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THE MAGAZINE AS A MEDIUM

ASPEN, 1965–1971

In 1964 a New York journalist and editor named Phyllis Glick was spending the year in Aspen, Colorado, where, in between skiing and working as a photographer, she attended the Aspen International Design Conference. Perhaps it was here, while encountering some of the most innovative trends in contemporary graphic design, that she had an idea for a new magazine. It was a whimsical idea. She imagined a three-dimensional publication housed in a cardboard box with all kinds of unbound contents, including flexi-disc records, films, souvenirs, and other objects, such as “blueprints, a bit of rock, wildflower seeds, tea samples, an opera libretti [*sic*], old newspapers, jigsaw puzzles.”¹ When she returned to New York, she founded *Aspen: The Magazine in a Box*, using her maiden name, Phyllis Johnson, as a *nom de plume*. “In calling it a ‘magazine,’” she explained to her readers in the first issue, “we are harking back to the original meaning of the word as a ‘storehouse, a cache, a ship laden with stores.’”²

This fundamental capacity of the magazine to bring together different types of things also appealed to a number of artists around the same time. Wallace Berman’s *Semina* (1955–1964), Henri Chopin’s experimental sound-poetry magazine, *Revue Ou* (1958–1974), George Maciunas’s Fluxus publications, Wolf Vostell’s *dé-coll/age* (1962–1969), and William Copley’s *S.M.S.* (1968) are just a few examples of artists’ magazines that experimented with multimedia or unbound formats in the 1960s. Whether or not Johnson was aware of these publications, she would soon discover for herself that the expanded category of the periodical she envisioned had a special resonance within the 1960s art world. Commissioning contemporary artists to design and guest-edit the magazine, she transformed *Aspen* into a miniature traveling gallery, enthusiastically announcing, “*Aspen* gives you actual works of art! Exactly as the artist created them. In exactly the media he created them for.”³ If *Aspen* attests to the potential of the magazine as a new kind of artistic medium and exhibition space in the 1960s, this chapter argues that its significance must be understood in relationship to the expanded categories of artistic medium during this time, witnessed in minimalism, conceptual art, and related practices—practices that were most evident in *Aspen* 5+6, edited by Brian O’Doherty, and *Aspen* 8, edited by Dan Graham.

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While today the town of Aspen, Colorado, is perhaps best known as an upscale ski resort, in the 1960s it emerged as a vibrant, offbeat center of cultural and technological innovation.⁴ It was this spirit with which Johnson sought to associate her magazine. To her, Aspen represented more than just a place; it was “a point of view, a state of mind, a symbol of the free-wheeling eclectic life (much as the *New Yorker* uses New York).”⁵ A former mining settlement, the town was reinvented in the 1950s by the Chicago industrialist Walter Paepcke, who founded both the Aspen Ski Company and the Aspen Institute, a progressive humanistic think tank that sponsored programs and

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Phyllis Johnson (left), c. 1967. Photograph
courtesy of Suzanne Hammer.



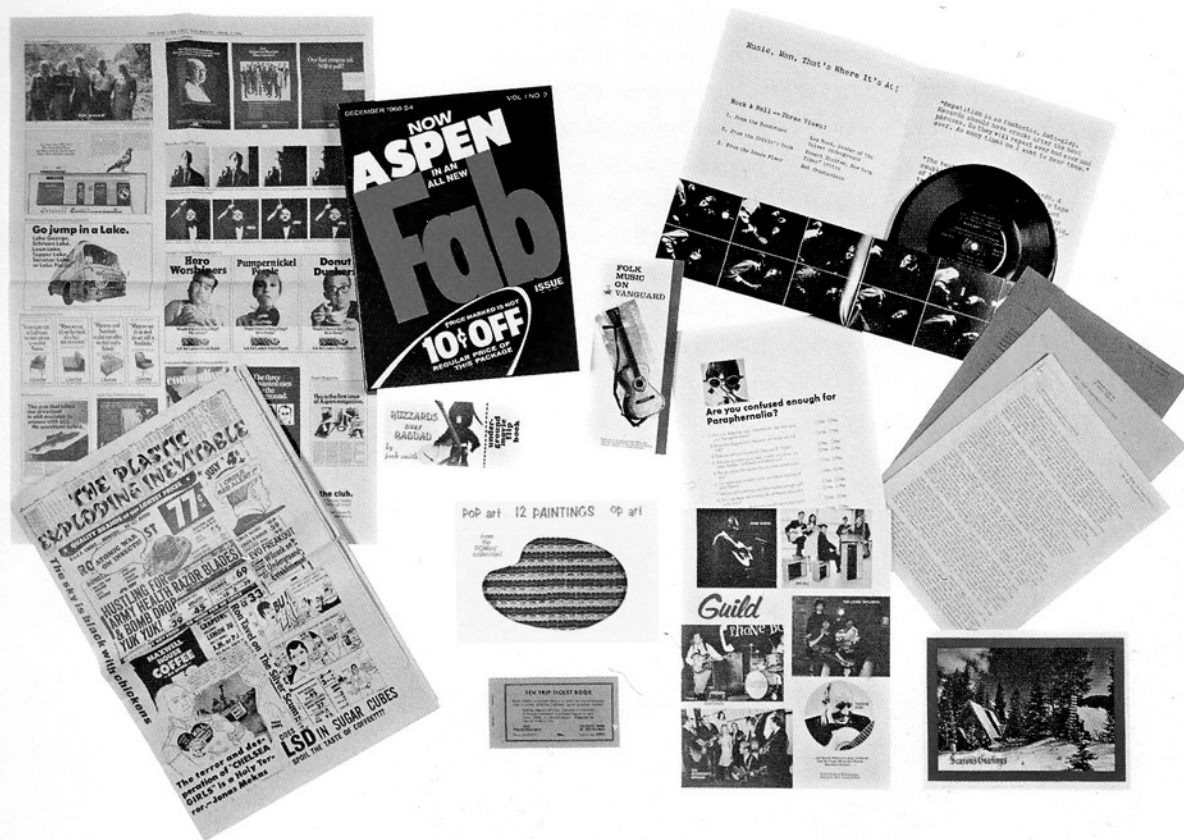
seminars on a broad variety of topics including the arts, communications, justice, education, and the environment. Hosting the annual International Design Conference, music and film festivals, and an artist-in-residence program, the Aspen Institute greatly contributed to the city's reputation as a meeting ground for artists, scientists, and writers, including Herbert Bayer, Hunter S. Thompson, and Buckminster Fuller.

Aspen's rich cultural and recreational offerings provided ample editorial material for the new magazine, which initially reported on proceedings at the Aspen Institute and on other local attractions. The first issue, published in 1965, was a flat, laminated, black cardboard box that hinged on the left side, opening to reveal an assortment of pamphlets and booklets in different formats and sizes, on topics such as cross-country skiing, Colorado wildlife, regional architecture, and recipes, alongside lengthy excerpts from the 15th Annual Aspen International Design Conference, plus a jazz record. George Lois, who designed the first issue, remembers Johnson's enthusiasm as she animatedly described its novel boxed format to him (though to him, he admitted, it sounded a bit like "trying to reinvent the wheel").⁶ This issue, and the second—a white box containing excerpts of papers delivered at the Aspen Film Conference, an article on downhill skiing, and a record of works by the classical composer Alexander Scriabin—seemed to cater to the wealthy, educated residents and tourists of Aspen, for whom Johnson claimed she wanted to provide "culture along with play."⁷ And yet the editor seems to have had other things in store for the magazine from the beginning—even if she herself was not yet sure exactly what they would be; as she explained to her readers, "for this first issue, we've started out with a rather dignified format, but who knows what the next issue will be!"⁸



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Aspen, no. 1, 1965. Edited by Phyllis Johnson and designed by George Lois, Tom Courtos, and Ralph Tuzzo. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (86-S1350 no. 1).



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Aspen, no. 3, December 1966. Designed by Andy Warhol and David Dalton. © 2009 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (86-S1350 v.1 no.3).

Johnson asked Andy Warhol, who was prominently featured in the collection of eminent Aspen art collector John Powers, to design issue 3, a task the pop artist largely delegated to the rock critic David Dalton, who was his studio assistant at the time (and who would soon go on to become a founding editor of *Rolling Stone* magazine).⁹ A drastic departure from the previous two issues, *Aspen* 3 was designed in the form of a box of Fab laundry detergent, and was steeped in the underground, countercultural milieu of the Factory. It contained a reversible movie flipbook with excerpts from Warhol's film *Kiss* on one side and Jack Smith's *Buzzards over Baghdad* on the other; a set of postcard reproductions of paintings from the Powers collection; a "Ten Trip Ticket Book" with excerpts from the Berkeley conference on LSD; the first (and only) issue of the *E.P.I. Newspaper*; and a flexi-disc of the first Velvet Underground release, *Loop*, a never-ending (because it ends in a locked groove), feedback-infused, instrumental drone. Providing a mélange for both ears and eyes, *Aspen* 3 emulated the multisensory experience of Warhol's intermedia performance group, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, which toured the country in 1966 and 1967.¹⁰

Within the 1960s art world, *Aspen's* multimedia format was clearly a boon, promising to *not only document but also simulate the proliferating forms of new media art*. Another multimedia magazine published in New York at around the same time and featuring some of the same artists as *Aspen* was William Copley's bimonthly *S.M.S.* (1968), which contained intricate, limited-edition artists' objects and multiples in a cardboard portfolio. "Art has left the canvas. It's expanded its activity and every kind of activity has become art," Copley observed, suggesting that the new malleability of the category of the periodical mirrored developments within the art world itself, as artists questioned and blurred previously distinct categories of medium.¹¹ A review of *Aspen* and *S.M.S.* by the intermedia artist Jud Yalkut captures artists' excitement about the new periodical formats at this moment:

What possibilities for the further evolution of the magazine format lay ahead in the challenges of new technologies now opening to the artist? More films, slides, film-strips, tape recordings as well as records and tape-loops, inflatable models and sculpture-structures may comprise a complete multimedia package with magazine "box" covers. ... In our foreseeable future, the perfection of three-dimensional color videotape may well, in the words of Nam June Paik, make *Life* magazine as obsolete as *Life* made *Collier's*.¹²

Yalkut enthusiastically embraces the new artistic possibilities of the magazine, and suggests the way in which these possibilities were deeply connected to new communication and information technologies being developed within the broader context of 1960s media culture. And yet, while Yalkut imagines how these technologies might transform and improve upon the traditional printed magazine, he also raises the specter that they might, in effect, render it extinct. Indeed, *Aspen's* strange, hybrid format in between old and new media speaks rather poignantly to the anxiety of print at this time—an anxiety that was all too real to magazine publishers, who watched their profits plummet as television cut into advertising revenue.¹³

As many pointed out at the time, *Aspen* epitomized the ideas of the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who heralded the end of print in an electronic age. *Aspen* 4 was in fact dedicated to the ideas of McLuhan. Designed by Quentin Fiore, the issue referenced the perceptual effects of hallucinogens as much as the visual signifiers of computer circuitry, showcasing

the decade's countercultural lifestyles and music, where McLuhan believed the seeds of the new social forms of the global village were being sown. It contained a double-sided poster version of McLuhan's 1967 bestseller *The Medium Is the Message*, with the book's pages spread out mosaic-like so that they can be viewed all at once, and featured articles on the Haight-Ashbury psychedelic scene, outlaw motorcycle culture, and the geodesic-domed, pro-LSD alternative community of Drop City, Colorado. Also included in the issue were John Cage's lecture from the 1966 Aspen International Design Conference entitled "Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)" and a flexi-disc recording of electronic music by Mario Davidovsky and Gordon Mumma.

McLuhan argued that new "cool" media, such as television, offered participatory, nonlinear, and multisensory experiences that would supersede the linear, static format of the phonetic alphabet, which "must be strung together bead-like, and in a prescribed order."¹⁴ However, as Nam June Paik pointed out, McLuhan's "biggest inconsistency is that he still writes books."¹⁵ *Aspen* 4 appeared to resolve this contradiction, exemplifying McLuhan's notion that technology would "extend" the nervous system by activating the aural and tactile capacities of the human sensorium, which, he argued, had suffered attrition during print's reign of visibility. And yet, while *Aspen* clearly alluded to the multimedia technologies of the electronic age—and was, no doubt, conceived, at least in part, in order to compete with them—it also utterly failed to rival the simultaneity and speed of broadcast or digital information. Against the virtual, integrated audiovisual experience of the television screen, *Aspen* insisted on a concrete materiality and an actual engagement with the human senses. As Phyllis Johnson proclaimed about the magazine, "you don't just read it: you hear it, hang it, feel it, fly it, sniff it, taste it, fold it, wear it, shake it, even project it on your living room wall."¹⁶

With its cardboard-box cover, *Aspen* appeared markedly—and captivantly—primitive as an example of multimedia. It explored the communicative possibilities of the future by looking backward, serving as a reliquary for those very media—records, films, and print—that threatened to become obsolete in an emerging digital age. However, while McLuhan is often remembered for predicting the end of print, he also raised the possibility that, as it was rendered anachronistic by newer technologies, the medium of print might release its true artistic potential. Echoing Walter Benjamin's notion of the outmoded, he observed: "the movie and TV, as much as radio and gramophone, have by-passed the printed word. That is to say they have turned the printed word into an art form just as Gutenberg turned the manuscript into an art form."¹⁷

Aspen certainly seemed to instantiate this possibility. Each subsequent issue of the magazine was sui generis: issue 5+6, edited by O'Doherty, focused on minimalism and conceptual art; issue 6A was a reprint of the single-issue Judson Church magazine *Manipulations*, documenting the performance series "12 Evenings of Manipulations"; issue 7 was a game-filled "British Box" issue edited by Mario Amaya, which included an Eduardo Paolozzi coloring book, recordings by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and kitsch souvenirs by Peter Blake; Dan Graham edited issue 8, devoted to "Art/Information/Science"; issue 9 was a psychedelic "Dreamweapon" issue edited by musicians Angus and Hetty MacLise, which contained a photo-poetry poster by Gerard Malanga and a sheet of gummed stamps illustrated with rainbow-colored nudes by Don Snyder; and issue 10 (which did not have editorial credits) was an incense-scented "Far East" issue, complete

with miniature Sung Dynasty landscape scrolls. A Buckminster Fuller issue in which each article would unfold into a geodesic dome was planned but—fittingly, perhaps—never realized.

Like many of Fuller's improbable inventions, *Aspen* seemed out of step with the demands of the practical world. Plagued by production issues, which were no doubt exacerbated by the complications of coordinating its various guest editors, the magazine was notoriously behind schedule. While billed as a quarterly, *Aspen* came out intermittently, once or maybe twice a year, prompting one reviewer to remark, "the publication date is as much a surprise as the contents."¹⁸ In all likelihood, such unpredictability contributed to the demise of its advertising section, which started off strong as an unbound "ad gallery" in its own separate folder, but then dwindled, apparently ceasing completely after issue 5+6.¹⁹

In 1971, the U.S. Postal Service revoked the magazine's second-class mail license, forcing it to fold shortly after its tenth issue. Citing criteria established by Congress in 1879, which required that periodicals be dated, numbered, formed of printed sheets, and have consistency between issues and periodicity, the Postal Service objected in particular to *Aspen*'s erratic publication schedule and inconsistent format. While admitting that the publication was "a clever and imaginative idea," the Postal Service concluded that it was not a periodical.²⁰ More than just a matter of postage, this historical footnote suggests how radically *Aspen* differed from a standard periodical in both its physical properties and its circulation. Though these differences spelled the publication's commercial failure, they would prove central to its artistic significance.

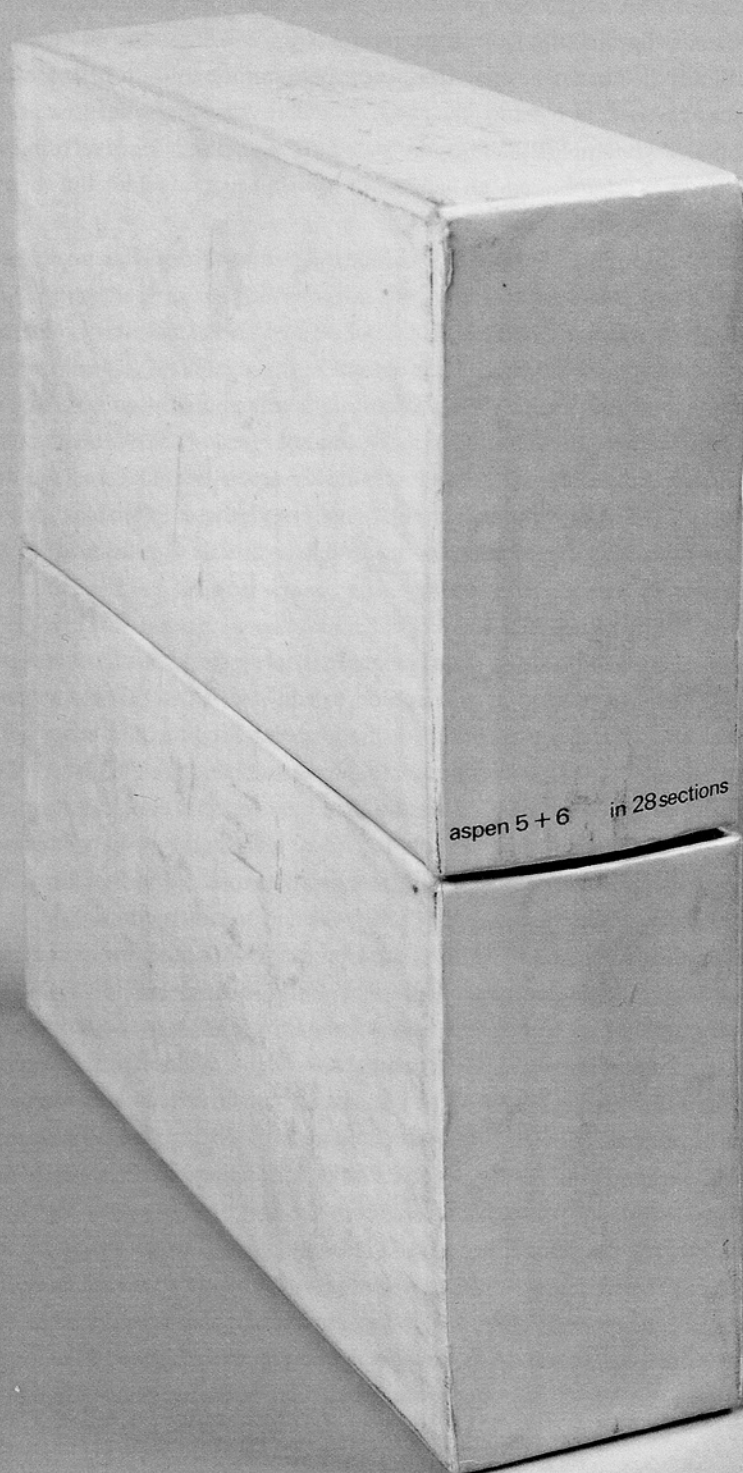
ASPEN 5+6: A MINIATURE MUSEUM

"With conceptual art, you needed a magazine more than a gallery," the Irish expatriate artist and critic Brian O'Doherty recalled of his decision to edit *Aspen* 5+6.²¹ The dematerialized forms of conceptual art, which largely consisted of texts, photographs, and other ephemeral documents, were perfectly suited for distribution in the reproducible printed format of the periodical. O'Doherty's expansive editorial vision soon spilled into a special double issue, published in Fall 1967, which contained four films, five records, critical texts, and several printed artists' projects, showcasing experimental art, dance, performance, film, music, and literature. Contained in a freestanding white cardboard box, *Aspen* 5+6 presented a cross section of the 1960s New York avant-garde, highlighting minimalism and conceptual art, while stressing its continental affinities and historical precedents. It included films by Hans Richter, László Moholy-Nagy, Robert Rauschenberg, and Robert Morris; flexi-discs of music by John Cage and Morton Feldman; texts and spoken word recordings by Samuel Beckett, Naum Gabo, William S. Burroughs, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Marcel Duchamp; an interview with Merce Cunningham; printed artists' projects by O'Doherty, Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, and Tony Smith; and critical articles by Susan Sontag, George Kubler, and Roland Barthes, whose landmark essay "The Death of the Author" was published here for the first time.

In his working notes for *Aspen* 5+6, O'Doherty referred to the magazine as a "miniature museum" and specified that it would contain diminutive works of art, such as dollhouse-sized sculptures by Oldenburg and Judd (neither of whom ended up participating in the final version).²² One model he likely had in mind was Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1935–1941), a "portable museum" which consisted of sixty-nine facsimiles of the artist's works, including miniature versions of

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Aspen, no. 5+6, Fall 1967. Edited and designed by Brian O'Doherty. Courtesy of Brian O'Doherty. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (86-S1350 no. 5-6).

ASPEN, 1965-1971

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his readymades, meticulously arranged in a small suitcase.²³ O'Doherty was a great admirer of Duchamp, whom he knew personally, and included in *Aspen* 5+6 recordings of the artist reading from "The Creative Act" (1956) and *À l'infinifif* (1912–1920). And yet, while the *Boîte-en-valise* was produced in special deluxe editions, creating an aura around mechanically reproduced works of art through collotype printing and hand-coloring techniques such as *pochoir*, *Aspen* was a very different kind of endeavor. At four dollars an issue, and with a stated circulation of 20,000 (albeit a figure that was probably greatly exaggerated),²⁴ it was not a limited-edition multiple, but a mass-produced museum, designed less to preserve and protect works of art than to set them free.

The square white cardboard cover of *Aspen* 5+6 evoked the proverbial white cube of the gallery space—which O'Doherty would later critique in his important series of essays "Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space," published in *Artforum* in 1976. Here he denounced the sterile elitism of the commercial gallery, describing its "unshadowed, white, clean, artificial" environment in which "there is no time" and "the outside world must not come in."²⁵ In retrospect, *Aspen* 5+6 seems to prefigure O'Doherty's later interest in how art might escape the architectural and institutional strictures of the traditional gallery. Rather than cloistering art from everyday life, the magazine released it back into the world, countering the timeless, contemplative visuality of the modern museum with a distinctly temporal, interactive experience.

The issue, which was opened by lifting the top half of the box cover off of the bottom half, presented a peculiar challenge to its reader, requiring various types of concentration and hands-on interaction. Subscribers to the magazine could watch, in grainy, silent, black-and-white footage, Hans Richter's *Rhythm 21* (1921), an abstract film composed of staccato squares and rectangles; László Moholy-Nagy's *Lightplay* (1932), which documented the dazzling patterns of light and shadow of the artist's kinetic sculpture; Robert Rauschenberg's *Linoleum* (1967), a kind of performance collage involving dancers and live chickens; and Stan VanDerBeek's film of Robert Morris's performance *Site* (1964), in which the artist hauls away plywood panels to reveal a tableau of Edouard Manet's *Olympia* featuring Carolee Schneemann as its reclining female nude. They could listen to the high-pitched shrieks of electronic frequencies derived from chance operations in John Cage's *Fontana Mix* (1958), and to the dreamy, arrhythmic percussive sounds of Morton Feldman's *King of Denmark* (1965), which specified that no mallets or sticks, but only the performer's hands, fingers, and arms, be used to play instruments. The reader was required not only to play records and to project films, but to perform a play in Brian O'Doherty's *Structural Play #3*; to compose music in Cage's *Fontana Mix*; to complete a poem in Dan Graham's "Poem, March 1966"; to turn the pages of Mel Bochner's *Seven Translucent Tiers* (1967), a stack of translucent tracing paper printed with a grid that contained patterns of pluses and minuses to be "added up"; and even to construct a cardboard model of Tony Smith's sculpture *The Maze* (1957).

Set loose from the traditional codex form, *Aspen*'s unbound format encouraged multiple rhizomatic connections among its components. The table of contents inventoried a dizzying cornucopia of themes and movements, including constructivism, structuralism, conceptualism, traditions of paradoxical thinking, objects between categories, time (in art and "history"), silence and reduction, and language. Against the strict evolutionary chronology of the modern museum, expressed by Alfred Barr's famous flow chart, art history in *Aspen* unfolds in an uneven temporality. Artistic influences do not proceed in a neat, linear fashion, but ricochet back

and forth, echoing among the various historical and neo-avant-garde practices juxtaposed in the publication, from minimalism and conceptual art to constructivism, Dada, and the French *nouveau roman*. The magazine as a whole manifests Kubler's claim in his essay "Style and the Representation of Historical Time," included in the issue, that "historically, every work of art is a fragment of some larger unit, and every work of art is a bundle of components of different ages, intricately related to many other works of art, both old and new, by a network of incoming and outgoing influences."²⁶

O'Doherty's working notes for *Aspen* 5+6 bear witness to the complexities of his editorial process in the face of these myriad connections and cross-references. Scribbled with elaborate lists, diagrams, arrows, and doodles, as well as phone numbers and dollar amounts, these notes reveal the labyrinthine relationships between the components, as he decided who to include and how to organize the sections, and worked out the logistics and production costs of the issue. O'Doherty listed himself as guest editor and designer as well as a contributing artist; he also contributed as a critic under the pseudonym Sigmund Bode (this was one of many alter egos that he would take on throughout his career, later producing art under the alias Patrick Ireland). He was also clearly operating as a new kind of curator, envisioning how the works of art and writings would be arranged physically and conceptually within this novel discursive space.

Aspen 5+6 was dedicated to the modernist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, whose explorations with the materiality and sonority of language served as a model for the issue's experiments with the spoken and printed word. In particular, the magazine paid tribute to Mallarmé's *Le Livre*, the poet's idea for a three-dimensional book, which was to consist of a set of mobile sections contained in a box and meant to be read aloud and collectively by an audience. Never realized during his lifetime, *Le Livre* was described by Mallarmé in his posthumously published notes, which were translated into English in the German music journal *Die Reihe* in 1964, where American artists such as Dan Graham and Sol LeWitt first encountered them.²⁷ *Le Livre* served as a kind of blueprint for how *Aspen*'s unbound format transformed the semantic and social possibilities of print, bringing about a collective, indeterminate form of reading.

In his 1967 article "The Book as Object," Graham described *Le Livre* as

a radical divergence from the traditional book, which attempts to translate its author's private viewpoint as re-presentation in the individual mind of its readers. The linear book's time is enclosed whereas Mallarmé's book exists in a moment-to-moment specificity, its duration and structure being formally identified with the constituent group of readers whose presence literally in-forms it. Unlike the old book, the "reader" does not work his way through in one direction.²⁸

Likely written with *Aspen* in mind, Graham's discussion of Mallarmé sheds light on the particular appeal of the magazine's unbound format for artists at this time. Graham's description of reading resonates strongly with the phenomenological models of spectatorship being explored by minimalism—where, in the words of Robert Morris, "it is the viewer who constantly changes the shape by his change in position relative to the work."²⁹ However, Graham also clearly evokes a poststructuralist model of signification—suggesting that the meaning of a text is determined by the reader's experience rather than solely by the author's intention—as Barthes described in "The Death of the Author," published, as mentioned, in *Aspen* 5+6. The unparalleled significance of

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this particular issue of *Aspen* has to do not only with the way in which it crystallized the intersection between minimalism's phenomenological models of perception and poststructuralist investigations of language—an intersection that was pivotal for the emerging practice of conceptual art—but also with the implications of this convergence for the social and political possibilities of both art and media.

MINIMALISM IN THE MAGAZINE: ASPEN'S THEATRICALITY

Published at the peak of minimalism's influence in the New York art world, *Aspen* 5+6 featured work by well-known minimalist artists including Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, Tony Smith, and Robert Morris. With its square white box cover and its reductive sans serif font, the magazine stylistically embodied the industrial, geometric forms of this work. O'Doherty conceived of the magazine's cover as itself a kind of miniature minimalist sculpture—a modular form that could be arranged in different ways by the reader.³⁰ In its metamorphosis from a flat, two-dimensional object into an unbound three-dimensional experience, *Aspen* in some sense paralleled the minimalist shift from an illusionistic pictorial realm to a physical or spatial reality, expressed by Judd's assertion that "three-dimensions are real space."³¹ And like Judd's specific objects, which he asserted were "neither painting nor sculpture," *Aspen* 5+6 threw into question its own category or medium, insisting on its hybrid status with its multimedia components ("objects in between categories" was one of the themes listed on its table of contents).³²

One of the most significant ways that *Aspen* 5+6 engaged with minimalist aesthetics was through its emphasis on temporality. In his working notes, O'Doherty repeatedly referred to the magazine as the "Art & Time issue of *Aspen*," and "time (in art and 'history')" was another theme listed in the table of contents. Indeed, *Aspen* vividly manifests the heightened engagement with temporality that, as Pamela Lee has argued, was central to 1960s art more generally, and that was perhaps most famously described in Michael Fried's scathing critique of minimalism, "Art and Objecthood," which appeared in the Summer 1967 issue of *Artforum*, just months before *Aspen* 5+6 was published.³³ Here Fried singled out minimalism's "endless, or indefinite, duration" as responsible for its "theatricality"—a new, and for the critic, deeply regrettable, relationship with the viewer.³⁴ Invaded by the mundane time and space of everyday life, minimalist works threatened to go on and on, refusing categorization or final meaning—and worse, failing to elicit conviction in the critic.

While all magazines might be considered temporal in that reading itself takes place in time, *Aspen* 5+6 dramatizes its temporality through its unbound, multimedia format. Consider the following review by Dore Ashton:

The book O'Doherty creates must, in physical fact, be seen in irregular time masses. I, for instance, had to arrange a film showing in my school in order to see the films. ... I had to borrow a phonograph with extra-slow time speed in order to hear Gabo reading his manifesto and Duchamp reading his prescription for an anti-Bouvard and Pécuchet dictionary. And I had to wrap up the essays and "data" (as the work by the visual "artists" in the box is called) and take them on a train to read. ... Assimilating O'Doherty's creation in these disparate temporal circumstances, I nonetheless, perhaps through unshakeable habit, was reading—reading a pattern of modern art in its multiple perspectives.³⁵

Ashton characterizes the experience of reading the magazine as explicitly temporal: it was impossible to view the magazine's contents all at once, or even in one sitting. Furthermore, the publication coincides with the reader's own duration, and is mediated by the "disparate temporal circumstances" of her own life, her teaching schedule, her daily commute.

Besides documenting works of art that might be considered quintessentially theatrical, such as LeWitt's *Serial Project #1 (ABCD)* (1966) and Morris's *Site* (1964), *Aspen* included documents—in the form of records, films, and printed materials—that were themselves distinctly time-based, requiring activation from the reader. Like the plywood slabs and beams, fabricated cubes, and found industrial objects of minimalist sculpture, which Fried abhorred because of the way they were driven by the spectator's interaction—in his words, this sculpture "*depends on the beholder, is incomplete without him, it has been waiting for him*"³⁶—the magazine in a box relied on the reader to activate it, to open it up and bring its mute, static contents to life.

This interactivity was staged in an especially acute—and earnest—way by Smith's cardboard model of *The Maze*. The original sculpture, created for the exhibition "Schemata 7" at the Finch College Museum of Art in 1957, consisted of four large modules arranged in a square, to create a labyrinth-like experience for the viewer who could walk through the pathways in between the modules. While the miniature version included in *Aspen* 5+6 obviously does not recreate the sense of scale of the original sculpture, it does underscore how deeply the magazine's literal interactivity resonated with minimalism's radical new understanding of the work of art as something intrinsically driven by the experience of the spectator. A set of eight black cardboard pieces meant to be cut out and pasted together by the viewer, the piece literally enacts the dissolution of the gestalt form of the work into a kind of endlessness of its different sides, which never quite cohere in the viewer's phenomenological experience. Furthermore, judging by the complexity of the instructions, it is likely that the construction of this piece would actually have been, for all practical purposes, an endless process—or at least one that the reader might have given up on before finishing. Indeed, to imagine the reader, all thumbs, fumbling with these cardboard pieces (the artist recommends using a matte knife and Elmer's glue) is to envision a model of viewership rooted in the duration and tactility of the human body.

And yet while such contingency meant one thing in the context of a sculptural work encountered in the architectural space of the museum or gallery, it undoubtedly meant something very different in the discursive space of a magazine, where critics and readers interpret art through texts. Indeed, if *Aspen's* unbound format evoked minimalism's new understandings of the viewer, it also powerfully conjured the new poststructuralist models of reception announced by Roland Barthes as "the birth of the reader," which insisted upon language itself as a contingent, interactive, and temporal medium.

THE BIRTH OF THE READER

The extraordinary importance of "The Death of the Author" for visual artists in the 1960s has long been acknowledged; to revisit it within its original site of publication in *Aspen* 5+6 allows us to more fully appreciate Barthes's influence on visual artists—and, perhaps, theirs on him. Brian O'Doherty had become familiar with Barthes's writings through the progressive literary magazine *Evergreen Review* (in which *Aspen* itself frequently advertised). He contacted the French

THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR / ROLAND BARTHES

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Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author,"
title page, *Aspen*, no. 5+6, Fall 1967. Courtesy of
Brian O'Doherty.

theorist in the summer of 1967, inviting him to contribute to *Aspen* 5+6. Apparently O'Doherty encouraged Barthes to take advantage of the magazine's unique multimedia format, for Barthes replied, "your project is of much interest to me, but I for one hold a radical belief in writing, and cannot imagine doing anything but writing."³⁷ He sent "The Death of the Author" a few months later, with a note apologizing for its brevity and expressing his hopes that it would be acceptable and "in sufficient harmony with the issue."³⁸

Commissioned specifically for *Aspen* 5+6, Barthes's famous essay must be understood as a deeply site-specific piece of writing, informed by and meant to be read alongside visual art, music, performances, and texts. To read "The Death of the Author" in the site of its original publication is to more fully comprehend Barthes's characterization of the modern text as "a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."³⁹ By leaving the sequence of the magazine up to the individual reader, who manipulates its various components, determining their arrangement and relationship to one another, *Aspen* echoes Barthes insistence on the primacy of reception—"the birth of the reader"—over and above the author's intention. As O'Doherty observed, "this discreteness will in effect measure the extent of the reader-listener-viewer's involvement."⁴⁰ The magazine's multimedia format attests to the important role of new communication technologies in the new models of authorship and reception announced by poststructuralist theory: to read (and listen to and watch) *Aspen* is to witness the death of the author as a casualty of the sixties' information society with its birth of new readers, who were also television watchers, radio listeners, and moviegoers. Even the layout and typography of the essay, printed in Univers font on square pages, embodies the stark, impersonal surface of the page as the locus of "that neutral composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the author, writing," as Barthes described the experience of the text.⁴¹

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pages

Aspen highlights the ways in which artists participated in the questioning of authorship, by using strategies such as chance operations, collage, deskilling, and serial procedures to displace artistic intention and engage the viewer as an active coproducer of meaning. (As Sol LeWitt explains in "Serial Project #1," published in *Aspen* 5+6, "the role of the artist is not to instruct the viewer, but to give them information. Whether the viewer understands this information is incidental to the artist; he cannot foresee the understanding of all his viewers.")⁴² The magazine also illuminates the tensions surrounding art criticism in the 1960s, for the death of the author also marked the demise of the critic. Barthes argued that "Once the Author is gone, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite useless. ... Criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author."⁴³ This assertion would have had special resonance given the heated debates that were going on between artists and critics in the pages of magazines such as *Artforum* at this moment. Formalist criticism, as exemplified by the writings of Fried, established aesthetic value according to the critic's conviction of a visual truth: his or her ability to instantly and automatically recognize—or dismiss—the virtues of a work of art. As Fried wrote, "it is this continuous and entire presentness ... that one experiences as a kind of instantaneousness" that allowed the critic to feel conviction.⁴⁴ Against this a priori recognition of aesthetic quality, *Aspen* 5+6 insisted on a less secure kind of knowledge, replacing a model of aesthetic judgment based on the consensus of a single, supposedly universal point of view with the unpredictability and indeterminacy of multiple viewpoints and subject positions.

Fried
call for
objective
criteria
✓
yes yes
yes

Beyond demonstrating the intersection between 1960s art and poststructuralist theory, *Aspen* embodied the egalitarian politics underpinning both. Indeed, Barthes's call for the radical redistribution of cultural production was realized in a very tangible way by this magazine which sent art through the mail in a cardboard box, allowing artists to circumvent the museum or gallery and bring about a more direct, democratic relationship with the viewer or reader. Barthes himself was apparently satisfied with the way *Aspen* 5+6 turned out, writing in a postcard to O'Doherty the following summer, "it is *fascinating*, and for me, very good."⁴⁵ (He also mentioned that he was still awaiting payment; as O'Doherty recalled with regret, none of the contributors ever got paid.)⁴⁶

CONCEPTUAL ART AND THE MAGAZINE: DAN GRAHAM'S *SCHEMA* (MARCH 1966)

Aspen 5+6 attests to the pivotal new role of language in 1960s art, as exemplified by Dan Graham's contribution to the issue, "Poem, March 1966"—a work better known as *Schema* (March 1966) (1966–1967). This work seems to graft the phenomenological investigations of minimalism onto the medium of language itself, demonstrating the "mapping of the linguistic model onto the perceptual model" which Benjamin Buchloh has identified as central to the development of conceptual art.⁴⁷ However, *Schema* also sheds light on the significance of the magazine itself as the vehicle of this exploration.

Schema consists of an algorithmic template: a generic list of variables—such as "(number of) adjectives," "(type of) paper stock," "(name of) typeface"—that self-referentially index its own appearance on the page, setting off a circular chain reaction in which the poem's form alters its content, which alters its form, and so on. The work, Graham stipulated, could be published in any magazine and was to be completed by the editor according to the design and layout of the particular publication in which it appeared. Originally typeset for *Arts Magazine*, it was pulled by the editor at the last minute. After its initial publication in *Aspen*, it appeared in numerous subsequent periodicals, including *Art-Language*, *Extensions*, *Interfunktionen*, *Studio International*, and *Flash Art*. In *Aspen* the template was printed, along with the completed poem, on a single sheet of 8-by-16-inch cardstock, folded in half.

Referred to as a "do-it-yourself poem" by one reviewer, *Schema* exemplifies Barthes's observation that "it is language that speaks, not the author."⁴⁸ As Graham himself observed about the piece, "there is no composition. No artistic or authorial 'insight' is expressed."⁴⁹ *Schema* enacts a profound emptying out of subjectivity from language: instead of communicating an author's ideas, it foregrounds the materiality of language itself, as it appears on the mass-produced page (in much the same way that minimalism's industrial forms and procedures removed the hand of the artist). To come across *Schema* in *Aspen* 5+6 is to be momentarily distracted from the meaning of words by the shapes of letters and numbers, and even by the density of the material on which they are printed. It is to observe the unadorned mechanical form of the font, to notice the texture and pliability of the page. Our automatic reading habits disrupted, we are reminded that reading is an activity that is not only conceptual but profoundly visual and tactile.

By foregrounding the medium of the magazine in this self-referential manner, *Schema* paralleled—and parodied—the reductive logic of the modernist work of art, which, critics such as Clement Greenberg claimed, revealed the purity of its medium by emphasizing its unique

material properties—the flatness of painting, for example. Ultimately, however, *Schema* suggests a very different notion of medium, one that (again like minimalism) challenges the autonomy of the work of art implicit in this formalist definition, by insisting on its context-bound nature. As Graham wrote about the piece, “it is not art for art’s sake” but “immediate, particular, and altered as it fits the terms (and time) of its system or (the) context (it may be read in).”⁵⁰

By enacting in a very literal—almost didactic—way a poststructuralist model of language, *Schema* functioned as a site-specific investigation of the magazine, demonstrating that the meaning of language was contingent upon the material conditions of the printed page, as well as on the editor’s interpretation of these conditions. Each time it was published, the piece was modified, registering the graphic design and typography of the specific magazine in which it appeared—adopting the stark modern style of sans serif, for example, or the bureaucratic, old-fashioned look of *Courier*. The work also draws attention to the distinct temporality and transience of the magazine—the fact that periodicals are linked to a specific window of time, after which they are relegated to the status of back issues. This limited duration was key to *Schema*’s critical function. As Graham wrote about the work, it “subverts value. Beyond its appearance in print or present currency, *Schema* is disposable, with no dependence on material (commodity), it subverts the gallery (economic system).”⁵¹

Just as minimalism and site-specific sculpture in the 1960s foregrounded the physical location of the work of art, insisting that the museum or gallery was not a neutral backdrop but a determinant factor in the work’s reception, so *Schema* insisted that the magazine page was not merely a generic container for discourse. And, just as the practice of site-specific art led from a consideration of the physical circumstances of the gallery space to the exploration of its social and political conditions—a practice that would become known as institutional critique—so Graham’s investigation of the material facts of the magazine page opened onto the ideological and institutional conditions of the art magazine and art criticism within the art world. His critique of these conditions would become more even more explicit in *Aspen* 8, which he went on to guest-edit.

ASPEN 8: ART AS IN-FORMATION

Organized around the theme “Art/Information/Science,” *Aspen* 8 reflected the preoccupation with cybernetics and systems theory in the art world at this time, as signaled by numerous exhibitions including Kynaston McShine’s “Information” and Jack Burnham’s “Software,” both in 1970. Dense with printed matter of various shapes, sizes, and formats, the magazine exemplified the propensity of art at this time to literally take the form of information and documentation. Among its contents were Robert Smithson’s *Strata: A Geo-photographic Fiction*, a collage of horizontal layers of found text and photographs of fossils; Yvonne Rainer’s choreographic diagrams, writings, and photographs; a poster version of Ed Ruscha’s 1967 book *Thirty-four Parking Lots*; documents and proposals by Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Morris, and Richard Serra; a lecture/song by David and Eleanor Antin; a booklet by Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin; an “audio study” by Steve Reich; a score by Philip Glass; and flexi-disc recordings by Jackson Mac Low and La Monte Young. The magazine’s cover, designed by Fluxus artist George Maciunas, was not a box but a large square folder, which appeared less a container of its contents than a vehicle for their dispersal.⁵²

SCHEMA

(number of) adjectives
 (number of) adverbs
 (percentage of) area not occupied by type
 (percentage of) area occupied by type
 (number of) columns
 (number of) conjunctions
 (number of) depression of type into surface of page
 (number of) gerunds
 (number of) infinitives
 (number of) letters of alphabet
 (number of) lines
 (number of) mathematical symbols
 (number of) nouns
 (number of) numbers
 (number of) participles
 (perimeter of) page
 (weight of) paper sheet
 (type) paper stock
 (thinness of) paper stock
 (number of) prepositions
 (number of) pronouns
 (number of point) size type
 (name of) typeface
 (number of) words
 (number of) words capitalized
 (number of) words italicized
 (number of) words not capitalized
 (number of) words not italicized

2.7

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

POEM

35 adjectives
7 adverbs
35.52% area not occupied by type
64.48% area occupied by type
1 column
1 conjunction
0 mms. depression of type into surface of page
0 gerunds
0 infinitives
247 letters of alphabet
28 lines
6 mathematical symbols
51 nouns
29 numbers
6 participles
8" x 8" page
80 lb. paper sheet
dull coated paper stock
.007" thin paper stock
3 prepositions
0 pronouns
10 point size type
univers 55 typeface
61 words
3 words capitalized
0 words italicized
58 words not capitalized
61 words not italicized

LECTURE ON MOVING

O.K. let's begin. The first decision to make is whether you are performer or audience. Half

exchange To part with for some equivalent; give up something for something else; change for another. To give and receive reciprocally; interchange. To part with in return for some equivalent.

interchange To put each of two things in the place of the other. To cause one thing to change

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INTRODUCTION TO THE YOUNG TURTLE ASYMMETRIES

Asymmetries are nonstanzic chance-generated poems of which the printed formats are notations for solo or group performances. They are asymmetrical in that they have no regularly repeating stanzaic or other patterns. They are notations in that most aspects of their format can be translated into aspects of performance. Notably, the lengths of blank space before, between,

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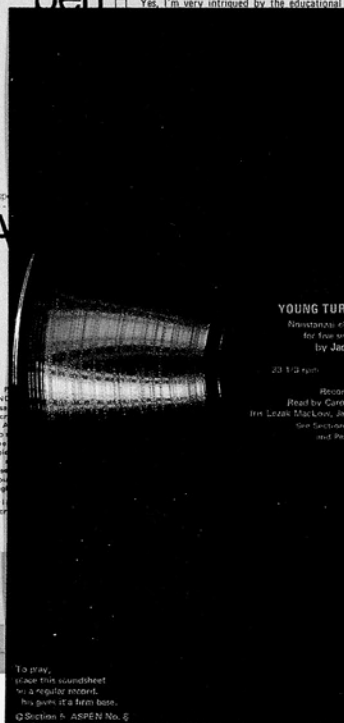
© SE

ART & VISION: MACH BANDS BY JO BAER

Aspen would like to know:
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Aspen is developing multi-media text kits for schools and colleges. If this is something you or an associate are interested in, please let us know.

☐ Yes, I'm very intrigued by the educational possibilities of multi-media text kits.



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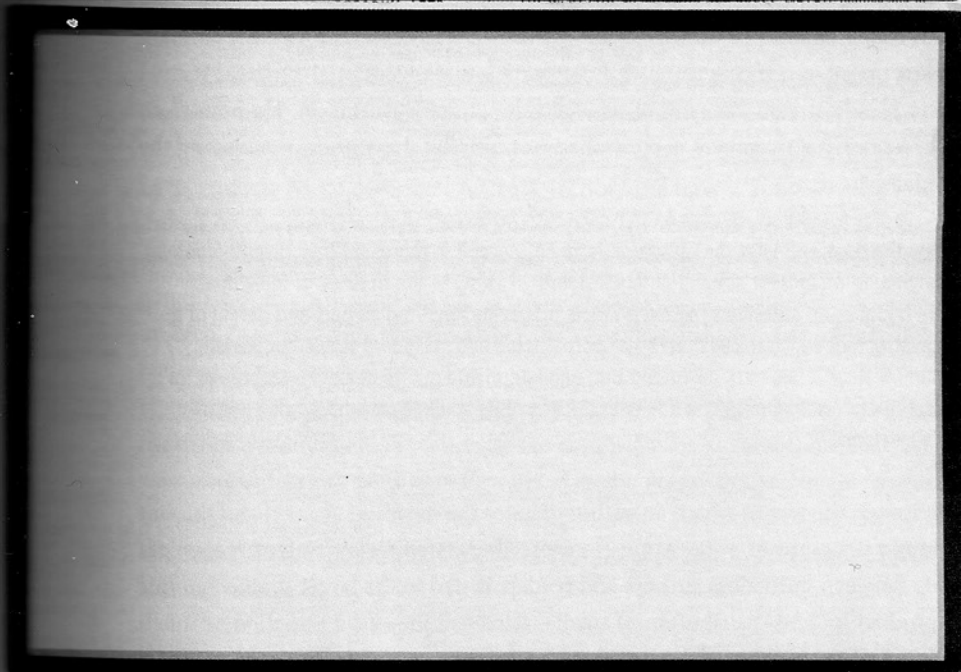
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IN PLACE OF
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BY
DAVID
ANTHONY

ASPEN MAGAZINE NO. 8 FALL-WINTER IN 14 SECTIONS \$4

ART/INFORMATION/SCIENCE



2.8

Aspen, no. 8, Fall-Winter 1970-1971. Edited by
Dan Graham and designed by George Maciunas.
Inside cover image by Jo Baer. Research Library,
The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
(86-S1350 no. 8).

ASPEN, 1965-1971

63

However, while *Aspen* 8 explored art's new status as information, it also challenged the dominant conditions under which this information circulated in an art world that, as Jack Burnham pointed out in 1969, was itself an "information system" in which "critics, magazines, galleries, museums, collectors and historians exist to create information out of unprocessed art data. ... The survival strategy of the art system is transforming preferred information into values."⁵³ Graham himself had condemned the role of the art magazine in perpetuating an economic system that benefited galleries and dealers instead of artists and viewers in his 1969 statement for the Art Workers' Coalition Open Hearing, discussed in chapter 1. With *Aspen* 8 he sought to challenge this system by reimagining the magazine's role both inside the art world and beyond it. As he explained in his editorial statement: "this issue where artists have conceived and (in part) designed their contributions ... may aid in redefining the magazine's place in (and as) art in (and as participant in) the larger world."⁵⁴

Specifically, Graham hoped that the publication's unbound format might emancipate the reader from the editorial and authorial monopoly on meaning, as it had in *Aspen* 5+6. Echoing his earlier writings on Mallarmé's *Le Livre*, he equates the literal mobility of the magazine's free-floating contents with a greater degree of interpretive leeway, explaining that "in reading ... a reader's mind's eye is changing: his position continually shifting."⁵⁵ However, in *Aspen* 8, Graham also began to explore more specifically how the magazine's unconventional physical format might correspond to a radical restructuring of its socioeconomic organization. He points out that the meaning of a text in a magazine is controlled not only by the author, but also by the advertisers who underwrite it:

While in the past the book and later the magazine form has served to represent (re-present) (contain) the author's privileged *insight* (or several authors' points of view) to the masses of individual readers who've bought and identified the *experience*, magazines serving as part and parcel of a socio-economic structure which necessitates and perpetuates this system of single dimension, single fixed point of view ... its form assuming that enough private points of view—static—of its readers and its authors can be brought in line with the line of its advertisers whose ads support the magazine's existence.⁵⁶

Graham's analogy between the way in which an author dictates the meaning of a text and the way in which the economic structure of a magazine circumscribes its editorial content recognizes how the relationship between individual authors and readers is tied to the larger socioeconomic conditions of the production and distribution of media. Barthes himself had implied as much, insisting that the figure of the author is "the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology," a statement that hints at how the corporate ownership of media perpetuates the treatment of cultural meaning as private property rather than public knowledge.⁵⁷

Graham further speculates that the traditional codex form of magazines might reinforce on a concrete level the integration of editorial content and advertising, ensuring that they are bound together and viewed in a set sequence. He condemns the "single dimension, single fixed point of view" as the traditional codex form, clearly referencing McLuhan's well-known comparison between print and *perspectiva artificialis* in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Here, McLuhan argues that the development of print resulted in an isolation of vision from the other senses that was

Meaning in
Aspen 8
never

analogous to the shift instantiated within visual representation by the fifteenth-century invention of perspective—a shift that resulted in “a reduction of experience to a single sense, the visual,” leading to the viewer’s detachment from the world and to contemporary attitudes of indifference and passivity.⁵⁸ And yet, against McLuhan’s technological determinism—buried in his glib adage, “The medium is the message”—Graham insists that the technology of print does not determine its communicative possibilities, but rather is itself deeply contingent upon the social conditions of its production and distribution.

These were the conditions that Graham sought to challenge with *Aspen* 8. He proposed turning the economic structure of the commercial art magazine on its head, suggesting that artists might team up with corporations to produce works of art as advertisements, with the profits from the ads going directly to the artists (Graham and several other artists had already experimented with this idea by creating individual magazine advertisement pieces, as discussed in chapter 1). “This arrangement,” he wrote, “would serve a twofold function: the artist might help the corporation in establishing its corporate image while the corporation might help the artist in freeing some of the limitations in relation to the reader and socio-economic frameworks.”⁵⁹ He later admitted that this plan was idealistic, and it did not materialize in the published issue of *Aspen* 8, which seems to have had no advertisements.

Graham sought to create a publication that would not be dominated by a single overarching theme or motive—whether the editor’s, the authors’, or the advertisers’—but that would combine multiple interests and opinions, and would be further destabilized by the diverse perspectives of its readers. As he described *Aspen* 8, it “does not have a point of view (mine or a priori determined by the form); instead its point of view is continually shifting, feedback contingent in its place (time and context) and its relationship to the readership who individually and collectively compose or in-form its meaning.”⁶⁰ Graham’s concept of “in-formation,” with its suggestion of an unfixed, indeterminate process rather than a concluded end state, clearly invokes the cybernetic concept of feedback. Defined as the necessary noise or interference in any communication system, feedback is a model of information as contaminated—but also enriched—by its own means of transmission, as well as by the conditions of its reception.⁶¹ In the late 1960s, feedback was used widely as a paradigm for radical media practices that sought to redress the asymmetry between the producers and receivers of media, as evidenced, for example, by the video art magazine *Radical Software*, founded in 1970 to explore the progressive social potential of video and new media.⁶²

While during the 1960s and 1970s cybernetics was most frequently associated with investigations of new electronic and digital technologies, *Aspen* 8 suggest that its implications were equally applicable to print media. Indeed, feedback was a metaphor that suggested to artists how the magazine might function as an interface that encouraged its readers to participate in its meaning, to interfere with its message: to talk back. Processes of feedback—messages rendered impure, disrupted, and distorted by their own means of transmission—are everywhere in evidence in *Aspen* 8, from the degraded reproductions of Smithson’s *Strata* that threaten to dissolve into abstract patterns of mechanically reproduced dots, to Steve Reich’s *Pendulum Music*, a score that uses receivers and microphones to amplify electronic feedback. However, feedback was also inherent in the very format of the magazine itself—its participatory nature as a container of

objects to be touched and grasped. If *Aspen's* interactive multimedia format challenged the conventions for viewing art within the museum space, it also challenged the spectacular regime of the media itself.

Ultimately, Graham wanted readers to participate not just in the magazine but in the world itself. He suggested that *Aspen 8* might "point directly to the outside world—to products to be played (maybe records) and services to be rendered."⁶³ He conceived of the magazine not so much as an object or final product but as an intermediary—a broker between the reader and the world, connecting the two, however temporarily: "The signs on the page function simply as vectors: switching terminuses in the transaction between the activating authorial mover, the world out there and the activated moved reader who, finishing, left to shift for himself in another place—continues the transaction (in another time and space); reading isn't another order of time or experience apart."⁶⁴ To say that the reader finishes "in another place" is another way of saying that the reader does not finish, is never finished with reading this magazine, which is not an ends, but a means—a medium—for another experience, and another and another, marked not by discrete beginnings and ends but by relationships and conversations and actions and passage through time.

.....

If *Aspen* suggests how the magazine functioned as a new kind of medium and distribution form that promised to radically transform the social and political possibilities of art, it also suggests the limitations and contradictions of this project. The magazine seems to have left some readers puzzled—and even exasperated. A review in *Time* magazine summed up issue 5+6 as follows:

Aspen is a magazine for people who don't like to read much. ... *Aspen* assaults all the senses not just the visual. ... Any reader (participant, player, victim?) who takes the trouble to wade through the latest issue, designed by Brian O'Doherty, should find his senses fully exhausted. ... For those who seek refuge in conventional words, a few are supplied. They are, however, often as inscrutable as the rest of the contents.⁶⁵

Clearly, for this reviewer at least, the "birth of the reader" was not a liberating experience as much as it was an aggressive affront to the reader. That the experimental and unfamiliar nature of *Aspen's* contents puzzled uninitiated readers, or fatigued those accustomed to being lulled by mainstream media (such as *Time* magazine itself, perhaps), should come as no surprise; some might argue that this perplexity was precisely the point. However, this review is interesting because it lays bare the contradictions at the heart of conceptual art practices of the 1960s: while this art claimed to be more accessible to a wider audience by reducing art to language and seeking out alternative models of distribution, it too often appeared opaque to all but the most specialized of audiences. In fact, *Aspen* belies the conceit of legibility that so often accompanied the egalitarian claims of conceptual art.

And yet rather than foreclosing on the artistic possibilities of the magazine, *Aspen* very much leaves them open and unanswered—an open-endedness that was in some sense affirmed by the publication's own unfortunate ending when the U.S. Postal Service revoked its second-

class mail license in 1971. According to the transcript from the legal hearing, the Postal Service claimed that *Aspen* was not a magazine but a “non-descript publication,” that it was “not easily described; unclassifiable; belonging, or apparently belonging, to no particular class or kind.”⁶⁶ *Aspen*’s breach of the bureaucratic category of the periodical illustrates the indeterminacy of the publication: the deep uncertainty about its format, contents, and publication schedule. This indeterminacy suggested how the conventions of the magazine—the rules that made it legible as such—might be conceived anew, so that the magazine was no longer merely a prescription for a given format, but a set of conditions rife with unforeseen possibilities. *Aspen* raises the question: What is a magazine? It suggests, in ways that parallel new understandings of artistic medium itself at this time, that a magazine might be something compelled by its own internal logic and rules, without determining ahead of time what kind of experience or object these rules will create.⁶⁷ This shift had implications for how artists understood the magazine as an artistic medium and also for how they used it as a communication medium, in ways that will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

Aspen’s publisher, Phyllis Glick, née Johnson, moved on to other endeavors, losing touch with the artists with whom she was once close, and disappearing from the art world, virtually without a trace.⁶⁸ She eventually moved back to Colorado to help care for her aging mother and aunt, and helped to found a retirement home in Glenwood Springs, Colorado; she wrote and illustrated *The Mushroom Trail Guide*, a highly regarded book on mushrooms (an interest that was perhaps inspired by her acquaintance with John Cage, who was an avid mycologist as well as a composer); she traveled around the world, climbed mountains, and learned to tango in Argentina. She continued to support the arts, working as a docent at the Contemporary Museum Honolulu at the end of her life. Though her time in the art world was largely a passing interlude, her magazine had an impact well beyond its brief existence.

