You can be inspired indirectly. Sometimes you get inspiration and you don't know you're getting it. It probably feeds in a year or two later. I think NAN brings artists together and in doing so it highlights the existence of artists in various regions. I've discovered where others practice and they know where I am.

I suppose NAN is trying to build up a network but 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 a clique, then they might not want to be in 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.

Glasgow weekender

As part of the NAN initiative, artists from North East England visited Glasgow. Here Alison Unsworth gives an overview of her experience.

Organised group visits for artists have both advantages and limitations. In this case, travelling north with nine other artists from North East England meant benefiting from a prearranged and researched 'presentation' of Glasgow's art world. This entailed a two-day itinerary of visits to galleries, studio groups and artist-run spaces, ranging from The Modern Institute, a commercial gallery, to Mary, Mary, an artist's bedroom transformed into a white exhibition space.

The visit provided a general introduction to the city, which I found beneficial, simply because it increased my awareness and understanding of other artists and organisations in a different city. More specifically, I was interested in two artist-run projects that had recently advertised exhibition and residency opportunities. The visit allowed me to view the spaces and meet the people who ran the projects prior to submitting a proposal, which is a desirable, yet rare, opportunity.

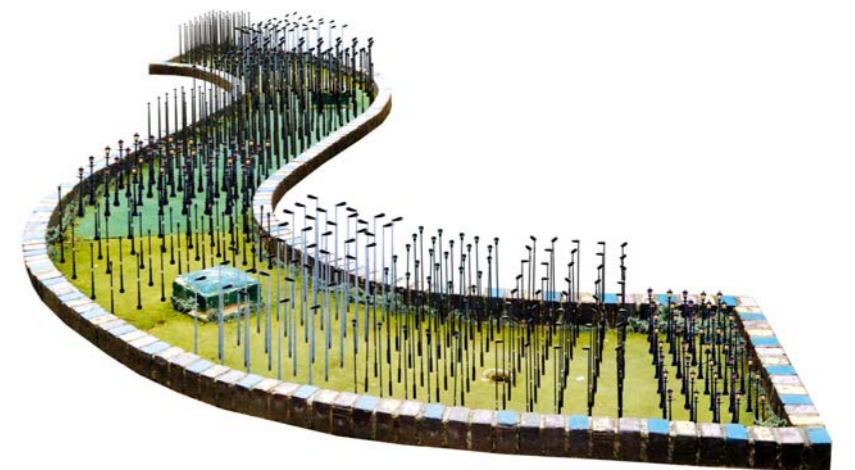
Being amongst a group of artists enabled me to learn more about the venues I was visiting, through the accompanying talks or slide presentations, and in slightly less obvious ways, such as benefiting from the questions asked by other people. Many artists on the trip were interested in organisational models of how artist-led spaces are established, run, and how they survive. This was reflected in the number of questions about the 'nuts and bolts' of how each organisation works, which were met with an openness and willingness to share information. Along with others on the trip, I was struck by the number of organisations that still depend on artists working in a voluntary capacity.

Paying for artists to have dinner, just to get together and talk, was an idea raised at Artists 04, an Arts Council England event about support for individual artists in the North East England region, as artists practising independently can be isolated and don't have access to the professional development budgets of many arts organisations. It felt ironic then, to find myself in this situation just two months later, as ten artists and curators from Glasgow joined the ten artists from Newcastle for dinner. The meal was preceded by three presentations about arts activity in Glasgow which, interestingly, received as many questions from Glasgow-based artists as they did from those based in Newcastle.

Overall, the research trip was a worthwhile and enjoyable experience. Any professional outcomes that might arise will depend on individuals pursuing relevant opportunities that they identified during the visit.

Alison Unsworth is an artist in Newcastle. The Artists' research trip to Glasgow was in July 2004.

First published: a-n Magazine September 2004



Alison Unsworth, Public Park, 2004.

A5 brochure and website produced in response to Clifton Park in Rotherham, south Yorkshire and commissioned by Creative Partnerships Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham. See www.cliftonparkproject.net for more information.

Have NAN, will travel

Mark Gubb takes a look back at the first year of the NAN bursary scheme and the artists groups it has supported, exploring the advantages of knowing that "you are not alone".

The activity that the NAN bursary scheme has funded to date has been a rich and varied stable of activity which provides an interesting insight into the activities of artist run groups in the UK and the networks with which they engage.

Refreshingly low on restrictions around those who can and cannot apply for the bursaries, they provide a level of funding which is quick and easy for groups to tap into and benefit from. The level of vision in the projects that have benefited from the bursaries is reassuringly high and far reaching; with ten of the twenty-five bursaries funding activity to travel abroad to build on or develop relationships with groups as far afield as Tallinn, Estonia. The projects have seen anything from visits to other groups and conferences, to networking over a curry.

Without fail, all of the projects have benefited from prior research. Thanks to the ease with which we can contact people anywhere in the world, networks now very easily extend beyond city, regional, or even national boundaries, allowing for an exchange of many different kinds to happen on a larger scale than previously possible. This has been reflected by the activities undertaken, as most had already begun to develop links and relationships with the organisations they wished to visit, prior to making their application.

Whilst this long-distance communication is facilitated with a greater ease than ever before, there is still nothing to match a face-to-face meeting. The Spaghetti Club went to meet with the collective, Bomba Suicida, in Lisbon. Whilst discussions about working together were already well underway by the time that they went, Tom Marshman said: "There was confusion about

issues surrounding a possible future point of collaboration. We were able to resolve this through a face to face meeting." Following this meeting, they have gone on to gain an agreement of future support from the British Council for their proposed activities.

The bursaries have shown a need and desire for travel and exchange between artists. Whilst this may sound obvious, the financial implications of making a trip solely on the chance that it may lead to something else is a financial risk that many are not in the position to make. These projects have not only reflected that desire, but show that this exchange can and will happen if there is the facility there to do it.

The positive effect of all of these activities helps to re-iterate the need for artists to get out and about; there being a sense that until you get out and about and forge relationships with the world in which you work, things aren't going to start moving where you want them to.

One interesting observation to come through many of the projects was the support these visits provided for the group as a structure, as opposed to the individual. While most artists' groups and organisations are formed through a mutual desire for a support network, who then provides support for the entity that is the group? Trips to talk with like-minded organisations give people a chance to discuss the problems and pitfalls of running and being involved in a group or organisation, and to feel the benefits of the 'you are not alone' ethos in the existence of the group.

Anyone, no matter how established, can benefit from meetings such as these. Leicester Print Workshop, an organisation of some nineteen years standing, visited print workshops in Ireland and

Aaron McCloskey, Transit Station, Berlin, February 2005. NAN bursary supported Aaron McCloskey of TotalKunst to visit Transit Station in Berlin, Germany. Transit Station is organised by Dagmar Glaushitzer-Smith (Berlin) and Charles Ryder (London).



De Tours, performance in Maribor, Slovenia, 2004. Photo: Yolk. Yolk's NAN bursary supported a networking trip to the Re-approaching New Media event in Minsk, Belarus

Wales. As well as new opportunities coming from this in the form of a potential touring show and an exchange between the workshops, gaining insight into how other similar organisations run has led to a fundamental shift in the running of certain aspects of Leicester Print Workshop. They have just introduced a different way of charging for key holder members, saying that "the models of Belfast, Seacourt, Wrexham and Cardiff and the importance of key holders to all workshops was an important benchmark to justify these changes". This has provided greater stability to the workshop whilst allowing more advantages to the key holders.

A similar benefit of the bursaries has been artists within the same organisations getting to spend time with each other. Whilst we may work alongside people on a daily basis, it is unfortunately rare that we get the luxury of an extended period of time with those people. Through taking time out to visit other organisations, people have found that they have had time to discuss things with their colleagues that would never have arisen had they not had the time, or inspiration, to step back from the day-to-day running of things.

It is also interesting to note how the proposed activity of many of the groups shifted in some way between applying for the bursary and undertaking the activity, none more so than Nottingham-based, Stand Assembly. They initially applied for money to go and meet with like-minded groups around the UK, but due to things moving much quicker for the group than initially anticipated, they found themselves in a position where it would no longer have been of maximum benefit to simply go and visit people. Instead, they held NANASAUR, a mini-conference at their studios, where they invited groups from around the UK to meet, socialise and discuss their activities. The bursary was still used for travel but instead it paid for the travel of the other groups to come to Nottingham to participate in the event.

This ability to react and be flexible to gain the most out of a situation is something that has come through in many of the projects and maybe reflects the activity of networks and groups working across the UK today. Yolk attended RAM 7 in Minsk, where they were also invited to make a new performance. For various political reasons the performance never happened. Far from seeing this as any kind of failure they realised that "as a group, perhaps we were not best suited to this type of event. Although we are interested in technology, it is not the main basis of our practice as it appeared to be for many of the artists there. However, this has made us re-address how we define ourselves as a collective and informed how we will decide which artists to work with."



Stand Assembly and its members have recently formed two new initiatives in order to help pursue their aims: NANASAUR and MOOT. NANASAUR was a successful networking mini-conference that took place 23 July 2005 and was funded through the NAN bursary scheme. MOOT is an independently run gallery/project space, that opened in October 2005.

VB

Aaron McCloskey is an artist in Edinburgh and a member of the Forest and TotalKunst. He attended the NAN research trip to Liverpool, and is a NAN bursary recipient.

I heard about NAN through friends and a-n magazine. 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.

Networking helps me to develop my practice, because dealing with an artist-run-space [TotalKunst], there's no set formula. It's a learning curve. Sometimes you feel a bit closed off, but when you go out and see what structures and infrastructures that other people deal with you can exchange information, and hopefully develop and energize your activities and save time in the future.

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 works. We have more confidence with the knowledge we have.

www.transitstation.de
www.theforest.org.uk

Have NAN, will travel continued



Field of Vision, September 2004. Lab Gallery/New York, 960 images by 220 artists collected over the internet and collaged by Digital Art Projects. A NAN bursary supported a trip to Frankfurt, Germany to establish new dialogues and foster collaborations.

The Cumbria Network staged a conference with an express desire to bring together artists working across Cumbria, in an attempt to develop future relationships and to strengthen the sense of community between the artists. Activities such as these reveal a growing sense that people are increasingly happy to be based where they are, no longer feeling the need, or desire, to relocate to cities in search of the yellow brick road. What has changed is that people want to bring the activity to them and build on what they already have, rather than searching for pastures greener all the time.

This was mirrored in the findings of Art in Romney Marsh who visited Lille to meet artists in their studios and live/work spaces. They found "a real sense that there was a life beyond Paris for contemporary arts. Rem Koolhaas, a key architect in the reinvention of Lille, said that 'it wasn't about where Lille is, but where it leads to.'" A philosophy that many a town, rural area or group could do worse than buy into.

The activities of the groups would also suggest a healthy inclusiveness in approach and an awareness of the greater benefits that a group's activity can bring to a certain place. For example, Total Kunst made a visit to Transit Station in Berlin. This meeting has led to the development of an event in Edinburgh which will be providing

opportunities for artists in the region to become involved in activity on an international stage. Whilst on one level this event will be great for Total Kunst's profile, they are also looking beyond their group's activity and seeing where they fit into the wider picture of activity in their city, region and the UK, providing opportunity for artists beyond their group to benefit.

It is also apparent that many groups aren't content with simply being good at what they do; they want to improve and diversify. Open Spaces Open Places visited Stroud Valley Arts to compare and contrast open studio events. They learnt much from this meeting, particularly in terms of the extra support provided by Stroud Valley Arts for artists, in terms of professional development, resources, venue and European links. Like any good research, they were left with as many new questions as ones they had answered.

Overall, the activity funded by the bursaries shows an extremely healthy artist-led scene across the UK and beyond. There is a clear desire to extend activity across regional and international borders, whilst at the same time feeding this back in to the regions where people are based. There is an evident desire for exchange of ideas, skills and approaches. The art community, like any other, has many facets, some of which never cross, but ultimately this increased exchange and support between groups can only lead to a more informed and sustainable community.

S Mark Gubb is an artist in Nottingham.
www.smarkgubb.com

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See www.a-n.co.uk>Networking for more about NAN Bursaries

VB

Christine Duff is an artist and a member of OrganicArts, in Devon. Her group used a NAN bursary to visit five other similar organisations.

I read about NAN in *a-n Magazine* and heard about it through Louise Short. We applied for a bursary to visit five other rural art organisations. Because we were a new art organisation we wanted to go and visit similar organisations to discuss the positives and the pitfalls of establishing and running such an organisation. We had considered doing this research, but getting the bursary forced us into going to visit them. The bursary hasn't affected our practice because that wasn't our intention. It has had an effect on how we organise ourselves. It reaffirmed our ideas, talking to other people and seeing how they

were doing things. It's affected us in thinking how we might be effective and what we want to focus on. It's given us an opportunity to see how unique we are – combining three artistic aims of an educational, rural, sustainable art group.

NAN is good at getting artists together. It's something that is easy to overlook because you can get quite low and isolated as an artist, even if you're working in a group. NAN helps you get out and meet other artists and see things from the outside. Inevitably, because NAN doesn't have huge amounts of money, the events tend to be centred in big cities and they don't seem to be engaging with the rural community but that's a failing in arts in general. Certainly for me, coming to a rural community has been a huge eye opener to issues of transport and sustainability.

The fact that NAN is looking at groups of artists is important. It encourages artists to work together which is a very positive thing. We're a very small group and though we have physical contact with one another we don't have any money. It's a never ending process trying to get money. The bursary was such a positive experience – visiting other organisations – but especially for us as a group because we spent 24 hours together and we took the farmer from the farm where we're based with us. He got a much better idea of what we were talking about and what we wanted to do with OrganicArts. Since the bursary trip we have organised an Apple Day and have now got money from Arts Council England for a feasibility study which includes conversion of the farm buildings.

www.organicarts.org.uk

VB

Jonathan Waring is an artist in Nottingham and a member of Stand Assembly. The NANASAUR networking event was funded through Stand Assembly's NAN bursary award.

Stand Assembly applied for the NAN bursary in November 2004. The majority of the group graduated that summer. Having decided that we wanted to remain making art in Nottingham we felt it was important to quickly establish a studio group. While we were saving up the money needed to rent a space, we decided to visit more established studios in order to do research. At this time we discovered the NAN bursary scheme which seemed the perfect thing to help us do this.

We visited Waygood studios in Newcastle in December 2004 – we wanted to visit them before they moved out of their building into new premises. We paid for this visit out of our own money because the NAN bursary decisions had not yet been made. We got the money from NAN early in 2005, however, by this time we had already moved into our space and we were then so busy working on the building that we didn't have time to go on any visits.

By the time the summer came we had the space more or less sorted out, so the time had come to use our NAN bursary money. As we are a large studio group (twenty plus members) we decided that we could make the best use of the money by holding an event in our building, rather than by three or four of us visiting a couple of other studio groups. Inspired by NAN we decided to host our own networking event for groups in Nottingham and the surrounding regions. We named the event NANASAUR and we used it to bring together groups from Nottingham, Leicester, Sheffield and Birmingham. Over forty artists attended the event. The event enabled a variety of artist-led groups to meet each other and discuss ideas in a sociable environment.

The NAN initiative has always seemed very relevant to the priorities and aims of our group and came along at just the right time for us. A lot of groups don't seem to be interested in doing much more than having some form of 'open studios' event every year or so. We've taken a very different attitude. We feel that there are many other ways of representing what we do and making connections with other interesting groups. We actively wanted to make contact with other groups around the country and we saw this as central to our practices as artists.

Our NAN bursary award has had many positive outcomes for us. The money gave us the opportunity to put on the NANASAUR event. It's something that we wanted to do anyway, but without the bursary award it is unlikely that we would have had a chance to do it at that time. The NAN bursary gave us the freedom to try it out. There have been many collaborations that have resulted from NANASAUR. Because the event provided networking opportunities for many separate groups, it provided far more opportunities for collaboration than a simple visit by a few Stand Assembly members would have done. The event benefited all the members of our group and also all of the attending artists and groups.

www.standassembly.org

Timeline

Timeline showing NAN (Networking Artists' Networks) development highlights.

2006

May	Artists' event 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
Feb	Artists' event, Cove Park, Scotland
Jan	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

