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Author(s): lori waxman

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The Banquet Years

FOOD, A SoHo Restaurant

THE FOLLOWING NOTICE APPEARED in the Fall 1971 issue of the vanguard art magazine *Avalanche*:

On Saturday, September 25, to mark the unofficial opening of Food, an artist-run restaurant at 127 Prince Street, free garlic soup, gumbo, chicken stew, wine, beer, and homemade breads were served to friends, gallery-goers, and passers-by until late in the evening.

So begins the very first published announcement for FOOD, the “restaurant commune”—as it would be dubbed by reviewers for the *New York Times* and *New York* magazine—that in its heyday was a center of life for a diverse group of artists who called Manhattan’s then-gritty SoHo their home.¹ Dozens of local sculptors, filmmakers, photographers, musicians, and dancers worked there—variously as cooks, waitresses, or dishwashers—glad to have a paying job flexible enough to allow them time to prepare for an exhibit or skip town for a gig, and still have a job afterwards. Even more of them ate there, partaking not only in fresh, homemade, creative, and affordable dishes—raw mackerel with wasabi sauce, stuffed tongue Creole, and anchovy onion pie, among the more exotic offerings—but also in a community of like-minded familiars who often exhibited together and collaborated on one another’s projects.

SoHo circa 1971 was a neighborhood in transition, existing somewhere between its former life as an industrial zone and its new one as the center of the avant-garde art world, which it would become by the middle of the decade. But in the late sixties and early seventies, it was a mostly abandoned space in a city that was itself being increasingly abandoned: white flight to burgeoning suburbs and manufacturing flight to the larger ports of New Jersey were just two of the many factors that led New York City into a deepening cycle of crime and squalor. By 1975 the city was bankrupt; its betrayal by the federal government famously, if somewhat inaccurately, plastered across the front page of the October 30 issue of the *Daily News*: “Ford to City: Drop Dead.”

If the city as a whole suffered, however, its woes opened up spaces where alternative cultures could experiment and even thrive. Downtown had long been a zone where artistic transgressions were freely parlayed across canvases, tavern tables, and low-rent studios. The New York School had Eighth Street and The Club; later generations would spread out across the Lower East Side.² Since the early sixties, the area south of Houston Street had attracted a steady flow of artists lured by its cheap, sizable, and increasingly deserted loft spaces. A district of light-manufacturing companies, the neighborhood had lost many of its commercial occupants as part of general urban deindustrialization trends, but also as a result of the Lower Manhattan Expressway project, which planned to obliterate the quarter by turning it into a highway corridor. Growing appreciation and concern for the historic architectural fabric of the city, especially for the area’s nineteenth-century cast-iron facades, eventually derailed the proposal, but wary manufacturers never returned. Instead, artists moved into more and more of the raw spaces left in their wake, taking occupancy under various legal and extralegal arrangements. Some received AIR (Artist in Residence) status from the city, but most lived illegally under threat of police raids and evictions.³ Still others moved into the “fluxhouse” co-operative spaces established by Fluxus artist George Maciunas beginning in 1966.

Throughout the sixties, SoHo, as the area South of Houston was unofficially known, remained a raw neighborhood, but one with a growing cultural energy. It was a Do-It-Yourself scene in which artists created their own economy of support, collaboration, and feedback. Extending the tendencies of the *Assemblage* and *Happenings* generations before them, they eschewed any kind of media specificity, and when they weren’t creating works in the streets themselves, they founded spaces in which to experience one another’s artistic experiments.

Right: Tina Girouard, Carol Goodden, and Gordon Matta-Clark in front of the space that would become FOOD, 1971.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD LANDRY. © ESTATE OF GORDON MATTA-CLARK. COURTESY OF DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK.



Alternative sites abounded: 112 Greene Street Workshop, Holly Solomon's 98 Greene Street loft, Alanna Heiss's Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc., Steina and Woody Vasulka's The Kitchen, and the Ward-Nasse co-op all opened between 1968 and 1971. SoHo even developed a fledgling market credibility: commercial gallerists Paula Cooper and Ivan Karp set up shop in 1968 and 1969, respectively, to be joined soon thereafter by uptown dealers Leo Castelli and Andre Emmerich. What the neighborhood lacked were not places to show the new kinds of art being made in its plentiful lofts but rather the more basic amenities of urban residential existence—grocery stores, schools, churches, libraries, pharmacies, and restaurants—absences that followed logically enough from the fact that it had never before been a neighborhood where people lived, but rather one where they worked in blue-collar manufacturing jobs. The few restaurants that did exist were luncheonettes that closed their doors at three in the afternoon, plus Fanelli's, a rough Italian bar at the corner of Mercer and Prince, which served terrible food, according to one artist's recollection.⁴

So when Gordon Matta-Clark suggested half-jokingly to Carol Goodden that she should open a restaurant in SoHo, she did. And she asked him to collaborate on it with her. Goodden was a sometimes photographer and dancer with Trisha Brown's nascent company; Matta (as he was then known) was a sculptor who had spurned his Cornell architectural degree to experiment with spatial deconstruction and the alchemical properties of fried photographs. Both were fond of throwing dinner parties, and their lofts were as full of communal gastronomy as were their friends'.⁵ Alan Saret, who went to Cornell with Matta and helped found 112 Greene—one of the first artist-run spaces in SoHo—held regular Sunday-night banquets at his place on Spring Street. The Louisiana expats who lived at 10 Chatham Square were famous for their Cajun specials. Even the *Brooklyn Bridge Event*, a 1971 outdoor group show organized by Alanna Heiss, concluded with Matta spit-roasting an entire pig over an open fire. Five-hundred pork sandwiches were served—though only after the pig had fallen into the fire the night before, and a group of friends had come down to ensure that it cooked at least most of the way through.⁶

This cohort was not, of course, the first to marry food and art. A long tradition of representing food stretches from Arcimboldo's sixteenth-century portraits of vegetable-headed men, through Chardin's eighteenth-century still-lives of dead rays and rabbits, to Wayne Thiebaud's twentieth-century cake-like paintings of, well, cake. Vanguard rejection of representation and of traditional

materials compelled a diverse array of contemporary artists to work with food in literal and often controversial fashion, as in Dieter Roth's chocolate sculptures and sausage drawings of the mid-sixties; Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* happening (1964), in which nearly nude performers writhed orgiastically with raw chicken, sausage, fish, and each other; Paul McCarthy's abject ketchup-splattered performances, begun in the seventies and continuing through today; or Jana Sterbak's *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987), sewn from fifty pounds of flank steak.

Closer to the tale at hand is the history of artists' restaurants, commercial establishments that served as regular gathering spots, like the Café Nouvelle-Athènes in Impressionist Paris, La Colombe d'Or in School of Paris Provence, or Max's Kansas City in Warholian New York. On their flipside are those enterprises created by artists who understood eating, drinking, and socializing as aesthetic activities in and of themselves, as did Filippo Marinetti when he opened the Futurist restaurant Penna d'Oco in Milan in 1930; Daniel Spoerri, who set up the first of his various restaurants in 1963 at the Galerie J in Paris, with the intention of using diners' leftovers to create his *tableaux-pièges*; and, more recently, Rirkrit Tiravanija, whose atmospheric Thai cooking—and its remains—have graced many an international exhibition.

The larger category of relational aesthetics, to which Tiravanija's installation-events belong, arguably owes much to the precedent of FOOD, just as FOOD owes something to many of the earlier components of the list above. Nevertheless, for as much as the story of FOOD belongs within this aesthetic-gastronomic narrative, it also has a meaningful place elsewhere, as a unique ingredient of the historical scene that it fed.

The Art and Life of FOOD

Completely taken with the idea of opening a restaurant, Goodden bought out the lease of Comidas Criollas, a Puerto Rican lunch counter at the corner of Prince and Wooster Streets, and in addition to Matta asked her friends sculptor Suzanne Harris and dancer Rachel Lew to participate.⁷ Initially, Harris and Lew each agreed to put up one-third of the starter money, but both eventually pulled out financially, leaving Goodden to cover most of the bills with her inheritance. Matta himself had no money, so she paid for them both, and her personal finances would continue to support the restaurant—and many of Matta's increasingly expensive art projects—for the next few years. Tina Girouard, an artist who was part of the 10 Chatham

Square crowd, joined in, and the three of them spent the summer of 1971 demolishing the site and building it up from scratch, along with the help of Robert Prado, Richard Landry, Manfred Hecht, and a few other friends.

Matta, the former architecture student, acted as general architect and contractor, drafting everything from the ground up—including designs for pots, dishes, and silverware that were never realized. He crafted the space based on his and Goodden's personal aesthetics rather than on practical ones. As she recalls,

I wanted wood cabinets because I liked the look and feel of wood. I did not understand how hard they were to clean and that there is a reason for stainless steel cabinets. We wanted tile floors because we liked the look of tile. We did not understand the horrendous noise/echo problem it would cause and the difficulty on people's bodies, working all day on tile floors. We wanted to cook "out in the open" and designed the kitchen that way—hang efficiency! We did not want a noisy, water-consuming, electric-consuming dishwasher, we wanted a person, an artist, one that could use a job.

The gastronomic intentions of the restaurant evolved in a manner as romantic and unconventional as its physical environment, parlaying fresh, often locally sourced ingredients into creative dishes that changed constantly. "I wanted to change the menu every day," Goodden explains, "because I was tired of going to restaurants and knowing what everything on their menu tasted like; I had already had it many times." But, she adds, "Talk about inefficient!" And though it would have been far easier, and possibly even cheaper, to order foodstuffs from a single supplier, the fresh daily catch was haggled for at 4:00 A.M. down at the Fulton Fish Market, and residents of Mad Brook Farm, Vermont, were given free living space in exchange for baking fresh bread nightly. Produce was sourced as locally as possible, but it was scarce, save for the summer season, and eventually the restaurant's regular vegetable supplier insisted on being its sole source.⁸ Even the organizational structure of FOOD was idealistic, with a hiring policy that allowed employees to work as many or as few hours as they wished, despite the resulting scheduling difficulties—and tax penalties for irregular employee hours.

Few, if any, of these and the other decisions Goodden, Matta, and Girouard made in setting up and running FOOD made much sense in terms of standard operating procedures. Far from it: the latest restaurant technology called for bringing in precooked frozen dishes, a time- and money-saving procedure learned from the airline industry. Contemporary food trends ranged from corporate

branding to chemical processing, standardization, over-consumption, and the rise of junk food and fast food.⁹ While the folks at FOOD were certainly in line with some of the most forward-thinking writers and advocates of the time, who were deeply critical of industrialization and agribusiness, they hardly had other restaurants to take as a template. Alice Waters and friends had just started Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, and the Moosewood Restaurant collective wouldn't open its doors in Ithaca, New York, until two years later. But running a restaurant, at least in the narrow sense of a for-profit business whose product is food service, was never really the point.

On the contrary, *restaurant* might better be understood as a normative model to which FOOD was an alternative, along the lines of Claes Oldenburg's Lower East Side *Store*, where the artist sold messy, expressionistic sculptures of food and clothing for two months in 1961, or the mail-order system George Maciunas set up in the mid-sixties to distribute Fluxus multiples. Such appropriations of recognizable commercial forms would only grow more common in the late seventies and early eighties, when artists associated with COLAB broadcast their own cable television shows and sold multiples at the peripatetic A. More Store.¹⁰ The various vanguard spaces that were FOOD's neighbors, from 98 Greene Street to the Performing Garage to Stefan Eins's 3 Mercer store, can be understood within this framework as well: part DIY, part mimicry, part invention, they were both like and completely unlike the kinds of spaces that existed outside of SoHo. Without them, the experimental work created by SoHo artists would never have been seen; some of it might never have been made. Where else but in the basement of 112 Greene would Matta have had the freedom to dig a massive hole in the foundation and plant a cherry tree in it?¹¹

Thanks to Manhattan's indifference, the inhabitants of the island within an island south of Houston could and did take the opportunity to reinvent what it meant to live in an urban environment—and what it meant to make art. As Suzanne Harris put it, reflecting back on the era, "We didn't need the rest of the world. Rather than attacking a system that was already there, we chose to build a world of our own."¹² The DIY ethos that suffuses Harris's statement, that built FOOD, and that permeated SoHo more generally, offered a broad, workaday echo of various activist paradigms of the time: the black power movement, the women's movement, and the gay liberation movement all provided meaningful examples for rethinking the most basic social and political systems not through rhetoric but through action.¹³

Closer to home, the cultural paradigm of pluralist art proffered its own array of possibilities, rethinking and reworking art into something increasingly unpredictable and uncategorizable, ever closer to life itself. Since the fifties, when John Cage spoke of erasing the gap between art and life, generations of succeeding artists variously heeded his call: FOOD patron and local art star Robert Rauschenberg moved from two-dimensional vertical paintings to horizontal *Combine* junk assemblages to collaborative performative events that involved actions as diverse as roller-skating or shimmying up a rope. Allan Kaprow left behind Expressionist painting to invent Happenings, radical theatrical events that surrounded audience-participants with a bombardment of nonsequential and often quite commonplace activities, from orange juicing to climbing on old tires. Coming out of Judson Dance Theater's exploration of everyday movement, dancers from Trisha Brown's company, to which Carol Goodden belonged, walked down the sides of buildings and across rooftops, sometimes to Cage's music or dressed in Rauschenberg's costumes, exploring everyday space in both ordinary and extraordinary ways. Fluxus artists dispensed with art altogether, scoring the minutiae of daily life—from the making of soup to the polishing of a violin—into absurdist events whose goal was to make one aware of the wondrousness of life, not art. These and other artists, many of whom lived and worked in and around SoHo, experimented radically and often collaboratively, discovering new forms, breaking away from traditional object making, rejecting the confines of the gallery, exhibiting a fervent need to act, to do, to mix, to create. Just as there was no longer any reason to separate sculpture from painting and dance, the boundaries between art and life and anything previously compartmentalized within those two categories dissolved. An artist's life could be art, just as an artist's art could be life.

FOOD thrived within this prevailing impetus to bring art and life ever closer. Conceived as a collaborative enterprise that didn't care much about the enterprise end of things, as a restaurant that would nourish its employees and customers with much more than just food, it fit into no strict categories—neither that of art nor of life—but rather somewhere shifting and in between the two. Yet, despite FOOD's unorthodox layout, menu, hiring policy, and finances, its claim to being a real-life business is never challenged. Rather, what is called into question is its status as art.

Goodden recounts that both she and Matta thought of the entire adventure as an art piece. For her it was “a series of live photograph-paintings”; for him, a complete work that could eventually be sold to dealer Leo Castelli. How

seriously Matta meant this is debatable; certainly he had expansive—and expanding—notions of what it meant to call something an artwork. Of course, neither Castelli nor any other dealer or collector ever did buy FOOD, but a successful sale does not a work of art make—a lesson long understood by the avant-garde, whose work rarely sold in the era in which it was made, and understood especially by the generation of artists that so recently produced Happenings, wherein there was nothing to buy, only to experience. Nevertheless, art historian Thomas Crow has argued that “it would stretch even the capacious aesthetics of the time to call FOOD a work of art in itself.”¹⁴ And in that pronouncement Crow isn't exactly wrong, just perhaps inappropriately stiff. A more generous definition of art might better suit the aesthetics of the time, or even a willingness to dispense with such limitations altogether. Certainly, Matta, Goodden, and the many artists who ate and worked and performed at FOOD seem to have thought so.

FOOD did have direct relationships with more recognizable artworks. It was the subject of one of Matta's first films, the unfinished *A Day in the Life of Food* (1971–1973). Shot with the help of Robert Frank, the documentary tracks the round-the-clock life of the restaurant, beginning early in the morning at the Fulton Fish Market and finishing even earlier the next morning with the baking of the restaurant's fresh bread—a trajectory that underscores a kind of food-related romanticism that wafted through the restaurant along with the smell of good cooking. Matta also made the first of his “cuttings,” his radical means of redefining architectural space by literally cutting it up into pieces, while renovating the restaurant; he later exhibited fragments of the restaurant's original walls and door at 112 Greene alongside his *Bronx Floors and Walls paper*.¹⁵ Bob Kushner, who worked as FOOD's dessert chef and manager from 1972 to 1974—he recalls baking a killer chocolate sour-cream cake and a Syrian coffee cake heavy on the nutmeg—held a fashion show at a nearby loft of clothing stitched from fruit and vegetables, all of which he'd sourced through FOOD and the unused portions of which were later served up at the restaurant.¹⁶

Kushner's use of foodstuffs in place of traditional art materials echoes one of the more explicitly artistic moments of FOOD, its guest-chef dinners, which Matta originated. Sunday nights were the time for these meals, and while some cooked up straightforward, edible fare—Rauschenberg served homemade chili—others took a more experimental approach, crafting dishes that were often more food for thought than food for eating. One infamous Matta meal, called “Alive,” included hard-boiled eggs hollowed out and filled with live brine shrimp. Another, the “Matta



Above: Gordon Matta-Clark with a camera at FOOD, 1974.

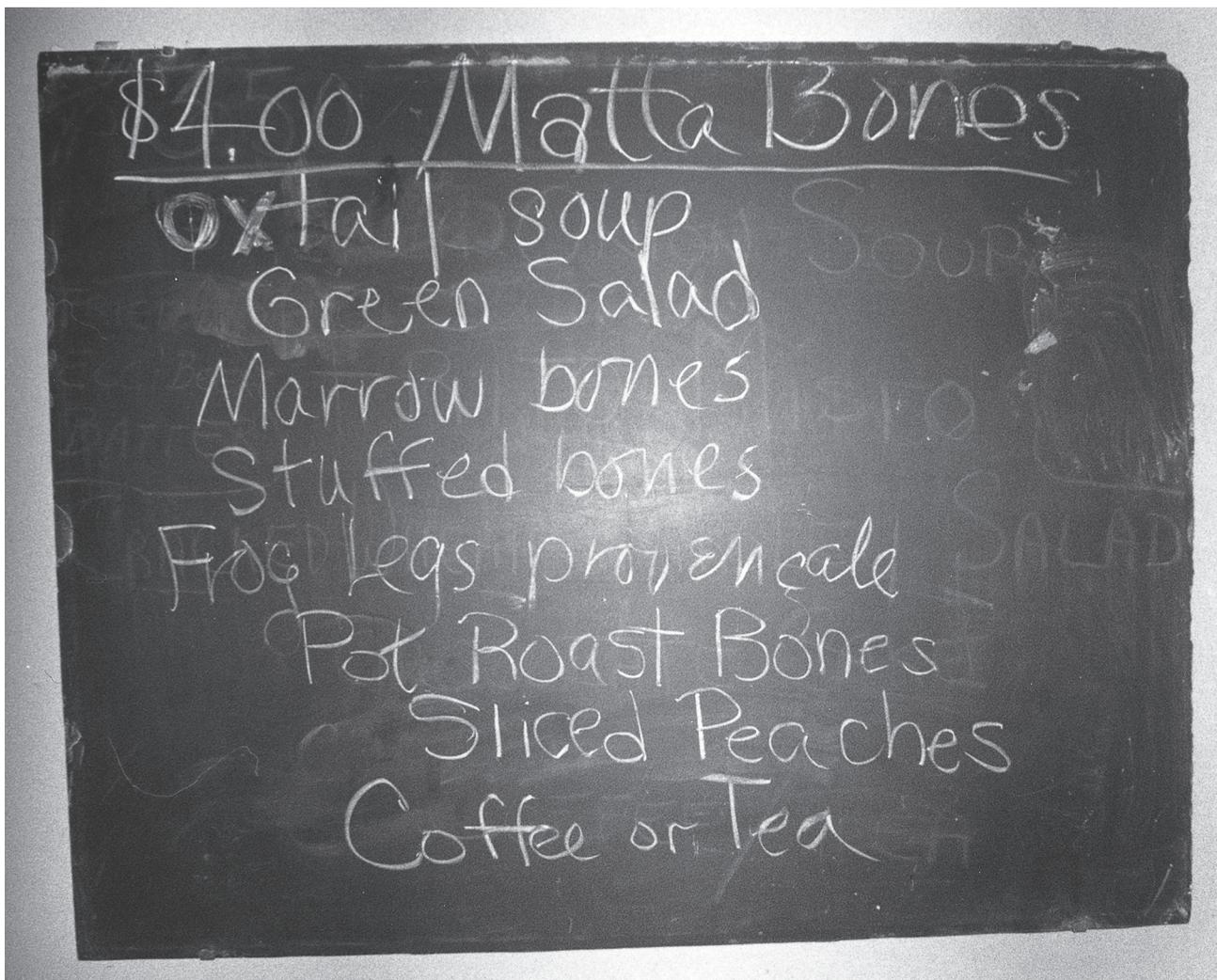
PHOTOGRAPH BY COSMOS ANDREW SARCHIAPONE. © ESTATE OF GORDON MATTA-CLARK.
COURTESY OF DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK.

Bones” dinner, cost four dollars and featured oxtail soup, marrow bones, stuffed bones, frog legs provençale, and pot roast bones; afterward, Hisachika Takahashi drilled holes through the bones and strung them together, so that diners could wear their leftovers home. On another occasion, Takahashi, who worked as an assistant to Rauschenberg, crafted beautiful paintings out of food plates. Mark di Suvero proposed—but never realized—a sculptor’s dinner to be served through the front windows by crane and eaten with screwdrivers, hammers, and chisels.¹⁷ Bob Kushner remembers a red-and-green dinner, where red sauce was served on green pasta and pesto on red pasta, but not who cooked it. Other guest chefs included Michael Goldberg, Donald Judd, Richard Landry, Italo Scanga, Keith Sonnier, Joan Shapiro, and Yvonne Rainer.¹⁸

The architecture and design of FOOD provide further clues to its larger role as “a work of art in itself.” In addition to Matta’s aesthetically motivated designs for the restaurant as a whole, including unrealized plans for cooking and serving ware, Girouard recounts how the space was organized as a kind of stage, from its open kitchen to its long bank of windows, through which one could watch the action from Wooster Street, especially when the restaurant was lit up at night. Open kitchens were not common in American restaurants of the era, which in New York meant upscale food palaces like the Four Seasons, all-you-can-eat steakhouses,

English- and Irish-style pubs, fast-food joints, Chinese restaurants, and nostalgic tearooms.¹⁹ FOOD looked elsewhere for inspiration—to Goodden’s travel experiences of European eating culture, for one—and the restaurant’s open-plan design even allowed dessert-making to be seen from Prince Street, as from the front tables. A rotating roster of chefs—Mabou Mines one night, Philip Glass’s ensemble on another, vegetarian dancers on a third—performed at their centrally located stove and prep tables for the surrounding audience of diners. Even the dishwasher was deliberately sited within the space—a moving, breathing, expressive human dishwasher, not a machine.

The broadest reaches of FOOD as a space for creative practice can perhaps be further understood through the context of the women’s movement. Proclaiming “the personal is the political,” feminist artists like Carolee Schneemann and Judy Chicago explored in the late sixties and early seventies how such quotidian aspects of their lives as menses and childbirth could be legitimate subjects for art. The trickle-down of that radical notion meant that all aspects of one’s life could be part of the creative process; it doesn’t seem too much of a stretch, given the times, to extend that idea to a restaurant run by artists for artists, a



Above: *Matta Bones Dinner, 1972.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY COSMOS ANDREW SARCHIAPONE. © ESTATE OF GORDON MATTA-CLARK. COURTESY OF DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK.

place whose original goals, as expressed by Carol Goodden, were not to function as a profitable business but rather to display cooking bravado, to create a sympathetic place for friends to meet and eat, and to provide artists with a flexible working environment. If FOOD still doesn't seem to fit the definition of capital "A" art, why not lose the capital? So Castelli didn't buy it. Happenings, Fluxus, and myriad other kinds of radical art-making had proved that anything could be art and that the process often mattered more than the end product—regardless of whether or not it sold, or was even saleable.

FOOD also published a string of inventive advertisements in *Avalanche*, a magazine owned and edited by friends Liza Béar and Willoughby Sharp. *Avalanche* was dedicated to the radical conceptual art being made not only throughout the world but also very much by the artists who lived and worked around FOOD and 112 Greene.²⁰ The ads were projects in and of themselves and were likely ad hoc and collaborative. A photo by Richard Landry (see p.25) forms the backdrop for the first ad, which appeared in the Fall 1971 issue: Girouard, Matta, and Goodden stand outside

the as-yet-unrenovated restaurant, below the original sign for *Comidas Criollas*, which, in the photograph, has been casually scrawled over with the word "FOOD." The next ad, published in the Spring 1972 issue, was the creation of Girouard, Goodden, Matta, and editor Liza Béar.²¹ "Food's Family Fiscal Facts" detailed not only the restaurant's financial state (in which the total running costs magically equaled total income, to the penny) but also a fantastical accounting of dozens of other kinds of consumption and activity: 379 lbs of rabbits stewed, 4,081 chickens succumbed, 220 bunches of parsley sprinkled delicately, 47 dogs asked to leave, 3 unfulfilled promises by good friends, 2 rebellions, and an unspecified amount of brandied people as opposed to pears. At the bottom of the page, an untitled paragraph of over one hundred names lists FOOD's big "family."

The first few names in the "family" list are easy to place: Carol Goodden, Tina Girouard, Gordon Matta, Suzanne Harris, and Rachel Lew—the official founders. Here's

Robert Prado, a musician with the Philip Glass ensemble, who was one of the first chefs and a maker of superb Cajun gumbos; and Richard Peck, also part of the Glass ensemble, who worked as a dishwasher. Over there some guest-chef names pop up. But soon the list gets hazy and very, very long. Who were all these people, and what was their relationship to FOOD? Incredibly, they all worked at the restaurant,²² but who exactly did what is to some extent beside the point. The essence of this list is that a whole lot of people were involved in FOOD one way or another, whatever the specifics of their participation, whether it was chopping, cooking, washing, eating, selling, paying, sitting, talking, filming, or picture taking. FOOD would not have existed without all of them. It existed for them: the people who came up with the idea, the ones who put it into play, those who worked daily to keep it functioning, and those who depended on it for social, gastronomic, or financial sustenance—roles that often overlapped.

FOOD's communal nature stemmed from an essentially generous spirit, a noncynical way of being in the world that found expression throughout SoHo at the time. Its nearest neighbors exemplified that essence: 112 Greene Street Workshop operated as a freewheeling creative space, open to the kind of experimentation that could hardly happen elsewhere, in a big, dirty, former rag factory that artist Jeffrey Lew owned and opened up to like-minded artists in 1970. Collectors Holly and Horace Solomon made available their 98 Greene Street loft to "allow artists and poets and performers to *do* their work, and have it be seen. The space was given to them and they could do with it what they wanted." Like the founders of FOOD, Lew, the Solomons, and many of their SoHo neighbors were propelled by a kind of oppositional urgency, a need to make positive, active gestures that would help create the kind of environment they felt was worth living in. The gestures may have been local and ad hoc, but, as Holly Solomon explains, "It was a time of great distress when everything seemed to be falling apart, and for Horace and me opening the space was a political statement. We felt that we couldn't change the world, but that privately we could do something."²³

But not all communal spirits are created equally. At the same time that FOOD can't be reduced to any one person, it would be disingenuous to ignore the importance of certain individuals. Fundamentally, FOOD was an idea sparked by Gordon Matta and nurtured, financed, and overseen by Carol Goodden. Tina Girouard helped build it and was initially responsible for personnel, remaining active for the first year or so and reappearing now and again to cook up Cajun dishes. Rachel Lew and Suzanne Harris, who were

responsible for procurement, pulled out almost immediately—though both spent hours peeling garlic for the opening-day soup. FOOD was conceived as a communal idea, but in the end most of the work fell on the shoulders of a very few people. Matta, according to Goodden, "was the charisma that made it work as well as it did," "the eye of the hurricane," but she ended up responsible for its day-to-day existence.²⁴ It was a mom-and-pop operation, and Goodden was both mom and pop—she got the call if the toilet was blocked or a delivery was late—a banal reality hardly borne out by the small body of literature that treats FOOD.

In part, this oversight can be attributed to FOOD's self-projected image as a collective entity, in which the ads in *Avalanche* played an important role. It follows naturally from the fact that so many different people were, of necessity, involved in the day-to-day activity of running the restaurant. But it is also very much a product of the art world's particular kind of memory, of the need for a celebrated artist like Gordon Matta-Clark (as he is known today) on which to hang an otherwise obscure, hard-to-categorize project like FOOD. The main locale for writings about FOOD are monographs and exhibition catalogues devoted to Matta-Clark, where the restaurant is treated as one among a résumé of ambitious projects completed in his short career.²⁵ Carol Goodden is the primary source cited within those texts. One exception to this rule is the catalogue for *FOOD: An Exhibition by White Columns, New York*, curated by Catherine Morris in 1999. But even there an entire chapter is devoted to the food art of Matta-Clark. Artworks by the other founders or workers rate little mention, unless they appeared in a group show alongside Matta-Clark's. This is not to deny the importance of Matta-Clark's work nor the fundamental role he played in the inception and spirit of FOOD, but it begs the question: If interest in his work hadn't continued to grow after his early death from cancer in 1978, would any scholarly attention have been given to FOOD at all?

Save for a few crumbs, FOOD would most likely have disappeared along with the memories of many other, less famous individuals who were part of it, Carol Goodden included. A few ads in a defunct avant-garde magazine and a restaurant review or two might constitute its sole remains, and that would be a loss, not just because FOOD stands at a nifty intersection on the food-art continuum, or because it must have been a really cool place to hang out, but because it offers a multi-paned window into an era on which it is hard to get a good sightline. Any attempt to understand the culture of early seventies SoHo has to look further afield than the art being shown in its commercial galleries, even

further than that being shown in its alternative spaces. FOOD is an exceptionally potent source of information, a key part of the expanded archive that can tell us about what it was like to live, work, breathe, eat, make art, collaborate, and play in SoHo circa 1971.²⁶

All Good Things Must Come to an End

FOOD continued to exist in name through the late seventies and possibly even into the early eighties, but only its first two or three years of existence are ever discussed, and with reason. The dates of Matta's film *A Day in the Life of FOOD*, 1971 to 1973, roughly correspond to that period, during which the initial founders and friends remained more or less active participants and the restaurant stayed true to its art-life principles. But by the fall of 1972 Matta had begun to lose interest, if not in the concept of FOOD, then in the actual running of it, coming by only to hang out, rarely attending meetings.²⁷ Sunday-night guest-chef dinners petered out. Goodden had by this time hired Robert Kushner, a twenty-four-year-old artist newly arrived from Boston, to work as a dessert chef; a few months later he became assistant manager and then acting manager, a position he held through 1973. As Kushner tells it, they were serving at full capacity but still losing money. With the help of some "creative accounting" and a less artistic hiring policy, the restaurant broke even for the first time.²⁸ In 1973 FOOD began to be just a restaurant. The shop next door was acquired for extra seating, SoHo became an increasingly popular destination for gallery-goers and tourists. The restaurant closed on Sundays, which, perhaps not incidentally, was a day when galleries also shut their doors. In a 1975 *New York Times* article titled "SoHo Grows Up and Grows Rich and Chic," the writer could sniff,

The artists' collective restaurant at Prince and Wooster, called FOOD, now turns out crispy little salads and crepes instead of ladling out thickened okra broth and mashed eggplant. Few artists eat there because it is less affordable than when it opened three years ago.²⁹

Somewhere along the way, Matta and Goodden both dropped out, as did most of their friends. FOOD had become a legitimate business, a triumph by some measure, but not by theirs. As Goodden recalls:

I did not like cringing when the busboy dropped the tray of glasses, because I knew what that would cost and margins were slim. I did not like being exasperated when the vegetable delivery would not show up. I was irritable going to the fish market at 4 A.M. and fighting for decent

fish at decent prices. It had ceased to be an "adventure." I had no time to spend on my photography, was almost too tired to dance with the Trisha Brown Dance Company.

Goodden tried to sell FOOD, but there were no takers. She offered to pass it on to Kushner, with the stipulation that she be able to eat and entertain occasionally, but he was burnt out from his managerial duties and refused—plus, his work had started to sell and he wanted to concentrate on art making. She ended up giving it to an English woman named Ruby, a non-artist who had been waitressing at the restaurant and showed some managerial abilities. When Ruby skipped town less than a year later, leaving a few months of unpaid bills and rent in her wake, it was the end of an era that was already on its way out.

Did FOOD become a business because Matta, Girouard, Harris, and finally Goodden left? Or did they leave because it was becoming a business? The answer likely lies somewhere in between. To put it another way, how does an idealistic enterprise survive the departure of the founders who charmed it into being in the first place? Alternately, can such an endeavor survive their continued presence? Speaking of 112 Greene, which eventually became White Columns, New York's oldest artist-run space (and the location for *FOOD: An Exhibition* in 1999), founder Jeffrey Lew recalled, "Something special happened during the first three years, and after we got the grants it didn't happen anymore."³⁰ Accountability—more often than not assumed due to the acquisition of money, be it from grants or outright profit—invariably alters the dynamics of a spirited adventure, for better or worse. Other factors must also have been felt: many of the original 112 and FOOD artists had begun to show in commercial galleries, and burgeoning art careers took them off to Europe and other places far from SoHo. Priorities, responsibilities, and needs changed. So did the neighborhood, which became increasingly dotted with galleries, restaurants, and shops, including the Spring Street Bar, Kenn & Bob's Broome Street Bar, and the gourmet market Dean & DeLuca, to name some of the earliest infusions—all of them still around. Surrounded by so much business, FOOD couldn't continue except as a business. And so it did, for some time, but without the collective energy and intentions of its founders, whose ad in the Fall 1972 issue of *Avalanche* wondrously proclaimed:

LOVE AMONG THE CABBAGES
EAT FOOD 127 PRINCE 260-3730

Rest in peace. ☹

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Carol McCoy (née Goodden), Tina Girouard, and Bob Kushner for being so generous with their own memories, as well as Rob Storr for the initial inspiration to undertake this research.

1. FOOD was referred to as a “restaurant commune” in Milton Glaser and Jerome Snyder, “The Underground Gourmet: Food, Glorious Food,” *New York* (January 3, 1972): 65; and Fred Ferretti, “SoHo Grows Up and Grows Rich and Chic,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1975, 184. The title of this essay is borrowed from Roger Shattuck’s seminal 1958 book, *The Banquet Years: The Arts in France, 1885–1918: Alfred Jarry, Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie, Guillaume Apollinaire*, which was standard reading material for the FOOD generation, according to Tina Girouard (telephone interview with the author, 15 December 2004). All subsequent references to Girouard are to this interview.

2. For a firsthand account of the New York School scene, see Irving Sandler, *A Sweeper-Up After Artists: a memoir* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003). The generation of New York artists succeeding FOOD would continue to thrive despite, and arguably because of, the city’s socio-economic difficulties, a phenomenon explored in *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974–1984*, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).

3. In the early 1960s the Artists Tenant Association petitioned Mayor Robert Wagner for permission to live in districts not officially zoned for residential use or in buildings lacking a Certificate of Occupancy. The city agreed to allow a maximum of two artists per such building, which would then be marked “A.I.R.” for Artist in Residence. Many of the buildings in SoHo still bear this signage today. See Richard Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists’ Colony* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

4. Robert Kushner, who worked at FOOD for two years beginning in 1972, offered this assessment of Fanelli’s during an interview with the author, 15 October 2004. Now a SoHo classic, Fanelli’s still stands at the corner of Mercer and Prince Streets, and the burgers are actually pretty good, at least in this writer’s opinion. All subsequent references to Kushner are to this interview.

5. As bohemian as these dinner parties must have been, in their attention to the pleasures of food and cookery they correspond to a wider home-cooking trend encouraged by the publication of such books as James Beard’s various tomes and Julia Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, as well as television programs on Greek and Italian cooking. See Waverley Root and Richard de Rochemont, *Eating in America: A History* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976), 456.

6. Girouard.

7. The story of the genesis of FOOD is told in more or less the same way in most published accounts, the majority of which are drawn from Carol Goodden’s recollections. Unless otherwise noted, details about the beginnings of the restaurant are taken from an e-mail Goodden (now McCoy) wrote to the author, 6 December 2004. All subsequent citations to Goodden are to this e-mail as well, unless otherwise noted.

8. Kushner.

9. Root and de Rochemont, *Eating in America*, 444–447, 453.

10. This trend has been dubbed the “mock shop” by Carlo McCormick. For further examples of the phenomenon, see his essay “A Crack in Time” in *The Downtown Book*, 81, 85, as well as a special section on the exhibition Web site, www.nyu.edu/greyart/exhibits/downtown/mock1.html.

11. Matta-Clark made a career of radically altering found, neglected architectural spaces, and many of his first such experiments, including the one described here, *Cherry Tree*, 1971, took place in the permissible climate of SoHo. See Thomas Crow, “Gordon Matta-Clark: Survey,” in *Gordon Matta-Clark* (London: Phaidon, 2003), 31.

12. Alan W. Moore, *Collectivities: Protest, Counter-Culture and Political Postmodernism in New York City Artists Organizations 1969–1985*, Ph.D. diss. (City University of New York, 2000), 47.

13. Robert Pincus Witten, “Gordon Matta-Clark: Art in the Interrogative,” in *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985), 14–15.

14. Crow, “Gordon Matta-Clark: Survey,” 44.

15. Gordon Matta-Clark interviewed in *Gordon Matta-Clark* (Antwerp International Cultureen Centrum, 1977), 8; Catherine Morris, *FOOD: An Exhibition by White Columns, New York* (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1999), 36.

16. For more on Kushner’s food costumes, see Robert Kushner, “Life in the Produce Aisle,” *Art Journal* 54:1, Clothing As Subject (Spring 1995): 62–65; and Robert Kushner, “Food + Clothing,” *Gastronomica* 4:1 (Winter 2004): 77–85.

17. Carol Goodden, quoted in *Gordon Matta-Clark* (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio Gonzalez, 1992), 370; Alanna Heiss quoted in Morris, *FOOD: An Exhibition*, 29.

18. The list of guest chefs is generally hard to confirm; the one I’ve compiled here, including the Rauschenberg anecdote, derives mainly from Jacob, *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective*, 38. Nevertheless, though Rauschenberg was a regular at FOOD, Carol Goodden doesn’t recall him ever cooking there, nor does she remember Yvonne Rainer participating, but Girouard does.

19. For an overview of the restaurant scene in New York in the late sixties and early seventies, see Michael and Ariane Batterberry, *On the Town in New York: From 1776 to the Present* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 298–313.

20. See Lisa Le Feuvre, “Avalanche,” *Art Monthly* 278 (July/August 2004): 7–10.

21. Morris, *FOOD: An Exhibition*, 33.

22. Goodden, e-mail to the author, 9 January 2005.

23. Quoted in *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview, 1969–75*, curated by Jacki Apple, with an essay by Mary Delahoyd (New York: The New Museum, 1981), 28. This exhibition catalogue provides a good overview of 112 Greene Street Workshop, 98 Greene Street, and related spaces.

24. Carol Goodden, e-mail to the author, 11 December 2004. Goodden’s point is backed up by Kushner and Girouard.

25. The Whitney Museum of Modern Art’s recent Matta-Clark retrospective devoted some exhibition space to FOOD and inspired a noteworthy article on the restaurant by Randy Kennedy in the Dining & Wine section of the *New York Times*. See Randy Kennedy, “When Meals Played the Muse,” *New York Times*, 21 February 2007.

26. Marvin J. Taylor discusses this expanded notion of the archive in “Playing the Field,” *The Downtown Book*, 34.

27. The story of FOOD’s transformation and demise is pieced together from the accounts of both Kushner and Goodden; specific attribution is noted only where their stories diverge.

28. Kushner.

29. Ferretti, “SoHo Grows Up and Grows Rich and Chic,” 184.

30. Quoted in *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 34.