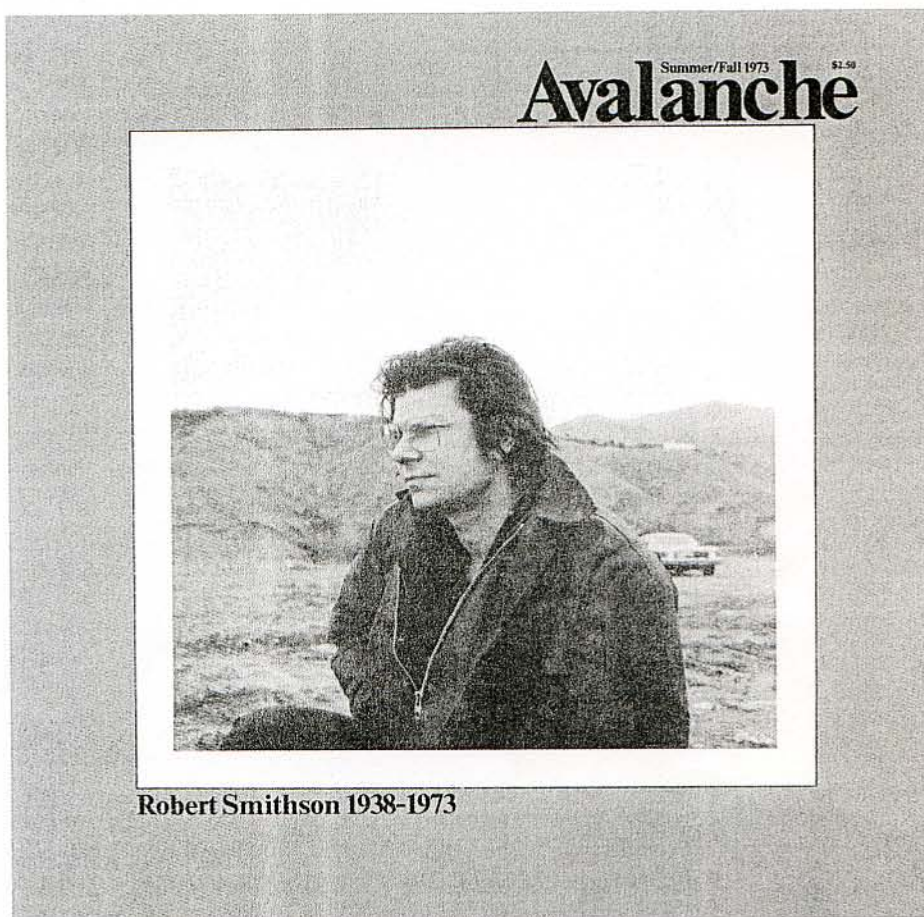


Avalanche

Lisa Le Feuvre on an American magazine that sought to close the gap between art and the reader in the 70s



Robert Smithson 1938-1973. Front cover of *Avalanche*, Summer/Fall 1973

ART MAGAZINES PLAY a crucial part in the distribution of art: they are where we find out about it, see it represented, find opinions, are informed about what we can see and what we have missed and,

most importantly, develop a sense of the contemporary moment. Arguably the art magazine effectively produces artwork by rendering it visible to individuals who circulate the artwork further through conversation, texts, exhibitions and citations.

The shortlived New York based art magazine *Avalanche*, which existed between 1970 and 1976, not only captured a sense of its time, but also engaged critically with the relationship between printed matter and artwork. Initially taking the form of a square journal and later mutating to a tabloid in 1974, it developed out of Kineticism Press, which

FOOD'S FAMILY FISCAL FACTS

Investment	\$63,000.00	4%	tons various flours for bread	41,272	customers
Guest Sales	104,120.72	16,000	oranges squeezed	1,083	glasses broken
Total Income	167,120.72	379	lbs rabbits stewed	47	dogs asked to leave
		1,690	lbs celery chopped	153	chairs broken
		3,050	lbs carrots juiced	16	bottles of champagne disappeared
		1,914	lbs butter	3	unfulfilled promises by good friends
Salaries	37,700.29	108	lbs tongue	1	closing order from health department
Food	37,007.10	37	lunches still	113	roaches left lying in the back room
Paper Goods	1,647.65	2,300	torillas pressed	0	internal fights
Rent	6,000.00	4,081	lbs chickens succumbat	3%	lbs keys lost
Telephone	207.70	708	lbs fish fucked	1	truck ruined
Con Edison	1,222.45	1,954	lettuce heads	2	rebellions:
Office Staff	514.50	15,660	potential chicken cracked		The Dishwasher Rebellion of Febr. '72
Insurance	1,167.00	435	gallons Tilly's organic apple juice		The Radio Rebellion of May '72
Liability	125.00	17,760	yards spaghetti steamed	5	Floods by Marco
Repairs	1,010.24	2	acres of mushrooms	31	tons of garbage trucked to Gansevoort Pier
Legal	1,397.00	5,890	onions peeled	243	cubic yds garbage removed by Pasquale Bro
Laundry	732.25	220	lunches parsley sprinkled delicately	7	made up Social Security numbers
Waste	306.50	17	lbs sasafas, root powder leaf, gumbooz	3	crations granted by City
Advertising	1,321.64	16	oz wasabi powder exploded	1,175	notions taped to windows
Dues & Subscriptions	00.00	1,879	lbs pork stuffed	84%	workers are artists
Trucking	350.37	1,480	lbs lamb led astray	3,913	shirts, aprons & towels dirtied
Miscellaneous	501.27	4,529	lbs beef bullied	1	box toothpicks used
Book-keeping	2,975.00	26	lbs poppy seeds	3	items salvaged from restaurant
Payroll Taxes	3,050.28	5	cubic feet bay leaves	7	harried people as ejected to peers
Other Taxes	276.80	43	lbs scavaged	174	days Glara tied up in front
Sales Taxes	7,288.45	2	lbs peanut butter	9	people growled at by him
Bank Charges	89.08	29	boxes brown backwhost groats	99	workers
Consultant Fees	100.00	1,111	lbs duck baked	99	out fingers
Rubber Checks	196.16	1	cubic foot sage	7	batterflies used to mend cuts
Construction & Destruction	28,696.77	100	lbs sunflower seeds	213	people needed to get it together
Kitchen Equipment & Supplies	33,147.29	442	lbs bell peppers		keep it together
Total Expenditure	167,120.72	5,568	loaves of bread baked	3,082	tree officers given

Carol Goodden Tina Girouard Gordon Matta Suzanne Harris Rachel Low Robert Prado Richard Peck Ann Marshall Douglas Penick Benton Quinn Letiani Schuman Kathie Mahon David Wood Billy Onalabigo Susan Olanthalzer Andrew Bregman Phillip Brennan Richard Taddler Ed L'ingrill Penny Cabile Ed Harris Barbara Wornestren Mary Derville John Kalesh Nancy Friedrich Walter Vatter John Parshaw Pat Perone Chuck Phillips Phil Swanson Lew Skinner Kitty Duane Karen Egan Jeanette Penoyer Chappi Judy Dorav Paul Richter Joan Richter Ms. Peanut Rusty Gilder Cindy Hoyt Debi Kops Abigail Levy Can Mitt Arthur Murphy Carla Northron Joe Turner Barbara Lloyd Cynthia Holstrom Michael Goldberg Hasechika Foster Loyd Simpson Lurie Deaver Thom Cathcart Leonardo Hegron Lee Brewer Glevia Hylder Doree Mike Kern Michael Koornbejan Susan Endley Lovice Brown Karen Batsley Marion Lyon Phil Swanson Epp Katske Mark Knight Kit Parsons Povelope Jeffrey Lew Deborah Hay David Breadshaw Phil Glass Chris McNeur Randall Arabie Keith Sommer Brad Davis Jed Bark Jo Ann Glass Bill Solomon Wm Sarbello Sylvester 5 man team de Lorenzo Charles Simmonds Manfred Hecht Rufus Fred Brandes Winston Reoff John Hall Jim Weatherford Arthurd Jim Lewis D'Arcy Landry Fred Prastine John Gibson Genney Koster Marco Ron Rosel Helen Conrads Robin Stouber Robert Altman Ray Perone Carol Zusman Sarah Dane Jay Roseman Brendan Jack Colorebo Kate Redicker Melinda Gurevitz Jay Letke Ruth Brewer Ruth Ackerman Selma Jackie Newlove Raymond Reid Chris Leon Tu Peter Hawkins Peter Barton Bob Rauschenberg

Food's Family Fiscal Facts in *Avalanche* Spring 1972

was initiated by Paul Maenz and Willoughby Sharp in 1966. Their statement of purpose proclaimed that 'works of art and artistic ideas are identical', and promised that the new venture would be 'dedicated to the total distribution of artistic information in all media'. Willoughby Sharp joined forces with Liza Béar two years later to produce *Avalanche*, the first instalment appearing in 1970.

As with Kineticism Press, *Avalanche* set out to investigate the possibilities of closing the space between the artwork and the reader, producing printed matter that engaged with the artwork rather than being a documentation of it. The mainstays of the magazine were interviews with artists and artists' projects, supplemented by advertisements and a news and announcements section, entitled 'Rumbles'. Reviews had no place: it was the art itself and the voice of the artist that were of primary importance. *Avalanche* existed at a time when printed matter had a very particular importance within artistic practice. It was when many artists were involved with extending and questioning the limits of the art establishment as they investigated the possibilities of counteracting the artwork-as-object. Seth Siegelaub describes how, in the late 60s and early 70s, books and magazines provided a space for Conceptual Art in the same way that the gallery or museum provided a space for paintings and sculpture. The return of these concerns today makes it pertinent to look back at *Avalanche* – it is a rich source of material that maintains a sense of presentness despite being 30 years old. There is also something inherently fascinating about seeing now well-established artists looking fresh-faced and working outside of mainstream museum and gallery circuits. *Avalanche* was a support system for a community of artists that included, to name just a few, Keith Arnatt, Bas Jan Ader, Alice Aycock, Bill

Bleckley, General Idea, Bruce Nauman, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Smithson, George Trakas and William Wegman. In a text giving advice on how to develop an art collection, Willoughby Sharp says of *Avalanche*: 'in hindsight, I consider that this magazine was a surrogate art collection: Andre to Weiner'. It is this hindsight, as well as foresight, that makes the collection of artists that Béar and Sharp bought together so important.

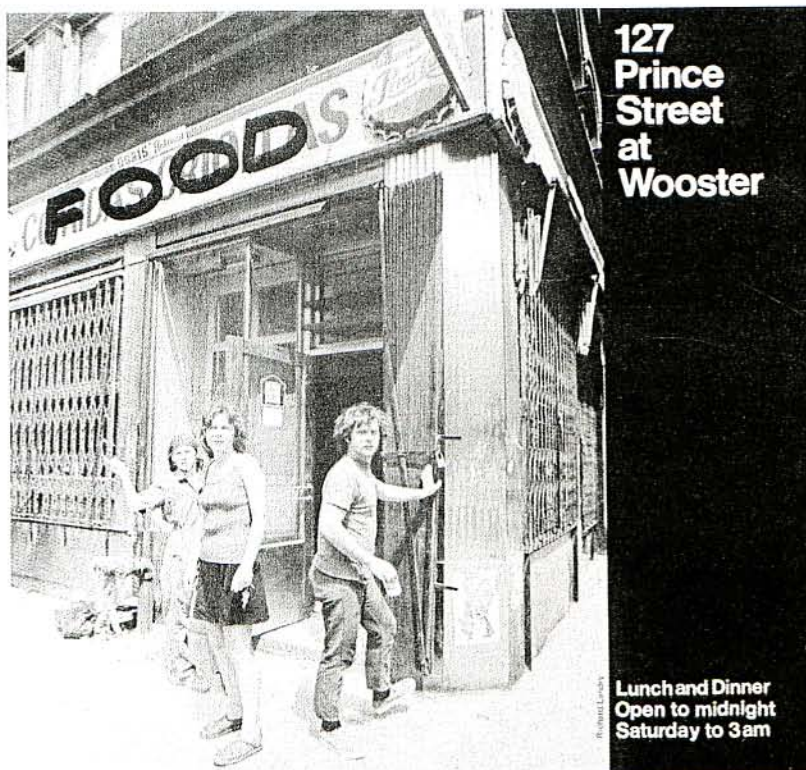
Interviews in *Avalanche* are conversational, centring on issues circulating at the time. In the launch issue of Fall 1970 an interview entitled 'Carl Andre on Log Piece' discussed the relationship between the photograph and the artwork. This is a crucial element of the art magazine: how it represents works. As Andre expressed it: 'the photograph is a lie. I'm afraid we get a great deal of our exposure to art through magazines and through slides and I think this is dreadful, this is anti-art because art is a direct experience with something in the world and photography is just rumour, a kind of pornography of art.' To the question: 'Do you think that there's no way in which photographs can be an accurate representation of a work of art?' Andre responded: 'None at all. All they are good for is as an aid to the memory.' In highlighting this difficulty *Avalanche* began by taking a critical stance towards its very own existence – its place within the system of representation and distribution of art. *Avalanche* manages to overcome this problem by avoiding the simple representation of an artwork through the creation of a discursive framework that remains open to the reader's interpretation.

The same issue of *Avalanche* featured an artist project by Robert Morris – the performance work *Pace and Process* which consisted of a set of instructions and a single photograph of Morris realising the piece on September 6, 1969. *Pace and Process* is defined not only by the implementation of the instructions and the outcome of their execution, but also by the instructions themselves. The work lies between text and action – a space *Avalanche* itself set out to occupy. Morris outlines the materials needed in detail: '10 or 12 polo ponies or well broken ranch quarter horses (not stable or riding horses); an experienced groom; two saddles (preferably light Western type); the necessary bits, halters, saddle blankets, walking blankets, feed, water, buckets etc; polo helmet, riding crop, spurs, poncho (in case of rain), canteen, box lunch'. A white chalk line with a hitching post at the end is to be drawn out in a field, with nine cameras positioned along the line at regular intervals, rigged to 'photograph sequentially, à la Muybridge'. The instructions demand that Morris should ride up and down the line on the first horse until it is tired, then move on to the next horse until it is tired and so on, with the groom deciding at which point the horse should be changed. When Morris himself feels he is too tired he will stop and at that point the work will be finished, leaving a path worn along the white line. Each horse will have nine photographs taken of it, which 'may be enlarged and shown later as a record of the event, together with two photographs looking down at the white line: one before I begin, one after I finish'.

>> 'I threw a party at my loft to celebrate my 31st and asked everyone to bring flowers. Gordon bought edible flowers. It was right in line with his work: he had been frying photographs. I was a photographer who loved to cook. Gordon said "You should start a restaurant". Right there, April 1971, Food was born.'

This work is depicted over two pages of *Avalanche* and it communicates an actual experience of the work beyond the event itself. Here was the power of *Avalanche*: it provided a location where realised, projected and proposed events could be interacted with directly. Through conversation and visual discourse, works and ideas could be tried out, and works out of the range of the viewer bought into cultural discourse. As Vito Acconci wrote in 1971 in an advertisement page in the third issue of *Avalanche*: 'this page is like a training ground: writing here is like preparing myself. There are many other artists' projects of great note within *Avalanche*. For example, Bruce McLean's very long titled *King For A Day and 999 other pieces/works/things etc (proposal for a retrospective at the Hayward Gallery, London incorporating the 'Piece a minute show' and the 'World's fastest speed sculptures in the world piece.'*) the same year. It consists of photographs of the artist, alongside a list of 1,000 works for the proposed retrospective. The 1973 Summer/Fall edition featured a six-page *Drinking Sculpture* by Gilbert and George, replete with images and text describing an evening where the pair stopped off at 'quite a number of places of refreshment' where they 'made a fair number of decisions ... and went home happy and diagonal' resulting the following day in 'two dizzy spells at lunch'. However this was remedied by asking 'a couple of identical waiters for identical doubles for the second time. Felt twice as good'.

Avalanche, of course, was far from the only publication site where artists actively engaged with the context. *ArtRite*, *Art-Language*, *Studio International*, *Arts Magazine*, *Artforum* are just a few examples where artists' interventions could be found – not forgetting *Art Monthly*, which launched with an artist project by Andre. In the case of *Avalanche*, the advertisement section was also an active site, and looking back it takes on an even greater resonance: it will be interesting to see if today's advertisements will do the same in 30 or so years' time. The advertisements included



Ad for 'Food' in *Avalanche* Fall 1971

Leo Castelli Gallery showing an austere Piero Manzoni smoking a cigar; The Electric Gallery in Toronto announcing on its full page non-advertisement that here is 'three hundred Canadian Dollars worth of white space to doodle on'; Konrad Fisher took a page spread to show a photograph of Daniel Buren's work that had been controversially removed from the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition; and Sonnabend's two-page spread featured the ground plan of the gallery rather than one of its represented artists.

There were also regular advertisements for the restaurant that frequently crops up in artists' biographies, Max's Kansas City (wine list covered in sketches in 1973, an imprint of potatoes – or perhaps breasts – in 1971), as well as for the artist-run restaurant Food. This was a collaboration between Tina Girouard, Carol Goodden, Rachel Lew, Suzanne Harris and Gordon Matta-Clark – artists who were frequently championed by *Avalanche*. Food developed from a conversation between Matta-Clark and Goodden, who wrote recently: 'in April of '71 I threw a party at my loft to celebrate my 31st and asked everyone to bring flowers. Gordon bought edible flowers. It was right in line with his work: he had been frying photographs. I was a photographer who loved to cook. Gordon said "You should start a restaurant". Right there, April 1971, Food was born.' More than a place to eat, Food was a location for artistic activity that, like *Avalanche*, pushed at its boundaries, as well as extending the limits of the location of artistic practice. It was an artwork in itself, in fact at one point Matta-Clark tried to sell it to Leo Castelli. Food's advertisements were also projects: for instance, to advertise its opening the founders are pictured outside of the restaurant during

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building work, with the word 'Food' drawn over the name of the restaurant's previous incarnation – Comidas Criollas – in marker pen. At the end of 1972, the first year of Food, *Food Family's Fiscal Facts* form the advertisement in the 4th issue of *Avalanche*, where the reader is informed that since opening: '2 acres of mushrooms' had been consumed, '47 dogs [were] asked to leave', '84% [of their] workers are artists', and that there had been '2 rebellions: the Dishwasher Rebellion of Feb 72' and 'The Radio Rebellion of 72'.

Both Food and *Avalanche* were products of a very specific time. They were part of a local self-sustaining New York art scene. A cross-fertilising network existed that stimulated thought and artistic production during the early 70s with conversation as the driving force. Looking at *Avalanche* now involves looking back at a

historical moment through the context of the present, and with it comes a critical distance and historical knowledge. The short length of its publication is perhaps key to the importance of *Avalanche*: as the art scene and artists around it changed it too shifted. It is impossible to imagine how it would be received were it to have continued. *Avalanche* was concerned with avoiding translation from work to text – instead the aim was to present an unmediated sense of artwork. This is something quite different from our situation today, where the presentation and distribution of artwork dominates discussion through analyses of critical positions and curatorial strategies – a discussion in which artists, as much as critics and curators, are actively engaged. ■

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