

# **Experience, Chance and Change: Allan Kaprow and the Tension Between Art and Life, 1948-1976**

Chay Allen

Christ Church



A thesis submitted for the degree of

*Doctor of Philosophy*

Michaelmas Term 2014/15

## **Abstract**

*“Experience, Chance and Change: Allan Kaprow and the tension between art and life, 1948-1976”, D.Phil. Fine Art, Christ Church, University of Oxford, Hilary Term 2015*

This thesis addresses critically the work of American artist Allan Kaprow (1927-2006), focusing especially on the tensions Kaprow proposed between 'art' and 'life'. It presents a reconsideration of the most fertile period in Kaprow's career, from his undergraduate studies in the late 1940s to his mature work of the 1970s, prior to the increasing demands made on him to produce re-enactments of his early work. The period 1948-1976 presents a fuller overview of the themes and motivations of his practice than has been scrutinised in the existing literature. The research is based on extensive examination of the Allan Kaprow Papers at the Getty Institute, Los Angeles, which revealed significant and previously unstudied documentation and images. This archive and Kaprow's personal library in Encinitas, California have provided substantial previously unpublished evidence of his early interest in the American pragmatist John Dewey, and reveal many of the motivations for Kaprow's emphasis on change, together with his relational approach to form, context and process. The role of composer John Cage in the development of Kaprow's thoughts on chance helps elucidate the complexities inherent in the development of Kaprow's negotiation between chance and control. The present study also gives, for the first time, a comparative and detailed reading of the five drafts of Kaprow's *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (1966), a reading which sheds fresh light on his art and publications of the period. The thesis also presents a thorough reconsideration of the significance of play in Kaprow's work of the late 1960s and 1970s, including the tensions between and among play, work, hierarchy and liberation. Kaprow's many struggles to conceptualise and reconcile these tensions, and others, such as between audience and participant, private and public and narrative and history, were a necessary feature of the categories of art and artistic identity, including 'Happening', 'Activity' and 'Un-artist' that he helped bring into being.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis is the end product of a long and demanding intellectual and personal journey, made possible by the generosity and support of many people both before and during my research. I am indebted to my late supervisor Katerina Reed-Tsocha for the faith she had in me and for helping me secure funding for my research. Her guidance and encouragement both before and during my doctoral studies, and her commitment to my academic success, are borne out in this thesis. I am deeply grateful for the guidance I received from my supervisors Brandon Taylor and Elisa Schaar. They stepped in at a crucial point and have been instrumental in guiding this project to its successful completion. Their dedication to my project far exceeded my expectations for supervision and helped me to create a highly polished final document. The robust feedback I received from Malcolm Bull and Jason Geiger during my Confirmation of Status interview helped me to shift gear in terms of my critical discussion of Kaprow's practice.

This research would not have been possible without the various grants and awards I received from the University of Oxford. Most notably this included a full three-year studentship from the Ruskin School of Art and a Hugh Pilkington Scholarship from Christ Church. Both bodies also contributed essential funding for my research trip to the Allan Kaprow Papers at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles and Kaprow's home in Encinitas. This trip was crucial to my research and led to the findings contained within this thesis.

The success of my research trip to Los Angeles and Encinitas was aided by many people, all of whom I owe a great deal of thanks. Jeff Kelley pointed me in the direction of Kaprow's annotated copy of John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) and kindly introduced me to Tamara Bloomberg of the Allan Kaprow Estate. Coryl Crane-Kaprow's generosity in allowing me to live and work in Kaprow's garden studio both enriched this project academically and contributed a personal dimension to it. Aimee Lind at the Getty Research Library provided immense assistance to me before, during

and after my research trip. And Blerime Topalli welcomed me into her home in North Hollywood for the duration of my research trip, making what was a transformative month for me truly memorable.

George Leonard compelled me to pursue the connection between Kaprow's practice and D.T. Suzuki's Zen, providing me with much needed encouragement and support. I am also thankful to Judith Rodenbeck for her advice and suggestions both via email and in person, and for allowing open access to the unpublished interviews she conducted with Kaprow during the 1990s. My thanks also go to Ken Friedman for his correspondence.

I have received incredible support from my parents, Andrew and Ella Allen, both before and during my research. I may not have begun this project without their encouragement and may not have completed it without their generosity and patience. Their unfailing belief in me has helped me to fulfil a long-held dream and to establish the foundations of a strong career. The connection I have with my sister Tegan Allen is a source of constant enrichment. Her company, humour and consistently incisive advice benefited this project to an extent that is impossible to measure. I am incredibly grateful to the close circle of friends that have been there for me throughout my doctorate: Jalin and Shalini Patel for housing me for two months during my write up, but mostly for helping make my life fun. Olly Mann for giving me subtle but effective kicks up the backside and for always providing the perfect environment within which to unwind. Ben Devy for his kindred spirit and shared desire to experience life aesthetically. And Barney Norman for his continued friendship. Thank you all.

Chay Allen  
Oxford University  
March 2015

## Table of contents

List of figures	i-vi
List of abbreviations	vii
Introduction	1
1. The Aesthetic Experience and Kaprow's Challenge to Formalism	20
1.1. 'Change' as a form principle	20
1.2. Using <i>Art as Experience</i> to understand Kaprow's early practice	25
1.2.i. Moral considerations of form and context	29
1.2.ii. The New York scene	32
1.2.ii.a. The wider debate around extensive form	32
1.2.ii.b. Kaprow's critique of form and process in the work of Jackson Pollock	35
1.2.ii.c. Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and the recognition of context	39
1.3. The emergence of an environmental practice in Kaprow's work	44
1.3.i. Activity as form in Kaprow's 'action collage'	49
1.3.ii. The 'legacy' of Jackson Pollock	51
1.3.iii. The creation of a 'total art'	57
1.3.iv. Expansive form and the principle of 'extension'	59
1.4. Extending further: activated spectatorship in <i>Push and Pull</i> (1963)	62
2. The Role of Chance in Kaprow's Practice	67
2.1. The suggestion of dynamic form in <i>Rearrangeable Panels</i> (1957-59)	69
2.1.i. Echoes of Cage's chance composition	71
2.1.ii. 'Beat Zen' and the blurring of art and life	74
2.1.iii. Kaprow's articulation of an "oriental attitude towards chance"	77
2.1.iv. The origins of Suzuki's Zen	81
2.2. Accident and simultaneity in Kaprow's early Happenings	87
2.3. <i>18 Happenings in 6 Parts</i> (1959)	93
2.3.i. Essences of the everyday	98
2.3.ii. The main event	101
2.4. Negotiating between chance and control	106
3. Maintaining Change and Negotiating Chance in the Spring of 1961	109

3.1. <i>A Spring Happening</i> (1961)	109
3.1.i. Echoes of Artaud	110
3.1.ii. Chance and avant-gardism	120
3.1.iii. Oldenburg's objections to "Happenings in the New York Scene" (1961)	126
3.2. <i>Yard</i> (1961)	129
3.2.i. The bargain for access	131
3.2.ii. Chance vs. Change: redefining the problem	134
3.2.iii. The objectionable conventions of space and purpose	137
3.3. <i>Self-Service</i> (1966): towards a resolution	141
4. The Role of Play in Kaprow's Practice	151
4.1. Political background/Death of the Happening	152
4.1.i. <i>Flick</i> (1967) and <i>Interruption</i> (1967)	154
4.1.ii. "Aesthetic anarchy"	157
4.2. Work critique	159
4.2.i. <i>Moving</i> (1967) and the re-direction of artistic labour	161
4.2.ii. Play as social critique in <i>Runner</i> (1968)	163
4.2.iii. Collective action and the critique of function in <i>Round Trip</i> (1968)	169
4.3. Understanding Kaprow's focus on play in the context of New Left ideology	171
4.4. Gossip as narrative	175
5. Models for Basic Research: 'Un-art' and Experimentation	183
5.1. Acts of continuous discovery	183
5.1.i. Five models of experimentation	184
5.1.ii. <i>Hello</i> (1969) and "the playful use of technology"	187
5.1.iii. Kaprow's proposal for a cybernetic model of "environmental research"	192
5.1.iv. Creating a feedback loop in <i>Message Units</i> (1972)	196
5.2. Educating the un-artist	198
5.2.i. Pedagogical experimentation in the Berkeley Unified School District	198
5.2.ii. Investigating homeostases in <i>Basic Thermal Units</i> (1973)	199
5.2.iii. <i>Time Pieces</i> (1973) and the elucidation of subjective bodily states	202

5.3. The problem of documentation	208
5.4. Reflections on Kaprow's engagement with play	211
6. An Irresolvable Necessity: Conclusions and Implications of the Tensions Within Kaprow's Practice	215
Bibliography	222
Figures	231-349

## List of figures

### Introduction

- Fig. 1 Building enclosure for Allan Kaprow, *Fluids* (1967)
- Fig. 2 Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project, I (ABCD)* (1966)
- Fig. 3 Donald Judd, *Untitled (Stack)* (1967)
- Fig. 4 Ellsworth Kelly, *Colors For a Large Wall* (1951)
- Fig. 5 Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II* (1959)
- Fig. 6 Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (1921)
- Fig. 7 Student volunteers working on ice construction for Allan Kaprow, *Fluids* (1967)
- Fig. 8 Student volunteers working on ice construction for Allan Kaprow, *Fluids* (1967)

### 1. The Aesthetic Experience and Kaprow's Challenge to Formalism

- Fig. 9 Allan Kaprow, *Untitled Collage* (1952)
- Fig. 10 Jean Follett, *Many Headed Creature* (1958)
- Fig. 11 Jackson Pollock, *Number 7* (1950)
- Fig. 12 Jackson Pollock, *Number 17* (1950)
- Fig. 13 Jackson Pollock, *Earthworms* (1946)
- Fig. 14 Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting (seven panels)* (1951)
- Fig. 15 Allan Kaprow, *Study after Velázquez* (c. 1952-3)
- Fig. 16 Allan Kaprow, *Red Forest* (1953)
- Fig. 17 Allan Kaprow, *Figures in Landscape* (1953)
- Fig. 18 Allan Kaprow, *Reclining Nude, Head on Cushion* (1952-53)
- Fig. 19 Allan Kaprow, *Red Dancers* (1955)
- Fig. 20 Allan Kaprow, *Baby* (1956)
- Fig. 21 Alfred Barr, diagram for 'Cubism and Abstract Art' (1936)
- Fig. 22 Robert Rauschenberg, *Rebus* (1955)
- Fig. 23 Allan Kaprow, detail of hanging raffia, *Untitled Environment* (1958)
- Fig. 24 Allan Kaprow installing mirrored lights, *Untitled Environment* (1958)
- Fig. 25 Allan Kaprow inspecting tape players, *Untitled Environment* (1958)
- Fig. 26 Participants engaging with Allan Kaprow, *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann* (1963)
- Fig. 27 "Points of view" cards in the entrance to Allan Kaprow, *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann* (1963)
- Fig. 28 Installation view, *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann* (1963)

Fig. 29 Vincent van Gogh, *Bedroom in Arles* (1888)

## 2. The Role of Chance in Kaprow's Practice

Fig. 30 Allan Kaprow, *Rearrangeable Panels (kiosk configuration)* (1957-59)

Fig. 31 Allan Kaprow, *Rearrangeable Panels (kiosk configuration)* (1957-59)

Fig. 32 Allan Kaprow, *Rearrangeable Panels (wall configuration with Kaprow's captions)* (1957-59)

Fig. 33 Kurt Schwitters, *Der Merzbau* (1923-27)

Fig. 34 Robert Rauschenberg, *Minutiae* (1954)

Fig. 35 Jasper Johns, *Flag* (1954-55)

Fig. 36 Jasper Johns, *Target with Four Faces* (1955)

Fig. 37 Yves Klein, *IKB 79* (1959)

Fig. 38 Piero Manzoni, *Linea* (1959)

Fig. 39 Allan Kaprow, detail of handwritten plan for *A Pastorale* (1958)

Fig. 40 Allan Kaprow, handwritten instructions for Miles Forst, *A Pastorale* (1958)

Fig. 41 Allan Kaprow, diagram and score for Miles Forst, *A Pastorale* (1958)

Fig. 42 Allan Kaprow, score for *Tape #1* (1958)

Fig. 43 Detail of set for Allan Kaprow, *A Pastorale* (1958)

Fig. 44 Allan Kaprow, diagram of action for Aristodemos Kaldis, *A Pastorale* (1958)

Fig. 45 Anita Reuben in front of "The Sandwich Man", Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 46 Allan Kaprow, hand-drawn plan for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 47 Interior of 'Room 2', Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 48 Interior of 'Room 3' with fragment of Kaprow's *Rearrangeable Panels* (1957-59) in centre, Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 49 Photograph of unnamed visitor in 'Room 3', Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 50 Poster invitation for Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 51 Allan Kaprow, hand-drawn actions for 'Room 2, Set 1', *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 52 Allan Kaprow, diagram of 'smile-types' for 'Room 1, Set 3', *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 53 Allan Kaprow, typewritten speech for "Room 3, Set 2", *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

Fig. 54 John Cage, excerpt from "Lecture on Nothing" (1959)

Fig. 55 Allan Kaprow, hand-drawn diagrams for actions for "Room 2, Set 1, Person 1", *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

- Fig. 56 Allan Kaprow, hand-drawn diagram for actions for “Room 1, Set 3, Person 2”, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)
- Fig. 57 Allan Kaprow, handwritten instructions for “Set 3, Room 1, Person 4 (violin)”, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)
- Fig. 58 “Sandwich man”, Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)
- Fig. 59 Allan Kaprow, handwritten instructions for “Room 1, Set 4, Person 2 (flute)”, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959)

### 3. Maintaining Change and Negotiating Chance in the Spring of 1961

- Fig. 60 Visitors to Allan Kaprow's *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 61 Allan Kaprow, *Coca-Cola Shirley Cannonball?* (1960)
- Fig. 62 Performers communicating through the slits of the tunnel while rehearsing for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 63 Performer throwing a barrel from the roof of the enclosure during rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 64 Barrel crashing to the ground during rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 65 Performer throwing a barrel against the ground while removing it during rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 66 Performer lighting matches during rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 67 Performers with branches moving slowly towards one another in rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 68 Performers hitting the floor with branches in rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 69 Shadow of performer behind muslin cloth in rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 70 Performer smearing soap water over transparent plastic encasing audience's enclosure, with the shadow of the performer cast by the light held by the performer behind, during rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 71 'Naked girl' with green vegetables hanging from her mouth, *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 72 Girl underneath white sheet illuminated by a spot light from the roof of the enclosure, *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 73 Lawnmower evacuating audience from enclosure during rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 74 Walls of enclosure collapsing while lawnmower is pushed towards audience during rehearsal for *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 75 Audience members leaving performance of *A Spring Happening* (1961)
- Fig. 76 Hans Richter, collage letter to Allan Kaprow (1963)
- Fig. 77 George Maciunas, *Fluxus (Its Historical Development and Relationship to Avant Garde Movements)* (1967)
- Fig. 78 Claes Oldenburg in his performance installation *The Store* (1961)

- Fig. 79 George Brecht, printed score for *Three Chair Events* (1961)
- Fig. 80 White chair of George Brecht's *Three Chair Events* (1961), with Allan Kaprow and guests outside the opening of 'Environments, Situations, Spaces'
- Fig. 81 Allan Kaprow standing in Allan Kaprow, *Yard* (1961)
- Fig. 82 Girl reading on the wall above a covered sculpture in *Yard* (1961)
- Fig. 83 Visitors navigating a route through the tyres in *Yard* (1961)
- Fig. 84 Hans Namuth, portrait of Jackson Pollock at work, Long Island, New York, 1950
- Fig. 85 Allan Kaprow throwing tyres in *Yard* (1961)
- Fig. 86 Allan Kaprow, *A Service for the Dead* (1962)
- Fig. 87 Allan Kaprow, plan for *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 88 Allan Kaprow and participants shouting on subway in Los Angeles, Allan Kaprow, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 89 Allan Kaprow and participants shouting on subway in Los Angeles, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 90 Leaving bouquets of flowers on supermarket shelves in Boston, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 91 Allan Kaprow explaining *Self-Service* (1966) to volunteers
- Fig. 92 Allan Kaprow explaining *Self-Service* (1966) to volunteers
- Fig. 93 Young girl offering flowers to man in New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 94 Young girl offering flowers to man in New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 95 Young girl offering flowers to man in New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 96 Young girl offering flowers to lady in New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 97 Young boy offering flowers in Grand Central Station, New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 98 Young boy offering flowers in Grand Central Station, New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 99 Young boy offering flowers in Grand Central Station, New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 100 Young boy offering flowers to two women in Grand Central Station, New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 101 Allan Kaprow and participants laying a banquet table by the side of a highway, Los Angeles, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 102 Allan Kaprow and participants laying a banquet table by the side of a highway, Los Angeles, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 103 Allan Kaprow, schedule of activities for New York, *Self-Service* (1966)
- Fig. 104 Allan Kaprow, final scheme for Los Angeles, *Self-Service* (1966)

#### 4. The Role of Play in Kaprow's Practice

- Fig. 105 Installation view of 9 at Leo Castelli, Leo Castelli, December 4–28, 1968
- Fig. 106 Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969)
- Fig. 107 Front cover of “Photoalbum”, Allan Kaprow, *Moving* (1967)
- Fig. 108 Back cover of “Photoalbum”, Allan Kaprow, *Moving* (1967)
- Fig. 109 Poster (including score) for Allan Kaprow, *Runner* (1968)
- Fig. 110 Allan Kaprow laying tar paper, *Runner* (1968)
- Fig. 111 Allan Kaprow laying breeze blocks, *Runner* (1968)
- Fig. 112 Allan Kaprow, briefing notes for *Runner* (1968)
- Fig. 113 Allan Kaprow, briefing notes (second page) for *Runner* (1968)
- Fig. 114 Volunteers laying tar paper and breeze blocks, *Runner* (1968)
- Fig. 115 Contact sheet for Allan Kaprow, *Round Trip* (1968)
- Fig. 116 Allan Kaprow, handwritten score for *Round Trip* (1968)
- Fig. 117 Pamphlet for Allan Kaprow, *Record II (for Roger Shattuck)* (1968)
- Fig. 118 “Silvering big rocks”, Allan Kaprow, *Record II* (1968)
- Fig. 119 Allan Kaprow, *Days Off: A Calendar of Happenings* (1970)
- Fig. 120 Calendar entry for the 4<sup>th</sup> April featuring *Record II* (1968), *Days Off: A Calendar of Happenings* (1970)

##### 5. Models for Basic Research: 'Un-art' and Experimentation

- Fig. 121 Title sequence of Allan Kaprow, *Hello* (1969), WGBH-TV, Boston
- Fig. 122 Participants shown in the broadcast of Allan Kaprow, *Hello* (1969)
- Fig. 123 Allan Kaprow, score for *Message Units* (1972)
- Fig. 124 Allan Kaprow, score for *Message Units* (1972)
- Fig. 125 Allan Kaprow, poster for *Six Ordinary Happenings* with scores (1969)
- Fig. 126 Photograph from Activity booklet for Allan Kaprow, *Basic Thermal Units* (1973), depicting cooling a body with ice
- Fig. 127 Photograph from Activity booklet for *Basic Thermal Units* (1973), depicting cooling a body with ice
- Fig. 128 Photograph from Activity booklets for *Basic Thermal Units* (1973), depicting increasing the temperature of a room
- Fig. 129 Photograph from Activity booklets for *Basic Thermal Units* (1973), depicting increasing the temperature of a room
- Fig. 130 Photograph from Activity booklet for *Basic Thermal Units* (1973), depicting “phoning repeatedly until the room's too cold or until the body's too hot”
- Fig. 131 Allan Kaprow, poster and Activity booklet for *Time Pieces* (1973)
- Fig. 132 “Pulse exchange”, detail of Activity booklet for *Time Pieces* (1973)
- Fig. 133 “Pulse exchange”, detail of Activity booklet for *Time Pieces* (1973)
- Fig. 134 Detail of Activity booklet for *Time Pieces* (1973), depicting the recording of a

counted pulse by tapping a microphone

- Fig. 135 Detail of Activity booklet for *Time Pieces* (1973), depicting “breath exchange”
- Fig. 136 Detail of Activity booklet for *Time Pieces* (1973), depicting “breath exchange”
- Fig. 137 Detail from Activity booklet for *Time Pieces* (1973), depicting exhaling into plastic bags
- Fig. 138 Detail from Activity booklet for *Time Pieces* (1973), showing Kaprow's wife Vaughan Rachel breathing into a telephone

#### 6. An Irresolvable Necessity: Conclusions and Implications of the Tensions Within Kaprow's Practice

- Fig. 139 Participants on stage in Marina Abramović, *512 Hours* (2014)
- Fig. 140 Participants sleeping and contemplating the present, in Marina Abramović, *512 Hours* (2014)
- Fig. 141 Francis Alÿs, still from *Re-enactments* (2000)
- Fig. 142 Francis Alÿs, still from *Re-enactments* (2000)
- Fig. 143 Francis Alÿs, still from *Re-enactments* (2000)
- Fig. 144 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument* (2013)
- Fig. 145 Marcus Steinweg “Daily lecture”, Gramsci Theater, Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument* (2013)
- Fig. 146 Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument* (2013)

## List of abbreviations

AEH	<i>Assemblage, Environments and Happenings</i>
CalArts	California Institute of the Arts
E.A.T.	Experiments in Art and Technology
NYU	New York University
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SUNY	State University of New York
UAWMF	Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers

## Introduction

In October 1967 a mock funeral ceremony, the 'Death of the Hippy', was held in San Francisco at the end of what had become known as the 'Summer of Love': a mass gathering of some 100,000 young ideologues. The utopian dream of communal living and social experimentation, political decentralisation and environmental awareness had been tainted by the transformation of the gathering into a commercialised media spectacle, along with anti-social behaviour in the name of such sentiments as 'free love' and 'dropping out'. In Los Angeles, 400 miles south of this ideological wake, the experimental artist Allan Kaprow was supervising the construction of fifteen rectangular ice structures for his communal 'Happening' *Fluids* (1967) [fig. 1] in various locations around the city. Each structure measured thirty feet long, eight feet high and ten feet wide, and comprised roughly 650 fifty-pound blocks of ice assembled by teams of between ten to fifteen student volunteers, with each structure taking around twenty-four hours to melt. The identical rectangular constructions echoed contemporary serial minimalist sculpture such as Sol LeWitt's *Serial Project, I (ABCD)* (1966) [fig. 2] and Donald Judd's *Untitled (Stack)* (1967) [fig. 3]. However *Fluids* subverted the permanence of LeWitt's and Judd's pieces, providing an ultimate reduction of form in its disappearance, in which context, process and change were its lasting legacies. The work effected a visual commentary on planned obsolescence and the obsession with property ownership that had come to characterise the postwar American economy. Commissioned for his mid-career retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum, it also challenged the museum's preserving function.

Like the Summer of Love, *Fluids* was an experimental project in communal endeavour. Though in contrast to the unstructured gathering and individual self-expression in San Francisco, it necessitated complex logistics to create a series of uniform multiples across

the metropolis. Permission, insurance, site acquisition, the recruitment of volunteers, and a strict schedule of ice deliveries every two to three hours contrasted with the freedom that the title “*Fluids*” suggested. The tension between the associations of *Fluids* and the rule-based structure necessary to realise the piece was alluded to in an interview with Barbara Berman for the catalogue accompanying Kaprow's retrospective:

BB: “Why do you set up rules for making a Happening?”

AK: “To provide as much liberation from past culture as possible.”<sup>1</sup>

The apparent contradiction between rules and liberation that Kaprow conflates in his answer hints at an intriguing dynamic within his practice. *Fluids* destabilised the relationship between work, function and commodity that ordered capitalist America: an ice construction in Los Angeles had limited architectural function and its transience undermined any commodity value it may otherwise have contained. Given the separation of labour and productivity the 'liberation from past culture' to which Kaprow referred was both artistic and societal. Furthermore the museum setting for his retrospective represented by definition the “past culture” he was trying to escape, though he needed its apparatus. In his preface to the catalogue he argued that art of the 1960s encompassing “enormous scale, environmental scope, mixed media, spectator participation, technology, themes drawn from the daily milieu, and so forth” was “inappropriate for museum display.”<sup>2</sup> His statement further on that “I shall try to camouflage the museum environment as much as possible”, illustrates the conflict he faced between his connection to the institution of art and his wish to escape it.<sup>3</sup> Though he challenges the institutional framework and environment of the museum space, he retains a

---

1. Allan Kaprow, interview with Barbara Berman, in Allan Kaprow and Barbara Berman, *Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum* (Los Angeles: Pasadena Art Museum, 1967), pp. 7-10, p. 8.

2. Allan Kaprow, preface to *Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum*, p. 2.

3. Ibid.

necessary tether, however reduced, to its perceived limitations. The 'inappropriate' work to which Kaprow referred emphasised “context rather than the specific manipulations of the work or materials”, disrupting what he would describe as “old-fashioned formal aesthetics.”<sup>4</sup> His stance challenged the approach of eminent formalist scholars, such as Alfred Barr, Clement Greenberg and Roger Fry, whose methodologies broadly excluded a recognition of context. Greenberg's veneration of the “purity” of what he had termed “Post-Painterly Abstraction”, evident in the work of artists who had eliminated physical expression in their practice, such as Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella [figs. 4-5], was challenged by Kaprow in his 1963 essay “Impurity”.<sup>5</sup> Greenberg's outlook, along with Barr's concentration on internal order and Fry's consideration of form and substance as separate, were challenged by Kaprow's contention of the inevitability of “impure” elements, such as the surface modulation and the implication of context that, he argued, were present in the supposedly “pure” line paintings of Piet Mondrian [fig. 6].<sup>6</sup> Kaprow's emphasis on change resists the idea of Mondrian's work as static abstractions, challenging the formalism of Fry, Barr and Greenberg. The year before his Pasadena retrospective Kaprow had published his definitive book *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings (AEH)* (1966), in which he proposed the changeable as a “form principle” in his practice. Though he had identified change in unlikely settings, his proposal was most profitably realised in participatory work such as *Fluids*. Kaprow was liberating form from the constraints of representation and remaining true to his first condition of Happenings, articulated in *AEH* that “the line between art and life should be as fluid, and perhaps indistinct as possible”.<sup>7</sup> Indeed within *Fluids* social negotiation and the

---

4. Ibid., p. 8; Allan Kaprow, “Formalism: Flogging a Dead Horse”, p. 161. *Quadrille* (Bennington College) 9, no. 1, pp. 24-28, repr. Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 154-162, p. 161.

5. Clement Greenberg, “Post-Painterly Abstraction”, repr. John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: the Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 192; Allan Kaprow, “Impurity”, *Art News* 61, no. 9, pp. 30-33, 52-55, repr. Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 27-45.

6. Allan Kaprow, “Impurity”, repr. Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 27-45.

7. Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1966), p. 188.

visual and functional associations between the constructions and their contexts emulated and brushed up against the rituals of daily life [figs. 7-8].<sup>8</sup> And the 'liberation' of form from 'old fashioned' culture of the past necessitated a strictly defined set of rules for its execution.

How we can profitably investigate the tension between Kaprow's call for liberation and the structures he establishes to achieve this is an understudied area in the existing literature. In his monograph *Childsplay* (2003) Kaprow's friend and collaborator Jeff Kelley offers a comprehensive overview of the key developmental themes of Kaprow's practice, with an emphasis on biography. This thesis expands upon the groundwork developed by Kelley to present for the first time an in-depth investigation into some of the most crucial aspects of Kaprow's artistic career. These include the relationship of the American pragmatist John Dewey's concept of aesthetic experience articulated in *Art as Experience* (1934) to Kaprow's practice, Kaprow's interest in chance methods, and the methodological role of play in Kaprow's work. All three areas are directly relevant to Kaprow's focus on change as a guiding principle of his practice, and the negotiation between permissiveness and control that resulted. While several theorists have successively referred to the inheritance of Dewey's ideas contained in Kaprow's work, this has been limited to revisiting the brief allusion made by Kelley to the importance of Dewey as Kaprow's "intellectual father".<sup>9</sup> In "Neo Dada', 'Junk Aesthetic' and Spectator Participation" (2006) Anna Dezeuze affirms the importance of this link, noting that "what distinguished these Neo-dada works from earlier avant-garde artists concerned with the impermanence of modern life was a focus on the *experience* itself

---

8. Jeff Kelley has argued this was a premodern quality of *Fluids*, *Childsplay*, p. 124.

9. *Childsplay*, p. 8; Jeff Kelley, "Introduction", in Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. xi-xxvi, p. xi & xxvi. Kelley's thesis is the standard reference for the connection between Kaprow and John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, repeated in Judith Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 26, Richard Shusterman, "Dewey's Art as Experience: The Psychological Background", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 26-43, p. 32, Joseph Jacobs, "Crashing New York à la John Cage", in Joan Marter, Simon Anderson (eds.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (Newark: The Newark Museum, 1999), pp. 67-99, p. 95, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*, p. 189, Eva Meyer-Hermann "Museum as Meditation", in Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal (eds.), *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), pp. 72-91, p. 89, fn. 31.

of apprehending this changeability and mobility.”<sup>10</sup> The implications that the indeterminate and unique experience has as both subject and content for a wider understanding of form, and the challenge presented to formalism within this period are underdeveloped by Dezeuze. Alex Potts in “Writing the Happenings”, as part of the catalogue to the 2008 touring exhibition 'Allan Kaprow: Art as Life' explores Kaprow's relationship to formalism and formalised procedures, noting his embrace of “real form” and “the impulse to realize a formal structure that would be experienced as pure immediacy.”<sup>11</sup> Potts' observations are helpful in preparing the ground for an investigation into the nature of form “experienced as pure immediacy”, as he terms it, in Kaprow's work. Such a study requires an investigation that extends beyond the contributions of Potts, Dezeuze and Kelley, to achieve a greater understanding of Kaprow's approach to form.

Kelley's analysis of chance in Kaprow's work, what Kaprow termed the “most problematical quality found in Happenings”, overlooks the associations of risk and accident apparent in Kaprow's writing during the early to mid-1960s.<sup>12</sup> Other scholarship has addressed the formal elements of Kaprow's engagement with chance, including Meredith Malone's entry in the catalogue to *Chance Aesthetics* (2009), but leaves his problematic relationship to chance underdeveloped.<sup>13</sup> Malone's statement that “Kaprow was ultimately less interested in engaging with chance operations as such than with the production of endlessly changeable aesthetic experiences”, ignores the importance of Kaprow's conflation of these non-exclusive categories in *AEH*, drafted as early as 1959.<sup>14</sup> Michael Kirby's edited edition of *Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1965), dedicated to chance and 'The New Theater' faces a similar charge of discussing chance and Happenings as two distinct

---

10. Anna Dezeuze, “'Neo Dada', 'Junk Aesthetic' and Spectator Participation”, in David Hopkins (ed.), *Neo-Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 49-71, p. 61.

11. Alexander Potts, “Writing the Happenings”, *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, pp. 20-31, pp. 24-25.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

13. Meredith Malone “Precarious Practices: Chance and Change in Nouveau Réalisme and Fluxus” in Meredith Malone (ed), *Chance Aesthetics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 45-67, pp. 60-61

14. See Kaprow's categorisation of chance in *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, pp. 188-198.

phenomena. The complexity of these notions and the practical problems of their application require further nuanced analysis. In *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement* (2008) Mike Sell has argued that “early American performance art was dominated by an emphasis on accident, most likely due to the fact that it was a significant and energizing theme in [experimental composer] John Cage's composition courses at the New School for Social Research.”<sup>15</sup> Sell's hypothesis calls for a further investigation into the relationship between Kaprow's interest in accident during the late 1950s and early 1960s and his attendance at Cage's class.

In *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (2013) Judith Rodenbeck presents a thorough reading of Happenings as politically radical works, in the context of a revolt against the confines of formalism, understanding his Happenings as totalitarian “political structures”.<sup>16</sup> Her analysis is restricted to Kaprow's career from the late 1950s to the late 1960s, bracketing the important practical and theoretical developments during the early to mid-1950s and the political nature of Kaprow's practice following the late-1960s. It calls for a wider consideration of Kaprow's approach to form and the political nature of Kaprow's practice beyond the period she considers. In *Installation Art: A Critical History* Claire Bishop has argued that, in performance art between 1965-75, “the main theoretical impulses behind installation art come into focus: ideas of heightened immediacy, of the decentered subject (Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida), and of activated spectatorship as political in implication.”<sup>17</sup> Bishop's acknowledgement that “It is important that so many of these artworks harness the viewer's own capacity to free-associate” provides an interesting counterpoint to the claims made by Rodenbeck of Kaprow's controlling and abusive

---

15. *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement*, p. 143.

16. *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*, p. 216.

17. *Installation Art: A Critical History*, p. 13.

relationship to his participants.<sup>18</sup> This disjuncture is in part addressed by Rodenbeck's acknowledgement that Kaprow dismissed ritual in his Happenings in 1966 as “pompous” and replaced it with game structure.<sup>19</sup> A recognition of the complexities of the legacy of gaming within Kaprow's work following the shift Rodenbeck recognises in 1966 is absent, as is the distinction Kaprow makes between play and gaming. Kelley has hinted at the correspondence between play and the political in Kaprow's practice. Characterising playfulness as the chief feature of Kaprow's work, Kelley describes his Activities of the 1970s as teaching models “tailored for a select group of students in the context of an educational experiment.”<sup>20</sup> Kelley notes that “at CalArts [Kaprow] found himself in an experimental milieu that encouraged such forms of creative research as play and meaningless work”.<sup>21</sup> Kelley's presentation of Kaprow's methodological interest in play is restricted to a recognition of “the personal and social dynamics of participation” and non-competition.<sup>22</sup> Kelley's and Rodenbeck's studies call for a critical framework within which to understand Kaprow's engagement with play as a mode of critiquing “the commodity- and object-oriented structure of visual art” as Johanna Drucker has termed it.<sup>23</sup> Julie Reiss has argued that Kaprow's shift from spectatorship to participation can be better understood against the political call for participatory democracy.<sup>24</sup> Her analysis compliments Robert Haywood's suggestion that Kaprow's focus on his principle of 'extension', outlined in *AEH*, “intersected with [political] interventionist strategies”.<sup>25</sup> Extension, Kaprow wrote, was “a form principle” for an experiential art unconstrained by physical limits, incorporating material not ordinarily associated with art.<sup>26</sup> The extent to

---

18. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

19. *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*, p. 219.

20. *Childsplay*, p. 157.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

24. Julie Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 16.

25. Robert Haywood, “Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro's and Allan Kaprow's Theory of Avant-Garde Art”, in *Experiments in the Everyday*, pp.27-46, p.42.

26. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 169.

which Kaprow's approach to art production can be linked to a wider political agenda requires further consideration.

This thesis specifically addresses the tensions surrounding the fluidity Kaprow proposed between art and life, including between regulation and permissiveness within its execution. This resulted in increasingly sophisticated methods of manipulation and imposition of rules and limits by Kaprow, as seen in *Fluids*, at odds with the public image of his permissive practice. I provide a reconsideration of the most fertile period in Kaprow's career, from his undergraduate studies, including his emergent interest in John Dewey's notion of aesthetic experience during the 1950s as it related to his experiential understanding of form, to his mature work of the 1970s, prior to the increasing demands on him to produce what he termed “reinventions” of his early work. It draws a synthesis between these periods to enable a critical understanding of the complexities inherent in the development of his experimental practice. I tackle a wider trajectory of Kaprow's career than has been attempted in existing literature, enabling a greater overview of the themes, motivations and tensions that existed within his practice over an extended period. I have extensively examined the Allan Kaprow Papers at the Getty Institute, Los Angeles, during a research trip, discovering significant and previously unstudied documentation and images upon which this thesis is based. The Allan Kaprow Papers has also provided substantial previously unpublished evidence of Kaprow's early interest in John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934), and show Kaprow's connected interest in art as a 'moral agent'. This thesis is based on significant and previously unstudied documentation and images from the Allan Kaprow Papers. This is the first study to use the entirety of Kaprow's annotated copy of Dewey's *Art as Experience*, held at his personal library in Encinitas, California, to understand the legacy of Dewey's ideas within his work. Kaprow's undergraduate philosophy notes and notes made while studying for his Masters degree under the supervision of art historian Meyer Schapiro are examined

critically for the first time, providing a significant and valuable context within which to understand his early development. This study also presents, for the first time, a comparative and detailed reading of the five drafts of *AEH* made between 1959 and 1966, against his art and publications of this period. They are an invaluable record of the development of his thoughts regarding the role of chance in his work, and the emerging distinction he made between the categories of chance and change. The question of the place of chance in his work is a problematic at the heart of his pledge to create a fluidity between art and life. These drafts present the conflict between permissiveness and control in light of his dual desire for regulated behaviour and an openness to outcome. The transcripts of three unpublished interviews with Judith Rodenbeck from the early 1990s, held within the Allan Kaprow Papers, have given me an invaluable perspective of Kaprow's reflection on the period I focus on in this study, and contribute additional depth to the context of my argument. There are some obvious limitations imposed on the historian of performance. While this thesis has benefited from the experience of the reinvention of a number of his works, together with Kaprow's writing, along with interviews, and the conversations of both Kaprow and those close to him, both professionally and personally, the lack of experience of the work I theorise within this study is an evident but unavoidable limitation.

In the first chapter I explore the emphasis Kaprow gives to the idea of change within his practice, through his mixed media work *Untitled Collage* (1952) and *Baby* (1957), his early figurative painting, his two untitled Environments at the Hansa Gallery in 1958, and his Environment *Push and Pull* (1963). I argue that these works promoted the activity and context of the artist as their subject matter, prophesying Kaprow's stated intention to blur the boundaries between art and life, and integral to his idea of the changeable as a 'form principle'. I explore Kaprow's relational approach to form, context and process that emerge from his emphasis on change, through his selective reading of Dewey's *Art as Experience* of

which he later commented had “influenced [him] considerably”.<sup>27</sup> Process appears as a prominent characteristic of *Untitled, Baby*, and *Figures in Landscape* (1953), and it is through an awareness of Kaprow's close reading of Dewey's text that the relationship between experience, form and process is clarified as a theoretical keystone of Kaprow's practice. This chapter addresses what Rodenbeck has claimed has been an oversight by Kelley of “Kaprow's Deweyan formalism”: an “essentially ecological understanding of 'form'”.<sup>28</sup>

Kaprow's reading of Dewey clarifies Kaprow's challenge to the fixity and abstraction of form from provenance and context, by theorists such as Greenberg, Barr and Fry, by creating work in which form was not necessarily representational. This is explored with reference to his shift from an object-based to an environmental, performative, practice. In the text handout for visitors to *Push and Pull* Kaprow had posed the question: “rooms full of people contrasted with empty rooms... your own feelings wherever you decide to sit down in the woods. Aren't these 'forms' also?”<sup>29</sup> It presaged his rejection in the mid-1970s of “old-fashioned formal esthetics” in place of a revised idea of form that “includes its vast history, its conceptual origins in the artist's mind, its processes of creation... the surroundings and the perceiver, its economics and its future”.<sup>30</sup> The first chapter presents the relevance of Dewey's text to Kaprow's practice, enabling his contextual focus, from collages and figurative painting to the *Environments* of 1958 and 1963, to be understood more clearly as a methodology. It also allows for a detailed consideration of reciprocity within his practice, important to his increasingly participatory and performative work, as a means of “bypassing the confinements of formalism.”<sup>31</sup> Change as form creates a category caught perpetually between flux

---

27. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996, Encinitas, California, pp. 2-3, Allan Kaprow Papers c. 1940-1997, accession no. 980063, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; hereafter Allan Kaprow Papers.

28. *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*, p. 26.

29. Allan Kaprow, “Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hoffman”, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 8, Folder 2).

30. Allan Kaprow, “Formalism: Flogging a Dead Horse” (1974), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 154-162, p. 161.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

and fixity, providing the basis upon which a discussion of the tension between control and permissiveness in his work is manifested in successive chapters. Kaprow's interpretation of the work of Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage provides additional context within which to understand his expanded notion of form. Mike Sell has argued that “Kaprow's simultaneous embrace of Deweyan pragmatism and Pollock-inspired exploration of the limits of spontaneous gesture” helped “exorcise” the spirit of the avant-garde from the conservatism of the North American post-war art scene.<sup>32</sup> This chapter builds on these assumptions, investigating the importance Kaprow attributed to Pollock's 'environmental' work facilitated by a recognition of the importance of Dewey to Kaprow's approach. By addressing the productive tension between the fixity that formalism represents and the perpetual change that Kaprow explores as form, the chapter offers the first critical reading of Kaprow's challenge to formalism, and the implications that Dewey's notion of the aesthetic experience had on Kaprow's practice.

The first chapter also builds upon Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois' articulation of the formless as an operation, as a way to examine and maintain the instability of non-formal properties of modernist art, and their attempt to “put the formless to work”, in *Formless: A User's Guide* (1997).<sup>33</sup> The problem of Kaprow's attachment to the notion of form in light of his focus on experience, is one that formlessness circumvents in its application to object-based practices. Whereas Krauss and Bois destabilise the idea of modernist form eliciting non-formal elements, the challenge this chapter addresses is the appeal of a work whose formlessness is guided by a revised idea of formalism. It also answers Harold Osborne's challenge in the *British Journal of Aesthetics* (1980) that

“Despite investigation and considerable study of the statements put out by the devisers and defenders of environments I have not been able to satisfy myself that the experiences of total

---

32. Mike Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), p. 48.

33. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), p. 18.

involvement offered conform in any important way with any of the meanings customarily attached to the word 'aesthetic'.”<sup>34</sup>

The degree to which chance should function within Kaprow's practice became a pressing question for him since his incorporation of random sounds in his 1958 Hansa Gallery Environments. The second chapter explores Kaprow's developing interest in chance processes as a means of facilitating change, through an analysis of his assemblage *Rearrangeable Panels* (1957-59), his *Happening A Pastorale* (1959) and *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959). An overview of the activity undertaken by Kaprow in Cage's class on experimental composition at the New School provides the context to *Rearrangeable Panels*, produced during the two years of his attendance. It is through a comparison between Kaprow's *Rearrangeable Panels* and Cage's composition *Music Walk* (1958), within the context of the rivalry between aleatoric and indeterminate musical composition during the 1950s, that Kaprow's assemblage aids a recognition of the early tension between chance and control in his practice. An unpublished essay by Kaprow, "Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde" (c.1956-9), provides a heightened insight into the importance that chance and accident had for his ambition to fuse art and life. In it he reveres “the oriental attitude towards chance or the accidental in nature... a profound appreciation of the essentially unified changefulness of things”.<sup>35</sup> The essay gives further clarity to his ambitions for his work, specifically the allowance for unforeseen happenings as a means of invoking change, affording an increased significance to *Rearrangeable Panels*. The analysis of *Rearrangeable Panels* presented in this chapter builds upon Paul Schimmel's entry in the Kaprow retrospective 'Allan Kaprow: Art as Life' (2008) catalogue. I offer a substantive reading of the

---

34. Harold Osborne, “Aesthetic implications of conceptual art, happenings, etc.”, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1980, pp. 6-22, pp. 18-19. Osborne rejects Happenings in particular, as aesthetic on the grounds that they subvert the centrality of the art object as product that is the concern of “Traditional Aesthetics”, “Aesthetic implications of conceptual art, happenings, etc.”, p. 20. Osborne's rejection poses the problem that the first chapter, in part, seeks to address: how to understand as aesthetic a practice whose object is the process of its own generation.

35. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

work in relation to Cage's chance composition, and the nature of Kaprow's engagement with chance during the late 1950s. While Schimmel places the piece against historical precedents including the work of Kurt Schwitters, Marcel Duchamp and Robert Rauschenberg, and while he comments on the environmental nature of the piece, important considerations of the panels' formal implications are left unexamined. Specifically these include Kaprow's emphasis on accident and nature, expressed materially within the piece. While Schimmel suggests a relationship of *Rearrangeable Panels* to Kaprow's attendance at Cage's class, this chapter examines the piece in terms of the specific value that chance held for Kaprow in the context of this class.<sup>36</sup> In his eulogising article "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958) Kaprow interpreted Pollock's legacy as a delimitation of the scope of material for art production, noting that "Objects of every sort are materials for the new art".<sup>37</sup> Of the article Claire Bishop has argued: "that Kaprow understood the implications of Pollock's work in this way reflects the influence of John Cage".<sup>38</sup> In this chapter I move beyond the rhetoric of 'influence' to an investigation of the complex relationships between Cage, Pollock and Kaprow, specifically regarding Kaprow's expanded idea of form articulated in terms of 'experience' and his complex and often ambivalent engagement with chance. I find Kaprow's references to Zen to have pragmatist roots, problematising a distinction made by Kelley between Kaprow's introduction to chance composition contextualised by Cage's interest in Zen and the appeal of Deweyan pragmatism.<sup>39</sup> The chapter offers a much needed critique of the blurred relationship between Kaprow's early interests in American Pragmatism and Zen Buddhism, and the importance of the latter in particular for the development of his approach to chance.<sup>40</sup>

---

36. Paul Schimmel, "Only memory can carry it into the future': Kaprow's Development from the Action-Collages to the Happenings", in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, pp. 8-19, pp. 11-15.

37. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock", *Art News* 57, no. 6, pp. 24-26, 55-57, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, pp. 7-9.

38. Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p.23.

39. Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004), p. 8.

40. Jeff Kelley has argued that "roughly coincident with his attendance in Cage's class, [Kaprow] began realizing that the presence of people in the work was perhaps the most animating variable of all – and certainly

Closely related to Kaprow's interest in accident, enabled in part by Cage, was the disruption of the conventional role of the spectator, largely informed by Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1* (1952). The implied agency of the viewer within *Rearrangeable Panels*, that Kaprow would soon make explicit in the eradication of the audience entirely, is important to any discussion involving chance processes in his early Happenings. I use Kaprow's aborted Happening *A Pastorale* (1958) as evidence of the tension between his interest in the accidental and the highly prescriptive score that contributed to the dissolution of its performance. *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) continues this tension. I read this work against his proposed notion of the "Essential Absolute", interpreting the latter as a challenge to the idea of chance as a de-individuating phenomenon indifferent to outcome. I interpret the Essential Absolute as a unique moment in an infinite division of time, combining multiple contingent layers of experience; an assertion of individualism within the framework of simultaneity and accident that threatens to negate it. I read the accidental in *18 Happenings* as a protest against increasing mechanisation, exemplifying the tension between the universal and particular within the piece. Cage's accusation that the work was too controlled helps expose the tension between Kaprow's idealisation of the accidental as opposing control and his contrivance of accidental instances of sight and sound through his highly determined score. This is the beginning of the problematic negotiation that comes to a head in the third, fourth and fifth chapters.

The third chapter investigates Kaprow's continual engagement with chance and his growing interest in participation, focusing on two works from 1961: *A Spring Happening* (1961) and *Yard* (1961). I use his *Art News* article "Happenings in the New York Scene" (1961), along with early drafts of *AEH*, and first-hand accounts, to produce a close reading of the least controllable. Being interested in the variability of experience, of what cannot be predicted or controlled, Kaprow finally decided to build people into the environments, to physically incorporate them as random elements in a chance-operational collage. This was the beginning of Happenings.", *ibid.*, p. 22. The second chapter takes issue with this oversimplified association of the incorporation of spectators as participants in the early Happenings, to address the highly controlled nature of *18 Happenings* as a means through which the accidental could emerge.

*A Spring Happening* and to understand Kaprow's presentation of chance and risk within the piece as tightly choreographed expressionistic theatre. The violent treatment of the audience in *A Spring Happening* helps substantiate this claim, read against the legacy of Antonin Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty', and presented as a conscious engagement with the avant-gardist rhetoric of daring, risk, fear and tension associated with Futurism and Dada. A series of exchanges between Kaprow and fellow Happening artist Claes Oldenburg in the summer of 1961, over Kaprow's *Art News* article, provides a useful critique of and contemporary perspective on Kaprow's treatment of subject and agency in *A Spring Happening*. It also helps reaffirm the tension between Kaprow's wish to invoke chance and his absolute control of its manifestation.

The second half of the chapter explores Kaprow's Environment *Yard* in terms of the destabilisation it causes to the conventionally passive role of the audience within a gallery setting. My analysis introduces a discussion of the collaborative operation of *Yard* in terms of Dewey's aesthetic experience presented in the first chapter: containing the terms upon which a 'complete' aesthetic experience can be formed. Complicating the distinction between *Yard* as participatory and the passive engagement of the audience in *A Spring Happening*, I find that both coerce the audience into a de facto contract in which the experience of the piece is conditional upon an interaction with it; the terms of the contract presented within the space of the work itself. Within *Yard* the 'risk' Kaprow associates with chance in his 1961 *Art News* article is manifested through his divestiture of absolute control over the work. This leads to a discussion of his distinction between the categories of 'Chance' and 'Change' articulated in the final publication of *AEH*. I find Kaprow's description of 'Change' to be communicative of hazard, rather than a description of form as discussed in the first chapter, and find 'Chance' to be a rule-based means of limitation. Kaprow's theoretical categorisation confuses the distinction between chance and control in relation to his practice, highlighted by the

discussion of 'risk' in relation to *Yard*. The limitations imposed by *Yard's* commercial gallery context, what Kaprow terms the “objectionable conventions of space and purpose”, oppose the idea of a continuity between art and life but provide the control that he associates with art, necessary to the functioning of his practice.<sup>41</sup> A concluding discussion of *Self-Service* (1966) addresses the ontological pre-determination and problems of control exposed by *Yard*. I show that the permissiveness of *Self-Service's* participatory framework is limited by the enforcement of the tasks by a select cohort of volunteers according to Kaprow's rules. This illustrates the illusory resolution suggested in the final score, between the opposing notions of chance and control contained explicitly and implicitly in *A Spring Happening* and *Yard* respectively.

The fourth chapter expands upon the discussion of control and permissiveness to investigate the incorporation of play and non-competitive games in Kaprow's Happenings during the late 1960s and his Activities of the early to mid 1970s, meditations on social and material exchange, in these terms. I argue that Kaprow's focus on play was motivated by an interest in liberating artistic and industrial labour, broadly reflecting the preoccupations of the New Left: a political movement of the 1960s and 1970s that rejected the Marxist fixation with class struggle and labour unionisation of the historical left, focusing on practicable solutions to social reform.<sup>42</sup> I argue that Kaprow's distinction between play and competitive gaming are of particular significance in this context. Two overtly political Happenings: *Flick* (1967) and *Interruption* (1967) help illustrate the political climate to which Kaprow was responding. His reduction of political agitation in 1960s America to allegory and ritual in

---

41. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

42. This expands upon existing scholarship on the political overtones of Kaprow's work during the 1960s, from the focus on gender stereotypes and the critique of alienated labour, to the disruption of commodity exchange in art. This includes Johanna Drucker, Lee Baxandall, Harold Osborne and Judith Rodenbeck who have theorised Kaprow's Happenings and Activities as works of activism: Johanna Drucker, “Collaboration without Object(s) in the Early Happenings”, *Art Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Interactions between Artists and Writers (Winter, 1993), pp. 51-58; Lee Baxandall, "Beyond Brecht: The Happenings", *Studies on the Left*, No. 6, (Jan-Feb, 1966), pp. 28-36; Harold Osborne, “Aesthetic implications of conceptual art, happenings, etc.”, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1980, pp. 6-22; *Radical Prototypes*.

these works provides the context for his call made in “The Education of the Un-Artist” (1969) for “an attitude of deliberate playfulness toward all professionalizing activities”.<sup>43</sup> I read Kaprow's *Happening Moving* (1967) in the context of this sentiment to 'un-art' playfully, as a means to avoid the limiting conventions of institutional art practice. I compare the similar motivations of the London-based Artist Placement Group, and the work of Fluxus artists Milan Knížák and George Maciunas. I explore the freedom that play represents for the artist in relation to that of the worker in Kaprow's *Happening Runner* (1968). His sequel “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II” (1972) facilitates my reading of *Runner* as a critique of modern labour and new-felt sense of political responsibility; an extension of the “moral” foundation of his art discussed in the first chapter. I complicate Kelley's recognition of a 'work ethic' in Kaprow's Happenings, to understand this as a self-consciously critical presentation.<sup>44</sup> I argue that *Round Trip* (1968) reflects the ethos of non-competition as a political statement of the New Games Movement, while the dissemination of photos in Kaprow's parody of work in *Record II (for Roger Shattuck)* (1968) is used to present his relationship to narrative as gossip: a means to continue the performativity of his practice, liberating it from the limitations of institutional discourse.

The fifth chapter focuses on imitative play as a means of achieving what Kaprow described as “basic research”, presented in the context of his essays “Experimental Art” (1966) and “Education of the Un-Artist” (1974).<sup>45</sup> I read Kaprow's interest in play as a means of discovery as a reaction to the phenomenon that the sociologist Daniel Bell described as a 'post-industrial' society (1973). Bell had argued that the rise of a technical professional class had widened the gulf between theory and empiricism and had increased “the centrality of theoretical knowledge”.<sup>46</sup> Kaprow's focus on play as 'basic research' resists the phenomenon

43. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I” (1969), repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 104.

44. *Childsplay*, p. 161.

45. Allan Kaprow, “Nontheatrical Performance” (1976), *Artforum* 14, no. 9, pp. 45-51, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 163-180, p. 177.

46. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 20.

Bell describes. I argue that Kaprow's networked Happening *Hello* (1969), for the public broadcaster WGBH-TV in Boston, and his Activity *Message Units* (1972) were playful interactions with, and a means of investigating the socio-environmental impact of, what he perceived to be the 'feedback' value of technology. I find Kaprow's work from the late 1960s to have taken a shift towards a pedagogical model, broadly informed by his career in academia; in particular his co-directorship of the educational experiment Project Other Ways from 1967-68 and his role as a founding member of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). Within this period I consider his works *Basic Thermal Units* (1973) and *Time Pieces* (1973). I investigate *Basic Thermal Units* as a parody of scientific measurement that used the subjective experience of the participants' bodies as barometrical devices, and discuss *Time Pieces* in terms of its similar focus on corporeal experience and experiential exchange, including the emphasis given to the information gained through feedback sessions. I find the use of technology to both mediate and be integral to these pieces, such that Kaprow's structured and hierarchical approach to his Activities, and his emphasis on productivity, considerably complicates his idealisation of play as anti-authoritarian. Kaprow's friend and critic David Antin has compared Kaprow's two-person Activities of the late-1970s with the research of American anthropologist Edward Hall into culturally engendered spaces.<sup>47</sup> And Richard Schechner, editor of the *Tulane Drama Review*, had made the comparison between Kaprow's Happenings and scientific experimentation in the early 1960s.<sup>48</sup> My fifth chapter expands on these historical observations to understand the broader theoretical implications of his experimental pedagogical focus from the late 1960s. Finally I investigate Kaprow's problematic relationship to documentation and gallery display, using the example of his video work *Private Parts* (1976). I find that, rather than compromising the performativity of these later works, the documentation serves to provide evidence of the 'basic research' he proposed.

---

47. David Antin, "Foreword: Allan at work", in *Childsplay*, pp. xi-xxi, p. xvii.

48. Richard Schechner, "Happenings", *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Winter, 1965), pp.229-232, p. 230.

The chapter concludes by complicating Kaprow's relationship to play in relation to his own experiences of his Activities, in the context of his unrelenting focus on how they should function and be experienced. I argue that this focus contributed to increasingly smaller-scale work involving increasingly fewer participants in which he could establish a greater degree of control. Indeed the paradox of Kaprow's emphasis on the freedom of both worker and artist was the degree of control needed to fulfil this end. Kaprow's authoritarian attitude to his participants complicates his promotion of 'aesthetic anarchy' as a means of absolute artistic freedom. The thesis concludes that the tensions examined were necessary to a practice that operated on the margins of both life and art.

# 1. The Aesthetic Experience and Kaprow's Challenge to Formalism

*“Even a crude experience, if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of aesthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience.”*

– John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934)<sup>49</sup>

## **1.1. 'Change' as a form principle**

As American troops returned from the battlefields of the Second World War, Allan Kaprow came of age, turning eighteen a week following the last day of combat for the United States Army. The strength of the national economy and the dramatic rise in birth rates precipitated a housing boom and mass consumption, while the political landscape started to shift with the birth of the civil rights movement, the onset of the Cold War and the fervent anti-Communist sentiment that affected American domestic policy. From 1945-1947 Kaprow studied art history and philosophy at New York University, also studying painting under the abstract expressionist Hans Hofmann from 1947-1948 and for an art history Masters degree under the Marxist art historian Meyer Schapiro from 1950-1952. The historical context in which Kaprow developed as a young adult was a time of intense change. Furthermore, his education during this time had fostered an interest in early European avant-gardes and their response to technological, societal and political change, in particular those artists associated with Impressionism, Cubism and Dada. It caused him a few years later to remark that

“since the first decade of this century, pictures and constructions have more and more exhibited a short life span, betraying within a few short years, or even months, signs of decay and (to the restorer) 'faulty' technique. This has hardly been indifference on the part of the artists for, though some have worried over it, it [became] necessary as means were sought to

---

49. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), p. 11, hereafter *Art as Experience* (1934).

adequately embody those subtle and spontaneous feelings and responses that were the living expressions of change.”<sup>50</sup>

This 'faulty technique' was employed in Kaprow's *Untitled Collage* (1952) [fig. 9], a mixed media assemblage of paint, wire, plaster, and newspaper fragments produced shortly before beginning his tenure as Assistant Professor in the Department of Fine Arts at Rutgers University, to elicit a similar effect. The composition is hectic and disjointed, described by Grover Foley in the Rutgers University publication *Anthologist*, of which Kaprow was a faculty advisor, as conveying “the feeling of motion and, somehow, the lost, futile feeling that ceaseless change has brought to everyone at some time... This painting in a word is 'Change.’”<sup>51</sup> At the time Kaprow was experimenting with many different styles, but the preoccupation with change was evident.<sup>52</sup> It reflected a similar interest in process particularly in the work of artists from the New York School, such as Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. These artists, along with Kaprow, had a shared interest in the American pragmatist John Dewey's aesthetic treatise *Art as Experience* (1934), found in many of their studios at the time. Dewey had proposed the aesthetic experience as a description of a quality of experience pursued for its own ends: “an experience”, as opposed to experience generally. According to Dewey whenever a dynamic interaction between an individual and their environment coalesced organically into a qualitative unity of meanings and values, according to both prior experience and present circumstance, an aesthetic experience is formed. This was, Dewey contended, the basis of all art: “what actual existence actually becomes when its possibilities are fully expressed”.<sup>53</sup> Artists of the previous generation including Thomas Hart Benton, and Joseph Albers had taken great interest in Dewey's ideas, particularly concerning the promotion of what Benton had described as a

50. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (c.1960-61), Allan Kaprow Papers, (box 47, folder 12).

51. Grover Foley, “Vigor or Violence: An Analysis on Contemporary Painting”, *Anthologist* 26 (1955), p. 6, repr. in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, p. 4.

52. Ibid.

53. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Perigee, 2005), p. 285, hereafter *Art as Experience* (2005).

focus on “direct experience and living art”.<sup>54</sup> And these sentiments contained in Dewey's treatise sat well with artists whose work was the expression of an immersive physical and emotional interaction with their environment, depicting action, process and change.

Foley's depiction of *Untitled* as a focus on change was later re-emphasised by Kaprow in a 1960 draft of *AEH*: “not only has permanence and skill been largely given up in the literal finished product, but it implies philosophically a greater involvement in the changeable as a *raison d'être*.”<sup>55</sup> In the final draft of this definitive volume, Kaprow went further, proposing that

“Change – we may capitalize it in this context – suggests a form principle for an art which is never finished, whose parts are detachable, alterable, and rearrangeable in theoretically large numbers of ways without in the least hurting the work. Indeed such changes actually fulfil the art's function.”<sup>56</sup>

Change and the experience of it, possibly reinforced by the post-war economic, social and political shift he was living through and the work of the early European avant-gardes he had been exposed to during his years in formal education, became the foundation of his working practice. Kaprow is at pains to stress the role firstly of the everyday and, secondly, of context as a formal element within his work: his activity and the space in which he works are critical with respect to the visual interpretation of the changeable form he describes. Kaprow directs the limitations of this expression of change and ultimately fixes his manipulations for posterity. The impact of his focus on context was felt most concretely in his wish to collapse the distinction between art and life, expressed in his early draft of *AEH*, allowing for “the continuous stream of everyday life without imitating it or substituting it for art”.<sup>57</sup> However

---

54. Maurice Berube, “John Dewey and the Abstract Expressionists”, *Educational Theory*, Spring 1998, Volume 48, Issue 2, pp. 211-227, p. 215.

55. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (c.1960-61), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

56. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 169.

57. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

the latter ambition remained elusive, as the presentation of the everyday enforced a separation, a redoubling and inevitable imitation, such as the everyday material incorporated into collages such as *Untitled*: the chicken wire, newspaper print and junk ephemera of the collage are separated from non-art utility, imitating the everyday through their elevated representation. In this chapter I will consider Kaprow's work throughout the 1950s up to and including his *Environments* of 1958, to provide a foundation upon which to understand his later 'Happenings' and 'Activities' as enquiries into experience and change.

During the period under discussion Kaprow's experimentation ranged from abstract to figurative work, heavily informed by what he termed the “formalistic teaching” of Hofmann, and the supervision of Schapiro who had challenged the tradition of formalist art history.<sup>58</sup> In his review of Alfred Barr's exhibition 'Cubism and Abstract Art' (1936) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Schapiro had refuted Barr's formalist approach based on internal order: “there is no 'pure art' unconditioned by experience; all fantasy and formal construction, even the random scribbling of the hand, are shaped by experience”.<sup>59</sup> It repeated his earlier call in “The Social Bases of Art” (1936) for the recognition of “a context of experience”.<sup>60</sup> Schapiro's challenge to formalism, aided by Dewey's concept of the aesthetic experience, was instructive in allowing Kaprow to expand the application of a methodology he had been attracted to, from a focus on internal form to an appreciation of the context of art production. Kaprow later reminisced of his time with Schapiro that “I always promote myself as a lover of formalism – at the same time that context was present, that sense of the broader setting of the artwork as something that grows out of the real lives of real people... and the presence of

---

58. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 60, Allan Kaprow Papers. Schapiro had based his recognition of the social history of art upon Dewey's association of a continuity between the aesthetic and the everyday. See Molly Nesbit, *The Pragmatism in the History of Art* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2013), pp. 30 & 40.

59. Meyer Schapiro, “Nature of Abstract Art”, *Marxist Quarterly*, January–March 1937, pp. 77-98, quoted in Molly Nesbit, *The Pragmatism in the History of Art* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2013), p. 27.

60. *Ibid.*

politics and money, or the absence of it.”<sup>61</sup> Kaprow recalled that Schapiro's refusal to dismiss formalism altogether as a useful methodology, as many Marxist critics had done due to a perceived “exclusionary” “specialism”, gave rise to a consideration of phenomenological aspects of form.<sup>62</sup>

In the late 1990s Kaprow would reminisce about his undergraduate days at NYU and “particularly [the work of] John Dewey, who influenced me considerably”, noting specifically that he became “deeply influenced by his contextualism”.<sup>63</sup> Schapiro's classes at Columbia reinforced Kaprow's burgeoning interest in Dewey's aesthetic theory.<sup>64</sup>

Significantly Kaprow recalled his desire while studying under Schapiro to

“experience [art history].... As long as I was going to study art history, which I was doing, then I wanted the feel of it. That's another reason I admired Meyer Schapiro so much, because he, too, wanted that same thing.”<sup>65</sup>

Schapiro's recognition of experience in art, following Dewey, resonated with Kaprow, reinforcing the importance of experience to Kaprow's approach to art analysis and production. In a passage underlined by Kaprow in his undergraduate copy of *Art as Experience*, the “task”, as Dewey termed it, was “to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience.”<sup>66</sup> It presaged Kaprow's

---

61. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, pp. 13-14, Allan Kaprow Papers.

62. Kaprow recalled “I knew that I liked formalism for many of its qualities, and I would look at it in a different way than, say, the Marxist critics would look at it. They would look at it as a kind of exclusionism that was for specialists and therefore was elitist”, *ibid.*, p. 14.

63. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996, Encinitas, California, pp. 2-3, Allan Kaprow Papers. Kaprow's undergraduate notebook shows evidence of his exposure to both Dewey's *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Nature* (1925), Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 1, Folder 3).

64. Schapiro studied with Dewey and edited two chapters of his aesthetic treatise *Art as Experience* (1934). Molly Nesbit argues that Schapiro had used Dewey's theorisation of the 'aesthetic experience' as a means to approach his art historical analysis, in *The Pragmatism in the History of Art*, p. 28.

65. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 65, Allan Kaprow Papers.

66. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 3.

suggestion that “the line between art and life should be as fluid, and perhaps indistinct as possible”.<sup>67</sup> It is important to note that Kaprow found Dewey's philosophy hard to comprehend.<sup>68</sup> As such, this chapter does not present the intricacies of Dewey's concept of the aesthetic experience as a way to understand Kaprow's work, but uses Kaprow's selective reading of Dewey to explore the themes that emerge within his practice.

## 1.2. Using *Art as Experience* to understand Kaprow's early practice

Kaprow's interest in change is apparent in his undergraduate notes made at Columbia on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, specifically regarding the ability of Aristotle to “account for matter or change” giving Plato's eternal forms “an embodiment in actual matter.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed the contrast between Plato's ideal forms and Aristotle's emphasis on matter would be echoed by Kaprow's urge to create a practice emphasising the action of action painting without creating an abstract form. Other notes Kaprow made during this time illustrate his interest in Cubist collage, and the collage technique in Cubist painting. This interest would result in his collage-like approach to composition: from splicing materials, to Environments and physical spaces incorporating active participants. Writing on late-Cubism Kaprow noted

“Effect on depth being built up as from the surface collage, texture. Operativeness of artist felt as a necessary constituent of picture.

Disintegration of world used as a basis for putting together which will allow the character of operation to be predominant.”<sup>70</sup>

---

67. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 188.

68. Kaprow admitted in an interview “I went quite out of my head trying to figure out what [Dewey's] categories were, and failing.”, Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996, Encinitas, California, p. 3, Allan Kaprow Papers.

69. Allan Kaprow, undergraduate notes on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 1, Folder 3)

70. Allan Kaprow, notes on Cubism, Columbia University, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 1, Folder 7).

His collage *Untitled* clearly shows the dominant status of the 'character of operation': the slap-dash marks made on the black surface, along with the exposed wire and seemingly random detritus suggesting a lack of fixity; one of many configurations the composition could have taken. It was the genesis of what Kaprow anticipated as “a form principle for an art which is never finished”, contributing to the feeling of motion and flux that Foley had discerned.<sup>71</sup> Kaprow's interest in the activity of the artist as an explicit feature of the work developed throughout his time at Columbia, specifically in the communicability of experience and the limitations of a priori aesthetic theory in addressing change. He noted that the

“Weakness of Neo Kantian [sic] is the fact that they cannot explain variations. Humans conceptualize on basis of experience. Experience prior to a priori concepts. Thus an increasing separation between object and subject which entails the notion of distortion and increases need for activity as definite role.”<sup>72</sup>

Kaprow's emphasis on activity, the “operativeness” or “putting together” of the artist collapsed the object/subject distinction he perceived to be a distortion of the arrested experience. Dewey had attacked the formalist critic Roger Fry on a similar charge of considering form and substance as separate. In a passage bracketed and starred by Kaprow, Dewey noted that “[Fry's] implication is that [ordinary experience] is directly connected with subject matter, [the artist's interpretation] with form that is separated from any subject matter”.<sup>73</sup> Kaprow had read Fry on Matisse while studying under Schapiro, and Dewey's argument formed part of a larger dissent against what was perceived to be the artificial separation made by formalists between form and substance, a dissent that Schapiro had also voiced. Indeed, “The sum of the whole discussion”, Dewey wrote of his *Art as Experience*,

---

71. Fn. 51.

72. Ibid.

73. *Art as Experience*, p. 89.

“is that theories which separate matter and form... rest upon separation of the live creature from the environment in which it lives.”<sup>74</sup>

Dewey, a devotee of the pragmatist William James, understood experience as a fundamentally chaotic, dynamic and relational phenomenon, one that philosophy could not sufficiently understand through logic alone; for James and Dewey, the epistemological value of experience resulted from the consideration of both the individual and its relation to the environment. The appeal of Jamesian pragmatism lay, as Dewey wrote, in providing “a method of orientation” through which to understand the knowledge value of experience. James had proposed the concept of “pure experience”, both preceding consciousness and the phenomena through which knowledge is created. The knowledge value of experience was derived from continual experimentation. The criticism James faced naturally rounded on his contradictory definition of experience as an a priori category: if knowledge is dependent on experience, the idea of 'pure experience' preceding consciousness created a perceived inconsistency in his argument.<sup>75</sup> But Dewey followed his lead, understanding experience as James did: revisiting a state prior to the division between self and other, between subject and object. Kaprow's criticism of neo-Kantian philosophy illustrates a sympathetic Deweyan and Jamesian pragmatist approach. In addition, the everyday objects and his mark as an artist constituting the form of *Untitled* displays an environmental bias in which there is no 'other' to which the work refers, recalling a passage he had highlighted in his copy of *Art as Experience*: “In the act there is no distinction, but perfect integration of manner and content, form and substance.”<sup>76</sup>

*Art as Experience* was a significant text for the introduction of what, for Kaprow, would be a sustaining interest in an art of the everyday. However hard he found Dewey's

---

74. Ibid., pp. 130-131.

75. *Songs of Experience*, pp. 283-286.

76. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 109.

categories to comprehend, the significance he derived from the idea of aesthetic experience was summarised in a note following his reading of the text:

“Dewey

Art is part of life...

Means are ends [arrow to 'AESTHETIC']”<sup>77</sup>

The last sentence could describe Kaprow's mature practice in which process featured as an integral element, already evident in the change and motion that *Untitled* evokes. And it is Dewey's theorisation of form as contextual that makes it possible to understand the conceptual basis upon which Kaprow could incorporate non-visual elements into his practice: “Form”, Dewey had said to Kaprow's evident approval, “as it is present in the fine arts, is the art of making clear what is involved in the organization of space and time prefigured in every course of a developing life-experience.”<sup>78</sup> While the collaging of everyday material could rightly be attributed to Kaprow's association with Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, prior to his interest in Dada, Dewey's conception of form as processual illustrates how Kaprow's deliberate presentation of operational elements in his work is profitably approached through his reading of Dewey.

Dewey's ideas also provide a compelling background to Kaprow's emergent interest in an increased reciprocity between viewer and art work. For Dewey both the artist and viewer have a participatory relationship with the focal object, realised in the reception of the work. In a passage highlighted by Kaprow, Dewey argues that “to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience... Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art.”<sup>79</sup> The sentiment of Kaprow's note in the margin “perhaps wrong?” appears to be overturned in an article of 1958 in which he argued that

---

77. Allan Kaprow, undergraduate notebook, New York University, c. 1948-9, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 1, Folder 3).

78. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

79. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 54.

“The long shadow of Dante or Michelangelo is only a shadow after all, and not the intensity, the electricity that infused their art. We can approach them with understanding and genuine affection when we have made something actual ourselves. Until then we have no right to look them in the eye.”<sup>80</sup>

And then again, in an early draft of AEH:

“if we stop to consider that in order to grasp a Monet's quality of vision, a glance, albeit highly sensitive, is almost sufficient. For a Cézanne a half hour is necessary. There is no question here of one being better or worse. The fleeting moment synthesized by the Monet almost demands the same quality of perception on the viewer's part.”<sup>81</sup>

The emphasis on everyday material and the activity of the artist in *Untitled* is further understood in terms of Kaprow's interest in reciprocity outlined above. The presentation of everyday elements and raw movement in the work emphasise the 'character of operation' and diminish the barriers to perceptual empathy, enhancing the degree to which the 'quality of perception' of the artist can be manifested in the mind of the viewer. Kaprow's interest in the reciprocal relationship of the viewer would fully emerge in his Happenings and Activities in which the viewers became participants in the creative process.

### **1.2.i. Moral considerations of form and context**

Though Dewey dismissed the idea of morality as an a priori concept used to determine experiential limitations, or impose behavioural prejudice, Kaprow characterised his expanded notion of form, derived from his reading of Dewey, as moralistic. Kaprow had highlighted in blue a passage from *Art as Experience* in which Dewey states that “the work of art develops and accentuates what is characteristically valuable in things of everyday enjoyment.”<sup>82</sup> In the

---

80. Allan Kaprow, “The Demiurge”, *Anthologist*, Vol. 30, No. 4., 1959, pp. 4-17 (Rutgers State University), p.17, Allan Kaprow Papers.

81. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

82. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 11.

margin next to the passage Kaprow wrote “moral basis of art”, revealing an idiosyncratic understanding of Dewey's philosophy.<sup>83</sup> Developing this brief notation cited above, he had written in an undergraduate course book

“[Aesthetic Experience] has an ultimate moral or ethical foundation. Must decide which can be most incorporated into our likes and experience. Any concern with how to live and what to do is a moral concern.”<sup>84</sup>

If the aesthetic shared a reciprocal exchange with the everyday this, for Kaprow, necessitated a moral or ethical awareness. In an early draft of *AEH* Kaprow determined that

“There are two kinds of art within the body of the vanguard, that, insofar as they are fairly opposed, define a major issue of our time. This issue, which goes beyond art, is articulated by art and concerns itself with the question of what values we may live by today... The most popular, the aesthetic, is nevertheless slowly losing its vitality in the face of a massive growth of an art of moral preoccupations.”<sup>85</sup>

Kaprow's reference to the aesthetic in this context differs from the aesthetic experience: whereas aesthetic experience necessitates an extension of the art object into a reciprocal relationship to its context, Kaprow's reference to aesthetic distinguishes the purely visual from an art of “moral preoccupations”. At Rutgers censorship by the McCarthy administration was acutely felt: Kaprow was explicitly instructed by the university to avoid any social analysis in his teaching of aesthetics.<sup>86</sup> This was in stark contrast to his art historical training with Schapiro and may have intensified his felt need to stress the importance of ethics as an integral feature of the aesthetic. By the time his second statement was written, Kaprow had moved beyond the confines of an object-centred practice to creating

Environments and theatrical Happenings. Moral art, Kaprow contended “comes out of art

83. Allan Kaprow, handwritten note, in *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 11.

84. Allan Kaprow, undergraduate course book, New York University, c. 1948-9, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 1, Folder 3).

85. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

86. Allan Kaprow, transcript of interview with Judith Rodenbeck, Dec 1997, p. 14.

itself by perfecting and refining, or continuing the development of elements that belong to the closed organism of the works of art per se, apparently indifferent to outside considerations.”<sup>87</sup> It echoed a passage of *Art as Experience* Kaprow had highlighted in which Dewey argues that “there are two kinds of means. One kind is external to that which is accomplished; the other kind is taken up into the consequences produced and remains immanent in them.”<sup>88</sup> However, whereas Dewey thought that the art object was a concentrated representation of the aesthetic experience, communicable to others according to their facility to mentally recreate the work of the artist, Kaprow argues that 'moral art' has a potential affective relationship upon the everyday. For Kaprow moral art is not restricted to a dialogue between artist and viewer, but contains the potential to change the environment beyond this otherwise enclosed exchange. Though Kaprow's articulation of moral art is vague and without concrete examples, it provides a valuable insight into the motivation behind his shift from producing art objects to generating environmental and performative work.

Kaprow's idea of a 'moral art' is an important part of his challenge to formalism, contributing to his articulation of the 'informal'. He argued that in being “open to impurities of any kind... [moral art is] not formless as is often supposed, but informal.”<sup>89</sup> He seems to have believed that informality rather than formlessness still carries with it the idea of structure and the operational control of the artist as creator or, more accurately, curator of a process in which the art work becomes environmental. Situated between form and formlessness, the informal, Kaprow argued, remains “less involved with the history of art, though it is quite conscious of it, but is instead insistent upon questioning or asserting immediate, dumb experience, or aspects of experience which (implicitly) are therefore hateful or good.”<sup>90</sup>

---

87. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12). The word 'organism' is Dewey's term for the subject within the aesthetic experience.

88. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 197.

89. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

90. *Ibid.*

## **1.2.ii. The New York scene**

### **1.2.ii.a. The wider debate around extensive form**

Kaprow's idea of an extensive, moral, art reflected one side of a debate held between 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> April 1950 in the loft of 35 East 8<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, known as Studio 35. The three-day closed panel discussion of artists and critics was moderated by the artists Robert Motherwell and Richard Lippold, along with Alfred Barr. Studio 35 was an offshoot of Subjects of the Artist, an informal school established by, among others, Motherwell and Mark Rothko. The April panel discussion, through Barr's mediation and insistence on a label to describe the non-figurative abstract work of the artists in attendance, arrived at the name 'abstract expressionism'. Though there was disunity within the assembly as to the accuracy of the title, it nevertheless became fixed for posterity. Participants were divided into those who saw the artists' role as fulfilling an internal relationship of harmony, and those who argued that the artist's role was to have a felt impact on the outside world. The terms of the discussion reflected the wider debate around formalism, of which the differences between the critic Clement Greenberg's approach and Schapiro's emphasis on social context serve as one example. An exchange between Hofmann and Motherwell exemplified the contrasting viewpoints as it impacted on their practices. Whereas Hofmann emphasised the dynamics of internal relationships of parts in an art work Motherwell spoke of the inevitability of external relations between art and its context. Hofmann's approach to composition, what he termed "push and pull", was based on the principle that the relationship between abstract colours could impact spatial perception: a departure from the model of linear perspective in representational art. The focus on spatial relations and an interaction between parts, though internal to the work, was important for Kaprow's early development as an artist. The interest in articulating parts and the relationships between them is clear in his object-based work such

as *Untitled* and manifest in his mature environmental, performative and collaborative work.<sup>91</sup>

In the discussion, Hofmann outlined an argument echoed through Kaprow's developing interest in the interaction of parts within a work. Though discussing abstract form, Kaprow's emphasis on relationship recalls Dewey's reference to the interaction between an organism and its environment as the basis for an aesthetic experience to occur. His introduction to Dewey following his instruction with Hofmann may have clarified, or put into further relief, Hofmann's emphasis on formal relationships:

“One shape in relation to other shapes makes the 'expression'; not one shape or another, but the relationship between the two makes the 'meaning'.... You make a thin line and a thick line. It is the same as with geometrical shapes. It is all relationship. Without all of these relationships it is not possible to express higher art.”<sup>92</sup>

Recalling Kaprow's discussion on moral art as implicative of context, this compound lineage asserts itself in the notes Kaprow made of the work of Jean Follett shortly after his time at Columbia. Follett, a fellow student of Hofmann's and junk assemblagist, helped pioneer the 'junk' aesthetic of the 1950s. Kaprow described how “Follett's hushed placements of totemic almost magical beings, made from city waste, old screws, hinges, screen, almost parodies the elegant vertical-horizontal moralities of Mondrian.”<sup>93</sup> Mondrian's 'horizontal moralities' Kaprow describes, such as the grid of *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (1921) [fig. 6] can easily be seen as not limited within a border, rather implying an extension beyond the edge of the canvas. In a similar way Follett's *Many Headed Creature* (1958) [fig. 10] is unconstrained by a spatial boundary, the non-art material seemingly extending beyond the confines of the canvas, both visually and in the real-world status of the objects constituting

---

91. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 60, Allan Kaprow Papers.

92. Panel discussion, Studio 35, New York, (1950), Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt (eds.), *Modern Artists in America - First Series*, (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1951), p. 33.

93. Allan Kaprow, “Some Notes on the Present Exhibition”, Hansa Gallery Members' group show, Rutgers University, December, 1953, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 46, Folder 1).

the piece. Furthermore, the objects are arranged in a grid-like formation. The emphasis Kaprow gives to the relationship of form both within the composition and its extension beyond, evident in his reading of Follett and Mondrian, is manifested in *Untitled*: the composition appearing as an instance of a much larger work. Kaprow's reference to Mondrian in the context of the relationship of formal properties of a work is intriguing given Mondrian's approach to form. Like Hofmann, Mondrian's interest lay in the relationship between coloured forms within a work and the emphasis on non-representation. And both had developed a sensitivity to creating compositions in which tension between forms contributed to a sense of equilibrium, what Mondrian had described as a “dynamic equilibrium” as the “*destruction* of particular form and the *construction* of a rhythm of mutual relations”.<sup>94</sup> This was close to Dewey's formulation of the aesthetic experience requiring tension and resistance within a developing experience, in order for an experience to be 'whole' and unified; in order for it to be aesthetic. Kaprow's exposure to Mondrian, possibly through Hofmann, and Hofmann's own approach to formal tensions in abstract form, gives a more thorough grounding for Kaprow's receptivity to Dewey's emphasis on interaction in the aesthetic experience.

More closely aligned with Kaprow's interest in the 'moralities' of extension was Motherwell's response to Hofmann and his insistence on the relationship of art to its context. Motherwell had read *Art as Experience* many years before Kaprow, referring to it as “one of my early bibles.”<sup>95</sup> He stressed that

“It would be very difficult to formulate a position in which there were no external relations. I cannot imagine any structure being defined as though it only has internal meaning.”<sup>96</sup>

---

94. Stella Paul, *Twentieth-Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Resource for Educators* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), p. 52; Piet Mondrian, “Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art” (1937), repr. *Twentieth-Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, pp. 157-158, p. 157.

95. Maurice Berube, “John Dewey and the Abstract Expressionists”, *Educational Theory*, Spring 1998, Volume 48, Issue 2, pp. 211-227, p. 220.

96. Panel discussion, Studio 35, New York, (1950), *Modern Artists in America - First Series*, p. 33.

Though Dewey's text could be found at many artist's studios at the time, Motherwell's statement offers a concrete example of the way artists who were particularly receptive to Dewey's ideas were interpreting the idea of context.<sup>97</sup> Colour for Motherwell was abstracted in the same way as the elements of *Untitled* were for Kaprow: while the "E" recalled the newspaper industry, modern media, rapid communication, and ephemerality, so for Motherwell did colour remind the viewer of everyday associations. Kaprow's early interest, far from separate from the interests of Abstract Expressionist artists, merely reflected one side of the debate within their circle of the role and function of the art object.

### **1.2.ii.b. Kaprow's critique of form and process in the work of Jackson Pollock**

Kaprow's early interest in experience and his championing of process is evident in a lengthy essay he had dedicated to Jackson Pollock, an associate of those assembled at Studio 35, while in the first year of his masters degree at Columbia: "An Essay Written for a Course Given in Modern Art by Professor Meyer Schapiro" (1950).<sup>98</sup> In the essay Kaprow focused on what he had perceived to be the experiential qualities of Pollock's canvases. Having come across Pollock's work just three years previously, Kaprow began the essay with a statement describing it with some ambivalence, punctuated with the cautionary endorsement "I think that Pollock has something to offer of some merit."<sup>99</sup> It is an insightful piece for what it reveals of Kaprow's early interest in experience and his championing of process. Noting the focus on texture that pieces such as *Number 7* (1950) [fig. 11], *Number 17* (1950) [fig. 12] and *Earthworms* (1946) [fig. 13] share, he describes his experience of apprehending the works' "closeness" as a reflection of Pollock's immersion in his environmental canvases.

---

97. Maurice Berube, "John Dewey and the Abstract Expressionists", *Educational Theory*, Spring 1998, Volume 48, Issue 2, pp. 211-227, p. 221.

98. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 15, Allan Kaprow Papers.

99. Allan Kaprow, "An Essay Written for a Course Given in Modern Art by Professor Meyer Schapiro" (1950), p. 2, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 2, Folder 2).

Kaprow described how the emphasis on texture gave “the sensation of being 'brought up short'... [suggesting] the feeling of extreme closeness.”<sup>100</sup> This proximal awareness resulted in what he describes as a “kind of looking which suggests a movement like travelling or rambling.”<sup>101</sup> Kaprow's stated equivalence between Pollock's experience and that of the viewer rested on his notion that Pollock communicates the creative process. In Pollock Kaprow had found a seemingly concrete exemplification of a passage he had highlighted in his copy of *Art as Experience*: Dewey's description of “The real work of art... building up of an integral experience out of the interaction of organic and environmental conditions and energies.”<sup>102</sup> For Kaprow Pollock had, in his focus on texture, isolated the operative process, presenting process as aesthetic content. Pollock's “primary concern”, Kaprow contended, “has been with painting not as a clearly expressed idea, but with painting as an operation; he is 'in' his painting.”<sup>103</sup> By using the flatness of the canvas as a basis for a contextual interpretation, Kaprow's analysis contrasted with Greenberg's already existing description of the 'strength' of Pollock's work: “Pollock's strength lies in the emphatic surfaces of his pictures, which it is his concern to maintain and intensify in all that thick, fuliginous flatness”.<sup>104</sup> While Kaprow reveres Pollock's canvases as an impression of action, the “vague scheme” of repetitive pattern in the work he deems to be “uninventive”.<sup>105</sup> Describing the impact this 'uninventive' scheme has on the attention of the viewer Kaprow likens the experience of viewing the canvases to taking “a Sunday excursion”, in which the repetition disrupts this process and the experience is “not sustained”.<sup>106</sup> This cessation limits, in Dewey's terms, the ability for the canvases to elicit an aesthetic experience, arresting the

---

100. Ibid., p. 6.

101. Ibid., p. 9.

102. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 64.

103. Allan Kaprow, “Jackson Pollock” (1950), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 2, Folder 2), p. 16. Kaprow repeats Pollock's statement of 1947: “When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing”, Jackson Pollock, “My Painting”, in Robert Motherwell and Harold Rosenberg (eds.), *Possibilities*, New York, 1947/1948, repr. in Francis O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1967), pp. 39-40.

104. Clement Greenberg, 'The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture' (1947).

105. Allan Kaprow, “Jackson Pollock” (1950), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 2, Folder 2), p. 15.

106. Ibid., p. 14.

experience before its conclusion, limiting its consummation as an aesthetic experience. Furthermore, Kaprow remains sceptical as to whether the lack of control he perceives Pollock to have over the work's form can produce critically substantive work. "It is a serious question" he writes "which I do not feel I can readily answer, whether much of the control and order we seem to think necessary in the greatest art can ever be achieved by creating in this way."<sup>107</sup> It was the first iteration of a problem that would become increasingly relevant to his practice.

The experience Kaprow describes, of 'rambling' through the canvas becomes complicated through his analysis of parts within the work. Having stated that the forms interfere with the attention of the viewer, he nevertheless argued that Pollock's work facilitates a "feeling of unity".<sup>108</sup> Dewey had used this term to describe the result of an aesthetic experience. Ostensibly it was a straightforward category, though like many artists of the time, and according to Kaprow's own admission, the apparent simplicity of Dewey's terms could be misleading. For Dewey, unity was the result of an aesthetic experience, explained in a passage of *Art as Experience* underlined by Kaprow: "The existence of this unity is constituted by a single *quality* that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts."<sup>109</sup> Dewey's terms had begun to spread throughout the artistic community: the year after Kaprow had written his paper, the abstract expressionist Alfonso Ossario had written the introduction to "Jackson Pollock 1951" at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York. In it he described how Pollock's "painting confronts us with a visual concept organically evolved from a belief in the unity that underlies the phenomena among which we live."<sup>110</sup> For the Abstract Expressionists, Dewey's proposal of unity as "emotional" was appealing as a means of expression, though the appeal of unity for Kaprow, and whether or

---

107. Ibid., p. 16.

108. Ibid., p. 8.

109. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 37.

110. Alfonso Ossario, "Jackson Pollock 1951" (1951), Betty Parsons' Gallery, New York, ([http://archive.org/stream/JacksonPollock1951/pollock1951\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/JacksonPollock1951/pollock1951_djvu.txt), accessed 24th August 2013)

not taken from Dewey, directly or indirectly, was quite different. Pollock's work was, Kaprow stated, capable of being “perceived as a totality, an all-over viewing”, characterised as “a feeling of unity”, echoing the emotional foundation of Dewey's category and describing the status of the finished piece communicating the completeness felt by the consummated aesthetic experience.<sup>111</sup> However, Kaprow contended, this feeling precluded the perception of unity, the latter being attainable only through the recognition of the “parts” constituting the work. The unity Dewey refers to is one resulting from the interaction of the individual with its environment, a continual build-up of elements of perception. In his analysis of Pollock Kaprow works backwards from the feeling of unity the work projects, to a perception of the contributing factors to this unity as a development of parts, “seeing how they relate to their immediate neighbors”.<sup>112</sup> Developing this argument Kaprow observes how “Pollock's, more than any works of art I have yet seen, are almost completely paintings of parts to each other.”<sup>113</sup> Fittingly he describes the “relationships” between the 'parts', emphasising the interaction of elements within the work, developing towards the feeling of unity that characterises the work “in an over-all viewing”.<sup>114</sup> Again Kaprow's analysis betrays his interest in process that would increasingly be a feature of his practice, along with an emphasis on the separation of works as parts and the interaction between them. The focus on parts would become manifest in his assemblages, 'Environments', 'Happenings' and 'Activities', in which he strove to isolate parts in his work as a way of analysing the relationships therein. Kaprow's 'rambling' experience of Pollock's canvases would lead him to note years later in a eulogy that when apprehending his work:

---

111. Allan Kaprow, “Jackson Pollock” (1950), p. 8, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 2, Folder 2).

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid., p. 9.

114. Ibid., p. 8.

“it is necessary to get rid of the usual idea of 'Form', i.e., a beginning, middle, and end... We do not enter a painting of Pollock's' in any one place (or hundred places). Everywhere is anywhere, and we dip in and out when and where we can.”<sup>115</sup>

Kaprow retains the emphasis on experience in his interpretation of Pollock's work:

manifesting a dynamic, rather than fixed, identity contingent of the viewer's perception.

'Everywhere is anywhere' is a neat summary of his, by now, Deweyan reading of the result of a complete interaction with the environment, of a unified aesthetic experience. It echoes a passage from *Art as Experience* Kaprow had underlined: “Only when all means are diffused through one another does the whole suffuse the parts so as to constitute an experience that is unified”.<sup>116</sup> The importance Kaprow gave to the artwork's unity, the operation of the artist and the implied responsibility of the viewer, seen in his early reading of Pollock, would help direct his approach to form away from an object-oriented practice towards an examination of environmental interaction: between participants as creative agents and their relationship to a given context. It paved the way towards his conviction that “audiences should be eliminated entirely” as a necessary condition of a truly interactive form that not only implied but incorporated the conditions of experience.<sup>117</sup> The notion of the audience as other becomes obsolete when perception is understood to recreate the act of creation. His statement a few years later that “the painter thinks of the world as a continuum, as a great flux in which the principle of unity is change itself”, illustrates the importance of unity as a category through which Kaprow could emphasise his presentation of change and contingency.<sup>118</sup>

### **1.2.ii.c. Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and the recognition of context**

---

115. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 5.

116. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 118.

117. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 195.

118. Allan Kaprow, handwritten note on Rutgers exhibition, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1953, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 46, Folder 1).

Along with Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage became particularly important for Kaprow's developing environmental awareness and for a widening of what “form” could be made to include. Kaprow first encountered a performance by Cage around the time he wrote his 1950 essay on Pollock.<sup>119</sup> The performance established a significance for Kaprow in what he perceived as a shared sensibility between Cage's musical composition and visual art. In a later interview, Kaprow noted that “I didn't look at [Cage] so much as a specialist in music as I looked at him as a kind of equivalency of painting”, explaining that “I heard the silence equivalencies and sound equivalencies as a kind of all-over, low-contrast Monet – like one of those great big water lily paintings.”<sup>120</sup> It was a sentiment that reflected an observation he also made of Pollock: “One must go from part to part in a quasi-musical sense, with less shifting of the eyes to include the whole.”<sup>121</sup> His stated recognition of the equivalence between music and painting in Cage's output reflected Dewey's theorisation that medium was nothing more than emphasis:

“While the emphasis of the plastic arts is upon the spatial aspects of change and that of music and the literary arts upon the temporal, the difference is only one of emphasis within a common substance.”<sup>122</sup>

Cage and Pollock were working in the same circles: both attended the Abstract Expressionist Artists' Club, a competitor of Studio 35, and Pollock's statement about being “in [his] painting”, quoted by Kaprow in his essay, appeared in the one issue of the journal *Possibilities*, co-founded and edited by Cage and Motherwell. And, though Cage was

---

119. Allan Kaprow quoted in Joan Marter and Joseph Jacobs, 'Interview with Allan Kaprow', December 8, 1995, in Joan Marter (ed.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: The Newark Museum, 1999), pp. 131-134, p. 131: “I actually became aware of John Cage in 1950 or '51, before I had a job at Rutgers.”

120. *Ibid.*, pp.132 & 131

121. Allan Kaprow, “Jackson Pollock” (1950), p. 8, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 2, Folder 2).

122. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 208.

approached to create the score for Hans Namuth's 1950 film of Pollock at work, his deep antipathy to the painter had caused him to turn it down.<sup>123</sup>

Both Cage and Rauschenberg had been involved with the interdisciplinary arts institution Black Mountain College in North Carolina: Cage as a visiting tutor, Rauschenberg as an unofficial student. Kaprow recalls being offered an unpaid position following his Masters program, funds being unavailable due to the small number of students. While the college had been progressive in its approach to education since its foundation, its financial destitution and increasing isolation had enabled a closer discourse between those who attended, irrespective of their seniority. Dewey's educational philosophy had been important for the college's foundation, indeed he had taken a practical interest in the administration, sitting on the advisory council.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore the Bauhaus artist Josef Albers had published an article, "Art as Experience" (1935) shortly after joining as head of painting, a position he held until the late 1940s, in which he adopted many of Dewey's ideas contained in *Art as Experience*. Albers argued for a "change of method in our art teaching: that we move from looking at art as a part of historical science to an understanding of art as a part of life."<sup>125</sup> It was a sentiment Kaprow echoed two decades later in his wish to produce a 'moral' art, but was also an approach manifested in the work of Albers' student Rauschenberg. Prefiguring his 'combines', collages integrating everyday material similar to Kaprow's *Untitled*, Rauschenberg had created the series of *White Paintings* (1951) [fig. 14] at Black Mountain College. Produced in panels, they provided a radical departure from the emphasis on action of Abstract Expressionists such as Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline, and from any external referent. While others including Mark Rothko used abstraction to express emotion, or Barnett Newman the relationship of internal form, in Rauschenberg's series there existed nothing except the 'flatness' Greenberg had referred to reflecting the viewer's movement. It

---

123. *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*, p. 5.

124. Mary Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1987), p. 6.

125. Joseph Albers, "Art as Experience", *Progressive Education*, October 1935, pp. 391-93, p. 391.

was this reflection that, for both Kaprow and Cage, had the most impact. On a visit to Rauschenberg's Fulton Street loft in the early 1950s, Kaprow recalled

“I was walking back and forth, not knowing how I should take these things, even though they had a kind of pedigree already. And then I saw my shadows across the painting – moving.”<sup>126</sup>

Kaprow's recognition of the works' implication of context and viewer was an important one for him. The lack of any depicted referent implied an increased activity on the part of the viewer, eliciting what Dewey argued to be the necessary condition for the communication of an aesthetic experience. It contributed to Kaprow's openness to an environmentally based practice whose form extended into a given context. More immediately though, the *White Paintings* caught the attention of Cage. In a letter to the gallerist Betty Parsons, Rauschenberg had explained that this series allowed for “the suspense, excitement and body of an organic silence, the restriction and freedom of absence, the plastic fullness of nothing”.<sup>127</sup> The importance of the “silence” Rauschenberg speaks of to the development of Cage's practice substantiates the interdisciplinary equivalence Kaprow had perceived in Cage's work. Cage had begun thinking of the potential for silence in composition in a proposal for a piece entitled *Silent Prayer* (1948):

“I have, for instance, several new desires... first to compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to the Muzak Co. It will be 4 ½ minutes long – these being the standard lengths of 'canned music', and its title will be 'Silent Prayer'.”<sup>128</sup>

References to “canned music”, subscribing to the commercial regulations including the “standard lengths” of the Muzak Co. repeated many of the devices and terms employed by Marcel Duchamp, a close friend and colleague of Cage's at the time. The impact of the *White*

---

126. Allan Kaprow quoted in Joan Marter and Joseph Jacobs, 'Interview with Allan Kaprow', December 8, 1995, in Marter, Joan (ed.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, pp. 131-134, p.132.

127. Robert Rauschenberg, letter to Betty Parsons, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1951, repr. in Joseph Jacobs, *Random Order* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 28-29.

128. John Cage, proposal for *Silent Prayer* (1948), repr. in David Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 59.

*Paintings* on Cage's approach to composition was recalled by his infamous remark that Kaprow's observations repeated: "The white paintings were airports for the lights, shadows, and particles... a painting constantly changing."<sup>129</sup> The terms of what could be presented had shifted for Cage, from the presentation of content to using a medium that reflected the ever-changing formal attributes that context imposed. Cage later declared that Rauschenberg's panels were responsible for his 'silent piece' *4'33"* (1952), first performed at Black Mountain.<sup>130</sup> Composed of three movements, each was silent and lasted thirty seconds, two minutes twenty-three seconds, and one minute forty seconds respectively. A performer sits at his or her instrument without sounding it throughout the three movements. Its content was identical to the proposal for *Silent Prayer*, however its form was entirely different: an environmental piece contingent upon the variations of context. An article by Cage published a few years after the first performance of *4'33"* explained the implications of the shift from the presentation of silence to silence as a contextual device: "The situation one is clearly in, is not objective (sound-silence), but rather subjective (sounds only), those intended and those others (so-called silence) not intended."<sup>131</sup> Aware of the interplay between Cage and Rauschenberg, a relationship described by Cage as a "sense of absolute identification, or utter agreement", Kaprow wrote of the second performance of *4'33"* in the Carnegie Hall:

"I heard the elevators moving, a lot of people's laughter, creaky chairs, and coughing. I heard police sirens and cars down below. It was like the shadows in Bob Rauschenberg's pictures."<sup>132</sup>

---

129. John Cage, 'On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work' (1961), in John Cage, *Silence* (London: Marion Boyars, 2009), pp.98-107, pp.102-3; Branden Joseph provides a detailed analysis of Cage's statement in *Random Order*, pp. 33-42.

130. See Fetterman, William, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: notations and performances* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), p. 71, and John Cage, 'On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work' (1961), in Cage, John, *Silence*, pp.98-107, p. 98.

131. John Cage 'Experimental Music: Doctrine' (1955), in *Silence*, pp. 13-17, p. 14.

132. Cage described the relationship between Rauschenberg and himself as a "sense of absolute identification, or utter agreement.", quoted in Carolyn Lanchner and Robert Rauschenberg, *Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), p. 6.; Allan Kaprow quoted in Joan Marter and Joseph Jacobs, 'Interview with Allan Kaprow', December 8, 1995, in Marter, Joan (ed.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, p.132.

Recalling his encounter with the *White Paintings* Kaprow remarked “they suddenly brought us face to face with a numbing, devastating silence.”<sup>133</sup> Kaprow's second comment repeats Cage's recognition of the role of Rauschenberg's *White Paintings to 4'33”*. It further establishes what Kaprow had described as an equivalency between painting and music in Cage's work, and highlights the significance of both Rauschenberg and Cage to Kaprow's recognition of a contextual form. This is evident in Kaprow's statement that *4'33”* “was [Cage's] most philosophically and radically instrumental piece... in the sense that it made available to a number of us not just the sounds in the world but all phenomena.”<sup>134</sup> While the shadows of Rauschenberg implied context, *4'33”* was nothing if not the surrounding sounds, smells and movements of the immediate environment. Indeed Cage's approach overlapped with sentiments expressed by those sympathetic to Dewey's aesthetic ideas, including Albers' and Kaprow's blunt interpretation of *Art as Experience* as a model for the integration of art and 'life'. Speaking in the late 1950s Cage had argued that “When we separate music from life what we get is art... contemporary music is not so much art as it is life”.<sup>135</sup> The formal integration of context had as its wider aim for Cage, as with others, the blurring of the distinction between art and the everyday.

### **1.3. The emergence of an environmental practice in Kaprow's work**

The relationship between Rauschenberg's and Cage's work to Kaprow's continually environmental approach strengthened throughout the 1950s. In 1953 Kaprow co-founded the Hansa Gallery, an artists' cooperative in Manhattan, along with fellow students of Hans Hofmann, the name of the gallery paying tribute to their tutor. Kaprow's associates included the abstract expressionist Wolf Kahn, junk sculptor Richard Stankiewicz, expressionist Jan

---

133. Allan Kaprow, 'Experimental Art' (1966), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp.66-80, p.70.

134. Allan Kaprow quoted in *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*, p. 189.

135. John Cage, “Composition as Process” (1958), *Silence*, pp. 18-56, p. 47.

Müller, and assemblagist Jean Follett. Established the same year as Kaprow's appointment as a lecturer in art history and studio practice at Rutgers, the Hansa from its inception would be an important forum for Rutgers colleague George Segal and students including Robert Whitman and Lucas Samaras. It was a heterogeneous space and, though Kaprow viewed it in retrospect as a conservative gallery, it was the space in which his work transformed from object-based to environmental.<sup>136</sup> The gallery was also the site of significant cultural occurrences, including lectures by Greenberg and collaborations with Rauschenberg, including in the 'Hansa Gallery Members' Show' at Rutgers a few months following Kaprow's appointment.<sup>137</sup> The relationship of Rauschenberg to the group was fostered by Kaprow, illustrating the growing personal and professional dialogue between the two artists. Whitman in particular was, by the end of the decade, borrowing from Rauschenberg's work of the mid-1950s.<sup>138</sup>

Rutgers was, as Kaprow later commented, marked by a particular interest in the environment and a conscious effort to maintain heterogeneity: “we understood that one thing we had in common besides a 'feel' for the environment was un-groupiness.”<sup>139</sup> Furthermore the multi-disciplinarity favoured by the art faculty at Rutgers was regularly justified through recourse to the example and successes of Black Mountain College. Kaprow brought a teaching method to the college that developed the process-based methods of learning he had supplemented his art history training with. “Experiencing” art history, as he had termed it, had included manufacturing and treating his own paper, and producing ink and pens, emulating Renaissance methods.<sup>140</sup> At Rutgers, he had instructed his students to recreate Pollock's method of 'action painting'. He had also encouraged them more broadly to

---

136. *Childsplay*, p. 20.

137. “Hansa Gallery”, in Joan Marter (ed.), *The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art, Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 438-439, p. 439.

138. *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, p. 19.

139. Allan Kaprow, introductory essay in *Ten From Rutgers University* (New York: Bianchini Gallery, 1965), n.p., repr. in Marter, Joan (ed.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, p.2.

140. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 65.

“experience” colour phenomenologically. They were to achieve this by choosing the Kool Aid drink of their favourite colour, filling a bathtub to dilute the drink, and staying in the bath until they were dyed the colour they had selected. Of the exercise, Kaprow had recalled “they experienced – the main point of that assignment... they experienced color as a surround.”<sup>141</sup> It was a methodology sympathetic to Albers' call for a “move from looking at art as a part of historical science to an understanding of art as a part of life”, quoted above.

The work Kaprow was producing at the time of the Hansa's inception, including *Study after Velásquez* (c.1952-3) [fig. 15], *Red Forest* (1953) [fig. 16] and *Figures in Landscape* (1953) [fig. 17], were expressionist in style, regressive even, compared to his *Untitled* collage of 1952. Indeed he was described in a review of a solo exhibition in *Lent Digest* as a “forthright and vigorous expressionist”.<sup>142</sup> *Figures in Landscape* displays Kaprow's continuing interest in the expression of change. Both *Red Forest* and *Figures* suggest an increasing interest in apprehending the natural environment: being in nature as a way towards conflating art and life and expressing the interaction between individual and environment. Not only did Kaprow's focus on the natural environment contrast with his abstract collage, it was also a sudden departure from the figurative paintings including a series of reclining nudes he had produced the previous year [fig. 18]. It was an expression of intent to get away from the studio into the environment. As Foley had suggested of *Untitled*, these pieces, according to *Lent Digest*, emphasised “direction and motion more than form or substance”; they embodied the expression of change as everyday environmental phenomena.<sup>143</sup> *Figures* illustrates Kaprow's continuing experimentation with canonical styles, in its Kandinskyesque execution, along with an adoption of Hofmann's push-and-pull theory of colour: the spatial relief suggesting that his work “seems to concern the act of painting itself rather than the

---

141. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

142. “Alan Kaprow”, *Lent Digest*, 1955, reprinted in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, p. 102.

143. *Ibid.*

outpouring of emotion.”<sup>144</sup> Though Abstract Expressionists such as Pollock, Motherwell and Rothko used abstraction to convey emotion, Kaprow's interest had been in Pollock's “painting as an operation”. The review signalled the visual form this interest had taken: Kaprow was heading towards both a focus on the environment and on the activity of the artist apprehending it. The review exaggerates the emphasis on process over content however: the colours and the motion implied by the hurried rendering of form inviting an emotive response. Of particular interest to the thesis presented in this chapter, the review describes Kaprow's work's impact as “an immediacy... which conveys the impression of a headlong and almost hasty approach, but underlying the rapid execution of each painting is a backlog of experiment and experience which gives richness and conviction to the work.”<sup>145</sup> The immediacy of *Figures* was an early experimentation with Kaprow's idea of 'informal' art, “asserting immediate, dumb experience”.<sup>146</sup> Though Kaprow's concept of the informal came to describe the contingencies and 'moralities' of environmental art, *Figures* has an explicit environmental concern, albeit in representational form, with context and the communication of experience; the almost Impressionistic and Expressionist manner in which it appears emphasising environmental contingencies. While his later pieces would champion physical contingency, *Figures* expressed those of light and colour, while the multiple shifting perspectives resonate with Kaprow's interest in Cubist painting and the interest in the shifting nature of perception within an environment. These experiential elements relayed in the work are compounded by the temporal self-consciousness of the gestures on the canvas. Like his later reading of Pollock, *Figures* presents a “diaristic” account of his interaction with his work, clarified through the perceptible speed of its execution.<sup>147</sup> The expression of time as an aesthetic consideration was not only shared with Pollock, and to a similar extent with Cage

---

144. Ibid.

145. Ibid.

146. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

147. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 4.

and Rauschenberg, but also with Dewey's assertion of the sustaining nature of change. In his copy of *Art as Experience* Kaprow had placed a large star in blue biro next to the statement that “What exists are things acting and changing, and a constant quality of their behaviour is temporal.”<sup>148</sup> Kaprow's interest in communicating time was to fuel work that was increasingly becoming an investigation of experience, resulting in the question he articulated in a second draft of *AEH*, “What shape and time does our experience have?”<sup>149</sup> Though his work appeared to share sympathies with Pollock's, in the catalogue for the Hansa members' show at Rutgers Kaprow had firmly identified himself as, along with Rauschenberg, resisting the expression of activity contained in the “all-over” work of Pollock and Willem de Kooning. Distinct from the work of these figures, he suggested, “are the pieces by Follett, Kaprow, Leslie and Rauschenberg... composed in the broad asymmetrical divisions of the still very forceful Western tradition.”<sup>150</sup> The distinction made here between East and West repeated the association in his 1950 essay of Pollock's work with Chinese landscape painting. *Figures* was, according to this reading, the inheritor of Baroque Rococo asymmetry. Kaprow's simplistic division may be based on an inaccurate premise of the “overall” symmetry “characteristic” of Chinese landscapes, but the division is worth noting.<sup>151</sup> It puts into question whether, given the multiple perspectives in *Figures*, it is meant to be “rambled” through, as he had described Pollock's canvases, against the impossibility he noted of the same experience from a Cubist painting. However, the impression one gets from the work, along with *Red Forest* and *Study after Velásquez*, is an environment to “dip in and out” of as he would later describe Pollock's work. This is corroborated by the *Lent Digest* review of his work of this period and complicates the perception Kaprow had of his output as distinct from

---

148. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 21.

149. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1960-61, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

150. Allan Kaprow, “Some Notes on the Present Exhibition”, at Rutgers, Hansa Gallery Members' group show, December 1953, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 46, Folder 1).

151. Allan Kaprow, “An Essay Written for a Course Given in Modern Art by Professor Meyer Schapiro” (1950), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 2, Folder 2).

Pollock's emphasis upon action. They are snapshots of delimited environments, characterised by change. Shortly before the Hansa members' show Kaprow had written in his notes on an exhibition of Barbara Frost's work

“If change is a mode of construction (as well as destruction); if that is the 'shape' the artist has given to the world (in contrast to the finite, closed compositions of the Renaissance) then the pictorial elements which are utilised must express this idea.”<sup>152</sup>

*Figures*, *Red Forest* and his *Study* all express the idea of change, albeit fixed, prefiguring the presentation of change itself in his Hansa Environments of 1958.

### **1.3.i. Activity as form in Kaprow's 'action collage'**

Kaprow's experimentation with snapshots of delimited spaces and the apprehension of change continued in *Red Dancers* (1955) [fig. 19]. As in *Figures* this large-scale work conveys movement not only in the visual forms represented but in the manner of its execution. The dancers, whose art is entirely processual, explore the limits to which their art can be accommodated within the space they inhabit. The painting depicts an art form whose visibility is an unmediated, direct, presentation of change, satisfying Dewey's understanding of the “real work of an artist” that Kaprow had highlighted, fostering a cumulative experience “coherent in perception while moving with constant change in its development.”<sup>153</sup>

The following year Kaprow gave up painting entirely, focusing instead on “a kind of action-collage technique, following [his] interest in Pollock... done as rapidly as possible by grasping up great chunks of varied matter: tinfoil, straw, canvas, photos, newspaper, etc.”<sup>154</sup>

Action collages were seemingly products of their contexts; the outcome of an impulsive

---

152. Allan Kaprow, miscellaneous notes, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1953, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 46, Folder 1).

153. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 51.

154. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 60, Allan Kaprow Papers; Allan Kaprow cited in Paul Schimmel (ed.) *Out of Actions: between performance and the object, 1949-1979*, Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), p. 90.

interaction of Kaprow with his environment. *Baby* (1957) [fig. 20], marking the birth of Kaprow's son Anton, is a mixed collage of paper, aluminium foil, pieces of carpet, oil paint, chalk and rope, engulfing the viewer in its scale. Kaprow's activity is evident in the strips of cardboard separating the visual plane, hurriedly coloured, along with the slapdash presentation of carpet and the flattened used tinfoil. Time is expressed in the distinction between the evident haste in which elements such as the cardboard and carpet strips have been completed, with the paint flung at various parts of the canvas, and areas in which more care has been taken. The latter include the tinfoil flattened to explore the contours created by its former use, and figurative elements verging on abstraction, such as the cigar smoking cartoon shape in the bottom left corner or the depiction of a baby at the top right-hand side. In between haste and contemplation is the name of the baby's mother, Vaughan, fragments of which appear periodically throughout the piece. The emphasis on the act of its creation is an important part of the work's content: the "manner and content, form and substance", as Dewey had characterised constituents of "the act", indistinguishable within the aesthetic experience, remain distinct. In short, the object's content refers outside its immediate form. In other respects the work does appear as a presentation of an infantile state, close to James's reverence for what he perceived to be the "pure experience" of a pre-cognitive consciousness, able to engage in an immediately felt relationship to its environment. The materials are ripped apart in an exploratory engagement, experimenting with the surrounding forms as if for the first time, while the piece as a whole displays a naïve, unsophisticated treatment of materials. In addition, aspects of the painting look automatic, as if a stream of consciousness. "LADY" appears as an additional reference to the mother Vaughan, along with a diagram of a female and an abstract breast. The action expressed by *Baby*, as in *Figures*, *Red Forest* and *Study* is in part constitutive of the work's form, reflecting Kaprow's interest in Pollock. While the work is understandable as an environmental piece, the way in which this impacts Kaprow's

expanded “moral” form can be more concretely theorised in *Baby* with recourse to James's notion of the pure experience. It is through the application of James's idea, which in turn informed Dewey, to *Baby* that Kaprow's challenge to formalism becomes further clarified in terms of his recognition of activity as form within an otherwise visual practice.

### **1.3.ii. The 'legacy' of Jackson Pollock**

The qualities of James's “pure experience” that *Baby* evokes was alluded to, though perhaps not consciously referenced, by Kaprow in the work of Pollock. Kaprow's eulogy to Pollock was written as an immediate response to the latter's dramatic alcohol-induced death in 1956, and published two years later in *Art News* as “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958). Of Pollock's action painting, Kaprow observed that

“Pollock's discovery seems to have a fascinating simplicity and directness about it. He was, for me, amazingly childlike, capable of becoming involved in the stuff of his art as a group of concrete facts as if seen for the first time.”<sup>155</sup>

Kaprow's move away from painting to 'action' collage coincided with this re-examination of Pollock's work. In contrast to his balanced criticism of Pollock a few years earlier, bordering on ambivalence at times, in his eulogy he positioned himself as the successor to Pollock's contribution to modern art. Continuing his earlier analysis of Pollock's work as an environment to be wandered through, he now characterised this environmental wandering as an 'instability', preventing Pollock's work from becoming abstract<sup>156</sup>. Given the presence of Pollock's activity on and within the canvas, Kaprow argued, the viewer is caught between “the hands and body that flung the paint and stood 'in' the canvas and submission to the objective markings, allowing them to entangle and assault us.”<sup>157</sup> This description, echoing

---

155. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 7.

156. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

157. *Ibid.*

his definition of a 'moral' art, sees Pollock's work extending beyond the picture plane and into the environment: an "art that tends to lose itself out of bounds, tends to fill our world with itself".<sup>158</sup> The manner in which Kaprow describes this phenomenon indicates an action not limited to Pollock's working process, but remaining immanent in the work itself. The action-painting becomes, crucially, instigative of activity: the art object mediating a relationship between viewer, context and artist. Kaprow's understanding of the visual form of Pollock's canvases resists clarifying it as abstraction and comes close to Dewey's recognition of form as a clarification of "the organization of space and time prefigured in every course of a developing life-experience." The emphasis Kaprow gives to the object as the facilitator of a reciprocal awareness between viewer and artist echoes his early reading of Monet, and the dialogic relationship Dewey perceives between the viewer and artist, facilitated by the art object.<sup>159</sup> In Pollock's work, "the artist, the spectator, and the outer world are... interchangeably involved".<sup>160</sup> In his essay "Impurity" of 1963 Kaprow would articulate his position in a manner that resembles Dewey's argument concerning the role of the viewer in recreating the aesthetic experience:

"The Pollock image... is at some point an immediate reference to the action that created it, and this, in the mind's eye amplifies what is on the canvas into a far more complex theme, amounting, for the sensitive observer to a re-creation of the whole circumstance of the making of the picture."<sup>161</sup>

Kaprow's concentration on the environmental impact of Pollock's work diverges from Dewey's ideas concerning the aesthetic experience. Whereas Dewey emphasises the

---

158. Ibid., p. 6.

159. Judith Rodenbeck presents a revisionary argument that Kaprow's eulogy, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958) "calls out to be reread not in the affirmative, but... in terms of a problem that cannot be resolved." This problem, she states, is related to the complication of the term "action" in relation to Pollock's canvases: encompassing both viewer as a 'participant' in the painting, as well as their engulfment by the painting's scale; the individual mark of the artist and the associated loss of self, *Radical Prototypes*, p. 209. This paradox alluded to by Rodenbeck resonates with the problem of the fluid notion of change as a formal property of Kaprow's work: both appearing to negate the other.

160. Ibid., p. 5.

161. Allan Kaprow, "Impurity"(1963), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, p. 28-44, p. 39.

importance of an interaction with a given environment as the foundational dynamic of the aesthetic experience, Kaprow understands Pollock's canvases to both communicate the environment in which his aesthetic interactions occur, and have an affective relationship to the environments in which the pieces are situated. Pollock's environments are, for Kaprow, continually active within the contexts they are placed in; they are extensive 'moral' works according to his lexicon. Kaprow articulates this view in his eulogy: "what I believe is clearly discernible is that the entire painting comes out at us (we are participants rather than observers)".<sup>162</sup> It was a reading that expanded Harold Rosenberg's analysis of what he coined "action painting" in "The American Action Painters" (1952), published in *Art News*, in which he argued that "act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence. The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life."<sup>163</sup> In addition Rosenberg had stated that abstract expressionist painting was "not a picture but an event".<sup>164</sup> And that "the lone artist did not want the world to be different, he wanted his canvas to be a world."<sup>165</sup> Such observations resonate with Kaprow's reading and contrast with Greenberg's interest in Pollock as the epitome of an historical progression that was self-critical with respect to its medium.<sup>166</sup>

Kaprow intimated that the active form Pollock's work manifested, specifically the marks of its generative environment and the interaction with subsequent environments, was restricted through the use of paint. "Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses", he wrote, "we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements,

---

162. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 6.

163. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters", *Art News*, Vol. 51, September 1952, repr. Sally Everett (ed.), *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-garde, Contextualist and Post-Modernist Thought* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1991), pp. 55-64, p. 58.

164. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

165. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

166. See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960), in Clement Greenberg, John O'Brian (ed.), *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969, The Collected Essays and Criticism Art Theory and Criticism*, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 85-93.

people, odors, touch.”<sup>167</sup> In his 1950 essay, Kaprow had expanded upon his reading of the texture of Pollock's canvases, arguing that “when one knows a good bit [of Pollock's oeuvre], the net effect of having a texture presented so repeatedly, is to focus our attention on a visual experience which we might normally ignore.”<sup>168</sup> Following Pollock's emphasis on action, his heirs, Kaprow argued, “[will] show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored”.<sup>169</sup> Like the repeated texture, the everyday is made aesthetic in a Deweyan sense, by the concentration of its experiential properties, not usually appreciated in aesthetic terms. It was an aim that echoed Dewey's call to “restore continuity” between the “intensified forms of experience” of art works and the everyday.

For an artist and academic with a keen awareness of the appetite for clearly defined historical lineages, such as Barr's diagram accompanying his 1936 exhibition at MoMA [fig. 21], Kaprow's eulogy of Pollock was a shrewd publicity tactic. By 1956 Pollock's status as an icon of modern art was of a magnitude rarely seen. Situating himself and his contemporaries as the successors to Pollock's legacy, Kaprow attempted to fill the void of Pollock's absence and capitalised on the publicity surrounding his death. Plenty of examples presented themselves, both in newly emergent academic studies and in the work of his own associates, of work that extended into the environment and utilised objects of the everyday. Cage's admittance of sounds in his compositions, both contingent noise and noise created by everyday items, featured prominently for Kaprow at the time. He had been attending John Cage's classes on experimental composition at the New School for Social Research from 1957 and was aware of Cage's approach to experimental composition since the start of the decade.<sup>170</sup> Kaprow admitted in an interview later in his life that his decision to give up

---

167. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 7.

168. Allan Kaprow, “Jackson Pollock” (1950), p. 15, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 2, Folder 2).

169. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 9.

170. Though Rebecca Kim argues that Cage's “*field* conception of sound was conceptually more in tune, for instance, with the allover paintings of contemporaries like Jackson Pollock”, Rebecca Kim, “The Formalization of Indeterminacy in 1958: John Cage and Experimental Composition at the New School”, in *John Cage*, pp.

painting may have come from his growing knowledge of Dada and Surrealist art, having first read Motherwell's anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (1951) while at Columbia. Others associated with Hansa, such as Follett and Rauschenberg, incorporated everyday items in their work throughout the period in which Kaprow had been creating expressionist pieces. *Baby* seems to have more in common with Rauschenberg's *Rebus* (1955) [fig. 22], a combine fusing elements of the everyday, including paint, newspaper and fabric, in both material and execution, than with Pollock's work. Indeed, in an unpublished note for *AEH* in 1958 Kaprow wrote that "Rauschenberg's 'Combines' must be given credit for setting an example for all of us. They served as a catalyst for much that has since transpired".<sup>171</sup> Kaprow's contention that Pollock was responsible for his generation becoming "preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life" appears to limit the importance of Rauschenberg.<sup>172</sup> Indeed collage was so central to Kaprow's notion of a "moral" contextual form that he would spend the next two decades experimenting with it as a principle of composition widely defined. Describing his later Happenings as a "collage of events", it was a sensibility that emerged from his early collaged assemblages and Environments.<sup>173</sup> Thus the responsibility he gives to Pollock for the recognition of the everyday and for the creation of art through utilising "the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors touch" appears overstated.

The manner in which Kaprow discusses Pollock's work also reflected a contemporary interest in "open form" composition. Coined by Heinrich Wölfflin in *Principles of Art History* (1915), the term was initially used to describe Baroque-Renaissance art being 'closed'

---

141-170, p. 151.

171. Allan Kaprow, 1959 draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12); Edward Lucie-Smith argues that Cage's work incorporating 'activity of sounds' was adopted by Rauschenberg as a visual interpretation of this ambition, Lucie-Smith, Edward, *Movements in Art Since 1945* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), pp.123-4.

172. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 7.

173. Allan Kaprow, "The Happenings Are Dead: Long Live the Happenings!" (1966), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 59-65, p. 63.

and recalls Kaprow's understanding of the "asymmetrical western tradition". Wölfflin's observation that "the style of open form everywhere points out beyond itself and purposely looks limitless", bears a striking correlation with Kaprow's interpretation of Pollock's work as an "art that tends to lose itself out of bounds".<sup>174</sup> This can be explained in the contemporary interest in the idea of openness of form in its application to many fields, including the Polish architect Oskar Hansen's theory of architectural "Open Form" as social experimentation, and music, and Umberto Eco's literary criticism *Opera Aperta (The Open Work)* (1962). Earle Brown was a key figure in Cage's adoption of graphic notation to score his work and his decision to experiment with indeterminacy and chance composition. Throughout the 1950s both Brown and Cage produced works whose compositions were of indeterminate arrangement. In the late 1950s Kaprow, along with Rutgers colleague Robert Watts, and the artist George Brecht, had written a funding proposal, "Project in Multiple Dimensions", in which they observed that

"In all the arts, we are struck by a general loosening of forms which in the past were relatively closed, strict, and objective, to ones which are more personal, free, random, and open, often suggesting... an endless changefulness and boundlessness. In music, it has led to the use of what was once called noise..."<sup>175</sup>

All three signatories had been attending Cage's classes, evident in the last statement: a clear reference to Cage's interest in the creation of music through the use of all available sounds. Kaprow's discussion of Pollock according to the presentation of an open, extending, form, beyond the description of Pollock's canvases in his earlier essays as discrete environments, should be read in the context of his close association with Cage at the time.

---

174. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of Development and Style in Later Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), p. 124.

175. Allan Kaprow, George Segal, George Brecht, "Project in Multiple Dimensions", repr. *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, p. 2.

And yet Kaprow's imagined extension of Pollock's work interfering with the environment and assaulting the viewer still remained at odds with the object-centred work he had been producing. Existing as fixed forms, his action-collages and sculptural assemblages fell short of his comment-cum-aspiration of the early Hansa years: "When things change constantly without rest into other things, the 'things' are never completely things: at no moment do they rest enough to be whole and uniquely something with a given shape."<sup>176</sup> For an artist who would come to base their 'raison d'être' upon the idea of change, he was still some way off a principle of form that would express change without arresting it. Knowingly or not Kaprow was working towards a version of Dewey's expanded understanding of form, enthusiastically underlined in his copy of *Art as Experience*: "defined as the operation of forces that carry the experience of an event, object, scene, and situation to its own integral fulfilment."<sup>177</sup>

### **1.3.iii. The creation of a 'total art'**

"Allan Kaprow, the avant garde artist of Middlebush, has a surprise awaiting the public at Hansa Gallery in New York City" wrote a reviewer of Kaprow's three-week installation of November and December 1958.<sup>178</sup> The surprise was a material embodiment of his idiosyncratic interpretation of Pollock's canvases as surrounding and "assaulting" the viewer. The New York photographer Jon Henry recalled that "The room was plastic curtained – floor to ceiling to form a maze of narrow corridors – loud speakers in top corners fed by different tape recorders", while an unattributed cutting from a review at the time refers to the space being "filled with a construction of raffia... along with winking lights... smell of the particular disinfectant... a collage of broken mirrors."<sup>179</sup> [figs. 23-25] If, for Greenberg,

176. Allan Kaprow, miscellaneous note, November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1953, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 46, Folder 1).

177. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 137.

178. Unattributed review of *Untitled Environment*, Hansa Gallery, New York, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 4, Folder 15).

179. Jon Henry, letter to "Mike" February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 4, Folder 15); Unattributed cutting from a review of Kaprow's *Untitled Environment*, November – December, 1958, Allan Kaprow Papers

Pollock marked the end of an historical progression towards complete self-referential abstraction, for Kaprow he had succeeded in “destroying” painting.<sup>180</sup> Both were positive attributions: for Kaprow the death of painting marked the possibility for a more literal engagement with the environment. The pamphlet accompanying the show, authored by Kaprow, entitled “Notes on the Creation of a Total Art”, explained that the “idea of a total art has grown from attempts to extend the possibilities of one of the forms of painting, collage, which has led us unknowingly toward rejecting painting in any form”.<sup>181</sup> The model, he stressed, was not a Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk*, nor anything approaching its appropriation by the Bauhaus: these had created a hierarchy of distinct art forms. The proposal was for an art form that was distinguished by its sympathies with Dewey's theorisation of art as that which develops upon and refines the aesthetic experience found in everyday, non-art, environments. Taking “nature itself as a model or point of departure” by using “the sensory stuff of ordinary life”, the contingencies of sounds, sights, movement, in everyday experience would allow “a principle of the materials and organization of a creative form [to] be built.”<sup>182</sup> It addressed Dewey's call to 'restore the continuity' between the art work as a refined experience and other events and sensations that constitute such experience. But it made the process Dewey described into a methodology through which the aesthetic qualities of experience would emerge. Total art would derive its nature not from the fusion of disciplines but from the ubiquity of references and media. Reinforcing this notion, Kaprow stated “What has been worked out ... is a form that is as open and fluid as the shapes of our everyday experience but does not simply imitate them.”<sup>183</sup> His argument bears a striking similarity to Dewey's description of form as the clarification of “what is involved in the organization of

---

(Box 4, Folder 15).

180. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 2.

181. Allan Kaprow, “The Creation of a Total Art” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 10-12, p. 11.

182. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

183. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

space and time prefigured in every course of a developing life-experience.” Total art does not imitate the experience of the everyday, but accentuates the potential for the aesthetic experience that it may contain. Central to the continuation of this specific notion of the aesthetic was the “responsibility” that Kaprow gave to the viewer. The Environment as an 'all-over' form, the apprehension of which the discrete objects within it would mask, gave Kaprow reason to state in his essay, bordering on a set of instructions for viewing, that “we do not come to look *at* things. We simply enter, are surrounded, and become part of what surrounds us, passively or actively according to our talents for 'engagement’”.<sup>184</sup> The talent to which he refers for viewing as an active rather than a passive engagement had been explicit in his reading of Monet and Cézanne, repeating the sentiments contained in *Art as Experience* and underlined by Kaprow. The Environment acted, as Dewey suggested of all art, as a medium through which both artist and viewer were actively engaged. The work's “success”, Kaprow remarked, “depends on [the audience] as well as on the artist.”<sup>185</sup> The Environments at the Hansa were his first interactive pieces, extending his notion of a moral art from object to environment. The inclusion of the viewer as participant was of significance to Kaprow's challenge to formalism. If form was the clarification of experience, an expression of an engagement, the rigidity of formalism was insufficient as a way of apprehending this expanded understanding. Observing “the connection between the way people relate to one another, to their natural and artificial environments”, Kaprow would write that it “may suggest to the artist possibilities for bypassing the confinements of formalism.”<sup>186</sup> The Hansa Environments were a step towards this end.

#### **1.3.iv. Expansive form and the principle of 'extension'**

---

184. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

185. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

186. Allan Kaprow, *Formalism: Flogging a Dead Horse* (1974), repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 154-162, p. 162.

Though Kaprow had promoted the importance of context in his description of a “moral” art, the Hansa Environments went beyond the recognition or inclusion of context to what he would define a few years later as “a certain form-principle which we may call 'extension’”.<sup>187</sup> Using Pollock's sprawling delineations to frame the idea, the final publication of *AEH* describes it in simple terms: as the creation of a work whose form is not predetermined.<sup>188</sup> It emphasised the importance of change within his practice, whereby “the field is created as one goes along, rather than being there *a priori*”.<sup>189</sup> Though it reflected the importance Dewey placed on the aesthetic experience as developing and contingent, the final publication of his book was far more conservative than the drafts he had produced in the aftermath of the Hansa Environments. The drafts are progressive in the sense of expanding the understanding of form outside of the discrete work of art, but they also complicate the reading of Kaprow's resistance to formalism. Kaprow's challenge to formalism has been understood in this chapter in light of a Deweyan premise, as the clarification and communication of experience, recreated in the viewer's perception as the work's consummation. Developing the idea of extension, Kaprow describes it as an “organicizing interchange... which, besides blurring traditional outlines, is producing a new set of forms that in turn are reconditioning our experience.”<sup>190</sup> Leaving aside for one moment the reference to the organic, Kaprow's approach at this point portrays form as discrete instances rather than a process as Dewey theorises, the latter explicit in Kaprow's articulation of “moral” art and in his reading of Pollock's “environmental” form. Though form in this reading shares the qualities Dewey proposes, in that it 'reconditions' experience, Kaprow proposes an explicit argument for cause and effect that takes form to be material. However a subsequent passage describing the character of the Hansa Environments appears to contradict this seemingly regressive position:

187. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (c.1960-61), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

188. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 159.

189. *Ibid.*

190. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (c.1960-61), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

“Space is no longer pictorial but actual... and sound, odors, artificial light, movement and time are now utilized. Hence, extension as an organic function is meant to imply the whole world of experience.”<sup>191</sup>

The reference to organic development in both passages is consistent with Kaprow's expanded idea of form that his analysis of Pollock and the interest in the environmental displays. For Dewey the idea of organically expanding form, described in a passage highlighted by Kaprow as “The marvel of organic, of vital, adaptation through expansion”, rests on the viewer 'consummating' the aesthetic experience communicated through the art object; the work adapting and reforming itself.<sup>192</sup> Kaprow's statement that extension as a principle of form implies “the whole world of experience” builds on Dewey's recognition of the importance of the spectator as an active participant. Though the Hansa Environments are expansive in a formalist sense, the form is limited by the 'talent' for participation the viewer may have on entering the space. Kaprow describes in his essay accompanying the second Environment how when viewers “speak [and] observe others variously, [they] will constantly change the 'meaning' of the work by so doing.”<sup>193</sup> Thus the multi-sensorial presentation, like Kaprow's description of “allowing [Pollock's canvases] to entangle and assault us”, become instigative of a form limited only by the perceptual capacities of the viewers. Kaprow's concept of extension reverses the process Dewey describes whereby form is that which organises and refines the experience within the work. Likewise the “substance” within the Hansa Environments: the raffia, light bulbs, mirrors, is not experience formed, but provides the basis through which the interaction of the viewers with the work's materiality can assume an aesthetic form according to their perceptual capacities. So far as Kaprow's principle of extension within the Hansa Environments is concerned there is no medium through which the

---

191. Ibid.

192. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 14.

193. Allan Kaprow, “The Creation of a Total Art” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 10-12, p. 11.

expansive form can be communicated save for the literal changing shape of the space according to the visitor's physical, moving presence.

Kaprow's idea of extension indicates a renunciation of control by the artist over the work. His Hansa Environments initiate a form resulting from the viewer's active engagement with his work. Its material content is controlled, but the works' form, an intangible ordering, is contingent and endlessly elusive. The conflict of this position was what Kaprow observed as "a never-ending play of changing conditions between the relatively fixed 'scored' parts of my work and the 'unexpected' or undetermined parts."<sup>194</sup> Indeed this conflict inherent in and consequent upon his Environments, fuelled by the idea of extension, guarantees the expression of change as the basis of his work. "Extension" would inform the theorisation of his later Happenings: the "shape" of which Kaprow argued "is self-generating... [it] begins anywhere and decides to end somewhere else."<sup>195</sup> The Happening, a genre reliant on active participation, would be "shaped" by the participant's actions and interactions, both prescribed and indeterminate. The Environments had initiated what Kaprow described as a "contextual problem that old-fashioned formal esthetics simply cannot handle."<sup>196</sup>

#### **1.4. Extending further: activated spectatorship in *Push and Pull* (1963)**

Kaprow's understanding of form outlined in this chapter informed his practice throughout his career. In 1963 he participated in the Museum of Modern Art, New York's touring group show 'Hans Hofmann and His Students', curated by William Seitz. Comprising work by fifty artists, including six major pieces of Hofmann's, it contained contributions from Lee Krasner, along with fellow Hansa artists Wolf Kahn, Jan Müller, Richard Stankiewicz and Jean Follet. The accompanying hand-out listed forty-nine paintings, six sculptures and one Environment:

---

194. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

195. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

196. Allan Kaprow, "Formalism: Flogging a Dead Horse" (1974), repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 154-162, p. 161.

Kaprow's *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann* [figs. 26-28] at the Santini Brothers warehouse in midtown Manhattan.<sup>197</sup> The score was first printed in Wolf Vostell's *Decollage No.4* (1964). Vostell was a friend and colleague of Kaprow's involved in Fluxus: an international network of avant-garde artists who, from the early 1960s, worked in a wide range of media and experimented with modes of activated spectatorship. Indeed many of Kaprow's other close associates, including fellow Cage tutees Dick Higgins and George Brecht, had been involved in Fluxus from its inception. With an invited audience including Hofmann and Barr on the opening night, Kaprow's Environment comprised two rooms: one brightly lit, furnished, and painted yellow, the other lined with black tar paper and lit with a single blue light bulb. The first contained an array of domestic items, including a radio tuned to jazz, yellow chairs, a desk, and a dresser, a bed, a dressing gown, a vase of flowers and pictures on the walls. As a review at the time suggested, and as later confirmed by Kaprow, this room had been modelled on Van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles* (1888) [fig. 29].<sup>198</sup> The second room retained the feeling of the space of the warehouse, containing wooden crates, a stepladder, cardboard boxes full of straw and old clothes, a television set and miscellaneous junk items native to the commercial space. The work's title both celebrated and parodied Hofmann's approach to composition. "Points of view" written on cardboard were placed in a box at the entrance to the gallery, instructing the visitors to study the relationships between the spaces and the objects within them, including themselves. With the request for the audience not to sit, their participation was all but obligatory. Items in the room were to be arranged and rearranged to make a "significant composition" according to "having both a calculated and an intuited reciprocity obtain between every push in one direction, and every pull acting against it in another direction."<sup>199</sup> Indeed the scenario Kaprow had conceived, of

---

197. Checklist, "Hans Hoffman and His Students" (1963-64), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 8, Folder 2).

198. Brian O'Dougherty, "Happening Conceived by Allen (sic) Kaprow Moves Audiences to Childlike Behaviour", Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 8, Folder 2); *Childsplay*, pp. 80-82.

199. Allan Kaprow, "Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hoffman", Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 8, Folder 2).

the Environment being rearranged by the same individuals, created a completeness whose leftover was the experience generated. It was a complete cycle and emulated Dewey's description of the aesthetic experience: an interaction between organism and environment, overcoming resistance and attaining completion according to Kaprow's schematic.

In *Push and Pull* Kaprow played with the notion of 'significant composition' in Hofmann's terms. Anticipating a random contingency of occurrences, including children bringing toys into the space, Kaprow suggested in a comedic tone that “allowing for a variable proportion of three yellow toy ducks ... be considered equivalent to one medium-sized violet dress”.<sup>200</sup> Hofmann's formal colour relations had been spliced with Mondrian's 'moralities' and extended within the Environment. In a word, the Environment was “change” and its “form principle” was that of continual rearrangement not only of material objects, but of the visitors inhabiting the space, including their multi-faceted “properties”. In a bid to explain the alternative to delineated form Kaprow wrote

“Instead of 'forms' try simply an idea like: rooms full of people contrasted with empty rooms... Or, the 'room' made by your own feelings wherever you decide to sit down in the woods. Aren't these 'forms' also?”<sup>201</sup>

Here, Kaprow presents form in more explicit terms than in his introduction to the second Hansa Environment. It illustrates more clearly the idea of form being as “open and fluid” as everyday experience.

Form had been, for Dewey, the representation of the experience of space and time within a given environment. Kaprow had taken this notion and created a “form principle”, namely extension, in which the form would not be only arranged, but continually rearranged. Writing of the Happenings that had emerged within his own practice and that of other associates, particularly in the Reuben Gallery, the successor to the Hansa Gallery, he had

---

200. Ibid.

201. Ibid.

written “From the principle of extension described earlier, it follows that an ever-changing time-space continuum must be the real means of its application.”<sup>202</sup> Developing this, Kaprow would write of composition that “it is important not to think of it as self-sufficient 'form,' as an arrangement as such”, rather “composition is understood as an operation dependent on the materials (including people and nature) and phenomenally indistinct from them.”<sup>203</sup> It echoed Dewey's argument that there can be no distinction between form and substance, the two elements comprising the work. And Kaprow's promotion of the dynamic substance of his Happenings, “people and nature”, responded to Dewey's idea that form and substance are fused in the act of creation. The perpetual dynamic of the performative Happening fostered an ever changing relationship between space and time, form and substance, all elements fused in a sequence of continual enactments. The form of the Happening as a live event, what Kaprow came to describe as “a continually active field”, would ensure that Dewey's observation of the possibility for separation of form and substance in reflection would not occur.<sup>204</sup> Writing in the late 1960s Kaprow stressed this point, implying too the reciprocity of the viewer, an important legacy of his reading of Dewey: “Happenings are an active art, requiring that creation and realization, artwork and appreciator, artwork and life be inseparable.”<sup>205</sup> In Kaprow's challenge to formalism, emerging during the 1950s and impacting upon his practice thereafter, he had reacted to the abstraction of form championed by Greenberg, Fry and others. His position echoed the “fallacy” Dewey had noted of “a separation of art from the objects and scenes of ordinary experience”.<sup>206</sup> In short, Kaprow's presentation of form challenged art “which *stood for* experience rather than *acting directly upon it*.”<sup>207</sup> He would

---

202. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

203. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 198.

204. *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 109; Richard Kostelanetz, Allan Kaprow, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), in Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, p. 108.

205. Allan Kaprow, “The Happenings Are Dead: Long Live the Happenings!” (1966), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 59-65, p. 64.

206. *Art as Experience*, p. 12.

207. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 156.

declare in his only manifesto in 1966 that his work “takes on philosophy's early role as a critique of life”, forcing “attention upon the aim of its ambiguities to 'reveal' experience.”<sup>208</sup> Kaprow had generated a contextual problem that had neutered the value of formal aesthetics as a methodological approach; the latter could not hope to survive what would be, for Kaprow, an increasingly active practice.

---

208. Allan Kaprow, “Manifesto” (1966), in Ay-o et al, *Manifestos* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), pp. 22-24, p. 23.

## 2. The Role of Chance in Kaprow's Practice

“The mediate production of chance is... not the result of blind spontaneity in the handling of the material but its very opposite, the most painstaking calculation.”

– Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974)<sup>209</sup>

Kaprow's transfer of control to the audience in the Hansa Gallery Environments was the result of his increasing interest in chance and indeterminacy. The 1950s had been a fertile period of development for artists interested in chance. Following the publication of Robert Motherwell's anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets* and John Cage's chance compositions since the beginning of the decade, an awareness of chance as an avant-garde trope among artists of Kaprow's generation had taken hold.<sup>210</sup> In a review of Kaprow's second Hansa Gallery Environment Dore Ashton had referred to it as 'Neo-Dada', and *Newsweek* had published a piece in 1959 describing the work of Johns, Rauschenberg and Kaprow as 'Neo-Dada'.<sup>211</sup> It was the revised compositional devices of chance, collage, assemblage, the readymade, the grid, monochrome painting and constructed sculpture used by these artists that had contributed to the 'Neo-Dada' label. Having planned his first Environment at the Hansa Gallery Kaprow had become frustrated by the predictability of the sound landscape he created through wind-up toys, bells and other objects placed around the ceiling moulding. He had developed a close dialogue with the artist George Brecht, whom Kaprow had been introduced to by Robert Watts at Rutgers. Brecht, like Kaprow and Watts, was interested in the creative potential of chance, and in his essay “Chance Imagery” (1966) had explored the

---

209. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 67.

210. Texts from *The Dada Painters and Poets* were read at some Happenings. Al Hansen describes Larry Poons reading from Motherwell's anthology at the Hall Street Happening (1963), in Al Hansen, *A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965), p.13.

211. The term “Neo-Dada” had first appeared in Robert Rosenblum, “Castelli Group”, *Arts*, vol. 31, no. 8, May 1957, p. 53; Dore Ashton, review of Allan Kaprow exhibition at the Hansa Gallery, *The New York Times*, 14 February 1957, p. 20; “Trend to the 'Anti-Art'”, *Newsweek*, vol.51, March 31, 1958, p. 94. For a full discussion on 'Neo-Dada' see Susan Hapgood, *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art, 1958-1962* (New York: American Federation of Arts in association with Universe Publishing, 1994), and Helen Molesworth, “From Dada to Neo-Dada and Back Again”, *October*, Vol. 105, Dada, Summer, 2003, pp. 177-181.

history of chance methods from Dada, through Surrealism, to Jackson Pollock. Already in contact with Cage in connection with that essay, Brecht had arranged a meeting between Kaprow and Cage to assist Kaprow in working towards his wish to create “a kind of randomness” in his Environments. It resulted in Kaprow enrolling in Cage's class.<sup>212</sup> The class was notable for also being a springboard for other artists who would be associated with Fluxus and Happenings. These included Dick Higgins, who would publish Brecht's “Chance Imagery” through his Something Else Press, Hansa Gallery artists Al Hansen and Jackson MacLow, along with proto-Happeners Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg and George Segal. Brecht's essay helped contextualise the developments Kaprow would make in Cage's class, and Kaprow recalls Brecht adopting a position of leadership among the rest of the class as well.<sup>213</sup> And Brecht's subsequent work using chance methods helped encourage Kaprow to experiment further with indeterminacy. The class consisted of Cage detailing his work and approach, with the creative work done through compositional assignments completed outside of the classroom, usually with restrictions as to the length of the pieces or their medium of expression. Cage encouraged his students to use everyday items as instruments, utilising the noises as one would sounds conventionally regarded as music: “Given four film phonographs, we can compose and perform a quartet for explosive matter, wind, heartbeat, and landslide.”<sup>214</sup> The attenders would then present their scores to the class the following week. Watts had helped Kaprow achieve a random output of noise using a 'randomizing wheel' for the orchestration of sounds. Kaprow explains: “It had bumps on it that had a bar across the top that had microswitches that switched on and off various loudspeakers so that it

---

212. Joan Marter and Joseph Jacobs, 'Interview with Allan Kaprow', December 8, 1995, in Joan Marter, *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: The Newark Museum, 1999), p.132.

213. Allan Kaprow in conversation with Sidney Simon, early 1970's, quoted in Julia Robinson and Alfred Fischer (eds.) *George Brecht Events: A Heterospective* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2005), p. 264.

214. John Cage, “The Future of Music: Credo” (1937), in John Cage, *Silence* (London: Marion Boyars, 2009), pp. 3-6, p. 3.

constantly changed.”<sup>215</sup> These randomness generators answered his initial need for approaching Cage, but the importance of Cage's class transcended discrete tools of chance production. Its value to Kaprow was in the encouragement it gave to him to experiment with uncontrolled elements in his work, as an expression of what he described as “the essentially unified changefulness of things”.<sup>216</sup> Cage furthered Kaprow's interest in open composition, echoed in the funding application for “Project in Multiple Dimensions” quoted in the previous chapter, providing him with a method of creating works whose form was fluid. By the end of his time with Cage in 1959, Kaprow had the reputation of having attended the class longer than any other student and was asked politely to leave. Kaprow perceived this to be due to Cage's irritation with the overtly physical nature of his work, in particular the displeasure he experienced at Kaprow's first Happening, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), a simultaneous piece incorporating chance methods developed in Cage's class.<sup>217</sup>

### **2.1. The suggestion of dynamic form in *Rearrangeable Panels* (1957-59)**

The transition Kaprow made from the fixed composition of his action collages towards a 'self-generating' form is exemplified in his assemblage *Rearrangeable Panels* (1957-59) [figs. 30-32], produced throughout his time in Cage's class. It consisted of nine panels, each distinguished according to the materials or method used. These included tar, pieces of broken mirror, apples on a silver panel, apples on a green panel, collage, mirror and collage, elm leaves, elm leaves with gaps, and one panel of white paint. It was a collage that could be endlessly rearranged, reminiscent of Kurt Schwitters' continually expanding and morphing *Merzbau* (1923-27) [fig. 33], and Rauschenberg's combines such as *Minutiae* (1954) [fig. 34], an arrangement of three vertical panels of everyday elements including mirrored glass, wood,

---

215. Ibid., p.133.

216. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (box 47, folder 12)

217. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 23, Allan Kaprow Papers.

metal and fabric. The latter was designed to be used as a prop by the choreographer and partner of Cage's, Merce Cunningham, for a performance of the same name, around which the dancers moved. The shadow of Rauschenberg appears in both the white and black panels. And while the form of the piece is static, once arranged by either Kaprow or the curator, like in *Minutiae* the mirrors and white surface are changed by the presence of the surrounding bodies. As such the assemblage becomes self-generating in its reflectivity, visually paraphrasing Dewey's idea highlighted by Kaprow, that art is "recreated every time it is esthetically experienced."<sup>218</sup> The elements of the work seem to play-off against each other, the mirrors on tin foil explore variant qualities of reflectivity, responding also to the mirror and collage panel, the silver panel with apples, and less literally to the white panel. Nature is a prominent feature: the leaves and apples giving the construction a supplementary environmental emphasis, repeating his pledge to "take nature itself as a point of departure", whose relations are continually re-examined by its rearrangeable nature in order to establish change as its 'raison d'être'.<sup>219</sup> It was a piece in which the focus upon change provided the context for continual flux: the unfinished apples, and large seemingly unfinished areas in the broken mirror panel, along with the naïvely rendered collage, communicate the feeling of a work in progress; its rendering complementing the idea of process inherent in the piece. Produced over two years it was an organically expansive form, the 'marvel' of which, as Dewey had described, came from the implied agency of the viewer through the reflective surfaces, and the more direct agency of the curator. The latter would punctuate the panels' reconfigurations with the string of light bulbs around the top, presenting a theatrical construction similar to *Minutiae*. However the placement of the lights indicated its role as the

---

218. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), hereafter *Art as Experience* (1934), p. 108.

219. Allan Kaprow, "The Creation of a Total Art" (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 10-12, p. 10.

foundation for a stage and its operations, rather than a fixed form against which scripted change would occur.

### **2.1.i. Echoes of Cage's chance composition**

*Rearrangeable Panels* was a visual interpretation of the experiments in chance composition made in Cage's class, in which he had introduced developments he was making in his own practice. These included scores produced from 1957-1961 that functioned as methods to create a variety of indeterminate works, rather than compositions scored in advance. The parallels between *Rearrangeable Panels* and Cage's outlook become apparent with the comparison of Kaprow's assemblage to Cage's *Music Walk* (1958). *Music Walk* consists of a number of variables, all of which can be rearranged by the performers, occupying a similar position to that of Kaprow or a museum curator in relation to *Rearrangeable Panels*. Written for one or more pianists, who may or may not also control the dials of a radio according to their wish to do so, the performers are given nine sheets of paper with random dots, one completely blank sheet, and a transparency scored with five sloping parallel lines. A sheet is chosen by the performers and the transparency placed upon it in any direction “including those that would give no actions”.<sup>220</sup> The conjunction of the two present the foundations for the piece: the points representing sound events and the five lines different categories of sound, split into either piano or radio sounds. The first comprised either plucking or muting the piano strings, or what Cage described as “kilocycle glissando”: a continuous slide up and down the radio frequencies. The second line indicated either playing the piano's keys, if in front of it or, if behind, performing string glissandi on either single and multiple strings, or tuning the radio to a piece of music. The third line indicated either noises made from the inside of the piano, or radio static, with the fourth indicating noises made outside the piano or

---

220. John Cage, instruction sheet for *Music Walk* (1958), repr. in William Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), p. 50.

radio speech. The fifth line was for “auxiliary sounds”, including all contextual sounds, and singers if the performers desired. The attribution of the sounds to each line was, in addition, decided on by those performing: the dots or blank spaces on the ten sheets “interpreted by each performer in any order”.<sup>221</sup> While *Rearrangeable Panels* could only be configured horizontally, the dimensions fixed in advance, with no possibility given for the absence of any panels and with the light bulbs appearing always at the top, each part of *Music Walk* was indeterminate. The piece lasted as long as the performers agreed upon, with a fluid and open form accommodative of any interpretation they may suggest. It was what Cage had described in his lecture “Indeterminacy” (1958) as a composition that is “indeterminate with respect to its performance”, in which the “sequence” of parts elicits “the possibility of a unique form, . . . a unique expressive content for each performance.”<sup>222</sup> Cage's definition of indeterminacy was developed with support from Brecht, and was in direct contrast to the tightly controlled and fixed serial composition popular in Europe that Pierre Boulez had termed “aleatory”. Cage's lecture was part of what Virgil Thompson, chief music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune* during the 1950s, later described as “the modern music war that went on throughout the Eisenhower decade.”<sup>223</sup> It was a rivalry that divided Europe and America, connected to the wider anti-European sentiment of Cage's generation.<sup>224</sup> Indeed he had not only borrowed the use of the term 'indeterminacy' from Christian Wolff's essay “New and Electronic Music” (1957-1958), comparing European and American avant-garde music, he had also lifted chunks of it due to the lack of time he had given himself to prepare.<sup>225</sup> Against Cage's previous compositions in which aspects were decided upon through pure chance, Boulez had

---

221. Ibid.

222. John Cage, “Composition as Process, ii. Indeterminacy” (1958), in *Silence*, pp. 35-40, p. 35.

223. Virgil Thompson quoted in Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004), p. 154.

224. Judith Rodenbeck notes that “Pollock, true to the anti-European rhetoric of his generation, stressed the influence not of Dubuffet or Picasso – though he was following an analogous primitivist trajectory – but of Native American sand painting.”, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*, p. 211.

225. Rebecca Y. Kim, “The Formalization of Indeterminacy in 1958: John Cage and Experimental Composition at the New School”, in *John Cage*, pp. 141-170, p. 157.

limited the scope for contingencies to exist in his work. Karlheinz Stockhausen had composed *Klavierstück XI* (1956) two years previously: a piece consisting of nineteen fragments printed on a large piece of paper. The performers play each fragment randomly until each has been performed three times. Though similar to *Music Walk*, Cage had taken exception to the more prescriptive nature of Stockhausen's score, reflecting the experience of his close associate David Tudor. Having agreed to perform the piece, Tudor had recalled: "I remember my shock when I found the rhythmic values notated. How frantically I tried to get out of the four walls that the piece represented to me."<sup>226</sup> Stockhausen had, Cage argued, abused the model of indeterminacy he had championed in resistance to "European musical conventions."<sup>227</sup> "The work" he suggested "might as well have been written in all of its aspects determinately."<sup>228</sup> The only 'detraction' being "It would lose... its single unconventional aspect: that of being printed on an unusually large sheet of paper."<sup>229</sup> It was less than generous given the unanswered question Cage and Brecht had pondered, recorded in Brecht's notebook: "*How limited to be determinate?*"<sup>230</sup>

The developments in chance composition pioneered by Cage reflected a wider concern with the complexity of information in the Cold War age, such as the engineer Claude Shannon's information theory. Shannon proposed that the greater the disorder or 'entropy' of a message, the more information it would contain.<sup>231</sup> *Music Walk* provides enough variables for sound to be produced in varying ways and at indeterminate times, and the potential for information overload becomes apparent. However Cage contradicted Shannon's aim to isolate

---

226. David Tudor, quoted in Joan Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond* (Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), p. 125.

227. John Cage, "Composition as Process, ii. Indeterminacy" (1958), in *Silence*, pp. 35-40, p. 36.

228. Ibid.

229. Ibid.

230. Rebecca Y. Kim, "The Formalization of Indeterminacy in 1958: John Cage and Experimental Composition at the New School", in *John Cage*, pp. 141-170, p. 157.

231. Charlie Gere, *Art, Time and Technology* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), p. 97.

noise against the 'signal' in information technology, in providing an outlet for 'noise' as part of the piece.<sup>232</sup>

### **2.1.ii. 'Beat Zen' and the blurring of art and life**

The fixed parts of *Rearrangeable Panels* and the limited scope of its arrangement had more in common with the score of *Klavierstück XI* than *Music Walk*. However the emphasis Kaprow had placed on the 'extensive' form of the Hansa Environments, produced through the indeterminate movements of visitors around the space, reflected Cage's outlook, characterised by an increased lack of authorial control. In Kaprow's work of the 1960s and 70s objects or processes would be predetermined, with substantial importance given to the unforeseen occurrences elicited by the public setting of these predetermined parts. It was, as he described for his second Hansa Environment a “never-ending play of changing conditions” between fixity and indeterminacy. It was an openness to context much like Cage's *4'33*” and the acceptance of events and sounds that the pieces indeterminate of their performances could provide. In his address at Darmstadt Cage had described the “intolerable situation” of Western music in which “bias” was introduced with order and emotion, or through tables of random numbers using probability theories, “elements, that is to say, under the control of man.”<sup>233</sup> Describing his fixed compositions from the 1940s and 1950s as the creation of “a Frankenstein monster” controlling the performers, Cage's approach to indeterminacy was based on an openness to vagaries of the performer's behaviour as it facilitated the chance generation of sound. It was a development of the allowance he had given to everyday sounds in *4'33*” within an otherwise temporally fixed score: his resistance to the notion of separating noise and music was a prelude to collapsing the conventionally perceived hierarchy between everyday events and artistic acts. In his lecture “45' for a Speaker” (1954) he had attacked the

---

232. Ibid., pp. 97-100.

233. John Cage, “Composition as Process, ii. Indeterminacy” (1958), in *Silence*, pp. 35-40, p. 37.

“European thinking” that had “brought it about that actual things that happen such as suddenly listening or suddenly sneezing are not considered profound.”<sup>234</sup> Indeterminacy of performance allowed for such contingencies to be appreciated as part of a work. It was the acceptance of sounds in his work, created by any instrument, musical or otherwise, that elicited

“an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order or chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.”<sup>235</sup>

Cage's indeterminacy was a manifestation of a worldview he had attributed to his exposure to the work of Daisetz Suzuki, the figure responsible for popularising Zen Buddhism in the West. The ideas Suzuki was presenting had begun to capture the imagination of the wider American public. In 1954 *Time* magazine reported his lectures were “drawing a wide variety as well as a large number of students... Painters and psychiatrists seem especially interested in Zen, he finds”.<sup>236</sup> These painters included Ad Reinhardt and Mark Tobey among others. Coverage on Suzuki's teaching by fashionable magazines including *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, in which Cecil Beaton noted in the latter “He is curiously both like a saint and a dandy”, helped cement his dual position as both a figure of enlightenment and a glamorous exemplar of “Japanese style.”<sup>237</sup> While references to Zen and Suzuki became fashionable during the 1950s, especially within the New York elite, another group used his presentation of Zen as a means of justifying their rejection of middle class life and material values.<sup>238</sup> This included the beat poets Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, both having attended Suzuki's

---

234. John Cage, “45' for a Speaker” (1954), in *Silence*, pp. 35-40, pp. 146-193, p. 166.

235. John Cage, “Experimental Music” (1958), pp. 7-12, p. 12.

236. *Time* magazine (1954), quoted. in Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 40

237. Cecil Beaton, quoted in Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 33.

238. See *Virtual Orientalism*, p. 35.

lectures at Columbia along with Cage.<sup>239</sup> While Buddhist references had appeared in America prior to Suzuki's emergence, including Ezra Pound's unfavourable depiction in a section of his epic uncompleted poem *Cantos, LII-LXI* (1940), and the translation of the formative *Tao Te Ching* by Witter Byner (1944), Suzuki defined and popularised Zen with greater force through English translations of his texts *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1949) and *The Manual of Zen Buddhism* (1950). In the mid-1960s Cage had described Suzuki's role in changing his emphasis from abstract chance composition to the allowance of everyday sound and activity, expressed in his quotes above:

“I found through Oriental philosophy, my work with Suzuki, that what we are doing is living, and that we are not moving toward a goal, but are, so to speak, at the goal constantly and changing with it, and that art, if it is going to do anything useful, should open our eyes to this fact.”<sup>240</sup>

The philosopher Alan Watts had at the time described this interest in Eastern mysticism popular among Cage's generation as “Beat Zen”, in which “there must be no effort, no discipline, no artificial striving to attain [enlightenment] or be anything but what one is.”<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, Suzuki would later be charged with only presenting Rinzai: a school of Zen that promoted immediate enlightenment through the *koan*: a paradox to be meditated upon. Suzuki's presentation of Zen ignored the Soto school that believed in a slower approach to enlightenment through meditation. Suzuki's emphasis on “no striving” and immediate enlightenment resonated with the increasing interest in psychedelic drugs among those engaging in alternative lifestyles. Suzuki had, Watts maintained, been responsible for the growth of interest in Zen in the West, with an affirmative emphasis that misrepresented its

---

239. Joseph Jacobs has argued that “For Cage, life was largely perceived from a Zen perspective, much of which he acquired directly from Daisetz Suzuki's course on Zen Buddhism at Columbia University”, Joseph Jacobs, “Crashing New York à la John Cage”, in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (Newark: The Newark Museum, 1999), pp. 67-99, p. 68.

240. Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, “An Interview with John Cage” (1965), repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 43-58, p. 50.

241. Alan Watts, 'Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen' (*Chicago Review*, Vol.12, No.2., Summer, 1958, pp.3-11), p. 9.

fundamental characteristics including its defined hierarchy, strict discipline and specific tests of enlightenment. This approach was championed notably by Cage and emerged in work such as Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1957). However Watts was also against the interpretation of Suzukian Zen that had become accepted as authentic within the academic community.

Writing in *Philosophy East and West*, an academic journal exploring non-Western traditions of philosophy in relation to Anglo-American philosophy, Harold McCarthy had suggested also at the time that “Zen gives us no laws, no rules, no principles”.<sup>242</sup> Elements within America's academic community had become as complicit in promoting 'Beat Zen' as the Beats themselves. And Kaprow had noticed that the “studio talk” concerning Zen “hardly touches on the metaphysical aspects of this philosophy”.<sup>243</sup>

### **2.1.iii. Kaprow's articulation of an “oriental attitude towards chance”**

Throughout the construction of *Rearrangeable Panels* Kaprow had become aware of the benefits of relinquishing control to increase the changeable nature of the work. Chance, facilitated by its indeterminate composition, provided a way to carry the piece “beyond authorship, beyond the signature of the maker.”<sup>244</sup> These words appear in his unpublished article “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde” (n.d.), his first recorded written exploration of chance in contemporary art. Though the essay is undated, an approximate date can be arrived at by references made in the text. His focus on Paul Taylor's choreography and Jasper Johns' flag paintings, both produced from 1954, places it in the mid to late 1950s. And, given the references that explicitly revere Cage and his role as the artistic spokesman for Zen, along with the Cagean statements that appear throughout, it would seem likely that it was written during Kaprow's attendance at Cage's class. Additionally his observations on Zen

---

242. Harold McCarthy, “Zen: And Some Comments on a Mondo”, *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 17, No. 1/4 (Jan. - Oct., 1967), pp. 91-96, p. 91.

243. Allan Kaprow, “Kaprow, Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

244. Ibid.

beliefs were likely based on his experience at Cage's class. As Kaprow recalled: “He introduced me to the possibility of contemporary Buddhism and it had a profound effect on my outlook then”.<sup>245</sup> Kaprow argues that Zen consciously informed Cage's work, becoming “distinct enough from the larger body of the avant-garde to take this preoccupation seriously.”<sup>246</sup> The Buddhism he refers to is that of Suzuki, quoted in many lectures by Cage at the time and acknowledged by Kaprow to have been the frequent reference Cage used when speaking of Zen in his classes.<sup>247</sup> Indeed Brecht referred to Cage's teaching as “a kind of confirmation [of] the thought of Suzuki that I'd already discovered on my own”.<sup>248</sup> Kaprow sought out Suzuki's translated texts from the Greenwich Village bookshop Orientalia, whose proprietor and followers soon became regulars at the early Happenings developed in Cage's class. “It is this street level of Zen” Kaprow wrote “which has likely touched the imaginations of so many of the avant-garde” in which “the studio talk is what one hears most often”.<sup>249</sup> Zen had become a buzz-word through which to give a semblance of profundity to ideas that may or may not have been consistent with its historical teachings. While Cage had contextualised many of his ideas at the time with reference to Suzuki, Kaprow highlighted the importance of Suzuki's presentation of Zen for his own outlook. In a statement resonating with Cage's desire to collapse the distinction between music and noise, understanding both as sound and emphasising his own aim to conflate art and non-art, Kaprow argues that “Zen's emphasis upon the ordinary, the common event, must be understood... as a recognition of the essential naturalness of everything: nature in all its parts exists and man, being part of nature, exists

---

245. Allan Kaprow, “Notes for *Meditation I*” (1981), repr. in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, p. 279.

246. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

247. See the following lectures by John Cage in *Silence*, “Composition as Process: i. Changes” (1958), pp. 18-34, p. 32, “Composition as process: ii. Indeterminacy” (1958), pp. 35-40, p. 40, “Composition as Process: iii. Communication” (1958), pp. 41-56, p. 46, “Indeterminacy” (1958), pp. 260-273, pp. 262 & 266, “History of Experimental Music in the United States” (1959), pp. 67-75, p. 67; Allan Kaprow, transcript of interview with Judith Rodenbeck, Dec 1997, p. 39.

248. Brecht cited in David Davis, 'Zen Vaudeville: A Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus', in Ken Friedman (ed.), *The Fluxus Reader*, (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1998), pp.91-135, p.120.

249. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

also.”<sup>250</sup> It repeated Pollock's proclamation “I am nature”, referring to the apparent contradiction between his free, automatic, style and his ability to control his compositions: the dual relationship between the self and universal.<sup>251</sup> Kaprow's focus on nature also paraphrased Cage's call for an “affirmation of life”, opposed to order, including his criticism of *Klavierstück XI*, suggesting that “if [the artist] wills, ambitiously, to rise, to conquer, he... unconsciously fights against her, as Suzuki points out.”<sup>252</sup>

Kaprow's references to Suzuki's emphasis on the ubiquity of nature, enable a greater insight into his burgeoning interest in chance. Writing of the attraction of “the modern artist” to “the oriental attitude towards chance or the accidental in nature”, Kaprow explained it as the derivation of “a profound appreciation of the essentially unified changefulness of things [in which] nothing according to this view is really an 'accident', nor is anything static or closed.”<sup>253</sup> This sentiment was repeated in a letter of 1958 explaining his first Environment. In it he stated, “I try to begin with what I find in any average room. There everything 'happens' by nature, naturally..., and it is from such happenings that I take my clues.”<sup>254</sup> Nature was contingent and, for an artist who had been experimenting with automatic processes in his action collage, emulating Pollock, a phenomenon in which the unforeseen was a manifest quality was an appealing way to approach his practice. Through opening itself up to life art could be formed by the same unforeseen changefulness as in nature. Kaprow's critique reflects Brecht's discussion of Pollock's 'chance-imagery', a category that does not distinguish between art and non-art images, in his essay “Chance Imagery”, a first draft of which appeared in 1957. He writes “as art approaches chance-imagery, the artist enters a

---

250. Ibid.

251. Carolyn Lanchner, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), p. 35.

252. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

253. Ibid.

254. Allan Kaprow, handwritten letter to “Mr Tyler”, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1958, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 65, Folder 22).

oneness with nature”, using a quote from Suzuki to justify his point.<sup>255</sup> Chance, for Brecht and Kaprow, had become as ideological as Cage's embrace of indeterminacy in opposition to the aleatory. In a statement reflecting the perceived value of Zen, Kaprow writes of the role of chance in art “to suggest the existence of something else of importance as well, using the ordinary or unexpected as means, is for the contemporary artist weighed down by old habits, a veritable gold mine of possibilities and new experiences.”<sup>256</sup> The appeal of the accidental for Kaprow reflected Cage's non-discriminatory approach towards sound and the inclusion of otherwise secondary actions as primary. The presentation of contingent phenomena or “the accidental in nature” could yield greater diversity than the application of contrived chance processes. The accidental is a necessary factor in the realisation of change in his work and his presentation of this notion gives additional context to his call in his 1958 essay accompanying his second Environment at the Hansa Gallery to “take nature itself as a point of departure”.

Kaprow furthered the significance of accident to his burgeoning interest in blurring the distinction between art and “life”, arguing in “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde” that the “so-called 'accidental' in modern art... is at once evidence of life, of the unplanned and free”.<sup>257</sup> “To a Zen Buddhist”, he continued, “life is not paltry and no such distinction [between art and life] can be made. All life is directly apprehended and is as spontaneous as making a modern painting”.<sup>258</sup> Such work, Kaprow argued, existed in Johns' depiction of everyday objects and Paul Taylor's choreography. Johns' work, such as *Flag* (1954-55) [fig. 35] and *Target with Four Faces* (1955) [fig. 36], contained the “essence” of Cage's presentation of sounds “transposed to the visual”, in which “Truth [had] rarely been so blunt”.<sup>259</sup> Kaprow's interest in the accidental as “a veritable gold mine of possibilities and

---

255. George Brecht, *Chance Imagery* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), p. 12.

256. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

257. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

258. Ibid.

259. Ibid.

new experiences” is apparent in his description of Pollock's practice: “Employing an iterative principle of a few highly charged elements constantly undergoing variation (improvising as in much Asian music)” Kaprow writes, “Pollock gives us... a means to respond continuously to a freshness of personal choice.”<sup>260</sup> *Rearrangeable Panels* appears as an abstraction of what Kaprow perceives to be the 'personal choice' that Pollock's canvases provide. The emphasis on the choice of those apprehending the work as to the order of parts perceived and the manner in which they would be viewed has obvious parallels to the Cagean indeterminacy of *Music Walk*. And the variation of Asian improvisation that Kaprow analogises Pollock's work to clearly resonates with Cage's lean towards Asian composition as a means of avoiding the biases he had described.<sup>261</sup> It is intriguing that the appeal of the unforeseen or accidental for Kaprow is illustrated through both opposing notions of chance and choice. His increasingly performative and collaborative practice would force a re-think concerning the relationship between the accidental and personal choice.

#### **2.1.iv. The origins of Suzuki's Zen**

In “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde” Kaprow recognised a familiarity with what he had come to know as Zen, noting that “the West [may be] merely approaching a point in its own development where the teachings of Buddha can sound familiar.”<sup>262</sup> Indeed, summarising his argument he notes of Johns, Cage and the choreographer Paul Taylor that, though

---

260. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9, p. 5.

261. Rebecca Kim has identified a connection between Cage's teaching and an associated appreciation of Buddhism for Kaprow, specifically in Kaprow's article “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958). Of this article she writes “the language betrays an implicit homage, particularly toward the end as Kaprow outlines his renewed artistic convictions 'to give up the making of paintings entirely' and to 'become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of everyday life' with the same 'amazingly childlike,' 'Zen quality' that *Pollock* had exercised.”, Rebecca Y. Kim, “The Formalization of Indeterminacy in 1958: John Cage and Experimental Composition at the New School” (2008), in Julia Robinson (ed.), *John Cage* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: The MIT Press, 2011), pp. 141-170, p. 162.

262. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

“in the group as a whole, a variety of expressions are found and... seem to have a common and active participation in some of the basic characteristics of Zen Buddhism... One of the healthiest signs in the group as a whole is the total absence of orientalism... Believable, modern experience, is present here.”<sup>263</sup>

Suzuki's article “The Philosophy of Zen” (1951) published in *Philosophy East and West* shortly after his arrival in the United States, gives an insight into the familiarity Kaprow had sensed in his ideas. Suzuki emphasised the apparent appeal of pragmatism to his presentation of Zen, introduced in relation to *tathatā*: the Buddhist idea of an 'essence' of things that the experience of any given moment contains. Suzuki argued “The *tathatā* concept is what makes Zen approach pragmatism... [they both] accept experience as the basis of their theorization”.<sup>264</sup> “In a way”, Suzuki writes, “we can say that in the Zen conception of *tathatā* there is something reminding us of an aesthetic appreciation of works of art or beauties of nature.”<sup>265</sup> The statement repeats Dewey's thesis of the potential for all experience to embody the character of an aesthetic experience. Indeed the parallels between Suzuki's text and *Art as Experience* are remarkable. Suzuki continues “we are so made as to give expression to every experience we go through, and by thus expressing ourselves we realize that the experience grows deeper and clearer.”<sup>266</sup> It recalls Dewey's argument that “the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience”. Dewey's description of “the penetrating quality that runs through all the parts of a work of art and binds them into an individualized whole can only be emotionally 'intuited’” is repeated by Suzuki's explanation of *prajñā* “as differentiation undifferentiated; here the whole is intuited together with its parts; here the undifferentiated whole comes along with its infinitely differentiated, individualized parts.”<sup>267</sup>

---

263. Ibid.

264. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, “The Philosophy of Zen”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Jul., 1951, pp. 3-15, p. 7.

265. Ibid., p. 12.

266. Ibid., p. 13.

267. Ibid., p. 200; Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, “The Philosophy of Zen”, p. 13.

Subsequent discourse within *Philosophy East and West* recognised the similarity of both scholars' output. In his article “Dewey, Suzuki, and the Elimination of Dichotomies” (1956) Harold McCarthy argues that both Dewey and Suzuki had “a deep and instinctive suspicion of dualisms, all rigid dichotomies, and all logic with its built upon dualisms and dichotomies.”<sup>268</sup> He points to a wider argument, that “Dewey and Suzuki can, in the end, be viewed as supplementing (or complementing) one another”.<sup>269</sup>

The similarities between Suzuki's presentation of Zen and Dewey's pragmatism can be explained, in part, through Suzuki's education: a fusion of pragmatist and Buddhist teachings. In Japan he had lived as a lay monk in a Rinzai monastery for four years, under the instruction of Zen Master Soyen Shaku. Suzuki had accompanied Soyen to the United States to act as his translator at the World's Parliament of Religions of 1893, which was part of the World Columbian Exposition.<sup>270</sup> It was here that Soyen encountered Paul Carus, editor of Open Court: a publishing house focused on scientific and religious discourse, regularly producing pragmatist texts. Impressed by Soyen's speech, Carus invited him to spend a week together. Inspired by their dialogue Carus wrote *The Gospel of Buddha* (1894), presenting Buddhist texts in the format of the Christian gospels. On returning to Japan, Suzuki translated *The Gospel* into Japanese.<sup>271</sup> A letter from Soyen to Carus illustrates the admiration Suzuki had for the text: “[Suzuki] tells me that he has been so greatly inspired that he earnestly desires to go abroad and to study under your personal guidance”.<sup>272</sup> Vitialy, Soyen is cautious about endorsing Suzuki's ability to contribute in any scholarly way, describing him as “an honest and diligent Buddhist, though he is not thoroughly versed in Buddhist literature, yet I

---

268. Harold McCarthy, “Dewey, Suzuki, and the Elimination of Dichotomies”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 1956, pp. 35-48, p. 36.

269. Ibid., p. 35. Robert Sharf has argued that it was this “striking confluence of Western and Asian interests [that] prevented those on both sides from noticing the tenuous ground on which the exchange had been built, Robert Sharf “Experience” in Mark Taylor(ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 103

270. For the history of Suzuki's arrival in America see *Into the Light of Things*, pp. 148-161.

271. Ibid., p. 153.

272. Letter from Soyen Shaku to Paul Carus, repr. in *ibid.*, p.153.

hope he will be able to assist you.”<sup>273</sup> Suzuki was subsequently immersed in the work of Open Court from the age of 27 to 38, during which time *The Monist*, one of two in-house journals, regularly featured articles by pragmatist philosophers including Dewey and Pierce.<sup>274</sup> Suzuki researched courses at the University of Chicago in the late 1890s, including Dewey's.<sup>275</sup> Of particular importance however is Suzuki's exposure to the work of William James towards the end of his stay.<sup>276</sup> In *Pragmatism* James had defined two categories of experiential knowledge: immediate 'direct experience' and “an outer chain of physical or mental intermediaries” that was purely conceptual.<sup>277</sup> Suzuki's admission in *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (1934) that “Zen appeals to direct experience” situates his understanding of Zen within the conceptual framework of James's epistemological category.<sup>278</sup> Furthermore Suzuki's argument that “The foundation of all concepts is simple, unsophisticated experience”, and that *satori* (enlightenment) is “independent of logic and discursive understanding”, reflects the reverence James has for 'pure experience' as pre-cognitive.<sup>279</sup>

In a notebook from his time in Cage's class Brecht had produced a diagram signifying various ways of apprehending the world. In it he grouped the “outer chain of physical or

---

273. Ibid.

274. Ibid., p. 156

275. Ibid., p. 151.

276. Suzuki had returned to Japan two years after James's *Pragmatism* was published, introducing James's work to his school friend and philosopher Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945). Nishida's first philosophical monograph *Zen no kenkyū* (1911) (“A Study of the Good”) examined the notion of *keiken*, or “pure experience” that Robert Sharf argues was taken directly from James, Robert Sharf “Experience” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, p. 102. Sharf notes that no Japanese equivalent of the term 'experience' existed before the Meiji Period (1868-1912), and that the first Chinese texts on the subject of experience were translations of Nishida's neologisms that popularised the notion of 'pure experience' in Japan, *ibid.* Soon after Nishida's publication Suzuki began writing a series of articles for the Japanese journal *New East* from 1914, later compiled as *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1927). These papers are the first of his to argue that “Personal experience...is everything in Zen”, reflecting a peculiarly Jamesian approach, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 33.

277. William James, “The Tigers of India,” (1895), in William James, *Pragmatism and Four Essays from the Meaning of Truth*, (New York: New American Library, 1974) (reprint of *Pragmatism* 1907 and *The Meaning of Truth* 1909), pp. 225-8.

278. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (Kyoto: The Eastern Buddhist Society, 1935), p. 68.

279. *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, p. 33; Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki quoted in Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p.197. David Bernstein and Christopher Hatch have identified the similarities between Suzuki's presentation of Zen and James's pragmatism, arguing that “when Cage attended the lectures of Suzuki and consulted his writings, he encountered an interpretation of Zen that was richly charged with the pragmatism of James”, David Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (eds.), *Writings through John Cage's music, poetry, and art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 88.

mental intermediaries” such as art, philosophy and religion, against the “direct”, “non-symbolic” engagement with the world that Suzuki had proposed as Zen.<sup>280</sup> It reflected the distinction Suzuki made in *Essays in Zen Buddhism: 2<sup>nd</sup> Series* (1952) that “the masters of Zen Buddhism...are not philosophers but pragmatists' because 'they appeal to an experience and not to verbalism’”.<sup>281</sup> The appearance of Jamesian ideas concerning direct experience in Brecht's analysis of Suzuki is striking and illustrates the extent to which the pragmatist origins of Suzuki's Zen were communicated to Kaprow's contemporaries during the 1950s.<sup>282</sup> Given Brecht's instrumental role in reinforcing Kaprow's interest in chance processes, it is noteworthy that he situates the “direct” and “non-symbolic”, qualities that could describe chance, within Suzuki's interpretation of Zen. Brecht's characterisation of Zen in these terms reflects Kaprow's understanding of the “accidental in nature” as a particularly Zen interest.

In a co-authored paper of 1951 Suzuki had argued that

“In the West, experience and thought are differentiated and thinkers, professional thinkers, pursue the exclusive course of intellectualization. From the Oriental point of view this is unsatisfactory”<sup>283</sup>

In light of the discussion above this 'Oriental point of view' may well have been more Western than Oriental.<sup>284</sup> This helps explain the similarities commentators at the time perceived between Suzuki's Zen and pragmatism. It also contextualises the interest Kaprow discerned of Zen Buddhism in the direct experience afforded by the accidental. Direct

---

280. Anna Dezeuze, “Neo Dada', 'Junk Aesthetic' and Spectator Participation”, in David Hopkins (ed.), *Neo-Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 49-71, p. 62.

281. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

282. Hannah Higgins has argued in *Fluxus Experience* (2002) that artists schooled by Cage developed an empirical art form, noting that “Both American pragmatism and Zen Buddhism are radically empiricist, based on the principles of direct sensory perception of everyday life and the sense of connectedness to the world that results”, Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), p. 83. David Scott has argued that James helped elicit “Something of a double spiral... between Buddhism and American pragmatism”, David Scott, “William James and Buddhism: American Pragmatism and the Orient”, *Religion*, Volume 30, Issue 4, October 2000, pp 333-352, pp. 347-48.

283. Willmon Sheldon and Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki “On Philosophical Synthesis”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Oct., 1951, pp. 3-7, p. 7.

284. Robert Sharf has previously made this point in “Experience”, *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, p. 101.

experience understood as 'life' in Kaprow's essay both preconditioned and was integral to the occurrence of the chance event. That Suzuki's Zen was seized upon so readily by American artists may in part have been presentational: Suzuki's distinction of the oriental attitudes contained in Zen, not between East and West, but between the East and a perceived European worldview, chimed with and possibly helped form comments made by Cage and later Kaprow to the effect that the dualistic "attitudes and aspirations that are part of a European heritage" countered the 'direct experience' afforded by Zen.<sup>285</sup> Indeed the interest in the knowledge value of experience had been a reaction by Pierce and James, among others, to the perceived limitations of rationalist European metaphysics.<sup>286</sup> In addition the distinction between American experience and European idealism was by the late 1950s informing political commentary: the historian Daniel Boorstin had argued in 1958 that the "genius of American politics" was found in its embrace of real-life experience to guide decision making, against the fixity of European political ideologies such as Fascism, Nazism and Communism.<sup>287</sup>

There remains a further noteworthy aspect of the Western contribution to Suzuki's presentation of Zen. While an undergraduate at Tokyo University he had become interested in the work of transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, the impact of which he later recalled: "I was indeed, making acquaintance with myself then."<sup>288</sup> Emerson had opposed what he characterised as "historical Christianity", in which God was perpetually distant and judging, understanding God as only always present.<sup>289</sup> Unlike the equivalency McCarthy and Suzuki suggested between pragmatism and Zen, Emerson's link to Buddhism transcended the re-presentation of Suzuki's pragmatist-inspired Zen, engendered rather through an appreciation

---

285. Allan Kaprow, "Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde", n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

286. For an extended analysis see Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (London: Flamingo, 2002)

287. Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958)

288. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, "Zen Buddhism and its influence on Japanese Culture" (1936), quoted in *Into the Light of Things*, p. 151.

289. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Divinity School Address* (Boston, MA: American Unitarian Association, n.d.) pp. 8 & 18

of historical texts. It was under Emerson's joint editorship of *The Dial* that the first Buddhist text was published in America: the English translation of part of the Mahayana *Lotus Sutra*. This exemplified his long-term interest in legitimising non-Western religions, particularly those of Asia.<sup>290</sup> Suzuki's 'Oriental point of view', Kaprow's reading of "the oriental attitude towards chance or the accidental in nature", and Cage's understanding of the immanence suggested by 'Oriental philosophy' become complicated in light of Emerson's place, however tangential, in Suzuki's articulation of Zen. Unable to be geographically distinguished, the Orient becomes an ideological construct providing a perpetual exoticism within which liberating ideas, such as that of immediate 'enlightenment' popular with the Beats and the engagement with chance of Cage, Kaprow and Brecht, all appear.<sup>291</sup> The fervent embrace of chance that Kaprow was beginning to make towards the end of his time with Cage is evident in an article of his published in the Rutgers' publication *The Anthologist*, in which he stated that "I am ruthlessly impatient with anything I seriously attempt which does not shriek violently out of the unknown present".<sup>292</sup> However, for an artist with a strongly felt individualism, the challenge for Kaprow was to navigate the tension between this instinct and an embrace of a phenomenon that by its nature de-personalises. It recalls Pollock's description of his free yet controlled application of paint. That Kaprow's engagement with chance can be articulated also through recourse to Emerson's transcendentalism helps contextualise its varied theoretical background, of which the Orient provided a neat focus.

## 2.2. Accident and simultaneity in Kaprow's early Happenings

---

290. *Emerson*, p. 164

291. This argument takes its cue from Edward W. Said's idea of identity and difference in *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 332: "the construction of identity... involves establishing opposites and others whose actualities are always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from us". My argument also develops upon Peter Bürger's notion of chance as an ideological category for the avant-garde, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp.64-68.

292. Allan Kaprow, "The Demiurge", *Anthologist*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1959, pp. 4-17 (Rutgers State University), p. 4, Allan Kaprow Papers.

The foregoing argument concerning the significance Kaprow attributed to the “oriental attitude to the accidental in nature” as “evidence of life, of the unplanned and free” allows us to re-evaluate *Rearrangeable Panels* in terms of the function of chance in the work. It is worth considering the piece in terms of its serial composition, and specifically how it differs from other serial composition at the time, including Rauschenberg's white paintings, Yves Klein's blue paintings from the early 1950s [fig. 37] and Piero Manzoni's *Linea* (1959) [fig. 38], a scroll containing a seemingly endless singular black line. While the seriality of Klein's, Rauschenberg's and Manzoni's works appear cohesive by the repetition of a singular visual characteristic, each panel of *Rearrangeable Panels* is radically differentiated in the disjunctive *mélange* of contrasting materials and colour that comprise the work. Leaving aside the close proximity of the distinct parts to one another in the historical arrangements of the work [figs. 30-32], the strongest factor that enables these parts to be viewed as a coherent unity is the operation predicated by the work's title. This comparison highlights the value of chance and accident as notional components of Kaprow's rearrangeable sculpture. Kaprow exposes his work to 'life' as that which is “unplanned and free”, grounding the panels through a shared relationship to the deferred contingencies of “personal choice” as he had characterised Pollock's work. While Rauschenberg's, Manzoni's and Klein's serial compositions are fused through a recurrent visual motif, *Rearrangeable Panels* relies upon an allegorised presentation of nature as its common substance, as accidental, unplanned and free. The plastic apples reinforce the appearance of nature and accident as a predominantly symbolic element of the work, an early exploration of chance as a conceptual interest.

Cage's composition classes had re-established Kaprow's interest in the articulation of parts, expressed in his essay on Pollock. The fragmentation of work into parts increased the potential for contingent and unplanned events to occur within and between them, suggested by *Rearrangeable Panels. Communication* (1958), Kaprow's first public Happening, was a

performance of simultaneous elements that extended the static relationship of parts in *Rearrangeable Panels* to a negotiation of dynamic and disparate elements. Performed at the Voorhees Chapel of Douglass College at Rutgers in April, it was part of a weekly series of talks on the subject of communication for faculty members of Rutgers and their families. It was a multimedia environmental event featuring Kaprow dressed in tennis whites seated motionless on a stage surrounded by the panels of *Rearrangeable Panels*. It began with tape recordings of a speech made by Kaprow broadcast from three speakers placed in the balconies of the auditorium. As Kaprow later described “The speech began clearly on one machine but was repeated and overlapped during the other so that the words became unintelligible.”<sup>293</sup> It was followed by recordings of bells and whistles and the short phrase “how d'ya do?” presented through three speakers simultaneously but with a delay between each of them to create a similar cacophony to that of his speech. It harnessed what Kaprow had prized as the “accidental in nature” as a means of presenting what he had described in “Zen Buddhism and the Avant Garde” as the “unified changefulness of things”. The otherwise disparate parts were fused by their contribution to the accidental symphony of sounds that emerged at any one time. Like *Rearrangeable Panels* the differentiated parts had little significance in isolation but combined to communicate what Kaprow had identified as the unifying property of nature, change; though unlike *Rearrangeable Panels* the simultaneity of *Communication* enabled a concrete rather than notional presentation of change and contingency to eventuate. The recordings were followed by another series of simultaneous happenings: red placards were raised from where the audience were seated, while striped coloured banners were dropped, a woman bounced a red ball down the aisle, and two men towards the rear of the aisle lifted tin cans out of a bag banging them loudly on the table at which they were seated. Kaprow stood up, faced the mirrored panel on stage with his back to

---

293. Allan Kaprow, handwritten retrospective statement on *Communication* (1958), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 2).

the audience, examined his face before lighting matches and blowing them out. Aspects of the presentation recall Tristan Tzara's "Dada soir  e" (1917) at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, in which his simultaneous poem was read aloud by twenty performers whose readings often conflicted with each other, followed by Tzara's manifesto read with his back to the audience, catalogued in Motherwell's anthology. Though unlike the vocal protestations and physical violence of those attending Tzara's evening at the Cabaret Voltaire, the lunchtime audience of *Communication* did not contribute to the display of simultaneity and accident. While echoes of the historical avant-garde were clearly present in the work, Kaprow later wrote that *Communication* also replicated "similar events [that] were privately presented in John Cage's classes".<sup>294</sup> Indeed it repeated many of the elements of Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1* (1952) performed at Black Mountain College that Kaprow recalled Cage describing to his class. *Theater Piece No. 1* was a simultaneous presentation of indeterminate activity performed around the audience disrupting, as *Communication* did, the distinction between the performing and viewing spaces. The audience was divided into four triangular sections around a central performance space, with the performance extending into the aisles and between the sections and the empty space behind them. It included a piano recital, a record player operated by Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham dancing followed by a dog, and a lecture read by Cage. Kaprow determined Cage's piece to be the first Happening performed, noting in *AEH* that "his 1952 example was an encouraging influence."<sup>295</sup> Challenging the separation of audience and performance was for Kaprow an important part of disrupting the distinction between art and life that his experimentation with simultaneity and accident contributed to.

The conflation of the performing and viewing spaces and the promotion of simultaneity and accident came to a head a few months later in Kaprow's ill-fated Happening

---

294. Ibid.

295. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 212.

*A Pastorale* (1958). Conceived of for the Hansa member's annual picnic in the spring of 1959, the performance spaces were dispersed with the audience grouped into three units facing in different directions, some facing away from the activities performed [fig. 39]. Kaprow had written the score before coming to the picnic and asked for volunteers “at the last minute” as he recalled.<sup>296</sup> Broken up into eight sections, including two of audience participation, the score suggests a display of mostly simultaneous activities, including trumpet, bell and flute playing, painting, a recital, a ball game, and audience participation. The painter Miles Forst was to play the trumpet throughout the piece in a wooden enclosure surrounded by transparent plastic, his placement providing an off-centre axis for the rest of the activities. The score for his trumpet section was conventionally notated but also contained instructions for him to face a different direction each time the piece was played [figs. 40-41]. It ensured Forst's contributions remained as visual as musical, reflecting the visual emphasis of Cage's practice that he had imparted in his class.<sup>297</sup> The score for Forst's section developed from the work Kaprow was producing in the class such as *Tape #1* (1958) [fig. 42], a composition of spliced sounds including water dripping into a metal can, a bouncing ball, a handsaw, and rubbed glass. Kaprow's attempt in *Tape #1* to indicate pitch through a modified stave and instructions for the exact duration of each note echoes the conventional notation of the trumpet score of *A Pastorale* and the idiosyncratic timing of each section. Robert Whitman, an early Happenings artist, would draw with black enamel on the banners attached to the wooden frame to the left of the performance space [fig. 43], taking his cue fifteen seconds following the beginning of Forst's trumpet playing. Forst would also provide the melody to the constant percussion of the two ball catchers throwing their ball over the 'A' section of the audience. The diagonal line of continuity that Forst and the ball catchers

---

296. Kaprow quoted in *Childsplay*, p. 25.

297. “There was a visuality that Cage emphasized. He said he didn't like records, compared to concerts, because he couldn't see the musicians sawing or tooting away.”, Joan Marter and Joseph Jacobs, 'Interview with Allan Kaprow', December 8, 1995, in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, p.133.

formed would provide temporal cues for the other participants. Four painters would echo the activity of Whitman directly opposite, painting slogans either side of banners draped over wooden constructs. To the right of the four painters a bell player was to be caged in a pen next to the “C” section of the audience. Half of the audience would stand at intervals dictated by the score, and the painter and political activist Aristodemos Kaldis would pace between sections “A” and “C” [fig. 44] reading a darkly surreal speech detailing the mutilation of dead babies. Like *Communication*, the simultaneity of this multi-sensorial display would result in accidents of overlapping activity and the contingent perception of the audience depending on their location and the direction in which they were facing.

The piece's simultaneity would have produced a seemingly contingent and indeterminate piece, at odds with its rigid scoring. But it was the rigidity of Kaprow's plans that proved unpalatable for some last minute volunteers. As George Segal and Kaprow later confirmed, the Happening had to be abandoned after Kaldis and others who had initially voiced resistance to the tightly controlled actions started throwing beer cans and calling Kaprow a “fascist”.<sup>298</sup> Indeed the content and form of the piece would have provided a stark and at times sinister contrast to the otherwise carefree holiday picnic the artists were expecting. The tight orchestration of performers and the audience, including prescribed modes of seating, along with the physical imprisonment of two performers opposed Kaprow's broader interest in the accidental effects produced by the contingencies of parts and modes of vantage points. As the younger generation's answer to the newfound popularity of the Hamptons amongst the New York School, their carefree picnic in New Jersey had little space for totalitarian organisation. Rather than realising a unity through the chance relationships of parts, Kaprow found disunity in the fragmentation of the unwilling participants. It is ironic that, given Kaprow's reverence for the 'Oriental' attitude to the accidental in nature, and the

---

298. Joan Marter, “The Forgotten Legacy: Happenings, Pop Art, and Fluxus at Rutgers University”, in Joan Marter, Simon Anderson (eds.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (Newark: The Newark Museum, 1999), pp. 1-47, p. 10; Kaprow quoted in *Childsplay*, p. 26.

perpetual changefulness of things, in which “nothing according to this view is really an 'accident'”, the unpredictable and anarchic way in which *A Pastorale* unfolded nullified the performance. It could even be said to reflect the vulnerability of the tightly controlled scores that both Kaprow and Brecht had been producing in Cage's class. These contrasted heavily with their colleague Al Hansen's laissez-faire approach exemplified in his musical composition *Alice Denham* (1958), named after his muse at the time. The score was made entirely of numbers relating to the letters of Alice Denham's name through using Cage's system of transposing letters to numbers. The first number designated the sound, the next the duration with the sequence repeated throughout. It was performed for the first time in Cage's class using noisy wind-up toys with the score written on a large paper sheet hung above the blackboard. Each participant could start at any number and proceed from there in any direction; there was no predetermined starting point. Cage attempted to illustrate the concept of the piece to those in the class who were still unsure: “Let's all consider it a picnic. When one arrives at the picnic site, he then proceeds to do whatever one does at a picnic and after a while goes home or goes away or isn't there anymore.”<sup>299</sup> While Cage's picnic analogy illustrated the autonomy given to those involved for the contingent and indeterminate form of the piece, Kaprow's piece disrupted the freedom the non-metaphorical picnickers were expecting. Kaprow's description of the “continually active field” of the Happening was, unlike Hansen's score, only permitted within his pre-defined schematic, falling short of the freedom that his emphasis on the accidental in nature implied.

### **2.3. 18 Happenings in 6 Parts (1959)**

The disintegration of Segal's picnic reflected the infightings within the Hansa group. The mounting financial problems of the Hansa Gallery and the flight of its founding members to

---

299. Cage quoted in Al Hansen, *A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965), p. 98

other galleries contributed to its closure in 1959. Fortuitously Kaprow was approached in the same year by the sister of Anita Reuben [fig.45] to act as a programming consultant for Anita's newly established Reuben Gallery in the East Village. Kaprow brought with him several associates of the Hansa, of Rutgers, and of Cage's classes at the New School. The Reuben Gallery was an influential launching-pad for the soon-to-be ubiquitous term the "Happening", promoted by Reuben's advertising executive husband Max Baker to attract more visitors to the gallery, with the highly anticipated *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) the gallery's inaugural piece.<sup>300</sup> And it was Baker's recognition of the potential impact of the term the "Happening" that led Anita Reuben to commission Kaprow's *AEH*.<sup>301</sup> Kaprow had continued to experiment with chance methods of sound-production, noting in a letter of 1959 that, rather than use a white-noise generator, "I prefer the unexpected qualities that can be derived from the static on an old radio."<sup>302</sup> His interest in radio static borrowed from Cage's works including *Imaginary Landscapes IV* (1951) and *Radio Music* (1956). The three-dimensional equivalent of radio static was what Kaprow longed for: the production of chance effects within a controlled environment. The products of his experiments in sound were incorporated into *18 Happenings* through four loud speakers around the gallery, including fragmented voices spliced with electronic noise.<sup>303</sup> In the same letter Kaprow alludes to the preparations for *18 Happenings*:

"I am very busy now working in N.Y. City in a large space in preparation for a performance in the fall. I am building a series of semi-transparent compartments in which several scored 'Happenings' will take place simultaneously. These will be partially visible and completely audible to the audience in each compartment."<sup>304</sup>

---

300. Joseph Jacobs, "Crashing New York à la John Cage", in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, pp.65-99, p. 76; "Happenings", in *The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art, Volume 1*, pp. 440-443, p. 441.

301. "Happenings", in *The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art, Volume 1*, pp. 440-443, p. 441.

302. Allan Kaprow, letter to "Mr König", 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

303. Allan Kaprow, sound tape reels for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 80, R9-R11).

304. Allan Kaprow, letter to "Mr König", 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

*18 Happenings* combined the simultaneity of *A Pastorale* and *Rearrangeable Panels* with the environmental experiments produced the previous year at the Hansa Gallery. Indeed *Rearrangeable Panels* functioned within the piece as a cluster of colonising cells, its panels spread out over two rooms around which the parts became an extended iteration of the reconfigurable piece, being endlessly rearrangeable according to the wishes of the coordinator.<sup>305</sup> While Kelley has provided a detailed overview of *18 Happenings* in *Childsplay*, in turn using Michael Kirby's account of the event, it has been my intention to piece together, from the original score and detailed plans, a more nuanced view of the piece in the context of Kaprow's engagement with Cage's classes and the interplay between control and accident. The piece comprised three rooms separated by semi-transparent plastic walls, throughout which slides, noises, actions, and sculpture were presented as a simultaneity across the three spaces [fig. 46]. 'Room 1' was lined with red and white lights around the top of the enclosure, with the audience seated facing inwards around the room; 'Room 2' contained a rectangular mirror and a blue globe in the centre, with the audience divided into two halves, each facing the centre [fig. 47]; and 'Room 3' [figs. 48-49] featured blue and white lights around the top and a partition with a window shade, the audience facing towards the first and second rooms.

The start and finish of each 'happening' was announced by the sound of a bell, with intermissions alternating between two and fifteen minutes respectively for each part. The audience switched seats twice after parts two and four to a room dictated by the instruction cards on their chairs. The collage-like arrangement of activities, sounds, images, and their simultaneous display, along with spaces in which nothing took place, was an attempt to produce what Kaprow had described as the accidental in nature. As he wrote at the time, "any

---

305. Horace Richter, solicitation letter for the Allan Kaprow Research Fund at Rutgers University, September 8, 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

confluence between events are unique within the over-all framework.”<sup>306</sup> Like his vision for *A Pastorale*, the pre-defined elements of the work would produce unforeseen chance results: its final form indeterminate according to the many variables concerning the performance of each part, including the varied perspectives of the audience.<sup>307</sup> The predetermined nature of the piece contrasted with the permissiveness of Cage's indeterminacy, realised by the choice of the performers within loosely defined variables. Though Cage worked to collapse the distinction between composer and performer while also destabilising the accepted roles of performer and audience in *4'33"* and *Theater Piece*, Kaprow attempted also to destabilise the role of the audience relative to the performance, specifically in reconfiguring the conventional binary performance space to a degree not attempted in Cage's work. Articulating the ethos of the piece, the invitation stated “You are invited to collaborate with the artist, Mr. Allan Kaprow, in making these events take place.”<sup>308</sup> The 'collaboration' still limited the audience to a passive role however, restricting the idea of interaction to an extension of presence and their willingness to accept the instructions to move between rooms, to stay in the building during the intermission, to remain seated in the intervals, and so on. “As one of seventy-five persons present”, the invitation continued, “you will become a part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them.”<sup>309</sup> The second aspect of collaboration outlined in the invitation concerned the donation of time and money in order to realise the piece. A fundraising letter for *18 Happenings* sent by Horace Richter, a board member of the

---

306. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of a letter to the theatre critic Fairfield Porter (n.d.), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

307. Kelley has a singular focus on the audience and experience as the axis of chance relations, arguing that “It was the unpredictability – even the unknowability – of [the participant's] experiences, and not the precise scoring of the Happening, that was its aleatory measure.”, *Childsplay*, p. 41. Kelley's reduction of chance in Kaprow's work to the aleatory overlooks the importance of the notion of accident to Kaprow's ideas of chance at this time. It also overlooks the associations chance had for Kaprow in terms of risk and accident, specifically as they would relate to the experiences of the audience in the early 1960s. Kelley's emphasis on the aleatory fails to appreciate the nationalistic view of his mentor in chance composition, John Cage, specifically his embrace of indeterminacy as against European aleatory composition. While Kaprow's conviction was not as strong, exploring his work in terms of the aleatory fails to appreciate the complexity of his engagement with chance, informed in part by the variety of historical sources from which he borrowed.

308. Invitation to *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), from “Reuben-Kaprow Associates” (n.d.), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

309. *Ibid.*

Jewish Museum in New York, expresses in greater clarity the possibility of an active role for the audience within a matrix of simultaneous events. He writes

“we may combine freely in order to see all kinds of relationships as each part is reassemblable indefinitely with other parts so that one can perceive relationships according to his individual taste and talents. This brings the spectator much more actively into the performance.”<sup>310</sup>

Kaprow's vision, articulated by Richter, recalls Dewey's argument concerning the non-passive nature of perception, and the experiential continuity between artist and viewer.<sup>311</sup> However, the limited permission granted to the audience was underlined in the poster invitation for the performance [fig. 50], promoting the singularity of Kaprow as *the* artist:

“We who sympathize with the artist's freedom of expression, who enjoy the experience inherent in advanced ideas, who affirm the artist's right – nay, obligation – to present his vision to the world unfettered have an especial obligation to tender moral and financial support”.<sup>312</sup>

Following his crisis of leadership in *A Pastorale*, the assertion of his 'right' as an artist to present his work unimpeded was a necessary precondition in scripting a spectacle of simultaneity. The conflation of audience and performer could only be achieved to the extent that it did not compromise Kaprow's 'obligation' to produce the work as he wished, namely to contrive the accidental as the result of a tightly controlled framework. Indeed a review of the piece likened Kaprow to “a composer of opera”, challenging his own distinction between the nature of 'total art' that the piece embraced and Wagner's concept of *gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>313</sup> It

---

310. Horace Richter, solicitation letter for the Allan Kaprow Research Fund at Rutgers University, September 8, 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

311. Darko Suvin suggested in “Reflections on Happenings” (1970) that a Happening “may be defined as an exercise in unlogging the perceptiveness of participants, in which case it is properly speaking pre-theatrical”, Darko Suvin, “Reflections on Happenings”, *The Drama Review*, vol. 14, no. 3, (T47), 1970, repr. in Mariellen Sandford (ed.), *Happenings and Other Acts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 241-262, p. 246.

312. Poster for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, repr. in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, pp. 120-121, p. 120.

313. Fairfield Porter, review of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, *The Nation*, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1959, repr. in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, p. 131.

called into question what Richter had described as “situations or events [that] occur next to each other but are not blended as in older art.”<sup>314</sup> The resistance Richter observes to the blending of events in *18 Happenings* restates the tension between the assertion of individualism and the denial of individuality that chance threatened. Their separation, he writes, is “to preserve their singularity”, a notion seemingly opposed to the idea of the contingently accidental in nature. Given the interpenetration of simultaneous sound and movement between the enclosures, Richter's anticipation of the preservation of singularity within the performance was seemingly at odds with its eventual manifestation.<sup>315</sup>

### 2.3.i. Essences of the everyday

The unforeseen result of simultaneous presentation in *18 Happenings* was a manifestation of the commonplace in view of the everyday phenomena and activities presented. The simultaneous parts, variously perceived according to the audience's placement and perceptual habits, were arranged to elicit the “unified changefulness” “of something severely planned and accidentally coming to be, as on any street corner a number of sounds, shapes, smells may come together.”<sup>316</sup> In a note written between performances he describes “waves of sound or sparse sections of silence which, punctuated by an occasional short tone, emerge as pure essences rather than 'music' in the conventional sense.”<sup>317</sup> The 'essences' of sound he describes are replicated in his interpretation of Paul Taylor's choreography comprising minimal restricted actions. Kaprow notes that Taylor's “lack of overt 'suggestivity' or 'fantasy'... accomplished an astonishing presence, as real as reality”.<sup>318</sup> Crucially however

---

314. Horace Richter, solicitation letter for the Allan Kaprow Research Fund at Rutgers University, September 8, 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

315. Ibid.

316. Allan Kaprow, handwritten note “To The Theater people”, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12). This statement recalls Cage's recollection of the impact of Sevilla, Italy, on his musical development: “In Sevilla on a street corner I noticed the multiplicity of simultaneous visual and audible events all going together in one's experience”, *John Cage, Writer: Previously uncollected pieces*, p. 238.

317. Allan Kaprow, handwritten note “To The Theater people”, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

318. Allan Kaprow, “Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde”, n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 49, Folder 13).

“Taylor is not intensifying... He is only giving one some movements to look at”.<sup>319</sup> The inclusion of Tayloresque choreography throughout the piece [fig. 51], with directions such as “slowly roll the right foot in circles just off the floor; left hand extended”, leads Richter to describe Kaprow's invitation “to know the familiar and strange beauty of a person lighting a match, painting a wall or just standing still” as “our most real present.”<sup>320</sup> “Most real” is here differentiated from the exploration of the real within the context of radical experimental theater, including Julian Beck's anti-illusionistic company the Living Theater; its members participating in the piece.<sup>321</sup> While Beck's focus was “on experimentation [as] an image for a changing society”, Kaprow was interested in the forensic examination of the ordinary, the essences of the everyday. It followed an early interest in Nicolas Evreinoff's *The Theatre in Life* (1927), an advocate for theatre mimicking nature. In a passage highlighted by Kaprow, Evreinoff compels the viewer to

“Study the postures, the smiles, the family groups, or the faces looking out of the window overgrown with ivy. Scrutinize all these figures 'outside the house fence,' these young men 'riding horses' or 'playing tennis.' Note the rolled-up sleeves and dishevelled hair.”<sup>322</sup>

The attempt to communicate essential characteristics of the commonplace in *18 Happenings* include directions to move around a space along the four cardinal points and an examination of 'smile-types' in Room 1, Set 3, “broken down into all possible types of smile.”<sup>323</sup> [fig. 52] It was what Kaprow described in his article published almost concomitantly with the performance, “Principles of Modern Art” (1959), as a 'molecular' compositional approach:

“Suppose we think of a nucleus of crumpled yellow paper, a smiling face and the sound of a

---

319. Ibid.

320. Horace Richter, solicitation letter for the Allan Kaprow Research Fund at Rutgers University, September 8, 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

321. In addition, for an account of the provenance of Happenings in the work of Antonin Artaud, see *Radical Prototypes*, pp. 155-58.

322. Excerpt from Nicolas Evreinoff, *The Theatre in Life* (London: George G. Harrap, 1927), p. 51, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 41, Folder 1).

323. As alluded to in Allan Kaprow, “Principles of Modern Art” (1959), *It Is* (New York) no. 4, pp.51-52, p. 52, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 46, Folder 11).

lunch box closing... From this grouping of three elements, the composition proceeds.”<sup>324</sup> The idea of an instance of the real revealed by the reduction of expression and movement to 'types' opposes the idiosyncrasies of the singular or individual. This reduction of the ordinary to the 'molecular' level becomes both singular and universal, subsumed by the mechanism of simultaneity that connects *18 Happenings* to the accidental contingencies of nature. And while simultaneity as a tool to (re)produce the accidental in nature liberates theatre from the constraints of plot and characterisation, it limits the autonomy of its parts.

In his article “The Demiurge” (1959) published in *Anthologist* alongside an early treatment for *18 Happenings*, Kaprow claimed

“I have taken my cue from those rare screwballs that emerge every once in a while in unexpected places, who are crazy to transform themselves into the Essential Absolute of each moment that passes through them and who are perhaps in that manner the purest living forms of art.”<sup>325</sup>

Kaprow's awe for the impulsiveness and recklessness he describes echoes the reverence for nature that Kaprow and Brecht had associated with Suzuki's Zen. Indeed Suzuki's description of nature resembles Kaprow's notion of the Essential Absolute:

“Nature never deliberates; it acts directly out of its own heart, whatever this may mean... Its 'irrationality' transcends human doubts or ambiguities, and in our submitting to it, or rather accepting it, we transcend ourselves.”<sup>326</sup>

While the 'transformation' into the Essential Absolute bears mystical overtones, rehearsing Pollock's declaration “I am nature”, it can profitably be considered as a specific idealisation of the temporal: the uncertain nature of the chance event. If the aural and visual essences in the piece, both in sound and action, are presented through reduction, the temporal 'Essential

---

324. *Ibid.*, p.51.

325. Allan Kaprow, “The Demiurge”, *Anthologist*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1959, pp. 4-17 (Rutgers State University), p. 4, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 5).

326. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism, Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1956), p. 234, quoted in George Brecht, *Chance Imagery* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), p. 12.

Absolute' as the irreproducible chance event compartmentalises time into discrete fractional instances, a notion continuous with Kaprow's desire to eradicate plot or narrative. It confronts the tension between simultaneity and separation that Richter describes, existing as individuated moments of the contingent relationship of parts within the work. Kaprow's speech in Room 3, Set 2 featured as a homage to Cage's "Lecture on Nothing" (c.1949-50) [figs. 53-54], giving equal weight to both silences and words, and helps put his notion of the temporal Essential Absolute into relief:

"It is said that time is essence..... We have known time..... spiritually..... as expectation, remembrance, revelation and projection, abstracting the moment from its very self..... and warping it into a thousand forms that mock..... or glorify our first and primary experience of duration".<sup>327</sup>

Time considered as essence elicits a tension now familiar between the universal and the particular in Kaprow's piece: its qualities are contingently subjective, while the 'abstraction of the moment', of which the Essential Absolute is a romanticised instance, and of necessity individuated. Cage had attempted to accentuate the immediate through freeing his work from the subjectivities of compositional choice, using indeterminate devices in *Music Walk*, or the silences of *4'33"* to produce what he described as "a music that transports the listener to the moment where he is".<sup>328</sup> This sentiment was reflected in the suggestion that *18 Happenings* would be altered variously according to the positioning and the perceptual capacities of the audience. However the appeal of chance for Kaprow, at this stage of his career, appeared less an acceptance, more a contrivance of the risk associated with 'chance' and 'accident'.

### **2.3.ii. The main event**

---

327. Allan Kaprow, speech for "Room 3, Set 2", *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 9A).

328. John Cage, "An Autobiographical Statement" (1989), in John Cage and Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), *John Cage, Writer: Previously uncollected pieces* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), pp. 246-7, p. 247.

To generate environing factors for unique temporal events Kaprow had employed methods of indeterminate composition similar to Cage. While the simultaneity of parts was the primary tool of indeterminacy, discrete instances of contrived indeterminacy peppered the work. In addition, the timings for many parts were determined through chance operations developed in the wake of Cage's class, taking the piece “beyond the signature of the maker”, as Kaprow had idealised chance processes. Though he later admitted “my chance operations were much simpler. Like putting things in a hat, shaking them and pulling things out, you know, on pieces of paper.”<sup>329</sup> The first set of *18 Happenings* featured the tightly controlled minimal movements Kaprow had derived from Taylor, dictating the number of seconds for each action to be performed over two rooms [fig. 55]. The timings were designed to jar with one another, drawing the attention of each of the audiences behind the transparent partitions, along with the slides in the third room and the surrounding noise of the tape score. The second set featured Kaprow's speech quoted above and Lucas Samaras' mocking speech on the 'seriousness' of art, Samaras filling in Kaprow's blanks while the audio speakers were silenced. While there could be little variety in the first two sets, given the highly determined nature of the score, indeterminate elements began appearing in set three, following the first fifteen minute intermission. The instructions for 'Person 2, Room 1' [fig. 56] were to “enter as in other set, walk to center of room, stand still, count 6” before enacting specific movements of indeterminate duration. In the same room a violinist played a score notated on one staff [fig. 57]. The score contained little allowance for performer choice or the length of its duration, the instructions reading “Play score through as many times as necessary 'till buzzer sounds. – Exit.”<sup>330</sup> The second room contained hints of freedom, though with sinister overtones. Samaras and Robert Whitman sat in front of a table containing a 'game' of twenty

---

329. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p.24, Allan Kaprow Papers.

330. Allan Kaprow, violin score for “Set 3, Room 1”, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 8).

blocks. Next to them stood the 'sandwich man' [fig. 58]: a naïve representation of a cyborg replete with record player within his abdomen. Beginning “Are the gentlemen ready?..... They shall ready themselves”.<sup>331</sup> Twenty-six instructions then issued from the cyborg on how to build a cubic platform. After the completion of the task by the participants functioning as mechanical proxies they left, as with Room 1, after the buzzer sounded. It illustrated the contrast Richter had described between the contingencies of the piece as a reflection of the simultaneity of life or 'nature' and the possible loss of freedom “within the shadow of the Robot.”<sup>332</sup> Richter's comments reflected the interest in cybernetic science-fiction growing throughout the 1950s. Publications including Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* (1950), Martin Greenberg's *The Robot and the Man* (1953), and Groff Conklin's *Science Fiction Thinking Machines* (1954) mirrored practical applications of cybernetic systems that had emerged during the 1950s, including Grey Walter's “tortoise” robots, programmed to exhibit lifelike behaviour.<sup>333</sup> By the end of the decade, with automated industrial processes widely adopted, the fear of changes “the robot” would bring to the human experience was palpable. An article entitled “Will Robots Make People Obsolete?” (1959) for *Parade* magazine described a dystopian future in which “Almost nothing familiar on earth today will survive in this robotized world”.<sup>334</sup> With work abolished by the “incredibly clever robots” it predicted that “Mankind's major struggle will be against boredom, with the suicide rate zooming as people lose the race.”<sup>335</sup> The theme was repeated in the tightly defined delivery of the speech in the third room: “Old modern times I am your buggar [sic] and salesman. I look at you, with the

---

331. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of recorded speech for “Room 2, Set 3”, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 9).

332. Horace Richter, solicitation letter for the Allan Kaprow Research Fund at Rutgers University, September 8, 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12).

333. Patricia Warrick, *The Cybernetic Imagination in Science Fiction* (Cambridge, MA. and London: M.I.T. Press, 1980), p. 88); Harry Henderson, *Modern Robotics: Building Versatile Machines* (New York: Chelsea House, 2006), p. 14.

334. Sid Ross, “Will Robots Make People Obsolete”, *Parade Magazine*, January 4, 1959, repr. <http://www.paleofuture.com/blog/2008/5/20/will-robots-make-people-obsolete-1959.html> (accessed 25th January 2014).

335. Ibid.

eyes of the deceased.”<sup>336</sup> The use of the British slang term “bugger” reinforced the alien threat the figure of the robot represented, communicating both the contemptible nature of the speaker assuming its voice, and the potential for increased mechanisation to defile a soon to be “old” modernity. Additionally the reference to “the eyes of the deceased” reflected the uncanny nature of “the robot” as represented in science fiction and the dehumanisation it represented.<sup>337</sup> Indeed the heavily structured piece, its minimal actions, the electronic noise, the efficiency of production, and even the simultaneity of activities conjured a sense of a perceived dehumanisation within a specific image of the future: one in which the rapid advancements in modern technology would threaten human sovereignty. The accidental chance event as a property of nature or life would be eliminated in a world determined by mechanical efficiency.

The tension between the mechanically efficient and organic accidental emerged in a series of programmatically indeterminate acts from Set 4. The score for the flute piece [fig. 59] in Room 1, Set 4 repeated the single stave arrangement of the violin piece performed in the previous set. However, the lengths of the three silences between the notes were chosen by the performer. With the length of time between the sequences of notes often vastly differing, the second silence varying between one and eleven seconds, the choice made both altered the piece and contributed to a variation of sounds and visuals travelling between the three rooms: a cacophony of spray painting, lighting matches, and a toy being carried between rooms 2 and 3. While the sandwich man was being wheeled into Room 1, Set 5, overseeing a woman squeezing oranges into a corresponding number of glasses, two painters, including Rauschenberg and Johns on one night, painted vertical stripes in red and circles in blue on either side of a muslin cloth separating the second and third rooms. The paint merged, around

---

336. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of the score for “One person”, “Room 3 – Set 3”, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 9A).

337. See Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17 (1917-1919): *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 217-256.

which the two performers improvised: a language born of accident curtailing the constrictive oversight of the robot.<sup>338</sup> Room 3 contained three performers sharing a choice of seven phrases between them. All performers would recite one phrase or part of a phrase simultaneously, repeating three of the phrases at their discretion if they chose. Making little or no sense, especially when combined, phrases were either questions or statements, replicating in words the chance conversation with paint occurring in the third room. The question “How?” could be posed in response to the statement “The same damn way 16 years both of 'em and the author”. Once all seven had been read out, in whatever order and with whatever repeats the performers had chosen, they left. The final set featured a silent space in Room 1, a series of mirrored choreographed movements by two men in Room 3, two women in Room 2 facing each other silently. Once the men had finished moving they walked accompanying the women into Room 2, each performer bringing down one each of the long purple and red scrolls containing words and sounds that divided the group according to gender. The script for the first performer was tightly determined according to both the length of the utterances and the time between them. Taking their cue from the first performer, the remaining three were instructed to “Read sounds in sequence in any speed but vary their speed and duration throughout.”<sup>339</sup> Multiple configurations of “uh”, “yeh!”, “mmmm”, “but”, “huh?”, “well”, “shshsh”, could be heard at any moment, the piece being almost entirely indeterminate of its performance, though with a fixed end signalled by a buzzer. The variables of the part combined, as a reflection of the piece as a whole, to produce undetermined instances, both ridding the colloquial language of any meaning in its reduction to sound over association while also providing rare occasions for partial comprehension. The accidental language, as in the previous set, reflected what Kaprow had described as the

338. This illustrates what Martin Jay has described as “the mutual readjustment between purposeful plan and environmental response” that characterised Dewey's idea of the aesthetic experience as a transactional concept, Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European variations on a universal theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 291.

339. Allan Kaprow, handwritten scores for “Set 6, Room 2”, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 9).

seeming meaninglessness of the piece.<sup>340</sup> However, the interest in replicating 'nature' or 'life' through this cacophony, as Kaprow had perceived the accidental, is clear in an early draft of *AEH*, in which he explains that “words [in Happenings] are more like the sounds of words, the sounds of nature and the space in which these occur: here or there.”<sup>341</sup> Language, as a functional system of expression, is reduced to a perceived primal essence into which the individual choices of the three performers is subsumed. This unresolved tension between universal and particular within the simultaneity of the piece is echoed by the fear of the robot, the cloned automaton, as an exemplification of dystopian authority.

#### **2.4. Negotiating between chance and control**

The year before *18 Happenings*, Kaprow and Robert Watts had invited Cage to give a talk as part of a week-long series they were organising at Rutgers, with other invitees including Taylor, David Tudor and Rauschenberg. Cage's speech reads like a warning against Kaprow's score, especially given that Kaprow was still a student of Cage's at the time. He cautions that “Where the performance involves a number of players... the introduction of a score – that is, a fixed relation of the parts – removes the quality of indeterminacy from the performance.”<sup>342</sup> Though diplomatic, Cage had not been reserved about his discomfort with the increasing physicality of Kaprow's work, disinviting him from the New School classes just before the performance of *18 Happenings* with the words “I think you've graduated, hm?”<sup>343</sup> Unlike Brecht, Higgins, MacLow and others who would begin producing proto-Fluxus musically-derived indeterminate pieces more aligned with Cage's vision, Kaprow had bastardised Cage's approach, producing a carnival of “total art”. *18 Happenings* had made way for a

genre that co-opted Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1* as its origin, though it did not, in Cage's mind,

340. Allan Kaprow, handwritten note “To The Theater people”, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 5, Folder 12)

341. Allan Kaprow, 1959 draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (1966), Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 47, Folder 12.

342. John Cage, “Composition as Process, ii. Indeterminacy” (1958), in *Silence*, pp. 35-40, p. 37.

343. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, October 29<sup>th</sup> 1996, Encinitas, California, p.11, Allan Kaprow Papers

emulate the freedom given to the audience in the former piece.<sup>344</sup> Indeed he accused Kaprow after the event of acting like a policeman in herding the audience from room to room and by producing such a tightly controlled score.<sup>345</sup> *18 Happenings* contradicted Cage's opposition to the hierarchical relationship between composer and performer that he took to be central to any programmatic engagement with indeterminacy. That he now had to account for Kaprow as his student was an additional frustration to him.<sup>346</sup> In truth the directorial control Cage had over his own work was as strong as Kaprow's, albeit with differing emphases, as Kaprow asserted in response to Cage's accusation: "Well, you always insist on people following your scores and not choosing to do something for expressive or personal reasons. What's the difference?"<sup>347</sup> The difference was in the differing functions of chance within the work of each. While chance, for Cage, freed the performer to create through indeterminate scoring, for Kaprow chance was the purposefully accidental bi-product of a predetermined score.

The relationship between indeterminacy, accident, and control is once again complicated. The year following *18 Happenings* Kaprow had written that

"We have, many of us, begun to sense that in the West we have over-controlled our lives and have thus shut off the very life-lines which nature always offered us ... I shall not even pretend to resolve the issue for I am not certain of the answers myself; but I can point to our by now widespread taste in all the arts for the accidental, and see this as a wish to give up some part of that conscious manipulation that we once considered as important for survival."<sup>348</sup>

While indeterminacy establishes a complex matrix within which choices may be made to alter the piece variously, Kaprow's idealisation of the accidental opposes the notion of

---

344. RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), pp.126-7

345. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1997, Encinitas, California, p.24, Allan Kaprow Papers.

346. As Kaprow recalled, "he was sorely pressed by people to account for me as his student and I think he was annoyed at that.", *ibid.*

347. *Ibid.*

348. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (1966), dated July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., pp. 19-19A, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

control: an apparent contradiction and something of a fantasy, seen in the light of his highly controlled work. While his mark on both the organisation of his work and its content remained, moving “beyond the signature of the maker” was an ideal Kaprow found difficult to resolve. The spectre of Cage's accusation that his work was over controlled would haunt Kaprow's practice throughout the 1960s. More immediately though, the conventional performance space of *18 Happenings* created a barrier to his nascent idea that “The *line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible*”.<sup>349</sup> Brecht had proposed in the press release for the Reuben's *Towards Events* following *18 Happenings* “that art is to become actively rather than passively existent, to be enjoyed as an unfolding experience”.<sup>350</sup> It was to lead to the fifth condition of the Happening articulated in *AEH*: that “audiences should be eliminated entirely”.<sup>351</sup> Though Kaprow was increasing the role of participation, he would discover that liberty could not be universal, and hence that the distinction between art and life was possibly a necessary one.

---

349. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

350. George Brecht, press release for *Towards Events* (1959), Reuben Gallery, New York, quoted in Anna Dezeuze, “Neo Dada', 'Junk Aesthetic' and Spectator Participation”, *Neo-Avant-Garde*, pp. 49-71, p. 62.

351. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 195.

### 3. Maintaining Change and Negotiating Chance in the Spring of 1961

“Hence the finality in the product of fine art... must not have the appearance of being intentional; i.e. fine art must be clothed with the aspect of nature, although we recognize it to be art.”

– Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790)<sup>352</sup>

#### **3.1. *A Spring Happening* (1961)**

“Everybody is crowded into a downtown loft, milling about, like at an opening”, explains Kaprow in his *Art News* article “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), setting the stage before attempting to define the genre.<sup>353</sup> Kaprow's description was familiar to many: after *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* the loft space at the Reuben Gallery had continued to show programs of Happenings. Kaprow and others from the Hansa and Reuben galleries, including Dine, Oldenburg, Grooms and Whitman had begun presenting Happenings in the equally marginal space of the Judson Gallery, established in the basement of the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village. These events were echoed in other forums for performance in New York, including the proto-Fluxus works being staged at Yoko Ono's Manhattan loft apartment. In March 1961 those who were able to reserve tickets for Kaprow's *A Spring Happening* found themselves in a comfortably familiar setting, milling about in the newly opened street-level Reuben Gallery, chatting in small groups in front of a seven-foot high muslin partition with a black panel on the left-hand side, waiting for the spectacle to commence [fig. 60]. It was the first Happening by Kaprow in almost a year, after his abstract puppet show *Coca Coca Shirley Cannonball?* (1960) [fig. 61], as part of Claes Oldenburg's series *Ray Gun Spex* at the Judson Gallery and the reinvention of his sound installation *Intermission Piece* (1959) at the

---

352. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 167.

353. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 15.

Reuben. Of this period Kaprow reminisced that “I changed completely into a brief period of populist performance inspired by my colleagues for the most part – you know, sort of circus stuff”.<sup>354</sup> For over a year he was immersed in a group of artists producing high-energy performances, attested to by the critic Jill Johnston's recollection of Whitman's last Happenings at the old Reuben Gallery as “a serious crazy mess that satisfied some of the craving for blood hell nonsense and purgation that people were expecting.”<sup>355</sup> Kaprow's *Intermission Piece* and *Coca-Cola Shirley Cannonball?* had by comparison maintained a clear distinction between audience and presentation, unconcerned with provocation. In the nine months since the closure of the old Reuben Kaprow's outlook had been affected by the energy of Grooms and Whitman's work, a fact of which the milling crowd were, albeit briefly, blissfully unaware.<sup>356</sup> His innocent, often comic circus-like events had been replaced with a far more sinister “flavour”, detailed in his 1961 article:

“big cartons... sliding and careening drunkenly in every direction, lunging into one another, accompanied by loud breathing sounds over four loudspeakers. Now it's winter and cold and it's dark...Coughing you breathe in noxious fumes, or the smell of hospitals and lemon juice... power saws and lawn mowers screech just like the I.R.T. [subway train] at Union Square... you stand up to see or change your seat or answer questions shouted at you by shoeshine boys and old ladies.”<sup>357</sup>

The audience's relationship to Kaprow's work would no longer be understood in terms of mere entertainment; the black panel in the muslin cloth portending the ominous discovery of this destabilisation.

### 3.1.i. Echoes of Artaud

---

354. Allan Kaprow, transcript of interview with Judith Rodenbeck, Dec 1997, pp. 30-31.

355. Jill Johnston, “On the Happenings – New York Scene”, *Encore*, September/October 1962, Jill Johnston, *Marmalade Me* (E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.: New York, 1971), pp.46-51, p. 49.

356. Joseph Jacobs, “Crashing New York à la John Cage”, in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, pp.65-99, p. 88.

357. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 15.

The chatter of the crowd was interrupted by the black panel being lifted, and a request to enter a dark narrow tunnel painted black, supported by regular wooden ribs approximately two and a half feet wide and seven feet high. The sides were punctuated with two sets of small slits regularly positioned, through which the audience could see the surrounding space [fig. 62]. It borrowed from Oldenburg's peep show approach in *Snapshots of the City* (1960) at the Judson. If Kaprow had acted like a policeman in *18 Happenings, for A Spring Happening* he had morphed into the role of a farmer herding his cattle into a pen, the function of which was as yet unknown to them. Some refused to submit to the cramped space, though most overcame their instinctive resistance after a while with only a few rejecting the proposition altogether.<sup>358</sup> “You come in as a spectator and maybe you discover you're caught in it after all” echoed Kaprow's *Art News* article later that spring.<sup>359</sup> In complete darkness, cramped and facing forward in a line, the theatre academic Michael Kirby, providing the most comprehensive account of the event, recalls “in doubt about what would take place, they giggled and joked to break the uncomfortable silence.”<sup>360</sup> It was a sensation Kaprow indulged in contriving: “You giggle because you're afraid, suffer claustrophobia, talk to someone nonchalantly, but all the time you're *there*, getting into the act.”<sup>361</sup> Susan Sontag, a survivor of the performance, agreed with the necessity of this definition, arguing that the “abusive involvement of the audience [provided], in default of anything else, the dramatic spine of the Happening.”<sup>362</sup> The drama was conditioned by the acceptance of risk immanent in the unknown event and the sudden loss of control on behalf of the audience, though occasionally it overwhelmed any sense of decorum of those attending. Kirby notes that “A few times

---

358. Michael Kirby, “*A Spring Happening / the production*”, in Michael Kirby (ed.), *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1965), pp. 94-104, p. 94.

359. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 15.

360. Michael Kirby, “*A Spring Happening / the production*”, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pp. 94-104, p. 94.

361. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 16.

362. Susan Sontag, “Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition” (1962), *Against Interpretation* (New York: Octagon Books, 1982), pp. pp. 263-274, p. 265.

during the four or five performances, a spectator, unable to stand the oppressive restriction any longer, would force his way out again into the lobby and disappear into the night.”<sup>363</sup>

Within the centralised viewing space, as the lights flashed on and off sixteen times to begin the Happening, the distinction between the observing and observed was disrupted. The legacy of Artaud's “theatre of cruelty” was palpable, repeating his call to “treat the spectators like the snake charmer's subjects”, through their placement in a centralised space, surrounded by constant “sounds, noises, cries... chosen first for their vibratory quality, then for what they represent”.<sup>364</sup> Sontag argued that “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.”<sup>365</sup> Though the distinction between performer and audience was maintained throughout *A Spring Happening* the visceral impact of *A Spring Happening* contributed towards the participatory phenomena Kaprow would describe in his final publication of *AEH*, whereby “the active and observing roles would be exchanged, so that by reciprocation the whole meaning of watching would be altered, away from something like spoon-feeding, toward something purposive, possibly intense.”<sup>366</sup> A hanging light on the right-hand side went on for three seconds, illuminating the red wall parallel to the enclosure, adorned with chicken wire, newspapers and cardboard attached to strings leading outside to the foyer. A light illuminated the left-hand side pulsing on and off five times, revealing the green wall parallel to the enclosure, before the audience were once again plunged into darkness and silence. Still in darkness, one performer began throwing between ten to fifteen metal oil drums from the roof of the enclosure onto the floor, producing a deafening racket, increasing the sense of vulnerability of those inside the enclosure [figs. 63-65]. The industrial

363. Michael Kirby, “*A Spring Happening* / the production”, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pp. 94-104, p. 98.

364. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double* (trans. 1958), quoted in *Marmalade Me*, p. 46.

365 Susan Sontag, “Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition” (1962), *Against Interpretation*, pp. 263-274, p. 273.

366. *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings*, p. 198.

effect was compounded by the loudspeaker on the roof emanating “low, growling, machine-like sounds”, making the entire enclosure vibrate.<sup>367</sup> The destructive mechanical efficiency of *A Spring Happening* extended beyond the innocuous allusion in *18 Happenings* to the robot, producing a sinister context with which to affront its human 'subjects'. The contrast between human accident and robotic efficiency was destabilised by the implication of the unpredictability of events both of mechanical and of human agency, within the confined space of *A Spring Happening*. The noise stopped and the enclosure was again lit up, while a performer sounded a bell outside, moving back and forth from the left-hand side, ending at the right-hand rear, before the light went out. The audience became destabilised once again in its role within the spectacle, viewed by the performer who goaded and exploited their assaulted vision. The torment continued with performers surrounding the pen, making hissing, sucking and blowing noises, occasionally lighting matches to illuminate their faces according to the score, reminiscent of a horror scene [fig. 66]. Upon their exit the hanging bulb lit up, flashing on and off rapidly, illuminating the chicken wire, newspaper and cardboard attached to the red wall, moved through the manipulation of its strings from the foyer: a marriage of human and mechanical forces, the accidental and the efficient, though producing neither a haphazard spectacle suggestive of efficiency, nor a planned event beyond the immediate manipulation of junk-puppetry. Lulled by this small spectacle suddenly there began, as Kirby recalls, “the loud, sharp screech of a power saw (operated by the man on the roof) as it bit into the heavy wood and jammed.”<sup>368</sup> In the face of the threat of the machine made concrete, slicing through the vulnerable wooden construct, the human subjects were saved by what appeared to be the accidental malfunction of the saw: the mechanical sabotaged by nature, infected, as it were, by the accidental properties of what Kaprow had earlier observed to be nature's defining characteristic.

---

367. Michael Kirby, “*A Spring Happening* / the production”, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pp. 94-104, p. 96.

368. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Schapiro had read the accident in art as “the beginning of an order... that in the end retains the aspect of the original disorder as a manifestation of freedom” against the industry accident, which “destroys an order” and “interrupts a regular process”.<sup>369</sup> In a work that functioned beyond the notion of regularity, in which every event, like *18 Happenings*, was discontinuous, the 'industry accident' of the saw jamming was as ordered or disordered as any other discrete activity within the presentation. Both human and mechanical elements contributed to the appearance of accident in *A Spring Happening*, though through the dehumanisation of the performers, as Kaprow suggested in a draft of *AEH*: “Sometimes a gadget which mal-functions (like the person who mal-functions) produces just that ingredient of the unforeseen which is sought.”<sup>370</sup> Against this statement, the idea of function and mal-function take on a malevolent aspect when considered against the impersonal treatment of the Artaudian 'subject' that Sontag had recognised within *Happenings*. Could the audience, used as material to achieve the nuance of the unforeseen that Kaprow desired, pushed to their psychological limit inside the terrifying and claustrophobic space and fled, be said to have mal-functioned? The program was tightly rehearsed, each activity carefully controlled, the saw manipulated to jam on cue, and the centralised viewing space, along with each activity, designed to disconcert and surprise. The psychological and mechanical functions and mal-functions were necessary, pre-determined elements, designed to elicit the feel of the accidental. In his *Art News* article Kaprow had described the *Happening* as “composed so that a premium is placed on the unforeseen” in which “control (the setting up of chance techniques) can effectively produce the opposite quality of the unplanned and apparently uncontrolled.”<sup>371</sup> The importance given to the appearance of chance was restated in a draft of

---

369. Meyer Schapiro, “The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art” (1957), quoted in Robert Haywood, “Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro’s and Allan Kaprow’s Theory of Avant-Garde Art”, *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts*, pp.27-46, pp.33-34.

370. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

371. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, pp. 20 & 19.

*AEH* written the previous summer and redrafted the following autumn, expressing the need to evoke “the feel of nature itself in all its variety and sense of the spontaneous and unplanned.”<sup>372</sup> This illusory quality of the accidental was important to the effect of *A Spring Happening* on its audience, achieved through highly-determined actions not subject to chance processes; the performances no more varied than any piece of theatre. Though chance processes could produce unforeseen effects for the performer, it was only necessary to produce the effect of the unforeseeable in the minds of the uninitiated while the distinction remained between the audience and performers.<sup>373</sup> Contriving the appearance of the accidental within the piece was necessary to the presentation of “the passing, the changing, the natural”.<sup>374</sup> As such the contract implicitly made with the audience to *A Spring Happening* was to adopt the “spirit” of the Happening, “a spirit that is at once passive in its acceptance of what may be and affirmative in its disregard of security.”<sup>375</sup> Kaprow's writing on the desired accidental nature of the Happenings would be ahead of its realisation by some way while “‘theater’ appear[ed] to be its essential nature.”<sup>376</sup> However, the existence or otherwise of the audience would not alter the central paradox of his practice whose “spirit” accepted the accidental, as he explained in his article: “The action leads itself any way it wishes, and the artist controls it only to the degree that it keeps on 'shaking' right.”<sup>377</sup>

---

372. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

373. Gunter Berghaus has argued that “Happenings [were] as indeterminate and fragmented as real-life events, but due to the artist's planning strategies they took place in an organised framework according to a predetermined structure.” While early Happenings by Kaprow and others were, by design, not as indeterminate as events outside the gallery space, Berghaus interprets Kaprow's rhetoric as a description of the form of the Happening, Gunter Berghaus, “Neo-Dada Performance Art”, in *Neo-Avant-Garde*, pp. 75-95, p.87. Kelley falls into the same methodological trap as Berghaus, conflating Kaprow's statements with a description of his work. Citing “Happenings in the New York Scene” Kelley understands Kaprow's description of a “crude, lyrical, and very spontaneous” practice to represent a shift in his work, Allan Kaprow quoted in *Childsplay*, p. 45.

374. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 20.

375. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

376. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1959-60, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

377. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 19.

The terror of the saw's whir rung in the audience's ears, the space briefly silent and dark before the tunnel became illuminated again. The silences and light provided a free undetermined space, upon which the psychological effects on the inhabitants of the enclosure would be cast as “shadows”, following Kaprow's and Cage's description of Rauschenberg's white panels, against the silence and luminosity of the space: the subjects becoming spectacular for each other and further incorporated into the work in the process. A tape began to play electronic sounds above the audience, softer than before, sounding “somewhat like wood breaking, popcorn popping, tinfoil crinkling, or perhaps a fire burning somewhere out of sight.”<sup>378</sup> The light in the tunnel went out and the lights on either side came on, illuminating two performers on the left-hand side carrying eight-foot long tree branches, moving towards one another and fighting in slow motion [fig. 67]. On the right-hand side a large cardboard box bumped against the side of the enclosure, operated from the foyer. The men began fighting in real-time, attacking the green plaster on the wall and bringing the branches down onto the tiled floor, before returning to slow motion [fig. 68]. The cardboard box exited and the lights went out. Overhead the mechanical noise of a floor polisher being pushed along the top of the corridor refocused the attention of the subjects back on themselves, aware of their vulnerability. The whole structure, its ceiling only inches above their heads, trembled with the force of the industrial tool. The machine disappeared, leaving the similarly industrial electronic noise, achieved using randomly spliced tape recordings, producing the appearance of unplanned and uncontrolled sound. Then silence. Such abrupt occurrences, interrupting the sequence of unrelated events, contributed to what Kirby would later theorise as “nonmatrixed” performances existing outside the structure of time, place and character. They extended the unforeseeable occurrence beyond the appearance of the accidental towards the spontaneous. In his 1960 draft of *AEH* Kaprow had written that

---

378. Michael Kirby, “*A Spring Happening* / the production”, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pp. 94-104, p. 98.

“In one way or other [happenings] are improvisational and give the impression of being purposively 'unprofessional' in tone... although in actual fact much care and highly disciplined action is required... The care of which I speak is therefore particularly directed toward that area of experience and those means which will maintain a maximum of the unforeseen.”<sup>379</sup>

The improvisatory impression given to his Happenings of this time, compared to the apparently accidental organic and mechanical 'mal-functioning', suggested the existence of conscious intent, producing a different order of the unforeseen perceived solely by the audience. The discontinuous parts and cessations, the silences, the slow-motion turning to real-time violence, that which could not be considered accidental, contributed to “a characteristic spontaneity (I do not mean 'liveliness' necessarily) as though they occurred suddenly, their action emergent rather than studied or planned.”<sup>380</sup> To further clarify the distinction, it is worth considering the analogy Kaprow made in his *Art News* article between the appearance of improvisation in his Happenings of the time, and improvisation within broadly fixed conditions in jazz music.<sup>381</sup> The latter was generally emergent, intuitive, and unanticipated in its particularity, though responding to a pre-defined framework of scale and tempo, alternating between the discordant and harmonious. Improvisation is consciously manifested, though unlike *A Spring Happening* remains within a framework of shared expectations for both the other performers who occupy a dual role of material support and audience, and by extension the audience proper. Though the analogy is useful in distinguishing between the appearance of the accidental and the improvisatory, it contradicts Kaprow's promotion of improvisation as characterised by unprofessionalism and disjuncture that informs Kirby's idea of the 'nonmatrixed' structure of the Happening. This is especially true if we accept Theodor Adorno's argument that jazz improvisation inevitably conforms to

---

379. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

380. Ibid.

381. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 18.

structural norms.<sup>382</sup> However, even in its novel presentation *A Spring Happening* was part of a genre that, as he wrote in *Art News*, presented “essentially theater pieces, however unconventional.”<sup>383</sup> As such there remained conventions of context and expectations of the presentation, including the passivity of the audience and the permissiveness of artistic freedom. Indeed Kaprow had exploited these norms in the reign of terror he imposed upon the incarcerated audience. Additionally the activities and treatment of the audience, partly derived from Artaud's popular *Theatre and its Double*, recently published in America in 1958, and the Living Theatre, adhered to trends prevalent in experimental theatre of the time. The appearance of spontaneity in *A Spring Happening*, through the use of avant-garde theatrical devices, operated in a similar manner to the improvisation of jazz within a known register; though ignorance of the norms to which both conform would do little to affect the appreciation of either in the moment of their performances.

The appearance of spontaneity continued: the audience were acclimatising to the silence left by the absence of the floor polisher above their heads when, to the left of their enclosure, a light came on behind a six foot high muslin cloth, casting the shadow of a figure behind [fig. 69]. No sooner had the figure become visible than an opaque plastic sheet was dropped in front of the enclosure, obscuring the view. The figure moved variously, her arms folded to obscure her human shape, while another performer moved the torch around, ensuring a constant mutation of her shadow. The audience's vision was further inhibited by soapy water smeared over the plastic sheet [fig. 70]. Then darkness, arrested by the light pulsating five or six times inside the tunnel while high pitched wailing and deep resonating sounds blared from the speaker above the enclosure. Darkness again. The left-hand light flashed once, followed by its right-hand counterpart, signalling the beginning of a search-

---

382. See Joseph D. Lewandowski, “Adorno on jazz and society”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, September 1996 vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 103-121.

383. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 17.

light chase led by the figure of the machine-wielding tormentor on the roof. Holding a small hand-held projector he moved the beam around the room slowly, briefly illuminating the figure of a naked girl with green vegetables hanging from her mouth [fig. 71]. “There were gasps and titters from the audience”, Kirby recalls; momentary relief from the constant reminder of their own vulnerability.<sup>384</sup> The light caught the girl and she faced the audience face on, the only noise being the self-consciously shuffling feet of the spectators against the wooden construction, producing noise as a response to Kaprow's pre-planned stimulus. A slow rhythmical banging on one of the metal drums in the lobby overpowered the human chamber of sound, heralding the arrival of two men who stood either side of the girl. Placing a blanket over her, they left as she sank to the floor, while the volume and tempo of the drumbeats increased [fig. 72]. The spotlight remained on the blanket as it trembled, becoming still with the drum beating loudly before the spotlight went out. The guilty witnesses had little time to reflect as a “powerful roaring noise” emanated from the front of the enclosure and the black muslin entrance violently pulled back.<sup>385</sup> The machine, having twice been repelled by the strength of their construct and industrial malfunction, now forced the spectators to act, while a lawnmower was pushed towards them by a performer directing a torch into their eyes [fig. 73]. While the light bulbs had overturned the normative relationship between audience and performers, the physical assault of the “snake charmer's subjects” left them in no doubt as to their involvement in the piece. Meanwhile a car horn sounded in the lobby, “its steady, supercharged, raucous shriek” combining with the noise of the lawnmower and the rhythmic drumming.<sup>386</sup> A curtain opened at the opposite end, where the audience had become bunched together, fleetingly providing the illusion of an escape route. However in place of an exit stood a large fan, its rotating blades complimenting the beat of the drum and complementing

---

384. Michael Kirby, “*A Spring Happening / the production*”, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pp. 94-104, p. 101.

385. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

386. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-4.

the mechanical threat of the encroaching lawnmower. Suddenly both sides of the multi-panelled enclosure fell simultaneously, the audience's emancipation made bitter-sweet by the evident realisation of a pre-conceived plan, ensuring maximum terror and discomfort [fig. 74]. The lights came up and Kaprow's Artaudian subjects were left among the neutered remnants of their voluntary trauma [fig. 75].

### 3.1.ii. Chance and avant-gardism

While the distinction between the spontaneous and accidental is useful in determining the nature of the particular occurrences, Kaprow's employment of chance elements was intended to contribute in a wider sense to the malevolent feel of the piece. "Chance" he wrote in *Art News* "is a key term, for it implies risk and fear (thus re-establishing that fine nervousness so pleasant when something is about to occur)."<sup>387</sup> To reinforce his point, Kaprow contrasts this approach with the use of chance as a means of distancing the artist from the work's authorship: "If artists grasp the import of that word *chance* and accept it... then its methods needn't invariably cause their work to reduce to either chaos or a bland indifference, lacking in concreteness and intensity, as in a table of random numbers."<sup>388</sup> It was an expressionistic stance that opposed the "indifference" of Cage's methodology and many of Kaprow's proto-Fluxus contemporaries who had developed their practice as an extension of Cage's compositional methods.<sup>389</sup> Such a practice would have included Brecht's procedural reliance on random numbers: his paintings prior to being a student in Cage's class, and his *Time-table Music* (1959) in which a train timetable in Grand Central Station was used to structure a concrete composition. It also included La Monte Young's highly mathematically scored

---

387. Allan Kaprow, "Happenings in the New York Scene" (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 19.

388. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

389. This included Brecht, Higgins, Ono, Jackson MacLow, La Monte Young, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Emmett Williams, all detailed in La Monte Young (ed.), *An Anthology of Chance Operations, Indeterminacy, Concept Art, Anti-Art, Meaningless Work, Natural Disasters, Stories, Poetry, Essays, Diagrams, Music, Dance Constructions* (New York: La Monte Young & Jackson MacLow, 1963).

works. The distinction between Kaprow's and both Brecht's and Young's practices was implied in Jill Johnston's comment made the following year: "Young thinks most artists are too busy trying to make their work interesting; to *make* something happen rather than to *let* it happen. George Brecht is inclined to feel this way too."<sup>390</sup> The deafening crash of the barrels in *A Spring Happening*, the demise of the vulnerable girl beneath the sheet accompanied by the heavy beat of the drum, all literalise the Latin root of accident, *ad cadere*, to fall: a metaphor for death. This etymological sense of "accident" is extended to a general idea of chance in *A Spring Happening*, defined by "risk and fear". The intuition of risk on the part of the audience is manifested in their belief that the consequences of these events are undetermined. Having in the previous chapter understood Kaprow's interest in the accidental as an allowance of properties inherent to "nature", within *A Spring Happening* it must be considered, additionally, as a dramatic device. The opposition between these two manifestations of the accidental in *A Spring Happening* represents the tension arising from the illusion of uncontrolled events, albeit tightly choreographed.

The contrivance of what Kaprow had described as a "fine nervousness so pleasant" was a stylistic choice, arguably made additionally benign through the safety of the performance space. Writing in 1965 Kaprow stated that "With respect to the first Happenings group in New York... the direct line of historical stimulation (usually conscious) seems to have been the Futurist manifestoes and noise concerts, Dada's chance experiments and occasional cabaret performances..."<sup>391</sup> Indeed *A Spring Happening* repeated the provocation of early Dada performances, such as Francis Picabia's *Relâche* (1924) in which torches were beamed into the spectators' eyes. Kaprow's statement reveals the appeal of what Peter Bürger would theorise as the "avant-gardiste intention" of the historical avant-garde, characterised by

---

390. Jill Johnston, "On the Happenings – New York Scene", *Encore*, September/October 1962, repr. *Marmalade Me*, pp.46-51, p. 48.

391. Allan Kaprow, "In Response", *Tulane Drama Review*, Volume 10, No. 4, Autumn 1966, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 184-185, p. 184.

devices including shock, chance and montage as a means of “returning art to the praxis of life.”<sup>392</sup> The 1950s had witnessed a surge in publicity given to Dada and Futurism in particular, including Motherwell's anthology, published translations of Futurist performances, solo exhibitions of Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp's work at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, and the Duchamp acquisitions by the Arensberg Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.<sup>393</sup> The comparison inevitably created between the New York School and these earlier avant-gardes led Kaprow to argue, in a private correspondence the year prior to *A Spring Happening*, that “from 1951 to the present there has been a good bit of downright conservatism in the avant-garde and a tremendous amount of dullness in abstract ex [sic] and impressionism”.<sup>394</sup> It was “The old daring and the charged atmosphere of precarious discovery that marked every hour of the lives of modern artists” that Happenings would maintain.<sup>395</sup> In his 1960 draft of *AEH* he had defined his Happenings as “experimental” against other less radical Happenings that he deemed “quasi skits” and “quasi vaudeville”, and “not really happenings” at all.<sup>396</sup> Musing later on what “experimental art” might be, he

---

392. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 58. In his critique of the resurgent interest in the avant-garde gestures of the early twentieth century, Peter Bürger had argued that the project of the 'historical avant-garde' was to destabilise the institution of art. Citing what he perceived to be the “failure” of the historical avant-garde in this regard, he argued that “the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions”. Among the many criticisms of Bürger's position, Hal Foster has mounted the most compelling response, opposing the distinction between origin and repetition to understand the project of the neo-avant-garde as institutional critique – as a development of the critique of medium undertaken by the historical avant-garde. Writing of Rauschenberg and Kaprow Foster observes, in a concession to Peter Bürger, that “As the *first* neo-avant-garde recovers the historical avant-garde, Dada in particular, it does so often literally through a reprise of its basic devices, the effect of which is *less to transform the institution of art than to transform the avant-garde into an institution*”, Hal Foster, “What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?”, *October*, Vol. 70, The Duchamp Effect (Autumn, 1994), pp. 22. Kaprow's revision of the language and devices used by earlier avant-gardes arguably contributed to their growing institutionalisation. Kelley's characterisation of Kaprow's shock tactics in *A Spring Happening*, as “a spoof on the avant-garde cliché of shocking the bourgeois audience out of its presumed complacency” overlooks the possible complicity of Kaprow in helping to form the cliché, *Childsplay*, p. 57.

393. Kaprow attests to the significance on the early Happenings of the Futurist translations and literature on Bauhaus and Dada: “[Around 1959] the translation of Futurist performances came out, along with books on the performances of the Bauhaus. And so right around the late '50s through the early '60s, suddenly one discovered there was a heritage, which it had never occurred to us there was.”, transcript of interview with Judith Rodenbeck, October 29<sup>th</sup> 1996, p. 17.

394. Allan Kaprow, clipping of his letter to the editor of *Art News* commenting on Irving Sandler's response to his article “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), c.1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 46, Folder 12).

395. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 22.

396. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

suggested that “The idea has the inescapable flavour of daredevilry. It smells of wildness, trouble, a good fight”.<sup>397</sup> *A Spring Happening* appears, in light of these statements, as a means of achieving an idealised version of avant-gardism, one characterised by risk, fear, aggression, precariousness, daring and tension. Indeed in an interview of 1992 he suggested an equivalency between Brecht's experimentation with chance and an earlier avant-gardism, noting that “For him Dada was a celebration of chance, or the appearance of chance.”<sup>398</sup> In relation to his own work, he continued “the answer to your question about how the chance operations evolved is: through Cage, as well as an awareness of Dada”; the latter facilitated to a large extent through Brecht.<sup>399</sup> In his 1961 *Art News* article Kaprow conflates the engagement with chance in his work with a pioneer spirit, writing that “The creators [of Happenings]... are adventurers too, because much of what they do is unforeseen. They stack the deck that way.”<sup>400</sup> It was a claim on contemporary radicalism, of which a prescient tract by him written two years earlier had hinted:

“The time has past [sic] when the spring season celebrated by the Vivaldis and Beethovens can make any sense. Not that the effect of the atmosphere, the deep metaphysic of new green is any less moving to us than to the past. It is that we can no longer respond to the language of hearts and flowers, however deeply inspired. Once Stravinsky raised it to the pitch of angry and T.S. Eliot suffered its cruelty, it could only be conceived of in terms of force.”<sup>401</sup>

---

397. Allan Kaprow, “Experimental Art”, *Art News*, vol. 65, no. 1, March 1966, pp. 60-63, 77-82, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 66-80, p. 68.

398. Allan Kaprow, interview with Susan Hapgood, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1992, in Margaret Iversen (ed.), *Chance* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), pp. 58-64, p. 61.

399. *Ibid.*

400. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 25.

401. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12).

Kaprow's statement conjures Filippo Marinetti's call in the "Futurist Manifesto" (1909) to reject 'old' art in favour of "violent spurts of creation and action".<sup>402</sup> The neo-Futurist fervour of this passage was repeated in a piece by Kaprow of the same year:

"only the sound of a fire engine screaming somewhere around the corner, a drunken hag thrusting violets into one's face, the big hot-house apple one has just bought, the pressure of the bladder, the newspapers blowing along the street, the clouds, words words words slipping by in every direction, an adventure had tearing through the bush, one's body full of scratches – all marvellous, all noise and all quiet, all at once – only these are inspiring."<sup>403</sup>

Both passages reveal an impulse towards an art of aggression and violence, characterised by force, discomfort and a veneration of the concrete that recalled, in addition to Marinetti's manifesto, Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noise* (1913).<sup>404</sup> It is in this context that Kaprow's attempt to elicit risk and fear through the appearance of accidental events in *A Spring Happening* reads as an attempt to knowingly evoke the spirit of early twentieth-century avant-gardism in reaction to what he considered a "conservatism" in much art of the 1950s, including the less "experimental" Happenings of his contemporaries.<sup>405</sup> It was a problematic position, an attempt to create an equivalency between his practice and the increasingly institutionalised historical avant-garde, one inseparable from his urge, in his 1961 *Art News* article, to define the "scene".

---

402. Filippo Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism", *Le Figaro*, Paris, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1909, repr. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 49-53, p. 52.

403. Allan Kaprow, "Principles of Modern Art", *It Is*, no. 4, 1959, pp.51-52, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 46, Folder 2), p. 51.

404. Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noise* was listed by Cage as the third most influential book on his development, *Into the Light of Things*, p. 137.

405. Mike Sell has argued that "The embrace of performance by the Cold War avant-gardes not only challenged critical standards, it compelled a rethinking – a critical remembering... of the avant-garde tradition as a whole, a rethinking of the basic concepts used to define it, and a rethinking of the methods needed to comprehend it." Kaprow's experimentation with methodologies borrowed from the avant-garde musical composition of John Cage, together with oblique references to the language of Dada and Surrealism, express the critical recollection Sell observes, and as a reaction to the painterly avant-garde of the New York School. The "critical establishment" Sell continues "under the impact of decades of modernist experiment, had grown to understand the avant-garde as essentially no more than a stylistic choice", *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement*, pp. 18 & 48. This is particularly relevant to Kaprow's *A Spring Happening* structured through violent public confrontation and shock and the rhetoric used in his accompanying article in *Art News*.

The newly publicised histories and work of the earlier avant-gardes had helped bring the language of Dada in particular into popular critical discourse for a new generation of American critics. The previous year Sidney Tillim of *Art News* had remarked that “Some of the noises coming from the vicinity of Tenth Street, and the Reuben Gallery in particular, with its 'happenings' and what have you, sound suspiciously like a kindergarten supervised by Alfred Jarry.”<sup>406</sup> The remark was part of a wider attribution of the term 'Neo-Dada' to the work of Kaprow and his contemporaries. Hans Richter, with whom Kaprow corresponded personally and a benefactor of *18 Happenings*, would contend in his 1964 anthology *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* that chance “may well be regarded as the central experience of Dada, that which marks it off from all preceding artistic movements.”<sup>407</sup> Kaprow's correspondence containing information on his recent Happenings had helped inform Richter's final chapter entitled “Neo-Dada” [fig. 76]. Kaprow had dismissed the comparison between Happenings and Dada, from his earliest rebuttal in a private correspondence to “Mr Tyler” in 1958 that “My work is not in any way concerned with Dada, and it is not conceived as against art or other artists.”<sup>408</sup> By the mid-1960s, coinciding with the publication of Richter's anthology, he recognised a “direct line of historical stimulation” between Futurism, Dada and Happenings. This critical shift was shared by critics: Jill Johnston had argued in 1962 that “The Dada demonstrations were spontaneous and programmatic. The present Happenings, 1959-62, are more like serious extensions of paintings and construction;” while Kirby would write in the introduction to his *Happenings* (1965) that “It is in Dada that we find the origin of the nonmatrixed performing and compartmented structure that are so basic to Happenings.”<sup>409</sup>

---

406. Sidney Tillim, “Claes Oldenburg”, *Art News* vol. 59, No. 4, Summer 1960, p. 53, quoted in Joseph Jacobs, “Crashing New York à la John Cage”, in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, pp.65-99, fn. 32, p. 97.

407. Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (1964), trans. David Britt (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), p.51.

408. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of letter to “Mr Tyler”, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1958, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 65, Folder 22).

409. Jill Johnston, “On the Happenings – New York Scene”, *Encore*, September/October 1962, *Marmalade Me*, pp.46-51, p. 47; Michael Kirby “Happenings: An Introduction”, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pp. 9-31, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 1-24, p. 14.

The ringleader of Fluxus, George Maciunas, had sensed the potential of the label “Neo-Dada” to describe and give a platform to those artists involved with Fluxus and Happenings.<sup>410</sup> His diagram *Fluxus (Its Historical Development and Relationship to Avant Garde Movements)* (1967) [fig. 77], echoes the design of Barr's flowchart for the front cover of the catalogue to 'Cubism and Abstract Art' (1936) [fig. 21], though with an emphasis on theatre and dance. Maciunas's diagram assimilates Fluxus to the historical avant-garde as a means of validating Fluxus as an inheritor of the avant-garde mantle.<sup>411</sup> Furthermore it offers a condensed and literal analogy with Kaprow's attempt to seek authority for both his own work and to define Happenings as a genre through an association with avant-gardism.<sup>412</sup>

### 3.1.iii. Oldenburg's objections to “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961)

Kaprow's definitive *Art News* article exemplified his 'rush for cultural maturity', helping define his position as an authorial voice not only on his own work, but also on the work of other contributors to the 'scene'. A series of exchanges with Claes Oldenburg following the publication of the *Art News* article not only reveals the disquiet caused by Kaprow's claims, but they also begin to probe the contradictions of Kaprow's practice.<sup>413</sup> In his final letter to

---

410. See George Maciunas “Neo-Dada in Music, Theatre, Poetry, Art” (1962), in Clive Phillpot and Jon Hendricks (eds.), *Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1988), pp. 25–7; Maciunas also delivered a lecture entitled “Neo-Dada in the United States” at the Galerie Parnass at Wuppertal, West Germany, June 9, 1962 in which he described Fluxus as a renewal of Dadaism: see Roswitha Muel, *Valie Export: Fragments of the Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. xv-xvi.

411. Hannah Higgins makes this point in *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), p. 80.

412. The public attempts of both Kaprow and Maciunas to claim the lineage of the historical avant-garde distinguished them from the majority of artists involved in Fluxus and Happenings. Furthermore their mutual desire for control was a source of friction contributing to their rift in 1962 over Maciunas's request to sign over the copyright to his work as a condition of being a part of Fluxus, and Kaprow's refusal: see Allan Kaprow “Maestro Maciunas”, *Mr Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), pp. 323-327, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 243-246. It was what Kaprow had recognised in “Happenings in the New York Scene” as “the mechanics of our present rush for cultural maturity” in which “our taste for fads and 'movements,' each one increasingly equivalent to the last in value and complexion, [makes] for that vast ennui, that anxiety lying so close to the surface of our comfortable existence”, Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, pp. 25 & 24.

413. The discussion of Kaprow and Oldenburg's exchange builds upon Eva Ehninger's recent analysis of their correspondence in Eva Ehninger, “What's Happening? Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg Argue about Art and Life”, *Getty Research Journal*, No. 6 (2014), pp. 195-202. While Ehninger provides a useful summary of the

Kaprow in December 1961, Oldenburg summarised his opposition to the article and its methodology, describing the former as a “fiction”:

“What you do is your business and you have no right to speak for me. All the less because you are not a good critic: you are not sufficiently observant of what I do, and you are not honest enough even in describing your work.”<sup>414</sup>

In an earlier letter of June Oldenburg had described the article as the attempt by Kaprow to create a fictional narrative.<sup>415</sup> Oldenburg's charge of dishonesty was an attack on the ambiguity of Kaprow's approach, specifically his resistance to the perceived limitations of the category of art. Kaprow had suggested in his *Art News* article that “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.”<sup>416</sup> Kaprow's statement resists the logic of the readymade, presenting a paradoxical proposition that the presentation of work in the institutional context of the art world may in fact be something other than art. Oldenburg had responded in a letter of July 1961 that “an art of non-artistic reality or philosophical reality is impossible and to flirt with it is an irrelevance”.<sup>417</sup> Kaprow's opposition to the conventionality of the category of art in an institutional context is as dialectical as his contrivance of chance effects through absolute control: his references to chance as a means of escaping artistic direction by being “the vehicle of the spontaneous” preconditions his idea for a form that escapes the category of art by distancing the outcome from the activity of the artist.<sup>418</sup> Kaprow's need for control that

---

exchange as it relates to both artists' competing agendas and attempts to define their practice, the potential of the exchange for scholarly enquiry has yet to be realised. In terms of the present enquiry, the value of the exchange is in the insight it gives into how Kaprow's treatment of agency and subject, and his need to control, was viewed by a close associate. This understanding expands upon Ehninger's critique of the self-historicising at work in the exchange.

414. Claes Oldenburg, letter to Allan Kaprow, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1961, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 69, Folder 7).

415. Claes Oldenburg, letter to Allan Kaprow, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1961, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 69, Folder 7).

416. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 21.

417. Claes Oldenburg, letter to Allan Kaprow, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1961, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 69, Folder 7).

418. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 19.

Oldenburg takes issue with presents an obstacle to spontaneity. Furthermore framing his approach within the rhetoric of avant-gardism assumes an institutional artistic identity for Happenings, giving that genre the artistic autonomy that he sees chance and the accidental to then be a means of subverting.

Oldenburg's penultimate letter of August 1961 repeats Sontag's critique of the impersonal treatment of the audience in *A Spring Happening*. Kaprow's focus on the accidental is what Oldenburg deplors as "your person eliminative approach".<sup>419</sup> Responding to Kaprow's conciliatory suggestion that, of Oldenburg's *The Store* (1961) [fig. 78], "I'd like to see the pieces which were at Martha Jackson's in a more natural setting", Oldenburg attacks what he perceives to be a suppression of his individuality: "They're not 'natural', can't you see? They're personal."<sup>420</sup> His reaction, though extreme, reveals how identities, artistic or otherwise, are displaced by Kaprow's veneration of chance and accident divorced from subject and agency. Kaprow's suggestion that there is a natural setting for the objects presented as part of *The Store*, supposedly a non-gallery setting, helps illustrate the differences in their approach. To Oldenburg this notion of an art of the everyday, of which, for Kaprow, the authorless accidental event is a unifying property, fails to recognise the subject in its appeal to universality. While chance events are tightly controlled in *A Spring Happening* as a means of suggesting the accidental, the emphasis placed upon the contrivance of an experimental form and the decentralised relationship between the performers and audience suppresses the notion of agency. The blurring of the identity of subject and agent emerged in the figure of the dancing girl: concealed behind layers of cloth, translucent plastic, and soap, her actions inform the audience of a second further obscured presence, while the agents of the audience's disrupted vision were invisible altogether. The rustling junk

---

419. Claes Oldenburg, letter to Allan Kaprow, August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1961, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 69, Folder 7).

420. Ibid.

on the wall, the moving cardboard box, the thrown oil barrels, the power saw, all repeat the dehumanisation represented by the figure of the robot.

### 3.2. *Yard* (1961)

Kaprow and Oldenburg's correspondence was peppered with references to conversations had during their involvement in the Martha Jackson Gallery show 'Environments, Situations, Spaces' from May to June of 1961. The exhibition, held jointly with the David Anderson Gallery, also featured work by Brecht, Dine and Whitman. The press release declared that

“The exhibition... is unique in that it is the first group show by artists working within the totality of physical space creating environments which demand full and active participation from the viewer.”<sup>421</sup>

Brecht's *Three Chair Events* (1961) [figs. 79-80] incorporated the utility of chairs into the otherwise ordinary spaces of the street and toilet of the gallery, while one was spot-lit in the gallery itself. Visitors often unknowingly engaged with the work, including Oldenburg's mother “wearing a large hat comfortably sitting in the [sidewalk] chair and talking to friends”, Brecht recalled.<sup>422</sup> Unlike *A Spring Happening* the role of the audience as subjects within *Three Chair Events* was involuntary: they became involved in a work hidden within the everyday.<sup>423</sup> As the press release elaborated “The viewer finds himself within the artist [sic] statement, forcing him to forego his passive objectivity.”<sup>424</sup> It was a theme continued out into the courtyard of the gallery, in which the high-modernist sculptures of Barbara Hepworth and Alberto Giacometti had been rubbished: covered up in black tar paper and surrounded by

---

421. Press release for *Environment, Situations, Spaces*, May 25<sup>th</sup> – June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 161, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 6, Folder 7).

422. George Brecht quoted in Joseph Jacobs, “Crashing New York à la John Cage”, in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963*, pp.65-99, p. 79.

423. Anna Dezeuze has suggested of *Yard* that Kaprow “developed tools that suggested ways of exploring the fraught place of the subject in an ever-more controlled society”, Anna Dezeuze, “Neo Dada', 'Junk Aesthetic' and Spectator Participation”, in *Neo-Avant-Garde*, pp. 49-71, p. 66.

424. Press release for *Environment, Situations, Spaces*, May 25<sup>th</sup> – June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 161, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 6, Folder 7).

the reclaimed tyres of Kaprow's *Yard* (1961) [fig. 81].<sup>425</sup> The otherwise fashionable gallery garden was turned into a dump, strewn with oil drums and minor detritus in which access to the work was exclusive to an interaction with it. Navigating the precarious obstacle course potted with holes and protruding junk was as much an interaction as throwing tyres around [figs. 82-83]. The lack of any prescribed activity spoke to its association not only with the junkyard as a marginal outlawed territory, but also with the backyard as a free space in which to play. Within this space rules were fluid and games discovered, the fixed conditions being inscribed in its physical limitations: the surrounding wall offering a safe arena within which to explore. Furthermore the wrapping of the sculptures and high walls suggested an infantilised space, a paternalistic attempt to limit the risk of uncontrolled play around the prized ornaments. This call to play destabilised the identity of the audience, used to the “passive objectivity” of the gallery space, poetically reflected in the visitor's physical instability.<sup>426</sup> The title page of Kaprow's photo essay in *AEH* comprised the words “STEP RIGHT IN”.<sup>427</sup> It echoed his invitation to the viewers cum de facto participants to engage with the physical extension of what he had perceived to be the childlike “directness” of Pollock's 'environmental' canvases. Indeed the images of Kaprow at work suggest comparisons with Namuth's stills of Pollock in his studio [figs. 84-85]. The loss of the audience's passivity through their physical incorporation into the artwork bears a curious asymmetry with what Kaprow had described as the ability of the “sensitive observer” to recreate “the whole circumstance of the making of the picture”. Dewey's correlation between perception and the ability to imaginatively recreate the efforts of the artist, constitutive of the aesthetic experience, became redundant in the viewer's physical re-creation of the artwork. In

---

425. The identities of the sculptures concealed beneath the tar paper were not alluded to in the exhibition, nor in reviews of the exhibition, but would have been clearly identifiable to regular visitors to the Martha Jackson Gallery.

426. Robert Haywood has described this instability as “a vicious side to *Yard* that undercuts the stable place of the viewer constituted by monumental painting.”, *Experiments in the everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, events, objects, documents*, p. 40.

427. *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings*, p. 209.

contrast to the aesthetic of the tightly rehearsed, expressionistic presentation of *A Spring Happening*, the de-aestheticisation of activity in *Yard* was re-aestheticised under the rubric of a 'complete' experience. It was a step towards the realisation of form as implicative of 'the whole world of experience', tentatively suggested in a draft of *AEH* the previous year:

“To return to the environments, there is this final question: shall we stop here with a relatively inactive spectator-as-part-of-the-work and a constructed affair which (by seeming more condensed and 'special') is perhaps begging for more to happen than a visit?”<sup>428</sup>

### 3.2.i. The bargain for access

In his introduction to the catalogue Kaprow had publicly defined the idea of extension in relation to his practice, while also outlining his proposal for engagement in his Environments, of which *Yard* provided the latest model. The focus on interaction had become an increasingly definitive element of his work, in which “the spectator is a real part, i.e., a participant rather than a passive observer.”<sup>429</sup> “The viewing situation” Kirby wrote of *A Spring Happening* “has become an organic part of the work itself”.<sup>430</sup> While the participant of *Yard* acts upon the installation, as opposed to the bombardment of the audience in *A Spring Happening*, the conditions attached to both pieces are equivalent: access to the work was coextensive with the viewer's acceptance of their inclusion within it. As the tyres occupied the entire floor space of the gallery's garden, to experience the work was to become part of it. Kaprow had established a dynamic that exploited the audience's curiosity, to instigate the conditions upon which the “changeable as a *raison d'être*” could manifest; the audience 'activated' the work in exchange

---

428. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

429. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1960-61, Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

430. Michael Kirby “Happenings: An Introduction”, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pp. 9-31, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 1-24, p. 12.

for being given access to it. Jill Johnston in her review of the show illustrates the choice given to the audience and the dependence of the piece upon their curiosity:

“I don't know what Miss Jackson thought about those tires. I didn't think much myself, I mean I perceived a bunch of tires there in the yard and then asked my son if he wanted to stay and play around in them while I went up to see the rest.”<sup>431</sup>

Johnston's rejection is not just of the piece itself, but the very nature of the expected engagement. An awareness of the latter is contained in the invitation to her son to “play around in them”, while she merely “perceived a bunch of tires”. Her rejection of the work's contractual bargain necessitates an expanded recognition of control in relation to Kaprow's practice, and exposes the vulnerabilities upon which his subsequent shift in the appreciation of the value of chance was based. When Kaprow wrote of his reverence for an “oriental attitude towards chance or the accidental in nature... a profound appreciation of the essentially unified changefulness of things”, the implications for this attitude in terms of his own practice had not yet been developed.<sup>432</sup> In *A Spring Happening* the appearance of changefulness derived from the controlled illusion of chance within the performance. The absolute control of the piece was similar to that seen in *18 Happenings* and in his object-based work such as *Rearrangeable Panels*; the latter only reconfigurable by an appointed curator. While of the Hansa Environments Kaprow had suggested, similarly to the introduction he had given to *Yard*, that the spectator is part of the work on entering, and subject to the pre-existing work either passively or actively according to their perceptual 'talent', the physical engagement with the piece was limited. Kaprow's work up until *Yard* had depended upon the audience conforming to a conventionally passive role, his artistic autonomy uncompromised by chance.

---

431. Jill Johnston, “'Environments' at Martha Jackson's”, *The Village Voice*, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1961, repr. *Marmalade Me*, pp. 43-44, p. 43.

432. Fn. 253.

The 'risk and fear' Kaprow had associated with the idea of chance provides an insight into his apprehension towards devolving the control of parts of his work to others. Writing in *Chance Imagery* Brecht noted “the resolution of the distinction between choice and chance” in his own work, between control and non-control, after his time in Cage's class.<sup>433</sup> *Three Chair Events* illustrates this resolution succinctly: the work functions whether or not the chairs are used, recognised as art objects, or ignored and, as such, the distinction between activity and non-activity is as irrelevant as the distinction between noise and silence is to Cage's *4'33*”. The sophistication of this approach contrasts with a comment on the problem of chance in Kaprow's 1960 draft of *AEH*:

“The accidental is a common feature to all contemporary art and so in itself is not startlingly new. But its occurrence in the form of persons moving about, parts which may be rearranged, thus pleasing x but infuriating y, introduce large areas of un-control which seriously threaten our security in thinking we know the difference between art (control) and haphazard life.”<sup>434</sup>

So far, Kaprow's attempt to create a fluidity between art and non-art had produced an oppositional rigidity between the two, in which art was synonymous with control, preventing an outcome comparable to Brecht's resolution. Though both *Yard* and *Three Chair Events* introduced what Kaprow had described as “large areas of un-control”, the primary distinction between the position of the two artists regarding the interaction of others was articulated in Kaprow's opposition between art as a means of control and “haphazard life.” Kaprow's stance contradicted the conviction upon which his argument with Oldenburg was based, articulated in Kaprow's artist statement for *Yard*: “it could be called art, or ordinary nature. I devote great effort to balancing what I do as precariously as possible on this tightrope of identities.”<sup>435</sup> The resolution Brecht described between choice and chance evidenced in *Three Chair Events*

---

433. *Chance Imagery*, p. 25.

434. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

435. Allan Kaprow, statement on *Yard*, 'Environments, Situations, Spaces' (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1961), n.p., repr. *Art as Life*, p. 147.

balanced precisely on such a “tightrope of identities”: the work's dynamic form was subject to factors ranging from the movement of others around it and the use of chairs as functional objects, to the physical displacement of the work by others perhaps unaware of the chairs' non-functional significances. In a sense the work was free of agenda, accepting any activity surrounding the chairs and, indeed, any recognition of the piece as either utility or art object. Conversely Kaprow's understanding of art as control implies a single agenda, if not a single agent. This led to the vulnerabilities inherent to *Yard* as a piece reliant upon the agency of others in the overall scheme. The potential conflict between the purposefully accidental involvement of the human variables and the singular agenda of shifting tyres within an enclosed space contributed towards the 'risk' of chance inherent to *Yard*.

### **3.2.ii. Chance vs. Change: redefining the problem**

While *Yard* engaged with the principle of change that had motivated Kaprow's work to date, it signalled a significant shift in the means of achieving it. Prior to *Yard* chance had merely been an expressive device through which to communicate his unilateral exploration of the changeable. Whereas the existence of *Yard* as a mobilised space had itself become subject to chance, contingent upon the complicity and subordination of the infantilised participants, enticing them to act within Kaprow's singular directive for the piece. In the final publication of *AEH* Kaprow would attempt to theorise what he capitalised as 'Change' and 'Chance' comparatively. In the following passage he defines the two categories against the potential risk inherent in the dynamic between audience and artwork exemplified by Johnston's refusal to participate in *Yard*:

“If employing Change in one's work is risky at this time because of a probable high percentage of artistic failure due to nothing more than a lack of cooperation from a public

invited to participate in the activity of transformation, a conscious use of Chance bypasses failure by building non-control into the work as a desideratum.”<sup>436</sup>

The phrase “employing Change” implies a shift in his thinking of change as a description of form, to a causal factor existing prior to the work's emergence and acting upon it through incorporation. Kaprow's reference to Change as 'risky' however repeats his description of 'chance' in his 1961 *Art News* article, leaving the question of what the newly defined category of 'Chance' is that Kaprow proposes. The mention of “a conscious use of Chance” provides a clue, suggesting a programmatic application of chance processes that diverges from his earlier description of chance as “the vehicle of the spontaneous”. This assumption is substantiated in a further passage of *AEH*:

“Chance... is meant to be a purposive following of rules, whereas Change is the following of intuition and wisdom. The rules of Chance are external to persons and history, while Change... is dependent upon human experience.”<sup>437</sup>

Given Kaprow had in 1961 considered chance and change interchangeably, this re-definition of both categories appears a significant revision. Revisiting the origin of Kaprow's experimentation with chance processes in the context of avant-garde composition of the 1950s, Chance as a “purposive following of rules” resembles the European aleatory model, opposing the indeterminacy of *Yard*.

Echoes of Schapiro's recognition of context, and Dewey's description of the 'intuited' relationship between parts that contributes towards the quality of experience he describes as aesthetic, appear in Kaprow's distinction between Chance as “external to persons and history” and Change as a “following of intuition”. This distinction helps understand the activity of those involved in *Yard* as primarily a demonstration of Change in Kaprow's revised terms, with the unforeseen 'risks' of non-participation this may entail. In addition, his revised notion

---

436. *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings*, p. 174.

437. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

of Chance supplements the physical limitation of activity provided by the garden walls of *Yard*. Emphasising the regulating function of Chance, Kaprow writes:

“An artist ostensibly involved with Change may actually be tangling with Chance. Change is closely bound up with Chance but it is not the same thing, for while Chance may palpably reveal some aspect of Change, the latter may also be regularized to exclude the former.”<sup>438</sup>

The dialectical Apollonian and Dionysian relationship between the categories of Chance and Change helps understand Kaprow's association between art and control, in contrast to Brecht's 'resolution' between choice and Chance exemplified in *Three Chair Events*.

Furthermore the employment of rule-based Chance enabled Kaprow to limit the potential for human agency as a catalyst in his work and mitigate the “risk” that the employment of Change represents. His reticence the year following *Yard* to incorporate unscripted elements into his work communicates an awareness of such risk. *A Service for the Dead* (1962) [fig. 86], performed at the Maidman Playhouse in New York, was a highly determined theatre piece that recalled *A Spring Happening* in its treatment of the audience. Led to a cramped basement filled with junk, they were subjected to the hissing pipes and petrol fumes, crashing oil drums, torches shone into their faces, sirens, before being ejected into the street accompanied by a menacingly slow beating drum. Like *A Spring Happening* the audience had no agency and regained their “passive objectivity”, watching performers in chicken wire enclosures making various noises and lighting flames, a nude woman overhead, eventually concealed as in *A Spring Happening* underneath a white sheet. The coercion of the audience was almost militaristic. Similarly the potential for the audience of his theatrical *Happening Sweeping* (1962) to be agents of Change was limited by their subordination. Invited to a clearing in the woods covered with junk piled up in the centre, workmen shovelled the debris into the central pile before inviting the audience to participate. The workers began giving them orders in much more forceful terms, physically grabbing tools from them and

---

438. Ibid., p. 174.

reprimanding their 'sub-standard' work. The audience were consequently tied up with string and made to witness the harrowing sight of a chicken being abused by a man who had been trapped in the central pile. It regulated what Kaprow had perceived to be the risk in employing Change, though not with the dissociated laws of Chance but through reinforcing a subordinated relationship, aided by the threat of force. Kaprow's articulation of Chance and Change represents the extension of this subordinated relationship, in which the coercive and physical control of these pieces is replaced by what he deemed to be the potential for a methodical use of Chance to structure his work and disempower the individual.

### **3.2.iii. The objectionable conventions of space and purpose**

Though the audience had an active role, albeit limited, in the theatrical pieces above, the distinction and distance between audience and performer remained. It was what Kaprow had described the previous year as offering “the same objectionable conventions of space and purpose which the galleries confer upon the agglomerates and environments.”<sup>439</sup> He meant that the environments of the gallery and the theatre both invited a set of behavioural norms, in addition to ontological assumptions that maintained the distinction between art and non-art, recognised in his manifesto of 1966: “the name on the gallery... assures us that whatever is contained within is art, and everything else is life.”<sup>440</sup> While anathema to his aim of blurring this distinction, presenting his work within these contexts helped reinstate the primacy of art (control) within environments that contained the potential for anarchy. As such these “objectionable conventions” function as regulatory tools: not only is the backyard a restricted space of play, the logic of the appropriated readymade necessitates that the placement of junk in the wider context of the gallery be considered part of a new context for art. While free play

---

439. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

440. Allan Kaprow, untitled manifesto, in Ay-O et al, *Manifestos* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), pp. 21-23.

within a space otherwise used for critical reflection disrupts the barrier between art and life, the idea of a junkyard as a recreational space for adults is dependent upon the gallery setting. Playing with junk outside of this context would not only be unappealing but junk is, in its redundancy, largely ignored. *Yard* subverts the conventions of presentation only insofar as it necessitates the interaction of the otherwise passive audience: the found objects shown within the space of the gallery revisit the established Dada and Surrealist devices of the readymade and objet trouvé. At the same time they institutionalise the historical avant-garde while reinforcing the gallery's 'purposeful conventions'. This phenomenon is evident in Johnston's characterisation of Kaprow and his colleagues as “the terrible children”, incorporated into the rhetoric of the avant-garde.<sup>441</sup> The accidental is clearly restricted in this context by a heightened awareness of the behavioural nuances that the gallery space allows. Damaging the concealed sculptures in the foyer through recklessness, changing the appearance of the tyres, or appropriating them would all be transgressions. The latter is ironic given the difficulty Kaprow faced in having the tyres removed. The spatial and behavioural conventions of the gallery limited the risk Kaprow would perceive to be inherent to the employment of *Change*. While being a product of persons and history these conventions offered the same restrictions as the regulation provided by rule-based *Chance* and, though an “objectionable” obstacle to Kaprow's wish to create fluidity between art and non-art, they helped insure against the risk presented by the ambiguous status of the audience. Behavioural expectations worked to similar effect in *A Spring Happening*, *Service for the Dead*, and *Sweeping*. The submission of the audience to their customary role within modern theatre created a vulnerability which Kaprow exploited. His anticipation of the audience's willingness to submit to the passivity associated with their function, to perform according to

---

441. Jill Johnston, “'Environments' at Martha Jackson's”, *The Village Voice*, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1961, repr. *Marmalade Me*, pp. 43-44, p. 43.

the behavioural preconditions of the context, enabled him to exploit their self-imposed restrictions in subjecting the assembly to environmental and physical assault.

The restrictions of the gallery context in particular was perceived by Kaprow as a regrettable inevitability. In a further note from his draft of *AEH* in 1960 he had written of his Environments that

“The problem here as I see it is to either find a way to make the new forms work with the exhibition space with which we are saddled (in lieu of a new architecture, work out of doors exclusively which brings up many more problems, not the least being bringing the public to one's work)”.<sup>442</sup>

Kaprow feared the increased likelihood of non-engagement that a rejection of the conditions attached to the gallery might bring. Working outside of an institutional framework would allow for greater flexibility, increasing the ambiguity between art and non-art. But in giving up the context of art, he would also by his own definition be renouncing control. The negotiation between his wish to renounce the restrictions of the institution and maintain control of his practice is a dilemma forced upon him by his separation of art as control from 'haphazard life'. Kaprow's ambivalence to the institution is thrown into relief by the contrast between *Yard* as a protest against the function of art as commodity and its placement in a highly commercial gallery. In the introduction to the catalogue of the previous year's group show at Martha Jackson, 'New Forms – New Media' (1960), taken from his drafts for *AEH* Kaprow had written “More crucial yet is the ephemeral existence of the work with its attendant financial consequences. We are no longer producing monuments or heirlooms”.<sup>443</sup>

The group protest of 'Environments, Situations, Spaces' necessitated obvious sacrifices, but in the hope of an eventual emancipation from the constraints of patronage it repeated his call in

---

442. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

443. Allan Kaprow, “Some Observations on Contemporary Art”, *New Forms – New Media* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1960), n.p., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 46, Folder 13).

*Art News* to resist its limitations. He continued, “whatever drawbacks exist now will disappear and it will all seem perfectly credible and will be praised as a note of freedom in a trying period.”<sup>444</sup> The pieces exhibited in 'Environments, Situations, Spaces' evidently shared an ambivalence if not a resistance to market forces. Oldenburg's *The Store* was the most evident satire: a series of wall-mounted reliefs of garishly enamel painted plaster casts depicting everyday items including food and clothing.<sup>445</sup> Though a critique of commerce the pieces retained their objecthood. The inevitability of commoditisation was alluded to in his second instantiation of *The Store* in his converted studio on East Second Street featuring over one hundred similarly naïve and garish objects, priced provocatively at between \$21.79 to \$499.99. Oldenburg's 'merchandise' was camouflaged among the low-end shops of the area and borrowed from their outdated display techniques; though the high price of the functionless items for sale, including garishly painted plaster cheesecake and solid dresses, invited a clientele unlike the usual bargain hunters of the Lower East Side. Ordinarily critically reflective observers found it hard to ignore *The Store's* invitation to consume. In her review of the work Jill Johnston noted that “most of [Oldenburg's] objects simulate the original product to the point of arousing the same desire associated with the original.”<sup>446</sup> This arousal of consumerist desire made *The Store* a profitable venture in its own right. In contrast to such a satire on the embrace of the market the resistance by Kaprow to the creation of permanent objects foreclosed the financial security that his assemblage work of the 1950s could provide.<sup>447</sup> The sacrifice made by Kaprow's 'freedom' from the bonds of commerce echoed the choice between the security that the institution provided and his desire to create an

---

444. Ibid.

445. See Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 22-30.

446. Jill Johnston quoted in *A Taste for Pop*, p. 29.

447. Johanna Drucker contends that “the refusal of the Happenings artists to produce, in at least that hiatus period of a few years, any signature objects, or, really, any objects at all, from their collaborative efforts, renders their activity a point of truly critical disruption within the narrative of post-1945 art's relation to consumer practices.”, Johanna Drucker, “Collaboration without Object(s) in the Early Happenings”, *Art Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Interactions between Artists and Writers (Winter, 1993), pp. 51-58, p. 56.

ambiguity between art and non-art. Kaprow had not rejected the 'conventions of purpose' attached to the gallery only resisted the creative limitations that commerce would impose, in the presumption of art before the event, upon the ambiguity he was trying to manifest in his work; thus avoiding the inevitability of a "stillborn art".<sup>448</sup>

### **3.3. *Self-Service* (1966): towards a resolution**

By the mid-1960s Kaprow's Happenings had obtained what he would define in *AEH* as the fifth condition for the Happening: the elimination of the audience. In works such as *Birds* (1963), *Paper* (1964), *Household* (1964), and *Calling* (1965) the passive viewer was replaced with a scenario resembling that of a Greek chorus. In contrast to the informational dissymmetry that had existed in *18 Happenings*, *A Spring Happening* and *Sweeping*, the scripts for the later pieces were known to all participants in advance of the event. It was a shift that disturbed his focus on spontaneity in relation to his performance. In "A Statement" published in Kirby's 1965 *Happenings*, Kaprow explained his changed perspective:

"At one time, perhaps, I did think of something spontaneous, and I did think that maybe the spontaneous could be achieved by the greatest discipline and control... This however, is asking too much of people and so I gave up the problem. I am not interested in the spontaneous, at this moment, at all."<sup>449</sup>

Spontaneity, from his first articulation of the notion in *Art News* had always only existed as appearance, as a representation of the contingencies of life. Its realisation relied upon rehearsal and maintaining the rules that the "conventions of space and purpose" provided. By eliminating the audience the spontaneous could only be incorporated as concrete, rather than as a dramatic projection with the security of "the greatest discipline and control" necessary to its realisation and maintenance. In *Self-Service* (1966), performed a year after the publication

---

448. Allan Kaprow, "Happenings in the New York Scene" (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 15.

449. Allan Kaprow, "A Statement" (1965), in *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, pp. 44-52, pp. 47-48.

of Kirby's book, the control of his rehearsed performances is replaced by a different authority: the incorporation of Chance as a means to mitigate the “risk” of Change; rules of convention are replaced with the rules of Chance.<sup>450</sup> Sponsored by the Pasadena Art Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston it comprised volunteers in Boston, New York and Los Angeles engaging in predetermined activities over four months from June to September. Introduced in the score as “a piece without spectators” those in each city had a number of activities ascribed to them for each month, decided by Kaprow in advance through the employment of “chance methods”<sup>451</sup> [fig. 87]. Each volunteer was required to pick at least one activity for their city, with no limit on the potential number of activities engaged with. The choice of time and place for each activity was made by the volunteers. It was a self-service art that reflected the contemporary shift in American consumer behaviour, the phenomenal growth of fast food restaurants linked to the widespread adoption of the car: in its turn the result of increasing suburbanisation driven by economic growth. Like the newly-emergent fast food restaurant *Self-Service* was an art consumed on the go, with the participants allowed to pick and choose from the environments of their everyday lives. Places in which self-service was the norm functioned as the context for many of the activities, including supermarkets, laundrettes, warehouses, dumps, petrol stations. Instructions included “Some people whistle a tune in the crowded elevator of an office building” in Los Angeles; “People shout in subway [in New York] just before getting off, leave immediately” [figs. 88-89]; and placing radios playing rock music “into shelves of cereal, soaps, freezers, bananas, napkins, etc.” in Boston, leaving bouquets of flowers on another day of the performer's choosing [fig. 90].<sup>452</sup> It was an innocuous version of the “propaganda actions” that Maciunas had proposed in New York for the *Fluxus News-Policy Letter* of April, 1963.

---

450. Allan Kaprow, “Self-Service: A Happening” (1966), repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 193-196, p. 193.

451. Ibid.

452. Ibid., p. 196; Ibid., p. 194; Ibid., p. 194.

Suggestions included organising motor vehicle “breakdowns” to disrupt the transportation infrastructure, interfere with communications systems and overwhelm museums with consignments of bricks.<sup>453</sup> *Self-Service* repeated the highly bureaucratic nature of Maciunas's proposed work and reflected a common interest in everyday interventions among those associated with Fluxus. This included Ken Friedman's *Websters Dictionary* (1965): “A series of dictionary definitions inscribed on sidewalks and walls in public places”, and Nam June Paik's *Zen for Street* (date unknown) in which an adult adopts the lotus position in a pram and is pushed through either “a shopping centre or a calm street” by “another adult or several children.”<sup>454</sup> In *Self-Service* a preliminary talk was given for each city [figs. 91-92] in which activities were distributed among the volunteers. Each activity was overseen by an event organiser or, as Kaprow termed them, “subcontractors”.<sup>455</sup> Unofficial photos reveal the idiosyncrasies and immediate impact of the various events. Taken by a participant rather than an outsider, this haphazard documentation creates a continuity with the activities themselves, now historicised through a series of snapshot mementos. One series of photographs documents an activity incorporating, the score instructs, “as many kids as seems appropriate” making and distributing paper flowers. On a New York street, a city infamous for the abrupt behaviour of its inhabitants, a young girl of about four chaperoned by her father hands out her flowers to unsuspecting strangers [figs. 93-95]. Her innocent approach to a smartly dressed man is met with sympathetic reserve. Whether it is her insistence or his relenting to the social pressure of being surrounded by the other participants involved in the activity, he extends his index finger and thumb from the hand holding his newspaper to grasp the outstretched flower; his other hand awkwardly clutching his right-hand pocket. It disrupts the social code

---

453. See Kristine Stiles, “Anomaly, Sky, Sex and Psi in Fluxus”, in Geoffrey Hendricks (ed.), *Critical Mass* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 60-88, p. 86, fn. 48; *Fluxus Experience*, p. 75.

454. Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, Lauren Sawchyn (eds.), *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* (Performance Research e-publication, 2002), pp. 40 & 88.

455. Richard Schechner, “Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow”, *The Drama Review* vol. 12, no. 3 (T39), Spring 1968, pp. 41-63, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp.186-192, p. 187.

of the city, reliant upon anonymous interaction, a uniform gesture instigating an indeterminate interaction peculiar to the group. The repeated activity shows this to be true: the girl's offering to a well-dressed lady, clutching a bag of shopping is, by contrast, met with a sincerely appreciative look [fig. 96]. A young boy offering flowers to groups at Grand Central Station, New York, [figs. 97-99] is greeted with indifference by a man engrossed in reading, and with hostility by the boy to his right [fig. 99]. Still in the station, his offering flowers to two women results in a blank stare from the younger woman clutching a live bunch of flowers, unwilling to accept his simulacrum as a gesture of goodwill [fig. 100]. These acts of kindness are transgressive instances within otherwise asocial spaces, subject to unscripted and intuitive reactions. The structured framework of *Self-Service* arrived at by Chance, in Kaprow's revised definition, allows for instances of Change without the risk of threatening the integrity of the piece. The plan only regulates the behaviour of the children giving the flowers and while the responses are both a consequence of the work and essential to it there are no limits to what these may be. Other interventions in *Self-Service* are equally visually and socially disruptive. This includes the instruction that "On the shoulder of a stretch of highway, a fancy banquet table is laid out, food on the plates, money in the saucers. Everything left there."<sup>456</sup> [figs. 101-102] The highway banquet exists as an everyday set-up made extraordinary by its contrast with the road. The sustaining visual and functional impact of the banquet, including whether the items it comprises are used or taken by others, are subject to the physical and social contingencies that surround it. Not necessarily witnessed as an art object after the participants have left, the set-up maintains an ambiguous relationship to its status as either art or non-art. In an interview with Richard Schechner following *Self-Service* Kaprow described the banquet as "an offering to the world: whoever wants this, take it. So many of the things had just the quality of dropping this in the world and then going

---

456. Allan Kaprow, "Self-Service: A Happening" (1966), repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 193-196, p. 193.

about your business.”<sup>457</sup> This statement communicates the seeming pointlessness of many of the undertakings whose bureaucratic organisation contributed to the complex form of parody that appears to underlie many of the activities comprising *Self-Service*. Activities marked “private”, such as “People stand on bridges, on street corners, watch cars pass. After 200 red ones, they leave” have neither visual nor social impact, but heighten the experience of the otherwise everyday event of passing cars.<sup>458</sup> Schechner in his editorial of the *Tulane Drama Review* the previous winter had described this emphasis on the rehearsal of the everyday, specific to Happenings, as “the beginning of a perceptual re-education... the receiver now confronts a freedom which is difficult to avoid once presented, and equally risky to accept.”<sup>459</sup> It recalled Kaprow's engagement with Dewey, and was aided, he would posit in *AEH*, by the engagement with Chance as a means to plant unexpected events into the continuity of experience.

Kaprow had chosen by a randomising process thirty-one activities from several hundred possible activities drafted in a notebook, using the same method to assign a specific number of tasks to be performed each month for the respective cities.<sup>460</sup> Describing this process in an interview he elaborated: “I threw a lot of numbers into a sack, enumerated the events in my book, and pulled out numbers one after the other; it was fast that way.”<sup>461</sup> The distribution of the events shows the randomness of Kaprow's approach: the activities scheduled for New York for each month numbering 9, 1, 5 and 3 respectively [figs. 87, 103]. The final shortlist was subject to the additional consideration of practicality, with the choice of cities dependent upon the availability of sponsorship: a greater number of activities were available in Los Angeles and Boston, home to the two sponsors. It was an engagement with

---

457. Richard Schechner, “Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow”, *The Drama Review* vol. 12, no. 3 (T39), Spring 1968, pp. 41-63, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 186-192, p. 186.

458. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

459. Richard Schechner, “Happenings”, *Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (T30), Winter 1965, pp. 229-232, p. 231.

460. Richard Kostelanetz, Allan Kaprow, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), in Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (London: Pitman, 1970), pp.100-132, p. 114.

461. *Ibid.*

randomness that repeated for the first time experiments conducted by Kaprow and his contemporaries in and following Cage's class, including the random selection of event-times and of Brecht's *Time-table Music*. Though unlike *Time-table Music*, in which participants responded to their randomly generated cues with indeterminate actions, the activities of *Self-Service* were created in advance, written with an acute sensitivity to the intended locations. The purpose of Kaprow's selection by Chance must be considered in light of its existence as a networked event, as “a continually active field”, spanning the breadth of a nation and “whose outlines are very, very uncertain so that they blend in and out of daily life.”<sup>462</sup> Not only was randomness a convenient tool through which to select a small number of events, it was Kaprow's hope that the haphazard distribution of events would help reproduce the contingency of the everyday: what he described as “fortuitous” parallels between the events performed and ordinary life that would emphasise the parody inherent to many of the activities. Alternatively the events might contrast with the context in which they were being enacted, exemplifying what he had described of “the advantage of Chance methods... that they free one from customary relationships.”<sup>463</sup> Additionally the random distribution of the number of activities performed in each city gave the appearance of freeing the plan from any suggestions of design. The irregular typography and spacing of the instructions for each activity in the published score emphasise the appearance of a haphazard sequence of events that Kaprow encouraged through the work. Chance methods appear, in this regard, as an antidote to any limitation a predetermined structure may have upon the ability for the outline of the piece to remain uncertain. Recall Kaprow's statement of 1961, that chance “needn't invariably cause [one's] work to reduce to either chaos or a bland indifference, lacking in concreteness and intensity, as in a table of random numbers.”<sup>464</sup> Clearly the public and often

---

462. Ibid., p. 109.

463. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 204.

464. Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 15-26, p. 20.

provocative nature of the events being performed avoided the “bland indifference” he had cautioned against. Randomness existed in the work only insofar as it was a means of depersonalising the choice Kaprow had to make in both restricting the number of events being performed and the number of events being performed in each city for a given month.

Though the scattering of events for month and city had been randomly determined, their enforcement required significant organisation, forming a tension similar to that in *Yard* between permissiveness and author-led limitation. The piece contained two immutable rules: the participation of each participant in at least one activity, “although many (or all) would be preferable”, and a fixed number of actions performed for each city in each month.<sup>465</sup> These conditions, though necessary, threatened the piece with “artistic failure” through the possibility of non-, or wrong, participation. This threat, inherent to the 'employment' of Change, was articulated in *AEH*:

“In the case of those Happenings with more detailed instructions or more expanded action, the artist must be present at every moment, directing and participating, for the tradition is too young for the complete stranger to know what to do with such plans if he got them.”<sup>466</sup>

This statement communicates the premise upon which his structure of event-specific “subcontractors” was built. By supervising the events they ensured the performance of each activity and their accordance with Kaprow's specificity. The intention seems to have been for his appointed representatives in the respective cities to ensure the volunteers fulfilled their pledges according to Kaprow's written instructions. As if stipulating a clause in a legal contract, Kaprow explained in his interview with Schechner following the piece that once an activity had been chosen by a participant “if anything came up – as it will during the summer – a person had the right to cancel out and substitute something later on.”<sup>467</sup> Of those enlisted

---

465. Allan Kaprow, “Notes”, *Self-Service*, May 1966, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 9, Folder 9).

466. *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 195.

467. Richard Schechner, “Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow”, *The Drama Review* vol. 12, no. 3 (T39), Spring 1968, pp. 41-63, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 186-192, p. 186.

however Kaprow had instructed that “decisions are to be made at the beginning and respected thereafter.”<sup>468</sup> Given these instructions a volunteer had no 'right' to cease their involvement, though some clearly did. While the plan for Los Angeles lists twenty-four activities for June, twelve for July, eighteen for August and twenty-one for September, the final tally [fig. 104] reveals only sixteen being performed in June, thirteen performed in August, twelve in September, but a surplus of one in July.<sup>469</sup> Permission was given within this predetermined framework for an activity to be abandoned should it be deemed impractical by Kaprow or one of his representatives. The final scheme for Los Angeles, for example, shows the abandonment of the task to be performed at “3:00 AM... at a 24-hour washerette”, with instructions for “piles of clothes washed. Turning cylinders, blue-white fluorescents. Regularly on the half-hour, loud bunch of photogs [sic.] burst in, flash pix, leave. Home at five.”<sup>470</sup> And the director of the Pasadena Museum, Walter Hopps, was in charge of two events but only managed to mobilise an engagement with one of the works he was given responsibility for, on two occasions over the course of four months. Within the context of bonded promises Kaprow's lecture in advance of the piece to the volunteers in New York illustrated the permissiveness of the events themselves. “*Self-Service*”, he stated, “will not suffer at all from indifference or laxity on the part of those who have elected to enter into it. There is nothing to harm”.<sup>471</sup> While every effort was made to foster engagement, once the participants were active an absolute freedom existed, as in *Yard*, to behave as they wished. Organisers could harm the work in a way that participants could not. Though Kaprow had established a network of representatives he found the work ultimately unsettling for his inability to be present at every moment.<sup>472</sup>

---

468. Allan Kaprow, “Notes”, *Self-Service*, May 1966, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 9, Folder 9).

469. Comparison between Allan Kaprow, “Notes”, *Self-Service*, May 1966, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 9, Folder 9), and Allan Kaprow “Final scheme for *Self-Service*”, 1966, repr. *Art as Life*, p. 184.

470. Allan Kaprow, “Self-Service: A Happening” (1966), repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 193-196, p. 196.

471. Allan Kaprow quoted in *Childsplay*, p. 110.

472. *Childsplay*, pp. 110-111.

Though Kaprow devolved the execution of *Self-Service* to elements within its predetermined hierarchy, he maintained, as he later explained in an interview of 1997, “a way of thinking about oneself as an artist in a solitary form”; a consequence of his early career as a painter.<sup>473</sup> The possibility of a large grouping was consciously neutered, to create “small groups, modularly operating within a larger context.”<sup>474</sup> In opposition to the progressive interest in communal living during the late 1960s, he continued “it would be very unlikely to me to first arrive at the concept of a commune as a community.”<sup>475</sup> His strategy of fragmentation and dispersal, orthodox tactics in neutralising the power of crowds, protected his artistic objectives from the vulnerability contained in the 'risk' of employing agents of change.

The participants' engagement with a variety of contexts and involuntary subjects resulted in each intervention being conditioned by the ensuing contingencies of these variables. Children offering flowers to strangers illustrated this well: the variety of responses to the gesture changed the outcome of the activity significantly, while their infantile unpredictability created a further radical dynamic. Additionally the number of activities per person and the number of participants allowed was unlimited, with the specific location of each activity also indeterminate. Within this scenario there was nothing to “harm”: whatever happened became an authentic part of the work, as with *Yard*, though unlike the latter the form of *Self-Service* was delimited by the fluidity of its environmental interventions in amongst the participant's daily lives. It was as Kaprow later described “an absolute flow between event and environment”.<sup>476</sup> By creating a continually expanding form outside the behavioural and physical limits of the gallery space, the flow from event to environment was both effected by and in turn propelled this expansion. The autonomy Kaprow gave to

---

473. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 37, Allan Kaprow Papers.

474. Ibid.

475. Ibid.

476. Richard Schechner, “Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow”, *The Drama Review* vol. 12, no. 3 (T39), Spring 1968, pp. 41-63, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp.186-192, p. 187.

participants within the work differed from his allowance for self-directed activity in *Yard*. In *Self-Service* authority was given to the volunteers to test the limits of the piece. In Los Angeles the instruction for couples to “kiss in the midst of the world, go on” was the most popular activity, with an additional instruction that “This activity should be enacted in a way that seems appropriate to the couple”.<sup>477</sup> This permissiveness was unprecedented in his work, emulating Brecht's environmentally co-optive work, pointing towards a resolution between the increasingly murky categories of chance (both rule-based Chance and his 1961 definition), and choice (of both Kaprow and the spectator). However the strict hierarchy that enforced this eventual liberty indicated that a full resolution was elusive, if not entirely undesirable. Kaprow's attempt to propose a resolution the following year, in articulating the interdependent categories of Chance and Change, would ensure its deferral through his recognition of Chance as a means of control.

---

477. Allan Kaprow, “Self-Service: A Happening” (1966), repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp. 193-196, p. 194; Allan Kaprow “Final scheme for *Self-Service*”, 1966, repr. *Art as Life*, p. 184.

## 4. The Role of Play in Kaprow's Practice

“The play experience, is... like art, a clarification of experience.”<sup>478</sup>

– George Seward, “Play as Art”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, March 1944

If the late 1950s to mid-1960s was characterised by a conflict between control and permissiveness in Kaprow's Environments and Happenings, the late 1960s witnessed the introduction of smaller-scale, tightly controlled, experimental pieces that allowed for indeterminate outcomes. Defined initially as 'Activity-type Happenings' later becoming just 'Activities' they extended the permissive experiment of *Self-Service*. They explored the complexities of human relations and normative social systems, along with the role of work in a society increasingly distanced from its mode of technological production. Like *Yard* and *Self-Service* these pieces demarcated structural limitations in order to regulate the activity they allowed. This regulative activity was structured around non-competitive games in which play could either be serious or non-serious, but was always used as a critical tool for specific contexts and societal shifts in the labour force of contemporary America.<sup>479</sup> Play suggests a degree of freedom for the participants, but the structure of organised play allowed Kaprow to maintain control of the overall piece. I will argue that these later Happenings and Activities produced two forms of critique. The first was a critique of work through parody and simulation, the second a critique of knowledge. Both explored their context and subject matter through what Kaprow described as “conscious emulation”, in which the focus on ordinarily unexamined activities was achieved through the selection of one task.<sup>480</sup>

---

478. George Seward, “Play as Art”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 41, No. 7 (Mar 30, 1944), pp. 178-184, p. 184.

479. The concept of 'serious play' comes from Joseph Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1955), whom Kaprow had read and quotes in “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. by Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 110-129, pp. 113-4

480. Allan Kaprow “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. by Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley, pp. 110-129, p. 112.

In Horace Richter's fundraising letter for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, he argued that “Many of us who think we are grown-up have forgotten the simple joy of responding to life, which as children we were able to do so well.”<sup>481</sup> It is this idea of play as a Jamesian “pure experience” that Kaprow's interest in play and playfulness imparts. In his *Artforum* article of March 1966, “Happenings Are Dead: Long Live the Happening”, a draft of part of *AEH* Kaprow writes “A Happening perhaps alludes more to the form of game and sports than to the forms of art; in this connection it is useful to observe how children invent the games they play.”<sup>482</sup> In a handwritten note regarding his Happening *Watching* (1967), he had defined the aim of a Happening as play: “What is a Happening? – a game, an adventure, a number of activities, engaged in by participants for the sake of playing.”<sup>483</sup> An idiosyncratic and incorrect reading of Dewey's *Experience and Nature* from his undergraduate notebook highlights “play – as art” to be one of the principal elements of Dewey's thesis.<sup>484</sup> And in 1983 he gave a lecture at La Hoya Museum of Contemporary Art in which he described *Company* (1982): a piece requiring participants to carry one concrete block for every year of their life into a basement room for eight hours. Recounting his own experience, he remarked that the blocks seemed to get heavier until the one representing 1977, the year he divorced. His explanation for this was that during his marriage “my sense of play, which I think is probably my deepest engagement in anything began to diminish”.<sup>485</sup>

#### 4.1. Political background/Death of the Happening

---

481. Horace Richter, “Kaprow 'Event' to Open at Reuben Gallery”, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 5, folder 12).

482. Allan Kaprow, 'Happenings Are Dead: Long Live the Happening', repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. by Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley, pp. 59-65, p. 63.

483. Allan Kaprow, handwritten score for *Watching* (1967), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 12, folder 8).

484. Allan Kaprow, notebook for Philosophy course, New York University, 1946-49, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 1, folder 3). For a further discussion on play and art at this time, see George Seward “Play as Art”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 41, No. 7 (Mar 30, 1944), pp.178-184.

485. Allan Kaprow, lecture at La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, "Wolf Kahn talk", Allan Kaprow Papers (box 76, C67).

By the late 1960s political revolt against the status quo among young Americans had come to define their generation. Widespread student-led demonstrations against the American-led war in Vietnam, the Hippie counter-culture movement, civil rights marches, the foundation of the Black Panther Party, the growing prominence of the Black Power Movement, and the women's liberation movement, were fragmented in their individual aims but united in their wish to rebalance the societal power structures within modern America. An influential call for a new economic, social and political system as a participatory democracy, based on non-violent civil disobedience, by the prominent radical organisation Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1962, came to define a new wave of radical leftist thought, the 'New Left', and helped provide a framework for the myriad social movements. This new wave was distinguished by its rejection of the Marxist fixation with class struggle and labour unionisation of the historical left, focusing on practicable solutions to social reform and the belief in sexual liberation as a means to liberate society. With such widespread disquiet against the very foundations of contemporary society, non-resistance was as political a stance as resistance itself. There was little that was not seen politically, including Kaprow's term 'Happening'. By 1966 the term had become co-opted by counter-cultural activists as an affirmative model for collective activity, illustrated in an article by the eminent social theorist, and counter-cultural icon, Marshal McLuhan for *Vogue* in July of that year, that Kaprow had clipped and archived. McLuhan argued that “The world of the Happening announces that our involvement in the conditions of life on this planet is such that we must begin to do, not some things, but everything as well as possible.”<sup>486</sup> Later in the article he announced of his oft cited phrase, “When I say that 'the medium is the message' I am merely stating the fact that 'meaning' is a Happening, the multitudinous interplay of events.”<sup>487</sup>

Kaprow recognised the vacuity of his term outside of his practice, writing in *The National*

---

486. Marshall McLuhan, “Great Change-Overs for You,” *Vogue*, July 1966, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 41, folder 8).

487. Ibid.

*Observer*, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1967: “Most people think a Happening is spontaneous, that it 'just happens,' that you can do anything you wish if you're in one. Nothing could be less true.”<sup>488</sup>

Kaprow's pronouncements on Happenings up until 1965, in which the value of the spontaneous was emphasised, had helped establish the association that he was now at pains to discourage. The appearance of spontaneity as a theatrical illusion in the early Happenings was incompatible with Kaprow's increasingly participatory work thereafter. The latter required a framework of limitation precluding the incorporation of spontaneity as a non-illusory attribute.

#### **4.1.i. *Flick* (1967) and *Interruption* (1967)**

Kaprow had created two overtly political Happenings: *Flick* and *Interruption*, both in 1967.<sup>489</sup> Sponsored by Angry Arts, an activist group given a platform by Kaprow's former gallery space in the Judson Memorial Church, *Flick* was a dispersal piece. Part of Angry Arts Week, a series of events by radical artists in Lower East Side, New York, from 26<sup>th</sup> January to 5<sup>th</sup> February 1967, *Flick* consisted of four groups of participants separated over four streets. At a quarter to midnight whistles were blown by participants and match boxes set alight before the participants discarded them as they walked home. Its political message was clear: the timing and setting of the piece in the middle of the night in New York City, along with the requirement to set matchboxes alight while holding them relayed the dangers of the war in Vietnam. The title 'Flick' suggested the futile loss of life suffered in great numbers by American troops, allegorised by the thoughtless discard of the matchboxes. *Interruption* was performed over two days at State University of New York (SUNY) where Kaprow was teaching. Less allegorical than *Flick*, it focused on the ritual of political demonstration, rather

---

488. 'Following the Script for a Happening', *The National Observer*, June 12, 1967, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 12, folder 3).

489. Though Harold Osborne in “Aesthetic implications of conceptual art, happenings, etc.”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 20 (1):6-22 (1980), argues that Happenings were more instances of activism than works of art.

than a political message. On the first day protesters carried blank placards, staged sit-ins for no apparent reason, and produced an impromptu rock concert. On the second day a “women's lie-in” was performed throughout the corridors of the humanities faculty, with male students covering them in newspapers, telephone directories and lecture notes. Explaining the piece, Kaprow described it as a display of daily ritual: “*Interruption* uses a lot of these rituals in your life, especially the ritual of demonstration, but here the politics are taken out.”<sup>490</sup> He emphasised his political neutrality outside of the piece, so far as to have outright disdain for the social issues being fought for. In an interview the year following *Interruption* he claimed that “There are no new great ideologies today... Surely you have local causes, such as civil rights and peace movements and things like that; but these are not essential philosophical problems.”<sup>491</sup> *Interruption* emptied political agitation of its content to focus on the ritual of protest as a case study in itself.

*Interruption* had been a difficult piece for Kaprow. Not only was the lie-in shut down due to health and safety objections from faculty staff, but the nature of the protests against it from students not part of the Happening caused it to have a political impact. The financing of *Interruption* by the university was vocally opposed on the first day, while the performance of hanging washed clothes by women was attacked by women's liberation protesters.

Additionally the rock-concert descended into a large-scale party, a situation that irritated Kaprow due to the popular association of Happenings as unstructured spontaneous and entirely permissive events. Kaprow was resolute that the term had lost its meaning, being diffused in mainstream culture as a byword to describe anything with fashionable pretensions. The traumatic memory of the failure of *Interruption* led to denial in a statement

---

490. 'Following the Script for a Happening', *The National Observer*, June 12, 1967, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 12, folder 3).

491. Richard Kostelanetz, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp.100-132, p. 130.

made the following year: “I once considered doing a 'sit-in' as a Happening; but I decided not to, because I thought it would be bad politics, if it were good art.”<sup>492</sup>

The Happening was a disaster in terms of Kaprow's reputation within SUNY. In a collective letter from the Department of History following the Happening the signatories complained of his 'intrusive' art form, placing a condition on its future within the university:

“If, for its value, the 'happening' requires a captive audience, it is an objectionable practice. If, however, the 'happening' needs only the enthusiasm of its participants, then we strongly suggest that all future 'happenings' be held in private, where the rest of us will find it much easier to wish them and their participants every success.”<sup>493</sup>

The faculty's letter emphasises the problem of context in which Kaprow found himself. His parody of student protest within the university invited not only unwelcome involvement by non-initiated participants, but irked those who were involuntarily implicated in the work. The scale of the Happening impeded Kaprow's ability to effectively direct the proceedings according to his preconceived ideas for the piece. The suggestion by the faculty that smaller scale Happenings could help solve this problem was a resolution Kaprow had already considered: he had just been awarded a Guggenheim grant to produce smaller-scale Happenings that would focus on “no more than two or three participants.”<sup>494</sup> By significantly reducing the scale of his work he could obscure his practice and distance it from the preconceptions attached to the popular appropriation of the term 'Happening'. The fallout from the event came two months after the tragic death of his daughter Nina after she was hit by a car outside the Kaprow family home. His increasingly sequestered practice reflected the private nature of his grief and his likely increased sense of vulnerability at this time. In an

---

492. Ibid.

493. Joint letter from the faculty members of the Department of History, SUNY complaining of *Interruption*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1967, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 12, folder 3).

494. 'Following the Script for a Happening', *The National Observer*, June 12, 1967, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 12, folder 3).

interview the following year Kaprow stated that a less public practice was sought “For the sake of the freedom to work as playfully as possible.”<sup>495</sup>

#### 4.1.ii. “Aesthetic anarchy”

The necessity to step away from the limelight echoed the need he perceived for progressive artists to sever their practice “from the body of culture... [so] that their state is not so much lonely as metaphysically nameless.”<sup>496</sup> Indeed freedom for Kaprow represented both an artistic and personal, if not also a political, ideology. In “The Demiurge” (1959) Kaprow had articulated what he described as “aesthetic anarchy”: a rejection of aesthetic convention and reverence for historical Masters, in place of a focus on “the electricity that infused their art.”<sup>497</sup> “Anarchy” Kaprow proposed “now testifies to the healthiest part of us: our fundamental creative process.”<sup>498</sup> At the time of writing Kaprow had been in discussion with Julian Beck, an anarchist, in connection with recruiting performers for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. While *18 Happenings* did not entirely refuse “the body of culture” and artistic convention, his 'aesthetic anarchy' had manifested itself in public interventions such as *Calling* (1965) in which participants wrapped in cloth were deposited at the information booth at Grand Central Station, New York. It defied the authority of socially normative behaviour within the public space in which it appeared. And it was his natural inclination to defy the authority of institutional space that led to the provocatively titled *Interruption* receiving the scorn of faculty staff due to its subversion of the otherwise ordered scholastic environment of the academy. On the other hand Kaprow's self-professed aesthetic anarchism

---

495. Richard Kostelanetz, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp.100-132, p. 131.

496. Allan Kaprow, 'Experimental Art', *Art News* 65, no. 1, pp. 60-63, pp. 77-82, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 66-80, p. 70.

497. Allan Kaprow, “The Demiurge”, *Anthologist*, Vol. 30, No. 4., 1959, pp. 4-17, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 5, folder 5).

498. Ibid.

was contradicted by his authoritarian attitude to the participants in his work.<sup>499</sup> His display of 'aesthetic anarchy' was seemingly one-sided, a fact that may have contributed to his realisation following *Interruption* that he was “essentially anarchistic in leaning rather than in action.”<sup>500</sup> Kaprow had used the term 'anarchy' loosely and without any evidential basis in historical models describing, for example, the attribution of the term “neo-dada” by critics to Happenings as “a completely erroneous comparison [that] reveals more the helplessness and anarchy of understanding in the minds of these judges, than it does the nature of the art.”<sup>501</sup> Kaprow's political position appears to lean towards an individualist anarchism, apparent in his statement in “The Demiurge” that “it is time that we begin to believe that the philosophy of no man being an island was thought up by an island and has only rationalized the weakness of countless thousands of others who should have tried harder.”<sup>502</sup> The result of Kaprow's approach was described by Schechner's editorial for the *Tulane Drama Review*: an issue in which Kaprow had also written an evaluative piece on *Calling*. Schechner suggested that “just as Pop Art has made us somewhat immune to certain kinds of advertising, so, perhaps, we become somewhat immune to other forms of mass persuasion after participating in a Happening.”<sup>503</sup> It was perhaps an unwitting outcome, the nature of the contradiction being in the contrast between the idea of individual creativity espoused by Kaprow and the notion of the Happening as a parody of 'mass persuasion'. Though authoritarianism was not something he could divorce from authorship, and while he enthused over the idea of individual freedom, he remained most enthusiastic about his own freedom to create and under

---

499. Judith Rodenbeck has characterised Kaprow's Happenings during the early 1960s as “Authoritarian political structures [that relied] on the radical subsumption of the individual to the collective and the concomitant binding of that collective to a charismatic leader”, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings*, pp. 216-7.

500. Richard Kostelanetz, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp.100-132, p. 130.

501. Allan Kaprow, “Some Observations on Contemporary Art”, *New Forms – New Media* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1960), n.p., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 46, Folder 13).

502. Allan Kaprow, “The Demiurge”, *Anthologist*, Vol. 30, No. 4., 1959, pp. 4-17, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 5, folder 5).

503. Richard Schechner, “Happenings”, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Winter, 1965), pp.229-232, p. 232.

his terms. His smaller scale work to a great extent resisted the common misperception of the term 'Happening' as fundamentally permissive enactments, refusing to be confined by the totalising power of that nominal association. Furthermore in creating smaller 'Activity Happenings' Kaprow could determine the limits of his pieces, preventing them from being hijacked as with *Interruption*. His anarchist pretensions were as much a problem as his wish to incorporate indeterminacy within his practice: both jarred with a clear authorial intent. While his small scale works not only protected his games from being subverted or misconstrued, they also provided 'the freedom to play'.

#### **4.2. Work critique**

Like *Self-Service*, *Flick* and *Interruption* marked a shift in Kaprow's practice from a predominantly theatrical emphasis to an examination of the conditions of modern life, and the relationship of social, natural, exchange and communication systems to the experience of these conditions. Scripts were replaced with short instructions, distancing his practice further from the theatrical provenance of the Happening and giving way to an examination of form and process. This was facilitated through an ideological attachment to play as an emancipatory methodology, with an initial focus on the emancipation of the artist from the constraints of professionalism. In the first of his trilogy for *Art News*, "The Education of the Un-Artist", written in 1969 and published two years later, he argued that the institutionalisation of art isolated what he defined as "Art art" from the non-art world from which it came.<sup>504</sup> While nonart, defined by Kaprow as "whatever has not yet been accepted as art but has caught an artist's attention with that possibility in mind", retained unspent creativity, "Art art" was the moribund shell of the once creative impulse, the target of aesthetic anarchy.<sup>505</sup> "Art art" was a professional category "accredited", protected and defined

---

504. Allan Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I", repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109.

505. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

against “nonart” institutionally through exhibitions, books, magazine culture columns, stagings, and film screenings.<sup>506</sup> It incorporated “nostalgic echoes of antiart” such as in the work of Rauschenberg, Donald Judd, Frank Stella, and the “informal dispersions of felt, metal, rope, and other raw matter” during the 1968-69 season at the Castelli Gallery in New York.<sup>507</sup> This included '9 at Leo Castelli', December 4–28, 1968, curated by Robert Morris [fig. 105] and Robert Morris's *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, March 1–22, 1969 [fig. 106]. Indeed his position on this season, that “Art art in the guise of nonart quickly became high style” is evidently problematic with respect to his status as an institutionally recognised and influential artist promoting “nonart”.<sup>508</sup> Everyday life, the source of nonart, was “supervivid” in comparison to institutionalised art he argued: such vividness could be realised when habituated modes of perception were disrupted.<sup>509</sup> Kaprow had relinquished his first principle of Happenings that “The line between art and life should be kept as fluid and as indistinct as possible” to reject the idea that objects categorised as art were adequate vessels for the creative imminence of the nonart they purported to express.<sup>510</sup> While we could easily dismiss the proposition that nonart rejects the category of art as a nominal distinction, it is within the operation of nonart practice that nonart as a category engenders its own nullification.<sup>511</sup> Practitioners would “slyly shift the whole un-artistic operation away from where the arts customarily congregate, to become for instance, an account executive, an ecologist, a politician, a beach bum.”<sup>512</sup> Nonart, now transplanted as a self-sufficient quality, that of the imminence of creativity, and without recourse to a negative definition in relation to

---

506. Ibid., p. 101.

507. Ibid.

508. Ibid.

509. Ibid., p. 102.

510. *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings*, p. 188.

511. This process is analogous to what Jacques Derrida describes as the operation of deconstruction, as a philosophical category, in academia whereby “a discourse...borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself”: Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 357).

512. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 104.

art, “would operate indirectly as a stored code that, instead of programming a specific course of behaviour, would facilitate an attitude of deliberate playfulness toward all professionalizing activities”.<sup>513</sup> By working outside art, nonartists maintain the origin of play that the category of art as a centred structure closes off.<sup>514</sup> It perpetuated the interest of the historical avant-gardes in parodying the monetary value of the art work, epitomised by Duchamp's signed readymade objects.<sup>515</sup>

#### **4.2.i. *Moving* (1967) and the re-direction of artistic labour**

Kaprow's argument gives an insight into the way his practice had been moving from 1967, when he had claimed in his interview with Schechner that “Each of us is finding that the professional side of our [art] background is not bad but limiting.”<sup>516</sup> In his Happening *Moving* [figs. 107-108] he had functioned as the boss of a removal team, during a four day exercise in furnishing unused houses in Chicago, from November 29<sup>th</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1967. The workers pushed large pieces of old furniture around the city to four different areas, furnishing each of the houses' bedrooms on the first day, the dining rooms on the second, living rooms on the third, and filling the attics on the fourth. Rather than merely parading as functional workers, Kaprow's team enlivened the rooms they installed, sleeping in the bedrooms on the first day, eating a meal in the dining rooms on the second day and throwing cocktail parties in the living rooms on the third day. It was a deliberately playful workforce of the sort you might only want to use once. Kaprow's assertion in “Education of the Un-Artist” that “un-artisting will probably emerge as humor”, was more of a reflection on this early experiment than a prediction of a future practice.<sup>517</sup> Indeed Kaprow's proposal for the un-artist, and the

---

513. Ibid.

514. I borrow the notion of the 'centred structure' and the closure of play from Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, see fn. 511.

515. For a discussion of the idea of work in avant-garde art, see *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 55-59.

516. Richard Schechner, “Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow”, *The Drama Review* vol. 12, no. 3 (T39), Spring 1968, pp. 41-63, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp.186-192, p. 190.

517. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p.104.

notion of non-art, echoed the call made by the ringleader of Fluxus, George Maciunas in his *Fluxus Manifesto* (1963) to “promote non-art reality”.<sup>518</sup> In a letter from Maciunas to George Brecht, approving of his *Piano Piece* (1961) as a 'non-art' event, Maciunas wrote “By non-art I mean anything not created by artists with intent to provide an 'art' experience.”<sup>519</sup> This, he explained further, in a letter to new Fluxus recruit Thomas Schmidt, meant “choosing a field – applied arts or unrelated field – training yourself for it and then working in it. This will be your Fluxus activity – working at socially useful work & enjoying it without needing to do art on spare after-work hours.”<sup>520</sup> The irony of Kaprow's theorisation of a position that had been outlined nearly a decade earlier by Maciunas was that he had been forced to distance himself from Fluxus due to his inability to accept Maciunas's request for ownership of copyright as a condition of Kaprow's membership of the group. This urge to direct artists away from professional art practice towards unrelated fields of work was not only an American phenomenon, but was proposed also in London by the Artist Placement Group. Founded by John Latham and Barbara Stevini in 1966 the group had as its initial policy the aim to place artists in industries as diverse as manufacturing, land reclamation, psychiatry and local government, advocating that “the future must involve a more integrated and comprehensive approach to political and social organisation, in which the insight of artists could have a significant liberating role.”<sup>521</sup> However the particular identification with Fluxus that Kaprow appeared to have in his approach to un-artisting, shown in *Moving*, was alluded to in the dedication of the piece to Milan Knížák: a Czech member of Fluxus appointed 'Director of Fluxus East' by Maciunas around 1965. Creating participatory activities under the banner of Actual Art, later dropping the word 'art', Knížák had identified the affective potency of that

---

518. George Maciunas, “Fluxus Manifesto”, n.d. [c.1963], Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, repr. Owen Smith, “Developing a Fluxable Forum”, *The Fluxus Reader*, pp. 3-21, p. 4.

519. George Maciunas, letter to George Brecht, c. fall 1962, Jean Brown Papers, Getty Research Library, Los Angeles (accession no. 890164).

520. George Maciunas, excerpt from “Letter to Tomas Schmidt” (1964), repr. Kristine Stiles, Peter Howard Selz (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 726-728, p. 728

521. Michael Corris, “The Un-artist”, *Art Monthly*, June 2012, 357, pp. 5-8, p. 6.

which is neither a rarefied instance of the everyday, or the everyday itself, but something in between. This is clarified in a piece entitled *Aktual University: Ten Lessons* (1967-68), echoing the pedagogical approach Kaprow used in “Education of the Un-Artist”:

“One is most influenced by those things that are neither every-day nor too exceptional. Exceptional things are immediately considered rarities. And every-day things are lost in the flow of the commonplace. And so things that are only a LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT, that are impossible to include in recognized categories, possess the greatest ability to influence and effect.”<sup>522</sup>

Knížák's description strikes a familiarity with Kaprow's understanding of the creative immanence of his category 'non-art'. The familiarity is extended in Knížák's contention that “if we consider everything as a game, as play, if we ignore the usefulness (and sometimes even the difficulty and the strain) of what we happen to be doing, then we may make even something as boring as shopping seem just as amusing as watching cats stretching themselves.”<sup>523</sup> Indeed in an article of 1977 Kaprow describes the role of Knížák, Brecht and Robert Filliou in suggesting smaller-scale pieces such as *Moving* during this period.<sup>524</sup> Kaprow's suggestion to “facilitate an attitude of deliberate playfulness toward all professionalising activities well beyond art” appears to paraphrase Knížák's passage published four years earlier, revealing the debt to Knížák and the justification for the dedication of *Moving*.<sup>525</sup>

#### **4.2.ii. Play as social critique in *Runner* (1968)**

---

522. Milan Knížák, “Aktual University: Ten Lessons (1967-68)”, repr. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, pp. 739-744, p. 742.

523. Ibid.

524. Allan Kaprow, “Participation Performance”, *Artforum* 14, no. 9, pp. 45-51, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 181-194, p. 186.

525. Alongside Knížák and Maciunas, Kaprow identified the marginality of his idea of 'non-art' with the concept of 'intermedia' outlined by his close associate and Fluxus artist Dick Higgins.

Though *Moving* performed the shift in artistic operation to that of a professional environment, it did not fulfil what Kaprow came to theorise as un-arding: it still retained the status of 'Art art' by nature of its sponsorship by Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, and the publication of a photo album for its exhibition 'Pictures to Be Read, Poetry to Be Seen' (1967). It maintained what Kaprow had described in "Education of the Un-Artist" as the "sacred settings and formats handed down by this tradition... [to] grant accreditation the way universities grant degrees", echoing his attack on the "objectionable conventions of space and purpose" of the gallery.<sup>526</sup> The need for institutional support and the production of performance documentation was to be a perpetual paradox of his un-art methodology, one that distanced his theory from his practice. Accepting the inevitable conflict inherent to Kaprow's early utopian vision, and the obvious complications in communicating his educative decree via *Art News*, a bastion of institutional discourse, the one outcome of *Moving* that broadly succeeded in fulfilling Kaprow's vision was the function of play to change the experience of work. If Kaprow's practice could not help him un-art entirely it could provide a critique of work.<sup>527</sup> In 1968 he performed *Runner* [figs. 109-114] as part of his retrospective at Washington University Art Gallery in St. Louis. Sponsored by the University, it did not escape the trappings of 'Art art', but suggested the progression of his work as a social commentary in a similar vein to earlier Happenings such as *Bon Marche* (1962), *Household* (1964) and *Self-Service* (1966). Performed over three days on a private residential road from 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> February, 1968 *Runner* parodied the suburban expansion of St Louis. On the first day tar paper was rolled out over a mile along the roadside, with concrete blocks used to secure it in place. On the second day the process was repeated in reverse with the second layer of tar paper laid over the first, then again repeated in the opposite direction:

526. Allan Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I", repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 101; Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers, (Box 47, Folder 12).

527. Robert Haywood has argued that "Kaprow strove to reinvent an art critical of instrumental labor... in substantial part from the ruins of Schapiro's communist and Depression-era challenge to modern artists", *Experiments in the everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, events, objects, documents*, pp.27-46, p. 28.

mirroring through parody the “work of real road builders”.<sup>528</sup> On the third day the concrete blocks and tar paper were removed altogether. It was performed in the context of an economic exodus from the inner city of St Louis to its suburbs: between 1960 and 1970 the inner city's population declined by seventeen per cent, most of them wealthy white migrants. While the black population stayed static, it rose as a percentage of the total population during this time from twenty-nine per cent in 1960 to 41 per cent in 1970. The expansion of the suburbs had exacerbated the social divide between rich and poor. Though Kaprow had dismissed the civil rights movement as “not an essential philosophical problem”, the social injustice it aimed to correct was at least implicitly present in *Runner*. Tar paper was trail-blazed through the new frontier echoing the history of white American pioneers in the West. It also recalls Pennsylvania's “Walking Purchase” (1735) in which the colony negotiated a purchase of land from the reluctant native Delaware Sachems for “all the land a man could walk in a day and a half”.<sup>529</sup> The duplicitous administrators cleared a path and hired runners, covering over fifty-five miles and claiming approximately 710,000 acres as a result.<sup>530</sup> *Runner* also recalled the anatomy of the motorcar, the invention most responsible for enabling the expansion into suburbia. And the white middle class arts students, along with the predominantly white middle class audience that it was intended for, graced with free time due to the burgeoning service sector, reiterated the cultural and economic hegemony of St Louis' white middle class. But the focus of the piece that I wish to concentrate on was its commentary on the individual's relationship to work that was promoting this economic expansion and geographical dispersal.

It was in his second “Education of the Un-Artist” (1972) essay that the focus of play as a means of disruption moved from the artist's emancipation to that of the worker. Using the

---

528. Allan Kaprow, briefing notes for *Runner*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 14, folder 2).

529. Steven Craig Harper, *Promised Land: Penn's holy experiment, the Walking Purchase, and the dispossession of Delawares, 1600-1763* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2006), p. 53.

530. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

premise of the Dutch cultural theorist Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938) that it is in ritual and the “spirit of pure play” manifested through imitation that “the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin”, Kaprow suggested that while ritual in Huizinga's sense had been lost, adults imitated both nonhuman and manmade worlds in their work as an instinctive and unconscious part of the human experience.<sup>531</sup> The “addiction to work” however produced “a sense of the separation from the whole of life and also veil[ed] the imitative activity along with the enjoyment that might be had from it.”<sup>532</sup> It was a position that mirrored Dewey's characterisation of work against play in *Art as Experience*: “Play remains an attitude of freedom from subordination to an end imposed by external necessity, as opposed, that is, to labor; but it is transformed into work in that activity is subordinated to *production* of an objective result.”<sup>533</sup> The solution, Kaprow suggested, was to eradicate work by “Foster[ing] play as a foundation of society” as a way of “bringing together what has been taken apart.”<sup>534</sup> And it was the duty of the un-artist to facilitate the emancipation of the worker from work through converting the “Art work, a sort of moral paradigm for an exhausted work ethic... into play”.<sup>535</sup> As nonart was defined in opposition to the status quo, Kaprow believed the idea of play as “a stratagem for the survival of society”, could only be understood by the decentred members of that, particularly American, society:

“Unlike our usual forms of sports, outings, games and festivities, which are mirrors of our current values, these should be freshly conceived by teams of children, eccentrics, ad men, Yippies, artists and Happeners. As a group, these individuals, so often mistrusted by society,

---

531. Johan Huizinga, “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon” (1938), repr. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (eds.), *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 96-120, p. 100.

532. Allan Kaprow, “Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, p. 115.

533. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934) (New York: Perigee, 2005), p. 291.

534. Allan Kaprow, “Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, p. 124 & p.116.

535. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

are alone capable of understanding the metaphysics of play. It is not the 'straight' American who can save America.”<sup>536</sup>

While *Runner* preceded the publication of the second instalment of “Education of the Un-Artist”, it featured as a case study in the essay as an example of imitative nonart as a way towards the carefree play-world. As a child might copy the surface quality of a serious activity, such as talking on the phone to no-one in particular, or 'mowing' the lawn using a bladeless plastic box with handles, the process by which Kaprow's team imitated the activity of road-building, through laying tar paper as a repetition of the road's surface, was funny in its childlike naivety. As humour had provided a way for the artist to un-art in *Moving*, in *Runner* it indicated a way for the worker to play. In the notes Kaprow used to brief the participants he described the “Happening type” as being “work – play” [fig. 112].<sup>537</sup> The dash can function as both hyphen, “work-play”, in which work is subverted from functional operation to parody, and as a mark of the transition of the journey from work to play. And it was this transition that formed what Kaprow described as the “Social comment” of the piece, in which “useless work becomes useful as recreation” [fig. 113].<sup>538</sup> Kaprow's commentary can be read both pejoratively and positively, and it is through a pejorative reading that both can be understood in relation to Kaprow's notion of play as a means of social disruption. Kaprow had perceived that with the rise of the service sector came the modernisation of business practices, along with the increased efficiencies provided requiring less paid work, often meaning a shorter working week.<sup>539</sup> This was highlighted in the second point in his social commentary of *Runner*: “useful work [becomes] increasingly useless as technology takes its place.”<sup>540</sup> When workers strike against a reduction in working hours, only to accept higher pay, “the concept 'work', maintained artificially, can only elicit the most cynical responses in

536. Allan Kaprow, letter submitted to *Avant-Garde* magazine, 1969, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 61, folder 9).

537. Allan Kaprow, briefing notes for *Runner*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 14, folder 2).

538. Ibid.

539. Allan Kaprow, “Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, pp. 117-119.

540. Allan Kaprow, briefing notes for *Runner*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 14, folder 2).

society.”<sup>541</sup> Thus 'work', in Kaprow's societal framework, has no intrinsic value nor integrity. Stripped of its function to serve a purpose outside of the worker's self-interests, “labor suffers by doing patently dishonest work”.<sup>542</sup> The idea of work, distancing the worker from the act of work, becomes useless. The activity of the participants in *Runner* parodies what Kaprow perceived to be the systematic pretence of work, accepting this pretence as play and through play reconnecting with the process of imitation, becoming useful as recreation.<sup>543</sup> The objective of imitation as recreation was to enable “Play [as a means to] offer satisfaction, not in some practical outcome, some immediate accomplishment, but rather in continuous participation as its own end”, echoing the Fluxus artist Walter de Maria's 1960 suggestion for 'Meaningless Work' as that “which does not make money or accomplish a conventional purpose.”<sup>544</sup> The irony is that Kaprow himself was being paid through Washington University's sponsorship for this useless work. While he could propose play as a means of resisting the experientially barren fixation on an exhausted work ethic, as he perceived it, he was doing so from the perspective of a member of the elite being paid to play. Much like un-acting he was engaged in a dialectic of nominally resisting a system that supported his platform.<sup>545</sup>

---

541. Allan Kaprow, “Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, pp. 118.

542. *Ibid.*

543. Kaprow's critique of post-industrial labour can be understood in terms of Jürgen Habermas's distinction between “work” and “interaction”: the former based on the rational choice of efficient means, the latter on “communicative action” through “consensual norms”, “Jürgen Habermas”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/habermas/>), accessed 27<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

544. *Ibid.*, p. 122; Walter de Maria, “Meaningless Work” (1960), repr. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, p. 526.

545. Helen Molesworth argues that participatory art mirrored the blur between work and leisure that the service sector represented, with artists becoming service providers or facilitators instead of producers of objects: “while audiences were increasingly offered art as an anti-commodity, ludic, or ethical experience, they were also asked to do the 'work' of completing it. By disallowing passive viewership, the new participatory works pressed their audiences into service, asking them to 'work' for their art; in doing so, they both mirrored and created yet another moment where the traditional boundaries between work and leisure were blurred. While many artists desired this blurring, they may have unwittingly taken part in the larger cultural shift at hand: artists, too, were becoming service providers as opposed to object makers, mirroring the larger societal transformation from a manufacturing to a service-based economy.”, Helen Molesworth, M. Darsie Alexander and Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Work Ethic* (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art; University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p. 168.

David Antin has defended Kaprow's pieces, such as *Moving* and *Runner*, against the comparison with de Maria's idea of meaningless work, suggesting Kaprow produced “liberated” work.<sup>546</sup> This is a false distinction as de Maria's description of meaningless work is almost paraphrased by the attack on the “‘Serious’ practicalities” Kaprow describes of “competition, money, and other sobering considerations” that separate the imitative activity of work from play.<sup>547</sup> Rather de Maria's and Kaprow's positions seem to espouse equal ‘liberation’ from the market economy. Kaprow's means of liberation revisited the proposal made by Karl Marx in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 for “the meaningfulness of an inherently playful life in which one can rid oneself from alienated work.”<sup>548</sup> Accepting still the contradiction of a practice that espoused liberation while enforcing a strictly controlled score, Kaprow blamed the loss of play in society on an “Authoritarianism [that] closes out play's inviting role and substitutes the competitive game.”<sup>549</sup> The subversion of work through imitative play was, Kaprow perceived, maintained through a structuring of society upon the “ritual of the game” the objective of which was the pursuit of power.

#### **4.2.iii. Collective action and the critique of function in *Round Trip* (1968)**

---

546. David Antin, “Allan at Work”, *Childsplay*, pp. xi-xvii, p. xvii.

547. This understanding recalls an address by his mentor John Cage to the convention of the Music Teachers National Association in Chicago, 1957: “And what is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.”, John Cage, “Experimental Music” (1957), in John Cage, *Silence* (London: Marion Boyars, 2009), pp. 7-12, p. 12; Allan Kaprow, “Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, pp. 115.

548. Mechthild Nagel, *Masking the Abject: A Genealogy of Play* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), p. 109. Marx also claimed that a false distinction existed between leisurely play and work.

549. Allan Kaprow, “Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, pp. 120. This point was specifically argued in contradistinction to Huizinga's thesis that “The more play bears the character of competition the more fervent it will be”, Johan Huizinga, “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon” (1938), repr. *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, pp. 96-120, p. 105.

*Round Trip* (1968) [figs. 115-116], performed shortly after *Runner*, provides a programmatic illustration of non-competitive play as a means of continual participation for its own end. Performed at SUNY, Albany, where he maintained his professorship, the score directed half the participants to start with a “Tiny ball of paper, cardboard, string” rolled continuously, building up its form with the surrounding detritus until it was unable to be pushed any further. The other half would start with a large ball of paper, cardboard and string, removing pieces of it as they pushed it along until nothing was left. Having been prevented from performing the piece in the streets of Albany, Kaprow had to negotiate to hold it at the same campus he had scandalised in *Interruption*. With the memory of that Happening still fresh, *Round Trip* was performed underground, in a rectangular passageway that served as a supply route between the main campus buildings. Unlike *Runner* or *Moving* whose structure emulated work, albeit useless, to the extent that parts could be completed faster or more efficiently by some than others, maintaining the possibility of competition, *Round Trip* was focused upon the collective actions of the groups on their respective balls. Individual efforts could not be discerned in this cumulative activity. Though a comparison of the groups' respective activities did exist as their balls of debris passed each other half-way, the comparison was not an oppositional struggle upon which their relative progress was measured, but a reflection of their communality. This crossing prevented a sense of linear progress, as with *Runner*, the productivity of the piece being a transferral of material with the eventual form being indiscernible from the form that had existed at the start. A circuitous journey, its focus was on participation toward its own end, returning eventually to the point at which it began, illustrative of Dewey's “unity of a felt [aesthetic] experience” that had contributed to Kaprow's approach of integrating art and life within his practice, as discussed in the first chapter. The evident absurdity of the work is not only apparent in the description of the piece, but in its form. The clump of detritus in the middle of a dull functional space seems comical,

its effect registered on the wry smiles visible among the participants. Its entrance to the space reinforces this to the viewer: the lumbering mass of haphazard junk approaching the camera filling the height of the passageway in a seemingly unpredictable manner. It illustrated what he had written of *Runner*: “useless work becomes useful as recreation”.<sup>550</sup> It parodied end-driven work within an otherwise functional and sterile space as a way of reinforcing the focus on process. The suppression of this 'Activity-Type' Happening into an underground private space indicated the restrictions and necessity for Kaprow's schematic engagement with play as a means of critical enquiry. The detractions of having to be civic-minded in the public realm, as *Interruption* testified to, along with the possibility of the event being hijacked or subverted by those outside Kaprow's cabal, were mostly avoided by its private setting. His increasingly enquiry-based practice from the early 1970s, of which play was the means of disrupting a focus on productivity, would in the main be enacted in private spaces. Kaprow's need for control in order for the significance of the activity to emerge was achieved partly by the isolation of his practice.

#### **4.3. Understanding Kaprow's focus on play in the context of New Left ideology**

Kaprow had consistently made reference to his Happenings as 'games' throughout the 1960s, but games in which “no one wins”, and the distinction made in “Education of the Un-Artist II” between competitive gaming and non-competitive play was a nominal clarification of his commitment to a cooperative practice between players.<sup>551</sup> He had furthermore defined his interest in art as a non-competitive activity in 1948, writing in an undergraduate notebook “there is a freeing of the ego and complete absorption in the art. No competition.”<sup>552</sup> The

---

550. Allan Kaprow, briefing notes for *Runner*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 14, folder 2).

551. Kaprow began to define his works as games in 1962 following his Happening *Courtyard*; Richard Kostelanetz, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp.100-132, p.117.

552. Allan Kaprow, notebook from Philosophy course, New York University, 1946-49, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 1, folder 3). This point contradicts Kelley's claim that “Kaprow was able to make a key distinction that would underlie all his subsequent work: *that games and play are not the same*”, favouring play as the basis of his participatory Happenings from the early 1960s, *Childsplay*, p. 51. Kaprow's interchangeable use of the terms 'games' and 'play' throughout the 1960s show this not to be the case. In “The Happenings Are Dead: Long Live

existence of *Round Trip* as a cooperative, non-hierarchical activity, excepting its authorship, mirrored the practices of the New Games Movement from the mid-1960s. The Movement was formed to oppose the conflict in Vietnam. With a mantra 'nobody hurt', it subverted opposition into cooperation, suggesting activities such as the 'parachute game': a military tool whose agonistic associations were neutralised.<sup>553</sup> The parachute game provided a structure, the possibilities of which were only limited by one's imagination of what the form of a parachute was capable of producing. As with *Round Trip*, the structure was made possible through the collective action of the group. While Kaprow had begun his attack on the divisive nature of competition in particular with regard to work, the New Games protagonists George Leonard and Stewart Brand's engagement with play reflected a broader counter-cultural aim of cooperative endeavour towards a peaceful society. But both were at least sympathetic to the New Left's call for participatory democracy. Kaprow's contention in an early draft of *AEH* that "extension as an organic function is meant to imply the whole world of experience", reflected a call by the father of the New Left Herbert Marcuse for a civic role of art that "should no longer be powerless with respect to life, but should help instead give it shape".<sup>554</sup> Marcuse's 1955 *Eros and Civilisation*, from which the New Left and the SDS grew, went beyond the historically Marxist fixation on the alienation of the worker from the means of production to emphasise the progressive potential of play to counter the perceived alienating quality of work. In "Society as a Work of Art" (1967), Marcuse proposed that an

---

the Happenings!" (1966) he writes "A Happening perhaps alludes more to the form of game and sports than to the forms of art"; the script for his long-play record "How to Make a Happening" (1966) reads "This is a lecture on how to make a Happening. There are eleven rules of the game."; and his definition of the Happening in 1968: "Let's call it a game": Allan Kaprow "The Happenings Are Dead: Long Live the Happenings!" (1966), repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 59-65; Allan Kaprow, "On How to Make a Happening" (1966), Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 47, Folder 6; Richard Kostelanetz, Allan Kaprow, "Conversation with Allan Kaprow" (1968), in Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp.100-132, p. 112.

553. The first 'New Games Tournament' was held in 1973 and *The New Games Book* was published in 1976. For more on New Games, see Pamela Lee, "New Games", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, The Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, Brisbane, Australia, Volume 10, Number 1, 2010, pp. 35-55, and Fred Turner "Why Study New Games?", *Games and Culture* January 2006 vol. 1 no. 1, pp. 107-110.

554. Allan Kaprow, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (c.1960-61), Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 47, Folder 12); Herbert Marcuse and Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume 4* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 126.

increasing reliance on technology in the labour force could indicate a way of examining “the technical possibilities of labor and leisure” and a way of “experimenting with the possibilities of liberating and pacifying human existence”.<sup>555</sup> This would involve “the idea of a convergence – not only of technology and art but also the idea of work and play; the idea of a possible artistic formation of the life world.”<sup>556</sup> Art had become as alienated in its status as a commodity, as work and, Marcuse perceived, the embrace of technology by artists would help reconnect art to a society in which the prevalence and importance of technology was increasing.

The similarity between Marcuse's discourse and Kaprow's theorisation of the liberating potential of play to overturn the isolation of work shows the shared significance of his practice to the wider ambitions of the New Left. Groups such as Angry Arts and Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers (UAWMF) had developed overtly agitative political work in response to New Left ideology. UAWMF was directly affiliated with SDS as its only non-student chapter and counted the stepson of Herbert Marcuse, Tom Neumann, among its founding members, producing 'pieces' that were indistinguishable from the direct action proposed by SDS.<sup>557</sup> That Kaprow's practice shared less of the militancy associated with the New Left by the end of the 1960s might have something to do with the fact that his introduction to New Left thinking arose before the formation of the SDS: during the development of his practice from the 1950s through the mentorship of the Marxist art historian Meyer Schapiro. As discussed in the first chapter, Kaprow's relationship with Schapiro was heavily instructive to his practice, having had him as a tutor for his Masters degree at Columbia University, a visitor to his studio and attendee at his early Happenings, as well as a co-advisor for the exhibition “Artists of the New York School: Second Generation”

---

555. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

556. *Ibid.*

557. These included storming the Pentagon in 1967, dumping uncollected refuse into a fountain at Lincoln Center, New York at the opening of a “bourgeois” gala night in 1968, and cutting the fences at the Woodstock Festival, 1969, to enable free entry.

(1957) at the Jewish Museum, New York.<sup>558</sup> Kaprow later admitted to always having read his work “from the point of view of real admiration”.<sup>559</sup> Schapiro's understanding of art history as inseparable from socio-economic history, a dialectic between artistic freedom and socio-economic constraints, had had a clear impact on Kaprow's wish to construct a practice that blurred the distinction between art and life. Kaprow's class notes include an “Analysis of Marx in terms of Artist's 4 Causes” along with the observation that “Raphael paints man as a class of visual ideals, rather than man as a personality with...an individual history”.<sup>560</sup> While collapsing the barrier between work and play was heavily Marcusean, Kaprow's call for 'non-art' as the means by which to collapse the binary echoed Schapiro's critique of art and exchange in his essay “The Social Bases of Art” (1936).<sup>561</sup> Along with the call for the artist “to act on his society and for himself in an effective manner” in producing work that is not purely aesthetic, as discussed in the first chapter, Schapiro emphasised the need to shift art practice away from the private domain of art in which individuality (of subject, patronage and artistic gesture) was at the centre. Kaprow's notion of non-art responds to such a critique, displacing art's creative impulse, 'aesthetic anarchy', away from 'Art art' in order to correct the problem, as Schapiro argues, that art “is so exclusive and private; there are too many things we value that it cannot embrace or even confront”.<sup>562</sup> Furthermore, Kaprow's statement in an interview of 1967 that “Art should be discovery – including the discovery of useful social

---

558. Robert Haywood has argued that “From Schapiro, Kaprow would learn that the history of modern art was the history of an art within the class-based social order of capitalism.”, Robert Haywood, “Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro's and Allan Kaprow's Theory of Avant-Garde Art”, in *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, events, objects, documents*, pp.27-46, p.28.

559. Judith Rodenbeck, transcript of interview with Allan Kaprow, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996, Encinitas, California, Allan Kaprow Papers

560. Allan Kaprow, course notebook for Art History Masters program, Columbia University, 1950-52, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 1, Folder 7).

561. For further discussion on Kaprow's reading of “The Social Bases of Art”, see Robert Haywood “Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro's and Allan Kaprow's Theory of Avant-Garde Art” in *Experiments in the everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, events, objects, documents*, pp. 27-46.

562. Meyer Schapiro, “The Social Bases of Art” (1936), repr. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory: 1900-1990* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 506-510, p. 510.

tools” is entirely consistent with Schapiro's legacy in his artistic development, of acting on society in an “effective manner”.<sup>563</sup>

Kaprow was clearly affected by New Left thinking, seen in his participatory work, in the push towards 'un-art', and in the ideological overlap with the New Games Movement. That *Round Trip* was essentially a New Game in all but name illustrates Kaprow's sympathies with the spirit of progressive political thought of the time, partly facilitated through his long-standing engagement with New Left thought since its inception in the mid-1950s. His ambivalence of associating his practice with politics was problematic. As a member of the academic elite with a focus on social processes, politics necessarily entered the mix, yet his anarchist leanings and the ideology of the New Left shared a common interest in the liberation of the individual.

#### **4.4. Gossip as narrative**

The liberating potential of play as a critical tool within Kaprow's work extended beyond the implications for the individual towards the freeing of narrative. Given Kaprow's role as a tertiary educator, the critique of narrative was as much a critique of work as were his pieces focusing predominantly on parodying manual labour. Schapiro had developed a historiographical practice revealing the individuality of the artist as a socio-historical figure, hence recovering art that had been otherwise neglected in the canon of Western art history, including much early Christian art.<sup>564</sup> It communicated an appreciation of history as informed by representative biases: his discourse on style emphasising the role of the art historian's cultural context in the formation of their narrative on art of the past. It also understood the subjugation of individual legacies as part of the competition for posterity. Kaprow's early

563. Richard Schechner, “Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow”, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp.186-192, p. 190.

564. See David Rosand, 'Making Art History at Columbia: Meyer Schapiro and Rudolf Wittkower', *Columbia Magazine* (Fall 2003) <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/alumni/Magazine/Fall2003/witt.schapiro.html> (accessed 29.06.13)

understanding of history through Schapiro's tutorship, as amorphous and dynamic, concealing a deficit of democratic exchange, helps contextualise his relationship to narrative. A month after *Round Trip*, Kaprow staged the Happening *Record II (for Roger Shattuck)* (1968) [figs. 117-118] in Austin, Texas to supplement his retrospective at the University of Texas. Though presented as one continuous score, the piece was performed in two parts over two days. According to the score on the first day participants were employed in

“BREAKING BIG ROCKS  
PHOTOGRAPHING THEM

SILVERING BIG ROCKS  
PHOTOGRAPHING THEM”

With the last day spent

“SCATTERING THE PHOTOS  
WITH NO EXPLANATION”

*Record II* continued the parody of labour that was present in *Runner* and *Moving*, though unlike both previous pieces no end was sought aside from the activity itself; there was no finality that could be measured beside the generation of a material record. There was no equivalent to the length of tar paper or moving ceremonies that had signalled the end of the former pieces. And like *Runner*, imitation was arrested in its play mode, devoid of any functional associations, the rock activities producing no “practical outcome”. Furthermore the “silvered” rocks draped in foil communicated a wish to explore the imitative process of

dematerialisation associated with the quarry, the reflecting light eroding the visual integrity of the rocks. The workers were confined within the play world, exploring methods of both material and visual destruction. The theme of the work hinted towards an idealised disappearance of the quarry's contents, but it was the product of the piece as record of the activity performed “as its own end” that was intended to disappear. The photographs of the event were tacked and taped to the sides of buildings, taped to storefront windows and stapled to telephone booths, without any explanatory text. These anonymous images conveyed heroism, evoking the spirit of the American pioneers: four men atop the quarry walls triumphant, the central figure sporting a cowboy hat; Kaprow and the future eminent Conceptual artist Jim Pomeroy smashing rocks with sledgehammers, shirtless. The mythic connotations fitted with much of his work from the early 1960s that used myth as a means to structure his events, such as animal sacrifice in *Chicken* (1962) and the ritual of war in *Tree* (1963).<sup>565</sup> But unlike these earlier pieces, here the mythic was extended to function as part of the narrative of the work, in the fragmentation, dispersal and eventual disappearance of the record itself. Kaprow had experimented with the role of documentation in his performance work from the late 1950s, both in terms of its ability to communicate performances effectively and in the technical capabilities of photography, both stills and video, and audio recording. However the ever-present problem, alluded to in “The Education of the Un-Artist” (1969), was the inevitability of performance documentation, when exhibited as such, to subvert the original event into something “corny” and dull by comparison.<sup>566</sup> The 'non-art' Kaprow was agitating for could all too easily be transformed back into 'Art art' by transplanting the event into a conventional narrative structure, whether the conventions of gallery display or an official written account. In disseminating the record of the process, with a potential for unlimited forms of future publicity, the narrative was freed, allowing a

---

565. For more on myth in Kaprow's practice, see *Childsplay*, pp.65-98

566. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 103.

contingent sequence of individuals to communicate and add to the story relayed through the images and heard through word-of-mouth. Kaprow had resisted the hegemonic nature of historical narrative through the 1960s by relying on gossip to narrate his Happenings, resulting in their popular image being at odds with Kaprow's intention, and the communicative element of *Record II* continued this. Kaprow had explained the process of narrative at play within his work in an interview the year before *Record II*:

“That's what I call the myth-making aspect of a work - the gossip mongering that goes on. If you hear about a Happening but weren't actually involved, it takes on a reality composed of what you imagine, what you brought from your own experience, and what you've heard. If it moves you or if enough people engage in this kind of reportage or gossiping, be they stimulated by *Vogue* and these other magazines or just a friend's report, it is always the sort of thing that can begin to spread.”<sup>567</sup>

Kaprow's *Days Off* (1970) [figs. 119-120], a calendar of Happenings, produced for The Museum of Modern Art, New York, provides a clear illustration of the importance of gossip within Kaprow's practice and the dissemination of photos in *Record II*. Describing the calendar in the preface Kaprow writes:

“Photos and programs of [Happenings] are leftover thoughts in the form of gossip. And gossip is also play. For anybody. As the calendar is discarded like the Happenings, the gossip may remain in action.”<sup>568</sup>

Play in the service of narrative, functioning as gossip, was endlessly imitative, repeating itself through a dynamic, amorphous and eventually decentralised process of knowledge dissemination. The focus was not on an end result, a final retrospective understanding, but a continually evolving narrative that retained the performativity of the event it described. As play enabled “continuous participation as its own end” within the work itself, gossip as a means of communicating the event continued this continual participation without a privileged

---

567. Richard Kostelanetz, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp.100-132, p. 118.

568. Allan Kaprow, *Days Off: A Calendar of Happenings*, Oct 1969, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 15, folder 3).

perspective. It diluted the possibility of a hegemonic historiography, and much like the flat hierarchical structure within his work, exemplified by pieces such as *Round Trip*, created a contingent authorless history.<sup>569</sup> Sontag had commented that “Lacking a plot and continuous rational discourse, [Happenings] have no past. As the name itself suggests, Happenings are always in the present tense.”<sup>570</sup> Gossip prevented this presentness from being foreclosed, its history being also always in the present tense, a point underscored by Kaprow's observation that “as gossip [the work is] continually renewable by virtue of its unseizability”.<sup>571</sup> This point was reinforced by the gerund form of the score for *Record II*: “breaking”, “photographing”, “silvering” and “scattering”, remaining always present. Furthermore the pamphlet as a record of the performance and performativity, containing the score, remained endlessly renewable, reinforced by the blurred motion of a sledgehammer, abstracted from an immediately recognisable historical or geographical context. Both the performative nature of gossip as narrative and the ever-present score of *Record II* enact what Peggy Phelan has described as “Performance's challenge to writing” “to discover a way for... words to become performative utterances”.<sup>572</sup> Drawing on J.L. Austin's distinction between “performative utterances” against “constative utterances”, words that enact rather than describe, such as “I do” in a wedding ceremony, or “I name this ship...”, Phelan understands the performative utterance, after Jacques Derrida, to enable “the now of writing in the present time.”<sup>573</sup> The ever-present score of *Record II*, and the engagement with gossip as narrative, helps facilitate what Phelan determines to be the central concern of performance: enabling disappearance. This disappearance, according to Phelan, helps retain the character of the original

---

569. This point draws on Irit Rogoff's argument in “Gossip as Testimony: A postmodern signature” (1996): “gossip turns the tables on conventions of both 'history' and 'truth' by externalizing and making overt its relations to subjectivity, voyeuristic pleasure and the communicative circularity of story-telling”, Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 268-276, p. 268.

570. *Against Interpretation*, p. 266.

571. Richard Kostelanetz, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp.100-132, p. 125.

572. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 149.

573. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

performance while in preserving it, such as in photography or analytical writing “it becomes something other than performance”.<sup>574</sup> Through the original performance being allowed to disappear its performativity is retained. It is this continuing performativity that Kaprow's ever-present score for *Record II* and his intent to “create gossip for history” points towards.<sup>575</sup> As *Runner* and *Moving* suggested a way in which the artist and worker could be emancipated, so *Record II* suggested the possibility of a performative narrative, aided by the purposeful discarding of the documented photographs of the event around Austin.<sup>576</sup> Disappearance was essential to Kaprow's engagement with gossip as a means of playing with and imitating the limitations of an historicising narrative, foreclosing and subverting the performativity of the Happening. “Commentary”, Kaprow wrote, “can be as disposable as artifacts in our culture.”<sup>577</sup> As Shapiro had reinserted forgotten artists into the historical canon, Kaprow suggested a way to liberate Happenings from history itself. Fittingly the SUNY History Faculty's request for all Happenings to “be held in private” reflected an uncomfortable fit with their discourse as well as workspace.

#### **4.6. Acts of continuous discovery: a proposal for experimental art**

Kaprow's suggestion that “Art should be discovery – including the discovery of useful social tools” was anticipated by an article for *Art News*, “Experimental Art” (1966), in which he

---

574. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

575. Richard Kostelanetz, “Conversation with Allan Kaprow” (1968), *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp.100-132, p. 122.

576. Rodenbeck provides an in-depth reading of *Record II (For Roger Shattuck)* (1968), reading the poem score as “an experience of experience”, following in the lineage of 20<sup>th</sup> century vanguard poets Williams Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. She notes how Kaprow's text reflects Pound's simple but stark writing and her engagement with a form of haiku, and Carlos Williams' anti-metaphorical language. Rodenbeck reads the photographs and the text in *Record II* (1968) as doubly articulated: the photograph being allegorised by the use of foil while the text is both “instructional and poetic”. But this interpretation fails to account for the impact of discarding the photographs has for what I argue is the perpetual presentness of the work. The continuing presentness subverts a linear historical account, enabling a performative gossip-led narrative of the event. Rodenbeck's understanding of the piece as an allegory of “the photograph itself... in its performative aspect (for the facticity of the photograph, automatically registering the world, arrests the free play of memory)” ignores the crucial role of the photographs in enabling the 'free play of memory' in their disappearance, *Radical Prototypes*, pp. 235-236.

577. Allan Kaprow, 'The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I', repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 108.

suggested that it was only progressive art practices that 'tested' "questions of being rather than matters of art".<sup>578</sup> While art of the twentieth century avant-gardes had come to be known as 'experimental', "brand new, without antecedents" in which "influences were usually denied in spite of evidence to the contrary", Kaprow argued that modern art "functions as Art art; its genealogy is spelled out in columns of cultural events".<sup>579</sup> Modern art had, he argued, been 'developmental' rather than experimental and it was the challenge set to the experimenter to "Imagine something never before done, by a method never before used, whose outcome is unforeseen."<sup>580</sup> Accepting the limitations of his argument, it is significant with respect to the development of his practice. Anticipating his call three years later to 'un-art', this would be achieved through "nonart action undertaken in the context of the art world", in which artists are engaged in "erasing their profession as a value and accepting only what is phenomenally doubtless: life."<sup>581</sup> The scepticism implied by the latter statement reveals a particular understanding of experimentation as it pertained to art practice, with a "goal of discovery" and "insight... through methodical thought and operations."<sup>582</sup> Venturing towards the unknown, the "uninhabited area [which] is experimentation's proper place", Kaprow had formulated an academic practice in which experimental art functioned as a tool of knowledge production.<sup>583</sup> Indeed experimental artists would act, like the rational scientist, with "detachment" from "the body of culture", in "the testing or trial of a principle".<sup>584</sup> It was an important ideological shift, and expressed a phenomenon that was identified by Richard Schechner the year before: "One should note that scientific experiment is often carried on with the same methodology [as a Happening]: a controlled environment in which the 'natural

---

578. Allan Kaprow, 'Experimental Art' (1966), *Art News* 65, no. 1, pp. 60-63, pp. 77-82, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 66-80, p. 69.

579. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

580. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

581. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

582. *Ibid.*, p. 75, p. 76.

583. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

584. *Ibid.*, p. 70, p. 72.

object' under study is allowed to choose its own way of doing things.”<sup>585</sup> Evidence of Kaprow's knowledge of and interest in current and recent science is scant. Though fittingly he held a healthy interest in the interdisciplinary field of cybernetics, praising Jack Burnham's *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1968) for its discussion of cybernetic “responsive systems” and “automata” to describe kinetic and mechanical art.<sup>586</sup> The close association Kaprow was promoting between art and technological innovation, alongside the proposals contained in his 1966 essay, signalled an increasing willingness to present his practice as a means of achieving what he would later term “basic research”.<sup>587</sup>

---

585. Richard Schechner, “Happenings”, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Winter, 1965), pp.229-232, p. 230.

586. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 108.

587. Allan Kaprow, “Nontheatrical Performance” (1976), *Artforum* 14, no. 9, pp. 45-51, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 163-180, p. 177.

## 5. Models for Basic Research: 'Un-art' and Experimentation

“Only because the artist operates experimentally does he open new fields of experience and disclose new aspects and qualities in familiar scenes and objects.”

— John Dewey, *Art as Experience*<sup>588</sup>

### **5.1. Acts of continuous discovery**

Kaprow had engaged with play as a means of emancipation of the artist and worker from a linear association of work with function, including freeing his own practice from a linear narrative. Play held a secondary interest for Kaprow as a means of facilitating a form of empirically based experimental 'research'. Art as experimentation would be explicitly addressed in Kaprow's Activities from the early to mid-1970s that invited participation according to tightly scripted scores, in order to examine the social dynamics of the non-control subjects. In his third instalment of “The Education of the Un-Artist” (1974), the presentation of experimentation in his practice had come to resemble that of a social scientist:

“The models for the experimental arts of this generation have been less the preceding arts than modern society itself, particularly how and what we communicate, what happens to us in the process, and how this may connect us with natural processes beyond society.”<sup>589</sup>

And Kaprow's conscious engagement with play enabled an attitude amenable to art as an epistemological enquiry: “Playfulness... suggest[s] a positive interest in acts of continuous discovery.”<sup>590</sup> As Kaprow had theorised the ability for play to “restore participation in the natural design”, collapsing the divide between work and the carefree childlike world free from conscious intention, so did it function to restore the link between knowing and doing,

---

588. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934) (New York: Perigee, 2005), p. 150.

589. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III” (1974), *Art in America* 62, no. 1, pp. 85-89, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 130-147, p. 130. Ulmer (1985) has described how performance art, conceptual art and video art function as “laboratories for a new pedagogy.”, repr. *Performing Pedagogy: Toward an Art of Politics*, p. 22.

590. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I”, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 106.

between theoretical and empirical knowledge whose decay the sociologist Daniel Bell had described as a symptom of 'post-industrial' society.<sup>591</sup> While Kaprow had identified the culpability of the service-industries in exacerbating the societal obsession with work as an increasingly amorphous concept, Bell had gone beyond this to suggest that the shift in the nature of work and a rise of the technical professional class had changed “the character of knowledge itself... the primacy of theory over empiricism and the codification of knowledge into abstract systems of symbols that... can be used to illuminate many different and varied areas of experience.”<sup>592</sup> It was through what I read as an attempt to resist this stratification that Kaprow's Activities of the 1970s became tightly controlled investigations into natural and social processes, what he came to describe as “basic research”: “suppose that performance artists were to adopt the emphasis of universities and think tanks on basic research. Performance would be conceived as inquiry.”<sup>593</sup> That his work directly attacked the increasing emphasis placed on theoretical knowledge was attested to in a lecture of 1983: “it's this essentially human prejudice that I've got about real experience as being meaningful in a way that theoretical experience by itself is not.”<sup>594</sup> Kaprow's adoption of scientific language and procedures undermined a realm otherwise associated with the pursuit of theoretical knowledge and, as Bell had argued, industrial production, to focus on empirical ends: “When you view a normal routine in your life as a performance and carefully chart for a month how you greet someone each day, what you say with your body, your pauses and your clothing; and when you carefully chart the responses you get – this can be basic research.”<sup>595</sup>

### **5.1.i. Five models of experimentation**

---

591. See Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973)

592. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

593. Allan Kaprow, “Nontheatrical Performance” (1976), *Artforum* 14, no. 9, pp. 45-51, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 163-180, p. 177.

594. Allan Kaprow, lecture at La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, “Wolf Kahn talk”, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 76, C67).

595. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-79.

As Jack Burnham had used the technical language of science to describe kinetic sculpture, Kaprow adopted the language of scientific research to frame the investigative practice that play facilitated for the un-artist. In “The Education of the Un-Artist” (1974) he identified five “models for the experimental arts”.<sup>596</sup> These “five root types” were named as 'situational', 'operational', 'structural', 'self-referring' and 'learning' models, the nomenclature underscoring the technical emphasis he placed on the phrase 'basic research'. The categories were explained through reference to other artists' work, displacing any ownership of the categories themselves. Though in his assumption of the existence of these categories he established an authority over the definition of the works themselves, describing un-art practices through a list of evidential anecdotes or gossip, Kaprow's categories were, in the main, self-explanatory. Situational models explored associations of context, imitating conventional activity to disrupt a received understanding of a particular action with a given environment. Examples included Joseph Beuys' one-hundred day sit-in at Documenta in 1977 in which he invited discussion on the arts and politics and through which both his display and otherwise pedestrian activity was perceived to be a work of art. The examples given for operational models, based on the “insight” Kaprow had promised in his first “Education of the Un-Artist” had as their focus the disruption of predominantly technical processes, such as Barbara Smith's book of distorted images of her daughter, *Katie* (1965-66) through serial photocopying.<sup>597</sup> Structural models, including Dieter Roth's *Staple Cheese (A Race)* (1969) in which cheese put in two suitcases placed close together matured and ran to meet half way, were object-focused. Unlike the operational models, the structural models did not disrupt technology, but emphasised structural relations. Self-referring models provided what Kaprow would term

---

596. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III” (1974), *Art in America* 62, no. 1, pp. 85-89, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 130-147, p. 130.

597. Defining works by operative processes, Kaprow echoed Duchamp's highly technical descriptions of *The Large Glass* in *The Green Box* (1912-23): “to separate the *mass-produced readymade* from the *readyfound* – The separation is an operation.”, Marcel Duchamp, notes from “The Green Box”, in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (eds.), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), pp. 26-29, p. 26. The operation is part of the piece as it is implied in the readymade.

“the feedback loop” of conscious imitation, be it the context or artist, such as Helen Alm filming herself trying to relax, watching the film while trying to relax while filming that process, finally displaying this doubling to be watched by herself and others.<sup>598</sup> And learning models were described as “allegories of philosophical enquiry, sensitivity-training rituals, and educational demonstrations”.<sup>599</sup> Any one artwork could belong to two or more categories depending on the emphasis of the artist or interpreter who, as Kaprow noted, after Duchamp, defined the work in posterity by “engaging in gossip.”<sup>600</sup>

It is important to understand Kaprow's five models of 'basic research' in order to give greater clarity to his work produced in the context of this theorisation. The learning models Kaprow describes include the optical illusions of Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951), along with the shadows of the viewers and a recognition of the material qualities of the canvas. Also included was the recognition of contextual sounds in Cage's *4'33"* (1952) and Ann Halprin's 'Dressing and Undressing Dance' in *Parades and Changes* (1965), in which performers examined each other's movements in their various stages of dress. The emphasis given to exploration as a particular type of learning is important: they are not examples of existing knowledge being relayed, but new insights generated by the works. It is for this reason that this category is redundant, with all four categories prior to the 'learning models', in many cases, instances of the mode of learning through discovery that the examples given for this category relate. I understand all four categories as being models of learning, in particular models of discovery facilitated through the particular means described. Explicit imitation of technical processes, physical movement, and even social-scientific enquiry itself, allowed process to be divorced from a purposive function aside from the engagement with imitation, or play. Play, in other words, enabled 'basic research'.

---

598. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, *Art News* 71, no. 3, pp.34-39, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, pp. 112

599. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III” (1974), *Art in America* 62, no. 1, pp. 85-89, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 130-147, p. 130.

600. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

### 5.1.ii. *Hello* (1969) and “the playful use of technology”

As the focus on play had disrupted the goal-oriented nature of labour in *Moving*, *Runner* and *Record II*, Kaprow anticipated the non-artist would foster an open-ended research methodology through what he termed “the playful use of technology”:

“Systems' technology involving the interfacing of personal and group experiences, instead of 'product' technology will dominate [the technological pursuits of non-artists]... But it will be a systems approach that favors an openness towards outcome, in contrast to the literal and goal oriented uses now employed by most systems specialists.”<sup>601</sup>

As an example he described a network of 'TV Arcades' “in every big city of the world” both broadcasting and receiving images of the participants visiting the arcades, in which the technology could be manipulated to disrupt and “make up its own social relations as it went along.”<sup>602</sup> The piece conveyed Kaprow's interest in how individuals responded to “the informational deluge” of the time, for example “What happens when he flips the TV dial from station to station?”<sup>603</sup> His interest in the social impact of modern media had a substantive overlap with Marshall McLuhan's social theory that Kaprow had only discovered in the late 1960s.<sup>604</sup> According to McLuhan social relations would adapt to the limitations and allowances of electronic communication in which “the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village”.<sup>605</sup> Interested in exploring the artistic potential of this social arena, Kaprow suggested that

“If you simply think about TV – that 17 million people (or however many millions there are) are watching the same thing at the same time – that can create a terrific sense of

---

601. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I”, *Art News* 69, no. 10, pp. 28-31, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 106.

602. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

603. Richard Schechner, “Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow”, repr. *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp.186-192, p. 189.

604. *Ibid.*

605. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 36.

community... But the rub is that the TV community is passive and I am interested in a variety of modes including contemplation, observation, and participation.”<sup>606</sup>

Kaprow's example of systems technology was the original premise of his piece *Hello* (1969) [figs. 121-122], presented as part of the program “The Medium is the Medium”, in which artists were invited, by the public broadcaster WGBH-TV in Boston, to produce pieces as investigations into the medium of television.<sup>607</sup> WGBH was heavily involved in the development of video art and had begun to hold residencies from 1968, starting with the Fluxus artist Nam June Paik, the figure responsible for Kaprow's inclusion in the event.<sup>608</sup> *Hello* fell short of Kaprow's original ambitions, with twenty seven monitors placed in four groupings over three locations around Boston: the campus of MIT, a secondary school and at WGBH. The piece was resource heavy, with a team of vision mixers employed to manipulate the medium and the communication itself, diverging from his program for *Hello* in which users would have the freedom to experiment with the possibilities the new technology provided. Randomly switching the sound and picture availability for all four sites resulted in participants receiving either sound but no video, video but no sound, neither video nor sound, or normal transmission. As such the interaction via video-link was limited to an hour. It was an exercise in discovering the result of human communication with new technology, rather than the capability of the technology itself, while fulfilling the criteria for what he would describe as operational and feedback models. Like these models of 'basic research', *Hello* engaged with technology in a way that reversed what Bell had seen as the change in knowledge production of the late twentieth-century, “increasingly dependent on the primacy of theoretical work, which codifies what is known and points the way to empirical

---

606. Richard Schechner, “Extensions in Time and Space: An Interview with Allan Kaprow”, *The Drama Review* vol. 12, no. 3 (T39), Spring 1968, pp. 41-63, repr. in *Happenings and Other Acts*, pp.186-192, p. 189.

607. The title paraphrases McLuhan's iconic phrase “the medium is the message”: it is in any communication, McLuhan proposed, that the means of communication affects and is embedded into its content, Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) (London: Routledge, 2005).

608. Allan Kaprow, “Hello: Plan and Execution” (1974), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 13, folder 10).

confirmation.”<sup>609</sup> There was no hypothesis given, only a framework for a contingent set of events that would be enacted by the human subjects of the investigation, fulfilling the terms of experimental art that imagined “something never before done, by a method never before used, whose outcome is unforeseen.”<sup>610</sup> So far as Kaprow was aware *Hello* fulfilled all three criteria, documenting the experiment and broadcasting it after the event. And it was in the edited broadcast, rather than the subjective experience of interaction within the process that the educative value was manifested, as Kaprow stated in his 'write up' five years later: “The main purpose of the tape was to give the public an insight into what really happened among a small group of people.”<sup>611</sup> This model had clear implications for the use of play as a means of discovery: the process was directed away from the participants who interacted, towards an audience who consumed. He had consciously shunned audiences since *Courtyard* (1962), so that “All the elements – people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time – can in this way be integrated. And the last thread of theatrical convention disappears.”<sup>612</sup> In regaining theatrical convention within the context of modern broadcast technology, participation in the process was split between an engagement with the activity, existing in passive relationship to the 'insight' generated by the piece, and the engagement with the evidence of the interaction. Though functioning as participants within the execution of the experiment, they existed as subjects in the overall structure of the piece. Kaprow had referred to “the feedback loop” as the process of knowledge generation through play as conscious imitation: “the feedback loop [of conscious imitation] is never exact... something new comes out in the process – knowledge, well-being, surprise”.<sup>613</sup> Though he had been referring to imitative activity, his interest in cybernetics suggested an appreciation of the

---

609. *The Coming of Post Industrial Society*, p. 26.

610. Allan Kaprow, 'Experimental Art' (1966), *Art News* 65, no. 1, pp. 60-63, pp. 77-82, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 66-80, p. 69.

611. Allan Kaprow, “Hello: Plan and Execution” (1974), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 13, folder 10).

612. *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings*, p. 196.

613. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, *Art News* 71, no. 3, pp.34-39, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, pp. 112.

feedback loop within technology, particularly in terms of the impact of technology on an environment or situation.<sup>614</sup> Furthermore if the 'feedback loop' indicated the point of knowledge generation for an imitative activity, the focus in *Hello* was clearly, as indicated by Kaprow, the broadcast of the experiment to a passive audience. The loop was broken, and as Kaprow wrote "It is doubtful that the tape did what it was supposed to because TV audiences are still audiences."<sup>615</sup>

A further complication of the piece, as indicated by Kaprow, was the lack of control given to the participants over the technology they were communicating through. Kaprow had intended that "Controls would permit [participants] to localize (freeze) the communication within a few tubes. Other visitors... may feel free to enjoy and even enhance the mad and surprising scramble by turning their dials accordingly."<sup>616</sup> This was not possible, the control remaining with the technicians, thus limiting Kaprow's ambitions for the piece. It maintained what Bell had perceived as the increased technical component of knowledge and precluded what Kaprow had intended to be "acts of continuous discovery" manifested through the "playful use of technology", as a way of investigating new technologies.<sup>617</sup> The participants remained passive in respect of the manipulation of the technical apparatus, testing the pre-determined functionality of the technology as a means to communicate and disrupt communication between locations. Though playful to a degree, it did not provide the freedom Kaprow had given the artist emancipated from the confines of 'Art art' or the worker from work. The freedom of participants to fully integrate with the technological environment was cut short; their actions restricted, counter to the methodological premise of play as a means to facilitate enquiry. Recognising this, Kaprow had admitted "If it were to be done again, the controls would have to be put at the disposal of the participants... I would insist on its

614. "Kaprow [was interested in] a feedback loop on a mass-communications scale... the loop *was* the event.", *Childsplay*, p. 152.

615. Allan Kaprow, "Hello: Plan and Execution" (1974), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 13, folder 10).

616. Allan Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I", *Art News* 69, no. 10, pp. 28-31, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 97-109, p. 107.

617. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

importance as a liberating device (not to speak of its structural enrichment).”<sup>618</sup> The piece had the feeling of a fun-fair rather than the disruptive qualities of experimental art, as described through the examples given for both operational and feedback models, restricting activity and producing, Kaprow wrote, “a metaphor that was just a bit too close to daily frustrations.”<sup>619</sup> In attempting to produce a piece that focused on changing social relations between individuals through technology, the focus became more skewed towards the technical capabilities of remote broadcasting. The freedom proposed within this controlled structure was analogous to the 'indeterminacy of performance' proposed by Cage, as discussed in the previous chapter. Similar to *Self-Service*, the tasks had been proposed in advance with the choice of task and execution left to the participants themselves. Though, unlike *Self-Service*, the emphasis in *Hello* was on the observation of their engagement.

The arrangement of the television sets in *Hello*, stacked in abundance, evoked the notion of the 'fun market' Kaprow had spoken of in “Education of the Un-Artist II” and parodied the economist Victor Lebow's infamous paper "Price Competition in 1955" (1955), in which he stressed the importance of consumption for American post-war economic growth: “Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life... The very meaning and significance of our lives today is expressed in consumptive terms... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing pace. We need to have people eat, drink, dress, ride, live, with ever more complicated and, therefore, constantly more expensive consumption.”<sup>620</sup>

It was a phenomenon contributing to what Kaprow described as a societal “ambivalence toward pleasure”: an “incapacity to freely enjoy anything” due to the perpetually unfulfilled “pursuit of happiness”.<sup>621</sup> The “fun market” was a product of freed time in the developed

---

618. Allan Kaprow, “Hello: Plan and Execution” (1974), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 13, folder 10).

619. Ibid.

620. Victor Lebow, “Price Competition in 1955” (1955), quoted in Guy Champniss and Fernando Rodes Vila, *Brand Valued: How Socially Valued Brands Hold the Key to a Sustainable Future and Business Success* (Chichester: Wiley, 2011), pp. 20-21.

621. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, *Art News* 71, no. 3, pp.34-39, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, pp. 119.

service economy. Comprising entertainment, education and tourism, this sector was worth \$150bn in the year following *Hello*. Though Kaprow's critique of popular entertainment is not explicitly stated, it is clear that his subversion of a passive medium to one that was interactive reflected his emphasis on the “continuous participation” that play engendered.<sup>622</sup> Television, an integral feature of American consumption, was turned into an object of simultaneous consumption and production. Indeed the theme of participation was shared by Paik in his contribution *Electronic Opera #1* (1969). Images of dancers and political figures were spliced, distorting them with additional colour, before the voiceover announced “This is participation TV, please follow instructions”, proceeding to issue instructions for the viewers to open and close their eyes at certain intervals, before a final call to turn off the television set.<sup>623</sup> Paik's and Kaprow's similar interest in participatory networked art is unsurprising given their associations with Fluxus and its interest in networked practices. Paik's piece, like Kaprow's was an attempt to discover the expressive and communicative potential of otherwise uncritical receptive televisual entertainment, simultaneously a 'feedback' and 'operational' model, according to Kaprow's categories.

### **5.1.iii. Kaprow's proposal for a cybernetic model of “environmental research”**

*Hello* was produced in the context of a wider engagement between art and technology by the group Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), to whom Kaprow had submitted a proposal for a piece a year earlier, never realised, that would contribute to “environmental research”.<sup>624</sup> E.A.T. had been established by engineers Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer along with Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman. Its formation as an official group followed the series *9 Evenings: Theatre and Performance*, organised by Rauschenberg and Klüver in October 1966 at the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment Armory, New York, the site of the radical 1913

---

622. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

623. Allan Kaprow, “Hello: Plan and Execution” (1974), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 13, folder 10).

624. Allan Kaprow, letter to E.A.T. president Francis Mason, Jr., Allan Kaprow Papers (box 13, folder 9).

Armory show. It was a collaboration between ten artists and approximately thirty engineers from Bell Telephone Laboratories, the workplace of cybernetics founder Norbert Wiener whose research included air defence forecasting models based on probability analysis. Staged over ten months, those participating included Cage, Rauschenberg, Whitman, Öyvind Fahlström, Yvonne Rainer, and David Tudor. The series incorporated close circuit television and television projection, wireless sound transmission of speech and movement on stage to loud speakers in the vast space of the Armory, sonar devices transposing movement to sound, and fibre optic cameras relaying images of objects in performer's pockets. It pioneered the use of video projection in art of the 1960s, along with practices never before seen in a theatrical context. This included David Tudor's *Bandoneon! (a combine)* in which he connected a bandoneon (a type of concertina) to an electrical circuit comprising an array of technological components converting the sounds of the bandoneon into sounds and moving images. The series formed the inspiration for the sound-work collaboration *Reunion* (1968) between Cage and Duchamp.<sup>625</sup> It is plausible that the success of the series in providing a transformation of the immediate environment, through mediating the performance through technology, emphasising otherwise unnoticeable elements and, as with Cage's *Variations VII*, giving an auditory link to 'real world' environments, provided an impetus for Kaprow's *Hello*. Contributions by Fahlstrom, Paik and Kaprow to the collaborative publication *Manifestos* (1966), produced by the Fluxus artist and close friend of Kaprow's Dick Higgins' Something Else Press, recalls the activities of E.A.T. Paik's manifesto was what he termed “Cybernated art”, an “art for cybernated life”, of which his “participation TV” was an example.<sup>626</sup> The term referred to the recognition of what Kaprow saw as the “feedback” potential of technology in reflecting its interaction with human agency. The 'feedback model' Kaprow described

---

625. Leta Miller, “Cage's collaborations”, in David Nicholls (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 151-168, p. 162.

626. Nam June Paik, untitled manifesto, in Ay-o et al, *Manifestos* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), pp. 25-6.

emulated the Austrian-American physicist and pioneer of cybernetics, Heinz von Foerster's definition: "Should one name one central concept, a first principle, of cybernetics, it would be circularity."<sup>627</sup> And it also reflected the approach of British cyborg artist Roy Ascott who, having stressed the importance of play and chance in art, had proposed an educational model, the "cybernetic art matrix", a system of information exchange and feedback connecting citizens, precipitating shows such as *Cybernetic Serendipity* (1968) at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, *Art by Telephone* (1969) at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Jewish Museum's *Software, Information, Technology, its New Meaning for Art* (1970).<sup>628</sup> Like Kaprow, he was attempting to produce an investigative model facilitated by play, allowing for the unforeseen within a tightly controlled framework. While Paik's manifesto sketched a brief, rudimentary and at times incomprehensible stream of consciousness as to the challenges presented by developments in real world cybernetic networks, Kaprow's focused on the possibilities new technologies had for expression and interaction. Written around the time of his initial encounter with the work of McLuhan, Kaprow wrote that

"'Art' may soon become a meaningless word. In its place, 'communications programming' would be a more imaginative label, attesting to our new jargon, our technological and managerial fantasies, and to our pervasive electronic contact with one another."<sup>629</sup>

Unlike Whitman, Kaprow's work up until this time had largely shunned technology, but his proposal for *Message Units* reflected his idea of 'communications programming' and emulated the investigation of the experiential effects of technological feedback of the

---

627. Heinz von Foerster quoted in Zoran R. Novaković, *The Principle of Self-Support in Control Systems* (London: Elsevier, 1992), p. 18.

628. Roy Ascott, "Behaviourist Art and the Cybernetic Vision" (1966-7), repr. Roy Ascott and Edward Shanken (ed.), *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness* (London, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 109-156.

Kelley describes the artistic adoption of cybernetics accordingly: "In its aesthetic dimension, systems theory describes works of art as operating within and across various organic and inorganic systems such as neighborhoods, information networks, weather patterns, norms of social interaction, and so on.", *Childsplay*, p. 161.

629. Allan Kaprow, untitled manifesto, *Manifestos*, pp. 22-24, p. 24.

environment that E.A.T. had begun in *9 Evenings*. The piece would be set in a large expanse of woodland, with full-length mirrors suspended from their branches, “Their reflections... continuously alter[ing] the fixity of space for any observer”.<sup>630</sup> Microphones would transmit contextual sounds wirelessly, including wind, human movement and speech, bird calls and insects. And Kaprow surely had the sonar experiments at the Armory in mind in his plan for “photo cells attached to the mirrors [that] would activate a sound response”.<sup>631</sup> Dials on the mirrors, controlled by participants, would alter the sound level of speakers hidden in nearby trees and rocks. It was a dynamic network of human and technological agency that recreated the immediate environment. And Kaprow foresaw that the exaggerated imitation of otherwise casually observed sounds would enable an investigation into environmental change. The project was submitted in the hope it would be one of E.A.T.'s proposals for funding from the National Science Foundation, justified by Kaprow accordingly:

“One of the ways in which this may be of legitimate value to the National Science Foundation, is in the area of environmental research: such as sensory deprivation, overload, and mix-up of normal signal patterns. It may also provide useful information about what happens to animal and insect life when their (in this case, mostly auditory) environment is altered.”<sup>632</sup>

Play, enabling a “feedback loop” through conscious imitation, here functions to facilitate enquiry. Its title, 'Message Units', was a measure of the distance, duration of call and time of day of telephone calls used by telephone companies to charge their customers. Within the context of the piece it can be better understood as discrete units of communication combining in a contingent manner to create and recreate the environment according to the interaction of its participants. Like the telephonic message units, the units comprising the environment are constantly in flux. Furthermore the indeterminacy of these contingent parts indicated that

---

630. Allan Kaprow, letter to E.A.T. president Francis Mason, Jr., Allan Kaprow Papers (box 13, folder 9).

631. Ibid.

632. Ibid.

Kaprow's uneasy relationship with chance, the allowance of the unforeseen and his desire to retain artistic control, was to some extent ameliorated by the nature of his pieces as an 'experimental' enquiry into the unknown consequences of human and technological interaction within predefined variables. The idea for *Message Units* was the first step in the shift in his practice to investigate and disrupt social and natural networks through using methods reflecting his categorisation of models of experimental enquiry.

#### **5.1.iv. Creating a feedback loop in *Message Units* (1972)**

It was in Kaprow's second, realised, *Message Units* (1972) [figs. 123-124] that the interplay between technology and environment was scrutinised on a smaller scale. Enacted in various locations around the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), his academic home from 1969, it incorporated a literal allusion to the title, connecting two environments at any one time through the use of a telephone. The piece was intended for two participants at two separate locations. In each location would be four blinking light bulbs, initially switched off until the first person turned theirs on. He or she then called the second person, saying "I've turned on the light bulb" and hearing back "Ok, I'll turn mine on". This was repeated for the remaining three light bulbs and done at night. In the morning, the second person would turn the first blinking light bulb off, call the first person saying "I've turned off the first blinking light bulb" and hearing back "Ok, I'll turn mine off". This was repeated for the remaining three light bulbs. In addition the eight telephone events were distinguished by a sequential increase in the number of rings before the person receiving the call picked up, with ten rings for the first light bulb, and eighty rings for the eighth. While less ambitious than the proposals for *Hello* and the first *Message Units*, it required less support and was in keeping with the shift Kaprow's practice had taken in his 'Activities' of the early 1970s: work produced on a much smaller and more intimate scale. These Activities allowed him a greater degree of control

over the technology used, and allowed him better to appreciate the effect of the piece given the limited amount of variables investigated between a small amount of participants and their often intimate environments; they retained the ethos of cooperation through play. Kaprow's analogy for *Hello* was “an open conference call on the telephone.”<sup>633</sup> In *Message Units* the components of the medium of television were split into light and speech, the signal for the light operation transmitted through the telephone between the participants. It was a re-imagining of the participatory network he had attempted to manifest in *Hello* between sight, sound and technology whereby the participants' function within the piece would assume equal importance to that of the technology they interacted with. Thinking of the eight discrete parts of the piece as 'message units', they each conferred different significances or 'values' according to the time of day: the light bulbs having more environmental resonance at night than during the day and made unique in each instance by the number of rings. Each instance differed marginally from its previous enactment, allowing the participants an awareness of the role of environmental and technological factors in shifting the environmental experience. Like *Hello*, the first proposal for *Message Units* (1969), and the activities in *9 Evenings*, imitation of otherwise unexamined, ordinarily functional technology in *Message Units* enabled a critical examination of the possibilities it had to manifest environmental change: the 'feedback loop' of this conscious imitation was purposively not exact. The vital role served by both the light bulb and telephone and the impact they had in the domestic space was highlighted through the subversion of their otherwise ordinary functions. The blinking light bulb disrupted its assumed role in illuminating a space at night, changing the occupants' perception of the space in physical and emotional terms: the light bulb became an overbearing physical presence rather than a means to facilitate physical activity. The telephone's ring, ordinarily a communicative sound universally recognisable and unremarkable was structured to relay differentiated content according to the progression of

---

633. Allan Kaprow, “Hello: Plan and Execution” (1974), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 13, folder 10).

the score. It was an imitation that not only shifted the environmental resonance of the telephone, but established a new relationship with it as a communications device. It was a playful use of existing technology that closed off their ordinary functions as a way to examine the possibilities of their environmental impact. Speech itself as a mode of communication was emptied of its privileged role in human interaction: the speech act and number of rings ostensibly provided the same communicative function, though the former maintained the possibility of paralinguistic communication. The two environments, forming one dynamic network, contained an equivalency of function, allowing for the recognition of effect on participants and their dwellings. The premise of the work as a research exercise was comparable with an example given many years later in his *Artforum* article “The Real Experiment” (1983), illustrating his continuing interest in cybernetic networks: “Suppose you telephone your own answering device and leave a message that you called – you might learn something about yourself, etc.”<sup>634</sup>

## **5.2. Educating the un-artist**

### **5.2.i. Pedagogical experimentation in the Berkeley Unified School District**

As with much of his work of the 1960s, *Message Units* was conducted with his students and was part of a shift in practice that focused on his works as pedagogical exercises. Though whereas *Interruption* was a means of educating students about his work, his Happenings and Activities during the early 1970s were increasingly focused on the pedagogical value of the works themselves. And it was the education system that required reform to adopt play as a principle of learning, not only for the artist experimenter, but for the emancipation of the worker too. While “instruction in play [could begin in kindergarten and teachers college...

---

634. Allan Kaprow, “The Real Experiment”, *Artforum* 12, no. 4, pp. 37-43, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 201-218, p. 218.

The better bet [would be] the public [universities]”.<sup>635</sup> In 1967 Kaprow had received a grant from the Carnegie Foundation for an experimental educational project in which artists would introduce Happening-like activities to teachers and pupils at secondary schools as an experiment in enlivening both curricula and teaching practices. Developed with Herbert Kohl, a prominent figure within progressive education in America, the project was hosted by the Berkeley Unified School District. Known as 'Project Other Ways', the initiative was far from smooth: while Kohl's aim was to radicalise the structure of the educational system, Kaprow simply wanted artists who would introduce play into the classroom. Kaprow's *Six Ordinary Happenings* [fig. 125], performed during between 7th March and 23rd May 1969 revisited the idea of imitative play seen a year earlier in *Runner*, with the explicit intention to introduce play as an educative tool. Imitating the everyday life of the adult, it was an education in playing at life as preparation for functioning in it. In *Fine!* cars were left in public spaces until policemen, now unwitting participants in frivolity, issued fines. The pupils, parodying the work of the police, took photos of the tickets and wrote reports, sending these reports with fines to the authorities. Making the transgression of parking violations a condition of completing the task emptied the event of the frustration usually met with receiving a parking ticket, and neutralising the supposed enforcement that followed, the inevitability of which changed the event from punishment to farce. And in repeating, mockingly perhaps, the actions of the police, the participants avoided what Kaprow had seen as the “serious practicalities” of competition and money that subverted play into work. Imitation for Kaprow was an open-ended solution to education and a potential disruption to what it meant to educate.

### **5.2.ii. Investigating homeostases in *Basic Thermal Units* (1973)**

---

635. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, *Art News* 71, no. 3, pp.34-39, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, pp. 124.

In January 1969, following his directorship of the experimental educational endeavour Project Other Ways (1967-68), Kaprow submitted a statement on educational reform to *Avant-Garde* magazine: a periodical critical of American society and government that lasted fourteen issues, edited by the controversial publisher Ralph Ginzberg. Kaprow critiqued the prevalence of the service industry in contemporary society, declaring that “No one knows how to make use of the time that increasingly weighs on a puritanical culture that believes in labor as the highest virtue.” The solution, he suggested, was “that schools from kindergarten to college must begin to train young people and their teachers for leisure; train them, that is, not to compete but to *play*,” and finally that “civic and federal agencies, backed with major funding, should be formed to mobilize national programs of recreation (re-creation).”<sup>636</sup> Later that same year Kaprow became Associate Dean of the School of Art at CalArts. It was at CalArts he began structuring his pieces as experimental pedagogical enquiries. Founded by Walt Disney in the early 1960s, the school had become a hub for radical feminist and Marxist thought instigated by the appointments in the late 1960s of Herbert Blau as Provost and Robert Corrigan as President. Central to their pedagogical approach was the focus on research-led teaching from practitioners, rather than rigid curricula and the system of learning through project-based work. This, coupled with the collegiate engagement encouraged between staff and students and the cross-disciplinary approach within the arts, resulted in a dynamic model of learning to an extent reflective of the ethos of Black Mountain College and Rutgers. Aside from Kaprow, faculty staff hired by Blau and Corrigan included Paik, Fluxus artists Alison Knowles and Emmett Williams, sitar musician Ravi Shankar and the radical feminist artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. While *Message Units* (1972) had been part of the education of students at CalArts, Kaprow's newly educational emphasis was not confined to Activities within the institution. *Basic Thermal Units* (1973) [figs. 126-130], sponsored by three German institutions, was performed simultaneously in four German cities:

---

636. Allan Kaprow, letter submitted to *Avant-Garde* magazine, 1969, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 61, folder 9).

Essen, Duisburg, Bochum and Remscheid. The work emphasised the relationship between the experience of temperature and its numeric measurement in degrees Celsius. Each task was to last “for perhaps three hours”.<sup>637</sup> In Essen instructions were given for “HEATING A BODY; COOLING A ROOM”, one participant “adding layers of clothes; one after the other; feeling the body get warm”, before phoning another person to “raise their apartment's' heat by the increase felt in the warming body, e.g. 5°, 8°, 10°...”.<sup>638</sup> The first participant would phone the second repeatedly “until the body's too hot or until the room's too hot; saying, or hearing, that the limit is reached” [fig. 130].<sup>639</sup> Instructions for Duisburg were reversed: “HEATING A ROOM; COOLING A BODY”, the first participant “increasing the temperature of a room, watching the thermometer's rise” [figs. 128-129] before phoning their counterpart “to lower their body's heat by shedding clothes, by applying ice packs until the body feels 5°, 8°, 10°... cooler” [figs. 126-127].<sup>640</sup> The phoning would continue “until the room's too hot or until the body's too cold; saying or hearing that the limit is reached”.<sup>641</sup> Different configurations of the same process appeared in Bochum (“COOLING A BODY; COOLING A ROOM”) and in Remscheid (“COOLING A ROOM; HEATING A BODY”), in which the temperature of the bodies were changed through cooling a bath tub with ice cubes, or increasing the temperature of the bath water.<sup>642</sup> As the title *Message Units* (1972) had played on the notion of the telephonic pricing system, the title *Basic Thermal Units* contrasted the scientific unit of measurement of its namesake (the quantity of heat required to raise the temperature of one pound of water by one degree Fahrenheit) with an entirely subjective relation to the Fahrenheit temperature scale. The body acted as a means of processing the calculation of a basic thermal unit to arrive at a non-scientific approximation of temperature based on experience. It circumvented a specialised approach to knowledge production and collapsed

637. Allan Kaprow, typewritten score for *Basic Thermal Units*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 20, folder 17).

638. Ibid.

639. Ibid.

640. Ibid.

641. Ibid.

642. Ibid.

the divide that Bell had depicted between theory and experience, with no objective gauge given against which to measure their experiences. Imitating a thermometer's function, the piece shifted the emphasis from the unexamined consumption of barometrical knowledge, to an individual appreciation of the process of temperature discovery as a means of 'basic research'. This inevitably led to parody and farce: the participants using all means available to make their immediate environments as uncomfortable as possible. Like *Message Units*, the telephone played an important role in establishing a geographically dispersed dynamic network, though a key difference was in use of the human body as the focus of the piece, becoming a primary signalling device rather than as a means to facilitate networked activity. On one level the piece functioned as a corporeal cybernetic investigation, in which the relationship between the nervous response system and the capacity for rational thought was explored. While an equivalency was suggested between the human thermometers and their mercury counterparts, between the limit of the body's endurance and that of the thermometer. The instruction for phoning repeatedly until "saying or hearing that the limit is reached" did not distinguish between the body or the thermometers being used to monitor the room's fall or rise in temperature, creating a fluidity between them in functional terms and strengthening the sense of a networked relationship between all elements of the piece. Kaprow's experimental Activities of this period, to an extent imitated and parodied recent experimental scientific research in America, such as the Stanford Prison Experiment of 1971. As in Stanford where two groups of students had been put into predefined roles of authority to discover the dynamic that would develop between the two groups, Kaprow's Activities were based on giving sets of individuals roles and activities to discover the behaviour, and experiences, that would eventuate. In de-professionalising as an artist, Kaprow was approaching social psychology.

### **5.2.iii. *Time Pieces* (1973) and the elucidation of subjective bodily states**

Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago had established the Feminist Art Program in 1971, the first feminist course to be offered in an American higher education institution, including Chicago's iconic Womanhouse class. At Womanhouse Chicago had created an intimate teaching style focusing on the personal development of her students through their practices, what one of her students, Suzanne Lacy, has described as an “aggressively psychodynamic” approach that contrasted with the classes run by men.<sup>643</sup> Kaprow's non-authoritarian approach and his openness to experiential enquiry had attracted many of the feminist scholars at CalArts. Indeed Kaprow noted that the introduction of feedback sessions as part of his Activities, from *Time Pieces* (1973), derived partly from consciousness-raising exercises, activities encouraging the sharing of personal experiences in order to understand social issues from a female perspective, part of what would become known as 'feminist pedagogy'.<sup>644</sup> It is highly likely he also borrowed from Wolf Vostell's *Berlin Fever* (1973), writing in 1976 that “Vostell built into the Happening an aftermath... he viewed his piece as a consciousness-raising device, as teaching.”<sup>645</sup> Kaprow had also started attending group relationship counselling sessions from 1973. During these sessions the role of the therapist was replaced by mediation through group discussion. Both models of discourse shared strong resemblances to the feedback sessions Kaprow would introduce in his Activities from this time. Though his work prior to *Time Pieces* was intended to raise awareness of otherwise unexamined phenomena, not before had the reflection of experience gained been integral to the piece. As models for 'basic research', those involved in the Activities could now measure their effectiveness and Kaprow as lead-experimenter could better understand the effects of his models of enquiry.

---

643. Suzanne Lacy in conversation with Fiona Connor for “The Experimental Impulse”, REDCAT, Los Angeles, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2011, <https://soundcloud.com/fiona-connor/suzanne-lacy-on-the-feminist> (accessed 12.06.13)

644. Ibid.

645. Allan Kaprow, “Nontheatrical Performance” (1976), *Artforum* 14, no. 9, pp. 45-51, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 163-180, p. 177. p. 165.

Scored for partners, *Time Pieces* [figs. 131-138] formed part of the Aktionen der Avantgarde festival, Berlin and involved fifteen couples over a three day period, participating at times and in places of their choosing. In the introduction to the score it was determined that “An initial meeting to discuss practicalities, and a review afterwards to exchange experiences and their implications are considered part of the overall structure of the Activity.”<sup>646</sup> Though the feedback session was part of the piece, no record of it was kept. The title, *Time Pieces*, referred again to a means of measurement; one that, as with *Message Units*, was facilitated through an investigation of the human body. It was a piece that addressed a question Kaprow had posed in an early draft of *AEH*, “what shape and time does our experience have?”<sup>647</sup> The pedagogical nature of Kaprow's Activity as an empirically-grounded instance of the 'basic research' he described, was emphasised by the production of an accompanying 'Activity booklet'. It was one of the first of eighteen produced between 1973 and 1979, illustrating the score of the piece through staged visual demonstrations. He had arrested the free play of gossip he had attempted to manifest by ostensibly creating an authoritative document of the performance. The function of the booklets as instructional manuals for others to recreate the performances and to further disseminate his practice and preclude it from assuming any rarity value, soon became highly-prized commodities, undermining their desired function.<sup>648</sup>

Broken up into three units: 'PULSE EXCHANGE', 'BREATH EXCHANGE' and 'PULSE-BREATH EXCHANGE', the first set of instructions required the first participant to repeatedly count aloud his or her pulse for a minute, recording it on tape and playing the tape back. He or she would then phone their partner counting their pulse again for a minute, playing the tape they had recorded over the phone, and their partner did the same. They met, both counted their pulses for a minute repeatedly, with the final instruction being to climb

---

646. Allan Kaprow, typewritten score for *Time Pieces*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 24, folder 3).

647. Allan Kaprow, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (c.1961), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 47, folder 12).

648. For a detailed discussion of Kaprow's Activity booklets, see *Childsplay*, pp. 188-190.

stairs together, counting each other's pulse aloud, and at the same time, into two tape recorders. Then, having the tape recorders off, they were instructed to count aloud each other's pulse, but separately. Like *Basic Thermal Units*, *Time Pieces*, with the emphasis on 'exchange', communicated the equivalency of bodily experiences and appeared to work towards an increased awareness of the participants own bodily functions and that of their partners. The exchange was intra- as well as inter-personal, the documentation of bodily reactions to various physical states contributing to an enhanced awareness of the experience of the other. As Kaprow described in his introductory talk:

“*Time Pieces* is also a system of moves to monitor the feelings of others. We read the inner states of others as we do our own... And when we scrutinize each other, like doctors, or touch each other in the process, our own hearts and breathing may react in strange ways. Someone else's mood may be 'catching'. These are 'exchanges.’”<sup>649</sup>

While the piece used technology to mediate experiences, it did not replicate the remote networked structure of *Hello, Message Units* (1972) and *Basic Thermal Units*, but used a variance of proximity as an integral part of its investigation, the breath count acting as a control. The use of recording devices served to mediate the individual's pulse for themselves, replicating and emphasising their continuous experience of it and producing a potential disconnect with the current experience of their pulse in listening to it. This replication helped the subjects increase awareness of their pulse, fulfilling Kaprow's wish “to restore participation in the natural design” through play as imitation.<sup>650</sup> It was an experimental use of technology, testing the effect of human interaction with it, as Kaprow explained: “What isn't normal is what we convey on the telephone and store on the recorders: our pulse and breath rates. Used this way, they may either bring us closer to ourselves and each other, or separate”.<sup>651</sup>

---

649. Allan Kaprow, notes for introductory talk to *Time Pieces*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 24, folder 3).

650. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, *Art News* 71, no. 3, pp.34-39, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, p. 112.

651. Allan Kaprow, notes for introductory talk to *Time Pieces*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 24, folder 3).

The piece was “a framework of objective moves designed to tap subjective states, states which are, however, unknown at the beginning.”<sup>652</sup> Kaprow's reference to 'subjective states' did not indicate an emotional response, but of personal bodily states and rhythms. The “BREATH EXCHANGE” mirrored the scheme of “PULSE EXCHANGE”, with participants breathing rapidly into their tape recorders for a minute, before counting their breaths, noting the count and listening to the tape. They then phoned their partners breathing rapidly into the mouthpiece for a minute, counting their breaths and playing the previous recording to them. Climbing the stairs repeated the actions of the pulse exchange, replacing it with the recording and counting of the partners breaths, and the final task required them to breathe “into each other, mouth-to-mouth, for a minute; drawing the breath in and out (noting count); once again... and again...” [figs. 135-136].<sup>653</sup> As with many of Kaprow's partner-focused Activities, the piece had sexual overtones and, unlike *Message Units* (1972) and *Basic Thermal Units* the largest variable became the dynamic between the two partners. Indeed the potential for induced “subjective states” to destabilise the focus on examination and process, “upon quasi-medical examinations and measurements” as Kaprow put it, was great.<sup>654</sup> The last section, “PULSE-BREATH EXCHANGE”, fused both exercises, first holding one's breath after exhaling, counting their pulse while tapping the microphone and listening to the recording. Secondly phoning each other, holding their inhaled breaths for a minute, counting their pulses by tapping the mouthpieces, and playing the recording over the phone. Thirdly meeting, “each partner holding exhaled breath for a minute; counting each other's pulse by blinking eyes (noting count)”<sup>655</sup> They then climbed stairs, holding their inhaled breath for a minute and counting their pulse by tapping the microphone, listening to both tapes

simultaneously, climbing the stairs again without the tape recorder, holding their inhaled

652. Ibid.

653. Allan Kaprow, typewritten score for *Time Pieces*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 24, folder 3).

654. This firmly contradicts Glenn Phillips' interpretation of *Time Pieces*, in which he argues that “Despite limiting the physical demands of the piece, Kaprow nonetheless was certain of the effect it would produce in his participants.” (p.36)

655. Ibid.

breaths for a minute, counting their own pulse internally, exhaling into a plastic bag, sealing it, climbing the stairs again and inhaling the other's "bagged breath" [fig. 137].<sup>656</sup>

In its empirical approach to knowledge discovery, specifically self-discovery, *Time Pieces* seems rooted in the rising popularity of Gestalt therapy during the 1970s: an existential approach to psychotherapy focusing on the individual's experience of the present and guided by the belief that self-knowledge is only possible through external relations.<sup>657</sup> If, as Kaprow had argued, "Authoritarianism closes out plays inviting role", his approach to the generation of knowledge within this model of basic research threatened the operation of play that provided the very foundation of his pedagogical model.<sup>658</sup> The search for knowledge discovery, through emulating empirical practices of the professional therapies, furthermore threatened to sever play from imitation and direct it to the natural inclination Kaprow evidently had for work. While he could educate others as to the way towards imitation, his deeply ingrained work ethic had left him in an unenviable position in relation to his own theory. Play, having offered "satisfaction not in some practical outcome, some immediate accomplishment" was now directed towards that end: to the outcome of practical utility. His fixation with play as a liberating activity had become detached from its initial function of emancipation to the use of it as a tool of discovery with which to understand social processes. While Kaprow had freed the work of the scientist in approaching the job armed with the desire to imitate, within the apparent contradiction between the fused categories of work and play, play had been subsumed as a sub-category of work, producing the very discontinuity he had hoped to avoid. The emphasis on research was again highlighted through a number of participants donating charts of their measured breath and pulse during the Activity. It reflected the conceptual strategies being used by artists such as Hans Haacke in *Shapolsky et*

---

656. Ibid.

657. Association for the Advancement of Gestalt Therapy, repr. Linda Curran, *Trauma Competency: A Clinician's Guide* (Wisconsin: PESI, 2009), p. 213.

658. Allan Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II", *Art News* 71, no. 3, pp.34-39, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, p. 120.

*Al* (1971): an investigation into the business of landlord Harry Shapolsky, and Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973-8), the latter documenting the relationship between Kelly and her son over a period of six years, analysing differences between, as Kelly put it, “my lived experience as a mother and my analysis of that experience”.<sup>659</sup> As part of *Time Pieces* Kaprow was required to produce a gallery display, as Kelly would with relics of her son's first six years. His choice of display reaffirmed the framing of his practice as a means of experimental enquiry, with the most significant apparatus, the tape recorders, encased around the perimeter of the room, photographic evidence in vitrines in the centre, underneath inflated plastic bags containing specimens of the participants' breath, their names marked on each bag. Kaprow explained that “*Time Pieces* can be viewed as a 'container' which we fill with the discovery of ourselves”, the display serving to allegorise the intentions of the piece.<sup>660</sup>

### 5.3. The problem of documentation

*Time Pieces* was commissioned in three parts: as a gallery installation, as a performance and as a sixteen page spread in the exhibition catalogue. The latter presented a collection of documents that maintained the separated nature of the performance itself and attempted to answer the question of how to document an event, while maintaining its vital relationship to gossip. The answer appeared to be by presenting relics and staged illustrations. Indeed the staged demonstrations comprising his Activity booklets continued throughout the decade, with works such as *Useful Fictions* (1975) and *Satisfaction* (1976) providing models within which it was hoped unforeseen subjectivities would result from predetermined actions.

*Private Parts* (1976) was produced at the time Kaprow's focus was drifting away from play as a means of social experimentation, towards work that focused increasingly on private experiences. And the following year he would begin to sanction reinventions of his early

---

659. Mary Kelly quoted in Delia Gaze (ed.), *Concise Dictionary of Women Artists* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. 408.

660. Allan Kaprow, notes for introductory talk to *Time Pieces*, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 24, folder 3).

Environments, a phenomenon that would increasingly weigh on his time until his death in 2006. *Private Parts* was significant as the first Activity that was made as a video work, and without a booklet, the performance and its documentation presented as one. It was a sharp departure from an article he had written for *Artforum* three years earlier, “Video Art: Old Wine, New Bottle” (1974), in which he disparaged the documentation of performance art on video. “Taped performances of an artist doing something” Kaprow wrote “are, after all, theatrical arts... the tapes contain only minor 'discoveries'; they are not experimental.”<sup>661</sup> He concluded by stressing how opposed to participation he thought video documentation was: “we succumb to the glow of the cathode-ray tube while our minds go dead. Until video is used as indifferently as the telephone, it will remain a pretentious curiosity.”<sup>662</sup> His position was consistent with his desire to disseminate knowledge of his work through “gossip” rather than a permanent historical account. *Private Parts* existed firmly in the latter category and, while further troubling his relationship with documentation, gives a rare and valuable insight into the dynamics of the feedback session so important to his Activities during the mid to late 1970s. Taped at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, the piece required partners of different sexes to accompany each other to the toilet, choosing which to go into and using whatever facilities they had or wanted to. Rather than “a framework of objective moves designed to tap subjective states”, there was no prescribed action other than the negotiation of the gendered toilet to visit and the instruction to explore the environment.<sup>663</sup> It presented a freedom to enact entirely subjective moves relating to subjective states, furthering, as with *Time Pieces*, “the discovery” of self. The Activity provided the platform for discovery: of inter-personal relations, of the significance of context, and what the choice of certain activities revealed about those participating. The video shows a peculiar dynamic in the men's

---

661. Allan Kaprow, “Video Art: Old Wine, New Bottle” (1974), *Artforum* 12, no. 10, pp. 46-49, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 148-153, p. 149.

662. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

663. Allan Kaprow, *Private Parts* (1977), video cassette (U-Matic) (29 min.), col., mono., Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 91, V40).

toilet between Kaprow and curator Nancy Drew.<sup>664</sup> Drew, clearly excited about collaborating with Kaprow, stares at him while he combs his hair in the mirror. “I don't care” he remarks, before asking “how's your hair?” in an attempt to direct the Activity towards an examination of the self.<sup>665</sup> The obvious potential for the piece to have assumed a sexual character is evidenced in the dynamic, underscored by Kaprow's reference to the exchange in the discussion forum: “she has vested interests in the men's room”.<sup>666</sup> The discussion session brought to light uses of the bathroom space that extended the taboo of sharing a gendered space with someone of the opposite gender, including one male participant washing his hands in the toilet to confront “the worst thing that could happen”.<sup>667</sup> Another participant gave a close reading of the graffiti in the toilets, and it was the concentration on the minutiae of otherwise unexamined routine behaviour, enabled partly through the unconventional sharing of space and the temporary permission to deviate from social norms, that Kaprow tried to elicit in the discussion. On hearing a couple's experience, Kaprow seeks to further understand the precise dynamic between them and how this related to the space they shared. “Did you look at each other?” he asks; “What about the mirror?”<sup>668</sup> The forum afforded him the means to scrutinise the experiences of his participants as a way to examine the effectiveness of his model of enquiry, and the video gives us a heightened awareness of this process. Kaprow's distance from gossip-led narrative may illustrate that his understanding of his work as performance had shifted so far to that of social enquiry that literal evidence no longer compromised his work. While the substance of his earlier Activities and Happenings was in the enactment itself, the pseudo-scientifically guided enquiry of works such as *Private Parts* had become measurable through the consciousness raising sessions. In Kaprow's new role as

---

664. Ibid.

665. Ibid.

666. Ibid.

667. Ibid.

668. Ibid.

an 'un-arted' social scientist, problems of performance documentation were largely irrelevant to his desire to communicate the results of this basic research.

#### **5.4. Reflections on Kaprow's engagement with play**

Is it possible to measure the effectiveness of play as a tool of research? Given Kaprow's parody of scientific method, and the inherently non-scientific means through which he approached his pieces, including the lack of resultant documentation, almost certainly not. Though *Private Parts* was an exception, the emphasis of the Activities during the 1970s was on individual discovery through replicating the processes depicted in the Activity booklets. Consequently it falls on us to re-enact the works as a means of discovering for ourselves the individual significances these investigations may elicit. What can be judged quite clearly is the central role of play as a critical tool in Kaprow's practice from the late 1960s. While his work had been guided by his "sense of play" before this point, his programmatic and highly theorised engagement with play during this time distinguished it from the previous general associations with playfulness.<sup>669</sup> Kaprow's engagement with play as a means of research fused both the critique of work and the critique of knowledge: play replaces work with an imitative process, leading to knowledge discovery rather than material production. And though acknowledging the difficulty of producing work during the late 1960s and early 1970s without also being in some way political, whether intentionally or otherwise, both Kaprow's critiques of work and knowledge were politically motivated. Though *Moving, Round Trip* and *Record II* were not as politically charged as *Runner*, they expressed Kaprow's deep disaffection with the societal phenomenon he had observed whereby the value of work was increasingly amorphous, and his wish to reengage the worker with process as a goal in itself. These works also reflected a wider engagement with the critical interests of the New Left, in

---

669. Allan Kaprow, lecture at La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1983, Allan Kaprow Papers (Box 76, C67).

particular the work of Marcuse mediated through his mentor Meyer Schapiro. And his critique of knowledge, in particular the focus on empirical discovery that reconnected knowing with experience, reacted to what Bell had defined as a phenomenon of the post-industrial society: the increasingly theoretical basis of knowledge as a means to understand the human experience. Kaprow had presented a vision for the reorganisation of work, from primary education up. And though his Activity booklets were problematic for a practice that had attempted to distance itself from a fixed history and objecthood, they appear to have been important for the pedagogical emphasis of his Activities of the 1970s, given that their cessation in 1979 coincided with his shift away from investigating group dynamics as a pseudo-scientific enquiry. The conclusion of this inquiry in the mid-1970s coincides with the start of Kaprow's work to be enacted by individuals or pairs that emphasised private experiences. Though these pieces continue to reassert the sustaining importance of experience to Kaprow's work, their divergence from Kaprow's earlier practice, and the complex themes they engage with, would require a much larger study than is permitted here.

But how do we understand a model for education based on imitation, proposed as “a stratagem for the survival of society”, that uses play to isolate itself on, as Kaprow suggested, “a modern yet transcendent plane”, i.e. from the society it proposes to save?<sup>670</sup> The suggestion seems playful in itself, maintaining an ambivalence towards direct political action and, indeed, any possibility that may exist for its practical application. Creating purposively 'unreal' environments through parody had enabled a safe environment in which to experiment. And his reconnection of art and life through 'un-artisting' in the professional therapies had led to an emphatically private practice. It provided a means to exert control over a schematic that allowed for indeterminate action. However, his role as ringleader of the pieces with a clear objective of what he wanted the works to achieve in a broad sense arguably kept his focus on

---

670. Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II”, *Art News* 71, no. 3, pp.34-39, repr. in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 110-126, p. 115.

the process and structure of the works and limited his focus on the experience itself. This phenomenon appeared in his interaction with Nancy Drew in *Time Pieces*, conscious of her waning attention on her own activity and heightened interest in his own, trying to refocus her attention on what he wanted the piece to bring about. While this did not threaten his wish to 'un-art' it did threaten to undermine his engagement with play as a means to destabilise the notion of work and, more importantly, the concentration on function. This conflict is further illustrated in his *Coryl's Birthday Piece* (1985), a dialogue mediated through the use of a tape recorder, for his second wife Coryl Crane:

- K: "this piece is of great value to me, and I hope to you."
- C: "Well let's hope it will be to you, you don't know yet."
- K: "I do, I've already said it."
- C: "I know you've worked it out, but you haven't experienced it yet. You've worked it all out so carefully... and you don't know, you've got to experience it first. You don't give it a chance... you're very conscious of yourself and therefore me and everyone who relates to your life... And that is the thing that has disturbed me always, because I feel it is very hard to get to you without going through a performance."
- K: "Do you get some of the playfulness in it? And also the risk that I'm playing with?"
- C: (distractedly resigned) "Yup.."<sup>671</sup>

Kaprow's focus on the intended function of the work, and his need for control within a practice that invited indeterminacy, shows that his conflicted relationship between the desire to allow for indeterminacy and a need for artistic control was still unresolved. Even in his smaller, controlled, pieces involving "objective moves designed to tap subjective states" (a

---

671. Allan Kaprow, *Coryl's Birthday Piece* (1985), 1 sound cassette (47 min., 6 min.), Allan Kaprow Papers (box 76, C69).

permissive-sounding premise) certain subjective reactions were more valid than others, as has been seen. Kaprow's Happenings and Activities from the late 1960s to mid-1970s resemble more closely than any of his previous work the ethos of Cage's pieces that incorporated an 'indeterminacy of performance'. But, unlike the technical focus participants had in Cage's work, Kaprow's practice could never achieve the same satisfaction, the instruments substituted by the whims of his participants. Though he introduced his work to familiarise the participants with its ethos and to set out the idea behind the work, he could not influence its course to the degree he may otherwise have wished. While he maintained a deep interest in understanding the experience of others, his work, having become more intimate in a bid to exercise a greater degree of control, continued to diminish in scale throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It was the natural conclusion for an artist who had been caught in a conflict to fuse art and life while maintaining a semblance of artistic control. Describing *18 Happenings* in the late 1960s, he had admitted "The reason that the performance worked in one sense was that it was very controlled. A reason that it did not work, in another sense, was that it was *too* controlled, and people do not like to be controlled in that way."<sup>672</sup> This negotiation, on-going since 1959 had been accompanied by Kaprow's ever-decreasing scale of work, until he was left speaking to his wife through a recording device, documenting her resistance to the limitations his preconceived aestheticised experience offered to the participant as subject.

---

672. Richard Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Allan Kaprow" (1968), *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, pp. 100-132, p. 110.

## 6. An Irresolvable Necessity: Conclusions and Implications of the Tensions Within Kaprow's Practice

This thesis has sought to understand how the tension between permissiveness and control in Kaprow's practice was informed by his treatment of subjecthood and agency. It took as its theoretical framework the significant interest Kaprow had in John Dewey's notion of “aesthetic experience”, along with Kaprow's writings on accident, chance and change, to explore a vocabulary with which to discuss form in Kaprow's performative work. While we found many of the ideas contained in *Art as Experience* reflected in Kaprow's concepts of extension, morality and his wish to destabilise the distinction between art and life, this thesis uncovered important divergences between Dewey's text and Kaprow's practice. It provided much needed substance and depth to Jeff Kelley's claim that Dewey was Kaprow's “intellectual father”.<sup>673</sup> The separation Kaprow articulates between an aesthetic and moral practice, between an art that extends into the environment and the separation the art object has to the everyday, was found to have differed in emphasis from Dewey's focus on articulating the *quality* of aesthetic experience without discriminating between different forms of art. Kaprow's emphasis on restoring a physical continuity between art and life, rather than facilitating the perception of aesthetic experience in non-art contexts as Dewey had argued, was shown to inform his practice within the time line of this inquiry. This resulted in extraordinary manifestations of everyday environments, routines, technologies, occurrences and places, demonstrated in what he later termed “lifelike” works such as *Yard*,

---

673. *Childsplay*, p. 8; Jeff Kelley, “Introduction”, in Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. xi-xxvi, p. xi & xxvi. Kelley's thesis is the standard reference for the connection between Kaprow and John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, repeated in Judith Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 26, Richard Shusterman, “Dewey's Art as Experience: The Psychological Background”, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 26-43, p. 32, Joseph Jacobs, “Crashing New York à la John Cage”, in Joan Marter, Simon Anderson (eds.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (Newark: The Newark Museum, 1999), pp. 67-99, p. 95, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*, p. 189, Eva Meyer-Hermann “Museum as Meditation”, in Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal (eds.), *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), pp. 72-91, p. 89, fn. 31.

*Hello*, *6 Ordinary Happenings*, *Self-Service* and *Time Pieces*, noting they “were not nearly as lifelike as I had supposed they might be.”<sup>674</sup> Their extraordinary nature emphasised part of the dialectic at play in his work, to “not merely label life as art [but being] continuous with that life, inflecting, probing, testing, and even suffering it, but always attentively.”<sup>675</sup> This dialectic, at work in the relationship between chance and control, his categories of Chance and Change and his calls to resist the institutional framework that supported him by 'un-acting', is perhaps the most fertile aspect of Kaprow's practice, providing it with both its substance and justification as neither “Art art” nor “life” but somewhere on the fringes of both. Indeed this duality is, in a word, “change”: caught perpetually between freedom and regulation.

In his essay “Just Doing” (1997) published in the *Tulane Drama Review*, Kaprow provided further justification for thinking of his practice in these terms, describing

“Experimental art... [as] the one kind of art that can affirm and deny art at the same time. It is one kind of art that can claim as value no value! It is in agreement with American philistinism and its throwaway materialism – while it is free to enact a sort of 'native' creativity in the play of ordinary life (cf. John Dewey). The one caveat is that it must not be called art.”<sup>676</sup>

This description resonates with the tensions investigated in this thesis, while “native creativity” recalls Kaprow's exposition of “aesthetic anarchy” as the “fundamental creative process.” The final caveat though is disingenuous to the complexity of his practice as it bridged the gap between art and life, suggested by the term “lifelike” art. Indeed it is a suggestion precluded by his attachment to the institution and the discourse that frames it, of which this study is but the latest affirmation. While his work often appeared outside of a

---

674. Allan Kaprow, “Performing Life” (1979), *Performance Anthology – Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art* (San Francisco: Contemporary Art Press), repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 195-198, p. 195.

675. Allan Kaprow, “The Real Experiment”, *Artforum*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 37-43, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 201-218, p. 206.

676. Allan Kaprow, “Just Doing”, *Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 41, no. 3 (Fall 1997), pp. 101-106, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 247-251, p. 251.

physical gallery setting, and as such integrated itself with 'everything else' that could be considered 'life', according to the logic presented in his manifesto of 1966, much of it was still produced within the institutional context of gallery and museum sponsorship, and all of it was produced with Kaprow as the named artist.<sup>677</sup> His subversion of institutional spaces and modes of display throughout the period that this thesis has considered, included his untitled Hansa installations, to *A Spring Happening, Yard, Interruption, Hello* and Activities such as *Message Units* and *Private Parts*. These subversions contributed to the identification of his practice as art: his interventions in non-artistic spaces were justified by his status as an artist and, within an institutional art environment they reinforced both his status as an artist and the status of the product of his endeavours as art, additionally framed by his contributions to institutional discourse through essays and interviews published in the art press.

The legacy of Kaprow's derivation of aesthetic experience continued from his small group Activities, to one and two-person pieces from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. In his essay "Performing Life" (1979) he included the score for "a possible breathing piece" of three parts to be begun and concluded alone, with the middle section performed between two people.<sup>678</sup> It was a meditation on "the normally unattended aspects of everyday life."<sup>679</sup> The first section directed the participant to study their face in a mirror placed against or in ice, leaning closer to the mirror "until the glass fogs over" and "moving back until the image clears", repeating this "for some time" while listening to their breath amplified through a microphone.<sup>680</sup> The second section replaced the mirror with a clear pane of cold glass between two people, matching each other's facial expressions and breath (amplified on both sides). The two participants move towards the pane until the glass fogs, moving back again until it is clear and repeating this "for some time".<sup>681</sup> The third section instructed the

677. Allan Kaprow, untitled manifesto, in Ay-O et al, *Manifestos* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), pp. 21-23.

678. Allan Kaprow, "Performing Life", repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 195-198, pp. 196-198.

679. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

680. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

681. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

participant to sit alone at a beach, matching their breath with “the rise and fall of the waves” and recording it for “some time”, then walking next to the waves while listening to the recording of their breath.<sup>682</sup> Like many of the pieces discussed in this thesis, including *Hello, Time Pieces*, *Private Parts*, *Message Units* and *Basic Thermal Units*, the use of systems of feedback help ensure what Kaprow had intended to be perceptual “shifts”: “Such displacements of ordinary emphasis increase attentiveness but only attentiveness to the peripheral parts of ourselves and our surroundings.”<sup>683</sup> “The purpose of lifelike art” Kaprow wrote “was... to reintegrate the piecemeal reality we take for granted. Not just intellectually, but directly, as experience – in this moment, in this house, at this kitchen sink.”<sup>684</sup> If, as Dewey had argued, the basis of art was the aesthetic experience of the everyday, Kaprow had “bypassed” art to investigate its origin in all its contingency.<sup>685</sup> Indeed Kaprow's detailed investigations of natural and social processes in his *Activities* and later perceptual pieces had enabled all manner of unforeseen contingencies under the rubric of Change.

The tensions identified in Kaprow's dynamic and performative practice continue to be irresolvable in the work of other artists. Marina Abramović (b.1946) investigates and disturbs divisions of artist and audience, viewing and undergoing; Francis Alÿs (b.1959) probes the tension between art and the everyday, individual action and impotence, and the disruption of social spaces; Thomas Hirschhorn (b.1957) creates installations often in everyday spaces. In 2014 Abramović staged *512 Hours* at the Serpentine Gallery, London [figs. 139-140]. She inhabited a small room in the Gallery from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. six days a week for over two months, inviting members of the public to join her for as long as they wished. Visitors engaged in meditative tasks such as counting lentils and rice, and sleeping. The space was

---

682. Ibid.

683. Ibid.

684. Allan Kaprow, “The Real Experiment”, *Artforum*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 37-43, repr. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 201-218, p. 206.

685. Kaprow suggested the same in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue *A Tribute to John Cage*, Chicago International Art Exposition, Cincinnati, “Right Living” (1987): “experimental music, or any other experimental art of our time, can be an introduction to right living; and after that introduction art can be bypassed for the main course”, repr. *Essays in Blurring Art and Life*, pp. 223-225, p. 225

variously configured depending on the intended activities, from a central stage surrounded by four rows of chairs, to beds, to an empty space. The invitation of the public to be directed by the artist encouraged a disarticulation between categories of audience and performer, and instigated a purposeful tension between the two. The experiences of those who had been a part of the performance space were publicly documented on the social networking platform Tumblr, evoking a similar gossip-led narrative to that explored in relation to Kaprow's *Record II*. For *Re-enactments* (2000) [figs. 141-143] Alÿs bought a gun in Mexico City, walking the streets with it until he was arrested. He then enlisted the police who had arrested him to help re-enact the sequence of events. The two events were documented on video and appear spliced against one another. *Re-enactments* addresses the politics of public space, creating a tension between an illegal act and an artistic performance. Indeed the two films present a visual tension between reality and simulacrum, with neither footage being readily distinguishable as the original performance. In addition, though the police are willing participants in the second performance, their inclusion in the original work is a result of Alÿs forcing a performance of their functional role by virtue of his intervention. Likewise the bystanders are involuntarily complicit in the piece by allowing Alÿs to progress through the city without being challenged. The distinction between functional and artistic performances and spectatorship and participation are thus blurred, creating a tension that sustains the fabric of the piece. Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* (2013) [figs. 144-146] was a series of purpose-built shacks provocatively built within a government subsidised housing development. It operated in part as a community centre dedicated to Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci, comprising a theatre, museum, radio station, daily newspaper, art classroom, Internet centre, food kiosk and children's paddling pool. Built and staffed by local residents, it contained graffiti murals by a community organisation and broadcast tracks from Jay-Z, in contrast to the sparsely attended academic lectures on philosophy that regularly took

place. Gramsci had argued that states use cultural institutions to enforce a class divide in capitalist societies. As a monument to Gramsci the work fluctuates between a radical intervention and a cynical presentation of the very divide Gramsci articulated: using local labour and colonising the space of an underprivileged social group to address a privileged elite outside the community, both immediately within the work and through art journals and academic publications, just as, in Kaprow's practice, contrast and tension was an irresolvable but necessary part of his collaged juxtaposition, communicated in his statement that "I want to put together what cannot be put together".<sup>686</sup>

This thesis presents the foundation for a number of further investigations concerning the place of the artist in participatory performance art, and the precarious negotiation between control and permissiveness. These include the problematised notion of the artist as creator in work formed by the participation of others, along with issues of documentation, site-specific intervention, and the use of institutional contexts for participation. This has application for recent performative practice. Additionally there has been a large increase in institutional re-stagings of Kaprow's performances over the past decade. This provides a new and urgent theoretical problem concerning notions of authenticity, the role of the institution, and the viability of experimental engagement, along with ideas of accident and risk that featured as part of the original manifestation, as well as the need to re-examine the implications of historical participation for current practice. It also offers an intriguing divergence from the historical problems addressed in this thesis, to understand historical awareness as a constituent factor and possible function in the work, and an examination of self-reflective questions concerning the viability of participatory performance art as pedagogy. These include the efficacy of re-stagings to further understand the historical origins of the works concerned, and their ahistorical value as empirical investigations into social and material

---

686. Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman, Massimiliano Gioni, *Collage: the unmonumental picture* (London: Merrell, 2007), p. 44.

processes. Though Stephanie Rosenthal, Eva Meyer-Hermann and Martha Buskirk have made preliminary steps in such an investigation, applying the questions of this thesis to an analysis of Kaprow's reinventions, and other reinventions of historical performances, would contribute to the depth of this emergent critical discussion.<sup>687</sup> It is the task of future scholarship, armed with an awareness of the inevitable and necessary tensions that exist within Kaprow's practice, to realise the full critical potential of these contradictions as living expressions of change.

---

687. Stephanie Rosenthal, "Agency for Action", in in Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal (eds.), *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), pp. 56-71; Eva Meyer-Hermann "Museum as Meditation", in Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal (eds.), *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), pp. 72-91; Martha Buskirk, *Creative Enterprise: Contemporary Art Between Museum and Marketplace* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 115-145.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources (archival)

Allan Kaprow, undergraduate notebook c. 1948, New York University, Allan Kaprow Papers, ca. 1940-1997, accession no. 980063, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (hereafter Allan Kaprow Papers), Box 1, Folder 3.

\_\_\_\_\_, notes from Columbia University, 1950-52, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

\_\_\_\_\_, "An Essay Written for a Course Given in Modern Art by Professor Meyer Schapiro" (1950), p. 2, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 2, Folder 2.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Jackson Pollock" (1950), Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 2, Folder 2.

\_\_\_\_\_, handwritten retrospective statement on *Communication* (1958) (n.d.), Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 2.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Demiurge", *Anthologist*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1959, pp. 4-17 (Rutgers State University), p. 4, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 5.

\_\_\_\_\_, notes for Room 1, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 8.

\_\_\_\_\_, notes for Room 2, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 9.

\_\_\_\_\_, notes for Room 3, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 9A.

\_\_\_\_\_, handwritten draft of a letter to the theatre critic Fairfield Porter (n.d.), Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, letter to "Mr König", 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, invitation to *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), from "Reuben-Kaprow Associates" (n.d.), Allan Kaprow Papers Box 5, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, handwritten note "To The Theater people", Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Notes", *Self-Service*, May 1966, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 9, Folder 9.

\_\_\_\_\_, handwritten score for *Watching* (1967), Allan Kaprow Papers, box 12, folder 8.

\_\_\_\_\_, letter to E.A.T. president Francis Mason, Jr., Allan Kaprow Papers, box 13, folder 9.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Hello: Plan and Execution" (1974), Allan Kaprow Papers, box 13, folder 10.

\_\_\_\_\_, briefing notes for *Runner* (1968), Allan Kaprow Papers, box 14, folder 2.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Days Off: A Calendar of Happenings*, Oct 1969, Allan Kaprow Papers, box 15, folder 3.

\_\_\_\_\_, typewritten score for *Basic Thermal Units* (1973), Allan Kaprow Papers, box 20, folder 17.

\_\_\_\_\_, score and notes for *Time Pieces* (1975), Allan Kaprow Papers, box 24, folder 3.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Some Notes on the Present Exhibition", at Rutgers, Hansa Gallery Members' group show, December 1953, Allan Kaprow Papers Box 46, Folder 1.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Principles of Modern Art" (1959), *It Is* (New York) no. 4, pp.51-52, p. 52, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 46, Folder 2.

\_\_\_\_\_, letter to the editor, *Art News*, c.1959, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 46, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Some Observations on Contemporary Art", *New Forms – New Media* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1960), n.p., Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 46, Folder 13.

\_\_\_\_\_, "On How to Make a Happening" (1966), Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 47, Folder 6.

\_\_\_\_\_, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers Box 47, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, c. 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 47, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, July 1960, Old Bridge, N.J., Allan Kaprow Papers Box 47, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, handwritten draft of *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* c. 1960-61, Allan Kaprow Papers, box 47, folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Zen Buddhism and the American Avant-Garde", n.d., Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 49, Folder 13.

\_\_\_\_\_, letter submitted to *Avant-Garde* magazine, 1969, Allan Kaprow Papers, box 61, folder 9.

\_\_\_\_\_, handwritten letter to "Mr Tyler", 31<sup>st</sup> March 1958, Allan Kaprow Papers, box 65, folder 22.

\_\_\_\_\_, lecture at La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, "Wolf Kahn talk", Allan Kaprow Papers, box 76, C67.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Coryl's Birthday Piece* (1985), 1 sound cassette (47 min., 6 min.), Allan Kaprow Papers, box 76, C69.

\_\_\_\_\_, sound tape reels for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 80, R9-R11.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Private Parts* (1977), video cassette (U-Matic) (29 min.), col., mono., Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 91, V40.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1966).

\_\_\_\_\_, "Ages of the Avant-Garde", *Performing Arts Journal* 16, no. 1 (January 1994), pp.51-6, p. 55.

\_\_\_\_\_, transcript of interview with Judith Rodenbeck, Allan Kaprow, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996, Encinitas, California.

\_\_\_\_\_, transcript of interview with Judith Rodenbeck, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Encinitas, California, p. 65, Allan Kaprow Papers.

Horace Richter, solicitation letter for the Allan Kaprow Research Fund at Rutgers University, September 8, 1959, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 5, Folder 12.

\_\_\_\_\_, “Kaprow 'Event' to Open at Reuben Gallery”, Allan Kaprow Papers (box 5, folder 12).Claes Oldenburg, letter to Allan Kaprow, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1961, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 69, Folder 7.

\_\_\_\_\_, letter to Allan Kaprow, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1961, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 69, Folder 7.

\_\_\_\_\_, letter to Allan Kaprow, August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1961, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 69, Folder 7.

\_\_\_\_\_, letter to Allan Kaprow, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1961, Allan Kaprow Papers, Box 69, Folder 7.

Marshal McLuhan, “Great Change-Overs for You,” *Vogue*, July 1966, Allan Kaprow Papers, box 41, folder 8. George Maciunas, letter to George Brecht, c. fall 1962, Jean Brown Papers, ca. 1916-1995, accession no. 890164, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

#### Primary sources (non-archival)

Joseph Albers, “Art as Experience”, *Progressive Education*, October 1935, pp. 391-93

Ay-o et al, *Manifestos* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966)

Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973)

George Brecht, *Chance Imagery* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966)

John Cage, *Silence* (London: Marion Boyars, 2009)

John Cage and Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), *John Cage, Writer: previously uncollected pieces* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993)

John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Art as Experience* (1934) (New York: Perigee, 2005)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Divinity School Address* (Boston, MA: American Unitarian Association, n.d.)

Ken Friedman (ed.), *The Fluxus Reader*, (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1998)

Ken Friedman, Owen Smith, Lauren Sawchyn (eds.), *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* (Performance Research e-publication, 2002), [www.deluxxe.com/beat/fluxusworkbook.pdf](http://www.deluxxe.com/beat/fluxusworkbook.pdf) (accessed 12.11.14)

John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993)

Al Hansen, *A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965)

- William James, *Pragmatism and Four Essays from the Meaning of Truth*, (New York: New American Library, 1974)
- Jill Johnston, *Marmalade Me* (E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.: New York, 1971)
- Allan Kaprow, Barbara Berman, *Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition sponsored by the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum* (Los Angeles: Pasadena Art Museum, 1967)
- Allan Kaprow, Jeff Kelley (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003)
- Suzanne Lacy in conversation with Fiona Connor for “The Experimental Impulse”, REDCAT, Los Angeles, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2011, <https://soundcloud.com/fiona-connor/suzanne-lacy-on-the-feminist> (accessed 12.06.13)
- Herbert Marcuse and Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume 4* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007)
- Harold McCarthy, 'Dewey, Suzuki, and the Elimination of Dichotomies' (*Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 1956, pp. 35-48)
- \_\_\_\_\_, “Zen: And Some Comments on a Mondo”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 17, No. 1/4 (Jan. - Oct., 1967), pp. 91-96
- Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2010)
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) (London: Routledge, 2005)
- Van Meter Ames “Zen and Pragmatism”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 1954, pp. 19-33
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Zen and American Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962)
- Robert Motherwell (ed.), *The Dada Painters and Poets* (1951) (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988)
- Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt (eds.), *Modern Artists in America - First Series*, (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1951)
- Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (1964), trans. David Britt (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997)
- Julia Robinson (ed.) *John Cage* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The MIT Press, 2011)
- Sid Ross, “Will Robots Make People Obsolete?”, *Parade Magazine*, January 4, 1959, repr. <http://www.paleofuture.com/blog/2008/5/20/will-robots-make-people-obsolete-1959.html> (accessed 25th January 2014)
- Mariellen Sandford (ed.), *Happenings and Other Acts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995)
- Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (eds.), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989)
- Richard Schechner, “Happenings”, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Winter, 1965), pp.229-232

George Seward, "Play as Art", *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 41, No. 7 (Mar 30, 1944), pp. 178-184

Willmon Sheldon and Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki "On Philosophical Synthesis", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Oct., 1951, pp. 3-7

Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Octagon Books, 1982)

Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, "The Breadth of Buddhism", *The Open Court*, Vol. XIV, January 1900, pp. 51-53

\_\_\_\_\_, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (Kyoto: The Eastern Buddhist Society, 1935)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider for the Buddhist Society, London, 1949)

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Philosophy of Zen", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Jul., 1951, pp. 3-15

\_\_\_\_\_, "A Reply to Hu Shih", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Apr., 1953, pp. 25-46

Alfonso Ussario, "Jackson Pollock 1951" (1951), Betty Parsons' Gallery, New York, ([http://archive.org/stream/JacksonPollock1951/pollock1951\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/JacksonPollock1951/pollock1951_djvu.txt), accessed 24th August 2013)

Alan Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen", *Chicago Review*, Vol.12, No.2., Summer, 1958, pp.3-11

Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of Development and Style in Later Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952)

### Secondary sources

Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987)

Robert Anchor, "History and Play: Johan Huizinga and His Critics", *History and Theory*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Feb., 1978), pp. 63-93

Roy Ascott and Edward Shanken (ed.), *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness* (London, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003)

Lee Baxandall, "Beyond Brecht: The Happenings", *Studies on the Left*, No. 6, (Jan-Feb, 1966), pp. 28-36

Benjamin Buchloh and Judith Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, events, objects, documents* (New York: Columbia University, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, 1999)

Maurice Berube, "John Dewey and the Abstract Expressionists", *Educational Theory*, Spring 1998, Volume 48, Issue 2, pp. 211-227

David Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (eds.), *Writings through John Cage's music, poetry, and art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001)

Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005)

- Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997)
- Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958)
- Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003)
- Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007)
- Martha Buskirk, *Creative Enterprise: Contemporary Art Between Museum and Marketplace* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012)
- Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (eds.), *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interview, Round Table* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1996)
- Michael Corris, "The Un-artist", *Art Monthly*, June 2012, 357, pp. 5-8
- Linda Curran, *Trauma Competency: A Clinician's Guide* (Wisconsin: PESI, 2009)
- Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978)
- Anna Dezeuze and Julia Kelly (eds.), *Found Sculpture and Photography from Surrealism to Contemporary Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)
- Johanna Drucker, "Collaboration without Object(s) in the Early Happenings", *Art Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Interactions between Artists and Writers (Winter, 1993), pp. 51-58
- Sally Everett (ed.), *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-garde, Contextualist and Post-Modernist Thought* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1991)
- William Fetterman, *John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 1997)
- Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?", *October*, Vol. 70, The Duchamp Effect (Autumn, 1994), pp. 5-32.
- Stephen Foster, "Clement Greenberg: Formalism in the '40s and '50s", *Art Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975)
- Charlie Gere, *Art, Time and Technology* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006)
- RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001)
- Mary Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1987)
- Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory: 1900-1990* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998)
- Susan Hapgood, *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art, 1958-1962* (New York: American Federation of Arts in association with Universe Publishing, 1994)
- Steven Craig Harper, *Promised Land: Penn's holy experiment, the Walking Purchase, and the dispossession of Delawares, 1600-1763* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2006)
- Harry Henderson, *Modern Robotics: Building Versatile Machines* (New York: Chelsea House, 2006)
- Geoffrey Hendricks (ed.), *Critical Mass* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003)

- Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002)
- David Hopkins (ed.), *Neo-Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopl, 2006)
- Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004)
- Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)
- Margaret Iversen (ed.), *Chance* (London: Whitechapel Gallery/The MIT Press, 2010)
- Jane Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Joseph Jacobs, *Random Order* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2003)
- Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European variations on a universal theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)
- Gish Jen, *Tiger Writing: Art, Culture, and the Interdependent Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013)
- Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003)
- Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004)
- Michael Kirby (ed.), *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1965)
- Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (London: Pitman, 1970)
- Carolyn Lanchner, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; London: Thames & Hudson, 2009)
- Carolyn Lanchner and Robert Rauschenberg, *Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009)
- Pamela Lee, "New Games", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, The Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, Brisbane, Australia, Volume 10, Number 1, 2011, pp. 35-55
- George Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994)
- Joseph D. Lewandowski, "Adorno on jazz and society", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, September 1996 vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 103-121
- Joan Marter (ed.), *The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art, Volume I* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Joan Marter, Simon Anderson (eds.), *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (Newark: The Newark Museum, 1999)
- Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (London: Flamingo, 2002)
- Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk and Stephanie Rosenthal (eds.), *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008)
- Helen Molesworth, "From Dada to Neo-Dada and Back Again", *October*, Vol. 105, Dada, Summer, 2003, pp. 177-181

- Helen Molesworth, M. Darsie Alexander and Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Work Ethic* (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art; University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003)
- Mechthild Nagel, *Masking the Object: A Genealogy of Play* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002)
- Molly Nesbit, *The Pragmatism in the History of Art* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2013)
- David Nicholls (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Zoran R. Novaković, *The Principle of Self-Support in Control Systems* (London: Elsevier, 1992)
- Francis O'Connor, Jackson Pollock (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1967)
- Harold Osborne, "Aesthetic implications of conceptual art, happenings, etc.", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1980, pp. 6-22
- Stella Paul, *Twentieth-Century Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Resource for Educators* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999)
- Joan Peyser, *To Boulez and Beyond* (Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2008)
- Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005)
- Clive Phillpot and Jon Hendricks (eds.), *Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1988)
- David Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)
- Thomas A. Regelski, "Music and the Teaching of Music History as Praxis: A Reply to James Maiello", *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 109–36
- Julie Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, Mass London: The MIT Press, 2001)
- Julia Robinson and Alfred Fischer (eds.) *George Brecht Events: A Heterospective* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2005)
- Judith Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011)
- David Rosand, 'Making Art History at Columbia: Meyer Schapiro and Rudolf Wittkower', *Columbia Magazine* (Fall 2003),  
<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/alumni/Magazine/Fall2003/witt.schapiro.html> (accessed 29.06.13)
- Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995)
- Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (eds.), *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2006)
- Paul Schimmel (ed.) *Out of Actions: between performance and the object, 1949-1979*, Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998)
- David Scott, "William James and Buddhism: American Pragmatism and the Orient", *Religion*, Volume 30, Issue 4, October 2000, pp 333-352

Mike Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008)

Richard Shusterman, "Dewey's Art as Experience: The Psychological Background", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 26-43

Kristine Stiles, Peter Howard Selz (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996)

Mark Taylor(ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

Fred Turner "Why Study New Games?", *Games and Culture* January 2006 vol. 1 no. 1, pp. 107-110

Patricia Warrick, *The Cybernetic Imagination in Science Fiction* (Cambridge, MA. and London: M.I.T. Press, 1980)

Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997)