

THIS IS NOT TO BE LOOKED AT.

In his 1968 work, *THIS IS NOT TO BE LOOKED AT*, the American Conceptual artist John Baldessari paired an image of the cover of the November 1966 issue of *Artforum* with the text, appropriated from Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* series, «THIS IS NOT TO BE LOOKED AT.» (Fig. 1) This work suggests conceptual art's rejection of the exclusively visual concerns of formalist art and art criticism, exemplified by Clement Greenberg's influential notion of opticality which informed Michael Fried's interpretation of Frank Stella's paintings in this particular issue of the magazine. However, if conceptual art's iconoclasm was directed against the «opticality» of art and art criticism in the 1960s, Baldessari implies that it was also aimed at the visuality of the magazine itself.

Art magazines boasted larger formats, coated pages, and an abundance of high-quality, and increasingly color, reproductions during the 1950s and 1960s, establishing a new visual culture within which art and art criticism were experienced.² The spectacular visuality of the art magazine coincided with a shift in the magazine's role in the evaluation of art. As the artist Dan Graham observed in the late 1960s: «If a work of art wasn't written about and reproduced in a magazine it would have difficulty attaining the status of «art».»³ However, if the art magazine's promotional function was widely seen to diminish its function as a site of critical publicity, it also produced a novel set of conditions through which art might engage its public, as artists began to use the magazine as a new kind of medium and exhibition space. Here I want to explore this new understanding of the magazine as a medium in relationship to the changing category of artistic medium itself in the 1960s and 1970s, and in particular, the expanded field opened up by Minimalism and conceptual art. I also want to argue that the meaning of the magazine as an artistic medium was inseparable from its possibilities as a communication medium during this period.

With its reliance on textual and photographic documentation, conceptual art ushered in a dramatically new set of exhibition practices that no longer revolved around the display of unique objects but were instead ideally suited for the reproduced page. In the first issue of *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual art*, published by the British Art and Language group, the editors wrote, «Suppose the following hypothesis is advanced: that this editorial, in itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what «conceptual art» is, is held out as a «conceptual art work.»⁴ The journal's own graphic form – densely printed in roman typeface, and un-illustrated save for the occasional explanatory diagram – conveyed, in its very nondescriptness, the nonvisual or «anti-retinal» propositions of conceptual art. The editors explained that the journal's layout was aimed towards legibility and that »any decisions apart from this have been taken with a point of view to



2 Dan Graham, *Schema* (March 1966), 1966–1967, as published in *Aspen*, Fall 1967, no. 5+6, Fall 1967. Printed matter. Variable according to publication.

what it should not look like as a point of emphasis over what it should look like. These secondary decisions are aimed at eliminating as many appearance similarities to established art-objects as possible.⁵ Yet while language was here conceived as a conceptual, dematerialized, non-visual medium, even this refusal of the visual was clearly itself a visual strategy.

Indeed, as many have pointed out, the dematerialization of conceptual art paradoxically revealed the materiality of language. For example, Dan Graham's *Schema* (March 1966), 1966, one version of which was published in *Art-Language* suggests a site-specific model of language that underscored the magazine page as a material object. (Fig. 2) The work, Graham stipulated, could be published in any magazine and was to be completed by the editor according to the design and layout of the particular publication in which it appeared. Schema consisted of an algorithmic template: a generic list of variables that self-referentially index its own appearance on the page, setting off a circular chain reaction in which the work's form alters its content, which alters its form, and so on. To read *Schema* is to be momentarily distracted from the meaning of words by the shapes of letters and numbers, and even by the density of the material on which they are printed. It is to observe the unadorned mechanical form of the typeface, and to notice the texture and pliability of the page. Our automatic reading habits disrupted, we are reminded that the magazine page is not only visual but a profoundly temporal and tactile medium.

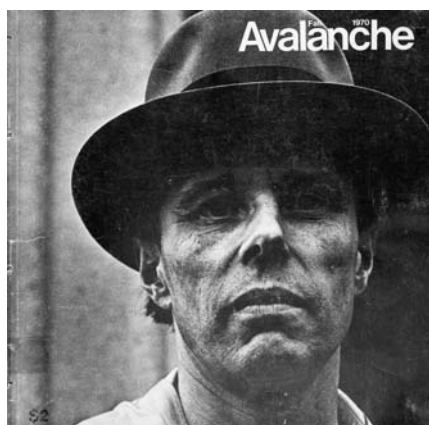
This was emphasized by *Aspen*, a multimedia magazine in a box, in which Graham's *Schema* was first published, in issue 5+6 in 1967. (Fig. 3) In this issue, which showcased Minimalism and conceptual art, artists did not merely document their work, but exploited the magazine's unusual format to embody the radical new models of artistic medium and spectatorship they were exploring. Indeed, *Aspen* strikingly paralleled minimalism's insistence on the work of art as a temporal, interactive, and indeterminate experience – an experience famously characterized by Michael Fried as theatricality. While all magazines might be



3 *Aspen*, no. 5+6, Fall 1967. Edited and designed by Brian O'Doherty.

considered temporal and interactive in that reading itself takes place in time, *Aspen* dramatized this through its unbound multimedia format. In this issue, the viewer could play records and project films; compose music in John Cage's *Fon-tana Mix*; turn the pages of Mel Bochner's *Seven Translucent Tiers* a stack of tracing paper printed with a grid containing a pattern of pluses and minuses to be added up, and even construct a cardboard model of a sculpture in Tony Smith's *The Maze*. Like the plywood slabs and beams, fabricated cubes, and found industrial objects of minimalist sculpture, which Fried abhorred because of the way they were driven by the spectator's interaction – in his words, this sculpture «*depends on the beholder, is incomplete without him, it has been waiting for him*»⁶ – the magazine in a box relied on the reader to activate it, to open it up and bring its mute, static contents to life. O'Doherty even conceived of the magazine's cover as a kind of miniature minimalist sculpture – a modular form that could be arranged in different ways.⁷

And yet if such contingency meant one thing in the context of a sculpture encountered in the architectural space of the museum or gallery, it undoubtedly meant something very different in the discursive space of a magazine, where critics and readers interpret art through texts. Indeed, *Aspen's* literal interactivity corresponded with new participatory models of reception then being explored by post-structuralist theorists such as Roland Barthes, whose landmark essay «The Death of the Author» was published in this same issue of the magazine. *Aspen* suggests the implications of the «birth of the reader» not only for the practice of art but also for the practice of art criticism. In the pages of *Artforum*, Fried argued for the a priori recognition of aesthetic quality exemplified by his notion of the critic's conviction – a certainty prompted by the «presentness» and instantaneousness of the modernist work of art. Against such conviction, *Aspen*



4 Photograph of Joseph Beuys, cover of *Avalanche*, Fall 1970, no. 1.

insists on a much less secure kind of knowledge. It replaces an a priori model of aesthetic judgment based on the consensus of a single, universal point of view with the unpredictability and indeterminacy of multiple viewpoints and subject positions. *Aspen's* challenge to the hermeneutic authority of art criticism was also, implicitly, a challenge to the social and economic conditions through which this authority was exerted and which it upheld within the institutions of the mainstream art, including the gallery space and commercial art magazine. Indeed, it promised an egalitarian model of distribution that was achieved in a very practical sense by sending art through the mail in a cardboard box.

While *Aspen's* unbound, multimedia format radically challenged the visual conventions of the commercial art magazine, other artists' magazines adopted these conventions for a different set of ends. *Avalanche*, for example, seized upon the spectacular visuality and promotional function of the art magazine – even borrowing *Artforum's* square format – in order to foster alternative art forms including conceptual art, performance art, video, and earth works within the emerging art community in SoHo in the early 1970s. (Fig. 4) Like *FILE* magazine, which hijacked *Life* magazine's red and white logo in order to support the alternative Canadian art scene, *Avalanche's* tactical appropriation of the forms of mainstream media constituted a site of radical counterpublicity.

According to Willoughby Sharp, the magazine's publisher along with Liza Bear, the magazine sought to «to amplify the artist[s], not merely by putting their faces on the cover but to go into some kind of dialogue with them and find out how the magazine could serve them. ... *Avalanche* was an artists' magazine.»⁸ Such goals suggest the magazine's role in the struggles over artistic identity, rights and self-determination in the politicized climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s, exemplified by groups such as the Art Workers Coalition, which its editors were, in fact, involved in founding. The artists' portraits that appeared on the cover of each issue – moody, filmic, black-and-white close-ups – suggest the magazines' aim to establish a more direct channel for the artists' voice by eliminating art criticism and exhibition reviews, in favor of artists' interviews and artist-designed contributions.

Avalanche suggests the important role of magazines in the documentation and distribution of the ephemeral, time-based practices of conceptual art. In its

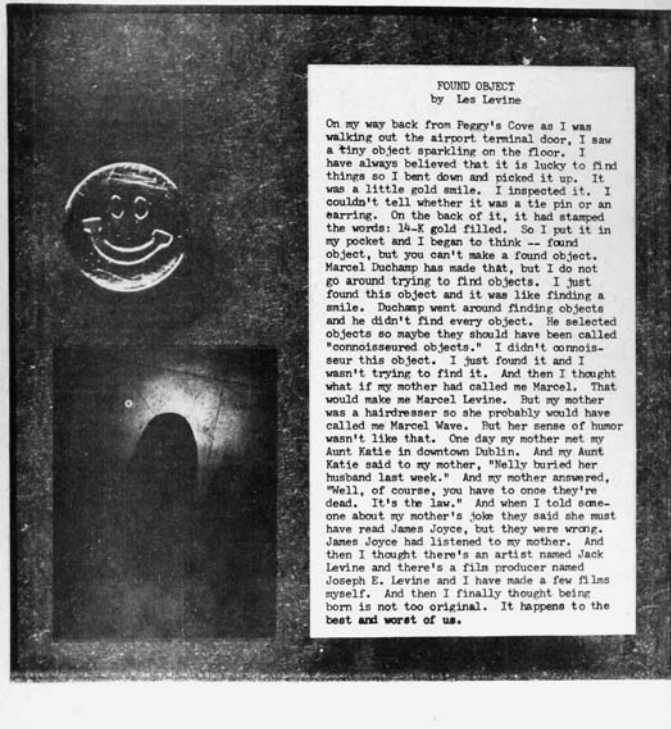
pages, artists explored new ways to present their process-oriented and time-based work to the public, experimenting with layout and developing a visual rhetoric to signify the passage of time through the static medium of typography and photograph. Robert Smithson saw magazine pages as prime opportunities for «non-sites,» the artist's term for the documentation – rock samples, maps, photographs, and texts – through which he frequently represented his remote, large-scale works to viewers. However Smithson also understood the magazine as a quasi-sculptural medium in its own right. Fond of describing printed matter through geological imagery, he once characterized art magazines as «strata» with «land masses of print (called criticism) and little oceans with right angles (called photographs).»⁹ Qua Smithson, *Avalanche* mined the materiality of printed matter. Designed as a series of doublepage spreads, with advertising wrapped front and back around editorial content, the magazine unfolds in a dense, layered manner, with texts and photographs cascading across the page, fullbleed images alternating with spare, white pages. There is a cinematic quality to *Avalanche*, and the sheer quantity of photographs published in the magazine is remarkable. In the first issue, a conversation between Smithson, Michael Heizer, and Dennis Oppenheim is illustrated with no fewer than thirty-two photos, several of which bleed across two pages.

The magazine's coated pages, and ample high quality photographs gave the offhand snapshots of performances, installations, and video stills a feeling of legitimacy, making their haphazard cropping and accidental blurring seem intentional, even stylized once they were neatly framed by a bright white border and surrounding by immaculate lines of Univers font. Such images became iconic, establishing public awareness of this art, and in retrospect participated in the accumulation of value by both the art and the spaces in which it was shown in SoHo. As Sharp himself asserted, he was «trying to get these artists and their work into the market.»¹⁰

This statement contradicts the anti-market, anti-commodity rhetoric of so much conceptual art, suggesting a much more complicated relationship between this art and forms of promotional publicity. Rather than rejecting advertising, *Avalanche* embraced it. However, while the benefits of the art world's information systems typically accrued to those at the top of pecking order, *Avalanche* worked to the artists' advantage. The magazine also used advertising space for purposes other than promotion, such as for antiwar statements, and to advertise new alternative spaces and galleries such as Paula Cooper and Food Restaurant. Ad space was even occasionally left blank, paid for by galleries that wished to support the magazine without endorsing particular artists. The magazine's own ephemerality – it lasted a mere 13 issues – amounts to a kind of resistance to the processes of acculturation as well. The last issue, published in 1976 shows on its cover the financial ledge for the magazine, suggesting how the magazine quite literally refused to profit from its engagement with the artists it revered.

Art-Rite founded in 1973, by Edit DeAk, Walter Robinson, and Joshua Cohn, suggested how ephemerality might be conceived as a political position in its own right. (Fig. 5) «We wanted people to throw it away,» its editors explained, adding that they «didn't want to contribute to raising the value of art.»¹¹ *Art-Rite's* humble half-tabloid newsprint format could not have been further from the coated, full-bleed pages and cinematic layout of *Avalanche*. While the magazine's

ART-RITE



5 Les Levine,
cover, *Art-Rite*,
April 1973, no. 1.

impoverished appearance was certainly determined in part by economic necessity, it was also deeply ideological, flaunting its contrast with the spectacular visuality of the mainstream art press, and signaling its anti-elitist aspirations. According to its editors, «It was printed on newsprint in the belief that the low cost process will help de-institutionalize and demystify the esoterica that it contains.»¹²

Unlike higher-quality papers, which are chemically processed to remove the lignon, a chemical compound naturally occurring in wood, newsprint still contains this organic substance, which causes the paper to deteriorate quickly when exposed to air and light, becoming discolored and brittle. Its high absorbency also means that reproductions are much coarser and cruder than those on coated papers. As its name implies, newsprint has traditionally been used for only the most temporary of publications, such as newspapers, meant to last for a single day. This literal ephemerality dramatizes the magazine's contingent nature as a document that sought to participate profoundly in the moment it recorded, by focusing on emerging art and artists. Characterizing its editorial policy of «coverage of the uncovered» *Art-Rite* encouraged younger, lesser known artists in SoHo to

write for the magazine and use it as a medium.¹³ The magazine served as a rotating exhibition space for a series of artist-designed covers: clever, understated works for the page, many of which emphasized and exploited the publication's distinct, lightweight materiality. In 1976, *Art-Rite* inaugurated its Dollar Art Series, in which entire issues of the magazine were given over to an artist or artists to create a mass-produced work of art available for less than a gallon of milk.

While *Art-Rite* underscored the magazine's commodified, mechanically reproduced status as an egalitarian form of distribution, it paradoxically affirmed the experience of the handcrafted. For example, issue 8, designed by Pat Steir, was decorated with potato-prints of cheerful flowers in primary colors, which the editors painstakingly hand-stamped on all six thousand copies. Judy Rifka produced two thousand original mixed-media drawings, collages, and stencils, each on a single sheet of paper folded in half, sent out like a handmade card. These vivid unexpected glimpses of the handmade gave the magazine an intimate quality that was in contrast to the standardized impersonal character of mainstream media. Indeed, the editors cultivated a friendly, familiar tone, addressing their readers with affectionate salutations and expressions such as «you're the greatest»¹⁴ – an attitude that also defined the circulation and distribution of the magazine, which was «given away in recognition of the community that nurtures it.»¹⁵

Among the most inspired of *Art-Rite*'s covers was Dorothea Rockburne's design for issue 6. Instead of printing something on the surface of the page, the artist explored its three-dimensional materiality, folding back the cover to diagonally bisect it into two triangles, outlined by the slightest shadow. The editors diligently executed Rockburne's idea according to her instructions, creasing thousands of covers themselves, and readily donated two extra pages of precious editorial space to accommodate the design, which required that the first and second pages of the magazine be left blank. Deeply site-specific, Rockburne's cover emphasized the interactive, tactile dimension of the «handmade newspaper,» as she called *Art-Rite*, as well as its quotidian, throwaway character.¹⁶ Heightening this effect, the exposed surface of the newsprint has yellowed over time, much like a photogram – a happy accident, according to the artist, but one that poignantly expresses the paper's fugitive quality.

Rockburne's cover cleverly referenced her *Drawing Which Makes Itself* series, begun in 1972, with which she reconceptualized the act of drawing as a fundamentally process-driven activity – less a means to render a preconceived object than a trace of the interaction between artist and materials. As Rosalind Krauss noted of these reductive, postminimalist works in which abstract marks were produced by creases and shadows on paper or carbon paper, they insist on the externality or «publicness» of meaning.¹⁷ Rather than using paper as a surface upon which to project her individual, a priori thoughts and feelings – a conduit for the private self – Rockburne allows that surface itself to generate meaning, locating artistic process in the external world as something equally available to all. If the democratization of aesthetic experience implied by Rockburne's drawings remained largely symbolic within the context of the gallery space, her *Art-Rite* cover demonstrates how this idea of publicness might gain significance within the medium – and media space – of the magazine itself, as a model of communication in which the meanings of art and art criticism were not dictated from above, but accessible, non-hierarchical, and collaborative.

Art-Rite fostered an unorthodox, decidedly unstuffy form of writing that eschewed the expert judgment of the critic in favor of the *sensus communis*. As Edit deAk explained, «It's cross-checking the art, taking it from the point of view of a layman walking into the gallery and not knowing any of the bullshit. What would he or she see?»¹⁸ In its deliberate embrace of the amateur over the professional critic, *Art-Rite* harked back to the ethical function of art criticism as it had emerged in the eighteenth-century public sphere. *Art-Rite* appealed to the emancipatory claims of criticism in order to facilitate the advent of new counterpublics within the art world of the 1970s.

Indeed, while artists in the 1960s and 1970s embraced the printed page as an inherently accessible and public medium – a concept with roots in the Enlightenment model of the public sphere – they also began to question the universal character of this normative ideal, which masked its historical reality. They began to think instead about how printed matter might register not the mythical universal character of some abstract ideal of the public, but the actual subjectivities of artists and their viewers. Lucy Lippard, for example, was interested in the role artists' publications might play in the feminist art movement, observing:

They open up a way for women artists to get their work out without depending on the undependable museum and gallery system (still especially undependable for women). They also serve as an inexpensive vehicle for feminist ideas. ... The next step is to get the books out into supermarkets.¹⁹

Though artists' publications did not show up in the grocery store checkout line as Lippard had hoped, they did offer a crucial platform for women artists to publicize their work, define the politics of feminist art practice, and create a sense of solidarity and community. Lippard herself was a founding member of the *Heresies* collective which published *Heresies* magazine – one of several magazines founded to support feminist art practices during the 1970s. The editorial statement in the first issue of *Heresies* asserted, «As a step toward the demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women.»²⁰ As this statement demonstrates, *Heresies* sought to change not only the form and content of mainstream media, but to alter its socioeconomic relations of production.

Unlike earlier avant-garde artists' periodicals, which tended to support specific artistic movements, artists' magazines in the 1960s and 1970s were motivated less by the need to promote a narrow aesthetic agenda than by a desire to transform the magazine itself. If the magazine was a new kind of medium it was equally a radical media practice and the two, while not reducible to one another, were deeply intertwined. Even as artists sought to make their work legible and accessible through the magazine, they questioned the latter's status as a neutral, universal public space, insisting on the specificity and contingency of both the magazine and its audience. In this sense, these temporary publications had an enduring effect on the social relationships among artists, critics, curators, dealers, and – not least – viewers and readers.

Annotations

- 1 This paper is drawn from my book, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* Cambridge/Mass. 2011. While the paper tries to give an overview and sampling of the book's argument, it necessarily abbreviates and simplifies the narrative that I present there. I am grateful to Antje Krause-Wahl and Anne Söll for the opportunity to present this material at the conference «Künstlerzeitschriften und ihre visuellen Strategien» in Mainz in 2010, and for their encouragement to publish it here.
- 2 See Stanley T. Lewis, «Periodicals in the Visual Arts», in: *Library Trends*, January 1962, vol. 10, no. 3, p. 330.
- 3 Dan Graham, «My Works for Magazine Pages: A History of Conceptual Art», in: *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, ed. by Alexander Alberro, Cambridge 1999, p. 12.
- 4 Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin, and Harold Hurrell, «Introduction», in: *Art-Language*, May 1969, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1–10.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Michael Fried, «Art and Objecthood», in: *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Gregory Battcock, New York 1968, p. 144.
- 7 Brian O'Doherty, notes for *Aspen*, 1967, no. 5+6, in the artist's possession.
- 8 Willoughby Sharp, interview with the author, June 25, 2001.
- 9 Robert Smithson, «Hidden Trails in Art», in: *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam, Berkeley, 1996, p. 366.
- 10 Willoughby Sharp, interview with the author, June 25, 2001.
- 11 Edit deAk, telephone conversation with the author, November 28, 2008.
- 12 Edit deAk and Walter Robinson, project description from a grant application, excerpted in: *The New Artspace*, ed. by Bridget Reak-Johnson, Los Angeles 1978, p. 55; Walter Robinson, quoted in: «The Art-Writing of *Art-Rite*», galleys for unpublished article, Getty Research Institute, Special Collections, n.p.
- 13 *Art-Rite* Publishing Company, grant application, excerpted in: *The New Artspace*, ed. by Bridget Reak-Johnson, Los Angeles 1978, p. 54.
- 14 Edit deAk and Walter Robinson, memo sent out with *Art-Rite* no. 17, Getty Research Institute, Special Collections.
- 15 DeAk and Robinson, project description from a grant application, excerpted in: *The New Artspace*, ed. by Bridget Reak-Johnson, Los Angeles 1978, p. 55.
- 16 Dorothea Rockburne, telephone conversation with the author, June 9, 2009.
- 17 Rosalind Krauss, «Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post '60s Sculpture», in: *Artforum*, November 1973, p. 43–52.
- 18 Edit deAk, quoted in Alan Moore, «The Art-Writing of *Art-Rite*», galleys for unpublished article, Getty Research Institute, Special Collections, n.p.
- 19 Lucy Lippard, untitled statement, in: *Art-Rite*, Winter 1976–1977, no. 14, p. 10.
- 20 Editorial statement, in: *Heresies*, January 1977, no. 1.