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Oral history interview with John Coplans,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with John Coplans on April 4, 1975. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: Actually, about your background is a good place to start. Two things I've been told: one, that you were born in South Africa and two, that you were born in London. Which is it?

JOHN COPLANS: London, with South Africa to grow up. Actually, I'll start out with my family. My family is a Jewish family that lives in the Pale of Settlements. In fact, we lived in the same village, Marshshapero, in the Pale Settlement and members of my family, many of whom immigrated from Russia to England, South Africa and America. And I have family in Boston, they're also Coplans. They're called Marshtons. But with several streams. My grandfather went to England and was a rabbi in Cantfield and my father was born in Cantfield and became a doctor.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was his name?

JOHN COPLANS: He was a Coplans. He went to South Africa in 1912 because there were already members of the family out there on his mother's side. I was actually born on a visit to England. My older brother and my younger sister were born in South Africa. They are South Africans and remain there. But I left for the first time in 1938 when I worked my way over on a ship to England and joined the Air Force. I was a pilot in the Air Force. I left the Air Force in 1940 and was supposed to go back to South Africa, but I joined the Army and was recommissioned. I went out to East Africa with the King's African Rifles. It was an Ethiopia campaign. And from there I went to Burma, again with the same King's African Rifles. I ended up the war in India.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's where the eight years of the military came in.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Then I was sent back to South Africa to my town of origin and I became demobilized there. I decided to become a painter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about school and education in South Africa?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. In South Africa I went to Seapoint's [phon. sp.] Boys High School in Cape Town and I went to Checkie [phon. sp.] High School in Johannesburg. But every couple of years my father, in the summer, said we will go to England. So I traveled quite extensively as a child. I saw the National Gallery in London as a child and the Victoria and Albert. I knew two certain museums in Cape Town, Dutch museums in Cape Town. That was my early involvement and interest in art, through my father who incidentally was a sculptor as well as a doctor. George Bernard Shaw was a friend of his at Harvard. So I had an early interest in art through him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So there was an art interest at home and you grew up with it in a way.

JOHN COPLANS: And I was very well acquainted with museums. We were constantly in America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have paintings at home, or sculpture?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Books and things like that. So it was a firm background in art. My father is a doctor and I became an artist. My father did a split.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you have one brother and one sister, don't you?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Older or younger?

JOHN COPLANS: Older brother.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He's still there?

JOHN COPLANS: He's in Cape Town.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What interest did you have in going to England? Was it to go to school, to go study particular

things?

JOHN COPLANS: I went to England and came back to South Africa and was demobilized there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean in 1938, before the war.

JOHN COPLANS: Oh, that was the period when it became obvious that Mussolini was taking Ethiopia. The Japanese had conquered China and obviously there was going to be problems in Germany. There was a kind of climate, at least around my family and kind of (inaudible) liberals in South Africa. So the great day of reckoning was about to come. In my mind, as a young man, I saw no point in adopting a career of any kind. So I would go prepare myself for that. I went off and became a professional soldier. But it was because of the particular climate of the time. I had no particular drive to become a soldier but it seemed better to go off and prepare oneself instead of being just thrown in later..

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why the Air Force?

JOHN COPLANS: I have no idea. I was always interested in planes and thought I would just try it. It was exciting. I just walked into the Air Ministry and said I wanted to be a pilot and had come from South Africa. Subsequently I was interviewed by a board, the Marshal of the Royal Air Force and all these people sitting there. They asked me what my views were about things and I merely explained that with the political climate and the way things were going it seemed like the kind of thing to do. It was still peace time and you must acquire a particular skill. I loved flying. Except they gave me a short commission and I went to the Havilands in 1938 and I went to flying training school. I became a fighter pilot, a bomber pilot. I went to flying fighter planes. I had no particular drive. It was just the climate at the moment. It was a coincidental chance that the Air Force was urgently looking for pilots at the time and they were actively recruiting in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in South Africa. They needed young men and were trying to get them in. It just suited them at the moment to take people on from these places. The fact that I had worked my passage over was a mark in my favor.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Good, it sounds good. How did you like eight years of the military? It was an awful lot. It went all the way through your 20's practically.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, from eighteen to twenty-six. I traveled enormously. I went to some of the most inaccessible parts of Ethiopia. I learned to speak Swahili fluently. As a person brought up in South Africa, I learned what it was like being in close contact with all kinds of African people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find that, given the climate of South Africa and then moving into the rest of Africa?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, South Africans are always looking north. As a child I knew the history of the southern continent and I had read Sir Richard Faust [phon. sp.] (inaudible) and his journey to Somaliland up to Ethiopia. And I had read the "One Thousand and One Nights," the original translations by (inaudible) with (inaudible) footnotes. So it was very interesting. South Africans don't really know central, eastern, west Africa. They are in the Southern part of the continent and their main experiences were with the Zulu, the Crosa(sp), the Transkians(sp), people like that who already have their own reserves and their own cultures and they stay distant from them. The idea of getting closer to the remote parts of Africa and the peoples was fascinating. I learned to speak Swahili as fluently as I could and I still speak it fluently. Getting into the African psychology, character and looking closely and being near to them and speaking the language continuously, you are going to gain insights into their customs and character and things like that. I found them enormously interesting and exciting. All that kept me going in those years. Because most of the time was total boredom.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about the military activity? Once you got out of the Air Corps into the other part, what kinds of activities did you do? What were you assigned to do?

JOHN COPLANS: I was actually commissioned into a Scottish Regiment, it is called the Scottish Rifles. It is the Scottish Regiment that was used against the Americans during the American War of Independence. And all the rifle regiments wore green and chose their (inaudible) and the pace they marched at and various things like that to accommodate themselves against fighting against the Americans. They were light infantry against heavy infantry. For instance, the Brigade of Guards is heavy infantry. And all the rifle regiments like the Rifle Brigade, the Scottish Rifles, these were all light infantry and fought in the forest against the Americans. That's why they had green jungle uniforms and they still wear them nowadays. I was commissioned into that regiment. They asked for people who had knowledge of Africa because all the officers and noncommissioned officers of what was called the King's African Rifles, which was a series of British officers and noncommissioned officers' regiments, and these troops were all raised in Somaliland, Uganda, Kenya, and what was formerly called Tanganyika. All these troops came into these regiments or battalions or groups of battalions came out of these particular troop distributions. I was in Uganda for a while. I was in the Fourth Fourth King's African Rifles. That meant that I was in the fourth, there was the first fourth, second fourth, third fourth, and fourth fourth. So there were four

battalions in the field from Uganda. There would be the First First and that is the first battalion of the Kenya battalion and so on. So they fielded an enormous number of troops who fought during the war. The first campaign was the campaign of the battalion in the outbreak of the war in Somaliland where the British were swept out of Somaliland. The battalions came down from Eritrea and from Ethiopia and swept the British Somalia Battalion of Rifles. They swept them out of there and they retreated into Kenya. When I arrived in 1940 from the British regiment of the King's African Rifles, an African division was formed out of the troops coming from east Africa, not west Africa. It was called the Eleventh African Division. We went south through Somaliland, up through the (inaudible) Somaliland to Kismayu, to Mogadishu and then up from Mogadishu across the border into Ethiopia and then fought at the last battle in Ethiopia. The Italian Blackshirts were involved and held out at Aganda which was a 17th century fortress built by the Portuguese in Ethiopia for the Ethiopians. Then we stayed in Ethiopia and administered the country, handing it back over to Haile Selassie, raised an Ethiopian army. During that campaign I referred to, Nubians came down and they came in from India across to Eritrea and they came down from the north to Ethiopia.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was real exotic activity. By the time the war proceeded along and was finished, you had had enough of the military, right?

JOHN COPLANS: Oh, sure. I was in Burma and with the Africans and with the dropping of two atomic bombs, it was a kind of psychological shock. People, officers and noncommissioned officers, slowly left. Sort of hearing of these distant events such as the destruction of Nagasaki and others, it had a terrible effect on people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of reaction? They didn't know, couldn't understand, it didn't make sense to them?

JOHN COPLANS: It seemed to so many people that it was a savage, the most inconceivably savage situation to hear that 60,000, I remember we heard that 60,000 people had died. The people who were in one-to-one fighting, hand-to-hand fighting in the jungles of Burma, this was fighting with old-fashioned rifles and bayonets and machine guns and hand grenades and mortars and things like that, sort of a 1914 style through the jungles, it was to our minds, we were remote and cut off in these various places, it just seemed so inconceivable to us. We didn't have massive air support, giant bombing raids. We had some air support and there were some tanks but basically all our fighting was hand-to-hand. If not hand-to-hand, at least very close. You actually saw the man you were killing. And the idea of an entire city being wiped out seemed to be the end of one point of civilization. It had a shattering effect on us. Because what we had been doing, we seemed to pay such a personal price. If you took a man's life or saw a man's life taken, it was always at a personal level. But it just seemed so impersonal. It was a vast impersonality.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is very strange the effect that it had on people, it's potential of wiping out any place.

JOHN COPLANS: Many of us could have stayed on as regular soldiers. In fact I couldn't get out because I was so young. They had a system of release whereby you got points for the amount of service, whether you were married, whether you had children, and the least amount of points if you were single. The older you were, you got out. But I had to stay on. That is why I got to GHQ in India and then I was a GHQ in Africa. I had to stay an extra year after the war. I had stock duties. I couldn't get out of the Army. They would have liked me to stay. I could have stayed as long as I wanted. I couldn't really before I got a commission. But the whole aura of what that was about, the end of the war and the atomic bombs were so nauseating to so many people, all they wanted to do was return to civil life and get out of the whole atmosphere of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You returned home then to be demobilized?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I was demobilized in South Africa.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you start painting there? Was that something you had thought about doing?

JOHN COPLANS: I just decided when I came out of the Army that you couldn't come out of the Army, what happened was that in order to get out, if you went back home to South Africa, they transferred you from the British Army to the South African Army. Then you were in another Army. You were back in another Army. And you couldn't get out of the Army unless you had a job. They kept you on unless you had a job or you were going to college. So obviously I had no skills and the only way you could go to college or get training was to borrow the money from the government. They loaned it to soldiers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So they had you again.

JOHN COPLANS: They had the same interest or something. So I got a year's grant and I wanted to be an artist and went to an art school. I got a year's loan. In the meantime I heard that the British were giving ex-soldiers grants free of charge. So during that year I wrote to England and asked for a grant from the English. They wrote back and said yes. I raised the money and at the end of the year I went to England.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was 1940 ---

JOHN COPLANS: 1947 or 1948. I went to England. I took up the grant they gave me there. Again, they wouldn't give you a grant unless you took a regular degree. They made you take a regular degree as an art teacher. I went to one or two of their art schools and I didn't want to be a teacher. I wanted to be a painter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which ones did you go to?

JOHN COPLANS: I went for a week to Chelsea and then for a week to the Goldsmith College. Then I went down and saw them at the Ministry of Education and said this wasn't for me. They said, well, we're really sorry. They said they would keep my grant until the end of the year and I could go on painting. But they wouldn't renew it if I didn't go to an art school. I refused to. Eventually I lost my grant and I just went on painting and doing various odd jobs as a house painter and did very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you get involved in the art world in London in 1948? There wasn't very much then in 1948?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, I went to the Antioch Center with Alan Davies. The Antioch Center was a place owned by a guy called Olley who had lived many years in Tibet.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where is that?

JOHN COPLANS: William Olley, and it is in Harwicher [phon. sp.]. And in this place was a 12th century church and he let out rooms and studios and sheds on the grounds. He ran the Gallery of Tibetan Art which still exists in London and some school runs it and they have a great collection of Tibetan art. Alan Davies was there and that is where Alan Davies first saw all these oriental forms, these Tibetan things. Davies was a little older than myself and had been an artist for a year or two before me. He was called up at the beginning of the war. He came back to being an artist and sort of being a follow-up to Cevallos [phon. sp.] before the war as a young student. Then he came back and had a grant too. He used to go down and see Peggy Guggenheim's collection in Venice and there he saw his first Pollock.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She went back in 1946 or 1947, didn't she? Right after the war.

JOHN COPLANS: He saw the Pollock in 1947. That was the first time that Pollock was heard of in England, through Davies. And he showed me some reproduced photos or reproductions or something of Pollock's, although he was not painting in any kind of style like Pollock. So I knew about American art at a very early stage and was very curious about it - although I wasn't very influenced by looking at Pollock, I had no idea what it was about and couldn't understand it at all. I just had this one vague reproduction and Davies talking about it, and also Davies' compulsive interest in things we could both see. It was an enormous Tibetan collection. He began to combine loose free painting with primordial forms of art with Tibetan and things like that. I began to paint eventually a year or two later in this kind of abstract expressionist style. It was by that time that I got wind of something of a sort going on and got involved in it in some way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You couldn't see much of American painting in England then, could you?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, no, it was not until years later, in about 1955 or 1956 I saw my first Rothko, that (inaudible) piece in London. I was prepared for them and kind of knew about them. Then in 1956 there was a show at the Tate, a very mixed up show of American art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was the one that traveled around museums on a Museum of Modern Art art show, wasn't it?

JOHN COPLANS: No. It was another show. The Museum of Modern Art show wasn't until 1958. The New American Painting was in 1958. This was two years earlier. In the meanwhile I had gotten in touch with - toward 1956-57, we used to all drift into the ICA in London and watch this extremely dynamic group. (Inaudible) Alloway was there. There had been a certain amount of pioneer writing by Patrick Allen who wrote about American painting toward the late 1950's. Marx was also writing. There were panels of artists. I saw my first show of Los Angeles art at the ICA I think in 1959, an exhibition of four (inaudible) painters, Feitelson (Stivulson), McLoughland, Carl Benjamin and one other painter that I can't remember. There were some discussions of this painting at the ICA. (Inaudible) wrote about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you think about the ICA in those days? What did it mean to you as a young artist getting going in England?

JOHN COPLANS: It was extremely important. Alloway knew about The Club. He structured it and was very dynamic and clever in the manner in which he structured it. Each panel was picked very carefully, selected. The

panel was always held wherever possible in the middle of the audience or later they would let the audience draw around the platform.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was in the ballroom, that big room with windows.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I remember because I used to work there.

JOHN COPLANS: Sometimes later on he used to put the chairs in a square so that the panel members were in the front of the square and the audience was behind and he would try to pack it with artists later on. He would try to bunch up the front as much as he could so that they could talk with the people who were near the audience around the outside, the perimeter of the square. It was like a British square in the reverse. It was exceedingly important because of the amount of information that was passed through the exhibitions and discussions, in other words continuous critical fights with Sir Herbert Reid. It always centered around what was happening of significance in America as compared with Reid's older style, attachment to various art symbolism and various things like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that must have been, let me see, I was around the ICA in 1955, 1954, the end of 1953.

JOHN COPLANS: I didn't come until 1956, 1957, 1958.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's when he coined his "pop art" term.

JOHN COPLANS: That came out of the exhibition at the White Chapel Art Gallery, "This is Tomorrow." It came out of the arrangements for the magazine. But at the time there was a tremendous amount of discussion and participation between critics and (inaudible) and one or two other people. And particularly the architectural historians and critics, Rena Bannum and various other people. (Inaudible), she wrote and was a painter, a (inaudible) artist. I must say this. I don't think that anyone knew much about art history the way that Americans know about art history. In British schools they never put people through art historical courses. At the Courtauld it was distant. I used to get out to the Courtauld and go to evening classes there and listen to lectures. That was my only contact with art history. You never heard any art history in the art schools.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. (Inaudible) a little while and it was very strange. It was just like going to this old building. We had sculpture under Keith Martin. He was teaching painting which I always thought was kind of marvelous. But there was nothing. Nobody really talked about what they were doing in terms of other artists. It was very strange.

JOHN COPLANS: The whole English art school system is strange. But it had its advantages in a sense.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He would say things like, "Go and look at Picketer."

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, that's right. It was all idiosyncratic and concerned pictures of what you could get across. Nothing was widely known about where was the best place to study or what kind of selectivity. You went to Slade or you went to this or that. No one knew who you were or anything of that kind. You had to find out for yourself. So the ICA was marvelous from the point of view of putting people in touch with some of the best thinking that is going on elsewhere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What painters interested you in those days or what other artists? Were you interested in the Europeans or were the Americans interesting? Or were there any painters that interested you in particular?

JOHN COPLANS: It was a confused situation. No one could quite evaluate what was happening in America. We weren't able to quite evaluate what was happening in America. We weren't able to really see it in any kind of vastness until the 1958 exhibition at the Tate. I remember going around that exhibition very carefully. And many of our evaluations subsequently turned out to be wrong. I can say that talk Austor Guston looked very interesting but you could understand her inclusions. We obviously had a sort of mixed up English view of things. I think that whatever our evaluations were and whatever we were looking, at certainly the exhibition in itself was a very confused view in comparison, let's say, to a much later view of abstract expressionism. So the weightings were very difficult for a foreigner to kind of understand. It was the first time one saw it. I remember Louis being shown. Alloway got hold of some of Louis's early work of the veils and showed them at the ICA in 1958. And happened to be away or sick or something like that and there was no one to lead the discussion. No one had much knowledge or direction. Here was this guy from America and this was already a second generation and we weren't sure just who he was. There was very little information. It was his early tentative work. I think this work was subsequently destroyed. We talked around it and talked about it but - for example, the word "biomorphic," some form of biomorphism of an abstract segmental view of nature as a kind of word in painting or how that fitted into American painting through say Baziotes, Gorky or de Kooning. None of us ever put those connections

together and had no idea of those particular connections.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was very hard to. Art News, I suppose wasn't available?

JOHN COPLANS: We used to go down and read Art News at the American Embassy. There was one library in London that had it. You couldn't get it often at the American Embassy because the cultural attache had it all the time in his office. You had to wait for him to return it. Sometimes he never returned it. He hadn't returned it months later. So there was a public library, Temartins(?) Library, that specialized in art. We checked their copy of Art News in the file and we would go down there to read Art News. But you couldn't find the Art Journal anywhere else. No one stocked it. The two art book stores didn't stock it. So it was hard to read anything other than what came out of the Studio International or the Studio as it was called then. And that was all Herrin's interpretation of it. So there was no information. There was nobody coming over from America feeding in information. Alloway was obviously reading Greenberg and although he wasn't at that time involved with that kind of formalism, he certainly was beginning to write with obviously Greenberg's ideas, thoughts in mind. I think he wrote fairly early an article on Rothko and one or two others which were slightly Greenberg influenced. But on the other hand, he was the only professional art writer that the other artists respected. They had very little respect for guys like David Sylvester, Coten(?) - no respect for him at all. I went to Paris a couple of times and tried living there for a few months and I saw Kline and all those people. In 1958 I had seen Kline's show and like that. But I can honestly say that basically people in England were pretty lost. There were people around like Robin Denny and perhaps some other people and they had that situation group. The first sort of post-war event was that medivisual(?) Tausig(?) abstract painting in England which was held at the Redfern Gallery and I was in that show. Then there was a lot of discussion at the ICA.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There still was a lot of Paris influence, wasn't there?

JOHN COPLANS: No, I was painting like a Tausig(?) painter. I painted a lot of large works. But I'm still painting like a Tausig painter. Then came a lot of talk and line of thought (mostly through Alloway and lots from Peter Stroud who was quite a significant figure at the ICA) about Newman. There was a general feeling that Newman was a much more crucial figure than de Kooning.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that? What lead to that observation?

JOHN COPLANS: Because Newman related far more in some way or other. Two reasons. One, there is no expressionist tradition in England. There were no expressionist painters. The only expressionist painter in England was a guy called Bomberg.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, there aren't many.

JOHN COPLANS: And there were no expressionist paintings at the Tate. You couldn't see. You could see Fobb(?) paintings. And Fobb(?) was a little understood. But no expressionism, high expressionism. Still today you can't see many of your expressionist paintings. It is not to the English taste. Although Bacon is obviously an expressionist painter because of the configuration, expressionist configuration, and the kind of aberrations and what seemed, to be the taste, none of us could respond terribly to Bacons paintings. We thought there were interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He's always been a little boxed by himself.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. So that was one thing. Secondly, the continuous English interest in a low level of figuration, the (inaudible) Rhodes School and that kind of thing, we were very antithetical to, kind of a very provincial, regional style of painting. And the third factor was of course the whole constructionist tradition which was laid down in England much earlier by the Circle group, the fine early work of Ben Nicholson. And the kind of revulsion against Henry Moore. There was a kind of revulsion against Moore.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that?

JOHN COPLANS: He was a weird English figure out of the mainstream, much more searching (inaudible) some kind of English artist out of the mainstream of modern art. It became clearer and clearer with time that without this expressionist tradition and understanding of this expressionist tradition that the idea of using geometry in a mysterious way, nonrational and mysterious way, the constructionist rationalism, was one particular aspect that came out. That is why the Los Angeles show was so interesting. The other thing that was very interesting was some thinking that was going on between Stroud and Denny and one or two others about the sensual effects of large paintings or paintings themselves and the manner in which they could be spatially related, so to speak, to the walls themselves, the rooms or its container. And there was a very good exhibition at the ICA. I think it was organized by Ralph Romnick called "Spaces."

PAUL CUMMINGS: That must have been when?

JOHN COPLANS: In 1958 or 1959. It was at that time that I began painting in kind of a hard edge style with obvious American overtones. But I also felt that whatever was happening in England was, and I'm thinking about the Tate Show, was merely a regional or provincial reflection of what was happening in America. Finally I decided that I would pack up and go to America. In 1960 I left England and went to America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who are some of the other artists that you were close to or friendly with in those days besides the ones you have mentioned?

JOHN COPLANS: Particular Peter Stroud and a guy called Dennis Barnes. He ran a gallery called New Vision Gallery. He ran it for years. A little basic gallery and he pioneered a lot of shows and all kinds of people. Dennis was a close friend. However, I felt that whatever he was thinking about things was so closed, and I was trying to get out. And the point was that I liked the guy so much that the idea of having, say, a rock show with (inaudible), I don't give (?) crude to the manner in which my painting was hardening up, the way it was hardening up, and the images were hardening up and finally becoming sort of geometrical in a sense pleased him very much. I felt at the time I had outworn my stay in England. So that's another whole factor, psychological factor. Dominion people are never first-class citizens in England. He was either Australian, Canadian or South African. He never fully integrated into English society. They will accept an American on a one-to-one basis.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why is that?

JOHN COPLANS: It's some aspects of the psyche - that intellectually one of these people could never be as good as an Englishman. And writers and poets and painters from these areas, the dominions, were never integrated into intellectual aspects.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I remember that in those years it was felt as well that a lot of the dancers came from South Africa. There were periods when they came from South Africa and Australia and there was a Canadian group that appeared and it would go around and round and round like that.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, there were a number of Canadian writers in London, Mordeci Richler was one of them. Cheet(?) Allan was another, and there was a whole group of very bright Canadian television producers that left Canada and tried to work with the BBC, but they felt exactly the same problems that the other "dominionites," so to speak, struck. The British have a sort of farrier, a snide sort of attitude toward dominion people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In 1960 when you decided to come here you were married, right?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I was married during the war. I got married in Ceylon.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ceylon, a mixed bag here. How did you sort of decide to go to the West Coast? You didn't stay in New York, did you?

JOHN COPLANS: No, no. I got divorced and I was living with a girl in Oxted(?) and she also wanted to get out of England and see the world. It was one of those typical miserable English days, fog and everything like that. We went to a movie and I saw a Neville Schute movie, what was it called? The last submarine in the world or the last group of Americans in Australia or the world was closing down, nuclear warfare, "On the Beach." The submarine leaves Australia and the Americans know they are going to die at sea but they want to die in America. And the submarine comes up in San Francisco harbor and the periscope goes up and there is that incredible shock of San Francisco abandoned and not a person there. I assume it was a kind of telephotic lens and you could see up the hill. I don't know how they cleared the streets of San Francisco but they did it somehow or another. I saw this and I said, well, there is a climate equivalent to Cape Town where I came from. It was warm and the city looked magnificent. It is like Cape Town. One of those beautiful cities around the sea. And I decided San Francisco was where I wanted to go. So when I did leave, I went to Boston. Immigrated, applied for a green card and for the girl I was living with. They told us we couldn't both get green cards simultaneously. But once we got married - so we got married and immigrated together. We left and I arrived in Boston and saw my family there and a friend who was a painter. I sold some paintings to a car dealer, I don't remember the name of the town. Anyway, I sold some paintings in exchange for a car. We got in the car and drove to New York and stayed in the Chelsea Hotel for a couple of weeks, looked at the museums and then drove across country. We went through Chicago, the northern route so we could see (inaudible) in Wisconsin. Then from there to San Francisco.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it like, that drive across the country?

JOHN COPLANS: I was used to enormous spaces like this, and even in Africa I had seen them. The sheer physical impact of driving endlessly, of course, was remarkable. What was also remarkable was how empty the landscape was. You couldn't find graveyards, or the land didn't seem to have any history. The history that they had was hidden away. It wasn't like Europe. It was the very opposite of say, going into an English village where they buried people in the same graveyard since Anglo-Saxon time. Or going to a French village on a river and from the town you could see on the other side of the river the graveyard and they had been burying people in that

graveyard since Roman time. It reminded one tremendously of Africa.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

JOHN COPLANS: In the sense of people being implanted on the landscape late and the landscape having no history of European, of history that is passed. Very empty. I mean you saw the towns, but the towns were the only history of the times. There were no old churches, no graveyards, no past association of human beings integrated into that landscape. There was no intimacy in the landscape. Except, of course, in Massachusetts where one saw these abandoned old farms where people had scratched their livelihood in the soil, rocky walls and remnants of things which were now being sold off just for people to live in. They were no longer used as farms. Across the Midwest all one could see were the incredible prairies. One understood and grasped immediately how the combine machine was of fundamental importance. The mechanization of agriculture in these vast spaces was a prime American enterprise.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did it conform to any ideas you might have had about what the country looked like before you got here?

JOHN COPLANS: Pretty much until one hit the Rockies and then over the Rockies into California. Then the American system of towns and how towns were laid out left one in kind of an ambiguous frame of mind and you had no idea what was happening. Like I remember hitting the Bay Area, hitting Oakland and then there was San Francisco. I didn't know that they were all separate towns, Oakland, Berkeley and Richmond and San Jose and San Francisco. I thought it was all one town. I had no idea in Europe that these were all separate towns with their separate governments and wasn't use to the system. So I remember in Oakland saying is this San Francisco? And them saying no it is not San Francisco. It is Oakland. I said, well, I don't understand. What do you mean, it is not San Francisco. They said, well, no this is not San Francisco. San Francisco is across the bridge. I felt terribly unsure driving across the bridge and getting a little bit lost and ending up in Chinatown and stopping the car and saying to a Chinaman, is this San Francisco? And he said, no this is Chinatown. I still didn't know where I was. I had to go find a policeman to explain to me where I am. I kept looking like some kind of lunatic. The Chinaman thought I was some kind of looney.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, sort of like this is my turf.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Because there was also a nervous anxiety the moment we hit Sacramento, driving along those freeways and the enormous number of cars. We had had no experience with the freeway system itself and the mobility with which cars thundered across. The other part of America when we were driving was virtually empty. We had hardly seen any cars, like in Europe, a few cars here, a few cars there. But once we hit Sacramento, we were on one of those four-lane freeways, cars out of sight. It was just like floating down a stream and hitting the rapids. You couldn't do anything for all these damn cars. You could never seem to stop except to pull off the freeway for gas and to pinpoint where you are or where you were. So we were kind of swept endlessly in a stream of traffic into San Francisco itself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you plan to do once you got there? To start up as a painter?

JOHN COPLANS: Sure. I had no idea what I was going to do. But I had some introductions to some people in San Francisco. I had been very friendly with a black artist, Aubrey Williams, in London and he had a friend in San Francisco, a doctor, a black doctor. We stayed in a hotel and phoned him up and he took us up the next night to a cocktail party in the black community on (inaudible) Hill. I think there was a black lawyer there and white one and doctors and druggists and various people like that. And among them was Charlie Maddox who was at the University of New Mexico. He was a kind of, he makes moving sculptures, a kinetic sculptor. I met him and talked with him and he asked us where we were staying and things like that. We told him in a hotel. He had a big loft downtown. We got very friendly with him and he said, if you need space to paint, come and use my loft. So we took an apartment and I got a studio from Charlie. But the black community was marvelous to us. They knew I was from South Africa and had been all over Africa. It was during a time when it was possible for a white, particularly a stranger, to move in among the black community and go to their homes and discuss the whole situation in the most open fashion in America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you think you got different kinds of questions because you were from South Africa? Say if you had been from London --

JOHN COPLANS: Well, they knew I had come from England but no, they were very curious. They were very interested and open. I remember the name of the doctor now. It is Carlton Goodrefuge. (Inaudible) and he practices as a doctor. Later on (inaudible). They were all extremely intelligent, well-qualified, professional people. And I remember I went to my first football game, a black judge took me to a football game, an American football game and explained the whole game to me. It was a liberal climate among the black middle class professionals. It was totally different from today. I don't think that one could possibly make the same kind of warm, open, human contact.

JOHN COPLANS: Did you remain friendly with those people for a long time or was it just a small period there?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, personal problems arose between me and my wife that kind of broke up our marriage actually. So I kind of dropped out and left San Francisco and went to Los Angeles. That was probably one of the reasons why I went to Los Angeles, one of the main reasons. So I dropped out of that and when I went down to Los Angeles, you would never be able to establish down there any real connections with the black community in the same kind of way, even though I was interested. But I did, of course, with some black artists down there, one in particular. It was an entirely different thing. San Francisco's black community was much more integrated and an open community, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But the city is itself. It is more fragmented, isn't it, generally? I always get that feeling in Los Angeles.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Sure, it is hard to communicate with people in Los Angeles. It is very tough to communicate with people. There is very little intimacy in the same way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is 1960 --

JOHN COPLANS: 1964, fall, I arrived in San Francisco in late 1960. I set myself up as a painter in a studio. My money was running out. We brought a little money with us. My wife was looking around at things and she was very uncertain of herself, my second wife. Because she had been working in an architect partnership in England on lowcost housing and did a lot of work for the London County Council. She couldn't grasp the system in America, the architectural system and the manner in which housing was being dealt with. So she felt very tenuous in San Francisco about everything that was going on architecturally. She use to go look at buildings and talk to architects and so on. But she didn't feel like working anywhere at the time. She felt more certain about the cultural approach, the social-political approach to architecture in America, at least in the Bay Area and she couldn't unravel it all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it is very different there than in other places.

JOHN COPLANS: So she said, after having worked in an office, what else could I do. The simplest kind of drafting and even then it would have to be under heavy supervision until she knew what was going on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was all different. All the symbols are different.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, it wasn't that the drafting was any different. The purposes were different, the need, the necessity, the local bylaws, all kinds of things. And since our money was running out, I went over to Berkeley to what now is called the School of Environmental Art. I went to the painting department and they steered me toward I think it was called the design department or something like that. I asked if they had a teaching job and they had a post. Someone hadn't turned up. I remember that January, I arrived in November in San Francisco and in January I taught at Berkeley for six months. Everything really begins in whatever happened to me in America from that moment onwards.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it really starts from January 1961.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, January 1961.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm always interested when people pick up and move like you did even when they come with a couple of letters of introduction. It is a whole new world. How did you find what you wanted to do or was it just economic necessity for you to support yourself and start maintaining the painting? You did keep painting for quite a while, did you?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Obviously the mere fact that I was so out of place in England and disliked it so much in England and to a large extent disliked the English temperament so much, that kind of snide sense of irony they had, and the feeling of not being integrated into the society and disliking the climate. I was forty years old and I didn't see much future in England. So it was a question of taking a chance. I had been used to taking chances before of all kinds. That was part of my (inaudible) temperament when I worked my way to England with the kind of idea that I would like to be a pilot in the air force. I walked into the Air Ministry and they said, fine. We will take you as a pilot. That's just kind of faith in one's own future. I always had that kind of blind faith in whatever I wanted to do. I always took the chance and said, well, that's good enough and I will try it. So it was the same game walking into Berkeley. Probably there might be a job there. Why not try it. So I just walked in and there was a job.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you start teaching there?

JOHN COPLANS: It was a continuation of the teaching I had done in England. I never taught art anywhere and I

never wanted to teach painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had been a lecturer at the Maystone(?) --

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, but I had taught basic design. Peter Stroud, peculiarly enough, followed me to America and took on after me. When I left my job at Maystone's(?), he took my job there because as of that time he had been a school teacher and he wanted to get out of school teaching. This was a great opportunity. So I taught basically design, actually, at Berkeley and I painted. That was the year that I had a show at the de Young Museum, a four-man show there. And at the same time, while I was teaching at Berkeley, there were a number of visitors, Michael Goldberg, Angelo Ippolito, Hugh Conley, myself, Carol Carouse. They were teaching mainly in the sculpture department and painting department as visitors. I was teaching in the design department and Peter Valkist was in there. I became friendly with Phil Leider, the director of the Bolles Gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was John Bolles?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, the gallery run by the architect. And I proposed a show the visitors sent me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was actually an announcement with a photograph?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Years ago I had it and I tried to find it the other day. I remember seeing that.

JOHN COPLANS: Jim Monte was Phil Leider's assistant and he was the gallery (inaudible). I think he also did some drafting for Bolles and ran the group print machine. He was very young, about 20. He worked in (inaudible) at night.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So here you were getting yourself established as a painter, teacher, in the Bay Area. How did you like the academic life?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, that was the problem. Of course I had never ever attended a university. I knew Berkeley was an extraordinarily distinguished one. However, I was simply shocked by the place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of what?

JOHN COPLANS: All kinds of things. Remember the discussions at the ICA had been very sophisticated. I myself had taught down at Maystone(?) and was very well read in my area. I had a fair amount of information. Teaching in this design department and, as I said it eventually became the School of Environmental Design, and they had jewelers and weavers and ceramists and book illustrators.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was all the crafts.

JOHN COPLANS: All the crafts. I was somewhat puzzled at the start. I couldn't quite make out what was going on in terms of the intellectual quality around this discipline, that was there that they discussed, the design. They knew nothing of industrial design. They weren't interested in the commercial aspects of the applications from the point of view of industry, nor of the scientific, sociological aspects of design, kind of socio-political factors surrounding the manufacture of all kinds of --

PAUL CUMMINGS: The designer's responsibilities.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. None of this stuff was ever discussed. They seemed immolated in crafting, and I found myself teaching with a considerable repugnance. The staff was affable. They liked jewelry and they liked leather and books and those kinds of things. I kind of found myself puzzled and more than puzzled, shocked, by the quality of the people. There was an architect there, a quite nice and sophisticated man in the history of (inaudible) or something of that kind. But not particularly interesting, no incredible, spectacular scholar in the sense of the kind of man that would be employed at the National, the Victoria and Albert, and would have immense scholarship in the area. No doubt he did. But it didn't seem desperately apparent to me. And I could not understand the quality of the students. The first thing I did when I went to my class, I was told this was a great university and that they were drawing students with a 2.8 grade point average or beyond the 2.8, 3.2 or something and that they were the cream of the California students. And I began talking about, I did a basic course there, introducing them to the same kinds of things that I had done in England, a kind of general cultural course. I was trying to give some meaning to the various types of forms, their history and what they connected into and various things like that. But I found the students desperately ignorant of any kind of history, any kind of cultural overview. I remember once giving a test to these so-called bright students. I wrote out a list of 100 names of great men of the twentieth century and all kinds of disciplines and wherever possible, I put down the name of an American, if it was possible, or somebody that would be associated with America in some way or other. I asked them to identify the discipline, the kind of person - like Frank Lloyd Wright, Albert Einstein because

after all Albert Einstein was at Princeton and was in America. And I put down American painters, like de Kooning and well known ones and I put a few Europeans. And I asked them to identify the disciplines that were possible and secondly what they were noted for. I remember that I was astonished at the end of the class when they handed in the papers that on an average, the whole class, out of 100 names, they couldn't identify more than sixteen. And only something like three percent of the class could identify more than fifty percent of the names. I suddenly began to realize that I was dealing with people who had no general knowledge of the world. I asked them things, like did they read the newspapers. They didn't read newspapers. I asked them what journals they read. They didn't read any journals.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Totally in a vacuum.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I felt very unhappy about this.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why is that out there though? California seems isolated intellectually more than other parts of the country.

JOHN COPLANS: The students also began to complain a little bit to the chairman of the department about my arrogant attitude about their lack of any background or knowledge. (Inaudible) what American schools must be and what was this 3.2 grade average that they had and they seemed to be so enormously ignorant about everything. I think I began also to irritate people around me about my attitude or my lack of sympathy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Irritate who, the faculty?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, the faculty and so on. My lack of sympathy for what they were doing too, the jewelers and so on. I remember going and looking at the jewelry department and just wondering what this was doing in this university. It seemed to me that it should have been in a trades school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Lumpy biomorphic shapes.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I came across Peter Voukos very early on and became great friends with him. Of course he had the same contempt for this department that I had.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He always impressed me as someone who had been very inventive in what he wants to do and his work and where he goes, very different from the normal run.

JOHN COPLANS: Oh, I was so taken by him later in that attribution, that expressionist ceramics and felt it very deeply. And what you see here is obviously a result of that experience that I had with Voukos. Then I was spending a lot of time in the art department.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In the art history department?

JOHN COPLANS: No, the art department.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The painting.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, the painting. I was friendly with Goldberg and I would see Goldberg and Angelo and Rico. They were very puzzled over my painting because they were abstract expressionists and here I was painting these hard-edged things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You continued that?

JOHN COPLANS: Oh yes, very much so. My exhibition at the De Young was entirely these sort of large hard-edged paintings. The things I showed the visitors, if you look in the catalog, were hard-edged paintings. But they were very close-toned and without you realizing, this close-tone varied in that close tone extremely to Reinhardt. And I actually in 1961 had not seen any dark paintings by Reinhardt until a little bit later. But it looked very much as if I were very close to Reinhardt somewhat, but it was merely coincidental. However, it is quite true. The work did look a lot like Reinhardt's except it wasn't painted on a rigid symmetry the way Reinhardt's was. I still used a much more European way of balancing the forms and the kind of motion and edge tension that I used was very European. It didn't have anything to do with American painting. That's how I got to know the faculty at Berkeley in the painting department (I'm not talking about the visitors) and the more I saw their work and the more I saw the attitude, the more unhappy and dissatisfied I became with what an art school was considered to be in a major American university.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was teaching there then? I mean the regular staff people?

JOHN COPLANS: The guy who did the book on Cezanne, Erle Loran. Loran was sort of the dominant man in the department.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He had been there forever hadn't he?

JOHN COPLANS: There was a bad faculty of men with the sufficient school influence or background who got jobs in the Depression and hung on to them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they must have been much older weren't they?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, they were five or six years older than I when I went there. They got their jobs during the last part of the Depression in 1938, 1939, 1940. Remember that America didn't go to war until 1941. So they were getting jobs during those years. I was 20 years old in 1940 and these guys may have been three, four or five years older than myself and they got in right after they came out of college. They came in in the late 1930s and just stuck there. I found men of very little intellectual achievement and very little artistic passion and power.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sounds like a very exciting atmosphere.

JOHN COPLANS: I kind of thought to myself, what had I landed myself in. I had come to San Francisco and taken this tremendous chance. I had cut off my sources in England because I certainly wasn't going to return there. I had no intentions of returning and here I had landed in this place. And there was no intellectual life at this major university. I met a couple of the art historians, Herschel Chipp and another medievalist, and they were polite but seemed to have some fear or distance from painters. All the art historians kind of feared painters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. They don't like painters. Almost every art historian I know at one time or another have said, you know, painters are really nuts. I mean they really don't like painters as people and don't like them around. It makes them nervous or something.

JOHN COPLANS: Also I gather that I was sort of bad-mannered in my private directness. If I saw something, I would say, oh, that is awful. I was irritating people a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were questioning the assumed values.

JOHN COPLANS: I got on very well with Peter Voukos. He and I were absolutely of like minds. I remember saying, I went down to San Francisco to see what they were painting there. Again I found a climate that was rather peculiar with embedded sets of ideas and questions. I think that after a while I felt that the only way to get some sort of intellectual life perhaps was to get some panels going and discuss some things so that you could know what people were thinking. And I wanted to find out. So I remember trying to organize some panels down at the Art Institute. I read Alfred Frankenstein in the local newspaper and I remember him reviewing my own show. He was very nice to me. Again, there seemed to be no input of ideas. So there was no input of ideas at the university, no input of ideas down at the Art Institute, and I also wandered around. I went down to San Francisco State College and there was a guy called Wayne Champion down there and he had heard about me and called me to talk about his industrial design department. I went down there and went through the department. I couldn't understand his department either because they were training industrial designers but they weren't teaching them any specific skills. They weren't casting anything. They weren't adding any engineering things. They were training a department of stylists. Again I was very critical of it, to their horror. And indeed they were training stylists. They sent ten every year to General Motors' styling department. And these guys were styling and drawing cars and had no idea how they worked.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That is apparent, isn't it.

JOHN COPLANS: There was no casting and they didn't have any engineering or anything of this kind. Whatever they designed, they had no idea of the manufacturing process.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think what you hit on there is exactly one of the problems in the college art school idea because they are more interested in a surface than what it takes to develop the person who then develops the work, kind of thing. I see that all the time and it still goes on.

JOHN COPLANS: I wasn't, and have never been, a party line socialist. I am interested in the social effects of things. And in my stay in London I watched avidly the London County Council and the (inaudible) department go visit the new schools that they were designing and the low-income housing. I had a tremendous interest in this marvelous effort made by the London County Council. They were trying to house the county population in very sophisticated buildings and produce marvelous school buildings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think the intellectual life in the American universities in those days was rotten? They were afraid to express a new idea because somebody was going to steal it or afraid that they were never going to have another idea. What did you see?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I made some assumptions. I don't know if they are correct assumptions but I did make

some assumptions. McCarthyism had an effect on the entire climate. Charlie Maddox had been chairman of Artists Equity and was very left-wing. And because he was so left-wing at the time, he was unemployable in art schools. Later as time went on, he was able to go back in as the climate improved. But I found a climate that was in a sense so full of decorum and so frightened of anything radical and the discussion of radical ideas and the natural affects of these radical ideas, it was solidly middle-class at the university in the art department. Full of solidly middle-class values which were buried under a false face of radicalism. In other words, I very rapidly gathered the idea that people spoke radical and talked conservative so that their entire attitude in the university, teaching and the things they did were obviously extremely conservative. They never questioned any of the socio-political structures, values or intellectual ideas. They were merely repeating on their comfortable situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So what did all of this produce in you? What kind of effect did it elicit besides the fact that you aggravated everyone?

JOHN COPLANS: I remember there was a lecture by Sir Kenneth Clark. The art department got Sir Kenneth Clark as a visitor and he gave a lecture. Subsequently, I was asked to give a lecture and I chose to give a lecture on pop art. The year was 1962 and they were considering me for a permanent job. They were so infuriated by the populist view as against the elitist view. I took pop art, that it was a kind of art that was radical in the sense that it was dealing with, we questioned all the assumptions of abstract expressionism as it examined ironically perhaps the American production system. It was a talk and I subsequently used it in the essay in 1963 in the show at the Oakland Art Museum that I did there on pop art. But the art department was so infuriated by my claim for the radical content of this art that they decided that they could not employ me then in the kind of job they seemed to be negotiating for me. It just fell through. So in any event, I was so irritated by the situation that I found myself in and this quagmire that I felt that some kind of hard intellectual conditioning of the area was necessary if I was going to stay there. I had been talking for a long time about the possibility of having a journal. The only way you would ever get something going there was to have a journal and you could openly discuss some of these situations. There was a print salesman that worked for an Italian printing firm. His name was John Irwin, a man of about 35 or 37. He wanted to become a publisher and start a magazine. I think various people steered him through to me and we had long discussions in my studio in 1961 about the idea of starting an art magazine. He got to be very taken with the idea. I showed him Arts International. I showed him Art News. I showed him Art in America. And I encouraged him to start this art magazine. So we worked on it and I was sort of advising him on it until the first issue appeared in June 1962. It was in a planning stage from about November 1961. Would you like to go on about that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. I think we should continue with that, how it got started. Well, why don't we start a little bit more on Artforum and continue that. How did you get things together? Who else was involved with it then besides Irwin?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, in the early stages just Irwin and myself. But he was unsure and uncertain. He went around asking most people and kept coming back to me. As we got nearer and nearer to publication, he began to look for someone in the Los Angeles area. He wanted obviously the magazine to take as a focus San Francisco and Los Angeles. Arthur Secunda was down in Los Angeles. And Arthur was helping him in Los Angeles. As it turned out, Los Angeles had a much stronger impact on him at that time than San Francisco did because of the people he got in touch with like Henry Selvinson(?). But he was a man who was extremely uncertain. He had no knowledge and as far as he was concerned I was just an Englishman visiting there and teaching at Berkeley. And obviously there were experts who had published like Alfred Frankenstein, the critic of the San Francisco Examiner; obviously George Cullen, the museum director, was an important person; obviously this person and that. They were the real pros and I was the amateur. I advised over his shoulder. He was so full of uncertainties that he tended to want to get these people in. The only article I could get him to publish in the first issue was one from Sidney Geist. I showed him a Scrap magazine of Sidney Geist and I told him how I thought it was important to get in someone who was radical when he began showing me the list of people. I argued with him as much as I could. And it was his specific idea that in order for a magazine to take up in America, it had to be sweet. It had to look good. It had to have good paper, first class layout. He actually employed a designer and paid a big fee to him to think up the format for Artforum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it the designer's idea to have the square?

JOHN COPLANS: A square magazine because I told the designer that reproductions are both horizontal and vertical. If you look at Art International, you will see how difficult it is sometimes to fit the reproductions in. There are space problems. I showed him other magazines and he worked it out logically. It was quite correct for the format to be vertical and horizontal and therefore the format should be square. Irwin was very worried by this because obviously it was going to be different from any other magazine. It was going to be difficult to handle. It was going to be difficult for bookstores to handle and people like that. On the other hand, it did have this radical format and he thought it might be a good point for the magazine to make itself known. The question of Artforum itself --

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find the name of it?

JOHN COPLANS: Irwin and I discussed the idea of having Art Dialong but my irascibility about the situation, the difference between this journal and the other journals would be the idea of a forum. There would be discussions and people would be able to write in and it would not be in the hands of any one particular group and that it would not represent any one particular group and that it would not represent any one particular point of view but be devoted to vanguard, and like Scrap magazine it would take on all real and paper tigers, whatever they might be. After the first issue, the people that he spoke to to get their advice on the magazine, Herschel Chipp, Gerald Nordland, myself and Arthur Secunda, in that order were thanked and their names appeared on the title page. So historically one knows who the people were that he was trying to deal with. Of course, Herschel wasn't very involved himself in the magazine. He was an academic and he tried to give him, I think, some sound advice. Gerry Nordland was writing for the journal called, I think, Frontier Magazine, published by Philips. It is a West Coast magazine like (inaudible). It was published by Gifford Philips. Then very soon thereafter, I'm not sure if I reviewed in the first issue, I don't think I did - I spent most of my time in the first issue trying to advise him on what to do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think the reviews started a little later.

JOHN COPLANS: No, the reviews were in the first issue.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really? I mean your reviews.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. My reviews started I don't think, no, I am in the first issue; San Francisco, the Artforum of December. Here it is. I began writing straight away. However, apart from a couple of small articles I had published in London in Art News and Review which were biographical sketches of friends, I had no writing skills of any kind, of any sort whatsoever. It was ludicrous. I don't think I could spell (inaudible). My grammar was very stiff and awkward and my writing was stiff and awkward, and I began to review regularly and to help advise the guy. I, of course, was very friendly with Phil Leider and the Bolles Gallery. By this time Leider had packed up and left Bolles in disgust and gone back into the welfare department in San Francisco. He was a welfare officer. But I knew he was a very literate man. We used to talk about Berkeley and I knew that as a student he had been all over the States and that he had earned his way through college by writing masters theses for people. He used to write a number of masters theses for people every semester and he used to charge \$75 a time. He was an avid and skilled writer and typist, like a machine gun. So I went to Phil Leider and said, look, this guy Irwin is not very literate and I'm certainly not very literate. I can't spell. We need someone of your magnitude. It needs proofreading and all these things, it is full of misspelling, as I discovered in my article and other articles. Phil wasn't terribly interested at first. I kept pressing him. If we are going to have a proper professional magazine, we simply have to have someone on the magazine who was a professional in that area. I think in the third or fourth issue, he began to come in. He didn't begin writing but he began full time employment with Irwin on the fourth issue but that could have been the fifth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you finally agree? Did he find it a more interesting situation than the welfare? It certainly couldn't have offered a great deal of money at that point?

JOHN COPLANS: No, it offered very little money but it offered something unusual. He was married and - here we are, Phil's first piece of writing, a book review on the (inaudible) by Peter Selz. That was his first contribution to the magazine and that took place in the August 1962 issue, the third issue. From that point onward, Phil came in and worked full time for the magazine. Once Phil was in I began to get the idea that - no, Phil is not in yet because he is not on the masthead. I'm on the masthead and Arthur is on the masthead. I'm on the masthead in San Francisco and Arthur Secunda is on the masthead in Los Angeles. Here we are. Phil was on in the fifth. The reason I can't give you the month and it is not on the magazine is because Irwin said, let's not put a month down because if this stuff is any good, people will go on buying the magazine if they don't know what month it is. Just put a number there. Only those who are in the know will want to get the latest number. Otherwise they can stay on the book stands and sell them out. So the date was withdrawn from the magazine and a number was entered there. As soon as Phil was in, then the magazine began to take much better shape. Once I could convince Phil, then both Phil and I could work on Irwin. About this time or a little bit earlier, I wandered into the San Francisco office of the Institute to see what was happening down there. Walter Hopps was giving a lecture. I was so taken with the incredible level of knowledge of his lecture on West Coast art, the depth and the range of it, that I knew I had shot across someone who was quite remarkable. That was in the summer and it was a summer class. I wondered who this guy was and discovered that he was curator of the Pasadena Museum and we became immediate friends. A number of exhibitions were shooting through the Bay Area. In particular, 'round about this time was an exhibition of British art which I reviewed in the magazine. And included in the magazine was Peter Phillips and various other what subsequently came to be called English pop artists. I showed these to Walter Hopps and Hopps immediately picked up and began to say, well, I know people like this in Los Angeles, Joe Goode, Ed Ruscha. There was a Wayne Thiebaud show and we went and looked at it. I got Hopps to review it for Artforum and he listed in this review all the artists working in this similar style. So that by this time he then

picked up the idea that there was something serious going on in the area. Through this discussion that we both had I gave him a history of what had happened in England. He did the first museum exhibition of pop art which was called "The New Painting of Common Objects." Do you want the date of his review in the Artforum?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, we can find it.

JOHN COPLANS: We began to realize too what was happening in New York, and he was getting some of that from his partner Irving Blum, who was going to New York a lot. His ex-partner rather because by this time they had broken up and Blum had taken over the Ferus Gallery. He was getting the idea that this was strong in New York and had a lot of information on it. Blum showed Warhol in 1962, the first one man show of Andy Warhol in 1962 before his New York show. Very rapidly Blum and my man came up to San Francisco and met me. Hopps had told him about a guy up there that seemed to know a lot and I was getting on and being very active and they had got this magazine Artforum going. Very soon Blum came up and I met him. Hopps began to realize that this was phenomenal what was taking place, not only in England and not only in New York but out on the West Coast itself. For the first time there was something that was being generated simultaneously on the two coasts. It all continued from New York's leadership. People who were working out on the West Coast had no idea of the people working in New York. So, fairly obviously, Joe Goode's work came right out of (inaudible) art. He had that coat hanger of (inaudible) art hanging in his studio. I went down there and saw it there. It was the coat hanger poster, not the print. It was the same with Ruscha in that particular respect. Having met Hopps, having met Blum and beginning to read the magazine and realize the kinds of articles that were coming out of Los Angeles where art was being fed in there and the fact that Leider seemed now to be in control of the San Francisco office, had gotten things going with Irwin, combined with the breakdown of my own marriage, I felt that I should go down to Los Angeles and take over and begin to organize things in Los Angeles. Hopps was there and Blum was there and both were assuring me of quite extraordinary things. I had been to Los Angeles previously, but we began to unite and tie in together more than we had earlier. In 1963 I went down to Los Angeles. It was from Los Angeles that I did the show at the Oakland Art Museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It seems that it was very easy to move from one place to another up and down the coast and go to the museums and talk to the curators and directors and whoever. Was it that easy or did one have to do a lot of selling and persuading to do these projects? To get the magazine launched must have been --

JOHN COPLANS: Well, Irwin was seeing to all that kind of thing. All we were concerned with was the content. Irwin was the publisher. He had been a print salesman and knew about distribution, advertising and all that kind of stuff. However, our first advertising manager was Wilfred Zogbaum's wife, Marta Zogbaum. Marta was a sharp New Yorker and very interested in the idea and she went out and got advertisements. Then down in Los Angeles we had another woman, I can't remember her name. But there was no money. I remember that there was just sufficient money to pay Irwin and Phil Leider, who was married and had children and we had a little bit of money to pay him. No money to pay the writers. It was very difficult for me to get any money for my writing. Irwin was doing the publishing, Phil was writing. I said, there is no money. I've sold my house and broken up with my wife and decided to take the money and go down to Los Angeles.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it hard to find people to write or did people come flocking?

JOHN COPLANS: No, no. It was hard to find people to write, extremely hard. I was writing as much as I could. Art Secunda was writing. We were going around asking for people to write. Phil and I were sitting and looking over articles. The model for our activity as far as I was concerned was Art International. Art International was a kind of high point of the critical stance that was so significant. It was the most admired art magazine. There was a lot of animosity against Art News and its attitude. I kept thrusting Art International under Irwin's and Phil's noses and saying this is what we are after. This is the kind of thing we have got to find. I began writing myself and my writing was all about the West Coast. I reviewed the English art exhibit. I worked hard. By this time Alloway had come to New York and he was teaching at Bennington. I wrote to Alloway and asked if he would contribute something to the magazine and if he knew of any people. We were trying to get the magazine off. There were certain steps that were taken after our discussions. You've got to remember also in California people used to go up and down between L.A. all the time. First of all, the airfare was only \$12.85. Even today it is only \$14.85 for 450 miles. If you compare that with Washington - it is something like \$50 or \$60 to go to Washington and \$50 or \$60 to go to Boston. Both distances are much shorter than L.A. and San Francisco. The commuter service they have running between L.A. and San Francisco is quite unusual. It is not unusual for people to go down to L.A. or come up to San Francisco for dinner and return the same night. Planes leave every half an hour. It is terribly cheap. On top of that, the drive up and down was only six and a half or seven hours driving. It was very cheap to drive. One could get back and forward between the two cities. More than that too, the historical link between the younger generation of L.A. artists like Bengston and various people like that, and the certain generation in San Francisco. What was shaping up, of course, was Hopps and Blum down in L.A., and the group of artists down in L.A. had a much stronger persuasive attitude about establishing another style of West Coast art different from the remnants of abstract expressionism as it developed through Still. You've got to remember that the situation at the San Francisco Museum of Art was incredibly bad. There was that situation in comparison in southern

California with Leavitt at the Pasadena Museum. Leavitt was still director but Hopps was hoping to mount a number of shows at the museum. The galleries, at least the Ferus Gallery as it is called in L.A., which was a kind of cooperative art gallery, seemed to have less of that private turning in upon themselves than the San Francisco artists had and less of that sense of a kind of frustration and isolation that was all around in San Francisco. Also, there seemed to be a market in Los Angeles and no market in San Francisco. I think we counted about 75 art galleries where people showed art in San Francisco. All kinds of little shops. But nothing seemed to move very much. Galleries would open and do a show and then close four months later as people realized that they couldn't sell anything and with the cost of shipping art across the country. Whereas they were developing markets down in L.A. and they also had some interesting exhibitions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think San Francisco has been so bad as far as the market is concerned?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I think that what people were interested in was tasteful and a much better style of taste than in Los Angeles, certainly in expressions of taste in furnishings and antiques and books, rather than in what one would call extremely modern works. That taste hadn't developed. It was embedded in the history of the city, the style of the city. Whereas in Los Angeles there was very little. It was all pretty poor foreign furniture, Sloan's furniture, Bloomingdale's furniture. Even the wealthiest people down in the Los Angeles had very little feelings about style. They were ready to go with anything that came along that they thought might be interesting. Whereas with San Francisco people tended to be more closed, more sealed in their opinions and inherited more things from the past.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was much more conservative in some ways.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, much more conservative. The big houses on Nob Hill, very beautifully furnished with really lovely Persian rugs. They had no interest in modern art. Down in Los Angeles things in comparison were much more cruder in style. At that time, I hadn't realized it, but Hopps was pioneering. Lecturing in people's homes and introducing them to what was happening in New York and on the East Coast.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wasn't there a lot of work like his activities there in a very personal way? I mean, one doesn't think of Los Angeles as a place where you give great public lectures like you would in New York. You go to Beverly Hills and you go here or you go there and see 40 or 50 people and that's like one little cultural activity. I don't know if that is true or not, but I always get the feeling that there are no places to give lectures like at the Metropolitan and places like that.

JOHN COPLANS: They say that there was a great difference between the public institutions in Los Angeles and San Francisco. But it is true that lectures were given at the San Francisco Museum but they tended to be of a very poor quality, not of any particular interest. The San Francisco Art Institute had no public vehicle and needed to develop a public thing. It is very internal and was seen in the art world as artists' art school. We had some panels there. One panel discussion was in Artforum. Berkeley had occasional visitors in but the community as a whole didn't have anything to do with San Francisco. There was no integration culturally into San Francisco, no tentacles into San Francisco, no kind of intermixing of any kind of things. Each institution seemed to be locked into itself, without any roots in the community whatsoever. Which to me was a rather startling affair. Now this was equally true in Los Angeles but the spirit was different, mainly because of Hopps' activities. More than that of course, and I didn't know about this until much later, Fred White had carried out a remarkable program in the 1950s. He had been a major museum man in California in the 1950s. No one knew about it. There was no criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He did those marvelous exhibitions.

JOHN COPLANS: No criticism, no public status and feeling or understanding. People hadn't even heard of Fred White up in San Francisco. Fred had been fielding exhibitions into New York. All we knew in San Francisco was that there had been Grace Morely, a marvelous woman at the San Francisco Museum. The museum itself was in a very rundown condition under Cuther's administration. And that it seemed to be a locked, closed, ambience which turned in on itself. Artists were always in their studios, occasionally meeting in bars or talking, cut socially. They didn't want to talk about intellectual ideas at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's a very standard American artist idea, don't you think?

JOHN COPLANS: No, not in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I mean outside of New York.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, it is standard in the sense that people are isolated by long distances. Things are far apart. It is quite true that universities provide no ambience for artists and no interlockings, no interconnections of intellectual ideas.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It is all phony.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, it is all phony. What I'm saying now other people must be also saying.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it is different in some ways too. Why do you think that you are so motivated to keep stirring things up? That seems to be a kind of favorite activity of yours. Go here and stir things up and when that is bubbling you go start another pot boiling and jump back and forth.

JOHN COPLANS: I have a tremendous amount of nervous energy, of energy itself. If I don't discharge it, I get sick.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You have something in the activities that seem to --

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I'm a pragmatist. I like to see things done. I like to. That comes from my South African ambience. Any people who come from frontier places are used to doing. That's what I found so fascinating about California, the kind of frontier ambience. You differentiate (inaudible). You don't wait to inherit. A man goes out and does some things for himself that he is interested in. He knows no one else is going to do it for him. So I was kind of remarkably fitted from my South African experience and my East African and Asiatic experiences. If you wanted to change things, you had to go and change them yourself. Do it yourself and find people who are interested and move and shift and do it. It is a very frontier attitude.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But when you moved finally from San Francisco to Los Angeles, that was again reestablishing yourself again in a way.

JOHN COPLANS: Sure. I went down and I was the first artist in Los Angeles and looked for what one typically expects in New York. I lived in San Francisco in a loft in the old Jackson Square area. I lived there with Charlie Maddox. He didn't live there, but he used to paint there. But it was an old loft on top of some bars. A beautiful huge space, giant windows, whitewashed walls. When I went down to L.A., I looked for a similar place. I found such a place above a clothing factory. The factory was not in use and for \$100 a month there was lots of space for myself, down near the old L.A. County Museum where the actual history of art began. It was not far from USC. Later on lots of other artists began to go downtown. But I like what went on in New York and San Francisco. I didn't live out in Venice or somewhere like that like the other artists did. I was looking for space and cheap space.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you do the work, you know, work on the magazine, write pieces? What kind of schedule were you keeping?

JOHN COPLANS: When I went down to Los Angeles, I taught two mornings a week at the old Chouinard Art School. Eight o'clock in the morning I taught, from eight to nine, two art history survey courses. What is not on the tape is that when I left Berkeley, I taught at various other institutions. I taught at Davis, I also taught at the California College of Arts and Crafts. And at these places people began to say, well, you know quite a lot about art history. Of course, I never had any particular formal training. I had gone to a lot of museums in Europe and I had put together some kind of notion of what I thought it was all about. Of course, I had read a lot. I was completely self-taught. People seemed to want me to teach in that area. They wanted art students to have lectures on art history.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Modern art history?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I taught on modern (inaudible). They would rather have it from an artist, you see. The chairmen of departments thought it would be interesting to have it from an artist or tentatively I was cheap labor. They paid the same rate for me as they did for an art scholar. It was difficult to get hold of artists in those days who had come out to California. I taught painting at California College of Arts and Crafts. In fact, John McCracken was there as a graduate student. I was very early involved in his work. His wife was one of my students.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like teaching painting? Do you think you can really teach painting?

JOHN COPLANS: No. I hated it. I loathed it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think I can be done? What does one teach a young art student?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I always regarded art school as merely a convenience for people who want to do things to get on with the things they want to do. Although you don't shortchange anyone, you kind of do the best you can with what is there, developing what any particular person seems to have a drive or urgency for, and you watch and study their urgencies. You deal with their urgencies, their instinctual drives and their urgencies and intellectual qualities. You try to open that up as much as you can. You can't teach them how to paint. You can listen to them sympathetically. You can make suggestions. You can look at the work and if they talk, you can say

this doesn't seem to match up with what you are talking about. What about this and what about that. You deal with this as best you can in a very sympathetic way, leading them as hard as one can into more sophisticated lines of thought and try to put them in touch with their own inner-drives and instincts. Which is all I ever did in teaching. I crafted the things to be taught today.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you find it difficult? Because the museums out there are so diversified. Or didn't you use them as a teaching device?

JOHN COPLANS: It was impossible to see anything of any great significance. And beyond that, one of the worse aspects of students is the fact that they will simply not go to museums and see anything at all unless you personally take them over. Pile them in a car and, like children, talk to them about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that is?

JOHN COPLANS: It is actually epidemic. I am prepared to bet that the School of Visual Arts, which has maybe 600 students, that probably of those 600 students most of them haven't been more than once to a museum or more than once to an exhibition. They simply don't go to them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They go to the appropriate galleries to see the style.

JOHN COPLANS: Not until they have been painting two or three years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really that bad.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. The idea of going consistently to museums is quite foreign to students' temperament. It is too distant.

PAUL CUMMINGS: From his own problems.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. And also the cost. The idea of having to pay \$1 to go to an exhibition, when \$1 will buy a beer or junk food.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You knew Hopps and Blum and who else in that area?

JOHN COPLANS: Shirley Blum was very important to Hopps as well as to myself. She was the best art historian that I ever came in close contact with, professional art historian and we became great friends. Later in my life and career she was an enormous help to me. As I developed as a writer, she spent large amounts of time with me, leading me into art history itself, into the discipline, trying to improve my own level of sophistication. She was leading me away from those opinionated opinions which are of an uninformed artist into opinions which, let's say, are based much more on historical research.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you think was the most valid in terms of criticism? Or do they serve different purposes?

JOHN COPLANS: I think they serve different purposes. The idea today is that the critics have to have deep respect for art history and for art historical processes, almost in many cases to be able to work as an historic which an artist doesn't have to at all. He or she can arbitrarily take from the past whatever they want to on any occasion that it strikes them if the ideas or the information may be of some use to them, even if they aren't. Whereas one is supposed to have a systematic regard as a critic for art history itself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that can function practically though, thinking that way as a critic?

JOHN COPLANS: The problems with critics which I find based on my experiences - remember what we are talking about now is some 15 years later in my own education. The problem of critics is that they know very little about objects. They rarely go into artist's studios. They almost never have done any museum work. People like Rosalind Krauss, for example; when I first met her, she came to New York and had never been in an artist's studio, never had organized an exhibition. She was a Ph.D. and an art historian at MIT. She had never seen these things. The younger critics that I have known have never handled an exhibition, never handled works of art, never hung a show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They are scared to touch a work of art.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. There are problems of integrating all these things into one person. The mere fact that you are an art historian doesn't make you a writer. The mere fact that you are a writer doesn't make you a critic or an art historian. There is a wide range of talents necessary. Let me put it this way; there is the fact that there is no place to train museum people, there is no place to train critics. The critics seem to emerge despite the situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think the one thing we did not really say is why you decided to move to Los Angeles. There was obviously some reason to pick up and make a whole shift from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, there were several factors, but the principle factor was that I had gone down to L.A. several times and I found it seemed to have some lively potential. Obviously Hopps was a key factor in Pasadena and that museum program, the kind of information that was developing out of the series of exhibitions, including, of course, the two Duchamp (inaudible). It was more lively and formative than anything that was going on in California. Secondly, there was obviously a group of artists down there centered around the Ferus Gallery and Irving Blum whose direction and views concerning art was vastly different from the Bay Area, which was still locked into abstract expressionism. In other words, there was great diversity in L.A., when one thinks of it. There was McLaughlin and Feitelson, the two old artists. There was much work for a major figure in assemblage and Bruce Connor working in films in the assemblage, though he was of course between the two cities as well. But nevertheless, there was a clear assemblage movement of some significance in Southern California. Painters like Lynn Polk was coming out of it, a real mixture of the assemblage. And Mara Bridges photographs of California landscape. Then of course Billy Al Bengston, Kaufman and a number of pop artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where was Voulkos in those days? Was he down there?

JOHN COPLANS: He left in the late 1950s and went to the University of California at Berkeley. By this time, outside of Mason and Price, the whole clay movement was dissipated and they were all working in sculpture. Voulkos was working in sculpture and so were the others. Price was in small (inaudible) and Mason in master clay sculpture. However, despite the new (inaudible) so to speak, or beginnings that were taking place in Los Angeles, the city itself artistically speaking was in the grips of the kind of old guard represented on the one hand by, greatly, by three figures - Gerald Nordland, Henry Seldens at the L.A. Times, (inaudible) at the National, and Gilbert Blackstone. Obviously the rival of Artforum, so to speak, on the West Coast or publication of Artforum on the West Coast, its only purpose to be not to support the established critics and figures, and trying to find some way to deal with the developing art. So this was locked into the academic painters at UCLA and Rico LeBrun and various people like that. (Inaudible) was a very much more intelligent critic and wider critic than Seldens and with a better eye. A somewhat disappointed man. He wanted to be an older man. He wanted to be curator or director of the Pasadena Museum. He had no specific role. He worked for Art International and I think he was a kind of inventive man. And Nordland was an educationalist. He was a rather sentimental educationalist, more occupied with American service art like Chass(?) and people like that than he was with the current scene. Although he was able, he never had a kind of focus. All these people in their own way were reasonably able but they never had a kind of intense focus.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They never got really interested in the living artists of the moment did they?

JOHN COPLANS: Like the art was just beginning. They were never terribly interested. Nor were they terribly interested in forcing the dynamics of a situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did that interest you? Those things seem more interesting to you the fact that an intelligent, laughable 25 year old and somebody who is a professor and 45.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, there were obviously a number of factors. One was that the firm belief in my mind that a work of art has no meaning or position or place or cognizance or reality until it ends at the support structure - that is, the world, human beings. And the only way you can enter into the world, the audience, is of course through the support structure; through commercial galleries, through museums, exhibitions of various kinds, or criticisms in books. So that the more sophisticated the support structure, the more sophisticated the response to the art and the more the art will be sorted rather than being like an indifferent vegetable garden where one didn't know which of the vegetables were good and which were poor. I felt that the artist's support structure, a sophisticated support structure, was very necessary if there was to emerge a strong West Coast scene.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, really what you are defining is a kind of patronage.

JOHN COPLANS: Absolutely, the patronage system of some kind. However, I'm less interested in the idea of patronage from the point of view of the classical patronage, which is the purchase of works of art, rather than the critical effects of exhibition and exhibiting of works of art. That is, an aroused consciousness.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But that helps to induce the patronage. People won't buy something new unless they've got some indication of how to look at it, experience it.

JOHN COPLANS: I was never involved in patronage in that sense. I never was terribly interested in forming collections. That was a high activity on the part of artists who formed most of the basic collections in Southern California. People forget how you form the Chass(?) Collection, the Weisman Collection, the Atta(?) Collection. And in a recent article I wrote for Artforum on Pasadena where I named the collections that Hopps had formed, and there was some fury among collectors saying, Hopps didn't do it. But I know for a fact, for example, that the

Weisman's put on an extraordinary collection and publicly proclaimed that they had been collecting for 30 years. Sure they had been collecting. In 1958 their collection consisted of eight or nine Keans, wide-eye Keans. And people forget this kind of thing. Sure they collected but they collected poorer things. The first sophisticated collection undoubtedly was engendered by Hopps.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was he able to do that?

JOHN COPLANS: It was quite unique, his program. He himself, while he was at the Ferus Gallery, which remember was a co-op then, he saw it as an educational thing. While he was there, he set up lecture courses in people's homes. He would lecture for small groups of ten people for (inaudible) or at times for nothing. Just to get the audiences, to sophisticate the audiences with money. He would give a systematic course on the origin and evolution of modern art and of contemporary American art and West Coast art, just to introduce some sophisticated knowledge to the audience itself. These people obviously in the future were going to be trustees of museums. They were interested in art and had wealth. He felt that the more they knew, the better off these people would be as trustees and so would the artists and curators themselves.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that has worked out in some of those instances that people do become trustees? Or do they get too ambitious for their own good?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, there were two groups in L.A. There was the group that Hopps got interested in contemporary art through Ferus' operations and then secondly through his role at Pasadena. Then there was another group around the old County Museum, which were Hollywood people. And as I mentioned in the article, the Pasadena trustees were very antithetical to the Hollywood group of people. They were basically a WASP board of trustees and although they weren't specifically anti-Semitic, anyway they disliked the kind of brashness of the Hollywood movie crowd. And they had nothing to do with them. They didn't like the kind of people. For that reason, that crowd moved into the old County Museum and they tended not to be interested in contemporary art. They either collected copies of Old Masters or of Impressionist and post-Impressionist work, particularly Picasso and early 20th century and a mixture of 20th century French art. They were under the domination of one Frank Perls. Frank had no sympathy whatsoever for contemporary art of any kind. So there was this split.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What were your intentions going to Los Angeles to, you know, you were carrying the magazine with you as part of your (inaudible) in life?

JOHN COPLANS: It is simple. Phil was stuck in the office and was married and had two kids. He couldn't move out and there wasn't much money. I had a little money and taught two mornings a week at Chouinard which kind of paid my way along. So I was very free. I was up and down between San Francisco and Los Angeles, correlating the two scenes, feeding information backwards and forwards to Phil and finding out what was going on. My title on the magazine had changed from associate editor to editor-at-large. Shows were coming into Los Angeles that weren't to the museums in San Francisco. Phil had no idea of what their history was. He would get first-hand reports from me. Then we would decide how to deal with them. Also, there was no information whatsoever feeding out of Los Angeles on the new artists, the younger artists. Lonston(?) was not terribly interested in them nor did --

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true and most of them didn't have New York galleries --

JOHN COPLANS: They had no New York type galleries, they only had the Ferus Gallery. So there was really a link to the Ferus Gallery. I became a spokesman for the younger artists and some of the people in Southern California. I wrote four columns for Art International (inaudible). And really at that time rather than seeing myself in an adversary situation as a critic, I saw myself in a support situation for the unknown art, in the sense of a publicist. Of course, later there was a lot of anger as soon as I took up an adversary situation, and dropped the role as a publicist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did the change come about?

JOHN COPLANS: With me personally?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

JOHN COPLANS: I had spent a lot of time writing the initial articles on these particular artists and being defensive about their role. Well, a whole series of moves took place which needed to be dealt with. But later, of course, there came the problems of honing and refining a critical process. We were young, naive, we were enthusiastic and there came through the process of defining the critical process, defining our own roles as critics, and of course the fact that we began to be sucked into the national scene. Our standards and taste and ideas were constantly undergoing a transformation. Secondly, by the time the magazines moved east --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which was what, 1970 -- ?

JOHN COPLANS: 1967. The whole world of the magazine had changed. The terms on which the West Coast art field were dealt with were very different. That is partially because of the attitudes of Phil Leider, which I will discuss later. My first task as I saw it was to focus the grass roots of West Coast art, to define them in an easily readable way. So I wrote a long article for Art in America in 1963, a survey article on West Coast art which dealt with both San Francisco and Los Angeles. (Inaudible) survey exhibitions. But the exhibitions in themselves, there was one at the Whitney, did very little to really lay out the development that had taken place. So I began to visit studios and write articles on individual artists in Southern California.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened with the painting? How long did that continue?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, in 1963 I obviously came to a point of crisis when I had to decide to be a painter or a writer. The two didn't fit hand-in-hand that well. But there were always self-serving problems. You can get an exhibition as easy as possible. I remember the moment I arrived in Los Angeles, Esther Robbs offered me an exhibition and the reasons were abundantly clear to me that the interest wasn't in my art but in my activities. She would like to see them brought into the gallery. (Inaudible) I was very antithetical to Crimean(?) people like that. So I found severe problems in being both artist, an exhibitions organizer, and a writer. I decided that I would have to give up one or the other, which I did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what, 1963, 1964?

JOHN COPLANS: 1963. I think the last time that I exhibited was in 1963 at a show called "Southern California Geometric Art" or something like that, with Larry Bell and some others. Then I decided to pack it in. It was a conscious choice on my part but painful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, obviously. You had been at it for a long time. Was that also because the activity of the writer and exhibition organizer was growing and growing and the magazine's demand...

JOHN COPLANS: It was devouring my time. I was a slow writer. I found it very difficult because I had had no training as a writer. It was a slow, hard task writing and it consumed all my time. I would endlessly be writing and rewriting articles.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was amazed at the number of articles that would appear. There would be something in the magazine and Art News would have something, Art International. Going through a bibliography one gets the feeling that you spent all your time writing, at the typewriter for months. But do you think also, mentioning there that you were refining the critical process, but as you continued writing and living in Los Angeles and seeing these people, having written the first substantial articles appraising their work that you were reappraising your own thinking and writing habits and processes and values? It all seems to start shifting so soon there.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, the first crisis that affected all of us was what role the magazine was to play. We felt that it was insufficient merely to propagandize West Coast art. We felt that we were addressing our own audience. The thing was how to get the Eastern establishment to read about West Coast art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think they did rather aptly and quickly. I remember people talking about it here every time it would come out. Immediately you would hear what was going on.

JOHN COPLANS: We were really very upset when we got no feedback. The first phase of results from the magazine actually was when Sidney Janis decided to show Larry Bell and Bob Irwin in 1963, a new talent show. Warhol had come out, as I had mentioned. He had given me a painting as a gift and I sold the painting for a few hundred dollars. It was very expensive then to travel to New York and I had very little money. I talked to Phil Leider at some length and we both agreed that we should try to get some Eastern writers into the magazine and build the magazine up in such a way that the Eastern audience would read the magazine because of the other writers from the East that would be publishing Eastern art. At the same time, our own audience out there would get first hand information in their own magazine on what was happening. Then we would begin to fit together the parts both on the East and West coasts, and broaden our own horizons as writers and editors. So I flew to New York for the Bell-Irwin opening. We had written to all kinds of people without any success. Alloway, who I was friendly with, had written an article on Gorky and Gorky's biomorphism was one of the best articles on that aspect of Gorky. But Gorrows(?) and Barbara Rose and Michael Fried and Max Kozloff and Bob Rosenbloom were some of the people that we were interested in. When I got to New York, I phoned Barbara Rose up and she called a meeting. I went to the meeting and told them what our aims and plans and ambitions were and that we would like a cluster of New York writers to write for us. At the time they were very fed up with Art International, extremely fed up with Art International. He never paid people, it was always very difficult in getting paid. Max, I know, had quarreled with him and the others were dissatisfied. I made a proposal at the meeting that they write for Artforum and they accepted the proposal. I flew back knowing that we had at last got a body of Eastern writers. That was a change in the magazine. It wasn't that single decisive thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why were you interested in them as opposed to some of the other people?

JOHN COPLANS: You must remember that Art News represented the enemy. They were still tied in, we thought, to an older aesthetic. Surely if we, in Los Angeles, were interested in the early American art, conversely Art News did not seem to be interested in that in New York. They didn't seem to heroize in the way we thought they should people like Johns, Rauschenberg and Scalon(?) and the whole group of developing artists. The key factor I think in the switch was when Hopps was appointed commissioner for the San Porta Biennale. So now we had the (inaudible) Museum, a new museum. Hopps was now a director and he was appointed a commissioner for a major international exhibition. We had very strong conversations with him, Phil Leider and myself, we were very friendly, as to what the nature of the exhibition should be. We felt strongly, Phil and I, and Hopps was undecided, that exactly the right move was not to show West Coast in the art exhibition but pick groups of East and West Coast artists and show them together. Then the dialog went into the exhibition itself. Part of the catalog in actual fact was written by Barbara Rose and part by myself, the essays that were published in Artforum. Hopps condensed them under his own name in the actual catalog and wrote the (inaudible). He did that with our consent because he was a person who had great difficulty in writing. The exhibition consisted of Stella, Poons and Gill on the one side and Bengston, Bell and Irwin on the other side, the West Coast side. (Inaudible). The exhibition then went to Washington. Barbara Rose and others went down and looked at it and there was some critical discussion of it. Nevertheless, they began to get interested in West Coast art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It hadn't really been seen in New York. You would see an occasional piece in a show but never enough.

JOHN COPLANS: So that was another factor. We began to get critics writing for the magazine and then notably some of these critics drifted out. Kozloff came out on a visit and Barbara Rose came out. I got Frank Stella to teach at [U. of C.] Irvine. That was in 1965 when I was running the newly formed department on the new campus at Irvine. I got Frank to come out. And Barbara came out. People began to get used to West Coast art. That was some couple of years later. By 1965, I think, clearly the West Coast scene was recognized. Particularly more in Southern California. And by that time people dropped Southern California and Northern California categories and talked of the West Coast, even from San Diego to Vancouver.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about the Pace Gallery that opened in New York about that time that started showing people from there?

JOHN COPLANS: They picked up Bell and Ramos. What happened was that by the mid-1960s Pierce came out and began to look for West Coast artists. Don't forget that Thiebaud, for example, among the pop people, was shown earlier. He was picked up earlier by Allan Stone in 1962 I think. Even Kuntz, of course, was a well-known figure. That was in Northern California but he did come down to Southern California later. But the younger people, I don't think we showed that group that picked up until much later. It was a slow process of feeding --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Anything that was shown was --

JOHN COPLANS: Well, down in 1958 or 1959 Martha Jackson got a bad review and was hurt and was treated very intensively and became a very anti-New York figure. She rarely exhibited here. It also happened to Kienholz. He showed here at (inaudible). He felt that his reception was so poor that he cut out of New York and always avoided New York since then and began to show in Europe. So what began to happen was another phase. Finally at last it was the Europeans who began also to be interested in West Coast art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that come about?

JOHN COPLANS: The first show was at that gallery in London. I have the catalog over there. I wrote the catalog. Whenever anyone came out, we would see them and suggest exhibitions. It is the guy who went to jail in a drug charge, his gallery. Yes, Favor(?). Favor(?) did a West Coast show which included Connor and some of the assemblage people like that and some of the pop people. That was a kind of watershed exhibition. It was the first time that they had shown in London. A little later when I did the Lichtenstein show, for example, the Tate people came out and began to tape the show. Later at the Warhol show, of course, the same thing happened. People began to drift out. Also the opening of a new county museum had visiting stars coming through from official institutions, as well as dealers from New York, looking for clients and sorting the scene out. They began to pick art itself. They also visited Artforum. Artforum by the mid-1960s was seeping into Europe. The dealers were reading it. A certain number of artists were trying to get in on the ground floor. So there was this mixture of events going on which took the interest of a wide audience from both the East and Europe. By 1967 this had turned into a strong interest. (Inaudible) was seen, directed the study, fairly early. I think he came through somewhere in 1965 or 1966, somewhere between there. He began to look, He came out several times. He liked Jim Turrell immensely, as well as Irwin and Bell and people like that. He got very fascinated with them. The Tate came out later and also organized exhibitions around some of these figures. Maybe the first major museum exhibition of major West Coast people at the Jewish museum included Irwin in the show but there was very

liberal response from New York institutions toward West Coast art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about New York art going west? These people seem to have been shown out there quite soon.

JOHN COPLANS: It was mainly because of the Ferus Gallery. The Ferus was stable and had Johns, Kelly, Stella, Morris, various people like that. Then the (inaudible) Gallery with a vast amount of money had Andre and Rauschenberg, as well as paintings by Kline and Rothko and various people like that. For the first time you began to see good exhibitions of eastern art. Not only that but there were special shows of artists' work that wasn't even shown in New York. So we began to write up these shows. There were many things that we would discuss and talk about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So many dealers outside of New York would complain that they couldn't sell major works because people who could afford them would buy them from a New York dealer. the economic situation was very difficult for some people.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. There was one guy that ran an excellent gallery; Fred Weisman backed him. He was subsequently at the Guggenheim - Edward Allan, and Allan organized a Johns show. He did a Nolan Target show, a very fine one.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did he do a David Smith show?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, a David Smith show. Then he kind of went broke and packed up. Dwan decided to move to New York for a variety of reasons. I think maybe they (inaudible) their tax scene. They never made any money. Virginia [Dwan] might have made some money on some of the Klines and Rothkos that the gallery owned.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She didn't really set it up as a money-making venture, did she?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes and no. I mean it was a commercial gallery but she was very generous in her support of art. She supported Kienholz, for example, and paid for a lot of his work that he made. I don't think that he would have managed quite as well without her patronage.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that hard to develop, people like that who were interested in supporting projects? Some of the Kienholz things must have cost a mint to make.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, he made them himself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I mean just in terms of time and materials. In some cases they are not all that grandly expensive.

JOHN COPLANS: He used junk. He was a craftsman and did everything himself. He could do metal work, plumbing, wiring. He was a rancher, brought up on a ranch in the kind of atmosphere where one has to be able to turn one's hand to any of the normal skills. One person could do carpentry and plumbing and electrical work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that has always interested me and that is the sort of interrelationship of the Los Angeles artists. Where did they go for their social life? They all sort of lost touch and were distant.

JOHN COPLANS: Not really. They basically lived on the waterfront in Venice. They all lived around Venice before it was redeveloped. They only began to disperse from that as they could afford to buy a house or land or something. Now they are very dispersed. Bell lives in New Mexico. Kenny Price lives in New Mexico. Kienholz bought a house up in the Hollywood Hills. Ron Davis built a luxurious house somewhere. Kaufman bought a house near Irvine. And so on as they got some sort of financial success. Of course, the Venice area was then filled in by a group of younger artists and continued to be filled in by younger and younger artists. Another thing that began to happen was the drift downwards from San Francisco of artists to L.A. L.A. acted as sort of a magnet for a --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that because of the Ferus? Every time they did something they seemed to get a lot of notice.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, to some extent. But, of course, Mickey Wilder came down, also in I think 1964. He gave the first exhibition to the guy from Davis who settled in Pasadena, Sorrenson(?). Then Ron Davis himself came down. I knew Ron Davis and asked him to come down. The San Francisco people were very antithetical to him. In fact, he could not get his degree at the Institute.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that?

JOHN COPLANS: Some quarrel over his painting, the direction of his painting. And he came down. Tony Olap(?)

came down from San Francisco. So there were a number of immigrants from the north that reinforced the scene.

PAUL CUMMINGS: While there was this activity going on, I guess you all must have proselytized it, where did the collectors come from? Was that again through Hopps and through Blum?

JOHN COPLANS: Hopps and Blum and Wilder. But generally there was a very small market in Los Angeles and the principal market was for Eastern art or what one would call historical modern art. A few people, Betty Asher, for example, was one of the principal supporters of West Coast art and very early on built up a great little collection of West Coast art until she ran out of money. The other was that art collector who lived down at Irvine or just south of there, I can't remember his name. He brought back some (inaudible). From what I can gather from the dealers, the feelings were very tender. They had great difficulties in selling West Coast art. They sold hardly any of them to the East. If they found a collector, it made an enormous difference to the lives of the artist. They never had at the galleries more than one or two collectors at a time. They didn't have large numbers, as say Castelli had, coming from all over the world to buy. They only had a few people who were interested and barely kept the galleries alive from that point of view.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They didn't develop collectors in the Midwest, in other words, like New York dealers were able to do in --

JOHN COPLANS: (Inaudible) in by 1967, '68 and '69, things began to change. Particularly when European galleries and New York galleries began to take the art. It happened step by step. I suppose the first step was when the Pace Gallery merged with the Ferus Gallery briefly and took on a number of artists and showed their work in a substantial way in New York. Then Rubin and others began to take up people. Another important factor, of course, in 1965 was the opening of the L.A. County Museum of Art and the arrival of Maurice Tuchman. Tuchman did a kind of follow-up where there only seemed to be a very enormous sense of rivalry with Hopps, myself and others. Nevertheless, he did an important pioneering job at the County Museum of putting the County Museum itself on the map in the international exhibition scene. He was a man who liked to do large and important shows. His sculpture of the 1960's, his New York painting show, abstract expressionist show and the catalogs were very important in supporting the museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find it when Artforum moved to New York in 1967?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, that's now another phase. (Inaudible). The first phase, which was the naive phase and the establishment of the magazine, pioneered efforts to write about West Coast art. The second phase, which was highlighted by Hopps' exhibition (inaudible) with East and West Coast art, and the arrival of a number of writers from the East into Artforum with Max Kozloff as New York editor, representing that second phase of the interfeeding. Then the opening of the County Museum and large numbers of visitors from all over the world coming out and seeing Los Angeles, represent a kind of second phase also. Now in 1965 the magazine came to Los Angeles. So Leider left San Francisco. He felt it would be more practical to bring the magazine out into the more dynamic scene. As soon as he arrived in Los Angeles, however, he felt that the L.A. artists were very hostile to the magazine. They were very hostile to the amount of so-called publicity given to the major eastern artists. Whenever they saw a large article by Fried on Stella and not an equivalent article for themselves, they felt that they were being let down, kind of an issue survey which the magazine represented was no longer there. They began to be very hostile to Leider.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But still, it was a major outlook to the world ultimately.

JOHN COPLANS: I know, but they saw it this way, I regret to say. Leider got pissed off. He really got pissed off. They were overtly hostile to him in measuring these differences. They began to be hostile to Hopps. Years later, of course, Hopps was looked on as a hero and no doubt with some of my activities, I am. But at the time we felt it personally when I was at Pasadena.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of what?

JOHN COPLANS: In terms of the large exhibitions devoted to eastern artists and the smaller exhibitions devoted to western artists. In other words, the funds, the trustees and the curatorial staffs in combination obviously gave greater space, money and catalog to the major eastern artists rather than to the western artists who were younger and whose art was of a very special kind. Various factors in the artist aesthetic itself led to difficulties in showing their works in a major way. For instance, with the eastern artists there were traveling exhibitions that had been initiated in the east or if they were initiated in the west, they could be traveled elsewhere. But to travel for some of the western artists was practically impossible. Their installations were all very special and the museums wouldn't pay the costs. Therefore, there wasn't a large amount available to do major shows and serious things like that. There was a certain amount of paranoia in the air in respect to Leider. Given his sudden interest in the, it started between 1965 and 1966, in Greenberg, he had been very antithetical to us up to that time. Given the sudden interest in Fried and some of the painters, we felt that if the magazine was to survive financially and to survive viably as an important, critical journal, it should move east where the best writers

were.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did you become interested in Greenberg?

JOHN COPLANS: The only interest in Greenberg per se, and I had written an article attacking Greenberg's exhibition at the County Museum, post (inaudible) and attacked it very strongly in the magazine, but he got very interested in Michael Fried. They were both New Yorkers and in the letters that they wrote to each other and the kind of articles Fried was sending through, we either felt that here was some kind of handle by which contemporary abstraction could be dealt with. On some critical terms it seemed to him to make a tremendous amount of sense. He was totally antithetical to pop art. He was totally antithetical to Johns, Rosenberg and any of the developments that came out. He was absolutely anti-Duchampian in his attitude. In more and more time he began to detest that wing of art. And because he detested that wing of art he also began to detest, I think, some of the West Coast artists whose ideas were neither connected with Duchamp nor with Greenberg's ideas. I am referring obviously to Irwin. Given his strong academic background in English and history, he wanted a kind of criticism that was linked to some mainstream of efforts and ideas. Obviously the post-Greenberg writings of Fried provided him with a kind of model that he needed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now what about your own attitude at this point, because there was a shift. In previous stages you have mentioned your interest in Alloway's writing. Now that seems to have shifted. Were you getting interested in Greenberg or Rosenberg? Who interested you, say, in the early 1960s in terms of contemporary criticism? Or were you really trying to find your own? I never really understood why people align themselves. You had been more independent.

JOHN COPLANS: I had my interest in Alloway for one factor and one factor only. That was the notion of the coexistence of styles. One of the crises that I went through in giving up painting was the fact that I was painting in a particular style. Obviously if you paint in a particular style, you attach to it a kind of abstraction that I was in then, and it tends to make one very antithetical to all other styles.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, that is what you are doing.

JOHN COPLANS: You can't show sympathy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, you have to stick to home.

JOHN COPLANS: I became tremendously interested in the assemblage exhibition. I thought it was an extraordinary and brilliant exhibition. It haunted me. I saw it in San Francisco in 1962. I was tremendously interested in pop art, not for its novelty but because of its American qualities, the manner in which this painting seemed to view the industrial interest structure of America itself and the distribution of goods and information. Remember that America was alien to me. So I would often look with surprise and wonderment and delight and interest, a type of sociological interest in things that Americans regarded rather passively. To me they were extraordinary in their symbolism. This wasn't so for Phil Leider and he despised everything they did. I know he was an intellectual liberal and that he was very hostile to it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think pop art at that time kind of evoked the raging response of the opposite side, you might say? One certainly saw it in New York everyday if you were around the art scene.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, it was accredited as being offensive to the academic liberal intellectual. It didn't seem to represent the high ideals of civilization. It seemed no way to have the aims or ambitions of "high art."

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened to "high art?" What happened to "low art?"

JOHN COPLANS: Phil Leider did an article in the New York Times which talked of high art and popular art as two different things. I know that he was using some kind of categories such as one would find, say, in Mayan art where the temple structure, the architecture and the decorations of the temple could be regarded as the high art, a kind of priestly high art, and the dogs and the clay figures and so on as a people's art, a popular art, with no special ritual significance. Though they might be buried with the figures, clearly there was a difference between the two. He was applying principles of that order to the manner in which he was reviewing the subject matter of art on the American scene.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This brings to my mind at the moment the fact that you haven't mentioned that there was a development of critics in California or on the West Coast. There were not very many people who emerged out of that group or who lasted. Why was that?

JOHN COPLANS: First of all, Hopps himself had great difficulty in writing. It is not that he was unable to write. But the necessary task of criticism, that is its - what do you call it when the American legal system, the fighting of one party against the other? The adversary situation of criticism itself, Leider understood to a great extent. And I

was getting glimmerings of it myself. However, the museum people had no adversary situation. So for Hopps himself, the idea of an adversary situation was outside of his ken. And people who were capable of writing a little bit, such as Nordland and Henry Hopkins, never took an adversary stance. They never took an adversary stance against the collectors. They were never critical in that particular manner, of a dialectical situation. We did get a couple of younger writers in, Nancy Marner who was married to Michael Goldberg's brother who was a professor of English at UCLA. She was a good writer. She was a painter too. She found it difficult to take an adversary stance as a painter against the other painters. Fidel Danielle, a young man also from the West Coast who --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was he? I didn't know much about him. Where did he come from?

JOHN COPLANS: Fidel was from Los Angeles, went to one of the state colleges, training as a painter I think, and taught at one of the minor state colleges and began to write. He writes very well indeed. Again, the idea of an adversary stance was difficult for him to adopt, and he began to drop out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that was because they felt nonsupport for that kind of stance? That the magazine wasn't sufficient support, that there was no social support for that kind of an idea or attitude?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, they were living in a small community. There were very few people in the community. They were cheek to cheek. If you wanted to write an article, you had to go to the artists. Once you began to adopt an adversary stance for the artists, then of course you didn't get access.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everything was closed.

JOHN COPLANS: Everything was closed. So it was an impossible situation for them. And Leider was feeling this very strongly that we would never get a fair critical assessment of the situation unless some of a stance of that nature was taken up. But of course, since the West Coast artists saw themselves in an adversary situation themselves and felt somewhat deprived, certainly deprived from the point of view of the market and certainly deprived from the point of view of exhibitions in galleries, any kind of adversary stance was --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Wow, you were really in the minority.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. They constructed a gigantic wall upon our heads. This was the reason that Phil decided to leave. Way back in 1965, 1964, I think, the Cowles family came in and took Artforum over.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was always heard in New York that Artforum had enough money to make two more issues and that was it. Is it always so tricky or what happened?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. From the first day onward. Irwin had no money or very little money. In fact he couldn't pay printing bills. So the first six issues of the magazine that were in storage were destroyed by the printer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That explains why they were so hard to get.

JOHN COPLANS: The printer was enraged by the fact that he wasn't paid earlier. He was an Italian printer in San Francisco. And part of the move to Los Angeles, of course, was the fact that (ah, this is some of the information that no one made or spoke about) we had exhausted all credit in San Francisco of the local suppliers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had to move on.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, move on and find some new suppliers who would provide materials. It was difficult for them to come down to Los Angeles over a \$200 or \$300 bill and demand the money. It took spending of capital. So one got letters and phone calls instead of visits from sheriff's offices. There had been a certain amount of support of the magazine in San Francisco. Woods Heller, who married into the Heller family and whose name I don't quite remember but I could trace it for you, put up some money. And then the guy who runs Maxims Shipping Lines put up some money. But in 1964, Cowles purchased the magazine and made his son, Charles Cowles, who had just left Stanford University, the publisher. Then it moved down south.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did they come in? I mean, how did they get together?

JOHN COPLANS: Through Mitchell Wilder. Mitchell Wilder went to Stanford University and was a close friend. He had just become a dealer and he interested Cowles in art itself and in the idea of buying the magazine. Cowles got his father to put money into it and take it over. The terms under which it was taken over were well defined. And that was total editorial independence: that the publisher would never interfere editorially with the magazine. Cowles has honored that agreement both legally and in spirit ever since he owned the magazine. He has never, ever interfered with it in any way whatsoever. It was, I think, a remarkably generous act on his part. There were times when there were pressures of various kinds from Charles Cowles, but by in large, we have been left alone.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you ever have pressure from advertisers, people who have bought a certain amount of space?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I will come to that and read you some letters later. That is at the time when we came to New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Charles is no longer there, right? You don't have a publisher do you?

JOHN COPLANS: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He has gone off. But does he still own it or --

JOHN COPLANS: His father owns it and Charles owns some of it. It is between them. It was never quite realized the amount of money that was required to run the magazine. We made strong attempts in Los Angeles to raise further funding for the magazine. And if further funding had been raised in Southern California, I think the magazine would have stayed there. I know Fred Weisman tried to take the magazine over but he wanted editorial control. There were some brief discussions. He got the idea of buying up a ring of magazines. He tried to buy Art International, Artforum and have a European and American magazine. At the same time of course he had money in Edward Allan's gallery. This is to some extent another story of course, and that's why I never dealt with it in that Pasadena article. There was continuous pressure by collectors not only to take over the museum support structure as trustees and collectors (it is a very important point and needs to be dealt with, I suppose, in some article) but also at the same time, to take over the journals. And even to this moment I would say that a large number of the collectors in this country are secret backers of galleries as well as being trustees in museums. No one knows exactly who has money in what. But it is another story that needs to be dealt with. I saw this growing in Los Angeles.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There wasn't very much investing in West Coast art. No one knew that Larry Bell would all of a sudden be tens of thousands of dollars rather than just a few hundreds.

JOHN COPLANS: There was no market. The guy who would tell you about this best is Irving Blum. He dealt with it the whole time. But there was no investment market in the same way that there was in the east. There were reasons for that. First of all, the West Coast artists were very poor producers. Their production of art was irregular and unpredictable, as against eastern artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that was?

JOHN COPLANS: In the case of, say, Bell, there was a difficult technology to deal with, enormously expensive in making his process.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Something about their lifestyle too.

JOHN COPLANS: Very much to do with their lifestyle. Also, they wanted to leave themselves free to change. Irwin is typical of that. Irwin went from a man who produced paintings and had exhibitions to someone who has entirely divorced himself from the marketing support structure. He will only work in academic institutions and whatever museums where he can put one of his screen shows up in and no longer has a studio. He merely has a small apartment. Then he goes anywhere in the United States and will talk to anyone, make a show and talk to students and do whatever. But totally independent of the market structure. That was fairly early on. And others began to go that way. Jim Turrell is a typical product of that kind of ambience. It was Turrell, I think, who influenced Irwin in this particular direction or the other way around. I think that basically West Coast artists (inaudible) really, and really has its roots in focus of a West Coast scene. The modern scene, I think it is called, has its roots in the clay movement and focus. They were so used to having to support themselves and rely on themselves that they never had any model to go by on the marketing scene that would support them. Although they wanted support, they seemed to operate somewhat independent of it and place heavy pressures on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That isn't really all that different here. I know artists with fairly good reputations who in their 40's (in the early 1960s) were still working as plumbers and carpenters. Their work was not making a living for them.

JOHN COPLANS: Certainly by 1965 that had changed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In many cases it has. But there are still artists who have kept teaching jobs.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, typically of the faction, I think it kind of melts into it very well. With the opening of Gemini, the workshop and (inaudible) which kind of signaled the print boom. Gemini took on an important group of artists. They began with Alvis who was their first artist. Then they subsequently took on Johns and Rauschenberg and Lichtenstein and Stella and Kelly and Oldenburg.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One wonders again because it indicates Castelli interest.

JOHN COPLANS: The interest in Castelli had already been laid in Los Angeles. But also you have to remember that Castelli has been a tremendous absorber of art. In the last couple of years we've seen Oldenburg and Kelly desert Janis for Castelli. When Dwan closed down, there were artists thrown on the market that had no gallery. He began to share in some of (inaudible) and so on. He was comfortably upgrading, so to speak, artists into his gallery. His is the most active gallery there is, with agencies, so to speak, all over the world which he shares the work with.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that he is about the only dealer who has done that? I mean, Janis never particularly cared about other dealers.

JOHN COPLANS: Janis' system of operation was quite unique. Janis' system of operation was quite different and to compare Janis and Castelli give away the whole mode of operation. Janis is a hard, tough, professional dealer. He keeps remarkable stocks of work. He sells only one or two major works a year or a small number of major works a year, knowing quite well that if he sells to an excess he is only going to pay heavy taxation. Whereas if he stays in bed, so to speak, he won't have to pay as much tax on it. Castelli has no material outside of the artists that he deals with. He doesn't have a backroom scene of dealing with Mondrians, Picassos, the way that Janis does. His total endeavor and support is in contemporary art. Therefore, he is unique in that respect. The Pace Gallery, for example, deals in African and all sorts of things. Janis deals that way. And such a gallery as Elcons(?), for example, his main activity is the backroom scene behind those curtains. It is hard to find a gallery which has been established for so long which has an exclusive group of artists and which is exclusively devoted to contemporary art and which sets a model for the rest of the U.S. in that time. Castelli is a kind of grandfather of the gallery which is exclusively devoted to the support of living artists and does not deal with the artistry of dead artists. It is remarkable. To come back to Gemini, the fact that Gemini took on these artists and the fact that they had to come out to the West Coast to work directly, this was the first time that major artists of the 1960s who emerged were mixing shoulder to shoulder with the L.A. artists. I think from that moment onward the scene began to change. Very much so is the fact that Jasmine(?) was not a major figure but someone that any young artist could speak to. The fact that he constantly visited studios and looked at the work of artists was of some significance. I think that the sense of professionalism in the scene from that moment on was engendered.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One of the key things that bothered me about what went on on the West Coast was - I mean, I think Seattle and that area felt selfish in the fact that they didn't want to fight amateurism --

JOHN COPLANS: In San Francisco, Greenberg.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. And the fact that they are not really serious about it. They could go out and start knitting or something.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, Seattle, for example, does support a number of artists. Seattle provides a livelihood professionally. This is never recorded or discussed but I would say that between 30 and 50 artists who paint modernist paintings and sell them at modest prices, from \$300 to \$500, and take home \$35,000 a year, but who get no critical discussion of any kind.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And they just go round and round and round.

JOHN COPLANS: Now L.A., on the other, hand has never been able quite to operate in that particular way because there were artists that, say, Seldens admired and liked in the L.A. Times and the L.A. Times is a powerful institution in Southern California with 7 to 8 million people in that area and they are the principal newspaper. It has no rival. They have the monopoly grip. It is the only newspaper that has two art critics. Seldens was the senior and there was a junior one on it. So when Seldens wrote up a rave review on a show, people would come in and either look or to some extent buy. The interest and opinion of a critic on an exhibition was terribly important. I remember at Pasadena if Selden panned an exhibition, we got no visitors. If he praised an exhibition, we got an enormous number of visitors. I think the same could be said of the daily press here in New York. I think there were very few visitors, for example, to the Newman exhibition because it received a hostile critique in the New York Times. Kramer or whoever wrote it was very against it. They were so hostile to it that the attendance at the Modern was terribly low in comparison, say, to the de Kooning exhibition. These museums get financially punished by this factor. So Seldens' support of certain tastes which did not receive critical support elsewhere in national journals, provided some kind of a local market for quite a wide number of artists. That in itself I suppose is another factor. It is okay. But with the Gemini situation, the West Coast artists felt left out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was just going to ask you - because immediately Gemini published all the East Coast stars and not that many from California.

JOHN COPLANS: A few, but unfortunately it was very small. But on the other hand, I continue to get letters at

Artforum saying, why don't you give proportionate space to Los Angeles and San Francisco as you do to the east. My reply is that we give them proportionate space. Because there are no more than 10,000 artists, maybe 5,000 at the most, in Los Angeles and San Francisco and there are probably 100,000 artists in the eastern United States.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So if you give 10 percent, you are doing well.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. In fact, we give them far more than that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now you were at Irvine for a while.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. In 1965 I went to the University of California at Irvine. There was never sufficient money on the magazine to support two editors. Though my title was editor-at-large, it was an honorary title. I received an honorary of \$50 or \$100 a month. It just could not support Phil Leider and myself and a publisher. So I was forced to look for a livelihood. I had exhausted whatever little money I had. In fact, I was on my last \$200 of savings when Irvine offered me this job and I took it. I became director of the art gallery. I wanted to do it. I needed the financial support. I just couldn't carry on as I had been without savings. Secondly, I wanted to learn museum work. I thought it was an ideal opportunity to begin to do exhibitions and catalogs and learn the whole process. However, when I did, Phil, who had been managing editor of the magazine up to that time said, well, everything has changed now and I'm going to be the editor and the decisions will all be made internally in the office. I think the reason to go ahead was over my support of pop art and assemblage. I don't think he was antithetical toward assemblage. He liked Conners' work tremendously but he really thought that people like Warhol and Lichtenstein and Oldenburg and Rosenquist and people of that kind were common. And he was always in anger. This created a quite sharp difference between him and myself and he decided to take over the editorship. So it seemed the time to go to Irvine and have a base of my own and to begin to do exhibitions. I began to examine the roots of West Coast art. Hopps had done some exhibitions down there. For example, I did the abstract expressionism in ceramics. I did a show on West Coast sculpture. I have done a few shows in other places like Los Angeles, Vancouver (inaudible) artists, sending exhibitions out to Irvine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was that, to organize those to travel? Were other institutions open to your suggestions or was it difficult?

JOHN COPLANS: I traveled quite a number of shows. I didn't travel far. I traveled up and down the West Coast, to Seattle and Vancouver. No, I had no difficulty in traveling shows.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So there was interest. If somebody put a show together, you could find an audience.

JOHN COPLANS: Sure, there was a hunger for exhibitions, for someone to do the work. Many people came to me to say they were doing a show and could I help them. Finally they would say, well, why don't you write the catalog and put it together and so on. When I was still there, I did the Lichtenstein show for Pasadena as guest curator. But a number of factors now entered into the scene about this time which began to provoke the disintegration of the scene. That was the firing of Rick Brown from the County Museum. I think that was the first sign of decay in what was otherwise, up to that point, a virginal scene. It shook the scene up in such a way that several weaknesses in the support system became so apparent and our confidence was shaken. First of all, of course, the County Museum itself, the cleanliness of the building, its unsuitability for housing works of art was very apparent. And secondly, that in a very short period of time after Rich Brown's departure the trustees themselves became antithetical to Tuchman's program and he had great problems in surviving. He tried hard with the Contemporary Art Council. It had been formed to get a building and separate the programs. But nothing ever happened. Secondly, Hopps' dismissal from Pasadena shook the scene very severely. Thirdly, the departure of Artforum in 1967 was almost the closing down act as far as the vitality and energy was concerned. Well, we had integrated and the support and optimism had grown, and the opening of Gemini and the things happening, and we felt that there was no limit to the possible sophistication of the scene. (Inaudible) University of California Press became interested in the contemporary scene and wanted to do some books and everything was going very well with all kinds of planning until these series of factors occurred and they created immense problems. And also problems at the University of California. The question of the oath at the University of California turned out to be an insurmountable problem in employing the major West Coast artists as lecturers. I wanted Stella to come to Irvine and it was agreed to by the Dean. He came out with Barbara Rose to the house and went in to teach. No one ever mentioned to him that he had to sign the oath of allegiance. And he refused to sign it. He said he would teach without pay. But under the state law, he was not permitted on the campus to teach without signing the oath whether with or without pay. He stayed there and left soon afterwards. That got around New York and just cooled the idea off the program at Irvine. Irvine was at that time becoming the kind of focal point of activity and something which was subsequently closed down became the focal point in your activity because it was a new campus. When I was there, I was able to bring in all kinds of people from Los Angeles. Irwin taught there. Bell taught there. Kaufman taught there. All kinds of people taught there. I could never get any Einsteins interested in 20th century teaching there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What were their objections?

JOHN COPLANS: I think principally with the administration. He was a theatre man. At this campus 17 percent of the students were registered in the fine arts. The art department was one of the largest departments.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had a certain amount of waste.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. And the dean was very antithetical. He was a theatre man and was very antithetical to the art department. The art department threatened his own theatre department and the financing of the theatre department.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was he?

JOHN COPLANS: A guy called Clayton Garrison. He began to clamp down in various kinds of ways. And the possibility of Irvine burgeoning into a strong intellectual center disappeared when I left. Or actually, that is not strictly true because Allan Solomon came out. Allan Solomon would have carried on the program but he unfortunately died. He had excellent qualifications but he died. The kind of vitality and strength in intellectual ideas in Southern California and the academic student had now moved down to San Diego where a cluster of people with writing ability and historical ability and were artists as well have got a department going down there which is trying a much more intellectual ambience for the training of artists. UCLA of course, all this time in the years that I have been discussing, was totally closed and frozen with a group of academic artists and had simply no effect on the scene. There was, however, one significant figure at UCLA that there was some historical regard for and the kind of work he did, the kind of pioneering he did. That was Frederick White. In the 1950s at UCLA Fred White provided an astonishing range of sophisticated exhibitions on architecture and art, traveled extensively to New York and other places.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I always wondered what happened to those exhibitions out there. If anybody ever saw them or was interested or influenced.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, the problem with campus exhibitions is that it is very difficult for the general public to get access. In California there were restrictive regulations on campus to parking and finding your way on these giant campuses.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You couldn't find a sign saying that way to the museum.

JOHN COPLANS: No. The University of California doesn't put signs on its campuses. It is primarily to discourage outside people. They had so much trouble at Berkeley with strangers coming on the campus that now I think that unless you have some business on the campus, the police will remove you. So this is a discouraging atmosphere. It is inaccessible. Apart from memberships in the Art Council, it is hard for people to attend unless they know their way pretty well. It is hard for the general public to attend.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about the artists? They usually know how to get through red tape and see things.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. They came up to some of the exhibitions. You have got to remember that in Southern California, for example, the County Museum draws I think several million people a year to visit it. The smaller places and museums draw a very tiny audience. The audience, for example, at Pasadena was never more than about 400 people a week.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Sixteen hundred people a month. As against the County Museum's several hundred thousand people a month. The audience that UCLA gained was never more from outside the campus itself more than a handful of people. They saw their task in the galleries there to provide information for the campus itself, 27,000 students. It was a small city.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. I had thought that the large university exhibitions were more available to the general public.

JOHN COPLANS: Not at all. I mean, underprivileged people like Chicanos and Blacks would come to the County Museum. They can park. They don't have to pay to park because they can park on the side streets. They can park and take the children to the restaurants and then come back and --

PAUL CUMMINGS: They can make a whole afternoon out of it.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, a whole afternoon. You can't make it to a small exhibition at a university gallery. Besides, it is not of any significant interest. The mere fact that there is a huge general collection at the County Museum ranging through different cultures and ages alone is an inducement. The same thing at the San Francisco

Museum with the De Young Museum. The De Young Museum is a beautiful park. They could make a game. You can see various cultures, oriental, European, different ranges of exhibitions. Special traveling exhibitions. There is a place to eat. This is very important and encourages a greater range of people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like your new activities at Irvine, the art gallery, organizing exhibitions? Did it go the way you wanted it to proceed as far as your own education and information?

JOHN COPLANS: I had a small budget. The budget was about \$80,000 a year. I converted the gallery myself out of two classrooms. I designed the catalog myself with the help of my students. Most of my catalogs were designed or pasted up by Jim Turrell. I would design them and he would paste them up. I was pretty much left alone doing whatever exhibitions I could or wanted to. I could borrow from local collectors. As far as I was concerned, it was a marvelous learning process.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You didn't write so much in those years, did you?

JOHN COPLANS: I wrote the catalogs for the shows.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, outside magazine pieces.

JOHN COPLANS: My production of outside magazine pieces began to drop off. So the abstract expressionist ceramics show was entirely reproduced or basically reproduced in Artforum. The color and the things like that. But since I was away from Los Angeles, I found great difficulty in getting up there. I had a heavy teaching load at Irvine. I found that the amount of time I could spend writing was less and less. Except I did publish with Hopps an introduction to a Swedish book of (inaudible). A lot of my time went into the gallery catalogs and gallery activities teaching.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What were you teaching then?

JOHN COPLANS: I was teaching a huge survey course with 250 students. We had no graduates of any kind.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sort of like an art 1, 2, 3 type.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I was teaching a full load, four classes, as well as running the gallery on a new campus and committed to sit on the Library Committee and I was pretty busy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like having students (inaudible)? You were used to mainly lectures. Did you find that useful or did it get repetitious?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I could always change my courses. There was so much to get through and so few people to cheat(?) that I could kind of select the courses that I would like to teach. So I could take the students through on the new campus for various years. For the second, third and fourth years, I could make the courses different and more sophisticated and more specialized as they moved along. It was a hard and tremendous burden.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that was 1965 to 1968?

JOHN COPLANS: 1967. Demetrian became Director of the Pasadena Art Museum and asked me to become its curator. I had already done the Lichtenstein exhibition for them in the spring. My first exhibition as curator of the museum was Cezanne watercolors.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick Cezanne? Was that a program in the works?

JOHN COPLANS: It was a question of - with Hopps' departure the program at Pasadena collapsed. Demetrian's principal interest was in German expressionism. He had great difficulty in writing. He focused his interest around the Blue Four Collection. He did the Galka Scheyer exhibition as a guest curator before he became curator. He subsequently did one other exhibition. I think that was the only other exhibition he did there. The other member of the Blue Four Klee collection exhibition was a small piece of writing. The great problem was that we were terribly understaffed at the museum. You had a director and a curator. And in the old museum the curator of prints and drawings was a volunteer. There was a tutorial system that was being passed down. We had a heavy program of exhibitions to do. So the thing was that with whatever limited resources - and you must remember that we never had more than \$100,000 a year to run the museum - what exhibitions could we put on of a major historical nature that were not allied to the collection itself and borrow the works. I knew that Norton Simon had fourteen great Cezanne watercolors. I went through his collection and saw these Cezanne watercolors there. So one of the first exhibitions that I proposed when I arrived there was the Cezanne watercolor exhibition. We hadn't the resources of the County Museum and so this provided the perfect means of looking at the work of a major artist. Someway overlooking the major vehicle in that work. We knew that we couldn't borrow 50 or 60 Cezannes to do an exhibition. We didn't have the resources. It was a way of working around the difficulties of the (inaudible) and borrowings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How were people about lending things to the Pasadena Museum?

JOHN COPLANS: It was difficult. It was always difficult. However there was the fact that we had the Blue Four Collection and people wanted to borrow it of course, so it worked out all right. (Inaudible) to loan anything. I found with the Cezanne watercolor exhibition the most extraordinary difficulties. Simon wouldn't lend one single one of his watercolors and he would never give an explanation. I had done a show at the University of California at Irvine. When I began to set up there were inter-university exhibitions which I could share. So, for example, I shared exhibitions with Shirley Blum who was the director of the Art Gallery at the Riverside campus. We did Yablinski and the Serial Imagery together, jointly. I did an exhibition of some of Simon's holdings in 20th century art and Shirley Blum had her students at Riverside, the fourth-year students, write the catalog notes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So Simon would lend for that but not the Cezannes?

JOHN COPLANS: Oh, that was out of the Huntington Hartford Foundation. And under law he was compelled to lend some of the Foundation's art to some of the public institutions. Otherwise, they would have dropped his foundation status. However, his personal collection was a different matter. The fourteen Cezannes were in his personal collection. In any event, it was a tremendously humiliating experience to try to borrow for that Cezanne watercolor exhibition. Simon absolutely refused to lend. I went to the Modern and saw Dorothy Miller. And with great difficulty I borrowed a more inferior watercolor from the Modern. And but for the fact that one collector loaned me a large number of works, I don't remember his name, I would never have been able to put the exhibition together. We had incredible difficulty borrowing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about with more contemporary? The Serial Imagery or the West Coast artists, the local?

JOHN COPLANS: Oh, there was no difficulty at all. As soon as one came into the post-World War II American scene, there was very little difficulty because of the enormous activity. The fact that we had no Old Master galleries meant that we had no resources in the way of dealers who were interested in helping us borrow from their own collectors. There were very few major collections, some historical art in Southern California, and it was very limited. There was one Cezanne watercolor here and one there. I borrowed maybe one or two from Southern California collections and the rest came from the eastern United States. This is one reason why the Met won the watercolor, the Met was very good. This was one reason why I suddenly realized that it would be impossible to carry on any historical program. It was extremely difficult with our limited resources. The total budget each year was about \$100,000 for everything. The exhibitions program was only about \$25,000 a year. So you had to be enormously resourceful. For example, the catalog of the Cezanne watercolor show, I sold it to a local publisher who published it, which paid for it, and the museum guaranteed to buy a certain number of them for distribution to the membership who had to see one catalog a year. Then he took the entire profit and royalties and everything for himself. He could sell whatever he could sell through his own distribution system. So, for every exhibition there had to be an angle. For the Serial Imagery I had a total budget of \$7,000 for the show. That was for shipping, the works. So I had to sell the exhibition on the one hand, and on the other hand I had no money left really to do a catalog of the nature that I wanted. So what I did was get New York backing by 3,000 copies and what with free distribution of several hundred copies or a thousand copies as the annual catalog to the membership, I had to say I will need at least 4,000. Print the order at 4,000. And in actual fact, the exhibition made a profit because to our surprise the catalog sold 6,000 or 7,000 copies across the country.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you got royalties out of that?

JOHN COPLANS: No, the museum did. I didn't get any royalties.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I meant the museum.

JOHN COPLANS: The museum made a couple of dollars on the catalog. Then I was able to use the funds from that to do an exhibition that wasn't on the budget. I was able to do the Irwin exhibition and so on. One had to find all kinds of devious ways and means of extending the budget by selling exhibitions. It was a necessary evil - to sell the exhibition. When Hopps had been there, none of Pasadena's exhibitions traveled.

PAUL CUMMINGS: By selling the exhibition to other public institutions?

JOHN COPLANS: You sell the exhibitions to other institutions. "Serial Imagery" I think went to San Francisco and to Washington, to Seattle, Washington University and they all paid \$2,000 or \$3,000 plus shipping. So one, always as curator, had to look for resourceful means to extend the budget. So then exhibitions began in a sense to cover some of their costs of catalogs and things like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In the way you describe it, it sounds like a continuing appalling situation for you. You had to go create something with practically nothing to start with over and over. Or did you like that kind of pressure?

JOHN COPLANS: I accepted it as a type of challenge. I had done it at Irvine. Somehow or other I would always put

things together and with a small budget do a lot of shows. I used to do eight shows a year on that \$8,000 budget with catalogs and color plates. In Pasadena I did the same kind of thing. The richness of the program depended on the extent to which one could turn the budget over and get people into the museum. I think we had a good attendance on the Cezanne watercolor exhibition. Although the gate money went into the general museum fund, nevertheless it put money into the situation and made it healthy. And the healthier the situation was financially, the more one could do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were there in Pasadena for three years?

JOHN COPLANS: I was at Pasadena from 1967 to 1970. I stayed on longer doing exhibitions later. But I also did exhibitions down at Irvine, Casaul(?) and I. There wasn't anyone down there. So I helped them out by doing exhibitions down there too. This was a whole other case forming.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let's just discuss Pasadena some more. How was it to develop support for your more contemporary exhibitions? Could one find patrons or collectors or people who would give you \$1,000, \$2,000, \$3,000 or was money-raising difficult?

JOHN COPLANS: No. Ron White, at this time, was president of the Board of Trustees. On the Art Committee was Fred Weisman. So Ron and Fred Weisman and another person were on the Art Committee that I had to go to for the exhibitions. They were working with the director of course, which was Jim Demetrium. The problem was that they were highly antithetical to devoting money to West Coast exhibitions. Their main focus of interest were the areas in which they collected. They welcomed exhibitions of major eastern figures even if they didn't collect those particular figures. They liked to look at their work in depth and to evaluate it. The way I got over this was by taking the gallery like the Nicker(?) Gallery in the Whitney, that lower floor gallery, and using it for West Coast artists and getting a tiny budget out of Demetrium and writing small folding catalogs. A single page of paper and folding it several times over. I would write a piece and publish it in Artforum as well. Phil would still publish those pieces. So that artists themselves felt that they got something out of it even though they were deprived of the kind of major showings that they wanted. I showed in those small situations Irwin, Turrell, Doug Wheeler, Judy Chicago (she was then Judy Garrett). I did a series of programs in that small gallery. I would also borrow small clusters of major artists' work that we couldn't show at the museum like a large exhibition. There was no budget for them or it was too difficult to organize them. I would put in six paintings of Clyfford Still or eight paintings of Clyfford Still. So they didn't feel entirely deprived in that particular small gallery that I began to use. However, the fact was that the old Pasadena situation did not last long because I went in 1967 and in 1969 we were moving to the new building. That was in 1969. So I only had a year's program there. I remember that the next program was to take place in the new museum and that had to be planned. But Demetrium resigned prior to the opening of the museum, perhaps six months before. And at the same time that he resigned, most of the staff resigned, whatever staff we had.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There weren't that many people.

JOHN COPLANS: (Inaudible) went off. Hal Glicksman to Washington to Walter Hopps as assistant director; the registrar resigned; the curatorial assistant resigned; the director resigned. That was all the staff we had. I was left with no staff at all. I had a giant museum to open up with a gigantic space and no program.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why did they all resign?

JOHN COPLANS: The moment Hopps was fired from the museum, that situation again decayed. Our move to the new museum no one believed would work and which they knew that there were no funds to properly run. They saw the whole museum threatened and the situation completely impossible. So they just decided to clear out. Demetrium's resignation signalled the start of people who were very friendly with him to leave at the same time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So they all went off to new worlds. But most institutions, and I think you mentioned two, had three or four people who were the main source of money. How broad a base of public support can you build in an area like that for a museum the size of Pasadena?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, the Pasadena situation was complicated. It is mentioned in my article. To a large extent what I am saying now on tape is either a repetition of little fragments of that particular article or filling in on it. The point was that the Pasadena situation was a highly ambiguous situation which was riding on the crest of what was happening in Los Angeles, or the optimism of what people thought was about to happen in Los Angeles, with no forethought or planning for the future of any kind whatsoever.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In terms of endowment?

JOHN COPLANS: Endowment or future programs or the day-to-day operations. It was entirely dependent on the resourcefulness of the people who were doing the exhibitions. And when I say the resourcefulness of the people doing the exhibitions, there was no staff virtually. One had a very tiny little staff. Yet I would say that probably

the exhibition program matched that of major museums elsewhere in turn-out on a number of exhibitions and the breadth and scope of the exhibitions. So it meant that people were working full blast. In my article I spoke of staff working 112 hours a week and literally we worked 112 hours a week. One would have two months to do an exhibition and in the meanwhile you were doing other exhibitions. In the "Serial Imagery" catalog I know that I wrote it, I began writing it on the first of the month and six weeks later the exhibition was mounted with a 144-page catalog with color plates all written on the art of (inaudible). In that very month that one was doing that, one was working on the next exhibition at the same time, trying to get something done, with no staff. So there was always incredible pressure which the trustees never realized. The trustees thought that this was a normal way of running a museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Running everybody into the ground.

JOHN COPLANS: People were exhausted. Community relations were nonexistent. Our relations with volunteers and the trustees were nonexistent because we were exhausted. We were hysterical with pressure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know that seems to be a fairly similar thing with a lot of small museums around the country. They work and work and work and work and try. Then somebody says, well, forget it. I'm not going to give you any money this year.

JOHN COPLANS: Correct. This was the principal problem on the West Coast and at the same time the principal pleasure of working on the West Coast. It was the fact that you had to train yourself. Rick Brown had never directed a museum before. None of the people at Pasadena had ever directed a museum. None of them had ever been curators before. But it was a learning process. And that was great for the people themselves because it depended on the level to which they were capable of extending themselves and sophisticating themselves, which they did. In that learning process they came up against a series of problems with trustees. And the trustees themselves, not knowing any of the differences, you had to force views and changes on the trustees who were not prepared to reciprocate in any way whatsoever. So instead of having a smoothly working, sophisticated organization, you had a bunch of amateurs at the top and a bunch of amateurs at the bottom trying to do a professional job. That was a tremendous problem. On the other hand, there were no bars or hinderance against you coming up with something such as what Hopps did with the Duchamp exhibition. Given the slenderness of these resources, the lack of professional background, it was crazy to attempt the exhibitions and it was complete madness to borrow all the Duchamp material and put it together in that tiny museum with no staff.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was still comfortable.

JOHN COPLANS: But he did it. The thing was that one always has to be resourceful. For instance, right up to the last moment he didn't have a catalog. He hadn't written it. So what he did, he took Labelle's book and tore out the pages of the book, collaged it in with corrections and alterations in addition to some of his own research. Suddenly he had a catalog. We were always doing things of that kind. That exhibition was put together in a matter of months, weeks or days, getting anyone that you could to help work it. I used to go up there at nights to help Hopps on some of the exhibitions. I remember the "New Painting of Common Objects." I came in to see the exhibition and Hopps said, come on and help me hang it. We have no staff. There we were hanging it, the director and the critic. I was writing about it days later.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Don't you think that there is something very exciting about an activity like that at a certain point in one's life, to have that kind of thing? But it offers the availability of such a variety of work, the physical confrontation, picking things up, moving things around. You mentioned before about people who had never organized exhibitions and hadn't been to artist's studios and that sort of thing. Just the physical presence of the material.

JOHN COPLANS: The difference is that, for example, in New York I don't go near an artist's studio. I sit in the office and put together everything. Whereas on the West Coast I knew every artist's studio that there was. Two nights a week I went out and talked to four artists, month after month after month. And I just don't go near an artist's studio in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a different kind of thing.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. There you did everything. You put a magazine together, you wrote it yourself. And if you were doing exhibitions, you would run around going through studios, picking up ideas and seeing things. But it was direct contact at every level. You met the trustees. You knew them socially and things like that. You don't know anyone here. Everyone remains in separate layers except on certain occasions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When they all come together in a standoff. You received a Guggenheim in 1969, right?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was that for?

JOHN COPLANS: In 1969. It was to do a Kelly book, a travel grant. I took a month off from the museum and took my month's leave writing the book. I got a travel grant from the Guggenheim to visit Kelly and to see him as often as I could before and after doing the writing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I couldn't find anywhere what you did then. The Kelly. What did you experience with the various books that you have done, because you have done about a half dozen or so? Do you find them rewarding or exhausting or enlightening? What use have you been able to make out of writing various books?

JOHN COPLANS: I think that the culture itself and the notion that the book is the ultimate document on the one hand and on the other hand one knows perfectly well as an article writer that to break the barrier, so to speak, is something much longer, more detailed, more lengthy and is very important. In trying to do a book, the structure and organization of it, is a kind of sophisticated process one looks forward to. It obviously makes writing much easier and articles much easier. I think it is an ego thing to some extent. It is an ego trip. One likes to see permanent publication as against the kind of publication in a magazine. However, in retrospect, given the American book market - particularly in what one speaks of as advanced art which amounts to only a matter of a few thousand copies, to some extent I think you are better off publishing in a magazine. If you publish in a magazine a major article like in Artforum which has a distribution close to 20,000 and it is going to be far more widely read and referred to than a book with a distribution of a few thousand. So I am not so sure that the book format is so advantageous for a writer, at least in the art world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A magazine can come out month after month and a book can take forever.

JOHN COPLANS: Sure. And on top of that the kind of effort that has to go into a book and the amount of financial award for it. I think people want to do books principally because they want advancement in the academic establishment, and the academic establishment simply doesn't count in art history the publication of magazine articles, particularly in contemporary journals. They prefer the more permanent format of the book. Therefore, there is a tremendous exploitation of writers who are mostly academics. I think in the United States there are no more than three, or four at the most, full time critics. In fact it is hard for me to count more than --

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean people who work full time as a --

JOHN COPLANS: Writing criticisms. I can think of hardly any. There is Lucy Lippard, Barbara Rose - I don't know, she used to be but then she taught.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She has so many other things going.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. And Tom Hess has, I think, independent finances. Greenberg has other resources, is a trustee of various estates. And of the younger people, it is hard to think of any.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, somebody asked me recently who the young critics are, who had emerged in the last three or four years as a kind of new talent critic. I couldn't think of very many.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, there is a particular reason for that. Generally speaking, anyone with any tremendous intelligence and integrity usually does one article per month. For example, Bruce Boyd is a case of that. He wrote principally one article for Artforum which was elaborated on in letters, columns and reviews that he had. Then, of course, he gave up. The younger people, of the writers who are under 30, they simply are unable to write about anything other than the art right under their noses because they have never seen the major retrospective exhibitions of the major artists of the past. All of my writers have been writing for a couple of years except they haven't seen, say, for example, the Oldenburg retrospective of four years ago. They never saw the Rauschenberg retrospective at the Jewish Museum ten years ago or the Johns. They simply don't know and have never examined coherently or been able to see coherently the production of major artists before their time. So their outlook is enormously restrictive. You simply can't let them write on these artists. They just don't know. They are incapable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And the older people just can't afford to sit down and write.

JOHN COPLANS: The older people are simply just not interested in the new art. So you have got a tremendous breakdown in the critical system between young people and --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Each new movement in art seems to develop its own critics. Lucy came in with minimal art people and a lot of things that were sparse and tight. Barbara Rose just came in generally.

JOHN COPLANS: She was married to an artist and had always been an artist. Barbara was part of the post-Rosenberg/Hess/Greenbergian as Michael Fried was and various others. Then Lucy and various others came in

that later phase. But if one speaks of young critics now and the five or six writing for Artforum, Art News and Art in America, they have very little to bite their teeth into or specificness of movement to attach themselves to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why is it do you think that the whole movement style seems to have collapsed? Do you think there is a new movement that hasn't been defined yet? There is pop and minimal and whatever, the earth works and things. And now it seems that for two or three years people seem to be wandering around saying what, what, what.

JOHN COPLANS: That is not true, because there have been all kinds of movements in the last three years that we don't have any older critics that are interested in them and any younger critics that are adept enough to deal with them. There has been a whole series as far as I am concerned, quite important movements that are beginning to surface now but they have not had any critical regard or respect to any great extent. Maybe the art is not as important as previous movements but certainly no one has dealt with them in any depth. For example, the whole (inaudible) situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The art and language business.

JOHN COPLANS: The art and language business. The photo art of these people. I don't mean photo realism but the people who use photograph and language together, a kind of story art. James Collins wrote a little on it and saw it as a movement. However, people tend to regard it as somewhat lightweight. But I don't think they are necessarily correct. I think we just don't have any good writers who are able to sort and assess and deal with the material in the same manner as we were able to do in the past.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why is that, do you think? Is something not functioning or is the functioning not apparent? Something in the social structure that --

JOHN COPLANS: Writing energy has dried up in the following way. First of all, with the collapse of contributions from people who worked in museums. No writing is coming out of museum curators. Five or six years ago James Monte, who is a curator at the Whitney, and Marsha Tucker provided articles for Artforum. They wrote catalogs. They do very little now outside publications. This has happened all over the place. Secondly, the discrediting of formalism and what that represents, the discredited sense of values, the kind of notion that the whole western civilization in art ends up in three or four or five articles, a small cluster of articles, is an unpalatable, unacceptable view point. That the totality of the human endeavor in art ends up in five galleries, three on West Broadway and two uptown. That in itself is a kind of symbol of dehydration and decay. The - in fact, those writers who were particularly involved in that movement, in formalism, no longer write - Michael Fried, Jane Harrison, Cohn, Barby Bannan. If you lose five or six of those writers, there alone that is a lot. If you lose six or eight from the museums, that is another crowd. It has just been a general dehydration and no replacements of any kind.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I did have a couple of questions about Pasadena. As an example, who were some of the people who were hired while you were there? Barbara Haskell was one. Were there others?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, that was through the staff of the museum, and the staff connects in various ramifications. As I said in the article, up to the time that Leavitt was there, there simply never was any staff. There wasn't even a preparator. In other words, there was the director and he had a secretary, membership and office secretary, and maybe a couple of secretaries, but nothing any further of any kind whatsoever. No museum trained personnel. There might be a caretaker become preparatory and start hanging the stuff. So all these first moves were to gain some articles and get some staff. This staff and the people who came and went had some subsequent bearing on American museumology. The first appointment was, I can't remember her name. It is in the article. She subsequently married Hal Glicksman and her name is Glicksman. She was the librarian at UCLA - Gretchen Taylor. She was his first appointment and she was appointed as registrar. She was the first registrar that the museum ever had. His second appointment was a graduate student in art history called Hal Glicksman who became the preparator. It was an unusual appointment to have someone as preparator who had a baccalaureate and who was well through some of these masters. Glicksman came from, he had a strong, not exactly a left-wing edge to him as much as a sort of beatnik edge to him. He was very involved in the assemblage movement. He and the poets in the assemblage were great friends. He had great reverence for works of art, for art itself. He would rather be here and close to it and restoring it, looking after it, hanging it and handling it than doing any kind of scholarly work. When Hopps left the museum, he subsequently followed him and became the assistant director of the Corcoran. He went from being a preparator to an assistant director of a museum. And then from the Corcoran he went, I think, to Washington University and finished his masters and did some gallery work there. Then he went to the University of California at Irvine and then the art gallery there. He is now at that musical college, the Municipal Institute, the rather old fashioned one. He is the director of the gallery there. Gretchen went with him and worked in various posts in various places. The last job she did was the full catalog of the Docenshire(?) bequest at Pasadena. Demetron who was at Pomona College and was doing his Ph.D. at UCLA, did the Yabliski exhibition as a guest curator and was subsequently brought in as curator.

When Hopps left the museum, he became director. He resigned and went to Des Moines and is now director at Des Moines. When Demetrioan became director, I became curator.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you been there before that or not?

JOHN COPLANS: No. I had guest curated the Lichtenstein and then I became curator. And my appointments were, let's see, I can't remember the name of my registrar. She came from the Modern. I brought her in and she was the assistant or associate curator at the Modern. I brought her in as registrar. A guy called Fred Parker, I brought in as curator of photography.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there a photography collection then?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, there was. He got the good photography collection. Eric Beamous, I brought him in when I became curator. I brought him in as preparator. He came from Seattle museums and he has been there since 1966 or 1967. I think I brought him in and got him an appointment there even before I came. He was a first rate preparator. The curator now at the Whitney, Barbara Haskell was, contrary to her press release, an undergraduate student at UCLA who didn't do anymore I think than a couple of years. Her father and mother are professors down at San Diego, one in mathematics and one in English. She was a very sharp, bright girl who was a prodigy of Kurtland Marsh. She left UCLA I think in her second year and came to me and asked me to employ her. I employed her as a research assistant and trained her. She remained my assistant until I left, but as a curatorial assistant.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She came to you then rather than you finding her somewhere.

JOHN COPLANS: She was completely untrained, literally a second year undergraduate. She came to study philosophy and philosophy was just bullshit, unequivocal bullshit. I took her through each phase of her training and while she was with me, she worked on all the shows with me to varying degrees, right up until the end more fully. I don't remember the rest of the people. We had a tiny staff. There was virtually no staff.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They all, most of them, have all gone out to other institutions.

JOHN COPLANS: Oh yes. All the people at Pasadena went out to other institutions of some form or another, and good institutions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I am curious about the problems of a museum like that in terms of local support. Was it funded by the trustees? Did you have some money from the city?

JOHN COPLANS: No. In fact, very few people realize that the structure of a museum is immensely complicated and how complicated it is. All they know is that there is a board of trustees, a director, a curator, curatorial assistants, secretaries, maybe an education department. But in actual fact it is rather like the Army in the field, literally like the Army in the field. For every front-line soldier, there are 100 people in support or 50 people behind the line but that is what holds it together. A pyramid for one soldier of perhaps 100 people. It is exactly the same in a museum. There are committees of the committees and organizations. There were seven volunteer organizations of different kinds at Pasadena. I mentioned two of them in the article, the San Moreno League and another one. But there was a musical organization, an educational organization, a dance organization, I can't remember all of them. There was a funding organization, the fellows of the museum organization, a businessman's club organization and so on. The director's time, an immense amount of it, was spent with these various organizations that would raise a major part of the budget. Of course, then there was the membership itself. So you've got all this complex series of organizations spread over quite a large geographical area around Pasadena, raising different amounts of money to fund the museum. In fact, the whole of the exhibition program was paid for by support organizations. The general overhead of the museum was paid out of membership funds and the door receipts. There was a tiny little endowment, a very small amount of money. The net on your deficit over the years of the old museum, that is when it was at (inaudible) in the old Chinese building, would amount to no more than \$30,000 or \$40,000 a year. At the utmost, \$50,000.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was that covered then?

JOHN COPLANS: In various ways. Every two years, for example, they would hold a sale of material they had collected with another volunteer organization, like a superior Salvation Army donation sale. It was a great event in Pasadena. People would go around to wealthy people and ask for any old Persian rugs and furniture or items and people would claim off their taxes what they thought the value of a particular thing they had given was. It had no relationship necessarily to the price that was ultimately paid for it. The major items then were auctioned at a dinner party, a posh dinner party at \$50 a head or \$30 or \$35 a head and \$50 a couple, with marquees and tents and music. Then they would call in a famous, well-known auctioneer, fly him in from New York. And he would auction the more attractive items. Then the following day the museum would have been cleared. The following day and for a week there would be 5,000 or 6,000 different items on sale for from 50 cents to 500

dollars. There would be a whole organization of women working on this seriously, cadging objects and things from other people for two years until they filled a huge warehouse.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So there was a lot of local civic support.

JOHN COPLANS: A tremendous amount. It came in nickels and dimes and fifty dollar and one hundred dollar dinners and parties and various things like this. So the support was at a wide and varying level according to these various organizations.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that would be useful in terms of operating the museum or was it an enormous amount of work to gather up the nickels and dimes and fifty dollars and hundreds there?

JOHN COPLANS: What it means is that the chairperson of every committee had to be someone of significance in the community and had to have clout in other areas. That is, that during this particular women's organization event that you might be introduced elsewhere to the five or six or eight or ten chief people who worked with her. They usually had sufficient social, political and other types of clout. If she got to know them well and she liked them, she could carry them on into another social sphere. So when one talks about in the article the kind of socializing at Pasadena, one is talking about this type of aura surrounding the museum. So your seven or eight or nine chairpersons, all women, all with varying types of energy and ambitions and clout and things --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were they very competitive with each other?

JOHN COPLANS: Extremely competitive with each other, which meant that the director of the museum was pulled on in all different directions. They would never meet together in a single meeting because they would not allow the domination by one particular group over another or domination of one particular woman over another. It wasted enormous amounts of energy. And more than that, each chairperson had direct social access to the board of trustees. So they would bypass the director and make all kinds of bargains and deals with the board for that support. They would try to choose what exhibitions they wanted. If they had heard of a particular exhibition somewhere, they would demand that the exhibitions be brought into the museum. They had sufficient clout with the board to make noise and for the board to say, well look, director whoever you may be, you better bring that exhibition in because Ms. Sounds has seen it in Chicago. So ultimately these people were actually running the museum. They were making the decisions behind the scenes of what exhibitions went on. More than that too, since they provided the costs of all the exhibition programs, they would demand in the catalog that their names be printed and that there should be an ideologue exhibition and they demanded that the wife pick and approve the exhibition. Well, the wife would pick and approve the exhibition and it turned out to be what they had suggested. So you had a volunteer group actually running the museum up and down to the last detail.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fantastic. The director was really an umpire.

JOHN COPLANS: He actually was an umpire and if he didn't have any particular skill, as Demetron did for example, then it was a hopeless situation. To hold it together was too difficult.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One other thing that is interesting. Given the --

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I will qualify that. I mean no social graces to hold it together. Because obviously these people had to be dealt with socially and it wasn't the question of a leader of intellect but being able to manipulate these women with charm so that they would feed out of one's hand rather than the other way around.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did, while you were there, have acquisitions. Were they through purchases, through gifts or were gifts accessible in those years? Were the acquisitions difficult?

JOHN COPLANS: The history of Pasadena and its acquisitions are partially covered in the article and I can just add to it. Let me say that generally up to the time that Hopps became director, gifts tended to be not works of art that the museum wanted but things of sometimes sentimental and sometimes actual value of a decorative nature. The vault was jammed with, for example, American teapots and objects that were of no value as works of art that might have been to a decorative arts museum. But they were not ultimately of great significance, they were mediocre objects which people gave to the museum in the name and memory of their mother and things of that fashion.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was hard to refuse.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, they used to accept them because they were afraid that they might not get money, they might offend people. This was another aspect of this whole volunteer thing. So the vault was jammed with all sorts of useless items. The major part of them had no museum value. There were some of commercial value which could not be disposed of. So there were conditional gifts of all kinds. Some of these conditional gifts were

fakes of no value whatsoever, especially 19th century paintings, paintings ascribed to well-known 19th century American painters, not in the catalog, unable to be sold under the name of a particular painter and a basement full with them. Immense numbers of items of this kind. Sometimes, for example, in the case of one particular painter, I can't remember his name, they finally gave the entire estate of this absolutely unknown professional painter, a woman who lives in Pasadena, some 700 paintings stored in the basement, in the hope that the family might give some money. No money was gotten to maintain it or anything like this. And if any attempt was made (like I did when we moved from the old museum to the new museum) to clear out the basement and get rid of some of this stuff, there were howls of rage from the families and messages pouring in to the board.

PAUL CUMMINGS: These are creative paintings, what are you doing?

JOHN COPLANS: No significant work of art of any kind whatsoever came into the museum. However, there was a Pasadena Annual, one of the things that the museum inherited from the old days, a kind of annual show of the work of Pasadena artists. Every year there would be a prize for watercolors and for oil painting and for printmaking. This show had gone on for 30 years or 40 years and the prizes were taken by the museums and stored in the basement. They became part of the museum collection. Of course, it was virtually impossible for any director to have the Annual canceled because the artists were all friendly in some form or another. Some of them really were just commercial artists or directors of advertising agencies and people like that. They were friendly with these ladies in the museum. You had the ad agencies and the volunteer organizations all mixed in. It was very hard to do anything with this mess. There were about five paintings that were taken per year, or works of various mediums that were taken. So five a year over thirty years is another room full of various things with no artistic or commercial value whatsoever. In fact, the frames were more valuable as second hand than the works in them. Hopps realized that he had actually no funds whatsoever available to buy works of art for the museum. So what he did instead was to advise a number of collectors with a number of important collections and give his advice free about major works that could be obtained and purchased to go into collections on condition that they become available to him at the museum, to borrow from them. He formed approximately every single major collection of modern art in Southern California in one way or another; the Weisman Collection, the Janss Collection, the Asher Collection. These people forget all of this nowadays. The way he did it was through little lecture groups in the homes and so on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Obviously this is a plan so that in time all the things would go to the museum, right?

JOHN COPLANS: Exactly. So that, in time, people would maybe give gifts to the museum. In fact, one or two of them did. I can't remember the name of one lady but she did give one or two things. Generally these people (take a Philips or Janss) as these works acquired greater and greater significance and as they acquired greater and greater market value, they began to sell them off. Take their profits. Many of these people are immensely rich people. Ed Janss, for example, is one of the wealthiest men in California. His father obtained the land that Westwood is built on, gave the land that UCLA is built on to the university and developed Westwood. Janss himself and his brother moved northward buying up land on the fringe and developed Sherman Oaks, a whole city. Though it is not possible to estimate Janss's wealth, it probably lies in the \$200 million to \$500 million range. They obtained works of art, major works of art of all kinds, Johns, Cornell, Rothko, at minute prices and, in every case with Janss, he sold the works. For example, the Rothko in the Henry Martkins(?) bought at the Art Center in Texas, in the Fort Worth Art Center, is Janss's painting. Jansse has According to War by Jasper Johns and various things like this. He doesn't loan them to museums.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are they just investments to him, like real estate or cattle?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, purely. And so they are to many of the other people there. In fact, some of the people even manipulate the museum. Fred Weizman was typically one of these people. Weizman was one of those sort of weird characters. He was always looking for a deal of any kind. And I specifically want this to go on the tape because it is quite specific. He came to the museum with a proposition. They own a major 1913 Kandinsky, probably the date is 1915, I'm not sure, but it is the Kandinsky which has flowery brush strokes which looks very much like a Pollock in a certain period, a very important Kandinsky. He offered a deal to the museum that he would sell the Kandinsky at its market value then which was \$60,000 in 1963 or 1964. He would sell the Kandinsky to the museum and a cluster of other works - Sworio(?) and other little works of no particular market value. He would sell the Kandinsky and these other works which they could dispose of for payment of \$10,000 a year until the full amount of paid on condition that he could retain a lifetime interest in the Kandinsky, keep it in his house until he died.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Good deal.

JOHN COPLANS: This was the only major acquisition during Walter's tenure at this time. Walter's tendency a little bit was for obscure deals this way. It went through the board and was rigorously screened by the board. They called in outside experts to certify that the Kandinsky was good enough to go into the Museum of Modern Art, that it was a very important one and that the deal looked very good. However, the museum on several occasions

was late in its payments to Weisman. I now understand that Weisman has said that in view of the fact that they were late in their payments, the contract is null and void.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So he pocketed the money and painting and everything.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. And he will resist any attempt by the museum to take it. But there it is. And worse than that, of course, is that the chairman of the board of trustees for the museum is his own brother-in-law. It is more than unlikely that his own brother-in-law was going to enforce a contract against a member of his family and his sister when Weisman dies. The other things that entered the museum collection were small gifts of remakes by Duchamp, for example.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like editions?

JOHN COPLANS: No. For the Duchamp exhibition at Pasadena, Duchamp made, what are the three rulers, what is the title of that piece?

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Mallic Mose.

JOHN COPLANS: Anyway, there were a number of Duchamp pieces remade with Duchamp's approval and under his agent's supervision. They entered the museum's collection. Demetron however, was far more of a connoisseur. He was active in exhibitions. He was anxious to obtain for a whole variety of reasons major works for the museum because he didn't want to be dependent upon these trustees. So he did two things. When he became director, he made it a condition of his directorship that he had \$25,000 a year to spend on acquisitions. And since the museum didn't have \$25,000 a year, that similar organizations, the ones that Walter Hopps had of lecturing in houses, he started in the museum and he called the Fellows of the Pasadena Art Museum, in which youngish, about-to-be collectors or interested people could come to a series of lectures, art history lectures. I taught them and Shirley Blum taught them. They paid a fee of something like \$500 and passed an exam at the end of it. This money was used toward the \$25,000 acquisition fund which was directly under the director's control. He didn't have to receive any nominal approval from the board to pick the particular works. He brought out of it Cornell boxes, a Kelly painting, an Oldenburg (I may be wrong about the Cornell) and a Larry Bell I know for sure. And those were the first items of any kind of post-World War II American painters to enter the museum's collection in the 25 years of that period.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That is incredible.

JOHN COPLANS: The second body of work to enter the museum was when Demetron was about to leave, had given notice and was leaving and I took over as professional head of the museum. I realized that we were going to be moving into a new museum with virtually no works other than a Darkishal(?) bequest. No contemporary American work. We were completely dependent upon Robert Rowan, a gang of cutthroat collectors for their Rons(?) and to be very contrary about them. I mean, for example, when I did "Serial Imagery," they all thought they had to explain themselves. When I did the Serial Imagery exhibition I went to Fred Weisman, who was on the committee on the exhibition, to get approval. I set it forth and explained it and it was approved and I said, I want to borrow your Mondrian, I want to match a couple of Mondrians to it to demonstrate the seriality of Mondrian's work. Two weeks prior to having it researched and obtained from Europe, the other Mondrians, and it being entered in the catalog, I sent for the loan form for him to finally sign it to obtain the Mondrian. He said he had sold it I couldn't have it. This kind of arbitrary disposal of work that was promised to exhibitions continued all the way through.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's all leverage isn't it? When a picture goes into a major exhibition, you can surely push the price up and get a --

JOHN COPLANS: Well, that is another part of the whole activity. But he, in this case, merely sold it and couldn't care less about the museum. The other thing was that when we tried to borrow works from Weisman that Solomon wanted for the opening exhibition, he actually refused to loan anything. Then he said he would loan certain key works that he had on condition that if they were damaged (and he would decide if they were damaged or not, he was to be the final arbitrator if they were damaged or not) we would buy the works at a price indicated by him, set by him. We would undertake to do that, which was an impossible loan condition. So we couldn't borrow anything from him. At that point, that was a few months before the opening of the exhibition and we were negotiating for the loans to get them into the catalog, I decided that the situation was totally impossible and that we would have to get a collection together. The only way we could get a collection together was to get the artists on the occasion of the new building and such people as I could to make gifts. I couldn't get the trustees interested in this. They couldn't be less interested in the idea. I tried to get them to come to New York as a gang, three or four or five of them, visit artists and have a cocktail party, talk to people. They absolutely refused to participate in this idea.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why?

JOHN COPLANS: Finally I went to New York myself and I visited as many artists as I could and obtained gifts from artists like Lichtenstein. I phoned them, I talked to them and spent quite a lot of time on it. I raised a large number of gifts for the new building.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why were they so uninterested?

JOHN COPLANS: It was just a peculiar factor of the trustees of Pasadena that in all the years of the museum, the trustees themselves had never raised any funds. They were absolutely dependent upon these support groups of ladies' committees. They themselves lorded it over the museum as trustees and somebody else paid for it. The only person ever to put his hands in his pocket during his tenure as president was Robert Rowan. He paid the museum's deficiency for several years. But other than that, not a single trustee. When I became the professional head of the museum, I went to Rowan and said this was ridiculous and he agreed with me. I said, well, why don't you appoint some trustees who will put their hands in their pockets more. So he asked me who. I said, Sadie Marks(?), Charles Hangenson(?), Terry Inch(?), several people. I said, make it a condition that they give \$5,000 a year or \$10,000 a year. And he agreed. I said, well, write them a letter and invite them. He said, no, you ask them. I went and saw them and asked them if they would give the money and they said yes. Then I went back and told them yes and then they held committee meetings and decided to ask them. But they were completely incapable, Rowan was completely incapable, and the other trustees of making arrangements to obtain contributions that would give money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think it was just that they couldn't ask their friends and people for money or something?

JOHN COPLANS: It was a social misdemeanor in their eyes. Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Since you were the director, that was part of your job.

JOHN COPLANS: I was the director and that was the professional head of the museum, the director. There was a trustee director. But they were completely incapable of asking for money and that was one of the great problems of the museum. The board of trustees never asked anyone for any money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that collecting for museum art (after all, it was a fairly affluent part of the country and with businesses and education and everything) is more difficult than let's say a more isolated museum? Does one collect differently for a museum in Pasadena than you would, say, in Kansas City or someplace?

JOHN COPLANS: I think there are two parts to the question really. Pasadena was always a museum without money. It didn't have an endowment. The new building was built without an endowment and that is why it ran into severe financial trouble. Most museums have an endowment, and part of an endowment is an acquisitions fund. There was never an acquisitions fund at Pasadena. In other communities, older communities, whether it was Kansas City or elsewhere, there is usually some kind of acquisition fund. Even the San Francisco Museum of Art had an acquisition fund and was able to buy one or two things a year. It simply didn't exist. The other thing was that until --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really, it was an exhibition gallery, wasn't it?

JOHN COPLANS: It was an exhibition gallery with Darkishal bequest in it. It had the Galka Scheyer bequest which was a major Klee collection. It's as good, if not better, a collection as exists in Europe or at the Guggenheim. It is probably quantitatively about 66 items, qualitatively the finest Klee collection there is. Among other things the Yablinski collection was absolutely unique, 150 Jawlenskys, 10 or 11 of the great early heads among other things. I did get in a large number of works and with the opening of the museum I managed to get a few gifts from trustees to level out the collection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that --

JOHN COPLANS: But the point was that everyone was so new to collecting, there was simply no reservoir say, for example, of abstract expressionist works. The abstract expressionist works that were obtained in Southern California were obtained 10 years to 15 years after the fact at very high prices and people weren't going to part with them to museums. In any event, the County Museum, when it began, took all of the major Beverly Hills collectors that had such things as a de Kooning drawing or a Kline painting. They associated themselves with the County Museum, and the older material of the kind went into the County Museum. The Bark(?) Collection, for example, consisted of a number of Rothkos, Klines, David Smiths and various things like that and went to the County Museum and not Pasadena.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you knew all the California artists, all the people who were emerging, growing up there, was there any local patronage for them? I mean, if you wanted to buy any number of the California people for reasonable figures, could you get money from people, or was it very difficult?

JOHN COPLANS: Impossible. The artists wouldn't give their things to a museum because anything that they sold was sold through New York and their collections were either European or New York collections. Since people in Southern California, outside of a few figures, never bought their work, they figured why give gifts to a museum if the trustees wouldn't even buy their work, had no belief in their work, despite the fact that the curators had belief. On the other hand, it was impossible to get major funding for one-man exhibitions for the West Coast artists. I couldn't even get space. For example, there was no budget for it, a very small budget. I think I had a budget of \$5,000 a year for West Coast artists, something of that figure or maybe \$10,000 a year compared with \$40,000 or \$45,000 a year for East Coast exhibitions. Trustees were basically interested in taking or organizing major exhibitions of East Coast artists so that they could cast their eyes over the work in these exhibitions, see what they were interested in and select and buy through Castelli and other dealers, Blum and various others, major works of major artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you were really doing a lot of shopping for them?

JOHN COPLANS: The museum itself was a shop. There was an educational thing for the artists and the lay members of the community, but for the collectors it was really a shop in which they could discuss the works, train their eyes as to the quality of them, get a more intimate knowledge about them, work out and assess in a first hand way what works to buy for themselves. And they weren't acquiring anything for the museum in any way whatsoever.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That makes one really want to stay in a place like that. As all of this progressed, getting on until about 1970 you were getting tired of Pasadena. What happened?

JOHN COPLANS: It is rather a long story but there is a whole series of factors. Very obviously, when we moved from the old museum to the new museum and we were directorless, that is, we didn't have a professional director, we had the vice chairman of the board as acting director. When Demetrios resigned, I went to Rowan. He asked me to come and have lunch. We went to discuss the situation. And I gave him a blank resignation, a formal resignation signed and said, here is a blank resignation. When there is a new professional director, he will want to appoint his own staff. Since I haven't been appointed by the board of trustees, I will stay and we will try to work out what we can until we get a new director. In the meanwhile, Tom Terbell the acting director was appointed. I was immersed in opening the new museum. Most of the staff resigned when Demetrios left because they didn't want to move to a new museum. They thought that it was a shocking building, that there was no collection, that there was no money, that the intervention of the trustees and of the volunteer groups was too powerful, that their professional futures were limited under those conditions. Had there been an immediate and orderly transition to a new director, some arrangements made between the trustees and director over the future of the museum, the staff would have stayed. But they just drifted away. So I was left with a new building to be opened, late because there had been a strike, the completion was uncertain. I couldn't get the trustees to advance the opening ceremonies. I warned them that the building might not be completed in time but they wouldn't alter any of the dates. There were several meetings and they wouldn't alter any of them. They would have to take a risk. It became more and more obvious that there would only be a few days, ten days maybe to go over the building, clean up and stock the exhibitions and get everything done, wind down and move out of the old museum and get some staff. In fact, I remember leaving the old museum. I had a preparator, I had Barbara Haskell who had just come in and was absolutely untrained, I had a new registrar from Marlma(?) who was still trying to take stock. The basement was full of thousands of items of stock which all had to be audited. There were our gifts which had to be received, accessioned and examined, and we tried to get hold of these gifts at varying times. I was trying to formulate a program for the new museum ahead of time. In the meanwhile, there were all these different social activities being planned for different times for the opening of the museum. We had no idea of what works we were going to hang or how we were going to do it. The space was actually untried. And on top of that, I had had a lighting test two or three months before the new museum opened in one of the galleries and the lights simply - we used them say at a five degree angle from a vertical, five degrees downward.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did they figure that out?

JOHN COPLANS: The architects figured this out. A five degree angle and they were crystal lights, powerful crystal lights which threw wings on the wall, colored wings which meant that the Klees which were the most ephemeral of paintings would be faded within a number of months. They were watercolors and touches of little unknown materials. Very little in oil paintings. The whole thing was a mess, a terrible mess. What was the last of your question? The problems with the architects were insurmountable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had they designed a museum before?

JOHN COPLANS: No, never designed a museum before. There was this whole lighting problem and although I held this test, I couldn't convince Rowan, the president of the board or the architects that it was an impossible situation, or that there was no way of lighting sculpture in any of the galleries. In other words, there were no

lights, a group of lights that only floodlit the walls from the five degree angle. That was one problem. Secondly, Solomon died and Rowan was beginning to issue me instructions on the museum and how he wanted things set up and various things like that. I just said that it was impossible until we got into the museum to decide how we would hang things. I made a model of the museum and tried to hang Solomon's show, the paintings that were on their way from New York in trucks and I just couldn't fit them into the gallery that was allocated. The Tenpre(?) Exhibition Gallery that could take at the most eight paintings and he had ordered 50 paintings. They were very large ones; Pollock, Newman, Frankenstein and so on. So I had to take the whole south side of the museum and even if I took the whole south side of the museum I still couldn't get the pictures in. We got into the museum two weeks before and at my absolute insistence we had to create a whole new lighting system. So that right up to the day of the opening of the museum another gang of electricians were working there for cash, because that was the only way they would work. For cash. Bringing in extra lines and installing a whole new lighting system, a track lighting system. In order to fit Solomon's exhibition in I had to board up windows because there were no walls to hang them on. and then, of course, I had to fill the north side of the museum. We had decided to open the oriental wing with loans from the Bundage(?) collection. I hadn't been to see these works because I was so busy. Signs had to be made and lighting fixtures put in so that it would be light and cases and cabinets to protect the work. So there was this huge museum the size of the Whitney to install oriental art with the Galka Scheyer bequest, the loan collection from the American painting exhibition of Solomon. And I insisted that we couldn't possibly open such a museum without a West Coast exhibition and the trustees were adamant about not having a West Coast exhibition. I was adamant about having one and finally I convinced them and they allocated me \$5,000 for a catalog for a history of West Coast art, and one tiny wing, the smallest wing of all. I was trying to borrow paintings and sculptures, install them, as well as the gifts that were made. We had this tiny staff and we were just working the most incredible hours. We slept at the museum. The electricians were still there when we were hanging paintings and it was kind of a terrifying thing. Barnett Newman flew out to install his own paintings and he saw the state of the museum. They were cutting through walls to put lights in and various things like that. It was impossible to hang his works. You could say, well, it is going there. They were still putting up partitions. We couldn't partition because of the curved walls. We couldn't partition the galleries and all I could do was board over the windows to get some extra space. Meanwhile all the seven volunteer groups each day had their own cocktail party for the group and they wanted to be in a gallery. They wanted to be in the galleries while we were trying to install and get these works hung and clean floors and polish them and get paintings up and partitions done. I saw what was happening and I just could not work. I was serious. I just couldn't have these cocktail parties because we couldn't do anything. They would bring the tables in and come in with food and tell us that we couldn't work and that we would have to come back when the cocktail party was finished at 9 o'clock. Finally I absolutely refused. I had ten doors put up sealing off all the galleries and said that I would walk out of the museum and the staff as well if we were not left alone in peace to install the museum. They could have their cocktail parties after the museum was open. This caused absolute fury and anger. The women went to the board and the board came down to see me. They said I couldn't behave like this and I said, I am behaving like this. The museum is going to be opened and I am opening it. Then Rowan came in to approve the installation and I told him he couldn't even approve it. He said I want that changed and that changed. I had him escorted out. I told two guards to take him out. So I had everyone against me, they were all upset. There was item after item like this. For example, the architect saw me boarding over the windows and they got the city engineers, the building inspectors in and they said, you can't board over those windows. I said, why not. They said, they have to be fireproof. I said, we are just putting up temporary partitions. They said, no, you can't put up temporary partitions in the museum. I said, you mean they have to be permanent? They said, yes. So I ordered plaster in and had them plastered over. They were permanent. It just went on endlessly, the scenes between building inspectors and the architects and the trustees coming in and trying to stop me and the cocktail parties. Finally, I mean, it even got to the stage where the fire department came in, for example, and began tearing at some of the paintings. For example, Rauschenberg's painting had a lighted bulb in it. They ripped the wiring out of it and said it had to be wired according to the code. They just walked up and ripped the wiring out of it. Actually ripped the work itself. This kind of business was going on. It was just a horrifying scene, a horrifying scene. We were exhausted. We never went home. We slept at the museum on the floor and the couch and things. We would go to bed at 3 in the morning and wake up at 7, stay in our clothes, have some shirts and socks sent in and away we would go. This went on for two weeks. We were short tempered but we finally got the museum open. But of course I had made the most incredible number of enemies.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Almost everybody.

JOHN COPLANS: Almost everybody, including the West Coast artists. When they came to the opening and saw what works they had there, a tiny little catalog without any color plates and all the East Coast artists with big color plates and a large catalog and ten times the space they had, they --

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had done them in.

JOHN COPLANS: I had done them in. I was responsible for it and they were white and livid with rage and fury. I remember Ron Davis following me at the first opening, following me, shouting his head off at me with anger. And he had been generous to the museum. He had given, for example, a Bob Morris to the museum. He felt

really insulted by the installation of the West Coast work and what had happened. So it was a period of unmitigated horror. I stayed on at the museum doing various shows with Tom Terbell protecting me. Because as soon as the first six weeks were over, the whole museum had to be stripped down for the Bauhaus exhibition and that took up the whole museum. The moment the Bauhaus exhibition was over, the whole museum had to be stripped and repainted and cleaned and six more exhibitions installed in various ways. But I think what finally broke the trustees' back was when I did a Richard Serra exhibition. I had arranged a Larry Bell exhibition, the first major showing of a younger West Coast artist in the new museum and three weeks before the exhibition was due to open I went to Bell's studio. He was going down there frequently and kept telling me the works would be ready. No works were ready. Three weeks before, I canceled his show. There was nothing ready. He said he would have it ready. I would open in three weeks time without a single thing there. So what I did, I ran around trying to find an alternative exhibition. I was going to do a Nauman show but Nauman was so busy with European exhibitions that it was not possible for him to do it. Finally, Richard Serra, who was out there, said he would love the space. He showed me a work that he wanted to do and I agreed to do this work. The work required 20-foot to 24-foot trees, 4 feet in diameter to be brought into the museum and placed on a base and cut. It was an enormous process work which would fill the whole gallery. I managed to find 21 or 22 trees in Northern California which had been lying in a logging cabin for 10 years or 15 years, which they gave to us for the transport. The transport down was about \$5,000. I got them down and I had them brought into the museum by crane and dollies with special teams. I had (inaudible) and we cut and did this work. But the trustees and the supporters were outraged at the lack of decorum of this exhibition, these huge logs being brought in to the museum. They considered it absolutely ridiculous. This work wasn't art. They wanted things in gold frames hung on the walls. This young artist, though he had a so-called reputation, certainly in their opinion didn't have the international reputation of a supreme order such as someone like Barnett Newman. They could barely stand Barnett Newman. To have someone young brought into the museum, and also the local artists were enraged. They were enraged by the idea of the exhibition, the exhibition cost about \$10,000, the idea of another eastern artist having a show in the museum. They also went to the trustees with fury and anger. And I think that was the end of my affair with the museum. I think that after that so many people were infuriated by the Serra exhibition, that despite, say, my competency up to that point, now I was considered somewhat of a mental incompetent. My reasoning was slipping if I considered this a work of art. Beyond that, Rowan's constant activity and interference at every level with everything in the museum was just impossible. I remember we had arranged a Judd exhibition and it had gone through the Art Committee. I went to New York to work on it and Leo Castelli crossed lines with me. He went out to see Rowan. I worked with Judd on finalizing the exhibition and what pieces. We discussed it and I did an interview with him. I flew back to find that the Judd exhibition had been canceled by Rowan. He had substituted a Warhol exhibition. And I was now to drop everything and within a matter of weeks have a Warhol exhibition ready. It was to be traveled, arranged between Castelli and himself and traveled to Europe and I was to do it. At which point, I also felt that things were too much. We got to the point where I began to doubt whether it was possible to continue under these circumstances. One day I was talking to Tom Terbell. He said, look things are very difficult. I appreciate they are very difficult. I have been smoothing things here and keeping the board off your back and it is going on and you are managing well. What about me becoming director. They're not going to appoint an outside director and I can continue to protect you. Maybe we can carry the program on. I knew the museum was in terrible financial trouble at this stage and I thought over the matter. I thought, well, we might as well do the best we can. Okay, I will work under you and support you as director. A week or two slipped by. Evidently he had gone to the board and they were talking about it. Finally they had to make a decision at the next board meeting. Terbell got me in the office one morning and said, look, it is agreed that I can become director but I can't become director if you stay as curator. You will have to resign.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Whose idea was that, do you think?

JOHN COPLANS: They were all against me. But Rowan knew it. So I was pretty furious about the stupidity of the whole thing. I kept my cool and said I would talk to him about it a little later. I was trying to decide if I wanted them to publicly fire me, you see. They wanted a very decorous arrangement obviously and I wasn't sure that I wanted a decorous arrangement. I thought about it and went back to him and said yes I would resign. He had changed his mind then. He saw that I was filled with a terrible anger. Now he was going to be left with the museum and no one there. Barbara Haskell's total museum experience was about 18 months. So he would have to run it himself. I think that he got frightened and said, no, no, we better not do it. I said, no, no, I have had enough. And I resigned. I went back to New York to work on the Wall(?) show. I sent in a letter of resignation. It was about 10 or 15 pages setting out the problems of the museum, a document on the problems of the museum. It was very politely written. I have a copy of it and I can put it into the Archives if the Archives wants it. While I was in New York and while I was unable to reply, a press release had gone out announcing that I had resigned and that they were very sorry and that I was the best curator they had ever had and hoped that I would reconsider.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When they knew you couldn't.

JOHN COPLANS: It was the most devious thing I had ever come across. So I just said, okay, I have resigned, so find yourself somebody. I will go and take another job somewhere. Then they came to me and said would I

please carry on because they couldn't find anybody. Finally Terbell came to me and said, look we have to carry on the museum program. Would you give us time to find somebody. I said, yes, of course I will. I'm not going to walk out and leave you cold. However, given the various conditions of the museum and the fact that I had resigned but in fact was being fired, I want a proper water tight legal contract from you and I will do a number of shows for you that are agreed and that are on the program being passed by the Art Committee as an outside contractor. I need two years and you can get in whoever you like. They must be shows that the board wants and that are passed and I could sell them a long-term show that needs working on and you can get the museum in order. You can bring in the new curator and do whatever you wish. So they signed a legal contract with me, document asking me to do a number of shows for \$15,000 a year plus travel expenses. I moved my office out of the museum to my home and began to work on the shows. Terbell came to see me one day and said that Mr. Rowan had canceled the contract. He was negotiating with Henry Geldzhaler, the curator of the Met to come in and do the shows instead of me. I said, well, I have a contract. He said, well, I can't help it. Henry is out there. Henry knew perfectly well that I had this contract and he was curator of the Met. But he didn't care. He was very indifferent to my particular problem. When my resignation was announced I was offered a couple of jobs and I was offered back my old job at the University of California at a very enhanced salary, under very enhanced conditions. In other words, I would only do a few shows a year and teach one course. I turned this down because of this contract. Now they were coming to me after I had begun work on the shows, cutting it off again and negotiating with the curator of the Met. I had two lawyers, of course, and finally they got Agee to come to the museum, Agee came in as director of exhibitions. And of course it was a very difficult position for him because there I was with this contract that they had canceled. I was there with my lawyer and they knew that I had them cold. They had signed a legal contract with me. Clearly I could claim severe damages, not only the salary for the period but of course damages for the publications that I hadn't been able to produce and further damages for the research and travel that I wouldn't be able to do. Finally I made a settlement with them to install the Stella show and do the Judd show for just \$10,000, and \$7,500 for the Judd and \$2,500 for restoring the Stella as a settlement. And we could forget about the \$20,000 and whatever else that would have amounted to another \$20,000 if they had paid my expenses for a secretary and things like this. Some of the shows were very important and I could have produced books out of them. So it was a severe loss to me. People like Judd heard that I was getting an enormous fee of \$7,500 to do their show and were full of fury because I was getting more money than they were getting for their work. But they didn't appreciate that it was part of the financial settlement rather than just a fee for a show. It was to pay me off and get me out of the museum and let Agee carry on. So that is the history of that particular episode.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was over by 1970?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, 1970.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Then you came to New York, right?

JOHN COPLANS: No. That year, 1970, I think that the Judd show was in something like January of 1971. I don't remember the date. And in the summer of 1971 I came to New York to take over the editorship of Artforum magazine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I'm curious about, obviously one should say Leo Castelli because you exhibited so many of his people there. How did that evolve? Were they people you were interested in? Were you interested in Leo?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, the exhibitions that I did at the museum in sequence have to be taken into consideration and I can say exactly who they were and the exhibitions that the museum itself did that I brought in at that time have to be taken into consideration. There are two different lists. In other words, the shows that I did, for example, directly I did the Lichtenstein exhibition as a guest curator. In other words, I was asked if I would do the show by Walter Hopps. So I had no input into that. Evidently Roy wanted me to do the exhibition and Leo wanted me to do it and I did it. Then when I arrived at the museum I did the Cezanne watercolors which was a historical exhibition. Then I did exhibitions of Irwin, Larry Bell, Judy Chicago, these are one-man shows, three more West Coast artists, Jim Turrell, Douglas Wheeler, Wayne Thiebaud. So seven exhibitions had nothing to do with Castelli. The exhibitions that I did myself apart from that were Warhol and Serra. And Warhol I didn't choose. So in a span of five years from 1967 to 1971, that's four years, at the very beginning before I came to the museum, were Lichtenstein and I had nothing to do with, I was only asked if I would curate it, and the other exhibition that I did directly out of the Castelli gallery was Stella and the Warhol was chosen by Rowan.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it is marvelous, the whole mythology that Castelli is able to establish. One doesn't think of the Thiebaud show as having been done there.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Or the other five that were West Coast artists. There is a lot of distortion. I myself raised the issue of course of Pasadena becoming a West Coast outlet for Castelli. The Stella show came from Marmal(?). That was purchased by the trustees. It was all organized by me. Oh, and Judd. So that is another one that I did. The shows that I did were Judd, Stella while I was curator of the museum, officially curator. I did two out of nine

exhibitions. I did some other exhibitions that I have to think about but they weren't Castelli exhibitions. The Stella was purchased by the board of trustees of the museum by Rowan's assistants from Marmal. The "Three American Painters" was done by Walter Hopps, but it came from the East, and that included Stella as well as Olitski and Noland, which were not artists from Castelli's stable. The Oldenburg show was subsequent to my leaving and that was when Oldenburg was with Janis or he may have switched to Castelli.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He was in the middle of switching.

JOHN COPLANS: In the middle of switching. The Kelly show was subsequent to my leaving. That's much later and of course by then he had switched to Castelli. But that was a Marmal show bought and that was done by Agee. So whatever is said, I think it can hardly be claimed, as far as I was concerned, that I was involved internally in the Castelli Gallery. The Nauman show was done by the County Museum. It wasn't done by Pasadena.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It is interesting to observe various dealers' activities in relationship to the museums. Were there California dealers that you could work with?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. There were two major California dealers. One was Irving Blum and he was very Castelli-oriented. I had a very special access into Castelli artists through my friendship with him. And the other was Nicholas Wilder, a very special access again, a Castelli through Nicholas Wilder. However, Wilder dealt with a lot of other people. But again most of these people were Castelli artists. Janis didn't have any connections in Southern California so --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, he didn't with anybody.

JOHN COPLANS: No, not with anybody. You had to go to Janis directly. Rubin wasn't in New York until much later than Blum and then he dealt in Stella. Dwan Gallery was out there, and again Virginia Dwan had large stocks of things. She again dealt very much with Castelli on some of her artists. She had as much access as Blum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Edwin's people went, well, Wilder had some of them I think.

JOHN COPLANS: Wilder had Edwin's people. He had Noland and Olitski and Kounz. I think Kounz was with Rubin but I'm not sure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, he was.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, Rubin. Johns and Rauschenberg were all with Castelli. The Johns exhibition came from Marmal(?) and was at the old Pasadena Museum. (Inaudible) definitely like this. But physically the two dealers that dealt with New York art were very Castelli-oriented. If you went to one, you got Castelli artists and if you went to the other, you got Castelli artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that those were kind of the Castelli years, if you go through the art magazines?

JOHN COPLANS: Let's take the other galleries that were in Southern California to clear that era up. David Stewart, who was next door to Irving Blum, dealt in pre-Columbian and some West Coast artists. I can't remember the name of the guy who was opposite. Felix Landau. Felix Landau had very few Eastern artists. He mostly had, he showed a lot of sculpture, state(?) sculpture and various things like that and virtually no Eastern artists. Robbs Nelson opened up for a while and then closed. He had some connections. He showed, for example, the older American woman artist who lives in the desert, images of skulls. He showed Georgia O'Keeffe. I wanted to show a Georgia O'Keeffe exhibition but could never get together with him on it. You could never seem to get proper access to her and nothing could seem to be arranged. So that fell through. I would say that of all the exhibitions that we planned at Pasadena, in order to do one exhibition, we went to four or five exhibitions that couldn't happen for a variety of reasons. Either the artists didn't feel like it or the artists' dealers didn't feel like it. Not because they disliked Pasadena but because there was such a changeover in staff that no long-term planning could be made that could be honored. The interest of one director was not the interest of another director. And obviously someone who is going to do an exhibition and write about it and deal with it as a curator, has to have some insight for the work in order to be able to handle it. And that takes time. More than that, the programs were never carried forward. A director would say that I'm leaving and by that time canceling all booking of exhibitions and all arrangements, so that the new guy coming along could have his program. And this kind of thing would go on. The board exhibitions from the Modern and various places and other museums, of course, would proceed. So what we would call the "filler" of the exhibitions that were done by the staff in between, they had to be worked through the people that were working that were capable of doing them. It would be impossible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that has interested me, going back to what I said before about Castelli, is that it seems that reputable museums were always able to get an exhibition of his artists. He somehow would pull

them out of a warehouse or collections.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, Castelli was terrific from this point of view. He was enormously agreeable about working with a museum but particularly when he had a president of the museum and was a heavy buyer of his artists. He was enormously agreeable about the idea of that museum initiating an exhibition, doing all the dog work, and Castelli taking the exhibition forward into Europe. For example, the catalogs and all the attendant features. And he preferred to have it done by Americans. New York was closed to him in the early days. Until Diana Wallman came on the scene, there was no one at any of the museums that had enough clout.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, after Allan Solomon.

JOHN COPLANS: After Allan Solomon. After Allan Solomon left. But even up to then, Allan Solomon's abilities were strictly limited to the Jewish Museum program and funds were declining heavily. Also, Allan Solomon had to watch his P's and Q's about the number of exhibitions he would be organizing of Castelli artists that Castelli would put them out. The Lichtenstein was typically such an exhibition. Castelli proposed it. I was nominated as the curator for it through the artist. He thought he would like for me to do it. I arranged and did the exhibition, wrote the catalog, did all the work and the exhibition then moved to Chicago under Pasadena's aegis. Then it was picked up by the Stedelijk who merely took the catalog and put their own picture on it. They would put their picture on it and the Tate Gallery did the same thing, except the Tate wrote a completely new essay. European museums were really getting it through the Dutch museums which had the Holland - American Line carrying the stuff across.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that was the way. The Stedelijk always had those shows before anybody.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. The Holland-American Line, which is owned by the Dutch government, agreed to carry exhibitions to the Stedelijk Museum free of charge.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's a lot of money.

JOHN COPLANS: It is a lot of money. They would have them first and put their catalog cover on them and then they would send them over to London.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. They would go all around through the circuit.

JOHN COPLANS: They would then go through Germany and then back to America. That's precisely how they would go. It wasn't until more recently that people began to put their feet down about the question of these European museums merely repeating the catalog as if they had done the exhibitions. For example, I remember I did the Warhol show for the Tate and it was the second time that I had done an exhibition for the Tate where they had taken all the material, all the research, all the paintings and put their own catalog together with an essay, using a lot of material out of my catalog, and I said to myself, this is the last time I will ever do this. It's just nonsense. I remember Tom Hess talking to me about the Newman exhibition and the Tate wanted to have the same arrangement and the Stedelijk wanted to have the same arrangement. I had a lot of experience and I just said, don't do it, refuse, if Mrs. Newman will support you. And she did support him. She said, no, you have done the work. It is going to be your catalog. They can translate your catalog with your name. And that was the first time that that had ever happened, when Mrs. Newman supported Hess.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right, because all those exhibitions would end up having almost all the same paintings didn't they?

JOHN COPLANS: Almost all the same paintings, slight variations of European paintings that were in European collections. Shrewd people. There was an enormous number of exhibitions that moved from the United States to Europe. Some of them obviously through the International Council, but some through regional museums, such as Pasadena.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I want to talk for a bit about your moving to New York and setting up at Artforum. Phil Leider, who had been involved with the magazine forever, was going to retire or disappear or something.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, basically the position with Phil was that by 1970, when the first continuing anxiety about formalist criticism was beginning to be perceived on the scene, and a kind of drying up of some critical energy. He'd always had difficulty putting the magazine together, mainly because the staff was so tiny. It was a one-man operation. There was an editor, and the managing editor was really a traffic controller and copy editor in a minor way and many people refused to let their material be copyedited. It was in such obscure jargon that even to copyedit it, it meant a major rewriting task. The copyediting was absolutely minimal. In a sense he had invested so much in Michael Fried by the publication of Fried's Ph.D. thesis, his doctoral thesis, and his access to the magazine and the group of critics around Fried. Even though he himself (and I am speaking for him) began to have a lot of doubts about some of the directions of formalist criticism and the nature of the manner in which it

supported a small group of artists, even though Greenberg had quarreled with Leider bitterly and threatened to sue the magazine over the publication of Ad Reinhardt's interview, and a great number of things of this nature, he had grown very tired and had great difficulty filling the magazine and he felt that he wanted out. He told me this and suggested that I should come and take it over as I was the person who had been longest associated with it. I was available. I had in the meanwhile been offered Art in America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Because that was going through a change.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. That was going through a change. But Brian O'Doherty received the appointment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Lots of people were fighting and carrying on to get that.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I arrived in New York and had arranged to take it over at the September issue, which was in July. I came to New York and Phil said he would be there for July, would see me through the first issue. I came to New York in June to find an apartment and then go to Europe for a holiday. I found that Phil Leider had decided to leave immediately. He just walked out of the office and left me the magazine with nothing in the drawer and no arrangements for July and went to California. I simply didn't know how to proceed. I simply didn't know New York well enough to be able to handle the magazine, to do the set up and the review section with continuity, to allocate reviews to writers, the whole procedure of running the magazine cold without a single issue, without anything in the drawer whatsoever. In other words, empty desks and empty files. Not one thing. Not even a list of writers and a deadline. So I called a meeting of writers for the magazine, the ones most intimately associated with it that I was friendly with Barbara Rose, Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Robert Pincus-Witten, and at the same time I invited to join the meeting Lawrence Alloway and Max Kozloff. Kozloff formerly had been associated with the magazine but had quarreled with Leider over the increasing formalist quality of the magazine. In 1963, if you will remember, he had written a letter attacking Greenberg severely which appeared in Art International. I had, that same year, written a review also literally attacking Greenberg's show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. So I had a tendency to be extremely anti, a narrow formalist view, though I admit or felt at the time that formalism had some role to play in criticism. Anyway, I called a meeting of the writers. I felt that the only way, given a stranger in New York, someone who had never lived here before, that the magazine could be run under these conditions was to have an editorial board. I formed an editorial board with this group of people. We held regular meetings and it was great work to some extent. The pressures were so incredible of trying to get the magazine out under these conditions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What would they do as members of the editorial board? Would they suggest articles or writers or things that might be considered for review, projects that were abroad that you might publish?

JOHN COPLANS: No. They seemed to have their own particular interests. For example, Annette Michelson proposed that she would like to do a film issue. We voted the film issue and she did the film issue. There was considerable controversy and debate among them, animated debate among them, about the direction and the content of the magazine. Out of these debates would come suggestions, proposals. I want to do this, I want to do that. I would note them and then I would see them concerning these particular directions. In time the arrangement turned out to be impossible. Each had such specific interests, such specific differences and they also formed little cliques. Like say, Annette Michelson and Rosalind Krauss supported each other and began to have some animosity and anger, say, against Alloway, who was interested in narrative film. In fact, he published a book on narrative film. They had no interest in narrative film whatsoever. Annette Michelson had none. She didn't want to see it in Artforum and he did. Pincus-Witten and Max Kozloff and Alloway could not agree at all. Alloway and Kozloff were dead against Pincus-Witten's concept of post-minimalism and his style of writing. There would be incredible hostility and anger by the two of them against Pincus-Witten. Then Krauss would support him against Alloway and Kozloff because she had a formalist bend herself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There you were being an umpire again.

JOHN COPLANS: I was sort of an umpire. The debates were increasingly acrimonious. Barbara Rose was around a lot and would come in the office a lot. Each was trying to be most helpful by bringing in works of their students for publication, especially Barbara Rose. Pincus Witten would bring in students that were working on programs, his own programs, to become critics.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They were building their little armies.

JOHN COPLANS: They were building their own little empires. They were late on their deadlines. Articles that they promised never came along. They were very protective about other writers publishing in Artforum. It was a closed shop. Gradually in time I began to get more and more anxious about the direction of the magazine. There was a destructiveness of these intelligent people, totally destructive of each other. They had no respect for each other in any way whatsoever. Each was out to kill the other, in my opinion. Finally after three years I dismissed the editorial board and reinstated a full editorial control of the company.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So in fact they did have some say on what went into the magazine.

JOHN COPLANS: The arrangement I made with them really was that they would have the right to publish. I would have first call on their material. They would have the right to publish and I would negotiate with them what they would like to publish through the year. That was my arrangement. For example, I would say to Alloway or Krauss or Michelson, give me the particular major essays you feel you will be writing over the year or are about to emerge or have emerged. I would get each writer independently in the office after these meetings and work out annual programs with them. Also I had a museum program up on the wall of museum shows through the year and I would try to role-cast each writer according to his background, knowledge, interests and abilities to writing on a particular show that may come up in any particular museum. So there was sort of an allocation of duties by negotiation, and this gave me six writers that I could depend on. In time there were less meetings and more separate negotiations. In the meanwhile, behind the scenes they would accuse me of dividing and ruling. Since I couldn't get any consensus about anything at any of the meetings, except their dislike for each other which kept shifting and changing according to realiances, it is true, I began dividing it up and dealing with individuals more and more and more.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was going to ask you. Many publications have people submit things to them just cold. Do you get much material like that or very little?

JOHN COPLANS: No, quite a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is much of it useful?

JOHN COPLANS: A small percentage of it, and also in most magazines I understand. Generally Artforum turned out to be, well, let's talk about the alliances. Art News' alliances were all established alliances around a cluster of art historians that liked to publish in the journal, right back to ancient art, generally short articles or articles of medium length. Artforum's authors tended to be art historical authors that had emerged in the 1960s and tended to want to publish there rather than in Art News. Many of them had published in Art International. William Rubin was one, for example, who had published in Art International. As soon as Art International lost its scheme, he switched his allegiance to Artforum. Once Bill Rubin published in Artforum, all the young art historians who liked and admired and esteemed and respected Bill Rubin wanted also to publish. So it became the prime medium for younger art historians publishing in the 20th century. I think they preferred to publish in Artforum rather than in Art News or Art in America. Art in America was much more attached (before Brian's arrival). Jean Lipman, the editor, was much more attached to American art and American status was nowhere as advanced as European status. So there were actual places, slots where work fitted into slots according to the nature of the outlook of the art historians. Secondly, young critics preferred, I think, to write in Artforum than in the other journals, the younger avant-garde critics who admired Fried and formalism. Those who didn't, published elsewhere. Thirdly, in time after Hilton Kramer's departure from Arts Magazine, artists such as Judd, Morris and various others preferred to publish in Artforum than in Arts Magazine. Arts Magazine went through a period where they switched allegiance to Artforum and was part of the energy in Artforum in the 1960s. So what I inherited was a situation whereby there were certain allegiances to Artforum, a whole cluster of varied people. They continued to want to publish in Artforum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you find it difficult attracting new people to write for it or not?

JOHN COPLANS: That is a great problem for every magazine, I think, at the moment. It is the fact that young art critics or art historians who are writing as art critics coming out of school have never seen the exhibitions prior to their major interest. For example, anyone graduating let's say with a masters about to write criticism now, the limit of their historical knowledge at the most is six years, when they first became undergraduates. The limits of their real awareness is probably four years, or even less. So when you get younger writers in and you give them a show, say, of Kelly to write on, they simply don't know anything about Kelly's previous work unless there is a retrospective that they can see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Then they have a book.

JOHN COPLANS: Then there is a book or catalog announcing the show. But in the case of, say, Johns or Rauschenberg or figures of that kind who had their retrospectives very early or Holand who has never had a retrospective and there is no easy book for them to look up in, they had no idea of the historical connections, no first hand awareness.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In the May 1975 issue I noticed that your table of contents is changing. The areas of interest seem to be larger than before. You seem to be writing in many more areas than the magazine had ventured into before. Was that a new interest on your part?

JOHN COPLANS: That was both true and untrue. For example, we had an African article but if you look through Artforum you find that it has published articles on African, pre-Columbian and others before. But for some reason

or other, no one ever commented on them and no one ever read them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that's because there is such an alliance in such a world that people who were involved with pre-Columbian or African art didn't know it was there because they didn't read it consistently?

JOHN COPLANS: No. I think there obviously was the question of what's happening to criticism and what is happening to art magazines and what is happening to the market and what is happening to art itself. There is much more a sense of anxiety now than there was at any previous time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think so? What produced that?

JOHN COPLANS: First of all, unquestionably in my mind, there are a number of factors and it is hard to say which particular factor is more important than another. But there is an overexpansion of galleries. There are too many galleries junking the quality of the work. In each gallery, and there are innumerable galleries in New York, each gallery shows for two weeks and there are literally hundreds of exhibitions going on in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Most of which don't require a great deal of looking.

JOHN COPLANS: Most of which don't require a great deal of looking. Secondly, since the shift to SoHo, there has been an enormous increase in space. What would have formerly been small shows, that is, a small gallery 28 feet by 20 feet which holds about 8 paintings, in the same way that Leo Castelli for years had a small gallery up there and never showed more than 4 Stellas, 6 Johns, whatever. Now each young artist has a literally museum-size show in one of those huge galleries. And some of the galleries such as Ivan Karp's gallery has four or five exhibitions simultaneously. They are opening a 420 Broadway with the alliance of Ileana Sonnabend and Leo Castelli, both by ex-marriage and financially, so you now have artists who have three exhibitions simultaneously. For example, they will have the Upstairs Gallery of Sonnabend, the Downstairs Gallery of Castelli and the Upstairs Gallery - Uptown.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you have enormous amounts of work.

JOHN COPLANS: Enormous amounts of work and enormous exhibitions. I mean it is incredible. Rauschenberg, I think, if I remember correctly had his prints and (inaudible) works and drawings uptown and he had the Sonnabend Galleries uptown and downtown. That is equivalent to the size of one of Whitney's galleries, the main gallery. So there was a tremendous magnification of size at a moment when there is a low energy, a tremendous tempo of exhibition at a moment of low energy. I don't think that the number of serious important artists in New York has dropped or increased. I know it has dropped to some extent, some of the energy has dropped, but I think that there are too many shows. Whereas people used to have a show once every two or three years, there are so many galleries now and they have a show once every year. I don't think that people systematically had a show every year in the 1960s. Sometimes every three years. Now artists are having shows, sometimes 20, 30 shows a year. There are not only shows downtown but shows in Los Angeles, all over Europe, in London, in Milan, in Switzerland, and so on, as well as museum shows, gallery shows. I know of many artists who literally spend a third of their year on planes and people are talking about plane art now. They are actually designing exhibitions while they are on the planes, flying from place to place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But don't you think that all of this chaotic movement seems to dilute the thinking and the end results in many things?

JOHN COPLANS: There is that dilution, and secondly, I think there has been the retirement from the scene of an enormous number of critics, of writers who used to write. Large numbers of them aren't available and don't write anymore. One can begin to name writer after writer who simply doesn't write anymore.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that has happened?

JOHN COPLANS: I think they were caught up in the excitement of the 1960s and I think they are now older and settled into academic jobs. They don't have anything more to say and it is hard for them to switch from one generation to another. In other words, I believe each critic is firmly embedded in his or her generation the way Rosenberg's embedded seriously into one generation. And some of them make an effort to go forward, like Hess, but I don't think they do it very successfully. So critics are locked into their own generations and you get younger generations coming along and they simply can't look backward because they haven't seen the works. There is a tremendous problem. If somebody could only write about, say, you take a 1960s critic, and a critic like Rosalind Krauss is typical, is not interested in the new art. Let's talk about Krauss and Michelson. Michelson gave up art altogether for films because she lost interest. She wasn't capable or didn't want to make the shift to a younger generation and decided to apply her accumulated mental resources in art criticism to a somewhat overlooked area like the art of films. So all her energies are going into it. In the case of Krauss, there she was a foremost critic and she found herself in grave difficulty reequipping herself to the language that could deal with the new art. In other words, she either made any new art she looked at sound like the old art, she hadn't gotten

the language, or alternatively she would only look at current art that looked like the old art and she stayed interested. The only person who was been able to continue as one of the Artforum writers to have an interest of that kind is Robert Pincus-Witten who has written criticism for a good 12 years and has maintained an interest in generation after generation of artists. But I like that certain aesthetic that he has.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you honestly think that the fact that the market has shifted so radically in the last, say, three or two years that people don't gamble \$1,500 or \$3,000 on a new artist the way they might have in the 1960s has affected the exposure these people have?

JOHN COPLANS: That certainly hasn't had an affect on exposure because there are more and more galleries and more and more exhibitions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well then in the sense of more artists seeming to come and go, or maybe I just notice it that way.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. The point is that Lichtenstein, for example, just to take an example, or Judd, never had the delusion of shows that they now have. I mean Lichtenstein or Stella have shows every year in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Paris, London, Dusseldorf, Milan, and they may not specifically show in all those cities, but in Minneapolis, St. Louis. But generally each of these artists have six to eight shows a year in these cities. So instead of the work being sold through Leo Castelli in New York to collectors in these areas, you have local galleries arranging local shows selling to their own collectors. Which is absolutely new. So there aren't fewer works being sold, there are more works being sold. So now you've got such young artists as, say, Brice Marden and all his works are sold for years in advance because he only produces, say, 20 paintings or so per year and --

PAUL CUMMINGS: And there are ten galleries and each wants three.

JOHN COPLANS: There can't be a show with less than seven. It is not economically worthwhile. So they all start fighting over his work and offering more money. As the outside galleries are offering more money, there is pressure on (I don't want to pick Marden as my example but I should say artists X that are typical and Marden would be one of them) X to deliver. Since these many dealers have to have new blood and material to sell, they place great pressure on the master dealer in New York to get the work. The master dealer can't supply any work. The just go to the artist and say, look we will pay you double the price. The artist goes to the master dealer and says double my price. That doesn't make more work available. It just makes the prices higher. So you see somebody like Rockburn(?) in two years the works rockets from \$2,000 for a major work to \$15,000 for a major work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do they really make that much money?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. The same numbers of works are having to be shared by a much larger audience. This has serious consequences on the pressures on the artists themselves to produce and also a very synthetic and artificial set of values about the price structure of work. I do have examples of this. Say with Lichtenstein, for example, having a show in X town, say in London, and dealers from America sending English people in to buy the two or three works under their names and ship them straight to their galleries and paying the full retail prices.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sure because the demand keeps going up and up and up and there are just so many objects.

JOHN COPLANS: There are only certain numbers of objects on the certain part that they are interested in. It is crazy. At the worst moment in the history the last 20 years in terms of unemployment, mass unemployment, inflation and economic uncertainty, the advertising in all the magazines is at the highest point it has ever been in the history of American art. Most magazines now have between 40 to 100 percent more advertising than they had two years ago. Artforum has 40 percent more advertising than last year. And the European dealers, the amount of advertising that we are getting is nearly paralleling America because the European dealers want Americans to come there and buy American works. They have fought for their market, there is no money in their market or they are having difficulties in their market, however they have some arrangements with artists and are hoping that the Americans will come and buy certain American artists that they paid fantastic prices for.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think about the about the fact that, say, an artist who is in his late 40's who is getting \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000 or \$80,000 and whose works are being sold --

JOHN COPLANS: You are talking about some of the photo-realists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. What do you see as a projection for 10 years or 20 years of those people? A major Lichtenstein brings an enormous amount of money.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, the highest price right now for a Lichtenstein is about \$300,000 or somewhere around that figure. That is the tempo which Bundent Helmet(?) has which they purchase off of a collector for a quarter of a

million.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you see a leveling off or a burst bubble in the future?

JOHN COPLANS: I don't have sufficient knowledge of the market. I'm not a dealer and don't have special insights into that kind of, I don't have any experience the way dealers have. I think that very obviously people like Rausenberg, and Janis as a later example, buy works and put works away. They buy on the principle like land speculators buy on. That is, if you own property near the center of the city, you sell it at a high price and you buy good land on the periphery of the city at a low price. You put it away for a generation and then in the generation's time when that property becomes very valuable, you go through the same process of selling the property on the periphery and buying property right in the suburbs. And when you finish buying in the suburbs, you look for property on islands to buy. That's how the art market proceeds along.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You haven't talked much about your own writing and activity since you came to New York. You just finished a book on a non-art subject, right?

JOHN COPLANS: On Gainsberry(?).

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that appear? Was it an interest of yours for a long time or was it just a chance happening?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I'd known the individual (who happens to be Larry Bell's brother) for many years, Robert Bell, and have been a friend of his for many years. I myself have been testing the limits of my own writing in the past couple of years. But when I came to New York, I found it very difficult to write with the pressures of Artforum and I virtually did not write for two years. Then last year, my third year here, I began to write again. I did the piece on Smithson among several others, in Artforum on Smithson. Then this year I did the Pasadena piece, a very lengthy 20,000 word piece. I was testing in those pieces another way of approaching criticism and extending it and testing my own ability to extend it in my own writing. I just merely thought that since I was in that process, that I would take a subject that was completely unfamiliar to me and I would test my writing skills, my ability to lucidly explain a subject that was completely unfamiliar in the simplest possible English as a test of writing skills, yet trying to make it interesting. So I undertook it as an exercise in craft almost.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you feel about it now that has been page proofed or galley proofed?

JOHN COPLANS: It hasn't been page proofed yet because I just handed in the final manuscript and it is not ready for page proofing yet. I have no idea. I enjoyed doing it. I did part of it while I was doing Pasadena and it obviously had a profound effect on my Pasadena article and simplified my writing. And it gave me a better method of handling facts and narrative together, subjective facts and narrative discussions of vernacular situations. I think my writing was invigorated by the process.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So we can look forward to some new essays. You said it was difficult the first few years in New York to write and now you are slowly getting back into it. Is writing an easy process for you or is it just over and over and over and over?

JOHN COPLANS: I didn't start writing until I was in my 40's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But has it become a more accessible activity or is it difficult?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I have written several books and I think that until one has written a book or two, it is hard to get any kind of fluency. I think that once you have written a book, you get a certain amount of fluency. I also think that there are too few art critics who are overworked or who try to make a career out of writing, constant writing, and that their talent isn't suitable. I think a lot of art writers, let's put it that way, I will take the whole spectrum of art writers. There are those who will write on anything with a certain ease and assurance and shallowness and there are those that have great difficulty in writing and can only write on particular subjects which they have a special interest in. Everything lies in between one extreme or the other. I happen, I think, to be on the extreme of having great difficulty in writing and only want to write on subjects that interest me tremendously. I see writing, even as an art writer, as some sort of evolutionary form of thinking. The writing is a test or the filaments of one's ability and one can only write as well as one can think. You can't write more intelligently than you are as a person, unless of course you have a craft deficiency. So the thing is to get over the craft deficiency and get a fluency. I think a lot of the young people try to obtain this fluency and have a fluency but write too much. They overwrite.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you enjoy writing or not?

JOHN COPLANS: I enjoy the sense of relief after I finish writing. To me it is a process like taking a hammer and hitting your hand. To get back to this question of writing, I think this question of writing is very important. I think

that by my standards of measurement, a literate person is a person who can write. I think that any person who is a specialist in an area and makes some intellectual pretensions in an area, should be able to write fluently and easily in their native language on that particular specialty.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It doesn't happen often enough.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. But there are a lot of things that need discussion, things that I am dealing with as an editor. They are really puzzling, strong. I've known the things that we have been dealing with now are anything but sort of historical material that I have tried to set forth in time and space as events occurred to me in various ways. But I haven't sort of discussed the complexity of the problems that I am involved in at the present moment and the thinking that goes into trying to solve those particular problems.

(August 4, 1977 this is two years and several months later and not following the actual continuity of the previous interview.)

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let's start with the Pasadena situation and continue because I don't know what happened with the resolution, if it has been resolved or you did mention at one point that somebody interviewed you for several hours about the Pasadena, a lawyer or somebody who is involved with it.

JOHN COPLANS: At the time that we did our last interview, the Pasadena issue, I think, I wasn't in a position to talk about. But I am now and I can pick up from that point.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay. Let's start there.

JOHN COPLANS: The architect Ladd and Kelsey issued a \$2 million writ for libel against Artforum, its owner Charles Cowles, Gardner Cowles the principal shareholder, myself as editor and writer of the article, and Walter Hopps, curator of American art at the Smithsonian because of a quote that I used from him in the article concerning the manner in which the architects were employed or retained. So he became a component of the lawsuit. The problem that arose around the lawsuit was of great public interest and very important to architectural criticism was that a year previous to publication of the article or thereabouts, the Supreme Court had made a new ruling redefining the nature of a public figure. Now where a person is a public figure, libel or slander is extraordinarily hard to prove because it had various components to it which include that they have got to be able to prove actual malice and more than that. For the public figure you don't have to verify or check for certainty the objectivity of the truth of your statements. You merely have to believe them to be true or being informed of them and to report them and quote them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is in terms of publishing that information.

JOHN COPLANS: In publishing. Yes. Whereas, if a person is a private party, you are bound to find out the truth of the matter and be able to report the truth of the matter objectively. Now in the redefinition so far as I gather that the Supreme Court made, it said that merely to be a public figure or personality does not make one a public figure. The public figure has to be in some form or other in their function accountable to the people because they have gone to the people in some way or another and sort of a public pulse.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean like a political figure?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. A political figure, for example. A civil servant by the very nature of working for a federal, state or city government is publicly accountable. Heads of departments are publicly accountable. They are accountable in some form or other because they have been appointed by representatives of the people in some form or other. So they are accountable for their actions and publicly accountable. They can't hide their heads in the sand like ostriches at every action they do, their regulations, their hierarchies.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now how did all this interpretation affect you?

JOHN COPLANS: In the sense that any trade union leaders are publicly accountable because they are elected officials. They are elected by trade unions and they are in a position of public trust. Now the issue in criticism becomes when an architect building a building is a private person and therefore anything that you say about that architect and their work under the Supreme Court ruling would appear to be under the new definition of libel and slander that there has to be absolute, tangible and incontrovertible proof of the statements that you are making.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But this is a public building?

JOHN COPLANS: That, of course, the lawyers finally picked up on, and there is now an application before the Court to test this issue. If an architect is working on a public building, then surely they now become public figures pro tem.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. In other words, if they were building a private house for somebody and you said that they built Sam Smith this horrendous house that keeps tripping me or something, it would be very different than if they built, say, a stadium or they were building a museum or whatever.

JOHN COPLANS: Exactly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

JOHN COPLANS: But that doesn't mean to say that the suit that is going before the California Court will necessarily be successful because, is a private museum a public building? Of course one has some proof of that because it has been raised out of funds that have been tax deductible and various things like that. So I can't comment beyond that. The status of the case is like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It is still in the works.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Susan Stevens and other architectural critics have noted that this situation may be a great impediment to architecture criticism because anyone who doesn't like your review of their work and feels that they have been libeled or if there are genuine errors in the article, genuine errors of description or something of that sort, can send out a suit for libel.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This becomes a real (inaudible).

JOHN COPLANS: It becomes a very crucial issue in the future of architectural criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, even in art criticism. All you've got to say is that if you give somebody a bad review, you are decrying his merchandise or civil disobedience act or something.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, not civil disobedience but I guess it could be stretched to all kinds of lengths, though it has not been done so yet in the art world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That is rather really amazing. How long do you think it will continue?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, it depends on whether that warrants the request for the dismissal of the case on the grounds that it falls under a public situation will be well regarded by the Court. The second part of the tension that arose over this matter in the minds of the publisher was that although I had taken out insurance against libel, because of excessive delays on the part of the agent it would appear that we were not insured. In other words, although we had requested libel insurance several months previously, the agent so delayed matters that the actual policy was issued on the 7th of February, whereas the article appeared on the 5th of March or whenever it was, the 5th of that month. So we were faced with at the magazine horrendous legal fees which have to come out of income and that was a matter of terrible concern to Charles Cowles and Gardner Cowles, since at this point the magazine was showing a great degree of profitability. However, eventually the lawyers, since the suit was brought in the State of California, applied to the Court, they didn't apply to the Court, they pointed up to the insurance company under the Uniform Publication Act, a federal act of the United States Government, the actual arrival of the magazine or the published article in the state in which the action had been commenced was date of publication. The magazine had not arrived in California until the 15th.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was time between the policy in publication and public appearance.

JOHN COPLANS: They finally agreed to pay the legal fees but not the legal fees of Gardner Cowles.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why? Was he included separately in this, being a stockholder? Did they pay the magazine's fee?

JOHN COPLANS: They paid my fees and the magazine's fees. Not Walter Hopps' fees, who supplied the information. And for some technical reason, not Gardner Cowles, who carried a separate policy. His insurance company would not cover him under that policy and they said, well, we are not covering you either. So something like a third of the burden had to be carried or 25 percent of the burden had to be carried by Gardner Cowles. He refused to carry it and put it back on the magazine, saying that they should pay it. So there was a considerable amount of tension and anxiety, (a) because of the suit and (b) because of the lack of insurance. Finally the insurance came through. But the fact that the insurance came through in my opinion was a strong contribution factor to my eventual dismissal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? In what way?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Because so long as there was no insurance, I was the vital witness to stave off the \$2 million libel suit, the bankruptcy of the magazine and the possible garnishment of this money if we were found in fault for Gardner Cowles. But since the majority was covered by insurance, my position or whether I was with the

magazine or not was a matter of indifference.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you had libel insurance before this?

JOHN COPLANS: It was presumed to be under Charles Cowles' management libel insurance but when I actually searched for it, I couldn't find any.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But just prior to this you had turned the magazine around financially right?

JOHN COPLANS: Prior to this I had turned the magazine around from, in 1971, a loss of \$122,000, to in 1972 \$7,000 plus and thereafter increased and enhanced profitability amounting to a very substantial sum annually. In the one year I think we hit pre-taxation to something like \$70,000 or \$80,000.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's pretty good.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, what happened was that, of course, what was a bankrupt magazine of no value except for its good will and name, it had no assets, it went from that to a journal probably worth in capital value about \$400,000 a year. So it was kind of low income but great capital value of the magazine itself. Of course this then became an issue.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you do that? In terms of management or what?

JOHN COPLANS: Didn't I discuss it in the last tape at all?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, you didn't, not at all.

JOHN COPLANS: I did it by requesting Charles Cowles to relinquish control as publisher which, of course, was the cause of bad blood between us, something again that he felt very angered by. Then I instituted cost accounting. That is, by taking the income of 1971 and saying that is what we have to manage on and then fitting the magazine to that income so that the product and the amount of money generated by it knitted together. That was done by, for example, changing the printers from one who made 85 cents per copy charge to one on a schedule. So that the more magazines you printed, the less it cost you. You could make choices as to what was the cost of the print bill by the amount of color, the number of cuts and various things like that; by not having the magazine enveloped, which cost \$500 a month, for example, and that's \$5,000 a year; by not having it shipped to the Humborg(?) House, which was another \$80 a month, \$800 a year; by not having it hand stuffed into envelopes, which was \$500 a month and \$5,800 a year and instead getting the printers to put a wrap around cover on it and post it. So that you saved the transportation, you saved all those costs and all you had to add in the bindery was roughly 2 cents per copy for the wrapping of the binder and another 3 or 4 cents for a (inaudible). Instituting procedures of that kind, strict cost accounting, cutting paper waste and various things of that nature, I was able to do it. For example, the magazine weighed over a pound and there was a premium on postage for magazines that weigh over a pound. If you drop down half an ounce under the pound, you save 20 percent of your postage bill and there were items of that nature that had never been done.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I understand that. And look at all the money you lose.

JOHN COPLANS: It added up to a difference of \$129,000 in one year, the \$122,000 lost and \$7,000 gained.

PAUL CUMMINGS: These were just sloppy procedures.

JOHN COPLANS: Sloppy procedures. By instituting a proper hiring and proper procurement service and a person to look after the procurement service in the office, our print order left from 1971 to 16,000 copies per month, of which incidentally 1,000 was lost in the bindery and it was really 15,000, to the time I left several years later to 20,000, of which in many cases during the last year there was a 100 percent sellout. Many issues in the last two years were absolutely unavailable. So we went up roughly 5,000 copies a month and 50,000 copies a year which was considerable. So procedures of this kind brought the magazine into the black. These matters sound very personal, but here you have a young man who was the son of an extremely wealthy man who had no particular either jest or ability as a publisher and who used the magazine for its social prestige being challenged by a much older man as to his abilities and proving that his abilities were absolutely wanting, and immediately switching a magazine that had lost \$560,000 in one year through simple, common-sense operations into a profit and thereafter into strong profitability, a man who basically was regarded as a long-haired intellectual and writer become critic. This I think was the cause of very strong resentment.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How old was Charles?

JOHN COPLANS: I guess he would now be about 30, let's see, he joined the magazine when he was 24 or 25 roughly in 1965, so he would be about 37 now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was very difficult to take.

JOHN COPLANS: It is hard to swallow. But then, of course, having successfully brought the magazine into the black, here was this whole question of this lawsuit. Any knowledgeable publisher including Gardner Cowles, who said so, knows that you can be slapped with a libel suit at any time and under any kind of circumstances. It is part of the game. It is normal risk. On Look Magazine you had libel suit after libel suit. Look at the one with Alioto himself for which there was an appeal and I think Alioto got several million dollars damage. They have had dozens of libel suits and they retained lawyers. But nevertheless, Charles Cowles felt that I had been indiscrete in any event in revealing the inner workings of a museum, and I had written publicly somewhat contemptuously of board members who also were on the International Council with him at the Museum of Modern Art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. So it gave him a difficult time at parties.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, very difficult. And more than that, other issues began to arise in time that caused severe problems. Do you want me to talk about that or do you want to ask questions?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, why don't you just keep going and we will see what develops. The articles that I have read here say something but there is beginning to be a shift of editorial policy.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, I'd gone through the fall of 1971 up to fall of 1974, three years. I had gotten used to the New York scene and I was not so dependent on my editorial board who, in any event, were in constant conflict with one another and I had gradually began to sense a view which came in time to be sharper and sharper about the condition of criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that developed by your use of the board or ignoring them? Was it an active board? So many publications have editorial boards --

JOHN COPLANS: Oh yes. It was an active board. We had monthly meetings. In fact, the special museum issue became the bone of contention from which the libel suit arose was from a meeting which Rosalind Krauss called. She had felt that the time had come for us to take a more consequential role in analyzing the support structure and its effect on the art world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you mean by that term, "support structure?" Where does it come from?

JOHN COPLANS: It is merely a convenient catch-all word to describe all those forces which lead to a making of a work of art that are within the control of the art world. That is to say, social effects and the broad spectrum of social effects, sociopolitical effects are not in the control of the art world. What a particular president does or who declares war on whom, the nature of the stock market in relationship to unemployment, those things the art world cannot control. But what it can control and does control is its educational methods, universities and art schools and what is taught there, the expectations of the artists, the gallery system and the method in which articles are shown and sold and their contracts and various affiliations of that kind, the museum world and the manner in which the museum world handles and deals with artists and works of art, and the critical world, that is, those professional journals or house journals which report upon and comment upon art in the art world. Generally I think that is what is regarded as the support structure. She felt, as many of us had been feeling, that a broader context for the examination of art was very imperative, we had all talked about it, and indeed this was an issue that we could begin with on museums and brought up various facts about museums. This was something that I was very interested in and Max was very interested in. Don't forget that Lawrence Alloway, in the tenth anniversary issue, had written a long article on the support structure too. In any event, a proposed table of contents was made. I was asked if I would do the Pasadena article, which I was very reluctant to do. I had divorced myself from Pasadena and tried to maintain a discrete distance. It was felt that I was the only person who had experience inside museums and could deal with that particular issue. I said that I would think over it and it wasn't until September when we held another meeting where some of the issues discussed were found to be shallow or false or not necessarily correct, were rumors, and we got down to a proper table of contents and I finally agreed to do the Pasadena article. That was for February the following year. Krauss was supposed to do an article. She never turned up with the article. Annette Michelson was suppose to do Bowdler(?) but turned up late with the article and the article had certain deficiencies and we could not run it. But anyway, we managed to put together an issue. The only editors were Narschicked(?), Momer(?) and the design department, a critical analysis of that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was sort of the beginning then, I mean the first public appearance?

JOHN COPLANS: No, forces had been gathering that way. There had been a previous article on the Museum of Modern Art and the Cold War by Eva Cockcroft in which it was shown that, to put it rather briefly, that the Rockefeller connection --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sounds like the Mafia.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Well, you must remember, for example, that Rockefeller as a young man was a great supporter of Roosevelt. During the early years when Roosevelt was trying hard to supply England with destroyers and things like, that Rockefeller had used all his resources in South America to counter the Nazis and when America came into the war, to launch a pro-Allied platform in South America. What was the OSS formerly, the Secret Service, the OSS was gathering intelligence, eventually became converted into the CIA. There were strong ramifications between Rockefeller's political activities, his general outlook, his whole connection with the various government and quasi-government institutions and the museum which he had avidly supported both financially and every other way straightward and forward. They were leftovers between government connections or these past connections that at least a couple of former senior officials of the Modern had been members of the CIA or had worked with the OSS as it was then. The major artists were gathered under the aegis of the Modern and the State Department, major American artists, and been sent abroad in the late 1940s or early 1950s as representatives of American culture. That American culture was all about their thoughts rather than being the contrary, that the artists were violently in opposition to the mainstream.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know the International Council was formed as a result of the Cold War.

JOHN COPLANS: So there was a general article describing it. The Modern made loud and bitter complaints about the article, it was not factual, it was incorrect, and so we offered the Modern space for replying. But Richard Oldenberg decided that the matter was best left quiet rather than it should come further out into the open and no reply was ever made.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that is appropo to all of this is that Jack Brenner writes in what is called the New Art Examiner here, February 1977, inferring a kind of shift of politicalization of Artforum is contemplated. Is that a conscious thing or was it an unconscious thing? Is it observation on his part that has no foundation?

JOHN COPLANS: No. He is quite correct. It is hard to point one's finger objectively, especially as a person who played a role in all of it or even a role in parts of it, to be quietly objective about it. I would like to describe my personal feelings in the situation which would give some indication. Certainly in my considered opinion, the magazine was unreadable in its formalist stance, its use of jargonized language --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Became so convoluted that it was the interior point of the spiral.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I wanted to get rid of that as editor. But I was saddled with a board of convoluters. Annette Michelson was as convoluted as could be. Rosalind Krauss unbelievably so. And they preferred that style and type of writing and I wanted a more open situation. Now the point to me was this. If one was anti-Greenberg, as indeed I was and as indeed many of them claimed to be, what was the point of merely using Greenbergian formalism other than to make a counter argument for your own case, your own personal preference and taste, rather than getting into the cultural facts that led to the situation. In other words, the nature of the language is the style of writing itself. He barred the writers from opening up to a more potent way or more reasonable was of examining the art world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So their own commitment was a limitation.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, their own commitment was a limitation and I felt this all along. But nevertheless, I could not convince anyone.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But didn't you, as editor, sort of have the power and ability to override whatever your board would suggest?

JOHN COPLANS: You know, Charles Cowles wasn't on the board.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but I mean he was the publisher.

JOHN COPLANS: But I had total editorial freedom. But I gradually became more and more in time at odds with my board. It looked this way. Kozloff and Alloway versus Michelson and Krauss.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, the boys against the girls.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, Michelson and Krauss were following a line of French intellectual thought, Semantics, Miller(?) Pointee(?) and various people of that kind. Michelson was not interested in art. She had given up art and was interested only in film. She felt that no one else could write on film, including Alloway.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was her private --

JOHN COPLANS: It was her private domain. She was the film editor.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was very bad for Alloway because he was very involved with it. He was doing a book on

film at that point.

JOHN COPLANS: He had done a book on film, Violence in American Movies. He was very involved in popular culture, and with popular culture film is very involved. Nevertheless, there were constant regroupings. For example, Pincus-Witten believed in the death of painting and postminimalism, as he called it. That is, that art which derived in some form or other from Duchamp was the only viable art, and painting as far as he was concerned was more or less dead. But I didn't mean to say that he wouldn't write an occasional article on somebody like Cy Twombly, who was essentially and is a painter. But generally he bent toward what one might call non-painterly forms of art, conceptual forms of art, within certain limits. He wasn't interested in what one might call the extremity of pure conceptualism. Kozloff was antithetical to everyone because he felt that the style and type of criticism that was being written in Artforum had no rational basis outside of the individual taste-making of the writers as to who they were friendly with or who they liked. He felt that the role of criticism should be one of skepticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which is still a personal stance.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, in a sense yes, and in a sense no. He was saying knowledge should be balanced. That one should not go overboard to promote people. That rather one should examine the art in the broader context.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sort of a god-like image pointing and making associations and judgements.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Let's put it this way. At this particular time, and it had been for a number of years, there was generally a feeling that the whole art of the world, anything that was of any significance in what we would call art within the United States, with a few exceptions, was shown in three galleries on West Broadway and a couple of galleries uptown with certain obvious exceptions. They seemed to be in an untenable position that no one else in the world could make up. No other nation, race or anybody. Only a group of Americans who were shown in these five galleries. That these artists, coincidentally and not deliberately, because of critical attitudes were being vastly reinforced by the nature of the criticism in Artforum. To give you an example, and I mean this was part of my own personal view and anxiety and anguish, Rosalind Krauss introduced a new writer to Artforum, Jeremiah Gilbert Roth, who did a formal piece or two and then I said to him, would you like to do me 1,200 words on Brice Marden. He turned in with a 9,000 word article on Brice Marden. I told Gilbert that I wouldn't publish this article, that it was not in accordance with the commission and he screamed censorship.

PAUL CUMMINGS: From what, excessive of 1,200 words becoming 9,000.

JOHN COPLANS: 9,000. Besides, it was unreadable. I was prepared to sit down, given my burdens, and edit a 9,000 word article down to the required length?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fifteen percent or something? That is wild.

JOHN COPLANS: I wasn't going to. I wanted the article cut. I didn't mind 2,500 words but I wanted a smaller article on somebody that I regard as a minor artist, a pleasant artist but no one of any tremendous significance in the light of Kelly's work, Newman's work and the whole stream of people, all kinds of people. An extraordinary fuss developed and it was not unusual for this kind of fuss to develop with an editorial board. He screamed censorship and went to Krauss. He was teaching with her at Princeton in that program. He wanted academic license, regarding Artforum as a scholarly journal, completely misunderstanding the situation and wanted it both ways. Krauss intervened and I said that the article was unreadable. I can't publish it. She defended it staunchly but nevertheless edited it and came up with an article that I still did not want to publish. Well, it meant the sharpest break with her. Besides which, to fill the magazine was a constant problem and at that particular time I hadn't gotten an alternative.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You didn't have a filler.

JOHN COPLANS: You very rarely had a filler.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Whoever does?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I reluctantly published the article with a cover and discovered to my horror, and it was about the third or fourth time that this had happened, that the prices on Brice Marden leaped from \$7,000 to \$30,000 as a result of the article.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How could it have been so much?

JOHN COPLANS: Do you want me to describe what happened?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. That is fascinating. A certain percentage is interesting.

JOHN COPLANS: I can give you other instances of this nature. What happened was that Marden was a slow producer, painted very few works and his dealer at that time was Bykert(?) gallery and sold the paintings for \$7,000. They drew whatever their commission was, 40 percent. But there was immense pressure from European dealers who wanted to buy in on Marden and they had bought some paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was also a dealer in Minneapolis.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. And when I went to the Brussels Art Fair that year, a few months later, I discovered that those European dealers as a result of the article were offering Marden \$30,000 for the few paintings that were available. There weren't many available because his production was small. They were indeed getting that price, the same price as Kelly. I then began to check back on our covers, ringing the dealers, asking the dealers what happened to the paintings if it was a new painting of a younger artist if it had been put on the cover of Artforum and there had been an article. Now forgive me for not remembering the name, and I hope it won't come out too strongly on the interview. But I remember the woman sculptor who did wood poles bound in the corner with rope --

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know, the Whitney owns one of those.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, I know. We put her on the cover of Art Forum and her dealer, who was Paula Cooper, told me that when Art Ffum came out she had five museums phone in to buy that piece.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It said the museum leaders.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, all of this is about the idea that I had a board, that I was dissatisfied with the formalist approach, I myself earlier in writing a Smithsonian article tried to make a new approach for Robert Smithson's death, beginning the article with the very first few words. Smithson was a troublesome artist in attempting to locate him, he had great deficiencies as well as strengths, giving a more balanced cultural view of Smithson rather than to heroize him. Then again in the Pasadena article I tried very hard to describe in more open language the forces that were at play. I was of course fully aware of the hostilities against me as editor of the journal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Weren't you also supported by a faction?

JOHN COPLANS: Oh yes. But I mean that I was sensitive enough to realize that the situation was an impossible situation. Museum shows were decreasing. There was a great decrease in energy. Money difficulties developed. And that we needed to actually overhaul the magazine in some way or another. The situation was brought to a head I think when I had a personal row with Robert Pincus-Witten, who was a close friend, with Robert Pincus-Witten on the one hand and with the editors on the other hand, who wrote a letter impugning me for the publication of the Linda Benglis ad. Now the circumstances of the Linda Benglis ad were again a set of circumstances. I had sent it to Charles Cowles to decide as publisher whether we should advertise it or not.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who submitted it? The agency or did she make it up herself?

JOHN COPLANS: No, she came along. Pincus Witten had written an article on her and she wanted to make this part of the article, a special piece for the magazine. As you are probably aware, it was a kind of dialog between her and Robert Morris with whom she had been very close at one time, in response to Morris' sado-masochistic macho image of himself with chains and a German helmet.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And a leather jacket.

JOHN COPLANS: And a leather jacket. And she made a feminine response.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. That's right.

JOHN COPLANS: She made a feminine response, ostensible in my mind at least, is the fact that women could also be startlingly macho if they cared to be. So there was this image of her with a double-ended rubber penis stuffed actually in her vagina and she was oiled, and she wanted this in the article. I wanted no part of it in the article because we controlled independently what goes into the articles and the illustrations. Finally she came around to the idea of could she have an ad. I said, well, I'm not against it. It is not my decision. It is Charles Cowles' decision. He, I must admit in all fairness, bent himself in all directions realizing that if he refused the ad, he would be regarded by the art world as somewhat cynical and not the open-ended kind of man in admiration of modern art that he was claiming to be. On the other hand, he was very reasonably torn by what his family would say, his mother and his sister, if they saw such an ad in Artforum. After all, they were very proud of the magazine and he simply didn't know what to do. He kept appealing to me and I kept saying, you have to make the decision. Finally he said, I will go with it. And I sent it down to the printers and they refused to print it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Your are kidding?

JOHN COPLANS: No, they refused to print it. He said, fine, that's killed it. That is one relief. I can now tell the art world that the printers wouldn't print it. I said, now this becomes an editorial matter. He said, in what sense is it an editorial matter? I said, we cannot work with a firm of printers who are censors, who decide what can and what cannot go in a magazine, editorially or from the point of view of ads. There was nothing illegal about the ad and I wrote to the printers and said we have a contract with you, an annual contract for us to produce the magazine and for you to print it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was their reasoning?

JOHN COPLANS: They said it was obscene and they were afraid of prosecution. So I said, look, let's resolve this problem very simply. We are friends, you work well for us, you like our money and working for us brings you a certain prestige. Submit it to your lawyer and if your lawyer says that you could be prosecuted, because printers can be, printers and publishers are usually bracketed together in any action. I said, if they tell you that there is some legal bar or the possibility of it, then I will abide by it. They wrote to their lawyers and their lawyers said nothing of the sort. You are quite free and there is no reason why. I then said to Charles that I must insist on it being printed now, which it was. But of course, that combined with a cover by Meatyard, a photograph of Meatyard's which I had not noticed, it was so barely in the photograph, the word shit was on it, and showed vaguely.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't even remember that.

JOHN COPLANS: I have the issue if you want to see it. But there is an interior, a wrecked house and two ghostly figures and on the right-hand side is the word "shit" in vertical letters. Well, let me say that whenever any instance of this kind occurred, Mrs. Cowles became extraordinarily upset, if she saw any content in the magazine that she did not, not from the point of view of the writing, but from the point of view of images, did not show decorum, a kind of decorum that is in her middle-class values and she was used to. She had good reason, in all fairness. There was a constant stream of letters to her, anonymously by artists, of the most vulgar type, addressed to her or her husband about the magazine. Some of them I saw. For example, letters saying to her husband, anonymous letters, saying did you know that your wife is having an affair with John Coplans. Collages made with Polaroid, placed on an Artforum cover of a man jerking himself off. So Charles Cowles' sensitivity to these issues was not unreasonable. But on the other hand, how can you run an art magazine without --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Without dealing with what happens to be in the world of art.

JOHN COPLANS: What happens to be in the art world at that point. Art in America very successfully avoids this issue. They are very decorous and the magazine seems decorous to some extent, though I think Betsy is a very good editor and does an extremely good job under the inhibitions imposed on her by the board, which were imposed when she took the job. Mine weren't. So we come to this point. Were the editors right in faulting me for publishing this, six or seven editors.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They wrote in to you or who?

JOHN COPLANS: The editor and demanded its publication in the magazine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, letters to the editor from your own staff.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. And in a prominent position. I have no inhibitions about that sort of thing. I put it in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did they think? Did they expect that?

JOHN COPLANS: I don't know. I never had any bar about publishing criticism of myself. When Peter Plagens, for example, wrote an article on his visit to New York and made some catty remarks about me, I didn't edit it and say it couldn't go in. It doesn't bother me. Fortunately I was able to publish side by side with this letter, a letter from Peter Plagens which had coincidentally come in. Do you remember that marvelous letter from Peter Plagens about his daughter, an esoteric letter, even though he has Playboy and various other obscene magazines of a worse type on his coffee table, he felt that at least he should protect his daughter from something in Artforum because Artforum was an art (inaudible). I published the two side by side. But in any event, notwithstanding this, Krauss kept up a constant warfare against me. Robert Pincus-Witten also began and, as I said, I had a private quarrel with him, and he began a warfare against me. There was constant quarreling and I regret to say that the pressures became so great, my agony became so great over how we could run an art magazine given the cultural conditions around us, given the fact that we needed new insights, that we needed new blood, new thinking about a situation, and new structure about the magazine, I no longer cared. I no longer cared if I stayed or left or if they stayed or left. But if I stayed, I was going to change the magazine. Now I had been in dialog with Max Kozloff for some considerable time and I finally decided that the editorial board was at

an end. I couldn't use it anymore. It was more of a hinderance than a help, and that I would change the structure of the magazine. I went to Max. I spoke to him at some length. Our ideas were very much in accord in principle but very much in opposition in particular. I was in no position to change the magazine overnight. It takes time. There must be a continuity. But we would work out a working procedure between us and I would like him to come in as executive editor half-time to help me to rebuild the magazine. The editorial board, those that agreed and would work with us could stay and those that disagreed could leave. At which point, oh, I rejected an article of Michelson's.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How could you do that?

JOHN COPLANS: I rejected an article of Michelson's. That's not true. She began to put extreme pressure on me to travel to Europe to various film festivals and I actually paid for her to go, and she turned up with a little interview as a result of spending about \$1,500 of our money and I was dissatisfied and told her I was. I said, I just wouldn't do it. I was very sharp about it. I was very angry and very sharp about it, having spent all this money and gotten nothing for it. I became very hostile to them over these issues of Gilbert and various things like that, and I made it clear that I didn't care if they stayed or not, but that kind of autonomy was over. And they left. This is not to say that I was prepared to make a working arrangement if I could get some assistance from them. Krauss had indicated herself that she was willing to make a change when she brought up at that editorial meeting the whole issue of the museum issue and the problems of the support structure, to which she did not contribute. And Michelson's article was late, as was usual with her articles, and insufficient and had to be published subsequently. In any event, it was incredibly incorrect, poorly researched, pompous and incorrect. I had knowledge of the circumstances of Goldberg and she did not. Pincus-Witten had written himself out. His articles would appear in the form of lecture notes and I was rewriting them in their entirety. I would spend three or four days doing it. He was giving me help on the reviews, but I was rewriting his articles. He was a good, loyal friend. I had no quarrel with him. My quarrel was purely a professional quarrel and I felt that he had exhausted what he was doing. Alloway was fine and Joe Mashak sided with Michelson and Krauss. And there was a breakup with Kozloff's appointment. Should I just go on?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. It builds up the background, the internal factors.

JOHN COPLANS: I want to emphasize all the way along that this was from my view point. It is not an objective statement of any kind. It is from the editor's chair looking out on the world and a contrary view might be taken by those editors and so on, and one of some potency perhaps in the argument. Nevertheless, these were causes and effects in my mind and the conditions. Now in the following remarks I'm going to try to bring this mass of material together in some sort of summation with --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let me ask you about that. What was Charles' reaction to the editorial fireworks that went on? Was he involved with it or did he let you handle it? Was he unaware of it?

JOHN COPLANS: No. He was absolutely aware of my set-to with Pincus Witten because Robert had been very close to him. Robert had played the role of a mediator between himself and myself. He was fully informed. But soon thereafter he left to take up his post at the Seattle Art Museum and I was, if not defacto on the masthead, I was defacto publisher of the magazine and he was hardly ever there over the next two years. If there was any change in the financial structure of the magazine, I was to consult his father and I had a volume of correspondence with his father or I phoned him and told him. No consequential changes were made without his knowledge or his father's knowledge, who I consulted rather fully.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was his father influential in the magazine?

JOHN COPLANS: Not at all. His father's only worry, he was rather old, I think he is close to his 80's, was that he had a \$100,000 bank loan guaranteed to the magazine by shares deposited by him and that his financial advisor's accountants said that that \$100,000 should be wiped out. And he gave me instructions to begin paying it off. But I couldn't pay the legal fees and pay him off. See, because at that time the insurance was inoperative. It was in contention and when it became operative, the money was only refunded after I left the magazine. I, in fact, had to borrow more money from him to pay those legal fees because he had appointed counsel himself, and very expensive counsel, who he had employed at Look Magazine who charged extraordinary legal fees. We hadn't sort a lawyer to defend and he hadn't allowed Artforum's lawyer to defend or appoint counsel. He had chosen this very special, expensive person. He, in fact, offered to sell me the magazine at that time, if I could raise a substantial amount of money to buy it. I refused.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why? You didn't want it?

JOHN COPLANS: I didn't want to become involved at my age in excessive financial responsibility. I felt that my job was to change the magazine and make it more viable as a journal, more responsive and open to the cultural situation. I thought it was better to concentrate on that. The events that I am now about to describe operated in a time frame of 1974 to 1976. Angela Westwater had left the magazine as managing editor and Nancy Foot, who

had been managing editor of Art in America and worked on the New York Council for the Arts, became managing editor. She was far more sophisticated in the art world ways and as the managing editor than Angela Westwater, which is not to say that Angela Westwater was any less intelligent, but Nancy was a much more experienced person being a writer herself, which Angela Westwater was not. The terms under which Kozloff and I were working, that is, close consultation in pursuit of a new cultural policy for the magazine which included, as I previously stated but that I want to emphasize, clarity of writing, clarity of thinking and a much different attitude toward the relationship of the artist to the magazine and our responsibility toward him, meaning that certain kinds of skepticism rather than some kind of coincidental pushing of artists' careers would now take place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it an independence of the critic and the writer as opposed to an embracing relationship?

JOHN COPLANS: The relationship I think was seen particularly under Phil Leider in the 1960s where the writers were promoting Michael Fried and Stella and a whole group of artists, Oliski and various people of that kind. We were actually determined now to make a shift and that given what was in our opinion a kind of loss of energy in the New York scene, we would now make the strongest endeavor to turn Artforum into what it was not. That is, an international magazine. We would try very hard to deal with a wider range of phenomena both cultural and artistic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's rather interesting because you set 1974 and 1976 as the dates, one was just well enough into the 1970s to realize that the energy was being dissipated, the passions were worn out, a lot of things that sustained and drove people through the 1960s seemed to have been given up and entombed by one thing or another. What was it that was pushing you in this direction? What stimulated you or caused you to observe this sort of thing?

JOHN COPLANS: The point is that I do not believe in any specific theory of criticism. I do not attach myself nor have I ever attached myself to any particular school. I have always been an independent. However, merely being an independent without some aim in view is to be as confused as to attach one's self to a narrow view point. One is arbitrary and the other is restrictive or deficient. So from my point of view, it seemed to me that having watched over the years as both a writer and an editor, the various conflicting schools, and I am speaking to from Tom Hess as editorship of Art News, to Brian O'Doherty's Art in America, to Simmons on Art International, that what one needed was simply a more potentially open view of the art world itself. That if, for example, our education --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Making it more as a part of society rather than a clique.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. I mean that if the support structure, that is, art education, museums and galleries, played a kind of role in the making of art and how art was defined, then they were just as much subject to criticism as artists. But it wasn't a question of aesthetic criticism, it was getting at the root of the problems --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Social and political and economic, much broader cultural criticism.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes, much broader cultural criticism. And I had always been interested in architecture and had tried to publish architectural articles and had invited Susan Stevens, had invited her previously to come in and help us. We felt that photography itself, I personally felt that given that it was a modern invention and in my opinion equally as important to culture as a whole as the invention of the printed book, it was a factor and would not be overlooked. It was quite true, Phil Leider had published the first major article on Diane Arbus. We had always had an interest in photography, but I thought it ought to be a little more systematic. Again, certain films I thought were also of some importance, though not as much as architecture and photography.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why the limitation on films?

JOHN COPLANS: Because there is immense coverage of films. I think that I certainly felt that it should be only very selective in the sense that only very major films that might have been overlooked such as Max ?????? films, ones that would have great interest to the art world. I didn't see that we could run a film magazine because that was very adequately done and there was a lot of coverage.

PAUL CUMMINGS: An article on the products of Joseph E. Levine or something.

JOHN COPLANS: On the other hand, Manny Farber who had written on films for years in Artforum, we had asked him to come write again. We were looking for a kind of writer that would provide a range of ideas not heretofore covered in the various journals all over the world. But if someone unique like Manny Farber came up, we were certainly prepared to publish him. We were open-ended but we were seeking, rather than just seeking to merely cover something, we were seeking the right writers who could --

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, you know, as you describe all of this, it seems to me that somewhere underneath all of this is a drive to make a magazine which is not limited to the visual art world but a broad cultural --

JOHN COPLANS: No, no, on the contrary. Photography is a visual art form --

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but I mean outside of just painting and sculpture and things like that.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, let's put it this way. As the art world shrank in exhibitions, that is, the major museums' programs shrank, so the opportunity to provide interesting, alert and vital critical articles shrank. In other words, art critics cannot travel over the country, go into studios. If 20 years ago there were 10,000 artists in the country, now there are 100,000 artists or more in the country, which is a situation well known to you. But if one examines the museum program, say, 1965 to 1970 and then compares 1970 to 1975, the number of exhibitions shrank exorbitantly. If you took the Modern, for example, in the year of 1976, there were hardly any exhibitions. I mean, what kind of critical coverage is one going to give of the Stein(?) collection? What kind of critical coverage is one going to give of Swiss collections?

PAUL CUMMINGS: You could write something on Bolard(?) but not much.

JOHN COPLANS: Not much because it has been tremendously covered. I mean, the question is an extremely pertinent one. To my mind, correctly or incorrectly, the nature of criticism is about the evolution of art, the art which is unfolding under one's gaze.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It sort of dramatizes the fact that criticism really comes afterward.

JOHN COPLANS: Absolutely. And that art history is about sealed matters. It may be reinterpretation, but in a sense, the moment you are dealing with Barnett Newman seriously in the light of all of the exhibitions and articles, one is reevaluating him as a historian and not as a critic. So true, we were publishing historical articles in Artforum, but we found increasingly, increasingly to my dissatisfaction, that the art historical articles were in many cases not the kind of thing that we wanted to publish. Moreover, what? Another article on Newman? Another article on Stella? Another article on Rothko? Another article on --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that was because there were already 25 articles that they could quote from.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. What we wanted to do was look for new things to write about. For example, given the women's movement, why not Frida Kahlo. One of the articles that we published was one on Frida Kahlo, the wife of Diego Rivera. We had one of our writers working on her Ph.D. on Callow, and that was a unique opportunity to provide an article on a non-American, North American artist. Why not John Hartfield(?), the inventor of photomontages who took photomontage into and darterics into a sharply honed anti-war stance. Why not begin to look at overlooked phenomena historically?

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of response did you get from your readers with this change? Was there a perceptible one?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. It greatly enhanced circulation and greatly enhanced income. We never had such a high income as the year of 1974 when the change began. The change had been incipient under my editorship but it was incipient in the sense that it wasn't that I was timorous, but I was trapped by my existing editors and writers and I needed a new range of writers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you go to find the new writers?

JOHN COPLANS: That's the problem I am now going to describe. The editorial problem is as follows. There existed a generation of writers who were on the editorial board of Artforum and others whom we employed from time to time who had lived through as young people the 1950s, 1960s and therefore they had seen the unfolding American art from Pollock through the major abstract expressionists and the Americans of later art, through Morris, Judd and various people of that type. They had actually seen the work when it was first exhibited. They had seen the retrospective. Now the moment you pick up some young writer, you had people who had no first-hand knowledge of the past. The only knowledge of the past that they had is by looking at museum catalogs or reading the articles in Artforum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you were picking up your first generation in a way.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. And it is very hard to find a second generation of critics and it meant tough, hard, remedial editing and running virtually a criticism school within the magazine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It is the same thing with the Archives now.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. You understand what I am talking about. It is a pragmatic matter. And Kozloff and I were absolutely open-ended about this. We felt that this was the only solution. There was no other solution than to proceed along these lines. But it caused us incredible difficulty of course. Because, for example, Lawrence Alloway, who seemed at one moment extraordinarily open to the changes that we wanted to make on the

magazine, but when he realized that he was not, as an outside person, going to be part of an editorial board, he withdrew from the magazine. He said that he had to be part of the inner circle which makes these decisions. We felt that we could not any longer have close editorial associates of the type that we had previously that were consulted on the issues. Besides which, Alloway's popularism is in my opinion severely deficient because of the logistics of the American situation. In order to have a populist outlook, you must acquaint yourself firsthand with everything that is going on in the country, as well as Europe. And he was a person situated as a professor in New York City teaching, and the only people who he wrote about were people with whom he was closely affiliated in what seemed to be some kind of friendship.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It started to become old women artists that he started writing about.

JOHN COPLANS: I don't mind that in the least. The point is that if he was remedying a bad situation in the past, I have no objection to that. But the point was that it was very severely limited because he would only focus on people that he knew. The style and type of article that he was producing was not generative of a wide range of ideas. It was tied to the specifics of a given person's art and again it was promotional. We were getting to the same promotional thing. What the women's movement appeared to me to be, at least, was that they wanted the same share of the pie the male artists had. In other words, they wanted the articles that confirmed their status and confirmed their position in the market. And of course, I would have tried to shy away from that but that is what the women artists wanted. So there was an immediate conflict. That is not to say that long before Lawrence moved in on the particular thing, I had not been extremely open. I began to give covers to women. I began to ensure coverage of women. But I would not give in. I mean for example, with Lucy Lippard there were severe quarrels between us because she wanted to be able to write any article that she wanted on a woman, without realizing that she was merely playing the role of a promoter. She said, well, why not? I said, well, why? I want a different kind of magazine, (inaudible) from that point of view. I'm not digressing. You see, we have one problem on one side and another problem on the other side. As I pointed up and as I haven't pointed up, the accumulative effect of the changes in the 1960s and 1970s in the lives of the artists and their artworks was to generate an enormous speculative art market, a massive speculative art market. I said this before, that if you take someone like de Kooning and every work that has been marketed since the 1930s, the middle 1930s when he painted, that is, drawings, prints and paintings, the total value in the world based on the \$800,000 price paid by the National Gallery of Australia for a major work and the current price of \$150,000 for new works, is that he had over a billion dollars worth of work out in the world. These works are like money. They are sold at auction. They can be realized for cash.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They go up and down like the Dow Jones.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, it is ever-increasing each year, the value of these works. If you take a younger artist like Roy Lichtenstein, it comes to 100 million dollars, the value of the works, the prints, drawings and paintings that he has put into the world. Now if Lichtenstein received, as he did receive, a bad review in Artforum, it is a matter of grave concern to the network of dealers under Castelli who invested in these paintings and are now trying to sell them. People say, well, there is a bad review for that work. That work isn't so valuable as something else and maybe we should (inaudible) up. It forces some kind of depreciation in the market, since Artforum was a very influential journal from this point of view.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that is? Do you think that is because people cannot make their own decisions or they look to the press because it is informed?

JOHN COPLANS: No. It is a very mixed thing, Paul. There are articles which are totally independent of criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What used to fascinate me is the P?N, if we ran a 2-1/2 inch text and an illustration of a print in a new edition, almost invariably it would sell out in a matter of two or three months.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, then here is your own experience. You understand the situation I was in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But was it the approval of the publication for that object that made everybody relax and spend their money or become pleased and spend their money.

JOHN COPLANS: I'm not saying that Artforum played a major role, powerful role, all-embracing role in the marketing. Nevertheless, a bad review sometimes would cause a lack of confidence. Let's put it that way. Maybe it did not even necessarily affect the market, but it made the dealers work harder and think twice and made the clients think twice. They felt that they were operating under a severe handicap. After all, they were advertising in this magazine and this magazine was panning their artists. Time Magazine or any magazine you care to name, the New York Magazine, if somebody advertised it, there was no commitment, far from it, on the part of the Ford Motor Company advertising in Time for Time to describe or write or yell about the products for Time to be skeptical about the products, and there is no problem. They are buying advertising space. Unfortunately, because of the nature of French criticism as it was and certain other magazines that exist now such as Arts and Arts International where you can literally buy space, the feeling is that if a dealer advertises in a magazine, he

expects some results from it. There was a time when it was important to advertise in Artforum at the insistence of the artist or it was the artist paying the money indirectly through commissions who was really buying the ad. Later this began to change. Advertising became very regular. It was part of contracts. They should advertise. This feeling was less and less that and the galleries felt that they were buying the space. With the result that if a magazine adopted in any way a skeptical or adversary role, they thought they had cause to complain. With Marmer(?), they withdrew their advertising after ten years as a result of Peter Plagens article which described New York (inaudible) money lying in state.(?) I happen to know that Emmerich had complained bitterly about the amount of coverage of his artists in Artforum. He said that he would not advertise unless we covered his artists. I knew that Webber also said the same thing to me. But in their minds there was clearly a tit for tat idea. And I knew that Castelli was extremely dissatisfied and very unhappy over the situation. I think what brought things to a head was the review by Bud Hopkins, an artist who I had asked to come and do a set of reviews. I used to occasionally ask outside artists to come in rather than critics to do a set of reviews. He did a review of Roy Lichtenstein's show which was followed then by an article by Nancy Foot on Claes Oldenburg which was somewhat critical of his recent works. More or less to the effect that the drawings, the ideas, the fantasies were far more interesting than the giant sculptures themselves. Which leads me to a final point. Anyway, there was great dissatisfaction among the dealers but peculiarly enough, not among large groups of artists. They, or a large portion of the artists, welcomed this change. They felt that we were really getting rather mildly into some of the roots of the problems. All of this fed through to Cowles and my contract was due for renewal on January 1, 1977. I had a three year contract. In July I had spoken to Cowles asking him if he wanted to renew my contract. Otherwise I would look for a job earlier. In fact, I was in the process of looking for a job. He said, no, no problem. We will renew your contract. We shook hands on it. The terms had to be discussed but we talked about renewing it for another three years. There various matters had been proceeding and others probably on the side when I phoned Leo Castelli to get some Rauschenberg colors because we had commissioned a Rauschenberg article. I phoned him three days, twice a day. He never replied. I knew he was down in the gallery. I know Leo Castelli very well. If Leo is on the toilet and the phone rings, he will interrupt his shit to get to that phone in case of a sale or some information. And I said to Max, something is wrong. He said, you are paranoid. I said, Max something is wrong when Leo Castelli won't phone me back. I've known the guy for years. Something is wrong. My contract hasn't been renewed. It should have been signed months ago. It was due for renewal in a week. I phoned Charles Cowles and said, Charlie, what about my contract? He said, I will see you in New York come Monday, naming a lawyer's office. When I got to the lawyer's office he said, I'm not renewing the contract. I put two and two together. I had no proof beyond conjecture that Leo Castelli had been consulted and knew this and wouldn't speak to me. Now, I never received any reason for the dishonoring of the contract. It had been promised to be renewed. But I am sure that it had to do with the general feeling of anger by those critics that I had severed from the magazine, the disaffiliation and anger of the various art dealers, I think notably Emmerich Webber, Marlborough and Castelli. But on the other hand, the magazine was doing extremely well. There were large numbers of photos - oh, I should add Sonnabend to this.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's Leo.

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. And I think that combined with the fact that Cowles never knew when he would receive information that the Modern had been attacked or some institution from which he had to borrow paintings --

PAUL CUMMINGS: As curator from Seattle.

JOHN COPLANS: A magazine that he and his father had owned that it was not a severe embarrassment to him, that as a member of the council at the Modern, again, there were people who felt --

PAUL CUMMINGS: What are you doing, Charlie?

JOHN COPLANS: Yes. Why do you allow this? Can't you get rid of the guy? Plus the dealers. Finally he made up his mind that I had to go. Is that a fair enough summation, do you think?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, since you can't really see into his mind, I guess.

JOHN COPLANS: I tried to be reasonably impartial in describing the events.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But after all, you had turned the magazine around and taken something that was losing substantial money and made it profitable. I wonder, is he the kind of person who cannot maintain his own position?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, that's his particular problem. I am merely drawing my own conclusion and I think that everything I said can be said in public without any, I mean, I am trying to say things that do not have any edge of bitterness or anger to them but describe the situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, there must be. After all, you were involved with the magazine --

JOHN COPLANS: I put 16 years in it. It had been my life. I am trying to describe the chain of events as I see them that lead to my departure and of course to Max's. But that is not the whole of the story. I must say that if this goes on tape into the Archives, that I was given one hour to leave the office.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You are kidding.

JOHN COPLANS: No. After 16 years, I was given one hour to leave my desk and leave my office. Max thought over the situation and he spoke to Charlie and wanted to know why I was dismissed. He could not find out. Charlie said, oh, you can fill in. Do I have the freedom to publish whatever? I wasn't present. And he couldn't get a reply out of Charlie. He was extremely evasive. I want you to fill in until I appoint an editor. Well, Max said, I can't do that unless, I mean, how long will this take and what will I be doing then. Max felt that the situation where I had been sacrificed to ideas that he also fully believed in and in some cases had led me toward, that it was an untenable situation for him. And he resigned. I must say that Nancy Foot seem absolutely ineffective. She just regarded it as a job. No issues to her at all. She was my great disappointment because she was a key figure. If she had gone to Charlie and said, hey, you can't behave like this.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She had some influence over him?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, she carried the magazine when Max resigned. She proceeded to do all the work. So it has been said before, I don't know if it was Menken who said it, maybe I'm wrong in who said it but the quote is more or less correct, the only freedom of press there is in America is to the extent that you own the press, which we have seen with Clay Felker and other people. One of the tragedies in the whole print situation whether we are dealing with art journalism or any other kind of journalism is that the ownership ultimately decides the nature of the journal. I. F. Stone was an independent who published his own journal and no one could ever stop him. My mistake was that I never bought the magazine or bought into it or had ownership. But on the other hand, how can there be a free intellectual life if an editor has to be an owner because he then has to always protect his own interest and his financial picket. And it is absolutely necessary to maintain a discreet distance between ownership and public opinion or criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it is true. That issue is never going to be resolved because you see it over and over, the same thing. If you run a publication that you own, you not only have to pay the bills but you have to think about what goes into it. Very few people can do that.

JOHN COPLANS: It is a very hard task. It is an absolute conflict of interest.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about some of the things you said in terms of the ideas that were current and the problems with finding writers as you began changing your image of the magazine. You didn't really say how you went around finding those people. You mentioned Manny Farber.

JOHN COPLANS: No, Manny Farber was an old writer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know he was an old writer. But what did you do when you wanted new people and new points of view? Did you get many things over the transom? Did people write to you and say --

JOHN COPLANS: Oh, no. Like once there was some remark made about how the new editor would read all manuscripts that were submitted unlike the old editor. Well, that is just bullshit. I read every manuscript that came in and replied to it the same day. It was my policy to reply the same day, never to, except when I had to agonize over an article, then I would wait a little bit. I would get Max to read it. And I think only once in two years did we disagree over our readings and only once in two years did I reject one of Max's articles that he brought in and passed on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean written by somebody else.

JOHN COPLANS: I won't mention the name of it. Written by somebody else and he edited it and passed it and I read the manuscript and said it was an untenable manuscript. I went back to him and pointed it out. He realized the implication. He was an excellent editor. He realized the implications and the correctness of what I said and the article was canceled. We had very few disagreements. There was nothing published in the magazine that I did not see or read or which to some extent I did not edit. Max could only edit a certain amount of material, but he worked hard at it and I did the rest, as well as the publisher's duties. We worked in incredible harmony. There was very little discrepancy between our views. The most serious problem was the issue on a series of exhibitions which were dramatically linked by politics, which Max wrote a little introduction to and which Hilton Kramer seized upon as a muddled Marxist view. If the introduction hadn't been written, I am quite convinced that the contents of the magazine would have passed Kramer's scrutiny without the slightest raising of an eyebrow. It was much more to do with Max's position than what was in the magazine. If you pick it up and read it yourself now, you will find that there are arguments between scholars, equally grounded in scholarship as those that wrote them. The review of the Rosenbloom article is by a woman art historian and her views are views as an art

historian. The same goes for the remainder of the articles that are in that issue. They were professional conflict of views between professional people and they weren't written by us at all, nor the terms of them indicated. It merely happened that a group of articles got put together that covered from 1814 to a Chinese show on palaces. Nothing was synthetic. They were all exhibitions that were in the process and they all came in and looked like an issue that would fit together. It was purely coincidental. They all had this.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I do think that a lot of people criticize publications and are unaware of how they are formed and might feel differently if they knew.

JOHN COPLANS: I never finished what I was saying, the phone interrupted me. I was talking about Time Magazine and other magazines accepting advertising. You have to remember, and these remarks should be added back to those, that an art magazine is no different from a plumbers' magazine in the sense that it is a special interest magazine, that is dependent on the advertising. It is a trade journal, a trade rag. In the case of Artforum, as is the case in most magazines, half the income comes from advertising. So long as you have a magazine that is contingent upon advertising for its life, there will always be the veracious pressure to make good remarks about the products that are being advertised. Unless there is some kind of understanding that the interest of one party, that is the advertiser, is only coincidental to criticism, then you can't have any kind of a tenable critical dialog going on. The only kind of tenable critical dialog that can go on are in those newspapers and journals, such as Robert Hughes in Time Magazine, where the advertiser, art people don't advertise in Time Magazine, the guy has complete independence from that pressure. Or Tom Hess in New York Magazine, where the galleries again don't advertise. But I think in the case of the special interest journals there are these pressures and any publisher has to understand that there are these pressures and they have to be fearfully resistant.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You have one thing about resisting that in the inference of publications is that often the audience is very small numerically. You had 20-some thousand circulation?

JOHN COPLANS: Well, a factual circulation of about 18,000 after allowing for returns.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you had a readership of 50,000 or 60,000 a month, which is small when compared to anything other than the trade magazines.

JOHN COPLANS: Well, it's like being a trade magazine, Publisher's Weekly or those journals. Publisher's Weekly probably has a much bigger audience than Artforum. There are dance magazines and film magazines. The architecture magazines don't have that much bigger a circulation. They have a circulation of about 35,000 or 40,000 which is the same as Art in America and Art News. Artforum is the youngest of the magazines, I think I am correct in saying, of the monthly journals. Art in America I think is 70 years old or more and Art News the same.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Arts is old if you go way back to --

JOHN COPLANS: It began with Robert Goldwater who converted his magazine into Arts and it goes back into the 50s.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, even before.

JOHN COPLANS: So they all had a great headstart on Artforum. But it was able to maintain itself very well and vigorously financially, quite independently. If Castelli had cut his advertising out, it would have made no difference to the magazine of any appreciable kind. He did not spend more than \$4,000 or \$5,000 a year. In that sense, of course I find on Cowles' part incredible shortsightedness, if not a kind of compulsive greed about money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

JOHN COPLANS: That if Castelli didn't advertise, it would be a severe loss to the magazine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but don't you think in that particular instance it is also the social influences, Castelli's broader umbrella?

JOHN COPLANS: No, I don't think so. I think that if Castelli hadn't advertised in Artforum, there would have been a lot of questions asked about Castelli's openness to the art world. He distributed his advertising very equally. He never gave more advertising to Art News and Art in America than he gave to Artforum or Art International. He put a quarter page in each journal each month. Sometimes a half page. He would cut back very severely. But it was much more to do I think with the mixture of Cowles' conflict that was going on as to Cowles being curator of a museum and owning a magazine. And he should have placed the magazine in a trust.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I often wonder why it still now does not create problems for him. Maybe it does.

JOHN COPLANS: I have no idea.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think it is very questionable anyway for a curator of a museum to have a soapbox of that size and importance and still try to function as curator. It imbalances the situation with other curators that he works with, his peer group, as well as his dealings with collectors and dealers and artists and everything else. I think that one can understand the conflict deeply.

JOHN COPLANS: But I think the conflicts were resolved in the wrong way. The right resolution of the conflict would have been, while he had the job, to place the magazine in trust, with another publisher, that is, a professional publisher. And there was money enough to do that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think it will continue making a profit given the changes in the art business now?

JOHN COPLANS: It is hard to predict. Journals have a kind of momentum and it takes a long time for this momentum to unwind. I read the issues and you find a lot of articles creeping in that we had rejected, that are being brought out again. There is very little animation in the magazine. It is now much nearer to Arts Magazine as an in-house gallery magazine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's too bad.

JOHN COPLANS: And if you go through the issues yourself, you will see that the level of cultivation and openness has decreased enormously. What will happen is anybody's guess.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay. Do you have anything more you want to say about that?

JOHN COPLANS: No, Paul. I'm trying very crudely to cover very one-sidedly, only from my point of view, the problems. I think the other guy you should interview is probably Kozloff and then you might go down if you want to and see the mayor, of course, Kraft and Mikes and all those people are all gone. It is a different issue. But I think Kozloff can give you more information and I think you should interview Cowles.

END OF INTERVIEW

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