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(17) Happenings etc - Segal's chicken farm - Burgess - Oldenburg - Kaprow's "Legacy of Jackson Pollock" -

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Note

In 1960, audiences at Happenings were straight clothes, suits & ties — even Kaps & Bellamy.

Kaprow appears in his book wearing corduroy suit, white shirt & tie

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Happenings (chronology)

Black Mountain College event - summer of 1952 (Cage, Cunningham, Tudor, R. etc

Gutai - first event in 1955, in pine forest at Ashiya; second Gutai event (first autonomous) in 1956, in Ohara Hall, Tokyo; third Gutai in 1957 had stage happenings. Jiro Yoshihara, leader of group. See NY Times article on Sunday, Dec. 8, 1957.

New York group - 1956, Allan Kaprow's penny arcade at Hansa, people look through ripped canvas at paintings, lit by flashing bulbs. Others followed.

1956 (spring) - picnic at George Segal farm near Rutgers, N.J. Kaprow, who was then teaching art at Rutgers, ~~invited 50 people.~~ org. a scenario.

1958 - first Happenings at Reuben that fall; others at Judson (Oldenburg) and ~~Provincetown~~ Delancey Street (Red Grooms)

steaks and paint; a pop-art musical called "Home Movies," and two free showings of "The Connection," the movie about drug addiction that had been banned shortly before by the New York State Board of Regents.

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Allan Kaprow (Archives tape, 1963)

Born Atlantic City, 1927. Moved soon after to NYC - father a lawyer. Childhood in Arizona (health reasons). Studied with Hofmann at NYU. Majored in art and philosophy - esp. the Pragmatists, James + Dewey. Then studied with Meyer Schapiro who urged him to spend more time on his art.

Had first show in 1953, at Hansa.

Met Rauschenberg after R. had his show at Stable (blacks, whites, fetishes) - This got him interested in Dada

Started doing Happenings in 1957, after going John Cage's class. "What I had to do was get rid of my being a painter, a spectator artist."

"Mostly since 1962 ... I've shifted the concept art to that of game."

Kaprow - looked for a time like a great force on the scene, but his happenings were the worst, the dullest. No sense of humor. Still doing them. Best happenings were by Grooms, Dine, Oldenburg -- real psychodrama. (Ivan Karp)

steaks and paint; a pop-art musical called "Home Movies," and two free showings of "The Connection," the movie about drug addiction that had been banned shortly before by the New York State Board of Regents.

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GUTAI (Martha Jackson Gallery, Steve Joy)

A group of young Japanese in their 20s and 30s, living in the industrial triangle Kyoto-Kobe-Osaka, who stage outdoor exhibitions in a pine grove near Kobe. First show in 1958. Leader of group is Jiro Yoshihara, a well-to-do manufacturer (cooking oil, soap).

Gutai means 'embodiment' -- the desire to create something new through novel means. Materials include plaster, rocks, cans, light bulbs, etc. One artist hangs plastic bags filled with colored liquids in trees - the colors change with changing light.

Very close to theater. One exhibit took place inside a plastic cage with one white wall -- artist threw paper balls dipped in color against white wall, then began throwing ladels of diluted paint against plastic walls. In another sequence, a huge vinyl balloon was slowly inflated until it filled the whole stage, while monotonous music played (like breathing) and colored lights illuminated the huge bag from inside; then the air was let out again and it subsided, hissing.

Michel Tapié, French ~~painter~~ critic & dealer who took up the movement, writes: "Gutai nous propose le plaisir."

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Hansa Gallery 1952-1959

First at 70 East 12th St. (Fall 1952-Fall 1954), then at 210 Central Park South (Fall 1954 - Summer 1959). 12th Street space was up two dingy flights, corner 12th and 4th Avenue. ~~Wha~~ "Hansa" from Hans Hofmann, also Hanseatic League of free cities. CPS site was parlor floor of a brownstone, and this is where they took on Bellamy and Karp. Founders included: Allan Kaprow, Wolf Kahn, John Gruen, Jan Müller, Felix Pasilis, Richard Stankiewicz, Jane Wilson.

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POP

The Rutgers Connection

Kaprow writes, in catalog to Bianchini show of "Ten From Rutgers University":

"Ironically Rutgers was the catalyst in all this, in spite of itself. For the record, it never encouraged and often opposed, what wex were doing...Watts originally came to teach engineering; I teach art history. Segal was a chicken farmer nearby; and Brecht in his inimitable way of seeming anonymous, chose to live in a split-level while working as a scientist for Johnson and Johnson Company." In 1960 Lichtenstein joined the faculty at Douglass College, Rutgers University. Among the students who responded to this apparently accidental but poten group were Lucas Samaras and Robert Whitman.

(from Alloway, "American Pop Art", p. 20)

clad performers, dead fish, raw steaks and paint; a pop-art musical called "Home Movies," and two free showings of "The Connection," the movie about drug addiction that had been banned shortly before by the New York State Board of Regents.

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25th Anniversary Concert – May 15 1968 – Cage

Cage Anniversary Concert

John had tried to get Town Hall himself, but was turned down. Jap and DeAntonio and Bob were angry about that, and Dee said 'I can get that hall,' which he did. "We became entrepreneurs overnight." The event was so successful that they did another for Merce at the Phoenix. They had met Dee at the New City evening (Cage concert).

work." Bob, Jap and Dee took over all details, left only the music up to Cage. "And so in a way the situation was reversed from the Theater de Lis, where I was able to give Bob a job..."

ton Square in Greenwich Village. The church has been called "far out" so often that one might wonder if it is on the moon. Mr. Moody has been called "an extraordinary Christian," "the anti-Christ in the church" and "groovy."

This spring new attention centered on the church when two nude ballet dancers appeared briefly, in a number called "Waterman Switch," during a dance recital there. ("You have to understand what's going on down here," Mr. Moody was saying on the telephone to another clergyman, a week after the performance. "No, Paul, it's not a rumor. Yes, Paul, in front of the cross. Yes, a man and a woman. . . . Well, it would have been worse if they were the same sex, don't you think? Sure, Paul, I know.")

Judson Memorial has also been the scene of "Meat Joy," a "happening" involving bikini-clad performers, dead fish, raw steaks and paint; a pop-art musical called "Home Movies," and two free showings of "The Connection," the movie about drug addiction that had been banned shortly before by the New York State Board of Regents.

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PROGRAM—Judson Memorial goes in heavily for drama (above), dance, films. In an artistic community, it aims "to serve the artist."

the size of congregations, the carpeting in the nave. His primary concern is with the growth and development of the urban church. He deplores what he calls "the prevalent mood of a frustrated Protestantism . . . raised on the farm . . . fearful and distrustful of the city." He pleads that Protestantism get over being a "small-town pastoral religion" and become relevant to more complex societies.

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The congregation of the church numbers about 100. It is primarily from the Midwest; its educational level is very high, and there isn't a beatnik in it. Seventy-five pe cent of church members wor for nonprofit organizations sixteen are ordained minister: This impressive group ful supports all of Judson's pro ects. Ask any one of tha about the outspoken plays o bearded fellows in the choi loft and you will hear a re peat of Howard Moody: "We must allow the artist to create without censorship. Not all th plays are good, but last ws we won another Obie." s

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25th Anniversary Concert - May 15, 1958 - Cage

Cage living in Ston Point by then. Had met DeAntonio, who was then living NY and acting as an agent for artists, with access to Madison Avenue. "One day Bob called to say they had a project they wanted to talk to me about. I went down to their studio, and they told me what it was -- a concert of my music at Town Hall." Cage was working on Concerto for Piano and Orchestra at the time, and thus suddenly confronted with a deadline and "a mountain of work." Bob, Jap and Dee took over all details, left only the music up to Cage. "And so in a way the situation was reversed from the Theater de Lis, where I was able to give Bob a job..."

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Within the structures ofo American Baptist and Uns Church of Christ denomin tions, every local church h complete autonomy. There a 14-member governing boat at Judson Memorial, which Mr. Moody consults. There are scheduled discussion groups and there are informal coffee hours allowing time for criticism and exchange of ideas. Church funds come from three sources: an endowment, the congregation and the parent denominations. The pastor's annual salary is $9,000, which is about average. He lives in a brownstone parsonage on East 18th Street with his wife and two children.

"JUDSON opened a pipeline between the avant-garde and the more conventional society of the Village," says Daniel Wolf, publisher of The Village Voice (for which Mr. Moody often writes). In addition to the church proper, Judson offers the "more conventional"

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Way-Out Minister Of Washington Square

By LYN TORNABENE

"FOR centuries the church has been pushing people into a corner of despair and slipping them God. If they weren't despairing, we would make them despair. You've heard of the shell game? Well, the church has been playing that spiritual con game too long. And nobody could win because the church always knew which shell God was under."

The speaker is the Rev. Howard R. Moody, the Baptist-Congregationalist minister of Judson Memorial Church, a large, yellow-brick structure on the south side of Washington Square in Greenwich Village. The church has been called "far out" so often that one might wonder if it is on the moon. Mr. Moody has been called "an extraordinary Christian," "the anti-Christ in the church" and "groovy."

This spring new attention centered on the church when two nude ballet dancers appeared briefly, in a number called "Waterman Switch," during a dance recital there. ("You have to understand what's going on down here," Mr. Moody was saying on the telephone to another clergyman, a week after the performance. "No, Paul, it's not a rumor. Yes, Paul, in front of the cross. Yes, a man and a woman. . . . Well, it would have been worse if they were the same sex, don't you think? Sure, Paul, I know.")

Judson Memorial has also been the scene of "Meat Joy," a "happening" involving bikini-clad performers, dead fish, raw steaks and paint; a pop-art musical called "Home Movies," and two free showings of "The Connection," the movie about drug addiction that had been banned shortly before by the New York State Board of Regents.

WHAT'S going on here? you wonder as you walk into the church. What's going on here? you wonder when you walk into the book-crammed study and meet the 44-year-old pastor—crew cut, brass-buttoned red vest, aromatic pipe tobacco. What are you up to? you ask him—just like that, because, with all the tumult going on, tact seems superfluous. Mr. Moody laughs. "Why don't you follow me around and find out?" he says. And so you do.

You learn that the Rev. Mr. Moody is subjecting his ideas on modern Christianity to extreme exposure to find out whether they will survive. He believes, as does a growing group of clergy, that in order to function in today's world the church has to involve itself, to be and do —and to stop worrying about

LYN TORNABENE is a freelance who has interviewed dozens of personalities in the news.



PROGRAM—Judson Memorial goes in heavily for drama (above), dance, films. In an artistic community, it aims "to serve the artist."

the size of congregations, the carpeting in the nave. His primary concern is with the growth and development of the urban church. He deplores what he calls "the prevalent mood of a frustrated Protestantism . . . raised on the farm . . . fearful and distrustful of the city." He pleads that Protestantism get over being a "small-town pastoral religion" and become relevant to more complex societies.

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PASTOR—The Rev. Howard Moody of Judson Memorial Church. His congregation is small, but the stir he has created is large.

Villagers a community center for young people. ("It's highly unstructured," Mr. Moody says happily; "it's like chaos when you walk in there") and a dormitory sheltering 20-odd students, half of them from foreign countries.

"Sunday services are still pretty square at Judson," says its pastor. The Gospel is still read, hymns are still sung and the minister still preaches—but not from a pulpit. There is no pulpit. There was one, but it was pushed into a corner a few months ago to make room for a performance of "Winnie-the-Pooh," and the congregation decided it should be left there.

On the first Sunday of the month, the "service" takes the shape of a shared meal—an agape, or (love-of-God) feast. The pews are moved back, tables are moved in, and a feast of lox, bagels, rolls, fruit, cheese, French bread and Chianti is spread out for whomever wanders in looking for fellowship. This is a recent innovation, and not everyone in the congregation is fully committed to it. During the second such feast, one member was chafing because he missed the historic traditions of Sunday worship; another thought the lox and bagels were a bit too much.

Special holidays are given special treatment. Last Palm Sunday, for instance, the choir and organ gave way to a jazz trio and a dance group in white leotards. There was no sermon. When there is a sermon, it is likely to be topical, intellectual and consistent with the philosophy of Moody and Judson. An example from a recent sermon: "There is a profound sense in which religion is lost without the arts. Whether the church can recover them soon enough to withstand the impending drift into a swamp of cultured pietism is still unanswered."

The pastor is not a parish-conscious man in the usual sense. His flock doesn't need the usual tending, because most tend their own flocks all week. What the congregation wants from Mr. Moody is representation in social and civic actions. "I couldn't go to Selma because I work, but Howard went for me," said one woman recently.

LIKE so many of this city's colorful figures, Mr. Moody was neither born nor bred anywhere near it. He comes from Dallas. His parents were devout Southern Baptists who introduced their son to church at such an early age that by the time he was 5 he was preaching, for entertainment, at family gatherings. The only other vocation he ever considered was politics. The most he has said publicly on why he became a minister occurs in a lecture he gave at the Harvard Divinity School:

"The call and sense of mission which the ministry bestowed on me gave a depth of meaning to my life which I will never fully understand but for which I will always be grateful. I can point to no hour or circumstances of that call, simply the steadily growing conviction confirmed in retrospect and validated by an inner compulsion that made all other possibilities impossible."

His usual answer these days to queries about his calling is some variation of "Well, I wasn't hit by lightning, and there was no thunder." Pressed to the wall, he will grit his teeth—steeled for the epithet "do-gooder"—and say: "I guess I believed that the church at its best represented care and concern and love of people without the ulterior motives of other institutions for human good." In the next pained breath he acknowledges the weaknesses of the church, and asks, "What is perfect? Where else could I go?"

Mr. Moody spent four years as a marine in the South Pacific during World War II. Within the next five years he got his B.A. from the University of California and his B.D. from Yale. In the six years that passed before he became Judson's senior minister, he was chaplain at Ohio State, busy with what he describes as "a different approach to student work."

He explains that the church's traditional role on campus at that time was to make sure that the student went out the way he came in. Mr. Moody wanted to be there when the student got hit with the first shock waves of life. He wanted, he says, "to nurture him in his rebellion, help him make the choices: who am I, what am I going to be, where am I going to go?"

WHEN he moved to New York in 1956 Judson Memorial Church was already heading in the direction it is going today. Dr. Robert Spike, now with the National Council of Churches, was in charge. Dr. Spike had come to the church in the late nineteen-forties when, for want of a function, the building was being rented out for dog shows and bazaars. "If the church doesn't have anything to say to Greenwich Village, it doesn't have anything to say anywhere," Dr. Spike declared, and he set about making it speak. Mr. Moody's job, as Dr. Spike's successor, has been to repeat what it had been saying, only louder.

To that end, in 1959 he became president of the insurgent Democratic group that unseated Carmine de Sapio in 1961. In or out of organized politics, he has skirmished with City Hall—fighting to keep the Village safe from an extension of Fifth Avenue, safe from high-rise apartments, safe for coffee houses, safe for tenants, safe for people of every color, creed and sex who lived there.

His favorite skirmish was the one that took place in 1961 when folk-singers were banned from Washington Square. He laughs out loud when reminiscing about it. For five weeks the folk-singers rallied on Sundays in Judson Memorial, while the minister and friends applied pressure where it hurt the right people. One Sunday, Mr. Moody led the singers back into the square, their guitars draped in black, to sing without accompaniment. "I can't carry a tune myself," he says, "but I sang."

He started an art gallery in the church which lasted until the abstract paintings exhibited there became a fad and moved to fancier galleries. There was a little avant-garde magazine called Exodus for two years, and then there was the Hall of Issues—artists brought their creations into Judson and debated issues with passersby.

"That was a wild year," says the minister. "We had some great discussions going—100 to 150 people in a night. Beats, lawyers, all kinds. I never heard dialogue like this before."

MR. MOODY is involved, physically and emotionally, in what he terms "the fight for the Negro's God-given rights." He was reconnoitering in the Deep South long before it was fashionable ("Wear my collar in Mississippi? Are you kidding?" he asks. "They were just prayin' to get their hands on us men of God"). More recently, he was arrested for blocking the path of a cement truck during an integration demonstration in Brooklyn.

His guilt is deep over racial injustices, though he doesn't use the word. "I admit my complicity," he says, and talks about the day he got on a bus

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in the South just home from service, wearing his Marine blues with all his decorations, and watched two white men beat up a Negro and throw him off the bus. "Watched," he emphasizes. "I just watched. I didn't do a thing."

Considering the number of fronts on which he has been fighting, it is small wonder Mr. Moody is reluctant to get into a brand new battle over who wears what to dance in his church. His usual ebullience fades when the subject is mentioned.

"I'm not interested in defending nude dancers in church —that whole thing," he says. "I wasn't in town at the time, but I understand the dance was very discreet; I don't think we broke the law or anything. Even though I wasn't in town, I am; of course, responsible. If I had been there I might have censored it, not on 'the nude issue' but because of timing. There has been a lot of trouble about it."

WHAT he means by "timing" is that people are still reacting to a recent article of his published in Christianity and Crisis. The article was titled "Toward a New Definition of Obscenity." It said, in essence, that outrage over pornography would be better directed at inhumanity. According to managing editor Wayne Cowan it drew more protests and more requests for reprints than anything the magazine ever published.

Mr. Moody has been lecturing to student groups all over the country about his article. He says to them what he wrote: "The dirtiest word in the English language is not ——, but 'nigger' from the sneering lips of a Bull Connor." Some of the students go away shocked, of course, but shock is not an unusual reaction to a Moody lecture.

Some people are shocked to hear him say he is in the church to "subvert" it: "When you face up to the inadequacies of the church, you either have to get out or get in, and in a kind of calculated, concerned way call and question the methods, goals and structures of institutional religion."

Some people are shocked because he worries about communicating: "We've talked so much and made such a botch of it. Even talking about Christ can be such a botch. What if we're living in a world where words don't matter any more? If only symbols matter, and images? Symbols don't mean the same thing to everyone; a cross is beautiful, but not if it's burning on somebody's lawn."

And—well, some people are shocked by the idea of nude dancers inside the church. But that's the way it goes. "Every hippy is somebody's square," says the Rev. Howard R. Moody. "And don't you ever forget it."

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Emile DeAntonio

A displaced intellectual. Taught English lit at William & Mary and elsewhere, then quit teaching to come to New York and be a deal-maker. Came to know the whole avant-garde, including dealers, collectors, and harpies -- the scary women who prey on homosexual artists (Eleanor Ward, Martha Jackson, etc). Has made a lot of money doing so. Now making (producing and directing) films.

First contact with Cage was in connection with concert for the Rockland Foundation, of which he was director. He had heard Cage's music on records and liked it, suggested the Foundation do a Cage-Cunningham concert. It was a great event, four years before the Town Hall Concert. The whole NY avant-garde came out (DeKooning, Kline, etc). Shortly before the performance, the police called him to advise calling it off. Torrential rains had been falling all day in the county, in October, washing out roads etc. DeA. asked Cage what he wanted to do, and they decided to go ahead. 500 people came, sell-out. Among the young men who came along to help set up the thing were Rauschenberg and Johns, and DeA met them at this time, too.

Later, he got jobs for R. and Johns with Bonwits, Tiffanys, Reynolds Metals, Plaza. Acted as deal-maker and banker: They were living primitively, had no bank accounts. DeA. would cash their checks, for $1200 or more at at time, made out to fictitious "Matson Jones" which they had decided on as their commercial name, to keep work separate from more serious art. "They were never in any doubt that they were going to make it as artists." When the Chase Bank demurred at the fictitious name bit, DeA cancelled his account there and took it to "a little old ladies bank, the Underwriters Trust Co."

When R. and Johns began to make some money, the two of them and DeA. formed something called "Impressarios Incorporated." "It wasn't incorporated at all, we just called it that." Their first venture was the Cage concert in Town Hall, which was a brilliant event because it brought together the entire avant garde world in New York. They sold boxes for $50 to DeKooning and Martha Jackson and such. DeA says this was the first and last time such a thing ever happened. Not long afterwards, Cage and the group around The Club parted company, one reason being that Cage was giving his support to the new group that followed the abstract expressionists, namely Rauschenberg and Johns -- partly because the abstract expressionists were becoming the establishment.

Cage, opines DeA., has shot his bolt now. Has gone so far out in attempt to remain in avant garde that he approaches the ultimate fascism in art -- chance leads to this, in the sense that if anyone can do it, only a small coterie is accepted. Also the international homosexual world, which DeA likes to call the "homintern," a closed circuit. From the beginning, what Cage really wanted was to approach the centers of aesthetic power, and in this he has been enormously successful. His influence on a large number of fields -- music, painting, writing, philosophy, Zen, mycology -- is absolutely incalculable. DeA feels he has always been a mediocre composer but an extremely important theoretician. "His big problem is always where to go next. You just can't go on being avant garde, because it's the nature of an avant garde, once its battles are won, to become something else."

Says Cage's eccentricity is built in. His father is crazy, a really wild, comic strip sort of inventor whose things -- anti-gravity machines, etc. have no basis in reality. Remembers going to elder Cage's one night to see his invention of color television. The living room full of electronic equipment, dangerous looking, tubs of water with wires in them, etc. Regular black and white set turned on, then all sorts of electronic hell broke loose,

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and several of those present really thought they did see colorxx on set. Pure hallucination.

DeA doesn't much like R's work any more, finds it thin. "The shock value it used to have isn't there any more." For him, the only real artist of the new generation is Johns, whom he says is actually crazy. Johns, he claims, has broken with Cage intellectually tho not socially, doesn't accept all that chance, Zen, idea.

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NEW SCHOOL STUDENTS

Ge orge Brecht

New York born, age 37, now lives in Metuchen, NJ. As an abstract expressionist painter, became interested in chance and time -- natural development out of abstract expressionism, with realization that such a style is only one possible application of chance, which is much bigger idea.

In the mid-fifties, 1956, wrote to Cage about his interest in chance. Cage stopped by to see him in New Jersey one day, on his way home from a mushroom walk. Brecht obviously heavily influenced.

Studied inCage's Experimental Music classes at New School for two years, "along with other painters, poets, photographers, and not many musicians. John was great to study with because he always went right to the cente r of things. It was a very practical sort of course. He'd tell us to make a piece with three radios, or something else, and then the next day we'd play what we'd done and talk about it. He always made himself astonishingly clear. When he criticized a piece it was usually because it wasn't lifelike, because we'd made unnecessary demands on the musician or gone to some unnecessary length."

Cage conducted a Brecht work in New York on Sept 4, 1963 (previously done in Tokyo) called "Concert for Orchestra." The score was a single sheet of white paper, with a single word in parentheses. The word was "Exchanging." Cage and his people made it up as they went along, exchanging instruments, wallets, bits of jewelry, shoes, sounds, smoke, etc.

Brecht says he is now working on a "large piece" for eight rooms, one of which will be a barbershop. Some of it will "be handled through the mail," other parts in a small gallery, (Note: see my stuff on Brecht in Happenings notes)

Allan Kaprow (home: 516-OR 1-6735)

Born Atlantic City, raised in Arizona, then back to NY. Started as painter, moved into making sculptures, assemblages, which grew into environments. Gravitated to Cage class because he wanted to learn how to use tape, had always been sent by Cage music -- not a musician, though.

New School system was that teachers were paid on per capita basis of students in their class. Cage's class would start out with 30 or 40 on first day, and most of them would immediately quit. "He established this atmosphere of suspended gentleness right away, and most people just weren't on that wavelength at all, and so very soon the class would be down to about seven or eight people. It was costing him more to come in and teach it than he was getting paid."

Kaprow says Cage confirmed things for him -- i.e. direction in which he was already moving. "But I couldn't have done what I did if it hadn't been for John. He cleared the air, he prepared the way for all of us-- most of what's beeing going on in art today would have been unthinkable without him. He's a guru, really, a kind of saint-- his feet are a little off the ground."

Cage taught by Socratic methods, having students bring in work to perform, discussing it, asking questions about what came next. Always

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clear when he wasn't interested in something. A very strong person. Small classroom. Events sometimes extended out into hall.

Got Kaprow reading the I-Ching and Artaud.

"John is such a terrific moralist. He makes value judgements all the time, about everything, in private life, even though he goes to such length to avoid them in his music. But you see, even the chance operations in his work involve choice. You have to make a choice to have no choice...

Feeling in Class: "We all felt that something terrifically exciting and new was happening there. It was a little like what those scientists must have felt when they were splitting the atom. I just couldn't wait to get back to that class every week."

Violence - very much in Kaprow's work. His new series is called "Fight," involves four events with combat -- "I'm afraid things are going to get pretty rough."

(Note: Cage says that the Happenings are "the only sort of theater that interests me now." Feels they are very important- Also feels that the work of dancer Anne Halprin, in San Francisco, is more like Happenings than Happenings. Halprin Company uses very dark lighting, like night compared to Merce's day - often can't see what's happening onstage.)

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Cage's classes at The New School (1950s)

After the first two, the classes were given over to performance of student works.

Students included: Toshi Ichiyanagi, Jackson MacLow, Richard Higgins, Al Hansen, George Brecht, Allan Kaprow. Occasionally Cage asked other composers to take his place: Feldman, Brown, Richard Maxfield.

Students sometimes brought friends to listen: George Segal, Jim Dine, Larry Poons.

Dick Higgins: "Cage speaks in a slightly nasal, resonant way that is so startlingly marvelous that Alan Hovhaness once wanted to compose a piece especially for Cage's voice." "The usual format of our sessions would be that, before the class began, Cage and George Brecht would get into a conversation, usually about 'spiritual virtuosity,' instead of the virtuosity of technique, physique, etc. This would continue as the people arrived, then gradually expand, until the subject matter became hard to follow." "But the best thing that happened to us in Cage's class was the sense he gave that 'anything goes,' at least potentially. Only George Brecht seemed to share Cage's fascination with the various theories of impersonality, anonymity and the life of pieces outside of their perceivers, makers, or anyone else. For the rest of us, the main thing was the realization of the possibilities, which made it easier to use smaller scales and a greater gamut of possibilities than our previous experience would have led us to suspect. Ultimately, of course, this contributed to the developing of happenings."

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George Segal - 5/12/78

Born NYC. Father moved to NJ and became a chicken farmer, and George commuted back to the city to finish school. Then bounced around a bit, Cooper Union and Pratt, non-matriculated student at Rutgers, before entering NYU where he studied art with Tony Smith and Wm Baziotes. He graduated in 1950, a time when "no serious artist could make a living at art." He was already married to Helen, and she was pregnant. He'd planned to go into teaching but couldn't get a teaching job. It was "relatively easy to slide into farming," so he borrowed money and built some chicken sheds on land his father gave him across from his, and started raising chickens for eggs and painting in his attic. His work then was very ab-ex, and his god was de Kooning.

Met Kaprow when K. rented a cottage about a mile or so from his. K. teaching at Rutgers then, just out of college himself. He hadn't grown his beard, and he was very articulate and very impressive, with a knowledge of art history that George didn't even suspect. Kaprow was a member of Hansa, and through him he introduced George to the Hansa artists, most of whom were painting semi-figuratively. Kaprow was also going to NYC to take Cage's course at New School, and he was a leading dispenser of Cage's ideas. "He was charismatic, vivid, articulate and persuasive. At a time when every Monday and every Wednesday a new crisis in abstract expressionism was announced, we argued the possibility of making a great new art that would be expressive of ourselves and our ideas."

Kaprow's painting heavily influenced by Hoffman. Then it became influenced by Cubism and abstract-expressionism. "My own encompassed Matisse and de Kooning -- it was typical student work."

"It was Kaprow who brought to the discussion certain revolutionary ideas dealing with real objects, real space, and questions about the basis of the esthetic experience. It took me a while to find that some of this referred to real precedents, like Schwitters, like collage in Cubist painting, like performances by Marinetti and the Futurists. He was proposing the basis for a new esthetic. His article on 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock' really extended the implications of the 'environmental surround' of art work into real terms. I've dealt for a long time with that same impulse, and a lot of my friends have done it in terms of pure abstraction. And I still don't feel that it's exhausted. To give Kaprow credit, he was one of the early proponents of changing conceptions of space.

"We were both in transition then. I joined Hansa in 1956, and I had a show every year until Hansa folded in 1958. My last show was pure painting, a series of six by eight foot paintings on the Legend of Lot, with a freestanding sculpture of Lot alongside one of them -- hand built, with rough textures, not unlike deKooning's recent pieces. So the problem of deep space was already there...

1959 Picnic

"I had a place in the country, so I decided to throw a picnic for the Hansa people, and Kaprow used the occasion to involve everybody in a Happening. We built props out of one-by-twos and plastic, and Kaprow wrote a script that called for a lot of slow motion and sort of sensual activities. The Hansa people were pretty sensual, and they'd all had too much beer, and they didn't pay much attention to the suggested activity. Kaprow wanted to have sort of ritual movements, but it was a hot summer day and nobody was in the mood." K. was quite upset.

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This first picnic was attended only by Hansa people, no more than a dozen in all. Segal also feels that Kaprow's Cage-oriented esthetic, being cerebral and sober, did not go over with the ab-ex attitude with its emphasis on passion and spontaneity. It was cold rather than hot.

There was another, much larger picnic in 1961 or 1962 -- after the early Judson and Reuben perfs and ~~jmxk~~ before Oldenburg's Store (George is hazy on dates). Six Happenings were done: Kaprow did his "Macbeth" where an army of cars advanced on people armed with sticks; Vostell destroyed a TV; Dick Higgins performed; Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown danced on ~~ther~~ roof; La Monte Young and four musicians did something in the tall grass. 450 people showed up -- after a one-inch ad in the Voice. Kaprow organized the whole thing.

Segal wrote about three scripts but ~~nevxrdidxthem~~ refused to ~~dd~~ do them. "I was more private, I wanted to return and brood in this intensified space. I accept the validity of a chunk of space in the real world; you do something to intensify your experience in that space. I accepted the idea of walking physically through that space, and seeing three-dimensional objects from that point of view. But I disagreed with the making of a performance. My own work repr sented my response to these -- for me -- brand new ideas that raised a whole new set of possibilities. We were inventing the ground rules as we went along."

Oldenburg and Kaprow argued vehemently -- mainly over credit for the ideas. Both came separately to Segal, "but my attitude was that it didn't matter, all these ideas were floating in the air." Segal went to all the NY Happenings.

"Kaprow introduced a series of ideas, and people like Oldenburg and I fleshed them out, brought them to fruition in our own way. I did it with the Old Testament themes... Oldenburg with the city, with the objects around him. Kaprow introduced the new ideas at a point where itseemed to be an end of possibilities and inventiveness in abstract expressionism.

Kaprow's re l contribution was that he was talking about totality. He ~~zegaixonzRauschenbergxandxJohnsx~~ spoke of ~~Scriabin~~ Scriabin doing musical performances complete with smells. He called his performances total operas. So here Kaprow was talking about the invention of a new esthetic that seemed to have all the romance of shooting off the cannons in Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture -- yet it came off as formal, restrained, cerebral: a strange contradiction. None of us -- me, Dine, Whitman, Oldenburg -- could really accept Cage's passivity. We were all too expressionist. Warhol and Lichtenstein came much closer to it. But I come from an expressionist background that wrestles with meaning; the suspension of meaning is difficult for me to accept. I owe a dept to Kaprow and to Cage -- they reintroduced coolness, sharp hard edges, the plastic carving of space, at least a suspenion of meaning. And who is to say that the sensual and the physical expresses only the emotional?

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Segal on RR and JJ

"Kaprow brought me to meet them on Front Street. We were aware very early of what they were doing. We were also aware very early of Cage and his attitudes. And Duchamp. I was interested in Bob and Jasper's work. My private reservation, in arguments with Kaprow, was that if we were looking for fresh invention, a new container for our own style, and we were rejecting abstract expressionism, I questioned hopping back one notch to Cubism. Early on it seemed to me that Bob was dependent on a Cubist scaffold -- later I changed my mind about that.

"Bob's work accepts Cubism. But his underlying idea of dealing very freely and freshly with the world about him, not prejudging anything -- that was extremely important."

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(Geldzahler)

Sixties

Bob Whitman (lunch 1/21/71)

At Rutgers Whitman was a lit major, with special interest in drama. Kaprow was teaching there at the time, though, and George Segal was living nearby on his chicken farm, and a group began to form around them. Brecht, Grooms, others. Whitman says that although there did seem to be something going on in writing (Ginsburg, Burroughs, Kerouac), he felt increasingly that most of the vital energy was in painting. He did some early constructions, with fragile materials, and was shown in Hansa Gallery when that group included Segal, Kaprow and the rest. Hansa operated as cooperative, under joint supervision of Ivan Karp and Dick Bellamy. Pretty spaced out operation. Bellamy used to keep his bedroll in the office. Some of the cooperators were supposed to help out financially, but didn't.

From the Hansa, Kaprow and others went on to form the Reuben Gallery in 1959, first at 61 4th Avenue (3rd floor). Others included Whitman, Oldenburg, Dine, Samaras, Brecht, Grooms, Rosalyn Drexler. Run by Anita Baker. That first season they started doing theater work that became happenings.
Whitman says that one of the factors involved was the work artists had been doing with dance companies. RR with Paul Taylor, Cunningham, etc. Whitman had seen a Taylor performance at Rutgers that excited him enormously, and he himself was in a dance of Aileen Passloff, as part of the set that Kaprow designed.

First piece was Kaprow's, in fall of 1959 at Reuben. Then Red Grooms did ~~his~~ "The Burning Building" in the Delancey Street Museum -- a landmark work, key to all the rest. Fantastic theater. There was great excitement among the group. "Everyone seemed pretty confident and full of energy, and there was a lot of mutual respect -- if somebody wanted to do something the feeling was that he knew what he was doing." Not much discussion about what was going on. Sort of a romantic feeling that you shouldn't vitiate it by words. Kaprow was the only academic, who verbalized things. The feeling of collaboration was very strong - an esthetic community of underground teams. "You could talk to somebody without having to be perfectly clear."

There were several more pieces at the Reuben that season. The following season, they all decided that the Reuben would do only performances. They all used whatever was available, which meant mostly junk. A performance that cost $100 was considered pretty lavish. Nobody could even think of affording a tape recorder. Martha Jackson helped out considerably, the only real one from uptown establishment who did. And her three shows were crucial.

Henry Geldzahler was always going to help, but then his contribution would turn out to be vague and inconclusive. "He was always a good audience."

After the second season the Reuben disappeared -- everyone on their own from then on. Oldenburg at Store, Dine uptown, etc. Felt strong enough.

The whole Judson theater grew out of these early happenings. A few people like Bob and Claes continued to do theater, and things were still going strong at time of Theater Rally in 1965. But by Nine Evenings the energy had started to go out of the movement. They had sort of expected that after first few seasons opportunities to work would open up, but they didn't. For one thing, people began to need greater resources; where they had done pieces for less than $100 before, they now talked of spending a thousand or two.

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Whitman (cont)

The social and political aspects of the movement were hard to define. Bob says that nothing of his was designed to last, and he planned it that way. Was bothered by idea of "all that junk lying around a thousand years from now that nobody needs." Whole idea of cultural monuments not crucial to problems of the city as he sees it. "The great thing about New York is that you can always tear it down every few years."

Did the artists have a social purpose in mind? Not really. "The artist is neutral. It's the critics who may or may not find uses for what he does."

Whitman feels that the energy seemed to go out of the art world, or at least to decline, about 1966. Where did it go? For a while he thought into civil rights movement, political protest, anti-Vietnam etc. But now it's not even there.

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Bob Whitman - 5/9/68

Born and raised first in Cold Spring Harbor, then in Englewood NJ. Went to Rutgers because it was the only college that accepted him - confirms that the presence of Kaprow et al there was purest accident. Bob himself was majoring in English lit, thinking mainly in terms of the theater. The key event for him was meeting Lucas Samaras, who got him interested in the art dept. Samaras' ability to work, his craftsmanship, was very impressive. It soon became obvious to Bob that there was more energy in the NY art world than in the contemporary theater.

Kaprow was teaching in the art dept, and was the leading exponent of John Cage. Bob reacted negatively to that influence at first - it seemed to him a poor use of resources to go around tossing coins. Also, Kaprow and Segal were fighting against the notion of France being the center of all culture, and Bob, with his literary leanings, thought this was silly -- 19th century American lit was unsurpassed. Kaprow was very articulate, very interested in establishing a position of power and winning disciples; the trouble was, the things he did were not very interesting, and often downright embarrassing.

Major events at Rutgers for Whitman were (1) a dance recital by Paul Taylor at New Jersey College for Women (later Douglass), which was very close to the kind of activities going on now in its vanguardness. Taylor was working with RR then, and Whitman saw the piece with the electric fan, the one where RR's score was a telephone voice announcing the time, and one in which people in business suits walked back and forth. Taylor made a complete switch soon after this, and began choreographing to Bach, but the recital was a real eye-opener for Whitman; "It led me into an awareness of non-verbal theater," and from there he discovered Buster Keaton, the whole ancient clown tradition, puppets etc. Whitman has a theory that Shakespeare buried this whole tradition and that we're just rediscovering it. (2) Another big event was Dylan Thomas's visit to America. Thomas didn't recite at Rutgers, but his presence made people aware that you could read poetry in public and be exciting about it. Thinks this had a great effect. Ginsburg and Kerouac.

Whitman left college in 1957 (grad in English lit), went to live in Alpine for a couple of years. Joined Hansa Gallery and showed there in 1959 - constructions.

Picnic at Segal's was in 1959, he thinks - sort of the annual Hansa outing. Afterwards, Segal let others use his place for various events. The first picnic there he remembers as "very gross." Kaprow's efforts were embarrassing, a sort of combination of Cage and Paul Taylor: scored movements written down on paper. Segal very much under Kaprow's influence then - at the time he was still painting Bonnard-ian figurative pictures (later he went into expressionist figurative pictures, then sculpture). Kaprow "Allan was relentlessly avant-garde. He always had to take the forward position."

Everyone in the Hansa group had been talking about doing theater pieces -- Kaprow, Segal, Lucas, Leslie etc. Along came Anita Reuben, who fell under Kaprow's spell and opened a gallery (she is now a fully professional physical therapist). Red Grooms did his first piece in the summer of 1959, at Delancey Street Museum, and that fall the Reuben started.

Grooms's "The Burning Building" was hugely influential. In Kaprow's events, movement was choreographed and scored very elaborately, and was not dynamic. Red's BB was "an explosion of intensity and energy like no one had seen. It was like going from the icebox to the madhouse, from coolness to passion. Red was kind of a living Kerouacian angel, with his total enthusiasm for everything. His Burning Building really turned people's heads around."

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James Waring was doing pieces at the Living Theater that were also highly influential. Whitman did sets for him.

In january 1960 Whitman, ~~Kaprow~~ Dine, and Oldenburg all appeared in a Kaprow Happening that was fairly embarrassing - he remembers Dine and Oldenburg hopping around in gorilla suits. That same month, Whitman, Grooms and Kaprow shared an evening at the Reuben, and Dine and Oldenburg did their first pieces there soon after. Oldenburg's was a brilliant, brief piece called "Snapshots from the City" -- "something really dark and mysterious and poetic and physical, like a tortured dream. Claes always came up with fantastic visual images, and he was also one of the best performers. My own feeling was that his later pieces never had quite the formal coherence of 'Snapshots.'"

Nobody was really thinking in terms of founding a new theater or working permanently in this form -- except maybe Whitman. The others were planning to move into galleries as soon as possible. "Dine, like Red, was passionate and explosive and theatrical, and also very open about his ambitions; he set his sights on the Martha Jackson Gallery, and that's what happened. Then he sort of withdrew. Claes said he'd sold out for too little too soon, and it's interesting that anybody could have seen it as selling out."

The "California invasion" really sparked the Judson dance theater (which Whitman himself did not frequent). Yvonne Rainer, Judy and Bob Dunn, Trisha Brown and others came from Calif. All wanted to dance with Merce but he thought they weren't good enough (?).

his divorce, all in one day, so as to be on hand.

Billy worked full-time for Bell Labs until the end of 1965, but he was in NY every evening, often staying over. (Note: Billy married Olga Adorno in 1965. They were divorced in 1976, having been separated since 1974.)

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Kluver - New York in late fifties

Billy had been in Paris during 1956 and 1957. He came back to NY in 1958, August, and started work at Bell Labs. (This was the same year the Moderna Museet opened in Stockholm). Billy started to go to galleries and to experimental films about equally. He met Al Leslie at Cinema 16, during the screening of "Pull My Daisy." He also met Maya Deren, through Anais Nin. He had shown Deren's films in Stockholm, and was rather surprised to find she looked like a sausage, with a fuzz of red hair coming out the top. Her apartment was full of magic stuff. "She was hyperactive -- you expected her to die of a stroke while she was talking to you." Billy also met Henry Miller several times, and through him went to see Anais Nin (who later wrote about Tinguely's Hommage).

Pontus came in 1959, the year the Guggenheim opened -- see Pontus notes. Tinguely came 1960.

Al Leslie - he was a good friend of Dick Bellamy's, the man behind the scenes, the one everybody listened to. Dick lived in Leslie's loft for a while, on a sofa (23rd and Bway). San Francis had the loft next to it; Kiki Kogelnick was staying in that. The whole building burned down in 1966, and Leslie barely survived. Lost all his paintings. His style radically after that (altho Billy says he was overwhelmed by Pop, and survived only by changing his style). He got married, had children, now lives outside Boston. Leslie was a good friend of Ornette Coleman, and spent a lot of time at the Five Spot, as did Larry Rivers.

For the Construction of Boston, Billy made it to El Paso and back for his divorce, all in one day, so as to be on hand.

Billy worked full-time for Bell Labs until the end of 1965, but he was in NY every evening, often staying over. (Note: Billy married Olga Adorno in 1965. They were divorced in 1976, having been separated since 1974.)

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In happenings and related phenomena, the artist becomes an impresario, using elements of theater, ballet, music, poetry, the visual arts—and life itself—to create a new art form

Happenings
ART IN Amer.
March-Apr 1972

Eugenia S. Robbins

In discussing the artist as a performance-maker (not as a creator of the performing arts) the problems of verbal definition are considerable. Kinetic art, even at its most formalistic, may be regarded as an art performance. Happenings, even when planned on so vast a scale that no single person, whether audience, performer or originating artist himself, can view the whole, are also art performances. Similarly, events, compositions (whether performed or experienced), operas, environments, total exhibitions, occurrences, all may be performed works of art or art performances—areas of experience so separate from life itself that these activities can only be called art.

Since differences among the many aspects of performed art are so great, one might begin by asking what they all have in common. The simplest, if circular, answer is art itself. Shall we stop there? Or go on to include form, sensitivity, motion, chance, intention, limits and receptivity, even though these exist in varying degrees according to the artist-impresario and his medium. The word performance implies the quality of many dimensions, and artist-made performances frequently exist in as many as five: height, width, volume, time and unbounded space. (Even film performances sometimes exist in all these dimensions, as the works of Stan Vanderbeek attest, for they are performances with or on film rather than filmed performances projected on a single plane.) The degree of form or formlessness, of content or near void, is predetermined by the originating artist. No matter how based on chance or how formally restricted a performed work might be, the basic program is the creation of an artist. Influenced by various philosophical and/or artistic considerations, it is he—and he alone—who sets the boundaries and is responsible for the limitations within which the performance exists or can be perceived. If the boundaries are fixed in time, the work comes close to our familiar concept of music. If the limits exist primarily in space, even if they are only indicated by a few fixed or semi-fixed points scattered at great distance, then we may identify the occurrence with the visual arts. If they exist only as a created idea within the mind, we may choose to relate the phenomenon to literature.

Those who dismiss art performances as non-art, anti-art or hoax miss the point. None of these works depends on a definition of art; rather, each individual work or performance depends exclusively on its creator's definition. If an artist, or even a momentarily artistic sensibility, draws boundaries or a formal pattern over anything, that which is contained, whether it can be perceived or not, becomes art. Paradoxically, the closer, the more intermingled art is with life, the more art depends on conscious isolation for its very existence.

The progenitor of American art performances is Allan Kaprow, the acknowledged inventor and master of happenings. (Some artists, however, look to the composer John Cage, whose influence has reached far into other art forms, as a founding father.) Philosophically unconventional, Kaprow is also surprisingly academic, and his respectable intensity, obvious sincerity and talent for verbal articulation are as endearing to matrons of Back Bay Boston as they are frequently disappointing to many young artists who cling to a romantic ideal of the artist leading the world despite itself. Today, having unleashed a torrent of performed art on America, Kaprow is in a middle position between formal and formless artists.

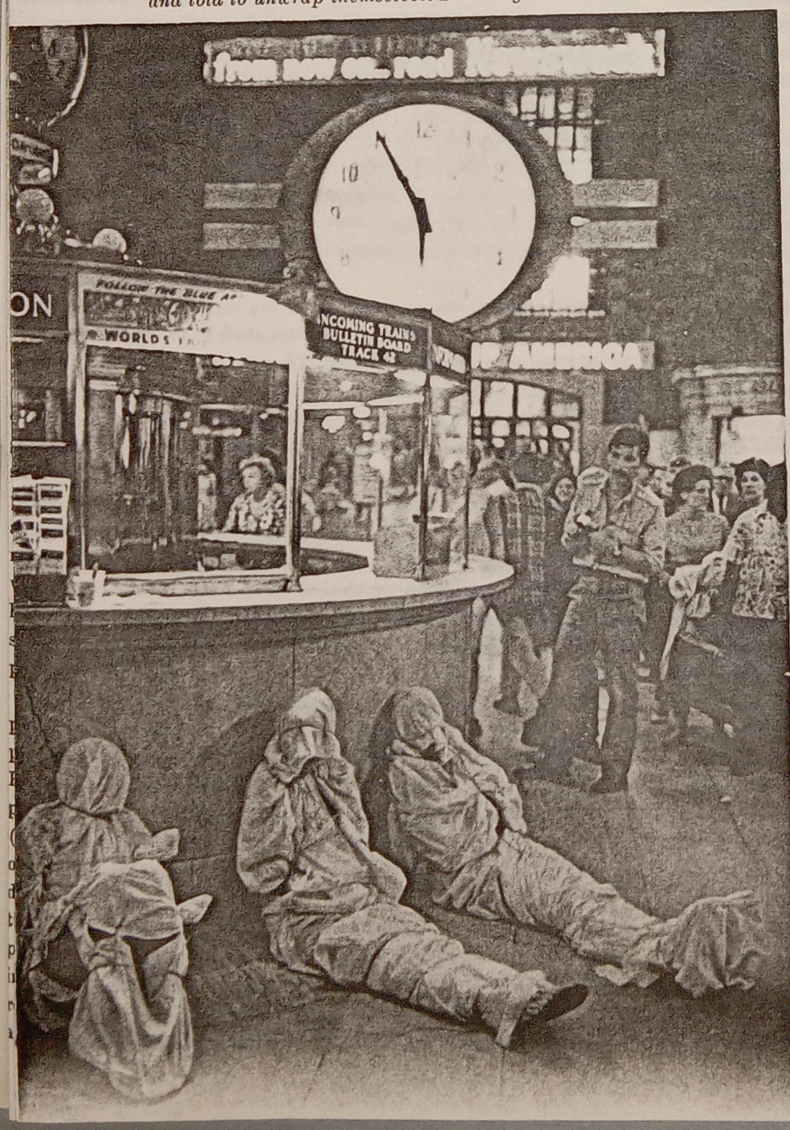
During the past year, at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, Kaprow has been explaining, introducing, discussing and happening. If he is serious and intense, his audiences have been even more so. Every Monday evening, several hundred strong, they have bombarded him and his guests with eager questions and have participated with what seemed a reckless abandon. They are unabashed by the sometimes wordless poetry of Jackson Mac Low, by their own public readings of Dick Higgins' startling prose and even by the final culmination of the year's program: an all-Boston Kaprow happening. But Boston is by no means the only sphere of Kaprow's influence or activity, for he travels all over America and abroad creating happenings, lecturing and historicizing. His large volume, "Assemblage, Environments and Happenings," to be published shortly by Abrams ($25), will probably become the "definitive" artistic and historical statement on this art form. Kaprow is now arranging for his long-dreamed-of global happening: artists in cities on different continents will direct happenings that overlap in time; participants will keep in touch by radio or phone.

Several of the basic problems of art performances—especially of the transitory happening and event species—have been discussed by Kaprow frequently and at length. A collage of Kaprow statements might present his main thoughts as follows: "Once the task of the artist was to make good art; now it is to avoid making art of any kind. Once the public and critics had to be shown; now the latter are full of authority and the artists are full of doubts. Formerly art set up an order 'for good'; present art sees what will 'come out.'" Faced with the poignant and absurd nature of art today, Kaprow sees the artist as "wondering what art might be. Art and life are not simply commingles; their identities are both uncertain. Art not only becomes life, but life refuses to be itself. Precisely because it can be confused with life, it forces attention upon the aim of its ambiguities to 'reveal' experience." The fact that anything the artist says, does, notices or thinks is art (Kaprow once made this point explicit by signing himself on the sole of his shoe) "makes the identification of oneself as an artist an ironic one, attesting not to talent for a specialized skill, but to a philosophical stance before elusive alternatives of not-quite-art, or not-quite-life."

Thus, art becomes a perception of life guided, if we cannot guide ourselves, by the artist's isolation and arrangement of symbolic fragments of life. In Kaprow's current happenings, programmed or scripted events occur on such a large scale that no participant or audience can know the total work. In "Calling," three muslin-wrapped living people transferred from three different cars to three more cars in three different garages are related to each other only by Kaprow's script and by knowledge of it. If somewhere in the same city at the same time a similar body was "accidentally" involved in a similar situation, this could become part of the art only if someone participating in the script became aware of it at some time. The participants know what is supposed to be happening elsewhere, in its broad form, but they do not, nor will they ever, know the particulars of all aspects of all events. Kaprow himself never reassembles his participants to compare notes or to check on their perceptions and actions in order to form a total experience of the

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In "Calling," an Allan Kaprow happening, three muslin-shrouded bodies were deposited at Grand Central Station's information booth and told to unwrap themselves. Photo by Peter Moore.



Allan Kaprow (left) stands in the midst of one of his early works, an environment at the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, 1961.

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happening. This is not necessary; the action itself, and the certitude that it will occur with chance variations according to his artistic intentions, is the art.

Of a different order is Karl Heinz Stockhausen's work "Originale," which was considered a happening by many viewers. Kaprow, who directed its New York performances, suggests that its severe artistic order and its carefully delineated script, which dealt with the element of time in a particularly rigid fashion, qualify it as an opera. Much more formal, in the sense of having a given form, than Kaprow's own works, "Originale" could be performed repeatedly, with only inconsequential variations. Although elements of chance could (and did) influence each evening's performance, the work was meant to remain essentially the same. When an outside event, the non-programmed participation of three young men from the audience, was introduced, the art performance was interrupted as it should not have been.

Carrying some, but not all, of the philosophic implications of Kaprow's happenings to one extreme are the compositions of La Monte Young. In his "Composition 1960 #5" a butterfly is loosed in the performance area. The performance lasts either a fixed time period or until the butterfly flies away; the "performer," thus, is inaudible to human ears and usually invisible to the majority of his spectators. Young's art, which is the result of a musical rather than a visual preoccupation, is not in controlling either his butterfly or his audience, but in defining the limitations of the performance to which the audience must respond.

Historically, these new art performances seem to have affinities with post-World War I dada activities. Definite similarities exist, but basic attitudes are radically different. Kaprow's reminiscences of his own development are revealing, especially when he discusses the evolving relationship between his work and his audience. His work grew out of abstract expressionism or, for this case, the more descriptive synonym, action painting. Gradually, out of a preoccupation with the effective marriage of action with collage and assemblage materials, Kaprow arrived—momentarily—at environments. Dissatisfied with the limitations of physical space on his environments and with the static boundaries of his action in the art, he has been consistently expanding both boundaries toward unlimited space and a continuing action, first by an audience, now by his performer-participants.

Many early Kaprow happenings, and indeed a majority of art performances today, involved manipulating an uninformed audience placed in a situation it found uncomfortable and incomprehensible. Kaprow has changed from this type of program to his current, completely voluntary and carefully explained participation "scripts" (his "rules of the game"). Explaining why he has done so, he touches on one of the major difference between his goals and those of the old dadaists: "I found that the range of human response to manipulation, to forcedly unpleasant situations, was repetitive, boring and predictable." It was not enough to incorporate audiences willy-nilly into an artistic situation—especially since these audiences repeatedly responded with anger and frustration. Instead, the artist today aims at expanding his audience's freedom, voluntary perceptiveness, consciousness and active participation in life-as-art.

In the Kaprow-inspired vocabulary of art performances the "purity" of a performed work is measured not by the art involved but by the art-life involved. (Despite his verbalism, Kaprow sincerely insists that verbal definitions are not important and that even the name "happening" is a casual misnomer.) Some early happenings, such as Jim Dine's "The Smiling Workman," first performed in 1960, are today classified as events because they are defined, acted and absorbed by the artist himself within his own specific framework. The entire performance is art, and the audience is relegated to a passive or, at best, responsive role. Dine's intense participation—pouring paint over himself, drinking it into himself, and ultimately diving through his work, the canvas—unifies art and life only insofar as the art and life of Jim Dine are commingled; but neither his art nor his life is that of his audience. We, the audience, and he, the artist, are, if anything, further differentiated by his performance of his-life-as-his-art.

This is not true of works by Kaprow, Young and Cage. Cage is fond of describing the reaction of one critic: "Alan Watts came to a concert once, and left very shortly because, as he said, 'I can hear this sort of thing outside, I don't need to be here.'" One suspects that Cage presents this "criticism" so neutrally because it actually illustrates the purpose behind his highly complex, but chance-governed, compositions. Although one can indeed hear "this sort of thing" (in its fragments), one rarely takes the trouble to listen. The artist must provide the framework and define it as "art" before anyone will pay attention. Merce Cunningham has made exciting use of Cage scores in his ballets. Neither the music nor the choreography depends on the other for its particulars, but as an esthetic experience, each "independent existence" (one austerely, disciplined art, one art-imbued life) gains immeasurably from fusion with the other.

"Contemporary art, which tends to 'think' in multimedia, intermedia, overlays, fusions and hybridizations, is a closer parallel to modern mental life than we have realized." In this statement Kaprow, not unwittingly, suggests that many of today's artists wish to evoke mental rather than sensual responses to their work. Although happenings often inflict almost sadistic discomforts on the participants (hanging upside down from a rain-sodden tree, being tied inside a sack), the intellectual response to these self-created symbols remains the important element. Art-life performances, like the fixed images of pop art, result in the experience of art-life become life-art with differences. This, again, is an inversion of the dada experience; it becomes almost an analytical experiment in the ever broadening scope of esthetic consciousness. Whereas Duchamp removed his "found" object from its life context (exhibiting a urinal as a fountain), thus forcing a new view of the object-as-art upon his audience, today's pop artists have eliminated the purposeful consumer appeal of a shoe advertisement and made it possible for us to consider it, even within its intended context, as an esthetic experience. If nothing else, the artistic use of life-objects has enabled us to treat manufactured products as materials of life rather than necessities, to experience them not as consumers but as participants.

(*continued*)

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Thus our relationship to objects in the art of assemblages, pop or happenings is based on an attitude that challenges the familiar concept of American materialism.

Art forms are no longer contained geographical fragments. It is increasingly difficult for an American art, a Japanese art, a European art to exist. To the same extent, cultural distinctions are scarcely perceptible in art performances, although the different tendencies operative in America today may often be traced to artistic traditions developed elsewhere.

Kaprow's evolution as an artist represents a particularly American process, for he focuses on action as art. The new "fusionists" and the practitioners of a very pure life-art, such as Jim Byers, La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, have conscious affinities with the oriental tradition of Zen, where the material of life, indeed the contemplation of life, is art. On the other hand, a major European tradition is perhaps responsible for those art performances which, although neither static nor permanently tangible, are more formed and more separate as art than the uniquely American or oriental counterparts.

These European traditions stem, as kinetic sculptor George Rickey has consistently maintained, from two paths which, despite frequent crossings and minglings, have each retained a distinct character. One of these, a valid extension of dada attitudes, is closer to life-as-art; the other, an outgrowth of the constructivist tradition, is closer to art-as-life and, in many cases, is almost purely art. This latter form, despite its sympathetically adaptable attitudes, is perhaps the most exclusively European of all. The subtle, exquisite relationship of Lucio Fontana to his sculpture, the more violent interaction of the late Yves Klein with his work, the element of chance in Max Bill's carefully formed sculpture and the total environment of Otto Piene's meticulously programmed light ballets have more in common with each other than with the music performances of John Cage, the happenings of Claes Oldenburg, the activities of Japan's Gutai group or the superb art-machines of Jean Tinguely.

Tinguely's works highlight the European emphasis on "art." His famous self-destroying machine, which performed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1961, utilized elements of life as analogies, reflections, even stimuli, but above all remained a work of art. When chance intervened to cause the machine to malfunction and to perform quite differently from his original plan, Tinguely was unconcerned. His artistic intention and the art of the machine were inviolate; they could neither be destroyed nor even significantly changed by the actual performance of the machine. The chain of events did not have to be unbroken for the art to remain, to exist and to destroy itself as art. But, in admitting the unexploited element of chance to exist independently of the quality of art inherent in his works, Tinguely differs from most of his European colleagues as well as from the performance-artists who base the very specific form of their performed works on the exploitable quality of chance.

The awesome sprung-steel loops of Len Lye, the swaying or circling forms of Rickey or Bill, the constantly creeping styrofoam blocks of Robert Breer, even the dancing or quivering forms of Alexander Calder, although in part dependent on chance for their effect, exist equally as art regardless of the nature of the random chance that unites with their forms. Their performance is valid in a hurricane or in a mild sea breeze, whether flicked into operation by a finger or an obstructing wall, and they exploit the chance effect rather than being exploited by it. By contrast, in a Cage or Young composition it is the audience or the performance itself that is incorporated into chance, which is almost synonymous with life.

The assemblages of Daniel Spoerri are philosophical more in presentation and implications than in precise content. A Spoerri dinner tray, permanently fixed in plastic and hung on an aseptic wall does, indeed, become art, but at the very moment of its being "fixed," of its being hung instead of laid, it ceases to be life. On the other hand, Spoerri's recent book, "An Anecdoted Topography of Chance" (Something Else Press, $5.00), is more in the American tradition, being a continuum of art-life, artifact-object and simultaneously the exploiter and exploited of chance. Its form is fixed by the artist-author, but its content is a continuing agglomeration of sense and nonsense anecdotes, each a separate element of art, but neither the topography nor the anecdotes could exist independently of each other. Its existence as a book adds different dimensions of time-space to an idea, allowing it to be both fixed (as a Kaprow happening cannot be) and expanding (as a Tinguely machine cannot be). Since its publisher intends to continue the process of anecdoting, and since the reader cannot read (participate) without himself anecdoting, it continues to "happen" every time it is even partially assimilated by its audience-participant.

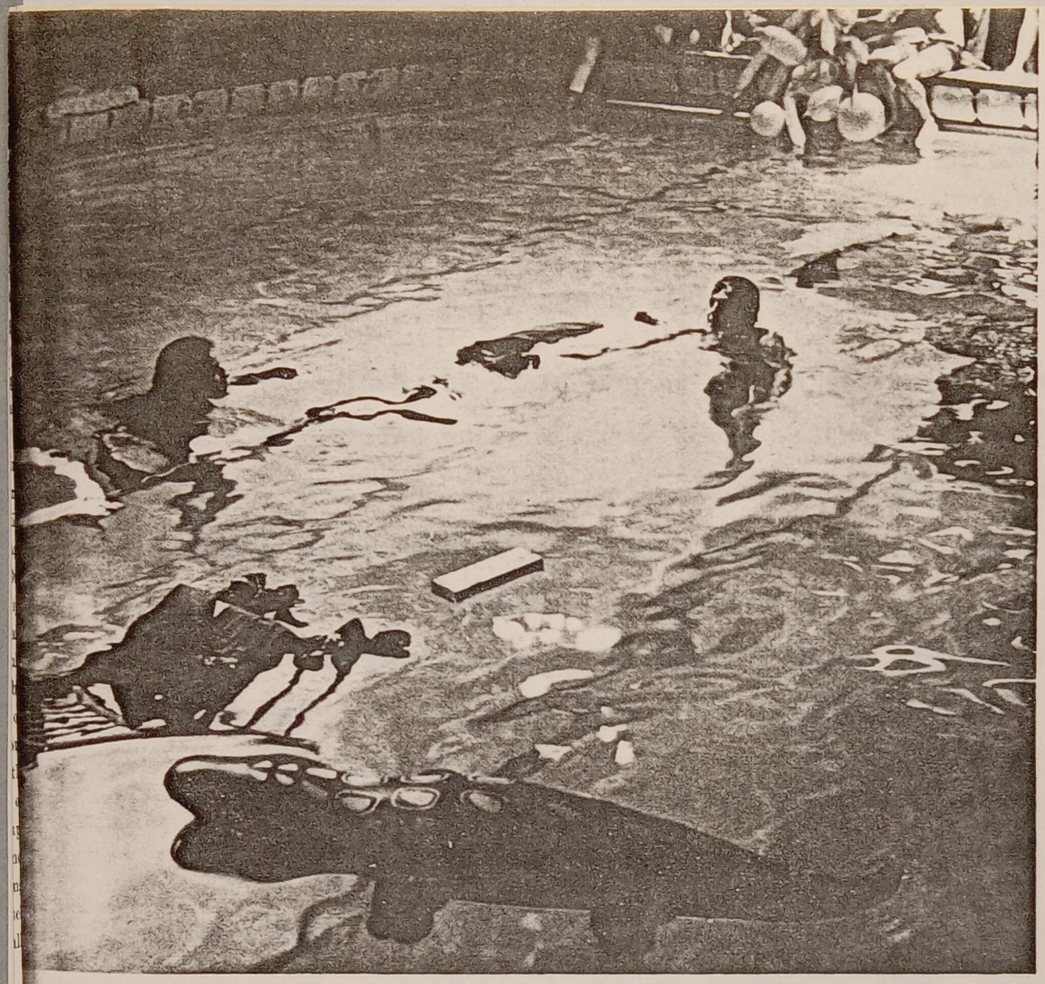
Zero 3, a collection of illustrations and artists' writings on space, time, motion, order, expansion and related subjects, and many of the works of biblio-artist Diter Rot are also continuous. But in them continuity is an implication of form that is not only established but fixed by the artist. It is a mental continuum, as when a Zero 3 article begins and ends in mid-sentence or a Diter Rot piece spreads beyond its enclosing case or cover. It is the artist, rather than his audience, who continues.

In even the most formal of performed art there is usually a fusion of two or more elements that were once considered separate arts. Music is no longer simply a question of organized sounds; a painter's environments are no longer purely visual; a poet's readings are no longer necessarily verbal. The fact that the Tulane Drama Review devoted an entire issue (Winter, 1965) to happenings and related phenomena does not, nor did it intend, to incorporate these many forms under the category of "theater arts." They are no more theater, generically, than they are painting, sculpture, ballet, music *or* poetry. Their ability to fuse, however, is not a measure of "good" or "bad" art. (They may quite possibly preclude the traditional notion of quality in art.) Fusion is the result, at best, of a selective assault on all the senses; and the eighteenth-century distinction of the arts as directed to one or another of the senses is today replaced, however tentatively, with the twentieth-century notion of totalization.

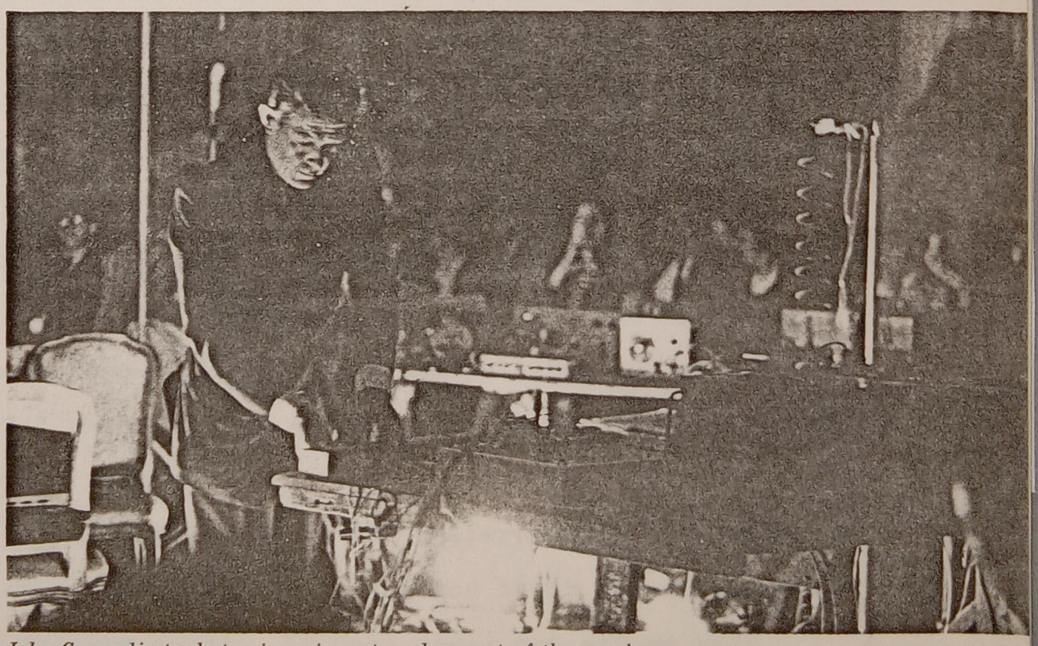
At its most inclusive, performed art is life examined under the direction of an artist-impresario-maestro. In old-fashioned terms, its form is an attitude or a point of view and its content is the experience of life.

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A steamy swimming pool in New York was the scene of "Washes," a happening by Claes Oldenburg. Photos by Peter Moore.



John Cage adjusts electronic equipment used as part of the sound system for his composition at the Now Festival, a celebration of performed art held in Washington this spring.

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REUBEN GALLERY → 61 Fourth Ave (a block from Cooper Union)

The Reuben Gallery was started, funded and run by Anita Rubin. C loft 2 flights above the second-hand bookstore

She described the late 50's as a time of despair for younger artists trying to show their work. 10th Street was, for the most part, a mess, with galleries teeming with bad second and third generation AE painters. Anita's sister Renee was and is a painter, bringing Anita into a group of artists including Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman. Through them, Renee and Anita met and befriended the rest of the New Jersey group including Segal, George Brecht.

Anita was 24 years old in 1959. She was raised and educated in New York, and was working as a physical therapist. (That is still her occupation.) In the Summer of 1959, she said that she decided to help her artist friends out by opening a gallery for them. She had $700 saved in the bank- she rented a space, had a telephone installed and bought a desk opening the gallery in October with George Brecht. (The address of the gallery, 61 4th Avenue, was between 9th and 10th Sts.) She held openings on Friday evenings which she describes as mobbed with all the art people that also attended openings on 10th St. She met other artists through other dealers- Karp and Bellamy sent her people as did Castelli and other galleries, artists too radical for the more established spaces.

The artists paid for the rent of the gallery during the time of the exhibition. They also had to pay for their announcements- printing and mailing costs. If they could not afford this, Anita helped out. She says that no works were sold from the

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gallery, and often the artist would throw his constructions and objects away rather than pay for transportation costs. Anita had some drawings and paintings given her by the artists and a few things salvaged from the garbage, most notably some gauze wrapped figures by Lucas Samaras.

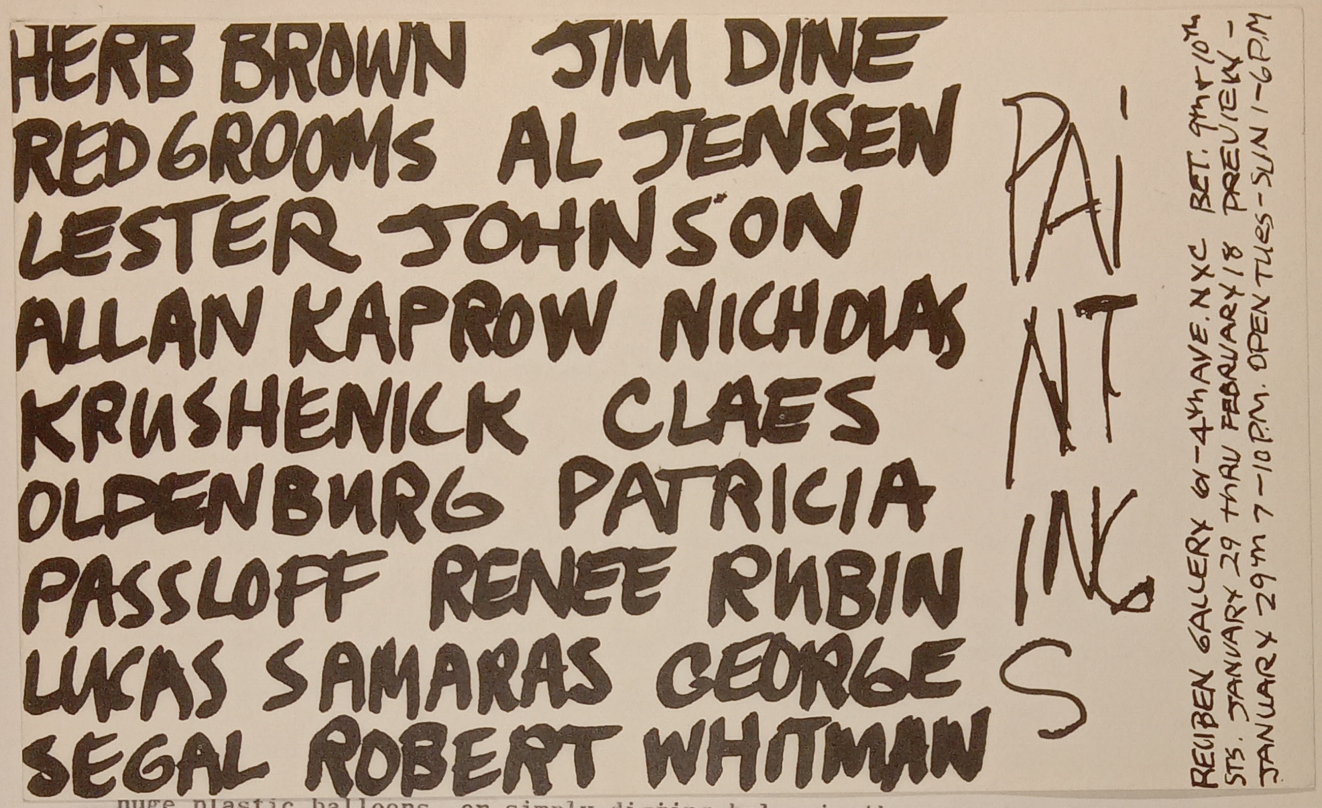
Anita's maiden name was Rubin- she changed the spelling for the name of the gallery to look more arty, and as she says evoke something in the history of art- notably Peter Paul Rubens. (I don't think she realised the correct spelling of his name.)

In the Summer of 1960, she closed the gallery and worked once more as a therapist- to raise money for the next art season. She rented another space on East 3rd Street, and used the gallery primarily as a showcase for theatre events that are now called Happenings. The first Happening had been Kaprow's "18 Happenings in 6 Parts" as the premiere event of the 4th Avenue space, and others were performed there during the 59-60 season, but the gallery on 3rd Street had no art exhibitions per se- only theatre events.

By the end of the Apring 1961 season, other galleries and spaces existed for this kind of work, and once more, Anita Rubin returned to her job. She was married to Max Jacob during this period, but does not want his name used. She is npw married to an architect, Joe Simmons.

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nuge plastic balloons, or simply digging holes in the ground and illuminating them.

Surely some revelation is at hand? In the absence of soothsayers, though, it can only be reported that these improbable events are all put on, not by group therapists, but by artists. Simultaneously in various countries, unfettered spirits have decreed the death of the "fixed image" and the imprisoning canvas, and are seeking out new forms that lie somewhere in the no man's land between abstract art and experimental theater. But nowhere is the search being pursued with such diligence as in New York, current world capitol of the avant-garde, where an intrepid expeditionary force of young artists has been staging what they call "Happenings," and what others might describe as living nightmares.

"I am for an art that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum," says Claes Oldenburg, the Tennessee Williams of the Happening group. In his "Ironworks-Fotodeath," the hit of last season's Happenings at the dingy downtown storefront known as the Reuben Gallery, the action included (simultaneously): The silhouette of a drum majorette high-stepping

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happenings - tomkins

In Paris recently, a young girl named Niki de Saint-Phalle exhibited her "paintings" in a show entitled Fire At Will. They were made of plaster, and designed to be shot at by the spectator with a .22 rifle provided by the gallery ("Firing every day from 5 to 7 p.m."). In Cologne, a sober German audience attended the trial of a chicken in which judge, jury and opposing lawyers kept switching roles; at the end an executioner appeared and decapitated the fowl. In a pine forest near Osaka, members of a group called the Gutai have been entertaining thoughtful Japanese by throwing paint-soaked balls of newspaper at a white wall, inflating and defl ting huge plastic balloons, or simply digging holes in the ground and illuminating them.

Surely some revelation is at hand? In the absence of soothsayers, though, it can only be reported that these improbable events are all put on, not by group therapists, but by artists. Simultaneously in various countries, unfettered spirits have decreed the death of the "fixed image" and the imprisoning canvas, and are seeking out new forms that lie somewhere in the no man's land between abstract art and experimental theater. But nowhere is the search being pursued with such diligence as in New York, current world capitol of the avant-garde, where an intrepid expeditionary force of young artists has been staging what they call "Happenings," and what others might describe as living nightmares.

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from side to side and endlessly saluting; a man trying to sit in a chair, only to start up in agony each time; two famous men shaking hands; a photographer attempting to take the portrait of a family whose members keep collapsing limply to the floor; a muscle man strangling a dummy; a maniac breaking a chair to bits; and two girls in polka dot gowns, with bells at their wrists and parasol overhead, who promenade delicately while a figure swathed in grimy coal sacks (their indelicate thoughts?) shuffles beside them.

The trouble with Oldenburg, some members of the group feel, is that he is too theatrical. His audiences sit and watch, whereas in a proper Happening there is no separation between audience and event -- "all the time you're there, getting into the act," says Allan Kaprow, the movement's bush-bearded spokesman. In Kaprow's "Spring Happening" last year, for example, the spectators were packed into a narrow tunnel with plexiglass windows, while Kaprow and his assistants rolled ashcans around outside, threw water at the windows, turned lights off and on, and eventually produced a nude girl who pursued a spotlight, tossing bits of broccoli into its beam. The walls of the tunnel then fell outward with a crash, and Kaprow scattered the audience by charging through them pushing a power mower.

The six young men (all under 35) who think up, stage, and act in one another's Happenings were all painters to begin with, and their stage doings appear to have grown directly out of the New York school of "action painting" -- i.e. more action, less painting. No two Happenings are remotely alike. James Dine's "Car Crash" featured male and female "cars," bearing flashlights, which danced together, changed sex, and smashed up in a junk shop. The offerings of Robert Whitman (a distant relative of poet Walt) have included a bit of social comment called "Small Cannon," which turned out to be a machine for disposing of people (but not the audience) by

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splattering them against the ceiling -- there was a smaller cannon for splattering dogs and cats. Red Grooms' "Magic Train Ride" employed a whole group of energetic actors who jumped up and down and shouted through most of the ride through an enigmatic "forest." The materials and props used in these performances are usually picked up from the street or the junkyard -- cardboard boxes, chicken wire, rags and newspapers. Oldenburg goes so far as to manufacture his own "junk" out of papier mache, and has now opened a "store" on east 2nd street to sell huge, gaily painted papier mache salamis, fish, loaves of bread and cuts of meat to the baffled citizenry of his neighborhood.

The Happenings really began one spring day in 1958, when Kaprow invited fifty people to a picnic at a friend's farm near Rutgers, N.J. Kaprow was teaching art at Rutgers then. He was also under the influence of John Cage, the electronic music pioneer, whose far-out, Dadaist wit pervades all layers of the New York avant garde. Kaprow had prepared a script for his picnic guests, who were supposed to jump through plastic sheets, sit in chicken coops rattling noisemakers, paint a collective canvas, or simply run around the place. "It was a lot of fun but a complete bust," Kaprow says now. "Everyone had a hostility to what I was trying to do."

Undaunted (what great innovator minds hostility?), Kaprow staged his first official Happening the following October in the Reuben Gallery. The idea quickly caught on among other artists. Oldenburg put on a Happening soon after in the basement of a tolerant church off Washington Square. Red Grooms did one in Provincetown. The group picked up momentum, and organized the Reuben as a sort of cooperative "painters' theater." Last winter they all staged one or two Happenings apiece there, each of which ran for a week. There were two performances a night, tickets cost $1.50, and every performance was well attended. The art world, at least, has started to take the move-

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ment seriously -- as evidenced by two recent and approving articles in the authoritative monthly Art News, one by Kaprow himself.

Do Happenings bear any real relation to theater? Certainly not, says Richard Barr, a leading off-Broadway producer (Krapp's Last Tape, The Zoo Story, The American Dream) and one of the few theater people to have seen a Happening. "Spontaneous art is never continuously effective in the way a real play is," Barr insists. Happenings, though, don't really attempt to be theater. They are almost plotless -- only the haziest outline is written out, and rehearsals are primarily means of generating new ideas. The action itself is as much a matter of chance as the "accidental" drips and splashes of action painting. Consequently, no two performances of even the same Happening are much alike, and any single performance runs the ghastly risk of becoming intelligible -- i.e. a total flop. If things go well, though, the audience does at times feel the effect of what Kaprow likes to think of as "images of uncommon power and primitive energy."

The most spectacular Happening to date took place last spring at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Kaprow, invited there by the school's unsuspecting department of art and architecture, proceeded to put on a show for 100 or more spectators (mostly students) in an unused gymnasium. From the 40-foot ceiling he hung a great phantasmagoria of junk -- ashcans, exhaust pipes, tire irons -- each item with a rope hanging down that could be pulled by the audience. When the ropes were all pulled at once, the noise, Kaprow recalls, "was like some church on Mars going mad."

The room was pitch dark except for the glimmer of flashlights held by twelve Kaprow operatives concealed inside twelve large cardboard boxes. After a three-minute crescendo of noise, capped by a barrage of firecrackers, the lights came on. The cardboard boxes began spewing out paper and stuffing it back again -- what Kaprow calls "a great vomiting and feeding back scene."

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Then the boxes attacked the spectators, knocking them down where possible. Four huge plastic sheets dropped over the audience, trapping them but only partially shielding them from pailfuls of paint and floods of firefoam from extinguishers wielded by Kaprow and his merry men. Thirty flashbulbs went off in a forest of cardboard trees -- the signal for the trees to advance on the now somewhat uneasy spectators, driving them back and gradually forcing them out the doors. "We gave four performances in one night," says Kaprow, "until everything fell apart."

The future of Happenings in New York is somewhat uncertain. The group couldn't pay the rent on the Reuben through the summer, and will have to find new quarters. "But we'll find something," Kaprow says confidently. "The galleries are going to have to support Happenings. Right now we're trying to persuade the World's Fair authorities to let us have a tent to do Happenings in."

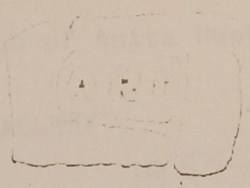
Even if the galleries don't come across, though, there will still be Happenings of one sort or another. George Brecht, one of the original group, has recently been experimenting with "private" performances for a few friends in restaurants (he has one gripping drama involving a matzoh ball) and parking lots, where they meet by prearrangement to turn their headlights off and on. This is pretty cool stuff. But Happenings, basically, are whatever happens, and there's the rub: The group's next big Happening might be a decision to say the hell with the whole idea. That moment, however, is probably some time off.

"It's going to take a while," says Robert Whitman, "before our work is defined enough so that people can come and overthrow us."

-- Calvin Tomkins

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KAPROW'S 'APPLE SHRINE'

On December 30 there closed an exhibition at the Judson Gallery by Allan Kaprow, called "An Apple Shrine." So far as I know, it received no critical reviews and was hardly noticed by the public or much of the professional art world. This was regrettable because it was an event of considerable importance.

the village VOICE, *January 12, 1961*

It seemed at first surprising that it was so little noticed, for Kaprow has been well known for some years now for his "environments" and "happenings," both as an exceptionally original artist and a leader who has seen a movement develop around him. Perhaps it was the bad weather that dogged his showing, perhaps it was the holiday season, but one has strong suspicions that it may also have been part of the apparatus of the "deep freeze" that so frequently attends the early years of a radical and sometimes difficult art.

This most recent of Mr. Kaprow's environments generated one of the most densely sustained moods that has been come upon in some time. An opiate tranquility pervaded the whole with touches of unexpected excitement, causing one to feel steeped in it, even saturated.

Modern Labyrinth

This was not, however, fortuitous. It was, I should judge, induced by the plan and materials of the idea. The "Apple Shrine" was a modern labyrinth of narrow passageways constructed of chicken wire, ripped cardboard, rags, tarpaper, enormous quantities of torn and crumpled newspapers stuffed into the wire from ceiling to floor, and extending to the floor in heaps through which one slushed and waded. Intestinally wound from dark to light, almost Manichean if it were not for the softness of the atmosphere, the alleys led by a cascade of straw, some pieces of which brushed one's face. Then, a hot, bright light, revealing walls of wrapping paper dripping with black enamel; next the light slightly dimmed, and finally one emerged into the quiet of the shrine proper.

The gentleness of the light here was unforgettable. It had been somewhat cold in feeling until now with only glimpses through openings, of color and warmth, fragments of other persons moving about as though from far away. This inner area was really beautiful in that discarded sense of the word, bestowing upon the visitor a pleasant, unsought "grace." It was startling too, because it was hard to believe that such rubbish as chicken wire and newspapers (whose items could be read with an almost enchanted appropriateness, a nameless catechism of daily events), were capable of evoking such a state of attentiveness and contemplation; [illegible] in the center of paper and wire, an open at first for an opening in the rough wall, suddenly revealed one's own face as if meeting a stranger.

One stayed there for a while, quietly enjoying this peaceful state, and then returned as one had come, seeing everything in reverse. A cycle of sorts was complete.

Admittedly, Mr. Kaprow's art poses problems. The exhibition is now dismantled, its materials have been carted away by the junkman, and it will not be seen again. If its vocabulary is unfamiliar, it will not remain to be judged at a later, more knowlegeable year. Its life is a present one, and only memory can carry it into the future.

Instantaneous and Dramatic

Yet I believe Allan Kaprow's art is not of itself hard to grasp, right now. On the contrary, its impact is instantaneous and dramatic. It is an art both of high seriousness and of emotional breadth. What does present a problem is its apparent lack of relation to an established cultural tradition. Beneath the surface of each confrontation with this work is the doubt that it is art at all. There is a distrust and fear of an expression which is short-lived by intention, as though this were subtly calling upon death itself. One cannot comprehend an attitude which bluntly embraces the fleeting. Perishable materials, perishable forms, perishable genius; chance, change— all conspire to damn this work and dissolve our values. Far beyond the "Apple Shrine's" actual content and humanity stands Kaprow's inadvertent quarrel with all the vapid glories, qualities and eternities which we think are History.

—Theodore Tucker

South Lincoln, Massachusetts

Four Tiers

In the center of this sanctum, hanging in four tiers of the same crude matter, was an "altar," an apple-stand, on one level of which were strewn paint spattered artificial fruit, fruit which naturally asked to be picked, faintly stimulating the memory of an old tale. Torn banners with fragments of the repeated word "apples," and a blue-and-green lighted bulb, were hung in the tiers. On the floor the newspapers were spread at random, but here smoothly. And around this enclosure were long, vertical bands of red and green in some order that appeared architectural and impossible to follow. A small [illegible] topical, yet suspending time to the point of something endless . . .

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photograph of Anita Rueben with C. Oldenburg- Rose, Moma, p. 47

REUBEN GALLERY

61 4th Avenue 1959-1960

44 East 3rd Street 1960-61

organized by Anita Rueben- to show work of artists involved with the human figure in a sea of Abstract Expressionism

incorporated artists from the Hansa Gallery, a cooperative Gallery open from 1952-58-59 season, Red Grooms' City Gallery of 1958-59 and the Delancey Street Museum (1959-60), and the Judson Gallery which had opened in 1959.

specialized in what Lucy Lippard calls "impermanent, perishable gutter art that went beyond Surrealism in its involvemant with urban industrial subject matter for its own sake." (POP ART, p. 74)

2 exhibitions at Martha Jackson Gallery (uptown) included artists of the Green & Reuben galleries-

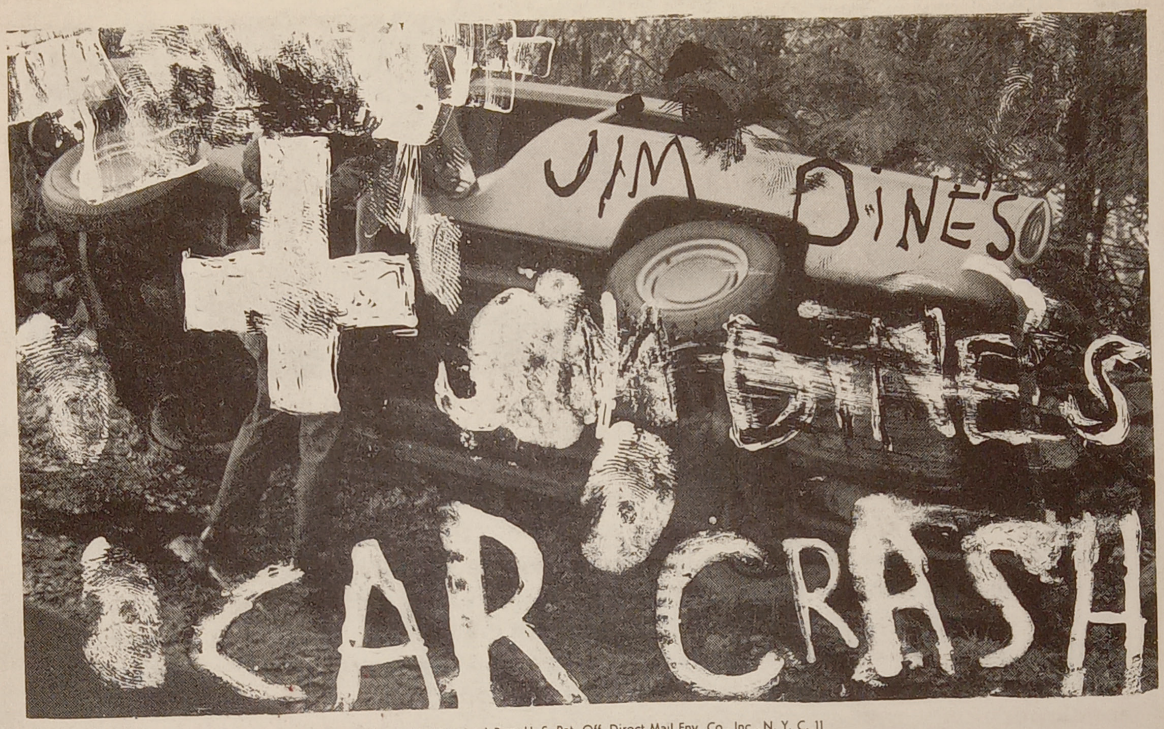
NEW FORMS,NEW MEDIA, 1960

Environments, Situations, Spaces, 1961



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CARL LEHMANN-HAUPT

CLAES OLDENBURG

LUCAS SAMARAS

TOM WESSELMANN

CLIFFORD SMITH

CHIPPY MCKELLEN

PAT MUSCHINSKI (PENNY FLAYME)

CLAIRE SELLEY

JUDITH TIRSCH

MARILYN JAFFEE

L i g h t s b y M A X B A K E R

Intermission feature: P I C K P O C K E T , a slide sequence

FEBRUARY 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 at 8:30 each night

R E U B E N G A L L E R Y

44 EAST 3rd STREET - N.Y.C.

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new happenings

at the

Reuben Gallery

The Reuben Gallery will devote its 1960 - 1961 season exclusively to a series of evening exhibitions of art in a new dimension. A workshop for 'happenings' has been created by the artists who last year began to explore this new form.

Jim Dine	CAR CRASH	Nov. 1 thru 6
Robert Whitman	THE AMERICAN MOON	Nov. 29 - Dec. 4
"VARIETIES"	(short pieces by members)	Dec. 16 - 18

- Dates to be announced -

Allan Kaprow
Red Grooms

Claes Oldenburg
George Brecht

Oldenburg -- "Off-beat... thoroughly enjoyed..." TIME

Whitman --
"Daring... witty...."
Tallmer, Village Voice







You are invited to become a patron -- and participant -- in these exhibitions, which we of the Reuben Gallery feel will be among the most exciting evenings of the New York season. Your tax-deductible contribution will not only make these 'happenings' happen financially, but will assure you of seating on your choice of evenings. Each performance will run for one week, except Monday. Last year many had to be turned away because of capacity audiences. So don't be disappointed: send your contribution today in the attached envelope.

Gentlemen:
I enclose $_____, my contribution to NEW HAPPENINGS at the Reuben Gallery. Please mail me ____ reservations for _____ evenings. I understand that the Reuben Gallery reserves the right to alter this schedule without notice and that reservations will be made on a first-come basis. (All performances at 8:30 except Friday, Nov. 4 at 10:30 only. Make checks to Reuben Gallery.)

A contribution of:	entitles you to:
$500	SEVEN PERFORMANCES - Command performance
$ 50 - $100	SEVEN PERFORMANCES - Up to 20 reservations
$ 25 - $ 50	SEVEN PERFORMANCES - Up to 10 reservations
$ 15	SEVEN PERFORMANCES - 2 reservations
$ 8.50	SEVEN PERFORMANCES - 1 reservation
$ 1.50	ONE PERFORMANCE - 1 reservation

Capacity - 50. NO STANDING ROOM. Admission by advance reservation only -- please make your reservations by mail.

There will be a special Christmas Party for patrons only.

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CLAIRE SELLEY
JUDITH TIRSCH
MARILYN JAFFEE

Lights by MAX BAKER

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L i g h t s b y M A X B A K E R

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P l a y e r s

EDGAR BLAKENEY
HENRY GELDZAHLER
CARL LEHMANN-HAUPT
CLAES OLDENBURG
LUCAS SAMARAS
TOM WESSELMANN
CLIFFORD SMITH

OLGA ADORNO
GLORIA GRAVES
CHIPPY MCKELLEN
PAT MUSCHINSKI (PENNY FLAYME)
CLAIRE SELLEY
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MARILYN JAFFEE

L i g h t s b y M A X B A K E R

Intermission feature: P I C K P O C K E T , a slide sequence

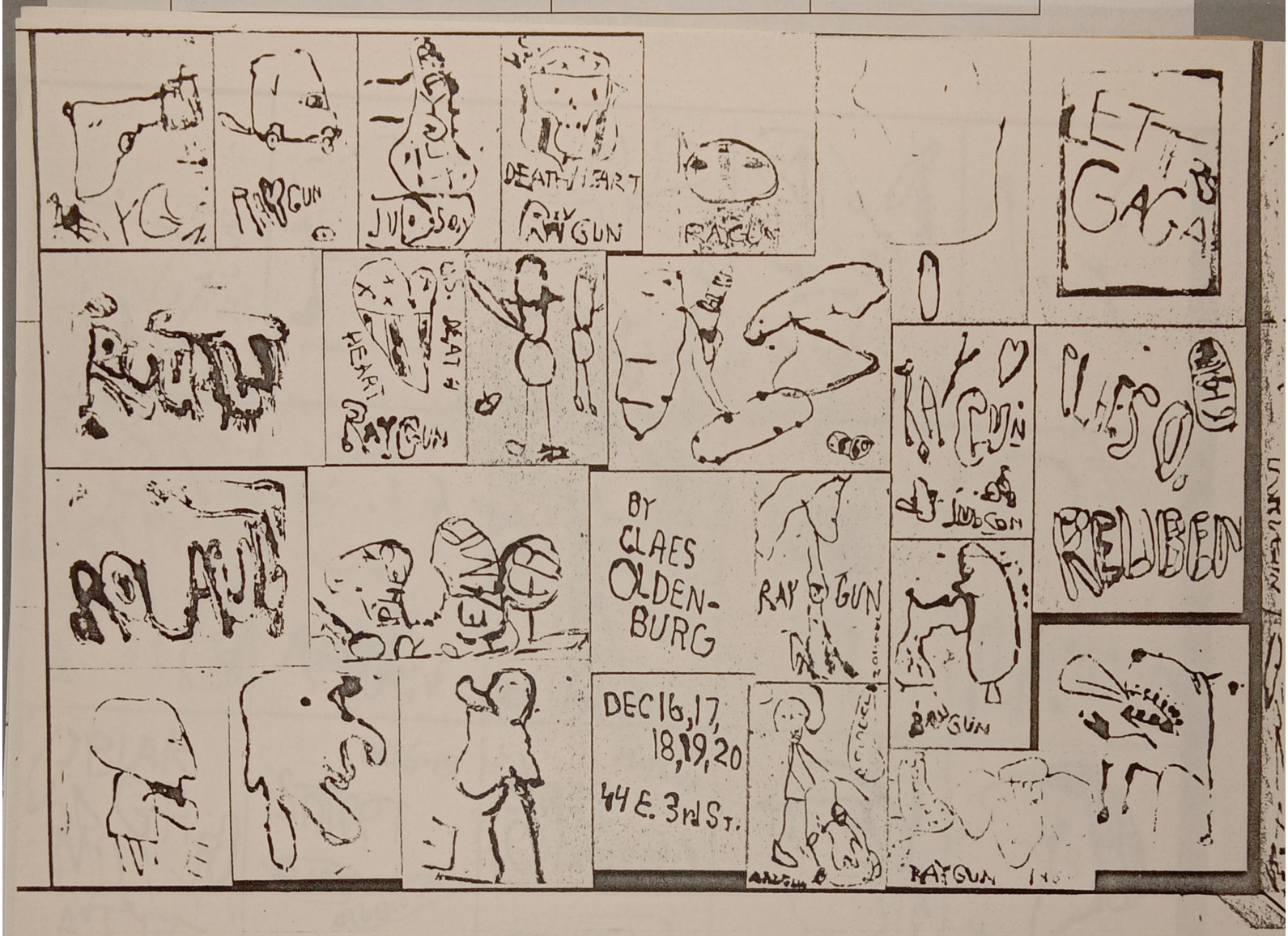
FEBRUARY 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 at 8:30 each night

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RAY GUN
DEATH HEART
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LET'S GAGA
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BY CLAES OLDEN-BURG
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RAY GUN SPEX February 29, March 1 & 2, 1960

order on announcement
Claes Oldenburg- "Snap Shots From The City"

Jim Dine- "The Smiling Workman"

Dick Higgins- "Edifices Cabarets Contributions"

Al Hansen- "Projections"

Allan Kaprow- "Coca Cola. Shitley Cannon ? Ball"

Red Grooms- "The Big Leap"

Bob Whitman- "A Duet for Small Smell"

held during exh of DINE - The House
CO - The Street

see Judson Gallery



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Art News
May 1961



Allan Kaprow arranges his *Apple Shrine*, 1960.

By Allan Kaprow

Photographs by Robert R. McElroy

'Happenings' in the New York scene

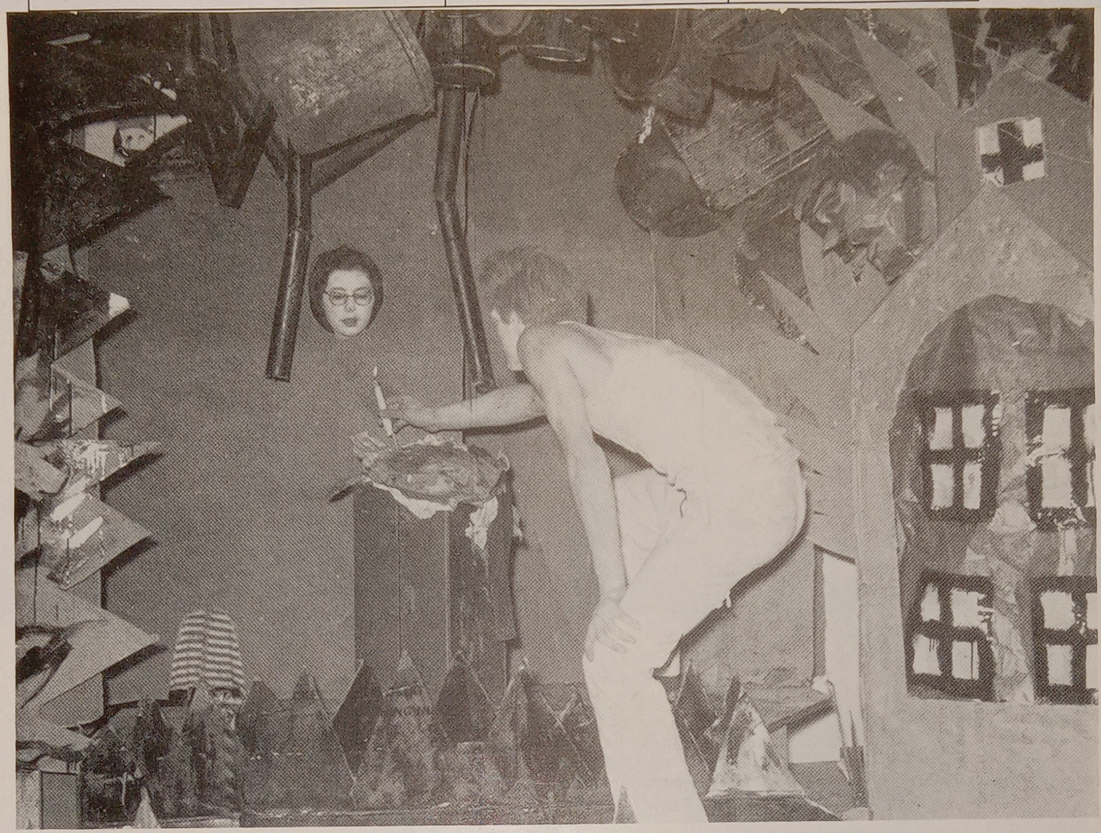
The leader of a group of younger artists explains how they are translating painting into a new kind of drama and some ideas behind their work

The Apple Shrine itself (Judson Gallery), at the center of a maze.



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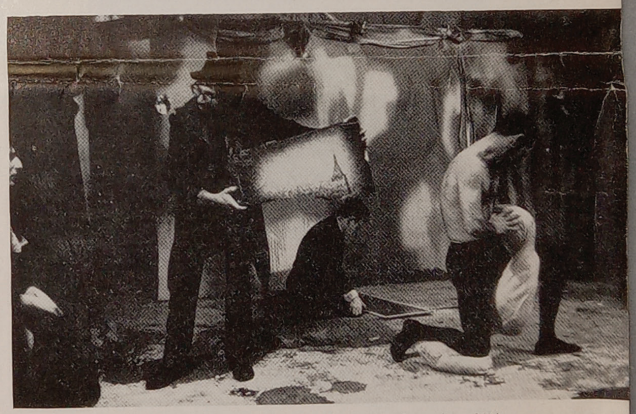
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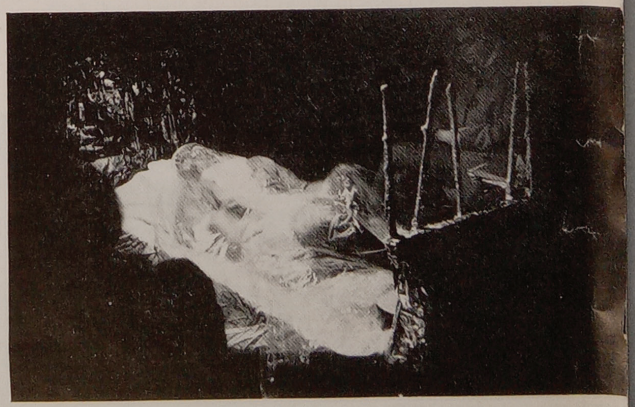
One of the most successful Happenings: Red Grooms's *Burning Building*, 1960.

If you haven't been to the Happenings, let me give you a kaleidoscope sampling of some of their great moments.

Everybody is crowded into a downtown loft, milling about, like at an opening. It's hot. There are lots of big cartons sitting all over the place. One by one they start to move, sliding and careening drunkenly in every direction, lunging into people and one another, accompanied by loud breathing sounds over four loudspeakers. Now it's winter and cold and it's dark, and all around little blue lights go on and off at their own speed, while three large, brown gunny-sack constructions drag an enormous pile of ice and stones over bumps, losing most of it, and blankets keep falling over everything from the ceiling. A hundred iron barrels and gallon wine jugs hanging on ropes swing back and forth, crashing like church bells, spewing glass all over. Suddenly, mushy shapes pop up from the floor and painters slash at curtains dripping with action. A wall of trees tied with colored rags advances on the crowd, scattering everybody, forcing them to leave. There are muslin telephone booths for all with a record player or microphone that tunes you in to everybody else. Coughing, you breathe in noxious fumes, or the



Claes Oldenburg's *Foto-Death* (Reuben Gallery; see A.N., Apr. '61).

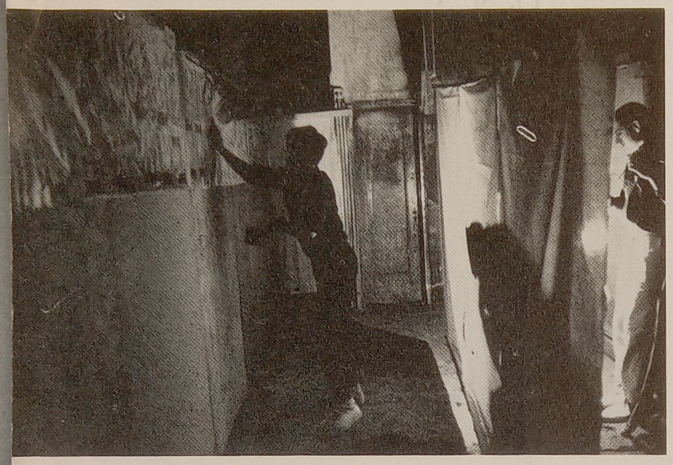


James Dine's *Shining Bed*, a Santa Claus satire.

In Allan Kaprow's Happening, *The Apple Shrine*, the audience threads its way through narrow passages of board and wire choked with tar paper, newspaper, rags; lights change from very dark to very bright. At the end of the maze is a large "tranquil" space where apples are suspended from a tray and signs read "Apples, apples, apples, etc." There are bright bands of color hanging from the ceiling. After contemplation, the spectator winds his way out of the gallery.

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Allan Kaprow's *Spring Happening*, 1961.



The lawn-mower ending of *Spring Happening*, in rehearsal.

In Kaprow's *Spring Happening* [above], the audience sits in a narrow space, like a cattle car. Through slits of light they see various events, including water being sloshed over plastic at eye-level. Finally a rotary lawn mower races down at the audience and the side walls fall down with a crash.

"Happenings" continued

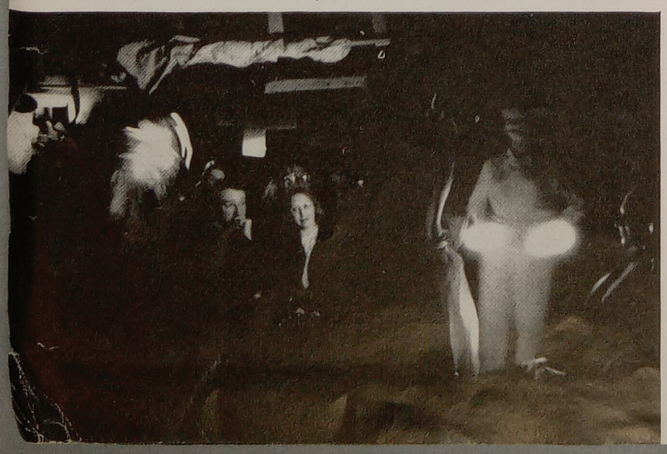
In James Dine's *Car Crash* [below] a male and female car perform an amorous dance. They change sexes. A man (Dine himself) tries to communicate with the audience by grinding words out of a machine or by drawing a car crash on a blackboard or by grunting and stammering. The set is a semi-abandoned store, its shelves lined with remnants of paper.

smell of hospitals and lemon juice. A nude girl runs after the racing pool of a searchlight, throwing spinach greens into it. Slides and movies, projected over walls and people, depict hamburgers: big ones, huge ones, red ones, skinny ones, flat ones, etc. You come in as a spectator and maybe you discover you're caught in it after all, as you push things around like so much furniture. Words rumble past, whispering, dee-daaa, baroom, love me, love me; shadows joggle on screens, power saws and lawnmowers screech just like the I.R.T. at Union Square. Tin cans rattle and you stand up to see or change your seat or answer questions shouted at you by shoeshine boys and old ladies. Long silences, when nothing happens, and you're sore because you paid $1.50 contribution, when bang! there you are facing yourself in a mirror jammed at you. Listen. A cough from the alley. You giggle because you're afraid, suffer claustrophobia, talk to some one nonchalantly, but all the time you're *there*, getting into the act . . . Electric fans start, gently wafting breezes of "New-Car" smell past your nose as leaves bury piles of a whining, burping, foul, pinky mess.

So much for the flavor. Now I would like to describe the nature of Happenings in a different manner, more analytically—their purpose and place in art.

Although widespread opinion has been expressed about these events, usually by those who have never seen them, they are actually little known beyond a small group of interested persons. This small following is aware of several different kinds of Hap-

James Dine's *Car Crash;* enter a "car."



Car Crash: the female "car" that will become male.



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The end of *Spring Happening*, walls fall down, in rehearsal.



Robert Whitman's *The American Moon* (finale).



The American Moon: Whitman and his plastic bubble.

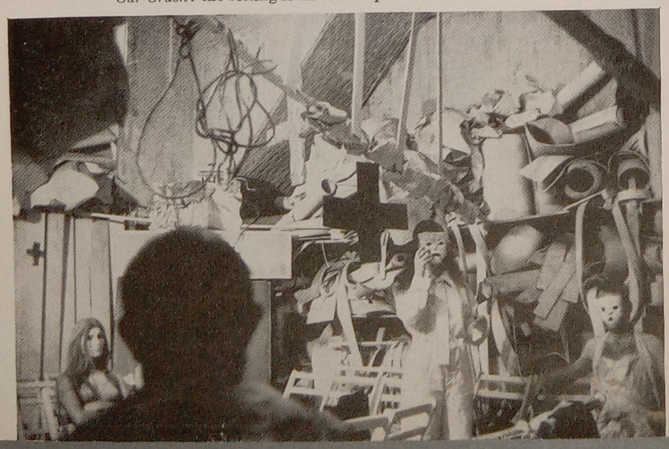
pening. There are the sophisticated, witty works put on by the theater people; the very sparsely abstract, almost Zen-like rituals given by another group (mostly writers and musicians); and there are those in which I am most involved, crude, lyrical and very spontaneous. The last grew out of the advanced American painting of the last decade and I and the others were all painters (or still are). However, there is some beneficial exchange between these three areas.

In addition, outside New York, there is the Gutai group in Osaka, reported activity in San Francisco, Chicago, Cologne, Paris and Milan, as well as a history that goes back through Surrealism, Dada, Mime, the circus, carnivals, the traveling saltimbanques, all the way to medieval mystery plays and processions. Of most of this we know very little; only the spirit has been sensed. Of what *I* know, I find that I have decided philosophical reservations about much of it. Therefore, the points I shall make are not intended to represent the views of all of those who create works that might be generically related, nor even of all of those whose work I admire, but are the issues which I feel to be the most adventuresome, fruitfully open to applications, and the most challenging of anything that is in the air at present.

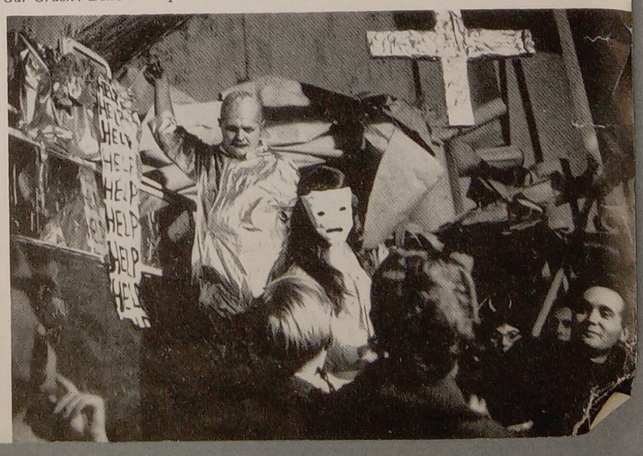
Happenings are events which, put simply, happen. Though the best of them have a decided impact—that is, one feels, "here is something important"—they appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point. In [Continued on page 58]

Robert Whitman's *The American Moon* [above] starts with the audience in narrow caves. Then a huge plastic bubble is blown up, forcing you deeper inside, and Whitman performs with the bubble, pushing it, climbing on it, etc. The lights go out, the audience emerges to the center, the lights go on and there is Whitman swinging over your head.

Car Crash: the setting is an old shop with shelves of remnants.



Car Crash: Dine attempts to call for "help."



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precarious discovery, which marked every hour of that modern artist's life, even when he was not working at his art, vanishes. Strangely, no one seems to know this, except, perhaps, the "unsuccessful" artists waiting for their day . . .

To us, who are already answering the increasing telephone calls from entrepreneurs, this is more than disturbing. We are, at this writing, still free to do what we wish, and are watching ourselves as we become caught up in an irreversible process. Our Happenings, like all the other art produced in the last decade and a half by those who, for a few brief moments, were also free, are in no small part the expression of this liberty. In our beginning, some of us, reading the signs all too clearly, are facing our end.

If this is close to the truth, it is surely melodrama as well, and I intend the tone of my words to suggest that quality. Anyone moved by the spirit of tough-guyism would answer that all of this is a pseudo-problem, and is of the artists' own making. They have the alternative of rejecting fame if they do not want its responsibilities. They have made their sauce; now they must stew in it. It is not the patrons' and the publicists' moral obligation to protect the artists' freedom.

But such an objection, while sounding healthy and realistic, is in fact European and old-fashioned; it sees the creator as an indomitable hero who exists on a plane above any living context. It fails to appreciate the special character of our mores in America and this matrix, I would maintain, is the only reality within which any question about the arts may be asked.

The tough answer fails to appreciate our taste for fads and "movements," each one increasingly equivalent to the last in value and complexion, making for that vast ennui, that anxiety lying so close to the surface of our comfortable existence. It does not account for our need for "loving" everybody (our democracy) which must give every dog his bone; which compels everyone known by no one to be addressed by his nickname. This relentless craving loves everything destructively, for it actually hates Love. What can anyone's interest in *this* kind of art or *that* marvelous painter possibly mean then? Is it a meaning lost to the artist?

Where else can we see the unbelievable and frequent phenomenon of successful radicals becoming "fast friends" with successful academicians, united only by a common success and deliberately insensitive to the fundamental issues their different values imply? I wonder where else but here can be found that shutting of the eyes to the question of *purpose?* Perhaps in the United States such a question could not ever before exist, so pervasive has been the amoral mush.

This everyday world affects the way art is created as much as it conditions its response—a response the critic articulates for the patron, who in turn acts upon it. Melodrama, I think, is central to all of this.

Apart from those men in our recent history who have achieved something in primarily the spirit of European art, much of the positive character of America can be understood by that word. The saga of the Pioneer is true melodrama, the Cowboy and the Indian; the Rent Collector, Stella Dallas, Charlie Chaplin, the Organization Man, Mike Todd, are melodrama. And so [illegible]. Probably without trying,

"Happenings" continued from page 39

contrast to the arts of the past, they have no structured beginning, middle or end. Their form is open-ended and fluid; nothing obvious is sought and therefore nothing is won, except the certainty of a number of occurrences to which one is more than normally attentive. They exist for a single performance, or only a few more, and are gone forever, while new ones take their place.

These events are essentially theater pieces, however unconventional. That they are still largely rejected by most devotees of the theater may be due to their uncommon power and primitive energy, and to the fact that the best of them have come directly out of the rites of American Action Painting. But by widening the concept "theater" to include them (like widening the concept "painting" to include collage) it is possible to see them against this basic background, and to understand them better.

To my way of thinking, Happenings possess some crucial qualities which distinguish them from the usual theatrical works, even the experimental ones of today. First, there is the *context,* the place of conception and enactment. The most intense and essential happenings have been spawned in old lofts, basements, vacant stores, in natural surroundings and in the street, where very small audiences, or groups of visitors, are commingled in some way with the event, flowing in and among its parts. There is thus no separation of audience and play (as there is even in round or pit theaters), the elevated picture-window view of most playhouses, is gone, as are the expectations of curtain-openings and *tableaux-vivants* and curtain-closing. . . .

seen. He stacks the deck that way.

By some reasonable but unplanned process, Happenings, we may suspect, have emerged as an art that can precisely *function,* as long as the mechanics

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the idea of "worst" and Value is defeated by paradox. Its most poignant expressions have been the blank canvas, the motionless dance, the silent music, the empty page of poetry. On the edge of such an abyss, all that is left to do is *act.*

A few have acted, and what they have done has altered the way we think about art. What art has begun to mean now can best be described by its new circumstances and by the self-image artists have had to adopt as a result. Although the change is not complete, other artists are measuring their stance and goals by what has happened; and those opposed pay it tribute by contrasting their preferences to its alleged inadequacies.

The picture that follows is a synthetic one. It describes no particular artist, neither does it add up a number of specific facts about many artists (though some may be recognizable). It is based upon observations made within the circle of painters and sculptors who make up the present vanguard, as well as upon the activities of agents and the public. The picture is an interpretation of these observations as much as it is a characterization of them, simplified and purposely dramatized. This, of course, is my responsibility, but simple and dramatic interpretations focus upon issues and these issues, I believe, are crucial.

Neither church, nor state, nor individual

For Leonardo da Vinci, the artist was an Intellectual; for Baudelaire, a Genius; for the 1930s (as the scene shifts to the U.S.), a Worker; and for the 1950s, a Beat. What a fall from grace! It is said that when a man hits bottom there is only one direction to go and that is up. In one way, this has hapened, for if the artist was in hell in 1946, now he is in business. But society is becoming so fluid that the way from here is not so much Up as Out. Not simply "far out," but out of that inner-man who has been bled to death or reduced to impotence from over-indulgence. There is a chance that the modern "visionary" is even more of a cliché than his counterpart, the "conformist," and that neither is true. One looks around and what does one see?

The natural aristocrats are gone, and those still playing the part are like carnival Pagliaccis, pathetic in their self-mockery. The geniuses, too, have vanished, with the

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The sheer rawness of the out-of-doors or the closeness of dingy city quarters, in which the radical Happenings flourish, are more appropriate, I believe, in temperament and un-artiness, to the materials and directness of these works. The place where anything grows up (a certain kind of art in this case), that is its "habitat," gives to it not only a space, a set of relationships to various things around it, a range of values, but an over-all atmosphere, as well, which penetrates it and whoever experiences it. This has always been true, but it is especially important now, when our advanced art approaches a fragile but marvelous life, one that maintains itself by a mere thread, melting into an elusive, changeable configuration, the surroundings, the artist, his work and everyone who comes to it.

If I may digress a moment to bring into focus this point, it may reveal why the "better" galleries and homes (whose décor is still a by-now-antiseptic Neo-Classicism of the '20s) desiccate and prettify modern paintings and sculpture which had looked so natural in their studio birthplace. It may also explain why artists' studios do not look like galleries and why, when an artist's studio does, everyone is suspicious. I think that, today, this organic connection between art and its environment is so meaningful and necessary that removing one from the other results in abortion. Yet, this life-line is denied continuously by its most original seers, the artists who have made us aware of it; for the flattery of being "on show" blinds them to every insensitivity heaped upon their suddenly weakened offerings. There seems no end to the white walls, the tasteful aluminum frames, the lovely lighting, fawn-grey rugs, cocktails, polite conversation. The attitudes, I mean the world view, conveyed by such a fluorescent reception is in itself not "bad." It is unaware. And being unaware, it can hardly be responsive to the art it promotes and professes to admire.

Happenings invite one to cast aside for a moment these proper manners and partake wholly in the real nature of the art and (one hopes) life. Thus a happening is rough and sudden and it often feels "dirty." Dirt, we might begin to realize, is also organic and fertile, and everything, including the visitors, can grow a little in such circumstances.

To return to the contrast between Happenings and plays, the second important difference is that a Happening has no plot, no obvious "philosophy," and is materialized in an improvisatory fashion, like jazz, and like much contemporary painting, where one does not know exactly what is going to happen next. The action leads itself any way it wishes, and the artist controls it only to the degree that it keeps on "shaking" right. A modern play rarely has such an impromptu basis, for plays are still *first written*. A Happening is *generated in action* by a headful of ideas or a flimsily-jotted-down score of "root" directions.

A play assumes words to be the almost absolute medium. A Happening will frequently have words, but they may or may not make literal sense. If they do, their sense is not part of the fabric of "sense" which other nonverbal elements (noise, visual stuff, actions, etc.) convey. Hence, they have a brief, emergent and sometimes detached quality. If they do not make "sense," then they are heard as the *sound* of words instead of the meaning conveyed by them. Words, however, need not be used at all: a Happening might consist of a swarm of locusts being dropped in and around the performance space. This element of chance with respect to the medium itself is not to be expected from the ordinary theater.

Indeed, the involvement in chance, which is the third and most problematical quality found in Happenings, will rarely occur in the conventional theater. When it does, it usually is a marginal benefit of *interpretation*. In the present work, chance (in conjunction with improvisation) is a deliberately employed mode of operating that penetrates the whole composition and its character. It is the vehicle of the spontaneous. And it is the clue to understanding how control (setting up of chance techniques) can effectively produce the opposite quality of the unplanned and apparently uncontrolled. I think it can be demonstrated that much contemporary art, which counts upon inspiration to yield that admittedly desirable verve or sense of the un-selfconscious, is by now getting results which appear planned and academic. A loaded brush and a mighty swing always seem to hit the ball to the same spot.

The word "chance," then, rather than "spontaneity," is a key term, for it implies risk and fear (thus re-establishing that fine *nervousness* so pleasant when something is about to occur). It also better names a *method* which becomes manifestly unmethodical if one considers the pudding more a proof than the recipe.

Traditional art has always tried to *make it good every time*, believing that this was a *truer* truth than life. When an artist directly utilizes chance he hazards failure, the "failure" of being less Artistic and more Life-like. "Art" produced by him might surprisingly turn out to be an affair that has all the inevitability of a well-ordered, middle-class Thanksgiving dinner (I have seen a few remarkable Happenings which were "bores" in this sense). But it could be like slipping on a banana peel, or Going to Heaven.

Simply by establishing a flexible framework of the barest kind of limits, such as the selection of only five elements out of an infinity of possibilities, almost anything can happen. And something always does, *even things that*

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the idea of "worst" and Value is defeated by paradox. Its most poignant expressions have been the blank canvas, the motionless dance, the silent music, the empty page of poetry. On the edge of such an abyss, all that is left to do is *act*.

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are unpleasant. Visitors to a Happening are now and then not sure what has taken place, when it has begun or when it has ended, or even when things have gone "wrong." For by going "wrong," something far more "right," more revelatory, has many times emerged. It is this sort of sudden near-miracle which presently seems to be made more likely by chance procedures.

If one grasps the import of that word "chance" and *accepts* it (no easy achievement in our culture), then its methods need not invariably cause one's work to reduce to either chaos or a statistical indifference lacking in concreteness and intensity, as in a table of random numbers. On the contrary, the identities of those artists who employ such techniques are very clear. It is odd that by giving up certain hitherto privileged aspects of the Self, so that one cannot always "correct" something according to one's taste, the work and the artist frequently come out on top. And when they come out on the bottom, it is a very concrete bottom!

The final point I should like to make about Happenings as against plays was mentioned earlier, and is, of course, implicit in all the discussion—that is, their impermanence. By composing in such a way that the unforeseen has a premium placed upon it, no Happening can be reproduced. The few performances given of each work are considerably different from each other; and the work is over before habits begin to set in. In keeping with this, the physical materials used to create the environments of Happenings are of the most perishable kind: newspapers, junk, rags, old wooden crates knocked together, cardboard cartons cut up, real trees, food, borrowed machines, etc. They cannot last for long in whatever arrangement they are put. A Happening is thus at its freshest, while it lasts, for better or worse.

Here we need not go into the considerable history behind such values as are embodied in Happenings. It is sufficient to say that the passing, the changing, the natural, even the willingness to fail, are not unfamiliar. They reveal a spirit that is at once passive in its acceptance of what may be, and heroic in its disregard of security. One is also left exposed to the quite marvelous experience of being *surprised.* This is, in essence, a continuation of the tradition of Realism.

The significance of the foregoing is not to be found simply in the fact that there is a fresh creative wind blowing. Happenings are not just another new style. Instead, like American art of the late 1940s, they are a moral act, a human stand of great urgency, whose professional status qua art is less a criterion than their certainty as an ultimate existential commitment.

It has always seemed to me that American creative energy only becomes charged by such a sense of crisis. The real weakness of much vanguard art since 1951 is its complacent assumption that Art exists and can be recognized and practiced. I am not so sure whether what we do now is art or something not quite art. If I call it art it is because I wish to avoid the endless arguments some other name would bring forth. Paradoxically. if it turns out to be art after all, it will be so in spite of (or *because* of) this larger question.

But this explosive atmosphere has been absent from our arts for ten years and one by one our major figures have dropped by the wayside, laden with glory. If tense excitement has returned with the Happenings, one can only suspect that the pattern will be repeated. These are our greenest days. Some of us will become famous and we will have proven once again that the only success occurred when there was a lack of it.

Such worries have been voiced before in more discouraging times, but today is hardly such a time when so many are rich and desire a befitting culture. I may, therefore, seem to be throwing water on a kindly spark in a chilly country when I touch on this note, for we customarily prefer to celebrate victories without ever questioning whether they are victories indeed. But I think it is necessary to question the whole state of American Success, because to do so is not only to touch on what is characteristically American and what is crucial about Happenings; it is partly to explain America's special strength. And this strength has nothing to do with Success.

Particularly in New York where it is most evident, we have not yet looked clearly at recognition and what it may imply—a condition that, until recently, has been quite natural to a European who has earned it. We are unable to accept rewards for being an artist, because it has been sensed deeply that to be such a man means that we must live and work in isolation and pride. Now that a new *haut monde* is demanding of us art and more art, we find ourselves running away or running to it, shocked and guilty, either way. I must be emphatic: the glaring truth, to anyone who cares to examine it calmly, is that nearly every artist, working in any medium from words to paint, who has made his mark as an innovator, as a radical in the best sense of that word, has, once he has been recognized and paid handsomely, capitulated to the interests of good taste, or has been wounded by them. There is no overt pressure anywhere. The patrons of art are the nicest people in the world. They neither wish to corrupt nor actually do so. The *whole* situation is corrosive, for neither patron nor artist comprehends his role; each is always a little edgy, however abundantly the smiles are exchanged. Out of this hidden discomfort there comes a still-born art, tight or merely repetitive at best, and at worst, chic. The old daring and the charged atmosphere of

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precarious discovery, which marked every hour of that modern artist's life, even when he was not working at his art, vanishes. Strangely, no one seems to know this, except, perhaps, the "unsuccessful" artists waiting for their day . . .

To us, who are already answering the increasing telephone calls from entrepreneurs, this is more than disturbing. We are, at this writing, still free to do what we wish, and are watching ourselves as we become caught up in an irreversible process. Our Happenings, like all the other art produced in the last decade and a half by those who, for a few brief moments, were also free, are in no small part the expression of this liberty. In our beginning, some of us, reading the signs all too clearly, are facing our end.

If this is close to the truth, it is surely melodrama as well, and I intend the tone of my words to suggest that quality. Anyone moved by the spirit of tough-guyism would answer that all of this is a pseudo-problem, and is of the artists' own making. They have the alternative of rejecting fame if they do not want its responsibilities. They have made their sauce; now they must stew in it. It is not the patrons' and the publicists' moral obligation to protect the artists' freedom.

But such an objection, while sounding healthy and realistic, is in fact European and old-fashioned; it sees the creator as an indomitable hero who exists on a plane above any living context. It fails to appreciate the special character of our mores in America and this matrix, I would maintain, is the only reality within which any question about the arts may be asked.

The tough answer fails to appreciate our taste for fads and "movements," each one increasingly equivalent to the last in value and complexion, making for that vast ennui, that anxiety lying so close to the surface of our comfortable existence. It does not account for our need for "loving" everybody (our democracy) which must give every dog his bone; which compels everyone known by no one to be addressed by his nickname. This relentless craving loves everything destructively, for it actually hates Love. What can anyone's interest in *this* kind of art or *that* marvelous painter possibly mean then? Is it a meaning lost to the artist?

Where else can we see the unbelievable and frequent phenomenon of successful radicals becoming "fast friends" with successful academicians, united only by a common success and deliberately insensitive to the fundamental issues their different values imply? I wonder where else but here can be found that shutting of the eyes to the question of *purpose?* Perhaps in the United States such a question could not ever before exist, so pervasive has been the amoral mush.

This everyday world affects the way art is created as much as it conditions its response—a response the critic articulates for the patron, who in turn acts upon it. Melodrama, I think, is central to all of this.

Apart from those men in our recent history who have achieved something in primarily the spirit of European art, much of the positive character of America can be understood by that word. The saga of the Pioneer is true melodrama, the Cowboy and the Indian; the Rent Collector, Stella Dallas, Charlie Chaplin, the Organization Man, Mike Todd, are melodrama. And so now is the American Artist a melodramatic figure. Probably without trying, we have been able to see profoundly what we are all about through these archetypal personages. This is the quality of our temperament which a classically-trained mind would invariably mistake for sentimentality.

But I do not want to suggest that the avant-garde artist produces even remotely sentimental works; I am referring more to the hard and silly melodrama of his life and his almost farcical social position, known as well as the story of George Washington and the Cherry Tree, and which infuses what he does with a powerful yet fragile fever. Partly it is the idea that he will be famous only after he dies, a myth we have taken to heart far more than have the Europeans, and far more than we care to admit. Half-consciously, though, there is the more indigenous dream that everything is in the *adventure;* the tangible goal is not important. The Pacific coast is farther away than we thought, Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth lies beyond the next everglade, and the next, and the next . . . meanwhile let's battle the alligators.

What is not melodramatic, in the sense I am using it, but is disappointing and tragic, is that today the vanguard artist is given his prizes very quickly, instead of being left to his adventure. And he is, furthermore, led to believe, by no one in particular, that this was the thing he wanted all the while. But in some obscure recess of his mind, he assumes he must now die, at least spiritually, to keep the myth intact. Hence, the creative aspect of his art ceases. To all intents and purposes, *he is dead and he is famous.*

In this context of achievement-and-death, an artist who makes a Happening is living out the purest melodrama. His activity embodies the myth of Non-Success, for Happenings cannot be sold and taken home; they can only be supported. And by their intimate and fleeting nature, only a few people can experience them. They remain isolated and proud. The creator of such events is an adventurer too, because much of what he does is unforeseen. He stacks the deck that way.

By some reasonable but unplanned process, Happenings, we may suspect, have emerged as an art that can precisely *function,* as long as the mechanics

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of our present rush for cultural maturity continue. This will no doubt change eventually and thus will change the issues of this article.

But for now there is this to consider, the point I raised earlier: Some of us will probably become famous. It will be an ironic fame fashioned largely by those who have never seen our work. The attention and pressure of such a position will probably destroy the majority of us, as it has nearly all the others. Our kind of artist knows no better how to handle the metaphysics and practice of worldy power than anyone else. He knows even less, since he has not been in the slightest involved with it. That I feel it necessary, in the interests of the truth, to write this article which may hasten the conclusion, is even more fatefully ironic. But this is the chance one takes; it is part of the picture. . . .

Yet, I cannot help wondering if there isn't a positive side, too, a side also subject to the throw of the dice. To the extent that a happening is not a commodity but a brief event, from the standpoint of any publicity it may receive, it may become *a state of mind*. Who will have been there at that event? It may become like the sea-monsters of the past or the flying saucers of yesterday. I shouldn't really mind, for as the new myth grows on its own, without reference to anything in particular, the artist may achieve a beautiful privacy, famed for something purely imaginary, while free to explore something nobody will notice.

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the former is austerely elegant with its rigorous disciplining of line and plane; in contrast, the *Pink Tablecloth* is attractive, tasteful, charming and self-deprecating because of these blandishments. Perhaps, you will say that the charm of this latter painting derives from the French tradition of Watteau and Chardin. I would rather liken it to the Rococo of Boucher and Robert, essentially non-experiential, essentially superficial.

This artistic détente marks the course of abstraction from its truly potent beginnings through three decades of flagging inspiration. "By the 1920s," writes Mr. Rosenblum, "the contagious vitality of Cubism had waned considerably, and by the 1930s, even its greatest practitioners could only rival, but never surpass, the finest work of the early years." It is extraordinary how many talented artists deteriorated after their first decade of modern art production: Kandinsky, Delaunay, Marcel Duchamp, Léger, Jacques Villon and Lipchitz come to mind among the abstractionists, while figurative artists such as Derain, Vlaminck, Rouault, Chagall, Chirico, Kokoschka and Beckmann also declined in power. Consider, too, how creatively fertile German Expressionism and Italian Futurism were in their first years when abstraction was motivated by creative drives rather than mental wizardry. Yet there is very little critical recognition of this deterioration: Chagall is Chagall and Kokoschka is Kokoschka, even though some of their recent work burlesques that created before World War I.

World publicity fastened on abstract art from its earliest beginning, for example, the sensational notoriety given to Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. To the somewhat private exploitation of originality by artists was now added public identification of abstract art with the strange, the unusual, the esoteric. Needing publicity as a prerequisite to recognition and success, many abstract artists have deliberately fostered sensationalism in their work and lives. This nod to journalists is most evident in Dada, Surrealism, and today's neo-Dada and neo-Surrealism: hail the shocking, the mad, the "too-too," and be sure to call the press. A blatant example was Tinguely's spectacle in the Museum of Modern Art's garden. As reported in *The New York Times* of March 18, 1960, eighty bicycles, tricycles and wagon wheels, a piano of sorts, some metal drums, an addressing machine and other junk hammered and melted each other before two-hundred and fifty spectators who booed some fireman on hand to control the fire. No mention was made of a violin accompaniment. This would have made the party even cuter. Here is a vicious contradiction: how can an inner-directed, simple, honest, existential art, torn from God knows where, be served by this hucksterism? "Anything to make a buck" can be here paraphrased to "anything to get in print."

Two modifications to the above are in order. The very nature of creation tends to make artists eccentric, for example, nineteenth-century Paris rightly fostered that Bohemianism needed by artists to live and work freely. Of course, original work will always seem strange, witness the abuse heaped on the Impressionists. What I protest against is the deliberate evocation of originality, that forced strangeness which inevitably leads to superficiality. Also, there's absolutely no reason why artists shouldn't be successful. That artists should lead a monkish life of denial and isolation is not my argument at all. What I protest against is that abstract-art sensationalism which seeks notoriety.

Another liability of publicity has been the sacred-cow status bestowed upon famous artists. Newspaper and magazine coverage begets recognition and sales, particularly to museums, which in turn begets more recognition and success, etc., etc. This institutional-image importance is reinforced by writers and teachers who repeat stereotyped descriptions and criticism so

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By Allan Kaprow

Should the artist become a man of the world?

Yes—answers the painter who founded the "Happenings" movement in this manifesto that appeals to his vanguard colleagues to join the new classless society; a contrasting point of view appears in the editorial on page 19

Voltaire concluded his book *Candide* with the bitter advice that since this is the best of all possible worlds, we had better cultivate our gardens. We agree with Voltaire, but call ours the worst of all worlds. Yet the art world, at least, has never been in better flower. There are probably more novelties today, more esthetic theories, more sheer energy, than at any time in history.

We read our papers, attend to our work and go to sleep at night, having been inundated (we are told daily) by a torrent of the impossible, all of it leading to confusion. As artists, we know more about the history of our field, the infinity of its alternatives, than artists ever knew before. And all this is reflected in the array of styles with which we beckon others' attention. For the first time, blissful ignorance hasn't a chance.

Something for everybody

Once two drinkers sat contemplating a bottle; the whiskey was at the half-way mark. One said it was half-empty, and the other said it was half-full.

Updating the story, imagine the bottle as a Cubist painter might—from inside and out, above and below, front to back, near and far, in angles and curves—the data concerning the whiskey level are intensified as the vantage points are increased. Suppose, further, that the drinkers themselves are Cubist beings whose many discrete observations are perfectly normal; and that the judgment of each to the other is not a simple statement but a "Cubist" one: "The bottle is half-full; 'half-full' makes two syllables; 'half-full' begins with 'h'; 'h' is a crooked letter. . . ." Now set all these components into Futurist motion, add Dada cynicism, Surrealist psychology and Abstract-Expressionist crisis, and we may approximate the situation today. Everyone, the artist and perhaps even the non-artist, is "right."

There is another story: a donkey starved to death between two bales of hay because he could not make up his mind which to eat. We resemble the donkey, but are surrounded by countless bales of hay. We race inside a circle and go mad trying to choose the best. The defiant fall, sooner or later, exhausted from the effort, while the sensitive ones stand shaking in the middle of the arena nibbling on a straw from a past season. Pursuit of the idea of "best" becomes then (insidiously) avoidance of the idea of "worst" and Value is defeated by paradox. Its most poignant expressions have been the blank canvas, the motionless dance, the silent music, the empty page of poetry. On the edge of such an abyss, all that is left to do is *act*.

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beret and velvet jacket. A Union Label can mean Hoffa, instead of Humanity. There is no more Beat Generation, it found suffering pays off; and the new young hollow-eyed in tattered jeans come freshly showered from the best families and folk-sing the virtues of Courbet and Cézanne.

The men and women of today's generation matured during and directly after World War II, rather than during the Depression. They are almost all college-educated, and are frequently married, with children. Many of them teach or have taught. On the street they are indistinguishable from the middle-class from which they come and towards whose mores—practicality, security and self-advancement—they tend to gravitate.

They do not live very differently from anyone else. Like anyone else, they are concerned with keeping the rooms warm in winter, with the children's education, with the rising cost of life-insurance. But they are apt to keep quietly to themselves no matter where they live—in the suburbs or in the city—rather than enter into the neighborhood coffee-break or meetings of the P.T.A. This is not unfriendliness so much as it is a lack of commitment to the standard forms of camaraderie, a detachment born partly of lingering vestiges of alienation and partly of the habits of reflectiveness. Their actual social life is usually elsewhere, with clients, fellow-artists and agents, an increasingly expedient social life for the sake of career rather than just for pleasure. And in this, they resemble the personnel in other specialized disciplines and industries in America.

Where they differ from their neighbors is not in beliefs, but in consciousness of what is implied by their unexpected position. It shows up in their relations to the art world, in their connection *as artists* to society, in their sense of themselves and the role they are playing.

According to the myth, the modern artist is the archetypal victim who is "suicided by society" (Artaud). In the present sequel, the artist is entirely responsible for his life and death; there are no villains any more. There are only cultured reactionaries, sensitive and respected older radicals, rising up in indignation to remind you that Rembrandt, van Gogh and Pollock died on the Cross (while you've "sold out"). As may be expected then, the artists' involvement with each other is primarily professional. If it is sometimes friendly, the old idea of an Artists' Clan or Group no longer exists.

Society nowadays—at least a rapidly-growing part of it—pursues the artist instead of exiling him. Unconsciously, it sees him as a spokesman, while consciously, it is looking for diversion and status. Of this I shall have more to say shortly, but it is enough to point out that Aunt May and Uncle Jim do not always fit the philistine costumes that history has assigned them. Attracted to art by its promotion in mass mediums, they come to an artist with enthusiasm, and, of course, little grasp of what he is doing. Disconcertingly, they pose as hippies-ready-for-anything and want to be shocked over and over by the very self-analyses, sexual preoccupations and raw techniques that once repelled them. (Which brings up the problem of whether art should not now be shocking to the artist instead of the public . . .?)

It is disturbing to be appreciated for naïve or wrong reasons. But is it so much better to be vilified for reasons equally invalid? In any case, this uncertain relationship is hardly grounds for war. If society is not entirely bad, if we are a little doubtful of its intent, can we be so sure of our own? If intellectuals cannot come up with fresh insights into the "bourgeois evil" other than its parvenu love for the arts (which they are guilty of themselves), then the main question becomes not, "Who is against us?" but "What can be done exactly where we are?" Unfortunately, there is nowhere else to go.

Unfortunately also, in the new myth of modern art, *the artist can no longer succeed by failing*. Deprived of his classic enemy, society, he cannot comfort himself in his lack of recognition by the refrain "They'll discover me later," for now his only opponent, if he has any, is the competition. He must put-up or shut-up, succeed in conveying his vision in reasonably good time or consider giving up the attempt. Deprived, also, of imaginary ideals, he must work towards an art which he sees functioning neither for Church nor State nor Individual, but in a subtle social complex whose terms he is only beginning to understand. Art becomes harder to make than ever.

The modern artist is apolitical, like some predecessors, but he does not have their anxiety of ideological betrayals, so typical of the 1940s. International affairs lack essential issues: in practice Communism and Capitalism look alike, both are simply ambitious, and there is dissension within the ranks of each. National issues, such as Civil Rights, seem far more real. Yet the newspapers are too full of detailed accounts of the maneuvers and professional tactics of this struggle to leave the artist unaware of the consequences of naïveté in a man's game. Political responsibility is more than mere reaction to injustice and feeling for a cause; it is action planned for results. Political awareness may be all men's duty, but political expertise belongs to the politician. As with art, only the full-time career can yield results, for results are all that count. The well-meant amateur in either is ridiculous and the criterion for involvement in fields which are manifestly no longer easy is: who is qualified?

Things that can be touched

Harold Rosenberg has pointed out that, after World War II, the artist did not know quite who he was, how he was to function or what, if anything, there was to value: "The refusal of Value did not take the form of condemnation or defiance of society, as it did after World War I. It was diffident. The lone artist did not want the world to be different, he wanted his canvas to be a world. . . . The American vanguard artist took to the white expanse of canvas as Melville's Ishmael took to the sea. . . . On the one hand, a desperate recognition of

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moral and intellectual exhaustion; on the other, the exhilaration of an adventure over depths in which he might find reflected the true image of his identity."

Since 1952, when this was written, artists have found their identities over and over in that white expanse of canvas, and many look remarkably alike. When the plunge into depths brings togetherness up to the surface, the adventure must be shifted to the pursuit of identities. If things-without are truer than the soul-within, the same agony of choice faces artists as it did Æsop's donkey. Those who escape the dilemma grasp at the few things personal contact gives them to understand, as if they were life-jackets, knowing they are not exclusive, yet fighting for their recognition *because they are true.*

Value, then, however relative, is taken for granted as the real goal. It is *valuable* just to make something. It is valuable just to *point* to something. It is valuable to depict an electric light in a commercial technique (even if it is both an affirmation of this act and an irony). It is *right* to attach a pair of pants on a canvas. It is *true to life* to compose a work which perishes with the occasion. It is *better* to weld junk-metal than to carve wood; and what this means is *better* than another meaning for the sculptor, and so forth.

Where once artists disclaimed Value in favor of the search for it, now artists admit to the blur of Values, in general, and are compelled to establish one or two of them in particular. But if Value is the result of the artist's crucial decision to act on his own tangible experience, the problem is its effective transmission in the contemporary department-store milieu. If politics on a national or global scale is presumptuous for amateurs (as "serious" Sunday painting is presumptuous), art politics is not only possible but necessary. It is the new means of persuasion. And persuasion leads to a verification of the artists' contact with the world.

Positions of leadership

The best of the vanguard artists today are famous, usually prolific, financially comfortable. Those who are not yet, can be; and those few who will not be, must agree that they have rejected the opportunity out of a preference for the tradition of artistic martyrdom or out of fear of temptation.

Among those who have helped the vanguard to become well-known and successful are fellow schoolmates from the '40s, the new curators, gallery dealers and critics, risen to prominence since the War. Nearly all the curators write criticism and monographs (as some of the artists do), thus connecting with editorial policies of art journals and art publishers. Mutual interest between these segments of the profession is quite natural.

Through their colleagues' efforts, artists are called upon to lecture and appear on panel-discussions and on radio and T.V., where what they say is increasingly attended to as their work is admired. They jury national exhibitions and exert influence on international ones, directly promoting the idea of the New and their own reputations, in addition to recruiting younger artist-allies to the Big Leagues.

They are invited to colleges as part-time "Distinguished Visiting Critics." As Chairmen of Art Departments or as members with tenure, they personally influence the course of the next vanguard as much as the look of their work: artist-teacher X's good name has made teaching respectable, so his students decide upon a similar career, and a generation of creator-professors is born to continue the pattern.

Socially, in turn, the vanguard artist is sought after in the homes of the wealthy; is seen at fashionable parties and resorts; is honored at the White House. He finds, in most instances, his audience is not the condescending one of the past, because it is not "old money" that seeks him out, but the *nouveau-riche,* who has been trained like himself to respond to what is timely.

In such a society, artist "Y" donates his highly-priced work to a useful charity, and others, also reaching uncomfortable tax-brackets, find a way to keep their work in circulation while legitimizing the remunerative side of success. At the same time, if an artist can perform a charitable act with his own work in the way the executive-collector who buys from him does, by giving it to a museum for a tax-break, then the artist not only proves he is on a par with the collector *as a business man,* but he has socially bested him by acting independently.

Under such circumstances, a painter who may do his work in a loft, cannot in any sense feel himself part of the "Loft-Generation" of the '40s and '50s. Such circumstances are, rather, the conditions of a certain power. The methodology of power is what we normally call politics, and, although "politics" has a bad name, especially in connection with art, implying conniving and dishonesty, it can also be the method of vitality. To assume that standing off from the politics of culture insures goodness of intent and purity of heart is convincing to no one, least of all to the artist who does so; for he will never know whether he has proven himself "in the presence of temptation" or simply run away.

The responsibility of power

Obviously, power in art is not like that in a nation or in big business. A picture never changed the price of eggs. But a picture can change men's dreams; and pictures may in time clarify men's values. The power of the artist is precisely the influence he wields over the fantasies of his public. Its measure lies not only in the magnitude of this influence, but in its quality as well. Picasso competes with Walt Disney who in turn competes with "Mary Worth." As it is involved in quality, art is a moral act. The artist usually sets out only to be good at his work, but once

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he recognizes the nature of his acts, his obligation is to serve that nature well, and perhaps in ways which can be confused with the practices of hustlers and fakes. When the New is hard to separate from the pseudo-New, motives and results are obscured; but in the absence of standards beyond "Each to His Own," the best must contend on the same field with the worst. The effectiveness of an artists' vision becomes largely a matter of his insights balanced by his responsibility to them *as Value*. Practically, this means defending them against other values that may be more immediately compelling; it also means attending to their future. An artist's work, as Rothko and Still have warned, may be misused, perverted and watered down when it is taken up by the community he has asked to buy it.

No artist can assure his success any more than he can control the public's reception of his vision. But this is not the same as saying that it is all just a matter of luck. An artist today cannot leave his entire career to chance, because he will find that others are attending to theirs and he will be "closed out" as a result. A picture remaining in a studio neither exists as Value nor exists at all for an art-hungry public which no longer dreams of the romance of bohemia. Similarly, "idle" (i.e. useless) art produced by artists unpreoccupied by Eternity is a philosophical contradiction as much as it is unacceptable as a way of life. The composer John Cage once said that for him a piece was simply incomplete until it was performed. A picture, in this view, is unfinished until it enters the world. But once in the world, that picture cannot be indifferently released, to exist as best it can. It cannot, for instance, be sold to a recluse in Idaho and to the Time-Life Building in New York, with the assumption that these will have the same effect—on the work and on the world. It cannot be given for reproduction to a girlie magazine and to an art journal without its value and its meaning becoming confused. However, if a painter *decides* that these alternatives are important, he must also decide *how*, according to each context; and must be prepared to handle the different consequences. For such consequences polarize the range of real connections the artist has with those around him, who, in turn, have their own interests at stake.

The people out there

What has been called an "art public" is no longer a select, small group upon whom an artist can depend for a stock response, favorable or otherwise. It is now a large, diffused mass, soon to be called "the public-in-general." This expanding audience, comprised of readers of the weeklies, viewers of T.V., visitors to Worlds Fairs here and abroad, members of "culture" clubs and subscribers to mail-order art lessons, charitable organizations, civic-improvement committees, political campaigners, schools and universities—not to mention the boom of new galleries and museums which serve the private collector, the corporation and the man-on-the-street—this growing public is involved in art for reasons that are as complicated as they are varied.

A ladies' club wants a "stimulating" show and lecture, but "not too serious" and "not too shocking." Some of its members want the artist as well. But some of them also want to *learn*. A university art department may want to galvanize its students with the challenge of modernism at its most virulent, as well as to prove a point to a lethargic faculty. A politician may see an advantage in enlisting the aid of the intelligentsia and so sponsors municipal exhibitions, incidentally becoming so intrigued by the exhibits that he starts his own collection. A business wants not only the latest art around its factories, but enjoys both a good investment and, in the tax allowances accompanying large-scale buying, a pleasant sort of philanthropy.

The collector, the most committed part of this public, is himself a compound of motives. Newly-rich and newly-privileged, he is a man who is basically intelligent, but without excessive training to encumber his enthusiasms. He is often crude, compulsive and unsure of his responses, but his grasp of the vanguard's work is rapid and straightforward. He supports and buys art with a terrifying mixture of awkward avidity ("Wow, does that swing!"), suspicion ("Is he nice to me for my money?"), cheap-bargain tactics ("I'll take six paintings at half-price") and a deep sense of inherited guilt for his father's philistinism. (Giotto's "Arena" Chapel, we are told, was to atone for its donor's sins; art lovers today may spend cash to redeem their country's art-less past). But such contrasts of intention are not appreciably different from what the artist himself experiences so the point need not be pressed.

On the whole, this widening interest in art stimulates its practice as statistics amply confirm. It echoes not only a pluralistic esthetics, but it suggests that *the range of reasons people now have for being interested in contemporary art is sufficient for art's admissability to the public domain*. Not every artist can benefit from all of these reasons, just as the converse is obvious. But the artist is in a position to turn the welcome-signs to his advantage; for, in any case, people are taking advantage of the artist.

Essentially, the task is an educational one. The artist is faced with an involved public, willy-nilly. It is not bent on hating him, and so it is better to be loved well than loved to death. The duties of instruction in love fall primarily to the artist himself. His job is to place at the disposal of a receptive audience those new thoughts, new words, the new stances even, which will enable his work to be better understood. If he does not, the public's alternative is its old thoughts and [Continued on page 58]

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Art - March '64

By Allan Kaprow

Experimental Art

Obviously it is more than simply pushing a style to its conclusion or shocking a shock-proof audience, but how much more? And what are the risks?

Artist as man of the world continued from page 37

attitudes, loaded as they are with hostilities and stereotyped misunderstandings.

Traditionally such responsibility has been the critic's and, to some extent, the dealer's. A division of labor was considered correct when art was assumed to be an entirely private matter. Middle-men emerged to tell audiences in words what the artist was doing in shapes. But, as pointed out earlier, today's artist is sharing this job at the very urging of his representatives. Indeed, he has done so well at it, that the public, still afraid of being the fool in its new-found culture, will only have its doubts allayed by the reassurance of a word from the horse's mouth. Such an artist is no longer merely the authority-as-creator; he is going to be urged more and more to become the creator-as-authority.

It seems evident that the days when dealers and critics launched an artist into orbit, while he played the uncontaminated genius, are drawing to a close.

The end of the temple

The trends discussed above have affected art's highest office: the museum. This setting has been considered its ultimate glory and sometimes its beatification. (*Mona Lisa* is "enshrined" in the Louvre.) Artists still look up to it.

But we might remember that the public museum (along with art shops) developed principally as substitutes for the patronage of the Palace and Church. Physically, the museum is a direct parallel in mood, appearance and function to the cloistered, unattainably grand surrounding art once had. In Europe, it was the unused monastery and former palace that were taken over for the purpose, while in America the style was imitated. Therefore, we have the "aristocratic" manners of curators, the hushed atmosphere, the reverence with which one is supposed to glide from work to work. Reverent manners became (and still are) confused with reverence for art.

Needless to say, until recently, far from supporting the art of its time in the manner of a pope or prince, the museum became a *conservatoire*. To the modern artist, it connoted worse than a repository of *objets-d'art;* it connoted a repository for dead artists, and he was not yet dead.

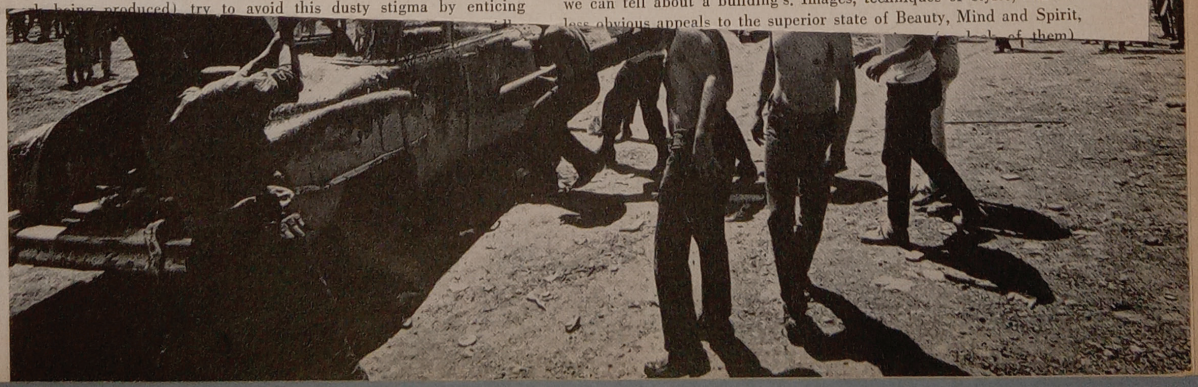
The new curators of today's up-to-date palaces and churches (faced by a scarcity of older art and a genuine sensitivity to the new [illegible] being produced) try to avoid this dusty stigma by enticing famous living names—and even an occasional "scandal." Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York,* a marvelous contraption of junk which partially and intentionally destroyed itself in performance, was, besides being a work of art by a known innovator, a publicity gesture on the part of the Museum of Modern Art that benefitted both parties.

The enterprising commercial gallery, functioning as a museum in miniature, and only distinguished by its more open financial interests, does the same. Both, attempting to be *engagé,* enact their rites of life in the isolation of the *sanctum sanctorum.* However a House of Art is like a jewel-case for a jewel that has no proper place in life, thus the museums (and galleries) are rapidly losing contact with the very art they are so anxious to promote. As artists become more worldly, their work is less precious, less likely to profit from a setting which, in its silence and privacy, suggests a chapel for the disembodied soul.

At one time, modern art, on its way from the gallery to the museum, stopped off at a collector's home, and there it looked out of place because it was *lived* with. Now it is the reverse. "Kitchen-Sink" art, "Pop," "Common-Object" art, "Assemblage," "Junk-Culture," "Rearrangeables," "Multiples," and "Environments," united in their appeal to, and often literal involvement in, the themes and space of daily existence, appear absurd and out-of-kilter in museums where they *cannot* be lived with. (Even the current "Hard-Edge" and "Retinal" painting or sculpture, whose forms are more retardataire, reveal their precarious purity in *contact* with the active life in which they were made, rather than deprived of it.)

The museum is thus a comparatively recent occurrence which we have tended to assume *always belonged to the nature of art*—though in fact most of the past did without it. And it is already obsolete. It is an irony that when art is becoming a part of the world, more museums are being built to entomb it. It is a tragedy that painters and sculptors who have reviled the edifice for just this reason, willingly consign their life's work to an early burial there. The only hope is that this process will soon stop and that modern museums will be converted to swimming pools or night-clubs.

Middle-class money, both public and private, should be spent on middle-class art, not on fantasies of good taste and noble sentiment. We are quite as able to tell about a painting's social registration as we can tell about a building's. Images, techniques or styles, and the less obvious appeals to the superior state of Beauty, Mind and Spirit, [illegible] of them)



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Artist as man of the world continued from page 37

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The new curators of today's up-to-date palaces and churches (faced by a scarcity of older art and a genuine sensitivity to the new work being produced) try to avoid this dusty stigma by enticing droves of public with traveling shows, educational programs, rapidly-changing exhibits of new work, concerts, lectures and forums by famous living names—and even an occasional "scandal." Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York,* a marvelous contraption of junk which partially and intentionally destroyed itself in performance, was, besides being a work of art by a known innovator, a publicity gesture on the part of the Museum of Modern Art that benefitted both parties.

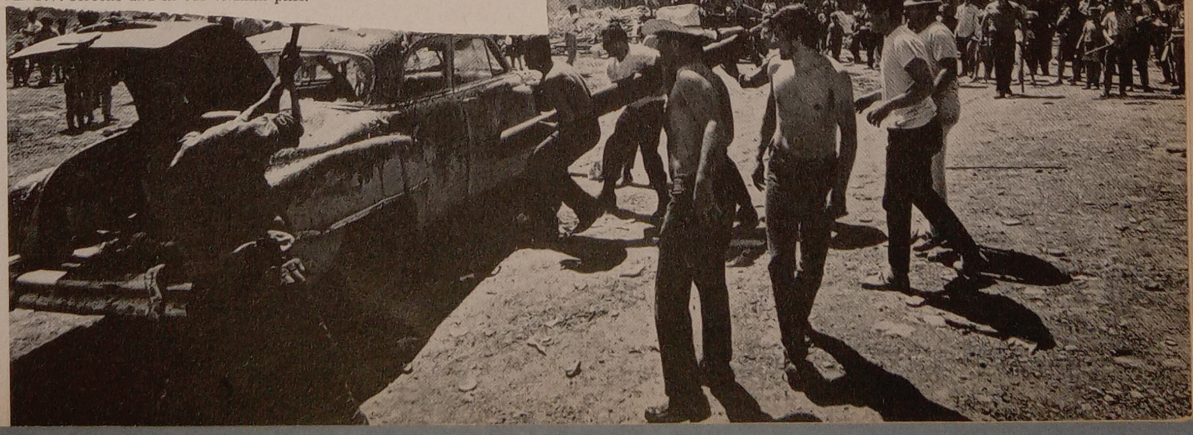
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Middle-class money, both public and private, should be spent on middle-class art, not on fantasies of good taste and noble sentiment. We are quite as able to tell about a painting's social registration as we can tell about a building's. Images, techniques or styles, and the less obvious appeals to the superior state of Beauty, Mind and Spirit, all display their pedigree and their intentions (or lack of them),

along with whatever else the work is about. Middle-class art can wistfully seek "class," but it can never claim it, any more than can its authors, for "class" doesn't exist here. The United States is a country of sophisticated mongrels and anyone pretending to the high-falootin' is marked as a nostalgic or one of those ladies who drinks her Dr. Pepper with a little finger crook'd. Phony class is always repulsive; but even the sweet dream of yesteryear is getting harder to evoke as time separates us from our origins overseas. Historical awareness is a necessary part of thought, but contemporary action is quite another. The spirit and body of our work today is on our T.V. screens and in our vitamin pills.



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Art - March '64

By Allan Kaprow

Experimental Art

Obviously it is more than simply pushing a style to its conclusion or shocking a shock-proof audience, but how much more? And what are the risks?

The world is full of artistic artists, some of them quite good. But there are very few experimenters. The leading vanguard styles of today are engaged in something else.

Hard-Edge is the most obviously conservative mode. Its shapes, applied to the standard canvas or to the "shaped" canvas or the "object," are a summary of neo-classical abstractions of 1920-45, with a recent boost from Matisse cut-outs. From the last it was able to parallel the large-scale effect of Abstract-Expressionism while avoiding the romantic method. Its composition, however, is more contemporary: it favors the juxtaposition rather than the relationship. Derivatives of the circle, square, triangle and wave form are abutted, rather than joined by echoes and permutations as in older art. But this device is shared by Assemblage, Pop, some re-worked phases of Action Painting and even Environments and Happenings. Though the last two are more genres than styles, and are not "leading" in any case, they are mentioned to show how standard the currency of juxtaposition is. And the use of any currency is antithetical to experimentation.

Op Art intensifies the color theories of Pointillism via Albers and the retinal-fatigue game of Duchamp's Roto-reliefs. Its motifs and their arrangements remain in the Futurist-Constructivist-Purist tradition. These conventions find echoes in the moiré patterns of the fabric industry and diagrams of psychology and engineering

Author: Allan Kaprow, founder and chief protagonist of Happenings, has written a massive book on the movement which will appear this spring (Harry N. Abrams).

Art mixes with life: A street corner incident which happened to catch photographer Peter Moore's eye [left] and a moment in one of Allan Kaprow's Happenings, at Cornell, 1964 [below].

Photograph by S. Goldberg



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textbooks and have been reabsorbed by Op artists. While there are subtle differences from the past in this style (and in Hard-Edge as well) the sustained impression of Op is not its new look, but its familiarity. Its interest lies in the creation of a new, more palpable disparity between the illusion of a chromatic movement and the usually static stimuli which cause it, but the stimuli themselves are well-worn. The same may be said for its kinetic manifestations.

Abstract Symbolism or **Color-Field** painting is in a line that passes back from Newman and Rothko through Purism to the Symbolist circle around Mallarmé. Characterized by an extreme reduction of means approaching vacancy, and attracting the viewer to the subtlest changes of hue and tone, its special appeal comes from the psychic tension caused by prolonged and obsessive use of a single idea minutely varied—within a painting and from painting to painting. But this is the theme-and-variation principle in a state of fixation, and in its very continuousness, it cannot be called experimental.

Ob (or *object*) **Art** has two aspects. One is a contemporary version of the ready-made and found-object tradition: instead of bottle racks and driftwood, there are electronic devices and cigarette lighters. No further comment is necessary. The other is the physical counterpart in real space to Hard Edge and the crisper kinds of Color Field painting. It shares a taste for large, hyper-simple structures, usually geometric, whose blank monochrome surfaces and impersonal treatment at first suggest the reduction of architecture, furniture or industrial casings to mute essences. It thus invokes the same Purist and Constructivist history as the paintings. Yet most of the works in this vein have no such purpose (metaphysics is unpopular today). Either they frankly exist for themselves without further reference or they betray a "cool," dead-pan wit directed at their "hot" predecessors' search for profound experience. The freedom of this sort of Ob lies in its ambiguous connections to culture and life. But just as it needs art history to define its point of departure and scope, it needs a group of artists all practicing a quasi-repetitive activity to underline its intention; that is, its intention of non-intention. It plays this idea like a popular recording, its insistence increasing with its recurrence. And, while this may be a devotional act, it is not an experimental one.

Pop Art continues to affirm a taste for stylization, as it narrows its imagery to the nostalgic, chic or outré, and its methods to refinements and parodies of mass reproduction techniques. Compositionally, it takes off from photomontage, layout design and display, or from comic-book and movie-frame sequences, used singly or in repeats (while these themselves were derived from earlier forms of modern art). Pop is *par excellence* an art of deliberate cliché, but in its pre-occupation with virtuosity it precludes experimentation. A stylist cannot experiment because *what* he styles must always be explicit.

Assemblage is potentially the most unbound of present Isms: it eschews consistency on all counts, favoring juxtapositions of not just the shapes of a whole, as in Hard-Edge, but of materials and objects differing from one another. Yet Assemblage is an outgrowth of Cubist collage. And in practice, it is not appreciably different from territory made familiar by Dada and Surrealism; the urban wastebasket and the Oedipal dream. Its subject matter has been updated to include shower fixtures, tires, television sets, rusted motor parts and neon signs (at which point Assemblage joins Pop). But usually these are fragmented, or the whole group of parts is a fragment of a bit of common reality, in the manner of late Cubism; and so we are continuously playing our present responses against the first quarter of this century.

The avant-garde functions as ART art, its genealogy is spelled out in columns of cultural events: so-and-so begat so-and-so, who begat . . . It is developmental rather than experimental. Yet if it is a truism that art, like everything else, has its past, modern art until recently has acted as if it were an exception. It was New, Brand New, without antecedents. It wiped away the past in a marvelous gesture of self-sufficiency. History was Bunk and influences were usually denied in spite of evidence to the contrary. Like the Russian Revolution, an era was being born. For the public, urged on by talk in vanguard circles of the early twentieth century, contemporary art as a whole became known as "experimental."

Now we know better. We admit with a shrug that there is nothing new under the sun and devote ourselves to magnifying marginal differences. Like popular soaps, the same lather comes out in shades of blue, greeny blue, turquoise and lilac, each dramatically novel . . . Still, if the characterization of modern art as "experimental" was incorrect, it remains intriguing to speculate on what an experimental art might be. The idea has the inescapable flavor of daredeviltry. It smells of wildness, trouble, a good fight . . .

To Experiment: schoolboy memories of oddballs puttering in their garages with twisted wires, sparks flying, bubbling test tubes, clanking gadgets, sudden explosions . . . Tom Swift, Frankenstein, Jules Verne and now the astronauts (I have often wondered what it would be like to have the first hot-dog stand on the moon). Imagine something never before done; by a method never before used; whose outcome is unforeseen. Modern art is not like this, it is always Art.

This is the adventurer's side. Couple it with the professional view that nowadays young artists are schooled historically to an extraordinary degree, and their knowledge of what is going on is staggering. It is nearly impossible to make the slightest gesture without calling up references that are instantly recognized as History. Among the cognoscenti, whose number is steadily growing, innovations are met with nods of expectation as though they were foregone conclusions. Predictions of things to come are not the business of prophets and quacks, they approach computability on the basis of the abundance of data made available at every minute to the communications systems.

But if something were to occur in which the historical references were missing, even for a short time, then that situation would become experimental. Certain lines of thought would be cut or shorted-out, and normally sophisticated minds would find themselves aghast.

Such a position must be willed, worked at. It shares with the tradition of militant modernity that one essential ingredient of newness which has been confused with experimentation: *extremism*. For the experimenter, like the extremist or radical, being at the outer limits is an important condition for jarring into focus attention upon urgent issues, but the experimenter's issues are philosophical rather than esthetic. They speak to questions of Being rather than to matters of Art. In contrast, extremist painting—Cubism, for instance—need not be experimental at all; it may be no more than (to the public) an uncomfortably rapid evolution of a prior mode. The leaps taken by the painter are simply too large for the public to follow quickly.

The developmental artist knows what art is. At least he has faith in it as a discipline whose horizons can be extended. The experimentalist has no such faith. What he knows of the arts and the variety of esthetic theories confirms his suspicion that art is a free-for-all meaning nothing and everything. The one thing that keeps the experimentalist from becoming a barber or cattleman is his persistent curiosity about what art might be in addition to what everyone else has made it.

It can be argued that we are not really dealing with alternatives. If almost all modern art is developmental, consciously or not, with a family tree of commentaries, quotations and extensions, then the very notions of experimentation and brinkmanship are themselves a heritage of the last hundred years. Admittedly so, but the crucial difference here involves a separa-

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tion of cultural *attitudes* from cultural *acts*: attitudes which are to be applied to a zone, still unmarked, between what has been called art and ordinary life. Metaphorically, the displacement is almost a manufactured schizophrenia, and in the shift, a unique mentality may take over.

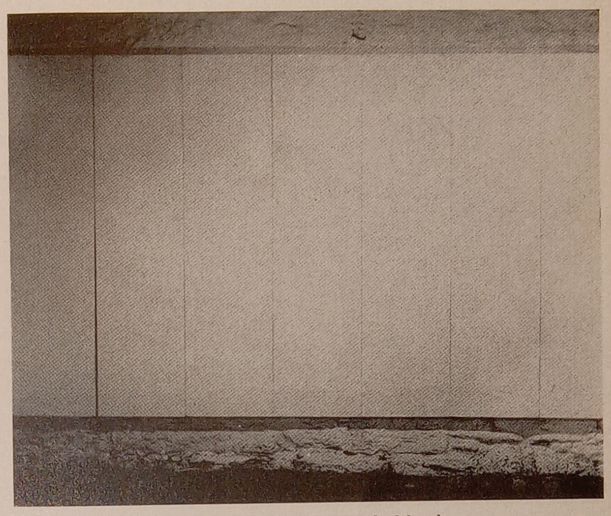
Once over the line, the experimental artist is one who not only is considered by the public and his colleagues as "far out," but believes this about himself. He feels cast adrift. He is the opposite of a naif, but the past as a measure has become useless to him; there are no traditions to draw on, no allusions to the work of contemporaries, no esthetic problems and no apparent solutions. Such circumstances are rare, as any extremist artist must admit; *he* at least has a fair idea of what he is doing (in spite of his statements, after the fact, that while working he did not know). The detachment of the cultural experimenter from the body of culture must be so great that his state is not so much lonely as it is metaphysically nameless.

Such an alienation has nothing to do with the social plight of the artist. If there are causes in society, they reflect the general existential crisis, rather than the waning conflict between the arts and the middle class. Nor has it to do with the personal doubts and despair which all artists have known in the course of work. They suffer when the magic is not going well; they feel powerless to serve certain principles they believe in and everything seems chaotic. But this is due to a loss of confidence and self-esteem, not to experimentation. Uncertainty for painters and sculptors may be no asset, but for the experimentalist it is the sine qua non.

In 1953, Robert Rauschenberg exhibited a number of large all-black and all-white paintings on which the paint was applied flat and without modulation. Nothing more was done to them. They were taken as a joke by most of the committed artists of the New York School. Yet they are the pivotal works of the artist, for in the context of Abstract-Expressionist noise and gesture, they suddenly brought one face to face with a numbing, devastating silence. Even granting the salvational overtones in the pairing of black and white, an implication that no work was done, no expected artistry was demonstrated, left the viewer with himself and the void in front of him. His shadow moved across the blanked screen, and it mirrored the stammering images of his unwilling mind because such "nothing" was intolerable. He may have caught a glimmer of the point that now much, if not everything having to do with art, life and insight, was thrown back at him as his responsibility, not the picture's. And that was shocking. But for Rauschenberg's part, he did not want to shock; he "wanted to make a painting."

About the same time, Rauschenberg asked Willem de Kooning, whom he admired, for a drawing, in order to erase it. De Kooning agreed and Rauschenberg erased the drawing. The request, often recounted, has also been interpreted as though it were merely a case of witty one-upmanship. But I find it more in keeping with the equivalent, though psychological, erasure of sensuous paint and personal content from the surface of the black and white canvases. It was a similar kind of esthetic denial. Symbolically, the deed had the same function as, say, a hermit-saint's renunciation of worldly life, but now exercised within the profession of painting and drawing.

It probably was as uncomfortable to Rauschenberg in view of his sensitivity to art, as it was agressive of de Kooning. But at that moment, the two painters became involved as participants in a drama which transcended them and neutralized personal feeling. The younger man felt that de Kooning understood this, for in the latter's work, a parallel process of scrap-



These all-white Rauschenbergs (badly photographed by the artist himself) caused a furore in the art world when they were shown at the Stable Gallery, New York, in 1953.

ing-off and interminable repainting made his canvases often seem unfinishable, and implied the impossibilty of art. Rauschenberg's negation was a tacit acknowledgement of de Kooning's bout with the deeper predicament of modern art which could not provide the utopian solutions to the world's ills which it once promised. At best it could be just the effort of the artist to make something that felt honest, as Harold Rosenberg has often pointed out. And Rauschenberg here, too, simply "wanted to make a drawing." By erasing art, art might become possible.

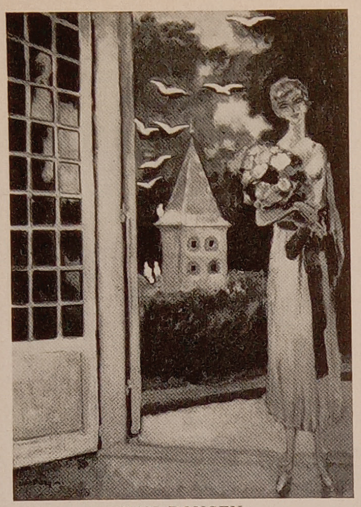
Renunciations are not new. When they have been purposive, as Rauschenberg's example was, they have been means for achieving freshly and honestly what could not be achieved by going on as before. St. Francis, an urban gentleman, found honesty by "erasing" his secular life and communing with nature. In this he became innocent (and thereafter dealt with men very well). The dream of the return to innocence has been part of history for a long time and has been the plaintive cry of the modern artist since Impressionism. But the innocence of the adult is always the product of a struggle. Today, lacking another generation's trust in the purity of childhood, innocence is not something a man is born with; something once had, then lost, then regainable. It is an intellectual invention, a willed achievement which he is forever in danger of losing as soon as he seems to attain it.

Pissarro and later the Futurists considered the idea of burning down museums, not out of perversity, but to express a longing to be unencumbered by the seduction of a past that blinded them to the present; that is, to a modern life that, in its instantaneity, was the available counterpart in the everyday world to the apparent innocence of the child or saint. In a less romantic way, Mondrian's art was a methodical pursuit of the same thing. Its effect on the eye and mind is that of a fullness of visual action and counter-action whose paradoxical consequence is emptiness, a blank canvas, a tabula rasa. I have described elsewhere [A.N., Oct. '65] how this was brought about by a continuous process of optical and plastic

[Continued on page 77]

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Reviews and Previews continued from page 19

made on a recent visit to New York. They are done in a poster-ish style which combines airbrushing and lettering (words like "Machine" and "Boccioni") with recurrent pictorial images (Magritte-like man in a bowler hat, child descending the stairs clutching a teddy bear, many pairs of feet in motion) all implying some sort of visual homage to Futurism. S.G.

Betty Lou Schlemm [Grand Central] showed modest, nostalgic watercolors of Central Park and New England landscapes and houses. S.B.

Eloisa Schwab [Artzt; March 21-April 1] paints clear, bright, happy scenes where convivial generalized people gather for picnics, skating or art fairs. J.G.

Helen Seasonwein [Barzansky] brings to bear on her ambitious painterly abstractions a range of textural and color skill that all but overwhelms a talent for brooding shapes. P.S.

David Seccombe [Brata] showed large mobiles and stabiles incorporating tires, fan blades and twisted pipe, rusty and polished. As if in defiance of their size and actual weight, the linear qualities of the component parts are exploited and their massiveness diminished. J.G.

Zoe R. Sherwood [Aegis] showed paintings in hot arbitrary colors on two themes. One group presents variations on "The Hunger Artist"; another group is titled "Men and Women." The paintings are literary in tone, their interest, if fleeting, is genuine. T.B.

Sildar [Sachs; to March 5] carves pillar-like knobby totem-poles and groups of vertical structures suggesting anonymous crowds. Wooden chains hang from the ceiling or coil on the floor into compositions arranged at will. His toy-like shadow-boxes are nostalgic reconstructions of memories. C.N.W.

Alyce Simon* [Funt; to March 12] exhibits real Atomic Art. She works in a laboratory where she hits sheets of plaster or glass with an atom smasher, causing veins and rose and amber colors to appear on the material. C.N.W.

Jesus Raphael Soto [Kootz; March 1-19] Venezuelan artist of subtle optical constructions who has been working in Paris since 1950 and who won the Grand Prize at the Cordoba, Argentina Biennale in 1964, has his second show here. H.R.

John Stanley [Gallery 84; to March 10] shows Surrealist paintings in which the color is greyed and the drawing made most explicit. S.B.

Frank Stout [Dorsky; to March 31] shows greyed seated figures and more recent fluid landscapes where the oils, thinned to behave like watercolor, run on the canvas to make trees and foliage. He washes out the image, then reinstates it. J.G.

Tadé's [Schaefer] new paintings move away from the earlier heavily crushed abstractions of dark wall-like images into a graceful adaptation of the plastic vocabulary of Surrealism. Paint and plaster combine in a pale matted surface over which the linear silhouette of his fanciful figures traces a pattern at once elegant and lyrical. D.W.

Tania's [Schaefer] mutiple panels unfold in a series of sequentially ordered spaces, over, around or below the spectator; these are painted, with a combination of geometric forms and optical colors, and collaged with a variety of "found" objects, among them signs which read ONE WAY, PUBLIC TELEPHONE, TAILOR. The artist is concerned with the ambiguities created between the illusionism of the painted surfaces and the "real" presence of the panels and attached objects. The work suffers from an all-too-literal exposition of this thesis and in the expanses of painted surfaces which tend to go flat. D.W.

Valfred Thelin [Caravan] is an able watercolorist whose wintry landscapes of slanting hills with delicately detailed trees are reminiscent of the virtuosity of Wyeth. C.N.W.

Gaetan Therrien* [Foussats; March 8-April 2], of Montreal, shows stone figures standing in close proximity to one another forming monolithic masses which aspire to the vertical. D.W.

Bernardino Toppi* [Burgos; to March 21], born in Rome and now living in Paris, works in a combination of oil, sand

*First one-man show in New York

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Soldiers), G. B. Piazzetta, W. van de Velde the Younger, G. D. Tiepolo and others.

A major item in an old master sale at Sotheby's on March 16 is a tiny panel, *St. George and the Dragon* ordinarily attributed to Hubert van Eyck, although also variously ascribed to the Master of Flémalle and (by Friedländer) to Rogier van der Weyden. Among the other interesting paintings also in this sale are: a Vittore Carpaccio *Madonna and Child with Saints* (No. 66 in the Carpaccio show, Venice, 1963); Paolo Veronese's *A Concert* (probably the modello for his fresco in the Villa Maser) and his *Susannah and the Elders* (ex-coll. Cavendish Bentinck); a huge Tintoretto, *Paradise* (57 by 180 inches, held to be the modello for his painting in the Doge's Palace, Venice); an El Greco *Head of Christ;* a Terbrugghen *Man with Violin;* a well-documented Gerard Dou *Woman Nursing a Baby* (ex-coll. Duc de Choiseul; Duke of Westminster); two typical Jan van Goyen views; a Francesco Guardi of the *Island of Sta. Maria delle Grazie;* a Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Electress Sibylla of Saxony* (8 by 5½ inches).

Old master prints, at Sotheby's on March 15, lists a number of exceptional items: Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *Landscape with Rabbit Hunters; The Masquerade of Ourson and Valentine,* and other allegorical woodcuts after Pieter Brueghel the Elder; Rembrandt's *Christ Healing the Sick* (ex-coll. Earl of Aylesford); *The Women's Bath* by the 15th-century Master P.M., one of only two known impressions; warships and fishing boats engraved by Frans Huys, including an unrecorded one. In an old master drawings sale at Sotheby's on March 17 is a group of Melchior Lorch pen drawings, including *Nine Women of Pomerania, Danzig and Prussia,* ca. 1571-73.

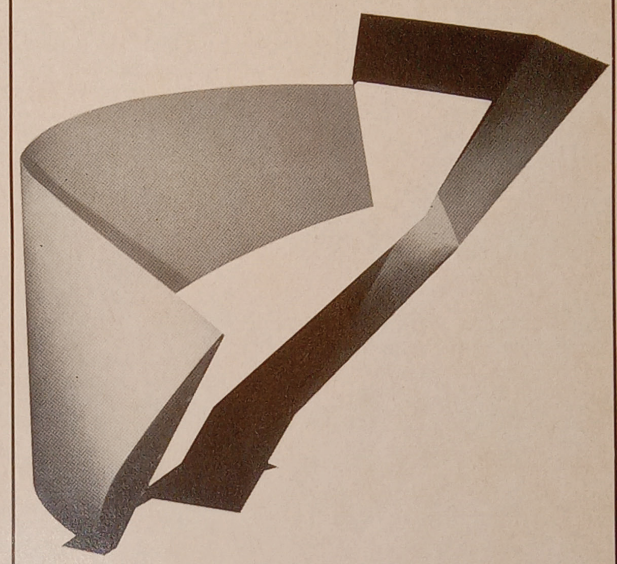


A late Gauguin blue crayon and pencil drawing, *Two Tahitian Girls,* ca. 1895, 24¾ inches high, at Sotheby's on March 30, in a sale of Impressionist and modern paintings, drawings and sculptures which also includes works by Degas, Pissarro, Boudin, Monet, Matisse, Tanguy, Soutine, de Staël, Corot, Vuillard, Bonnard, Marini, Dubuffet.

Experimental Art continued from page 63

cancellations, and quoted Mondrian as saying: "The destructive element is too little emphasized in modern art."

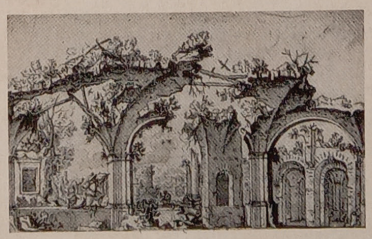
But the Impressionist's and Futurist's search for the clean slate was more or less intuitive, while Mondrian made it the



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endless means of his work. Rauschenberg's erasures were total and decisive and left no room for further action in that arena. The black and white paintings could not be repeated.

In retrospect, as much as these deeds were an effacement, they were also an experiment. "Experiment" suggests, among its meanings, "the testing or trial of a principle" and the principle at stake in 1953 was explicitly (Rauschenberg's) Creativity and implicitly all Art. It is conventional to assume as a theorem that the human being is creative and expresses this in works called art. To question this within the activity of painting or sculpture (that is, non-verbally) requires a means that at once accepts creative art and challenges it on its own grounds. This is what Rauschenberg did. It was unclear then if the experiment with art was itself art—although in 1966 it has become art. The interested few at the time seemed not to care. What mattered was that an artist did something unambiguous, under a burden of what I recall to have been great doubt about everything esthetic and, perhaps, personal.

The move was irrevocable (like suicide) and allowed neither reduction nor amplification. It thus had nothing to do with puristic essences, symbolic states or mystic onenesses, but it had much to do with being utterly deprived of the most elementary means for achieving something productive. This was the price of the experiment, posing as it did the alternatives of jumping blind or facing spiritual impotence. The artist never doubted the value of art as a cultural dream; he challenged its existence as fact. In front of such choices it was really easy to jump; there was nothing else to do. For him and for us who saw them, the black and white paintings were an end to art and a beginning. Once a man's shadow gets into a painting for a moment, everything becomes possible and the conditions for experimentation are thrust upon the scene. Possibility, artists know, is the most frightening idea of all.

It is no accident that the lines dividing the arts are rapidly falling out of place and everything is becoming confused. There are no clear distinctions between drawing and painting, painting and collage, collage and Assemblage, Assemblage and sculpture, sculpture and environmental sculpture; between environmental sculpture, displays and stage-sets; between these and Environments; between Environments, architectural design and architecture per se; between the fine and commercial arts, and finally, between art of any kind (Happenings) and life. This is the way the world goes because, apparently, it wants to go. (Is the line between the North and South the lower border of Pennsylvania or racial prejudice . . . and where is that?) Conventional distinctions are not merely inadequate; they are tiring and fatigue sits well with no artist.

Conventional distinctions, moreover, in so far as they are maintained by a few men and women of considerable gifts, are not so much accepted as the natural order of things as they are pronounced as articles of faith or the requirements of an ideology: *"Good painting will always be good painting"*; or, *"The main stream of modern art leads inevitably to abstraction, therefore . . ."* Everyone knows what is occuring, though no one knows to what extent or purpose. It may be that the only safe conclusion to draw is that traditions find their place today alongside of non-traditions precisely *because* no distinctions can be made. The American melting pot has become a global stew, and the American mind is an Assemblage.

"Safe conclusions" may be useful for keeping one's footing in a precarious art situation, governed as it is by historical awareness. However, they are quite useless, except as points of departure, for the experimental artist. History and esthetic pluralism cannot be avoided by the latter, any more than they can be ignored by the "art" artist; but the experimentalist is temperamentally less likely to be able to take a stand in his cultural kaleidoscope; and in order to find somewhere he can stand, he will have to renounce everything. For him all existing values are equally good and equally unconvincing. To affirm any one of them requires that it be discovered anew by some as yet unknown method; or some other value must be discovered by the same path. If this decision to deny everything is not made early, a consequence close to catatonia can be expected.

Granted, this is artificial, and psychologically it may be dangerous, for no one loses anything he tries to give up. But as in the example of Rauschenberg thirteen years ago, the artist may have no real choice. He jumps, or else.

The thing to do is to take the bull by the tail and try to swing him. Instead of beginning with styles and techniques, it becomes necessary to violate one's beliefs regarding the very idea of art; it becomes necessary to destroy as many distinc-

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tions as still exist in the idea; necessary to let loose with confusion and insecurity (matching by deliberation what already goes on mindlessly in the world). The day after, the week or year after, much will be clear again. It is then time to start all over. One stirs up confusion for the sake of clarity, and strives for order to lose one's wits. We've heard this yell before, but its purpose has always been to keep the action going. The action slows down when men are sure there are answers, and when they are sure there are no answers.

A somewhat fuller characterization of an experimental artist can now be proposed. He will usually say he is making art, whatever anyone thinks. But he will not be sure until some time in the future, whereas the "art" artist knows he is always making art, good or bad. If the former occasionally says what he does is not art, or it both is and isn't art, this is to be understood as irony to underline the nature of doubt; for he is speaking as an artist to other artists and critics. His action is problematical only to those involved in the profession, who tell the public, via the news mediums, that it is a problem for them, too. He knows that as contradictory as it is, any non-art action undertaken in the context of the art world may become art by association. Therefore he keeps pushing what he does toward areas in which greater and greater uncertainty lies. His moves become the more decisive as his means become most elusive in value. His goal of discovery is the more compelling as the outcome of these means is less and less predictable.

Such conditions will obtain probably only once in his life. If he discovers something of value in the process, the chances are that he will cease experimenting and devote the rest of his career to mining what he has found—at which point he joins the larger community of artists. But if he wishes to continue experimenting, even if only from time to time, his method must be applied as rigorously as in the beginning.

It means erasing his profession as a value and accepting only that which is phenomenally doubtless: life. He doesn't need to refer to Cartesian argument to verify his existence. To an artist, if existence is doubtable—that is, if life is a dream—then it is all art, in which case it has been senseless for it to have been restricted to such a narrow range of dream language as painting or sculpture. If life is not a dream, then what has been called art is different and the latter can easily be denied. Besides, vanguardists seem intent on confusing the two anyway, for everything they touch has a way of turning into dreams. If each succeeding dream is called art and is summarily denied value, then statistically an endless range of discoveries is available. Innocence is possible, after all.

However, once art and being an artist are rejected as values, this does not automatically *make* them non-values. Nor, in contrast, does life or the dream of life automatically become value and thus art. A painter or sculptor cannot put out his past as he would a light. Michelangelo, Bach, Iktinos, Shakespeare, de Kooning, Rauschenberg, and their occupations, may be devalued by edict, written off, but this can only be made effective by a deliberate discipline of eradication.

Each day the former "art" artist, his back up against the weight of memory and training, insistently turns away from books, exhibitions and the shop-talk of friends until the seduction of art has ceased. He acts like a monk, or a criminal going straight. The art habit is broken with accompaniments of withdrawal symptoms in the brain no less agonizing than the heroin addict's. Similarly, turning back to art during this time will prove as fatal to the experimenter as worldliness, crime and dope are fatal to those of related callings.

Abstinence of this sort functions only in a context of knowledgeability. Novices or flip types with an axe to grind can renounce nothing for they possess nothing except inexperience and/or disrespect. Under the banner of Denial, they would merely substitute naïveté and licence, qualities which if pursued to any degree would approach the pathologic. For the man of experience, that is, the man of the world, for whom the test of art is an ethical imperative, this cannot be done either casually or intuitively. Obeying feelings as they come and go, wandering around as if in search of pebbles at the beach, will almost certainly lead to clichés. Putting trust in sensibility and the haphazard is no longer a source of enlightenment for the best minds, because lesser minds have played them out of service. Insight, for this time (if indeed it is to be had at all), is to

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be gotten through methodical thought and operations. The university training which the majority of artists receive today gives them the reasons for doubting art, and the means for both destroying it and recreating it. Experimentation is a philosophical affair; but its outcome may be explosive.

The experimental artist always denies art within the circle of art, submitting his alternative actions for acceptance as the preferable form of what he has rejected. Even if he occasionally refuses the accreditation when it is given, he does so to prolong the experimental atmosphere since the experiment could not be performed elsewhere without losing its identity and the issues it proposes to tackle. This acceptance as art, no matter how late it comes, is in my view the goal. The temporary ambiguity of experimental action is quite appropriate, for in leaving art, nothing is really escaped from; as it is suppressed it emerges in disguise. A residue of esthetics and masterpieces lies on the inside of one's eyelids as patterns of semi-conscious recall. The task is to build up sufficient psychological pressure to release from the transformation of this material the *energy* of art without its earmarks.

Put differently, if any action made by an artist as a renunciation of art can itself be considered art, then non-art is impossible in those circumstances. Shredding newspaper into a shop window need not be merely making litter for puppies; it could become an Environment in which the dogs might play roles. The thuddings of raindrops in the dust could become fabulous sound-paintings; ant hills could become great architecture in motion; the screeching of a thousand starlings blotched against the treetops could turn into an unbelievable opera; the monkey building at the zoo could blast one with a powerful orchestration of odors, revolting, strange and even pleasant. The art terms "painting," "architecture," "opera," etc., are used advisedly to point up the ease by which displacement can occur between one mode of reference and another. It is the process of metaphor-making, approved as the way life is poetized, but deplored when, in the domain of the arts, metaphors are mixed. This is called confusion; but it is exactly what I recommend.

Once this is understood, namely that the objective is to raise the pitch of that inner tension to such a degree that the conversion of non-art to art will be electrifying, it should be further understandable why the experimenter must be ruthless in ripping out the last shred of artistry in his every thought and enthusiasm. It is not enough to refuse contact with museums, concert halls, book shops and galleries. Nor is it enough to put out of one's mind actual paintings, poems, architecture, musical pieces, dances and movies. It is also necessary to reject the facility for metaphor-mixing, whenever it becomes apparent, and it will become apparent often. It is compulsory to put aside from conscious thought all echoes of art mediums, art subject matter, art's methods of formation.

Paint, for example, has other uses than in pictures. The experimenter might find it worthwhile to watch the way repairmen, hanging from ropes, daub red-lead into the peeling girders of the George Washington Bridge. Regarding subject matter, it simply is not true that everything of human interest has been incorporated into novels, pictures, dances and theatricals. If still-lifes of apples, gestures of supplication, vertical lines on a rectangular field, bottle racks, Dick Tracy, young men contemplating skulls or Ronzoni macaroni, have been identified with art, they may not be used by the experimenter. (So far as I know, nobody has ever put a functioning Roto-Rooter into a work of art.) Similarly with compositional practices: all the habits of thematic elaboration, counter-variation, inversion, rhyme, spatial tension, transition and balance, so important in an artist's training, are to be given the heave. Carrying them over to act upon non-art materials would automatically make the result a development of recent art history. The only form a thing has is what it looks like or does. That is, if a chicken runs, eats chicken feed and roosts, that is all the composition required, and all the composition the experimenter needs to think about. This is not non-form, for the brain can only function in patterned ways. It is simply an avoidance of the familiar artistic distinction between matter (the medium) and its malleability (the form). The experi-

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menter's focus may fix on recurrences and relationships, but they will be more like the recurrence of the pulse and the seasons than inspirations to artifice and skill.

At this juncture we are not just drawing up battle lines; we are implying active responses. The question is: what does the experimental artist *do*? He might sit quietly with friends in a tree, all of them painted black; and when the starlings alight, screech with them. Microphones amplify the noise across hidden public-address systems. Earsplitting. Probably silence soon. He might rent a bulldozer and throw up a man-hill near an ant hill. Naked people slowly crawl like ants up and then down the mound, and on and away, in a file. He might dynamite fifty patches of meadow during a thunderstorm. Two hundred big metal drums are thrown end-over-end, booming, bonging.

He goes on: In an automat lunches are being eaten. Usual business. Suddenly the eaters smash their dishes to the floor and leave at once. Meanwhile, in a rush-hour subway, a bunch of passengers start to shout as loud as they can, and bang on pots and pans, for half a minute. At the next stop they get off . . . An empty 3 AM, in the Whitehall Street subway station. A bewildering maze of ramps, stairways and passages connecting several train lines. Sweepers descend from the street sweeping dust and bodies with them, while coming towards them from below, tarpaper is unrolled. As the two groups meet, the bodies are covered with the paper. The sweepers and rollers go home. Still, black clumps in the corridors. After a while the covered people get up and stuff their tarpaper into wastebaskets and go home, too . . . Watchers stand around Times Square waiting for a signal from a window. It doesn't come for a long time. When it does, it tells them to walk to a place on the sidewalk and fall down. A truck comes along and they are loaded up and driven away . . .

In a stroke all the esthetic problems over which generations have argued go by the board. Classic questions regarding "the discrete art object," "psychic distance," "pure form," "significant form," "the transformation of nature through a medium of expression," "the unity of time and speed," "permanence," and so on, do not apply, or apply so generally that nothing is gained by dwelling on them. The real issue is that until these actions were written here, or, if not written, until they are pointed out by someone calling himself an artist, they would hardly have been classifiable as part of fine art.

This no-man's land is experimentation's proper place. And the longer the artist can keep the art world's judgment of it hung in the balance between acceptance as Art and dismissal as something beyond the pale, the more he can trust in the validity of what he does. For he gambles against it being art too soon. Judgment may be difficult—often artist and public are enmeshed in a situation which will vanish after its enactment—but the context *demands* criticism in retrospect. If something of value must remain for our tomorrows, it will have to be a myth. A myth may compel even more than a picture, and someone may decide to act it out, however altered it may be in its new form. At that moment it becomes art.

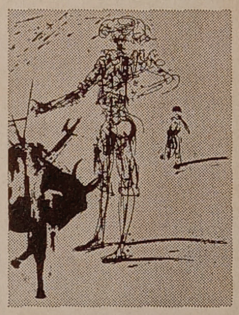
Let us imagine the suicide of an obscure painter. It is around 1950. He lives in a railroad flat in New York and is painting large, all-black canvases. He covers most of the walls with them and it is quite dark in his place. Shortly thereafter, he changes to all-white pictures. But he does a curious thing: he proceeds to seal off each of his rooms with four paintings constructed to just fit their space, edging the final one into position as he moves to the next room. He starts in the bedroom and ends in the kitchen (which lets out to the hallway). There he paints the same four white panels, but doesn't leave. He builds a series of such cubicles each within the other, each smaller. He is found dead sitting in the innermost one.

His act is tragic, because the man could not forget art.

Let us imagine the suicide of an obscure painter. It is around 1950. He lives in a railroad flat in New York and is painting large, all-black canvases. He covers most of the walls with them and it is quite dark in his place. Shortly thereafter, he changes to all-white pictures. But he does a curious thing: he proceeds to seal off each of his rooms with four paintings constructed to just fit their space, edging the final one into position as he moves to the next room. He starts in the bedroom and ends in the kitchen (which lets out to the hallway). There he paints the same four white panels, but doesn't leave. He builds a series of such cubicles each

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within the other, each smaller. He plans to be found dead sitting in the innermost one.

But the thought of committing suicide becomes less compelling than the thought of how beautifully he is going about it. He breaks open the cubicles, leaves the apartment, makes a lifelike image of himself, returns to put it on his death chair, replaces all the panels and then invites his friends to see what he has done.

This act is tragic, because the man could not forget art.

Let us imagine the suicide of an obscure painter. It is around 1950. He lives in a railroad flat in New York and is painting large, all-black canvases. He covers most of the walls with them and it is quite dark in his place. Shortly thereafter, he changes to all-white pictures. But he does a curious thing: he proceeds to seal off each of his rooms with four paintings constructed to just fit their space, edging the final one into position as he moves to the next room. He starts in the bedroom and ends in the kitchen (which lets out to the hallway). There he paints the same four white panels, but doesn't leave. He builds a series of such cubicles each within the other, each smaller. He is found dead sitting in the innermost one.

Actually, the painter is telling this story to his friends as a project he has had in mind. He sees how attentively they listen to him and he is satisfied.

This act is tragic, because the man could not forget art.

Experimental art is never tragic. It is a prelude.

Johns continued from page 59

are sometimes painted other colors; thoughtfully staged messiness (such as white dripping over dark, as in Pollock's *The Deep*); and careless neatness (the shaded gradations of the central panel, and a multicolored column of circles in squares, like stoplights). The whole gives an impression of organized chaos or arbitrary order. The canvas is divided down the center by the band of colored discs that successfully prevents any communication between the two halves, marching over the horizontal band of newsprint that might otherwise perform this function. Elsewhere the "red-yellow-blue" letters set up an additional vertical barrier, and further confuse the already hectic brushwork in this section, as much with their occasionally readable message as with their rainbow colors and "sloppy" painting. On the right, a blocked-off area of Action Painting seems to be trying for monumentality, but is impeded by the incongruous presence of a bent coathanger and spoon, and by the band of newsprint that fizzles out on the left.

What is it all about? Precisely these conflicts, these conflicting conflicts, between different kinds of things and between individual things within these kinds, which project a powerful impression of the simultaneity of events as they happen around us, and of the texture of reality. And so it fulfills Johns's intentions as stated in a 1964 ARTNEWS interview: "I am concerned with a thing's not being what it was, with its becoming something other than what it is, with any moment in which one identifies a thing precisely and with the slipping away of that moment, with any moment seeing or saying and letting it go at that."

We cannot "understand" the record of changes Johns has kept, but we can appreciate the amplitude of the means with which he orchestrates his untranslatable statement. One notable feature is his use of materials from the recent past with telling disregard for their present degree of fashionableness. Others are the inevitably affecting bigness, the surges of color, the monumentality and formal clashes, all curiously at variance with the cold and static final effect, but which must be included in any inventory of the painting's contents.

The three remaining pictures are relatively bold and simple, though they seem to be saying that simplicity and boldness are no more (and no less) what was meant than clutter and baroque dissonance. *Studio* is mostly big rectangular shapes including an impression of a door which projects below the bottom edge of the picture. It adjoins an oblong resting on squares, vaguely suggestive of a canvas on an easel, striated with a kind of rudimentary sunburst. Also included are an impression of a ruler (Johns rarely lets us forget how useful he finds this implement) and a string of empty beer cans like a

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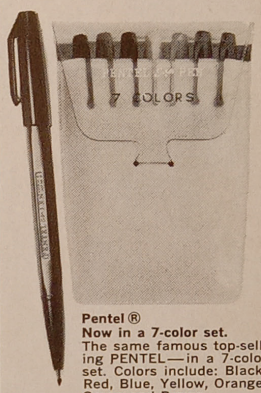
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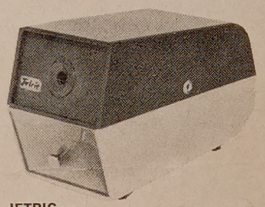


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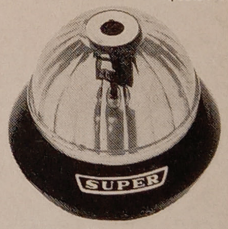
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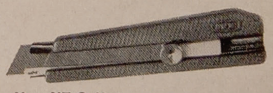
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CLAES OLDENBURG'S "SNAPSHOTS FROM THE CITY"

Up-Beats

Skirts are short, and always up.
We are just a little tired of four sides and a flat face.
The day to come is the day we can operate without resistance . . . turn ourselves at will from heroes to loonies.

Plastered over the walls of an obscure basement gallery in Manhattan's Greenwich Village last week, these slogans counterpointed a new kind of art show that was half picture and half theater. The exhibitors were determined to be offbeat, off-Broadway and off their rockers. Viewers trooped from room to room artfully littered with nets and old bottles, the walls splashed with weird designs and slogans ("Dirt is indeed deep and very beautiful—I love soot and scorching"). Somewhere, a voice was counting in German.

One leader of the new movement is Allan Kaprow, 32, an assistant professor of art at Rutgers University. Kaprow's "painting in the shape of a theater" got started by way of giant paste-ups of indiscriminate materials. To bring back the idea of a picture, he hung canvas tatters in front of his paste-ups. Then he moved the tatters forward and installed lights behind them. Suddenly he had a stage, and so he brought on "happenings," something like the incidents children contrive for an improvised circus. The idea took hold, and happenings have been put on around the world in the past year.

Last week's Manhattan happenings were ignored by the serious critics, but thoroughly enjoyed by uncritical crowds. Among the more surprising:

¶ Claes Oldenburg's *Snapshots from the City* featured a garbage-strewn set of charred paper, a cardboard automobile and retching noises. "Now I'm in the Age of Paper," muses Oldenburg. "Next it may be the Age of Wood."

¶ Jim Dine's *The Magic Room* is a shocking-pink and green affair with bedsprings hanging from the ceiling and an umbrella protruding from the wall, with cardboard signs reading, "Breakfast Is Ready," "Go to Work," and "Why Can't We Be Friends?" Dine calls these "phrases you hear around any household. I wanted to show the violence of a home."

¶ Dine's *The Smiling Workman* featured the artist himself lettering "I love what" in blue paint, "I'm doing" in orange paint, and then emptying the paint buckets over his head. This was meant to show "the feeling of being a happy compulsive painter, which is what I am."

¶ Bob Whitman's *Duet for a Small Smell* was introduced by the burning of sulphur, which put the audience into paroxysms of coughing. That made them "part of the act," Whitman figured. At the climax, a girl stabbed a dummy, but not violently. "A violent stabbing would be much too literary."

It was beat, man, though up-beat, and it was, like, existential. Real children might do it better.

Cenema ; Circus ; old Hollywood Comedy ; Hellzapoppin ; etc. → Stanislavsky,

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Allan Kaprow - "Assemblage, Environments and Happenings" (Abrams, 1966)

Kaprow lists a number of "rules of thumb" for Happenings:

A) The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible.

B) Therefore, the source of themes, materials, actions and the relationships between them are to be derived from any place and period except from the arts, their derivatives, and their milieu.

C) The performance of a Happening should take place over several widely spaced, sometimes moving and changing locales.

D) Time, which follows closely on space considerations, should be variable and discontinuous.

E)Happenings should be performed once only.

F) It follows that audiences should be eliminated entirely.

G) The composition of a Happening proceeds exactly as in an Assemblage abd Environments, that is, it is evolved as a collage of events in certain spans of time and in certain spaces.

Kaprow is critical of those who do Happenings in more or less conventional theatrical form -- a fixed space with an audience. For him they are extensions of painting and sculpture.

Cenema ; Circus ; old Hollywood Comedy ; Hellzapoppin ; etc. Stanislavsky,

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ELEVEN FROM THE REUBEN GALLERY

JANUARY 1965

THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
1071 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK

just as collage is a new form

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Brutism, etc.

bist collage (1911); Environ-
ter); Action Painting, with
thieu's painting the Battle of

matrix & performance compartmented

– New School 1956–1958;
Theatre of Cruelty
taud (pub. in Eng. 1958) – "it is
of the theatre & the like"; Moder
Rauschenberg; Experimental
Cinema; Circus; old Hollywood Comedy; Hellzapoppin'; etc.
Stanislavsky,

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the following lenders: Mr. and Mrs. Max Baker, New York; Mrs. Nancy Dine, New York; Mrs. Sylvia Jorrin, New York; Marcia Marcus, New York; Dr. Alan Solomon, New York; Green Gallery, New York; Sidney Janis Gallery, New York; Kornblee Gallery, New York; Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris; Tibor De Nagy Gallery, New York. Several of the artists also loaned documentary material, and answered my questions, for which I am grateful. I am especially grateful to Miss Rosalyn Drexler who suggested the theme of the exhibition. I want to thank Alice Hildreth for her research on the exhibition and editing of the catalogue.

L. A.

INTRODUCTION

The Reuben Gallery (at both its addresses, 61 4th Avenue and 44 East 3rd Street) was one of a number of downtown galleries, important in New York in the 50s, for showing new, experimental, or unfashionable work. This is not the place for a history of them, but reference to a few helps define the position of the Reuben Gallery. Allan Kaprow and George Segal came from the Hansa Gallery (the word compounded from Hans Hofmann's Christian name and the Hanseatic League), a cooperative gallery that ran from 1952 until the close of the 1958-59 season. Red Grooms used successive studios as a gallery: first the City Gallery (1958-59 season), then the Delancey Street Museum (1959-60 season), which coincided with the Reuben's first season. The Judson Gallery, founded by Dine and Oldenburg, paralleled the opening of the Reuben Gallery, and then, subsequently, joined it. There was, as these examples show, an easy contact between artist and gallery, an affinity between the act of production and the act of presentation, which was very different from the regular marketing or promotional activities of art dealers.

Pop art, used as a comprehensive term, includes most of the Reuben Gallery artists. However, their early work and personal developments are entirely different from other artists called pop, such as Andy Warhol or Roy Lichtenstein. There was, for instance, a strong expresssionistic undercurrent to much of the work shown there. They are different again, despite a connection with John Cage in Kaprow's case, from Jasper Johns or from Robert Rauschenberg. To the extent that there is a Reuben Gallery style, it existed momentarily and was unevenly manifested in different artists. However, there was a shared quality which is anti-ceremonious, anti-formal, untidy, and highly physical (but not highly permanent). Shared, also, was an interest in stretching and violating the borders of art, which was done, not by repetition or quotation, not by riddles or the incorporation of solid found objects, but by the assumption of an organic continuum, expressionistically taken possession of and shaped.

Anita Reuben, in retrospect, regards her gallery as an outpost for human image art in a sea of Abstract Expressionism, which describes an aspect of the iconography common to the gallery artists. This was certainly an aspect of art downtown. Important at the Hansa Gallery, for example, was Jan Muller, with his influence in the direction of a symbolically weighted figure painting. Lester Johnson (Red Grooms was his student) was also influential with his dark human contour paintings, like shadows with volume and juice. Oldenburg's streets, Dine's heads, Drexler's resolutely human lumps, Samaras' plaster rags twisted into reclining figures, Grooms' toy-like effigies may be related to this curiosity about "the uses of the human figure" (to quote a 1959 symposium title). However, this imagery is inseparable from a particular use of materials, in opposition to the intact surface or the compact rectangle by which art is habitually separated from nature and random events. The city and its inhabitants was not only the *subject* of much of this art, it was also, literally, the *substance*, providing the texture and bulk of the material itself. The works are like condensations of city products and waste, identified by the mark and edge put on it by the artist. The material is anonymous, throwaway, and theoretically infinite; like plaster, cloth, cardboard, or paper. Where found objects are used, they are embedded in this continuum of intimate common material. The homogeneous, undifferentiated materials thus echo experiences of the environment beyond the gallery or museum in which individual objects, made out of its substance, are shown.

The first season of the Reuben Gallery was a series of extraordinary exhibitions and happenings, packed with artists whose futures were beginning. The second season was devoted to further happenings, in which the dispersive and throwaway properties of the sculpture, paintings, and drawings were expanded. Both Allan Kaprow and George Brecht have argued for a line of descent for happenings out of Jackson Pollock owing to his use of "chance processes used with such primacy, consistency, and integrity" (Brecht) and owing to the environmental "sprawling" of his big pictures (Kaprow). Whether or not this is Pollock's main legacy (and it is true that few painters have found ways to continue his work), it has been fertile in an area of art's extension into the environment. Ideally, in a happening, the boundaries and duration of acts and the area of the scene are problematic. Renée Miller and Martha Edelheit call their works with elaborate pointed projections, like steam-rollered bouquets, extension painting. It is generally true of the Reuben Gallery artists that extension into the environment or absorption of the environment into the work of art happens. Whether the work is amorphous or concise, discursive or perfunctory, the work of this time is remarkable both for its physicality and its speculativeness.

LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

Cinema ; Circus ; old Hollywood comedy ; Meyerhold, Stanislavsky, →

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EXHIBITIONS AT THE REUBEN GALLERY

1959	Oct. 16-Nov. 5:	George Brecht, one man show
	Nov. 6-26:	Roughly 18 Oils and 60 Pastels by Lucas Damianou Samaras
	Nov. 27-Dec. 17:	Robert Whitman, one man show
	Dec. 18-Jan. 5:	Below Zero—Group exhibition: Yvonne Anderson, George Brecht, Jim Dine, Martha Edelheit, Jean Follette, Red Grooms, Bruce Gilchrist, Al Hansen, Ray Johnson, Allan Kaprow, Renée Miller, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, George Segal, Richard Stankiewicz, James Waring, Robert Whitman
1960	Jan. 9-28:	Red Grooms, one man show (paintings, collage, constructions, and part of the set of *Fireman's Dream*)
	Jan. 29-Feb. 18:	Paintings: Herb Brown, Jim Dine, Red Grooms, Al Jensen, Lester Johnson, Allan Kaprow, Nicholas Krushenick, Claes Oldenburg, Patricia Passloff, Renée Rubin [Miller], Lucas Samaras, George Segal, Robert Whitman
	Feb. 19-March 10:	Rosalyn Drexler, sculpture
	March 11-31:	Herb Brown, one man show
	April 1-14:	Jim Dine, one man show
	April 15-May 5:	Renée Miller, one man show
	May 6-19:	Claes Oldenburg, sculptures and drawings
	May 20-June 9:	Martha Edelheit, one man show

HAPPENINGS AT THE REUBEN GALLERY

1959	Oct. 4, 6-10:	Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*
1960	Jan. 8-11:	Red Grooms, *Fireman's Dream* [changed to *The Magic Trainride*]
		Allan Kaprow, *The Big Laugh*
		Robert Whitman, *Small Cannon*
	June 11:	An Evening of: Sound—Theatre—Happenings
		Jim Dine, *Vaudeville Act*
		Allan Kaprow, Intermission Piece
		Richard Maxfield, Electronic Music
		Robert Whitman, *E.G.*, a new opera
		George Brecht, *Gossoon*, a chamber-event
	Nov. 1-6:	Jim Dine, *Car Crash*
	Nov. 29-Dec. 4:	Robert Whitman, *The American Moon*
	Dec. 16-18:	Varieties—Happenings at the Reuben Gallery
		Jim Dine, *A Shining Bed*
		Simone Morris, *See Saw*
		Claes Oldenburg, *Chimneyfire* and *Erasers*
1961	Feb. 21-26:	Claes Oldenburg, *Ironworks* and *Foto-Death*
	March 22-27:	Allan Kaprow, *Spring Happening*
	April 18-23:	Robert Whitman, *Mouth*

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

GEORGE BRECHT
1926 New York
Resident Metuchen, New Jersey
Exhibits Internationally

JIM DINE
1935 Cincinnati
Resident New York
Shows at Sidney Janis Gallery, New York

ROSALYN DREXLER
1926 New York
Resident New York
Shows at Kornblee Gallery, New York

MARTHA EDELHEIT
1931 New York
Resident New York
No Gallery

RED GROOMS
1937 Nashville, Tennessee
Resident New York
Shows at Tibor De Nagy Gallery, New York

ALLAN KAPROW
1927 Atlantic City, New Jersey
Resident Glenhead, New York
Exhibits Internationally

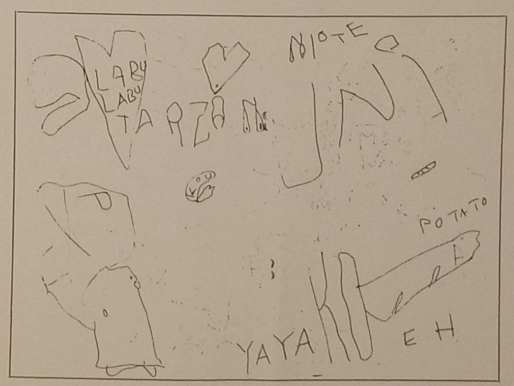
RENÉE MILLER
1929 Brooklyn
Resident New York
Exhibits in Group Shows

CLAES OLDENBURG
1929 Stockholm
Came to the US in 1929; resident New York
Shows at Sidney Janis Gallery, New York

LUCAS SAMARAS
1936 Kastoria, Greece
Came to the US in 1955; resident New York
Shows at Green Gallery, New York

GEORGE SEGAL
1925 New York
Resident North Brunswick, New Jersey
Shows at Sidney Janis Gallery, New York

ROBERT WHITMAN
1935 New York
Resident New York
Shows at Green Gallery, New York



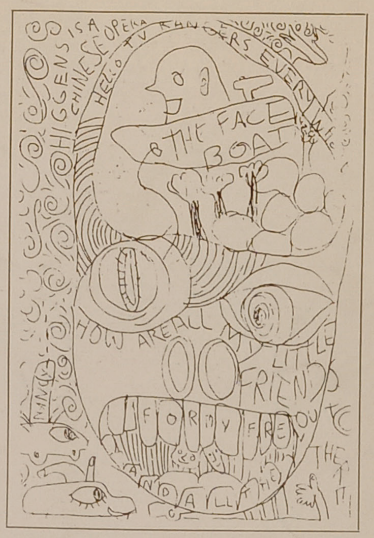
Claes Oldenburg. RAYGUN POEMS. Judson Gallery Comic Book, 1960.

Cinema ; Circus ; Old Hollywood

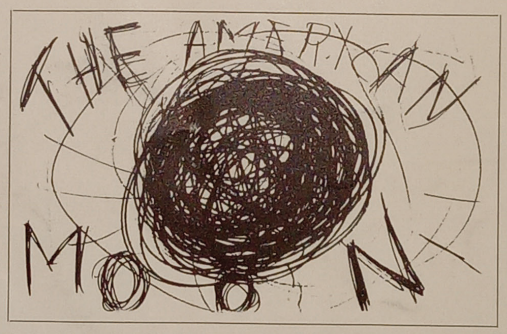
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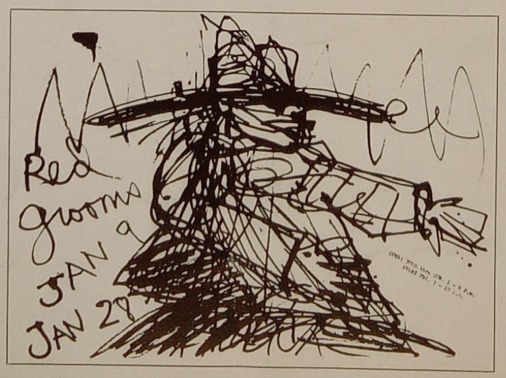
Michael Kirby



Jim Dine. MY EPHARUN. Judson Gallery Comic Book, 1960.



Robert Whitman. THE AMERICAN MOON. Happening Announcement, 1960.



Red Grooms. Exhibition Announcement, 1960.

definitions:

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HAPPENINGS

Michael Kirby

"Happenings are a new form of theater, just as collage is a new form of visual art..."

They are "essentially nonverbal," although some use words as sounds; and they "have abandoned the plot or story structure that is the foundation of our total theater."

"Compartmented structure"... the information is passed from one discrete theatrical unit – or 'compartment' – to another. (Like circus perfs., or a Rauschenberg combine).

"There is nonmatrixed performing" (i.e. no matrix of time-place-character).

"The action in Happenings is often indeterminate but not improvised."

definition: "Happenings might be described as a purposefully composed form of theater in which diverse alogical elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmented structure."

Historical antecedent: Futurism (Russolo); Brutism, etc.; Cubist collage (1911); Environmental collage (Schwitters' Merz Theater); Action Painting, with its emphasis on process-not-result – Mathieu's painting the Battle of Bouvines, p. 29; Dada ("origins of nonmatrixed performing & compartmented structure"); Surrealism; Cage – Black Mtn. 1952 – New School 1956–1958; Bauhaus Theater – Moholy-Nagy; Artaud ("Theater & Cruelty" (pub. in Eng. 1958) – "it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text"; Modern Dance – Cunningham, Taylor, etc.; Rauschenberg; Experimental Cinema; Circus; old Hollywood Comedy; Hellzapoppin'; etc. Stanislavsky, →

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"It is enough to emphasize that every field of art (not just painting and sculpture) has had some formative influence on Happenings."

Kaprow explains that his first show at Hansa in 1952 had paintings in various styles, constructions, and what would later be called "assemblages." Soon afterward he developed an interest in a kind of action-collage technique, out of Pollock -- using tinfoil, straw, canvas, photos, newspaper etc. These action-collages became bigger, and included flashing lights, ringing buzzers, bells, toys, etc. His next exhibition was an extension of these works -- he filled the gallery from one end to the other, with sheets of plastic, cellophane, tangles of Scotch tape, bands of colored cloth, and there were five tape recorders playing electronic sounds. This was a real Environment.

But the discord between the Environment and the gallery's space bothered him. At this point he realized that "every visitor to the Environment was part of it. I had not really thought of that before. And so I gave him occupations like moving something, turning switches on -- just a few things. Increasingly during 1957 and 1958, this suggested a more 'scored' responsibility for the visitor. I offered him more and more to do, until there developed the Happening."

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Kaprow

"Happenings are events which, put simply, happen. They appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point." (Art News, May 1961)

..."no separation of audience and play" (ibid)

"Traditional art has always tried to make it good every time, believing that this was a truer truth than life. When an artist directly utilizes chance he hazards failure, the "failure" of being less Artistic and more Life-like." (ibid)

Note: The word "happening" first appeared in an essay by Kaprow, published in a 1959 issue of The Anthologist, a Rutgers Univ. literary review: "Something to take place: a happening." Certain elements from this un-script became part of Kaprow's 18 Happenings in 6 Parts. In his new work, K. sends script ahead; foresees time when "some man from Oshkosh, ordering a H. thru a Sears, Roebuck catalog, could set the whole thing into motion & play the part alone, just as I now do." (Kirby, p. 52)

Whitman

"The thing about theater that most interests me is that it takes time. Time for me is something material. I like to use it that way. It can be used in the same way as paint or plaster or any other material."

"I intend my works to be stories of physical experience and realistic, naturalistic descriptions of the physical world."

"Time is the medium that I use to demonstrate what I know about, what I think people need to know about." (Kirby)

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Dine

"I cannot talk about theater because I have no background except acting out everything in daily life. That is a complete, comprehensive background, because it happened every day of my life. The Happenings then became an extension of that, rather than an extension of my painting... I felt that it was the most natural thing to do — to do a Happening."

"The name 'Happening' was a great crowd-pleaser. People knew what they were going to see... It is Kaprow's word, and it does not refer to me."

"I stopped doing Happenings because I felt anyone could do anything and be liked. It was becoming so chic. The audiences were laughing at everything. And I also felt that it was taking too much from my painting, which I really wanted to do." (Kirby)

Oldenburg

"What I do as a 'happening' is part of my general concern, at this time, to use more or less altered 'real' material... whatever I happen to come into contact with. The 'happening' is one or another method of using objects in motion, and this I take to include people..."

"I mix realistic and fantastic events, as the imagination does, and I consider the imaginary event as real as the 'real' one."

"The audience is considered an object and its behavior as events... The place of the audience in the structure is determined by seating and by certain simple provocations."

(Kirby)

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Susan Sontag - "Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition" (1962)

"Perhaps the most striking feature of the Happening is its treatment (this is the only word for it) of the audience. The event seems designed to tease and abuse the audience..."

"What is primary in a Happening is materials -- and their modulations as hard and soft, dirty and clean. This preoccupation with materials, which might seem to make Happenings more like painting than theater, is also expressed in the use or treatment of persons as material objects rather than 'characters.' The people in the Happenings are often made to look like objects, by enclosing them in burlap sacks, elaborate paper wrappings, shrouds, and masks."

"The Happenings...registed (in a real, not simply an ideological way) a protest against the museum conception of art -- the idea that the job of the artist is to make things that can be preserved and cherished."

"Artaud shows the connection between three typical features of the Happening:, first, its supra-personal or impersonal treatment of persons; second, its emphasis on spectacle and sound, and disregard for the word; and third, its/ professed aim to assault the audience."

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Happenings

Note Marcel Jean's description of Picabia-Satie ballet Relâche ('Theater Closed'): 'The overwhelming impression was of light and movement. The first act decor was literally dazzling: scenery festooned with innumerable spotlights so blinded the public that they could barely make out, on the stage, a fireman pouring water interminably from one bucket into another while chain-smoking cigarettes. In the background, vague dancers revolved in a darkness where occasionally beams of light revealed, briefly, the tableau vivant of a couple stark naked, representing Cranach's Adam and Eve. A man sitting on a chair at the edge of the stage in an attitude of total idleness got up from time to time and paced up and down...' (During intermission, showed Picabia-Rene Clair film Entr'acte).

"Relache is life, Picabia wrote in programme. "Life as I like it, all for today, nothing for yesterday, nothing for tomorrow."

Note Dada performances in Zurich, Berlin, Paris, Such as Zurich Noir Cocadou, "a dance of five persons concealed in weird-looking pipes;" see Motherwell p. 179.