The basis of most conflict between artists and museums like the Modern seems to be the conflict between the permanent collection and the loan
exhibitions. Artists are reluctant to cooperate in shows when their work
is not being bought, and vice versa. It seems a system guaranteed to produce
ill will; everybody knows of endless individual variations on this theme.
They are now being amplified to an unheard-of extent by the Museum's projected
"New American Painting and Sculpture" show. This will concentrate on
Abstract Expressionism in the 40's and 50's and will eventually occupy a
new wing. It is not a loan show, but a Museum Collection show and the
artists involved are being asked to donate major works to the collection so
that they will show up well in future catalogues, dissertations, books. In
other words, to maintain their so-called "historical" respectability, they must
be well represented in the world's best collection of modern art, and to be
well represented they must give their major works to the Museum (if they
still own them; if they don't, they're out of luck). This kind of blackmail
is in many cases being leveled at artists whose work the museum ignored
during the 40's and most of the 50's when prices were low; now they are
asked to forgive and forget and guarantee their own place in "history".
It will take a lot of guts for any of these artists to refuse to have
their own room in this show and in the permanent collection; at the same
time it will take a lot of the opposite to go along with such a plan. It
is difficult to see why the museum did not conceive of this as a loan show
rather than pretending to make an "historical" selection from gift horses,
but in any case it offers a perfect and timely example of the way artists
are exploited.

There seems little hope for broad reform of the Museum of Modern Art. It
has done a great deal in the past and now seems to have become so large and
unwieldy that it has outgrown its usefulness. The conventional museum is by nature too big, too bulky, too slow to keep track of and keep up with the studios in a time of such rapid change. The present policy of throwing an occasional bone to recent art is insufficient. The recent sections of both the Modern Machine show and Dada and Surrealism made this obvious. When attempts to rival the galleries and even the smaller museums, the result is inevitably disappointing.

What is really needed is not just an updated Monolith of Modern Art, but a new and more flexible system that can adapt itself to the changes taking place today in the art itself. All the media have rejected traditional confines: room space, proscenium stage, academic symposia, literary readings. I would like to see the Museum of Modern Art retain its respected position as a study center for the history of modern art (and by modern art I mean art of the last 50 years or so; the older work belongs in the Metropolitan, as was originally stipulated by the Museum itself). The money spent on exhibitions could be channeled into purchases, free admission for all artists, night film showings, etc. The exhibition function could be shifted to a series of smaller museums resembling branch libraries, in loft buildings or any large, simple space, each of which would naturally evolve an identity, style, and structure of its own. There is no reason why these branches should even be called Museums; they are needed more as vital community centers that would provide workshop space for experimental projects in all media, including performance, as well as space for showing art or organizing more open situations. The fact that this idea in one guise or another has come up several times in the last few months among poets, dancers and visual artists indicates its relevance.

Just propping up existing institutions won't do; imaginative planning is
The very loosely knit and constantly changing group that for the time being calls itself the Art Workers' Coalition may or may not be the right instrument for advancing these changes. We're still in the discussion stages. The point of an open hearing at this time is to get people thinking about change instead of continuing the personal griping and backbiting that always goes on; to crystallize and analyze the broad dissatisfaction and see where constructive energy can be directed. It has been exciting to see common ideas emerge from extraordinarily different and often conflicting esthetic positions. The reason for continuing Takis' action, (aside from the fact that it brought up the very valid point of an artist's control over his work), was the fact that such trans-esthetic solidarity; the fact that there was support for further discussion despite basic disagreement with much of the first group's program. The present organization, if you can call it that, survives by its own flexibility, by its precarious ability to absorb opposing opinions. No two people involved think alike; few support all and some support none of the 13 demands drawn up by Takis and his six colleagues. No one can speak for anyone else. I for one don't think we can dictate esthetic choices to the Museum and I am against any more motley group shows as well as inclusions of any group on a separatist basis. Nevertheless the black artists and the artists without galleries have every right to speak for themselves. My own interest is in projection of a constructive alternative to the present situation, in increased civil rights for artists in general.

Lucy R. Lippard