

# Some Recent Happenings

by Allan Kaprow



1966

A Great Bear Pamphlet  
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## Definition

A Happening is an assemblage of events performed or perceived in more than one time and place. Its material environments may be constructed, taken over directly from what is available, or altered slightly; just as its activities may be invented or commonplace. A Happening, unlike a stage play, may occur at a supermarket, driving along a highway, under a pile of rags, and in a friend's kitchen, either at once or sequentially. If sequentially, time may extend to more than a year. The Happening is performed according to plan but without rehearsal, audience, or repetition. It is art but seems closer to life.

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## Birds

*(For participants only. Commissioned by the University of Southern Illinois, Carbondale, performed February 16, 1964.)*

### Setting:

A patch of woods near a lake on the campus. A road leading to a small wooden bridge over a dry brook filled with rocks. On the bridge, a patio table loaded with packages of cheap white bread and strawberry jam, a bright beach umbrella opened over this. Women in trees are widely separated and some can only hear each other. Below each woman is a mass of old furniture hung on ropes.

### Events:

1

Tree women swing hanging furniture, and bang trees with sticks.

Wall men build wall of rocks on edge of bridge.

Bread man hawks bread and jam, "Bread! Bread! Bread!" etc., blows toy pipe whistle.

2

Bread man silent.

Wall workers go to tree women, taunt them, bang with sticks and rocks on trees.

Tree women drop furniture.

3

Wall workers carry furniture to pile under edge of bridge.

Tree women blow police whistles.

Wall workers bomb furniture with rocks from wall.

Bread man resumes hawking.

4

Wall workers leave quietly one by one when finished.

Bread man continues hawking.

Tree women silent after first wall worker leaves.

5

Bread man slowly bombs rubble with bits of bread, leaves when finished.

Tree women rhythmically yell in unison "Yah! Yah! Yah!" like crows, as Bread man does this, and when he leaves they are silent.

(JANUARY 1964)

## Household

*(Commissioned by Cornell University and presented May 3, 1964. There were no spectators at this event, which was to be performed regardless of weather. Participants attended a preliminary meeting on May 2, where the Happening was discussed and parts were distributed.)*

### Setting:

A lonesome dump out in the country. Trash heaps all around, some smoking. Parts of dump enclosed by old, red tin fence. Trees around rest of it.

### Sequence of Events:

1

11 a.m. Men build wooden tower on a trash mound. Poles topped with tarpaper clusters are stuck around it.

Women build nest of saplings and strings on another mound. Around the nest on a clothesline they hang old shirts.

2

2 p.m. Cars arrive, towing smoking wreck, park outside dump, people get out.

Men and women work on tower and nest.

3

People circle dump, out of sight in trees and behind tin wall, wait.

Women go inside nest and screech.

Men go for smoking wreck, roll it into dump, cover it with strawberry jam.

4

People's voices call "Hey! Hey! Hey!" all around dump.

Men go to women, put on shirts, squat down and watch them.

People very slowly start coming in toward car, still calling "Hey! Hey!"

Women screech.

5

Women go to car and lick jam.

Men destroy nest with shouts and cursing.

People, coming in, start to pound pots and blow police whistles in slow unison.

6

Men return to women at wreck, yank them away, eat jam with fingers, slap white bread all over sticky stuff, mouth up the pieces.

Women scream at men "Bastards! Bastards!"

People advance, banging and whistling.

7

Women destroy men's poles and tower, laughing, yelling "Watch this! Watch this!"

**Raining**

*(Scheduled for performance in the spring, for any number of persons and the weather. Times and places need not be coordinated, and are left up to the participants. The action of the rain may be watched if desired.) (For Olga and Billy Klüver, January 1965)*

Black highway painted black

Rain washes away

Paper men made in bare orchard branches

Rain washes away

Sheets of writing spread over a field

Rain washes away

Little gray boats painted along a gutter

Rain washes away

Naked bodies painted gray

Rain washes away

Bare trees painted red

Rain washes away

**Notes to RAINING**

**Black highway painted black:**

A lonely stretch of highway should be selected, and a time when it is only sporadically traveled, such as 3 a.m. Black watercolor in large buckets is splashed and brushed onto as long a piece of road as possible. When it next rains, the painters may choose to return to sit at the edge of the black strip.

**Paper men made in a bare orchard:**

Constructions or papier-maché images should be made in the bare branches just before they bloom in early spring. When it next rains, the slow collapse of these paper men into dripping sogginess may be watched by the builders.

**Sheets of writing spread over a field:**

An elderly woman might sit by herself and watch her old love letters wash away; a painter might spread out his worst drawings and laugh in the drizzle. These papers should be personal, in any case.

**Little gray boats painted along a gutter:**

Children (or adults) should paint images of a boat in a gutter; when it rains, they may watch them dissolve and disappear down the sewers.

**Naked bodies painted gray:**

When it rains, adults or children may paint themselves or each other's naked bodies on a city rooftop, at the beach, or at a country place.

**Bare trees painted red:** Here again, an April orchard is best, just before the leaves emerge. A gasoline-powered spray gun, using red watercolor, is most efficient for covering large areas of branches, but if preferred, brushes may be used. When it rains, the dripping color will probably stain the ground around the trees.

(JANUARY 1965)

### Allan Kaprow

was born August 23, 1927, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and spent his childhood in Tucson, Arizona. He attended the High School of Music and Art in New York City, New York University (B.A.) and Columbia University, where he did his master's thesis on "Piet Mondrian: A Study in Seeing." Kaprow studied painting and art history with Hans Hofmann and Meyer Schapiro, and music composition with John Cage.

Kaprow's first public Happening took place at Douglass College, New Jersey, in 1958, and he did another at the farm of sculptor George Segal the same year. The term first appeared in print in 1959 in an article he wrote for the Rutgers *Anthologist*, a subsection of which was called "Something to Take Place: A Happening." His "18 Happenings in 6 Parts" took place in October 1959 at the Reuben Gallery in New York.

He has had numerous solo exhibitions, and his paintings, collages, sculptures and assemblages are owned by important museums and private collections here and abroad. His *Environments and Happenings* have been set up and produced in many American galleries, museums and academic institutions, and in Amsterdam, Stockholm, Edinburgh and Paris. Kaprow has published extensively, and he himself has been the subject of many studies, the latest in Michael Kirby's *Happenings* book (E. P. Dutton, N. Y., 1965). His own masterwork on the subject, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, is published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. His *Calling: A Big Little Book* will be published by Something Else Press in 1966.

Kaprow has taught at Rutgers, Pratt Institute and the State University of New York at Stony Brook (where he is an associate professor in the department of fine arts). Currently he is director of criticism and experimental research at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

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