

Wallis, Brian. "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces." *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*. Ed. Ault, Julie. Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2002. pp161-181.

Public Funding and Alternative Spaces

Brian Wallis

The capitalist's power to move a factory away from a region because of militant union activity is exactly the same as the capitalist's power to withdraw support from a museum when he or she disapproves of the art shown there. . . . Alternative spaces which depend on elites for their support are not really alternative to anything and are not even reformist.

—Carl Andre, 1980

In 1989, when right-wing politicians and religious leaders began attacking U.S. government funding for contemporary art, their oppositional rhetoric focused mainly on certain kinds of objectionable imagery, which they labeled pornographic or blasphemous. Explicit depictions of gay sexual acts or reconfigured religious icons helped these antiart zealots to capitalize on public fears about the supposed immorality of public culture. The national media eagerly collaborated in inciting a full-fledged "sex panic," which embraced condemnation of gay and lesbian artists as well as the ferreting out of so-called child pornographers.¹ But in the midst of the ensuing culture wars, which lasted for at least a decade, the real legislative goal continued to be the removal of government support of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Since at least 1980, conservatives had sought to abolish the NEA, regarding it a liberal luxury and a symbol of the "excess of democracy" that had been allowed to flourish in the radical sixties.²

One of the least remarked aspects of this broad-based culture war of the 1990s was its devastating effect on a rather narrow but important sector of the cultural



Juan Downey, *Information Withheld*, 1988. Messages to the Public program. Courtesy of the Public Art Fund. Photograph by Jennifer Seacor.

field, the alternative space. Mostly artist-founded and artist-run alternative spaces had sprung up nationwide since the 1960s as venues for a range of experimental multimedia art activities and as a deliberate “alternative” to the commercial gallery system. By the late 1980s, alternative spaces were well established within the international art world and well funded by the NEA. In the beginning, these spaces had been forced to struggle and try to get by on private funding of various kinds. Things changed radically in 1972, when the NEA began supplying substantial support for these local efforts. In 1978, the NEA established a separate granting category for “artists’ spaces,” and as funding in this category increased, alternative spaces expanded, continuing their practice of fostering bold challenges to the social and political conventions of the art world.³

When the radical right began to assault the NEA, it turned, seemingly by instinct, toward artists and exhibitions supported by alternative spaces. In almost every key battle over the NEA, alternative spaces were at the center of the conflict. Throughout the episodic unfolding of conservative complaints, the litany of alter-

native spaces—the Kitchen, Franklin Furnace, the Washington Project for the Arts (WPA), and Beyond Baroque—became almost as familiar as the names of the publicly vilified artists Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, Karen Finley, and Tim Miller. But while the individual artists and the NEA itself survived the ordeal, sometimes even strengthened by their oppositional positions, the already waning alternative space movement was dealt a death blow.

Although alternative spaces garnered far less of the overall NEA budget than operas, theater companies, and major museums, they suffered a disproportionate amount of cuts to their budgets, often as punishment for supporting “controversial” artists. In 1990, the NEA withheld twenty-five thousand dollars from the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Philadelphia for having organized a Mapplethorpe exhibition, and it eliminated funding for the Southeast Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for having promoted the work of Serrano. The agency subsequently sought to withdraw federal funds from Artists Space and Franklin Furnace in New York, as well as from other small arts spaces throughout the country for fear that NEA funds would be associated with controversial activities. Most egregiously, the NEA virtually discontinued funding for the WPA in Washington, D.C., which had taken the controversial Mapplethorpe show after it had been aborted by the Corcoran Gallery of Art. The Corcoran purportedly canceled the exhibition out of fear that the (homo)sexual content of some of Mapplethorpe’s photographs would cause controversy; at that



Mike Glier, *White Male Power: Cut the Dialog and Do What I Say*, 1980. Courtesy of Mike Glier. Photograph by Mike Glier.

time Congress was deliberating NEA funding. While the WPA had averaged around two hundred thousand dollars annually in support from the NEA during the 1980s, by 1995 it was receiving only ten thousand dollars a year.⁴ As a consequence of such dramatic defunding, by 1998 alternative spaces, once the symbol of the NEA's adventurous philanthropy, were being subjected to what one critic described as "a kind of malnutrition or fading away."⁵

Certainly, many economic and political factors have led to the decline of the alternative space movement, but the punitive withdrawal of NEA funds was unquestionably the final straw for many organizations. This was crushing not only because of the sudden loss of capital but also because of the betrayal by the NEA itself, which had earlier nurtured the ramshackle artists' spaces like foundlings. It was painfully ironic that when the NEA was forced to reform, it enacted a series of measures that distanced it from the contemporary artists and alternative spaces that had once been its hallmarks.⁶ In 1995, the NEA abolished individual fellowships to artists, reorganized and reduced its granting categories, and entirely eliminated the genre "Artists' Organizations" under which the agency had traditionally funded alternative spaces. Moreover, it launched cost-cutting attacks aimed at specific alternative spaces. To save itself, the NEA cannibalized its own stepchild, the alternative space.⁷

The NEA sought to portray these efforts as an attempt to protect artists by challenging the overt censorship of the right wing, but one might also regard these reformist measures by the NEA bureaucracy as censorship by other means. And if we look closer at the history of the NEA's involvement with alternative spaces, a pattern becomes clear: from the beginning, the NEA, while nominally supporting alternative spaces, was always engaged in shaping and curtailing their activities. In particular, the NEA strategically compelled alternative spaces to become more institutionalized, to seek and rely on greater and greater amounts of funding, to redefine the role of contemporary artists as professional workers, and to qualify the types of art being made and shown. Those everyday practices of social control, while less obvious than the blunt force of conservative politicians, may ultimately have exacted a far greater price from the original mission of the alternative space.

Given the later successes of alternative spaces, it is sometimes difficult to understand the radical transformations that took place in the alternative space movement as a result of public funding. By all accounts, the emergence of alternative spaces in the mid- to late 1960s was part of a radical, utopian effort to circumvent the commercial gallery system, especially its social exclusivity and economic prerequisites. In this sense, alternative spaces derived directly from the political movements that agitated for civil rights, equality for women, student rights, and an end to the war in Vietnam. Alternative spaces offered artists a new basis for forming collectives to discuss and understand their role as workers within an eco-

nominally and politically regulated system. Thus, the formation of collectives like the Art Workers' Coalition, the Guerrilla Art Action Group, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, and Womanhouse provided opportunities for artists to voice their political opposition (through protests and demonstrations) and to understand their own political positions (through organizing and discussion). As critic Kay Larson commented, "protests over the Vietnam War were shaking the art community, disrupting the international exhibitions (such as Documenta and the Venice Biennale) and instilling the notion that individuals acting in concert could actually have an impact on 'the system.'" ⁸

In fact, the impact of these artists was so great that critic Allan Schwartzman wrote that "alternative spaces were the center of American artistic life in the '70s." ⁹ Many date the tendency from 1970, when 112 Greene Street was founded in New York. Within a few years similar grassroots spaces were founded throughout the city, including the Kitchen (1971), the Institute for Art and Urban Resources/P.S. 1 (1971), Artists Space (1972), and Just above Midtown (1974). Within a few years, grassroots arts organizations were established in storefronts and lofts throughout the country. Among them were Southern Exposure in San Francisco (1974), and/or in Seattle (1974), NAME in Chicago (1973), and Hallwalls in Buffalo (1974).

A second generation of alternative spaces, which began around 1975, tended to focus on new media, diversity, and performance art. These "artists' organizations" included New York's Franklin Furnace (1976) and Printed Matter (1976), which both focused on artists' books; San Francisco's New Langton Arts (1977), which emphasized performance; and New York's Alternative Museum (1975), which presented political and marginalized culture. Between 1981 and 1983, a third generation of artists founded alternatives to the alternatives in the form of commercial galleries in New York's East Village (Fun Gallery, Gracie Mansion, Nature Morte, Civilian Warfare, International with Monument). Even museums became more receptive to "alternative projects." By 1998, more than seven hundred identifiable alternative spaces existed throughout the United States, ranging from occasional publications to nonprofit institutions boasting multimillion-dollar budgets. Local and state arts councils also encouraged these grassroots arts organizations, which sometimes provided the sole cultural nexus in isolated areas and often revitalized old or abandoned real estate for cultural purposes.

Much of the impetus for alternative spaces—as for early conceptual art—was economic, an effort to break the commercial galleries' stranglehold on exhibition opportunities and to overturn the conditions of cultural consumption. By making work that was both noncommercial and not infused with the aura of museum art, the artists involved with alternative spaces sought to prevent the transformation of their artistic production into "a tool of ideological control and cultural



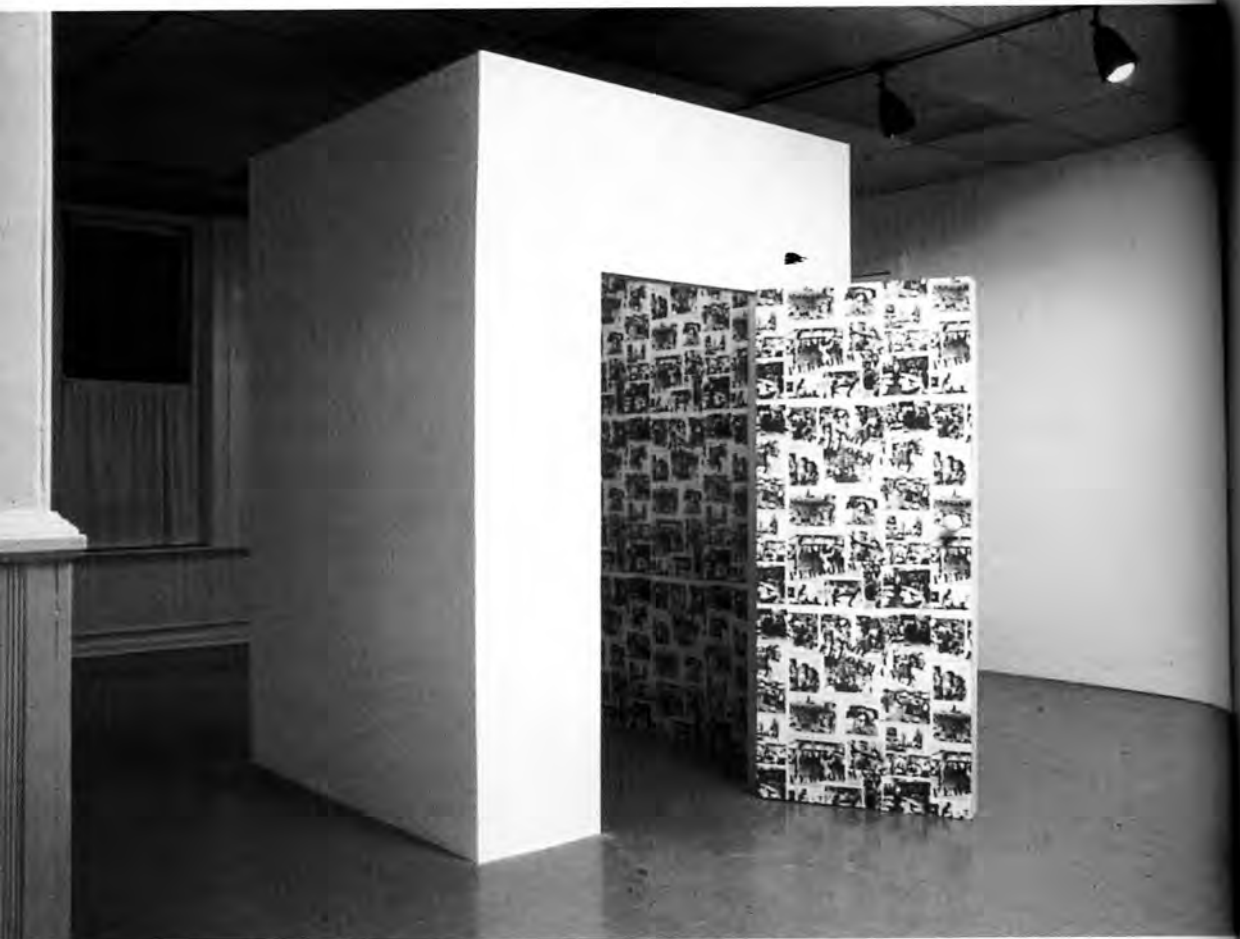
Justen Ladda, *bookburning*, 1981. Site-specific piece at P.S. 37, an abandoned school in the South Bronx. Courtesy of Justen Ladda. Photograph by Martha Cooper.



Justen Ladda, *The Thing*, 1981. Site-specific piece at P.S. 37. Courtesy of Justen Ladda. Copyright TM Marvel Comics Group 1981. Photograph by Martha Cooper.

legitimation.”¹⁰ Alternative spaces facilitated and directly encouraged artistic experimentation that yielded no product or salable art, which therefore would not have served the purposes of the museum or gallery. Such artistic activities or manifestations were often labeled “antiart” and included conceptual art, site-specific installations, artists’ books, and performance art. Not only were these forms not welcome in most conventional art institutions of the early 1970s, but they also seemed to require the sort of raw, quirky contexts that alternative spaces provided.

Central to the opposition to commercial art, then, was a dispute with the preconditions of commercial art, namely, the imposed value system of the “white cube” gallery, with its implied transcendence of time and its focus on the individual art object.¹¹ The art produced in alternative spaces was process oriented and situationally specific, that is, it involved “a relationship between materials, concepts, actions, and locations.”¹² In this sense, the actual sites for production



Adrian Piper, *Art for the Artworld Surface Pattern*, 1976. Courtesy of Adrian Piper. Commissioned for Paris Biennale, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris.

and exhibition were critical elements of the work, particularly as artists explored the politics of spatial and corporeal transgressions. Typically, alternative spaces were located in large, empty lofts or abandoned buildings, and the art shown or created there could often be spontaneous, improvisational, ephemeral, or even dangerous. At 112 Greene Street, for example, artists broke down walls, dug into the basement, hung ropes from the ceiling, covered windows, and set up shop in a dumpster outside. The overriding need to foster artistic freedom and experimentation tended to obscure the novel organizational and funding structures that were being established. One alternative space artist, Roger Welch, has said, "They were spaces run by artists or other non-gallery art people so that artists could work with a sense of freedom and explore their ideas."¹³ The artists' goal was to experiment with new experiential situations, not to make an object or a product.

If this approach to art making was fueled by both idealism and self-sufficiency,



Adrian Piper, *Art for the Artworld Surface Pattern*, 1976. Courtesy of Adrian Piper. Commissioned for Paris Biennale, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris.

so too was the desire to create in alternative spaces a new type of institutional structure. An early article on the movement defined alternative spaces as "neutral, nonjudgmental, nonauthenticating, openly experimental and sympathetic places to house new ideas, [places] unconcerned with traditional amenities like engraved invitations and plaques on the walls, or trustees with connections to IBM or Xerox."¹⁴ Artists sought to formulate loose administrative structures in these venues that were communitarian, antielitist, collective, anticommercial, and culturally diverse.¹⁵ But far from establishing a single institutional model, alternative spaces prompted many hybrid forms of cultural organizations, some preinstitutional (such as the placeless collectives Group Material, Guerrilla Girls, and Gran Fury); some anti-institutional (Colab, Fashion Moda, Public Art Documentation/Distribution, and ABC No Rio); and some deliberately replicating established institutional structures, though with very different content (for instance, the Alternative Museum, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Studio Museum of Harlem).¹⁶ These variable and flexible infrastructures were meant to suit the needs of both the artists and the changing types of art they were imagining. As arts administrator Ruby Lerner pointed out, "A new kind of organization was envisioned: one that would be more adventurous artistically, less bureaucratic in organization, able to respond directly to the changing needs of local artists."¹⁷

A key function of alternative spaces, recognized from the beginning, was their potential to fulfill and to reshape the necessities of the artist: to emphasize the collective struggle of artists and to counter the alienation of the individual artist from the art economy. This was accomplished in part by offering participation in a parallel art system, in which artists had a greater degree of power and control. Many of these spaces were administered entirely by artists, who decided how money would be allocated and whose work would be shown. Even official government support was predicated on the idea that the artists' interests were paramount. According to one NEA publication, "[Alternative spaces] support a range of the artists' needs, particularly for exhibitions of experimental contemporary art. In doing so, they generate a dialogue among local artists as well as between artists and the public."¹⁸

Artists believed the following needs had not been addressed in the commercial gallery or museum context: the need for unions or other democratic collectives not ruled by capitalistic interests; the need for defense of artists' legal and moral rights; the need for the control of exhibition space and artists' housing; the need for monitoring of and protecting artists from specific health hazards; and the need for changes in the distribution of power within the art world. Also important to many artists were movements toward community organizing, both social (identity formation, particularly in ethnic neighborhoods) and physical (adaptive reuse of old buildings and the formation of artist districts). Many of these issues were origi-

nally promoted by groups affiliated with early alternative spaces, such as the Art Workers' Coalition and A.I.R.

Although a principal impulse of the alternative spaces was the requirement to be nonprofit and anticommercial, this did not preclude the need for fund-raising, and the collision of these contradictory tendencies led to the development and implementation of many novel funding schemes. For instance, 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street in New York's SoHo was founded in 1970 in a space owned by an artist with some seed money from the uncle of a friend. Artists Space in New York was established in 1972 as a pilot project of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA); Trudie Grace, head of NYSCA's Visual Arts Program, became the organization's first director. Even more unusual, San Francisco's 80 Langton Street was founded in 1975 by the local art dealers' association.

While it might seem ironic that the federal government would be involved in funding such deliberately alternative or even antisocial arts projects, from the start there was a certain logic to the reciprocity between the NEA and the alternative arts movement. The NEA was created in 1965 as part of a larger group of welfare proposals put forth by President Lyndon B. Johnson. It was meant to aid state policy by helping to achieve three specific ideological goals: to strengthen a sagging sector of the economy, to promote American cultural values abroad, and to make culture available to all Americans at home. As cultural critic Grant Kester notes, however, "in none of these early arguments are artists themselves considered to be the principal recipients or beneficiaries of government largesse."¹⁹ Rather, it was assumed that art and artists would serve the needs of the country in terms of propaganda and international public relations.

Unlike later Republican executives, who sought to eliminate the bothersome arts agency altogether, President Richard Nixon recognized immediately the real potential of cultural programs to serve as Cold War propaganda both at home and abroad. During his two administrations, the NEA received its greatest boost. Under chairwoman Nancy Hanks, who served from 1969 to 1977, the agency expanded greatly, increasing its budget from \$11 million in 1969 to \$114 million in 1977.²⁰ Federal funding for alternative spaces also began in earnest during these years. "We got involved in it from the beginning," noted Brian O'Doherty, NEA director of the Visual Arts Program from 1969 to 1976. "Government support came in at just the right moment. It was a happy accident that the endowment was there when all this started."²¹ In 1972, the NEA began awarding small grants to some artist-run spaces through its Workshop Program; that year, twenty-three organizations were awarded a total of \$203,478.²²

O'Doherty was instrumental in channeling NEA funds to alternative spaces. As an artist himself and an influential art critic (he wrote a classic critique of the conventional art gallery, *Inside the White Cube*), he was directly responsible for aligning support for what he first called "alternative spaces."²³ Although

O'Doherty's interventions within the NEA demonstrated laudable support for the aims of artists, his desire to assist their unconventional art making often bore conventional baggage. He argued, for example, that through alternative spaces "the *best* local artists are brought into the national channel of recognition and national artists are brought into contact with the regions."²⁴ Statements of this sort demonstrate the contradictions of NEA support for alternative spaces. Many of the goals of the NEA were precisely those originally opposed by alternative spaces: the notion of quality ("the *best*"), the shaping influence of the art world star system ("the national channel of recognition"), and the top-down dispersal of artistic credibility (whereby famous "national artists are brought into contact with the regions").²⁵ O'Doherty also fostered the argument that NEA money came with no strings attached, saying, "NEA support is nonintervening and nonideological, that is, it does not make the kinds of demands or impose the kinds of pressures that would fall on an organization supported solely by a popular base within a community."²⁶

Contrary to this view is considerable evidence that by the end of the 1970s "the managerial class of artist/administrators and the NEA's staff transformed the relatively amorphous funding philosophy of the Endowment into a highly nuanced paradigm centered on the artists' space and artist-run organizations."²⁷ This success was noted by O'Doherty's successor, Jim Melchert, who stated in 1977, "There is such enthusiasm for the alternative spaces program that we are not about to change that funding category."²⁸ In 1980, the NEA boasted that Artists' Spaces was one of the visual arts division's "fastest growing categories," with double the application load of three years before. A year later, the NEA highlighted the category in its bimonthly magazine, *Cultural Post*, in an article titled "New Dimensions for Artists' Spaces."²⁹

But already by 1980 others were beginning to have doubts about federal funding for the arts and the direction of the NEA, particularly its investment in the alternative space movement. As an influential transition document prepared in 1980 by the right-wing Heritage Foundation shows, the incoming Republican administration of President Ronald Reagan was encouraged to disregard the agency. Skirting the issue of the artist's role, the report, authored by Michael S. Joyce, criticized the arts for being both too elitist ("the enduring audience for art is largely self-selecting, a relatively small public") and too populist (the NEA has come "to emphasize politically inspired social programs at the expense of the independence of the arts").³⁰ The latter criticism was aimed at initiatives of the Carter administration that had sought greater geographical distribution of grants, but it was typical of the perceived failure by the NEA to identify a widespread consumer demand for art.

As part of a general plan to "privatize" the arts, the Reagan administration began to examine how to make alternative spaces profitable, help them gain private-sector funding, or eliminate them altogether. In 1983, critic Gerald Marzorati

observed, "No one at the NEA is saying that alternative spaces are slated en masse for some Endowment scrap heap. But no one is exactly defending them either."³¹ Reportedly, Visual Arts Program director Benny Andrews initiated a plan that would provide NEA-funded consultants to assist alternative spaces in instituting programs for selling the work they showed. Although this seemed fundamentally contrary to the purpose of alternative spaces, Andrews, a respected artist, argued: "The people who set up the alternative spaces, they kept a certain attitude, an anti-commercial attitude. It's built in—they don't want to sell work. But most artists don't see anything wrong with selling."³² This attitude typified the new acceptance and promotion of the commercial gallery structure under Reagan, but ultimately the plan to tinker with alternative spaces was shelved.

The overtly political attacks on the arts that characterized the early days of the Reagan administration and were later revived by far-right critics of the NEA such as Patrick Buchanan and Senator Jesse Helms were not favored by President George Bush. He responded to the NEA crisis of 1989 by regarding it as a managerial problem. The chairman of the NEA, John Frohnmayer, was dismissed, the rules of granting and accountability were overhauled, and more levels of mediation were placed between the government and "controversial" artists. The Bush administration's handling of the NEA crisis not only returned to the basic practice of shaping U.S. cultural policy through disciplinary management but also demonstrated the politics of brokering, compromise, and conflict avoidance.³³ In a sense, this marked a return to the type of administrative management that had silently shaped the agency—and the alternative spaces it funded—from the beginning.

The significant changes, then, were found less in the types of art that artists were producing than in the types of artists they were compelled to become. Even those who did not move on to successful gallery careers found that they and the alternative spaces with which they were affiliated had gradually been co-opted. "Success and visibility have turned originally rebellious artists' alternatives into full-fledged art institutions with all the bureaucratic trappings that new identity entails," noted one critic. "Not surprisingly, their directors and founders have undergone a similar transformation. Now in their middle to late thirties, they are no longer the politicized idealists of the 1960s who initiated these radical projects; they have become professional art administrators."³⁴ This shift was more than a practical necessity; it was a concrete demonstration of what philosopher Michel Foucault called "governmentality," the technique of producing self-regulating, freethinking, and autonomous individuals who conform to the pastoral form of power.

Given that the programs for alternative spaces were developed during the law-and-order Nixon presidency, with its Cold War policies of "containment," it is not surprising that they were governed by a plethora of bureaucratic rules designed both to regulate the industry and to draw artists into a language of administration.

Even while providing subsidies to experimental artists, the NEA effectively neutralized dissent by instilling a self-regulating standard of professionalization: "Artists with good artistic sense could start organizations but that's no longer enough. Now you have to be a financial expert who understands marketing and personnel issues," says arts fund-raiser Jeff Jones.³⁵ Formerly autonomous artists were required, first, to see themselves as part of a professional class. In addition, through the granting process, they were encouraged to give institutionally acceptable shape to their practices through the conventional managerial means of planning, performance, and accountability. For the first time, many artists had to explain what they were going to do before they did it, then do it.

Professionalism also had an economic aspect: "professional artists" contributed to the general economy not only through the artistic products they made but also through their cultural capital, a certain level of competence or expertise based on degrees of education and experience. Many alternative spaces, such as Artists Space in New York, were established primarily to help young and unaffiliated artists become established in their professional field, the implication being that gallery representation was a desirable goal. Others regularly sponsored programs like Just above Midtown's popular seminar "The Business of Being an Artist." The NEA regularly provided information and specialized training for artists, arts administrators, and arts educators to increase their "professional" skills.³⁶

Moreover, there is evidence that the NEA was established, at least in part, with the specific idea of organizing and improving the business of the arts. Cultural policy expert Richard A. Peterson notes that in 1965, when there were calls for government funding to cure the "costs disease" of the arts, many critics argued that what was really needed was better management: "The professionalization of arts managers was one of the recommendations of the Rockefeller Panel Report [*The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects*, 1965] that . . . was influential in shaping the structure of the National Endowment for the Arts. The need to upgrade the managerial skills of arts managers was a continuing theme through the 1970s."³⁷

The NEA guidelines also served to bureaucratize the alternative spaces, particularly in ways that could serve the economy. First, just as artists were professionalized, so too were the managers of the new exhibition spaces. These managers, most of whom were neither artists nor formally trained museum directors, were forced to adhere to specific administrative programs. Most alternative spaces were reconstituted as nonprofit organizations to qualify for NEA grants, matching grants, and tax benefits; this meant they were compelled to have a formal hierarchy and a board of directors and to be legally and fiscally accountable. As Robyn Brentano wrote in a book on the history of 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, "Although the grants insured that the workshop could continue free from commercial considerations and the special interests of private funding, their advent in turn created new demands—for policy, scheduling, budgets and record keeping—

things which necessitated an administrator and threatened to put an end to the anarchic, spontaneous flow of events in the space."³⁸

In an early article speculating on the impact of government funding on arts organizations, sociologist Paul Dimaggio theorized that the very structure of the granting process would require a minimum level of administration. Grant applications and reviews would require administrative staffs for preparation, accounting staffs for audits and budgets, and grant writers to prepare mission statements and other formal proposals, policies, and plans.³⁹ These administrators also had to function as mediators between the artist and the state, as well as other donors. In collaborating with the NEA as peer-panel participants and even in drafting some of the language of grant materials, alternative space administrators helped to formulate cultural policy.

The NEA sought to foster new artistic developments, yet it provided little encouragement for odd or unrecognizable—that is, alternative—business structures. Instead the agency encouraged alternative spaces to become more like other cultural organizations; small groups were urged to adopt conventional structures like the ones they had been founded to oppose. The twin themes of an NEA-sponsored conference on alternative spaces held at the Contemporary Art Center of New Orleans in 1981 were professionalizing the management of artists' spaces and forming a national membership organization. The result is, as Judy Moran and Renny Pritikin of New Langton Arts point out, "Structurally, artists' organizations today have come to resemble museums—the consensual anarchy of the early years having by necessity faded away to a more traditionally hierarchic form."⁴⁰

The expectations of the NEA in this regard were undoubtedly fueled not only by a desire to curb the unruly managerial habits of untrained artist-managers but also by the current vogue for arts administration. The first college course in arts management was offered at the New School for Social Research in New York in 1963, then the real heyday of the movement occurred during the late 1970s, precisely coincidental with the alternative space movement. As Richard Peterson notes, between 1976 and 1981 the number of postgraduate arts administration programs in the United States doubled, from twelve to twenty-four.⁴¹

In the beginning many alternative spaces had managers or directors who were artists and who accepted these jobs by default, but later most hired professional directors trained in mediating between artists, their patrons, and audiences. In effect, these directors were acting as culture brokers. Their role as mediators was to create a compromise between the two parties, the NEA as sponsor and the artists as grantees. Richard Kurin, director of the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, wrote: "Culture brokers act within the parameters of their own professional conventions. For many these are twofold: the practices of their institutions . . . and the practices of their disciplines or fields of

knowledge." But, Kurin continued, this benign description belies the manipulation and compromise necessary to brokering: "As culture brokers manipulate their own and collaborating institutions, they necessarily demand compromise in order to effect agreements between divergent parties."⁴²

For the most part, this collaboration between the NEA and alternative spaces was beneficial to avant-garde artists, who came to anticipate individual grants, support from alternative spaces, and relative autonomy. But at the same time, with relatively minimal NEA investment, the union furthered certain state interests: boosting local economies (through the gentrifying influence of artists' organizations in certain neighborhoods, particularly in small cities), reviving old buildings (particularly abandoned government or industrial facilities), promoting research and development (by offering "laboratories" or "institutes" for creative experimentation in the knowledge industry), and providing training for underemployed citizens (highly educated artists). Thus, what can be read from one angle as a successful takeover of the governmental cultural apparatus by artists might from another view be seen as a textbook case of governmentality in action.

In his famous lecture on governmentality in 1978, Michel Foucault sought to reconsider conventional notions of power.⁴³ In particular, he was trying to understand shifts in the notion of governance that occurred in political philosophy in the sixteenth century (coincidental with the origins of modernity). In analyzing the simultaneous rise of reformist religion and the triumph of sovereignty over feudalism, Foucault noted the emergence of a new, "pastoral" form of power. As opposed to the doctrine of governance proposed in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, in which the differences or discontinuities between princely and other forms of power must always be controlled, pastoral power desires and requires two-way continuity. An upward continuity requires the leader to learn to govern, principally from guidebooks and other forms of education. With a downward continuity these same rules of leadership and management are applied to domestic and everyday situations. Instead of a top-down centralized authority, power is dispersed across a wide range of self-regulating individuals and local circumstances. Thus, concludes Foucault, "it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality."⁴⁴

One of the disheartening conclusions to be drawn from Foucault's notion of governmentality is that even oppositional identities can be—or, perhaps, always will be—harnessed to the larger systems of social production and reproduction. Indeed, one might argue that oppositionality itself is a constitutive and programmed part of social organization. While the artists and organizers of alternative spaces always feared some sort of "institutionalization of dissent" through their liaisons

with the NEA, the true nature of this governmentalist appropriation was quite different from what they suspected.⁴⁵ It was not the case, for instance, that the state (through the NEA) dictated any particular type of art, in terms of style or content. Nor did the state directly proscribe the type or location of the new art institutions. Rather, through a series of regulatory guidelines, the agency established a new subject, the “professional artist,” and a new form of administration, the “artist-run organization.”

Whenever sponsorship is involved in facilitating the production of art, some forms of social control or censorship are also involved. But in the case of the NEA’s patronage of alternative spaces, social control supplanted censorship. This fact is



David Wojnarowicz, *Sex Series (Bridge)*, 1988–89. Courtesy of PPOW, New York. Photograph by Adam Reich.

particularly sensitive with respect to alternative spaces, which were established to ensure maximum autonomy for the individual artist. As Nello McDaniel, president of Arts Action Research, has explicitly stated, "Any time a small group tries a new structure and is forced back into a traditional mode because guidelines require certain quantitative procedures, this is retaliation."⁴⁶ In reviewing the ways the NEA exerted control over alternative spaces, it is important to consider several factors: social control as compliance (professionalization); social control as institutionalization (models of practice); social control as nondeviance (compliance); social control as utility (product making, market value); and social control as publicity (government patronage strengthening ideological control and providing symbols of legitimacy for government programs and activities). These regulatory features, while less obvious than other forms of control, dramatically delimit alternative artistic practices. "Artists are not exempt from the social control exerted by occupational norms," sociologist Steven Dubin has observed. "Rather, they can be likened to scientists, who also operate in a regulated sphere of symbolic inquiry."⁴⁷

In recent years, the gradual withdrawal and reallocation of NEA funds have created a sort of Darwinian ethos in the world of alternative spaces. Many of the smaller and more fragile spaces have ceased to operate or have become "virtual spaces." Those that have survived have become larger and more like those institutions they once challenged. The Institute for Art and Urban Resources/P.S. 1, for instance, has merged with the Museum of Modern Art. Whether this indicates a triumph or an evisceration of the values once espoused by artists of the alternative space movement is a point for debate. But what surely has been lost in the art world is the original, political motivation for alternatives of all kinds.⁴⁸

Notes

1. On the culture wars, see Carole S. Vance, "The War on Culture," *Art in America* (September 1989): 39–45; Richard Bolton, ed., *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: New Press, 1992); and Brian Wallis et al., eds., *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). On the sex panic, see Lisa Duggan, "Sex Panics," *Artforum* 28, no. 2 (October 1989): 26–27; and Carole S. Vance, "Reagan's Revenge: Restructuring the NEA," *Art in America* 78, no. 11 (November 1990): 49–55.

2. For a brief discussion of the "excess of democracy" as developed in the Trilateral Commission's *Crisis of Democracy* (1975), see Brian Wallis, "Democracy and Cultural Activism," *Democracy: A Project by Group Material* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 5–10.

3. This funding category of the Visual Arts Program of the NEA was called Workshops when it was established in 1972. In 1978 the category name was changed to Workshops/Alternative Spaces; from 1980 to 1981, the name was Artists' Spaces; and from 1982 to 1995, it was Visual Artists' Organizations.

4. In 1996 the WPA went bankrupt and, ironically, was absorbed by the Corcoran as a "department."
5. Robert Bedoya, director of the National Association of Artists' Organizations (NAAO), quoted in Robert Atkins, "On Edge: Alternative Spaces Today," *Art in America* 86, no. 11 (November 1998): 57.
6. On the reformation of the NEA, see Brian Wallis, "Bush's Compromise: A Newer Form of Censorship," *Art in America* 78, no. 11 (November 1990): 57-63.
7. Allan Schwartzman, "Alternative Art Spaces: Survival of the Nimblest," *New York Times*, February 20, 1994, sec. 2, 1, 29. A useful contemporary source on the alternative space movement is Joan Jeffri, *The Emerging Arts: Management, Survival, and Growth* (New York: Praeger, 1980), especially 106-29.
8. Kay Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," *ArtNews* 76, no. 8 (October 1977): 34.
9. Schwartzman, "Alternative Art Spaces," 1.
10. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art, 1962-1969)," in *L'art conceptuel, une perspective* (Paris: Musée national d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1989), 53.
11. On the "white cube," see Brian O'Doherty, "Inside the White Cube: Notes on the Gallery Space," *Artforum* 14, no. 7 (March 1976): 24-30; "Inside the White Cube: The Eye and the Spectator," *Artforum* 14, no. 8 (April 1976): 26-34; "Inside the White Cube: Context as Content," *Artforum* 15, no. 3 (November 1976): 38-44; reprinted as *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
12. Jacki Apple and Mary Delahoyd, *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview, 1969-1975* (New York: The New Museum, 1981), 5.
13. *Ibid.*, 30.
14. Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 33.
15. There has been considerable debate about the perception that the largest—and most extensively funded—alternative spaces are overwhelmingly white male establishments. When the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art held the conference "Alternative Visual Arts Organizations" in April 1978, women artists and artists of color protested that no nonwhite artists or administrators were present.
16. For these distinctions, see Julie Ault, "For the Record" and "A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists' Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965-85," in this volume.
17. Ruby Lerner, "Artists' Organizations," in *The Modern Muse: The Support and Condition of Artists*, ed. C. Richard Swaim (New York: ACA Books, 1989), 92.
18. *Cultural Post* 6, no. 1 (May-June 1980): 33.
19. Grant H. Kester, "Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public," in *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, ed. Grant H. Kester (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 106. This is a particularly insightful and valuable essay.
20. On the early history of the NEA, see Edward Arian, *The Unfulfilled Promise: Public Subsidy of the Arts in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Livingston

Biddle, *Our Government and the Arts: A Perspective from the Inside* (New York: American Council on the Arts, 1988); and C. Richard Swaim, "The National Endowment for the Arts, 1965 to 1988," in *Public Policy and the Arts*, ed. Kevin Mulcahy and C. Richard Swaim (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982).

21. O'Doherty, quoted in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 35.

22. NEA Annual Report (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1972).

23. O'Doherty exhibited as an artist under the name Patrick Ireland. As a critic, he wrote *Inside the White Cube*.

24. O'Doherty, quoted in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 38.

25. Some sense of the official criteria that NEA peer panels employed in judging alternative spaces can be gleaned from the report of the 1980 Artists' Spaces panel of the NEA. The panel reviewed 170 applications and recommended 97 grants totaling \$907,050. According to a report in *Cultural Post*, "Panel tended to support organizations that: present high-quality work; maintain innovative exhibition or program schedules; offer opportunities to young or emerging artists; provide services to the local community of artists" (*Cultural Post* 6, no. 1 [May-June 1980]: 33).

26. O'Doherty, quoted in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 35.

27. Kester, "Rhetorical Questions," 114.

28. Melchert, quoted in Larson, "Rooms with a Point of View," 38.

29. Stephen Sinclair, "New Dimensions for Artists' Spaces," *Cultural Post* 7, no. 1 (May-June 1981): 1-4.

30. Michael S. Joyce, "The National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts," in *Mandate for Leadership*, ed. Charles L. Heatherly (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 1981), 1055-58.

31. Gerald Marzorati, "The Arts Endowment in Transition," *Art in America* 71, no. 3 (March 1983): 9. See also Vance, "Reagan's Revenge."

32. Marzorati, "The Arts Endowment," 13.

33. On Bush's cultural policies, see Wallis, "Bush's Compromise."

34. Deborah C. Phillips, "New Faces in Alternative Spaces," *ArtNews* 80, no. 9 (November 1981): 90.

35. Jones, quoted in Robert Atkins, "On Edge: Alternative Spaces Today," *Art in America* 86, no. 11 (November 1998): 59.

36. See, for example, *Report of the Task Forces on the Education, Training, and Development of Professional Artists and Arts Educators* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1978). Critical to the attainment of professional status for these artists was the formation in 1977 of the first professional group for alternative spaces, the National Association of Artists' Organizations (NAAO).

37. Richard A. Peterson, "From Impresario to Arts Administrator: Formal Accountability in Nonprofit Cultural Organizations," in *Nonprofit Enterprise in the Arts: Studies in Mission and Constraint*, ed. Paul Dimaggio (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 19.

38. Robyn Brentano, introduction to *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists, and Artworks* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), n. p.

39. Paul Dimaggio, "The Impact of Public Funding of Organizations in the Arts," Yale Program on Non-Profit Organizations, working paper 31, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1981).
40. Peterson, "From Impresario to Arts Administrator," 19.
41. Lerner, "Artists' Organizations," 96.
42. Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 22.
43. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104. On governmentality, see also Toby Miller, *Technologies of Truth: Cultural Citizenship and the Popular Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), especially 14-18; George Yúdice, "Civil Society, Consumption, and Governmentality in an Age of Global Restructuring: An Introduction," *Social Text* 13, no. 4 (1995): 1-25; Tony Bennett, "The Multiplication of Culture's Utility," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 4 (1995): 861-89; and Michael Dorland, "Policing Culture: Canada, State, Rationality, and the Governmentalization of Communication," in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, ed. Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), n. p.
44. Foucault, "Governmentality," 103.
45. Sandy Nairne, "The Institutionalization of Dissent," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg et al. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 387-410.
46. Quoted in Lerner, "Artists' Organizations," 96.
47. Steven V. Dubin, *Bureaucratizing the Muse: Public Funds and the Cultural Worker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 179.
48. For one of the best overviews of alternative art and practices, see Josephine Gear, "Some Alternative Spaces in New York and Los Angeles," *Studio International* 195, no. 990 (1980): 68. Gear concludes her article with this advice: "One should recognize the real accomplishments of these truly alternative spaces, in the domain of collective and socially organised art-making rather than profit or prestige-oriented work; in the lowering of barriers between the professional and the non-professional or the maker and consumer of art; and in the overcoming of traditional artistic solipsism."