ASK NOT WHAT OUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR US, BUT WHEN WILL WE REALIZE THAT WE ARE THE COUNTRY-OR-WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Nine individual artists' views after the New Artsspace Conference Compiled by Dorit Cypis, April - July 1978

It is not an issue that these reactions come several months after the fact. Nor should the attitudes expressed here be seen in a limited context, rather, as examplifying frustrations which permeate many levels of this culture.

The statement "Do You Really Think You are a Part of It?" drew ovar 60 people (April 20). Not bad considering the mailing was to 100 artists, and the city was Los Angeles. The occesion was to discuss implications of the First National Alternative Artspece Conference, sponsored by the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, to be held April 26-29, 1978. That statement obviously pinched a lot of nerves. The feeling, exemplified by that statement, was my reaction after having read the conference brochure. It seemed to me another bletant example of an administrator assuming the organizational responsibility for many, and passing it off as open, innovative, alternative, "what's good for you." Patronism is subtle castration. This time, I noticed my own complacency. Rather than take my questions, as en individual ertist, to the institution, I chose to take them to artists in the community. This resulting meeting was the first of several, at which artists' grievances were aired, argued, clarified, honed, with the objective of presentation to the paid participants of the conference. Our efforts culminated in a demonstration of protest, after the inaugural dinner. Let it not be forgotten that well over 100 artists appeared in support of the protest. What actually did happen is herd to sayit probably werrants an in-depth sociological/psychological study. Suffice it to say here, that beyond causing disorientation and confusion, we actually were, faced with the reality, numb. We are oversocialized, and that is an important message! It's scary to speak out, to rock that boat which we trusted would be steered for us. It's not enough to realize that we don't like the course it is taking us on. It's not enough to realize that without us there would be no need for a boat. We are here. We must learn how to steer. We cannot weit to be taught. We must teach ourselves, We must accept the actuality of our own power and take every opportunity to use it. We can order our own meal. That is innovation.

The following views are offered by some of the artists still concerned with making their view public. As editor, I decided that the main issue was to support and nurture that concern. Everyone who chose to participate was included, unedited. If you are sensitive to redundancy, keep in mind the importance of speaking out.

-Dorit Cypls

That the New Artspace Conference, a nationwide alternative space conference, funded by the N.E.A. and planned by the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, excluded artists, (via allocation of N.E.A. funds; from the planning of the conference; by requiring registration fees), indicates that the government and local alternative space organizations are coopting public arts monies for institutional ends. It appears that one of the dangers which can occur when alternative spaces become institutions is that they become economic bureaucracies capable of functioning entirely indepen-

dent of artists. From the nature of much of the discussion at the conference, it became evident that there is great concern about how to become bigger and more powerful institutions, how to get more funding.

Never was the question of the artists' participation or economic relationship to these institutions brought up or examined. Alternative space administrators, not by design but by function, neglected one of the fundamental issues inherent in the notion of radical alternative space—that of the new economic relationship of artists to exhibiting institutions. This omission exemplifies the danger of alternative spaces functioning independent of artists and underscores the fallacious idea that these spaces offer a new economic alternative or alternative of any kind.

And it punctuates the necessity for artists themselves to become a functioning part of arts exhibition systems, responsible for decisions which determine economic policy and exhibition philosophy. Artists must begin to function on their own behalf within these institutions if their needs are truly to be met.

-Sheila Pinkel

Being and Usefulness

I've been on many panels. It appears to be that no matter what the name of the panel I am on (or other panels during the conference) the panel will drift to a topic that is really on the minds of the panelists. This observation may or may not be generally true, but a recurring concern of the panels I attended at the Alternative Space Conference was this: what do we do when the money runs out? Not once did anyone conclude (other than myself) that perhaps an alternative space should stop functioning—that perhaps it had outlived its useful life, and that a new space might arise that would address then-current urgent issues. The best way to test if a committee is still useful is to disband it. If a reason to be is still there for that committee, it will certainly arise again. I suppose it is much like a vote of confidence for government. It makes one wonder how many spaces really need to exist (that is, are they still serving the needs of artists?) or are they still going mindlessly on, simply because they are there. Mere existence doesn't mean usefulness, nor does a smoothly running ship.

-John Baldessari

It seems fitting that an art conference should manifest as many layers of meaning and be as subject to multiple interpretations as a work of art itself; yet on the other hand a few common threads seem to emerge from and even dominate the content of this conference and its ensuing debate, just as we are beginning to observe similarly pervasive ideological strands converging in the structure of art per se.

After all is said and done the thing which grates on one's critical pretentiousness the most is the billing of the show as an "alternative." The artist's protest points, specifically, to a deep and underlying meaning constant through virtually every form of "artist's support" thus far: the subsumption of art under—or at least its placement in an inferior position with respect to—the logic of rationality, embodied in our day in the familiar bureaucratic apparatus. From Plato and his xenophobic attitude to poetry, to Kant with his great divide of Sensibility and Understanding (the latter clearly on top), to the mindless and naive cliche of art as "apolitical," and the attitude of L.A.J.C.A. to art and artists, we can see the continual maintenance of art as, to use Levi-Strauss's metaphor, a "public park." Non-rationality is tolerated so long as it remains within bounds and is ultimately malleable, fungible, administrable. If L.A.I.C.A. et al are alternatives, they are so only in relation to the now-defunct (did we really need anyone to tell us) commercial gallery network-but certainly not, to pick one example, to the telephone company or more insidiously, to the culture industry.

Of course, it's clear that things can't go on like this for much longer—or is it? One's sense of despair is heightened by the fact that alternatives to the alternative seem few and far between, offered perhaps least of all by the artist's protest group. The dialectic of bureaucracy may be moving onto its next phase as it completely expunges, through subsumption (the latter merely a product of its inherent logic), the very subjectivity it had pretended simply to "support"—eventually emerging as a stale and lifeless redundancy.

This ultimate consequence is belied, thankfully, by the fact that artists did get up and say something. Whether or not the presently emerging generation of artists will have any significance in terms of the history and development of art (remember that?), as distinct from entertainment—let alone significance with respect to society as a whole—depends upon how well we can nurture and how far we can extend that cry of protest.

-Frederick Dolan

No matter how hard I try, I find it hard to think of the New Artspace Conference without lapsing into notions of food and feeding. I refer not to a metaphor of personal survival, rather, the thoughts are like the instinctive, uninflected musings of a beast. It is the inordinate concern with whether one will find a place to park. I am tired of decorous, collective stagefright. I involuntarily cease to care.

-Sheena Snake, as told to Harris Boldt Edelman

The Form of a Breakdown

The Alternative Space Conference brought to light some disturbing relationships in the Los Angeles art community. Two circumstances fomented a breakdown in communication between artists and other artists. There was a breach of (verbal) contract between the conference head and the artists: artists were promised, and not given, a full accredited conference panel format for their presentation. The artists were relegated to a much less effective position as one in a series of speakers (creating justified confusion and resentment by the artists which became apparent, without the reasons being known) to the conferees.

Artists of "high professional stature" in the Los Angeles

art community were involved, from the inception, in the planning of the artists' presentation. None of them, however, chose to speak during the "artists' time" at the conference.

The above factors contributed to a devastating discrediting of the artists' points of view. They effectively undermined significant discussion of the issues at hand (which were clearly stated in hand-out sheets which had been passed around beforehand). This was no one party's fault, but unfortunately, it was everyone's loss; for the issues at stake in the role of the artists within the alternative space context still need to be honestly and thoroughly addressed. It is crucial that artists feed their opinions into the existing art structures, alternative and otherwise. It is deeply discouraging that a schism between the more successful artists and the "unaffiliated" artists became apparent when it came to a point of making a public statement.

One hopes that the conference sparked off discussion between artists and institutions at the local level around the country. And one hopes that the attitudes represented by the circumstances I've outlined here will not be duplicated in each local situation; for such debate is finidamental and important enough to deserve a national forum and national publicity. It deserves a conference of its own.

-Kathy Kauffman

Artist's Run Spaces for Artists Run Spaces

I learned a lot, or rather confinned a lot by attending the New Artspace Conference—or since then have you read Melinda Wortz's article in Art Week 5/27/78? "Love it or Leave it"—Merle Haggard—

Within my rejection notice for an individual artist's fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, is the following statement:

"Our Panels looked at 3,683 applicants and recommended 127 for fellowships." I wonder what ratio exists between applications and acceptances for the arts institutions (alternative spaces)?

I realize that often a space may not be funded for the maximum grant application, and in that case, because operational costs usually take precedence in the functioning of an institution, the artist fee becomes bottom priority.

Has money ever been cut back from an institution to fund the individual artist?

-David Askevold

MOTOTOTOTOTO

From a talk presented at the L.A.I.C.A. conference on the New Artsspace, April 26-29.

- ... An art space is:
- 1) a box (i.e., the typical studio or gallery).
- 2) a physical exterior space, such as a street, desert, forest, parking lot (or a group of these).
- 3) a human body and its immediate space of movement.
- 4) a contextual environment or situation, in which (like a city's center or bedroom) meanings of things and spaces commingle. (Hence, the space of a gallery box that resembles a factory conveys overtones of industry and art history).
- the physical interior space of the human body, the vital organs, the sensorium, nervous system, circulation, etc.
- 6) communicational spaces such as telephones, roadways,

postal ways, radio, T.V., telegraph, as well as transpersonal activities.

7) the spaces of the mind; conceptual and metaphoric behavior, private a i social senses of the self and group, education, religion, political consciousness, etc.

When viewed against this range of alternatives, the current new art spaces mainly reflect definition number one. They are boxes, or containers modelled on a sentimental image of an earlier day. Peripher !!y, they do support art activities (such as performance) not bound up with the box and its meanings; but their major commitment goes into fostering of exhibitional art. Their message to the world is: art is what you put into a gallery, and a gallery carries more meaning than any art work put into it. Put another way (Yves Klein did it once by "exhibiting" opening-night guests in an empty gallery), the gallery is the art.

No one would quarrel with this message as a conservative belief, but it is misleading when it is represented in brochures and articles as innovation, and is offered as the typical example of fresh change. It would be helpful to ask if indeed the new art spaces adequately refact the range of legitimate experimentation in the arts today. While they may be defended as sympathetic to and supportive of experimentation, in the end they confuse the issue (however sincerely) because everything novel is referenced to the notion of a "house of art." Human energies and use of monies set aside for the arts could be far more diversified. For example, all that might be needed to manage a "new art space" would be a typewriter, a public relations budget, and some airplane tickets. Compared to the cash required to support a "house" for several years, the outlay would be minimal. Marinetti, Tzara, the post-revolutionary Russians, Seth Siegelaub, Lynn Hershman, are good models for the next agents of "New Art Spaces" to follow.

—Allan Kaprow

Alternative spaces have done some good for the art communities across the U.S. and Canada. Regrettably, they have not left many of the problems manifested through the museums and galleries. The New Artsspace Conference was organized in a way that could only pass on the ills inherent in past and present systems. No effort was made to enlist new ideas from artists outside their own ranks. The conference was far too self-serving and lacked any creative or progressive conditions to benefit a wide range of artists (ed. note: one was hard pressed to find Third-World artists). It is a pity that all this money and energy spent in the name of artists, was wasted on the perpetuation of a system that refuses to critically look inward.

-Paul Tzanetopoulos

© Dorit Cypis, 1978

ART IS A DANGEROUS GAME. IT CALLS FOR A KIND OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE THAT MOST PEOPLE REALLY DO NOT WANT.

-Lawrence Durrell

ART PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Christo has been given permission by the Kansas City Parks Commissioners to wrap walkaways for the city's Jacob L. Loose Memorial Park. Christo will install 13,400 feet of nylon fabric walkaways in three days about October 3. They will remain on view for approximately two weeks. Wrapped Walkaways is to be funded by Christo, and the Contemporary Art Society of the Nelson Gallery will publish a book documenting the project.

Nelson Rockefeller will pay royalties to the creators of works of art he plans to reproduce and sell in a catalog to be sent to 500,000 potential purchasers. Not only will he give the artists or their heirs or estates 5 percent of the retail price in royalties, but he plans to grant the artists or their representatives a role in controlling the quality of the reproductions.

Edward Durell Stone, the architect, died in New York at the age of 76.

Henry Moore has celebrated his 80th birthday.

Beatrice Wood, famed ceramicist and friend of Duchamp, has recently had two exhibitions in the Los Angeles area.

Harold Rosenberg died in July at the age of 72. He was art critic for the New Yorker.

Thomas Hess, consultative chairman of the Department of 20th-Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and for many years editor of Art News magazine, died suddenly at his desk in the museum in July at the age of 57.

Benedict Nicolson, editor since 1947 of the Burlington Magazine, died in May in London.

Alan Sieroty, State Senator of California, has been appointed Chairman of the Arts Task Force of the National Conference of the State Legislatures. The task force, composed of state legislators from throughout the United States, will develope a new national project on "The States and the Arts" as well as policy positions on arts-related issues for the Conference.

Charles Exmes died in St. Louis in late August at the age of 71.

Mike Robinson has taken over as editor of Art Letter, a publication of Art in America, replacing Lee Rosenbaum who has left to edit Art News' monthly newsletter.

Gordon Matta-Clark, artist, bookmaker and video artist, died in late August at the age of 33. On 30 August, a memorial service was held in his loft in SoHo, New York City.

Van Deren Coke, currently Director of the University Art Museum and Chairman of the Art Department of the University of New Mexico, will be the new Curator of Photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, effective 1 January 1979.

Barbara Kibbe, an attorney and arts law advocate from New York City, has joined the Bay Area Lawyers for the Arts (BALA) as its new Executive Director.