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Vancouver as a Going Concern

Artists' Spaces, Public and Non

The history of artists' spaces in Vancouver since the 1960s is, in some ways, a history of bureaucratic forms. The artist collective Intermedia struggled with the imposition of a board of directors by the Canada Council as a condition of funding. Iain and Ingrid Baxter's N. E. Thing Co. embraced the model of the corporation while adhering to the structure of a patriarchal family. The Western Front and other artist-run centres pursued an owner/operator format as a stabilizing strategy in order to hold space. And independent spaces, through necessity, organized themselves around and through precarity. How these artists' spaces emerge, survive, dissolve, and re-emerge is imbricated with issues of affordability, national and provincial arts policy, and shifting expectations of what art can and should do. In his excellent history of the Vancouver-based Kootenay School of Writing (KSW), Jeff Derksen cautions that "a history of an artist-run space can unfortunately become a history of its governmental funding" (288). Such an emphasis on funding structures, particularly in the case of the KSW, he argues, can diminish the agency of artists and writers in their collective response to the material conditions created by shifts in cultural policy. But I want to argue that there is a valuable history of artists' spaces in Vancouver that can only be told through an analysis of the role that public funding has played in sustaining, constraining, and forming art practices and subjectivities over the past half-century.

Most histories of the material and conceptual infrastructure of contemporary art in Vancouver begin with Intermedia, and for good reason. Intermedia was formed as a loose collective comprised of visual

artists, dancers, poets, filmmakers, non-artists, and explorers who came together in the late 1960s to imagine how a society of artists might live. They organized happenings and performances, many of which were purposefully undocumented, and opened a workshop on Beatty Street that functioned as a meeting place, studio, and production centre. They also hosted a free high school and kindergarten organized by the Company of Young Canadians,[1] and, in partnership with the Vancouver Art Gallery, operated satellite galleries throughout the city that doubled as community centres and aimed to reach audiences not usually affiliated with art. Nancy Shaw points out that "the satellite galleries were intended to be numerous and located through the city in order to reach as broad a public as possible, but these plans turned out to be short-lived due to funding difficulties" ("Expanded" 88). Such "funding difficulties" are common to most artist-run spaces, but in Intermedia's case, one of their funding problems would turn out to be too much of it, in combination with its source: the relatively young Canada Council for the Arts, which in 1967 awarded Intermedia a forty-thousand-dollar-per-year operating grant without the collective having ever applied for it. With the grant came particular responsibilities, and the co-operative character of Intermedia strained under the pressure. They eventually hired a director to facilitate the day-to-day operations, a gesture that for some alleviated tension and for others tainted the group's character. Kate Craig, who would go on to co-found the Western Front, remembers that Intermedia submitted an ambitious grant application to the Local Initiatives Program, a federal government effort meant to alleviate winter unemployment by funding privately generated projects that contributed to "community betterment" (Huneault and Anderson 30). Their original request was for seventy-nine artists' salaries. They received twelve, which were distributed amongst various projects, including "Video Inn, Granville Grange, Image Bank, New Era Social Club and Intermedia Press. . . . [I]t was at that point that all those different groups went their own way" (Craig 261). The realities of administration that emerged contemporaneously with the aesthetics of administration were anathema to the spirit of Intermedia's enterprise, and they disbanded in 1972 (Wallace, "A Particular History" 27).

Questions of scale emerge from the failure of Intermedia's utopian experiment. As a group, they partnered with and navigated institutions and their organizational challenges. They coordinated projects with both the University of British Columbia and the Vancouver Art Gallery and managed to maintain a satisfactory level of autonomy. But the strictures of

funding from the Canada Council, a body designed in large part to foster the creative and socially transformative practices that Intermedia exemplified (and also to encourage Canadian artists to resist the lure of the American art market), were simply too contradictory to the spirit of the project for it to be sustainable. The Council's bureaucratic requirements of reporting and quantifying activities, and of articulating the value of experimentation, impeded the kind of open, creative, and imaginative mode of art production the funding body had been designed to encourage.

After Intermedia's dissolution, former members went on to initiate other artist groups and spaces, many of which recognized and capitulated to the requirements of government funding. Vancouver's Co-op Radio and Pacific Cinematheque are two such examples that still remain, and that have had a lasting impact on the cultural landscape of the city (Wallace, "Introduction" 2). Also in the wake of Intermedia came the emergence of publicly funded artist-run centres. The Western Front, which opened in 1973 at 303 East 8th Avenue at Scotia Street, was founded to pursue interests and projects similar to those of Intermedia. It emphasized cross-disciplinary, performative, explorational media practices, but it was artist-*owned* and operated, and it absorbed and architecturally performed the structures of ownership. The building was previously occupied by the Knights of Pythias, a kind of Freemason-like secret society, and was zoned for non-profit use only, a category that frustrated the previous owner and contributed to its affordability (Wallace, "Introduction" 1-2).[2] In a particularly meaningful shift from Intermedia's openness to the public, where people could come in and use equipment and facilities with very little oversight (and consequently could steal equipment with very little trouble), the Western Front disguised itself from the public. It installed a buzzer on its front door, so visitors needed to request entry to see an exhibition.[3] Keith Wallace points to this particular adjustment as evidence that Vancouver artist-run culture no longer felt the pressure to serve a general public because it served its communities, which were often small and diverse, but energized and committed ("A Particular History" 30).

Before connecting the emergence of artist-run centres in the 1970s to Vancouver's contemporary moment, I want to address another artist group that operated concurrently with Intermedia: the husband-and-wife team of Ingrid and Iain Baxter, who produced work under the banner and corporate structure of N. E. Thing Co. (NETCO). Like Intermedia, they had a strong interest in the relationship between technology and art, and in the potential

for art to intervene in and transform everyday life. Whereas Intermedia was a loose and revolving collective that buckled under the strain of formal organization, NETCO had a bureaucratic structure and space in place from the beginning: a marriage and a shared home in North Vancouver. Multidisciplinary and politically peripheral, if not disengaged, NETCO was originally developed to operate outside the conventional parameters of art. In a 2011 interview with Alexander Alberro, Ingrid makes explicit that "the whole point of forming a company was so that the individual artist would be subsumed by the larger entity" (42). While much of their practice involved ephemeral interventions into landscape, or work sent via new communication technologies such as the telex, some of their major exhibitions foregrounded their incorporated identity. In 1969, they turned the first floor of the National Gallery in Ottawa into their corporate headquarters, which included hiring "temporary workers to sit at the desks and push paper around for the duration of the show" (Alberro, "Iain" 31).[4] That same year, they joined the Vancouver Board of Trade and then displayed the documents from the process at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York.

The language NETCO used to articulate their project bordered on the parodic. Their position statement from 1971 reads:

> The role of an "ARTIST" in society today is constructed by a series of negative structures, i.e. financial, political and especially the connotations of the word *ARTIST* itself, which propels his [*sic*] position to the fringes of the sources of power and its servants, the media.
>
> An artist in this marketplace environment relies ultimately on the charity of those who, for whatever psych-socio reasons, wish to "support" the arts. It is essential to free the artist from these constraints, and allow the cultural knowledge he possesses to fuse with that of business, politics and education. Rejecting impotence and violence, it seems essential to develop a financial base, therefore the N. E. Thing Co. Ltd. is transitioning itself into a business organization operating within the current framework—to generate funds by legitimate, highly imaginative and profitable business activity, in areas like food, clothing, shelter, leisure and consultation, so as to support and accomplish the projects and concepts it wishes to conceive.
>
> The object is not personal profit, but to develop a structure and method whereby products, functions and power can change directly the value systems of society. (Shaw and Wood 43)

The posture NETCO assumes here is interesting, not only for its rejection of the term "artist" itself as being too negative, but of art in general for being either impotent or violent. We can recognize the influence of Marshall McLuhan's thinking in the term "marketplace environment," though here the Baxters

extend McLuhan further into an economic sphere than he might normally venture. In the combination of the adjectives "legitimate, highly imaginative and profitable" with the noun phrase "business activity," we can identify a shift away from an artistic vanguard to a corporate vanguard, one that is perhaps more meaningful to contemporary observers than it was to critics who read NETCO's press releases and very structure as a parody of business.[5]

Compare NETCO's position with how representatives from Intermedia, Victor Doray and Joe Kyle, described their group during a 1967 interview on CBC radio:

> It is our intention that Intermedia be a place where creative exploration could take place on an interactive basis between artists, between technologists and between seriously interested people. The only criteria that we have is that it is far out, creative and exploratory.
>
> I don't think it's very desirable to try and define Intermedia in too great detail at the moment because it's exploratory—we are, in a sense, discovering this thing into existence.
>
> We have tried in the setting up of this to create as unstructured an environment as possible. This is the essential difficulty involved in working within an existing institutional structure. ("Intermedia")

A contemporary reader will likely be familiar with the tone of these passages, for both positions—the unabashedly corporate and the unapologetically speculative—have been adopted to varying degrees and effects by the discourses of late capitalism. We hear these phrases and ambitions from corporate leaders as well as politicians but also from less established voices: students, small businesses, artists, and others involved in what have been designated as the "creative industries."

But when we situate these statements in the spaces from which they emerged—the familial live-work-play suburban home and the urban, collective, fluid studio workshop—we can begin to understand which forces converged to impede or support the operations of both Intermedia and NETCO. Margaret Thatcher's oft-quoted claim, in a 1987 interview with *Women's Own* magazine, that "there is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women and there are families," provides an entrance into thinking about notions of collaboration, support structures, and stability (Keay). For if there is no such thing as society—a collectively responsible, fluid, connected group of people who share an understanding, however superficial, of the world they live in—then a project such as Intermedia's would have a tremendously difficult time sustaining itself. And if there are only individual men and women, and there are families, then

Ingrid and Iain Baxter—as individuals, as a family unit, and as a corporation that, under law, is also granted legal personhood—have structural advantages that should come into play when considering their position in the history of experimental art spaces in Vancouver. While Thatcher's statement is obviously false, the ideological structures that allowed her to first think and then speak it are very real, and they have real effects on the formation of subjectivities, art-related and otherwise.

Iain Baxter became the president of N. E. Thing Co. upon its founding in 1966. Ingrid began as secretary, and then became vice-president, and then briefly, in 1969, co-president. When they formally registered as a corporation, though, regulations required that there be only one president, and Iain became president again, putatively because his name came before Ingrid's alphabetically. Iain's account of their working relationship during that time is this: "Well, I was the art guy. Ingrid was a kind of consultant and sounding board for me, as is true in any relationship. I bounced ideas off many people every day. That's how I work. Ingrid never really made anything. I made all of the artworks and all of the aesthetic decisions" (Alberro, "Iain" 29). Ingrid remembers their working relationship differently:

> We collaborated on all of the works and events that were produced from about 1965 until we separated around 1978. . . . The main body of the artworks between 1965 to 1978 was jointly produced. Iain did not exhibit anything outside of what we produced together during that time. . . . We were both producing the concepts and the ideas for the work. Iain would manufacture the work, but the concepts and ideas were very much a collaboration. (Alberro, "Ingrid" 41-42)

Ingrid's specific emphasis on claiming authorship of the work in this interview from 2011 is likely a response to Iain's practice of exhibiting and claiming sole authorship, post-separation, of work produced during NETCO's tenure (Shaw, "Expanded" 96). That she would have to make a point of insisting on the value of her role brings into relief the social terrain of Iain and Ingrid's collaborative structure. When asked about how NETCO involved itself with the larger art community in the late 1960s/early 1970s, Ingrid responded:

> You'd have to ask the art community. To us it just felt natural. . . . Connecting to the community, I think we were so busy, doing things, we were just really, really busy and didn't get involved in the community all that much. Intermedia was really active and we were on the fringe. We went to meetings and did some stuff, but it was always just so . . . so many things to get done at home base. (Arnold)

Out of these two statements from Ingrid, I want to extract a couple of points. The first is that being part of a husband-and-wife team at that sexist moment prevented Ingrid from being taken seriously as a full participant

in the company by both the business community and the art community, including, unfortunately, her husband. Various observers have commented on this before, specifically the way in which Ingrid would often be referred to as Iain's "beautiful blonde wife" (Shaw, "Expanded" 95). My second point is spatial. It seems that the Baxters' position as a domestic unit reduces the utopian or subversive character of collaboration, which in other forms challenges assumptions about authorship, property, or participation. As husband and wife, the Baxters shared a family home, income, and, to some extent, child care, though Ingrid notes that she couldn't participate as fully in some projects, like NETCO's Eye Scream Restaurant (1977-1978), as she would have liked because they took place at night, and she had to care for the children (Arnold). As husband and wife, they worked from an economic structure that provided them more security than those individual men and women that Thatcher revered. As an entrepreneurial team that fused work with the domestic and operated largely outside of the artistic community, they were, paradoxically, an ideal manifestation of the neoliberal individual: the married couple as the highest form of the individual.

Around the same time as the Baxters were actively pursuing a fusion of art, business, and the family, Michel Foucault was attempting to think through the historical trajectory of the market economy's encroachment into everyday life. In *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, he points to the work of Quebec economist Jean-Luc Migué as evidence of how economic discourse had become imbricated with that of the family. Migué advocated for a rethinking of the dynamics of the family as equivalent to that of a firm, where a marriage becomes a long-term contract that allows the spouses, as co-signatories, to "avoid the transaction costs and the risk of being deprived at any movement of the *inputs* of the spouse and, hence, of the common *output* of the household" (qtd. in Foucault 262). Just as we recognized the language of speculation and corporate trumpeting in the earlier mission statements from Intermedia and NETCO, we likely recognize Migué's language here, as it is the language of contemporary economic discourse, where everything from nations to institutions to friendships is couched in the language of efficiency, equilibrium, and investment. Economic rationality even finds its way into cultural sectors.[6]

The pervasiveness of economic or finance-based discourse has been taken up by various critics who are concerned about how that hegemony might suppress or limit other ways of imagining social and cultural forms. The French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, in their 1999 book

The New Spirit of Capitalism, studied managerial texts published between the 1970s and the 1990s and found that the language of management had co-opted the language of protest from the 1960s. The demands of the activists affiliated with global anti-war, anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and feminist movements for more politically responsive structures of power were taken up by capital and implemented globally to great effect. Boltanski and Chiapello argue that, as a result, "a new representation of the firm has emerged, featuring an organization that is very flexible; organized by projects; works in a network; features few hierarchical levels; where a logic of transversal flows has replaced a more hierarchical one, etc." (165). This re-branding of the firm in the face of protest has been tremendously successful: organized labour suffers from the reputation of inflexibility and capitalists are reframed as "job creators." A shift in the modes of production made possible by the technology NETCO welcomed and celebrated as connective actually increased separation, as workers who work remotely or global firms who have factories in multiple locations are unable to form collective identities in opposition to their employers.

The effects of these technological and cultural transformations of labour and consumption practices culminate in what Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval refer to as the "neo-subject," a subject who is no longer the autonomous liberal subject that formed during the Industrial Revolution and who believed themself free to sell their labour, but who maintained an inalienable self apart from their labour. This new subject, this "neo-subject," forged within the neoliberal technologies of the self that reward competition and discourage any non-productive activity, is a speculative subject, more financialized than the *homo economicus* that Foucault identified in the 1970s. The neo-subject has internalized the idea of human capital and competition, and is the one competing to work for free. It is also, on the other side of the desk, the subject creating the job posting that calls for a graduate degree and three years' related experience for a thirteen-dollar-an-hour limited-term contract. The neo-subject is a subject with a limited capacity to imagine and pursue a social relationship outside of the strictures of the dominant economic discourse.

The connection I want to make between the development of the neo-subject and artists' spaces in Vancouver is perhaps a tenuous one, but thinking through the relationships that particular spaces encourage or limit, and how those relationships might manifest in behaviours or proclivities (political or otherwise), allows us to address the material conditions of making, holding, or abandoning spaces in Vancouver. If, in the late 1960s, an institution like

the Vancouver Art Gallery could partner with Intermedia to support the development of satellite galleries that also functioned as community centres, how can we understand the recent push from Bob Rennie—a condo marketer and art collector from Vancouver—for the gallery to abandon its downtown building as well as its plans for a new, larger space a few blocks away, in favour of developing eight to ten smaller, satellite galleries throughout the city? A 2012 article from *The Globe and Mail* positions the wealthy real estate marketer against Kathleen Bartels, the director of the cash-strapped public institution who has been involved in an ongoing feud with Rennie for over fifteen years. Marsha Lederman presents Rennie's argument this way:

> For the city, multiple sites mean spreading the cultural wealth around the downtown core and to neighbourhoods beyond. And true to his background, Rennie also looks to a spreadsheet for some of the benefits: From a practical, fundraising perspective, multiple sites offer several opportunities for wealthy philanthropists to get their name on the outside of a building.
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> "Once you've given away naming rights to the building, it does get difficult to raise large sums of money," says Rennie. "This way we have eight to 10 different naming rights." He offers a hypothetical example: the Vancouver Art Gallery's Michael Audain Museum of Contemporary First Nations Art. (Audain has a keen interest in first-nations [*sic*] art.)
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> "This to me starts to lead where the world's going," says Rennie, acknowledging his is more of a vision than anything near a concrete plan at the moment. "I really think that this is starting to look at where we're going, as opposed to what's been done before." (Lederman)

To ask "what has changed?" between Intermedia's satellite galleries supported by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Rennie's proposal is to be confronted with the impossibility of accounting for—note the financial language—a wide terrain of social, political, and cultural forces. In some ways, nothing has changed. The approach to city-making is still largely determined by propertied classes. Vancouver now has a Trump Tower, the last building designed by Arthur Erickson's architecture firm, on West Georgia Street. Despite the suggestion that one of the satellite spaces be devoted to First Nations art, the honorific is awarded to Michael Audain, whose great-grandfather was Robert Dunsmuir, after whom a main thoroughfare in downtown Vancouver is named, and who made his fortune as a settler from mining coal on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish people. Audain's fortune was similarly made developing unceded territory via his company Polygon Homes. In October of 2017, the publicly funded North Vancouver museum once known as Presentation House Gallery opened its new space with a new name, The Polygon Gallery, in recognition of a donation from Audain.

The culture of public funding has also changed. In the 1983 catalogue for the inaugural exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery's current Hornby Street building, *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931-1983*, there is, significantly, an account of art in Vancouver in the 1960s and 1970s by David P. Silcox, who was the visual arts officer for the Canada Council for the Arts at the time. The text reads as an insider's account of the art world. Silcox speaks of visits with the Baxters and points out that the NETCO button that reads "Artoficial" was made for him. In an anecdote that is sure to deflate anyone who has recently applied for funding (a process that requires lengthy project descriptions, detailed budgets, and samples of work), Silcox claims that "it was with [Iain] Baxter that I set something of a record in those pre-bureaucratic days by receiving a request by phone on one afternoon and having the cheque in the hands of the artist in Vancouver (by mail yet) twenty-four hours later" (154). Similarly, Silcox was the one who, after a single meeting to discuss a multimedia centre to serve the technological needs of an experimental arts community, secured the forty-thousand-dollar grant that would fund Intermedia's headquarters, all before Intermedia had even gone through the process of becoming a legal entity (158).

While the recent bureaucratization of granting institutions has slowed the distribution of funds to artists, the role that federal, provincial, and civic arts councils play is still widely influential. In "Canadian Cultural Policy: A Problem of Metaphysics," Ken Lum makes the point that "there has not been a single Canadian artist of consequence in the last thirty years who has not benefitted significantly from Canadian government financial assistance in one manner or another—not a single one" (83). Lum wrote his article in 1999, and despite the problematic category of "artist of consequence," I would venture to extend his claim by nineteen years into our present moment. Lum's analysis is not a celebration of government support for the arts; he argues that the availability of financial support has adversely affected the level of critical and curatorial practices in Canada, a claim that he does not develop and with which I cannot agree. But he does well to shine a light on the ideological foundations of the Canada Council, which grew out of the anxiety of "Canada's ruling anglophone elite" that they would be unable to retain a unique national culture if Canadian artists could be seduced by the much more robust commercial art market in the US (76). The strategy of paying artists to stay, of supporting experimental practices that could resist the aesthetics of the market, and of financially supporting small, artist-initiated and artist-run exhibition spaces, resulted in a particular aesthetic,

but one that lacks the easy metric of sales. In a cultural environment that consistently reverts to market valuation as a rhetorical strategy, one that now consistently supersedes the rhetoric of the nation, an argument for supporting experimental practices without *accountability* becomes much more difficult to craft.

If, as Bob Rennie believes, the world is heading in a particular, financialized direction, then it seems as if public space is destined to be sacrificed, initially in name only, to private interests. A common impulse when encountering the overwhelmingly white, hetero, and cis male philanthropy class is to retreat into a nostalgia for the "public." This is what Rennie points to at the end of his statement, having likely come up against people who resist his "vision." But an analysis of the public artist-run centres and the independent spaces that operate alongside them troubles that comfortable distinction between the good state and the bad capitalist.

When the Western Front purchased its space and secured it through a buzzer entry and an architectural camouflage stemming from its residential location and lack of signage, it performed a synthesis of the utopian collectivism of Intermedia and the entrepreneurial, strategic capitalism of the Baxters. Some of the founders, and eventually other artists and friends, lived in the building, in apartments above the gallery, hall, dance space, and offices. Over the past forty-four years, there have been a fluid board of directors and succession of curators at the Western Front, but the space has remained the same and the funding has been steady from federal, provincial, and civic granting institutions. But it is primarily the technology of ownership that has allowed it to remain in place, and to continue its program of exploratory, non-commercial presentation and production of visual art, video, sound, performance, and dance work. A legal structure was created via a nest of contracts and leases, drawn up by Peter Fraser, a lawyer and one-time resident of the Front, that allowed the owners to become directors of the society. Memberships were sold, but without voting rights (Wallace, "Introduction" 6).[7]

Other artist-run centres have come and gone. I realize that any attempt at a history of artists' spaces in Vancouver cannot adequately cover every space and the relationships, personal and material, that they have to the city and its roiling arts community. But I want to jump forward from Intermedia, the Baxters, and the Western Front to address the conditions that artists' spaces experience currently. Over the past several years, Vancouver has oscillated between being ranked the second or third most unaffordable housing market in the world (Pawson). To have and hold a space in Vancouver in the past

fifteen years, a period when affordability has reached crisis levels, is to invite particular questions: Do you rent or own? When did you buy and for how much? How much money do you get from your family? How long can you stay here? These questions—though always there—were less deafening in the 1980s and 1990s, when a storefront in East Vancouver could be rented as a studio gallery for not much more than what a decent party would earn in alcohol sales.

In the 1980s and 1990s, artist-run centres seemed to move further toward their current identity as galleries, and away from collectives or support systems. Their networks reduced in scale, and they became an infrastructure for friendship rather than the larger and more abstract "arts community." Then in the 2000s, there appeared to be a shift towards a professionalization and internationalization of the spaces.[8] Directorships of various artist-run centres switched from artists to curators, and the spaces became, in some cases, mini-museums, pressured to present their exhibition practices in relation to an increasingly market-driven visual art scene and a particularly rationalizing, quantifying government funding structure. In return for operating funds, capital project funds, travel support, and special project money or even wages for employees, publicly funded artist-run centres are required to provide detailed, auditable financial reports, audience numbers to prove their value to the public, and justification of their exhibition practice to prove they are contributing to a contemporary art discourse. All of those articulations serve to develop a spatial subjectivity, and none of them are voluntary or artist-initiated. The work of the director/curator has become less curator and more director/bookkeeper/grant writer over the past twenty years, adding to the bureaucratization of artist-run centres.

Alongside the public artist-run centres is a shifting collection of independent spaces. Over the past few years, some of the most active of these spaces have been Model/Exercise Projects, Sunset Terrace, Avenue, Duplex, Plaza Projects in Richmond, and Spare Room. None of these spaces received any operating funds from government granting agencies, though the artists involved in their day-to-day operations might receive support from the British Columbia Arts Council or the Canada Council for other projects. These independent spaces are funded mostly by collective studio rent or parties, and consequently are allowed to articulate themselves differently, oftentimes with mumbles or shrugs: that is their advantage, and it is one to be envied and celebrated. The conditions that allow them to do this are often poverty and precarity, though, so I want to be careful not to valorize

them. Independent spaces have the option to close or stop exhibiting work (as Exercise/Model did, as Avenue did, as Sunset Terrace and Index did, as Plaza Projects did, though some of those closures were not the decision of the artists involved but their landlords). They have the option to present work that fails, and that can be accepted as failing. In this case, the flexibility accorded by failing is a luxury, as it does not come with the conservatism of a balanced ledger or the pressures of payroll.

When I began to think about how these independent spaces operate outside of a public funding model, I was concerned that 1) the anemic capacity for exhibition and dialogue had pushed artists into a more commercialized, market-driven understanding of art production, and that the artists most able to take advantage of those independent spaces would be those who come from money, the propertied classes, those relatively common artists with family wealth or support; and then 2) that the success of these spaces at showing and fostering contemporary art would serve to undercut a public funding apparatus that—within consecutive neoliberal provincial, federal, and civic governments—has been under threat alongside most other public expenditures. These concerns were likely rooted in my own position as an artist and critic who has exhibited in, and written primarily for, publicly funded galleries, and as an academic whose milieu is firmly rooted in the public university system. I am also currently the president of the Board of Directors of an artist-run centre, where I have been on the board since 2013 and where I exhibited twice, in 2005 and 2007. I have a deep personal interest in public funding for the arts and a reciprocal suspicion of the intervention of private capital and the vicissitudes of patrons or spectral market forces.

Having witnessed the gutting of public arts funding models in different spaces—particularly Ronald Reagan's and George H. W. Bush's attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts in the US in the 1980s, Thatcher's shift away from public arts funding to corporate sponsorship around the same time in Britain, and, more recently, Mark Rutte's government's slashing of the Netherlands' culture budget by twenty-five percent—I was prepared to find in the independent artists' spaces the kinds of neo-subjects who do not recoil at the term "entrepreneur," and who do not hear the boots of strike-breakers in the undertones of "flexibility" or "innovation." I did find them there, and I found children of privilege there, but not in any greater number or intensity than I found them in the artist-run centres, or in the universities. So perhaps that nostalgia for a lost or diminishing public is, like most nostalgias,

a fantasy. It is certainly true that the publicly funded artist-run centre is consistently under threat that its funding will be cut if its programming does not adhere to specific, bureaucratically determined codes of exhibition or community engagement. And the language that the institutions are required to implement in order to communicate with granting agencies has its effects. It leaks into mandates and press releases, into mission statements and directors' reports. Regardless of how genuine the grant applications and reports might be, they create a textual corpus and discursive habits that influence a spatial subjectivity that is focused on holding space and surviving in a permanent crisis.

In an interview with the British art critic Jonathan Harris, the London gallerist Sadie Coles points out that it was the presence of advertising magnate and art collector Charles Saatchi's private gallery that opened British artists' eyes to what was possible when shifting out of a national arts culture:

> [Sadie Coles]: I think that seeing that work, whether those students were reacting against it or reacting positively towards it, was just enormously influential. It led to a kind of Thatcherite, do-it-yourself, opening up of art here.
> [Jonathan Harris]: Entrepreneurial?
> SC: Yes, entrepreneurial.
> JH: The positive side of entrepreneurialism?
> SC: Basically everybody wanted to get into it. But it wasn't the established Cork Street galleries they wanted to get into, it was New York—international, you know, the world. And the way to do it was to actually "do it yourself," rent a store-front as Sarah [Lucas] and Tracy [Emin] did, and just do your own shows. (Harris 97)

In a way, Coles is correct, that in comparison to a globalized art market with vast networks of support for large projects and spectacular installations, exhibitions of smaller-scale work by artists who subsist on grants, intermittent sales, and supplementary employment will be less attractive to students and to collectors. But in other ways, Coles is speaking for her class (economic and artistic). The most evocative part of the exchange between Coles and Harris is the moment that Harris' question about the entrepreneurialism Coles seems to be celebrating goes past Coles without her responding. When he tries to clarify that what Coles is referring to is "the positive side of entrepreneurialism," by which I assume he means the creative, imaginative, and enthusiastic pursuit of new ideas and forms and not the dismantling of structures of solidarity and support through the displacement of social care and responsibility from the state onto the individual, Coles ignores the distinction, and repeats the do-it-yourself, bootstraps narrative that allows successful people to feel entitled to their

success and to view less successful people as responsible for their own miseries. I tend to err on the other side, where I worry less about the quality of art than the quality of the housing or health of the artist. Like Jen Harvie, who sees a shadow of increasingly exploitative conditions of labour in her analysis of theatre performances that require volunteer casts (46), I worry more about who gets to make art if what is required to think through a material practice is the ability to afford rent and studio space in Vancouver. I have the same concerns for the wider discourse of entrepreneurialism, where the figures best positioned to reap the rewards of risk are those who are least at risk already, those who have access to one of those mythical garages and time and networks already in place. Who has a garage in Vancouver? What kind of art will they make?

In an age of distrust motivated by metrics of efficiency and transparency, and the diminution of other forms of trust—familial, historical, social—it is difficult to make arguments for funding experimental investigations or projects that might not make it to market. This is what a condition of crisis—somehow developed and fostered amidst a moment of extreme wealth—can produce in a cultural landscape. But the argument needs to be made anew, and to be expanded into other spaces. A worthwhile conversation to encourage is one that focuses on how to create and hold spaces that reject those conditions of crisis, while fostering structures of care and experimentation, not simply for national culture but for the open investigation of knowledge. What kinds of technologies of ownership or occupation of land or space can be developed in response to current modes? What kind of art, and beyond art, what kinds of thoughts and feelings could emerge from those spaces? What kinds of subjects might they develop, outside of the language of finance economics? What could happen if Vancouver ceased to be a going concern, and became a slowing concern? If it became a different kind of concern altogether?

NOTES

1 Thanks to the anonymous reader who, as a student and member of the Company of Young Canadians, corrected my earlier version of this paper that suggested the school had been hosted and organized by Intermedia.

2 The founding eight shareholders in the property are: Martin Bartlett, Mo Van Nostrand, Kate Craig, Henry Greenhow, Glenn Lewis, Eric Metcalfe, Michael Morris, and Vincent Trasov.

3 In 2017, the Western Front renovated the ground floor of the building to make it possible for visitors to enter without having to buzz.

4 "They annexed the first floor of the gallery for Company headquarters, displayed and demonstrated their company wares, and offered their services as visual consultants. The set-up was so convincing that one passer-by stopped to ask the rental cost of such a prime location. There to open the NGC's first environment was Ron Basford, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, who praised the company for its innovative and industrious artistry" (Shaw, "Siting").

5 Though many critics and curators approach NETCO's practice as critical of corporate structures, there are others who are less convinced. Lucy Lippard, who was familiar with NETCO via their inclusion in the show she curated at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1970, *955,000*, later wrote: "The corporate aspect [of NETCO] always gave me pause because it was ultimately not a critical stance. Humorous, yes. Ironic and corrective, no" (58).

6 As an example, the response to a ninety percent cut in arts funding in British Columbia in the lead-up to the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010 was a coordinated cry of "one dollar and thirty-eight cents": a figure that represented the amount of return in revenue for every dollar invested in culture (widely defined) in BC (Campbell).

7 A considerably longer and more focused study would be required to adequately investigate the histories of particular artist-run centres, and to emphasize their relationships to gentrification and ownership. 221A, which has recently rebranded to Polyanna Library, has survived by absorbing a landlord model in Chinatown and East Vancouver, using the income from artist studio spaces and storefront gallery space (including Access Gallery at 222 East Georgia) that they hold long-term leases on to fund their robust programming model. Similarly, both Artspeak Gallery and the Grunt Gallery own their spaces, thanks to the foresight of their boards stretching back to the 1990s, when participating in Vancouver's real estate market was possible for non-profit organizations, who could request help from the city or provincial and federal funding bodies. As a result, both galleries have benefited from a spatial stability that makes them much more attractive to funders, and they regularly rank first and second amongst artist-run centres in the amount of annual support they receive.

8 See Reid Shier, "Do Artists Need Artist-Run Centres?" in *Vancouver Art and Economies*.

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