ALTERNATIVES IN RETROSPECT: THE IMPACT OF ALTERNATIVE ART SPACES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTISTS' CAREERS

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to document the history of alternative arts spaces in the United States and their unique contribution to the ecology of the arts. The specific research questions addressed are: How have American alternative spaces evolved? What role do these alternative spaces play in the development of artists’ careers? Utilizing a sociologically-based, qualitative approach, the methodology included key person interviews with three distinct constituencies of alternative spaces: 1) funders (both public and private); 2) executive directors and/or founders of these organizations; 3) emerging artists who have performed or exhibited in these spaces. Chapter One provides background information and an introduction to the research problem. Chapter Two contains an outline of methodologies, the scope of the research and researcher biases. Chapter Three provides a detailed review of the literature related to alternative spaces and the development of artists’ careers. Chapter Four contains the "raw data" of the study, specifically interview transcripts. Chapter Five is a summary of the findings and conclusion.

For the purposes of this study, alternative spaces have been defined as "artists' organizations that are dedicated to advancing the contemporary arts, are committed to the payment of artists' fees and are non-profit. In these organizations, artists maintain an integral role in policy and program decision-making and are given full control of the presentation of their work." (National Association of Artists' Organizations)
Perhaps the most defining and central quality of an "alternative space" is the focus on meeting the artist on their own terms. Often regarded as the "research and development" arm of the culture industry (Jeffri, 1980), these organizations operate as laboratories for new ideas, where artists are given free reign to create and show work that is either deemed not ready or not conducive to being presented in conventional art venues such as museums, mainstream theaters or commercial galleries. The emphasis of their mission often reflects an interest in promoting artists' work in an unmediated environment, encouraging risk and innovation without regard to commercial pressures or traditionally elitist art world standards.

The collected data shows a clear correlation between the policies and practices of alternative spaces and the opportunities for artists to enter the "pipeline" for a career in the arts by providing both resources and opportunities to show their work.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to the five people, in addition to my family, whom have had an enormous impact on my life:

To Gerald Buck, for listening to me, guiding me and taking time to help me realize my goals.

To Chuck Stephenson for your warmth and humor and for teaching me the true meaning of patience.

To Caren Black, for giving me the opportunity to express myself, for teaching me to sing and dance, but most importantly, giving me discipline, self-confidence, and a deep belief in what the arts can do.

And finally, to my “other Mom and Dad”, Pat and Bill Crawford for taking care of me during a rough period of my life. You’ve been there through both very happy and difficult times and I love you very much.
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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Background to the Problem

Like most pursuits, academic inquiry often begins with an interest borne from personal experience. In the preface to his seminal book on the history of arts funding, *The Reluctant Patron*, Gary Larson describes his experience with an artist and friend:

As is true of a lot of Americans, my first encounter with governmental support of the arts was accidental. In my case it was 1972, and a local hero of mine, San Francisco pianist Mike Nock, was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship for $1,000. Now I had known Mike to be a struggling, deserving young jazz pianist (who had developed a small and not-yet-loyal following in the Bay Area), but I was amazed that anyone connected with the federal government should recognize his talents. (p. 2)

This anecdotal comment jumped out at me as a startling measure of how times have changed. As a young person involved with the arts, I too have many friends who are artists, struggling through what could be described as the "emerging" stage of their careers. What surprised me about the description of Mr. Larson's friend was not only that funding was available (NEA individual fellowships have been essentially eliminated as of this writing) but that it was awarded to someone considered "young" and "struggling".

As I've progressed through jobs in several arts organization along my short career, I have occasionally heard older colleagues talk about the "glory days" of arts funding and of programs like CETA which provided abundant and relatively unrestricted government money for a plethora of arts activities.
During the NEA's heyday, grant money for individual artists and artists' projects were more readily available.¹ By contrast, I began working in the arts immediately out of college, just as the national controversies about the NEA emerged. A fiery debate had begun on whether or not established artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe should be receiving funding; the prospect of grants to emerging artists (like my artist-friends recently out of art school) was never even on the agenda.

Several years ago, as an Arts Administration Fellow, I sat in on a typical NEA panel where every one of the ten or so panelist was over the age of 45. Reviewing a performance video by a group of young women, it was clear that some panel members were bemused or downright perplexed by what they saw. The applicant group's aesthetic was decidedly postmodern and informed by critical theory, strongly feminist in a "riot girl" kind of way and, while unpolished, topical and youthful in its concerns.

On reflection, I realized that what I witnessed was more than an aesthetic generation gap; it was a limitation on the part of several panelists to understand the influences and concerns of younger artists. Beyond cultural differences, I began to consider the ways in which constructing a life and career as an artist has changed over the past several decades. What is the plight of today's young artists, those in their 20's and 30's? As Julia Ward wrote in her essay "Youth, Organization and the Co-Generate Project":

As artists' organizations around the country begin to close and grant applications are sent in by the same people year after year, an apparent absence of the "next generation" of administrators and cutting-edge artists is becoming noticed. It is a concern that has entered the dialogue

¹ One limited example is that government arts funding went from $21 million in 1965 to $282 million just ten years later (Freeman, 1993).
of artmakers, funders, service organizations, marketers and artists' spaces. (p. 2)

My friend David Mills is a case in point. David graduated from a liberal arts college, where he studied theater and developed an interest in pursuing a career as a performer. During this time he developed his skills in acting and dramatic writing. I met David in San Francisco in 1992, soon after seeing him perform at an alternative space called 848 Community Space.

During the four years he lived in San Francisco, David developed a series of one-man shows: "Your Soaking In It with David Mills", "The Wedding Band" and "Duty Free". These shows combined David's dynamic sense of humor into unified, insightful and moving portrayals of political and social issues affecting the gay community.

During this period, he performed at a number of alternative venues such as Intersection for the Arts, Southern Exposure, Cafe DuNord and Josie's Cabaret and Juice Joint. These spaces were instrumental in giving David opportunities to perform his work on a regular basis. Not only was he able to hone his performance skills, he also received invaluable feedback from the audiences and staff. In addition, he formed friendships with other artists which lead to collaborations and furthered his creative growth. In his own words he states "Every Monday night at Josie's was 'Open Mike'. As a regular there, I knew I had an weekly outlet for trying out new material and getting immediate input from the audience."

The management of Josie's eventually gave him a two week run for his show, "The Wedding Band". From there, he eventually developed a weekly live talk show called "Late Night Live" on which numerous local politicians and celebrities appeared. During this time, he also applied for grants and other
opportunities to develop and showcase his work such as the San Francisco Arts Commission's Cultural Equity grant program. Although he received word that several of his applications were seriously considered for funding, he didn't receive a single grant. Despite an enthusiastic following and some glowing press, David (apparently by virtue of his age) was still considered an unknown quantity.

What became clear from my conversations with David (and other artists of our generation) was that the alternative spaces where he performed had been incredibly important to the growth of his artistic career - more so than "traditional" institutional approaches to serving artists as such grants, fellowships, etc. (by virtue of the fact that they are rarely given to unproven young artists). Among the relatively few programs and services targeted at emerging artists, most operate on the grassroots, local level (such as regranting programs run by local arts agencies or community-based residency programs). Beyond that, alternative artists' spaces have been and continue to be the most consistent venues in terms of providing opportunities for these artists to show and develop their work, hence these organizations have become a focal point for my research. In word and in spirit, these spaces appeared to offer a genuine commitment and openness to working with younger artists.

To confirm that alternative spaces are a key site for artists' growth, it may be necessary to examine how today's established artists got their starts. Outside of their talent and drive, what were the key events or opportunities that allowed them to develop a career? And, are these types of opportunities still available today? In terms of early opportunities to exhibit or perform their work, many famous artists such as Laurie Anderson, Vito Acconci, Cindy Sherman,
and Kiki Smith got their starts at alternatives spaces such as Artists Space in New York (D'Arcy, 1999). Almost as soon as alternative spaces began in the 70's, they were quickly integrated into the larger arts community as legitimate venues for discovering new talent and encountering cutting-edge ideas. This trend continued in the 80's when much of the most exciting (and media-hyped) artwork of the era was coming out of New York's East Village and the alternative galleries found there (Bowler and McBurney, 1993).

In the 90's what is abundantly clear is that these spaces and the entire alternative space movement is at a crisis point, in large part due to the drying up of public funding (according to the claims of some art world insiders). Tim Porjes in his article from New Art Examiner claims "The widespread decline in the number of alternate art galleries resulting from cutbacks in arts funding at all levels has threatened the avant-garde as much as any counterrevolutionary art movement have. There is no place in the world where any avant-garde arts entity has survived for long without a reliable base of permanent public funding" (p. 29).

Strapped by limited budgets with fewer and fewer opportunities for support, several of the most well-known spaces created in the 70's are closing or merging with other organizational entities (Atkins, 1998). Do these closings signal a trend or are they simply isolated incidents? Furthermore, if these organizations are in fact threatened, what effect will it have on the overall health of the arts? As Robert Atkins observes in his article, "On Edge: Alternative Spaces Today":

What's at stake if dozens of alternative spaces fail over the next few years? Plenty, if you regard the art world as an ecosystem. Such an outlook implies that the withering away of alternative spaces not only limits diversity - that is the range of artistic visions presented to
audiences - but impairs the prospects of the vast number of future artists who might develop their skills at these art-making laboratories. (p. 61).

Statement of the Problem

From the existing data I have gathered, no comprehensive historical analysis of alternative spaces currently exists (Heartney, 1996). The purpose of this study is to document the history of alternative spaces and their unique impact on the arts ecology. In order to make a case for the needs of alternative spaces, research was done to provide background on their collective histories and contributions to the field. To establish an in-depth understanding of these spaces, my research questions are as follows: How have American alternative spaces evolved? What role do these alternative spaces play in the development of artists' careers? In order to create a context for these larger questions, I will also address related questions such as:

- Why are these spaces important for artists?
- What impact have these organizations had within the ecology of the arts in America? (assessment and outcomes)
- What administrative structures are/were in place to operate these spaces? (management strategies)
- Are these spaces still vital today?
- What is at stake if these spaces are closed?

Significance of the study

If successful, this study will provide a historical perspective for analyzing the value of alternative spaces - past, present and future. While it is widely
acknowledged that these organizations and the artistic and social forces they epitomize are significant, very little research has been done on documenting their contributions. My hope is that this research will demonstrate the public benefit of alternative spaces and provide a context and data towards that end.

Now more than ever, advocates of the arts are in need of substantiated information to provide to funders and policy makers to justify needs and opportunities for maximizing cultural capital. Furthermore, research into this area will hopefully not only generate attention to the plight of smaller, artist-focused organizations but also further the dialogue on how they might better serve the needs of artists, audiences and the general public.

Outline of the Study

Chapter One of this study provides background information and an introduction to my research problem. In Chapter Two, I will outline my methodologies, the scope of my research and my research biases. In Chapter Three, I will provide a detailed review of the literature related to alternative spaces and the development of artists’ careers. Chapter Four contains the “raw data” of my study, primarily the transcriptions of my interviews. In Chapter Five I will summarize my findings and draw conclusions.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Whatever enriches the adult imagination, whatever complicates consciousness and thus corrodes the clichés of daily reflex, is a high moral act. Art is privileged, indeed obliged, to perform this act; it is the live current which splinters and regroups the frozen units of conventional feeling. (George Steiner)

With the recent rise of cultural policy as a discreet field of study, a new awareness has developed regarding the importance of examining systems of cultural support from an administrative and historic perspective. Yet, almost without exception, writings on American cultural institutions routinely focus on major cultural institutions or governmental agencies, largely omitting any kind of rigorous or systematic analysis of alternative or artist-run organizations. Furthermore, because these spaces have been significant sites of cultural production and exhibition, what attention (and writing) that does exist has tended to focus on the artistic side of the equation rather than the structural/administrative end. Many of my primary sources, for example, include catalogues from shows at these spaces which focus on documenting the work. However, as these spaces have become endangered and downsized, interest has grown to include how these spaces function in terms of supporting artists.

While I will describe the complex nature of alternative spaces in Chapter Three, I will now provide a very basic stretch towards defining these organizations. As a rudimentary basis for beginning my analysis, I will define an "alternative space" typically as a physical space where artistic work is
regularly presented, performed and/or exhibited. Although this is changing significantly in the 90's (which I will discuss in Chapter Five), most all of these organization operate as non-profits, usually with a 501(C)3 tax-exempt status. Finally, these organizations are concerned primarily with the work and needs of those who are considered (or are aspiring to be) professional artists, writers, performers, etc.

The History of Alternative Spaces

The Beginnings (1970's)

In late summer and early fall of 1977, two of the most seminal art journals in the country, ARTnews and Art in America ran stories on a new phenomenon taking hold in the art world. Both articles described the widespread creation of “the noncommercial, bare-walled, ripped out 'alternative space,'” run by artists for artists, and designed to be at least philosophically if not materially sympathetic to the needs of post-studio art” (p. 33). Noting the relative simultaneous development of these spaces around the nation, Kay Larson (in ARTnews) states that “the bits and pieces of this '70s eruption have to be seen not as an odd collection of unrelated symptoms but as an etiological event, a single spontaneous phenomenon whose causes have yet to be fully identified and whose effect are yet to be seen” (p. 33).

The driving force of these organizations might best be described as resistance, a reaction against many practices and attitudes specifically pervasive in the art world but in the larger culture as well. As Larson notes, “In the 70's, post-studio art has not only transgressed against the categories ('painting', 'sculpture') but has placed itself physically outside the framing walls of the gallery/museum, and politically outside as well.” On an artistic level,
beyond the noted resistance to the traditional notion of discreet artistic categories, there was a commitment to all genres of new work including newly developing ones like performance and video art. Continuing the oppositional position many of these spaces embraced, Patton (1977) notes that “these organizations were not interested in selling work (like commercial galleries) or in assembling permanent collections (like most museums)” (p. 80).

Politically, the beginnings of these organizations undoubtedly were influenced by the prevailing spirit of the era and fed by the “radical energies of the 60’s” as then NEA Visual Arts Director, Brian O’Doherty, put it. There was an unabashed idealism at the core of their missions. NEA staffer Renato Danese was quoted as saying, “An alternative space is a political and economic entity developing political muscle; it’s not simply another cry in the night” (p. 9). Empowering artists and building artistic communities at both a local and national level were seen as an inextricable aspect of their mission.

These articles also cited the National Endowment for the Arts’ foresight in responding to these organizations with new grant categories and substantial levels of funding. A consensus exists that without this funding, many of these organizations would have never come into existence (Patton, Larson, 1977; Jeffri, 1980). The way the money was made available was also key - it provided resources without heavy restrictions and (relative to later years) a minimum of bureaucratic reporting. “Money from the states and the Endowment . . . allows alternative spaces a rare and heady freedom - freedom from worry about pleasing a less than sympathetic public; freedom to take risks; freedom to serve whom and what they will” (p. 35).

Organizationally, an almost cultivated sense of disarray and informality was seen as central to keeping the focus on the artist’s work. “Sometimes one
senses a friendly rivalry between alternative spaces over who is less organized and who devotes more time and energy to artists” (Larson, p. 37) Yet even in these formative years, the pressure created by growing budgets led to increased infrastructure along with the contingent concerns about sacrificing artistic goals. “The exigencies of funding and administration have strengthened staffs at the expense of selection panels,” wrote Patton (p. 89).

As the spaces grew, so did the tension between an open-door policy towards serving artists and the desire to build a solid organizational track record. “While they wish to give exposure to new artists, they also have a responsibility, both to the public and to their own reputation, for showing good, interesting, innovative art” (Patton, pg. 89).

Perhaps most significant in this early point of their development was the awareness that these spaces had forever altered the perceived career trajectory for American artists. Patton notes that prior to their existence “it was extremely difficult to get the all-important first show. Alternative spaces . . . were aimed at giving new and less established artists a chance at recognition by critics and peers.” Their success in doing just that created an alternate track for artist to pursue a professional career. “Many of these alternative spaces have by now become so firmly a part of the art scene that numerous artists have successfully pursued careers in them alone. If present trajectory of prestige continue, it may soon be as important for a young artist to have a show at a place like P.S. 1 as to become associated with a reputable gallery” (p. 80).

*New Challenges (1980’s)*
During the 1980’s, alternative spaces encountered both new challenges and an increased presence on the American art scene. Allan Schwartzman, a founder of an alternative space in the 70’s, provides one version of the climate in the 80’s, “These front-line nonprofits, known as alternative spaces, were the center of American artistic life in the 70’s... But by the mid-80’s, this spawning ground had fallen into a state of artistic depression and spiritual malaise. Contemporary art had become big business and commercial galleries had usurped the function of spotting new talent. Alternative spaces were left with minor artists. Nevertheless, government and private foundations encouraged the alternative spaces to grow” (Schwartzman, 1994). In the early 80’s as the art market grew, a new sense of vitality was taking over, especially in places like New York’s East Village (Bowler and McBurney, 1993). Hailed as the “new bohemia” and subsequently gentrified and exploited, the East Village “scene” in many ways embodied the confluence of 80’s prosperity, on the one hand, and a highly politicized, grassroots art scene on the other. The artist “star system” was in full swing, creating bankable creative personalities and an unprecedented level of hype.

While the first generation alternative spaces continued to persevere, a new generation of organizations were taking shape. Born of the same counter-culture spirit as their forefathers, these spaces (such as Dixon Place and ABC No Rio) had a more sophisticated political take on the role of culture in a capitalist system. For their first show in an abandoned building they took over, ABC No Rio issued a manifesto stating that “the intention of this action is to
show that artists are willing and able to place themselves and their work
squarely in a context that shows solidarity with oppressed people." (Bowler
and McBurney) Although some of the alternative spaces founded in the 70's
had overtly political missions (for example, the A.I.R. Gallery which was devoted
to promoting work by female artists), a new sense of political disfranchisement
brought on my Reagan conservatism provided a new sense of urgency and a
more refined critical stance on the part of both organizations and artists.

Specific to the art work being produced during this period and reflected
in the concerns of alternative spaces was a new awareness and interest in
expanding diversity. Many alternative spaces were created in reaction to the
limited notion of Eurocentric high culture and were some of the first
organizations to embrace the notion of a diverse representation of race, class,
gender, sexuality, etc. at an institutional level.

This general movement was not without growing pains, debate and
conflict. An account from *Afterimage* on a July, 1986 meeting of
representations from alternative spaces noted "a long and heated debate over
the treatment of non-mainstream groups, specifically those serving women,
blacks, Hispanics, and native Americans" (Trend, p. 10). Not coincidentally, a
increased awareness of the need to make connections with a larger
community also began to surface.

The 80's were also marked by a new awareness of the need for
sustainable funding sources and an increased level of advocacy on behalf of
these spaces (Schwatzman). In 1982, the major national service organization
advocating on behalf of alternative spaces, the National Association of Artists' Organization (NAAO) was formed. The 80's also brought the beginning of other related service organizations such as the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture (NALAC), National Alliance of Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC), Network of Cultural Centers of Color (NCCC) and the Association of American Cultures (AAC). These organizations were started by their respective memberships and with the help of funders, in order to advocate for and coordinate constituent organizations' interests and needs on a larger scale.

As the number of alternative space grew in the late 70's and 80's, so did the demands on funders (Reynolds). This resulted in more competition for dollars and smaller grant amounts. With increased institutionalization came a new tension in preserving the artist-run ideals of the past with the need for increasingly professionalized staff. (Trend) This problem was expressed by a founder of one such space, Jock Reynolds:

The committed artists seeking to foster organizational growth are hampered with distinct handicaps. Very few of them have received any formal training in administration, fund raising, management, and other organizational skills. They continually rely on their wits, learning from many mistakes to achieve whatever organizational advancement is possible under the immediate circumstances. . . This is not an uninteresting learning process, but it can be debilitating and exhausting to the point of no return (p. 14).

Another perceived problem involved the issue of fostering the next generation of artists. As spaces struggled against the institution label, they also had to face the reality that they were increasingly perceived as the establishment by younger artists who felt the spaces were inaccessible. As
Lynn Warren noted in her essay, *Chicago's Alternatives* (included in the catalogue “Alternative Spaces: A History in Chicago”):

As N.A.M.E., ARC, Artemisia, Randolph Street [two of which are now defunct] and other galleries have begun to undertake museumlike activities - retrospectives, mid-career reviews, one-person shows of older and more established but hitherto little-seen artists, etc., the young, untried, unknown artists face tougher competition, both in terms of the amount of physical space available and in the level of maturity and professionalism required to convince the spaces they are worthy of showing (p. 22).

*Survival Mode (1990’s)*

The 1990’s has been, by all accounts, a difficult time for alternative spaces. Many of the financial constraints these organizations face have become worse and new challenges have arisen, specifically in terms of the highly publicized attacks from the religious Right that developed in the late 80’s and early ’90s. Roughly two decades since they began, alternative spaces also faced criticism from within. Art critic Martha Rosler offers this rather cynical critique of the alternative space movement:

So-called alternative spaces embodied a reaction against curatorial hierarchies, often a contempt for the glamorous upper reaches of the audience, and, outside New York, sometimes a rejection of New York domination. Begun as a democratized way of circulating work and ideas among a smaller rather than a larger audience (producers rather than shoppers or browsers - they are sometimes called ‘artists’ spaces’), they pose no inherent challenge to art-world ideologies and have already undergone a fair degree of institutionalization, having been adapted to provide a funnel for government grant money. Those run by artists tend to have a more-or-less explicit though enervated anarchic philosophy but, contradictorily rest on state support. They often serve as testing ground for dealers and generate publicity that may lead to sales. They can be manipulated, by clever dealers and others playing on the issue of artistic freedom, into showing work too controversial for a more mainstream gallery. (p. 327)
What Rosler and others identified was the increasing adaptation of new strategies by the mainstream art world which called into question the continued need for alternative organizations. Established galleries and museums had both come a long way in terms of, for example, showing contemporary and experimental work by living artists. Alternative spaces were increasingly viewed as “just another venue for arts activities, often indistinguishable from ‘establishment’ organizations” (Jacobs).

Some 20 years later, Art in America and ART News revisited the alternative space scene and noted the uncertain future they face. Robert Atkin’s article in Art in America provided a partial list of the spaces that have closed or been forced to merge with other institutions such as N.A.M.E. and Randolph St. Gallery (in Chicago), Washington Project for the Arts (WPA), Capp St. Project (in San Francisco) and Franklin Furnace (which re-invented itself as an online, “virtual” organization). As former Executive Director of Randolph St., Pater Taub is quoted as saying, “The field is currently defined by adversity” (p. 57)

Several factors contributed to the current malaise. In 1996, the NEA’s restructuring completely abolished the “Visual Artist Organization” category and thus wiped out what little federal money was specifically designated for these groups. In one typical example, the Washington Project for the Arts watched their Endowment funding drop from $200,000 to $10,000 over the course of a few years. Limited in their capacities to raise earned income, these spaces have struggled to identify alternate sources of funding.
Compounding this problem was a shift within the foundation community of nudging arts organizations towards self-reliance through adopting for-profit business strategies and practices. As San Francisco-based consultant Jeff Jones notes, “Every one of the five biggest arts funders in the Bay Area encourage administrative-heavy and art-light organizations. The problem is that these corporate models are fine for large museums and big-budget opera companies, but they have no relevance at all for artist-run organizations” (p. 61).

Part of the problem may lie in the lack of connection to the general public. Ironically, the funding conditions (specifically NEA funding) that helped create these spaces and allowed them to become what they are, may in the end, contribute to their demise. Re-visiting their formulation, Kester notes that:

... the ways in which artists and administrators, in collaboration with NEA program staff, were able to make use of the (deliberately) vague principles contained in the Endowment’s founding documents to fashion a fundamentally new, and in many ways progressive, model of arts funding policy. The institutional product of this model - the “artist-run space” - has functioned to buttress the autonomy of the alternative arts sector at the same time that it has provided a site largely insulated from direct political and economic (market) pressures within which a critical aesthetic discourse could take root. Yet ultimately this same insulation has mitigated the ability of arts organizations to develop a strong public constituency outside the alternative arts community itself. (p. 104).

In the late 90’s, an emergence of new organizations have arisen that are often described as “hit and run” or “do-it-yourself” spaces. Started by young artists outside the “traditional” artist-run spaces, these organizations represent a major shift away from the alternative spaces of the past. Many of them actively eschew the non-profit model which is viewed as too cumbersome and bureaucratic to bother with. Operating in often small, informal settings (like
individuals' apartments), they tend to have a limited organizational life and are largely personality driven. It should be noted that the impulse behind them is not dissimilar from that of their predecessors - an interest in cutting edge work, to be artist driven, etc. - yet the means of achieving these goals are markedly different.

Development of Artists' Careers

In order to make a case for the importance of alternative spaces as they relate to the development of artists' careers, I reviewed literature related to how contemporary artists build careers in the hopes of de-mystifying this process.

To write in any kind of meaningful way about artists' careers, it is necessary to lay bare some of the mechanisms and assumptions of the art world. What is a "successful" career in the arts? What is the difference between a good artist and a bad one? Objectively, there is no such thing as a "good" work of art. Whether discussing the Great Masters or contemporary living artists, what is generally considered "good" in art, and by extension, who is a "good" artist, is determined through an elaborate process of consensus involving many levels of "gatekeepers" such as critics, curators, journalists, collectors and other artists (Crane, 1987). Martha Rosler offers a key definition of the "art world" in these terms:

The ‘art world’ . . . includes the producers of high art, a segment of its regular consumers and supporters, the institutions that bring the consumers and work together, including specialized publications and physical spaces, and the people who run them. Since the art world is fundamentally a set of relations, it also encompasses all the
transactions, personal and social, between the sets of participants. (p. 323)

Sociologist Diana Crane expands this notion by illustrating how "gatekeepers" such as dealers, critics and curators allow certain artists through the chain of legitimation. "Critics rarely write about artists until their work has been exhibited. Museums are unlikely to exhibit their work unless it has been shown in a gallery" (Crane, 1987, p. 111)

Lang and Lang's (1990) work on reputation also offers key insights into how an artist's career is developed and sustained post-mortem. Their study reinforces the concept of cultural "gatekeepers". Examining printmakers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they document the impact of taste, family milieu, education and luck on which artists become known and placed in the cannon. While conditions in the art world have changed since that time, their findings bear witness to the fact that reputation is often not based solely on talent and the quality of creative expression but more on numerous outside factors.

Current "gatekeepers" often downplay their significance. As noted gallery owner Mary Boone explained: "Great dealers are always made by great artists. However, the inverse of that statement is not true. No matter how great a dealer is, you cannot make an artist. I would never take an artist on under the basis that I could sell them." (p. 332)

The notion of a career in the arts shifted dramatically in the 80's. Although the media created images of the successful artist and big money
prevailed, the real material circumstances of being an artists were arguably not that different from what they had been. As Bill Arning, the director of White Columns noted:

One of the things about the 80’s I liked, and miss, was that I would find an artist I liked and could be passionate about, I’d give them a showcase, and suddenly from that things were happening for them. That is much rarer today. . . . The idea that you would get out of grad school . . . then move to New York, get into a show at White Columns or Artists Space, get seen by an entry-level gallery, fuck them over ASAP, get a better gallery, the Whitney Biennial, Artforum cover, beach house. It didn’t matter that nobody exactly had that career. (p. 96)

In the end, it is important to return to what is hopefully the original aim of a career in the arts: to produce good work. As Henry Geldzahler notes in the aptly-named book, The Business of Art:

I have however observed that it is not the cunning careerist who wins in the end. It is the careful nurturer who tills his garden daily and grows the most natural, organic, and unforced flowers - the most beautiful ones and those most aesthetically ‘necessary’ and satisfying. A successful career is, most often, the result of countless decisions made along the way, decisions that always intuitively support the art and, without ignoring lifestyle, give it the weight it deserves. Success is a reward. Making honest art is the goal. In the short run, career strategies can appear successful. In the long run, the art remains as witness to a life (p. 161).
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

My original research contained two components. For the first part, I conducted eleven key person interviews representing different segments of the arts community involved with alternative spaces (see Appendix A). The next component is comprised of an analysis of the mission statements of several alternative spaces.

While I will attempt to utilize some quantitative data as a context for my arguments, qualitative research of this type lies in gathering opinions, some relevant personal and institutional oral histories, and anecdotal observations as the best means of evaluating the significance of the subject.

Interviewing

The interview is a valuable means of gathering data. Through verbal interaction, a researcher has the potential to capture the experiences of others in their own native and natural use of language, while eliciting perceptions that reflect their values, beliefs, and practices. The verbal interaction between an interviewer and interviewee may be thought of as a controlled extraction of the interviewee’s ideas. Patton (1990, p. 278) observes that the purpose of interviewing is “not to put things into someone’s mind, . . . but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed.”
To best utilize the time spent talking with each interviewee, open-ended interviews based on prepared questions were conducted. In order for the interviewee to provide thoughtful answers, each participant was faxed a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview. The rather formalized method of conducting each interview did not preclude the possibility for flexibility in order to accommodate spontaneity and more candid responses.

Of these in-depth interviews, I have chosen to focus on three different constituencies: 1) funders (both public and private); 2) executive directors and/or founders of these spaces; 3) emerging artists who have performed or exhibited at these spaces. In addition to these three distinct categories, I have also selected a few individuals who, by definition, are not included in one of these groups but whose perspective was nevertheless essential to my research (for example, staff from the National Association of Artists Organizations).

In conducting the interviews several criteria were taken into consideration. First, the interviews were standardized and systematic in order to minimize variations which might have effected the scope and quality of information provided by each interviewee. Secondly, an attempt was made to limit interviewer bias by adopting a set protocol of questions. Third, each interview was limited to roughly 30 minutes in order to allow for as equitable a comparison between interviews as possible. (This time limit was determined to be the optimal interview length after conducting the first few interviews and
realizing that this length of time was ideal to allow the interviewee to thoroughly articulate their thoughts without unnecessary digressions.)

Patton (1990) recommends that an open-ended interview be guided by questions that prove responses to behavior/experience, opinion/values, feeling, knowledge, sensory, and demographic/background data central to the focus of the research. Thus, research questions were designed to elicit relevant background and experience from each interviewee, as well as their opinions, knowledge and experience with alternative spaces, the careers of artists and the functions of these organizations. (See Appendices B, C, D)

Within each interview group, the same questions were used. Between the three groups, the questions addressed identical issues yet were appropriately tailored to reflect their occupation (for example, questions for the artists differed slightly from the administrator questions). All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to be effectively and objectively analyzed.

From these interviews, I did a correlational analysis of how alternative spaces function in order to corroborate my hypothesis. This qualitative, sociologically-based research provides multiple perspectives on the significance of these organizations. Each viewpoint contributed to creating an overall descriptive schema for understanding the alternative space movement.

Selection of Interviewees
Interviewing is a particularly useful way of gathering and analyzing multiple and occasionally divergent perspectives on a given topic. For this study, interviewees were chosen based on their geographic diversity as well as their experience and knowledge of the field. The selection of individuals to interview followed a somewhat organic process, as the research process evolved some new interviewees were added based on new information. This information came in the form of suggestions from other interviewees, references in the literature and occasional re-evaluation by the researcher. The availability (or lack thereof) of some interviewees also necessitated a flexible approach. The inaccessibility of some interviewees created unfortunate omissions in my research. For instance, while it would have been useful to interview a staff member at a state arts agency with a history of funding alternative spaces, two senior level staff members at the New York State Council on the Arts denied my requests for an interview.

Analysis of Mission Statements

The mission statement lies at the heart of every organization and speaks directly to its goals and mandates. As I have stated previously, these missions statements were compiled from interviewee’s organizations as a means of correlating data (see Appendix E). Implicit in these statements are assumptions about artists’ needs as well as how these needs should be addressed. By analyzing the mission statements from the interviewees’ respective organizations, I was able to assess these goals. Furthermore,
these statements also can be seen as an articulation of the organization's values.

Defining Alternative Spaces

Defining alternative spaces is a difficult enterprise. While there is no one concrete definition, I believe a loose consensus exists among those working in the field as to some of the defining characteristics. NAAO defines their member groups by the following terms: "Members are artists' organizations that are dedicated to advancing the contemporary arts, are committed to the payment of artists' fees and are non-profit. In these organizations, artists maintain an integral role in policy and program decision-making and are given full control of the presentation of their work." (p. 10)

NAAO's definition offers several key clues about the nature of these organizations. It should be noted, for example, that these spaces tend to be dedicated to "contemporary" work and encourage artists' involvement at the level of administration and policy-making. While some alternative spaces focus exclusively on visual or performing arts, in keeping with their commitment to interdisciplinary work, many operate spaces that are receptive to and equipped for all genres of art. It is also significant to note that most all of these organizations tend to be located in urban centers. Artists of all types tend to gravitate to cities in order to find not only an audience for their work but also a like-minded community of artists who share their aesthetic interests, social concerns and lifestyles.

Perhaps the most defining and central quality of an "alternative space" is the focus on meeting the artist on their own terms. By this, I refer to organizations which operate as laboratories for new ideas, where artists are given free reign to create and show work that is either deemed not ready or not
conducive to being presented in conventional art venues such as museums, mainstream theaters or commercial galleries. The emphasis of their mission often reflects an interest in promoting artists' work in an unmediated environment, encouraging risk and innovation without regard to commercial pressures or traditionally elitist art world standards.

Within the ecology of the non-profit arts, alternative spaces are often regarded as the "research and development" arm of the culture industry (Jeffri, 1980). This again refers to the fact that art works created in these environments are often cutting-edge and highly experimental. Free of commercial pressures and the need to cater to the interests of the marketplace, alternative spaces foster an environment that is conducive to "pushing the envelop" and providing a forum for new work to be viewed for its own merit.

Research Scope

My research focuses specifically on the development of alternative spaces in the United States from 1970 until today. I have chosen 1970 as the starting point for my inquiry because it marks the approximate founding date of many of the organizations discussed (Larson). It is important to state here that I have not undertaken the task of writing the discreet histories of specific alternative spaces, but rather to examine them in their totality in order to draw conclusions about their significance as a group. The danger in this approach is the tendency to gloss over their differences and overgeneralize about this very diverse group of organizations. Furthermore, the researcher must be
careful not to conflate issues that are specific to one organization and draw conclusions about the field at large.

At this point, I want to clearly note that each of these organizations (NAAO membership runs around 700 organizations) is different and that any attempts to broadly discuss them runs a very real risk of being reductivist. One of the many differences effecting them is geographic differences, specifically in terms of the local and regional economies. The economy in San Francisco, for example, is very different than, say, Cleveland. These discrepancies create different challenges both in terms of how the organizations function as well as the material circumstances of local artists.

In order to put a realistic limit on the scope of my study, I have had to regretfully exclude some types of organizations with an affinity to alternative spaces which are deserving of closer inquiry and their own separate studies. Among these organizations are culturally specific arts organizations (the Latino arts organization, Galleria de la Raza in San Francisco would be one such example); organizations providing professional facilities or services (such as photo labs, dance studios, etc.); arts service organizations; and organizations which are primarily community focused (such as amateur art leagues, community centers, crafts fairs, etc.) or organizations devoted to “outsider” art or folk art forms.

I am also not including in my definition of alternative spaces other types of non-traditional environments for displaying or performing work such as restaurants, cafes, churches, benefits, etc. While these venues and events do
provide opportunities for artists to present their work (particularly emerging artists), the art activities are generally secondary and periphery to the main function of the establishment (i.e. making a profit by serving food).

Finally, the scope of this research includes an examination of organizations which, for the most part, work largely across artistic disciplines. In order to accommodate the different range of art work presented by these spaces, I felt it was necessary and relevant to address organizations and artists who work in all genres of the arts including visual arts (from traditional painting and sculpture to film, video, electronic and multi-media work), the literary arts, dance, music, theater and performance. I have done this specifically because it is so central to how these organizations have operated as cross-disciplinary laboratories.

This proved to have both advantages and disadvantages. One of the hallmarks of these organizations is their dedication to cutting edge work which often embraces a blurring of discreet genres. Body-based performance art, for example, was a type of work that was largely fostered through alternative spaces. To have limited my focus exclusively to say visual arts or performing arts would have forced the researcher to create artificial and arbitrary distinctions in selecting both artists and organizations to include and made it difficult to assess the overall impact of these spaces.

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1 In order to be as comprehensive as possible, I have included information on some organizations that are primarily focused on one discipline. For example, while Artist Space in New York has presented performance-based work, they are primarily known for working with visual artists. Similarly, P.S. 122 is an alternative venue which does have a visual arts gallery but is primarily known for its emphasis on performance art.
The disadvantage or danger of this approach is that it was difficult to address all the nuisance and specificity of these forms, particularly when discussing the needs and careers of individual artists. The career trajectory and challenges facing a dancer, for instance, are markedly different from those of a sculptor. As much as possible, I have sought to recognize these differences while also examining the universal dilemmas facing all individuals working in creative fields.

A Note on the Term “Alternative”

It became clear through my conversations with interviewees that the term “alternative space” is widely considered to be dated and increasingly vague due to the continuing shift in definitions and functions of arts organization and the sheer numbers of organizational hybrids that have proliferated since the term was originally created. Today, a growing number of organizations exist, from the highly formal to grassroots, that have been influenced by the alternative space movement and its ideals, yet would not choose to be labeled or not be appropriately encompassed by the term “alternative space”.

Other overlapping terms often used to describe these organizations include “artists spaces”, “artist centered organizations”, “artists collectives”, among others. I have chosen to consistently use the term “alternative space” throughout this thesis for several reasons. The first is practical - many people working within the nonprofit arts community are familiar with the term and have a vague understanding of the organizations the term refers to. Secondly, it has
an element of historic specificity. Brian O'Doherty, the Program Director for Visual Arts at the Endowment during the early 70's, is often cited as the originator of the term "alternative space" (Larson). Finally, this label, like all labels, serves the uneasy but useful task of condensing a whole number of organizations into a concrete category that can be discussed and debated.

When applied more broadly to any discussion of culture, the term "alternative" becomes even more problematic. In what many consider to be our post-alternative cultural moment, the use of this label is both loaded and misleading due its appropriation by mainstream culture to serve commercial interests. In an article from the *Columbus Alive* on the current state of so-called alternative newspapers, Brian Lindamood writes:

'Alternative,' as it has entered common parlance in recent years, is almost entirely devoid of meaning. Since Nirvana's *Nevermind* sold its five millionth copy, the term has been co-opted by MTV to indicate some marketably hip approximation of the mainstream. Alternative music is played on Top 40 radio stations. If it's not distinct from the most insipidly popular and marketed music, what could it possibly be an alternative to? 'Edgy' Mountain Dew commercials are worse than mainstream culture - they're mainstream consumerism with a patronizing alternative veneer. (p. 4)

**Researcher Bias**

As a researcher, there are three areas of potential personal bias which might color my analysis. Although I have made every attempt to be non-biased and objective in collecting and analyzing my data, I feel it is necessary to acknowledge my own personal perspective and stake in this study.
First of all, my paradigmatic approach lies firmly within the realm of postmodernism. As a undergraduate at Brown University, I studied a range of "critical" or cultural theory from a variety of perspectives including feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism and poststructuralism, and deconstructivist theory. Hal Foster defines cultural postmodernity in opposition to modernist ideals such as "purity as an end and decorum as an effect; historicism as an operation and the museum as the context; the artist as original and the art work as unique - these are the terms which modernism privileges and against which postmodernism is articulated." (p. 191)

In this vein, while I believe the research I've undertaken may have legitimate and practical policy implications, I don't pretend that I have penetrated any universal "truths" about these organization nor that one even exists. What became clear over the course of this study is that there is no one set of answers to the problems facing artists and artist-run organizations. Conclusions and pat summaries are difficult, if not illusionary.

Secondly, the formulation of my research focus was also informed by my personal involvement with these types of organizations both as an audience member and as a staff person at an alternative space (New Langton Arts in San Francisco). These experiences have given me an appreciation and firsthand knowledge of many of the issues that will be discussed. To borrow from the socio-anthropological paradigm, I would consider my study to embrace the "emic" or insider perspective.
Finally, I have approached this research with a personal belief in art as a force for social change and transformation. Many of the ways in which contemporary artistic practices have evolved, particularly within the context of work addressing political and/or social issues, has been within the system of alternative spaces.

I have a deep respect for the work done by the many artists and arts administrators who have contributed to the vitality of these organizations and hope that my research will add to the body of knowledge available to them and help document the significance of these organizations.
CHAPTER 4 - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

In Chapter Four, I will provide the verbatim transcripts of my interviews with various individuals involved with alternative spaces. The interviews were conducted by telephone or in person between April 22, 1999 and June 22, 1999.
INTERVIEW WITH PAMELA CLAPP, PROGRAM OFFICER, THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, NEW YORK, NY (June 1, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Maybe we can begin by giving me your background in the arts.

Pamela Clapp: Well, let me begin by saying I studied art history in school and have been involved informally my whole life really in the visual arts and the performing arts in terms of being in the audience. I started professionally working in the field in 1981 when I worked for a commercial gallery in New York City, the Robert Miller Gallery and I went from there to the foundation in 1989. And it’s really at the foundation, with the work of the foundation that I began to before familiar with so-called alternative spaces. During the 80’s I would go to exhibitions at a few spaces in New York but didn’t really focus on the difference between them and the commercial gallery. It wasn’t until I got to the foundation that I began to really understand those spaces and their history and what they are about.

EW: Maybe you can touch on the Artists’ Projects Regional Initiative which the Warhol was involved in funding.

PC: Are you familiar with the structure of the program?
EW: Yes, I was one of the administrators of the program in San Francisco at New Langton Arts.

PC: Then I don’t have to tell you anything about how it was structured and what it was about. For the foundation, it was extremely important because it was a way for us to support the creation of work across the country. We’re a national foundation so it was enormously efficient for us in that it was a network that the Rockefeller and the NEA had set up and I think a very well crafted program. So we were in a fortunate position because the hard work had been done. We came along as a third partner. I think that was also a way for me to really get an understanding of the regional regranters who were often alternative spaces or artists organizations or so forth. And of course, the program for them was both a blessing and a burden because there was an enormous amount of work involved. I think most of them enjoyed being in contact with a national program and I think a lot of those spaces reached artists they hadn’t reached before but there was also a big administrative burden and usually not enough money to quite cover it. Like I said it was a mixed blessing. Certainly through that I got to know those spaces and appreciate them and the role they do play.

EW: Maybe you could talk about how you would characterize these spaces.
PC: I'd like to ask you how you're defining these spaces. I'll tell you what I'm thinking of in a general way. I'm thinking of places that could be defined as alternative spaces, as community-based arts organizations, as media arts centers, artists organizations. Is that similar to your definition?

EW: Yeah, a lot of people I've interviewed have a problem with the term "alternative spaces" because they feel it's very dated.

PC: Yes, it is.

EW: There's no question about that. I'm sort of using the term for lack of a better term.

PC: I just want to know if you're talking about a fairly broad range of organizations.

EW: I am working mostly with the definitions that NAAO has done and looking at organizations that constitute their membership, specifically things like being artist-run or having artist representation on the board, things like that. They tend to be interested in cutting-edge, experimental work, are often community-based in one way or another. Those kinds of things.
PC: So technically you're not including NAMAC members, media art centers.
Of course, they have cross-over members.

EW: I would include those as well.

PC: But an important ingredient is either artist-run or artists on the board?

EW: Yeah.

PC: Well, I think for me one of the important characteristics or contributions they make is that they are laboratories of one sort or another. Research and development places if you will. For artists who are at the stage where they are ready to experiment in public and make that leap from the studio, they will often offer that opportunity, whether it's an artist who's really forming their work and their ideas or an artist who's been working for quite a while but needs an opportunity to stretch in some way. To me that's the fundamental importance of them. I think they're also defined by their response to artists' needs in general, not just as a presentation space and as a place to experiment but also with other kinds of supportive kinds of activities whether it's a slide registry or technical assistance or advice about all kinds of things, discussions, all the various kinds of things that help artists try to negotiate. Obviously, we're generally talking about artists who don't have a commercial gallery affiliation so
they don’t get that kind of support. I think another characteristic is a flexibility
and openness, literally flexibility in terms of not having a rigid schedule set for a
couple years in advance and being able to respond to new work or new ideas
fairly quickly. I think most are characterized by a fairly good degree of openness
to diversity in its many forms, not all, they all have their constituencies but a lot
of them are quite open.

EW: One of the things I’m looking at is the contribution these organizations
make to the total ecology of the arts, particularly when we talk about these
organizations going away, what is at stake, what might be lost? I’d be
interested in hearing how you see these organizations contributing to that
ecology.

PC: Well, from my point of view, it’s crucial, it’s a crucial contribution. It’s a
crucial step. To take a very simplistic view of it, the range from artist’s studio to
an establishment organization like a museum, their role in the middle of it and I
don’t mean to suggest that it’s necessarily a progression that way, but their role
in the middle of that is critical. I think it’s changing, they are clearly changing
but I don’t think that means they won’t serve an important role for artists in the
future even though they are different creatures today than they were 20 and 25
years ago.
An example is I was just at the Williams College for the Tony Osler exhibition. He's in his early 40's as you know so this was sort of a middle-career survey, work that he started making in the mid-70's. There were two early video pieces that he made and one was presented at P.S. 1 in, I don't know, '79, '80, early '80s and the other was at the Kitchen in '85 and both of those pieces were very experimental for him. He was on the way towards a real breakthrough with video. They weren't in and of themselves, I don't think one of them in particular was a very strong piece. But if he didn't have a place, those type of places, to bring that type of work out in the public and air it with all it's attendant innovation and flaws and have feedback and so forth, he clearly wouldn't have been able to develop the interesting body of work that he has. And to have that kind of a venue, the laboratory kind of venue is crucial. And he's the kind of artist who has received a lot of attention and a lot of favorable critical review. For every one like him, there's nine others who don't but that's all part of it and if these spaces don't give people the opportunity to stretch, I don't see where they'll have it. I just think a lot of talent would not be developed and I think there's example after example.

EW: One of the things I'm theorizing about is how these organizations provide an entry point for artists to start a career. Do you feel that's true?
PC: Oh, definitely, I don't think there's any question. I think a lot of these spaces have slide registries for example and people use them. There's no question that they are used. Curators access them all the time and the space itself will very often have a strategy to once a year have a show out of the slide registry. I think that a lot of the spaces who are strong programmers will make studio visits and there are often to places where the artists have no shown yet in the space. I think those spaces aggressively look for new work and it is part of the stated mandate of a lot of them, to support new work and I think many of them carry through on them.

EW: Can you talk about the evolution in how these spaces operate and what their contribution continues to be?

PC: They certainly are more structured today, there's no question about it. As everyone says, 'alternative' was really alternative back then and there was a very conscious effort not to function as an establishment. But certainly many of them have developed into much more structured places and adapted business practices and strategies. A lot of people have seen that as their death now, but I just don't agree with that. I think that they still are performing a lot of the functions they did in the beginning, although in quite a different style. A lot of these spaces began in a highly political situation and the politics change, what you were reacting to isn't necessarily an issue at this point. I think though that
there's one exception to that which is a lot of the community-based, ethnically-specific organizations I think came about to give voice to very specific cultures. I think a lot of them are functioning in much the same way, they may have become a little more structured also, again they're learning more savvy ways of running, but in some ways I would say they have changed the least and are very political in that sense.

EW: Do you still see that as a need in the arts community? Or has multiculturalism been embraced enough by the establishment at this point that it's not really an issue?

PC: I wish I could say that it wasn't and that there was no need. Do you think that's the case?

EW: No, I would agree but it's an interesting question and I'm interested in hearing people's reaction.

PC: No, I think there is. I think there is certainly a huge change from 30 years ago from whom you see in museums but it's slow and it's gradual. A lot of it is rather token, particularly if you think of collections which is what will be permanent. So I'm afraid I think there is still a need.
EW: What challenges do you see these spaces - you know at lot of them recently have closed or merged with other organizations - from where you sit what do you see as some of the challenges for the future?

PC: Certainly, what you just mentioned - long range stability is a huge challenge. Financial stability still alludes most, if not all, of them. You just start again each year from zero, you hope. I think these are fragile institutions, I'm not clear we're losing that many of them. Why do you say that?

EW: Well, Capp St. Project in San Francisco. Randolph St. in Chicago, NAME in Chicago also closed. Of course, WPA merged with the Corcoran. I'm not sure I would consider them a performance space per se, but the Cleveland Performance Festival has gone under this year. There seems to be a lot of organizations sort of teetering on the brink.

PC: I've thought about them a lot particularly Randolph St. and WPA which were two very strong spaces and I think both are unique situations. WPA was circumstances that happened a long time ago in terms of real estate deals. Capp St. is a very strong founding director who's interest and focus changed. It's kind of unique to those places. On the hand as I go around and visit places, as I said, I see them as fragile, no question, but I see them getting stronger too because there has been such a focus on how to function in the world today,
within the nonprofit world. I think after the shock of the NEA changing so and being cut so drastically, it shook people into a realization that you’ve got to do this on your own. I think spaces are responding in some very creative ways and some gutsy ways. I'm optimistic actually.

EW: Are there other issues that I should have asked you about? Anything you wanted to add?

PC: I don’t know. I guess I’d really like to know the magic formula. (laughs) I think the ‘kamikaze’ spaces are a great addition to the scene. Part of that to me is simply the enormous increase in the number of artists making work, they have to have more places to show. I think it’s really healthy. It enhances the whole scene, there’s more activity, more voices. I think because so-called alternative spaces have become more structured and business-like, that those little temporary spaces are a contrast. I see that as enhancing the whole scene.

We’re starting an initiative here that the board just approved to help strengthen these spaces that you’re taking about. This summer we’re going to try to design a three-year initiative to try and help build capacity in these spaces. So that’s indicative of the way we feel about them.
EW: Are you talking about the established spaces?

PC: Yes, the other spaces mostly aren't incorporated as non-profit.

EW: In terms of this initiative, what kind of approach or philosophy are using or is there a particular thing you hope to accomplish? Or do you know at this point?

PC: Well, I don't really know because we're designing it this summer. I think that the criteria will be the quality of the programming, we're looking to the places that have very strong artistic programming. That's a given. Then within that group, we're looking to give some financial support obviously that would probably be individualized so that each organization would do some self-analysis, perhaps even with some professional, so some kind of technical assistance. Then a very specifically placed grant that would meet an identified need that would help build capacity but on a one-to-one basis, no formula. Of course, it will develop that there are two or three basic kinds of strategies because they are not all that different. But everybody's in a different stage of development, some have been through Challenge and Advancement, so forth. So it's got to be individual, that we know.
INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER DOWLEY, DIRECTOR, MUSEUMS AND VISUAL ARTS, NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS (April 22, 1999)

Jennifer Dowley: When you talk to people who have founded artists’ spaces one of the things they talk about is how there is a desire on the part of artists to be able to talk about their work and to have feedback, have conversations, have disagreements, have arguments, just be in contact with one another in order to be able to advance their own thinking. And that the spaces, while they did have a public function, really what they did was engage an artist community in the most literal way. You think of the alternative space movement in San Francisco, those openings were major events and provided contact for artists. It brought them out of their isolation, together, to meet other people, to attend symposia, etc. They were really key, they were much more focused then in their original form on the artists communities themselves. Artists of course came together to build things, to renovate buildings, to volunteer for projects because so much of their equity was “sweat equity” - muscle and time which artists had. So it was that interest in working together, they formed committees on the board. New Langton in San Francisco, I believe, still works that way. They have a committee of people that meet and chose writers to give readings. You know, they’re little mini-criticism panels in a way - you know, “What about him? Why not her? What about this?” And this ups the overall ambition and standards for the field if you’ve got people talking and defining and honing and critiquing. (Looking at cultural ecology chart) I adapted this to museums but I actually first came up with this when I was working as an advisor to the Marin Community
Foundation and all the arts groups were trying to advise them and we were all at each other’s throats, saying “the performing arts should get more than the visual arts cause they have bigger audiences” and it was just suicide.

 Somehow we came up with this notion that work is created and how do you support the creation of work? Well, through all these mechanisms - you support fellowships, residencies, workshops, provide studio space, rehearsal space, all the stuff that helps in the creation of work. Then it’s presented to the public through exhibitions, these things, but also literature, publication, performance, etc. And then it’s analyzed in some way - critiques, criticism, catalogues, periodicals, art historians, etc. Then eventually it comes into another phase of being held onto, conserved. Then it is taught to the public and to other artists and that sets up a new generation of artists who create. And our argument to the funders was that most money goes into here [presentations], everybody’s interested in funding these kinds of exhibitions but if you don’t fund all these other aspects of it, it makes things lopsided and out-of-kilter.

 Eric Wallner: To take a step back, I’d like to start with the formal questions.

 Could you tell me about your formal background in the arts?

 JD: I’ve worked in the arts since I got out of college. As an administrator, a facilitator of events happening. I don’t know how to generalize about it. I initially
spent my first summer out of college working for a writer and then I went on and ended up running a fellowship program in Mass. And I started several public art programs for about ten years. I ran public art programs in Cambridge, Mass. and then in Sacramento. So for me the whole philosophy or whole notion of artists engagement with the world at large became very interesting to me. It became very comfortable for me to try to work completely outside the gallery and market system and even the alternative space system to try and facilitate a much easier dialogue between artists and the rest of the outside world. In public art that's really all you did was negotiate that gap. Sometimes there were misunderstandings, sometimes it was a very easy conversation.

My greatest achievement in Sacramento was I got a call one day from the head of the engineering department (those are the guys that build bridges and fire stations and everything else) and he says "Jennifer, what's wrong? What are you doing over there? Taking some time off or something?" And I said, "No, why?" And he said, "Well, you just haven't brought me any projects. You know, I really am missing them." And here was this man I used to have to take all the public art projects by, each one more confounding and more, in a way, problematic if he had been narrow-minded and tough. I always had thought that these were difficult for him and in actual fact, they stimulated him, clearly in ways I hadn't realized, in a professional way. So that the absence of them was a disappoint to him. I just thought that was wonderful. Then my work in pushing those boundaries further continued at Headlands for almost ten years.
What we really wanted to do was to broaden the horizon for artist participation in the world even though, ironically, we were in this national park that was removed from the world. But a lot of our projects really put artists in positions . . . we hired artists to do a guidebook to the Headlands as a way of looking at the Headland's history. That was rather radical. We hired artists to do a guide to plants of the Headlands. So things that normally would reside with other professionals, we put artists in a major role in providing a way in for discussion. That kept me all very interested. And then here, of course, things still have those interests but things shifted rather dramatically to work on a national basis, to look at broad issues across what has become a very large continuum of visual arts organizations as well as museums. I've learned a lot about them since I've been here.

EW: It must be interesting to see the ways in which they are similar and different from other, smaller alternative spaces.

JD: They're different period. Different purpose.

EW: To start in with the alternative spaces: One of the things that I'm struggling with is having to define what are the characteristics of alternative spaces and what would you say are some of the defining qualities. Granted there's been a lot of changes over time. But as a starting point . . .
JD: You've been in our library and I didn't know if you've been looking at our old guidelines under eligibility but - I'm so annoyed, I'm leaving the Arts Endowment and have been cleaning out my files, and I think I threw away some remarks I made when I looked back over our guidelines to try to describe alternative spaces. The information is there. If you look under eligibility of what they are, it's very interesting. When I first got involved in Arts Endowment panels in the 80's, there were very strict guidelines of what a VAO (visual artists organization) was. It had to have artists on the board and in policy and decision-making roles. It was a real effort in that case to focus on these artist-run organizations, to differentiate them from either community-based visual arts organizations or else small museum kinds of organizations or college or university museum, art galleries. The focus was always on the artist's role in the institution and how significant it was and those were the defining features. And in a way, when I remember looking back on those early guidelines, that really is the defining characteristic of them, even from the very beginning before they were called visual artists organizations, they were called alternative spaces, they were working facilities, they were workshops focused on the creative process and the development of new work. Really focused on opportunities for artists. Museums, the textbook definition of a museum whether it's a collecting institution or not, is to exhibit, educate, collect (for some) and preserve. Artists spaces never start off like that. They probably
would never start off saying exhibitions is our purpose. Their purpose in being is to, my guess is if you were to look at all their mission statements piled up on top of one another, is to really support new work, new ideas. In the 90’s, a lot of the projects we are funding recently, the community is a major partner. That was not true in the 70’s and 80’s. We just funded Real Art Ways in Hartford to hire an Education Director. We just funded the Center for Women and their Work to fund their education programs. This was not even on their agendas in the 80’s because they were focused on this much smaller, tight knit community. Marketing, bringing in outside audiences, was just not part of what they were interested in. Partially because of the shift of our funding, the shift of our guidelines, the realities of that have necessitated them looking elsewhere for funding. If you’re looking to your city for funding or a corporation for funding, there has to be this sort of public benefit. Our program used to define public benefit, used to include the artists’ audience as part of a public benefit. That is really being broadened now much more. I’m afraid to say artists’ audiences aren’t considered enough any longer.

EW: One of the things I picked up working at spaces like New Langton, picking up on the sort of organizational culture of a place like Langton or the other alternative spaces, is a sort of counterculture mentality, an anti-bureaucratic bias. Do you have other things that you think of in terms of defining alternative spaces as a movement?
JD: A lot of them did start out in the 60's and the reality of the world at that time is that a lot of museums, for the most part, did not deal with living artists, even museums of modern art. So there was a huge generation of artists coming out of grad school, no jobs, no nothing, museums aren't there. In San Francisco, it's interesting that the first alternative space was actually supported by the dealers. It was the dealers that got together - it was a space called 407, or 704 or something like that. Diana Fuller was involved in it. But during that time the dealers were really involved in this. They were interested in expanding their own audiences, there was a larger, not quite as ruthless art market. There was just a larger, more generous feeling. Then places like New Langton came up. There was a real sense that, well, if the museums aren't going to do it - they are big, they're tied in to big interests, they're not interested in us - we'll just do it ourselves. And we'll incorporate different values. Counterculture is really a value. (laughs) We talk so much about values now, that's what we talked about then - was the value of supporting creativity, being generous about younger artists coming into the world and how they could be helped. It was really a collaborative, cooperative effort. And the more you helped them, the more you worked together - it didn't matter if things sold or not, what mattered is people moving forward in a generous stance to one another. So, yes, that was definitely all part of it.
The anti-bureaucrat thing, I never . . . I mean Headlands I guess was an alternative space, although it was interesting, when we formed, and I guess it's different, Headlands is perceived differently now. But when we started, the alternative spaces in San Francisco would have nothing to do with us because we didn't do exhibitions, we were really about process. NAAO meetings, they were really not interested in the kinds of issues we were. So there was a kind of closed clubism that developed around NAAO members out of an intensity of agenda, being outsiders, being so poorly funded and so little understood by the world of art. A lot of people feel that museums have taken over that role. I feel that's not true. But there's some museums that have taken on that, the Matrix program at the Watsworth Anthenenium is really the first undertaking in that regard where they had constantly rotating exhibitions of emerging artists. That program, David Bancroft here has a whole file of the exhibitions held by that gallery program that we used to fund year after year after year and all those artist are now major artists. But it was this curator going out on a limb, in one little room in a museum. Berkeley had one of those. So all of that, museums did respond and kind of take that in. Then the gallery scene really mushroomed. The 80's kind of blew everything out of the water in terms of young artists could just bypass the alternative art system or use it to jump into the mainstream market.

EW: How have they changed over time? Or de-volved as the case may be . . .
JD: Well, some of them have dried up. Did you read Robert Atkins story about that? I actually really disagreed with a lot of things in there and I’ve talked to him about it. He was wrong about some things and our role so if you were going to reference that, I’d love the opportunity to talk to you more specifically. But, like Randolph St. in Chicago vanished. WPA, for all intensive purposes, has vanished here. They both had real estate problems, they both had leadership transition problems, meaning that these organizations are very, very thinly staffed. There’s not a lot of infrastructure there to carry them. So if a leader is strong and leaves, there’s no successor and no one has been groomed to come along. So unless the leader is very conscious about devolving authority, power and everything else to the staff and the board - sometimes they’re too thinly staffed to do that. But if anything happens to that leader it’s just really trouble for that institution.

So the characteristics of them now is that they are becoming much more management savvy than they ever were. A lot of people are graduates of museum training programs, MMI (Museum Management Institute) and other training programs. They [the spaces] have come through what I would call a fiery hoop and have made connections with their communities that have meant that their programming has broaden enormously into schools, to more public things. Southern Exposure is, I think, an interesting case in point. Their focus
shifted to schools, and artists working in schools not as artists-in-schools programs but as artists really working with kids as part of their own art-making and that was going on seven or eight years. So that was a very different switch for Southern Exposure and that happened under Jon Winet when he was there. So that’s kind of characteristic of the 90’s is switch in focus on audiences.

EW: How do you think the Endowment helped the alternative space movement?

JD: I think the Endowment was absolutely critical in giving money for those spaces to grow. One of the reasons we were so critical is that the money we gave was for operating support, ‘seasonal support’ we called it. The great part about it is that an institution would come in for funding - they submitted slides and examples of their past funding - and they would say we’re thinking about working with this artist or that artist. They would apply to us, it would be quite a while before we would be able to get back to them. It was a long turnaround time, six months, eight months and then they would be funded but really based on past work. So they did not have to put together a project for us, it would allow them to maintain their flexibility and quick response time because most of them put together programs quarterly or seasonally. They sit down in October and say “Okay, what are we going to do in January, February or March. We have $15,000 this year from the Arts Endowment, we could spend five of it
on the literary series and five or ten of it on the exhibition.” I remember distinctly
the Exxon Valdez happening when I was at the Headlands and one artist space
that’s gone now, the Eye Gallery, immediately responded with asking people to
submit photographs of some kind of ecological disaster so that it would
provide some way of dealing with it. We can’t do that anymore. With Congress’
call for greater accountability on the Arts Endowment’s part, our Chairman, our
Council, our staff have to know exactly what we’re funding. Therefore, these
spaces that used to program like I just described have to submit to us a project
that they have pretty well thought through, got the artists lined up and agreed to
do it. And then wait for seven months until it’s reviewed by us and then a few
months after that, to begin. So, it automatically has put a kind of strain, if you
will, on their ability to work cause we provided that kind of glue money, the fluid
money. Now operating support is the hardest money to come by, very few
people provide that. In our field, the visual arts field, there are only two main
funders - us and Warhol on a national basis. Lannan is not really in the picture.
Nathan Cummings sometimes comes through but is not a constant. That is
thin. I don’t know, I don’t think that Warhol does operating so . . . the change in
the nature of our funding is dramatic and is having a dramatic impact.

EW: What contribution do you think the alternative spaces make to the cultural
ecology? And what’s at stake if they continue to die out?
JD: Well, I don't know that they are dying out. I think some of them have stabilized and are stronger now than they've ever been. I think of Cameraworks in San Francisco, Real Arts Ways in Hartford has come through a fiery period, there are several in New York that I think are well-established and well instituted. The value of these places is enormous and their list of alumni. Think of Visual Studies Workshop in upstate New York, think of Nathan Lyon's influence on the field of photography! Almost every major photography curator in the museum world has been through VSW, in one way or another. He's trained a generation of curators and writers about photography. So their impact has been absolutely incredible and when you really trace them, trace the artists. You can ask the artists. Like Cindy Sherman will credit Hallwalls for the beginning of things for her. I think they give artists - like Headlands and other artist communities that really engage with their artists - they provide first contact with other artists just out of grad school and in a more professional setting, and with the public. It also gives the public a first time opportunity to see what's going on, see new things. I think they're critical.

Curators, if they're worth their salt and most of them do this, pay attention to alternative spaces. Contemporary curators know exactly what's going on and use them as a kind of way to get acquainted with new people.

EW: Entry point to the pipeline of building artist's careers. [paraphrased]
JD: It’s interesting. A number of spaces are now having their 25th anniversaries, Artists Space in New York for one. They’re publishing a catalogue that will do exactly this, trace it. We funded their catalogue. There are essays by all the directors and I think some of the artists and it traces the development of artists through Artists Space. It’s just so obvious. I don’t know how to articulate it any more deeply. The thing about these spaces is they’re not interested in the market. So that they are artists looking at artists and artists have very critical eyes. In some ways, you couldn’t get finer tuned eyes to look at work and select them. So the work is not selected through single dealers, usually these committees are group processes and they’re chosen. At Headlands, they used to do installations and projects, curators would see them, writers would see them, the press would see them, collectors would see them and things would just begin for them [the artists shown]. Because their work was good or interesting, it was brought into a more public arena where other movements that are going along in the world will pick them up, or not. Otherwise the artist has to rely on the market - and dealers are interested in what sells. Many of them say they are interested in what’s good and many of them are but they’ve got to make a living.
EW: That's an interesting question looking at the audience side, alternative spaces have introduced new ideas as well as new genres of work to the public [paraphrased]

JD: Artist spaces are really open to that [cross disciplinary work]. The other thing that really comes to my mind about artists' spaces and a lot of this had to do with pressure from our guidelines - cultural diversity really began to take root, artists of color were really introduced to the art world through the alternative space scene. Because of a sense of moral obligation to the world, because of the civil rights movement, the women's movement. It just ripened as time went on. Whenever we had panels - and we always had people of color on our panels - and those people of color would say, "Where are the people of color on the board? Where are they on the staff? Where are they in the program?" And it really influenced the decision-making and that moved it right back out into the field. In fact I think if you talk to artists of color, they will speak of the alternative space movement as really being important in their initiation into the art world on all fronts.

Going back to the point you were making, alternative spaces weren't like schools, they didn't have departments - sculpture, video, heaven knows where performance went. The performance scene and performance art emerged out of the alternative spaces. It was all about pushing the boundaries of visual arts
and merging with other disciplines. Because they were interested in art and ideas and not necessarily objects, these things could naturally evolve and take form there and mess around until form was there.

EW: When the Endowment was very discipline-based, a lot of work fell through the cracks.

JD: We’ve always been very open here in Visual Arts because of the alternative space movement. Many alternative spaces had just a whole range of programs - literary programs, performance programs, visual programs - so all of that was just a natural way of doing business. We didn’t sit around saying ‘Well, is this visual arts or not?’ It was just, ‘Good people, good programming, go for it’.

EW: Challenges for the future. Critique of alternatives as “mini-museums”.

[paraphrased]

JD: I don’t think they are mini-museums. We have all forced them to be institutionalized. They have to be smart to survive. If they are not in the right location in town, they’re not going to get people to visiting them, they’re not going to be able to make the case to funders that they have, you know, more than 150 seeing them and they’re not going to get money. It drives me nuts
when people critique them for being institutionalized because where’s the money for them to not be that way. It’s what’s happened. The whole culture has conspired to push them there. That included the academic structure, certainly the private foundation world which won’t even look at them unless evaluation, especially right now, is number one on their agenda. And us [the Endowment] with our inability to fund operating support and demanding project accountability. And if we give you money for this and you don’t do it, you have to talk to us about it. It is what’s happening.

I don’t think it’s more museum-like. Now that I know museums well and I see these operate side by side - they’re very, very different still, although they are more institutionalized. The thing I worry about and wonder about is where the new generation of artists are playing things out? There never were enough alternative spaces in the country in the first place to create this thick, diverse network that would allow artists to create work in Omaha, or another small town, say Kansas City. To come out of school, to not come out of school, to come out of the community, to find similar like-minded souls and create work for the public and begin to move on. There just wasn’t that sort of blanket number of visual artists organizations because they’re hard to run. You have to prove yourself as a non-profit to the IRS and duh, duh, duh.
So now there are slightly fewer than there were ten years ago and what about the new artists? They're not going into visual artists organizations. My colleague, Doug Sontag, and I are about to start, hopefully, a mentorship program to bring younger people into VAO's and train them over a year period in all aspects of running the organization in hopes we can cultivate the next generation of people running these things.

EW: As an administrator, I think that's very exciting because, while there's not a lot of opportunities for artists, there's also not a lot of opportunities for new administrators to train in the field. You're answering phones and then there's this huge gap between that and the person running the organization, particularly when you're talking about a small organization. And there's not a lot of opportunities to get the skills you need.

JD: Well, this is not going to be a lot - I think $5K a year over a several year period and then hopefully continued after that. So my big question is, and has been true for a number of years: Where are younger artists going? And many of them, as you know, are avoiding the 501(C)3 structure. I remember vividly a session from the last NAAO conference called "Not for Profits, Not for Me" and hearing these two really smart young women, one in San Francisco, one in Chicago, both started their own programs. One of them did it on her credit cards, the other did it on her savings. She said she did not want to be bothered.
with committees. The other one said she could maintain more control over things if she just went out and bought the equipment and invited the artists she wanted. They both mentioned the possibility of censorship and having to answer to other agencies, whether it be us [the Endowment] or the city or private foundations. So there was no incentive for them to go non-profit. They weren't looking to make a lot of money, they just wanted to make a living and make a go of it. And their ideals were very similar to what probably the beginning days of New Langton's; there's a need here, artists need this space, let's provide support for them, a place to introduce them to a new community of the public, let's get that dialogue going. It sounded really familiar, it was just the tax structure that was really different.

EW: I'm really interested to see where that's going to go because I know a lot of those spaces are really off the radar, they're in people's basements or wherever. One thing that I was thinking about was just documenting the work that comes through. For example, that it's so ungrounded that you're certainly losing a sense of continuity. I know spaces that opened and closed that did really interesting shows and there's not really anything left.

JD: The other thing I wonder too is especially the galleries, because they are focused on the market in some way, is that galleries' natural inclination is to open the doors, find new artists but then one or two of those artists are going to
get hot and successful. And the inclination is to stay with those artists because you both make money together and the relationship is good and there's trust and all of that. Visual artists organizations were constantly cycling through new people and that was their mission. They were interested in new, what's new, let's move on. Then maybe they'd say let's go back, like New Langton is doing now, let's do a retrospective of Jim Pomeroy. But fifteen years ago, Jim might show up for his new performance every 18 months or something but there's always a commitment to bring in new things. And the commercial structure, it's needs mediate against that commitment to untried new things. In some ways, I'm sorry I'm leaving because Pamela Clapp at the Warhol and I have been talking about how to stabilize visual arts organizations just to keep them around. Because I feel so strongly that the landscape is better off for their presence and they are in danger. Leadership mostly because it takes such an act of will to keep these places going and alive. I really wanted to work on setting up some kind of Endowment program for them. Pamela's going to do that now.
INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN CHANNING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SPACES, CLEVELAND, OH (May 27, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Maybe we can start with some background information about you. How did you begin working in the arts and what's your background with alternative spaces?

Susan Channing: I have an MFA in printmaking and photography from a hundred years ago. (laugh) And I needed to pay the rent so I started out working for the National Endowment for the Arts after graduate school. Then went to the Wadsworth Anthenenuem were I worked with performance art in the education department and performance artists that came to the museum. Then I got married and we moved to Boston and I worked at the Institute for Contemporary Art and then the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities. At the Council I was the Assistant Director and then started the artists' fellowship program for the state of Massachusetts which at that time grew to be the second largest in the country next to New York state. That was in the early 70's and at that time we gave grants to artists in 12 different categories: fiction, playwriting, poetry, dance, film, video, painting, printmaking, photography, etc. And because of my husband's jobs we moved to Philadelphia and then to Cleveland. So I've always been involved with artists in my work and have felt compelled to be a champion for the arts and for artists.
EW: How would you characterize alternative spaces? What are some of the defining characteristics and values?

SC: They were all begun by artists who wanted exhibitions and work by artists to be seen in a way they intended them rather than for a commercial gallery or museum or the taste of a museum curator. So they began these places all over the country sort of in defiance of the establishment I guess you could say and they were nurtured to a great extent by the National Endowment for the Arts in their Visual Artists Organization category. That played a huge role in the structure of those spaces and the formation of all those spaces. At the heart of what we do and this has been since 1978, half of our board of directors are artists and most artists organizations began that way. Many of them have not be able to stay that way because they have needed to raise more dollars and have a different kind of board and they occasionally have advisory boards that are artist-run. We've stayed an artist-run and an artist-driven organization through the board and also our staff, we have two full-time and three part-time people and four of the people are artists. Also at the heart of our mission is that one of the things that we do that most artists spaces have done throughout time, and again this may have changed because of the changing financial climate, artists are paid honoraria to present work at an alternative space. Often alternative spaces show work that is not commercially viable, that can only be that if the space were a museum and so the space pays the artist to
show there, to give a talk, whatever an artist does the artist should be paid a fee. This was almost a requirement in the Visual Artists Organization category at the Endowment and I think helped nurture that aspect of artists spaces. However, when everything changed at the Endowment, a lot money went away for artists spaces and many of them are not able to do as much as were in the past. Alternative spaces are generally artist-run, artist-driven, the artist is the center of the activity rather than in the periphery. I guess at many of the spaces, everyone is underpaid, I guess that’s a defining characteristic.

Usually they were begun by energetic young people who were very zealous and they presented work, and still do, that is difficult, unpopular, confrontational, censurable, work that makes the viewer think, work that often has social or political content to it, work that is an alternative to a pristine commercial gallery setting.

EW: What contributions do these organizations make to the total ecology of the arts?

SC: In our cases, we often provide developing and experimenting artists with their first major exhibition anywhere. I think alternative spaces have given artists the opportunity to experiment with new ideas, to use the gallery as a laboratory and to either soar with the results or fail. I think we’re here for
experimentation, we're here so the artist can gain exposure and then go on to the other links that are made through other kinds of organizations. For us anyway, we're the first major step in an artist's career, the artist doesn't have to be young necessarily but young in his or her career. However, we do show work by artists who are not necessarily developing or emerging from other parts of the country. That work needs to be seen here, there needs to be a reason to bring it to Cleveland. We present work from artists from all over the country not just locally, we show local, regional and national artists. Work that that may be seen in other states more often that hasn't been seen in Cleveland can be brought here. It doesn't need to be an unknown person just starting out.

EW: What impact have alternative spaces had on the careers of individual artists?

SC: Well, I think it's the first thing that you do. You find out whether or not your project's going to work. It gives artists a professional, well-lit space to present a major project. Most alternative spaces do a great deal of publicity, the work gets reviewed, we send an invitation out to 5,500 people, we have an opening reception for the artist and we try very hard to gain critical press. We often try to have the artist interviewed on local radio stations, etc. We try to do as much as we can for the artist bearing in mind that our honorarium is not going to pay for everything that the artist does but we do pay artists honorarium for what they do.
EW: How do you think alternative spaces have changed over time?

SC: Well, many of them have gone out of business. And that has happened because they have relied on too few sources of funding. Or they have burned out the staff and the second generation hasn’t come to take over because it’s hard work for hardly any money. Some artist spaces have merged with other organizations like WPA merged with the Corcoran. I don’t know if LACE in Los Angeles went out of business entirely or merged with another major institution. So in some cases they have lost their feisty personalities. The older ones are not necessarily the alternative anymore. They have become the young mainstream organizations, they’re not a museum yet, and they’re not the contemporary art museum yet. They still have a slightly different take on the world but they’re not as rough and ready, and down and dirty as they used to be. However, if they’re true to their mission, they’re still providing a real function and a purpose in artists’ careers and in the cities where they are. And they’re still making people ask questions about art and really contemplate society.

I think it was always true that the alternative spaces on the East and West coasts were more involved at an earlier stage with issues like gay rights, AIDS, real serious political issues. The organizations throughout the middle part of country have caught up with the issues and are still bringing work about these
issues. Performance art which used to be . . . most alternative spaces used to embrace performance art and that has seemed to dwindle. Also dance, there's some performance art groups that began in the visual art arena but are now moving towards experimental dance.

EW: I'm curious about what you said about being in the Midwest. Are there special issues that SPACES faces because of where you are located?

SC: Well, we deal with ecology in some ways I guess because we're right on Lake Erie and we've worked with other alternative spaces in the area, the same thing with post-industrial cities like Pittsburg, Buffalo, we're worked a lot with Hallwalls. We had an exhibition about censorship in 1987 before the NEA difficulties and one would think that somebody would have censored what we were doing but we didn't have any trouble at all. But in Cincinnati, a more high bound city, censorship is rampant. So in some ways we are more free to do what we want because I guess Cleveland seems to be a more liberal minded community than many other cities were. And more open to experimentation and new ideas. But there are less of the different caucuses for gay rights, even for what used to be called minority representation and now is artists of color.

EW: What challenges do you think these spaces will need to address in the future?
SC: Any kind of artist voice that goes against the establishment, against the mainstream is slowly silenced and that’s bad. I think one of the issues is self-censorship because of funding. Every alternative space runs on a shoestring budget. We all know how to budget better than the larger organizations do because we have to do a lot for a little bit of money. Artists are very inventive and able to get the most of a buck that they have. So self-censorship in order to get financial support is a problem. It’s a really difficult political and economic climate for the arts right now. I don’t think that the backlash in Congress is as bad as it was a few years ago, I think the future looks a little more hopeful but it’s always tenuous, you just don’t know. I think it was helpful in the past that there were grants for individual artists all across the country and through the NEA. It helped artists pay for projects that alternative spaces couldn’t totally fund. Those grants don’t exist except in a few states and we’re really fortunate in Ohio that the Ohio Arts Council is very helpful to artists. Those are challenges for alternative spaces and I think it’s a challenge to be true to your mission and not to grow too large and become too corporate I guess and try to do what that satisfies the funders rather than what’s at the heart of your mission.

EW: I think that wraps it up. Are there questions or issues that I should have asked that you wanted to bring up?
SC: Censorship might be one of them. I think that's a huge issue, many organizations refuse to apply to the NEA because of the many times that the NEA has relinquished grants because of the content of the work. Also, whether these groups are still applying to the NEA. We bought a building and we have tenants in our building and the tenants' payments offset our mortgage or else we wouldn't exist anymore. Every artist organization has to be really creative in its fundraising because we can't rely on the same old sources that we were able to rely on before. We do work that's difficult for a corporation to underwrite because it sometimes flies in the face of corporate America.

Maybe a question about the whether the mission has changed over time since the organization started and what the new mission is.

EW: What's your take on that?

SC: For us, it hasn't really but the one thing we haven't done officially is, education is not part of our mission. But now, and this is somewhat based on funding I guess but it's also a no-brainer that if you don't educate kids to enjoy the arts, partake of the arts and be challenged by the arts you're not going to have a public for the arts in a few years. People who are attending symphonies are getting older and older, every arts organization needs to bring in younger
people. So we've began to do more officially with quote-unquote education even though we've always done gallery tours, talked to school, you know. We've began to think much more about that because there's such an emphasis on it.

I guess the other thing that's a few years back is diversity. To be aggressive about diversity rather than just saying, 'Oh, we're open to the public, anybody can come', all of these organizations need to think about the diverse cultures and how programming can relate in a meaningful way to diverse constituencies, not in a way that's just something to satisfy part of a funding request.
INTERVIEW WITH GERALD GIVNISH, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE PAINTED BRIDE, PHILADELPHIA, PA (May 26, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Tell me about your background as an arts administrator and how you became involved with alternative spaces?

Gerard Givnish: I was a painter back in the late 60’s just out of art school and myself and others were trying to show our work and we would rent garages or put up shows in people’s houses. The opportunity came to rent a storefront on South Side so we did it. The group had some experience in self-presenting our work, this was just a commitment. We had the experience of sharing bills and sharing work.

EW: Was this the beginnings of the Painted Bride?

GG: The Painted Bride was the moment when we signed the lease as a group and committed ourselves to monthly rent. Prior to that we had been a loose working group of visual artists.

EW: So once the Painted Bride was formed, you’ve been on staff there since as a staff person?
GG: It had different stages. The first stage was setting ourselves up as a business, some kind of loose arrangement about who would work what hours, some kind of guidelines about who would show when and how the work would get up. It was very loose. It was a coop. It was in a run-down section of the city that eventually become the center of Philadelphia's nightlife. Then we started out as a gallery in June. It was difficult to get people to walk around at night in that area so we started doing performing arts in November, some more in the Spring and we did it full bore in September of '70 and started our first season.

EW: At what point did you become a nonprofit?

GG: In about '72, someone told me about the Pennsylvania Arts Council which was just starting up and I made some inquiries and they were probably looking for people to fund in those days. Then we heard about the National Endowment for the Arts so we decided that maybe this was a way to support the enterprise, so we became a nonprofit seeing that there was government money. We did that in '73 and '74, we got our first state grant in Spring of '73, our first federal grant in '74.

EW: How would you characterize alternative spaces?
GG: It was about access. It was about getting work to the public that artists were making but that commercial venues were not interested in or for which there was maybe no commercial potential. It was about artists taking control of their product too.

EW: How have they changed from the initial days in the 70's into the 80's and 90's?

GG: The alternative space movement was primarily by trained professional artists, mostly white kids, not all but mostly, who were out of art school and trying to make a dent in the world and maybe try to support themselves from their work. They brought a whole lot of work before the public that the public hadn't seen before, it was a nice coincidence of mutual interest, mutual benefit. The multicultural movement which came to the fore in the early 80's. I remember one of the first meetings I went to at NAAO must have been in 1979 or '80 in Washington. I still remember Gino Rodriguez speaking about artists of color not being represented at NAAO and that was the challenge of the '80s, at least the way the Bride took it is to become more culturally diverse. Artists who had institutionalized themselves in the alternative space movement felt the obligation to broaden the representation within their institutions.

EW: How successful do you think that's been?
GG: For us, it's been a wonderful joyride of ten or fifteen years of discovering new artists, discovering ourselves, challenging, exhilarating. I think that's probably more of what the Bride has come to be about than alternative space. I think alternative space lost its meaning, meet its challenge in the early 80's, there just was a new challenge that still befuddles.

EW: I know in the mission statement for the Bride it talks about social change. Could you talk about that? Was that always what you were about?

GG: Here's an early one, probably not the first: 'Painted Bride exists to present the best in artistic experiment and expression presented by living visual, literary and performing artists.' Here it is, 'The Mission Statement of the Painted Bride is to serve the community by presenting the formative works of living artists chosen primarily from the Philadelphia area through artist selected programs in all disciplines.' It's kind of a wooden statement. That was it. Then we had another version, another iteration of the mission statement. 'Painted Bride Art Center acts to stimulate creative activity and to promote public understanding and participation in the creative process. We fulfill this mission by presenting the works of living artists from diverse cultures, by nurturing organization to artist relationships, and by relating to broader community issues through the arts.' So that was when we were early involved in diversity.
EW: What year was that?

GG: July of ’89. The first one was 1983. Then the last one is the third, you have it right? That was the third stages that it went through.

EW: Can you say anything else about the values or unique characteristics of alternative spaces versus museums or other visual arts organizations or performing arts organizations?

GG: Isn't there a word in German called ‘Kunsthalle’? It means workshop. That kind of draws the line between formal presentation and education that museums are about and the stage of making the work and getting it out. I think we were about making the work and getting it up. I don’t think there was a generation of institutions in America. . . . There was the community theaters that were about that kind of thing. I guess we were more about that.

EW: One of the things I’m trying to look at is how alternative arts organizations have contributed to the overall health of the arts in America. Can you say anything about the contribution they have made or the function they have served?
GG: Nonprofit alternative spaces are a new arena where jazz is played that didn’t exist in the ’70s. Jazz was still played in clubs. I think that has influenced the music quite a bit, having a concert setting for it.

EW: Do you think that allowed people to do more experimental stuff that they wouldn’t have been able to do in another setting?

GG: Yeah, it allowed for more concentration on composition and writing. It integrated audiences for jazz. It’s created more literacy about the music. I think more jazz artists are known and appreciated through the proliferation of... I guess it has more to do with record labels and stuff. There’s a more knowledgeable audience. Alternative spaces have really pumped a lot of energy into the visual arts that show up in MOMA and the larger museums. You have a lot of institutions where people could show work and get critical feedback and grow in their careers. I don’t think anybody could question the value of alternative spaces for visual arts culture in the United States. Video is another area where we have probably opened up a new genre, a new art medium.

EW: Were alternative spaces showing video before the major museums?
GG: Well, the video collectives - the Philadelphia Independent Video and Film Makers Association, these are self-help trade groups so to speak where artists have gathered together to help themselves. I think that was one of the contributions of the alternative space movement was this self-help concept where people would gather together and come together to offer support to each other and their work. That model of artists collective, there's a lot of video collectives who have advanced the art form of video making. The experimental theater movement in the '70s in New York that took place in the Performance Garage and the lower East Side and you had probably the biggest Renaissance in theater in the 70's was in New York. You had Mabou Mines, Spalding Gray, Richard Foreman, Richard Schikner, Charles Lundlum, the Ridiculous Theater Company, Theater Yumen in New York. It changed the nature of American theater, I really believe that.

EW: Can you talk about the impact alternative spaces have had on individual artists' careers?

GG: I think all the people who are stars today started in alternative spaces. I'm not too fluent in the visual arts, even though I'm a visual artist. You know some of the people who are big today, I believe they all started in nonprofit galleries.
EW: You talked about the ideal of people being able to support their work and that was one of the visions people had in the collectives you were involved in. Has that happened?

GG: No, and I don’t think that remained in anybody’s mind as an obtainable ideal. I think people were happy to show their work in a situation that they could control. Given the vagaries of the marketplace, if you suddenly made it big that was part luck and part skill. The stimulation of making work that would be seen all artists need.

EW: What about the evolution of these spaces? Have there been any changes that occurred into the 90’s?

GG: Yeah, the next evolution was alternative spaces learning about other cultures, learning to present other cultures, look at their city differently. At least we do, look at our city differently and saw that if we were presenting black dancers, then we needed to have black audiences. Then we started looking into our neighborhoods for audiences and for partners and saw neighborhood groups forming and we started to work with them and encourage them. Now you have a generation of community-based art centers and culturally-specific art centers who define their work as part of renewing cities, building communities. That’s the next challenge that the Bride is interested in accepting.
is to work with communities to show the healing power of the arts and their ability to effect social change. We’d like to see it happen in what some people would call abandoned neighborhoods, to see the renewal happen there. These are places that are maybe of aesthetic blithe but also of great possibilities. So that would be the third phase of alternative spaces: one, access, two, diversity, three, community building.

EW: What do you see as the challenges or problems that alternative spaces will face in the future?

GG: I don’t use the word anymore cause I think we’ve hybridized. The Bride is often called community-based, although we’re not. ‘Alternative’ to me has lost its meaning because I don’t think artistic experiment as artists were doing it out of art school has any relevance anymore. Trying to speak or let communities speak through you is more what I would consider an artist’s mission today.

EW: Are these spaces still relevant anymore?

GG: My answer is no.

EW: Why is that?
GG: Cause they have already accomplished access which is the purpose of alternative spaces. Wait, let me amend that. If the purpose was to provide a friendly environment for artists to work and experiment, that would still be the purpose. If you could somehow provide resources for artists to work, either time or money or space. You have to be an artist centered institution, and the challenge would be to get money to do that and to be an advocate for the artist and articulate why the artist is a productive member of society. Not only productive but necessary for a whole society.

EW: Are there any other questions I should have asked you or issues you wanted to talk about?

GG: Well, it's interesting what is going on at On the Boards now. I just got a letter from the Board of Directors yesterday saying why they canned Mark Murphy and from a distance it looked like here you have a corporate board firing an artist because they didn't understand the artistic process. In reading the letter they said Mark certainly had strengths as a curator but big weaknesses that they were trying to address but that he was unwilling to address. So in some ways I'm heartened by the letter because here's a group of non-artists, apparently businesspeople, who have become stakeholders in the alternative space movement. Which means that somehow the community recognizes the value of our work, which is the only way it's going to survive.
EW: So you see that as a positive rather than a negative? You're not worried about the loss of the original vision of the space?

GG: I think that we started as artists helping artists and artists helping themselves. For the future, we have to be able to make the case to the general public that what we do is valuable and the community has to participate in our survival. If I read On the Board's letter, maybe it's starting to work where the community's saying 'This is an institution we're going to fight for.'

EW: I think that's one of the tensions I have seen in artists spaces is the tension between keeping things loose and artist-centered and becoming more institutionalized and having hierarchies.

GG: I think the organizational structure has to be compatible with the mission. Social change has to be informed by an open-ended dialogue and that has to be characteristic of an organization. Dialogue means team work, team effort. The other hallmark of a social change institution is entirely collaborative, able to work with other organizations in a team fashion and again characterized as open-ended dialogue and communication and sharing. The structures that make this possible are more horizontal, less hierarchical. It seems that corporate America is trying to discover those kinds of structures too which is
kind of ironic. I think the compatibility between how you marshal human resources and your mission is particularly important.

The alternative space movement was part of a political movement. It drew energy from the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement. There was definitely a sense that you were participating in something that was bigger than an institution. And I think in the 80's we became more institutionally-oriented and that sapped our energies a lot. Returning to a sense of political movement is crucial to the work.
INTERVIEW WITH MARK RUSSELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, P.S. 122, NEW YORK, NY (June 15, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Maybe you could tell me a little bit about your background in the arts.

Mark Russell: Somehow I was always attracted to the arts. My family moved around a lot and that’s what my mother did to help try to socialize me and so I ended up in theater quite a bit. I went to the University of Texas theater school, got my drama department degree in direct ing out of there. When I was graduating from there, I went to Poland, sort of a last final project, worked with Grotowski and a lot of other people. I was very interested in experimental, avant-garde work and when I arrived in New York, I started working. I was actually on my way back to Texas but I stopped in New York and I ended up staying.

EW: And how long have you been at P.S. 122?


EW: Let’s talk about how you would define alternative spaces and performance venues. What are some of the defining characteristics and values they hold?
MR: Well, I think it's different for each place. There was a movement, as you know, of alternative spaces in the 70's or artist-run spaces, artist-friendly spaces. Sort of reacting against the Eurocentric or high culture turn. A lot of that I think was spurred by the NEA and the fact that people started recognizing culture or higher culture in the States and then realized that there was a lot of American work that needed support and then these places grew up to support that work. It's been going on for a long time, without the NEA as well. It kind of comes around that people feel the need to show works and then they build the theater to do it. Or create a gallery to do it. You hear about O'Neil or somebody like that starting a small theater in Provincetown to do his work, stuff like that.

EW: Tell me about the 70's and 80's in terms of the East Village and what was going on there and how that lead to the development of P.S. 122.

MR: In the late 60's, early 70's the East Village was full of the hippies and it was kind of a loft area. In the early 70's, the landlords were burning it down, sort of a lot of arson was happening for various reasons. It was a lot of insurance fraud, sort of an epidemic of it. They ended up trashing a lot of what is the east, east, East Village, hoping then to sell off those lots to create bigger housing projects and stuff like that. So 122 was on the edge of that and the City was getting into financial problems and stuff. The school itself was an antiquated thing, almost a hundred years old and there was sort of a dip in the
population and it was getting expensive to run, it wasn’t the most efficient building. So the City closed P.S. 122 in ‘76. Then it was immediately occupied by a bunch of social service organizations because what used to happen was that the City would abandon a building or a landlord would abandon a building and they would come in and rip the cooper out of it and really created a shell and it would get inhibited by junkies and homeless people and stuff like that. So 122 was lucky in that it had a bunch of people that, as soon as those doors were officially closed, they broke them down again and occupied the building and squatted it essentially for social service organizations and artists. Those were rough years, but they managed to save the building. For a long time, it was on a dollar a year lease. Then in ‘80 we got a more aggressive lease but we got a ten year lease and then that changed in ‘90 and we were on a month-to-month lease and now we’re back to a dollar a year.

EW: In terms of the kind of work that was done during that time period, maybe you can tell me a little bit about what sort of niche 122 filled.

MR: We were one of the last LOFT theaters basically. Places like the Kitchen and Franklin Furnace were more well-known and established arts organizations that had grown up in the ‘70s and our people couldn’t get gigs there. So when this thing started and they didn’t know what to do with this large room, we started renting it out for performances. And then presenting
performances there and doing rehearsals and classes and things. And our own reputation grew until we became a presenting institution but essentially an institution that was in service to the artist.

EW: Going back for a second, why do you think the performers you mentioned weren’t getting gigs?

MR: They were young. They were young puppies, they were fresh in the City and no one knew them. A lot of the work we started to do, they were sort of the children of Robert Wilson and Meredith Monk and that kind of thing. They were the people in those casts, they were the little gremlins that Wilson was using. Then as they began to make their own work they needed a place to find their voice and then to get seen and then to be picked up. But there’s a big gap before they got picked up so this was their shop. And there was a whole scene around it. I think this scene thing happens constantly. There’s a scene happening now somewhere in Brooklyn, in Williamsburg or something that will eventually become, there may be another P.S. 122 that will arise out of that.

EW: So you see it as a natural . . .

MR: It’s a natural progression because there’s a lot of people that now can’t get gigs at P.S. 122, what do they do? They go start their own. The situation is
now that they are having to do that in living rooms. They start places like Dixon Place or Surf Reality and stuff like that.

EW: Sort of expanding on what we've been talking about, what has the impact been on artists' careers?

MR: We became an important place for people to develop work. Sort of stood for a generation that did not hate TV. Performance art used to happen like one night only, once. We turned out a generation that took in that and started making it happen four nights in a row and for longer runs and combining it with lots of theater and dance techniques to re-create performances with a craft. That scene began to merge more with theater and dance. It's always been a transitional place but we sort of formed a shelter for that batch of work. Out of that a lot of work has gone on there. There's been a couple of people that actually caught the attention of the public and gone on to do work around the country or work in film, to just find a wider and wider public and actually make a go of it.

EW: How do you think the alternative spaces have changed over time?

MR: It used to be, I think that P.S. 122 kind of grew up in the golden days, I wish we'd known it was the golden days, when there was actual funding for this kind
of thing, that responded to the work and create shelters for individual artists. And now, because the NEA is out of the picture for the most part, you have to support these shelters by box office or other means. So a place like Surf Reality, which would have been a great idea as a not-for-profit in the 70’s or early 80’s, is actually run as a for-profit. Or they try to, I don’t know how well they’re doing it. It changes the tenor of the work and the way they work with artists and it makes it a tougher environment for artists. Not as supportive because we can’t be as selfless. It is harder to create a career, to staff these places. It goes up and down with the economy. Now there’s not that much unemployment in the country. It depends on different generations. This generation, you know an alternative guy would have probably been out selling candles in the woods in the 70’s, is now a Internet start-up entrepreneur. So that finding people attracted to giving a lot of their time for free, using a lot of their business instincts in places that won’t necessarily return them big money is difficult. It’s harder to find those people. And also a lot of the artists are coming out much more career oriented than art oriented because there’s fewer of these shelters for artists I think and it is not as nice a time for it.

EW: I have a friend who’s doing a show at a new venue where they didn’t even know if they were going to see the work. It was a very different attitude.
MR: I've had a hard time changing my culture. The whole process of 122 in the '90s has been trying to slowly, we should have done it faster, but change our culture from this sort of grant oriented one to box office and earned income and rental oriented one. I started as a rental place and now I'm going back to that. I never wanted to go back there. Actually it's funny, we're actually getting more support from foundations because we have this rental thing in our profile now - it's limited and it's curated, etc. - but they wanted us to rent because they felt that that would be safer for us and allow us not to rely on grants as much. They wanted me to have more earned income streams that I could count on.

EW: Do you think that's true, that those measures will do that?

MR: It is. It is doing that. I still think it sucks because that's another 10 weeks that I'm not helping artists, I'm living off artists. And I always thought I was in this business and that the reason we had these places was to support artists. So to me, it's a little off message. But what we're finding is that these places now with the restraints they're on, they have to have a lot of "Preserve the space first, artists second." That's not the way I was brought up, that's not really why I was in it. I've had to tweak as much as possible my procedures and outlook on this to preserve the space and deal with the reality that if I keep on giving it all away, eventually there won't be a P.S. 122. I think the balance we strike between giving it away and then living off some of our producers or our
audience is a thin line but we’re walking it and so far have been able to walk it successfully more or less.

EW: Did you have anything else to add about the challenges for the future?

MR: I think keeping the mission in place and in focus is hard. The challenges of keeping a staff of grown-ups in place and trained well is a real difficulty here. When I started I was living on unemployment and then paying myself part of the year and then going back on unemployment. That’s how me and my staff supported ourselves for about four years in the beginning. When I came to work they said, “We have $7,000 to pay you.” And actually what that was was four thousand dollars and they expected me to get the other three through unemployment, they were already counting that in. So I went ahead and figured that out. That’s when I learned how to fundraise the hard way. Now kids these days just won’t do that. Also, the unemployment scam is not as good a scam as it used to be. It used to be tax-free, now it’s not. So now I’m trying to get people to work for $40,000 a year.

EW: I think that might be a generational thing.

MR: Well, there’s all these generational things and what was cool in the 70’s was like, “Oh, no, man. I’m going back to the land.” (laughs) And “I’m my own
guy and I’m going to go take a motorcycle and ride around the world.” Now it’s like “You’re a chump!”. You know the person that doesn’t wash everyday - that’s kind of a chump. And so if you’re a real hero you’re there with a palmtop.

EW: In terms of the visual arts spaces that started in the 70’s, do you think there is a link between those spaces and the spirit of what you guys started out as?

MR: Definitely, we were part of NAAO for a long time. And there was a sort of disconnect because I’m part of a live theater thing. But those ideals that those people set in place in the 70’s were pretty important and still inform these places a great deal. I think it may be a completely dying breed, I hope it doesn’t die out, but especially the visual arts places they were very dependent on grant income and government grant income because they weren’t patron based really and there was no income really and they weren’t living off their artists, they started these traditions of paying artists - Oh my god! They were an answer to the vanity galleries. I don’t know how a place like Art in General keeps going but they seem to, thank god. But other places, Artists Space and all, these places are going under or having to change radically what they do. Places like Franklin Furnace which sort of had a lot of performance but was mostly a gallery as well, more rooted in the visual art world, they had to close and go cyber.
When I came to NAAO, the generation of the old warriors that had started these spaces was drifting away. They were in the same place I'm talking about now, going “Kids these days!” And then we came in and answered that or as best we could. My feeling is, and I know it's going to come somewhere along here, and to some extent places like Surf Reality or NADA are there but there needs to be a place that kicks my ass and they aren't coming up that easy. And what does that mean? What does that mean for the quality of the culture, for places for visual artists or performance artists to develop work? They are fewer and far between.

EW: Was there anything else I should have asked you?

MR: I think what happened in the foundation world was very interesting because once the NEA abandoned this field, then they were set loose. Foundations and corporations did not have a central focus. The NEA didn't give out a lot of money but they were a central thinktank and exchange area for the ideas. And an idea like multiculturalism or performance art or something like that would grow within the NEA through their use of fellows, etc. That was a way of approaching the business of doing art in America. Now that they're not there, now these foundations are essentially directionless and each of them going off on their own little path and the synergies are not there like “Okay,
here's a problem - Let's get the Ford and the Pew to deal with this problem”. It's harder to make those connections, that's what we used the NEA for. But in denial, because they didn't want to get caught holding the experimental art bag either, they have kind of stepped back in this nice way. First of all, their salaries are paid. But they're like “Oh, that's a nice little place, P.S. 122. I'm glad they're doing what they're doing. I'm just so sorry that our guidelines don't cover them anymore but I'm just so happy that you know, I would really help you guys if I could.” There was also a period there where you would get more complaints from foundation people going “Oh, I wish I could fund you but my life is so hard here.” So it was always a competition to see who could complain first. I think there's a deficit of leadership, there still is, in the foundation world and it is growing less and less connected to the world of artists and the concerns of artists. Because, well, some of those concerns are rather prosaic or very practical and they're not as interesting as ending global hunger. There's this whole re-organization going on at the Rockefeller right now and I think it's really going to hurt the arts. I mean look at what's happening at the Pew. They're more likely to fund your paper than the work. Which might be good for you! (laughs) But right now they have stopped giving money on a certain level and they're funding papers on developing a national cultural policy. It's a lot of money to take out of the arts. What do my artists do while everyone else is trying to develop a freckin' artistic cultural policy? In the meantime, they're starving. It's a very interesting site right now, I think it's a very critical time.
INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT STEARNS, FORMER MANAGING DIRECTOR, THE KITCHEN, NEW YORK, NY (May 11, 1999)

Robert Stearns: [School in San Diego] I learned to do in school what I continue to do now. When I moved to New York, I found myself in the opportunity of applying for the job as the assistant to a new gallery that was just opening at the time, Paula Cooper which now remains very well respected. Paula was just opening her gallery. She reminded me a couple of years ago that I was her first employee, she was my first employer and I was her first employee. But the connection here was that Paula was running a gallery in rather an alternative mode to begin with in 1969-1970, in that she didn’t want to have regular exhibitions every month and place ads in expensive art magazines, that it would be more of a rotating presentation. And she was in a neighborhood of Manhattan that had no galleries, the beginnings of Soho. Paula was interested in not only artists who were painters and sculptors in the traditional senses of the word but she was willing to give over her gallery during evening hours for poetry readings, dance concerts and performances by artists who lived in the neighborhood and who were friends of the visual artists who she represented and those “neighborhood kids” were people like Philip Glass, Patricia Brown, Steve Reich, Lee Brewer, the list goes on. I was very happy to take on the responsibility of going home and coming back and setting it up for artists to do those kinds of events. So this commercial gallery was already providing its facilities in a way similar to what would develop as alternative
spaces and actually catering to those who came to be very much dependent on the alternative spaces that began to develop a few years later.

I remember one morning there was some commotion going on downstairs and Paula came in and said, “Oh, Jeffrey is up to his antics again.” And Jeffrey was an enterprising young artist who had a studio place, large studio place around the corner at 112 Greene St. and somehow he managed to pay the rent on the ground floor and second floor of this space. Whatever he was doing outside, he was rolling an enormous ball of twine, literally eight feet across, down the street and he was going to roll it into the ground floor of his building and that was my first introduction to Jeffrey. This wonderfully nutty, high, high energy guy who was doing kind of crazy stuff without any kind of commercial direction to it. Around Jeffrey there were a number of artists, one of them was fairly well know, Keith S. who was represented by Castelli Gallery at the time, he did a lot of neon and such and Keith was an ex-patriot Louisianian, a Cajun boy, and he had a whole crew of people, some were dancers, some were poets, a mad group of people and they used Jeffrey’s space as a place to show work. Nothing was incorporated, nothing was a business, there was no structure to it what so ever. Whoever was Jeffrey’s friend could do whatever they wanted to do in his space. There was Paula’s space giving concerts and such. Already there was Anthology Film Archives which had been operating for quite a number of years since the mid-60’s at least. Jonas Mekas had been
running Anthology primarily for film, alternative and non-commercial film. But around him were people like Nam June Paik who was showing his work. They were located on 80 Wooster St. So you have 80 Wooster St., 112 Greene St., 98 Prince St. and these places begin to kind of gel a bit.

Some time around my first or second year of working with Paula I was looking for a roommate to share my exorbitant rent - 2,500 sq. foot loft, beautiful condition - it was $250 a month and I had to find some way to share the rent. I was getting paid $75 a week so you have to look at apples and apples. One of the artists represented by the gallery, Linda Benlos, was sharing a class at University of Rochester with a fellow named Jim Burton. Jim was a composer, an experimental composer and he wanted to move from Rochester down to New York and he was looking for a place to live. So Jim and I hooked up and shortly thereafter Jim got involved with this place just north of us called the Kitchen which was just beginning and was running some Monday night electronic experimental music evenings. Six or seven people would come, someone would put a tape on an audio deck and sit on the floor and listen to someone’s newest electronic studio composition.

I was increasingly interested in all of this because, it seemed to me, I was beginning to question my continued interest in the commercial gallery field. Because the needs were to represent a specific number of artists and your job
was to connect the works of those artists to clients and collectors so you were limited to that field of people and to the objects that that artist produced. Conceptually there’s nothing wrong with that but it limited my field of interest. I had a real interest in finding a way where I could put the talent I had, and I’m not an artist, I knew I was not an artist, I was around artists now of extraordinary talent and I knew the difference between an artist and someone who just makes things. But I did find that I had a talent to convey the ideas behind the artist’s work to other people, not so much as an educator but in a sense as a promoter or entrepreneur in some fashion or another but the structure for it didn’t exist. But suddenly living day to day with Jim Burton and his interests and his beginning to program concerts at the Kitchen. The Kitchen seemed like a really interesting place where artists just went. So as I just kind of noised around when Jim was doing concerts and met a few people who were there, I begin to find that this was really answering a very interesting issue for me. We had absolutely no money, the first year the budget was $7,500 for the entire year which was coming through a nonprofit organization set up by a well-to-do former Cleveland gallery owner who was very interested in electronic arts, Howard Wise. Howard maintained his gallery in Cleveland. So the kinds of things the Kitchen did which in the beginning was exclusively electronic art - video, electronic music and so on - was the kind of thing Howard Wise was interested in helping so he assisted the Kitchen by serving as a conduit organization and so Electronic Arts Intermix would add some money to the
request they would put in to the New York State Council on the Arts and as I said, for that first year when it was just beginning, that sum total was $7,500. I think at first I got paid maybe $100 a week and Jim got paid a little bit. It was very much whoever was there at the time was kind of running it. It was really originated by Woody and Stanya S., two very, very creative video artists and musicians.

I was really the first official director. I was hired as director by Howard Wise to put the books together and enter what little bits of money came in and give it some business structure which I had gained from working with Paula and handling sales and records and such that needed to be handled at the Gallery and, through that, gained the experience of organizing a major exhibition. That was 1972. Very critically, and this was a critical thing, what was happening then with 112 Greene St., the Kitchen and Anthology Film Archives and the 10 Bleecker St., which was Alanna Heiss' space that she used, which she opened the Clocktower which evolved into P.S. 1. Alanna was doing similar things for performance and visual artists as well.

Right around 1972-73 was an enormous explosion of cash that started to become available not only at the level of the New York State Council on the Arts but also the National Endowment for the Arts. There was, I remember very clearly, a meeting that Brian O'Doherty who was Director of Visual Arts, Brian is
absolutely critical to the whole development. Because at a level of public policy this meeting was one of the most important fulcrums that got things moving and moving very quickly. He invited a number of young people who were directors or managers of or heads of, whatever informal way they were, of these spaces that were beginning to operate outside of the commercial system, he invited us to come to Washington, DC and sit down and talk about what our needs were and what we felt were the things that should be addressed by the Endowment. Jeffrey Lou was there, Alanna Heiss was there, I was there, Anne Focke was there, Bob Smith, who was then Director of the L.A. Institute of Contemporary Art which has long since disappeared for personality reasons, and I'm probably missing a few but those were some of the key people. And the thing that was really important was that we were involved and were being engaged at a level of public policy development and from those discussions, guidelines emerged quite quickly to define an alternative space and what it was and then obviously through those guidelines money was set aside specifically to fund those organizations that operated under those conditions.

EW: It's an interesting moment in the Endowment's history and don't know if it's because of Brian or because of the Endowment at that time, but it was incredibly responsive to what was going on in the field in a way that I don't think it has been since.
RS: No. Well, there were no rules and there was no track record. What was happening was that an enormous increase in Congressional allocations were being made to the Endowment ahead of demands and needs. So there was an opportunity to go out and initiate or to read the field and find where money could be used well and effectively and put it there. Rather than responding to pressures from below and giving in to them, it was a situation of initiative at the time. And so in a period of no more than 24 months, the Kitchen's budget, like others - Franklin Furnace was opening, Real Artways began in Hartford, so many other spaces - we watched budgets run from that initial $7,500 in the middle of the year, there was another $15,000 made available to us from the New York State Council on the Arts. The next year we probably doubled that and added another $20,000 or $30,000 from the Endowment so from 1972 with a budget of $7,500 in 1974 our budget went from $7,500 to $100,000.

And so there was a great deal of expansion not just of the Kitchen's activities but of a lot of spaces. But it was still as loose and as unstructured artistically as it was to begin with. To a degree, whoever had something interesting to offer and some semblance of an audience that wanted to see what it was that they did, it was just a matter of finding time and space in the schedule and human work time to clean it up. But around that developed certain kinds of relationships between artists. Certain visual artists gravitated towards Artistspace and White Columns and places like that that catered specifically to
the visual artists. The Kitchen was focused primarily in the electronic media, performance and the ephemeral material. Although the Kitchen early on had a very aggressive visual arts program, it was always related back to those ideas - multi-monitor installations, sound installations. Because we were in the middle of Soho, we were a place where people would drop in during the day or on Saturdays, so we were running day and night. It was a gallery during the day, performance center at night. And there was a lot of cross talk between the artists. Keith Somia would do a light environment for Lee Brewer who was in theater. Philip Glass would do the sound for a dancer and so on, a lot of back and forth.

I was with the Kitchen for about five years by which time I think our budget was around a quarter of a million or $300,000, I'm using that as a kind of a measure, the economy of an organization is one way to measure. We were producing between 110 and 120 events a year and generally closed from mid-June to early September to renovate, clean. There was no air conditioning in the space so it was hideously hot, it was useless and so many people were away during the summer anyway so we would close.

EW: What did you do once you left the Kitchen?
RS: When I was first working for Paula Cooper, I worked to secure loans and works for the new Center for Contemporary Arts in Cincinnati, which opened the facility it is still operating in in 1971. The opening exhibition there in 1971 was an exhibition of monumental sculpture and several of the artists that Paula represented were in that exhibition and I worked through a lot of the details of shipping, etc. Sometime around '77 I was contacted by the Contemporary Art Center, a curator had been to the Kitchen and seen an exhibition we had done of multi-monitor video which she was interested in. Of course, she was thinking of bringing it out to the Center and asked if I would come out and help them set it up. And when I was out there I was told that their Director, a fellow named Jack Dugan had left the Center awhile ago to take on the curatorship of the Chase Manhattan corporate collection and they were looking for a new director and would I be interested? I think I was 29 at the time and I was first of all challenged at the idea but it also seemed like an extraordinary opportunity to grow professionally. The Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati was one of the 8 major cultural institutions in town. Small, yes, but it was considered one of the major institutions. The Kitchen, while very important, was probably the 5,000th most major institutions, it [CACC] was a bigger fish in a small pond. So I went there in '78, and I worked there for five years. Then I was approached by Martin Freeman, Director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis who asked about my interest in taking and assuming the position of Director of the Performing Arts program at the Walker. This was something I really wanted to
do. That was 1982 to '88. Actually the Wexner is based on the Walker. I came from there to here. After six years I was hired away from the Walker to head up the Wexner. I was hired well after the building was constructed, I had 13 months to hire a staff and develop a program out of nothing. The conceptual structure was already there to be multidisciplinary because it was joined to Mershon and had a performance space and a theater.

EW: What do you consider to be characteristics of alternative spaces?

RS: On the surface, if they manage to get as close as they would like to be to this, their values are absolutely altruistic. At least they certainly began that way. These were places for artists to gain exposure, these were places that took the risk to support artists with small amounts of money that enabled them to create work. This was done for the purpose, well, for the good of art. It's not possible to be absolutely 100% that way, there are egos involved. Those spaces which have tended to be run by very strong personalities, have developed their cultures around that personality. I think Alanna Heiss is a very good example of that, starting at 10 Beecker St., the Clocktower and P.S. 1. Alanna is very interesting, she comes to mind first as someone who started in 1972 or '71 with the first performances at 10 Bleecker St., then she founded the Institute for Art and Urban Resources which was a foundation that strived to recycle unused
real estate for artists’ purposes and artistic endeavors. She would find any place which was available.

Another one of the values that some of us felt very strongly about, and you see it carried out in Alanna’s trajectory, was that these spaces could serve as switchboards in a sense for the community to learn about the younger generation of artists. That they were in a sense proving grounds, laboratories for the creation of new work and for the development of the careers of young artists who were not being shown by the commercial galleries because they had nothing to sell, nothing commercial to sell. The strategy by which we tended to get the switchboard working was to bring, when we got a little more formal and created boards of directors and corporations, we invited influential members of the community, not necessarily money-giving people because we weren’t, we just took money from the government, we weren’t into private giving and contributions yet at that time. We were so invisible, what would people give to? Some people were friends and they had money and they’d give you $5,000 or something like that which was very, very important but still we weren’t going after $100,000 requests and stuff like that.

The Kitchen, for example, invited Paula Cooper onto that initial board of directors which she was on until recently, if she isn’t still on it. She was chairman for nearly ten years of the organization. Barbara London who is the
Associate Curator for video at the Museum of Modern Art. So the careers kind of circle around each other. And there were also collectors and some business people but they were all people who were passionate about the arts. By having the gallery people, it helped us to have them know about what was coming up in this next generation of artists. So there was that strategy very much in our minds that we would serve as a kind of bridge between the early stages of an artists’ career to the next steps beyond. As some of those artists began to gain much wider visibility and financial success, they came onto the boards to serve as advocates for our causes. Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk and Eric Bogosian and people like that. Eric Bogosian was a junior student at Oberlin, a theater student who we placed in an internship who came back to work as a public relations director and then did Talk Radio and went on to be famous.

EW: A lot of people have talked about the values of the early spaces coming out of the values of the 60’s and 70’s.

RS: Yes, and also as a reaction to the incredible expansion of the influence of the commercial galleries during the 60’s. Art galleries through the 50’s up til the 60’s were pretty much private places that art collectors went to, the audiences for art galleries was very tiny. The 60’s, Pop Art, Leo Castelli, OK Harris, let’s use Leo Castelli as an example, the explosion of public interest in
the Pop artists, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein. People started going to
galleries on Saturdays to see the art, they weren't buying but... The value of art
objects skyrocketed in the 60's and American artists became known
internationally and the commercial gallery business became a very powerful
component of the arts community. By the late 60's and the disillusionment of
the '68 revolution and the alternative concepts really started to take hold and the
feeling among many artists was that they didn't want to be controlled by the
commercial gallery business. In Europe and in America you saw the
development of 'poor' art or junk art that was made of cardboard boxes and oil
or whatever cheap materials, flew in the face of the purchasable commodity
and even more so, so-called conceptual art where it was only an idea. It was a
photography of a document of an event. What on earth commercial value could
that have?

You mentioned earlier Vito Acconci getting his start in alternative galleries. In
fact, he did not. He was older and relatively well established. He did his
infamous Seedbed piece as an installation at a commercial gallery in 1971, I
think it was, before the Kitchen even began. So Vito Acconci, Howard Fotts, and
Dennis Oppenhiem were three artists in particular who were getting
international recognition for their very conceptual, very ephemeral and
completely un-ownable artwork. In a way, what they were doing in galleries as
events was part of the impetus for the creation of alternative spaces. So the cart and the horse, in some ways, need to be put in the right place.

EW: I’m really interested in the unique functions of alternative spaces and how alternatives contribute to the ecology of the arts. Can you speak to that a bit?

RS: I’ve always felt that there are four critical components of the art world, of the ecology of the art community. First and foremost - the artists themselves, those that create work. There is the buyer and the buyer can be a number of different creatures but let’s start out with a simple one, the patron who buys an object from the artist that creates an economy that exists. Then there is the third leg of this - the critic, the observer, the one who interprets what it is this artist is doing or making. Some might see the critic as a parasite on the process but I don’t think so at all, in fact, they are absolutely critical when you’re talking about the intellectual development of art in a way. Fourth is the more permanent chronicler, the museum. The museum collects for posterity and creates a history through the accumulation of objects over time.

Now, there’s this fifth leg out here, the alternative space, where does it fit? Is it an adjunct of one of these four ecological centers, is it an appendix or is it a leg? I would say it’s an appendix, I don’t think it’s a critical leg. It’s part of one of these other areas. It’s part artist, it’s part patron, it’s part critic and it’s part
chronicler or archivist. In fact, it does all four of those things. It is a creative element in the process. No other of those four ecocenters are creative except the artist and alternative spaces. Alternative spaces are creative. They make things happen that would not otherwise happen. They patronize by raising money, providing resources that the artist would not otherwise have. They have a critical component because they encourage and create feedback and reflection on the work. And through, if not collecting although some of them do collect, take for example, Franklin Furnace, a very important service as a collector of artists' book and works on paper. But more importantly, they have archived histories of themselves, at least there are correspondence files, files of posters and history. The alternative spaces have done it for their own economic self-interest. They've documented their work because that is how they promote what they have done in order to raise the money to continue to do what they do. Alternative spaces are very odd because I think almost every one of them provide some aspect of all four of the essential ecological components of the arts community.

EW: What has the impact been on individual artists' careers?

RS: I have conflicting views on that subject. I think that they have had such an extraordinary impact as to say that the arts of today would not be what they are without the existence of alternative spaces. At the same time, I think and truly
believe that the same artists that were born whenever they were born and grew
up to be artists would be artists whether there were alternative spaces or not.

EW: If the alternative space movement had never happened, how would they
have gotten into the system?

RS: I think the spaces have had a greater impact on the form of arts rather than
whether or not this or that artist or however many artists have flourished as
artists. I think that alternative spaces have had an tremendous impact on the
form of art and maybe to a degree, on their own demise. Alternative spaces
operating as laboratories operate in some ways like scientific laboratories - in
a relatively isolated and self-interested bubble especially as long as they were
protected with non-politicized public funding.

EW: How have these spaces changed in the 80's?

RS: The trajectory of the work that was created in the early 70's into the 80's
was very much focused on the issue of self - self-identity, individuality, the body,
person, race, ethnicity, all of which moves towards certain aspects of political
correctness. Within the somewhat isolating or self-serving bubbles of
alternative spaces where anything goes, those envelopes were pushed and
pushed and pushed and they were being encouraged especially by the
sources of funding, particularly at the Endowment level. The members of panels were the producers and consumers of the work itself. They were the artists and they were the directors and staffs of alternative spaces who reviewed and judged the applications.

What tended to happen in that process was that older artists who’s careers were already established tended to be set aside, put out to pasture, because this money for alternative spaces was there to nurture new work. Well, new work means new boundaries, new boundaries mean new risks, new risks mean new territory uncovered. This system was essentially greater and greater levels of combative discourse, sort of more politically-correct-than-thou. This kind of dynamic began to settle into the panel process at the Endowment level by the early to mid 80’s where safe, unchallenging artistic activity was increasingly not tolerated. Why should government support go to or underwrite work that was now commercially viable? That was true in the 70’s too, that was the mission all along, was to support that work that did not have commercial potential. So by the time you get to the 80’s, step by step, wave by wave, the edges of that non-commerciality was pushed and pushed and pushed.

Established artists with established careers who are now more into their mid-40’s and 50’s who were still just as challenging as they were before and still just on the outer boundaries of commercial success. This is really a
complicated issue. Some artists have been around for 20 years and their work keeps coming back through applications to alternative spaces or fellowships for example. They keep coming back, there's Peter that and Sean this and Bella that and we know these people. This is their only resource for income. But we're here to support young artists, and I'm talking about at the federal policy level through the panel adjudication process. The newer, younger artists were becoming increasingly politically active and motivated.

EW: This was in the '80s?

RS: Particularly in the 80's where at the same time you had a huge bubble in the commercial success of some artists - the David Salle's and the Robert Longo's, the Brat Pack of the 80's - they weren't going to the Endowment anymore. Robert Longo who also worked at the Kitchen for a number of years, was making huge amounts of money and sending his kids to private schools. So was David Salle, after begging to have a performance at the Kitchen once and I turned him down, later on he's making more money than the Kitchen's budget for an entire year. There was another movement of especially, I don't know of the right term to call it, but I would call it socio-politically motivated art work - let's call them the L.A. Four - whose work dealt with issues of gender, gay issues, female sexuality, were pushing those boundaries. Those artists got attention because they were creating new directions. The panels felt,
because those panels were made up of people who ran those spaces, that this was work that was cutting-edge and that had been the Endowment's mission since 1970, '72, '73 was to support the cutting-edge. Of course, that cutting edge ran up against a brick wall.

[Problems with the tape recorder required writing notes from this point on]
Important to remember that alternative spaces were artist initiated, initiative is entirely self-directed, sometimes support structures are the death of those initiatives

Capital “A”, capital “S” alternative spaces are a nonsequitur, with all the negative connotations of a real fraternity, an institution has been formed which encourages new ones, alternative spaces of the past are dinosaurs

Four Walls and these new “hit and run” spaces are alternatives to the alternatives, it’s better that there is no system to support them

Have a relevance and visibility for now and the future, don’t cry for those that have gone under, Darwinism, cry for the spaces that go on

The Kitchen is now totally irrelevant, has become nothing more than a venue
When an alternative space is no longer serving the four parts, it’s no longer serving its purpose, not creative, a venue for performance but not a catalyst

ABC No Rio, Gracie Manson, etc. were a breath of fresh air

We’re in a lull of creative energy at the moment, lack of overriding cultural imperative that is driving artists to a common if unknown goal

Can’t manufacture a groundswell, foundations cause harm when they try, can’t force old models, surplus of riches now

The phenomenon of alternative spaces was a response to artists, created audiences, structures in place now may do more harm than good

Younger artists today feel that they are due a career, the success of the alternative arts has encouraged a younger generation to think they are due a career

Wexner Center as an example of the maturation of alternative spaces, trying to be an alternative space
INTERVIEW WITH EMILY TODD, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DIVERSEWORKS, HOUSTON, TX (June 22, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Please tell me about your background.

Emily Todd: Well, my career is pretty simple. I got out of Princeton with a BA in art and archeology and then I went to the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, worked on the curatorial staff. Then I went and got my MA in art and art history from Rice which is in Houston. Then I got a job at the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts in New York.

EW: How long were you there?

ET: '88-'95. So I was at the CAM from '80 to '86. I won't tell you how long it took me to get my MA. (laughs) And then I went to Diverseworks in '95 and was there until March. I was also on the board of a number of organizations and on panels. One of those organizations I was on the board of was NAAO.

EW: Let's talk about the characteristics of alternative spaces.

ET: I think it should be flexible, part of me thinks there should be as many definitions as there are artists out there. I think they would be characterized generally by a dedication to experimental, new work. As we said at
Diverseworks, “Everything is a premier”. And while that wasn’t true 100% of the time, most everything was a premier for Houston or maybe even a world premier. So the dedication to really working with the artist to help them achieve their dream. We always have to remember the time and funding constraints that goes along with that kind of work.

EW: What would you say are some of the values that have grown out of those spaces?

ET: I think each one is different. I think for a while people tried to follow a model that was sort of the museum model and I’m not sure that’s the most successful model in terms of governance. I know that there must be other ways to do it, I just don’t know what they are at this point. But I think, they give a place for artists to be preeminent, artists are at the center of it and I think that that’s a huge contribution. If you didn’t have that you’d never understand that artists can run everything. And I think that also gives, I think that what they propagate is this notion of the artist at the center. Also, it’s an audience development tool, for the audience to get insight into the artist’s processes is amazing. I also think there’s an intimacy. I think that kind of intimate relationship with the artist is something you don’t get if you’re going to a big pavilion or a big concert hall, you can really see the artist, sort of the fine points of what they’re doing.
EW: What I think I hear you saying is that there is maybe a value of process over product?

ET: Sure. I think that with contemporary work it has to sort of be that way because you don’t really know what the product is going to be. I was reading something that, the National Arts Stabilization Fund has a publication and there’s a quote from this woman named Sharon Luzman whose head of the Alvin Ailey Company and she was talking about how arts funders and arts spaces have really different methods. She talked about ‘Wouldn’t it be terrific if we knew the exact height and location of the ring before we tried to reach for it? In some cases we would probably decide to eliminate the ring and reward the process.’ And I think certainly at a place like Diverseworks the process was very, very, very important and the kind of conversation that goes on. I also think the way that communities are involved, it deals with the audience and the community, the participants in a different way.

EW: Let’s talk about audiences for a minute. Who would you define as the audience and how has that changed?

ET: Boy, changed, I don’t know. The audience in Houston has remained at the core, artists, and then around that, students, architects, people who are
working in professions that are not arts related who come to these spaces to
kind of get the charge that we all get from working in them, to see the artists
working. I've never been able to get my hands around the audience issue or
marketing, it's something that had I stayed at Diverseworks, it probably would
have been next. The whole educational, audience development, outreach, that
whole mode. Because I think you'd get people there once but if you make it too
confounding, because there's a weakness, it's very oblique sometimes. And I
just think we need, as a field, to know about how to talk. I think I share that
weakness, my biggest weakness probably is that I don't know how to define
and articulate some of the ideas that I know in my gut. And I don't think I'm
unusual in that. The language around the arts in general is poor, we talk about
what the art can do all the time but what is the art? What's beauty? It's very
elusive, but a very special thing.

EW: It's interesting because I think that whole notion of audience is shifting a
lot and those spaces are sort of re-addressing that and that it's maybe not
enough just to address other artists. That there needs to be a broader public
purpose perhaps.

ET: I'm not doing it because I think it's the right thing to do for somebody else's
vision. I'm really scared about the way the world is going and that people don't
value creativity and difference, everybody needs to be sort of the same and that
there’s this priority set on conformity. You all drive the same car and all wear the same clothes and the counter is just squashed. And I think you always need to have counter voices, they don’t have to be dissent, but you need to have a society that allows for different voices. We don’t think of the long term and I think when you’re in the art-alternative space continuum, you understand that it takes place over a long period of time and it slows it down. It’s not like I have love this, I hate that - it’s not an answer. You have to be able to think about it as part of society and what does it mean? My impulse is to broaden it because I think there’s something really special happening there and a lot of people get a lot of joy out of it that they’re not getting out of going to Austin Powers movies which is fun but it’s sort of in-and-out, it’s a quickie gratification. And I love instant gratification (laughs) but you can only have so much of that and it all seems very hallow.

EW: Let’s talk about the contribution that these organizations make in relation to the other kinds of arts organizations that exist?

ET: I think that’s an interesting question because I think that’s one of the things that’s changed about the artist space model. The contemporary art institutions and the museums and the performing art spaces have taken on a lot of the work that was originally being premiered in alternative spaces. And you can think of a zillion examples from Blue Man to that show at the Modern, that
“Dislocations” show which is work that all came out of the alternative space movement. So I think that what happened was that a lot of those curators saw the vitality of the work and they consumed it. So what does that leave, what is then the artist space niche? Because I know that Diverseworks grew out of the fact that in Houston, local artists, Houston-based artists weren’t being shown. It started as a venue for the kind of work that wasn’t being shown, be it performance art or visual art or literary art. And as time has gone on, in fifteen years, the Contemporary Arts Museum is showing a lot more Texas artists, the Museum of Fine Arts is showing a lot more Texas artists. Everybody’s doing a lot more adventurous work. People are much more interested in multiculturalism. I think alternative spaces, it depends on which ones but Diverseworks was always looking to have a much more diverse group and really saw themselves in that mode. And now, for whatever reason, larger institutions see that as important. So what does that leave that’s fresh ground, tillable ground for the artist and the alternative space? And I think people are struggling with that. But that’s fine. Houston - it’s a huge city and as long relationships are convivial between groups and people stop finger-pointing, it can be a very fruitful conversation because there are plenty of artists that need to be showing. It’s interesting to me that some artists who get to the point where they’re showing at the Museum of Fine Arts and they try a new medium, they come back to Diverseworks, to see, to test it in the public eye, testing their new ideas in public.
EW: That leads into my next question which is about what impact alternative spaces have had on the careers of individual artists?

ET: I think it's varied. I think it's shown a lot of faith in the artist. You sort of give people as much as you can and show you believe in them and I think that a lot of artists feel they are working in relative isolation so I think it's a vote of confidence. It allows you to test your work. Sometimes there's a public feedback that helps the artist think about what they are doing. I don't think that's at all limited to alternative spaces. I think I could make claims that I couldn't substantiate. You know a lot of people who work in alternative spaces are artists so, to understand how some of these structures work. I think it's a very transparent process to the people in it, but not the audience. Much more transparent that a lot of others.

EW: Then museums say?

ET: Yeah, but that may just be my perspective from being involved. I also think it's a place for a lot of people that go on, at Diverseworks there's an artist board and artists on the board of directors and so a lot of those people get trained and go on to other boards. They kind of learn how to do it. So Diverseworks is a point of entry.
EW: How would you say that organizations like Diverseworks has changed since they started?

ET: I think the world has changed. I think that in the beginning there was a lot more money available, federal money, so a lot of us relied very heavily on the NEA. So I think the shift in funding as been a big change, having to develop alternative sources of income, be they earned income or other fundraising tools.

EW: Would you characterize that as good, bad or indifferent?

ET: I think that if an alternative space can’t be flexible and is not relevant to its community, then it should close. I mean certain things have a life, they’re not institutions. I mean the whole idea of institution building and alternative spaces is almost an oxymoron. Although I was very committed to the notion of building infrastructure and board and staff at Diverseworks, I still think you lose . . . you don’t lose anything actually, you don’t lose a dang thing, it frees you up. But I think for a lot of people, it a degree of maturity and responsibility to want to take on. And these were founded by people who were young.
EW: That seems to be one of the critiques of these spaces is that they have become institutionalized . . .

ET: I don’t think that’s a critique. What’s bad about becoming institutionalized, to have some stability in your funding? I remember being on the board of Diverseworks in the mid-80’s where at the board meeting, there’d be ‘Well, we have a show opening on Friday and, by the way, we’re $8,000 short.’ Now, Diverseworks can be $8,000 short but you don’t come the day before the show opens, that sort of panic mentality. If you want to support your artists, well, you need to have a stable organization. I mean whatever stability is in this world when you’re operating, you’re understaffed, you’re underfinanced. I mean, who’s an institution?

EW: Talking to younger artists they tend to see the alternative spaces as institutions that are out-of-date and less flexible.

ET: I know that a lot of things look really complicated and inaccessible until you’re sort of in the middle of it and you realize how stupid and open it is. I mean having been in various places that look really powerful from the outside and it’s not. I mean it’s powerful but it’s totally accessible, everybody answers their phone calls here, people are out doing stuff. It’s curious because whenever I’m in centers of power, they don’t look like there’s so much power
there after all. Sort of the Oz thing. I would say that maybe alternative spaces have failed to demonstrate to younger artist that they’re accessible. But I know that Diverseworks has a lot of 20-somethings on its board and they’re a really important part of their programming. So I think that that’s something that’s relevant and it’s a generational shift but . . . P.S. 1 might be an exception. Diverseworks is one of the few really healthy ones and is as adventurous as it ever was but now we pay our artists on time. You’ve got to respect people, you can’t ask the artists to always take the short end of the stick. And you’re got to respect your board, and they’ve got to be adult in some way that they can raise the money or give the money. I don’t know what analogy rings true for you but I always thought budgeting was really boring and I still thinks it’s relatively boring and horrible but somebody said to me, ‘Look it as a tool. It’s not a harness, it’s not a yoke, it’s just a tool’. Having the board understand that, yes, they have to raise $1,000 is good because if they don’t, boot ’em. You don’t need dead weight on your board. People have to be committed or they don’t belong on a board. And that maybe the biggest shift is trying to get the board engaged and be responsible, I think that’s been a big change. Diverseworks’ board got down to 8 people before I started, now it’s 32 or something like that.

EW: That’s great.
ET: Well, I didn’t do it. You know what else has changed, the political atmosphere has changed enormously. It goes back to sort of what I was saying that there’s not so many alternative voices. You know we don’t really have political parties in this country, we have polls. I think it’s a very different political climate, we don’t have a lot of dissidents. Just when culture is ever more heterogeneous, we are becoming ever less heterogeneous in our thinking.

EW: Let’s talk about that in specifics. Like diversity for example. One idea that I’ve heard floated by a lot of people is that alternative spaces were some of the first organizations to embrace that concept. And now, at least on the surface, we hear about it from all segments of the arts sector, there’s a realization that that should be important, whether or not there’s actually a commitment to it or not is another story.

ET: Well, that’s the gulf right there. That’s the difference. Including alternative spaces. Who’s making, it’s harder, there’s class differences, there’s race differences, there’s sexuality differences, the raft of things that separates is huge. And how do you do that thing that Guillermo Gomez-Peña talks about which is to see it in its complexity and hybridity and embrace that and I don’t think alternative spaces have, nobody’s got the answer, but some alternative spaces are working very hard on that. I know Diverseworks continues to talk
about these things and talks about these and tries to put these things into action. Big institutions tend to see it in terms of audience and the future and the demographics, more than they see it in terms of leadership, because nobody likes to share power.

I felt at Diverseworks that we gave more power away than we ever kept. And maybe that’s because I was the boss and I had power that I didn’t realize I had. But take it, you want responsibility? Take it. I don’t need to hold any of my bailey-wick.

EW: And how did you do that? How do you give power away?

ET: I think you just share the responsibility. I think in the shift from founder-driven institutions to second and third directors, I think the founders have a lot more ego at stake and I was much more interested in the institution in the whole over my own ego and I had a very strong staff and even if I wanted all the power, you can’t hold all of it. I think it’s a sign of naiveté . . . But if I had started the organization when I was 23 years old and I was in my mid-30’s I probably would have a very different point of view. And I’m proud of the place and I take enormous joy in its successes and responsibility for its weaknesses but it’s not about me, it’s about Diverseworks and the things it stands for.
My big thing is I see the audience as part of the contract so until you give the audience a role, and I don’t mean coming up on stage, but until you see them as part of the continuum, you’re not doing your job for the artist because the artist wants more audience. And that’s where I think Diverseworks and probably a lot of others fall short is completing that cycle, that contract.

EW: What about the challenges for the future?

ET: Paying attention to what the artists need because that will keep the organization vital. That will be the benchmark, are artists coming? Are artists using your space? I think it’s going to be reinventing the organizations and keeping them vital, that whole nexus there of artists and the vitality of these organizations come from having artists who are vital. I’ll quote someone, Peter Marzio, whose the head of the Museum of Fine Arts here, said, “The enemy is apathy”. I’d just expand that to say that there’s enormous competition for people’s leisure time. There’s an appetite for television that completely confounds me because it makes me suicidal. (laughs) There’s so much live music here, so much to do, there’s outdoor activities, movies, sports, just a ton of stuff to do year round and you’re competing with all these other things for people’s leisure time. And that’s tough. It’s very hard to get board members who will put in the time for any organization, particularly ones that aren’t socially prestigious where you might meet people that you would do business with or
whatever. I think the competition for dollars. They say the economy is so great, well, I don't know that it's impacted grassroots arts organizations in the way that it's effected others. And the audience thing, that whole mode.
INTERVIEW WITH JON WINET, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SOUTHERN EXPOSURES GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA (May 10, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Tell me about your background as an administrator.

Jon Winet: I was a graduate of an experimental, interdisciplinary arts program at San Francisco State in the late 70's. Then worked as an artist-in-residence for the Nevada State Council on the Arts sort of immediately thereafter. So I moved from California to Nevada. And in the course of doing residencies, I got more interested in doing exhibitions and became a curator along with my art practice. And ended up starting a space at a community college which very much had the ethos or gestalt of an alternative space. I still had very strong ties to the Bay Area and started to hear about NAAO and about various activities going on around that national organization. I attended a regional meeting - this is by now the mid-80's - and this conference I attended was in Los Angeles, I think it was in 88' - at LACE which at the time was probably the biggest artists' organization on the West Coast. At some point, I joined the board of NAAO probably in the late 80's and stayed six years. My biggest accomplishment there was to coordinate a conference in San Francisco. In - I hope I have this date right - in '95 called “On the Edge”. It was one of NAAO’s once-every-eighteen-month gatherings.

EW: I was at that actually.
JW: Oh, yeah. It was called “Culture on the Edge”?

EW: Yeah, something on the edge . . .

JW: For the last fifteen years, sixteen years I've been in a collaboration with a writer named Margaret Crane. We actually got one of those Langton regional grants. And somewhere along the line, I didn't mention this, I moved back from Nevada to San Francisco and took a job as the Executive Director of Southern Exposure from 1989 to 1994, so for five years I was the director there. And now I serve on the advisory board of Southern Exposure and of NAAO and of a couple of other organizations actually. In some ways I kind of see the work, my administrative work at artists’ organizations as a kind of service to the field and of doing a kind of “tour of duty”. I now work as a college professor and have been fortunate enough to get a fair amount of support for the artist’s projects that I do. That’s sort of what I do when I get up and go to work is try and be an artist or be a teacher and I still feel vitally connected to the work of artists’ organizations and to this whole enterprise.

EW: [discussion of artists as administrators]
JW: Well, I think, and I'm not sure if it's still in the language because the NEA re-organized so radically when they got the major cuts a few years back, but the sort of criteria for artists' organizations - this is something the Endowment put out as who was eligible to apply, the category was called VAO (Visual Artist Organizations) - is actually a really eloquent description of how these organizations were different and one of the things it listed was that artists be integrally involved in all aspects of the organization and that artists control the production and exhibition of their work. It's actually language which is quite similar to that of the NAAO eligibility language that you would see in "Organizing Artists" (the NAAO publication).

EW: Let's talk about how you would characterize alternative spaces. What are some of the formal characteristics and then more generalized observations about how they operate, what their purpose is, what they do.

JW: I'd be happy to do that. I'm tempted to start at the end and work backwards. I think this is a really interesting time to observe the culture of alternative organizations because from the vantage point of someone who really came up or matured as an administrator with a sense that 501(C)3 non-profit organizations with strong community standing was the standard, the way you did it. We now have hit-and-run spaces, a culture of people who are enormously skilled and very committed but don't use the public, not for profit
model. I'm thinking locally of spaces like Four Walls run by Julie Deamer. Really amazing ideas but couldn't imagine having a board, sort of dealing with some of the ultra democratic ideals that we carried into it. 'Alternative' is another one of those terms that makes some people a little skittish like 'Alternative to what?' Isn't it possible for this group of organizations or this activity to have a kind of equal footing, equal standing with other institutions? I think the NAAO model was very much 'alternative meant artists organizations'. I think alternative has also meant the media that are presented and produced so again looking at the mid-70's through the 80's, installation art's only venue to a great extent was alternative spaces. So we were both championing new media which I think continues to be the case and championing the idea that artists could control the means of production and presentation.

I'm sure this is coming up elsewhere but I think that 1989-1990 was a pivotal date around the Mapplethorpe, censorship, public funding for the arts, Jesse Helms, Diana Rorbacker event which really forced a re-thinking about things. If you look at the history of the Endowment, it changed the way artists organizations thought about the Endowment and about notions of public funding. I think one of the things it may have generated is the kind of hit-and-run spaces. Again just thinking just locally - Push, Victoria Room, Four Walls - which just go around the issue of public funding and just do it with whatever resources they can generate.
I think the decline of the art market in New York may also have something to do with a new kind of exhibition space particularly in Manhattan - as I understand something like 400 galleries folded when the stock market crashed in the late 80's and then you would have curators and artists that would open spaces that would last a month and then go away. I think one of the things I'm most interested in right now is spaces that have beginnings, middles and ends. There is no end of the Museum of Modern Art, it's a permanent institution. But maybe we need to appreciate models now where the place runs it's course and there are some examples of that locally. The Victoria Room would be one to look at and I think there are lots of spaces like that all over the country.

**EW:** I think that's one of the problematic things about those spaces. As you were saying before, the alternatives which are a little more institutionalized and can't even document their history and then you have these spaces that are around for a couple of years and do these really interesting shows and a lot of it's lost.

**JW:** Well, I think some of those places stop because they run out of steam or because the trust fund dries up or the person decides to do what their parents wanted them to do which is to go to law school or whatever. Excuse me for drawing on my sociological background here but these are really what I would
call ‘charismatic institutions’ meaning that they’re driven by individuals rather than a code or a set of rules or a mission that a number of people agree on.

EW: Can you talk a little about the culture of alternative spaces. Sort of what the thinking was of people that were involved in them as someone who’s run one. I’m trying to identify some of the values that were floating around.

JW: Obviously Southern Exposure and NAAO are the organizations I understand best. NAAO as an organization of organizations is a real odd duck so I’ll talk about Southern Exposure. It really has been completely dedicated to the idea of artist’s involvement not as lip service but literally, there have been times where 100% of the curatorial committee is made up of artists, over 50% of the board is made up of artists, 100% of the staff are artists. So part of the driving force there was a conviction that that was the right thing to do and the conviction that that was the way the deepest support could be built. I’d say Southern Exposure’s culture in general is driven by that. Side by side with that has been a commitment to experimentation. Beginning in the early 90’s, we embraced the idea that community-based practice was completely consistent with avant-garde art practice and, in fact, community-based work could, was almost it’s own genre of production and a really valuable piece of what we could do. So an Arts-in-Education program begun, which unlike many arts-in-education programs, we perceived the artists working in the program, the
teachers as being the primary beneficiaries of the program. So they didn’t deliver the service to the clients, to the people in the program - they were the recipients of the program. So it encouraged and supported a number of artists who were interested in community-based work and in education.

Having been an artist-in-residence in Nevada, I’ve done a couple dozen residencies that were as short as two weeks and as long as nine months. Some of them it was like ‘Okay, you’re the artist in residence. You’ll be teaching nine workshops a day at three elementary schools’ and it’s just really back-breaking work in which the artist is clearly the worker, the person making the project work but not really benefiting from it. I think at it’s very best Southern Exposure probably approaches each project, each issue it has to deal with as an organization with the question, ‘Is this good for individual artists? How will this activity benefit individual artists?’

EW: What contribute do you think these organizations make to the ecology of the arts?

JW: Well again I’ll speak about San Francisco cause I understand it best. It creates a kind of cultural milieu which makes up for the absence of a viable commercial market here for artists. And that’s unfortunately true in both performing arts and visual arts. I won’t say for literary arts because I think for
the most part avant-garde writers never have the expectation of big payoff. There is no Mary Boone equivalent for people who write concrete poetry. I think they understand that they are their own best audience. But it creates a milieu in which emerging artists, young artists can really thrive. Artists can continue to work. It provides employment and education opportunities for sure and a forum for the exchange of ideas. That's something you might want to look at, I think that is interesting. I would say in general that the Bay Area as a culture really encourages community-based, not-for-profit democratic ideas. I think it gets a lot trickier in a place like LA where not-for-profit is like 'What do you mean not for profit?' It's sort of like an inferior product. I think Manhattan presents an interesting case too because, for the most part, I think it's very hard for alternative spaces in New York to compete with what commercial galleries are doing. In San Francisco, I can honestly say that the best work you are going to see, you're going to see in places like New Langton, Southern Exposure, the Lab, SF Cameraworks. In New York, I can't say 'Don't bother going to the Chelsea, or Metro Pictures, the really cool work is down at Art in General or the Kitchen' or whatever. So I think that varies from site to site. I think there's no doubt that we provide a lot of encouragement and support to artists at all levels of production and a kind of community forum and a kind of focused forum.

EW: [Growth of Artists careers, my assertion of a present lack of opportunities]
JW: I'd like to float the idea that at least locally, and I think that this may be on a case by case basis in terms of cities, but I would say that locally opportunities for artists may be greater right now than they were 10 years ago. Part of that has to do with a change in collection policy by the Museum of Modern Art so that they are buying work by young, local artists much more than they would have in the past. And the economy here is so hot that, for example, a number of artists who are willing to engage in electronic and digital media are able to get extremely well paid jobs. Again, I won't say that's true in Cleveland but locally you're premise may not actually fit.

I can also speak to this as an artist. At Southern Exposure, Margaret Crane and I started doing collaborative work in 1985. Image/text work, it pretty quickly became quite political. One of our first projects was at an alternative space, not a 501(C)3 but a very interesting space whose history I hope will some day will be written called Media. We did a piece about Spuds McKenzie and Olivier North and it was kind of cheeky, punky work that compared these two. It was called “Summer Heros” and it was at a time when you turned on the TV you either saw Spuds McKenzie selling beer or Oliver North selling Iran-Contra. I would say through the next ten years most of our shows were at alternative spaces and without their support, without their commissioning or giving us the exhibition opportunities, I wouldn't be talking to you on the phone right now, at least not as an artist. I'll just sort of name the spaces off really quickly - Media,
an amazing place, Karen Finley did a performance there, the artists of Media all
have done pretty well since. None of us are quite household names but,
Nayland Blake, Peter Edland, Margaret K., I'm missing some too. The person
who ran that was just an individual who got a small settlement in an accident
and used the money to start an alternative space. It had a very strong but very
short trajectory. Just thinking about the spaces that we worked with - LACE in
Los Angeles, Installation in San Diego, Spaces in Cleveland, then a little later
on, White Columns in New York, New Langton Arts, Friends of Photography
which begins to be more like a museum and a lot less like an alternative
space. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, sort of one step up, although I really
resist that idea of making the alternative spaces less and making the more
established institutions more.

EW: Could you say more about that? Why did you think that's a problematic
distinction?

JW: Speaking as an artist, we've never been treated better than we have been
by alternative spaces. Organizations run by artists understand intrinsically what
artists need. So that, I don't want to name names, but working with larger
institutions the bureaucracies are bigger, their bottom line concerns seem
much more dominant and they often, quite simply, although the preparator and
installation crew may be wonderful, the overall institution does not understand
how to create a truly supportive environment. Right now we’re working with Hallwalls, which we’ve worked with in the past as well, a kind of legendary space in Buffalo I bet you know about. SF Camerawork and the Walker Art Center where we’re working on a project around the 2000 presidential elections. But the Walker, which is by far the biggest institution we’ve ever worked with, just seems incredibly supportive and great. I don’t want in a blanket way to say ‘Well, the bigger institutions don’t know how to support artists’. But I do think that bigger is not better. In fact, artists run, one of the key concepts of alternative spaces, turns out to be a very powerful idea behind running an institution well.

EW: Let’s talk about how alternative spaces have changed over time.

JW: I think 1974 is often an operative date for the beginning of spaces at least ones with 501(C)3’s and I realize I’m speaking primarily about those because those are primarily that the ones I know and understand best. It’s not coincidental that that was also the end of the Vietnam War. I see a kind of grassroots, activist self determination movement that fueled the anti-war movement just moving into the culture of art practice. So I see a direct shift - I don’t want to use the word ‘direct’ - but there was definitely a kind of translation of that energy from the one activity to the other.
It's tended to be that as some institutions got bigger, often as they got to be a certain size, I think this is true of LACE and Langton, they de-evolved in some way. I almost think in some way, and I can't be more precise about this, but at a certain point, a kind of professionalism, the kind of development demands of a large institution would sort of cause a rapture in the conceptual framework of the institution.

EW: So you saw those things as a negative rather than a positive.

JW: I think that that has often been the case. There are alternative spaces with million dollar budgets. The other one that really bears looking at is Washington Project for the Arts and in an odd way, Capp St. Project. The last two I mentioned, WPA and Capp St., have both been absorbed by larger institutions, CCAC for Capp St. and for WPA, the Corcoran. So that's one way that they have evolved that's not so great. Another way, again take Southern Exposure because it has 29 foot high ceilings, it went from showing big paintings in the 70's to showing installation art in the 80's but then also in the 80's to recognizing arts-in-education as a kind of interesting piece of the world to take on and one that would be important for artists. Now a lot of alternative spaces are looking at new media, a kind of digital based art. As installation has moved into the museum, alternative spaces sort of have to figure out what they can do now. There is a way in which they are forever young because work by emerging
artists tends to be the work that gets shown in many of the spaces. There is some reckoning now with what to do with artists who continue to work experimentally that aren’t just out of graduate school or who just turned 20.

EW: What challenges do you think these spaces are going to have to face in the future?

JW: I know from NAAO’s perspective one of the issues was the aging of the field. In terms of 501(C)3’s, there was starting to be a generational rift between the administrators and the hoped for clients, the hoped for visitors, people participating in these agencies. A way to keep organizations vital and oriented towards the contemporary culture, I think, is a big one. Southern Exposure is now 25 and we often show artists who weren’t born at the time we started. I think as budgets grow the development demands grow so the good news about having a $500,000 budget is that you have that much money to spend. The bad news is that at the beginning of each fiscal year you have to raise that amount of money to keep your programs going. I think in terms of the lack of a national cultural policy, the lack of significant, substantial support for the arts and for this kind of practice, puts too many organizations in the role of having to raise money way too much of the time. I’ve heard that congresspeople have to spend one of each two congressional years, half of each day on the phone raising money to get re-elected. And I think there’s a kind of parallel here, I
have friends who are the directors of artists spaces who say they are professional beggars. Most of what they do when they go to work is call people and ask for money. I think that is a very regrettable situation and a terrible problem. Organizations deal with that differently, capital campaigns, organizations buying their own spaces, organizations doing major re-designs. I think those are both opportunities and things that can threaten the integrity of an organization.

How to remain stable, how to have stability within a staff, within a board but also be able to grow and change with the times I think is something that organizations have to look at. I'd say in general the field is more responsive and lighter on its feet so that it can shift gears and change what it's doing more than bureaucratic laden organizations. I'm almost stopped dead in my tracks on this questions because there's so many challenges that it's kind of overwhelming. I also think it's a tremendous opportunity. And the one thing I used to worry about that I don't any more is I used to think that this could end. And now having taught for the last six or seven years and having worked with artists - there will always be alternative spaces, there will always be organizations which contribute to the broader culture.

EW: I totally agree with you and yet, looking at the Endowment's funding levels over the last 20 years, there was a time when there was just a lot of money
flowing to the field and it’s obviously not the case anymore. It’s a very difficult thing to document what has been the impact of that. There’s obviously a loss of cultural capital. Beyond that, to put it in terms that people can relate to is very difficult.

JW: I don’t even know how you would take that on but one example would be, the Endowment’s funding of NAAO’s conferences. There was a point, I believe, that there was $30,000 in travel subsidies made available for organizations. That meant people from Langton could meet people from the Kitchen, that these conferences were incredibly vital and all these people could get there and it wasn’t like this horrible economic burden for all these organizations to get there. And that kind of getting people together, it’s hard to go ‘Well, when Martha Wilson met Renny Pritikin in ’86, it resulted in the following things’ but I think that Regional initiative that you worked on may in fact have been conceived at a conference that happened because funding was provided for it. I could be wrong about that, but I have some vague recollection in the back of my head that that was something that the field proposed to the Endowment rather than vice versa. Another thing, and I think this really relates, to me it’s terribly depressing that the only interesting experimental work being done on Broadway now, it’s genesis is Disney. *The Lion King*, which I haven’t seen but people tell me is truly wonderful, that came out of super high end culture. Now the person that is the choreographer I’m sure has some roots in alternative
work. In general, Broadway's dead on arrival now. I think the fact that
alternative performing arts spaces aren't as strong, don't received the kind of
public funding they used to. Certainly there's a relationship there, a corollary.
So that the future of the culture I think is threatened in some way by the
absence of strong institutions. On the other hand, actors will still find a way,
performance artists, whatever. The proverbial 'Let's turn the barn into a theater,
let's do a performance' - with or without funding.

EW: [Intersection of commercial and not for profit arts. Need for nonprofits to
increase earned income will result in more limited, commercially orient work
being presented.]

JW: I certainly think that, in general, we are experiencing a kind of shrinking of
public space. If public funding equals space and I think it does and it's
shrinking, then private space is bigger which means we're looking at a
privatization of culture. Margaret Crane and I spent the last five years as artists-
in-residence at Xerox Park, the research facility of the Xerox Corporation.
They're wonderful, visionary people but Xerox is not the same thing as the
public. They're just not. It's private enterprise and it effected in some ways the
kind of research we did and the kind of direction that our work went in. I always
have more trust in democratic practice than I do in even the most enlightened
private people. So the reliance on foundations I think is the same thing. The
Tides Foundation and the List I think are wonderful but they're not elected by the people. It's a different story.

EW: Is there anything I didn't ask you that I should have?

JW: We did touch on this briefly but I do think that the fact that new media is capital intensive raises some very interesting challenges. The fact of the matter is if you need ten Silicone Graphics machines to run an installation, then that's a million dollars worth of machines. That's way different than some of the concerns that both artists and institutions have dealt with in the past. At least locally, since high technology is the signature industry of the Bay Area, I think it will be fascinating to watch how some of those issues get dealt with. There's so much capital being produced here, there's so much money in the Bay Area now. I think there's a difference between the enlightened CEO or really cool engineer that helps out. I think this is pretty well known that SRL [Survival Research Laboratory] has all kinds of support from cool geeks in Silicone Valley that want to help him blow stuff up and feed him all kinds of technology and support. But that's different than SGI, just to pick one, saying 'Okay, we're gonna give $500 million a year to the arts' and it's going to be a program and philanthropic.
I think the issue of our ability to write our history, the history of alternative spaces is so fragile. I think increasingly I'm recognizing how important it is that our conversations, the kind of forums that we've been running for 25 years now be documented.
INTERVIEW WITH JULIE DEAMER, CURATOR AND FOUNDER, FOUR WALLS, SAN FRANCISCO, CA (June 3, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Could you tell me about your background and how you started Four Walls?

Julie Deamer: Just to clear things up I'm actually not an artist. I think there's some confusion because of the venue I'm running is a hybrid. I used to intern at Southern Exposure. I guess that was my first real experience working with artists. I studied art history and complimented that by working at Southern Exposure. At the same time, I was pretty inspired by artists run spaces that had a kind of temporary life - Fusalon, Victoria Room, Push, those are a few that were happening in San Francisco at that time. I really liked the freedom that they exuded, the ability to just show whatever they wanted whenever they wanted, there's just more freedom there. The exposure that I got working for a nonprofit was interesting but I really wasn't interested in writing grants or the whole kind of committee decision-making and process that was the basis of those models. I thought it was wonderful how they curated artists rather than actual artwork.

So I guess what I'm doing is running a small business. I wasn't really aware of that when I opened up, it wasn't until about six months into it because I just thought it was going to be a temporary venture where I would just mount some shows and then move on, that I would use it as an experience. So I found this
space and kind of just started and then four years later it has turned more into a business and a commercial gallery but it’s not really a traditional commercial space either. It’s kind of a confused identity but it gives me a lot of space to move. I think I enjoy it being a kind of “in-between” space rather than fixed as one thing or another.

EW: What have been some of the biggest challenges to starting out a space?

JD: Financial challenges. I started the place without any capital so I had to go into quite a bit of debt. Simultaneously running a gallery while working other jobs to support myself and the gallery. Waiting tables and artisan tech stuff like guilding and glazing, that’s more or less what I’m doing now. Actually a few months ago I received some corporate sponsorship from Docker’s so that helped out quite a bit. It’s a little unorthodox for a commercial gallery but that’s kind of what I mean about being able to move in these different terrains.

EW: What did they want in return for that? Just their name on stuff?

JD: Yeah, logo exposure on announcements and posters, websites and that kind of thing. It’s been interesting. (laughs) They don’t have their hands in any way in the programming decisions. It was a compromise that I felt I could make because that or I change the kind of work that I’m showing or I continue...
to go into debt or I take money from this strange corporate source. It was a compromise but it’s working out okay.

EW: Tell me about sales. Are you having luck with that?

JD: I don’t think it’s as hard as in the real gallery sense. If I were running a gallery that shows really kind of sellable stuff I’d probably have an easier time with it. The kind of the work that I’m showing is work without much of a track record, a lot of emerging artists who really do projects in the space, do a lot of solo shows. Over the past several years, artists that I’ve established relationships with have been working hard and we’ve been growing up together and they’re gaining more exposure and the interest in their work is growing as well. I’m benefiting from that certainly. It’s still challenging getting the real collector types in here because of my location and because the work is generally more risky. But I have a backroom area where I have a factfile and minimal storage and I sell enough. I definitely have had peer support all along, a lot of artists buying work and peers and stuff but not the heavy hitting collector types.

EW: How would you characterize alternative spaces in terms of the values and philosophy of those older spaces and what you’re doing?
JD: I think it’s hard to pin down what the differences are. I’ll give you an example. New Langton Arts [an established alternative space in San Francisco] served as my fiscal sponsor so that I could receive money from Docker’s and everything had to be very structured and I had to go through these very, for me, tedious things. Like I had to write a formal budget and project description and then I was asked to revise my budget to kind of reflect the ideals of their long-standing philosophies, so basically I had to write in some artists’ fees which was fine ultimately because I liked the idea but that doesn’t really go along with the whole commercial model where artists are generally paid to show their work in the gallery. I feel like we have this mutual arrangement where I work for them, they work for me. That’s that. So like I had to contend with what I felt was kind of an old fashioned approach to working with artists.

EW: It’s interesting because everyone I’ve talked to is really interested in what you and people like you are doing with these sort of “hit and run” galleries. Everyone is very interested in seeing what this is all about.

JD: It’s happening all over the world and I find that interesting. It’s like a current, that people of my generation, it’s that “do-it-yourself” kind of spirit where you don’t like a lot of red tape. I just did an event with an art school here, CCAC, I don’t know if you’re heard of “Three Day Weekend”, it’s a kind of roving artists
space and I asked them to do one up here and we held it at CCAC and there were just so many bureaucratic obstacles to get through and it was just very frustrating. And I think that’s what myself and others are trying to avoid. It’s just a spirit I guess.

EW: Are there any downsides to what you’re doing in terms of potential problems?

JD: I think that one of the differences between what I’m doing and what an artist might do running a similar kind of space is that I do have a long term agenda. I do see longevity for the gallery. I’m not compromising my own practice because this is what I want to be spending my time doing so I’m more interested in how to survive. Basically finding different strategies in order to do that. As far as documenting stuff, I do as much as I can. It’s a continuum, it’s not going to end as far as I know, I’m going to keep doing it. I have thought of doing a catalogue, a brief history of what’s occurred but I think the artists and their work kind of carry forth a legacy because they are going to continue working and I’ll continue working with them. We have kind of a partnership thing.

EW: How would you say your space and the other more established alternative spaces contribute to the growth of individual artists’ careers?
JD: Well, I think just by virtue of having a space and offering opportunities to artists. That's obvious. There's about four or five artists I'm working with who really don't need to show in San Francisco for a while because they've grown in popularity here and are kind of local celebrities so it's time for them to start showing in other places so I'm trying to expand their audience by getting them shows in various other cities. It's difficult to do all of this single-handedly but it happens naturally, people come through and opportunities arise and if one thing leads to another then it's a flow.

EW: Do you see yourself following your artists as your artists grow?

JD: I guess at this point just by default I'm representing people. I didn't seek out to get a stable of artists but there are people I do want to continue working with and they want to continue working with me. Yeah, we're growing up together, that's the best way of looking at it.
INTERVIEW WITH DAVID MILLS, PERFORMER, NEW YORK, NY (May 28, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Please give me a brief description of your background and training as an artist.

David Mills: I sort of did a very traditional acting route. I went to undergrad and studied acting at University of California, San Diego.

EW: Now let's go back further. Did you start out as the star of the fourth grade play and all that stuff?

DM: Oh, yeah - all that! (laughs) The Wilksberry Little Theater which is a big old theater that's been around like a hundred years and in total disrepair, they would put on big musicals. Really fun, and I was always the Chorus Boy, this that or the next thing. They weren't particularly expansive in their casting. (laughs) They didn't quite know what to do with me, but I was enthusiastic so they would throw me in. And then I moved to California and started doing shows at community college and then ultimately at UCSD and then moved into the theater community in San Diego and started working around in San Diego at different theaters and had some success doing that. I took a year in England and did some playwriting, did acting but also playwriting and that was a real sort of revelation for me - writing. I found that on some level really rewarding to be able to write something and not have to compete for acting jobs frankly. So
then I came back from England. Soon after I came back, someone was putting together a performance show, sort of a spoken-word performance show as a benefit for the Gay and Lesbian Community Center and I approached them and said ‘Oh, I have this piece’ which, of course, I didn’t, ‘It’s about Oprah Winfrey’. And they said ‘Oh, great, well, why don’t you come to my house next week and show it so me’ and I said ‘Super’. And so I wrote something and did it for them at their home and they loved it and then I got this gig, this performance benefit and that was what took me there.

EW: So you graduated and worked in San Diego for a couple years, and then you moved up to San Francisco. Take me through the shows and venues, etc. up there.

DM: Okay, there were little benefit things that I sort of nudged my way onto and I think this is one great thing about the gay community, is that there are a lot of little benefits going on all the time, particularly ten years ago around AIDS. So they just needed entertainment and it was at a cafe or a community center or somewhere and you could sort of get on the bill and sort of work your shit out. And I think that’s one of the reasons there was this boom in gay comedians but also this boom in solo performance. From there, I mounted my own piece at a cafe called ‘GWM Descending a Staircase.’ Then there was a producer in town, much like in St. Louis and Portland, there is often times one individual
who brings in every act and her name was Brenda Shumacker and she had a
group named Fresh Dish, or that was her production company and would bring
in Tim Miller and all sorts of people. Well, she was bringing in Kegan and
Lloyd from L.A. and I convinced her to give me 15 minutes before they went up
and then took 45. And wrote this solo piece called ‘Serious Coffee’ which was
about a killing, a sort of gay bashing that had galvanized the gay community in
San Diego the previous year so it was very topical and a lot of fun. That was at
Sushi Gallery which is sort of the alternative space in San Diego. They weren’t
producing it but they saw it which was good. So then from there, I was invited to
be part of their annual or ten year, fifteen celebration or something like that and
I got 10 minutes with a whole host of people but that was a nice boast. Then I
was able to do ‘Serious Coffee’ at Highways [an alternative performance venue
in L.A.] on sort of a broad night of performers. They certainly weren’t featuring
me by any means but that was nice. Then I was picked up to do the show in St.
Louis at That Uppity Theater Company, Joan Lumpkin, who’s one of these
people who’s produced everyone and that was on a double bill with Marsha
Wilke who’s a solo performer from Chicago who’s really good. From there, I
came to San Francisco and got a call from a producer in San Diego, her
girlfriend was working for the Gay Games in New York and got me in on a gig at
the Fez with some performer from Canada who I don’t even remember so I
wrote a new piece called ‘You’re Soaking In It with David Mills’ that I did there
and then came back and did that in San Diego at Diversionary Theater which is

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a gay and lesbian theater down there. I should also say that after moving to San Francisco I was able to go back down and do 'Serious Coffee' one more time in a bigger space on a bill with Tim Miller, so it was me and Tim Miller. So that was really nice and that was in sort of a mainstream theater but Fresh Dish produced it.

So I got back to San Francisco, had written this new show, did it at the Fez and also at Wings Theater and did it there. And these are shows were like ten people are showing up, you know, no one. Then I went back down to San Diego, did it there, it was a big show for me in San Diego, sort of my big success after being in New York and San Francisco. Then I did it in San Francisco at 848 Community Space which I got through Tim Miller who basically said to Keith Hennessey, 'Schedule this guy' which was really nice. Then started doing stuff at Josie's [Cabaret and Juice Joint], you know. Didn't write for a long time, really got scared and really didn't write anything, just started doing stand-up but was really, really scared of stand-up even. And then I heard about this artist-in-residence program at John Sims Center [a nonprofit performance space in San Francisco]. Then I got to do 'You're Soaking in It' in DC at the DC Art Center, a group called the Theater Conspiracy brought me out and they were doing a festival of solo performers. But mostly I wasn't doing anything in San Francisco except at Josie's and sort of having some success but nothing really rewarding.
Then I found out about John Sims and John Sims was really, really a great opportunity for me. Just a really fabulous boast because I was given rehearsal space and I was given three, stretched over three months, three performance dates. And it was fabulous, it was like a three month workshop process. It was really, really wonderful for me. And I really went into it with the goal of coming out with a solo piece. A lot of people use it for exploratory purposes, or whatever but I knew what I wanted to get out of it and really pushed it and rehearsed a lot, and tried to use those readings to do as much performance of it as possible. Then I was able to get someone from Josie’s to come see the piece and they did and then I got to do it at Josie’s so that was exciting.

From there, I got to do the piece, this is ‘The Wedding Band’, at Solo Mio Festival who, it was a great thing, a real feather in my cap but I didn’t feel like they were very supportive, I felt like they were really just producers, sort of ‘Bring ‘em in, bring ‘em out’. Then came ‘Duty Free’ and what had happened was I was getting these little reading gigs at Intersection for the Arts through Charles Windlen who I know from San Diego, just on their Tuesday night reading series and I invited them to come see the ‘Wedding Band’ at Josie’s and they did and after that I approached them and said I’d love to do a piece at Intersection.
I knew that there was something qualitatively different about doing a show at Intersection from doing it in a cabaret space, in a comedy space and I wanted to make sure I was still doing shows in a theater and in sort of an alternative space. So I was really lucky that they were open to that. So I wrote ‘Duty Free’, again through John Sims, again I did the three month development process at John Sims which was really helpful, got Danny Schie to one of the readings and he agreed to direct it. And we mounted it at Intersection and it really bumped me up to the next level, especially having the professionalism of Danny who said ‘Oh, we need a designer. Oh, well, we need a piano player. Oh, well, we need a video person’. I hadn’t gone that route before, I had sort of only started working with a director.

One of the other things about a lot of these smaller spaces is that they don’t always encourage a lot, they don’t want a huge production moving in. They can’t afford that so if it’s one person that directs their piece and does everything, that’s fine with them. Whereas Intersection has an experience were they don’t expect one person to come in and do everything. So it was nice to sort of understand that you can collaborate with other people and still be a solo performer. Then I went to Baltimore and did ‘Wedding Band’ in Baltimore. And you know, these things in Baltimore, St. Louis, DC, they just happened because I sort of have a burst of energy and send out a tape and someone
says ‘Oh, yeah, sure. We’ve got an opening, why don’t you come on out?’ I haven’t been as aggressive about that as I should be.

EW: Now when you went out on the road did these organizations pay your expenses and an honorarium and stuff?

DM: Oh, yeah, yeah. The other thing around these shows in San Francisco is that no one ever really produced me. I think that Solo Mio produced me but they were producing a huge festival. No one has really ever produced me in San Francisco, I’ve sort of produced everything I’ve done largely.

EW: Is that by choice?

DM: Well, that’s just sort of how it’s happened. That’s just how it’s been.

EW: It seems like there’s a real lack of people doing that kind of producing.

DM: Yeah, there is. It’s just not happening. Now, if I go to Baltimore or St. Louis, they have to produce me, I can’t produce myself. That’s just the way it is.

EW: So how did you get to New York?
DM: Well, ‘Duty Free’ happened and I came to New York to be a part of a festival here, I’ve even forgot what the festival was called, it was at Primary Stages, and about a week before I arrived, the festival was canceled and I was kind of devastated. But what I did was I said ‘Well, I’ll come out anyway and spend a month in New York and have a great time’. And while I was here, I thought to myself, I sort of thought back on my experience in San Francisco and thought about what more do I want in San Francisco, what more can I accomplish there and can I not accomplish that here [in New York]. And more importantly, if I accomplish that here, will it mean more? Because certainly there was more to go in San Francisco but was it going to translate into anything more than just moving a few steps up in San Francisco? And I got the sense that in New York, if I put that energy out and moved up those next few steps, it would move me up on sort of a more national level. It would improve my opportunities in a national way whereas in San Francisco, if I moved up three steps it really didn’t mean much.

EW: Tell me a little about the grants you’ve applied for and got.

DM: Well, I’ll be honest, I’ve applied for almost nothing. I applied for one grant from the City of San Francisco that I did not get and look at what John Sims Center provides as kind of a grant, sort of a space grant. But that’s it. I did
apply for and was a semifinalist for a writing program in Minneapolis, I’m blanking on the name, which is really a good program.

EW: What has been the biggest help to your career so far and what has been the biggest hindrance?

DM: You know I was looking over your list of questions and it’s such a hard thing for me to identify an individual or a space that’s really been that.

EW: It doesn’t necessary need to be a specific person or space, just an issue or whatever.

DM: It’s so hard. One of the things that has just, and I feel it so strongly right now, has been so critical for me in the past four years and really got me through a tough period where I was feeling like I don’t know why I’m doing this, was Josie’s. Having a consistent place, having a base to return to week after week after week and just get up and work shit out that would inform, not just inform but end up in my solo work, in work that I was really putting together. It was critical, it played such an important role.

EW: What about obstacles?
DM: What I need or what I would love to find is a manager. I think the lack of producers, the fact that there's no one there to produce me and that is my role all the time and has been. And that anything that has happened is because I've pushed to make it happened. I guess I don't know what I expect but there's no one out there playing attention to solo performance saying 'This one, let's help him. Let's work with him,' like a funding organization, and maybe there are and I'm just not aware of it but . . . No one's watching and saying 'This one needs a hand, let's move him to the next stage or give him some technical support'. It's just not out there. You know, ten years into it, it's getting to be a little tiresome.

EW: It definitely takes a lot of hustle. Do you feel that has detracted from your ability to focus on the work?

DM: Yeah, for sure. It's really discouraged me.

EW: How would you characterize alternative spaces and the performance spaces that you've worked with?

DM: Well, I think one thing that runs through them consistently is this desperation, almost this feeling that this is the last hope. (laughs) So there seems like there's a lot of pressure working in these spaces. The people who are in them, who are running these spaces are like saints in America. There
needs to be a national holiday for these people. But they are really like the
unrecognized saints of our community. There’s a sense of kind of lost cause
around them, like we don’t know how this is going to work and any minute this
could all come crashing down around us, let’s hope we make it through the
weekend then we’ll talk about cutting the check. They’re all under siege, or
maybe they’re not necessarily under siege but that feeling has become their
way of working, their way of looking at the world so you very much feel that when
you walk in. It’s interesting because I think when I first started I didn’t
understand that, more of what I felt was ‘Oh, here’s a community, a little haven’
and I feel like now that’s a little bit gone. It doesn’t feel like a safe haven, it feels
more like a bunker. Kind of heavily reinforced and everyone’s sort of stepping
lightly because there’s landmines everywhere.

EW: Let’s talk about the issue of community. How do these spaces foster a
sense of community or not?

DM: One of things is I don’t perform on the same bill with anyone and I haven’t
done that for a long time. I was doing that much more when I started. You
know, Kegan and Lloyd, I was on a night with David Cale, I was on a night with
Tim Miller, I was on a night with Holly Hughes, etc. That’s sort of gone, I don’t
really do that anymore or haven’t in awhile. And maybe that’s just because I
haven't gotten out in New York in the way that I need to yet and maybe that's coming for me, I hope that's coming. So that might be part of it.

EW: Do you feel like you are a part of a community of performers?

DM: I don't. I don't really. I know that there is a community of performers, or actually, there are communities of performers but to me, they mostly circulate around a space and right now I haven't found that yet in New York. Maybe Here [a new performance venue] but even Here is not particularly, they don't really foster community, they're not so much about community, they are almost like a television set with a lot of channels. They're all a lot of really good channels but the space leaves you a little bit cold, I feel. The people there are great people but they're not going to support you and they make it really clear here is the dividing line, hopefully we'll get a chance to see you but we're not even going to guarantee that which, as a performer, is really difficult. To perform in a space and have the people be like 'Well, hopefully we'll see you.' But they've got so much going on and they're doing a lot of stuff and they just don't see everything even though it's their own space and that's like 'Whoa!'

EW: Assuming these organizations had money and resources, what could they do for people like you? Assuming the work is of a certain quality, which I think yours is, how could they better serve artists?
DM: What I would love is for Here or P.S. 122 or for some space like that to have a year round residency program where they choose four or five performers and allowed them to, associated them with the space for a year. They maybe got shows early in the season, maybe group shows early in the season. And then worked on pieces they presented later in the year or something along that line. But really worked with the performer to identify how they could support them and also got an opportunity to meet all the different artists that came through and develop professional relationships and help to build an audience. I think, in fact that on some level, the fact that spaces aren’t doing that, especially P.S. 122 is failing. It’s really letting down the artists and the community. P.S. 122 now is like this high level producing company and that’s great, they need to be doing that but they also, now more than ever, they have the ability to reach out in a structured way to the community and build an institution that allows for a constant flow of new energy. Instead of this sort of occasional, random ‘Oh, we’ll pick this one person’, like ‘Oh, we have some extra money now, let’s look around and see who’s out there.’ If they had a method or a tool that sort of went out into the community in a systematic way or the community sort of filtered up into P.S. 122. That would be really great! And now is when they should build it before they become an off-Broadway house or something.
INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW SIMONET, DANCER, HEADLONG DANCE COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA, PA (June 3, 1999)

Eric Wallner: Could you describe your training and background in the arts?

Andrew Simonet: I started dancing when I was in college at Wesleyan University. Before that I had never danced before, I had done a lot of theater and I stopped doing theater out of dissatisfaction and when I finally took a dance class I realized that this was what I'd been wanting to do. So I studied there, I majored in dance. They have a kind of unusual program in that you can be an untrained dancer and still come in and be a dance major and choreograph and everything. Then I spent a year at the Center for New Dance Development in Holland after college, which is this very out there school. Very small, about 50 students and you do month long workshops or projects with choreographers and teachers from all over the world. Then I came back here and with Amy Smith and David Brick founded Headlong Dance Theater here in Philadelphia.

EW: Tell me a little bit about the company.

AS: It's a collaborative company so the three of us all choreograph, we share all the credit for the work. Initially it was just the three of us and we would make work together and then we would also use dancers for specific projects. Then
about a year ago we added three dancers as our sort of full-time dancers. There’s a lot of collaboration there too, we’re still sorting it out. It’s all very complex and intricate and a little hard to explain how it works, but there are times when one of us will take the lead on a project and sort of be in charge of it, but even then there’s a lot of input from the other two of us and the dancers.

EW: Now you had a space as well, right?

AS: Yeah, that’s right. Originally we had a space way down in South Philly and then we got a space in Old City which has kind of emerged as this arts district with a lot of galleries and stuff. Yeah, so we had a studio and taught classes and rehearsed there and performed there. They had these First Friday festivals and we had a couple shows during that.

EW: Have you guys toured at all?

AS: Yes, we perform a lot in New York and we’re done limited stuff here and there. We did shows in Connecticut and New Jersey and New Hampshire and we went to a couple of festivals in Europe last year, stuff like that. Part of the thing is that we don’t really want to become like a full-time touring dance company. We’re much more interested in just making the work.
EW: And I take it you all have day jobs?

AS: Yes. They are now taking up a smaller proportion of our time which is great because the company is paying us. We all are lucky enough to have day jobs that are somewhat flexible. That’s the secret history of the performing artist is the day job. What kind of great job you can get that allows you to suddenly take off for two months.

EW: Are you doing the nonprofit thing or not?

AS: Yes, we’ve been a 501(C)3 for a little over three years now. We do fundraise a lot, spend a lot of time and energy fundraising. We also do an annual giving campaign from individuals. This year our budget’s about $70,000. We worry that we might be hitting a ceiling but we feel like we’re in a really good place to do this in terms of funding.

EW: Are you getting money from the Pew?

AS: Yeah, they are actually pretty significant because they have a separate program for dance, that in fact, you can get without being a 501(C)3 or you can get as a company as well. We’ve been very lucky to get a lot of money from them this year, we got $20,000 this year.
EW: As a young company, what would you say are the biggest obstacles you've faced and what has been the biggest assistance?

AS: There's definitely sort of a strange feeling that the ladder of success in the dance world has had a lot of the rungs kicked out of it. People don't really know either what to do in terms of a career or if a really successful career is even possible anymore. So there's that and there's the thing that the older choreographers that we know and who have been successful and who's work we admire, they can't quite give us advice about what to do because it doesn't work anymore.

EW: Everything's so different now.

AS: Yeah. I don't know, I still wonder if we could at some point become a funded company that pays us and quit our day jobs. I still don't know, I go back and forth, sometimes I'm like 'It'll never happen, just let that go and keep doing your work'. So that's a little strange. I don't feel like, I know some artists feel a little bit like the world keeps them down, we don't tend to really feel that way. We don't feel like we're at odds with our culture, or no one cares about it, or the press are so terrible to us. Obviously, the obstacles of trying to really focus on your work and really investigate it and really stay true to it, pay attention to it, and
not get stuck doing something that you’re just kind of good at and is facile for you or doing something that other people want you to do.

EW: What about things have helped you guys out? Was there any kind of crucial moment where something came along that was what you needed to take the work to the next step?

AS: I would definitely say that here, community is the biggest help. There’s an incredibly supportive dance community and performing arts community and people really know each and come to see each other’s work and perform in each other’s work and support each other. I’m just realizing that more and more now when I go to other places, just how rare that is and just how vital. There are institutions that I think are just great. There’s a place called the CEC, the Community Education Center, here in Philadelphia and they have this Independent Performing Artists Project and they give you a two night run of your show, an evening length show, and they produce it and do the publicity and they give you a photo shoot and video documentation and rehearsal space and $1,000. It’s specifically geared towards emerging artists who haven’t had a full show yet. So we got that soon after coming here and it was just great! It’s really a model for what emerging artists need. Everybody who’s anything here has gone through there, has gotten one at some point. It really is the sort of nest for new artists. So that was just great, especially at that point we were like
‘Oh, my God, a thousand dollars! What are we going to do with all this money?’
And it's sad how you become somewhat immune to it and now we get a big
grant and we barely feel it. We know that it will just get eaten up. But that was
incredibly great, it was just exactly what we needed.

EW: Turning to alternative spaces for a moment, have you had experience
performing in those spaces?

AS: Would a place like the Painted Bride be included in that?

EW: Yeah, definitely.

AS: It's interesting, there are sort of some spaces here that have been around
for a long time that came out of the artists space movement and that generation
of artists. They do really great stuff and there are also ways in which they're
kind of out-of-step. They're kind of creaky, old dinosaurs in a way. I have a lot
of ideas why that would be. They have a hard adapting in some ways and
they're stuck a little bit in their mode and their mode is a great mode, I love their
mode and I love what they believe in and I love the spirit that they come out of
but it's not always the most effective thing. And especially when there's very
little money around, it's not always the best place to put resources sometimes.
EW: Can you be a little more specific?

AS: There's a space that we rehearse in called Kumquat that started out as Group Motion in the early 70's I think and Group Motion was kind of a collaborative hippie style dance company. They have two studios there now, there's a little bit of a shortage of studio space now especially since we lost our space because the rents got too high. So we started rehearsing there and it's great, this guy has kept it running for 20, 30 years. It really is a home for dance but it's also a real dump, it's a shithole, there's rats, no one takes care of it. And the thing that it could be, like ways that it could be an amazing place, Todd would never do and when people try to, there's a weird sense of territorialism and anxiety about someone taking it over. So like we want to get out of there, we have to get our own space. It's great spirit, you run into everybody from the dance community there, the space is cheap, they're just trying to help you. They give you space for $6 an hour, you can perform there, you can do all this stuff, if you're not a nonprofit, you can use them. But it's also just so badly run, you just feel like the ceiling is about to come crashing down.

EW: I think that's one of the tensions that exists within those spaces is kind of good vibes versus trying to stay organized and have the administrative structures in place that aren't repressive but make it more efficient.
AS: Right and also realizing the things that you can and can’t do. Like maybe it’s my space but maybe I’m not very good at this part of the deal so I’ll let someone else do that. Delegating isn’t a real strength. And the same thing with the Painted Bride. I mean the Painted Bride is great and they have supported us so much and we’ve performed there. We started this thing called Dance Camp which is this collaborative dance festival in the summer where choreographers come together and we all teach workshops and classes for a month and we make work together so it’s free for everybody and nobody has to pay for it. And the first year we did that, the Painted Bride said ‘Great, do a performance’, gave us their space and produced us. Totally site-unseen, like we were totally unproven. They’re just wonderful in that way and the woman who’s in charge of dance there is great, Terry Fox is great, she’s brilliant but it’s also poorly run. It’s a really poorly run space. I mean the number of sort of gaffes and bumps and very unprofessional stuff that’s happened. And I have a pretty high tolerance for that stuff, if somebody messed up something on the tickets or the poster, I don’t really care but stuff in performance and technical stuff. It’s just really known for being a very frustrating place to perform at. And it wouldn’t take much, it really wouldn’t take much to change that and again it’s been run by this one guy since the 60’s and he’s stepping down but I don’t think much is going to change.

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EW: I'm trying to generalize about these spaces and do you have any thoughts about what their defining qualities or characteristics or values might be.

AS: I think that one of the reasons for their lack of adaptability, and I feel like adaptability and flexibility that's, like the young performing artists of our generation are incredible at that, about changing forms, about having a pick-up company here or there or performing in non-traditional spaces. There's no sense that once you build a structure or form or organization, that it has to stay that way. And that's sort of a necessity, but it's also good for the work. You stay low to the ground and adaptable. There's a way in which older structures aren't and I think there's a little bit of vehemency about the way that the organizational structure embodies my values and if I compromise the structure, I'm compromising my values. If I let you change it, I'm sort of letting you change my deepest held beliefs. Obviously, that's a little bit maybe of a baby boomer thing. So that it gets intertwined in that way. And I also think there's this notion, there's this feeling from those people that there's no way they could ever become the establishment, there's no way they could ever become out-of-touch with what's going on. So if they do, if you try to tell them that they are, it's very upsetting to them and strange, 'Well how could I possibly? Look at me, I was throwing dog doo at the audience back in the 60's, I've got to be a rebel on the edge'. But of course, it's not that they're not a rebel, it's just that their ways are out-of-touch and they don't know what's going on now.
EW: What do you think these spaces have done in terms of artists' careers?

AS: They're just incredible. They're just amazing. I think that any space that is run from the point of view of the artist and the artistic work and sort of the founding decision-making energy is there, is going to be an incredible place and is really going to lead to better art, better art communities. As opposed to spaces that are based more around the audience and attracting the audience and communicating a sense of safety and reassurance and predictability to the audience. To have a space that really says 'Well, we're really interested in doing exactly the art that this artist wants to do.' It's a really radical notion, and I never cease to be impressed by it. You can feel it when you're around those people and you see those performances and when you're part of a community in which that energy is there, people really take risks, they go farther than they would otherwise and it means that the art gets better. People don't just make what the producers want. There's a little of that in New York, there's such a strange little marketplace in New York in the dance world and people are constantly worrying about what niche they're fitting in and where they work and who feels what about their work. There's just something so damaging about that, about people feeling that the value of their work is determined by where it fits in to someone else's system. You're never going to make good work then, if you ever had a chance of making good work.
I think the relationship to the audience is a complex one and certainly I take into account very much the way that it's communicating or not communicating and I find that out. But to say that I'm going to put my work into a form that will be legible to as many people as possible is different from saying I'm going to make the work that these people want me to make. I'm going to make the piece that they've seen before, that they know they like so it will reassure them.

EW: How do you think these spaces might better serve emerging artists or do you have any ideas about how they might?

AS: I think the charismatic founders need to be very aware of who and what they are in the organization and if they are exerting too much control and if they're stuck in old ways. And not all of them are but a lot of these things really ran on the energy of the founders for years and they only really existed because these people were persistent and dogged in their belief in it. So I think often they have too much power, they're stuck running it in a way that is no longer responsive to the arts world in general now, let alone young artists in that picture. And that's really hard to do, I don't know how you would do that. But basically if people could really say 'Well, what's best for this organization? What are we really doing and how does that fit into this world we're a part of? And leaving me and my desire for control out of the equation'. That could
extend in many ways, I think you could include younger artists and younger arts professionals in your decision-making processes. Here, at the Bride, she gets kind of a dance curating panel together and it's made up generally of pretty young people and certainly people who are active in the community and that's just a very simple way of getting young voices in there. Maybe they would end up choosing the same people she would have but maybe not and at least there's this sense that there's a dialogue going on. I think that there are new forms out there that are being created and these artists spaces could respond to them. I think they do a fairly good job but I think that all the ways that people work collectively and collaboratively. One dancer might dance for two other choreographers and choreography their own work and choreography as part of a collective. There are ways in which the presentation, the notions of presentation, 'We're going to present this artist's work for a weekend. 70 minutes of one choreographer.' That those modes of presentation are a little outdated and it's hard often for people who have these very multifaceted artistic lives to enter that world. They're never going to have an evening length work just of theirs.

EW: It sounds like it doesn’t reflect the way those artists work now.

AS: Right. So, okay, what are you going to do then? Well, I'm not sure exactly what it would be, what it would look like. Maybe it's presenting more mixed bills
or what if you presented one dancer’s artistic life, so you’d show three pieces
that she was dancing in and two pieces that she made, maybe from all different
companies? There are ways in which I think you could get beyond this model
of the superstar, the sort of star economy of the art world which seeks out the
individual and valorizes them and gives them all the money and the attention
and sort of puts them up on this pedestal. I just think that’s bad for the art world
and it’s certainly bad now because there just aren’t that many people going it
alone.
CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I will attempt to summarize the findings of my inquiry and make some recommendations based on them. I believe it is useful to articulate what I have said in other places within this paper: That no one reality exists in terms of summarizing the function, development and above all, significance of these organizations. Within the scope of my interviews, different respondents have articulated a range of positions and ideas, which at times were divergent or outright contradictory. These positions are, of course, based on their own perspective and often speak to their personal biases, interests and world views. That is not to discredit any of them, but rather to simply note that each voice (including the researcher's) comes with a limited view. Hopefully by assessing the totality of their opinions, I can draw some meaningful conclusions on the topic.

All the interviewees felt that alternative spaces had made a significant contribution to the arts. As one interviewee noted, "I think that they have had such an extraordinary impact as to say that the arts of today would not be what they are without the existence of alternatives spaces". Furthermore, there seemed to be a great deal of consensus on how these organizations started out and what their defining characteristics were: mainly having a passionate
interest in serving the artist, a commitment to new and experimental work, and a partisan belief in challenging the dominant culture. Implicit in these values seems to be an underlying view of artists as an oppressed or marginalized group in need of institutional assistance and services. These organizations have strived to serve artists by not only providing an outlet of getting their work to the public but also through “technical assistance” with such areas as grantwriting, promotion, etc.

The contribution of alternative spaces to American artists can then be seen as multi-fold. They have been successful in creating environments that fostered not only new artwork, but more broadly, served as laboratories for new artistic innovations and genres. Most significantly for the purpose of my study, it is clear that alternative spaces have provided the initial entry point for a number of artists to begin pursuing a professional career in the arts.

Not surprisingly, interviewees tended to view many of the current hardships facing alternative spaces as a result of external forces. While this may, in fact, be true, there was little acknowledgment of internal problems within their organizations. Weak boards, presenting work of inconsistent or questionable artistic merit or general mismanagement are organizational weaknesses that many arts organizations face. Because of the limited access I was afforded, it was difficult to determine which, if any, of these issues were relevant to the organizations discussed.
Analysis of mission statements

The analysis of the organizational mission statements I have examined further confirm this notion of service to the artist as central to the goals of alternative spaces. All of them articulate values related to being artist-centered, committed to diversity, and interested in promoting contemporary work. Promoting a concept of community and reaching audiences is also a hallmark of these statements. Each of these statements contain an implicit belief in the need for alternative voices to be heard as well as for committing resources to support artists.

FINDINGS

The following is a summary of the major findings I have identified from the texts of my interviews.

- While these organizations were uniformly characterized as endangered, there was no consensus on how bad the situation is

All the interviewees spoke in one way or another to the sense that alternative spaces are facing huge challenges and that some may not survive into the future. Beyond that, interviewees were mixed in their level of concern. Some were optimistic that the organizations would find a way to adapt while others felt they had outlived their original function. “I think it’s changing, they are
clearly changing but I don’t think that means they won’t serve an important role for artists in the future even though they are different creatures today than they were 20 or 25 years ago” stated one interviewee.

- Interviewees viewed mainstream culture in negative ways and felt alternative spaces were positioned in opposition to this

“We don’t have a lot of dissidents. Just when culture is ever more heterogeneous, we are becoming ever less heterogeneous in our thinking,” said one interviewee. Another stated, “I certainly think that, in general, we are experiencing a kind of shrinking of public space. If public funding equals space and I think it does and it’s shrinking, then private space is bigger which means we’re looking at a privatization of culture.” Yet another felt that “any kind of artist voice that goes against the establishment, against the mainstream is slowly silenced and that’s bad”.

- The struggle to simply stay open has negatively impacted their ability to serve artists

One interviewee described this mentality as “preserve the space first, artists second.” He noted that, for his organization, this has meant starting space rentals as a means of increasing earned income but noted that “I still
think it sucks because that's another 10 weeks I'm not helping artists, I'm living off artists.” Several interviewees noted they have had to cut back on programs or services in order to remain fiscally sound.

- **Demonstrated commitment and idealism on the part of staff, board and constituent groups**

Most all of the interviewees expressed a very clear commitment to the work they do in spite of the perceived obstacles and hardships they face. At an intuitive level, one senses an almost religious zeal and dedication on the part of individuals involved in these organizations. It also became apparent that the continued existence of these organizations was undoubtedly due to this commitment, a commitment which was driven not by monetary incentives but by the values and ethos their staff and boards hold.

- **Impact in creating changes in other arts institutions, the “trickle up” effect**

The art world has opened up dramatically since the creation of alternative spaces. In effect, the curatorial practices and goals of alternative spaces could be said to have “trickled up” to effect other segments of the art world, notably museums and commercial galleries. In this sense, the alternative spaces have almost contributed to their own irrelevance by focusing
attention on new artists and new genres that have since been appropriated by other segments of the art system.

- A new (or re-newed) interest in building connections with the community

"In the 90's, a lot of the projects funded by the Endowment, the community is a major partner. That was not true in the 70's and 80's". While alternative spaces have always been committed to the spirit of grassroots work, it is only recently that most of these organizations have made it a priority, often by revisiting and revising their mission. Several interviewees mentioned the additional of educational programs as one way of reaching out to the community. One interviewee mentioned that Real Arts Ways [an alternative space in Hartford, CT] recently hired their first Education Director. She felt that this was a signal of a trend that would continue as alternative spaces look to broader their audiences and make themselves more relevant by serving a wider public.

- Tension between being artist-run, artist focused and adopting more formal administrative structures

Many interviewees expressed a concern about the institutionalization of alternative spaces. While most acknowledged this had already happened in
response to changes in the cultural climate particularly in regards to funding, some saw this as constituting a lose of their original flexibility and counterculture identity. Furthermore as institutionalization has increased, it has created a tension between the original ideal of being artist-run versus seeking more professional staff with the training and skill sets needed to effectively manage a nonprofit organization in the current environment. As one interviewee stated, “What’s bad about becoming institutionalized, to have some stability in your funding? . . . If you want to support your artists, well, you need to have a stable organization.”

- A lack of the next generation of leaders

Several interviewees mentioned the challenge of finding qualified staff willing to work for the modest salaries these spaces can offer. “We’ve burned out the staff and the second generation hasn’t come to take over because it’s hard work for hardly any money,” noted one interviewee. Beyond that, there seemed to be a major generational shift happening as many of the founding directors (generally of “Baby Boomer” age) are beginning to retire. Several interviewees mentioned the need for “new blood” within these organizations.

- A solid commitment to multiculturalism and diversity
During the 1980's (in some cases before that), alternative spaces came to demonstrate a commitment to the ideals of multiculturalism both at a level of the work presented as well as broadening representation within their boards, staff, and audiences. While there is arguably a strong continued need to actively engage in these issues, alternative spaces appear to place a high value on diversity and pride themselves on this commitment. While individual “track records” on inclusiveness vary from organization to organization, the rhetoric of diversity can be, in part, linked to artwork presented by many alternative spaces in the '80s which addressed issues of cultural subjectivity and “identity politics”.

• A need to reach out to emerging artists

While the rhetoric of concern for emerging artists was abundant, evidence of a systemic approach and an institutional commitment in terms of specific programs to deal with these artists was less tangible. All of the emerging artists I spoke with felt these organizations could do more to address their needs and provide more opportunities for developing their work. They also spoke about workshop projects they had participated in and what a positive impact they had on their work. Curiously, neither of the programs mentioned were connected with an established alternative space.
Continuing from my last point, one way in which this definition could be broadened would be to include age (specifically younger artists and audiences but also the elderly) within the ongoing articulation of diversity. This may be simply a matter of taking an implicit organizational value and making it explicit. What was clear from my interviews and research was a marked perception from the outside that these organizations were closed off to younger artists, whether that was actually the case or not.

- A sense of alienation and lack of inclusion within the current dialogues on public arts policy

As a national dialogue on cultural policy has become more defined and publicized, these organizations feel that they have been left behind and are not included in that discourse. During the heyday of the Endowment, many of the individuals involved with alternative spaces served as de facto policy makers through their involvement on panels, with service organizations and other policy making bodies. (Kester) In order for a truly comprehensive national cultural policy to be articulated, alternative spaces and organizations like them need to be more included in this dialogue. This would necessitate an effort on both sides to achieve. Some interviewees lacked an appreciation for the emergence of cultural policy at all. As one interviewee declared, "What do my
artists do while everyone else is trying to develop a freckin' artistic cultural policy? In the meantime, they're starving."

The question of audience

My research has focused primarily on artists and organizations which is only part of the equation. What I have neglected (and is beyond the scope of this study) is the formulation and expansion of audiences for these spaces. Although a passing concern with audiences was often mentioned, what was conspicuously absent from almost every conversation I had on this topic was any really meaningful or fully articulated sense of how audiences should or could be engaged with these organizations. Without articulating and defining who their audience has been, could and should be, these space do themselves a disservice. One lesson of the NEA debates is clearly that all arts organizations must address the issue of how they serve public purposes. The organizations I have focused on and the artists and artworks they present have arguably had a limited focus and visibility (often by their own choice) and while that may not be a problem per se, they must articulate a discernible purpose that goes beyond simply serving artists.

Kester's article provides a useful framework for deconstructing the ideology and practices of the alternative space sector.

The cultural worker and artists space models stressed the importance of autonomy for the contemporary artist and led to the creation of a network of state-funded laboratories engaged in various forms of cultural experimentation. This model is no longer sufficient . . . because this very autonomy has prevented artists and arts administrators from
developing and administering models of cultural production in which the needs of the public are taken seriously (p. 130)

The insularity that created such freedom at the time these organizations began has turned out to be a liability today. As Kester acknowledges, "The artist-run space . . . was intended to reject the banality of the market and provide support for a vital, alternative culture in which artists were responsible only to themselves and their own interests" (p. 116).

**Alternative spaces and artists' careers**

Based on the findings of my research and literature review, I will attempt to identify specifically how alternative spaces serve artists' development. In order to do this, I began by trying to conceptualize the career path an artist might take towards building a professional career in the arts. Using an organic concept of "career cycles", I devised a conceptual framework which identifies specific events that constitute milestones in an artists' professional development. (See Appendix F) Programs and initiatives that seek to aid artists could be viewed as offering assistance at specific "intervention points" in this cycle. While an artist's movement through the various events I outline is not at all static and exact, certain career advances may depend on preceding ones.

Based on information from my interviews, I observed that, in terms of career growth, there were three groups of artists. The first group is comprised of those highly talented individuals who would succeed no matter what. Not
only is their work on a high artistic level but, beyond that, they possess the skills, determination and/or social connections (and often a knack for self-promotion) to succeed, with or without outside assistance. At the other end of the spectrum lies the artists for whom talent is questionable at best, who's work doesn't rise above well-worn clichés and who lack proficiency in technique. In addition, these artists may not possess the drive or ability to compete as professional artists or suited to the often turbulent lifestyle choices many artists face. This is not to suggest that one group is "better" than the other, but to say that there are marked differences in their ability to build a meaningful career.

The third group of artists (the one that I believe most artists fall into) have made a commitment to their art and possess the basic skills necessary to create interesting work. These artists have a contribution to make but may not be as well connected or as business-savvy as the first group. These are the artists that benefit from programs that seek to not only help them develop their work but also provide opportunities to exhibit or perform. These artists are the ones that are most likely to gain from the range of institutional strategies and programs designed to foster artistic development such as fellowships, residencies, artist colonies, and the other myriad of assistance programs that exist.

Historically, alternative spaces have clearly allowed for emerging artists to enter the "pipeline" for a career in the arts by providing both resources and
opportunities to show their work. Judging from the perspectives of the emerging artists I’ve interviewed, the organizations’ ability to continue to do this may be called into question. However, more so than any other arts organizations out there, I believe alternative spaces are in the best position to be able to continue this critical support for the next generation of artists. One thing is for sure, that if these spaces were to disappear, it would have an extremely negative impact on the ability of young people to enter a career in the arts.

The future for alternative spaces is far from clear. What techniques and decisions they make in the short and long term will determine not only whether they will remain a vital component of the arts ecology but also whether they will survive at all.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS

Funders:

Pamela Clapp, Program Officer, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, New York, NY

Jennifer Dowley, Visual Arts Coordinator, National Endowment for the Arts and former Executive Director, Headlands Center for the Arts (Sausalito, CA)

Executive Directors:

Susan Channing, Executive Director, SPACES, Cleveland, OH

Gerard Givnish, founder and former Executive Director, The Painted Bride Art Center, Philadelphia, PA

Mark Russell, Executive Director, P.S. 122, New York, NY

Robert Stearns, former Executive Director, The Kitchen, New York, NY

Emily Todd, former Executive Director, Diverseworks, Houston, TX

Jon Winet, former Executive Director, Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA

Emerging Artists:

Julie Deamer, curator and director of Four Walls Gallery, San Francisco, CA

David Mills, performer, New York, NY

Andrew Simonet, dancer/choreographer, Headlong Dance Company, Philadelphia, PA
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - FUNDERS

Please give me a brief description of your background as an arts administrator and your involvement with alternative spaces.

How would you characterize alternative spaces? What are their defining characteristics?

What contribution do these organizations make to the ecology of the arts? (function)

What impact do you think alternative spaces have on the careers of individual artists?

How have alternative spaces changed over time? (evolution)

What challenges will these spaces need to address for the future?

What question should I have asked that I didn’t?
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Please give me a brief description of your background as an arts administrator and your involvement with alternative spaces.

How would you characterize alternative spaces? What are their defining characteristics?

What impact do you think alternative spaces have on the careers of individual artists?

How have alternative spaces changed over time? (evolution)

What challenges will these spaces need to address for the future?
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - ARTISTS

Please give me a brief description of your background and training as an artist.

What has been the biggest obstacle to developing your career? What has helped you the most in developing your career?

Please describe your involvement with alternative spaces.

How would you characterize alternative spaces? What are they defining characteristics?

What impact do you think alternative spaces have on the careers of individual artists?

How might alternative spaces better serve the needs of emerging artists?
APPENDIX E

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION STATEMENTS

Diverseworks

MISSION

DiverseWorks is a non-profit art center dedicated to presenting new visual, performing, and literary art. DiverseWorks is a place where the process of creating art is valued and where artists can test new ideas in the public arena. By encouraging the investigation of current artistic, cultural and social issues, DiverseWorks builds, educates, and sustains audiences for contemporary art.

VISION

DiverseWorks is the leading contemporary art center in the United States. Known for its groundbreaking artistic education programs and distinguished by its financial stability, DiverseWorks serves as an open venue for artists, a training ground for future arts administrators and a model for arts centers across the country.

DiverseWorks remains notable for its commitment to artists who are exploring inventive and successful earned-income ventures. DiverseWorks serves as a crucible for artistic exploration and audience development. DiverseWorks' activities are supported by an active Board of Directors and Artist Board and an involved corps of members, audience supporters, students and volunteers.

The Kitchen

The Kitchen is an interdisciplinary laboratory for visionary emerging and established artists. It has been a powerful force in shaping the cultural landscape of this for over two decades, and is internationally renowned for its early support of artists who have gone on to receive world-wide stature. In the coming millennium, The Kitchen will remain a nurturing space for artists to collaborate across disciplines and push the boundaries of their fields, and will
support the artistic exploration and application of new technologies that help connect artists and audiences from around the world.

Under new leadership, The Kitchen is emerging as a new kind of cultural center, simultaneously serving an international artistic community and acting as a resource in its own neighborhood. The first institution to focus exclusively on multi-disciplinary work, The Kitchen is preserving an archive of performance work, which is of great historical significance.

NAAO (National Association of Artists' Organizations)

Mission, Membership, and Programs

More than 700 artists' organizations, arts institutions, artists, and arts professionals comprise the National Association of Artists' Organizations/NAAO membership. NAAO's constituency reflects a broad range of aesthetics, as well as great diversity in geographic, economic, ethnic, and gender-based communities. NAAO's six membership regions represent artists and organizations from across the United States. NAAO was established to provide its constituents with a vehicle for communication and a clear and distinct national voice. For the past 15 years, it has provided services to the primary creators of new, emerging, and often experimental work.

NAAO represents all disciplines, including visual, performing, media, literary, and interdisciplinary arts organizations. Its programs are designed to serve this broad community—to strengthen the field from within, promote its many and varied accomplishments to the public without duplicating quality services available elsewhere, and provide a national voice for artists' organizations in forums that debate issues of cultural policy.

Artists' organizations function as the research division of the art world, encouraging experimentation and providing a context for the development of new work free from commercial restraints. Characterized by a commitment to community, artists' organizations frequently enter into collaborations with other art and non-art organizations on local, national, and international levels. These collaborations often result in innovative partnerships with social service agencies, school districts, park departments, galleries, museums, and other organizations throughout the world. As the only service organization for artists' organizations, NAAO's leadership role demands vision, commitment, and the flexibility to respond creatively and effectively to the changing needs of artists' organizations. NAAO fulfills this role through services and programs promoting organizational stability and communication within the field.
NAAO's membership programs and services are designed to address common concerns such as cultural pluralism, community-based work, organizational stability, working conditions, isolation, and lack of visibility, among others.

The Painted Bride

Painted Bride Art Center acts to stimulate creative activity and to promote public understanding and participation in the creative process. We fulfill this mission by presenting the works of living artists from diverse cultures, by nurturing organization-to-artist relationships, and by relating to broader community issues through the arts.

Performance Space 122

The Mission...

Performance Space 122 is a not-for-profit arts center serving the New York City dance and performance community. P.S. 122 is committed to supporting the development of work by individual artists who create live art with an authentic vision. We are fully dedicated to finding, developing, and bringing to the public eye artistic creations from a diversity of cultures, points of view, ages, and sexual orientations.

P.S. 122 advocates innovation. The work it supports challenges artistic forms, traditional contexts, and content as a means of revealing truth.

P.S. 122's primary concern is supporting artists' individual creative process. We encourage artistic investigations by providing creators with rehearsal space, workshop space, constructive criticism, performance opportunities and challenging audiences.

P.S. 122 further supports its mission by providing national and international touring opportunities to exemplary works developed under its auspices. Linking communities through the medium of live art, P.S. 122 seeks to facilitate communication between artists and communities, at its home space and on the road.
P.S. 122 is a New York based institution with an inclusive view of the world. We participate in a dialogue of artistic exchange between like-minded cultural centers nationally and around the globe. We do this in order to expand the education and development of American artists and their audiences.

Since its founding in 1979, P.S. 122 has been committed to the advancement and development of this community by providing an environment that encourages exploration and risk-taking through a series of programs which addresses its needs and cultivates an audience for the work. In the past twelve years, the Center has become a major contributor to the cultural life of the city. P.S. 122 has achieved national and international recognition as one of this country's most important and innovative alternative presenting organizations.

Southern Exposure

Southern Exposure's unique programs nurture a broad range of innovative, risk-taking contemporary art in an accessible environment. As an artist-run organization, Southern Exposure reaches out to diverse audiences, and serves as a forum and resource center providing extraordinary support to the Bay Area's arts and educational communities.

SPACES

SPACES creates opportunities for developing and experimenting artists to present challenging new work to the public, and exposes their work to audience in and outside of Ohio.

SPACES provides local, regional, and national artists with gallery space and facilities, honoraria, services, promotion, efforts to secure critical press coverage, and freedom from commercial pressure.

SPACES shows significant work which would not otherwise be seen in northeast Ohio. By doing so, we invite dialogue and provide a forum for the vital exchange of artistic ideas in a positive environment for artists and the public.