

EIGHT AND A HALF SPACES
A Study of 'Alternative'
Visual Arts Venues.

by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:-

Much of the information in this paper was based on interviews with people involved in the running of 'alternative' spaces and in the Visual Arts in general. We would therefore like to thank:-

Rob MacDonald & Juilee Pryor of Art Unit
Judy Annear of Artspace
Bonita Ely of Avago
Paul Hewson of Images
Ian Jackson of Butcher's Exhibit
Jill Yates of Shepherd Newman Building
Geoffry & Rose Perrin of Nicholson Street Gallery
Rob Tuckwell of Australian Centre for Photography
Susan Norrie representing Mori Gallery
Ross Wolfe of the Visual Arts Board
Terrence Maloon Art Critic of the Sydney Morning Herald
Peter Thorn of Art Network
and Eloise Lindsay for obtaining the initial comprehensive list
of spaces.

Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty black birds baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,
Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the King?
The King was in the counting house counting all his money,
The Queen was in the parlour eating bread and honey,
The maid was in the garden hanging out the clothes,
When down swooped a black bird and pecked off her nose.

SYNOPSIS:

This paper is divided into two parts. The first deals with the role and operations of eight and a half 'alternative' spaces in Sydney. The second with funding and its influence on their nature and their future.

The Eight and a Half Spaces are examined in order to show the diversification and objectives of 'alternative' venues. The common link is their desire to bring about change, to reflect and make accessible contemporary art within the community.

Operating in the gap between Museums and Commercial Galleries, a very different vocabulary is used, one which is neither pre-occupied with traditional antecedents nor with monetary values but instead with the needs of artists and the creative process.

All these spaces were established by practicing artists who sought to provide facilities for others with similar ideals and to communicate their art to the public. And by so doing shift the society's frame of reference for art and creativity from a position of elite reverence to one which is incorporated into daily life. While practicing artists participate in the running of 'alternative' spaces they remain sensitive to the needs of other artists and break down the barrier between the users and makers of art.

The Eight and a Half Spaces only constitute half the number of recognised alternatives in Sydney. In order to serve all sections of society it is necessary to have at least this diverse range of options.

When looking at 'alternative' spaces it becomes apparent that the most pressing mutual problem is funding. This can be seen as the main obstacle to unity and co-operation between 'artists-run-spaces', as they must compete for funds. Without unencumbered income they are reduced to a marginal existence within the community. Funding is the stumbling block which must be overcome in order for 'alternative' spaces to reach their full potential.

INTRODUCTION

There is a definite place for 'alternative' spaces "that are free from both the restrictions of having to be financially successful enterprises and from traditional taste. State and regional galleries have a responsibility to a wider public, to a more general view and uphold more conservative values. Commercial galleries, although they can support radical innovation, have to keep their eyes on their profits and their clients". [1]. This freedom nurtures creativity, growth and change and provides a positive direction for Australian Art. Therefore these spaces are deserving of close examination in order to fully understand their potential and to locate specific problems which present obstacles to the realisation of that potential.

To facilitate such a study a frame of reference has been drawn up in which a discussion of the terminology, political, social and economic climate with specific reference to Eight and a Half Spaces in Sydney will take place. [2].

The term "alternative space" is in itself problematic. As an umbrella term it implies that all the groups operate in the same fashion and have similar ideals; this is not in fact the case.

Each space grew out of a specific set of circumstances and as a result has its own identity and function. If any general category can be used it could more properly be called "artists' run spaces". This stems from the fact that all these groups have grown from the needs and aspirations of artists and the majority continue to be run by practicing artists. It should be noted that this phenomena is not isolated but has a strong traditional precedent. The present proliferation of artist run spaces in Sydney is almost inexplicable but has been tied to the economic climate.

In order to understand some of the diversification that can come under the heading "alternative" the selected spaces must each undergo examination with reference to its history, current aims, philosophy, activities, support and projected developments both economic and political.

From this foundation it will be possible to identify the problems and benefits of greater co-operation between groups and together with material from the Australia Council, the Cultural

Division of the N.S.W. Premier's Department, Open Sandwich Conference and other involved groups and individuals will facilitate an analysis of the funding and political aspects of "oppositional" art practice.

At the moment only a limited number of people mostly confined to the inner Sydney area have knowledge of and access to many of these Spaces. In most cases this is not due to any structural rigidity; on the contrary most of the organisations are extremely accessible; but to a lack of wide ranging publicity. This is detrimental to both the ability of the space to disseminate cultural developments and in terms of a case for funding.

There is still a considerable factionalization within the "alternative" arena which prohibits a truly representational lobby that could increase the effectiveness of all the spaces. It is hoped that by examining the existence, nature and problems of artist-run-spaces they will be brought to the attention of and better understood by both artists and a wider public to the benefit of all.

- [1] ADAMS, Jude. Continuation or Change? - paper for Open Sandwich, 1983.
- [2] See Appendix I for list of examined spaces and list of other recognised 'alternatives' in Sydney.

PART I

The Spaces.

The Australian Centre for
photography,
257 Oxford Street.

Phone: 356 1455 Workshop
331 6253 Gallery

Executive Committee: of 14
people elected by members.
Director: Tamara Winikoff.
Workshop Administrator:
Leslie Solar.
Gallery Co-Ordinator:
Miranda Lawery.
Workshop Co-Ordinator:
Lisa Hahn.
Office Administrator:
Sue Cooper.
Bookshop: Judy Bell.
Exhibition Committee: 5
practicing artists. (Changing
each year).

The A.C.P. began in 1974, initially it aimed to ".....
fulfill the national role of advancing photography as a visual
art through the exhibition of the work of exemplary artists,
educating both practitioners of the art and an audience for their
work and providing services for people involved in photography as
a visual art" [1].

However it is presently changing both its policy and direction
in order to provide a more open structure and greater participation
in the hope of overcoming their elitist image.

In May, 1981 the A.C.P. moved into larger and better appointed
premises in Oxford Street where they have two gallery spaces and a
bookshop on street level. Above this is the workshop which provides
both black and white as well as colour facilities. The centre also
contains conference rooms, research library and also represents 80
artists in its draws.

The gallery pays for itself exhibiting 12 shows a year. The
work covers a broad spectrum and is not solely that of established
artists but includes new work, graduating students, overseas artists
and subjects of current interest, for e.g. Franklin Dam Issue.
These exhibitions are well attended and draw a very mixed audience
numbering between 180-200 people per day.


In addition the A.C.P. also runs an extensive education pro-
gramme including a public lecture series (held every 2 - 3 weeks),
a gallery forum as well as workshops for students, artists and the
school holidays, and lastly the travelling exhibitions which are
sent both interstate and overseas.

The income of the A.C.P. comes from the gallery, the workshop
fees (State \$), booksales, membership fees and grants from both
Federal and State as well as some corporate funding.

The Centre sees itself as an alternative "..... which strives to serve artists and their audience." [2].

[1] Australian Centre for Photography Newsletter, 1983.
New Directions for the Australian Centre for Photography.

[2] *ibid*



Mori Gallery,
56 Cathrine Street,
LEICHARDT.

Phone: 560 4704

Director: Steven Mori.

Steven Mori left art school in 1972, disenchanted with the existing art system. By 1975 he had given up being a practicing artist. In that year he received a grant of \$75,000 through the school's commission to set up a work experience centre for disadvantaged high school students in Leichardt. Providing arts and crafts training, mechanics and boat building courses, two days a week. The funding lasted one and a half years, with the cessation of income, the operation was forced to change direction. The Gallery continued by taking on the work of art students and young artists calling itself "Students Gallery". In 1978, it was one of the first alternative spaces in Sydney.

The exhibitors and gallery matured "hand in hand" and evolved into a commercial venture, so by 1980, the name "Students Gallery" seemed inappropriate. Still struggling with financial problems Steven saw the need to join the Commercial Gallery Association under the title "Mori Gallery". Remaining in Leichardt he encouraged a new audience in line with his belief that galleries should be decentralized.

Steven Mori will refer young artists to other galleries if he is unable to show their work. About forty people a month approach him for an exhibition. Of this number it is only possible to take on one, as he feels committed to provide time for his regular exhibitors every eighteen months. This commitment extends to mutual support and advice.

There is a flat commission rate of 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % on all sales made by his exhibitors. This generates enough income to maintain the gallery but is not sufficient to produce a living wage. A framing business provides additional money. Steven Mori has applied to the V.A.B. for assistance, however, this application was rejected on the grounds that Commercial Galleries are not eligible. This battle remains unresolved as the V.A.B. funds other Commercial ventures.

Steven Mori, although no longer a practicing artist, remains sensitive to needs and concerns of art. As Susan Norri, long-term exhibitor summed up, "Steven provides an alternative because he is very down to earth and approachable.....art is his main concern, not money" [1].

[1] Norri, Susan- manning Mori Gallery. Interview - 21st April, '83

Images,
27 Glebe Point Road,
GLEBE.

Directors: Paul Hewson
Bruce Searle.

Phone: 692 9980

Images opened in August, 1982 as a "small alternative venue for photography"[1]. It is Paul Hewson's brainchild. As a practicing photographer with working knowledge of alternative photographic centres in New Zealand and Melbourne, he saw the need to establish a similar outlet in Sydney.

This year Paul formed a partnership with fellow photographer Bruce Searle and Images was re-located in new premises. Here they have two galleries; one on each floor and would eventually like to see a darkroom and classes operating in the basement.

Images holds two simultaneous exhibitions which change fortnightly, making up fifty shows per year. Work is selected by the partners on the basis of quality - they are "not interested in big name shows"[2]. The exhibition schedule for this year was filled by April and although there is no so called 'stable' they see no conflict in giving exhibition space to an artist on more than one occasion. No commission is charged however "an exhibiting fee of \$200 per floor per 2 week exhibition is charged all exhibition and administration expenses not met or covered by this fee are paid by the Gallery"[3]. This system of charging covers the rent on the building but does not provide an income for Paul or Bruce. Stock wooden frames are available for the duration of the exhibition at no cost. Publicity is seen as important, press releases are sent out and they advertise regularly in the Metro and they have met with critical approval gaining favourable reviews and support from both Max Dupain and Terrence Maloon.

This Gallery has been able to establish a good rapport with other alternative galleries including Art Unit and Butcher's Exhibit. This has led to an exchange of work, ideas and equipment. Paul Hewson sees Images as operating as healthy competition with A.P.C. he has shown work there and has received assistance from them.

Images is facing financial problems as it is not funded, a situation that they hope will soon be redressed.

To avoid a stagnant situation developing P.H. & B.S. will only continue to operate the gallery for another 2 years after which they will consider selling it to an "ideologically sound buyer".[4].

- [1] Hewson, Paul - Interview 21.6.83.
- [2] ibid
- [3] Images [information for Exhibitors]
- [4] Hewson, op. cit.

Art Unit,
84-86 Henderson Road,
ALEXANDRIA. 2015
Phone: 699 1961

Directors: Rob MacDonald
Juilee Pryor.

Art Unit commenced operations on 8th April, 1982 and is the result of two years research, by Rob MacDonald, into the current and projected needs of artists in the 80's. As a non-profit, artist-run organisation it aims to accommodate a wide range of art practices and media by providing studio and exhibition facilities of an accessible nature and low cost for short periods of time for artist, post-graduate students and the local population.

Facilities include four studios operating on a monthly basis, two large exhibiting rooms, a two person darkroom with black and white photographic equipment, a photocopier, paper and print storage area, a mezzanine projection room for screening, film or slide projections and a small silk-screening area. There is also a plan to acquire an offset printing press for artists books and essays.

However, it is impossible to properly describe Art Unit's aims and facilities in isolation from the ideology which permeates the entire operation. Both Rob and co-director Juilee Pryor espouse the politics of the "social security class"[1]. They believe that this group, ever expanding through increasing unemployment, will inevitably dictate future needs and cultural direction. The art of Rob MacDonald and Juilee Pryor is that of street-level production.

Rob and Juilee will consider anyone's work for exhibition but give preference to first exhibitors, young artists and minority groups. When asked how he chooses shows from the considerable volume of work presented Rob replied, "It's a dilemma, being the arbitrator of taste is a heavy problem and then there's the political overtones. People often want to exhibit here on the grounds of Art Units radical reputation but that's not enough. We don't exhibit people who jump on the fashion wagon - we look for something valid, we talk to people - find out their stance - why here? Why do you want to exhibit?" [2]. Art Unit shows work in any medium and has a good reputation as a music and performance venue. No commission is charged on work sold and all transactions are the responsibility of those exhibiting. The audience is drawn from local people-

(particularly the young), artists, art students and members of minority groups. Advertising takes the form of posters distributed in the Alexandria Newtown area and mailouts to subscribers.

The costs of maintaining and developing Art Unit are vast. The space generates money through an entry charge to some events and holds discos and parties. This is supplemented by subscriptions to activities and both Rob and Juilee have outside jobs.

In October, 1982 the V.A.B. granted Art Unit \$4,800 funding to provide the safety equipment needed for studio operation. Another application for the same amount was rejected in 1983. As it is not a public company with limited liability Art Unit is not eligible for a larger grant from the V.A.B. nor any funds from the Premier's Department. This problem is common to many of the smaller 'alternatives' in Sydney.

The operational life-span of Art Unit is five years. It is hoped that cost and space efficiency will be reached within two years. At this stage membership will be available and an open-ended co-operative will be established to provide members with access facilities. Rob and Juilee will then operate the space for another three years after which they hope to hand it over to others of a suitable ideological persuasion.

[1] Pryor, Juilee - Interview 20th April, 1983.

[2] MacDonald, Rob - Interview 20th April, 1983.

ARTSPACE
Visual Arts Centre Ltd.,
11 Randle Street,
SURREY HILLS.
Phone: 212 5081

Director: Judy Annear
Board: Consisting of 12
members - elected
annually.

Sharing the first floor of 11 Randle Street with Art Network, Art Law and the Art Workers Union, Artspace opened its doors in February, 1983 to reveal a much smaller space than was originally envisaged. Nonetheless it does provide a wide range of exhibitions concerned with contemporary and experimental art, public lectures and seminars, filmscreenings, a national and international link with other centres, encourages the distribution of art information in Sydney and promotes public involvement through its membership. Commenting on the location Judy Annear said "Some people still think of this as a compromise but I think most people with membership are delighted that something is here, something that is actually usable" [1].

This area is then divided up into two gallery spaces. In both cases exhibitions are already booked for this year and involve a variety of media, including performance, film and photomontage. For a greater diversification and due to the prebooking Artspace will not be holding any one person shows this year. However anyone can approach them for an exhibition. For approval, applications go via the director, to a programme committee, which meets monthly and then recommendations are made to the board, before an exhibition space is allocated. As Artspace does not sell work it has avoided the situation of judging work on the possible income an exhibition may return. The selection of work which will be shown, as Ms. Annear explained, is made ".....for a combination of reasons and is not tied up with the people who want to show but with their integrity and how the public is going to relate to that work. That doesn't mean pandering to the public at all, but there has to be some kind of educational value in the work that is going on". [2] As well as advertizing in Metro they send newsletters and mailouts to 500 people including, not only members, but also art critics and other galleries. As one of the major objectives of Artspace is to reach an audience "as diverse as possible"[3] acting as an educator in the community for the dissemination of contemporary art and ideas.

Artspace sees itself as alternative although not in an historical sense, as a political or natural reaction. But alternative in the sense that it is attempting to fulfill a need that exists in the gap between Museums and Commercial galleries. Interested in establishing an alternative space, the Visual Arts Board, in 1981, invited thirty artists and held several public meetings. From these discussions the format and management of Artspace was decided. It was felt that the centre should provide a "venue and focal point for new developments in the visual arts, support facilities and services beyond the reach of individual artists, a meeting place and forum for discussions"[4] as well as a centre for the spreading of new ideas, none of which were being covered by existing galleries. Eventually Artspace received a grant for \$20,000 from the V.A.B. and another from the Premier's Department which supplied half the salary of the director.

However, it was never assumed, that this funding would be continuous nor even in the initial stages, Artspace's sole source of income. And that even as a non-profit organization the centre should be capable of generating funds through membership fees and sponsorship from the private sector. Despite being one of the few centres to receive funding Judy Annear feels there is no conflict with other alternative spaces "each always finds its own role"[5].

Artspace is only in its first stage and plans for the future to provide workshop facilities, to act as a centre where people can meet informally and discuss ideas, to remove "the cultural cringe by educating the public"[6] to introduce an advertising budget in order to widen its audiences and eventually to expand into larger premises. Obviously to make these changes possible more funds are needed and Artspace is promoting the development of sponsorship from the private sector as well as endorsing the 'Visual Arts Lobby' in its call for greater government assistance to the arts.

[1] Annear, Judy - Interview - Wednesday, 11th May, 1983.

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid

[4] Visual Arts Centre - Proposal to Visual Arts Board, 1981.

[5] Annear, Judy - op. cit.

[6] Ibid

The Butcher's Exhibit
20 Palmer Lane,
DARLINGHURST.

Phone: 33 - 4116

Directors: Ian Jackson
Michelle Barta
Jill Moonie.

(Director in absence:
Steven Fasan).

Butcher's Exhibit is run by a group of practicing artists and was initiated by a number of Alexander Mackie students. Ian Jackson, this year's curator, explained the name by stating "We were originally located in a disused butcher's shop in Annandale and didn't want the bias attached to the title gallery, so we called it exhibit"[1]. The "Exhibit" is now in its second year in Darlinghurst and offers an adequate space for the display of "mixed visual media"[2] as well as community access painting and drawing classes.

Work from all over the country is considered for exhibition shows by young artists, first exhibitors and final year students are regularly staged. As an alternative they aim to show work that might not otherwise gain exposure "neither fashion nor market demands dictate the selection of work for exhibition but rather the consideration of formal qualities, and evidence of intellectual input" [3]. In evaluating the work Ian Jackson feels that he must also keep in mind that Butcher's Exhibit is in competition with commercial galleries for both audiences and sales, so therefore cannot afford bad reviews.

For exhibitors the space is available on a weekly rental basis or for shorter periods by negotiation. Butcher's will provide all publicity and an opening for a basic fee or the artist can arrange their own with the use of an established mailing list. A commission of 15% is taken on sales and the artist is expected to assist in organizing the manning of the show. The number of shows varies from year to year, there were sixteen in 1982 and it is hoped there will be twenty this year.

The sole income of the gallery is provided by the money it can generate. In recent times high costs and low returns, as well as the desire to develop the facilities they offer, have lead its directors to consider an application for funding. This is seen as a tricky situation, although additional funds would be advantageous, ideally Butcher's would like to remain autonomous.

Despite financial problems, Ian Jackson is optimistic about the future and believes that Butcher's Exhibit will continue to provide a "flexible public outlet"[4] for art, working harmoniously with both artist run spaces and commercial galleries.

[1] Jackson, Ian - Interview - 21st April, 1983.

[2] ibid

[3] ibid

[4] ibid

AVAGO
13-20 MacDonalld Street,
PADDINGTON.

Curators: Marr Grounds
Bonita Ely
Shayne Higson
Tony Coleing

Avago is reputed to be the smallest gallery in the Southern hemisphere. It was set up by Marr Grounds and Michael McMillen in 1980. "In effect it is a miniature shop front, cuboid in shape measuring approximately 18" by 18". It has a plate glass front and is situated at eye level beside the front door of the MacDonalld Street Factory" and adjoins the Roslyn Oxley Gallery "forming a formidable double attraction for the Sydney art lovers itinerary"[1]. The management of Avago rotates. Tony Coleing and Shane Hickson presided in 1981-82 and the present curator is Bonita Ely, its "fun and democratic"[2], Bonita said.

The gallery will consider all applications however most exhibitions are in reply to an invitation. It's not all fun and games at Avago, Bonita Ely went on to explain "people take a lot of care with their work, they take Avago seriously"[3]. In selecting shows Bonita looks for a sense of humour coupled with an ability to comment on the art world or current politics. Offering no financial incentives, Avago only presents an opportunity for exposure out of the traditional gallery context. Exhibitions last for a maximum of two weeks and artists can make use of the many facilities available. These include a cassette tape loop, lighting effects, a suspension grid and any necessary maintenance of the piece.

Public reaction to Avago is varied, "some people find Avago threatening while others are really delighted, whatever their reaction Avago is a conversation point"[4]. Feedback is received by way of letters, flowers and broken windows "...It's nice to see that art can still stir people up"[5]. Avago's are springing up all over the place. There is Avago-in-'Obart, Student Avago at the Tin Sheds and in the pipeline Avago-in-Soto New York with project officers Ann Katz and Peter Burgess as well as Portable Avago.

In 1980 Avago applied to the Visual Arts Board for a grant of \$32.99 to cover one year's expenditure. It was unsuccessful. Although this application was tongue in cheek it was intended as a comment on the rigidity of the funding system. Avago is now considering making a serious approach to the V.A.B. in the hope of securing a publishing grant in order to produce a second book

documenting its installations since December, 1980.

- [1] Ely, Bonita [Avago - Letter to Potential Exhibitors, 1983]
- [2] Ely, Bonita - Interview - Monday, 6th June, 1983.
- [3] ibid
- [4] ibid
- [5] ibid

Nicholson Street Gallery
BALMAIN.

Directors: Geoffery & Rose
Perrin.

Nicholson Street Gallery opened on the 10th of January this year. Rose and Geoffery Perrin have converted a waterfront warehouse into an excellent exhibition space, capable of showing a wide range of work.

Geoffery Perrin, an ex-Alexander Mackie student and practicing artist, recognised the potential of the space and with the support of an enthusiastic landlord, has initiated a gallery. It is a very personal venture and when the title alternative was suggested, it was quickly rejected by Geoffery who thought "autonomous space" was a more suitable description. The atmosphere is friendly and relaxed, both Perrins are very approachable, choosing to show work they like and that they feel has merit.

Nicholson Street must be seen as an option to the more established commercial galleries, allowing public exposure for young artists, students, first exhibitors and artists whose work, although it may be of a high standard, is not presently fashionable. The gallery pays for itself and funding is not an issue. The commission is 25% and they share half the cost of mounting the exhibition with the artist. As well as using their own mailing lists, advertizing also takes the form of handbills and posters distributed around Sydney and they also make use of the free advertizing in the Herald "Metro". By April this year, there had been seven shows which were quite well attended, audiences being drawn from "friends, friends of friends and the just curious". Nicholson Street has a good rapport with other commercial galleries and would like to encourage a greater art school involvement.

It is still early days in the life of the Nicholson Street Gallery and it is difficult to predict how it will develop in the future. The Perrins, while remaining sensitive to the needs of artists, are not ideologically opposed to running a commercial gallery and this appears to be the road they are travelling.

The Shepherd Newman Building,
Hardgreave Avenue,
DARLINGHURST.

The Shepherd Newman Building is a large converted warehouse in Darlinghurst which provides accommodation and working space for its nine permanent residents, along with a small floating population. It is not truly a communal situation, although there is a strong feeling of support, each floor operates autonomously containing its own living facilities and studio. This enables a diverse range of art practice to operate within the same building. On one floor there is sculpture by Nicholas Cahill, Textiles and Dress design by Jill Yates and Sark Clothing on another, 'Mud Print' downstairs as well as dark room facilities.

In addition to this the basement provides a venue for exhibitions, film screenings, performance and live music. This area as well as being used to display the residents' work, is available for rent, the cost of which varies between \$40 and \$100 a night, plus a share in the door takings. Most of their exhibitions come from or involve the local community. However, bands and private parties have been limited as they could easily over shadow and conflict with the residents' basic aim which is to encourage community access to the arts.

The people at the Shepherd Newman Building feel more aligned with street art than the commercial art world. Yet most of its artists are able to generate some income by producing highly saleable products, including posters and T-shirts by 'Mud Print' and mail order dresses by Jill Yates.

Peter King and Hugh Ramage, who run the silkscreening business, as well as producing a large number of the posters seen around the inner city area, provide the S.N.B. with its own means of advertizing. To increase their audiences radio advertizing on 2JJJ is also utilized.

The Shepherd Newman Building has operated successfully without funding since the early seventies as a living, working and exhibiting environment. Possibly this is due to the fact that a constant situation has been maintained, by limiting the population at any one time to a small number of artists. Its present residents are interested and involved with other alternative spaces, they also believe there is a genuine need to make government funding more accessible.

PART II

PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION, FUNDING
AND THE FUTURE.

"There seems to be as many different definitions of "alternatives" as there are alternative." [1]. To Sydney the recent mushrooming effect of artists run spaces clearly shows the variety of alternatives, ranging from the highly institutionalized 'Art Space' and 'The Australian Centre for Photography' to the radical street level operations of Art Unit.

At one end of the spectrum 'alternative' only offers an increase in resources to the artists and the public already catered for by the established venues. Whereas the other extreme provides for a completely different set of people whose needs are not met or recognised by existing spaces. In fact different needs are answered throughout this spectrum, such as the Mori Gallery, which has decentralized art attracting local audiences from a migrant working class area. People who have never been into a gallery before are buying work. Or Avago, with its shopfront operation, exposing art to a new group of people, the passing crowd rather than the gallery goers.

Despite the philosophical differences all alternative spaces share a number of common motives. These are, to show art that is not commercially viable and oppose the established tradition, hence encouraging creativity and innovation through experimentation.

Such aspirations have a strong historical context and have frequently been precursors to artistic growth. In terms of the historical basis for alternative activities in Sydney the Contemporary Art Society Catalogue of 1941 stated:-

"[The Society offers]...absolute freedom to the Australian artist, imposes no limitations and refuses no work, except that which has no aim other than representation. It is essential that opportunities be provided for showing the work of artists trying to break new ground. No jury has sat upon these pictures, nor do they represent the theories of any particular group. The paramount object of the society is the encouragement of a creative contemporary art. To do this, the society realises it must show at all stages of experiment and discovery". [2]

The sentiments of this statement could apply to any alternative art group from the Salon de Independants to the lifestyle alternatives of the 60's and 70's and back to the individual pursuits of the 80's.

The cycle begins with dissatisfaction. Such places originate from an idea, shared by a small group of people who find themselves confronting common problems and wish to instigate change. For example, the Shepherd Newman Building. At this stage an alternative has ultimate control over its direction and resources. For an alternative space to nurture creativity, the needs of the originators of the new, the "primary producers of art"[3] must dictate the operation.

However, working against them are the factors of time, money and exposure. The work load is immense, there is no financial gratification and existing marginally they cannot effect a change in the community at large. Eventually they must face the question of supplementing their income. The present options for obtaining funds include Government assistance, patronage from the private sector and self generating income.

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE.

There is a limited amount of money available through government departments. In order to be eligible for funds a space must fulfill certain criteria, which include being a non-profit limited liability company, being compatible with the board's current established aims and objectives, it must be unique in its area of influence and should be well supported by local artists and the public should have easy access to membership and participation in its activities.^[4]

These requirements are basically the same for funds from the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the N.S.W. Premier's Department Division of Cultural Activities. Both the Australian Centre for Photography and Art Space fulfill these requirements and receive ongoing grants. For organizations that do not meet these conditions one-off special purpose grants are sometimes given. Art Unit was allocated \$4,000 to enable them to cover fire safety standards.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The Private Sector can be divided into three areas of patronage - Foundations, Companies and Individuals.

Money from private sources is the hardest to attract as alternative spaces offer little or nothing in return. In fact by their very nature artists run spaces and corporate organizations are diametrically opposed. However companies can be encouraged to invest

money, although with strings attached, either as a promotional gimmick or a tax deduction but never gratis. Under these conditions it is advantageous to be registered as a tax deductible beneficiary such as an Elizabethian Trust Member or an educational institution.

A recent funding trend in the visual arts can be seen in Art-Space's campaign to capture corporate and private sponsorship using similar tactics to those utilized by the film industry. This promotion has been given coverage in an article by Terence Maloon which stated "Gough Whitlam and John Coburn launched an appeal for supplementary funds for Artspace. Artspace is endowed by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the N.S.W. Premier's Department but \$500,000 is required to buy and outfit a permanent home for it.....but in general the captains of industry have been reluctant to 'give contemporary art a go' as John Coburn put it"[5]. Another suggestion has been put forward by Rob MacDonald from Art Unit, that Sydney's unfunded "alternatives" form a visual arts trust.

David Kerr shared these sentiments in his Open Sandwich paper when he said, "If money is being given from the private sector the compromises or tied conditions and the inability of alternative arts/projects to attract that money, could be overcome with the establishment of a neutral body (a trust) to handle the money. Such a structure has been developed in the U.S.A. for community welfare projects. It could operate as a parallel to (though more democratically structured) the government funding bodies"[6].

SELF GENERATING INCOME

There are various ways of generating income through the venture itself such as publication sales, restaurant/coffee shops, sales information, sale of services and a charge for events. All eight and a half spaces generate some income through this method.

If an alternative space secures outside funding it forfeits its complete autonomy and certain changes take place. It benefits in so far as, its existence is less marginal and can disseminate new ideas and act as an educator. It can provide a greater range of workshops and facilities and provide employment. "The idea that alternative spaces are becoming employers and involved in job creation....could become one of the major directions for alternative spaces to concentrate on in the near future and in a time of recession job creation is a vital and importance role." [7]

On the negative side funding creates an artificial situation. The original anti-establishment operation is transformed into a bureaucracy, the very thing it opposed. Such bureaucratic controls can ultimately dictate the mood of the venture. For many this price is too high, Nicholson Street Gallery is an example.

The problems associated with the funding of alternative spaces has become a very topical issue. Timothy Pascoe in his draft proposal on funding policies for the Australia Council stated, "Alternative groups frequently give up their initial intention to provide challenging, low cost work once they taste the sweetness of subsidy and success. As such groups develop they seem to gravitate towards the mainstream - also to the traditional and false trapping of excellence/rather than up-date their "alternative" offerings. Perhaps this is because we appear to revere excellence in presentation more than relevance." [8]. Artspace and the A.C.P. should be wary of this as many predict this may be their ultimate fate.

Funding also changes a natural characteristic of artists run spaces. Unaided they are short lived and cannot remain after what they represent becomes incorporated in the society, for acceptable means established. With funding the life span is unnaturally prolonged. They remain only as an obstacle to new developments hiding behind the label "alternative" and can actually obscure the fact that current needs are not met recognised. As Dian Lloyd observed "Once an alternative has been established ipso/facto there is a need for an alternative to that alternative". [9]

A positive step that funded alternatives could take would be to, as Jude Adams suggested, "close up shop" [10]. That is the ability to recognise that the role and function is no longer necessary. This is not to accept defeat but recognise success. Another solution may be to totally reassess the aims and directions of the "alternative" every two years. Art Unit and Images both have this failsafe mechanism built into their structure, even though they are not funded.

However, at present the problems associated with government funding are almost hypothetical for most artists run spaces are either not eligible or unprepared to make the necessary changes to qualify for assistance. Prerequisites such as, non profit, rule out any kind of commercial venture despite the fact that this venue may be providing a unique 'alternative'. Steven Mori, a member of

the Commercial Gallery Association, has questioned the definition of a non-profit organization, siting Art Network as a business venture in receipt of government funding. Butcher's Exhibit with a foot in each camp and a need for funding would also find it advantageous to have this question resolved.

These are some of the reasons which have lead various members of the art community across Australia to recognise the need for a Visual Arts Lobby. There is a lobby in its infancy, however, in order to be effective it must first overcome the existing factionalization. A group of eight people have been meeting since March this year in order to establish a steering committee and organise this lobby. They have sent questionnaires to various visual arts organizations in order to evaluate the needs and desires of a cross section of the art world. An \$8,000 grant from the V.A.B. has been received. In May this year they attended Open Sandwich which was held in conjunction with ANZART ("the second Australia/New Zealand artists encounter, a major showing of experimental work") [11]. The aim of the conference was "to strengthen the position of alternative art spaces by forming an arts lobby, to share experience, to develop strategies, for the future" [12]. It was in fact a V.A.B. assisted forum.

Despite this conference criticism has been levelled at the eight person panel, it has been stated that they are in fact a self appointed steering committee. In reply to this a member, Tamara Winikoff said, "The visual arts in Australia are being set against each other. We really need to work together to reinstate the visual arts". [13]

When examining alternative spaces the real problem of funding is clouded. Words such as "deceptive, suspicious, distrusting and threatening" [14] have been used to describe the situation. In fact everybody wants a larger share of the cake and the V.A.B. just does not have sufficient funds. Of the Australia Council's annual budget the Visual Arts Board receives a mere 5% [15], of which a tiny amount is allocated to alternative spaces.

Strategies for funding is the issue of the 80's. Presently the Australia Council is rethinking its priorities in terms of the Visual Arts. It has been suggested that they should provide increased funds for organizations that innovate, promote co-operative projects across art forms, increase artist in community programmes,

including greater community participation, encourage new job creation schemes and link the arts with daily life.

All these directions are supported by the Arts Policy of the A.L.P. Other moves in keeping with this mutual feeling are; to strengthen Australia's national identity, to promote the arts within the school system, to reflect the diverse ethnic and racial Australian Society, to achieve even and fair distribution of programmes and resources throughout the whole community and develop community participation and decision making. Prior to the Government's election, promises were made to reinstate expenditure to the level experienced in 1975.

All of these moves are pertinent to the present economic climate. "Ensuring that artistic endeavour is part of individual life experience helps to build personal identity and self worth which is a valuable source in any nation at any time but particularly so in the difficult economic and social climate which Australia is presently experiencing." [16].

Interestingly all these activities can only be covered by an alternative approach.

- [1] Lloyd, Dian - Alternative Spaces and Resources (paper for Women's Art Festival Conference, 1982.
- [2] Adams, Jude - Continuation or Change? (paper for) Open Sandwich, 1983.
- [3] Pascoe, Timothy - Setting Priorities of the Second Decade (paper for debate).
- [4] The Australia Council - V.A.B. Programs of Assistance, 1983 See Appendix II.
- [5] Maloon, Terence - Blame it on the Bossa Nova, Sydney Morning Herald, June, 1983.
- [6] Kerr, David - Funding Strategies for the 80's (paper for) Open Sandwich, 1983.
- [7] Adams, Jude - op. cit.
- [8] Pascoe, Timothy - op. cit.
- [9] Lloyd, Dian - op. cit.
- [10] Adams, Jude - op. cit.
- [11] Open Sandwich - Provisions for the Future-Program, 1983.
- [12] *ibid*
- [13] Winikoff, Tamarra - Public Support and Funding in the Visual Arts (conference) Newcastle, 21st of June, 1983.

- [14] Ferguson, Andy - *ibid.*
- [15] Delavour, John - *ibid.*
- [16] Pascoe, Timothy - *op. cit.*

CONCLUSION

Too often Australia's view of excellence has been debased through a national lack of confidence. Second best overseas cultural models have undermined indigenous development. This has taken the form of palatability for meaning, slick for good quality and mediocracy unchallenged in the place of excellence.

'Alternative' Spaces are the expression of contemporary concerns and issues and as such are of vital importance in establishing a true Australian cultural identity. They encourage a wide range of art practice, experimentation and development by providing artists with a stimulating environment, facilities, resources and exhibition space. Artist-run-spaces also provide a meeting place for contemporary art, its makers and the general public. It is a step towards integrating art and the community calling on people for greater participation. The eight and a half spaces examined are an illustration of the diverse ways in which this can be achieved. Even within the small area of Sydney each space offers a unique alternative.

There is a genuine need to supplement the income of such spaces in order that they can effect social change rather than continuing to operate on a marginal plane. To ensure integration of art into every day life, for all Australians, there is a need to increase resources available and develop a concept that will act as an umbrella for these activities across the country. At present the only form of income which poses no restrictions is self generated. In order for Government or private funding to be beneficial it must assume a neutral stance that does not interrupt the natural cycle of 'alternative' spaces. The idea of an unbiased Trust seems most promising.

Alternative Art spaces can instigate and nurture experimental work and new models of cultural production. They can also tolerate failure or tentative beginnings, recognising this as part of the process of new developments. Creativity is a necessary gamble.

POST SCRIPT

On the 25th August, 1983, Rob MacDonald and Juilee Pryor of Art Unit sent the 12th Art Unit Communique to subscribers, friends and supporters. The news was not good; it began "It is with great regret that Art Unit announces the cancellation of our immediate programmes and activities. Art Unit has been forced to close for financial pressures beyond our resources." [1]. The communique continued to explain that the situation had been brought about through "The burden of running a continuous program at Art Unit on a dole cheque and a TEAS cheque with a continued lack of support from the funding bodies." [2]

As of 25.8.83 Art Unit had 14 days to meet the demands of creditors or vacate the premises.

[1] Art Unit - 12th Communique, 25.8.83.

[2] *ibid.*

APPENDIX I

The Eight and a Half Spaces:

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY - 27 Oxford St., PADDINGTON.
MORI GALLERY - 26 Catherine Street, LEICHARDT.
IMAGES - 27 Glebe Point Road, GLEBE.
ART UNIT - 84-86 Henderson Road, ALEXANDRIA.
ART SPACE - 11 Randal Street, SURRY HILLS.
BUTCHER'S EXHIBIT - 210 Palmer Lane, DARLINGHURST.
AVAGO - 13-20 MacDonalld Street, PADDINGTON.
NICHOLSON ST. GALLERY - Nicholson Street, BALMAIN.
SHEPHERD NEWMAN BUILDING - Hardgrave Avenue, DARLINGHURST.

Other 'Alternative' Spaces in Sydney:-

HARDENED ARTERIES - 742 Darlinghurst Street, ROZELLE.
ALPHA HOUSE - King Street, NEWTOWN.
BETAVILLE - King Street, NEWTOWN.
UP CAKE - 15 Harns Street, FAIRFIELD.
ARTARES GALLERY - 275c Pitt Street.
PERFORMANCE SPACE - 199 Cleveland Street, REDFERN.
GLASS ARTISTS GALLERY - PADDINGTON.
INNER CITY CLAY WORKERS - GLEBE.

APPENDIX II

SUPPORT FOR ORGANISATIONS

Closing Dates: 15 July, 1983.

Decision advised: September, 1983.

Purpose:

To assist in making contemporary art more accessible to the public by helping a selected group of organisations establish and maintain 'alternative spaces' for contemporary art in major centres.

The organisations are encouraged to provide, in addition to the exhibition of contemporary work, a forum for lectures and discussions on art, and to disseminate information on the visual arts.

Assistance:

In any given year a small number (from six to ten) of grants are made, ranging from \$3,000 and \$40,000.

Grants are not available for purchase of real property or construction of buildings.

Normally, assistance is initially given for administrative salaries and general expenses, which may be extended to include a component for a year's program of exhibitions and related projects.

Eligibility:

1. The Board requires applicants to be incorporated under local State legislation and aims to maintain general purpose funding for a period of three years only from the time of initial selection. During that three-year period of support by the Board, applicants are expected to seek funding from private sponsorship, State and local government sources.
2. The Board will rarely make grants after three years for general purposes.

CRITERIA

1. Apart from being incorporated, the applicant should be able to demonstrate that its operation does not duplicate the operation of another organisation within the area of influence.
2. The organisation should be well supported by local contemporary artists, and the public should have easy access to membership and participation in its activities.
3. See Criteria for Grant Assessment on page 4.

Special Requirements and Conditions

1. Grants will not be available to State, regional, non-State or local government galleries or institutions directly and fully funded by the Australian Government, or organisations operated for financial or commercial gain.
2. The organisation must have genuine public access and the regular display of works of art.
3. The organisation must have a full-time professionally qualified and experienced director, appointed after public advertisement.
4. The organisation must be incorporated as a non-profit company and have a board selected by a membership.
5. Successful applicants will be required to provide audited annual accounts, an interim finance report, a written report, fifteen copies of catalogues and other promotional material relating to exhibitions funded, and a list of public attendances at exhibitions funded.
6. Successful applicants must ensure that the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council is publicly acknowledged at all times.
7. Successful applicants will be required, as a condition of grant, to pay Australian artists exhibition participation fees.
8. See Notes for Applicants on page 5.

Contact/application forms: Project Officer - Visual Arts Non-Performing Arts Organisations Unit - telephone (02) 923 3364.

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