

These articles are reproduced with permission of a-n  
The Artists Information Company.

First published Future forecast: Social space, edited  
Becky Shaw 2005 and on [www.a-n.co.uk/research](http://www.a-n.co.uk/research)  
2008.

Copyright: © writers, artists, a-n The Artists  
Information Company 2005

an

FUTURE FORECAST | SOCIAL SPACE | £5

The dynamics of artists' practice in the social realm



## CREDITS

Edited Becky Shaw  
Publisher Louise Wirz

© writers, artists, a-n  
The Artists Information  
Company 2005

ISBN 0 907730 51 5

Published by  
a-n The Artists  
Information Company  
Registered in England  
Company No 1626331  
Registered address  
First Floor, 7-15 Pink  
Lane, Newcastle upon  
Tyne NE1 5DW UK  
T +44 (0) 191 241 8000  
info@a-n.co.uk  
www.a-n.co.uk

Copyright  
Individuals may copy  
this publication for the  
limited purpose of use  
in their business or  
professional practice  
artists. Organisations  
wishing to copy or use  
the publication for  
multiple purposes  
should contact the  
Publisher for  
permission.

Artists form the  
company's largest  
stakeholder group  
contributing some  
£340K annually in  
subscription income,  
with support through  
revenue funding from  
Arts Council England,  
and funding for  
specific projects from  
Esmée Fairbairn  
Foundation, European  
Social Fund and  
Scottish Arts Council.



Scottish  
Arts Council



The *Future forecast*  
series of publications is  
sponsored by Scottish  
County Press



**Ricardo Basbaum**, artist and writer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; co-editor and co-founder of *Item* magazine, co-directed artists' collective Agora (1999-2003). Works at Art Institute of the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro and undertaking PhD research at Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil.

**Chance Projects**, artists Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska [www.chanceprojects.com](http://www.chanceprojects.com)

**Sarah Cole**, artist and lecturer in social context at Central St Martins, University of the Arts, London

**Robin Deacon**, live artist  
[www.robindeacon.com](http://www.robindeacon.com)

**Lorric Douglas**, artist currently researching early twentieth-century African American folk dance; Artsadmin Artist's Bursary recipient; projects include Shedology 'An exploration into the secret life of sheds' [www.thepublic.com](http://www.thepublic.com)  
Pageant [www.grizedale.org](http://www.grizedale.org)  
[www.transartists.nl](http://www.transartists.nl)  
[lorricdouglas@hotmail.com](mailto:lorricdouglas@hotmail.com)

**Steven Eastwood**, filmmaker and researcher [www.cinemaintothereal.org](http://www.cinemaintothereal.org)

**Functionsuite**, project in psychiatric and general hospitals in Edinburgh and Lothian exploring artists' role in collaboration and research. Lead artists are Anne Elliot and Kate Gray. [www.functionsuite.com](http://www.functionsuite.com)

**Hewitt and Jordan**, artists Andrew Hewitt and Mel Jordan  
[www.hewittandjordan.com](http://www.hewittandjordan.com)

**Lubaina Himid**, artist, professor and leader of MA Archive Interventions at University of Central Lancashire

**Mark Hutchinson**, artist, London; co-editor (with Dave Beech) of *The First Condition*. Recent projects include solo exhibition at Studio Voltaire and poster for 'It's the Only Life I Know', Hewitt and Jordan project for Insertspace. [www.thefirstcondition.com](http://www.thefirstcondition.com)  
[www.tempcontemp.co.uk](http://www.tempcontemp.co.uk)  
[www.insertspace.org.uk](http://www.insertspace.org.uk)

**Kelly Large**, artist using range of distribution mechanisms including FM radio and publications to explore processes of transmission and reception; teaches at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design. [www.static-ops.org/projects](http://www.static-ops.org/projects)  
[www.curatingdegrezero.org](http://www.curatingdegrezero.org)

**Richard Layzell**, artist, London, working in wide range of contexts including architecture, museums, artist groups, [www.sva.org.uk](http://www.sva.org.uk) and communities, [www.thepublic.com](http://www.thepublic.com), researching the creative process as a member of Rescen [www.rescen.net](http://www.rescen.net)

**public works**, collective founded by architects Sandra Denicke-Polcher, Torange Khonsari, Andreas Lang and artists Kathrin Böhm and Stefan Saffer, collaborating in different constellations since 1998. [www.publicworksgroup.net](http://www.publicworksgroup.net)  
[www.myvillages.org](http://www.myvillages.org)

**Rebecca Reid**, artist based in the UK, Artsadmin Artist's Bursary recipient.

**Becky Shaw**, artist investigating relationships between individuals and wider society; recipient of Artsadmin Artist's Bursary; co-director of Static Gallery with architect Paul Sullivan [www.static-ops.org](http://www.static-ops.org)

**André Stitt**, live artist, making performances at major galleries, festivals, alternative sites throughout the world since 1976; founder of Trace in Cardiff [www.andrestitt.com](http://www.andrestitt.com)

**Una Walker**, artist in Belfast, exhibited in Ireland, UK and internationally for over twenty years. Her main focus is site-specific installations for a variety of locations; undertaking PhD within Interface at University of Ulster.

**Gareth Woollam**, artist, Liverpool, co-editor of *Static Pamphlet*; practice explores social space, utopia and cartography. Part of Darkhorse Projects, with Elizabeth Kearney, interested in pedagogic structures and contributions to artists' practice outside institutional frameworks.

## FUTURE FORECAST SOCIAL SPACE



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

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

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

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

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

a-n readers automatically receive *Future forecast* publications that otherwise cost £5 each. For current subscription cost go to [www.a-n.co.uk](http://www.a-n.co.uk)

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



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

**Robin Deacon**

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

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

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

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

**André Stitt**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Functionsuite**

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

**public works (Kathrin Böhm)**

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

**Mark Hutchinson**

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

**Ricardo Basbaum**



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

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

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

Personal correspondence, Steven Eastwood, 2005.

[www.cinemaintothereal.org](http://www.cinemaintothereal.org)

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

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

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

[www.backspace.org/maldoror](http://www.backspace.org/maldoror)

[www.urbanfestival.hr](http://www.urbanfestival.hr)

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



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

**Mark Hutchinson**

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

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

**Richard Layzell**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Lubaina Himid**

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

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

**Una Walker**

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

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

**Chance Projects**

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Extract from text by Ricardo Basbaum 'Differences between Us and Them', Static Pamphlet  
[www.static-ops.org/archive\\_october/pamphlet.htm](http://www.static-ops.org/archive_october/pamphlet.htm)

# MATTERS ARISING



## The social contract

While a significant number of artists describe their practice as developing from 'happenstance', many others regularly fulfil project and residency contracts. Andrea Fraser<sup>1</sup> points out that if artists are contracted to deliver defined outputs then they are obligated to satisfy them. However most artists interviewed here say that commissions are only acceptable if they suit their own interests. What then, is explicit and implicit in such contracts?

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

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

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

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

Charles Esche<sup>2</sup> recently wrote that the word 'performance' means both a theatrical act and to carry out, or attain a target. He called for a greater recognition of the impact of art on its own terms, rather than for its instrumentality. However, by drawing attention to these dual meanings Esche doesn't close down the possibility that art remains influential.

## Negotiating value

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

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

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

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

## Critical networks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Andrea Fraser, *How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction*, presented at The Depot, Vienna, October 1994 <http://adaweb.walkerart.org/~dn/a/enfra/afraser1.html>

<sup>2</sup> Charles Esche, *Foreword, Afterall 9*, 2004.