

AVALANCHE AND FILE:
THE POLITICS OF ALTERNATIVE ART MAGAZINES IN THE FIELD OF
CULTURAL PRODUCTION 1968-1976

by

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Abstract

The expanding discourse surrounding the importance of magazines in the field of cultural production during the 1970s presents the alternative art press as a forum that contributed to the dematerialization of art and presented a more democratic space within which to encounter artworks. While discussion surrounding alternative art magazines has often revolved around the idea of the “museum without walls,” magazines have also been recognized as a site of contradiction within the artistic avant-garde. The alternative art press has come to be seen as a contributing factor in the failure of avant-garde movements trying to escape institutional power structures. Acting as a lifeline to the art market and institutions of art, alternative art magazines impeded artists from achieving the utopian goal of conflating art and life and escaping the confines and context of the institutional white cube.

Drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu’s essay, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,” this thesis aims at articulating a new space within which to consider the contributions of alternative art magazines. Through case studies of the New York based *Avalanche* (1970-1976) and the Toronto based *File* (1972-1989) I argue that focus must be shifted to consider the medium of the magazine as a fertile ground exploited by artists, editors and publishers, in order to redefine and call into question how “the game” of cultural production was being played at the time. Instead of escaping the institution altogether artists took advantage of the medium of the magazine to erect their own institutional alternatives.

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Introduction: Naïveté or Art World *Savoir Faire*

On April 16, 1973, at 12:30 pm, the members of the artist collective General Idea were visited by Willoughby Sharp in their Toronto kitchen for a discussion concerning all things cultural.¹ The aroma of marijuana and hash wafted through the air as the group became acquainted. Sharp, the self-described “mighty art mogul,” made the cross-border trip from New York City to record an interview with the members of General Idea that would later be published in *Avalanche*, an alternative art magazine that he co-founded and had been editing with Liza Béar since 1968. A long way from the working space of his SoHo loft that was paid for with the proceeds from a recently sold Duchamp rotorelief,² Sharp found himself in the company of a group of people, who, despite their playful nonchalance, were becoming a force within the Canadian art world.

The final transcript of this interview reads like a game of cat and mouse with questions such as “What’s the General Idea?” to which AA Bronson replies, “None of your business,” followed by maniacal declarations like, “I have a habit. I want more, if I see a palm tree I have to get it. If I see them in a store window I’m hooked. I need my fix, I need my palm tree fix.”³ Sometimes, however, serious questions receive close to serious answers. While the interview touches on issues surrounding performance and mail art, it could be said that Sharp’s interest in the artist collective from Toronto was partially driven by the desire to meet other people participating directly in the “alternative” art press community. Jorge Zontal (Slobodan Saia-Levy), Felix Partz (Ronald Gabe), and AA Bronson (Michael Tims) had been publishing their own art magazine since 1972, using pseudonyms and operating under the corporate identity, Art-Official. When the conversation leads the members of General Idea to address their role

as editors and producers of their own periodical, *File* magazine, the answer is distilled into a simple conclusion, “*File* helped [artists] define themselves as artists.”⁴

This is a significant episode in the short six year history of *Avalanche* magazine as it represents the single instance in which the editors broach the topic of art magazines by seeking to address the purpose of publications like their own.⁵ Although the members of General Idea found no opportunity to reciprocate Sharp’s inquiry about the purpose of *File*, the occasion for a broader discussion presents itself as readers begin to examine closely the material they are consuming. If one of the most significant contributions of the Toronto magazine was made manifest in the symbolic naming of artists, what can be said of *Avalanche* and other magazines from the 1970s that fall within what is typically described as an “alternative” genre?

In 1976 John A. Walker, in his effort to place alternative art magazines within the broader context of art publications, formulated three categories for considering art periodicals. The first describes the more traditional, “art magazine that is about art.”⁶ These periodicals, following a mostly textual format, are accompanied by reproductions of works of art that support and substantiate articles, reviews, etc. In the second category, the magazine about art is distinguished from the “magazine that is art,” in that the latter is produced and is intended to be understood and treated as a work of art.⁷ The third category is one that Walker devised with magazines such as *Avalanche* and *File* in mind; the periodical as anthology or art gallery not only provides space for the publication of poetry, fiction and criticism but, depending on its focus, can also act as a kind of mobile art gallery in which the works of artists are showcased in a veritable museum without walls.⁸ Walker’s analytic delineation is useful in that it facilitates an

understanding of the design and layout of alternative versus traditional art magazines and, by proxy, encourages the conclusion that alternative periodicals, falling mostly within the second two categories, generally define themselves in the negative image of their “mainstream” counterparts. That being said, it should be recognized that, just as alternative art magazines were nonconformist in terms of design and layout, they also found little room for the promotion of artists who might have found a ready home within the pages of more mainstream periodicals.⁹

While Walker goes on to describe the process of producing these magazines and the importance of new technologies in allowing even small budget operations the opportunity to publish, what is missing is a discussion that would link the content and form of alternative magazines with the motivations of those who chose to publish them. While it is telling that the producers of alternative periodicals rejected established conventions of design and layout, especially at a time when Marshall McLuhan had predicted the demise of the printed press, equally important to consider are the differing ideologies that motivated alternative producers to take action. What is it that the editors of magazines like *Avalanche* and *File* were pushing up against at a time when cultural revolution was in the air?

The discourse of the avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s has influenced the manner in which alternative art magazines have been situated historically. This period marked the re-emergence of avant-garde tendencies generating various artistic practices aimed at critically addressing and circumnavigating the authority held by galleries, museum’s and critics concerning the definition and public reception of art. In abandoning the sanctioned spaces of the various institutions of art, the obvious question

arises as to where artists subsequently found themselves in operation. Advances in technology allowed artists to employ innovative methods of disseminating works of art, the full potential of which had previously remained untapped. Magazines, in particular, acted as important vehicles for the perpetuation, dissemination and documentation of unconventional works of art. In an expanding discourse surrounding the importance of magazines in the field of cultural production, during the 1970s, the medium has often been hailed as the space within which avant-garde artworks were realized and disseminated to a broader audience; magazines have in many instances, been characterized as a forum that not only contributed to the dematerialization of art, but that significantly, presented a more democratic space within which to encounter artworks. As the interlocutors of an emerging alternative art scene involved in attempts to bypass and/or escape institutions of art, alternative art magazines are characterized as holding the same goals in mind: exposing the inadequacy of accepted definitions of art and display practices that separate art from the lived experience. But while artworks, realized within the pages of magazines, arguably circumvented the physical four walled institution of art, the question of where magazines themselves are situated in relation to these institutions arises with a retrospective undertone that plagues this period in art history. While discussions surrounding magazines from the 1970s has often revolved around the idea of the "Museum without walls," to use a phrase coined by André Malraux, magazines have also been recognized as a site of contention within the cultural avant-garde. This is yet another instance in which the avant-garde, unable to realize the revolutionary potential for change, failed to escape the confines of already existing power structures. "Alternative" magazines, in particular, have come to be seen as a contributing factor in

the failure of various “escape attempts,” to use Lucy Lippard’s popular characterization, as the medium served as a lifeline to institutions of art and the art market.

This thesis aims to articulate a new space within which to consider the politics of magazines from the 1970s. For the purposes of this project politics can be taken to mean what the producers of art magazines, “articulate—either explicitly, or as is often the case implicitly—as being the problems of the present cultural system; what they imagine and create as possible solutions to these problems and what strategies and chances they have for articulating these ideals...”¹⁰ In lieu of characterizing the artistic activities that were carried out, in and through, magazines as failed escape attempts, I argue that focus must be shifted to consider the medium of the magazine as a fertile ground exploited by artists, editors and publishers, in order to redefine and call into question the rules by which the game of cultural production was being played at the time.

Outlining the motivations of alternative magazines, as exponents of the avant-garde, Benjamin Buchloh, who edited issues ten through twelve of the alternative art magazine *Interfunktionen*, demonstrates his disappointment at once having been idealistic, by posing the question, “Should we pity the moment that had the naïveté to believe that [...] making a magazine constructed a new space, provided alternative forms of access and generated different forms of readability?”¹¹ For Buchloh the question is rhetorical. But it is this line of questioning that offers a clue to understanding how projects like *Avalanche* and *File* can be recuperated from a discourse that sees them perpetually fall short. If alternative art magazines failed at constructing new spaces, providing alternative forms of access and generating different forms of readability where can we locate their success?

Returning to the afternoon of April 16, 1973, when Willoughby Sharp sat sipping coffee and getting high with the artists of General Idea, the proclamation that, “*File* helped [artists] define themselves as artists,” illustrates the kind of generative force, the kind of politics behind “alternative” magazines that is rarely taken up. Focusing instead on failed efforts to overthrow the status quo and escape the institution, the literature on alternative art magazines has paid little attention to the success of publications that adopted the conventional operations of art institutions and ultimately forced a change within the system. Alternative magazines were engaged in activities that had always defined the art press: ascribing symbolic status to artists, favouring certain producers, certain movements and certain ways of writing about and understanding works of art. Positioning myself against critics like Buchloh and Lippard, I contend that the conventional participation of alternative magazines in the artworld should not be considered a symptom of youthful naïveté or the cause of failed attempts to escape the institution, but should be recognized as a strategy that allowed the fledgling avant-garde to compete on an equal footing with more mainstream artists and magazines that already held the power of publicity.

In what follows I will argue that the politics of Sharp and Béar and the artists of General Idea were geared toward gaining exposure for alternative art practices by maintaining a modified presence within art institutions in order to launch an attack from the inside out. *Avalanche* and *File* will be considered as instruments of change, not for their unconventional contents, but for their positioning within the field of cultural production as newcomers whose manipulation of the rules were aimed at overthrowing the status quo.

This investigation is theoretically grounded by Pierre Bourdieu's work "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed." Bourdieu's delineation of cultural production and consumption is integral to this project as it accounts for the importance of the art press in the consecration of art and artists. In his assertion that art exists both materially and symbolically, Bourdieu assigns value to the post-production dissemination of art through exhibitions, magazines, artist talks, catalogues, etc., adding a dimension to theories of the avant-garde that have either disregarded the art press or cast their activities as peripheral.¹²

For the purposes of this project I have identified two themes within Bourdieu's work that will help to position *Avalanche* and *File* within the field of cultural production of the 1970s. In the first chapter of this thesis I will explore the broader historical context within which these magazines emerged and the strategies employed by the editors of *Avalanche* and *File* to infiltrate the artworld. Because Bourdieu conceives of the field of cultural production as consisting of various positions that producers struggle to occupy, consideration will be given to the influence exerted on these publications by both mainstream and other alternative magazines that *Avalanche* and *File* were in competition with.¹³ I will also outline the notion of symbolic capital, a key concept in "The Field of Cultural Production," that Bourdieu devises as a means of accounting for the discrepancy between the production cost of a work of art and the subsequent monetary appreciation that some works experience as a result of their re-presentation in exhibitions, reproduction in magazines and art criticism. It will become clear that the primary impetus for magazines like *Avalanche* and *File* were to function against the institutions of

art which sought to thwart challenges to mainstream artists by controlling the avenues through which symbolic capital was ascribed.

In the second chapter the focus will shift toward a consideration of artistic autonomy, a concept that Bourdieu defines in relation to market forces and ultimately positions as the main goal of avant-garde artists. Autonomy, as opposed to heteronomy, in the field of cultural production is a coveted position because autonomous artists are permitted a certain amount of economic disinterestedness to pursue their own artistic activities. They are not subject to market forces like heteronymous artists whose works are produced for mass consumption at a comparatively small profit above the cost of production.¹⁴ While the first chapter focuses on the motivations behind establishing alternative magazines, the second chapter considers how these publications serve to promote the autonomy of artists and how the editors of these periodicals maneuver themselves into their own position of autonomy. Artistic autonomy is promoted and defined as the quintessential lifestyle of the “starving” avant-garde artist who is nonetheless free from convention to make his/her own work. However, as I will demonstrate, this artistic persona cannot mask the economic profits that artists stand to gain by changing and eventually controlling the standards by which art is ultimately judged and thereby unseating their competitors.

Chapter 1: Staking the claim to Symbolic Capital

Alternative art magazines, such as *Avalanche* and *File*, have their historical precedents in the “little magazines” produced as part of the artistic movements that comprised the historical avant-garde. Taking root at the beginning of the twentieth century, the “little magazine” was an essential venue for the promotion of new movements in literature and the arts.¹⁵ As Renato Poggioli points out in his seminal text *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, “the goal of the little review is [...] to publish proclamations and programs or a series of manifestos, announcing the foundation of a new movement, explicating and elaborating its doctrine, categorically and polemically.” He goes on to say, in conjunction with Walker’s definition of the art magazine as exhibition space, “they [also] present to a friendly or hostile public an anthology of collective work in a new tendency or by a new group of artists and writers.”¹⁶ In addition to illustrating particular aspects of the little magazine that were carried forward by the 1970s alternative art press, Poggioli’s discussion offers a clue to the conflict involved in producing alternative publications that function, “as independent and isolated military unit[s], completely and sharply detached from the public, quick to act, not only to explore but also to battle, conquer, and adventure on [their] own.”¹⁷

The use of militaristic language, although fitting of historical avant-garde rhetoric, is not altogether out of place when considering that later publications were bent on overthrowing the status quo, despite the fact that many alternative art magazines from the 1970s lacked the pomp and heroic pronouncements of manifestoes published in little magazines. The importance of printed media in allowing fledgling artists the opportunity to disseminate their methodology and work was not lost on later cultural producers and

the concept of using magazines as a weapon in a kind of battle between artists and institutions is not one that Poggioli holds alone.¹⁸ In an article written for *Print* magazine in 1970, Marshall McLuhan draws attention to the original meaning of the word “magazine” as referring to a store of weapons or ammunition.¹⁹ The magazine as arsenal seems a fitting description when considering the broader framework of the “alternative” art scene within which publications like *Avalanche* and *File* are situated. By definition the word “alternative” points toward a relationship between disparate forces, and while that relationship is not always polemical, it is the notion of alternative as struggling against something, as defining oneself in the negative image of something else, that is most important when considering the goals of *Avalanche* and *File*.

Pierre Bourdieu brings to light the dynamics of the field of cultural production upon which the battle that Poggioli describes takes place. In his essay “The Field of Cultural Production or: the Economic World Reversed,” a text, the concepts for which Bourdieu began working through in the midst of the cultural struggles that eventually culminated in the events of May 1968, the French sociologist describes the logic of the field as characterized by tension and opposition. By demonstrating that, to varying degrees, cultural production always succumbs to market forces, Bourdieu implicates institutions, and the ability of artists to infiltrate them, in the success or failure of works of art.²⁰ In so doing he defines several terms that facilitate discussions surrounding periodicals of art especially in relation to artists struggling to make a place for themselves within the field.

Marcel Duchamp’s attempted exhibition of *Fountain* in 1917 established the possibility of exposing the process by which art comes to exist, as something crafted by

the artist genius in the studio, placed on display and later evaluated by knowing cultural figures such as critics, connoisseurs, dealers, or art historians, as essentially corrupt or never having existed at all. Duchamp exposed the power of art institutions to control and instill belief; his success resulted from the refusal by the Society of Independent Artists to display his porcelain urinal and its subsequent induction into the art historical canon as one of the most influential artworks of the twentieth century. For Bourdieu, Duchamp's gesture highlights an essential aspect of cultural production. In his assertion that one must consider, "as contributing to [the] production [of a work of art] not only the direct producer of the work in its materiality (the artist) but also the producers of the meaning and value of the work—critics, publisher, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such,"²¹ Bourdieu stipulates that art exists both materially and symbolically, with the former dimension often depending on the latter. The degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity and honour that is given to a work of art through recognition of the work of art as such is what Bourdieu calls *symbolic capital*.²² It is this kind of immaterial and arbitrary currency that makes the field an economic world reversed, for while in business and other fields, economic capital is seen as the highest gain, in the world of art and literary figures the quest is toward symbolic capital often at the expense of economic profits. This is, at least, what Bourdieu suggests is the most common understanding or perhaps misunderstanding of the logic of the field of cultural production.

In an article published in 1980, "The Production of Belief," Bourdieu suggests that symbolic capital is of utmost importance for artists and their interlocutors as it is

only by making a name for oneself and becoming a recognized and consecrated figure that symbolic capital can be converted into economic profit. This is often only achieved however, through appearing to disavow economic motivations. He states, “Producers and vendors of cultural goods who “go commercial” condemn themselves, and not only from a ethical or aesthetic point of view, because they deprive themselves of the opportunities open to those who [...] *recognize* [that] by concealing from themselves and others the interests at stake in their practice, [they can] obtain the means of deriving profits from disinterestedness.”²³ This is not to say, however, that artists consciously forego economic compensation, or exude an air of commercial disinterestedness in order to eventually reap the fullest monetary gain, Bourdieu suggests that it is the logic of the field that encourages producers to disavow genuinely the success of those whom they are trying to unseat. It is not only the responsibility of emerging artists to create a reputation for themselves, to engage in the accumulation of symbolic capital, it is vital that this be achieved in a manner that highlights their difference from past producers, the already consecrated artists whose dominance in the field has given them their once disavowed economic profits. Change in the field of cultural production is something that Bourdieu asserts can only be achieved by those who are willing to risk playing the game, “the initiative of change falls by definition on the newcomers [...] they must assert their difference, get it known and recognized, get *themselves* known and recognized,”²⁴ for as he goes on to mention it is only once newcomers have gained enough acclaim that power and control over the prevailing definitions of cultural production fall to them incrementally.

One of the key methods of gaining symbolic capital is pointed out by Bourdieu in a discussion of Duchamp's *Fountain* and the significance of the signature R. Mutt. In, "The Production of Belief," Bourdieu reproduces a section of an interview during the course of which Duchamp is barraged with a series of similar inquiries in which he has answer for the interpretation of his works by others. In one instance Duchamp is asked to confirm the resonance of R. Mutt as deriving from the German word *armut*, meaning poverty, as suggested by Rosalind Krauss. Bourdieu demonstrates Duchamp's unwillingness to concede the meaning of his ready-mades to critics, quoting the artist as responding, "Rosalind Krauss? The redhead? It isn't that at all. You can deny it. Mutt comes from Mott Works, the name of a big firm that makes sanitary equipment. But Mott was too close, so I made it Mutt [...] And I added Richard... Richard is a good name for a loo! You see it's the opposite of poverty."²⁵ With this Bourdieu concludes that even in the misinterpretation or misrepresentation of works of art the process of "re-creating" the work through language nonetheless adds to its symbolic capital.²⁶

There are two important points to be taken from this brief discussion of symbolic capital. Firstly, Bourdieu's affirmation of the importance of language in the symbolic "re-creation" of works of art highlights the integral role of verbal and written communication in the multilayered production of art. A process of mythologizing abets the consecration of artists and their works. The dematerialization of art, to use Lucy Lippard's popular characterization, that took place during the late 1960s and continued into the early 1970s, shifted focus away from the object, necessitating a larger symbolic presence of the work. Magazines found new significance as an important framing device providing a point of departure for dialogue.²⁷ This dialogue, Bourdieu suggests, need not

be totally accepted and, more to the point, should not only contribute to the meaning of the work but create a debate around the work to be successful and further its symbolic existence.²⁸ Secondly, Bourdieu's example underscores the highly specific knowledge that is required to take part in the discourse surrounding art and its production. In order to be a contributor in the field of cultural production one has to be initiated into "the economic world reversed" where "value" is ultimately recorded by more than just dollars and cents. One must be able to come to terms with the kind of analytic proposition,²⁹ as demonstrated by Duchamp, that has the power to induct works into the symbolic realm of art's existence. Without any kind of cultural initiation, or cultural capital, to use Bourdieu's term, it would be impossible to appreciate the conceptual significance of a urinal turned on its side sitting on a pedestal. Ultimately, change in the production of art can only be brought about by those in the know.

Visualizing the Field: What Does It Take to be an Artist?

The field of cultural production during the late 1960s and early 1970s experienced an influx of art students and graduates with knowledge of what was necessary to become an artist. The post-war period in the United States propelled the professionalization of the field of fine arts resulting in an increase of degree granting programs that culminated in BFA and MFA accreditation.³⁰ Howard Singerman, having graduated during this period, reminds us that art students went to school not only to learn how to make art but also how to become artists.³¹ He notes that students were encouraged to think about their own practice in relation to that of other artists, the primary sources of information consisting of art magazines and art catalogues. Students were encouraged to visualize the field of cultural production and plot themselves as producers in relation to and in

competition with other artists. Singerman's notion of the field, analogous if not derived from Bourdieu's own conception of the art world, is complicated by the introduction of the art press whose purpose is to assist artists in disseminating their works and ultimately contribute to their symbolic survival. The following passage written by Walker sheds lights on issues that students like Singerman and others were trying to work through and come to terms with at the time:

the history of art periodicals is not merely a footnote to the history of art since they also help to determine that history—for example, by publicizing some artists and not others and so furthering the careers of the former at the expense of the latter. They also act as a feedback mechanism, the kind of art they feature, and thereby lend authority to, influences the work of young artists and hence the evolution of art.³²

Accounting for this new attitude of reflexivity, a self-awareness that some artists saw as leading to a kind of unprecedented careerism, was the waning popularity of abstract expressionism in the curriculum of American universities. Focus shifted toward teaching art as research and students and artists were not only challenged to consider themselves relationally to other practicing artists but also to previous traditions in art. To paraphrase William Seitz, an art professor at the time, art is best produced as art historical research.³³

Avalanche: An Alternative Art Magazine on the New York Scene

Among the students forging an image for themselves during the cultural revolution of the 1960s, and looking back on previous times of upheaval drawing parallels with the tumultuous cultural atmosphere in the United States and abroad, was the twenty-something Willoughby Sharp, whose international travels and undergraduate experience at Brown University led him to take up graduate studies at Columbia with

Meyer Schapiro. Having stayed in Dusseldorf in the late 1950s, Sharp met and befriended the art dealer, Alfred Schmela, who brought him into contact with artists such as Joseph Beuys and the German three-man artist collective Zero (Otto Piene, Heinze Mack and Günther Uecker).³⁴ While Sharp's collaboration with Beuys would last throughout the artist's life, he also credits Zero, whose activities consisted not only of happenings and ephemera but also the publication of their own magazine, as having a great influence on him. Through Schmela, Beuys and Zero, Sharp became acquainted with other artists, including Marcel Duchamp who he later met in New York. Having once set up a failed telephonic social networking company in New York City, Sharp was familiar with the "it's who you know" mentality and it was not long before his list of acquaintances grew.

On January 3, 1969 Sharp was among a coterie of individuals that accompanied the Greek artist Vassilakis Takis to New York's Museum of Modern Art in order to assist the disgruntled sculptor in the withdrawal of his work from an exhibition entitled, "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age." Takis, after months of negotiations with Pontus Hultén, the curator of the exhibition, agreed to participate in the show if he could exhibit a large recent work. The conflict came to a head when Takis discovered that, without his consultation, his contribution was instead represented by the smaller three dimensional *Tele-Sculpture*, a work that he had executed in the early 1960s and that had subsequently been purchased by MOMA in 1963. Unannounced, Takis entered the gallery where his work was on exhibit and took actions to remove it. In one of the few photographs (figure 1.1) of the incident, Takis is seen, wearing a Gatsby cap, leaning over the pedestal where his sculpture was on display, the object leveraged by his left

hand, his right hand occupied by the task of unhooking the work from the white block. The scene is observed by a dark, long-haired and bearded individual dressed in black. The figure, kneeling down and attentively watching the artist's maneuvers, while in the accompaniment of large group of people, some looking nervous, some taking notes, some engaging in conversation, is the only person, other than Takis himself, who has penetrated the museum's defenses, the white roped barrier, beside which is stationed a sign with the now ironic command, "do not touch." Accounts of this photograph often fail to identify the man dressed in black as it is generally used to illustrate and substantiate the textual retelling of this now infamous story.³⁵ The individual however, is without doubt Willoughby Sharp, whose participation in the event lead to his subsequent membership in the newly formed Art Workers Coalition.³⁶

Following the incident, Takis could not come to any terms of agreement when approached by the director of the museum Bates Lowery, making demands that the institution was unable to fulfill without compromise. Despite Takis' disappointment however, what transpired that winter day in the sculpture garden on MOMA grounds brought a number of people together allowing mutual recognition among a large field of individuals who were determined to resist cultural confinement. The Art Workers Coalition (AWC) attracted membership from an influential artistic constituency including Seth Siegelaub, Lucy Lippard, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Gregory Battcock, among others. From the public demonstration that the AWC organized and staged at MOMA in March of that year, to the open meeting held at the New York School of Visual Arts on April 10, 1969 it became clear that artists and other individuals involved in the field of cultural production could no longer accept the standards by which MOMA

and the larger network of institutions functioned. Seth Siegelaub, articulating sentiments already in circulation among those present at the open meeting, envisioned artists that would use their work as leverage against the demands of the institution, “the art is the one thing that you have... This is the way your leverage lies [sic]. I would think that by using that leverage you could achieve much greater goals than in any other ways.”³⁷ The significance of this statement has been highlighted by Alexander Alberro as a call to artists not to abandon exhibition practices altogether but to continue a practice that had already begun to gain popularity, “the refusal to operate according to the traditional practices, rules, and interests of galleries, museums, and collectors,” by producing works of non-conformity.³⁸

In that same year Sharp was invited by Tom Leavitt at the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. to curate an exhibition of such non-conformist works. The resulting show, “Earth Art,” was a large scale undertaking that saw the production of outdoor work by Jan Dibbets, Walter De Maria, Hans Haacke, Michael Heizer, Neil Jenney, Richard Long, David Medalla, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson and Günther Uecker. During execution and installation of the works each artist was videotaped, resulting in some six thousand feet of silent black and white film documenting the creative process. Each work was also subsequently photographically documented as recognition of the work’s impermanence. Artists who agreed were also interviewed. It was Willoughby Sharp’s obsession with recording and documenting the activities that he participated in that ultimately brought Liza Béar into contact with him.

In a small pamphlet entitled, “The Early History of *Avalanche*,” which is written in the third person, she describes the circumstances that brought them together,

In the summer of 1968 Graham Stevens, an English environmental artist participating in Willoughby Sharp’s *Air Art* show, asked one of his chums, Liza Béar, a little magazine editor then making her first visit to New York, to retrieve a film from Sharp who lived in Gramercy Park, and bring it back to London with her in the Fall. The package was dropped in the mail, and Béar sold her charter flight return ticket. There was a good reason to stay.³⁹

Among the many things that Béar discovered in New York that summer was her compatibility with Sharp, arising from their similar interest in seeking out and promoting subculture. Both had experience publishing and, both being involved with the AWC, they agreed to produce a publication to work against the grain in the New York artworld. Undertaking a partnership that would last throughout the six year run of *Avalanche*, the two collected the material for their first issue on the heels of the AWC open discussion from *Earth Art*. With the first issue, two years in the making, Sharp and Béar decided to assemble the material for subsequent issues thematically employing Sharp’s connections and the magazine as a means of soliciting work and interviews from artists.⁴⁰

As newcomers to the publishing world, one can detect the kind of impact that the editors of *Avalanche* anticipated from readers, in the countercultural language used by Sharp to describe the magazine,

The word avalanche and what it signified was very appealing to me because I saw myself as a renegade. I had hair that I could sit on, I started smoking marijuana in ’64 and was still smoking at the time, and I wanted this thing, this magazine, to represent a cultural break through... something that an avalanche does. It reconfigures and breaks down the old structure.⁴¹

Contrary to Siegelau's claim that artists had to rely solely on their work to make inroads in the artworld, a comment that suggests that only unconventional art would necessarily change already existing institutions, this statement is evidence that an alternative network, including magazines and galleries, was emerging with the goal of supporting artists working with unconventional media. The surfacing of these institutions attests to the necessary process of distributing one's work to the public, the oral and written "re-creation" of art that Bourdieu asserts is essential for success in the field of cultural production. Siegelau's comments omit this important aspect of distributing art, something that, as a curator and art dealer, he was familiar with. By this time however, he had already recognized a "spectacular" shift in the kinds of communication that audiences were responding to. Specialized, dense, critical texts about art were giving way to photographic reproductions. He states, "A photograph used to illustrate an article or an artist often prove[s] more effective in marketing his work than the article itself."⁴²

Using photographic illustrations as part of the important "re-creation" of works of art was something that Béar and Sharp attempted to exploit in *Avalanche*. As Walker observed, "In the early issues of *Avalanche* [...] the photographic image is given top priority while textual matter is reduced to a minimum and consists chiefly of short news items and interviews. Conventional art criticism is avoided because the aim of *Avalanche* is to present the work directly rather than through the experience of an intermediary."⁴³ A good example of this can be seen from the first issue when Sharp interviewed artists Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer and Dennis Oppenheim about the *Earth Art* show. Less than a quarter of each page is allotted to the transcribed interview, giving the rest of the space over to the photographs of the artists' recent "environmental" works. The

double page spread⁴⁴ announcing the interview depicts a disorienting view of Smithson's 1970 *Spiral Jetty* (figure 1.2). Instead of presenting the work from an aerial perspective, in the same way that Smithson might have selected the landscape upon which to execute his piece, we are faced with the work as if kneeling, almost at eye level, in front of the black basalt rock and boulder spiraling path. The coil shape of the work is barely comprehensible in the establishing shot upon which the words, "Discussion with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson" have been overlaid. The small caption running along the white border below the photograph reads, "These discussions were held in New York from December 1968 to January 1969. The transcript was edited in collaboration with the artists. *Heizer's remarks are in italics*; Oppenheim's in roman [sic]; **Smithson's in bold.**"⁴⁵ Next to the cut line that contextualizes the interview is a miniature rectangular high-angle shot of *Spiral Jetty* depicting a view of the work that people often associate with the man made circular walk.

The juxtaposition of these photographs at the beginning of this article presents the unfamiliar artistic terrain that *Avalanche* allows viewers to explore. The magazine's photographic reproductions are an introduction to unfamiliar and often times ephemeral works of art that are otherwise not accessible. *Avalanche*, unlike other art magazines that developed a repertoire of monthly and periodical features as a result of the latest museum and gallery shows, worked ahead of the tide showcasing artists, many of which had never mounted one person exhibitions. The emphasis that is placed on the larger disorienting reproduction of *Spiral Jetty* is akin to a declaration that *Avalanche* aims higher than other magazines by attempting to disseminate art in a unique way, not only from the perspective of the camera's eye but from a perspective that seems more corporeally

familiar. The more recognizable miniature shot of the work, acting as a kind of punctuation to the caption, is a reminder that while the photographic material shown on each page may be new and unusual the textual framing device of the interviews that accompany them acts as an anchor for understanding and exploration and situates the work in the larger context of the artist's practice. While the commodity status of these works are seemingly negated by their unconventionality, their subsequent existence in document form necessitates a dialogue to help pin down the meaning of the work, to help the work to exist symbolically where for many people the work cannot be seen to exist materially.

Avalanche, like other magazines, aimed to ascribe symbolic capital to works of art that may not have otherwise had the opportunity, and, by proxy, gain symbolic capital for themselves as risk takers, as a magazine mirroring the edginess of the art scene it represented. The purpose of this magazine differs little from that of other publications in the field of cultural production. Subsequently, as newcomers the editors of *Avalanche* have to assert their unique qualities in another way. In this light, if we are to see Sharp's utopian ambition of breaking down and reconfiguring the old structure as coming to fruition it is necessary to understand his remark in the context of the "re-creation" of art within magazines and not as an attack on the overall purpose of art media. While Sharp and Béar were compliant with already established currencies in art, their commitment to letting artists speak for themselves brought about change to whom and by what means symbolic capital exchanged hands.

With *Avalanche* operating out of New York City their most often cited influence is *Artforum*. Established in 1962, six years before Sharp and Béar went ahead with plans

of producing their own magazine, the San Francisco publication was initially an alternative periodical itself, aiming to promote marginalized art communities on the west coast. In 1967 however, the publication moved to New York and despite efforts to follow the constituents of the most advanced art, *Artforum* lost much of its countercultural edge while becoming one of the primary advocates of “serious” art criticism and publisher of strong promoters of formalism. With a vested interest in what, for many artists, seemed part of the problem, the magazine, for the most part, waded against the anti-institutional tide succeeding in influencing the symbolic significance, market value and demand for a select group of New York artists.⁴⁶

Artforum would seem the most direct influence on *Avalanche*. In addition to inspiring the editors, having once been an alternative magazine promoting lesser known artists, Sharp, as designer of the *Avalanche*,⁴⁷ adopted a square format when *Artforum* was the only other art magazine on the market putting together a publication whose pages were of equal length on all sides.⁴⁸ Despite the fact that *Avalanche* only appeared in black and white, a testament to the magazine’s purpose of documenting works of art, the lack of colour does not detract from the magazine’s ability to look like *Artforum*. The title of the magazine, much like the *Artforum* of the 1960s and 1970s, was always aligned with the top edge of the cover, generally appearing in the top right corner. While Sharp and Béar never chose to regulate the lettering used for the title, several of the first issues of *Avalanche* use a sans serif, Swiss inspired font, similar to the one that the editors of *Artforum* had specifically designed for the cover of their magazine.⁴⁹ In response to the question of the slightly smaller size of *Avalanche* as compared with *Artforum*, Sharp recounts the story of how he insisted that the magazine match the exact dimensions of

Artforum but the printers responded that the largest square they could produce was 9 3/8".⁵⁰ The suggestion that the glossy pages and square format of *Avalanche* were an homage to *Artforum* rings true up until 1974. In its fourth year *Avalanche* went through a dramatic change as the cost of printing skyrocketed and the producers could no longer afford anything more than a long rectangular newspaper throwaway.⁵¹

The initial decision to closely mimic the format of an already established art magazine demonstrates Sharp and Béar's awareness of the interdependent nature of the field of cultural production and also indicates their target audience in attempting to initiate change in the distribution of art. *Avalanche* was meant to take on the look and feel of *Artforum*, one of the most successful magazines of the 1960s, as both a ruse and as an important step toward pilfering some of the symbolic capital *Artforum* had already gained among its readership. The success of this strategy can be seen in the association of the magazines at the time, then senior editor of *Artforum*, Robert Pincus-Witten remembers, "When *Avalanche* came along, I said this is the first time that there's a magazine that's more interesting than *Artforum*."⁵² While he does little to indicate what caught his interest when looking through *Avalanche*, it is perhaps how the magazine carried out a particular tradition associated with the avant-garde that makes its contribution to the field of cultural production most significant. Seeking a direct link with their audience Sharp and Béar responded to the needs of artists dissatisfied with magazines like *Artforum* that, as they understood it, left little room for innovation and unnecessarily separated artists from an important part of ascribing meaning and symbolic capital to their work.⁵³

Notwithstanding the similar proportions of *Avalanche* and *Artforum* both Sharp and Béar have admitted to drawing from a broader range of publications when thinking about the contribution that their own magazine could make to the art press community. Not only were they enticed by issues of *Life* and the Dadaist publications that numbered among Sharp's substantial collection of books about art, a stockpile that Béar describes from her initial encounter with his library as, "a mammoth collection of books [and information that was] all alphabetized,"⁵⁴ they have also cited magazines produced in collaboration with artists in 1940s and 1950s such as *Tiger's Eye* and *It Is*. Importantly, these publications dealt with art and artists that were believed to be on the cutting edge of innovation at the time. Most tellingly, in regard to the content of *Avalanche*, is the common interest that these magazines shared in publishing artists' writings in lieu of commissioning articles by art critics. Dissatisfaction with the stifling status quo seems a mutual sentiment running across the pages of alternative art magazines from the 1950s through to the 1970s and, in some cases, it was expressed with vehemence in inaugural editorials. Addressing the issue of "normative art criticism," Ruth Stephan wrote in the 1948 issue of *Tiger's Eye*, "The critic who wields it [the pen] as a sword permits himself to become the counterpart of the lawmaker, the jailer, the executioner. He might be astonished if he were to visualize the uninspiring static position he has acquired."⁵⁵ Stephan's words, although somewhat overstated, communicate the kind of frustration that plays out in the pages of alternative art magazines, especially *Avalanche*, whose assault on critics came in the form of exclusion, as they chose instead to publish collaboratively edited interviews with artists such as the one cited above. Like cultural producers before them, Sharp and Béar sought to take back some of the power of publicity usually held by

critics. Artists and consumers at the time recognized that, as has been suggested, “*Avalanche* defined an alternative discursive “space” for the politicized practices of the alternative art movement, and suggested an alternative model for the critical judgment of works of art—one rooted in a cooperative search for meaning rather than the imposition of a critics opinion as a foregone conclusion.”⁵⁶

File: North of the Border: Where is the Art Press?

The responsibility that Sharp and Béar espoused in promoting producers they considered marginalized by the mainstream is something that the members of General Idea took advantage of when joining the roster of artists that appeared in *Avalanche*. The group of artists, from north of the border, had only been publishing *File* magazine for a year when they appeared in *Avalanche* next to the likes of Ed Ruscha and William Wegman, whose interviews were published in the same issue. Having lived and worked together in Toronto since 1969,⁵⁷ AA, Felix, and Jorge were familiar with the difficulties faced by young innovative artists when trying to gain exposure via institutions of art including magazines.⁵⁸ One of their later, more direct attempts of addressing the relationship of artists to the media, the 1985 video piece *Shut the Fuck Up* points to the kind of issues that AA, Felix and Jorge explored throughout their artistic careers. This short film demonstrates the importance of symbolic capital to artists but at the same time it is critical of how it is distributed. In the three short sequences that make up the film General Idea expose the charade that artists endure when appearing before the media; they demonstrate that, regardless of how one might want to appear to audiences, the media often mythologize artists to suit and produce market demand. Echoing Bourdieu, Felix concludes that, “it doesn’t matter what they say, as long as they are talking.”⁵⁹

The film begins with a white and blue text addressing the audience that states, “In this videotape we look at a media cliché of the artist. As the artist struggles to muffle the cacophony of the media in his larger context we hear these words rising above the din... Shut the fuck up.”⁶⁰ The video is separated into three parts. The first, “Part 1: Death of a Mauve Bat,” begins with found footage of an episode of *Batman* in which the Joker enters the Gotham City International Art Contest. Each artist is given a canvas and an allotted amount of time to produce a “masterpiece” that will be given an “honoured place within the Gotham City Art Museum.” In front of an attentive and well-dressed art audience, an audience not unlike those often seen in documentary photographs of performance works from the 1960s, the cognoscente possessing the cultural capital to appreciate works of art, the artists begin to “perform”. When the bell rings to indicate that the allotted time has elapsed the judges are impressed by all except for Joker who has chosen to leave his canvas blank. His work does not conform to their understanding of what a painting should look like. With a little effort the female master of ceremonies, a look of uncertainty on her face, explains that the work called “death of a mauve bat” is symbolic of the emptiness of modern life and Joker is chosen as the winner. Following this Jorge appears in front of a color bar background offering an indirect commentary on what has just been shown. His animated rant, peppered with vulgarities, exposes the “cancerous context” of art criticism that, regardless of how incompatible, can always subsume works of art within the dominant discourse. Jorge’s complaint, “Bend over backward for them and they fuck me up the ass,” is a sign of frustration with the media, but, unlike Joker, who is willing to play the fool and accept the accolades of those who

are content to make of his work what they will, the members of GI are standing up in protest.

The second part of the film consists of a short sequence of a troupe of dancers dressed in flashy leotard dog suits, the most recognizable of which is the poodle. The title “Mondo Cane” translates as “it’s a dog’s world,” the full resonance of which can be taken from what follows. In alternating head shots in front of the colour bar background Felix and AA discuss the importance of appearing in the media, an experience which they both liken to being treated like an effete poodle “who lives to please and must please to live.” It is a process that AA describes as being an artist dressed up in artist’s drag. The third sequence in the movie entitled, “Part 3: XXX Blue” again begins with found footage but this time from Gualtiero Jacopetti’s 1962 film *Mondo Cane* in which Yves Klein is documented “conducting” one of his anthropometric paintings to the *Symphonie Monotone*. While editing alone might not have acted negatively in the sequential narration of the video, the condescending male voice-over, couching the performance in formalist narrative, alerting viewers that Klein’s paintings are in high demand and critically acclaimed, creates an image of the artist that he rejected.⁶¹ The entire sequence complete with close-ups of members of the orchestra staring goggle-eyed at the nude models, covering themselves with paint, makes the performance appear as some form of bizarre bourgeois entertainment bereft of any revolutionary potential. Following this, in the characteristic headshot taken against colour bars, GI discuss one of their performance pieces that took place in Geneva in 1984. In alternating shots Felix and AA explain that they elected to work with three large canvases, three large stuffed poodles, and three large buckets of “Yves Klein Blue” paint. The end product: three large canvases upon

which were painted three large Xs, and three large poodles, of which only one side was covered in blue paint. Throughout the performance a trio played the score of the *Symphonie Monotone* making the association with Yves Klein and pointing specifically to the footage shot for the film *Mondo Cane*. The response? We are told, “The audience applauded,” and among them were the media, who as Felix and AA claim are “just another part of the joke.” In the final section Jorge, again in an indirect way, addresses what has just unfolded. Comparing the performance to “humpty dumpty,” he defies the audience to find one meaning in a work that resonates in several contexts. He states, “The pieces of the puzzle don’t add up, they just don’t add up,” and calls on the media to consider that when, “there is nothing to say [to] just shut the fuck up.”

While the demand upon the media to, “Shut the Fuck Up,” could be read earnestly, the different modes in which General Idea address the audience makes it is likely that more than wanting to silence the media, the artist collective is calling instead for those involved to recognize their scripted mode of operation and realize that while artists do seek public approval and attention they don’t wanted to be treated as side shows. Along the same lines, pleading with the media to be silent can also be seen as a request to let artists speak for themselves without having to answer to the artist stereotype, without having to dress themselves up in artist drag. Ultimately General Idea see the media as controlling the kind of exposure that artists get and subsequently the kind of negative symbolic existence within which artists can be confined.

“Shut the Fuck Up,” was conceived at a time when General Idea’s relationship to the media is one with which that they could express dissatisfaction. By 1984 the artists were internationally known, having come a long way from the young men who met in

1969 but began to call themselves General Idea in 1970. AA has described the early years as a time in which there was very little to complain about other than a lack of things to complain about. It was an art scene, “without real museums (the Art Gallery of Ontario was not a *real* museum to us), [and] without real art magazines (*artscanada* was not a *real* art magazine for us).” Despite having exhibited their work at the Art Gallery of Ontario with the *1971 Miss General Idea Pageant Entries*, GI perceived themselves to be foundering in a Canadian art scene that had little on offer for them. The moment they recognized that an alternative to the mainstream art press in Canada was necessary is something that AA relays through an anecdote involving an article written by the collective for *artscanada*. Having been invited by the magazine to write something regarding their solo exhibition at the AGO, GI decided they would produce what AA describes as an “article in simulacrum.” Appearing as one of *artscanada*’s regular features, and not as if they had authored the text themselves, the artists presented the editors with their contribution without suspecting that they would refuse to publish it.⁶²

This instance of rejection was not the only factor encouraging GI to publish a magazine appealing to alternative artistic sensibilities. A wide range of cultural producers found themselves outside art centers and outside the purview of mainstream art publications in Canada. In an essay published in 1979, David Buchan describes the motivation behind the establishment of what he calls the “Canadian artists’ press:” “Communities outside the larger urban centres frequently have little representation in the centrally-based national glossies (*Artsmagazine*, *artscanada*, *Vie des Arts*) which tend to reflect the concerns of critics and artists of these centers, and their aesthetic and editorial biases.”⁶³ Having exhibited in artist run centers, performed at alternative venues such as

InterMedia in Vancouver, in addition to reading underground newspapers put out by the Winnipeg Free School, A Space and Rochdale College, AA, Felix and Jorge understood the exposure that an alternative art magazine could afford artists within these communities. While alternative artists in New York could benefit from a magazine like *Avalanche* because they were not getting the kind of media coverage that they wanted, *File* magazine aimed at exposing alternative arts communities, mostly comprised of disillusioned students attempting to break away from their quotidian existences by forging new forms of artistic expression, including visual, performance and new media artists, as they were receiving very little media attention at all. A long whimsical quote taken from AA Bronson's essay, "The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat: Artist-Run Centers as Museums by Artists," demonstrates the perceived lack of institutions in Canada that could enable artists to begin international, let alone national, careers.

As an artist writing about museums by artists, about my own history, which is a story beginning in 1968, a Canadian story with elaborately Canadian characters dreaming the Canadian dream of one community, that is a network of communities, sea to sea, in that reticent evocation of collective consciousness which seems our national destiny; as a Canadian artist then, wanting a Canadian art scene like in New York or London, or Paris in the thirties; as a Canadian artist typically unable to picture the reality of a Canadian art scene except as a dream projected upon the national landscape as a sea-to-shining-sea connective tissue; that is as a dream community connected by and reflected by the media; that is, authenticated by its own reflection in the media; as such a Canadian artist desiring to see not necessarily himself, but the picture of his art scene pictured on TV...⁶⁴

Bronson's wish to visualize a broader, more complete art scene in Canada results from of a lack of media art coverage outside of Toronto and Montreal and reluctance on behalf of existing art media to devote space to the alternative art scene. Little known producers throughout Canada, producers that General Idea were increasingly becoming aware of

through their participation in mail art, were in the difficult position of finding media exposure where very little was to be had. Short of having access to a television station that would promote artists across the country General Idea made the decision to create access to the network of visual artists through the establishment of a magazine whose contents they controlled completely.

The interview published in *Avalanche* is among the most often cited texts when trying to establish General Idea's motivation for publishing *File*. Sharp heard about the Toronto artist collective while visiting Vincent Trasov and Michael Morris at ImageBank in Vancouver in the early 1970s and, interested in fellow artists producing magazines, made his way across the country to interview them. Being interviewed and later co-editing the manuscript that appeared in *Avalanche* allowed the artists to speak for themselves outside of the context of their own magazine and to an audience quite different from home. General Idea's appearance in *Avalanche*, gave them one of the first opportunities to address their own understanding of the need for an art scene in Canada, the need for a venue that would allow producers across the country to establish themselves as artists. In response to Sharp's inquiry into the necessity of a magazine, AA explains, "The first *File* was put together as a mirror held out to the Canadian network which had been building up in the previous months. It had built up to such a point that it only needed an awareness of itself as a network of people to exist."⁶⁵ The layout of the interview and accompanying images in *Avalanche* reflects this concern (figure 1.3). The photographs interspersed throughout the text, unlike other articles that appear in *Avalanche*, depict members of the network of artists that General Idea promoted through their magazine and not images of themselves. Focusing on one of General Idea's most

well known artistic themes *Mrs. General Idea* and *The Mrs. General Idea Pageant*, the interview and photographs shed light on the multifaceted nature of the mail art scene.

The Mrs. General Idea Pageant was a performance/art piece staged as a beauty pageant, at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1971. General Idea solicited candidates for the pageant from sixteen preselected members of the mail art scene. These potential contestants were sent “entry kits,” and detailed instructions concerning the materials included in the kit and the requirements for successfully entering the competition. Portrayed in the magazine are entries for *The Miss General Idea Pageant*, an example of an entry kit sent out by General Idea, the two former crowned winners, Ms. Paige (1968) and Ms. Honey (1969), and the subsequent Miss General Idea Pageant held at the AGO including a photograph of the newly crowned Marcel Idea (Michael Morris) posing in the official Miss General Idea gown. These images serve the dual purpose of adding to the Canadian mail art network by staging their existence in a magazine other than *File* and allow General Idea to ascribe symbolic significance to their own work through the interview.

In this instance the artists are not compelled to tell the media to “shut the fuck up,” as the collaborative process of appearing in *Avalanche* runs parallel to their own goals and interests. To draw upon Bourdieu, artists in Canada during the 1970s were in need of a framing device that would allow them the visibility necessary to become producers within the field of cultural production, and as AA goes on to explain, “[*File*’s] major purpose was to [...] ease the possibilities of communication and collaboration and correspondence between artists,” so that once established, their existence in the symbolic realm could be carried on.

Like *Avalanche*, the format of *File* magazine emerged as a kind of stolen lingo. While *Avalanche* mimicked *Artforum*, GI reached beyond the art world, crossing over into the realm of popular publishing. Looking at the first issues of *File* one can recognize that the artist collective simply chose to adopt the format of *Life* (figure 1.4). The tall rectangular magazine is complete with the red border and matching white on red rectangular date and price block at the bottom of each cover. It is without coincidence that the title of the magazine contains the same letters save the reversal of the “l” and “f”.⁶⁶ The defunct *Life* became the newborn *File*⁶⁷, a decision that was described by General Idea as the simplest way into the field of cultural production as, “It was easier copying [another magazine] than developing our own.”⁶⁸

Beyond wanting to appear like *Life* as a means of tricking unsuspecting readers into picking up a magazine that maintained little relationship to the publication from which its cover design derives, General Idea established *File* as a picture magazine and like *Life* it was meant not only to report on the art scene but actually create it. In interview AA describes the decision to mimic *Life* as completely strategic, “*Life* was the first magazine that made news by reporting on it. For example, *Life* had a feature in the 50s where they would go to a party or a barbeque in someone’s back yard and they would stage it as a human interest story and that made it into news. [...] What we wanted to do with our art scene was invent it by reporting on it as if it were there.”⁶⁹ By providing artists with a venue within which to situate themselves in relation to other like-minded producers, General Idea extended the gesture of Duchamp’s urinal to the realm of artist producers. The proposition “this is art if I say it is,” is turned over to the artist magazine and translated into a new context, “He or she is an artist if I say they are.”

To a large extent GI was successful in the promotion of alternative artists in Canada and the cover of the first issue of *File* indicates that the dream of creating and connecting an art scene from “sea-to-shining-sea,” was being realized. The now classic cover, dated April 15 1972, is a black and white photograph of Mr. Peanut standing on Toronto Island, the tip of his shell meeting the tallest building on the downtown Toronto skyline behind him. The spats on his feet, helping to complete the perfect Mr. Peanut wardrobe, seem incongruent with the remnants of the winter snow behind him. Judging by his state of undress Mr. Peanut hails from a part of the country where the winters are mild and the coming of April really does mean showers and not the continued threat of snow storms. His large top hat in hand, legs crossed, his weight resting on his cane, the nonchalant Mr. Peanut has travelled across the country with the New York Correspondence Dance School of Vancouver⁷⁰ to meet members of the mail art network whose dispatches help make up the content of *File* magazine.

An offshoot of the Fluxus artist Robert Filliou’s “eternal network”⁷¹ the Canadian mail art scene was propelled into mass correspondence after letters from the New York based correspondence artist, Ray Johnson, who headed the New York Correspondence School, began to arrive in the mailbox of Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov in Vancouver. In 1968 Johnson became aware of the artists masquerading as Marcel Idea (Morris) while looking through an issue of *Artforum* that featured Morris’ abstract painting *The Problem of Nothing* (1966). A year later Morris invited him to Vancouver to participate in an exhibition on concrete poetry held at the University of British Columbia’s Fine Arts Gallery. During the trip he was introduced to other members of the mail art network, leading to increased correspondence by Canadian mail artists and the

establishment of Image Bank. This was an important venue for mail artists in Canada as in that it was geared toward the exchange of images coming through the mail.⁷² Some of the main features supported by the activities of Image Bank that appeared in *File* were the “image request lists” and the “artists’ directory.” As a textual manifestation of the network of artists that participated in mail art the “image request list,” comprised an inventory of sought after images sent to Trasov and Morris as tentacles meant to reach out to a larger chain of individuals. If, for example, an artist was looking for images of palm trees their request would be “broadcasted,” so to speak, through the magazine. In addition to publishing materials from the mail, *File*’s “artists’ directory” consisted of a compilation of the contact information of individuals, artists, and institutions affiliated with the magazine. The importance of these features in helping the network to exist is highlighted in the February 1974 issue of *File* which was dedicated to these activities. Appearing on the fourth page of the issue is a black and white photograph of Jorge and Felix (figure 1.5) in a sparsely lit room. Jorge, holding the phone up to his ear, has a harried look on his face, a pencil in his hand as if he were about to speak, while Felix, holding a barely visible pair of binoculars over his eyes, a hard hat on his head, his jaw agape, looks as if he has come across a disaster on a construction site. The caption below the image reads, “*File* editors Jorge Zontal and Felicks [sic] Partz examine the Eternal Network.” This examination is open to anyone who picks up the magazine. Listed in alphabetical order, according to the affiliation with the publication, are all of the names of all the participants in the cross country and, by this time, international mail art scene. The final section of the magazine consists of the image request lists, a source of information that not only allows the network to continue its activities, but encourages anyone who

picks up the magazine to follow General Idea's dada inspired mail art command, "collage or perish."

Through the highly specific manipulation of symbolic capital General Idea and the editors of *Avalanche* changed the position of artists and their works within the field of cultural production. They did this by sustaining a modified presence within the field, by bending the rules, so to speak, and not seeking to change the system by breaking away from it. *Avalanche*'s focus on artists as a primary source of information about the significance of works of art made them more popular with alternative artists. *Artforum* did, on occasion, feature the writings of artists, but continued to bolster the careers of critics whose writings were seen as encroaching upon audience experience. Artists appreciated Sharp and Béar's open approach to promoting works of art through conversation. Providing less mediated, more direct interaction with works of art and artists, through photographs and interviews, was the mainstay of *Avalanche* and the number of artists that appear in the magazine attests to the popularity of their approach. Focusing largely on American artists but attempting to achieve the international status of *Artforum*, *Avalanche* allowed for little known producers such as General Idea and more well known producers such as Joseph Beuys to make an appearance on the radar of New York's art world. *File*, whose important contribution to the Canadian art scene was as a venue connecting the self-described "transcanadada" art network, can be seen as operating along similar lines as *Avalanche*. But its task was accomplishing a more rudimentary task. While *Avalanche* was set on promoting artists whose works did not conform to the norms of more traditional art, the repertoire of artists featured in *File* were to a large extent recognized outside of the context of the interviews and photographs

taken for the magazine. *Avalanche* allowed artists the privilege of self-ascribed symbolic capital whereas *File* introduced cultural producers to art audiences, elevating them to the status of artists, a basic privilege that might not have otherwise been possible. This still leaves two questions for whom were the artists featured in *File* being made visible and for whom were the voices of artists being made audible through *Avalanche*?

Chapter 2: The Possibility of Autonomy: Performing the Artist Persona

In response to the question of the target audiences of *Avalanche* and *File* it is useful to turn to the 1976 “Survey of Contemporary Art Magazines” conducted and published by *Studio International*. The seventh of twelve questions put forward to each magazine surveyed reads as follows, “What audience do you aim at, and would you be content to communicate only with a specialized “art” audience?” The responses to these questions submitted by both AA Bronson and Willoughby Sharp for their respective magazines are indicative of the limited number of individuals who might purchase their publications and understand their context. AA’s response, coming out of the mail art context, is as follows, “We aim at our fans. That is to say, we do not aim at our audience, they aim at us. Our audience is almost entirely an “art” (usually artists) audience.”⁷³ Sharp’s response is similar as it too serves to outline the narrow constituency of art initiated individuals that comprise the audience of his magazine. He states in almost the exact words used by AA that “*Avalanche* is essentially an artist’s art magazine.”⁷⁴ In their limited responses both editors ignore the second part of *Studio International*’s question about reaching an audience beyond the “specialized” art world. Understandably, however, the topic remained unaddressed as the circumstances were not such that their highly specific contributions to the field of cultural production would be comprehended outside of the “economic world reversed.”⁷⁵ The most autonomous artists and by proxy the media that promoted them, are according to Bourdieu relegated to a position where only kindred spirits (i.e. artists in the same position) and art initiated audiences can understand or reject them. More to the point, autonomous artists are almost only supported by artists and like-minded individuals trying to achieve a common goal. The circles within which avant-garde artists operate are insular by definition and all

prises de position are consequently less significant outside of the field of cultural production.

Artistic autonomy is an element in Bourdieu's theory that derives from the late nineteenth century context of the *salon refusé* and is closely related to his conception of economic disinterestedness within the field. Taking artists such as Edouard Manet and writers such as Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire as exemplary, Bourdieu established the notion of the autonomous artist as revolving around the refusal to conform to the conventions of state sanctioned art. From this he concluded that in order to repudiate the accepted definition of art, artists would have need to forego any interest in market success as their works would have little chance of being accepted. It was additionally necessary to differentiate themselves from their opponents in every fashion. Existing in a realm of restricted production where art patrons (the bourgeoisie and the state) would refuse them, Baudelaire, Flaubert and Manet joined a young group of artists whose living conditions were stipulated by their ability to forgo capital growth. In other words, in order to refuse tradition these artists had to rely upon their bourgeois heritage and their independent wealth.⁷⁶ In Bourdieu's sense of the word, "autonomy" for these artists was the ability to create works of art that were not subject to market forces.

What artistic autonomy signifies in the field of cultural production is important to understanding avant-garde tendencies. Bourdieu's, free from market forces, definition of autonomy is one with which avant-garde artists aligned themselves. However, the circumstances under which artists during the mid twentieth century were being "graduated" into the field of cultural production were a far cry from those facing Manet and others in nineteenth century France. Cultural capital in post WWII North America

was increasingly something that individuals could accrue from education outside of the confines of familial ties and upbringing. This is not to say that art was democratized to the extent that the field of cultural production was open to all but that increasingly artists from diverse backgrounds were entering the field and not necessarily with the financial backing to adopt an attitude of economic disinterestedness. According to Singerman, artists whose works were not saleable found themselves wrapped up in a different kind of economy, a star-system, for which *Avalanche* and *File* were the perfect promotional tool. He states, “Lacking a permanent museum object [...] the artists themselves became the commodity, their tours, lectures and installations became the objects of a new patronage system.”⁷⁷ He cites Allan Kaprow as espousing an attitude that helped the artist star-system to flourish. He saw the role of artists as, “place[ing] at the disposal of a receptive audience those new thoughts, new words, the new stances, which [would] enable his work to be better understood.” Kaprow’s concern for artists escorting their art as knowing experts, that could translate or “re-create” their work, stems from his fear that, “the public’s alternative [would be] its old thoughts and attitudes, loaded [...] with hostilities and stereotyped misunderstandings.”⁷⁸

Avalanche, with its focus on being an artist’s magazine, allowed for the kind of encounter that Kaprow and increasingly other artists saw as the solution for art that ran the risk of being misunderstood and misconstrued by audiences. At the same time however, these recorded dialogues also allowed artists to perform in such a way that their presence seems a necessary alternative to the critic.⁷⁹ Often the “artistic persona” that is conveyed in these interviews leaves readers with a sense that alternative artists are

complicated, often poetic individuals with cutting edge ideas about art, ideas that relay best from the horse's mouth.

This kind of performative interaction took place at the California home of Ed Ruscha on the occasion that Willoughby Sharp went to interview him. The photographs of the shaggy haired, mustachioed Ed Ruscha, his guests Willoughby Sharp and actress Samantha Eggar, in addition to various items from Ruscha's abode, are arranged in a narrative sequence reminiscent of comic strips (figure 2.1). The photographs of Ruscha depict the artist in the various poses of a cultural renegade that the dialogue about his work helps to substantiate. His hands occupied by the task of rolling a joint, the dialogue punctured by the offer to smoke, Sharp and Ruscha begin their conversation on the topic of the artist book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, the artist's first bookwork. Sharp's carefully researched and well structured questions prod Ruscha in a pattern that circles back to the "traditional" conventions by which alternative artworks, if judged, would be misunderstood. Questions such as, "In 1962, you were painting and drawing. What made you decide to make a book?" and "Was there a point in your career when you started losing interest in making things with your hands?" provide Ruscha with ample opportunity to set himself apart from his past work as a painter and convince readers of the importance of encountering an artist's new work through the artist. Sharp, by the same token, stakes a place for himself within the conversation by leading Ruscha's responses along lines that promote *Avalanche* as the magazine that showcases artists on the cutting edge. By asking carefully scripted questions Sharp is able to produce a reading of Ruscha's work that appears cooperative but in truth is meant to achieve a specific understanding of the artist's work that follows the mandate of the magazine. For

example, when Sharp is unable to get Ruscha talking about his bookworks in the context of “escaping” the gallery setting, he rephrases his question to the following, “But what about the multiple aspect of your books? When you make a painting there’s only one, but your books are printed in editions of thousands. You’re adapting a medium that exists very pervasively in the culture into something which is beginning to be classified as art. And it’s a work of yours that people can buy for six bucks.” Shifting the interview back to seemingly objective footing Sharp modifies the tone of the question by following up with this exclamation, “Now some people might construe that to be a rather revolutionary idea. I can’t think of any artist of the sixties who could produce something he could call his art for a couple of bucks.” Ruscha, not quite in line with Sharp’s aggrandizement, responds quizzically, “Oh, you mean they always sold for much greater prices?”⁸⁰

Despite Sharp’s attempts to compel Ruscha to expound upon his bookworks in “revolutionary” terms a great deal of space is left to the artist to speak candidly about his art. The interview edited in cooperation with Ruscha went to press with very little informality excised. The transcript, like the portrait photographs, alternates with various small indicators of the “real time” context of the interview. On the second page of the interview an aerial shot of someone’s half eaten breakfast alerts readers that the conversation is taking place at the start of the day. From the closed curtains, coupled with photographs of illuminated lamps and Samantha Eggar’s inquiry of whether the time had yet reached 7:30 p.m., it becomes clear that the day is just beginning as the sun goes down. These small unnecessary details provide for some sense of the artist’s lifestyle as a regular kind of guy who stays up late, drinks Dr. Pepper, watches television and wears

plaid shirts. Ruscha even goes as far as describing his works in language that falls beyond the purview of specialized art jargon. One reason that Sharp's interview with Ruscha is an interesting specimen, among the hundreds of interviews that the artist agreed to do throughout his career, is Sharp's willingness to play along with Ruscha in mapping out the kind of "huh" for which the interview is named. The sense of huh, as Ruscha puts it, "spelled H-U-H with a question mark," is the kind of feeling produced by works of art that audiences don't necessarily absorb instantaneously; it's an encounter of questioning and confusion. It is the feeling of not knowing the code into which art is being written and a process by which one becomes familiar with the strategies of the avant-garde. It's this feeling of uncertainty that causes us to seek out the meaning of the work and in *Avalanche* the artists were showcased as the most important source of that information.

In addition to the "off the cuff" interviews in the magazine, the black and white portraits featured on the covers of *Avalanche* are a testament to the primary importance of artists and provide an entry point for readers. Literally, the face of the magazine, the candid close-up photographs of artists featured on every cover communicate to potential readers the distinct characteristics of the material within.⁸¹ The first artist to appear on the cover of *Avalanche* was Joseph Beuys (figure 2.2). The photograph, credited to Shunk-Kender,⁸² is markedly different from the other portraits that were featured on the square glossies. Showing the artist, in the shadow of his characteristic felt hat, against a blurred black and grey background, the location, unknown to us, allows Beuys to blend into his surroundings. His squinting eyes, barely visible, his emotionless face pointing directly at the camera, the layering of the various black and grays thwart the kind of

optical sensation that subsequent covers produce. The white type face of the letters above Beuys' head pushes the artist into the background instead of foregrounding his face and allowing it to pop out at viewers. Subsequent covers, like those featuring Yvonne Rainer (Summer 1972), Lawrence Weiner (Spring 1972) and Barry Le Va (Fall 1971), picture the artists against a stark white background while the photograph of Vito Acconci (Fall 1972) accomplishes the same effect through opposite means (figures 2.3-2.5). Acconci's face, bathed in light, lies in stark contrast to the dark background, the artist, lifting a cigarette to his lips, confronts the audience with a mischievous gaze. These photographs, inviting the artists to strike a pose, replicate the performative aspect of the face to face interviews reproduced in the magazine. In the same way that the interviews in *Avalanche* allow artists to perform through question and answer, the photographer, similarly poses a question of the sitter (how do you wish to be perceived?) to which each artist must respond by striking a pose that they believe communicates their persona as artist.⁸³ Just as in the interviews, the answer changes with each artist. What remains the same however, are the dynamics of the field of cultural production, the pressure of the gaze from without that propels artists to attempt to stake a place for themselves in relation to other producers within the field.⁸⁴

In tandem with the performative aspect of the interviews and portrait photographs *Avalanche* also provided the opportunity for artists to negotiate an important part of their persona that highlights their autonomous position within the field of cultural production. By enforcing the image of artists as autonomous *Avalanche* also promoted alternative artistic venues that supported their economically disinterested lifestyles. The magazine often featured advertisements for FOOD, an artist run restaurant founded by Carol

Goodden, Tina Girouard, Gordon Matta Clark, Suzanne Harris, and Rachel Lew (figure 2.6). The restaurant was a place where artists were often casually employed and ate free of charge, a small demonstration of support for the SoHo artistic community. An advertisement published in the Spring 1972 issue of *Avalanche* illustrating, “Food’s Family Fiscal Facts,” accounts for things such as the number of dogs asked to leave the restaurant, the number of glasses broken and the number of customers since opening day. Among other things meticulously noted by management were the 3,082 free dinners served and the fact that 84% of the staff were artists. On Sunday nights these artists were invited to prepare special meals, at a small cost to the public, for “artistic” cuisine. While advertising space in the magazine was often doled out in exchange for services rendered, in the case of FOOD free meals, the “Rumbles” section of *Avalanche* often functioned as a form of free advertising for artists who might not be featured in the current issue. Derived from mailings addressed to the magazine and nights of drinking at Max’s Kansas City,⁸⁵ a bar where many of SoHo’s artists congregated, the “Rumbles” section of *Avalanche* reads like the structureless “Findings” section of *Harper’s* magazine, but with the urgency of a news announcer who not only tells of past events but also announces future happenings all across the globe.

Sharp and Béar also employed *Avalanche* to their own promotional ends. On one occasion they advertised the contents of their magazine as a mobile art gallery and quite regularly endorsed Willoughby Sharp’s lecturing capabilities, a service that could be acquired at a small price (figure 2.7). Sharp even contributed to his own symbolic capital, as magazine publisher, by appearing in *Avalanche* several times in the guise of the, “mighty mogul of the art world,” a persona that the artist maintained throughout his

career. In one instance Sharp is depicted smoking a cigar, wearing a visor and a long double breasted jacket, his arm resting on a majestic marble balustrade leading up to a neo-classical building (figure 2.8). The fine print beneath the image reads, “W.S. after the deposit of an undisclosed sum at the Banker’s Trust Woolworth Building, New York City on Friday November 10, 1972.” Read in conjunction with the main byline, “Willoughby Sharp... mighty mogul of the art scene. The Sol S. Hurok of the International Art World seeks engagements at greatly reduced rates,” this statement demonstrates how running an alternative art magazine forces publishers and editors into the same poverty endured by alternative, albeit autonomous, artists within the field.⁸⁶ In one of the few appearances that Sharp made in *File* magazine resounds with a message of financial uncertainty. A photograph resembling a police mug-shot depicts the long haired, bearded Sharp holding up a 1939 issue of *Life* magazine (figure 2.9). The smiling Joe Di Maggio, whose portrait appears on the cover of *Life*, stands in stark contrast to Sharp’s outwardly serious attitude. The hand written caption framing the photograph reads, “Willoughby Sharp... penniless publisher of *Avalanche* says: Subscribe to *Life*. Send \$8 (\$10 in Canada) to *Avalanche* magazine 93 Grand St. New York.” The advertisement, whose landscape orientation goes against the general portrait format of the magazine, forces viewers to take note of its contents. Sharp’s plea for subscriptions cannot be read unless the magazine is turned on a ninety degree angle. His playful jab at *Life* magazine, then defunct, not only draws attention to General Idea’s appropriation of the magazine’s format but resonates on several other levels. Sharp’s suggestion that subscribing to *Avalanche* is like subscribing to “Life” serves to highlight the “unmediated” access that the magazine provides to artist and their works. On a more

practical level however this advertisement draws a connection between the penniless publisher of *Avalanche* and the subscriptions that contribute to the survival of the magazine as one of the publication's essential sources of revenue.⁸⁷ Regardless of one's autonomous position within the field, there is still a need to pay the bills and this is precisely where alternative venues like *Avalanche* are most useful for artists seeking their autonomy.

While Sharp saw himself as forging an alternative art scene, promoting artists on the covers and within the pages of his magazine, the artists featured in *Avalanche*, gaining in symbolic capital and publically substantiating their artistic autonomy, secured a place for themselves within the field of cultural production. When the process of establishing one's self as an autonomous artist comes full circle, economic disinterestedness ultimately leads to economic stability. With little money to be gained from the sale of their works, the star-system, mapped-out through magazines like *Avalanche*, represented a much more competitive circle than any 19th century bohemian camaraderie. While artists saw themselves similarly vying for their autonomy, they were also engaging in a kind of performative careerism, competing for a limited number of lectureships, residencies, teaching positions, etc that could support their lifestyles.

The outward adoption of the persona of the starving artist, publisher or editor, exhibited by those who participated in the production of *Avalanche*, is something that Bourdieu describes as a disavowal of economic interests, as alluded to earlier, that conceals the possible economic gains that may be derived from a chosen immunity to market forces. While certain artists may genuinely forego monetary gains and relegate themselves to modest living standards, the possibility of artistic autonomy is ultimately,

according to Bourdieu, an illusion that subsists on the widespread belief in the exchange of symbolic capital. As Bourdieu points out, symbolic capital is a form of misrecognized economic capital that does not necessarily make itself known to cultural producers but is open to influence by those who *recognize* the potential of manipulating the aura of disinterestedness toward economic profits. Ultimately, as the producers of an alternative art magazine, Sharp and Béar cast themselves as supporters of the idealistic conception of autonomy, evidence of which can be seen in their interviews and self-effacing advertisements. They also acted as a conduit to the kind of careerism that emerged with the establishment of the art-star system. At the same time however, as agents in the field of cultural production attempting to overthrow the dominant position of magazines like *Artforum*, their potential connection to the art market, as arbiters of symbolic capital, a highly transferable form of currency, cannot be denied.

The responses given by both *Avalanche* and *File* for *Studio International's* "A Survey of Contemporary Art Magazines," provides a useful comparison of how Sharp and General Idea saw their magazines as operating within the field of cultural production as autonomous producers of art. Two questions in particular serve to highlight the fundamental differences between the two publications. Question eleven of twelve reads, "Are you happy about the influence which art magazines exert on the development of contemporary art?" with the concluding question inquiring, "To what extent do you consider your magazine is shaped by (a) your regular advertisers, and (b) the power of the market?" In response to the eleventh question Sharp preferred not to comment while his answer to the twelfth question reiterates his autonomy, "*Avalanche's* editorial policy is unaffected by our irregular advertisers and the art market."⁸⁸ Choosing not to respond to

allegations that magazines influence the development of contemporary art is a concession on Sharp's part upon which he chooses not to elaborate. One of the main reasons that Sharp and Béar established *Avalanche* was to give voice to a younger generation of artists who no longer accepted the influence of magazines like *Artforum* on art. By 1976, the year that this survey was conducted, *Avalanche* had become a force within the field of cultural production. Choosing not to admit to their own influence represents the magazine's unwillingness to acknowledge their waning position of autonomy and their inevitable transition toward orthodoxy that represents both their success and their failure.

Looking at the responses supplied by AA Bronson, the easy-going attitude espoused by the editors of the magazine lends itself to General Idea's acceptance of their success as the producers of *File*. Their publication not only gained in its popularity but slowly shifted away from the declining mail art scene to increasingly serving the promotional ends of the artist collective. Without any explanation AA's response to question eleven consisted of a simple, "sure" *File* is happy about the influence which art magazines exert on the development of contemporary art. As for how the magazine is shaped by advertisers and the power of the market, AA's reply mirrors the two-part format of the question stipulating that (a) *File* is not shaped by regular advertisers and (b) the art market does not influence them politically but culturally the influence is felt continuously.⁸⁹ A positive response to both of these questions, in comparison with Sharp's resounding denial, opens up the possibility of looking at *File* as maintaining a complex relationship to the art market and, as participants within the field of cultural production, not only being influenced by but also influencing the exchange of symbolic capital.

Recognizing that the only possibility of maintaining a presence within the field was to change along with it, one year prior to the release of *Studio International's* survey, General Idea published what many people have labeled the manifesto issue of *File* magazine. The autumn, 1975 installment titled, "Glamour Issue," differs from previous issues in that the magazine is organized thematically and little attention and space is allotted to mail art. (figure 2.10) The subversive tone, although a consistent element of *File*, is significant when considering that the "Glamour Issue" was released at a time when *Avalanche* magazine was about to fold and the alternative art movement was seen ultimately to have failed. One of the most often quoted passages is worth reproducing again as it harkens back to the performative nature of the exchange that took place when Sharp conducted his interview with GI some two years earlier. In a two page spread where AA, Jorge and Felix are photographed under low lighting, deep in thought in front of a table strewn with plans, various measuring instruments, coffee cups, a hole-punch, and phone, the collective's emblem, the hand of the spirit is conspicuously placed within view (figure 2.11). The treatise on glamour, whose white font pierces the black background, begins,

This is the story of General Idea and the story of what we wanted. We wanted to be famous, glamorous [sic] and rich. That is to say we wanted to be artists and we knew that if we were famous and glamorous we could say we were artists and we would be. We never felt we had to produce great art to be great artists. We knew great art did not bring glamour and fame. We knew we had to keep a foot in the door of art and we were conscious of the importance of berets and paint brushes. We made public appearances in painters' smocks. We knew that if we were famous and glamorous we could say we were artists and we would be.

We did and we are. We are famous, glamorous artists. This is the story of Glamour and the part it played in our art.⁹⁰

Read in relation to a question posed at the beginning of the magazine through Borderline Case No.3–“Now that we’ve got our distance we look back over our shoulders. Could this be our skin?”⁹¹ – the intertextual resonance of the photograph brings readers back to another moment of reflection within the magazine’s history. The photograph of Jorge and Felix “examining the Eternal Network” was undoubtedly taken by the same artist on the same occasion. With the addition of AA to the mix, the pose changes from one of interest and inspection to a deep seated introspection. For General Idea, looking back on the Eternal Network simultaneously represented a moment to contemplate the future and the viability of alternative artistic activities and the fate of publications that promoted them. General Idea’s insistence that they had achieved their goal of becoming “famous, glamorous and rich” artists should be taken to represent their light-hearted humour and their ability to parody activities within the field of cultural production they participated in directly. By referring to their “strategic” public appearances in “artist’s drag,” which is to say, touting berets with painters’ smocks and paint brushes within the context of glamour, GI manages to call attention to the performative aspect of being an artist and the consequences of turning avant-garde autonomy on its head by recognizing symbolic capital for what it is. In a later interview with David Vereschagin, the collective discusses how unpopular an idea like glamour appeared to young artists during the early 1970s. “It was the last subject in the world that anybody would mention. And the same with money and fame... in the early 70s that was the last thing in the world they would want. It would have meant the end of their careers probably, if they were demonstrably any of those things. Although secretly, of course, they wanted all three.”⁹² The

disavowal of economic profits and social popularity at the same time that yearned for them, is perhaps what GI is alluding to in Borderline Case No. 3 when they declare, “There are two of us to contend with now. Two heads are better than one [...] Casting our image in the mirror revealed a cast of two. Our very own dialogue to speak to ourselves.” As producers of an art magazine participating in the assignment of symbolic capital General Idea revealed the rules by which the game of cultural production was being played, and subsequently changed them.

In many ways the “Glamour Issue” represents the emergence of an alternative to the alternative art press, despite the fact that it was not until 1989, with their last issue that the collective launched their search for that alternative. The manifesto on glamour declared that, “The image of the artist is the easiest to inhabit. Because of its historic richness, its ready but empty mythology (berets, paint brushes, palettes, in a word FORM without content) the shell which was art was simple to invade,” exposing the theatre within which the field of cultural production is played out. The subversive affirmation of what alternative artists and editors of magazines were hard-pressed to conceal led General Idea to take a heteronomous as opposed to autonomous stance within the field of cultural production as a means of maintaining their autonomy.

Conclusion

On February 2, 1974 the members of the Eternal Network gathered at the Elks Building in Hollywood, California in honour of art's one million and eleventh birthday. Inspired by a tradition started in 1963 by Robert Filliou to celebrate art's birthday, members of the west coast mail art network, including Vincent Trasov and Lowell Darling, spread the word that a celebration was in the works. According to newspaper ephemera distributed after the event, it all began in January of 1963 when Filliou was thinking "about the fact that one million years ago modern human beings first appeared on the face of the earth and that in those days art *was* life." It occurred to him that, "it would be an excellent idea to have an *artless* day of festivities to celebrate the happy beginning and bring about a happy ending to the whole affair, so that art [would] become life again."⁹³

While Filliou was not in attendance himself, close to a thousand people gathered together for an evening of performance and award giving.⁹⁴ Among those present were the members of General Idea, of whom AA Bronson acted as master of ceremonies along with E.E. Claire (Glenn Lewis). Vincent Trasov and Michael Morris were also in attendance along with the touted "mighty mogul of the art world," Willoughby Sharp, who played American "host," among others, to a primarily North American group of personalities from the mail art scene. For many, the coming together of individuals who had only ever communicated through the post was a special moment. In a newspaper announcement entitled, "Decca Dancing in the City of Angeles, The Eternal Network Comes Out," people were solicited by the following statement, "Willoughby Sharp and others will throw a party for Art's one million and eleventh birthday at the Elks Hotel in

Hollywood California. This event will be the first to bring together an international group of artists who have been working closely together....”⁹⁵

While a number of people felt a sense of triumph during the festivities, the celebration that took place that evening did not accomplish Filliou’s goal of transforming the world into an “artless” place. Perhaps it was never positioned to do so. Days of celebration are observed to draw attention to something of significance and a day to celebrate the birth of art, in order to make it indistinguishable from life, seems counterintuitive. It is impossible to extinguish something without first calling attention to its existence, and interventions in the artworld cannot fall off the radar if change is the ultimate goal. This is the contradiction that lies at the heart of counterculture, and it is something that should be considered when writing the history of avant-garde movements that are seen now to have fallen short of their stated intentions. Participants in counterculture make declarations and sometimes lofty and utopian pronouncements in order to draw attention to their varying positions within the field of cultural production; it is an essential part of making their politics known. But this process of casting oneself in the negative image of something else creates inextricable ties to what is being challenged. These tentacles, always reaching into the past and always referencing competitors, are the ties that eventually act as indicators of success. The measure of achievement that is brought to bear on the alternative art scene should be generated under a retrospective gaze that accounts for the symbolic capital and autonomy gained by alternative artists within the system. It cannot be measured by their inability to escape it.

The editors of *Avalanche* and *File*, despite their stated and tangible differences, manipulated the conventions of the field of cultural production and instigated positive

changes for their supporters. In contrast to scholarship that speaks about the artists from the 1960s and 1970s as having repeated the failure of the historical avant-garde, this thesis has shown that the politics of alternative culture are fraught with contradiction but not necessarily to their detriment. While Filliou was calling for a “happy ending” to art, the editors of *Avalanche* and *File* instigated a change to once upheld standards of art and its distribution.

Notes

¹ In this interview the collective is listed as including Ron Gabe, Jorge Saia, AA Bronson, Granada Gazelle, P.J., Noah Dakota, Marcel Idea, Ms. Paige, Myth Honey and Ms. Generality. See General Idea, "The Gold Diggers of '84: An interview with General Idea," interview by Willoughby Sharp, *Avalanche* (Winter-Spring, 1973): 6-21. Fern Bayer has pointed out that, "In the beginning [...] G.I. was less a trio, a three-man collective, and more a fluid amorphous cultural 'happening,' in the parlance of the 1960s." See Fern Bayer, "The Search for the Spirit," *The Search for the Spirit: General Idea 1968-1975* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1997), 11.

² Sharp sold the only Duchamp work he owned to buy a three story building at 93 Grand Street in SoHo that became the home of *Avalanche*. See Willoughby Sharp, "Experimental Magazines and International Avant-Gardes 1945-1975," panel discussion chaired by David Little, MOMA, New York, N.Y., 11 December 2006 [digital audio file]; available from http://moma.org/visit_moma/audio/2006/pub_prog/downloadAAPAA_2006.html; Internet; accessed 08 October 2008.

³ General Idea, "Goldiggers," 6.

⁴ General Idea, "Goldiggers," 8.

⁵ Liza Béar has commented on the layout of the magazine. "*Avalanche* was designed as a double page spread. I think what was really unique about it was that it was designed as a film might be sequentially from beginning to end. If you were to turn the pages one at a time you would get a continuous and ever changing never repeated experience." See Liza Béar, "Experimental Magazines and International Avant-Gardes 1945-1975," panel discussion chaired by David Little, MOMA, New York, N.Y., 11 December 2006 [digital audio file]; available from http://moma.org/visit_moma/audio/2006/pub_prog/downloadAAPAA_2006.html; Internet; accessed 08 October 2008.

⁶ John A. Walker, "Periodicals Since 1945," *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*. Eds. Trevor Fawcett and Clive Philpot (London: The Art Book Company, 1976), 50.

⁷ This genre of art magazine is similar to artist books in which the work of art takes the form of a book.

⁸ Walker, "Periodicals," 50; The phrase "museum without walls," was first used by André Malraux in 1947 to characterize what he saw as the effect of photographically reproducing works of art in books. See André Malraux, "Museum Without Walls," *The Voices of Silence*. Trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1956), 13-127.

⁹ The observation is made that, "Many alternative press magazines served as megaphones for oppressed groups and were often produced by the groups themselves." See Walker, "Periodicals," 49.

¹⁰ Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London: Verso, 1997), 3-4.

¹¹ See Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Experimental Magazines and International Avant-Gardes 1945-1975," panel discussion chaired by David Little, MOMA, New York, N.Y., 11 December 2006 [digital audio file]; available from http://moma.org/visit_moma/audio/2006/pub_prog/downloadAAPAA_2006.html; Internet; accessed 08 October 2008.

¹² Renato Poggioli's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* from 1968 touches on the phenomenon of "little magazines," that was part of the historical avant-garde, while Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* from 1974 does not address the alternative art press at all.

¹³ It should be noted that while *Avalanche* saw themselves as competitors in the mainstream art press, despite their alternative politics, the circumstances under which *File* operated were quite different. *Avalanche* operated under considerable financial constraints, as little public funding was available to them. Their revenues were generated from subscriptions, small grants and advertising. In this regard, the editors of the publication had little choice but to "sell themselves" to readers. The members of General Idea however, were able to secure a Local Initiatives Project Grant, a Canadian Man Power Program

aimed at diminishing unemployment, to start their publication. While their initial application was declined the members of General Idea were ultimately awarded a sum of \$17 000 paid out as salaries for time spent working on *File* and the cost of its publication.

¹⁴ The terms “autonomy” and “heteronomy” crop up in everyday language whenever the idea of “selling-out” is addressed. Someone is a “sell-out” when they no longer engage in an activity for the sake of it. This is what Bourdieu calls the heteronymous principle of the field.

¹⁵ Stephen Perkins, *Artist's Periodicals and Alternative Artist's Networks 1963-1997*. PhD. Dissertation, University of Iowa, United States—Iowa. Retrieved July 15, 2008, from ProQuest Digital Dissertations database.(Publication No. AAT 3087655), 34.

¹⁶ Renato Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. Gerald Fitzgerald. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 22. Every historical avant-garde movement, except for cubism, participated in the production of and associated themselves with small publications. The expressionists, futurists, dada and perhaps most notably surrealists can all attest to the usefulness of a public venue to voice their concerns and opinions, not only about art but about the tumultuous social circumstances of the time.

¹⁷ Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22.

¹⁸ The word magazine is Arabic in origin and was initially used to describe a location or building in which goods of value were stored, most often consisting of arms and ammunition. Ruari McLean, “What is a Magazine,” *Magazine Design* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1.

¹⁹ Marshall McLuhan, “Understanding Magascenes,” *Print* (July/August 1970): 20.

²⁰ Success for Bourdieu is divided along two lines, those of high art and low art. They are tied to the axis of autonomy, the varying degrees of which are plotted between heteronomy on one end (with works of art succumbing to market forces) and autonomy on the other end (with artists not striving for economic success but only symbolic success). For heteronymous producers, widespread success among vast populations can be considered success, whereas autonomous producers would conceive of success as consisting of approval from one’s peers and the accumulation of symbolic capital which contributes to their ability to control the terms and conventions of art production. For a discussion of this, see Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production or: the Economic World Reversed,” *The Field of Cultural Production*. Ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1993), 29-73.

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production,” 37.

²² Randal Johnson, “Introduction,” *Field of Cultural Production*, 7. Italics mine.

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief,” *Media Culture and Society* 2.3 (1980): 202. Italics in original.

²⁴ Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production,” 58. Italics mine.

²⁵ Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief,” 292.

²⁶ Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief,” 292.

²⁷ Magazines act as a *parergon* working to buttress all that is found lacking in the materiality of art.

²⁸ Not only will debate help to ensure the symbolic survival of the work itself but will also contribute to the symbolic capital of the critic or art historian whose work is taken up in subsequent discussions.

²⁹ This symbolic naming, as I see it, is analogous to the manner in which Marcel Duchamp elevated everyday objects into the realm of art with his readymades. This gesture is one that is taken up by both Hal Foster and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh. For Foster this symbolic naming, what he calls, drawing from Thierry de Duve, ‘the enunciative condition,’ allowed Duchamp to ‘[reveal] the conventional limits of art in a particular time and place.’ Buchloh sees Duchamp’s gesture as a form of analytical proposition in which the artist announces the arbitrariness of institutional consecration of works of art: “this is a work of art if I say it is.” See Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 126; Hal Foster, “What’s Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?” *October* 70 (Autumn 1994): 19.

³⁰ Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 130.

³¹ Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 130.

³² Walker, "Periodicals since 1945," 45.

³³ William Seitz, quoted in *Art Subjects*, 152.

³⁴ The Zero Group originated as a collaboration between artists Otto Piene and Heinz Mack in Düsseldorf in 1957. Günther Uecker did not join the group until 1961. See Gediminas Gasparavicius, "A Belated Avant-Garde: The Zero Group in Post-War Germany," *Art Criticism* 19.2 (2004): 143-154.

³⁵ For example, Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 126.

³⁶ For a complete description of the event and its aftermath see Alberro, *Conceptual Art*, 125-127. In a short essay describing the establishment and activities of the Art Workers Coalition, Lucy Lippard states, "On April 10, 1969, some three hundred New York artists and observers thereof filled the amphitheatre of the School of Visual Arts for an 'Open Public Hearing on the subject: What Should Be the Program of The Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers' Coalition.' [...] The hearing was preceded by a list of the thirteen demands to the Museum of Modern Art and demonstrations supporting them which emphasized artists' rights: legal, legislative, and loosely political; they were the product of the newly named Art Workers' Coalition [...] The AWC was conceived on January 3, 1969, when the kinetic artist Takis (Vassilakis) removed a work of art, made by him but owned by the Museum of Modern Art, from the museum's 'Machine' show, on the grounds that an artist had the right to control the exhibition and treatment of his work whether or not he had sold it. Not a revolutionary proposition, except in the art world." See Lucy Lippard, "Art Workers' Coalition," *Idea Art*. Ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton Press, 1973), 103.

³⁷ Seth Siegelaub, quoted in Alberro, *Conceptual Art*, 128.

³⁸ Alberro, *Conceptual Art*, 128.

³⁹ Liza Béar and Willoughby Sharp, *The Early History*, London: Chelsea Space, 2005, 2.

⁴⁰ The themes of each issue are as follows: earth art, body art, process sculpture, conceptual art, performance art, Vito Acconci, and humour. The eighth issue and all of the issues in newspaper format were mixed.

⁴¹ Gwen Allen, "In on the Ground Floor: *Avalanche* and the SOHO Art Scene, 1970-1976," *Artforum* 44.3 (November 2005): 218.

⁴² Siegelaub, quoted in, Alberro, *Conceptual Art*, 9.

⁴³ Walker, "Periodicals since 1945," 50.

⁴⁴ Each page of *Avalanche* was designed as a double page spread.

⁴⁵ *Avalanche* (Fall 1970), 48-49.

⁴⁶ This is something that John A Walker observed in 1976. "'Recently *Artforum* has been attacked on the grounds that it is the trade journal of the commercial galleries of New York and the main agency through which the hegemony of New York art is maintained over that created in the rest of the 'free' world.'" See Walker, "Periodicals since 1945," 48.

⁴⁷ The magazine credits Boris Wall Grunphy as the designer of the magazine, which is an anagram of Willoughby Sharp's name.

⁴⁸ This aspect of the magazine was meant to mimic the dimensions of the works of art that *Artforum* was promoting. John Coplans, quoted in, Walker, "'Periodicals since 1945,'" 48.

⁴⁹ The font used by *Artforum* is similar to Akzidenz grotesque, a font designed in the late 1800s by the Swiss born H. Berthold. While the editors were unable to acquire the original font they commissioned James Robertson to design a similar font using the 'old fashioned' technique of making a stencil using razor blade and paper. See Gwen Allen, *From Specific Medium to Mass Media: The Art Magazine in the 1960s and the 1970s*. Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, United States—California. Retrieved October 21, 2007, from Proquest Digital Dissertations database. (Publication No. AAT 3145450).

⁵⁰ Sharp, "Experimental Magazines."

⁵¹ Gwen Allen, "In on the Ground Floor," 218.

⁵² Robert Pincus-Witten, quoted in Allen, "Ground Floor," 218.

⁵³ While the formal similarities of *Artforum* and *Avalanche* are striking, inspiration drawn from *Artforum* runs on a deeper level as well. In many ways *Artforum* could be seen as starting the trend of alternative

art magazines. In the early 1960s *Artforum* was a west coast magazine looking to promote neglected west coast artists.

⁵⁴ Liza Béar, *The Early History of Avalanche*, 2.

⁵⁵ Ruth Stephan, quoted in Ann Eden Gibson, "*Tiger's Eye: Not to Make a Paradigm*," *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist Run Periodicals* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), 25.

⁵⁶ Allen, *From Mass Media*, 30.

⁵⁷ Fern Bayer has pointed out that despite the fact that GI claim to have met in 1968, they did not actually meet until the subsequent year. For a complete discussion of why they chose to move their history one year further into the past see Bayer, "Search For the Spirit," 10-13.

⁵⁸ I refer to these artists by their first names following Fern Bayer in "Search for the Spirit."

⁵⁹ General Idea, *Shut the Fuck Up*, 1985. 14 minutes.

⁶⁰ General Idea, *Shut the Fuck Up*.

⁶¹ Yves Klein suffered a heart attack during a screening of *Mondo Cane* in 1962, shortly after the sequence in which he appeared.

⁶² AA Bronson telephone interview with Ashley Belanger, 11 June 2008.

⁶³ David Buchan, "The Canadian Artists' Press," *Art and Pictorial Press in Canada*. Eds. Karen McKenzie and Mary F. Williamson (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario 1970), 40.

⁶⁴ AA Bronson, "The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat: Artist-Run Centers as Museums by Artists," *Museums by Artists*. Eds. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 29.

⁶⁵ AA Bronson "Gold diggers of '84," 8.

⁶⁶ In a letter written by Jorge Zontal to Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov at Vancouver's Image Bank he explains that initially the artist collective wanted to call their publication *Art Official*, a name they later used as their corporate identity, but couldn't because there was already a magazine by that name. When asked about this, however, AA Bronson could not recall that there had ever been any consideration given to *Art Official* as the title of their publication. See The Morris and Trasov Fonds, General Idea, 1971-1972. Early Correspondence with General Idea. Box C9, File 22.01. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery Archives, University of British Columbia.

⁶⁷ *Life* magazine ceased its monthly publication of the magazine in December of 1972.

⁶⁸ General Idea quoted in Bayer, "On the Newsfront," 76.

⁶⁹ AA Bronson, "Interview."

⁷⁰ Inspired by Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School, Glenn Lewis initiated the New York Correspondence School of Vancouver in 1970. Artists who participated in activities organized by Lewis as part of the curriculum included Kate Craig, Mary Beth Knechtel, Vincent Trasov, Michael Morris, Barry Murdock, and Warren Knechtel.

⁷¹ Craig J. Saper has traced the term "eternal network" to its initial appearance in *File* magazine in a 1973 text submitted by the artist entitled, "Research on the Eternal Network." See Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15.

⁷² In a letter written to Image Bank from Jorge he states, "Please add us to the list of info wanted. We would like material on border line cases and also on sweeping generalities. Michael may add to this list when he arrives." This letter is indicative of the kind of exchanges that took place at the repository. See The Morris and Trasov Fonds, General Idea. 1971-1972. Early Correspondence with General Idea. Box C9, File 22.01. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery Archives, University of British Columbia.

⁷³ AA Bronson, "A Survey of Contemporary Art Magazines," Ed. Richard Cork. *Studio International* 192 (September 1976): 166.

⁷⁴ Willoughby Sharp, "Contemporary Art Magazines," 158.

⁷⁵ According to Marshall McLuhan, during the "electronic age" magazines that were successful were those that catered to specific audiences and were not in the business of advertising consumer products. See McLuhan, "Understanding Magascenes," 20.

⁷⁶ In his book *Bourdieu's Politics: Problems and Possibilities*, Jeremy F. Lane describes the historical situation in Bourdieusian terms. "The expansion of formal education in the nineteenth century had produced an 'intellectual reserve army' of potential consumers of the new autonomous art forms. This

educated *bohème*, unable to find posts in the state administration which reflected their educational qualifications, were drawn to the impoverished artistic milieus of Paris. Their expenditure on the products of the field of restricted production would have been insufficient to support the newly autonomous artists, had the latter not also been of bourgeois origin, able to rely on parental allowances and inherited rents to subsidize their art." See Jeremy F. Lane, *Bourdieu's Politics: Problems and Possibilities* (London: Routledge, 2006), 126.

⁷⁷ In his article, "Opting Out if Buying In," Singerman states, "Most of the art on 'the cutting edge' seemed to share a temporality and a technological complexity that contrasted with the art in traditional galleries. Yet the art media, glossy and otherwise, and the budding network of alternative spaces managed to create a secondary star system." See Singerman, "Opting Out or Buying In," *Laica Journal* 18.41 (June-July 1978): 40.

⁷⁸ Allan Kaprow, quoted in Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 158.

⁷⁹ Ronald Christ in "An Interview on Interviews," published in 1977 by the *Literary Research Newsletter*, explains that "the purpose of the interview is to allude to the data while being about the real business of creating character—that of the subject, the interviewer or both." See Ronald Christ, "An Interview on Interviews," *Literary Research Newsletter* 2 (July 1977): 114.

⁸⁰ Ed Ruscha, "...a kind of a Huh? An interview with Edward Ruscha." interview by Willoughby Sharp, *Avalanche* (Winter-Spring, 1973): 38-39.

⁸¹ Ken Allan, *Conceptual Art Magazine Projects and their Precedents*. Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto (Canada), In *Dissertations & Theses: Full Text* [database on-line]; available from <http://www.proquest.com> (publication number AAT NQ94530; accessed February 10, 2009).

⁸² Shunk-Kender, the famous photography team who took the photograph of Yves Klein jumping off a roof, was commissioned by Sharp to take photographs of artists who would perform works at an abandoned pier, called Pier 18 in Manhattan. It is unclear whether this photograph of Beuys was taken at Pier 18.

⁸³ This analysis has been greatly influenced by Roland Barthes who describes the ritual of being photographed in his book *Camera Lucida*. He states, "Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself into an image [...] I decide to 'let drift' over my lips and in my eyes a faint smile, which I mean to be 'identifiable,' in which I might suggest, along with the qualities of my nature, my amused consciousness of the whole photographic ritual: I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know I am posing...." See, Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 10-11.

⁸⁴ Along the same lines as Singerman, Thomas Crow writes, "Magazines and journals have been the vehicles for more than the musings of critics and opinions on new work; they have equally been responsible for disseminating basic information to artists about what their colleagues and competitors are doing." See Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 85.

⁸⁵ Max's Kansas City was located four blocks from *Avalanche* at East 17th Street and Park Avenue South. The bar, owned by Mickey Ruskin has been described by Béar and Sharp. "In 1968 Max's was the only place where all the different cultural worlds collided [...] Max's being a steak and Lobster joint no one was at all health-conscious. Mickey Ruskin traded art for an account with a lot of artists and took trade ads in *Avalanche*, which is why people could afford to go there." See Béar and Sharp, "The Early History of *Avalanche*," 8-9.

⁸⁶ Sol S. Hurok was a Russian born impresario who promoted the work of foreign artists, including dancers, actors, and musicians, to American audiences. The Wikipedia entry under impresario lists both Hurok and Sharp as two of several great impresarios.

⁸⁷ See *File 2.1-2* (May 1973), p.5. In response to Richard Cork's survey question, "What are your sources of income and do they give you a profit or a loss?" Sharp responded, "Revenue from Grants, advertising, subscriptions and sales does not offset a net annual loss." See Willoughby Sharp, "A Survey of Contemporary Magazines," Ed. Richard Cork. *Studio International* 192 (September 1976): 158.

⁸⁸ Sharp, "A Survey of Contemporary Art Magazines," 158.

⁸⁹ Bronson, "A Survey of Contemporary Art Magazines," 166.

⁹⁰ "Glamour," *File* 3.1 (Autumn 1975), 20-21.

⁹¹ "Borderline Case No.3," *File* 3.1 (Autumn 1975), 1.

⁹² General Idea, "What's the Big Idea?" Interview by David Vereschagin, *The Body Politic* 115 (June 1985): 29.

⁹³ Decca-Dance, souvenir newspaper, February 2, 1974. Italics mine. Michael Morris initially got the idea of celebrating Art's Birthday during a telephone conversation with Robert Filliou in 1973 when describing the Decca-Dance to him. The conversation began with Filliou saying, "I wish I could come but I will be in Berlin. I think in January I will begin celebrating Art's Birthday again –this time it will be the 1,000,011. Morris: Maybe we could too... the Decca Dance will be in February. Robert: You can do it in February if you want—eventually it should go on 365 days." See Telephone Conversations in Scott Watson and Sharla Sava, *Robert Filliou: From Political to Poetical Economy* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery University of British Columbia, 1995), unpaginated.

⁹⁴ Luis Jacob describes the celebration as "modeled after the Oscars and General Idea's pageants [...]. Attendees at the Decca Dance were treated to various slide projection sequences and performances." See Luis Jacob. *Golden Streams: Artists' Collaboration and Exchange in the 1970s*. Mississauga: Blackwood Gallery, 2002, 9.

⁹⁵ James Minton, "Decca Dancing in the city of Angeles, the Eternal Network Comes Out," *Artweek* 23 February 1974: 7. The Morris and Trasov Fonds, Box C14, File 26.17. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery Archives, University of British Columbia.

Figures

Figure 1.1

Vassilakis Takis observed by Willoughby Sharp removing *Tele-Sculpture* (1965) from the exhibition “The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age,” Museum of Modern Art, New York 3 January 1969. Black and white photograph reproduced in Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003, 126. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 1.2

“Discussion with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson,” *Avalanche* 1 (Fall 1970). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size unknown (less than 6000). Published by Kineticism Press, New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 1.3

“The Gold-Digger of '84: An Interview with General Idea,” *Avalanche* 7 (Winter/Spring 1973). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size 6000. Published by Kineticism Press, New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 1.4

General Idea, Cover of *File* 1.1 (April 1972). Offset periodical. 35.5 c 28 cm. Edition of 3000. Published by Art Official Inc., Toronto. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 1.5

General Idea, “*File* Editors Jorge Zontal and Felicks Parts Examine the Eternal Network,” *File* 2.5 (February 1974). Offset Periodical. 35.5 x 28 cm. Edition of 3000. Published by Art Official Inc., Toronto. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.1

“‘a kind of a Huh?’ An Interview with Edward Ruscha by Willoughby Sharp,” *Avalanche* 7 (Winter/Spring 1973). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size 6000. Published by Kineticism Press, New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.2

Photograph of Joseph Beuys. Cover of *Avalanche* 1 (Fall 1970). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size unknown (less than 6000). Published by Kineticism Press., New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.3

Photograph of Yvonne Rainer. Cover of *Avalanche* 5 (Summer 1972). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size 6000. Published by Kineticism Press, New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.4

Photograph of Lawrence Wiener. Cover of *Avalanche* 4 (Spring 1972). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size 6000. Published by Kineticism Press, New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.5

Photograph of Barry Le Va Cover of *Avalanche 2* (Fall 1971). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size 6000. Published by Kineticism Press, New York.
Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.6

Advertisement for Food Restaurant. *Avalanche 2* (Fall 1971). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size 6000. Published by Kineticism Press, New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.7

Advertisement for Willoughby Sharp. *Avalanche* 5 (Summer 1972). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size 6000. Published by Kineticism Press, New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.8

Advertisement for Willoughby Sharp. *Avalanche* 6 (Fall 1972). Offset periodical. 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Edition size 6000. Published by Kineticism Press, New York. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.9

Advertisement for *Avalanche*. *File* 2.1-2 (May 1973). Offset Periodical. 35.5 x 28 cm. Edition of 3000. Published by Art Official Inc., Toronto. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.10

General Idea, Cover of *File* 3.1 (Autumn 1975), "Glamour Issue." Offset Periodical. 35.5 x 28 cm. Edition size unknown (between 1500 and 3000). Published by Art Official Inc., Toronto. Image removed due to copyright.

Figure 2.11

General Idea, Photograph of Felix Parts, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson. *File 3.1* (Autumn 1975), "Glamour Issue." Offset Periodical. 35.5 x 28 cm. Edition size unknown (between 1500 and 3000). Published by Art Official Inc., Toronto. Image removed due to copyright.

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