Any comprehensive survey of the New Arts Space would be deficient without a close analysis of the preexistent structures which formed either the basis for, or caused reactions resulting in the development of alternative systems. The major focal point, in fact the dominant structure, is the modern art museum whose history, function, responsibility and potential is here examined, with specific regard to the commensurate evolution of contemporary art.

History is a facsimile of events held together by flimsy biographical information. Art history is less explosive than the rest of history, so it sinks faster into the pulverized regions of time. History is representational, while time is abstract; both of these artifices may be found in museums, where they span everybody's own vacancy. The museum undermines one's confidence in sense-data and erodes the impression of textures upon which our sensations exist. Memories of 'excitement' seem to promise something, but nothing is always the result. Those with exhausted memories will know the astonishment.

Visiting a museum is a matter of going from void to void. Hallways lead the viewer to things once called 'pictures' and 'statues.' Anachronisms hang and protrude from every angle. Themes without meaning press on the eye. Multifarious nothings permute into false windows (frames) that open up onto a verity of blanks. Stale images cancel one's motivation. Blind and senseless, one continues wandering around the remains of Europe, only to end in that massive deception 'the art history of the recent past.' Brain drain leads to eye drain, as one's sight defines emptiness by blankness. Sightings fall like heavy objects from one's eyes. Sight becomes devoid of sense, or the sight is there, but the sense is unavailable. Many try to hide this perceptual falling out by calling it 'abstract.' Abstraction is everybody's zero but nobody's nought. Museums are tombs, and it looks like everything is turning into a museum. Painting, sculpture and architecture are finished, but the art habit continues. Art settles into a stupendous inertia. Silence supplies the dominant chord.

Bright colors conceal the abyss that holds the museum together. Every solid is a bit of clogged air or space. Things flatten and fade. The museum spreads its surfaces everywhere, and becomes an untitled collection of generalizations that immobilize the eye.

Robert Smithson

Such was a dominant opinion held ten years ago by articulate and critical artists who sought to push past the narrow parameters enforced by an obsolete oppressive mercantillist system. Expansive social, formal and political permutations throughout the art world (a tiny fraction of a much greater cultural upheaval), developed an incalculable array of work, attitude, mobility, articulation and responsibility. The '60s and '70s witnessed the unprecedented growth of an "artist consciousness" that rejected the passivity encouraged by the ideology which sees art as a speculative commodity, views the artist as an eccentric indulgent romantic and uses these myths to mask far more pervasive aspects of cultural domination.

This rejection is characterized by the production of impermanent and nonmarketable work, a reevaluation of intention and audience, and by analysis and an adjustment of the roles and institutions associated with the established networks. The artist began to assume many functions previously assigned to other areas of the extant order: critic, curator, historian, agent, translator, dealer, judge, advocate, performer, publisher, disseminator, advisor, editor and promoter.

Culture has the power to shape not only our view of the past but also the way we see ourselves today. Official culture can only diminish our ability to understand the world and to act upon that understanding. The critical examination of culture is thus a necessary step in gaining control over the meaning we give our lives.

We are often assured that museums are central to our existence as civilized, spiritually complete beings. We are also told that museums bring us closer to people and help make art a part of life. An anti-catalog.

The last decade was an important one for the museum. Several died, a few were born, some received new buildings or additions, most increased the size of their collections, many changed administrations, and some dropped or cut back on contemporary programs. Inflation soared and the market retreated.
Staffs organized and wages increased. Pressures were applied from Third World and feminist sectors. Shipping, paper, printing and insurance costs tripled. Contemporary art was no longer conveniently sized, durable or fixed. Neither was it modularly similar in the style known as "movements." It became quite difficult for museums to cope with the contemporary art scene and apparently the artists did not make it any easier.

Nordland, former Director of the San Francisco Museum, said however, "Los Angeles has gone backwards in the last 15 years."

He said he was disappointed in the diminution of quality art dealers..."They can't stay in business if the collectors don't support them."

Nordland speculated that "capitalist collectors" may have been frightened off by recent art movements in non-collectible conceptual art.

And how are collectors important to our view of the museum?

Collectors, incidentally, frequently serve as museum trustees so that even if they are not actively pressing for exhibitions of artists in their collections, and some of them do, they at least constitute a niche of market compliance in the top echelons of museums. Collectors who are trustees may get preferential treatment from dealers who can expect in return not a direct payoff necessarily but sympathetic attention to future proposals in which they may be involved. If we equate knowledge of collectors with their enthusiasm for ownership, it follows that the taste brought to the formation of the collection is likely to be a limiting factor on their decisions as trustees.

And how do "recent movements in non-collectible art" affect museums?

Still, a truism of the museum world is that directors survive and flourish in direct proportion to their ability to please, if not all of their trustees, at least the most powerful ones. Considering the reviews that the Guggenheim International Exhibition received last winter (an instance precisely free of painting and where "sculpture" took the form of dirt, documents, and tape recorders), one can understand the Director's sensitivity to another potential hornet's nest. Gone are the days of Poeseguy, Manzu, Wotruba, Moore, and Pomodoro, when sculpture on the Guggenheim's ramps looked like jewelry in Cartier's! Quite possibly Process, Systems, and Conceptual art have become the final divorce decree between the avant-garde artist and the wealthy patron...

There is something profoundly pathetic in a great museum becoming a frightened third-rate institution. Already the response from the art community has been decisive. A number of artists have categorically refused to have their work in the building. By next season the Museum may be reduced to exhibiting its permanent collections and the art of a few obscure contemporaries. With his need for personal and institutional safety, Thomas Messer may very well transform the Guggenheim into a relic of a bygone age. Jack Burnham

Terry Allen has 'drawn' an interesting portrait of the Collector:

His lonely
is only
the blank space
in the hallway
between the hangings
of paintings
of lonely
that ain't lonely
at all.

In a real sense, the museum is the biggest collector of all...

San Francisco is to become the beneficiary of an art gift of "enormous magnitude and potential," the unique $10 million collection of paintings gathered over the last 14 years by John D. Rockefeller III and his wife.

The 71 year old Rockefeller made his announcement yesterday at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, where eight of his paintings already hang on long term loan.

but with markedly different ramifications:

We are often assured that museums are central to our existence as civilized, spiritually complete beings. We are also told that museums bring art closer to people and help make art a part of life.

A visit to almost any modern art museum teaches the exact opposite of these claims. Inside and out; modern museums are designed to keep art away from people—physically, psychologically and intellectually—and to keep art removed from daily life. It is telling that so many modern museums resemble windowless tombs, bunkers or bank vaults. Both of the museums pictured on this page (Whitney, Denver) are reminiscent of the fortified castle keeps of the dark ages (the Whitney actually has a moat). By design, modern museums literally force people to experience art as untouchable, inexplicable treasures—refrigerated relics from the past or the present. Museums architecturally enforce the untruth that art comes only in scarce, ownable forms that must be protected from both the elements and human understanding. an anti-catalog
Architecture is an interesting point. Although the numerous cases of overbuilding and insensitive design are legendary, boards of directors and architects persist in what Peter Plagens calls "The Edifice Complex." Rigid, inflexible, and domineering museum palaces commemorate more the powers that erected them than the treasures they are assumed to protect/Embrace/cherish/Preserve/ennable/enhance.

Once built, these dinosaurs eat budget like candy—security, air conditioning, staff, traffic, lighting, maintenance, exhibitions, force. By nature of these massive demands, an entropic situation that bleeds internally starves the flexibility and scope of the programs the museum was originally built to serve. Yet a museum, like a palace, is still thought to confer status. But the certification associated with museum recognition becomes an onerous sanction replete with limitations: poor design, collector/market dominated direction, and the box office appeal of popular shows like those devoted to King Tut, Van Gogh, Andrew Wyeth, and the recent archeological finds from the People's Republic of China. The artist working in experimental or critical formats has not a chance to entertain the audience of curators which is sandwiched between confining spaces and schedules, watchful trustees eyeing their portfolios like investment portfolios (which they are), and proven, profitable blockbuster "hits." However, the title "museum" and the focus "modern art" never contain disclaimers acknowledging the fact that these institutions cannot or will not exhibit art beyond the realm of traditional or neutral content formats. They obviously should not be expected to attempt something they are incapable of accomplishing, but to pretend that they have the action covered is another matter.

Ultimately, under the guise of "certification," "education," and "connoisseurship" (the art of collecting art), the museum influences rather than reflects the contemporary art it purports to present impartially. It is in the museum's interest to either ignore alternative art it purports to present impartially. It is in the museum's interest to either ignore alternative art, to excise them, or to substitute the labor involved in these programs for curatorial acumen. All too frequently, a museum or gallery will repeat, with massive publicity and documentation, exhibitions or performances premiered at artists' spaces and fail to acknowledge the previous source of exposure. Occasionally, the institution credits itself with the exclusive scoop.

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN THE NEW MUSEUM.
The New Museum is the only museum to focus on living artists and their work. It provides public exposure to adventurous and provocative art from throughout the United States.

...It is intended as a forum for the kind of exchange between artists and public that existed in New York in the late 1920's and 1930's, when dialogue and controversy were synonymous.

The New Museum's scope lies between the non-historically oriented alternative spaces and the major museums, whose primary function is the collection, preservation and exhibition of work of proven historical value.

The New Museum is unique in having, as its priority, a focus on living artists and art which cannot readily be seen outside the studio...

...a membership in The New Museum is an opportunity to support art by living artists. 10 Excerpts from an advertisement, Artforum.

(Here is how "living artists" are supported in The New Museum:)

MT: One of the things I've seen in recent years is an increasing estrangement between the artists and the museum. Artists, for instance, are not allowed to participate in any of the decision-making about how, where, and when their work is going to be seen.

BB: But they will in The New Museum?

MT: Well it's not so much a different technique as a different feeling and a different atmosphere. I believe that a part of my professional ability has to do with installations. That's a part that should be taken out of the artist's hands, that the artists should be relieved of and surprised by. The best thing you can do for an artist is to have him or her walk into an exhibition and say, "My God, my work is so GOOD." That's what you really want. Similarly with the catalog. I write the catalog, not the artist. That's because I want the artists—if I'm successful—to say, 'Ah ha. The work really does speak for itself.'

Barry Brennan, Marcia Tucker

...and what's so new about that?)

PATRONIZE 1: to act as a patron of 2: to adopt an air of condescension toward 3: to be a customer or client of

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary

A great deal of the United States is still dominated by the market/critic/museum myth. Ironically, the regions where these beliefs are strongest are usually those in which there is no significant local art market or criticism. Instead, a more oppressive machination exists: the competition. Usually, in a competition a museum advertises widely, featuring the name of a prominent museum, artist, or "critical" personality as juror. There is often an entry fee, an honorable mention for the juror, and prizes or purchases for the "winners." Work is brought or delivered (at artist expense) to a crowded storeroom, handled by volunteers, amateur staff (and frequently damaged). It is cursorily examined by the judge (except for favorites guaranteed to show, or inserted later by the museum) and then the 5-15% of accepted work is crammed into the galleries and hung on short notice by curator and crew unfamililar with either the work or the juror's rationale. Work not accepted is returned uninsured, damage is a risk borne by the loser. The show opens amid great fanfare and is touted as "another significant Survey of Art, The ______ Annual!" The winners get a ribbon and a line in a resume, the juror receives a fat check, some painless research and a couple of good strokes; the museum once again cops out and buys off the local artists for another year (with the artists' own time and money). Nothing can be learned
about the art work indigenous to the region from these shows; they're critical nightmares. As a con-
sequence, any semblance of peerage among the desper-
ate people fighting over these scraps is destroyed.

Recent fairs, Christmas sales, studio tours (all favorite fund raisers, although the artists are rarely offered membership for their efforts), patri-
on-curated introductions or acquisitions, and huge minstrel shows like the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's 'Artists' Soap Box Derby' are other major condescending forms of museum/artist interface.

Many museums still stage significant 'black tie' functions where the artist is definitely unwelcome. Only a few museums have begun to develop flexible progressive programs such as Jim Elliot's Matrix galler-
ey at Hartford and Berkeley (a museum with a his-
tory of artist-curated shows and events, Viewpoint at Walker, and Projects at MOMA). These approaches, though not identical or equally successful, nonetheless begin to confront many of the issues raised by the problems faced by the contemporary artist in a museum context. Experimentation and risk (with 'room to fall!'), education aimed at provoking rather than gratifying, a permanent and plastic space, accessibility to curator and schedules, budgetary and programmatic independence for the museum as a whole, broad latitude in the work shown (including installation, performance, socio-critical documentation, and interdisciplinary forms) are some of the ideas embodied in these programs. The lead time and reactivity of these spaces are far more responsive to work in progress than is the slowmoving pace usually attendant upon museum exhibitions. It is important to remember that these programs do not replace the contemporary or modern thrust of their parent institutions—they augment and expand the museum's scope. Significantly, they seem to derive from direct involvement with artists, frequently bypassing market or critical authority.

The establishment of video archives and distribution of videotapes is another concept being developed in several museums, with different solutions. Video is a useful tool, form, and document familiar to many people involved in alternative programs. Although museum acceptance has been slow, video probably makes more sense in a stable environment that places an emphasis on preservation rather than in many more flexible multi-use spaces. (David Ross's work at the Everson Museum in Syracuse and the Long Beach Museum of Art are well-known prototypes.)

The above encouraging approaches are, however, the exception. There are several instances, where museums, participating in contemporary art activi-
ties either folded or withdrew their support. In a large, developed scene, like San Francisco or New York, other institutions may be able to pick up the slack, and temporally offset the loss. Cities with solitary museums suffer more. The worst disaster area is Los Angeles, with three major modern art museums (L.A. County Museum of Art, UCLA Frederick S. Wight Gallery, Norton Simon Foundation), none of which deals with anything beyond token contemporary involvement, local or otherwise. Yet, a nontraveling show of a local, living artist is the least expensive exhibition a museum can mount, other than showing another permutation from its collection, and Los Angeles has the second highest population of artists in the country. Obviously, the vacuum created is a major factor in the development of broader based alternatives such as the Los Angeles Insti-
tute of Contemporary Art and Some Serious Business rather than the more specific orientations found elsewhere.

At this point a digression might be useful.

STACKING THE DECK: some gross generalizations
(with a few exceptions) that distinguish these structures from each other. Though they all involve "nice dedicated people," there are some differences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUSEUM</th>
<th>NEW ART SPACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>building:</td>
<td>designed (owned)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| location: | civic centers, parks | industrial or ware-
house districts, de-
clining zones of transi-
tion (a process that is often re-
versed as these areas become attractive real estate again and the artists are dis-
placed) |
| audience: | upper-class white | artist, frequently ethnic or other af-
finities (sex, media, etc.) |
| ambiance: | sterile ('white cube') | natural (studio) |
| ideal: | perfection | risk |
| overhead: | ponderous | skeletal |
| scope: | painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking | video, performance, music, dance, film, arts and community services, interdisci-
plinary forms, painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking |
| bias: | modern, historical | contemporary, work in progress |
| flexibility: | inertial | reactive |
| funding: | public and hard private | public and soft private |
| annual budget: | multiples of $100,000 | multiples of $10,000 |
| staff: | large, paid, professional | small, volunteer, part-time, CETA |
| director: | male | both sexes, (with a high incidence of women directors) |
| curatorial staff: | extensive, specialized, usually the part of the museum with the highest population of women | usually a part-time or volunteer gallery coordinator |
curators: historians
security: controlled access, electronic detection and surveillance guard force (usually the part of the museum with the highest population of minorities)
governance: hierarchical, with an active market/collection/collective influence and NO input from artist sector or community at-large.
attendance: large, diverse
affiliation: galleries, other museums, collectors, auctions, art historians
exposition: static
posture: conservative
acquisition: collection (marriage)
perpetual stability climate control segregated restrooms restaurant
artists
usually democratic, although a significant number of NAS reflect the goals and energies of one or a few individuals, with little or no accessibility to governance or program direction.
small, medium (usually identified with affinity/focus/membership)
artists, other NAS nonstatic radical rotation (one night stand)
expedient change may have heat may have restrooms
definitely box lunch

Influential models and present visible prototypes/histories for firm, viable support roles. Whereas artists have developed a rich, diverse, active responsibility, the museum prefers to continue a posture of benevolent patriarchy. The museum should reside in the passive, the reflective, the receptive mode. Corporate entities with survival instinct are desirable only when they do not compete with the processes from which they’re derived.

It is recognized that there is a need for additions to the existing art support system which would provide for increased exposure of serious, developing artists in a noncommercial context. Many artists suffer most at a stage in their careers when they are beginning to make visual statements but are not yet ready to receive full museum exposure. The present program of so-called "alternative spaces" is not sufficiently well-organized to serve as a bridge between the artist and the museum and he must still rely upon commercial galleries for exposure. This problem becomes particularly acute at times when many artists are producing art which is not marketable. 12

Hopkins seems to be under the impression that the New Arts Space is an alternative to the commercial galleries, and that it functions as a clumsy sort of bush league ladder to final recognition for mature artists "ready to receive full museum exposure." He does not seem to recognize the possibility that the New Arts Space is an alternative to the museum as well. In fact, many alternative spaces developed in situations with direct and enthusiastic support from members of the market community, even though it was highly unlikely work would ever appear in a gallery context. In most cases these situations were invisible to both museums and critics. The dealers were there as audience and support, they wanted to see the work as much as anyone else, and there was no where else to see it.

The New Arts Space is a parallel structure, not a feeder system to the museum. Much work can never be shown, nor should it be, in museums; but much can not be seen anywhere but. A significant amount of art functions well in either environment—it should be the artist’s choice of context (and context is a major part of content these days). At one time, museum certification was the cardinal accolade for an artist, but that mode of validation is quickly eroding; the museum simply cannot do it all. Persistence on the part of museums to maintain this position, to oppose development of alternative structures, to ignore or denigrate their presence constitutes gross negligence. Dropping or trimming the museums’ share of contemporary art programs in communities capable of supporting them is criminal.

It is important to recognize the complementary nature of these structures. The New Arts Space grants intimacy among peers, a highly critical yet directly supportive audience. The museum offers a controlled environment (or refuge) presentation to a larger, distant, more complacent audience. The artist is present in the New Arts Space, absent in the museum. Each forum offers unique valuable exhibitions in addition to interchangeable modes of exhibition (exclusions and overlaps).

These ideas begin to delineate areas that mus-
Helen Fried, Barry Holden, Anne Focke, Phyllis Plous, Lynn Learned, Cheryl Duke, Paul Demarinis, Michael Auping. The responsibility for the contents is mine, alone.


For expansion on just one aspect of the idea of cultural domination, see "Abstract Expression, Weapon of the Cold War," by Eva Cockcroft, in Artforum June 1974. Also pertinent is an anti-catalog, published by the Catalog Committee of Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, in 1977 in New York.

From an anti-catalog, see note number 2.

William Wilson, "Three Directors Resign from Institutions," Los Angeles Times, Wednesday, May 18, 1977, reporting Gerald Nordland's resignation as Director of the UCLA Galleries.


From an anti-catalog, see note number 2.

An excellent discussion, as well as prediction, of museum planning is laid out in "L.B.M.A., M.O.C.A., P.M.A.A., L.A.C.M.A.," by Peter Plagens, in Artforum October 1973. Plagens is also acutely accurate in recommending a museum format closely resembling the structure and considerations now found in programs like LAICA's, and/or, and I.A.U.R.'s.

Excerpts from an advertisement, Artforum, November 1977.


I would like to thank the following people for assistance and support in preparation of this paper: Jock Reynolds, Suzanne Hellmuth, Linda Dackman,