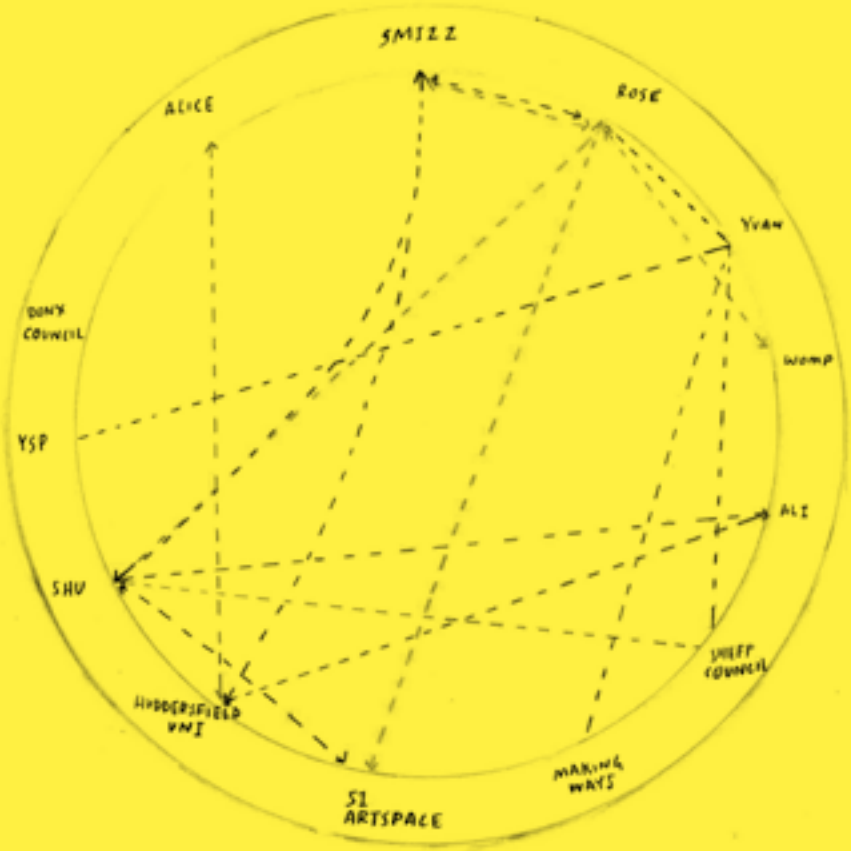
RESILIENCE
IS
FUTILE

RESILIENCE IS FUTILE

Resilience is Futile is the official publication of the *Corridor8* & YVAN Writer-in-Residence Programme, Spring — Summer 2019, and is generously funded by Arts Council England.


SEEKERS
ARE DARING & UNAFRAID TO TAKE RISKS — GAINING NEW PERSPECTIVES, FROM their FEARLESS DRIVE TO EXPLORE

ART ECOLOGY
BEFORE CARE



Editorial

LARA EGGLETON
Corridor8

ADRIAN FRIEDLI
Yorkshire & Humber Visual Arts Network

Resilience is Futile marks the first collaboration between *Corridor8* and YVAN. It's a timely pairing, with the need for support and advocacy in the visual arts growing increasingly urgent in an austerity-squeezed, Brexit-infused climate. YVAN is the Yorkshire and Humber arm of the national Contemporary Visual Arts Network (CVAN), influencing strategy and policy and delivering a programme that affects change in the profile, reputation and sustainability of the visual arts and artists, within and across the regions.[1] *Corridor8*, a writing platform for visual arts activity across the Northern 'corridor' (from Liverpool to Hull and everywhere in between, and sometimes outside), is dedicated to supporting writers and artists through paid commissions and a residency partnership programme.[2] Both YVAN and *Corridor8* are determined to combat the forces that threaten to weaken and undermine creative practitioners and the places and networks that sustain them.

YVAN's current ACE-funded programme 'Beyond the Obvious' includes four sub-regional Nourish events designed through a commission with artist collaboration Yoke, and fourteen micro-grants to support artists and makers with disabilities or those working with the theme of disability, developed in conjunction with Disability Arts Network and The Art House. It also includes two 'Snapshot' commissions with artist Sarah Smizz and *Corridor8*, responding to the nature of the sector in the region and manifesting in this publication. In initial conversations, our agendas lined up neatly, with *Corridor8* looking for ways to challenge the culture of unpaid and underpaid writing in the art world, and to address the health of the visual arts in the North, particularly outside major institutions. Further discussions with our contributors reaffirmed that expectations for creative labourers to carry on despite worsening conditions, and indeed thrive within them, is both unrealistic and punitive.

The precarious existence of artist practice and artist-led activity has been a consistent refrain across the country, put in stark relief by recent reports.[3] Exhortations to resilience in this context feel increasingly problematic. As Mark Robinson puts it, 'what makes us think we can have sustainable culture by requiring artists and much of the workforce to subsidise activity?'.[4] Rather than expecting

artists to soldier on and 'survive' counterproductive if not debilitating circumstances, we should be learning about and helping to create the conditions in which they can flourish. It is clear from the following case studies, distilled from the interviews conducted by writer-in-residence Alice Bradshaw, that artists can be excellent adaptors. But this is both a blessing and a curse in an art world that is increasingly competitive and profit-driven. Self-care strategies and the fostering of caring networks — often within or across local communities — are crucial ways that many of these artists sustain their practice, without having to sacrifice their happiness and wellbeing.

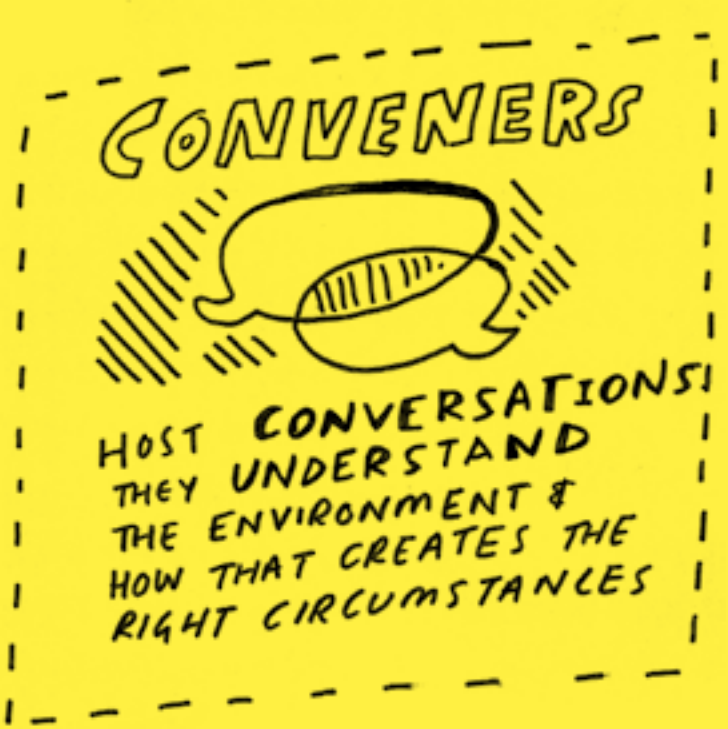
This publication takes a critical look at 'resilience' as well as other seemingly benign terms such as 'ecology' and 'authenticity', which are often used to describe artists and creative networks but lack the sensitivity and nuance needed to address individual circumstances and the regional and sub-regional conditions in which they operate. As demonstrated by Smizz and Bradshaw in their respective texts, the pressure on artists to be resilient can result in burnout and poses a serious risk to mental and physical health. In her essay, Kerry Harker convincingly argues that the use of ecology to describe the Northern visual arts sector glosses over the diversity of its practices and organisational structures, and hides its inequalities. Thomas Hopkin, recently appointed postdoctoral researcher on the Northern Bridge project, condemns the cavalier use of 'authenticity' as it reinforces an idea of 'Northerness' steeped in stereotype and caricature (all too prevalent in populist narratives), and obscures the broad range of voices and identities that comprise our city, town and rural populations. In the pages of *Resilience is Futile*, authors challenge the entrenched associations with words that have become dangerously commonplace and institutionalised. To replace them, they argue we must come up with new empowering and hopeful ways to describe the individuals, groups and networks who *are* the visual art sector in Yorkshire and Humber, and the wider North.

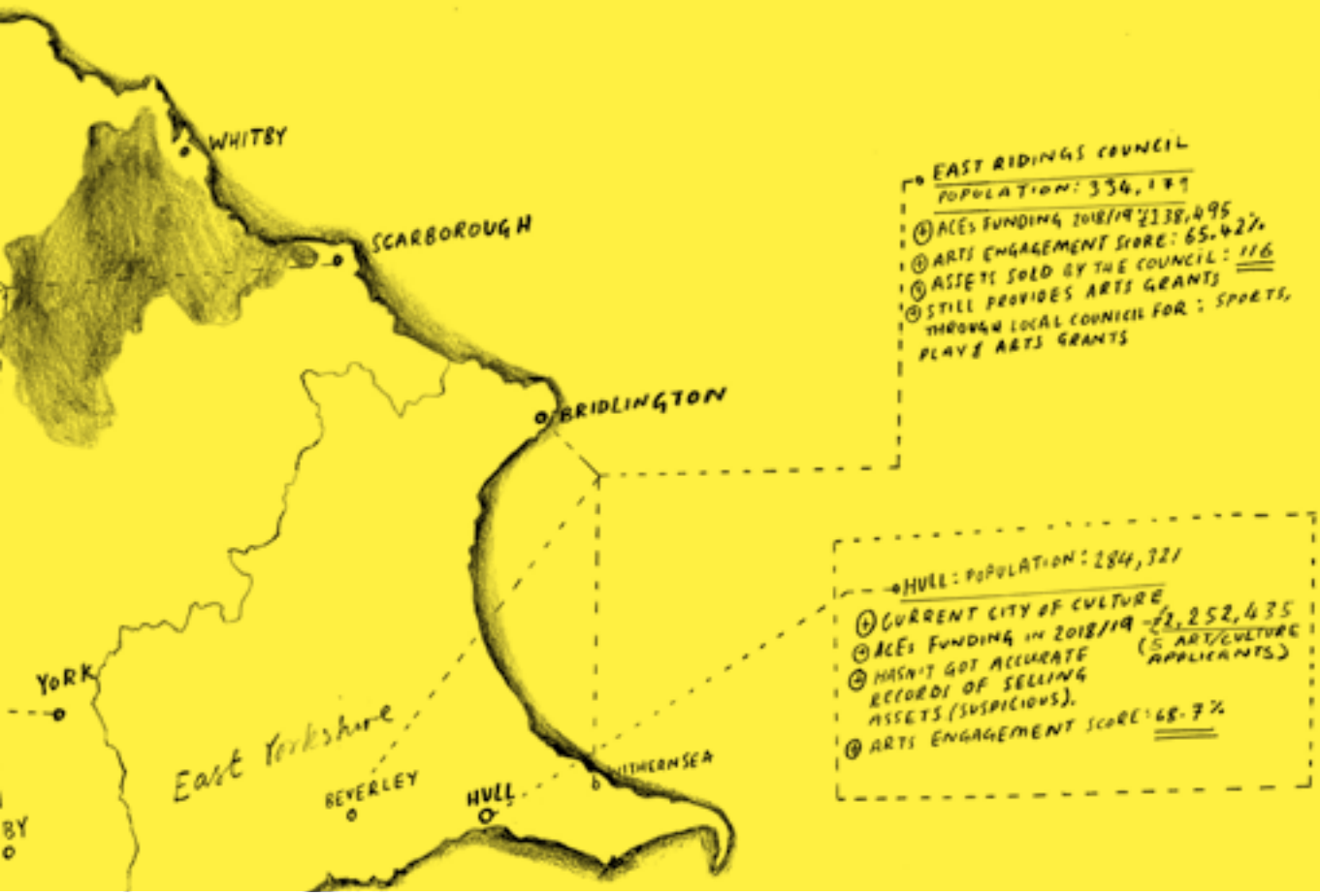
1. In the North, YVAN works closely with its networks in North East and North West to deliver strategic initiatives including a support programme for organisations to secure funding from HMRC's Museum and Gallery Exhibition Tax Relief scheme, and a six-month research placement working with the Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership investigating the concept 'North' as it applies to visual arts. In Yorkshire & Humber, they have developed a partnership with Sheffield Hallam University through which they have co-produced two 'The Artist's Journey' conferences and brought New York-based Interference Archive to present at the inaugural Social Art Summit in Sheffield, securing funding from Sheffield Cultural Consortium's Making Ways initiative.

2. Since 2016, *Corridor8* have worked with a number of partners to deliver art writing residencies including The Tetley, Castlefield Gallery, The International 3, Humber Street Gallery, Leeds Arts University and serf Studios, and are currently delivering an ACE-funded programme with YVAN, Yorkshire Sculpture International and New Contemporaries. Subsisting on project funding and mainly volunteer labour, *Corridor8* continue to lobby organisations to commission writers and editors, and support art writing as a creative and professional practice in its own right.

3. 'Livelihoods of Visual Artists: 2016 Data Report', TBR, 2018; 'Arts Pay 2018: A summary of pay and earnings in the arts and cultural sector', *Arts Professional*, 2019.

4. Mark Robinson in 'Experimental Culture: A horizon scan commissioned by Arts Council England. Summary Report and Provocations', Nesta, 2018, p.21.

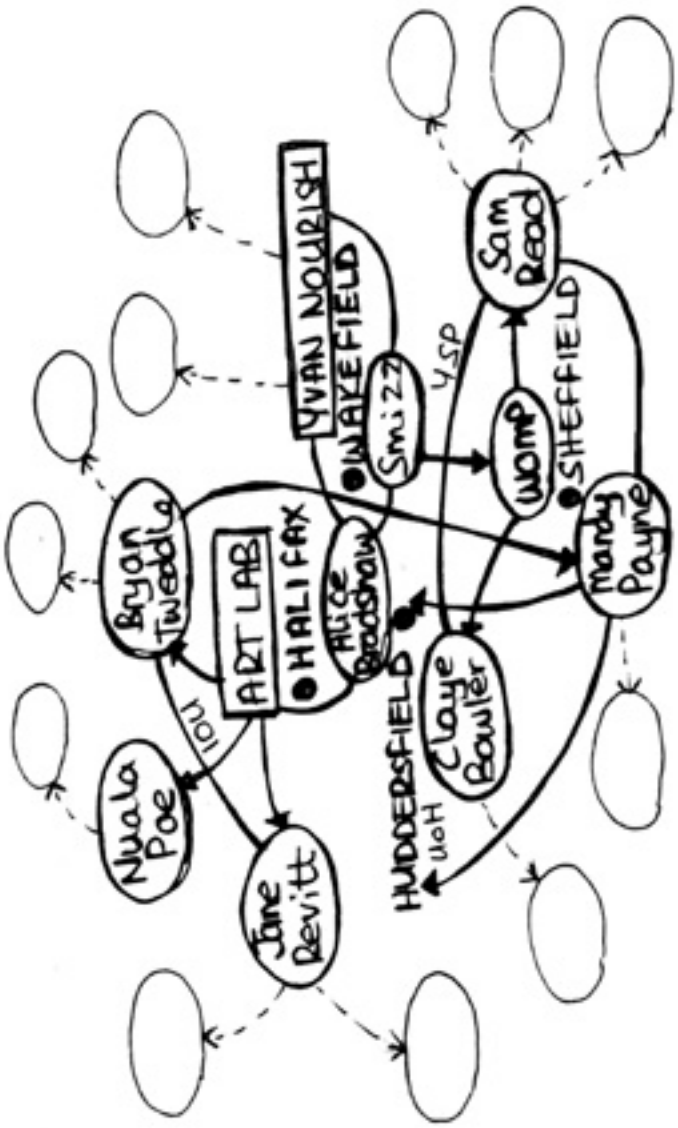

CONVENERS
HOST CONVERSATIONS!
THEY UNDERSTAND
THE ENVIRONMENT &
HOW THAT CREATES THE
RIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES



ALICE BRADSHAW

Introduction

Surviving or Thriving? How visual artists in Yorkshire respond to being called 'resilient'



I approached this residency by asking artists how they define 'resilience',[1] particularly when they have been nominated by a peer as being exemplary of this austerity-era buzzword. One artist's interpretation of resilience is different from the next, and may also be radically different from how funders, NPOs, institutions and the government define it in the arts and other sectors. Through a series of interviews, I observed individual characteristics and strategies that enable artists to survive and continue to make work with ever-reducing funding, opportunities and resources. Are there trends and commonalities in these practices or are they as fundamentally unique as the practitioners? Is the connectivity of a network critical to survival?

The research was designed to map a sample group of visual artists in Yorkshire, looking at the notion of 'one degree of separation in the art world' using chain-referral methodology. This involved 'snowball sampling', wherein I asked practitioners to recommend an artist or artists who they thought of as resilient in some way. They in turn recommend another artist or artists using the same criteria of resilience. The three starting points for recommendations were: YVAN's Nourish event in Wakefield,[2] the April edition of Art Lab at Dean Clough in Halifax, and artist Smizz's recommendation of one of their own case studies, the Sheffield studio group WOMP. The geographic spread of the resultant recommendations is unsurprisingly South/West Yorkshire -centric, and says something of the proximity of communities and networks.

1. Resilience: 1. the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness. 2. the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity (Oxford English Dictionary Online)

2. One recommended artist didn't respond (which is perhaps a form of resilience in itself, in terms of workload management) and one cooperative studio group responded very tardily due to their administrative process, and in the end was unable to participate within the publication timeframe.

Each artist interviewed artist was a new contact for me and our interview was the first time we met.

After I explained the context of the project and the output (this publication), each interviewee was invited to talk about their practice and how they make it work for them. What are their survival strategies? There is a very open and generous nature to these interviews, during which artists shared a lot of personal information and generously gave of their time. This went beyond a superficial kind of profiling, perhaps due to their desire to talk about challenges they face in sustaining their practices, and my reciprocal interest in hearing about them.

The Birth of Venus produced in collaboration with Aventi Display
Photo by Paul Herrmann

BRYAN TWEDDLE

Brain Wave produced in collaboration with Whalley Range All Stars

BRYANTWEDDLE.CO.UK

I visited Bryan in his studio — a large mill unit in Sowerby Bridge — and it was immediately apparent that he needs a lot of space for his large-scale sculptural work. With some humour he described himself as a 'creative interventionist', confessing that it's taken him a while to feel comfortable with the label 'artist'. In his own words, he is 'a sculptor, designing and making for theatre, opera, ballet, street performance, television, film, animation, educational projects, exhibition and carnival'. He has a collaborative approach and observes that working in theatre is particularly collaborative, requiring several people with specific roles to work together to make the performance happen. The connectivity Bryan has with theatre networks has had a significant impact on his practice, which started with a chance encounter with Artistic Director David Wheeler that resulted in his working for IOU, a producing arts organisation based at Dean Clough in Halifax, for the following fifteen years.

We talked about pivotal and serendipitous moments — the chance encounters that have defined Bryan's practice: 'Everything leads to something else in one way or another'. He has a strategy of rarely applying for anything but is very open to new collaborations and taking on anything 'if it's got legs', making an assessment of viability based on his knowledge and experience. We talked about success and he explained that, for him, it means accomplishing what he sets out to achieve or even more than he expected. This ability to recognise potential in the unexpected is part of his resilience. Bryan is also determined to 'keep doing things', what he likens to keeping an engine oiled. His practice comprises many different compartmentalised activities, which fosters cross pollination. The lull between shows or projects can be problematic and he recognises the important role of collaboration and external briefs — of being around other practitioners to keep him buoyant — to mitigate stagnation and creative block.

Bryan talked about the importance of finding day jobs that are not creatively draining. In the years after leaving art college he took jobs that gave him time and thinking freedom to pursue ways of working as an artist. One exception was when he worked as a teacher for a few years, which tipped the balance but equipped him with skills that

became invaluable much later when planning and leading workshops as one strand of his practice. Looking at his career history, it's clear that Bryan's adaptability is at the core of what he has achieved. Beyond chance encounters, his ability to collaborate with dedication and attention to detail allows him to make the most of opportunities as they present themselves. These skills and his enjoyment in serendipity seem to be an intrinsic part of how he has established and developed his practice.

WOMP HANNAH LAMB & LUCY LOUND

WOMPSPACE.COM

WOMP is a studio group and artist residency space in Sheffield run by Hannah Lamb and Lucy Lound. They set up the residency in response to an identified need for artists to have a dedicated space and time to practice outside of the pressures of everyday life. Their roles involve creating the infrastructure and facilitating the residency in order for artists to make the most of their time. The residency focus is less on maximum productivity or working flat-out and more on providing nurturing space and support. Some form of public outcome is encouraged and self-care is a central concern.

In early correspondence with each selected artist, WOMP shares Sheila Ghelani's 'Checklist of Care' for the artist to consider before embarking on the residency.[3] This includes questions such as, 'Will engaging in this activity/event/performance/'act' be nourishing and full of care?', and apply to the artists themselves as well as others, the environment and society in general. Hannah and Lucy's support roles, extending beyond the basics of providing a working space, including accommodating the artist at their home, cooking for them, showing them around the city and daily conversations centred around each artist's needs. This provides a considerate and nurturing space where basic needs are met, allowing them to focus on their work.

3. Will I be looked after? Will I get paid? If travelling where will I sleep? What will I eat? When will I eat? Will I be fed or is it self-catering? Will I get per diems? Will I feel safe? Who will I be hanging out with? Can I bring someone with me? If something goes wrong who do I contact and what is my exit strategy? Do I have any special health needs at the moment and will they be catered for? Have I informed anyone connected to the activity about these needs? Will there be any language barriers?/ How can these be overcome? Am I insured – health, belongings, public liability Have I got a contract? What press/PR will I be expected to do and does this feel ok? Where is the funding coming from? What's the overall environmental cost? What do I know about the location / area in terms of human rights / politics? What do I know about the organisation? *https://sheilaghelani.blogspot.com/2017/10/checklist-of-care.html*

Hannah and Lucy both have full time jobs alongside running the studios and artist residencies, as well as maintaining their own practices. They received £4,000 from Sheffield Culture Consortium's Making Ways programme for their three-part residency programme, but neglected to include a budget to cover their own time in the application. Recent graduates of Sheffield Hallam University, they didn't realise it was possible to include their wages as expenditure. Whilst they're chalking that one up as an important learning experience, they recognise that burnout is a potential outcome of maintaining all their commitments.

The residency programme was in the final stages when we met and, whilst Hannah and Lucy hadn't had a moment to sit down together to evaluate the programme at the time of writing, our conversation revealed their acute awareness of the precariousness of their current circumstances. Planning for future projects, they're identifying accessibility and sustainability as key focus areas. Their critical concern for self-care as a *modus operandus* seems like an excellent survival strategy — as long as they don't neglect themselves in the process. Their self-reflexivity and tenacity, evident in our initial meeting, convinced me they would find a way to make it work.

The Catmint Chair
Photo by Chester Zoo

JANE REVITT

The Feather Chair
Photo by Jane Revitt

JANEREVITT.CO.UK
TALKINGCHAIRS.CO.UK

Jane is a Hebden Bridge-based artist and designer whose bespoke *Talking Chairs* I had encountered before our first meeting. We began by talking about connections, both the connectivity of the sector and the organic processes that led her to her current practice. She knows Bryan Tweddle (see previous) through IOU, a job that originally brought her to West Yorkshire. Her practice is collaborative and living in the creatively vibrant town of Hebden Bridge works well for her. It's the kind of place where you bump into people, many of whom are creative practitioners, on the street, shop or cafe for impromptu conversations, and there is a perceivable enthusiasm for supporting one another and their town.

Residing in a small, well connected community is an effective survival strategy. It allowed Jane to outsource the complicated fabrication of her *Talking Chairs* for Chester Zoo. She approached Wood and Wire, a local company who make quality bespoke kitchens, who advised on the wood for the project and then agreed to construct the chairs. Jane also sought paint advice from a local mechanic who spray painted them with durable, weather-resistant paint. This skill of recognising and seeking out expert advice on materials or processes is made easier by having experienced tradespeople on her doorstep.

Jane's practice spans visual theatre, literary and poetry projects, curating, furniture and textile design ('Who knew tea towels would be so popular?!'). When the recession hit in 2008 and jobs and funding drastically diminished, Jane saw her two main choices as either to upscale with larger-budget projects or downscale and become more self-sustainable. Due to personal circumstances she chose to downscale, to become more selective with the work she takes on and pursue a small-scale commercial shop model that showcases her best-selling products (such as tea towels). Her commercial line of work now brings an unexpectedly regular stream of income she can rely on. Meanwhile, bigger, more demanding projects have become more infrequent. Jane's case made me wonder whether an artist's success is based on an innate adaptability, or whether their circumstances condition them to be so (perhaps a little of both).

Be in the world not of the world

NUALA POE

She gave him a doormat to show him the difference between that and woman

FACEBOOK.COM/POECERAMICS

Nuala wasn't sure why her friend Marie had identified her as resilient, but it quickly became clear to me at her house and studio in Mytholmroyd. Our conversation began with Tracey Emin, whose work had created a heated debate at the Art Lab session (also where Marie recommended Nuala). Emin was the subject of Nuala's dissertation for a degree that she was persuaded to embark on by her access course tutor, artist Mary Loney. Nuala has always drawn and made work as a form of self-therapy but finds the language and elitism surrounding art difficult to engage with, so was initially reluctant to enter into formal art education. She cites Emin as a major influence in making work about personal narrative and survival during her degree.

Nuala's home is beautiful and filled with her art. Her cat Ronnie watched on nonchalantly as we pored over her sketchbooks of intricate biro portraits and Nuala told me about how most of the work in her cellar was destroyed in the Boxing Day floods that devastated the Calder Valley in 2015. Only a few of her sketchbooks survived (with water damage) and her kiln was destroyed. Some of her ink drawings have taken on a new life with blurred, colour-separated lines and Nuala commented on these and her relationship to them. Marie told Nuala that she recommended her due to her strength and adaptability to survive, whatever life throws at her. A flooded cellar is a recent devastation but Nuala is also a survivor of childhood abuse. Her work is a way of continually channelling her thoughts and processing issues — a strategy she has employed since childhood, unknowingly at the time.

Nuala has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions over the years, has had gallery representation and enjoys the external validation of selling work, but still doesn't feel at ease in the art scene. She's previously sold small-scale homeware editions but she found it difficult to meet demands and decided that commercial product lines are not really for her. Ultimately, her heart's not in it. Nuala talked about working from the heart versus a profit-driven business model and taking a conscious decision to work a cleaning job to free her from the pressure to produce financially viable work.

Despite her modesty, Nuala's humble self-awareness and strength are palpable. She suffers from imposter syndrome and has insecurities about people thinking she's 'talking crap'. She counters this by actively trying not to worry about what other people think and avoiding being a people pleaser (a 'victim thing', she says). Listening to her instincts is her core strategy. 'Don't attach yourself to expectations and allow things to just happen', she advises, whilst admitting that this is 'easier said than done when the overwhelming urge is to be in control'.

SAM READ

Sam Read with Craig David Parr
Photos by James Clarkson & Anthony Hopwood

SAMFRANCISREAD.COM

Sam hates the term ‘resilience’. It sums up austerity, he says; the neoliberal rhetoric of a divisive, government-led tendency to batten down the hatches and focus on self-preservation in the face of Brexit and worsening social inequality. He’s done his time in fundraising and curating roles, and avoids using ‘corporate speak’, where words like resilience are used alongside phrases such as ‘diversifying revenue streams’. Sam used to introduce himself as an artist-educator but found there was a lot of snobbery in the art world around the ‘educator’ part, which was often undervalued by institutions. Originally from the East Midlands, he decided to move from Leicester to Sheffield (whilst continuing to work in Nottingham) because he liked the culture of the larger city. He moved into GLOAM studios and later joined the collective Retro Bar, identifying the support and solidarity that comes with being part of a collective as vitally important. Having the studio space is also necessary for him (even if he has to wear thermals because there’s no heating through the winter), something he likens to having a gym membership: if you’re paying for it then you have to go.

Sam talked about making the choice to avoid an institutional career and becoming a ‘jobbing artist’,[4] taking up a part-time job as a cleaning supervisor. For him, working a full-time day job and maintaining an art practice is just not feasible. He muses about a utopian Universal Basic Income for artists, in contrast to the difficult reality of having to make a living somehow. Sam outlines the options as he sees them: the boredom of invigilation roles (unless you are permitted to read on the job); the anxiety of relying on freelancework to pay the bills; or the misery of unskilled, barely-above-minimum-wage jobs. He does value the regular income of his day job, and being able to choose which and how many paid art roles he takes on, but there’s a sense that the situation is still suboptimal. He also mentions the stigma of artists working low-paid day jobs, as if they are not successful enough to secure jobs matched to their level of expertise (made

4. An artist who changes their practice to fit the project brief and who is continually seeking public funding.

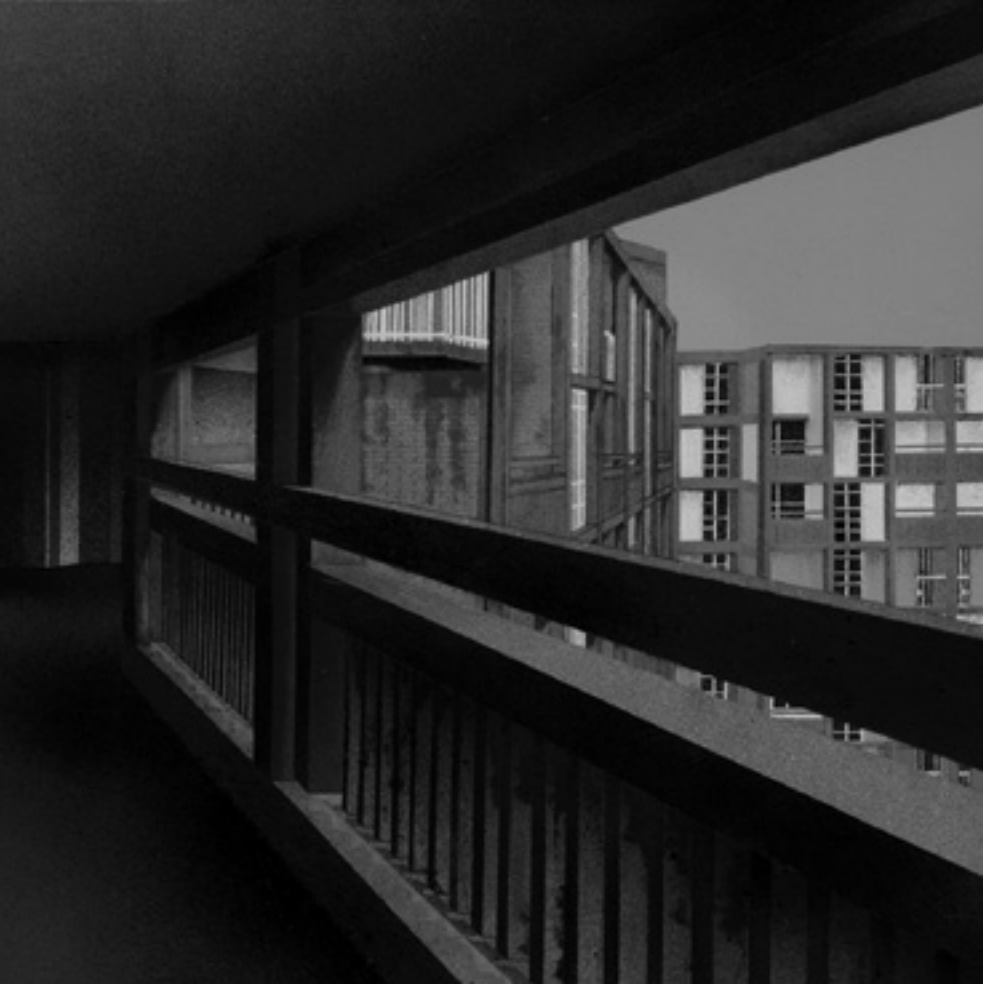
worse by the scarcity of skilled art sector jobs), with employers unaware of the negative impact working hours can have on creative practice.

Critical theory plays an important role in Sam's practice and he's written a lot of notes in preparation for our conversation. He's suspicious of the funding systems and finds it ironic that funders are reluctant to take risks on applicants while at the same time expecting applicants to take all the risks. His recent attempts at securing professional development funding have been unsuccessful, so he is focussing on more DIY and collaborative projects. This strategy seems to be working: 'Now I've stopped chasing funding I've been the busiest yet'.

Sam tells me about his current project, *Neo-Grotesk Realism*, which melds his interests in feudal history and technology. He says he might put out an open call for collaborators, which he does shortly after our meeting. Sam is impassioned when talking about his *Neo-Grotesk Realism* ideas and apologises after 'going off on one' but this is inspiring and revealing of his current interests. Aside from the practicalities of surviving as an artist — of making deliberate, conscious choices to afford himself time, space and networks — he recognises appreciation and recognition from his peers as essential for maintaining and developing his practice.

Aylesbury Estate

MANDY PAYNE



No Ball Games Here

MANDYPAYNEART.CO.UK

Visual art is Mandy's second career after spending decades as an NHS paediatric dental practitioner in deprived areas of Yorkshire. She nearly did an art degree (and also considered architecture), as she enjoyed both art and science A Levels, but her dad, a scientist, advised her to get a 'proper job'. Despite this, parental influence, Mandy took art classes and, encouraged by her tutor, enrolled part time on a three-year HND at Sheffield College. Realising that art was actually what she wanted to do, Mandy then enrolled on a part-time BA at Nottingham University. She planned her exit from dentistry for many years, gradually building up her arts practice. She worked hard to pay off her mortgage so that when she finally quit the NHS in 2012 to work as a full time artist, she was able to live on a less consistent income.

Mandy has lived in Sheffield for thirty years and is inspired by urban landscape, gentrification and Brutalist architecture. During her art degree she became 'mildly obsessed' with Park Hill — making daily visits as an unofficial artist in residence. The architecture inspires her paint and print works on concrete. Mandy began using dental plaster and concrete, set in crude wooden batons and mixing the concrete by hand. She sought advice at a Preston-based workshop where she learned techniques such as making vinyl moulds and using an electric kitchen mixer to increase mixing speed. The dentistry skills she practised for decades have been a source of inspiration and, as it turns out, very transferable. Mandy conveys with a wry fondness that during her twenty-three years in the NHS she has built up a lot of resilience. The job was physically and emotionally stressful and she has developed a tendency to find something positive in a situation even when things don't go to plan.

Mandy is thankful for her support network of friends and family as well as her collective activities with other artists, which range from sharing lifts and ordering materials in bulk, to DIY, self-organised group exhibitions. She's in the process of preparing for a solo exhibition at Huddersfield Art Gallery in the Autumn which she's finding quite daunting with the focus solely on her and without the group dialogue. Mandy received an Arts Council grant for the show, which she reveals is largely thanks to curator and arts consultant

Matt Roberts supporting her through the grant application process. She was put in touch with Roberts through a Making Ways small grant for the *Sheffield City of Makers: Confluence Exhibition* (15–27 October 2018), and consequently signed up to his membership programme. He helped Mandy through the onerous grant application, especially to make sense of the sometimes oblique language of the funding world. He prepared her to expect three failed attempts so Mandy was delighted to be successful the first time around. Her solo exhibition of concrete paintings and stone lithographs *Out of Time* will be on show at Huddersfield Art Gallery from 5 October until 30 November 2019.

CLAYE
BOWLER

CLAYEBOWLER.COM

Claye is in their third and final year of a textiles degree at the University of Huddersfield and when we meet they're busy preparing for their final degree show. We meet in their shopfront studio space in Huddersfield town centre, also known as KiN studio collective, part of the East Street Arts empty-space network. Claye is a KiN studio member but appears to be the only artist currently using the space. Initially rent free, they have now been asked to pay rent on the unit but Claye has negotiated occupancy until the end of their degree.

Claye's work spans the academic divisions of textiles and fine art and they are currently making sculptural forms in response to collections and archives of queer and trans histories. They speak positively about their choice to undertake a formal qualification in textiles as a way to learn technical aspects such as colour theory, but the journey has not been without its challenges. They have had to develop additional skills, such as plaster and cement casting, individually and with the help of artist friends. Choosing to work with less traditional textile materials has also meant that they've had to purchase materials that would have otherwise been supplied as part of the course. They have learned to be self-reliant, well supported by a network of friends and colleagues at Yorkshire Sculpture Park where Claye works (they know Sam Read and Hannah Lamb from working there).

During their second-year placement, Claye worked as an unpaid intern with a London wedding dress designer specialising in lace. They describe this unpaid internship as basically slave labour: nine hours of hand embroidery a day, for months, just to get a reference. After quickly realising this 'opportunity' was counterproductive and elitist, available only to those with access to private funding, Claye embarked on a self-directed internship, visiting up to ten exhibitions a day in central London. They say the University has generally been supportive of their approach, despite repeated requests for gender neutral toilets not being addressed, and they are consistently achieving high grades.

Having had a taste of life in London, Claye much prefers Yorkshire and access to open, neutral spaces like the moors for walking and making work in. Occasionally they feel a need for an industrial-strength dose of art so they visit London and power through twenty-four exhibitions in two days. However, the daily constitutional of walking and taking care of their emotional wellbeing is a greater priority. Their dream is to move to a two-bedroom house in Marsden and run artist residencies or retreats in the spare room. The financing of this brilliant sounding project has not yet been ironed out and, understandably, there are more immediate deadlines to meet. Claye acknowledges that they will need a rest after this intense period making for the final degree show and I'm grateful they've made time to talk to me about their practice in the midst of it all.

5. I visualise this as a rhizome structure with the lateral roots and shoots of non-expectant generosity growing outwards and sometimes taking root. The main stem of the artist's core practice continues to grow upwards (given the right conditions for growth) and the roots and shoots may lead to nowhere or may develop into a *stolon* (a creeping horizontal stem or runner that takes root at points along its length to form new plants) of new activity or opportunity for growth.

Conclusion

This small group of case studies feels like just the start of a more comprehensive piece of work. The research phase was very short and the brief was for a 'snapshot', not a complete mapping of the diversity of the visual arts sector in Yorkshire and the Humber. However, this snapshot exemplifies a large percentage of artists who are not represented by major institutions in the regions. Whilst major institutions have been mentioned in interviews, they are more often in the context of employment in non-artist roles than for showcasing their work as artists. When we talk about the 'resilience' of the visual arts sector, major institutions are notably absent.

Instead, the survival of individual artists seems largely dependent on collaboration and peer networks. It also seems that within an apparently nepotistic sector there is also an altruism of non-expectant generosity that reverberates through the networks.[5] These interviews map a kind of micro network within the visual arts sector, and were made possible by the generosity of artists' time, expertise and recommendations. The connectivity of this sector is complex and ever changing, but there is a strong sense that our survival depends more on each other than the funding bodies whose remit is to support artists.

Support, appreciation and recognition from peers and tutors are commonly cited as necessary to the survival of arts practice. Mandy and Nuala specifically mention their tutors' encouragement as pivotal in their trajectories and Sam identifies peer validation and collaboration as being primary factors in his continued development. Seeking out expertise and different kinds of support within networks is frequently discussed, expanding artists' capability and capacity. Especially for artists who have a more self-directed practice, awareness of and connectivity with these networks emerges as a form of self-care. Peer-led, reciprocal

support helps to meet a range of emotional, practical and developmental needs that would not be met otherwise, and is essential to a surviving (if not thriving) art sector.

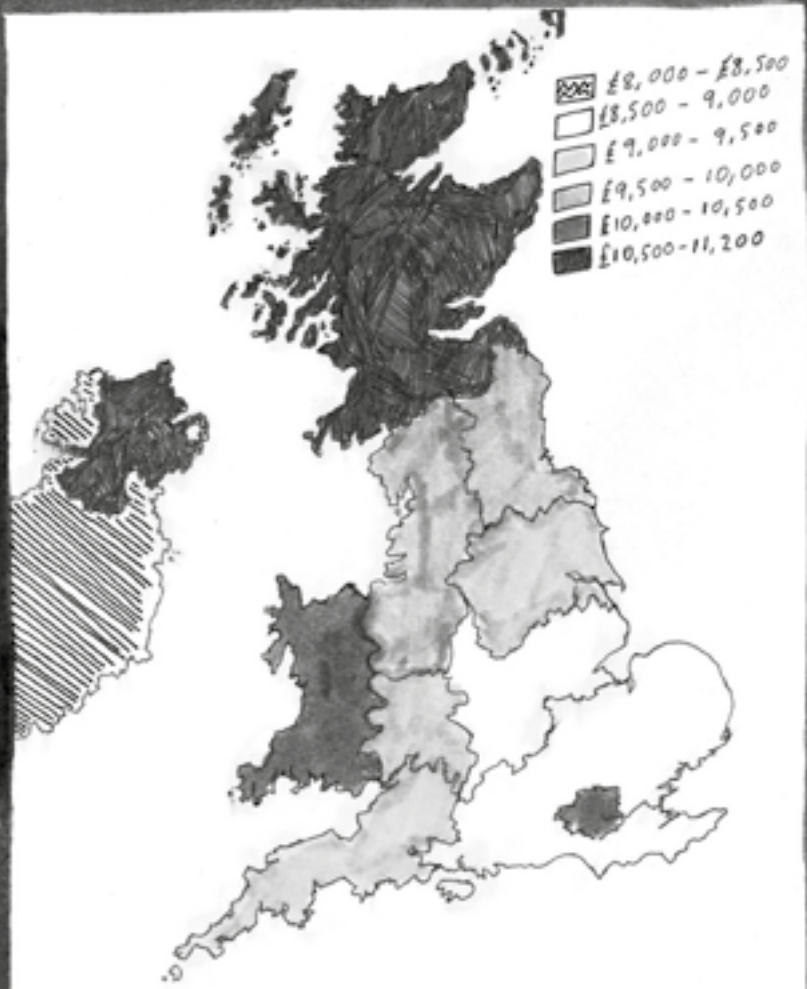
The subject of financial sustainability inevitably comes up in each interview, but often in the context of affordable studio spaces, compromising on materials, and working around the time constraints of day jobs. Taking the decision to work a day job to free practice from financial worries and pressure to make commercially viable work is one strategy (e.g. Nuala and Sam), however, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach and some arrangements work better at different times for different artists. Mandy and Bryan both quit their day jobs to concentrate on full-time practice. For Hannah and Lucy of WOMP, day jobs are currently taking up too much of their time and energy, but they are at early stage of career and more choices may well open up to them.

The places where artists live and work, and their ability to access local networks seems integral: Jane's access to tradespeople in Hebden Bridge; Sam's move to Sheffield to be part of a bigger city of makers; and Claye's day job at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, which provides an informal artist-invigilator peer network, all serve as examples. It's possible these artists would survive in any environment due to their open approach and adaptability, but it's clear that they are thriving because of their environment and networks.

My 'snowball sampling' approach has allowed new relationships to form; I've shared Sam's *Neo-Grotesk Realism* call for collaboration and asked my local network to recommend research sites in Huddersfield for Mandy's upcoming exhibition. Now that I have a good understanding of their practices I can signpost them, add them to my existing networks and perhaps call on their expertise in the future. The generosity of platforming and supporting each other sustains us and gives us agency when there is limited or non-existent support elsewhere. Transcending nepotism by extending generosity beyond our immediate networks (on the basis that we're all in the same boat, struggling to stay afloat), is our collective strategy of care. 'Resilience' in the visual arts, then, might be better defined as self-reflexive adaptability within supportive networks, bolstered by the serendipity of non-expectant generosity. Or in other words, everything leads to something else in one way or another.

Public spending by country and region

Spending per person, by region, 2017/2018



source: HM Treasury, country and regional analysis 2017, 9 November 2017

SMIZZ

Relational Resilience: Networks of Care in Yorkshire and the Humber

What does it mean to be resilient?
This is not just a philosophical question
or ethical call to reflect upon our own
individual strengths and weaknesses.
It is a deeply political question being
asked by ideologues and policy makers
who want us to abandon the dream
of ever achieving security and embrace
danger as a condition of life, now
and in the future.

Smizz with the Critical Arts in Health Network Group
Resilience & Resistance in Institutions
June 2019

The etymology of the word (according to Google) makes for interesting reading. Coined in the 1620s, resilience was defined as 'an act of rebounding', derived from the Latin *resiliens*, the present participle of *resilire:* to rebound or recoil (from *re-* 'back' + *salire* 'to jump, leap'). There was a steep rise in its use around the 1980s and a steady growth ever since, almost doubling year upon year. This isn't mere coincidence. The 1980s saw a political economy of resilience develop, laying the foundations for neoliberal governance and our present-day accelerationist tendencies.

Governments and organisations argue that we need to be resilient in the face of economic and social changes – which can include being dangerously understaffed, underfunded and overworked, while artificially dividing small funds between investment and prevention and support policies.[1] But resilience-led thinking causes policy makers and leaders to focus on 'strengths and opportunities', casually reorienting the conversation within impoverished communities where maladjustment and deficiency are rife. We see this in the North of England, where we wear our perseverance with pride. 'It's grim up north', but we gleefully boast that those not from Yorkshire can't handle the grimness like us: we are the ones who are truly resilient. For as long as I can remember, Yorkshire has had a bit of a complex. Some believe it should be independent, like Scotland and Wales, with freedom to spend money how it likes.[2] Like 'The North' generally, Yorkshire has suffered too long as the poor relation when it comes to the distribution

1. Marigold Walsh-Dilley et al., 'Rights for resilience: Bringing power, rights and agency into the resilience framework' (Washington, DC: Oxfam America, 2013). *http://www.acsf.cornell.edu/collaborations/oxfam-cu.php*

2. *Yorkshire Devolution*, 2019. *https://yorkshiredevolution.co.uk*

of taxpayers' money across the country. Those in support of devolution don't want to withdraw from the UK, but they want control over how to spend Yorkshire's share of public funding where it's best needed. I personally don't know where I stand on this idea of devolution in the region, but there is plenty of evidence that we are undervalued and underfunded.[3]

The state is the foremost agent and advocate of resilience, which is dangerous because its agenda is heavily influenced by the private economy, which invariably delimits and informs its funding strategies. Another problem is the adoption of priorities consistent with the economic sphere, which value short-termism over long-range perspectives.[4] And the art world (in all of its guises – from the traditional elitist art market, to local institutions, to the Art Council and other public funders) is hardly exempt from knowing or unknowingly mirroring these attitudes and values. Resilience affects all kinds of areas from economical strategies, to health and wellbeing, to accepted labour conditions and practices.

Resilience in 2019 tends to be framed in psychological terms; a person's ability to adapt to stressful circumstances or weather adversity. It is also a highly desirable trait in the modern workplace. Job adverts describe candidates who can 'thrive in stressful situations' and 'jump in with no complaints'. Upbeat office stationary tells us to 'hang in there' and 'keep going'. Resilience narratives implore us to bounce back from debilitating events (such as illness, injuries and personal loss), but whilst grit and gruff is needed to get us through life's tribulations and society's injustices, pushing this agenda to justify poorer working and living conditions is simply not acceptable. Art workers' labour has long been exploited, from 'using' artists for community projects (temporary contracts are cheaper and less complicated than waged social workers), to underpaying or offering 'exposure/ experience' instead of pay, to the persistence of unpaid internships in publicly-funded galleries (other creative industries no longer allow this, see RIBA's condition of every intern being paid[5]). These practices are both deeply unethical and present impregnable barriers to inclusion.

When I started working on this 'Snapshot' commission for YVAN about what it means to be a visual contemporary artist practicing in Yorkshire and the Humber, the theme of resilience continued to crop up. My whole life, and practice, has been about trying to question unjust systems and figure out ways we can gain equity within the lives we lead. How we can amplify voices that are marginalised, hidden or ignored? Often my works are about capturing the system in all of its complex

3. In 2017/18 the North East and North West received £9,847 and £9,815 per person, while Yorkshire received £8,969pp. To put this in context, Yorkshire is home to almost 5.4 million, greater than that of Scotland (with spending per head even higher than London at £11,500 in 2017/18) and its economy is bigger than that of Wales (Wales has similar spending per head to London at around £10,500). It has three of the ten largest cities in the UK (Leeds, Sheffield and Bradford) and in 2017 was around the same size of Northern Ireland in square miles (NI population was only 1.9 million in 2017). Research Briefings, Houses of Parliament, 2018. *http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04033/SN04033.pdf*

4. Pierre Filion, 'Fading Resilience? Creative Destruction, Neoliberalism and Mounting Risks', *Sapiens* 6:1 (2013).

5. Fred Bernstein, 'RIBA Takes a Stand Against Unpaid Labor', *Architect Magazine*, 38.03.2011. *https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/riba-takes-a-stand-against-unpaid-labor_o*

6. Orian Brook et al. 'Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries', in collaboration with Create London, Universities of Edinburgh/ Sheffield and funded by AHRC, 2018. *http://createlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Panic-Social-Class-Taste-and-Inequalities-in-the-Creative-Industries1.pdf.*

See also David O'Brian, 'Who is missing from the picture? The problem of inequality in the creative economy and what we can do about it', UK Research and Innovation, University of Edinburgh, 2018. *https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FP013155%2F1*

7. Arts Council England, 'The Active Lives Survey', 2019. *https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/participating-and-attending/active-lives-survey*

institutional wickedness, demonstrated in some of the drawings and maps included here. They provide local evidence that corroborate the findings in national reports such as 'Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries'.[6] I chose a cross-section of areas that represent diverse conditions to interrogate what resilience means – in theory and practice – for artists based in Yorkshire and the Humber. I looked at Sheffield, Doncaster, Hull, Huddersfield, Withernsea and other nearby places, documenting population size per local council, art engagement scores undertaken by Active Lives Survey,[7] ACE funding awarded between 2017 and 2019, and local council funding and opportunities for arts-based activity. I interviewed and informally spoke with artists working in art organisations who told me about their working conditions and environments within local art institutions across the region. I also talked to artists working in health and social care, local council culture directors, and public health and art policy writers.

What I wasn't expecting to find in people's responses was evidence of a kind of 'relational resilience'. At first I thought it might be an individual case, but the more I looked the more I saw 'ecologies of care' or 'caring networks' as a system or mode of operating. This is important because such self-organised models can change the terms of debate around the creative economy, recognising celebratory discourses whilst enabling more critically engaged voices. These networks of care act as softener for the harsh economic and elitist conditions of the creative industries, especially if these artists are from working class backgrounds or other underrepresented groups. Here was an active repurposing of resilience as a reflection of the quality of relationships within the region.

Here are some recurring or shared features of 'networks of care':

The number of people vary although a minimum seems to be three

Friends appear central and consistent

There is a core and outer set of networks

Service providers and funders are often in the inner network

They can arise spontaneously or be initiated

They are usually initiated by an artist who is already part of a community

There is usually a primary or lead artist that does most of the negotiating and organising

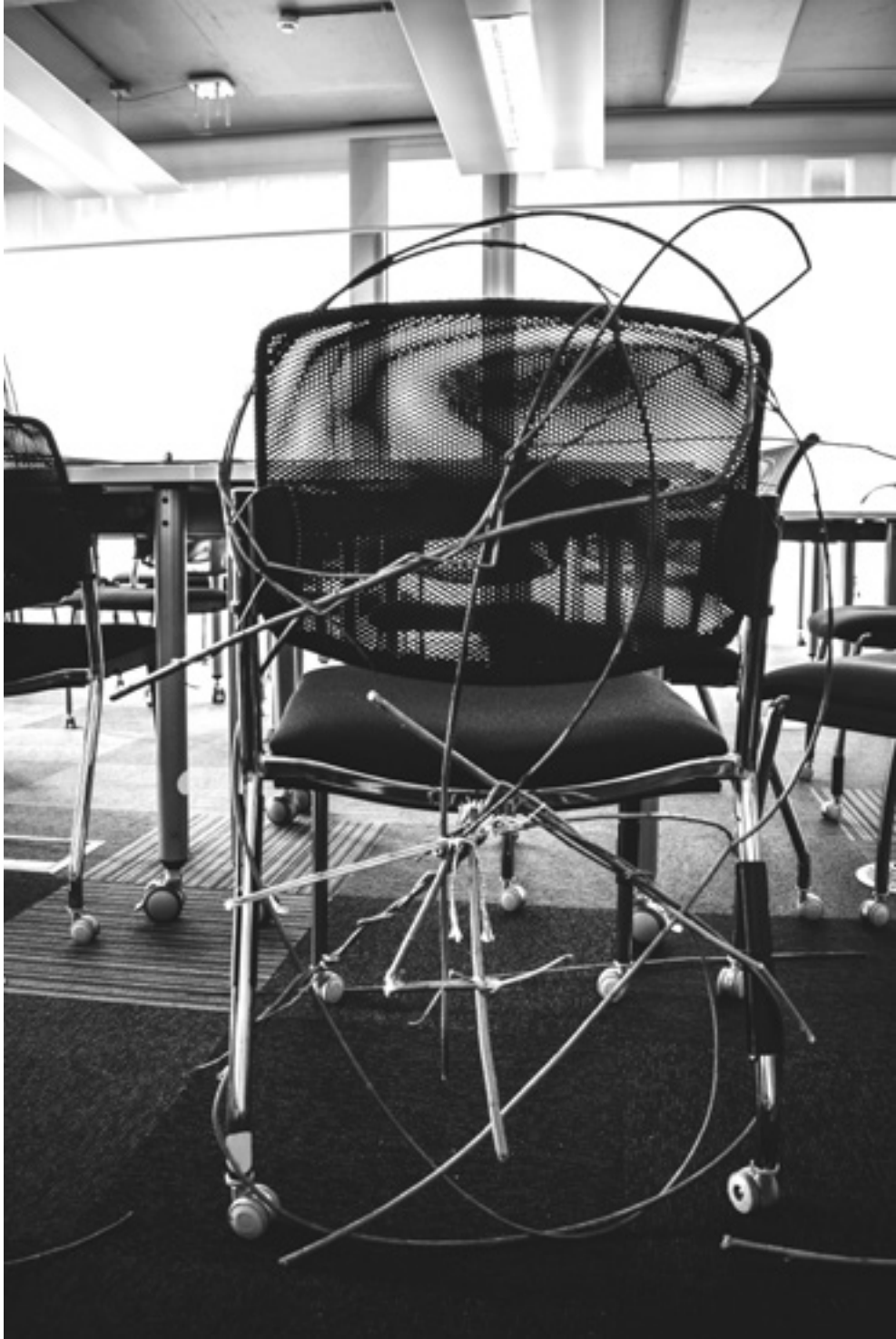
They are linked to dynamic places and organisations

The stories from participants show ‘cycles of mutual influence’, where both place and social relationships allow the co-creation of spaces in which people can care well for themselves and one another. They actively (or unknowingly in some cases) resist dominant working structures that affect larger organisations or groups, and as such put artists’ wellbeing ahead of profile and outcomes. They all have feelings of belonging and attachment to place, which allow their caring networks to come together. Crucially, being part of a caring network allows them to build relationships, community, art literacy and positive identities, with the knock-on effect of an increase in local revenue.

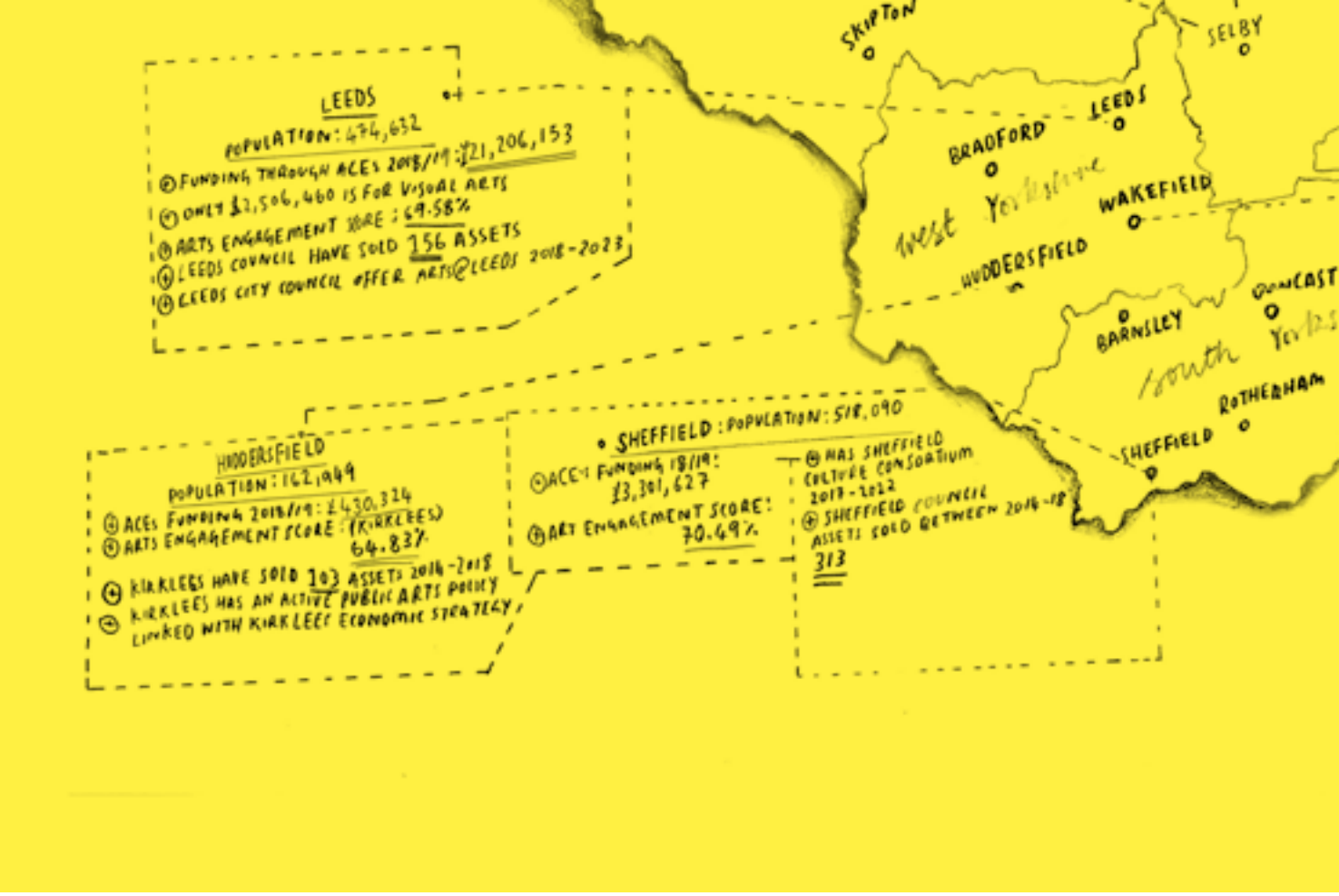
Society measures successes on GDP and a narrative of exposure and financial outcomes, but this pushes all the important stuff to the margins as it fails to acknowledge the complexities of lived experience. When a small group of people shift the way they act, and make these complex things visible, it can spread the social cures among wider and wider circles. And through this, if we’re lucky, we can convince policy-makers and funders to support the important stuff.

Real accomplishment is found in the giving and receiving of care. You are not your work. But we are the sum of all the times we helped others, created safe spaces and challenged the structures surrounding us that are unjust or inflexible through our practices. How do I know this? Because, despite the current economic climate and my background, I got to be here, writing these words, through the network of care that has been woven around me. For this, my heartfelt thank you.

Smizz with the Critical Arts in Health Network Group
Resilience & Resistance in Institutions
June 2019




CULTIVATORS
SEE THE LONG GAME
THEY'RE BIG PICTURE
PEOPLE CAN HELP ALIGN
& ORIENT OTHERS & THEIR
OWN ACTIONS



KERRY HARKER

Seeing beyond a false 'ecology' for visual arts in the North

It has become commonplace to hear visual arts activity within a given place described as an 'ecology'. Not only is such thinking fully internalised within the language of managed culture, but to some degree it has also permeated the everyday speech of artists and arts professionals everywhere. I am no exception: in the transfer paper written at the end of the first year of my PhD study, I wrote, 'In effect, [artist-led initiatives] provide a complete ecology of visual arts practice,' a position I now reject for reasons that will hopefully become clear. The wider absorption of this deceptively simple little word is something I can report on first hand: last year I travelled widely across the North and Midlands, carrying out research by interviewing individuals running artist-led initiatives in some of our larger towns and cities.[1] The idea of an 'arts ecology,' sometimes but not always explicitly referencing the 'e' word itself, followed me from conversation to conversation nearly everywhere I went. It has even stolen quietly into other pages of this publication in the words and drawings of my fellow contributors. A popular notion then. But how apt or benign a concept is it, really, and what's it doing to a precarious visual arts sector already straining under the weight of austerity economics and the requirements of funders and policy makers?

In its dictionary definition, 'ecology' refers to a branch of biology that deals with 'the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings'.[2] In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams sets out how the word came to prominence and took over from 'environment' and its associations (such as 'environmentalism') in the 1960s, having achieved common usage in the

1. I spoke to organisations based in Birmingham, Coventry, Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Nottingham, Rotherham and Salford, often more than one in each location.

2. Oxford Dictionary Online, *https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ecology*

English language only in the mid-twentieth century. This linguistic migration gave rise to today's essential vocabulary of 'ecocrisis, ecocatastrophe, ecopolitics and ecoactivist,' to which we might also now add 'ecotourism' and a plethora of new words with the prefix 'eco' such as 'eco-footprint'.[3] Imbued with new meaning in the twenty-first century as 'cultural ecology,' it has become an expedient and potentially compelling way to conceive of the somehow interlinked activities — of disparate large and small organisations, agencies, venues, groups and collectives, policy makers and funders, plus the infinite variety of individual practitioners — that make up the sphere we understand as the 'arts' and the 'creative industries' more broadly. John Holden's 2015 report *The Ecology of Culture* further developed the idea, moving away from assessing the contribution of the cultural sector and its individual components in purely economic terms, instead emphasising the complex fluidity and interconnectedness of the conditions under which culture can take place.[4] This involved taking a holistic approach to how all facets of what he terms 'public', 'commercial' and 'homemade' culture, operating across traditional divides such as 'professional' and 'amateur' and across huge disparities of scale, need to be considered as linked, interdependent and necessary elements of the whole. Therefore, the argument goes, even activities happening on a micro scale, with little or no public funding, could be seen as critical to the maintenance of the wider cultural sphere in different ways. This would attach non-monetary forms of value to those unable to be counted on the basis of financial indicators alone.

3. Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p.111.

4. John Holden, *The Ecology of Culture* (Swindon: Arts & Humanities Research Council), January 2015.

5. Alan Davey, 'Introduction: Preserving and Enhancing a National Cultural Ecology in England,' in *This England: How Arts Council uses its investment to shape a national cultural ecology.*' (London: Arts Council England, 2014), p.4.

This statement by Arts Council England's Chief Executive, Alan Davey, which predates Holden's paper, makes clear the extent to which 'cultural ecology' has become endemic within thinking on the arts over the last decade:

> **'The Arts Council's role in [creating the conditions for a thriving cultural sector] has been to direct its investment in considered and sustainable ways, to benefit the whole arts and cultural ecology — the living, evolving network of artists, cultural organisations and venues co-operating in many fruitful partnerships — artistic, structural and financial. The metaphor of an ecology, of a living, balanced environment, expresses how nothing happens within this system without its impact being felt widely. So it's vital we develop it with respect and care'.[5]**

As so often, funders construct the steely framework into which we must try to shoehorn our unruly passions. But when it comes to the visual arts, how well do we understand these links between actors in the field, the intimate entanglements of alliances, cliques, preferences and aversions among what are, after all, *people* negotiating complex social relations — and the ways in which they impact upon one another? How appropriate is 'ecology' as a metaphor for what we do, and does it actually help us to analyse and acknowledge the differing contributions of all those involved? Do we rightly perceive, from our everyday experiences and observations, complex connections between them and simply land on 'ecology' as a more-or-less convincing way to give shape to a shadowy symbiosis? I'm mindful that when invoking a 'we' here it is necessary, as always, to consider and work to include (as this publication seeks to do) those who exist beyond the officially sanctioned activities of a very few elite actors and a very few elite institutions — artists working at the fringes of something defined not by them, but by a centre from which many feel excluded.

The frequent reference to localised scenes structured around cities or regions when invoking a 'visual arts ecology' is perhaps unsurprising given that we operate within an administrative framework that tends to carve practice up into distinct geographic territories, no doubt in response to the political boundaries that structure everyday life and therefore determine monetary investment in the arts. This text has been jointly commissioned by *Corridor8* and regional body YVAN. Both operate within a terrain delineated as 'The North', at least partly for the purposes of the Arts Council England funding upon which they depend. The sheer diversity of our regional topography, which comprises major urban centres as well as expansive rural tracts and coastal communities (both landscapes littered with small towns and tiny villages) poses a challenge to coherence and communication that YVAN readily acknowledges.[6] All of these places and spaces carry local specificities that impact materially on visual arts practice, as do varying levels of economic investment, and of connectivity, enabled both digitally and physically via road and rail networks, to other parts of the regional environment. Across the North, this could be said to comprise a relatively small number of major institutions (galleries) and a much greater number and variety of medium or small-sized organisations that include: formal education providers as well as self-organised alternatives; a mass of artist-led initiatives, collectives and micro organisations many of which are not venue-based; studio providers; commercial galleries;

6. For the purposes of transparency, I sit on the Boards of both YVAN and *Corridor8*, and my text is informed by this organisational involvement and oversight.

7. John Clark and Ellen McLeod, ART: Independence and Interdependence, *A Snapshot of the Visual Arts Scene in Sheffield* (University of Sheffield, 2016). *https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.551028!/file/Sheffield-Art.pdf*

and many other entities and expressions such as publications, online platforms, arts activism, social practices and more. Many can be defined and categorised in multiple ways. Some self-consciously identify with the 'visual arts' as a distinct art form with its own internal language and logics, but there are so many more places and things that resist or depart from traditional definitions, the boundaries of which have long since eroded. To attempt to list them in all their diversity is to attach labels and connotations that are already loaded and inadequate, such is the fluidity and plurality of creative practices today. Across the Northern region, can we really align organisations' activities as disparate as, say, York Open Studios, the Harris, Feral Art School, The Ropewalk, Tate Liverpool, The Art House, S1 Artspace, Heart of Glass, Goldtapped, the Staithes Gallery, serf, Chrysalis Arts, Baltic, Space2, Output Gallery, In-situ, Harewood House or ROAR beneath the banner of one 'visual arts ecology'?

Artists based in rural or coastal communities or the small towns across our region which have felt the very worst effects of austerity may potentially consider themselves poorly represented by the powerhouses of Leeds and Sheffield, two of England's ten core cities and both major centres for contemporary visual arts. Patchy research, such as the 2015 report *ART: Independence and Interdependence, a Snapshot of the Visual Arts Scene in Sheffield,*[7] fills in a few gaps on the actualities of practice, but can raise more questions than answers — in this case the far from simple challenge of defining both 'Sheffield' and 'visual arts' practice. Much more must be done to better understand this vast artistic landscape and the survival strategies that allow all those who consider themselves artists to stay in the game. Hearing the deeply affecting stories of those interviewed by Alice Bradshaw, sensitively recounted here, only highlights the need to amplify more, and more diverse, voices than the ones we often hear.

Perhaps our region is too wide and unwieldy to ever make sense of, on any terms, or perhaps we are just looking for meaning in the wrong places.

Yet talk of a 'cultural ecology' persists. It is an organising principle, a unifying device designed to make sense of what is in reality an amorphous mass of people, places and activities that are often only tenuously linked, or not linked at all. The taxonomic impulse to define and delimit is ingrained and we are, it seems, always trying to give physical shape to the nebulous cloud of activities which constitute what we think of as the 'visual arts'. 'Yorkshire Sculpture Triangle' was conceived a handful of years ago to align four separate institutions spread across Leeds and Wakefield, fostering a shared identity around 'sculpture'.[8] This conceptual unity, initially articulated in the form of a triangular logo, worked to attract cultural tourism by outwardly promoting the region as one of the leading global sites for the art form.[9] This summer, with the advent of the new 'Yorkshire Sculpture International' [YSI], the triangle has been allowed to quietly recede into the background to make room for a new visual identity, which perhaps more assuredly aligns itself with the type of international biennial of contemporary art that now proliferates globally. This summer's inaugural event is accompanied by the perhaps inevitable fringe festival, 'Index', which will run for precisely the same dates.[10] It is self-evident that many other organisations and venues in the region also promote sculptural practice, and a challenge here to what we might think of as 'ecologyism' (an inelegant term I know, but one which separates it from both ecologism and ecologicalism which are different things) is to ask why alliances such as the YSI tend to involve organisations of a similar scale, rather than forging partnerships across alternative conceptual bridges? Scale of organisation, usually measured by corresponding levels of financial investment, is one of the major ways in which we articulate and project identity within the visual arts.

If the YSI brings together some of the largest institutions in Yorkshire, where is our region's comparator to 'Common Practice'? This is the advocacy network of small (by London standards) visual arts organisations in the capital who came together in 2011 to collectively commission research and thereby address the difficulties of being seen, heard and valued in an arena dominated by standard metrics based on footfall and economic impact. Their first report, *Size Matters*, sought to 'articulate the value of small visual arts organisations within the wider ecology'.[11] Written in 2011, it indicates an even earlier adoption of 'ecology', one that sat uncomfortably with subsequent research participants. This was reflected in the next Common Practice report, *Value, Measure, Sustainability*, published the following year:

> **'This [ecological term] was problematised by some, on the basis that it naturalised the existing order, potentially delimiting critical analysis of a notionally stable system, and thereby inhibiting its disruption'.[12]**

In *Size Matters*, Thelwall alternates between the terms 'ecology' and 'ecosystem,' an interesting linguistic slippage. The use of 'ecosystem' occurs less frequently in cultural discourse, but it

8. They are The Hepworth Wakefield, Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Wakefield), the Henry Moore Institute (Leeds) and Leeds Art Gallery (the latter two are conjoined buildings and counted as one, hence the 'triangle').

9. See for example *Yorkshire Sculpture Triangle* wins £750,000 for triennial show, Guardian online, *https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jul/28/yorkshire-sculpture-triangle-wins-750000-for-triennial-show*

10. See *https://www.indexfestival.org*

11. Sarah Thelwall, *Size Matters* (London: Common Practice, 2011), p.4.

12. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, *Value, Measure, Sustainability* (London; Common Practice, 2012), p.5.

does creep in from time to time. In NESTA's *Creative Nation* report, published in 2018, the analysis of creative 'Meetups' (organised networking events) conveys how datasets were studied 'to measure the diversity of the networking activity in a local ecosystem'.[13] Google 'ecosystem' and you will find endless diagrammatic visualisations constructed around the notion that in the natural world, such systems are governed by the existence of a primary predator.

Common Practice members are able to assemble around their shared understanding of what constitutes the 'contemporary visual arts,' something they might align with 'critically engaged practice', a similarly contentious term. There is a tactic agreement (if not a conspiracy) among some visual arts organisations that only certain facets of contemporary practice should be sanctioned and only the work of certain individuals shown. But this reflects a far narrower understanding of visual arts practice than the breadth of work that is actually produced in our region (as the above list suggests), and represents a significant challenge for the discourse on diversity that is now central to public funding for the arts. Adherence to what Suhail Malik calls the 'predicament of professionalised criticality' is central to the problem he identifies in formal art education today. For him, 'criticality' has become just another orthodoxy, and one which ultimately serves to prepare artists for a lifetime of commodification:

13. NESTA, *Creative Nation: How the creative industries are powering the UK's nations and regions*, (London: NESTA, 2018, p.62).

14. Suhail Malik, 'Art education and the predicament of professionalised criticality' in *Politics of Study* (London: Open Editions, 2015), p.51.

15. Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto, 2011), p.1.

> **'…art schools are now but a necessary step for emerging artists to get the certifying stamp of institutional credibility in order to become a professional artist, to get into a gallery, hook up with curators in (semi-) public institutions, or have your work in the circuit of market flipping'.[14]**

There isn't sufficient space here to question why so much of the visual arts sector, including formal Fine Art education, is fixated on the exhibition format, but this seems to me to be an allied issue. How many of the thousands of annual graduates will go on to have careers based on producing work for exhibitions within a small set of elite institutions? Outside this frame, individuals and groups continue to make essential, meaningful work that we might loosely gather under the 'visual arts' banner but which rarely touches on exhibition making: the resurgence of an interest in 'socially engaged practice', for example, is evidence of other priorities at work. Of course, individuals and organisations across the North have been embedded within communities for decades, working collaboratively towards social change and often beleaguered by questions over the 'quality' of the work they co-produce with them (provoking further questions around how to define 'quality', and who defines it). They are largely untroubled by the long arm of the international art market.

If we were to seek a corrective to Holden's totalising worldview (which manifests itself visually in my mind's eye as a circular shape — no sharp edges), we might look to Professor Gregory Sholette's concept of 'creative dark matter'. This he describes as a vast mass of 'makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices — all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world'.[15] Like 'ecology,' the term is borrowed from science, but this time from astrophysics, where it refers to the essential but invisible glue that holds the universe together. Until recently this was poorly understood by scientists and perceptible

only by differentiating it from fixed and knowable astral bodies such as planets and stars. The art world's structure is, for Sholette, 'strictly hierarchical', a pyramidal structure (decidedly sharp-edged) wherein artists play similarly adhesive but lower-level roles as technicians, administrators and educators within a system that simply could not function without them.[16] At the same time, he quotes Carol Duncan's 1983 invocation of a glut of 'failed' artists who will never make it, an oversupply that is the 'normal condition of the art market'.[17] If, within our Northern regions, we maintain too narrow a focus on a very small number of elite exhibition-making institutions, we risk perpetuating this structural condition and consigning the young artists being educated here to what Sholette describes as 'prolific failure' when measured in art world terms.[18] To challenge this, we must recognise artists as the glue that holds the universe of the visual arts together, and we need better terms and structures through which to think about, discuss and articulate what they do, where they do it, with whom and why, and what contributions their super-diverse practices make to the places where they happen and the people whose lives they touch.

Is it not time then to retire 'ecology' as an unfitting metaphor for what goes on in the visual arts, and in culture much more widely? Complicity with such an ideology can only serve to keep everyone in their place, supporting a status quo that keeps too many artists locked in an extractive relationship with an art-world economy that can never accommodate them. The problem is that it creates a false impression of homogeneity and equivalence and an 'everything in its place' wholesomeness that so many artists, existing at the sharp end, know to be false. The visual arts are, in any case, unhappy bedfellows with notions of a broader sphere called the 'creative industries', harnessed as these now are to a federal Industrial Strategy with a focus on economic growth. The notion of 'ecology' conceals more than it reveals, especially the power dynamics and flows of actual money that structure the everyday realities of practitioners. Research carried out for Arts Council England in 2016 and finally published late last year reveals that, among the artists surveyed, the average income *derived from art practice* in 2015 was just £6,020 and two thirds earned less than £5,000 from it. The precarity of working artists is a cause formally taken up by the relatively new Artists' Union England, the Paying Artists campaign and many others (including individuals like Su Jones), who campaign tirelessly for the fair remuneration of artists and its enshrinement in arts policy. They remind us that the way things are for artists is not *natural* but *social* — the result of policy and a system remade daily by the people within it.

It is the personal testimony of artists, heard in conversation with friends, stumbled across on social media, and profiled in the pages of publications such as this one, that really put meat on the bones of these alarming statistics, vividly conjuring an inkling of what it means to be an artist today. In this environment, survival strategies are urgent and necessary. Artists, as ever, find ways to become resilient. Rather than going along with 'ecology', let's refocus on the sense of 'community' that artists really value — complex and diverse networks of friendship and care among peers, often hyper-localised, that nurture practice as an essential expression of lived realities and make it possible in the face of an often hostile art world. Let's look to the supportive relations among people that Sarah Smizz's drawings within these pages so beautifully illustrate and illuminate. We need to find new ways to

16. Ibid., p.44.

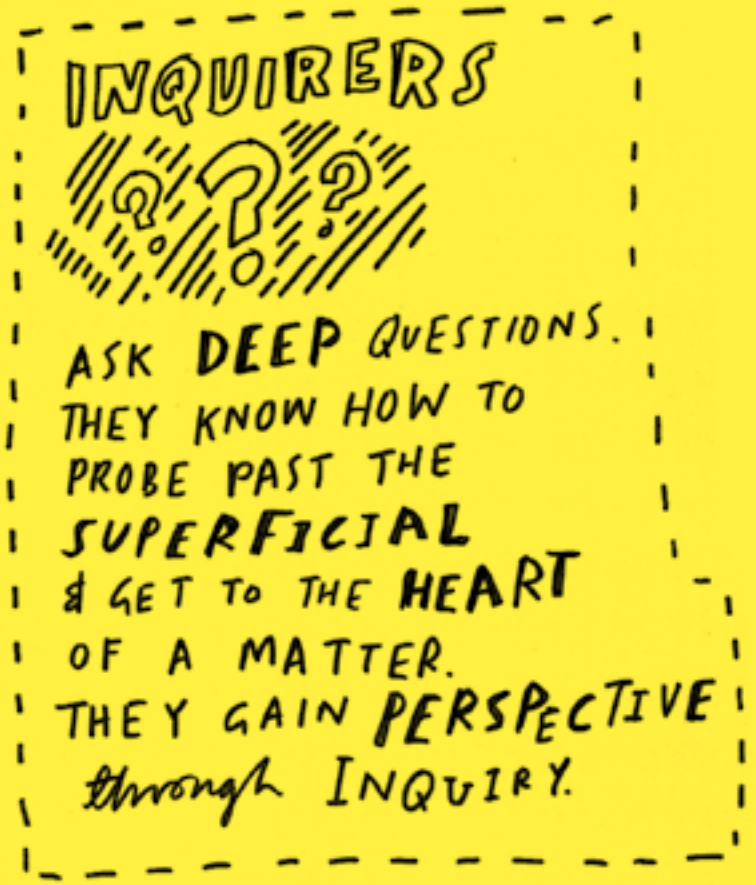
17. Ibid., p.6.

18. Ibid., p.3.

articulate what 'community' means among artists and why those who enable it to flourish outside the centre need meaningful support. As Smizz perfectly puts it:

> **'Community is a feeling that you're part of something that uplifts you and allows you to see eye-to-eye with different people from different backgrounds. A community holds you to a higher standard; it encourages you to focus on possibility, not fear'.[19]**

19. Sarah Smizz, Facebook post, 3 May 2019.



Archetypes of Empathy
5 of 6

THOMAS HOPKIN

Mick Morgan, 'Authentocracy' and Art

Mick Morgan, the former rugby league footballer, might not be the most obvious starting point for a conversation around the Yorkshire visual arts ecology, but continue reading unless you are, by Morgan's estimation,

> a 'bottleless git'.

Morgan's pan-Yorkshire career had notable stints playing for Wakefield Trinity, York and Featherstone Rovers throughout the 1970s, but has been immortalised by his outrageously partisan commentary of the 1994 Regal Trophy Final between Wigan and Castleford. His diatribe is triggered by the rogue forearm of Wigan's Kelvin Skerrett connecting with the head of Castleford's Andy Hay.

> "Send the dirty git off! Get him
> off the field, that were diabolical",

rages Morgan. Directing his ire at the referee (Campbell), he continues:

> "Walk him, Campbell, if you've got
> any bottle. If you've got any bottle,
> Campbell, he should walk.
> That were absolutely diabolical
> …he's given him a yella card.
> I can't spake.
> You bottleless git Campbell.
> You dickhead."

Morgan's disappointment soon turns to jubilation as Castleford gain momentum and address their injustice at the hands of the 'bottleless' Campbell by scoring a vital try.

> "Ohhhh, this is it!
> What a magnificent try!
> Shove it up your arse!
> Who's the best club in the world!?
> Never mind anyone else."

The vehemence and ecstasy Morgan exhibits is compounded, elevated, by his straight-talking, no-nonsense, heart-on-his-sleeve commentary. His authentic delivery.

Authenticity and the mobilisation of this notion in culture and politics is a ticklish subject. In his book *Authentocrats: Culture, Politics and the New Seriousness*,[1] Joe Kennedy argues that we find ourselves amidst 'a laundered, centrist populism that seeks to wield power with reference to an authenticity that is always "just over there"'. 'Authentocracy' relies on perpetuating certain enduring myths related to regional and national identity, plumbing the depths of Yorkshireness, Northernness, Englishness and other geographical variants, to discover a timeless, dislocated, irrefutable logic.

In a chapter titled, 'The Nine Yorkshiremen of the Apocalypse', Kennedy begins with a farcical scene that has fuelled authentocracy discussions. On an episode of Question Time in 2017, shortly before the general election, Jeremy Corbyn (no stranger to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), was challenged over his hypothetical unwillingness to employ the Trident nuclear arsenal. Vociferous attacks came from a selection of white, male and 'irately puce' audience members, whose images were quickly collated and circulated as a composite on social media. The Nine Yorkshiremen of the Apocalypse are, in Kennedy's opinion, 'ruddy, jingoistic old men with vowels flatter than the River Humber's flood plain'. They are 'not uncommon in the middle of Yorkshire, but they're hardly the picture of British demographic averageness in 2017' and their plain-speaking homogeneity not a reflection of the diversity of thought, identity and opinion in God's Own County.

These figures, somewhere between stereotype and simulacra, have been presented as a metonym for all other denizens in the county. Anyone who deviates from this extreme centre risks being accused of inauthenticity, and as such, robbed of an audience in the theatre of the so-called 'north-south rivalry'.[2]

This is where, I suggest, visual art plays a vital role in dismantling some of the more alarming authenticity narratives in a climate when ethno-nationalism oozes through mainstream political discourse and the most potent weapon of direct action is an airborne milkshake (McDonald's or Five Guys are both acceptable, apparently). Craft beer and 'frothy coffee' have recently been joined by milkshakes, in a culture war being fought on all fronts.

In Kerry Harker's essay, included in this publication, she references Gregory Sholette's concept of 'creative dark matter'. The concept illustrates the difficulty in viewing multifaceted and varied creative practices outside the rubric of formal, institutional practice. It is within this creative dark matter that we can find some of the most pertinent discussions regarding identity and regionalism and the flow between the global and the local in contemporary art practice, but that is not to say barriers and class conventions do not exist for artists moving between these spheres. In a recent interview with *a-n*, Leeds-based artist Simeon Barclay reflected on his experience moving from working in manufacturing to a formal art education, saying, 'When I first arrived at art school I tried to deny everything that went before and became quite bookish, but if you're going to live with the work that you do, it's very important that it has a sense of coming from a real place'.[3]

Barclay's 'real place' is quite different from the Yorkshire conjured by the apoplectic audience of Question Time, or Mick Morgan's fanaticism. Here lies a crucial point. If something occurs in a place, it is not necessarily *of* a place. The specificity of personal experience cannot always account for wider generalisations about place and identity. Conversely, it is also necessary to consider how the conditions of particular locations affect identity and practice, artistic or otherwise. The complex formulations of socio-spatial politics were long ago addressed in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*,[4] while Dave Russell's *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* explores the regional specificity of these politics via various cultural forms, including literature, sport, television, film and language.[5] What is absent from these discussions is visual art, or the constituent parts of its 'creative dark matter'.

It is with these points in mind that the YVAN poses the question, 'What does it mean to be Northern in the context of visual arts?'. Over the course of 2019, YVAN, along with its partners in the North West and North East, will explore the multiple interpretations of this question by talking to artists and organisations who operate in the geographical 'north' of England (although this initial framing calls in to question boundary distinction and the notion of 'hinterland heritage'[6]). As this conversation evolves, it may offer an insight into how geography and place are perceived, both inside and out, and from the spaces in between, in a region whose dark matter moves with an indefatigable creative force.

1. Joe Kennedy, *Authentocrats: Culture, Politics and the New Seriousness* (London: Repeater, 2018)

2. In *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), Dave Russell identifies a performative element to geography and identity. This is illustrated in a toe-curling vignette involving Labour MP Owen Smith and a 'frothy coffee' from Pontypridd's Prince's café in Joe Kennedy's *Authentocrats*.

3. Amelia Crouch, 'A Q&A with Simeon Barclay, artist exploring the construction of identity', *a-n*, 31.01.2019. *https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/a-qa-with-simeon-barclay-artist-exploring-the-construction-of-identity/*

4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983).

5. Joe Kennedy also refers to these cultural forms in *Authentocracy*, giving the YBAs as an example of how contemporary art and 'Britishness' have collided in the past.

6. Larry Achiampong and David Blandy's video installation in the exhibition *Idea of North* at BALTIC (1 May 2018 – 30 September 2018) explores hinterland heritage. It contrasts a video of Hadrian's Wall with the in-game fantasy world of *Skyrim*. This cluster of truth, myth, history and spatiality reveals aspects of the 'north' found in the cultural imagination.

Archetypes of Empathy
6 of 6

ART ECOLOGY

AFTER CARE

CONTRIBUTORS

Alice Bradshaw is an artist, curator, writer and serial collaborator based in Elland, West Yorkshire. She is interested in discarded, everyday materials and words. Recycling and repetition are important strategies in her work, which set up a dialogue around the value of rubbish through objects, publications, exhibitions and events.

Alice is the coordinator of Art Lab at Dean Clough in Halifax; a monthly event of artists' presentations and discussions established in January 2019. She set this event up through an identified personal and collective desire for more conversations about art practice locally, with a focus on peer support and critical dialogue. In addition, Alice is co-curator of *Dwell Time*; a publication of art and writing reflecting on mental wellbeing, produced in partnership with the Penistone Line Partnership. *Dwell Time* is currently in its second edition which will be launched in Spring/Summer 2020.

ALICEBRADSHAW.CO.UK

Kerry Harker graduated from a Fine Art degree and MA in Feminism and the Visual Arts, both at the University of Leeds, in the mid-1990s. She has been working in the visual arts sector, primarily in the Leeds city region, since then. In 2006 she was Co-founder of artist-led initiative Project Space Leeds (with Pippa Hale and Diane Howse), which led to her co-founding The Tetley (with Pippa Hale) in 2013, where she was Artistic Director until 2015. She is currently a PhD candidate in the School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds, where her research focuses on artist-led initiatives in the UK since the 1990s. She is also Founder and Artistic Director of the East Leeds Project, which focuses on social practice along the Wyke Beck Valley corridor between Roundhay and Rothwell.

EASTLEEDSPROJECT.ORG

Thomas Hopkin is PhD candidate at Newcastle University in the department Media, Culture, Heritage. His research is concerned with austerity and its impact on contemporary visual arts organisations in England. He is also assisting with ongoing research at Newcastle University into the future of civic culture in the UK and the impact of austerity on the 'civic purpose' of public organisations. As part of the Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership, he will be working with the Yorkshire and Humber Visual Arts Network, researching what it means to be Northern in the context of the visual arts.

Sarah Smizz is an artist, illustrative-mapper, recently qualified radiotherapist and is undertaking a practice-led PhD at Sheffield Hallam University. Her practice is motivated by empathy and questioning power, injustices and the knowledge-paradigms that surround us in the systems that we work within (particularly education, healthcare, governmental and artworld structures). She does this by using drawing and socially engaged art methods to gain visibility, interrogate the spaces within, establish authentic connections and make information understandable.

Smizz has shown her work at Postmasters Gallery, NYC, Site Gallery, Sheffield, UK and Tate Britain and has been commissioned by the BBC, NHS England, Channel 4, *The Guardian*, TED, and others. She has previously won the National UK Award for Radiotherapist of the Year (2016/17), and a Guardian Education Award (2018) for her work, and is publishing a book with Macmillan Cancer Services (2020).

@SMIZZ
SARAHSMIZZ.COM

Additional content:

Drawings by Sarah Smizz, apart from 'snowball sampling' diagram, by Alice Bradshaw **(p16)**. Photographs of artworks courtesy of artists.

Visit **corridor8.co.uk/residencies/yvan-resilience-is-futile/** to download a fill size image of Smizz's map, produced as part of YVAN's Snapshot artist commission.

Design by:

Dust
340 Glossop Rd
Sheffield
S10 2HW

studio@du.st
http://du.st

Supported by:

Sheffield Hallam University

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Lara Eggleton
Managing Editor
Corridor8 Ltd
le@corridor8.co.uk

Kerry Campbell
Residency Coordinator
Corridor8 Ltd

Adrian Friedli
Executive Programme Director
Yorkshire & Humber
Visual Arts Network Ltd
*director@*yvan*.org.uk*

Corridor8 is a not-for-profit platform for contemporary visual arts and writing in the North of England.

corridor8.co.uk

C V A N Yorkshire & Humber Contemporary Visual Arts Network

YVAN is a support organisation funded by Arts Council England through a partnership with The Art House, and are part of the national Contemporary Visual Arts Network.

yvan.org.uk
cvanetwork.squarespace.com
the-arthouse.org.uk

Resilience is Futile

ISBN 978-1-9160274-1-1

A Corridor8 and Yorkshire & Humber Visual Arts Network publication