

Contained within are writings submitted by peers involved with Chicago domestic artspaces -- both as facilitators and observers -- who accepted our invitation to address this latest trend in exhibitions with some tough love. This booklet will only be printed for the FLAT 4 event, but the writings may have their own life online or offline.

An optional questionnaire had been included with the initial invite.

A warm thanks to Anthony, Caroline, Lucia, Ben, Brandon, Liz, Eric M., Claudine, Jennifer, Dan, Chris, Mike, Jaime, Rob, and Erik W.

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Anthony Elms

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Note: the following is a short excerpt from "*Do you work hard? Do you try hard? You don't. Chicago, now!*", an article that Anthony published via the French periodical *May*, prior to our sending out invites to submit articles.

"To again ask the question: Why does Chicago, both within the city limits and abroad, have a reputation for harboring an independent spirit throughout the arts? It would be nice to answer: politics. But no. Narrowing consideration to only the visual arts, the independence of Chicago is a response to some hard facts: financially, Chicago has a fairly barebones and frugal art scene. A young artist in this town cannot hope to have his developing works featured prominently by the New York Times or Artforum, forging a position as a breakaway talent, and few established artists in this town will have mature works plucked for major focus by MOMA or the Whitney Museum of American Art, casting them as a crucial maker in the international aesthetic dialogue. This keeps the capital worth of artwork – both monetary and cultural – in Chicago to a modest level. There is no Chicago-based artist under 40 with a team of paid assistants working to please collectors-in-waiting. This star-making arm of the art market is largely muted in part because no major visual arts media sees in Chicago's galleries an irreplaceable and powerful base, and the local newspapers see the art scene as below their focus. This lack of attention by the media market draws fewer collectors to commercial galleries and artists exhibited therein, resulting in less pressure on local major art institutions to compete in the increasingly global-sized aspirations of the art world by putting forward Chicago-based artists showing regularly in Chicago galleries. When championing the independent nature of so much of the visual arts culture in Chicago, what is actually championed is market failure."

<http://www.mayrevue.com/issue2/Elms>

Caroline Picard

<http://thegreenlantern.org>

Reprinted from *The Artist Run Chicago Digest* (threewalls/Green Lantern Press)

On the matter of public (1) space : or my apartment gallery is an arctic explorer

“Oh, you have a roommate?”

“ ‘Yeah, she’s actually here right now, but she’s sick....Don’t do that—she’s trying to sleep.’

“I heard them but pretended to remain asleep by keeping my eyes closed; [closing your eyes] is what passed for privacy then. My ‘room’ was in a corner of the kitchen on the other side of a folding screen. If you were tall enough, you could see me from either side at any time. The above exchange took place during the installation of a show when I happened to have a cold. I lived at the Green Lantern from 9/06 to 8/07. Recently out of college, I moved to Chicago to get my bearings. I had just spent two years living in the French countryside with no heat, no car, no Internet, no noise, no zines, no sushi, no shows, no jargon. When I moved in, I had never owned a computer. Suddenly I was in the middle of an art scene.

“Any Chicagoan who’s hip to the jive knows that an apartment gallery poses a unique set of problems. Someone actually lives there—sleeps and cooks and poos there—and yet the obligatory neutral space of the gallery must remain white-walled, spacious, antiseptic. At the GL in the earlier days, the gallery was clean, airy, spare, while on just the other side of a makeshift wall was a seething and barely-controlled chaos. A visiting friend once described the living space as ‘under a great deal of pressure,’ like the lack of density in the gallery half had to be balanced by ultra-density in the living half. This density consisted of, among other things, a large mounted buck complete with antlers, a five foot plaster statue of a fat man with an umbrella, a bong made out of steak shellacked to a milk carton, a taxidermied rooster, two large Chinese screens, many works of art in various stages of undress, two living cats...enough plates and stemware to host a diplomatic gala, a sink doubling as a bookshelf, a home-made up-ended ‘bar,’ an enormous vintage fridge, a miniature vintage stove, an easel, double-stacked books, innumerable trinkets ranging from delicate Eastern figurines to an ancient can of spam, an old-fashioned sandwich press, two Dictaphones, one enormous toaster (not in use) and a tiny one (in use). People liked throwing around comparisons to Alice in Wonderland, but that was legit. The fact that the two-foot high pepper mill was three times as tall as the delicate teapot, for instance, made me wonder if I’d accidentally swallowed a pill. And keep in mind that I’ve listed perhaps a sixteenth of the contents of those two or three improvised rooms. I haven’t even mentioned

the huge quantities of building supplies, the aluminum ladder, the planks and tools and cans of paint..." (2)

This book is filled with the evidence of relationships. It is a book of conversations, including conversations about conversations and, sometimes, conversations about conversations about conversations. Each perspective constitutes one piece of an artist-run community reflecting on its endeavors. While it is important to archive these conversations for the community to which it speaks, it is also important to examine the consequences of such a culture in the context of a larger world—a world unfamiliar with the pattern of organizations described herein. Particularly if the conversations outlined here claim to cultivate new models for achievement, one must consider what the artist-run community looks like from the outside, from the vantage of a stranger.

What, indeed, is transgressive about artist-run exhibition spaces? Certainly those contained in this book will have their theories and while some of these organizations were constructed as political experiments, a number of them won't characterize their activity as political at all, saying instead that running a space is done for personal/professional experience, or as an experiment, or a labor of love. And yet. Regardless of stated intentions, all action is political.(3) Such an opinion comes from within a community where the practice of running an apartment gallery is fairly common.(4) In order to categorize such activities as transgressive or political, one must label them somehow. In doing so, necessary comparisons must be made to the world at large. Generalizations must be made about what the world at large consists of, what expectations it places upon members of its society and, ultimately, how its constituents measure themselves. Other generalizations must then be made about the smaller niche of artist-run communities, in order to discover the tension between them.

When compared to the world we watch on television, the practice of apartment galleries seems absurd. (5) Compared to the stories told via sitcoms and commercials, all young women want to get married, everyone desires fame and all clothes look brand new. Obviously the average viewer is literate enough to know that television is a fictionalized hyper-reality. Nevertheless as a primary source of cultural consumption, most viewers recognize subtle conventions that support the more prominent story lines. A home, for instance, means something specific. As a cultural symbol it provides the framework for countless many sitcoms—a framework based on common expectations of what a home should supply to its occupants. The viewer won't likely conceive of their living room as a potentially public place, a place for cultural distribution. Building a public environment of cultural creativity in one's home challenges traditional boundaries between public and private spheres just as it encourages intimacy between the art object and its epicyclic community. In such a community, relationships become as important as

the work on display and validation occurs through non-monetary, communal support.

The collusion of public and private space, mixed with a living contemporary art and the communities that support it, is transgressive in and of itself. Such a recipe breaks down the societal expectations of public activity. Furthermore apartment galleries

agitate common definitions of “home” and “domestic space.” The people who inhabit apartment galleries organize their homes according to the possible descent of an unknown body of people: the public. Meanwhile the public modifies their expectation of public space such that they are sensitive to the generosity of their hosts. A code of behavior has manifested between the host and the public. That code, while organic in its inception, facilitates the relationship between the audience, the art and their administrative hosts. While that code is not readily apparent, (6) Sarah Stickney witnessed that code as a newcomer only to embrace it as a resident.

In Chicago, the public consumption of visual art is not allowed by law to exist in intimate settings, (the house, the apartment, the garage, etc.,). The apartment gallery is essentially illegal. The illegality of these spaces occurs when they struggle for some shred of sustainability (i.e. through the selling of goods),(7) attempt to operate legally (by way of purchasing the necessary licenses and tearing through the ensuing red tape of bureaucracy), or when they attempt to avail themselves to a larger audience, one not restricted to Facebook friends. (8)

Obviously that isn't to say apartment galleries don't happen, or (even) that city officials don't in some blind-eye-manner endorse cultural DIY activity; the city of Chicago seems to enjoy identifying itself with those practices.(9) Nevertheless, said practices are not technically allowed. Thus, while a private party is acceptable, a publicized, public exhibition is not—especially when money changes hands. The city maintains its ability to control the watering holes this community frequents; the city can shut apartment galleries down.(10)

In our day and age much of the cultural production that takes place within the art world has been tamed and funneled into pre-existing power structures that support the larger mainstream. Artists often seek gallery representation, striving to achieve standing in the commercial market, such that they might support and (thus) justify their art making practice through the pursuit of public acclaim and monetary compensation. It makes sense. It is almost impossible to expect anything else. After all, how does an artist justify spending hours reading, thinking, painting and writing in a studio while his or her significant other goes to work sixty hours a week in order to support both of them? And what if the artist has a child? How does the artist explain his or her non-commercial and largely interior processes when a kid needs school clothes? It is perhaps impossible to strive through consumer culture,

where legitimacy is typically measured by purchasable signs of success—homes, cars, televisions, computers etc., making objects that are neither compensated by monetary sums nor attributed with an inherent non-market value. Indeed, on such a quest the consumer landscape becomes a veritable wilderness.

It is thus essential to create alternative methods of public validation. Exhibitions are one way to take a potentially monkish studio practice and drop it into the public sphere in which an audience can respond. Apartment galleries, while affording meager monetary relief, at least appeal to different values, values based on esteem and reputation—ambiguous, difficult-to-define attributes. In Chicago, they seem accrued by way of hard work, talent and generosity. Within such a community an artist with little to no interest in (or access to) the commercial world can relate to an audience comprised of other artists, art enthusiasts and, sometimes, the uninitiated. Further, they can contextualize their efforts to their family, the spouses or parents that might support them. The apartment gallery provides a different criterion for validation and empowers small groups of individuals to cultivate unique and potentially iconoclastic aesthetics.

Aside from those bastions of non-traditional/non-commercial artistic production, most cultural activity is distributed via mainstream arteries that reach millions of people at once. The same television shows are watched, the same movies, the same news sources owned by the same parent companies. Most people listen to the same music, read the same books and, therefore, refer to the same common body of knowledge. Contemporary America has a common vocabulary of cultural symbols that comprise the dreams of the individual. It is possible, for instance, that Tom Cruise made over a million cameos in dreams across the country last night. While the peculiar context for his manifestation would vary, he is nevertheless saddled with very similar associations, associations that stem from his public persona. As the mechanism of such a society continues, as the material for our thoughts sets, it will be harder and harder to transcend those ideas we take for granted: ideas about what a home is supposed to be, for instance. As we get locked into unconscious expectations of the world, it will be harder and harder to have new ideas, moments of inspiration, and innovation in which we might transcend ourselves.(11)

I believe that small hubs like the apartment gallery, the small record label, the small press, the underground movie theater: such venues generate and sustain micro-cultures that encourage unpredictable thoughts, ideas and enthusiasms. If anything, they might simply encourage people to believe once more in the capacity of the individual to influence the world. Exploring the tension between public and private, commercial and non-commercial, regulated and non-regulated business is good and valuable. It's worth always carving out our own identities, our own terms and communities, means of support, and methods of validation.

FOOTNOTES

1. vs. Private
2. Excerpt by Sarah Stickney from It's Your Turn, a silk-screened zine edited by Young Joon Kwok and Rachel Shine. Printed in an edition of 90 in June of 2009.
3. John Huston, the Arctic explorer, gave a lecture about an expedition he conducted where he traveled, primarily on foot, along the Northwest Passage. The Northwest Passage had long been sought after. In the 1800's, Norwegian and British ships set out to discover a passage that would improve shipping routes. It was never found in the 1800's because it never existed. Those expeditions only ever found ice. Last year, the Northwest Passage came into being for the first time. Climate change has melted enough ice such that a passage opened up, connecting the Arctic and Pacific Oceans. Just this summer John Huston walked along its bounds. He suspects that in years to come the unassisted expedition he conducted with expedition partner Tyler Fish will be impossible. In the years to come there will be no ice upon which to walk. I suggested that his journey was political, that it had the appearance of a quiet protest. In walking so many miles with so much risk he was calling attention to the ways in which we are destroying our environment. He denied the interpretation, saying instead that he was only interested in the application of the human spirit against terrible odds. While I understand that he has his own intentions, I also cannot avoid interpreting those same actions in a different, and in this case, political, light.
4. Me for instance: I started the Green Lantern Gallery & Press in 2004. Over the last four years I have hosted between six and eight exhibitions a year. I have hosted countless other public programs, including live music events, screenings, performances and readings. Working with Nick Sarno, Editor for the Green Lantern Press, we have published ten small edition books. In 2007 we achieved 501c3 status. In 2009 we closed the gallery portion because we did not have a business license. Throughout this process I have lived in the gallery, assuming my day-to-day life as though the public might, at any moment, descend upon it. I am thus sensitive to the nebulous boundaries prescribed by such a vocation.
5. A real estate agent once bought a copy of the Phonebook Annual Index of Alternative Art Spaces from me. Her eyes were big and wet with this million-dollar idea: She wanted to rent a storefront out to artists. It made sense to her that artists would pay for exhibition space. It made sense to her that they would pay more than a store because their occupancy would rotate over shorter periods of time; further she felt she would do some larger service to the neighborhood. We shared a mutual bafflement as I explained that, by and

large, artists did not pay for exhibition space. "The spaces in this book?" she asked, shaking the Phonebook. "Definitely not those spaces," I said. She asked me how anybody made money. I said, "With the exception of a few commercial galleries, nobody makes any money at all." She asked me how people made a living. I think I shrugged.

6. A friend of Sarah's, call her Jennie, came through town once. Jennie was in the midst of what she called a "journey," leaving an old life behind in search of a new one. She left a girlfriend in Portland. She was in the process of buying a car from that ex-girlfriend's parents, parents who happened to live in the Midwest. Jennie and I went out for drinks the first night. We had a great time. She was full of anxious enthusiasm and kept shaking her hands in the air, as though to exorcise the frenetic energy of transition. Because the gallery was between exhibits, she slept on the gallery floor.

After a few days, Sarah and I realized that we didn't know when she planned to leave. She was waiting on the suburban parents who couldn't find the necessary papers to change the car's registration. Over the course of ensuing days the radius of Jennie's personal belongings extended in a wider and wider arc. Her personal possessions could be found in any number of places, a mislaid sock under the gallery desk, a hairbrush on the window ledge. The more she seeded the gallery with her things, the more frightened we became. Sarah and I could not, for some reason, bring ourselves to directly ask about her plans. She provided a variety of unsolicited excuses, all of them likely legitimate enough: there were problems registering the car, the car wouldn't start, she couldn't get out to the suburbs that day, the train wasn't working, their family dog died. Yet palpable in those was a feeling that she was very happy with Chicago. She dropped hints now and again about how the new life she sought might be staring her in the face. "This is so cool," she might say. "It's a great life. All I want to do is get drunk every night and meet new people. I've been having the most amazing conversations. Everyone I meet is on the cusp of some massive coming-into-being transition." There were rumors that she might have fallen in love again and she began conducting long, hushed conversations on her cell phone. Sarah and I found ourselves avoiding the gallery altogether, as though the 600 square feet had become Jennie's bedroom.

A few weeks later, one week before the next exhibit, I came home to find laundry hanging from a clothesline strung across the gallery. I went into the kitchen and a boy came out of the bathroom in towel. He had just showered. I don't think I said anything to him, but I imagine I was pale. He smiled naturally and struck out his hand. I ignored it. I went to the back porch and found another boy smoking a cigarette with his feet up. I didn't recognize either of these boys. "Where's Jennie?" I asked, snarky. "She's on her way," he said. I did not ask from where.

I'm quite sure Jennie would have stayed indefinitely. She said as much later; the space seemed so large and empty that a girl in a sleeping bag—or even, a boy and a girl, for that matter—in her mind, seemed

inconsequential. She scoffed a little on her way out of town, because the space was not what it appeared, at first, to be. From her perspective, she said she thought it was a carefree environment where progressive people stayed up late, absorbed in bohemian activities, having lots of sex, doing exotic drugs, reading philosophy, dancing, automatic writing, drinking black coffee all hours of the day and smoking copious amounts of cigarettes.

I realized then that I was not bohemian. I also realized that the Green Lantern was more “serious” than I had thus far pretended. And then I realized that I was part of a community of artist-run spaces that had taught me, by way of example, what kind of space I wanted to run. I had never before had to define that model to anyone, because here in Chicago I was participating in a pre-existing custom. Unlike the wayward traveler, artists in Chicago understood the Spartan emptiness of the gallery space. To that audience, the space, while “empty” was in constant use. To my guest the empty space seemed wastefully idyll.

7. ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES THAT TOOK PLACE AT THE GREEN LANTERN:

- 1) Purchase of artwork
- 2) Purchase of books
- 3) Purchase of alcoholic beverages under the auspice of “donation”
- 4) Live music performances for which people paid at the door (a PPA license is needed for this)
- 5) Operating without a business license
- 6) The burlesque show in the front window

8. The Green Lantern was ultimately shut down because we carried a sandwich board out onto the street. A man from the city came to ask if we had a license for said sandwich board. We did not. He then asked if we had a business license. We did not. Had we never put the sign out, the man from the city would never have found out about us. Neither would the five weekly strangers who stumbled in to an exhibit from the street. The sandwich board encouraged people from outside of our immediate community to come up the stairs and see contemporary art.

9. Upon receiving my ticket from the city I went to City Hall. They sent me to the seventh floor where I waited for three hours. When I finally spoke to an administrator—a chubby, self-deprecating man—we filled out paper work. He didn't make many jokes but he did laugh at mine, albeit nervously. He plugged the information into an archaic computer and the computer rejected my proposal. He sent me up to the ninth floor.

On the ninth floor, I waited in line again, paper work in hand. When my turn came, I spoke to a woman behind glass. It was difficult to hear her and she seemed to carry on two conversations at once, the one with me and the one with a co-worker sitting next to her. When she saw my paper work she said, “Oh! You don't need a business license, you need a live/work space.

You're an artist, right?"

"Yes," I said.

"It's like a studio, right? You show your own work?"

I waffled, "Sometimes," I said. (I never show my own work.) I hesitated. "What if sometimes I show other people's work?"

She smiled. She winked. "You only show your work." She winked again.

"Oh. I get it. Yeah. I only show my work."

She sent me back downstairs.

After waiting another thirty minutes I spoke to the same self-deprecating man. Thumb tacked to his cubicle wall were several awards for Customer Kindness spanning almost ten years. "They told me I don't need a business license," I said to the award from 2006. Then I looked at him. "I need a live/work permit, they said."

The computer almost accepted my proposal. At the last minute it said we needed approval from another woman at another desk. This woman asked me twenty questions, after which she shook her head. "You need a business license," she said. "You need to research the history of the building to see if there have been previous businesses."

They sent me to the thirteenth floor.

I took the stairs.

On the thirteenth floor, I walked down a long corridor and into a corner office with two baskets—one brimming with paper work—on a front table. Behind the table there were several desks, all finished in faux-wood. The place looked like an office from an 80's sitcom that had fallen into disrepair: an old set no one had since paid any attention. I couldn't see anyone in the office so I called out, "Hello?"

A small, middle-aged woman stood up. She reminded me of the secretary from Ghost Busters. She had short, pink hair and very large glasses. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"I need to request a history for the building I live in?"

She pointed to the basket with fewer papers. "Fill out the form in that basket and then put it in the other basket." She pointed to the overflowing basket.

"When will I find out?" I asked.

"I don't know. We're all backed up," she said.

It has never before occurred to me to bribe anyone before. I didn't bribe her, though I think I should have because while waiting on the history of the building I got a second ticket.

After this second ticket I called my alderman. He put me in touch with a higher up at City Hall. Again, the woman I spoke to was very nice. "We don't want you to close," she said.

"What should I do, then?"

"You need a business license," she said.

"Can you give me one?"

"You can't get one at that location."

The Green Lantern was unable to get a license because of zoning; the building was not zoned for a business. Yet. Even if I had gotten a business license I would have had to move my apartment out of the space. They told me that if a) more than 12 people visited the space a week, b) objects were sold, c) there were two doors, d) either 100 sq. feet or more than 10% of the living space (whichever was less) was used for the business, then it was disqualified from the live/work permit. If I had qualified for a business license, I could not have lived there at all. You see? Apartment galleries are illegal.

10. In the recent year, The Aviary was shut down for not having a business license, as was Lloyd Dobler, as was Alagon. The Hyde Park Art Center also had some problems recently and were told not to serve any kind of refreshments.
11. We need new models of sustainability. Even as reports of global crisis encroach our daily consciousness, we continue to live lives dependant on fossil fuel. In order to remedy the current recession, we are encouraged once more to consume to resuscitate the country and our current way of life. Because consumable objects function as societal symbols of stability and success, members of society cultivate those objects. In order to alter the course of desire, we must change the meaning of those symbols and virtues for legitimacy/achievement, we might. If we do not, if we continue to follow our present mode of production in which more money means more exterior power and more self-worth, we will continue to ravage our resources. If, perhaps, we could find other symbols and virtues for achievement, we might make a better home in the world at large.

Lucia Fabio

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Former director of mini dutch gallery
<http://minidutchgallery.org>

**Start. A continuation of thoughts from the end of mini dutch.
November, 2009.**

mini dutch ended a two year run in July, 2009. Subsequently, I moved to Los Angeles. Not to pursue a career as an artist or curator in a more viable city, but to be near my mother who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. This is pertinent because it sets up my inability to be as involved in the art scene as I was in Chicago. At least, for the time being, I long for the tight knit community I felt forced to leave, and detest the highly commercial and impenetrable community that I have not been inducted into. I feel confident that I will find myself in a much more

optimistic mood after the unpacking ceases and I can start going to gallery openings, panel discussions, and lectures regularly again. I know that I now live in a city with a larger art presence, with a lively art market and community, but I am still am at a complete loss over leaving Chicago and my contemporaries. My thoughts have recently been drifting toward Chicago and its unique culture of the apartment gallery. What purpose do these spaces serve the city, and what did mini dutch do for me?

During my time as the director of mini dutch, I was an active participant in the apartment gallery scene. Along with my involvement with threewalls gallery and paid position as a preparator at the MCA (among other institutions) I was constantly aware of shows, events and the thereabouts of different artists. I prided myself on running an apartment gallery, giving it as much energy and attention as I could (even more than my art making). I had relationships with the artists who showed in my living room, and was able to bring new work into my domestic space each month. My life revolved around mini dutch and the overall art community with the lines between work and play becoming a warm and comforting blur. In my biased opinion, the apartment gallery is an essential part of the larger Chicago art community. It is the underlying energy that drives the rest of the city. Take away the multitudes of these homebound alternative spaces, and it would be a lackluster scene. Don't get me wrong, there are some truly notable commercial galleries in Chicago showing progressive and challenging work. But honestly, these spaces are few and far in between. Two such spaces, Tony Wight Gallery and Western Exhibitions didn't start their careers as straightforward commercial entities. Though never being "apartment" galleries, these two started out as alternative spaces. Similarly, spaces like Roots and Culture and The Green Lantern Gallery and Press would never have been able to develop into legitimate 501(c)3 non-profits if they weren't first able to experiment within the comfort of their domestic space.

Within the small, incestual community that makes up the Chicago scene, the apartment galleries look very similar to the commercial ones. Many of the artists who show at commercial spaces also show at the apartment galleries. The crowd of people who attend openings in the West Loop would also come through the doors of mini dutch. Apartment galleries have very little overhead and don't have to worry about making a profit. This is one of the most desirable attributes of running an apartment gallery. They should be operating as low cost, experimental spaces, where work can be shown and profits are not a priority. Occasionally, a visitor will be interested in a work and will want to purchase it. The allure of having some of your time and money compensated is tempting. Even mini dutch sold several pieces, though the amount I received put me nowhere close to breaking even. And that's the thing with apartment galleries; they aren't designed to be sustainable. Because these spaces are managed inside of apartments, they aren't zoned by the city to be a business and to make a profit. Therefore, they are not sustainable within their own practice, but need to be supported by their creators.

Here in Los Angeles, what little exposure I've had to its people, few are aware of the concept of the apartment gallery. Once I explain that living spaces are converted to show artwork people are flabbergasted. Especially once I elaborate and say that these spaces usually have month long shows with regular viewing hours. If, on the off chance someone does recognize the idea of the apartment gallery, I'm confronted with "Oh, like what they are doing in New York." This is where my fury begins. Chicago has a long, rich history of facilitating these spaces. Not only these spaces, but the whole city has a strong DIY attitude. Maybe it spawned from the stereotypical friendly hardworking mid-western upbringing, but I doubt it. The problem is that Chicago only operates within the confinements of the city. These apartment galleries should be used as the building blocks to a strong, viable, exciting, sustainable, commercial art scene. If not directly turning into a commercial space, but to train young artists, curators, dealers, collectors and critics within a supportive environment to eventually represent Chicago on a national and international level. An apartment gallery can be a means to its own end: not every apartment gallery should become a non-profit or commercial entity.

This has led me to my problem: have I just wasted two years of my life by being part of this microcosm with in the little known Chicago art community, just to move to another city to be dismissed? Or was this an invaluable experience where I had the opportunity to make a small impact within a specific community? Chicago offered cheap rent, lots of space and a supportive network, making mini dutch nearly impossible to run in any other city with the expectation of making the same impression. I hope to think that it wasn't a waste. I just have to work a bit harder to persuade Angelinos that yes, Chicago does have a thriving art scene: one where many dedicated people are doing remarkable things out of their homes. This weekend will be the first in which I will be attending openings. My first stop is Machine Project- a venue I was made aware of when I was researching alternative spaces for the threewalls and Green Lantern publication, *Phonebook*. I hope in the spirit of alternative spaces I will feel comforted in this lonely city and begin to search for a community.

And eventually, to be part of it.

Ben Russell & Brandon Alvendia

<http://dimeshow.com/benrussell.htm>

1. Do these space have real cultural or regional impact? Does anyone really care if Chicago has 2.3 trillion small project spaces?

BR: Isn't local the new national/global/universal? If we're to understand anything

from the leftist models of food consumption that seem to be occupying middle income wallets, it's that Slow Food and regional cuisine is the way to go. Buy local, think global – it's a sound catch phrase that is as easily applied to a cultural practice as it is a culinary one. To stretch the metaphor even further, local farmers are reliant on local markets for the sale of their products – the folks in the Big Apple certainly don't care about the Midwest organic grocer, and the denizens of Andersonville probably don't think too much about the vegetables that are being grown by the cats in the Wild 100', but the people who grow the food and eat the food care. Which is to say, the people who make the art and show the art care, and they'll likely continue to care about any other art that reflects their critical and aesthetic sensibilities (especially if it's local). That adds up in dribs and drabs to a pretty significant impact, especially if there are 2.3 trillion spaces on the map.

BA: It's apparent to me (Brandon Alvendia) that the Chicago art world cares very much about the presence and impact that artist-run spaces. We have all witnessed an impulse for more established institutions to continually take stock in the history of this type of exhibition model, in the form of panels, symposia, publications and large survey group shows. This overlap between larger well funded institutions and self funded artist-run model can generate greater exposure to artists possibly on the national/international level. On the other side of the coin, the inclusion of artist-run practices into institutional systems may often lend a ground-level street credibility type of cultural capital for the often rigid programming. The line is not as clear as I am describing due to the blurring and ambition of artists to practice relational/bureaucratic practices and art administrative workers to curate and organize with the freedom and looseness artists often enjoy.

2. Do these projects propose alternatives to institutional models or do they reinforce them?

BR: It depends on the space, of course, but seeing as the legacy of institutional critique is the slow dissolution of any clear institutional model, it's hard to pin down where those structures of power are being reinforced. There's a clear difference between the artist-run-space and the non-artist-run-space, although the language that codes them in either case has a lot to do with how meaning is transmitted. As an artist, I've always been troubled by the notion of the "project" space – it has the same damning-with-faint-praise quality to it that the word "experimental" does in relation to music or film/video works. I'm not sure why an artist would want to reiterate that model within the rules that they, ostensibly, get to lay out *but* there are enough examples of tongue-in-cheek project spaces for me to slow down the draw of my sword. MEDICINE CABINET is the best example of this that I know of.

Having said as much, I started a space in my apartment (BEN RUSSELL) and named it after myself – as much a proposition for an ego-driven vanity project as there could be, save for the fact that I started it with another artist (Brandon Alvendia), we named it together, and we chose to leave off the word "gallery" from the title. Our model of exhibition is one that superficially mirrors older notions of conventionally stratified art-making practices – performance, sculpture, large painting, small drawing, video loops. The fact that none of these things have to be realized, or even that they would be realized within a contemporary practice, is where the resistance towards an institutional model is actualized.

BA: I find it difficult to believe that projects like these spaces can challenge the power of the institutional model. In my mind the institution does not rest on any building, organization or funding structure, but rather the umbrella of art and the system that produces. We have the art-network context of the artist-critic-curator-collector-museum format (and the email cloud that encompasses) which in my mind can be quite limited. Though there is a handful of situations where a crossover happens where music, academia, activism, literature, and food culture (mentioned earlier) can peacefully coexist. Perhaps the institution I am talking about is the audience that any given project draws in or excludes. Though looking at the institution in a conventional sense (museum) will yield the common effect of flattening and distancing, which might be required for any deep analytic/historical discourse. But does any apartment gallery really have the ambition in this way? I doubt it. I believe the strength of the spaces is the directness of experience due to the folding of art in the lived space.

3. Do these spaces really provide something that institutions or larger galleries can't?

BR: Totally. We almost had a fist fight at our last opening. Somebody stole two pairs of tweezers from the show before that. Both of these are indicators that there is a thoroughly different kind of energy present in these spaces, an energy that is manifested via the meeting of That Art in This Space, an energy that proposes a radically different kind of engagement with both the practice of making and receiving art. They serve as a dynamic foil to more formalized spaces, and vice versa.

BA: We all know that in these spaces there is often a relaxed and casual environment that will keep visitors coming back and staying a while. The gallerist becomes more of a host, or as I overheard recently "gallery mom". We all still realize we are often coming into someone's home with their stuff out (with the risk of being stolen), all of which brings the context of life somewhat into the picture.

Not that a white cube gallery can't bring in a certain context of life (business, etc.) but independent spaces offer often a more homespun context in which to speak and gather. Of course the domestic art space will offer the exhibiting artist a noncommercial environment which can hopefully urge them to take more risks.

Moreover, the spaces of homes will have eccentric physical limitations – baseboards, molding, weak plaster lathe walls, non ideal lighting and other architectural quirks (ledges).

4. Have there been particular programs that you feel excelled in these spaces and would have benefited from being seen in a more traditional environment?

BR: Nope – the context is always such a significant part of the transmittance of the work that it's well nigh impossible for me to imagine what other sorts of lives they could lead. Institutions still seek to neutralize, to varying degrees, the space around the art; this doesn't make it especially hard to see how one work could exist elsewhere. This is totally not the case with a majority of artist-run spaces in Chicago – they are as much about the aura of the space as they are the work itself.

BA: Any properly conceived exhibition in a alternative space will hopefully take the context into account. The white cube institution is largely about providing a tabula rasa for artists to isolate ideas, so the corollary would be that a project excelling in a traditional context will not benefit being in a alternative space.

Though of course there is the notion of publicity which can work both ways, as discussed above. A band playing at a concert venue will sometimes play in a basement of someone's house. Some bands sound better in one context and worse in the other.

5. Are these projects a manifestation of DIY, or are they rogue businesses? Or vanity projects masquerading as non-profit cultural services?

BR: It's unlikely that these are rogue businesses, although most businesses fail in the first year so perhaps some graph paper would chart out a parallel decline. DIY seems like a more accurate descriptor, both in economic and emotional spirit, and there are certainly some spaces that are less able to conceal their individual ambition. It's curious to me that commercial galleries are rarely held up to such standards – they're all vanity projects, but the fact that they're after money somehow makes their self-identification more permissible. And sure, artist-run spaces are necessarily self-serving – they produce contacts, create alliances,

expand name recognition of the artists who operate them within a different context; however, this seems more like being an intern than having a career, and it's that difference that allows for generosity to spring forth.

BA: You will often, but not always, find this pattern at work in a gallerist's trajectory— apartment gallery with "x" name, moves to gallery district with "x" name, changes "x" name to gallerist's name, and so on up the ladder. This model is generally how much of the East Village art scene and the 80s in general. Koons and the Neo Geo cadre started their gallery to show their own work. Named International with Monument, this gallery was an attempt to show a hardcore ambition to be real and commercial (even if parenthetically). And we all know what happened to Koons.

6. Do these projects impact, in any way, the neighborhoods they are situated in?

BR: For sure – inasmuch as a neighborhood is comprised of a bunch of disparate groups with disparate interests, these spaces produce another articulation of culture for the local population(s). They draw lines between neighborhoods as well, moving artists and enthusiasts from one area to the next, providing a context for low-impact slow-time cross-pollination. Diversity is where it's at, after all.

BA: Of course, the flip side to what Ben is saying is the "problem" of art being a marker for chic urban living and the real estate prices that accompany that. A gradual process for sure but there nonetheless. A recent ambitious project to re-purpose a Mexican bodega into a studio/gallery building failed when the building owner realized he could make more selling outright. That was an example of the neighborhood skipping that middle stage.

7. Do these spaces provide a solution to Brain Drain in Chicago?

BR: The problem with talking about "these spaces" is the proposition that there is an essential relationship between all of them, that the Podmajersky gallery row is somehow up to the same thing as Vega Estates. There are great, fun, smart, and well-curated spaces and there are awful, lousy, mind-numbing, soul-sucking spaces. There are more of the latter than the former, and there are far more in the sad middling part than either of the two mentioned. The biggest problem with artist-run spaces is that they are a pain in the ass to operate – they take time and energy and money and have their own timeline of obsolescence built into them. DIY spaces don't cost much to house but they cost a lot to operate – while it's likely that they keep their proprietors around for a little while longer than they otherwise would, the folks who start such spaces have already committed to some kind of

minor timeline before they begin. On the flipside, my suspicion is that artist-run spaces make their audiences smarter by providing evermore opportunities for engagement with culture – even if the work is shit, there's still a conversation that wouldn't otherwise exist. So: maybe it's not a solution to Brain Drain as much as it is a move towards smartening up.

BA: Alternative spaces will grant young artists a great opportunity to tweak and perfect their ideas. And, taking good shows with the very bad is fine, so long as there is a steady stream and high density of artists generating some kind of discourse. So for me its about a weekly schedule, 52 weeks a year full of art. I couldn't see that as being any kind of brain drain, quite the opposite.

8. Do these spaces create collectors?

BR: Ugh – that's a terrible question, as if collectors were monsters and the spaces were Dr. Frankenstein. Nature or nurture? Aren't collectors already collecting from birth? Galleries, in whatever context, are all buying into the central notion that art has value – in that sense, the display of art (value) produces the desire for ownership, and the more there is of it, the more certain kinds of work are going to be overvalued and pursued. Exhibition = commodity awareness, but not for everyone. There's some kind of an answer in there.

BA: Yes, of course. But collectors are of all kinds, namely, friends and other artists who will trade or buy (cheaply) artworks they want. Almost every artist I know has a collection of some depth.

Liz Nielsen

<http://swimmingpoolprojectspace.com>

A few thoughts

Erik Brown and Michael Thomas invited me to write down my thoughts regarding the recent spurt of apartment/domestic/project spaces in Chicago with the intent of pushing forth a few waves of constructive criticism that might consequently enable some of these spaces to re-calibrate their homegrown efforts. Now, I run my own space too, the Swimming Pool Project Space in Albany Park, and so I began by looking at my own reflection in the mirror and asking myself why I do what I do, and why I am where I am.

I am a Chicago artist. I have seen my reflection many times but this time I saw something, a stark reality, with more clarity than I had seen in the past. Louder than ever before I heard a resonating sentence echoing inside my head: *If Chicago's art scene is second or third tier then naturally it produces second or third tier artists.*

But if Chicago's art scene is second or third tier, does it follow that it would naturally produce second or third tier artists? I am better than that. I know that we are better than that.

So the question becomes: can Chicago raise the bar? Can it rise above the standards set by third tier expectations? Do we ourselves want honorable mentions, or gold medals? The artists who do make it into the top tier usually leave Chicago shortly before or immediately after their success starts to happen. So this leads me to wonder, if Chicago artists want to be gold medal-winners and recipients of national and international recognition, must we leave Chicago?

I've been running circles in my mind trying to figure out why we are where we are, and why we don't, apparently, have the means to get the gold. We obviously have the energy. The innumerable independent spaces are one indication of this. I have come up with several reasons but there is one that I continually spiral back to, and that is that Chicago has very few "parent galleries", relative to the number of artists. At risk of being cutesy, parent galleries are the commercial venues that give us artist children shelter, that help us with our homework, hang our work on the refrigerator, talk us up like crazy, send us to art camps/residencies, and above all help us grow into the artists that we are capable of becoming. As it stands, hundreds of art students are pumped out of our schools in Chicago every year — and these are great schools — only to be orphaned with nowhere to show, nowhere to go.

So we parent ourselves.

We build our own tree-houses and clubhouses in the backyard or in our living rooms. We start our own spaces and exhibit our own work. We share our own ideas and show our friends. But to a certain extent, the pragmatic facts of "being an orphan" wear us down: the fact that the challenge of making work increases when we're also completely responsible for ourselves, for promoting our art, and paying the bills through other means. In the end, these tree-house projects, no matter how exciting and productive in certain instances, don't bring in much money, and don't

get enough support from the city or its institutions, and eventually most of us run out of gas without even making it onto any sort of global art map.

This leads me to a second point, which might actually be more interesting — and even beautiful in its own way. Money is not the driving force of many of these independent spaces. That outcome has already deemed itself improbable and maybe isn't even a goal at all. So what is the driving force? For me, the driving force is manifesting a vision, taking risks, and making marks, all in attempt to understand what art is NOW. Part of that is asking, what's the conversation that's being had? (And there's also the question of who's shaping the conversation — and the related issues of cultural capital, as recent commentators like Anthony Elms have noted.) As an artist, I'm always trying to locate myself in the larger continuum of contemporary art. I do this in a lot of ways, one of which is my experiments at the Swimming Pool. I don't see them as separate from my own practice as an artist. They are facets of artistic research.

Small spaces often shift their tone from exhibition to exhibition providing more mystery than larger galleries by the mere fact that it is quite difficult to know what to expect. Perhaps they also provide a greater risk of failure. I can't imagine having a show like Swimming Pool Project Space's DOGCAT or GroupSolo in a traditional environment. But the taking of risks in these places can help people to shift in their practice and grow in their work. By putting people in different roles, whether as curator or collaborator, it allows them new perspectives on their own work potentially enhancing it. And in fact, these spaces can be idea generators for any number of people.

But we don't just want to talk to ourselves. We *do* want to be part of a larger conversation. So how do we make this happen? How do we artists get the support to bolster us up, to lift us to the next level? I have a few ideas, although each of them involve overcoming certain (smaller) hurdles... I'm just going to throw them out to start the brainstorm.

What does Chicago have? Space. Cheap space. But many of the current gallery spaces are decentralized; other than the West Loop spaces, these small galleries are all over the city. There's the problem of getting from one to the other. There's no art shuttle to help us gallery hop. Even getting from Pilsen to Logan Square in one evening is not easy to do. How can we fix this, or at least accommodate this?

We also need to make art of more value in the minds of many Chicagoans. How do we create a desire for art and identify new collectors? There are plenty of people in

Chicago with a lot of money who do not collect art or go to art exhibits. How do we artists get on their radars? Beyond casual viewers, we need sponsorship, patrons, and media attention. Are there ways to foster longer-term relationships between artists and collectors beyond the few big names? Young collectors are a group that I'm really interested in. A lot of work that is shown in so many of these spaces is not expensive and many people could start buying it — people who may not realize they could be collectors at all. A few small sales can keep these spaces running. Most of us just need a little support, not much.

I'm also interested in the possible unification of small spaces... not as a single unification, because we all know there are too many flavors for that, but a few unifications to create mini-unions that support each other and create change, propelling things forward. A few years ago, I saw a sculpture by Tim Hawkinson. It was made of gears linked together from small to large. When I entered the room, I could see the largest gear, sitting still and as I walked to the back of the room, each gear was connected to the next, all the way down to a tiny, tiny gear. That gear was tirelessly spinning as fast as it could on high speed. As I was exiting the room, I could see that the big gear had moved. That tiny gear moved it. What if project spaces were in the habit of working together? What would happen then?

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1. Do these space have real cultural or regional impact? Does anyone really care if Chicago has 2.3 trillion small project spaces?

The overall arc of sixty+ years of independent art spaces in Chicago clearly has significance in that it's become the tradition it has, and an activity that folks here seem to stay interested in. Beyond that, the factors of cheap rent, lack of venues, and DIY spirit lend to the reason why every other undergrad starts their own space and we end up with 2.3 trillion things going on. I think that perhaps one of the strongest cultural benefits is the self-education of young folks in organizing—something risky and entrepreneurial. It almost doesn't matter if their project is "successful"—at least they've gone through the motions of taking on something bigger, outside themselves, and collaborative. And who will see all these activities? I think that's up to the folks running these spaces and how hard they are willing to work to promote themselves and stay dedicated. Some survive, some don't—lesson learned. A recent train of thought has questioned whether these spaces are a mere

surrogate for the healthier, better supported art venues of the bigger cultural centers– a last ditch effort for artists to get their work shown. All said, in the end of the day, the work gets shown. Chicago can have a really healthy community–supported art scene. Regional impact beyond our own metropolitan area? Folks that I know in Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kansas City, St. Louis, Ann Arbor, and Minneapolis pay attention to what happens here. I know people that, inspired by the independent space scene in Chicago, have embarked on their own spaces in their home cities. Flyover maybe, but at least Chicago’s got the busiest airport (do we even anymore?). Beyond that? Eh. Maybe I’m the wrong person to ask – I’ve been here my whole life! More press would be helpful...

2. Do these projects propose alternatives to institutional models or do they reinforce them?

We all start out feeling revolutionary in our aims, to do something better, more community–based, holistic. I guess the models that we have are, in fact, usually of the institutional template, though. In some ways I feel that the dominant modes of production– the very art being made and shown follows pretty conservative models. White wall, painting, sculpture, pedestal, postcard, press release, price list, opening– it is all rather rote and familiar of the institution. Perhaps we are at a moment where all is challenged– a proposition that interests me. Artists making conventional objects need conventional exhibition space– but let’s say we blow the whole thing apart. Social projects, space as practice, radical arts admin, I think that it’s a ripe moment to challenge the institutional paradigm. Artists run spaces? I keep asking myself what this means, what if I really *ran a space as the artist*? Actually, I run a space that functions quite by the books for the most part– though, I do believe that we are an active and relevant part of the art world. Some day I may re–invent the space, but for now, I am bound to the dominant structure and will support the kind of objectmaking– that while sometimes may feel conservative – I feel is still worthy of contemplation.

3. Do these spaces really provide something that institutions or larger galleries can’t?

I think this is a good point of defense for these kinds of activities. Again, maybe it’s a Chicago thing and symptomatic of our weak collector/ commercial gallery system that cannot support the throngs of artists produced yearly by our plethora of art degree producing programs. But I truly believe that we need the independent spaces to self–support our scene. Nurturing challenging and indefinable work is always at the core of the best of the missions of these spaces. If commercial galleries are too nervous to work with this type of art because there will be no one to buy it, then in order to foster a healthy and provocative art scene we need

independent spaces to fill this role. I think that the nonprofit model can still be relevant in obtaining cultural monies to support such projects. Even more progressive programs can take this further, blurring definitions of artist run space/ curation/ production. If we look ahead to more progressive models of both exhibition and production, we will need to move further and further toward new models that will support these new activities.

4. Have there been particular programs that you feel excelled in these spaces and would have benefited from being seen in a more traditional environment?

Well, I support all of my artists and wish for them to succeed in their careers, so of course I can envision our programming in larger art centers, museums, and perhaps commercial galleries. There seems to be an identity crisis that might be particular to Chicago – on one hand you’ve got the DIY, decentralized, almost anti-consumerist activities by both artists and venues. Then there are plenty of artists and spaces – both “alternative” and independent – style commercial spaces that are interested in participating in the market and the production and exchange of saleable objects. I cannot blame any artist for striving to achieve financial successes, we all know how hard it is. Make nice paintings, want them to sell? Why not. In the Capitalist age we all must survive in some way and that might mean participating in more traditional environments. On the other hand, programming at more progressive projects like Mess Hall and InCubate would be paradoxical to enter into institutional environments. I can think of several particular programs at R & C that probably would not fit so well either.

5. Are these projects a manifestation of DIY, or are they rogue businesses? Or vanity projects masquerading as non-profit cultural services?

Well with a constituency of 2.3 trillion, I think that the alt-space scene in Chicago most likely ranges the gamut. R & C has probably existed as all of these things. DIY seems a pretty common operational mode for most of these spaces. I don’t see larger institutions or private donors throwing loads of cash at start up galleries – we all start modestly and with support generally from our peers and friends. As for the idea of rogue business—that depends on how well folks have their shit together. Ways in which I ran our space for the first year and a half were off-the-books, the days before we were 501(c)(3). Also, it is so unclear sometimes what the convoluted bureaucracies of this city expect in terms of licensing and permits – they seem to invent new hurdles for small businesses all the time. Look at the wave of crack down last summer – I mean in my eyes, the Green Lantern is probably one of the more legitimized and organized spaces in the city, but they ran into trouble – for what, a sandwich board? Broke city needs money. Another example of DIY, while being a totally legitimately-run business is Golden Gallery. I can think of more-

than-a-handful of commercial galleries in the West Loop that had humble, perhaps legally questionable, beginnings in apartments and Pilsen storefronts. Vanity projects - who wouldn't take pride in the endless time and energy that they put forth towards a project with little gain other than supporting the local arts community. Maybe there are a few instances where self-centered motives can present a conflict of interest - for instance, curating your own art work into your own shows or at your own space. What else would this mean? I can see where maybe a curator puts together a show to the means of their own critical standpoint, but that seems commonplace enough. I don't think I am comfortable pointing fingers at anyone in particular's own "vanity". I'm sure that there is plenty of it, hell, I'm vain sometimes, but projects like these for the most part, I envision to be generous and oftentimes selfless acts.

6. Do these projects impact, in any way, the neighborhoods they are situated in?

That is an interesting question, one that is often asked by granting organizations in their proposals. Most immediately, I feel like new communities form around some of the more off-the-beaten path spaces. This raises questions of gentrification when seen through the perspective of neighborhoods with settled populations invaded by the art-going masses (which tend to have a certain overall demographic- educated, maybe in the upper range of the middle class). It is really tricky to reach beyond that community. At R & C, I feel like we have some success-being on a commercial strip - at attracting the customers and proprietors alike of nearby businesses - the coffee shop, the resale shop, the bike shop, the tattoo shop - I mean I guess there's not a huge gap in these kinds of audiences, but it mixes things up. Having a high school across the way always makes for an interesting dynamic - I can't say that many of the kids have tried to stop by (they like fucking with my cats through the window), but the teachers stop by for sure. I was at an opening on an unusually warm autumn night at a new space in Humboldt Park, Monument 2, and there was a pack of neighborhood kids who came around with piñatas and caused quite a scene on the sidewalk. That was a good vibe, having rug rats running in and out of the gallery. Inevitably, though, you see mostly the same faces at art events.

7. Do these spaces provide a solution to Brain Drain in Chicago? Do these spaces create collectors?

Geez, I would probably have to say that the independent spaces do not solve the greater problem of "Brain Drain". There simply are not enough resources to go around to support artists in their adult lives, exhibiting from one independent space to the next. Plenty of artists find other means and obviously stick around. I think a common path outside of the commercial system is obviously in education. The

plateau seems to happen pretty quickly with the careers of showing artists that work with independent spaces (and even our commercial galleries)– there is this sort of apex of street cred that one can develop which doesn't necessarily pay the bills. As a nonprofit, I envision a situation where perhaps I could provide stipends for my artists. If there was more public funding to go around this could be a reality, like in Europe or Canada. But unfortunately, I feel like there are two major options that the artist can foresee – get a day job (not a necessarily a bad thing) or find gallery representation. And with a lack of commercial options here, artists turn to the independent spaces, who try as hard as they may, don't typically have the resources to help artists make a living wage for themselves. So, the folks that wish to sell their work to make a living – they bounce, anyone with some tenure in this city has watched half of their friends inevitably leave for the coasts. Do these spaces create collectors? I've seen some evidence of this. I think there is a moment when spaces “grow up” and stray from the pack-em-in free beer party scene and start to function like business professionals. It takes a lot of work to court someone with an interest in art and can afford it, but might not necessarily know what they are looking at. My strategy is to throw the right kind of parties where folks like these will feel comfortable to view art, have conversation, and hopefully buy something– and sometimes it works. Maybe I'm not ready to grow up yet, but grown up parties can be fun (and more productive), too.

Claudine Ise

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First things first, I should preface my comments about apartment/domestic art spaces in Chicago with a number of caveats, starting with the fact that I have only lived in Chicago for about a year and half. Also, I'm not an artist. I'm a writer, and unlike a number of the people who were asked to participate in this project, I'm not involved in running an alternative space. Here's what, and who, I am: I'm a former contemporary art curator who has always worked in institutional university museum settings, first at UCLA's Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and most recently at Ohio State University's Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus. Now, I'm a part-time freelance art and culture writer and a part-time stay-at-home-mom to a 3½ year old girl. My perspective on the issue of domestic space and its relationship to art production is therefore somewhat different from those of you who are directly involved in the creation of these spaces. You could even say that, in this context, I speak from the position of the Other. Wow, that's a first!

When I first moved to Chicago about a year and a half ago, I knew nothing about what was happening art-wise and so set about exploring Chicago's gallery offerings on my own. It wasn't long before I realized that there was a whole lot taking place out there beyond what is shown in the commercial galleries: a parallel system, if you will. The geography of this parallel scene was not fully mapped out, in part because its terrain was constantly shifting. But once I tapped into it and started writing about the shows I saw there I grew increasingly excited about it. There's definitely a sense of mystery and discovery (coupled with a certain cultish insiderdom) to the apartment gallery scene in Chicago that, to an outsider, is simultaneously alluring and off-putting. It's very much based on a circuit of social relationships, which is stimulating and energizing if you're a part of it and somewhat daunting if you're not.

Now that I've been here awhile I'm somewhat less awed, and certainly less intimidated, by the cryptic nature of this parallel system. Note that I'm using the word 'parallel' here, and not 'alternative,' because I have some doubts about the degree to which apartment gallery spaces in Chicago are truly offering artists and other cultural workers an alternative to the so-called "dominant" modes of production and display. You can't say that something provides an "alternative" to something else when there's no real choice involved. Sure, there are artists who show work in apartment gallery settings and in commercial galleries, but not the majority. Many of those who run apartment galleries claim that they want to provide younger artists with a way to "get their work out there," as it were, in the not quite-private but not totally-public fashion that domestic spaces provide.

There's a certain safety and comfort in staying at home, so to speak, surrounded by supportive friends and buffeted by the fact that your art is being shown on the walls of someone's living room and therefore must be assessed on those terms. Those who run apartment galleries should work with, rather than against, the womb-like qualities their spaces provide. But ideally the function of an apartment/domestic space shouldn't begin *and* end with the m.o. of "showing work that I/we like" just because that work cannot, for various (and usually overdetermined) reasons, be shown in a commercial or institutional setting. It's fine to want to offer a platform for artists to exhibit their work, but there is so much more that an apartment gallery can offer beyond that simple framework. I have a few suggestions on that score. First, apartment galleries can and should provide artists with a laboratory-type environment for the exploration of ideas. In such a setting, artists (often those fresh out of art school) can explore their practice in a deep and sustained way that also enables them to engage public criticism/feedback/experience (via reviews, conversations with strangers who visit the show, and hopefully public conversations about the work staged inside the space itself).

Exhibiting work in someone's home is a great opportunity for artists to spur public discussion of their art, and art in general, in a manner not possible either in art school or museums or galleries. The types of conversations that domestic settings make possible enable artists to break free from the often rigid discourse of the art school critique, with its coded language, its internal politics, its pitfalls of ego and showmanship. To achieve this domestic art spaces would need to try even harder than they have been to encourage the general gallery-going public to come to their shows. Too often it's just critics, and the artist's other artist friends, who engage with the art on view. Artists who show in apartment galleries could have a real opportunity to engage in unique forms of intimacy with individual viewers that neither commercial galleries nor museums can provide.

This laboratory idea also goes for the kind of work that gets made and shown in domestic art spaces. Yes, domestic settings have lots of physical limitations, but then again, the artist potentially has a whole house or apartment at her disposal. It's worth considering that perhaps you shouldn't be running a gallery out of your home if you're not willing to let the artist fuck that home up a little bit--or a lot. Admittedly, I'm not exactly certain what I mean by "fuck it up." Artists, feel free to use your own imaginations here. My point is that by designating the front living room area or a spare bedroom or medicine cabinet as "the gallery space" and the rest of the house as not-gallery space, apartment galleries are (consciously or unconsciously) replicating that white cube, commercial/institutional model of exhibition space that is divorced from the outside world (despite the smells of food cooking in the kitchen, the cat rubbing around your legs, the homeowner's bookshelves, etc. These stimuli set a scene, but they don't fundamentally change the relationship between viewer and art object to the degree that they could). However, if the home that is being offered up to the artist was treated in a more, shall we say, sacrificial manner, I think some incredibly freaky and compelling and truly memorable art situations could come of it.

O.K., so say you're not interested in getting all freaky with the boundaries here. You **want** your space to have a proper gallery feel. You want to keep your living space separate from the art, and you just want to focus on showing good art, forget all of that aforementioned fucking around nonsense. You might even harbor a not-so-secret goal of someday running a full-fledged, open five days a week art gallery in a rented space. That's all totally cool. But apartment galleries aren't set up to sell work and establish a proper business relationship with artists in the manner that a commercial gallery does. So yet again, all they can be in this regard is a pale shadow of the actual thing and not truly an 'alternative' at all.

If you're in it "to show good work," then make a point of showing good work. Be selective. Forget for a moment that you may also be an artist and embrace your inner curator. Be hard on yourself and others, make choices, say "no" when it doesn't feel right. Make the absolute most of your limited space and resources by funneling them into something that's not just about creating exhibition opportunities or even new forms of exhibition making. What about fostering truly great art by artists you want to support? An idea to this end: try working with a very small core group of artists – maybe just 3 or 4 – whose work you really believe in and stick with them for at least a couple of years. Put whatever resources you have into helping that select group of artists bring their very best ideas to fruition. Instead of providing exhibition opportunities to as many artists as you can, give only a few artists everything you have to offer, be it space, time, discussion, feedback, connections. Make it your goal to help your artists get to the next level, whether that means becoming part of a commercial gallery's stable or simply helping an artist work through some a huge block in their practice that's holding them back.

Over the past year large-scale group exhibitions like *Artists Run Chicago* and *Heartland* provided a theoretical mapping of the alternative gallery system in Chicago and other Midwestern cities. (By the way, it's really a shame that neither of these shows traveled to other U.S. institutions. Arguably shows like those need to be seen **outside** the Midwest more than within it.) But now, it may be time to shift the focus away from "the system" and the social relations in which alternative spaces operate and back onto the actual works of art as well as the ideas that that system produces. The art shown in domestic spaces should be just as (and ideally more) compelling than the "alternative" nature of the space in which it's shown. If it isn't, what we think as alternative isn't much of an alternative at all.

Jennifer Breckner

<http://incubate-chicago.org>

Some Notes on Hosting

Brian O'Doherty, in his seminal 1976 book, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, takes the traditional gallery space to task, critiquing the manner in which its white walls became the de facto authority that conferred the status of art upon any object that resided within its space. Serving as a template, the white cube format—white walls, rectangular or square shape, wooden floors, and lit from the ceiling—may be utilized anywhere and continues to be implemented widely,

including in most of Chicago's beloved apartment galleries. What are some tactics for moving beyond this model in these types of smaller domestic environments so that a more equitable space may be envisioned?[1]

Presented as neutral but being far from it, the sanitized, white-walled space came into being during Modernism and quietly claimed more and more power over time so that eventually it became more important than the art that was displayed within. "We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the space first," asserts O'Doherty. [2] The white-cube model continues to be the premier method for the display of art within institutions such as the formidable museum, blue chip commercial gallery, and even the not-for-profit "alternative" gallery. Its structure conveys knowledge and authority; it asks of the viewer a quiet, almost religious-like devotion. While it often is a useful background for artwork to be seen on, the white-walled gallery may also be a place of exclusion and judgment where privilege, breeding, economic status, educational background, and social cache allow various stages of access and exclusion. It is a space of contention, often leaving visitors in the precarious position of questioning their right to be there.

If this type of space is rife with anxiety and power, then shouldn't the apartment gallery be an antidote to this situation since the power within these spaces resides with individuals who have broader latitude and more autonomy—because the stakes are not as high as the commercial gallery or museum—to experiment with setup? Yet most Chicago apartment gallerists seem interested in perpetuating the white cube and all its inherent structure and exclusions, even if the directors are not consciously aware that they are doing this. In large part, the use of this modernist template is due to the fact that most apartment gallery owners are renting the space that they live in and serious changes to the infrastructure of their domestic space could have a negative effect on their lease. Or perhaps they do not see the gallery space as elitist and find it useful to follow the professional set-up. More importantly, though, the institutionalization of exhibition methods has infiltrated even the tiniest self-produced endeavor and carries such weight that many individuals see their apartment gallery as a calling card to gain entrance to the realm of more professional institutions.

There are many of these self-initiated exhibition venues that do away with the materials of everyday life and gravitate towards the white cube blueprint. An article on Chicago's apartment galleries mentions an owner who was pleased that the exhibition part of her living space resembled a commercial venue and that all of the evidence of people living there had been removed out of sight.[3] This kind of approach is a mistake for how can one's living space compete with the likes of a commercial gallery? Instead of the domestic space striving to be more commercial and always falling short of the pristine effect and voice of authority that the museum or formal gallery embodies, the focus should be on finding inventive and innovative strategies of display that mingle art with living materials.[4]

The reasons for organizing an apartment gallery are varied. For many individuals, this kind of gesture allows them the autonomy to participate in the art world as they dictate. In a competitive field, and in a city populated with too many artists, curators, and art historians, running an apartment gallery is a resume builder and enhances one's cultural capital. It provides hands-on experience and a creative outlet for individuals who have little opportunity to exhibit, curate, or write in Chicago. The importance of this cannot be overlooked. In addition, these spaces provide a social outlet for Chicago's cultural producers and provide inspiration to many to take on the task of organizing their own initiatives. More often than not they may serve as a party space where the art takes a backseat. This, depending on one's viewpoint, may not be a negative quality. Sometimes, as in the case of 65Grand, work is sold and rent is paid,[5] but for many individuals who hope to enter the factory-line of cultural production, the spaces that make money are few and far between.

I am often perplexed by the expectations that some individuals have as to the value of their initiatives beyond their own experience. For example, a student in a class that I was taking had an interesting idea for a roving gallery. She mentioned to me that she was planning on raising \$25,000 in one year so that this new gallery could be self-sustaining. Even prior to the recent economic collapse in the United States, fundraising for experimental initiatives was difficult, but I am unsure from where these kinds of funds would materialize. I was at once in awe of this person's determination to have high goals that seemed a bit naive, and dismayed that their expectations were set on such a professional level. This example made me think of comments made by artist Nan Goldin in a 2006 lecture at the Art Institute of Chicago in which she talked about quitting her teaching position at an ivy league school because the students there were more focused on obtaining gallery representation and being mentioned in Artforum than on making good art. Has the business of art encroached too much upon the apartment gallery and stifled creativity?

In terms of the somatic relationship of the viewer to formal gallery space, O'Doherty articulates that minds are welcome but, as all obstacles such as furniture and miscellaneous debris are removed from the site, bodies seem intrusive.[6] While there is a generosity in opening up one's personal space for these kinds of events, and many of Chicago's apartment gallery owners are a friendly lot, for a new visitor entering an apartment gallery that tries to mimic the pristine controlled exhibition space, the body feels doubly unwanted as one enters both a space for contemplation of art and a private, domestic arena that acts as a small, tightly packed social scene as well. In addition, many apartment gallery owners fail to engage strangers in their space, and may seem indifferent to new visitors, encouraging the idea that these spaces are more for the cultural elite that exist at this ground level than for a variety of new people. Lastly, sometimes the

homeowners may be disdainful of new guests. There is one owner of a now-defunct Chicago apartment gallery who was known for actually discouraging visitors from entering the apartment and seemed bothered by the people that were in his space.

Therefore, I would assert that one area where apartment gallery directors, and even those individuals interested in alternative forms of exhibition, display, and social space coordination could change things is in the realm of hosting. The importance of being a gracious host is clear. Now, I'm not referring to the realm of hosting via someone like Martha Stewart who sees this quality as being a result of good breeding and lineage, and where individuals are encouraged to attend to superfluous minutiae—I am not suggesting that apartment gallery directors begin to think about making their own crocheted garbage bags or the like. What I am suggesting is that to be a good host means doing the difficult work of facilitating social interaction. Most people are more comfortable in their own groups than meeting strangers and social awkwardness is prevalent at art openings.

The apartment gallery director should take on the role of social director to create warm and open social spaces. They should introduce their self to strangers and then introduce guests to others to develop and enrich the social network that occurs within the space.[7] Acknowledging and welcoming someone into this complicated space, may set the guest at ease and make them want to come back. Someone skilled at hosting knows how to get different people talking and to be alert to those that are excluded. This, I would hope, would open up the Chicago apartment gallery scene just a bit. Food, beverage, and animals also help to break up the anxiety of these events but including these amenities really depends upon the budget and interests of the individual director.

For those apartment gallery directors who are serious in their endeavors to provide an alternative creative space that addresses local needs, it seems a shame that all of that hard work and monetary sacrifice could be negated in some fashion because a space seemed to resolve around a certain clique or seemed off putting. The creation and maintenance of an engaging, open and creatively modified social space seems to be an overlooked gesture that could distinguish apartment galleries from the other institutional models prevalent within cultural production today.

¹ This version of the essay has been edited since appearing in the FLAT4 publication.

² Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: Lapis Press, 1986, c.1976), p. 14.

³ Lauren Viera, "Artful Living in Alternative City Spaces," *Chicago Tribune* August 23, 2009.

⁴ Lucia Fabio, Director of *minidutch*, which is now sadly defunct, had an interesting series

called Eating on the Cheap where she invited guests chefs, this author included, to cook inexpensive but flavorful food at her apartment during open gallery hours. The idea was that visitors would sit around her kitchen table and discuss timely topics, such as food politics and the decline of the American economy, filling up her living space with bodies during the time that the gallery was open. It was an attempt to activate the space and make it more social. It would have been interesting to see the direction she would have taken this series if the gallery had remained open.

⁴ Viera.

⁴ O'Doherty, p.15

⁵ While this may seem like an attempt at brown-nosing given that Erik Brown is one of the co-organizers of this publication, both he, and his wife, Catie Olson, are particularly conscious of being attentive hosts, both of them at Floor Length and Tux and Erik, as one of the co-organizers of COMA. Their generosity was the impetus, for me, to write this essay.

Mike Wolf

Network of Casual Art

<http://stopgostop.com/nca>

More Gratuitous Questions and More:

A second short list of questions about art and cultural spaces, which we must now start calling places, and more

by Mike Wolf

In the hopeful Autumn of Earth Ox Year--2009

(That's hopeful in the Detroit sense of the word)

Introductory notes

All of these ideas are taken from someone else. I don't respect intellectual property and besides that I have ceaseless need to repeat the appealing things that other people say.

A few years back I made a list of questions when the marvelous Caroline Picard asked me to contribute to a Green Lantern publication. (While that does not appear online, you can see it in issue one of the Minneapolis-based publication ARP!* I'd love for you to read that too.) There was a flow there and I knew it would be a problem if I couldn't go with it. I find myself in a similar position now so it seems like I better jump in and get taken away by this second list.

I am going to use the word "we" a lot. Whenever someone does this s/he and

he/r readers are obligated to ask who “we” are. I will tell you my answer right up front, but if you think of it differently, please tell me about it! I am speaking to a constituency of people that I feel I know personally, you have some significant emotional investment in art, the so-called art world, and participate in culture as a maker of some kind. The greater part of my socializing takes place among these circles, you are in my living space, this building, this neighborhood, this region and watershed—probably even further afield, I suspect. I have only met a precious few of you but I have a great deal of affection that goes beyond that. I’m glad you’re here. We work and participate in these ways because we think it’s valuable and that it will somehow improve conditions. Because conditions aren’t great. In fact, they are fucking terrible. When I say so I am referring to the effects of capitalism in its many destructive aspects.

I have come to understand that one reason I became an artist is because as a young person I looked around the world and it seemed to me like the artists were the ones who got to do what ever weird stuff they wanted and everybody else was stuck in cubicles. I wanted that privilege. Obviously the picture is much more complicated than that, and I have learned that art can be just as oppressive as cubicle work, and that many non-artists are far more creative and able to produce uncubicked situations than many artists are. None the less I have been fortunate enough to have numerous first hand experiences of working on art in ways that begin to answer my youthful dreams of liberation. And since those answers are so nascent and fragile I have decided I need to cultivate patience, a sense of the long-view, and maybe to be more gentle too.

That being said I have a great deal of interest in your impatient, kinetic energy. I hope our work continues to produce a common ground, I mean real places where we can get together and share these energies. If it seems to work out fairly well for all of us, then lets move on and do it again in another place with more people. Lets find ways to do it with people who we didn’t think we could do it with. Which brings me to my first question.

Questions

Can we move like a benevolent mudslide or erupt as a joyous volcano? How could we organize that? Is it too soon for that?

What if artists would organize their work and bodies around something like our need for health care, housing, or good food instead of organizing it around the needs of large cultural institutions like museums and academic institutions? What if our organizational priorities shifted away from the needs of those slow to change bunkers? Could that force their hand and get them to serve us in the ways that they are actually ethically obligated to do?

Don’t you have a lot of questions about money? Do you talk about it with your friends? Do you talk about it with strangers? Do you try to figure out what is going

on in the economy, how it came to be the way it is? Is the economy just about money?

Where does your sense of validation come from? Why is it that we tend to trust huge, automatic, institutions operated by disaffected, disinfected zombies to provide that for us? (Hey, we've all been zombies.)

How can we develop our charisma and leadership abilities? What historical examples of socializing and leadership can help us develop these skills?

Don't you totally idolize the sex advice columnist Dan Savage? What if we could apply his ethic of consensual, safe, generous sexual relations across larger, (seemingly) non-sexual scales of relation? Where did Dan Savage learn this ethic? Doesn't a lover sometimes have to do something s/he does not initially want to do in order to satisfy he/r partner? Are the benefits worth the risk? Why does Dan Savage sometimes feel the need to say misogynistic things despite his otherwise generally appealing approach?

How can we honor the gifts of the queer universe?

Self reflection and self critique are invaluable aren't they? Is that a form of narcissism? Who cares? What are the changing bounds of the self? How is the region yourself? How is Angola yourself?

How do you reach beyond your social circle and risk being outside of your comfort zone as you work? Who are the people that are able to share power and cultural capital across class, cultural, and ethnic lines in their work? How can we find more of these people and learn from them? In our universe, the better universe, aren't these lines really more like lush, living shores than highly securitized, militarized borders?

Can we embark on a conscientious campaign to become more self-aware when the stifling, oppressive forces of jealousy and conceit inevitably rear their boring old heads? (It *is* inevitable and one of the first things that we need to learn is perhaps how to forgive ourselves for being normal like this). Can we fess up to these things with each other? Wouldn't that be a good way to establish stronger bonds, and cultivate bases of conscientious, thoughtful power? Can't we do this in our apartments and other cultural spaces in the same ways we make exhibitions? Should it be a potluck, a home-made pizza party, an affinity group, a picnic, a consciousness raising group, a stitch and bitch, or an experiment in self-powered group therapy? Are there historical examples of these types things, either in art or other areas that we can learn from?

What can we do to encourage more and more people to see the places in our cities and towns differently and revitalize a sense of the public? Why is a gallery or an apartment better than a park, or a sidewalk, or a busy intersection for doing cultural work? What if tons of us just started building idiosyncratic food carts, mobile structures, tents, public tinkering kiosks, and like, I don't know, knife

sharpening stands?

For that matter, why don't we just build stables and start riding horses around?

Why aren't we reading Kathy Acker? Waziyatawin? Hafiz? David Wojnarowicz? Winona LaDuke? Edward Said? Debbie Gould? Vine Deloria Jr? Brian Holmes? Weird zines? Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden? The Bhagavad-Gita? Robin Hustle? The terrible history of the rural Midwest?

Can we please all start doing a better job of acknowledging and honoring the indigenous people of North America?!

What are we angry about? Isn't anger sometimes the calcification of sadness? What were we sad about before we got angry?

What are we gonna make now?

Closing notes

I am asking a lot here so I invite you to simply take what you want and leave what you don't. But I would like you to at least take a little. I want to be like your brilliant mother when she suspected you would like a food that you were apprehensive about and kindly implored you to try a little bite. It would be a mistake to let any of these questions multiply the negative effects of guilt and shame. My hope is that you can use them for nourishment. Speaking of brilliant mothers, a powerful woman once told me that, "Guilt is a lesson." This is the best poem I've heard in years. That's why I memorized it.

Finally, I think 2010 is going to be a hard year. I think the best way for us to deal with it is to keep working. Don't falter in this (but remember to take breaks to eat breakfast or seek necessary medical attention), be brave and keep your head above the water of the flowing river. Feel free to work in different ways even if it seems peripheral and doesn't advance your career. Trying to stop the river or change it's course is foolish. Work to be generous. Work to listen carefully to others. Work to celebrate each other. If you see me faltering will you please help me remember? It will make the year more livable for both of us.

*http://www.artreviewandpreview.org/arp_online/ARP_1.pdf

EC Brown

<http://floorlengthandtux.com>

<http://occidentalmuseum.org>

LNS SEO DQY

As pleased as punch as I am with the latest uptick in domestic artspaces – especially in contrast to my experiences in Chicago through the 90's and early 2000's – I prefer to perceive these activities as formative stages, collectively inching toward something that hasn't already waxed and waned in the past. What has been unique about these events is not so much a change in the way that artists operate, but in the comfort level of the guests. Folks seem willing to allow homegrown spaces to fulfill their needs for viewing (or confronting) art, rather than only appreciating these events in deference to commercial and institutional spaces. Nevertheless, the author vs. spectator dynamic remains intact, and the imprint of the commercial gallery template has proved sometimes indelible, sometimes unproductively.

Potentially, artists and aficionados alike could cultivate a crowded and long-lasting game that wrangles space, atmosphere, scheduling, social relations, archives and marketing schemes as a holistic medium. I do prefer the word *game* over *discourse*. Not to suggest zero sum games under strict protocols, but rather the heated intensity of competitive engagement -- a fervent clash between dissonant operational models, temperaments and philosophies. At present, there are too few players on the field for a city this size, and the general social atmosphere is congenial and a bit measured – not quite a passionate crucible to compensate for the absent pressures of a lively commercial system.

The current domestic artspace phenomenon is not a solution to a problem, but rather a roughhewn design problem in itself. Anyone with a stake in how art is practiced in Chicago – as an intelligent maker or and intelligent beholder – owns this problem. There are many more untried models for intersecting people, aesthetics and strategy, and it's important to get more heads and hands together to accelerate this air of experimentation. Why the urgency? So that a local style of practice can have truly resound through the entire Midwest. Mind you, I'm really not interested in a provincial aesthetic, nor the ascendancy of a “Chicago art community” (clusters of inharmonious art scenes are fine by me), but in the

external outcomes of the reverberations. Chicago can argue itself to be the very best blend of cosmopolitan access and provincial tactics, and if surrounding cities like Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Detroit, St. Louis and Kansas City keep getting the word that our low-overhead operations are bearing sweeter fruit (justified or otherwise) – via the same means and opportunities available on their own turf – then this could be the thrown gauntlet. Artists at several hours driving-distance in all directions may tear open their shirts and beat us spectacularly at own game. Ultimately, there could exist a rich, competitive tension between Midwestern cities in which all camps are equally on alert.

A model I've been thinking about is the football hooligan (in the cinematic sense), and I'll take a moment to compare *Green Street* (Lexi Alexander, 2005) to the far more nuanced *The Firm* (Alan Clarke, 1988). *Green Street*, starring Elijah Wood, is a standard dramatic arc where a young man discovers his inner beast, strays from the life expected of him, and eventually finds a redemptive repose. *The Firm*, starring Gary Oldman, skips the initiation sequences as the protagonist pushes for rival clubs to band together and recalibrate for bigger matches beyond their familiar scope. This is realized when Oldman's character become the martyred rallying point for these alliances, and the film ends. It reminds me a bit of the original *Wicker Man* where the fiery finale, a tragic end in the conventional sense, is likewise celebratory pagan vengeance.

Granted, I'm blatantly skirting both directors' critique of public violence (as well as the fascist and masculinist tendencies that these clubs are known for), but my point is this: one officially-structured form of battle, thriving on aggressive spectatorship, is threatened by a parallel and irregular form which demands aggressive participation (or keeping a safe distance). This threat only flows in one direction: hooligan firms certainly draw inspiration from what happens in the arena, but the sports industry does not supplant the drive for streetfighting, and the firms can thrive even as arenas are on the defensive and keeping themselves in check. As a character in *The Firm* put it, "If they stop us at football, we'll just go to boxing or snooker."

In short, I believe what I am endorsing is a mass game of chicken.

Jaime Groetsema

*Brecht's Modus Operandi for Writers and Truth-Seekers:
Another trial against apartment gallery documentiers*

In the 1966 English translation of *Galileo*, an interpretation of Galileo Galilei's life written by Bertolt Brecht in the form of a stage play, Galileo, an important Italian figure who is considered responsible for the development of modern science in the early 17th century, is for Brecht, just an example. Within the play, Brecht highlights the consistency to which Galileo is both challenged and forced to deny the validity of his own astronomical observations by authority figures within the church and those that support the church. But only in the face of his potential execution—he is literally shown the instruments of torture and death—does Galileo publicly renounce his ideas to those figures so that he might live and finish his final work, the *Discorsi*. In this work he describes two new valuable properties that influenced the creation of modern physics: the strength of materials and the motion of projected objects. The completed *Discorsi* was taken by an old student from Galileo when he was on house arrest in Italy towards the end of his life. The student, Andrea Sarti smuggled the book into the Netherlands where it could be printed without permission or approval.

But for Brecht, these actions weigh heavily as he responded personally to the fascism of German political powers in the 1930s with his play *Galileo*. Throughout the play Brecht ultimately defines his hero, truth-seeker Galileo Galilei by way of his actions: his persistence in relaying the truth of his findings; his self-imposed responsibility for society in promoting these truths, and his subsequent detainment as an example of a complex resistance to the oppressive powers of the church's authority figures. Still responding to the contemporary climate, Brecht goes one step further and makes a call to his contemporaries. In addition to the play, he has written an essay titled *Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties*^[1] that has been published as an appendix to *Galileo*. In the essay Brecht includes powerful reflections and descriptions of what characteristics one must maintain in order to communicate effectively those truths hidden by means of oppression—'suppressed' truths—for the sake of bettering humanity (135). He summarizes his requirements thus (his italics): "He must have the *courage* to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; the *keenness* to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; the *skill* to manipulate it as a weapon; the *judgment* to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the *cunning* to spread the truth among such persons" (133). Brecht in listing these requirements, also expects that a writer with the courage to speak against one's oppressors must also use that courage to examine one's own failures, i.e. one must be critical of one's self and society. He continues to say that those that have the courage to speak truth in the face of an oppressor may not necessarily

have the knowledge, or ability, to adequately decode those purposely-hidden truths. Truths, he says, can be obtained only by a careful and concentrated study of both history and economics and he implores writers to be exact in defining these truths and to extract the specifics of truth when vague or abstract generalizations prevail. He continues to say that writers must write to an audience; to any reader that can use the text as a tool or realize the truth through it. These truths must be readable and understood by everyone. Without truth-seekers and truth-tellers oppressors will motivate societies by way of fear to inhabit silence and stagnation.

Brecht's important transition from 'courage' to 'keenness' leaves us with some significant evidence (133). For one to appropriately use courage, it is crucial that one must develop a well-considered methodology for study and learning. Only when one uses history and economics as a basis for their knowledge does the ability to find and tell truths develop for effectivity. He stresses the necessity of this development by saying that, "Method is good in all inquiry, but it is possible to make discoveries without using any method-indeed, even without inquiry. But by such a casual procedure one does not come to the kind of presentation of truth which will enable men to act on the basis of that presentation" (137). Without a methodology, one is not able to act on the knowledge that one has, therefore one cannot act with a effective criticism and definitely not with a criticism that will improve the impoverished conditions of one's society. Similarly, if a writer is uninterested in the prospects of humanity, it is so because this writer is without the knowledge needed to see hidden truths; without the ability to act truly courageously; without the evidence to respond critically to others or one's self. These differentiations are incredibly important when considering criticism of any kind, yet for essayists dealing with Chicago popular culture, a relevant detail cannot be missed. These critical and acting observers with the knowledge and the ability to dissect truth must necessarily confront and decipher falsehood as well; to critical observers *not everything is a truth*.

When looking at popular contemporary writings on apartment galleries or alternative spaces in Chicago-specific publications like Proximity, Time Out, and Newcity, one is shown very similar texts. As the ephemerality of these spaces is a consistent concern in this setting, writers have become more like documentiers, cataloging spaces, people, and events for an invisible archive of the future. This condition should not be mistaken as a tactful historicism, as documenting an object does not necessarily clarify its process or meaning. History and documentation are important for understanding complex social movements, yet, when documentation stands in for effective critical writing there remains a severe vacancy in the discourse (or if even a discourse at all) of cultural production. Using Brecht's text as more than just symbolism, the writers of those pieces do little to decode the truths of a truly suppressed society, let alone be critical of it, themselves, or their publications.

¹ Originally *Dichter sollen die Wahrheit schreiben/Poets Are to Tell the Truth*; Published in German in 1935, English translation 1948.

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Rob Ray

<http://deadtech.net>

Art Exhibition. A Test of Short Answer Questions.

Deadtech was an underground electronic arts venue in the Logan Square neighborhood of Chicago. I opened Deadtech in April 1999 and closed the doors in May 2008. For the first seven years of Deadtech's tenure, I made all planning and operational decisions – though countless insanely awesome folks assisted me. Alexander Stewart, Taylor Hokanson came on board to help me oversee Deadtech's last two years and their assistance and friendship is incalculable. Those last two years, in my opinion, were Deadtech's strongest. We went out with our chin up.

But this is no eulogy nor is it a "If I could do it all over again." lament. It is just a list of questions Deadtech never answered. Some of these questions I simply never saw coming. Some I answered through deference and one or two I tried to answer but gave up on or ended up having no real implementation strategy for the answer that was rolling around in my head.

If you're interested in finding out more about Deadtech and the curatorial, financial and political solutions we applied to the art exhibition problem, shoot me an email (rob@deadtech.net) or, if you're not feeling conversational, give the Internet a search. Most of the interviews and reviews out there are things I still feel quite good about.

What will you do when you realize certain elements of your mission are in conflict? And by conflict I mean they are dragging down the quality of what you are doing and/or are overwhelming you or otherwise making you unhappy.

What are you doing poorly?

What is it that makes you feel good about exhibiting art? This may seem like a narcissistic and/or really depressing question. Perhaps it is.

What role does your space play in the career of the artists you work with?

You're probably providing something that commercial galleries and museums can't. I'm sure of it, actually. But it doesn't mean you exist separate from those entities. Even if you don't want a relationship with them, one exists. You share a direct relationship with the artists and patrons you serve and you share indirect connections via other elements of your local creative ecosystem (such as universities, other cultural institutions, and entertainment newsweeklies). So... What do you want that relationship to be?

Pick a city in each state bordering your own. What do artists in those cities know about you?

Erik Wenzel

<http://artoridiocy.blogspot.com>

Do these spaces have real cultural or regional impact?

That is a big question, since it first makes me ask, "What is real culture?" Assuming culture in this sense means something that is a worthwhile activity that promotes things like community, dialogue and experience, then yes, definitely. I would say they do have regional impact simply by the fact that Chicago is known as a hub for this kind of activity. Shows like Artists Run Chicago indicate that a more "real cultural" impact is taking place, at least at the edges of the institutional level.

Does anyone really care if Chicago has 2.3 trillion small project spaces?

People should care that these spaces exist because without them there would be almost nothing going on in the city. As it is there are only a handful of galleries with worthwhile programs. There are plenty of irrelevant or stagnant things going on. These small project spaces provide a lot of flavor and character.

Do these projects propose alternatives to institutional models or do they reinforce them?

It's funny because my gut instinct says to be more alternative you have to engage certain institutions such as maintaining a website, writing press releases, having set hours, and building a coherent program or aesthetic. The alternative would be to then present work that is very experimental, risky and strange. And not risky or strange for the sake of edginess or shock. All the stuff trying to do that ends up being the most angsty and conventional. But an approach that says, "we are going to get cards printed, have a professional tone, but we want our artists to feel free to do something crazy."

I notice a lot of spaces are good about putting together websites and announcements. Some are more reliably on top of providing that kind of information than commercial spaces. I think it would be a good goal to beat these professional spaces at their own game. This is possible, not only in terms of administration but in terms of programming.

This is where criticality comes in. I admire anyone that month after month can put together a show and invite strangers into their living space to come see it in addition to everything else in their life. But a lot of times it becomes about filling slots rather than having a program or an overarching aesthetic. An interesting turn

that would signal a cultural or broader relevancy would be an alternative space that is run as though it were a kunsthalle. And not an ironic or fake kunsthalle. Strangely that would be pretty radical.

Do these spaces really provide something that institutions or larger galleries can't?

I think the main asset that alternative spaces have going for them is that there is a lot of freedom and room to experiment. They provide immediacy. An exhibition at an alternative space can come about very rapidly, which is the upswing of needing to have a regular schedule. This is great to try out an idea, or do something very impulsive.

Not being in a commercial space, there is no need to make money, a show can be completely art for art's sake. Not being at a museum there aren't the same bureaucratic and legal constraints. This is also the area with the most room for improvement. On the whole no one seems to make the most of this advantage. Most of the time you see two-dimensional work on the walls and maybe a sculpture or a video on a TV. A lot of times this comes, ironically, from an unrealistic desire to make big sales, be discovered, or whatever sort of secret fantasy all aspiring artists and gallerists (myself included) have.

This is different than being professional, if a space is run with a certain degree of structure and regularity there is definitely potential to make sales, develop collectors and garner recognition for the artists who show there. I would say though, that trying to work backwards from that goal results in art that is not very interesting. There is nothing inherently wrong with making work that ends up fitting into these prescribed modes but it seems very cynical and not very useful to let that be the criterion that determines where a work of art or a gallery's program is headed. For spaces needing to pay the bills, earn grants or increase membership this becomes an issue to navigate, but for alternative spaces, those concerns aren't automatically present.

I am interested in work that responds to a situation in a more critical way. And the situation of a garage, a basement, a kitchen a living room, a bathroom, that is at once very common, domestic and everyday, is also radically different than a museum or a commercial gallery. So this is an underutilization both in spatial and economic considerations.

Are these projects a manifestation of DIY, or are they rogue businesses? Or vanity projects masquerading as non-profit cultural services?

I think all of the above and then some. There are many models and motivations for running an alternative space. I think it would be helpful to realize there is a lot of

variation within the practice. There is also development, these spaces come and go, they grow, they shrink, they move, they turn into commercial spaces—there is dynamism.

Students get together to have a party, show their art, socialize and practice art stuff like installing work and writing a press release. These are essentially vanity projects as they usually start with the idea of a bunch of friends taking turns putting up their work. But this has value because it is a consequence free environment where people can make mistakes and learn things about the mechanics of exhibition making. And it is a way to get your work out there, potentially have a conversation outside the school environment. Even if students are the main audience.

Problems arise when it becomes too insular and incestuous. Which is the general problem in Chicago. Artists going around from project space to project space showing too much, producing too much of the same stuff and not spending enough time thinking. Chicago is so making oriented, there needs to be thinking in there too. This is another cause of the type of work I mentioned before that comes off as very conventional. There needs to be a critical conversation, not general consensus. Everyone knows it's great to hear that people like what you are doing, but constructive criticism leads to development.

There have been some criticisms of the business end of alternative spaces recently that are frankly ridiculous and stupid. I find most alternative spaces don't make a lot of sales. No one shows up at an opening with cash in hand wanting to buy the art off the walls. Those that do have that as a goal slowly move to a more professionalized setting. If an apartment gallery is doing any serious business, sooner or later they move to a "legitimate" commercial space. A lot of the established galleries got started this way. This occurs all over, not just in Chicago, and all throughout the history of art dealing.

Art is very different than other commodities, an apartment that has work on view, and is willing to sell it, is in no way the same thing as someone selling illegal cigarettes out of their house to people off the street. Art is unique, it's not like delivering the same Marlboro for half the price and stealing the corner store's customers. But that is the argument some seem to make, that selling paintings by your friends is going to put the real hard working commercial spaces out of business.

Do these spaces provide a solution to Brain Drain in Chicago?

I think it is starting to happen a little. But this is only one key element within a greater problem. If alternative spaces started taking more risks in terms of the art they show and the level of rigor, curatorially, conceptually and critically, there would be something. Art in Chicago is too fun and too zany.

People hold barbeques and cook food as almost a safeguard against boring art. The message seems to be the art isn't all that great or worth seeing, but you should still come because there will be a lot of beer and fun. The elaborate party atmosphere isn't even done as art. That at least, would be a step up. The social component is key, and openings are about fun. But art isn't. If you want to have fun, why are you looking at art? Art can be fun, but it doesn't have to be, and it certainly should not be a guiding principle. That's the problem of a one-night art event with a bunch of drawings on the wall. No one takes it seriously, no one can come back later and really look at the work, engage it. I'm speaking generally, but oftentimes that ends up being the case. This is where risk would be interesting.

Assuming it is going to be a one-time only party event atmosphere, what is an art-like moment that can be inserted into the social situation? A lot of art at alternative spaces, and in Chicago in general, is very polite and geared towards accommodating the audience. What about art that confronts the audience, makes them uncomfortable, makes them feel stupid, or alienated or confused? What about art that appeals to or requires an intellectual participation? Or art that you aren't even sure where it begins and ends? These tend to be the types of art that stay with me, and give me meaningful experiences.

Really pushing boundaries, experimenting and taking risks with ambitious projects also has the potential to start building these other things you are asking about, culture, reputation, collectors and patronage. This would be a reason to stay, or a reason for someone to come here and do a project.

Chicago exports artists, it doesn't import them. Artists feel there is no point in staying because there is nothing interesting going on. You are isolated from the greater art world because of the pervasive mentality repeated by a few loud mouths with chips-on-their-shoulders: a pride in isolationism. If you don't fit into the only legitimate mould of carrying on the Imagist tradition in the finest SAIC sense, it's easy to become alienated and overlooked. Exponents of sticking to the tradition dismiss New York, LA and elsewhere as being shallow and fashionable. But how is staying focused on one blip that is moving further and further into the past signal substance, authenticity or dedication? It's like one day having a really good meatloaf and then deciding you will only eat meatloaf for the rest of your life. In this climate artists feel like there is no way to escape the gravitational pull of the black hole without skipping town.

I think alternative spaces do, and could increase an open exchange with the world outside. Building a network of spaces across the country and internationally would be a very welcome and meaningful development. This occurs somewhat, but to really push that agenda I think would increase the value of staying in Chicago, as well as do some of the other things.

Michael Thomas

Dogmatic

- This article will include: Beer at it's beginning.
- This article will include: A primary history of the specific phenomena of independent art spaces in Chicago with the attending social, economic, and aesthetic motivations that have informed their development from, 1970 until May, 2004. It will be argued that in this time period the motivations for starting and maintaining such a space remained largely static regarding, aesthetic, and sociological positions within a decentralized International art community. While this may be the case, it is in the examination of the individual models developed by their executors where we can expect to find the greatest diversity in utility and attending speculations on philosophy and form.
- This article will include: JPEG's, however it will not accept slides.
- This article will include: Paint, a small tin of spirits, two brushes, and encouragement.
- This article will include: Speculation that Gallerist, as a word might be little more than fashion with some French flare.
- This article will include: An examination of the relationship that exists between the independent space and the academic institution. (tentative heading, but decay smells Sweet).
- This article will include: 2 photographs of the Art Institute of Chicago.
- This article will include: This sentence, "The Renaissance Society, The Chicago Cultural Center, and The Hyde Park Art Center can do this repeatedly precisely because they are not museums."
- This article will include: Analysis of a philanthropic model side by side the analysis of a for-profit model (charts might be color coded for clarity).
- This article will include: Materials as fact from the current program.
- This article will include: the borrowed VCR from Meg's last show (ca.2001).
- This article will include: An examination of the collectivist, pass-the-hat, and small institutional models conceived in 1970. It will also include the more contemporary not-for-profit, 501c3's as organized social networks. Then it will pit them against one another in an arena of DOOM with hens and pigeons; each with an eye patch.
- This article will include: An understanding that the models developed in Chicago, stay in Chicago.

- This article will include: Chicago, and all of it's neighborhoods.
- This article will include: Site specificity.
- This article will include: Architecture because it's a must.
- This article will include: at least 2 days for the changing of light bulbs.
- This article will not include: An adjunct teaching position, a part-time art handling position, or free passes to the show in question. This article will include: An archive of local art publications, broadsides, or magazines that might include, Ten by Ten, Cakewalk, New Art Examiner, FGA, CACA Newsletter, F student newspaper, CAC Newsletter, Lumpen, and maybe something else.
- This article will include: The Chicago Reader, in a section titled, Validity.
- This article will include: Examinations of the Federal, State, and Local government agencies that have provided funding for the Art's, and their recipient cultural press.
- This article will include: The New Art Examiner again, because it must.
- This article will include: Ovaries and Testicles.
- This article will include: Resistance to a critical voice since 1970, "We hate 1970."
- This article will include: It's own work in it's next show.
- This article will include: A developmental history of the Chicago Art Exposition at Navy Pier from its inception through the development of the Stray Show by Thomas Blackman Associates.
- This article will include: Nothing new or revealing about the motivations of an art fair.
- This article will include: Disdain for systems that fail at an individual level.
- This article will include: The names of many people that have left Chicago.
- This article will include: The names of many people that have returned to Chicago.
- This article will include: A deeper sense of meta than its readers might be comfortable with.
- This article will include: Art listings, postcards, mailers, email blasts, BB's, LISTSERV's, and websites, but still.
- This article will include: 1 photo of Dogmatic.
- This article will include: Hope.
- This article will include: My Signature.
- This article will include: Closing the doors and turning off the lights.
- This article will include: A thank you as I've always said, Skittles MT/DB.
- This article will include: A Dedication to John Gibbons, with love.

