



III. JACKSON POLLOCK.
The Artist at Work, 1950.
Environmental Painting



III. ALAN S. GREEN.
Tires, 1961.
Environment

Spread from Allan Kaprow's
*Assemblage, Environments
and Happenings*, 1966.

Photograph on left: Hans
Namuth. Photograph on
right: Ken Heyman/
Meridian Photographics.

Framed Space: Allan Kaprow and the Spread of Painting

WILLIAM KAIZEN

As modernism gets older, context becomes content. In a peculiar reversal, the object introduced into the gallery “frames” the gallery and its laws.¹

—Brian O’Doherty

A pair of images begins this brief history of the overlap between painting and architecture in America after world war II, of the period when painting spread beyond its frame toward what Allan Kaprow called environments and happenings and toward installation art today. It is a two-page layout from his book *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, with one image on either page. Published in 1966, the book had been in the works since as early as 1959 when Kaprow wrote the first version of the eponymously titled essay that would become its centerpiece.² Just before the written essay is a long sequence of photographs, a sort of photo-essay, titled “Step Right In,” consisting of a series of large black-and-white pictures with text interspersed. The title refers to Jackson Pollock and his comment that he works “in” his paintings.³ It shows a variety of work by artists from the 1950s and early 1960s, such as Robert Rauschenberg, Yayoi Kusama, Robert Whitman, and Kaprow himself, all of whom, Kaprow thought, extended Pollock’s legacy into three dimensions. By creating postpainterly installations that one necessarily stepped into, their work had come off the walls and expanded to fill the space of the gallery and beyond.

The sequence of photos ends by returning to a point of origin, the final pair of images serving to summarize the progress made by all of these artists who followed on the heels of abstract expressionism triumphant. These two images bookend a trajectory, marking an origin on the left and its logical outcome on the right. On the left we see a Hans Namuth photograph of Pollock at work in his studio. In his painting, Pollock is a blur, arm extended, the light that streams in from the windows above overexposing the upper half of his body. Caught in the wild light, his body is part of the canvases that surround him. Sectioned by the bands of light, he becomes part of the paintings and not just the source of the action. Pollock the man and Pollock the work become one. He is in, literally dissolving into, his paintings. On the right, following

the image of Pollock as if following directly from Pollock—heir to his legacy and also its conclusion—stands Kaprow in the middle of his sculpture *Yard*, a field of randomly strewn tires completely filling the small courtyard behind a tenement building.⁴ Like Pollock, he is shot from above so that in the middle of these throwaway commodities he is also caught in the work. Rather than blur into the work, Kaprow sits at the bottom of the page, riding the wave of tires that seems to tumble out of the picture. He looks up at the viewer, in shirtsleeves, a pipe between his teeth. Crawling behind him is a child whose presence elicits an atmosphere of play from an otherwise dingy environment. The madness and alcoholism that supposedly fueled Pollock's work, if only in the popular imagination, has now been replaced by Kaprow with his own image, as the bohemian academic and family man. "The abstract expressionists . . . [had] a point of view full of agony and ecstasy, full of crisis," Kaprow said. "This is no longer possible for us. We came too late for that."⁵

Kaprow's generation was born too late to remember the Depression, which was just old enough to be caught up in the new prosperity of the post-world war II economic boom. Instead of engaging with untrammled ego and pure expression, Kaprow engaged with the problem of painting and space, and with objects in a society turning away from production and toward consumption. While Kaprow, in *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, charts one trajectory out of Pollock, this essay follows another, slightly different line of flight. In constructing his own legacy in *Assemblage*, Kaprow obscures what is perhaps more interesting in the development of his own work as it relates to the work of others that followed: rather than only beget performance art, his early work opened up the conjunction of viewing subject, art object and gallery space, turning space into a field for artistic production.⁶ In the literature on Kaprow his own trajectory—one where he simply moves Pollock off the wall and into performance—is generally taken for granted.⁷ By tracing another trajectory, I hope to show how Kaprow, in the context of post-world war II America, called into being a different set of problems, problems that would be developed by minimalism and institutional critique and into installation and site-specific work today.⁸

The point of origin for this trajectory, and the one that I will follow throughout this essay, will focus on the problem of autonomy as first developed in the dialogue between Pollock and Clement Greenberg. In his essay "Towards a Newer Laocoon," Greenberg states that autonomy, under modernism, meant the separation of each art form into its constituent medium, rather than, as Theodor Adorno had had it, by its separation from social use-value. For Greenberg, each art form necessarily distinguished itself from all the others via its material support. "The arts," wrote Greenberg, "have been hunted back to their mediums, and

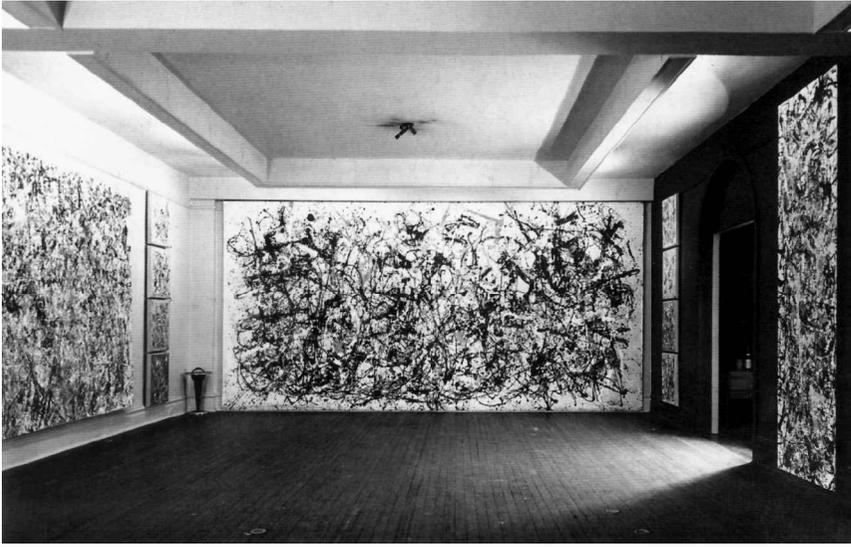
there they have been isolated, concentrated and defined.”⁹ As we will see, despite Greenberg’s later claims, he nevertheless recognized that Pollock’s work operated precisely against the limitations of painting as medium, pushing painting toward sculpture and architecture as much as it engaged with two-dimensional flatness. Conversely, Kaprow, whose early environments and happenings seem to inaugurate the “post-medium condition” of art since the 1960s, ends up reasserting mediumistic autonomy, one that is based on the specificity of the gallery space and its laws.¹⁰ To get from Pollock to Kaprow, I will touch on the intermediate points of Peter Blake’s project for a museum designed to house Pollock’s work, as well as the dialogue between Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage, using these intermediaries as a bridge between Kaprow’s engagement with Pollock’s work and Kaprow’s own early work in environments and happenings.



Kaprow had written an essay ten years before *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, staking out the territory that was to become his life’s work. Called “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” it was written shortly after Pollock’s death in 1956 as Kaprow was looking for a way beyond abstract expressionism and out of his art historical and artistic training.¹¹ He had read Harold Rosenberg’s essay “The American Action Painters,” where Rosenberg described abstract expressionism as an existentialist engagement with the morality of mark making. “The new painting,” Rosenberg said, “has broken down every distinction between art and life.” For Rosenberg the collapse of this distinction meant the collapse between the work of art and its maker, so that the work of art became the result of a specific ego struggling with a material process. Life for Rosenberg was biographical, and the artist was a heroic creator, an existential superman whose every mark became a moral act, realizing a will to power with each gesture.¹²

Kaprow’s essay extends Rosenberg’s argument, but rather than take polemically the claim that Pollock collapses art and life, he reads it literally. For Kaprow, Pollock’s unboundedness, his tendency toward infinite expansion, suggested an extension of painting into the space of viewing and into everyday life.

Kaprow had first experienced Pollock’s paintings at the series of highly influential and well-publicized exhibitions held at the Betty Parsons Gallery from 1948 to 1951.¹³ These shows featured Pollock’s drip paintings, shown so that they covered the gallery walls, many made specifically to match their height. As Kaprow described it, they filled the viewers’ senses, surrounding them in a complete environment, refusing any possibility of disembodied, purely optical viewing.



Jackson Pollock exhibition at
The Betty Parsons Gallery
28 November–16 December
1950. Photo: Hans Namuth.

This happened, he said, for several reasons, but it was the size of these paintings that was most important. “Pollock’s choice of enormous canvases served many purposes,” he said, “chief of which for our discussion is that his mural-scale paintings ceased to become paintings and became environments.”¹⁴ But it was their wall size (and not their scale)¹⁵ that caused Pollock’s drips to overflow the bounds of the canvas’ framing edge. Kaprow continues, it was “our size as spectators, in relation to the size of the picture [and] Pollock’s choice of great sizes [that] resulted in our being confronted, assaulted, sucked in.”

The size of Pollock’s paintings engaged, even attacked, the viewer’s whole body and not just their eye. Kaprow immediately qualifies the phrase “sucked in” as he contrasts Pollock’s relationship to the wall with that of Renaissance painting. If Renaissance painting acted as a window that the eye traveled through, extending the room outward into space, for Kaprow, Pollock’s paint came off the canvas and into the room with the spectator, filling and surrounding the spectator: “What I believe is clearly discernable,” he said, “is that the entire painting comes out at us (we are participants rather than observers) right into the room.”¹⁶

The experience of Pollock’s work as exceeding the constraints of the framing edge of the canvas was one that Pollock recognized in his own work and that he sought, however ambivalently, to elicit throughout his career.¹⁷ Although he had long been engaged with the mural, he had never convinced himself to make work that was fully integrated with an architectural structure. Even when working at wall size, he never made the full transition to the wall, painting even his largest works on stretched canvas. He recognized that his paintings existed ambiguously between the easel and the wall, saying at one point in the late forties, “I intend to paint large movable pictures which will function between the easel and the mural. . . . I believe the easel picture to be a dying form and the tendency of modern feeling is towards the wall picture or mural.” This statement, written in 1947, was in dialogue with critic Clement Greenberg.¹⁸ Greenberg, known for his teleology of flatness in modern painting, had at this earlier date recognized that the size of Pollock’s paintings made them wall-like physical objects

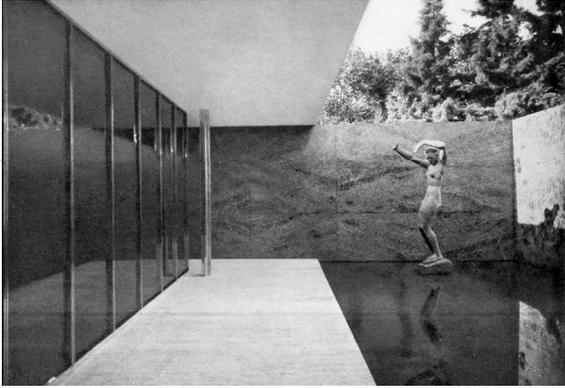
and that the tendency of modern painting was not to become flat but to spread out into space.¹⁹ While Greenberg would come to deny the implications of this idea by the 1960s, he said in a 1948 article on Pollock's work,

After all, easel painting is on the way out. . . . There is a persistent urge, as persistent as it is largely unconscious, to go beyond the cabinet picture, which is destined to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall like a mural, would spread over it and acknowledge its physical reality. I do not know whether there is anything in modern architecture itself that explicitly invites this tendency. But it is a fact that abstract painting shows a greater and greater reluctance for the small, frame-enclosed format. Abstract painting, being flat, needs greater extension of surface on which to develop its ideas than does the old three-dimensional easel painting, and it seems to become trivial when confined within anything measuring less than two feet by two.²⁰

Here we see, even in the critic best known for his call for the separation of painting from other art forms, that already within abstract expressionism lay the seeds of its dissolution into the space of architecture. For Greenberg this was a drive to be repressed. Painting could survive, in the end, only if it were to maintain its autonomy from the other arts.²¹ Nevertheless, he clearly recognized that with this lay the possibility of its dissolution into an impure state, a state where the framing space of the work becomes as important as the work itself. What Greenberg recognized in Pollock's work and what Kaprow extrapolated out of it was the relationship between painting and the space that contains it. What Greenberg's recognition amounted to, for Kaprow but also for many artists who followed, was the end of painting in a particular sense: with the end of easel painting in abstract expressionism, as painting became a wall, it was no longer a window. Painting as wall is not a window to be looked through but a thing to be looked at, an object in the way, some thing in space rather than a transparent surface.



Leading up to the exhibitions of wall-size paintings at the Betty Parsons Gallery, and key to their development, was the dialogue between Pollock and architect Peter Blake.²² Blake had visited Pollock's studio in 1949. Pollock had only recently begun his series of drip paintings and had been using an old barn behind his house, which was more spacious than the upstairs room in the house he had previously used.



Top: Jackson Pollock and Peter Blake looking at the model of Blakes's museum design, on display at the Betty Parson's Gallery. Photo: Ben Schultz.

Bottom: Georg Kolbe. *Der Morgen*, 1925. Shown housed in Mies van der Rohe. Barcelona Pavilion, 1928–29. Photo: Berliner Bild-Bericht.

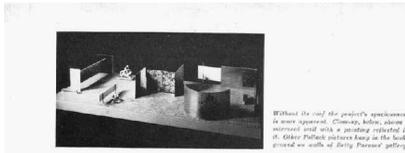
Seeing all of the paintings on the walls and floor of the barn elicited an intense reaction in Blake. The paintings seemed both transparent and reflective, dissolving the walls of the barn as if they captured the misty landscape of the bay outside and also, because of Pollock's use of aluminum paint, reflecting the light streaming in through the windows like enormous mirrors.²³ Blake's experience was central to his design for a small museum meant to house Pollock's work. Blake recalled,

I designed a large, somewhat abstract "exhibit" of his work—a kind of "Ideal Museum" in which his paintings were

suspended between the earth and the sky, and set between mirrored walls so as to extend into infinity. Beyond these floating canvases would be the marshes and the inlets of The Springs—the relentlessly horizontal landscape of that end of Long Island.²⁴

Blake's "Ideal Museum" was indebted to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, whose Barcelona Pavilion and Museum for a Small City project formed the basis of his design.²⁵ In Blake's monograph on Mies he expressed his admiration for the Barcelona Pavilion and noted that it suggested a new direction for the integration of art and architecture. "The resulting composition," he said, referring to the sculpture by Georg Kolbe as it was framed by the walls in the Pavilion's enclosed courtyard, "has become a favorite example of those who advocate collaboration between architects on the one hand and sculptors and painters on the other. [The Kolbe sculpture] does suggest that there may be other and better ways towards integration of the arts"—ways that Blake would further pursue in his Pollock Museum.²⁶

As in Mies's project for a Museum for a Small City, the exterior walls of Blake's Pollock Museum were to be made entirely of glass. No interior walls would be interposed between the art and the landscape outside. The art became the walls. Paintings were to be hung on free-standing walls no bigger than the work itself so that only the art itself would be visible, floating in space, with other works of art juxtaposed against it and with the exterior environment as a background. Blake unframes the work of art, pulling it out of its usual relationship with the wall where it would normally sit enclosed in a traditional frame, reframing it to create a collaged space, one where works of art are seen together, overlapping one another as the viewer moves through the museum.²⁷ Blake attempted to replicate the relationships between the viewer and the art object that Mies's Pavilion and Museum had embodied:



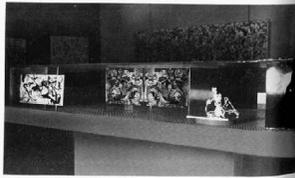
Without the roof the project's appearance is more spectral. (Clockwise, below, above a mirrored wall with a painting reflected in it. Blake Pollock pictures hang in the background on walls of thirty-foot gallery.)

Unframed space; a museum for Jackson Pollock's paintings

Peter Blake has given the spectacular treatment to the paintings of Jackson Pollock, but in this case we merely try to offer a selection of visitors an equal that we see steps to look at the exhibits. The pictures are heavily suggested designs whose own-blown structure often appear to exist because there was no mirror left for some and Mr. Blake feels that their distinguishing characteristics can best revealed by open space and by the absence of frames. The paintings seem as though they might very well be mounted immediately, such as is possible in the central wall of the plan. Here a painting 17' long conditions an entire wall; it is surrounded on both sides by a frame or a solid partition, but he mirrors. The painting is then revealed by walls of colored glass, and hence the double in the observer's mind as to this particular aspect of Pollock's work. The model also includes three small picture-size paintings made by the artist for Mr. Blake's use, and one of them stands before a curved screen of perforated brass. This is the only wall in the ensemble which covers exclusively a back ground. The length of the sculpture zone on a square base, while the other two stand on the floor. In its treatment of paintings as walls the design results in a totally different kind of pictorial art than of the Renaissance frame. The project suggests a re-integration of painting and architecture wherein painting *is* the architecture, but this time without message or content. Its sole purpose is to heighten our experience of space.²⁸ Contrary to Drexler's title, Pollock's paintings are rendered secondary to their use in framing space. It is the space of the gallery that submits them to its formal logic. In Blake's Museum the art is secondary to the space that contains it.



Peter Blake, New York City



Blake, 1950

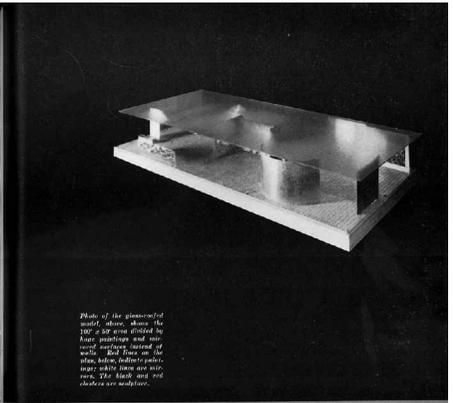
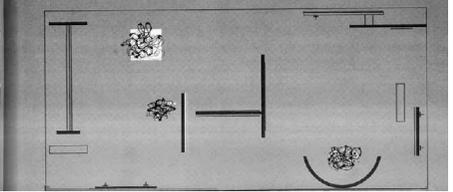


Photo of the glass model of the museum. Above the 10' x 17' is a wall filled by the paintings and mirrored surfaces, instead of wall. The frame on the left, below, holds the picture, space table, lamp and sculpture. The back and red structure are woodwork.

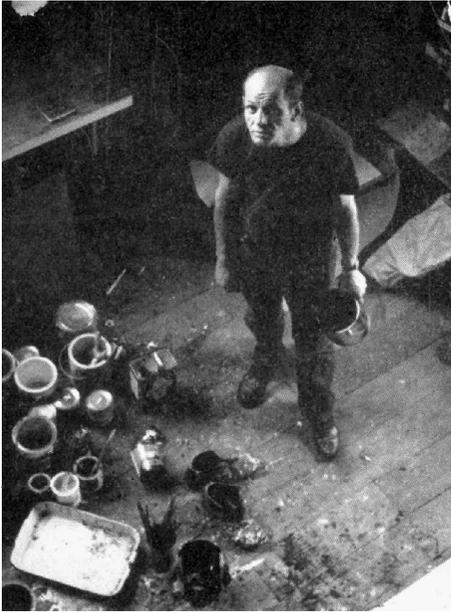


Interiors (January 1950) featuring Blake's Pollock museum.

the removal of the traditional framing device (the picture frame) for an overlapping frame of collaged space; the collapse of outside and inside; and the reflection back onto the viewer of their somatic viewing experience. Like Mies, Blake adopted the materials of modern distraction (plate glass in particular) and combined them with an open plan in order to create an interior that would use the glass curtain wall to offer respite from the city street and the speed of modernity.²⁸

The only substantive article published on the Pollock Museum at the time was Arthur Drexler's "Unframed Space."²⁹ The title came from Blake's own assessment that his project would realize the unlimited extension of Pollock's marks into a total environment. Drexler concludes his short essay with words that are similar to Blake's own assessment of Mies. "The Project suggests a re-integration of painting and architecture wherein painting *is* the architecture, but this time without message or content. Its sole purpose is to heighten our experience of space."³⁰ Contrary to Drexler's title, Pollock's paintings are rendered secondary to their use in framing space. It is the space of the gallery that submits them to its formal logic. In Blake's Museum the art is secondary to the space that contains it.

Blake's Museum conflates both of Mies's projects from which it was primarily derived. By using abstract paintings Blake was able to fill his museum with art while simultaneously returning these large-size abstractions directly to the wall. Pollock's painting functions like the stone cladding on the central wall in the Barcelona Pavilion: as a decorative surface. Pollock recognized the reduction inherent in Blake's project, saying to him after the design was done, "The trouble is you think I am a decorator." Blake's reply was telling: "Of course I think his paintings might make terrific walls. After all, architects spend a lot of time thinking about walls."³¹ What kept Pollock from working directly on the wall and what Blake, as an architect, recognized immediately was that when painting became a wall, or approached this condition through wall size, its autonomy was destroyed. It approached the



Photograph of Pollock in his studio. As published in Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” in *Art News* (October 1958). The model of Blake’s museum is visible in the upper-left corner. Photo: Rudy Burckhardt.

status of interior decoration, and that was the way Blake wanted it—Pollock reduced to “terrific walls.” He even tried to commission Pollock to paint panels for the moving walls of the Pinwheel House, his next project, so that when they slid shut, the house’s interior would be enclosed in Pollocks, surrounded by painted wallpaper.³² The paintings, as walls, are submitted to the logic of Blake’s architecture. He destroys the autonomy of Pollock’s paintings only to sublimate them into the autonomy of modernist architecture, realizing Pollock’s fear of turning his work into mere decoration. Blake’s project asserts architecture over

painting. As painting becomes wall, it is sublated into the autonomous, modernist space of Miesian architecture. Pollock’s work is turned into a decorative surface, into an interior design for a modernist space.

The Pollock Museum was never built, but not because either Pollock or Blake had second thoughts. Despite any misgivings that Pollock had with this project, the model was exhibited at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1949, and afterward the model remained in Pollock’s studio, prominently displayed in case he could convince a visiting collector to help finance its construction. At his next exhibition with Betty Parson in 1950, the paintings were made to be the same height and almost the same length of the walls on which they hung so that they would come as close as possible to realizing Blake’s design within the more traditional gallery setting.³³

If Blake’s project misrepresented Pollock, this was only to the extent that Pollock had already acknowledged the tendency of painting at wall size to become an object. What Blake’s project makes clear is that when paintings became wall-size, or as they literally became walls, they lost their capacity to create an autonomous space divorced from context. While it took an architect, initially, to realize such a possibility, artists soon followed suit.³⁴

It is likely that Kaprow saw the 1949 exhibition of Pollock’s work, which included the model for Blake’s Museum. Although in his writings on Pollock he doesn’t mention the Museum, in an interview from 1967 he claimed to have first seen a Pollock exhibition in 1949.³⁵ This would mean that he had seen the show at the Betty Parsons Gallery with the model on display. The model for the museum is also clearly visible in the photographs of Pollock working in his studio that illustrate both the original publication of Kaprow’s “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” and (much later) his collection of essays *The Blurring of Art and Life*.³⁶ Kaprow also explicitly referenced the subsequent Pollock exhibition, with its wall-size works, when he discussed the all-over field Pollock’s work created in the space of the gallery. But along with

Pollock and Blake, Kaprow also engaged with the work of Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage, two artists who had as much impact on his thinking about space as Pollock.



In the fall of 1951, when Kaprow visited Rauschenberg's studio, he saw the *White Paintings*.³⁷ Rauschenberg had made these works during the previous summer at Black Mountain College. Like Blake, Rauschenberg also engaged space using painting, but he did so as an artist not as an architect. Yet rather than reassert the autonomy of painting, he established a semiautonomous space for painting. The *White Paintings* are a series of works painted flat, matte white, with no visible marks to attract the viewer's eye. While Blake submitted the autonomy of Pollock's painting to the logic of his architecture, upholding the autonomy of modernist space in favor of architecture over art, Rauschenberg was far more ambivalent about the possibility of autonomy for either art or architecture. The *White Paintings* exist between the two as semiautonomous objects—not quite wall, not quite painting—and certainly not like their nearest precursor, abstract expressionist painting with its flood of gesture and mark. The *White Paintings*, in their utter blankness, call attention to the ephemeral effects of light and shade that played across them. Upon seeing them, Kaprow was unsure what to think until he noticed that they turned the surface of painting into an active plane of reception for the movement of his body. "I was walking back and forth, not knowing how I should take these things," he said, "and then I saw my shadows across the painting—moving."³⁸ For Kaprow the surface of these paintings became a temporal screen reflecting the viewer's body in the changing environment of the gallery. Their painterly incidence was not their whiteness per se but their ability to capture the presence of the viewer as he or she stood in front of the work. The viewer activated the work so that the work, the viewer, and the space in between all became part of the work. As Rauschenberg wrote at the time, "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)"³⁹ These paintings are caught between painting as an object that is functionally and fundamentally separate from its architectural container and the spread of painting into a semiautonomous state somewhere between art, architecture, and the viewing subject moving through the exhibition space.

Rauschenberg had developed his *White Paintings* in dialogue with



Photograph of Pollock in his studio. As published in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* 1993. The model of Blake's museum is visible in the upper-right corner. Photo: Hans Namuth.

Cage, who was also at Black Mountain in the summer of 1952.⁴⁰ That summer Cage incorporated *The White Paintings* into his own work, *Theater Piece No. 1*.⁴¹ They were suspended over the heads of the audience members at various angles as a variety of performance events took place beneath them. These events included Rauschenberg and David Tudor playing piano, poets M.C. Richards and Charles Olson reading poetry from atop a ladder, and Merce Cunningham and others dancing through the space and around the audience. It was the *White Paintings*, with their environmental quality, that led Cage to write *4' 33"* in 1952. Tudor was the original performer of the composition whose score was open to interpretation.⁴² He realized it on piano, playing it by silently opening and closing the piano lid, allowing the sounds of the audience and the ambient noises of the space to become the work. Kaprow attended one of the first performances of *4' 33"* at Carnegie Hall in 1952 and was deeply affected. He compared his experience of *4' 33"* to his experience of Rauschenberg's paintings. The sounds in the space, chairs creaking, the air condition humming, people coughing and clearing their throats—all the ambient sounds that filled the space of the auditorium—became foregrounded. "It was like the shadows in Bob Rauschenberg's pictures," Kaprow recalled. "That is to say, there [wa]s no marking the boundary of the artwork or the boundary of so-called everyday life. They merge[d]. And we the listeners in Cage's concert and the lookers at Rauschenberg's pictures were the collaborators of the artwork."⁴³ For Kaprow, Cage, like Rauschenberg, collapsed the autonomy of art by engaging the listener as collaborator in a semiautonomous space ("so-called everyday life" and not true everyday life) that depended upon the interaction between work, space, and subject.

On his visit to Rauschenberg's studio Kaprow also saw the earliest of Rauschenberg's black paintings.⁴⁴ This series is the antipode of the smooth, matte white surfaces of the *White Paintings*. They are all black monochromes, most painted with a high-gloss enamel soaked into newspaper pages that were then haphazardly stuck onto the surface of a canvas, trapped pockets of air often causing the paintings' surfaces to bulge outward repulsively. At their largest, they frame space as Pollock's work did, but as *art brut* walls instead of dazzling skeins of paint. One photograph of a later diptych shows the paintings blocking the doorway to Rauschenberg's studio at Black Mountain as if they were extensions of the rough-hewn stone walls on either side.⁴⁵ But in this next transformation of painting as wall, what seems more important for the direction that both Rauschenberg and Kaprow would follow out of these works was their newspaper ground. As Rauschenberg's paintings became wall-size, their *art brut* surface was built on the news of the day. At first, everyday events as reported in the newspaper are

painted out and hidden behind the black paint.⁴⁶ As the series proceeded, he allowed increasingly more of the news to show through. While the *White Paintings* engaged with the gap between art and life by capturing the viewer's body—as did Cage's *4' 33"*, at least for Kaprow—the black paintings did so by using the everyday object as a ground. Through their use of newspaper, they suggested another trajectory out of painting and into everyday space, a trajectory whose base condition was the commodity object.

In order to get into the gap between art and life, Rauschenberg's work first had to approximate the condition of being a wall. It needed to assume a relation to its architectural frame in order to move away from the autonomy of painting and into semiautonomy, but once it did so, Rauschenberg would abandon the problem of painting as wall. Following the *White Paintings* and black paintings (and then a brief series of *Red Paintings*), he made his first Combines, works that reinstate the autonomy of the individual art object even while they exist between painting, sculpture and the surrealist objet trouvé.⁴⁷ Rather than engage with space, Rauschenberg's Combines elevate the ready-made or found object back to the status of the autonomous art object. The Combines formalize the everyday object into an in-between state, but one that nevertheless produces singular art objects. While the black paintings led Rauschenberg back to the art object, they led Kaprow farther off the wall and out into space.



Robert Rauschenberg.
Untitled, 1952.



Kaprow wrote “a statement” about his work, sketching the trajectory he took from painting through collage then out into the space of the gallery.⁴⁸ After his initial show of paintings in 1952, he described the development of what he called “action collage.” These were done as quickly as possible by throwing together readily available everyday materials, including parts of his past work, tinfoil, photographs, newspaper, and food. Although he doesn't mention particular works by name, presumably these action-collages include the early pieces reproduced in *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*. In a photograph of *Penny Arcade* (1956) we see Kaprow standing in front of a large, wall-size assemblage, densely layered with parts of paintings, scraps of wood, and large pieces of advertising signage that look like Kaprow either found them on the side of the road or appropriated them from a



Allan Kaprow standing in front of *Penny Arcade*, 1956. Photo: W.F. Gainfort.

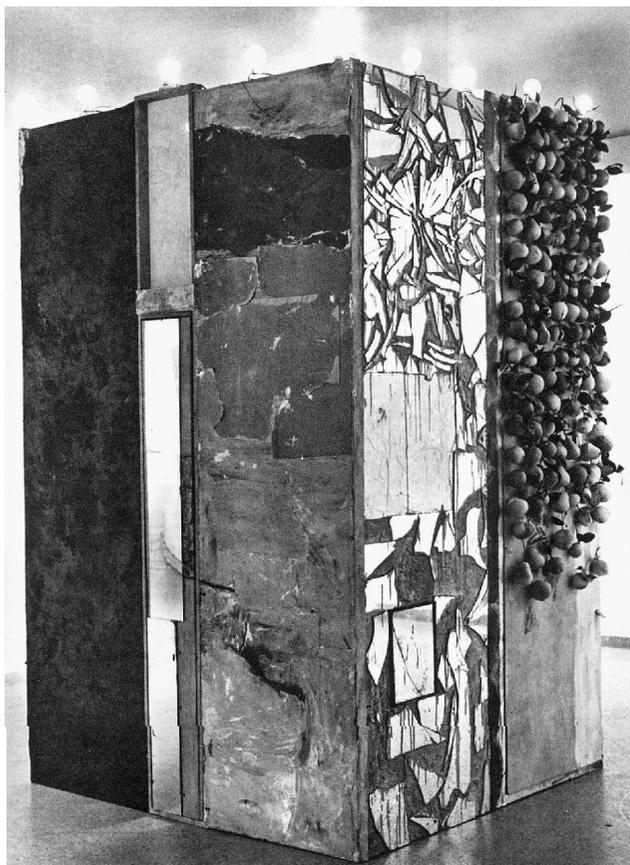
storefront. It also included flashing lights and sounds, calling out to the viewer like a Coney Island carnival booth, but one made all the more confusing with its hyperarray of upside-down and fragmented word parts. While collage had been delicate, even dainty, in its appliqué of small scraps of paper to the surface of the image, Kaprow's *Penny Arcade* was massive and rough-hewn. Unlike its glitzier real-world counterpart, *Penny Arcade* looks cobbled together, a temporary facade bricolaged from odds and ends. Here Kaprow turned the gallery space into the street, turning the wall into a pseudo-storefront, bringing the architecture of the outside world into the gallery but filtered through the compositional strategies of collage

and abstract expressionism. Abstraction before world war II had been undertaken in a quest to find a universal Esperanto of color and form, a problem that had been transformed by abstract expressionism into a private iconography of psychic signs. In *Penny Arcade* Kaprow turns the private symbolism of abstraction expressionism back to the world through advertising as commodity sign. He makes the private symbol public again by reconnecting pre-World War II models of collective production with post-World War II models of collective consumption.

Another work from this time further demonstrates how Kaprow used everyday materials to partition space. Alternately titled (in *Assemblage*) *Wall*, *Kiosk*, and *Rearrangeable Panels* (1957–1959), this piece looks like an enormous folding Japanese screen. Measuring eight feet high and over twenty feet long, its panels are covered in eggshells, leaves, and broken mirrors—not mass-produced commodities or signage but detritus and waste. Several of the panels are painted: one in Hoffman's push-pull style, two seem to nod toward Rauschenberg, one painted white, one black. This piece is designed to sit on the floor of the gallery, and as its various names imply, it can be placed in a variety of positions: called “wall” when arrayed in a straight line, “kiosk” when arranged into a square, and “rearrangeable panels” in general, or when it sits in a zigzag. Each position changes the relationship of the object to the space that contains it. Kaprow recast the painting-as-wall as a transformable piece of furniture, recognizing the possibility of ludic engagement with the viewer but withholding it because the viewer is not allowed to interact with the piece directly. Once installed the work transforms the space of the gallery but it cannot be reconfigured by the viewer.⁴⁹

When asked why he used junk to make his work, Kaprow replied:

It was clearly part of transforming reality. It gave everyone a sense of instant involvement in a kind of crude everyday reality, which was quite a relief after the high-art attitude of exclusion from the real world. It also allowed us to give up a certain kind of seriousness that traditional art making required. What's more, the materials were available everywhere on street corners at night. And if you didn't sell these environmental constructions, you'd just throw them back into the garbage can. Why not just throw them out? It was very liberating to think of oneself as part of an endlessly transforming real world.⁵⁰



The “crude everyday reality” captured by *Penny Arcade*, as with Kaprow’s subsequent work, is predicated upon his project of capturing the “endlessly transforming real world.” This statement connects him with Rauschenberg and Cage but also shows how their work differs in an important and crucial way. In Kaprow’s comment describing his experience of *4’33”* (as quoted in the previous section), he says, “And we the listeners in Cage’s concert and the lookers at Rauschenberg’s pictures were the collaborators of [*sic*] the artwork,” ending with, “It was a kind of collaborative, endlessly changing affair. The artwork was simply this organism that was alive.”⁵¹ For Kaprow the key word here is *change*, and, in order to move from artwork to organism, the work of art must be reconsidered not as a “chance operation” (to use Cage’s term) but as a change operation. During this time Kaprow had begun to take classes with Cage, and he was exposed to Cage’s use of chance methods of composition. While he would adopt much from Cage’s work and teaching, he thought that change was the most important principle for his own work.⁵²

For Kaprow change was integrally connected to the post-world war II environment, filled with mass-produced, throwaway products. The art of this time—his art—should necessarily reflect this environment. In opposition to the nostalgic use of the *objet trouvé* in surrealism, his method was closer to the readymade, choosing everyday objects to rescue from oblivion but spreading them out in space so that they would environmentally engulf the viewer.⁵³ Kaprow temporarily revalues the throwaway commodity in his environments to create a space where

Allan Kaprow. *Rearrangeable Panels*, 1957-9. Shown in their “Kiosk” configuration. Photo: Robert R. McElroy.

everyday life as planned obsolescence is brought under the control of the artist. He creates a momentary space of anti-entropy in the life of the commodity, where it is temporarily reinvested with value, only to be disposed of once the environment is destroyed.⁵⁴ Citing critic Lawrence Alloway on the “throwaway” culture of post–world war II America, Kaprow goes on to describe the importance of change in his work:

Change, governing both reality and art, has extended from the expression of an idea arrested in a painting to a work in which the usually slow mutations wrought by nature are quickened and literally made part of the experience of it; they manifest the very process of creation-decay-creation almost as one watches. The use of debris, waste products or very impermanent substances like toilet paper or bread has, of course, a clear range of allusions with obvious sociological implications, the simplest being the artist’s positive involvement on the one hand with an everyday world, and on the other with a group of objects which, being expendable, might suggest that corresponding lack of status which is supposed to be the fate of anything creative today. These choices must not be ignored, for they reveal what in our surroundings charges the imagination as well as what is most human in our art.⁵⁵

What is “most human” in Kaprow’s art, as he defines it, is its reflection of this throwaway culture. This is governed not by Cagean chance but by planned obsolescence, with its endless renewal of more of the same. “[My] work,” Kaprow says, “is intended to last only a short time and is destroyed immediately after the exhibition. If [its] obsolescence is not planned, it is expected.”⁵⁶ Alloway, also writing on assemblage, better describes the overlap between the throwaway object and its use in environmental art during the 1950s:

The acceptance of mass-produced objects, just because they are what is around, not because they issue from idolatrised technology, is central to mid-century Junk Culture. . . . Junk Culture is city art. Its source is obsolescence, the throwaway material of cities. . . . Assemblages of such material come at the spectator as bits of life, bits of the environment . . . frequently presented in terms that dramatize spread, flow, extension, trespass. The junk is obtruded into our space with the aim of achieving maximum intimacy. Proximity and participation replace distance and contemplation as the communicative style of the object.⁵⁷

So the space of Junk Culture, when used in art as assemblage or environment, achieves “maximum intimacy” with the observer through their “proximity and participation” with the throwaway commodity.

As Kaprow moves farther into the space of the gallery, he does so in an increased attempt to engage the viewer. He partitions the gallery space so that the body of the viewer becomes a product of its participation within the field of the throwaway commodity.

These early wall-like constructions were, for Kaprow, still not close enough to a participatory art. Kaprow wanted to move further toward the creation of environments and even events, to take over the gallery with a plenitude of throwaway objects among which the viewer would self-consciously circulate. The action collages still maintained too much autonomy because they existed as individual objects, and so, as Kaprow recalled, “now I simply filled the whole gallery up, starting from one wall and ending with the other.”⁵⁸ With his first environment Kaprow was no longer composing within the autonomous space of painting but composing the entire space of the gallery. Kaprow’s first environment—made at the Hansa Gallery in November 1958—was meant to totally engage the visitors to the gallery, to make them into part of the work itself, “passively or actively according to [their] talents for ‘engagement.’”⁵⁹ From a drop ceiling of wires suspended in a grid several inches below the gallery’s original ceiling, he hung various materials, creating a labyrinthine space divided by sheets of plastic, tangles of cellophane, Scotch tape, and more, including a time-released mist of pine-scented deodorizer. His work had taken over the gallery space, filling it with a nearly impenetrable field of throwaway objects.⁶⁰ Kaprow took the flood of post-world war II consumer goods and used them to compose walls that partitioned space. And compose—in the traditional sense of arranging shapes and forms on the surface of a canvas—is exactly what he did.

Kaprow described his use of the full space of the gallery as a field, a term that he derives from painting, calling the second section of his “Assemblage” essay “The Field in Painting.” “This space is in part the literal distance between all solids included in the work,” Kaprow wrote. “But it is also a space that is a direct heritage of painting.”⁶¹ Everything in the space that he produced became part of his composition, including the viewer. Like any other object in the work, Kaprow said, “in as much as people visiting [an] environment are moving, colored shapes, [they] were counted ‘in.’”⁶² Each visitor, as they moved through Kaprow’s labyrinth, became a part of the work. Art and life had now seemingly collapsed, the autonomy of painting as a separate object—framed and isolated from the rest of its environment as a space only for the eye—had been abandoned for an embodied experience. Viewing was now dependent upon space, a space full of the objects of everyday life. Using the materials of everyday life, Kaprow invited his viewers to get rid of their distance from the art object, forcing them into physical contact with his work. This work, he wrote, “invites us



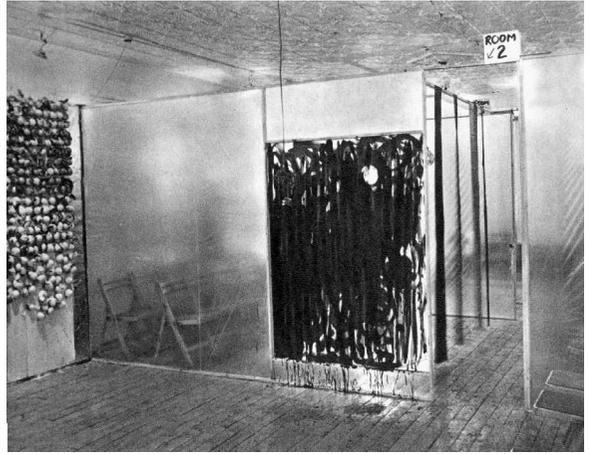
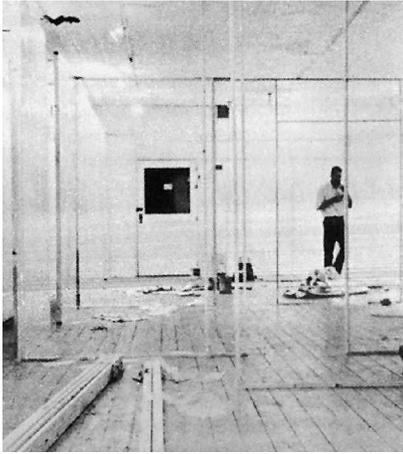
Part of the environment
Allan Kaprow created for
his piece *Pastorale*, 1958.
Photo: Vaughn Rachel.

to cast aside for a moment . . . proper manners and partake wholly in the real nature of . . . art and (one hopes) life.”⁶³ Against the look-don’t-touch attitude of museum and gallery, Kaprow created a haptic space where touch became the basis of the work, where visitors came into physical contact with his throwaway objects. In this space, as visitors threaded their way through the labyrinth, the color of their clothes and their presence among these objects turned them into a part of the work. The viewer appeared as another thing in Kaprow’s composition, not so different from his throwaway materials. In his environment autonomy collapsed into participation based on the reification of the subject as an obsolete material temporally

composited into the work. While Kaprow certainly intended to include his observers in the work, he could do so only by turning them into objects rather than active subjects. He later described his own sense of the failure with this exhibition, that he couldn’t seem to engage the viewer enough but blamed it on the framing space of the gallery. Afterward he said, “I complained immediately about the fact that there was a sense of mystery until your eye reached a wall. Then there was a dead end. At that point my disagreement with the gallery space began.”⁶⁴ But Kaprow didn’t abandon the gallery—at least not yet. To get closer to the everyday, Kaprow thought he should more fully incorporate the bodies of his viewers into his work. This led to the origin of happenings, in an attempt to make viewers into active subjects, to engage them more actively in creating the work as they became part of it.



In 1958 Kaprow had presented two other early proto-happenings, one at Rutgers called *Communication* and one at George Segal’s farm called *Pastorale*.⁶⁵ *Communication* was based on work he had developed in Cage’s class. It was close to traditional theater. Presented in a chapel that doubled as an auditorium for theater and music performances, it included movement, sound, and banners unfurled from the balconies. Kaprow built “plastic panels” behind which he performed a series of simple actions, finally hiding himself from the audience by painting the plastic wall in front of him and so “painting himself out” of the audience’s view.⁶⁶ For *Pastorale* he built frames that looked like abysmal theater sets, stretcher bars with torn strips of canvas running from top to bottom. During one part of the performance, artists Robert Watts and Lucas Samaras painted on either side of one of these constructions. Inserted into the landscape, these performance paintings



marked the boundary between event and nonevent, partitioning the ground into territories and framing *Pastorale*'s space using, once again, painting as wall. Unfortunately for Kaprow, *Pastorale* was held during a picnic, and the other participants were either too drunk or just plain unwilling to follow his directions. They were engaged but refused to follow his rules of play.

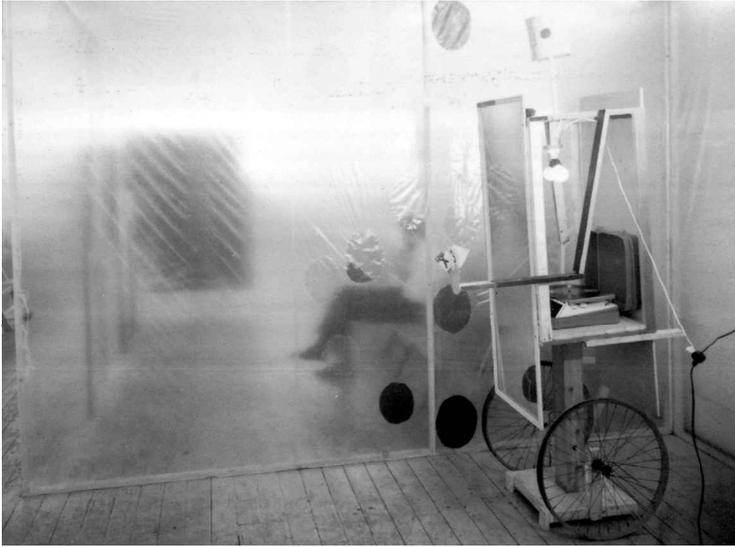
18 Happenings in 6 Parts, which took place in October 1959, was the first official happening.⁶⁷ Kaprow divided the inside of the gallery into three smaller contiguous rooms using wooden two-by-fours. In photographs of the piece as it was being installed, these wooden beams can be seen framing a space within the space of the gallery—not into a proscenium stage but into an environment within the larger gallery space where various events would occur. Instead of wood or drywall, translucent plastic sheeting created the walls so that action could be partially seen from one room to the next. Each room was lit with different colored lights, and in each room where the audience was forced to sit and observe the action, a group of actors moved through tightly scripted but simple routines as sounds came in and out, and films were projected.

On the program the audience is listed under the “Cast of Participants,” written into the performance itself and actively engaged but only as the subject of direction and authorial control. At specific intervals bells rang, and the audience was required to change seats and to switch rooms based on instruction cards they had been given when they entered the gallery before the performance. Kaprow had realized with his Hansa Gallery environment that he needed to give his viewers increased responsibility, but he also realized that relinquishing too much control could be a disaster, as it had been in *Pastorale*. As with his previous work, his goal with *18 Happenings* was the “integration of all elements—environment, constructed sections, time, space and people,” and the audience was once again included as just another material in his composition.⁶⁸

During the fifth part of *18 Happenings* one sequence of actions seems to reveal Kaprow’s relationship with painting, the viewer, and space. Kaprow had built a construction he called the “the sandwich man,” named after its everyday counterparts paid to walk around the city streets as human billboards. Kaprow’s sandwich

Left: The construction of the space used for Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1958.

Right: A view of Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings* where *Rearrangeable Panels* is partially visible on the left. The in-set canvas panel on which actors painted live as part of the performance is shown at center. Photo: Scott Hyde.



The sandwich man, part of Kaprow's *18 Happenings*. Photo: Scott Hyde.

man was barely humanoid, an automaton with forward- and backward-pointing mirrors for a body, bicycle wheels for feet and a gallon bucket of enamel paint for a head. Sticking out in front was a piece of wood for an arm ending in a hand that held cards labeled "X" and "3," the adver-

tising handbill reduced to its zero degree. In the middle of the sandwich man, hidden on a shelf between the two mirrors, was a record player, and projecting out from behind it were two handles so that it could be wheeled around the rooms. As the sandwich man was wheeled from one room to another, its mirrored body reflected the audience back onto themselves, their image taking the place of what would have been an advertisement. They were reflected not as participatory viewers, not even as active objects as in his environment, but as passive objects now totally reified, their image produced as a reflection of Junk Culture. Here, in Brechtian fashion using a literal "framing effect," Kaprow turned his previous use of the viewer back into a critique of the event itself. In reflecting the audience's passivity back to them, he forced a moment of recognition of their complicity in the production of the work. They could see that as they became an ad on the sandwich man's belly, so they became throwaway objects in his composition. By reducing the spectator to the general equivalence of these objects, Kaprow recognized the subject of the post-World War II period as a product of planned obsolescence and consumer culture.

Following this, as the sandwich man was wheeled through the second room and into the third, two men stood up from their seats, one in each room. Each took up a brush and a can of paint and approached opposite sides of one of the plastic walls, simultaneously painting on a section of canvas set among the plastic walls and so turning the wall back into a painting.⁶⁹ The canvas was left unprimed so that the simple figures that each artist painted (one was supposed to paint lines; the other, circles) would bleed through and so would be immediately visible on the opposite side, each mark responding to that of their partner. As in his two earlier happenings, painting is done live, before an audience, on a wall. Kaprow showed the audience that when painting becomes wall, it functions only to put space on display. Here, painting as a singular art object was meaningless. It became a throwaway stage prop and so became a demonstration of how painting as object was part of the larger environment in which it resides. The limit condition of painting as wall with viewer as spectator was the gallery as frame.⁷⁰

What this sequence from *18 Happenings* reveals is that Kaprow had an acute sense of the way in which the gallery as frame produces subject and space together. He undermined the normal function of the art gallery, turning both viewer and art object into Junk Culture. Throwaway viewers, throwaway paintings, and throwaway rooms turned the gallery space—a space designed to be neutral, to hide itself as the objects it contains become the sole focus of the viewer’s concentration—into the locus of planned obsolescence. With the creation of happenings, Kaprow used Junk Culture against the doxa of gallery space, upsetting the common sense of what a space for art is and what it does. After happenings, the paradoxical logic of the gallery as a site for both the private contemplation of singular aesthetic objects as well as the public transaction of luxury goods had been (however temporarily) subverted. In asserting the gallery space as the limit condition of painting, Kaprow framed the institution as the ground of artistic production.

In “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” Kaprow says, “Pollock left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life.”⁷¹ In “Assemblage, Environments, Happenings,” bridging the gap between his early and later work, he concludes, “this has brought sharply into focus that *the room has always been a frame or format too.*”⁷² Kaprow’s collapse of autonomy via art into life—that environments and happenings would “partake wholly in the real nature of . . . art and (*one hopes*) life”—was only ever a hope, as he himself knew. If painting had used the frame as the delimitation of a field for composition, then environments and happenings turned the gallery into the limit condition of this field. While he tried to get closer to everyday life, by making art he inevitably pushed it further away. This ambivalence toward the collapse of art and life runs throughout Kaprow’s work, even as he moved out of the gallery and into everyday life, following his early work with his later “activities.” The early work was, even by his own estimation, more a display of experience and not a fair representation of actual, everyday experience. But this is precisely where the importance of this work lies. Kaprow’s environments and happenings extended Rauschenberg’s semiautonomous gap so far that they turned the screw one notch higher, autonomy returning not through the sublation of art into architecture but through the medium of framed space.

Notes

Thanks to the generosity and insight of: Karen Kurczynski, John Harwood, Seth McCormick, Jaleh Mansoor, Beth Hinderliter, Vered Maimon, Benjamin Buchloh, and Barry Bergdoll, as well as Branden Joseph and the Editors of *Grey Room*.

1. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 15.

2. It was originally called "Painting, Environments, Happenings" and published in a condensed form in the catalog for the exhibition *New Forms—New Media I* at the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, the first uptown show of Kaprow and his contemporaries. It was changed to "Assemblage, Environments and Happenings" for final publication. Kaprow changed the title to incorporate the recent acceptance of the term *assemblage*. It had been used first by Helen Comstock to describe the work of Arthur Dove in the 1920s but remained obscure until Jean Dubuffet popularized its use in 1953. The term, as used by Dubuffet, was then adopted by William Seitz for his exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* at the Museum of Modern Art. See Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966), 150–208; *New Forms—New Media I* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1960), n.p.; and Roger Shattuck, "Introduction: How Collage Became Assemblage," *Essays on Assemblage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 119.

3. "When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing," said Pollock. Jackson Pollock, *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, Reviews*, ed. Pepe Karmel (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 17–18.

4. *Yard* was Kaprow's contribution to the exhibition *Environments, Situations, Spaces* at the Martha Jackson Gallery, a follow up to *New Forms—New Media* (see n. 2).

5. "Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon," in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Judith F. Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, Events, Objects, Documents* (New York: Wallach Art Gallery, 1999), 76.

6. To cite but one example of many, Thomas Hirschhorn is an artist who continues to extend and develop Kaprow's legacy today.

7. On Kaprow and performance see, Amelia Jones, *Body Art, Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 56–57; Paul Schimmel, "Leap into the Void: Performance and the Object," in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 59–63.

8. The relationship between painting and space had been explored before, particularly in the period between the two world wars by the artists associated with De Stijl and constructivism. For more on De Stijl, see Nancy Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983). On constructivism, see Yve-Alain Bois, "El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility," *Art in America* 76, no. 4 (April 1988): 161–181; and Yve-Alain Bois, "Material Utopias," *Art in America* 79, no. 6 (June 1991): 98–107. Another European who explored the everyday object, painting and space was Kurt Schwitters in the various incarnations of his *Merzbau*. See: Elizabeth Burns Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000). Two other important precursors who bridge the European and American context are Lazlo Moholy-Nagy and Friedrich Kiesler. For information on Moholy-Nagy's early environmental projects, as well as those of Lissitzky, see: Joan Ockman, "The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dorner's Way Beyond Art," in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, ed. R.E. Somol (New York: Monicelli Press, 1997). For

information on Kiesler see: R.L. Held, *Endless Innovations: Frederick Kiesler's Theory and Scenic Design* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982); Lisa Phillips, *Frederick Kiesler* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989). Brian O'Doherty draws out the connections between the pre- and post-World War II manifestations of this relationship in *Inside the White Cube*.

9. For Benjamin, the work of art attains autonomy under modernism with the emergence of art for art's sake. This autonomy is then usurped by mechanical reproduction. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hanna Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, Inc, 1968), p. 224-226. For Greenberg, as the above quote indicates, the autonomy of art continues even in the face of mechanization. See Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, vol. 1 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brien (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986), p. 32.

10. Rosalind Krauss uses the term "post-medium condition" to designate "mixed-media installation" work done today. While Krauss argues that only the most significant artists working since the 1960s reassert the medium in their work against the general postmedium condition, I believe that all mixed-media installation work operates using the gallery or institution as medium. See Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea": *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999); for her comments on a specific contemporary artist and the reinvention of the medium, see Rosalind Krauss, ". . . And Then Turn Away?": An Essay on James Coleman," *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 5-33.

11. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 57, no. 6 (October 1958): 24-26, 55-57, reprinted in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 1-9. Kaprow has stated that the essay was written in 1956 in "Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon," 77. Kaprow had been a student of both Hans Hoffman and Meyer Schapiro.

12. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 52 (December 1952): 22-23. In a footnote that Rosenberg added when the article was republished as part of his book of collected essays in 1959, he added the following: "Action Painting has extracted the element of decision inherent in all art in that the work is not finished at its beginning but has to be carried forward by an accumulation of 'right' gestures. In a word, Action Painting is the abstraction of the *moral* element in art; its mark is moral tension in detachment from moral or esthetic certainties; and it judges itself morally in declaring that picture to be worthless which is not the incorporation of a genuine struggle, one which could at any point have been lost." Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), 33-34. Kaprow recounts the influence of Rosenberg's essay on his work in "Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon," 77.

13. There were five all told. They were held as follows: 5-23 January 1948, 24 January-12 February 1949, 21 November-10 December 1949, 28 November-16 December 1950, 26 November-15 December 1951. These shows had a remarkable resonance, one that extended beyond even the insular New York art world when, after the second exhibition, *Life* magazine published the feature article, "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?" Dorothy Sieberling, *Life* (August 8, 1949): 42-45.

14. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," in Kaprow, *Essays on the*

Blurring,” 6.

15. Kaprow uses both the terms *scale* and *size* to describe Pollock’s work, but as T.J. Clark has shown, these are two very different terms and Pollock is a painter of size and not scale. For Clark, it is size that engages the body: “Normally speaking, size is literal—a matter of actual physical intuition. It involves grasping how big or small a certain object really is, most likely in relation to the size of the grasper’s upright body or outspread arms.” T.J. Clark, “Pollock’s Smallness,” in *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*, ed. Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 15.

16. Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Essays on the Blurring*, 6.

17. In most of his work the paint engages with the edge of the canvas, emphasizing and bordering it and not continuing around it as if the canvas had been cut down from some infinite expanse. Kaprow claims otherwise by singling out the exceptions, saying, “[H]is art gives the impression of going on forever . . . [T]hough evidence points to a slackening of the attack as Pollock came to the edges of many of his canvases, in the best ones he compensated for this by tacking much of the painted surface around the back of his stretchers.” Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 5. An examination of the paintings shows that more often Pollock stopped before the edge or reworked his compositions after they were stretched so that they reengaged with the edge even when cut from larger canvas. Kaprow claims otherwise because it furthers his arguments that Pollock’s paintings emerge into the space of the viewer.

18. Jackson Pollock, “Application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, 1947,” in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews*, 17. The influence of Greenberg at this time is discussed in Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (Aiken, S.C.: Woodward/White, 1989), 551. Pollock had also engaged with wall-size painting during his association with José Clemente Orozco and in earlier work such as *Mural* (1943–1944), painted for Peggy Guggenheim’s house.

19. Greenberg’s version of modernism was most fully laid out only in 1959 and published in 1960: “It was the stressing of the ineluctable flatness of the surface that remained, however, more fundamental than anything else to the process by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism. For flatness alone was unique and exclusive to pictorial art. . . . Because flatness was the only condition painting shared with no other art, Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else.” In Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, vol. 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O’Brien (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 87.

20. Clement Greenberg, “The Situation at the Moment,” in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, vol. 2 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O’Brien (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986), 194–195.

21. See Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” throughout.

22. Eric Lum has done extensive work on the relationship between abstract expressionism and architecture. The analysis in this essay follows from his, especially where Blake’s project is concerned, but also expands on it. As he jumps from Blake to Philip Johnson and Mark Rothko’s Houston Chapel, however, Lum misses the importance of other interventions between painting and architecture, such as those made by Kaprow. This is evident when he says, “Through this marriage of mural and wall, painting could become fully integrated into architecture . . . an idealized conjecture nor realized until Mark Rothko’s 1971 Houston Chapel.” Eric Lum, “Pollock’s Promise: Toward an Abstract Expressionist Architecture,” *Assemblage* 39 (August 1999): 68.

23. Blake said of his visit to Pollock's studio, "It was a very sunny day . . . and the sun was shining on the paintings. I felt like I was standing in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. It was a dazzling, incredible sight." Naifeh and Smith, 588.

24. Peter Blake, *No Place like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 111–112.

25. Mies's museum plan was designed at the request of the editors at *Architectural Forum* who had been publishing a series of articles "to show how building might be improved through fuller and more imaginative use of existing resources." They requested designs for a variety of buildings that could be placed in a hypothetical city of 70,000 inhabitants. "New Buildings for 194X," *Architectural Forum* 78, no. 5 (May 1943): 69–85. The Barcelona Pavilion was built in 1929 for the Barcelona Universal Exposition and was destroyed when the fair ended. It was subsequently rebuilt in 1981–86.

26. Peter Blake, *Mies van der Rohe* (New York: Pelican, 1960), 54. It is worth noting that, like Mies's use of the Kolbe sculpture, Blake had Pollock actually make small wire sculptures splattered with paint, miniatures of sculptures that Blake hoped Pollock would make for the actual museum. Pollock himself was experimenting with sculpture around this time, building three-dimensional forms out of papier-mâché that he then splattered with paint.

27. Blake's collage space follows from Mies's. The production of collages as in situ models for Mies's buildings had begun in the twenties with his work for the journal *G*, in association with Dadaists such as Hans Richter. Neil Levine notes this creation of a collage space in Mies, particularly in the Pavilion and the Museum for a Small City in relation to his use of reflection to layer one surface on top of another. Neil Levine, "'The Significance of Facts': Mies' Collages Up Close and Personal," *Assemblage* 37 (December 1998): 71–101.

28. Blake designed his museum just as Philip Johnson was building his Glass House, where they both spent considerable time while planning exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art. Johnson's influence is also evident in Blake's design. Blake, *No Place like Utopia*, 149–155.

29. Arthur Drexler, "Unframed Space: A Museum for Jackson Pollock's [sic] Paintings," *Interiors and Industrial Design* 109, no. 6 (January 1950): 90–91. The article was part of a special issue whose theme was "Interiors to Come," a recurring topic that was meant "to show the direction in which some of our best designers are going." The term *unframed space* was used several times in reference to Pollock's work as the title of two articles, Drexler's and one published slightly later by Berton Roueché. Though Roueché, in an interview in *To a Violent Grave*, says that Lee Krasner used the phrase first, Charles Pollock says that Blake was the origin of the term. The fact that Drexler's article was written and published earlier seems to confirm this. See Berton Roueché, "Unframed Space," in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews*, 18–19; and Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave* (New York: Pushcart Press, 1985), 126.

30. Drexler, 90.

31. Blake, *No Place like Utopia*, 113–114.

32. Blake completed construction on his "Pinwheel House" in 1952. It is a small beach house that he designed for himself and his family in South Hampton, on New York's Long Island. Situated on the beach, the house is square in plan, and its four exterior walls slide horizontally outward, each in a successive clockwise direction, revealing glass walls. When the exterior walls are fully extended and the house is viewed from above, it forms a shape like a pinwheel. Opening the exterior walls reveals an ever-changing view of the landscape outside, turning the ocean and the

dunes into the picturesque, framing them so that they entirely fill the space of the wall and put its surface in motion. Blake had discussed with Pollock the possibility of his painting the sliding walls so that his paintings would be superimposed over the landscape. Pollock considered it but Blake couldn't come up with the commission money that Pollock asked for. They never finalized their plans, and it was never clear how the panels were to be painted. Blake suggested that they might be made of glass, so he bought the sheet of glass that Pollock used to paint *Number 29, 1950* (1950), the painting that Hans Namuth filmed from underneath for his documentary on Pollock. His collaboration with Blake did lead to one commission, a mural-size canvas done for a house designed by Marcel Breuer, *Untitled (Mural)* (1950). Shortly after his collaboration with Blake, Pollock began another unrealized architectural project, this one with Alfonso Ossorio and Tony Smith for a church designed by Smith with murals by Pollock. For more on all of this, see Blake, *No Place like Utopia*, 114–118; Naifeh and Smith, 649; and Lum, “Pollock’s Promise,” 68, 85–88.

33. Lum, “Pollock’s Promise,” 67–68.

34. A few pages down from Drexler’s article on the Pollock Museum in *Interiors and Industrial Design* was another architectural response to the same problem. Olga Gueft’s article “The Museum’s Oasis” describes another museum, this one by Gyorgy and Juliet Kepes. “The Kepeses,” it begins, “are not exactly *opposed* to museums”; however, it would seem that they were opposed to museums containing works of art. Replacing the art objects entirely, the Kepeses substituted shells, driftwood, plants and animals. Instead of a natural history museum they proposed a modern-day *Wunderkammer* where natural forms take the place of art as objects for contemplation. “The proposed gallery,” they declared, “would bridge the gap between the art museum, which is concerned with man-made beauty, and the natural history museum, which is preoccupied with nature but not particularly with nature’s beauty.” Gyorgy Kepes’s *The New Landscape* exhibition at MIT a year later in 1951 (the same years as the Independent Group’s similar exhibition, *Growth and Form*, in London) and the publication that followed, *The New Landscape in Art and Science*, would ultimately realize this project with blown-up photographs of natural forms (cells, shells, and electron micrographs) in place of actual objects.

The Kepeses seem to have taken the next logical step beyond Blake, proposing an even more radical rethinking of the wall-size work of art. Eliminating the need for the artist altogether, they found abstract forms in nature and turned their reproductions into what would elsewhere have been works of art. By turning the art object into scientific vision, The Kepeses proposed its total instrumentation. Autonomous, abstract painting was transformed into its instrumental other, a mechanically reproduced science of vision. Rather than turn art into interior design, The Kepeses’ replacement of abstract painting recast the status of scientific technology into that of high art. See Olga Gueft, “The Museum’s Oasis,” *Interiors and Industrial Design* 109, no. 6 (January 1950): 100–103; and Gyorgy Kepes, *The New Landscape in Art and Science* (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Co., 1956).

35. Kaprow stated that it was, “In 1949 [that] I saw an exhibition of [Pollock’s] work for the first time.” “Interview,” in *Allan Kaprow* (Pasadena: Pasadena Art Museum, 1967), 7.

36. See Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Art News*, 25; and Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Essays on the Blurring*, 3.

37. Joan Marter, “The Forgotten Legacy: Happenings, Pop Art and Fluxus at Rutgers University,” in *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde 1957–1963*, ed. Joan

Marter (Newark: The Newark Museum, 1999), 4.

38. Marter, 132.

39. Quoted in John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 105.

40. Branden Joseph has developed the link between Cage and Rauschenberg in several recent essays. See Branden W. Joseph, "John Cage and the Architecture of Silence," *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 81–104; and Branden Joseph, "White on White," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 90–121.

41. For Cage on Rauschenberg, see Cage, *Silence*, 98–108. For his description of *Theater Piece No. 1*, see "Interview with John Cage," in *Happenings and Other Acts*, ed. Mariellen R. Sandford (New York: Routledge, 1995), 53. Cage subsequently referred to *Theater Piece No. 1* as "the first happening." See John Cage, "An Autobiographical Statement," *Southwest Review* 76, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 65.

42. The score itself has had various incarnations. It wasn't published until 1960 and, in this version, includes a note wherein Cage describes the first performance by Tudor. For more on *4'33"* and its various scores, see Liz Kotz, "Words on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Read as Art: Postwar Media Poetics from Cage to Warhol" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2002): 83–115. Kotz follows a different lineage out of Cage and into performance and happenings than the one traced in this essay.

43. Marter, 132.

44. Walter Hopps, in the first survey catalog of Rauschenberg's early work, does not name the black paintings as a group, as he does the *White Paintings*. He calls them each *Untitled*, followed by a description in brackets. Hopps notes of the largest of these works that "These paintings, with a greater vastness and ambiguity of scale than other Rauschenberg works, relate to spatial qualities of . . . Jackson Pollock." Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), 67. This convention was also followed in Rauschenberg's 1997 Guggenheim retrospective catalog and is followed in this essay. *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997).

45. The piece is called *Untitled [two black panels]* (1953). Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 99.

46. Helen Molesworth notes the importance of Rauschenberg's newspaper ground in the black paintings and develops this problem in relation to the abject body as it is further pursued in his work throughout the 1950s. Helen Molesworth, "Before *Bed*," *October* 63 (Winter 1993): 68–82.

47. Asked about this work, Rauschenberg said, "I called them combines. I had to coin that word because I got so bored with arguments. I was interested in people seeing my work. When someone would come up and I really wanted to know what they thought of it or wanted to sense the exposure, there was always this screen that they could get behind which was, if I said, 'It is painting,' they would say, 'That's not painting. That's sculpture.' And they thought this was very interesting." Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s* (New York: DaCapo, 1985), 153.

48. Allan Kaprow, "a Statement," in *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, ed. Michael Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1965), 44–45.

49. Benjamin Buchloh notes the importance of play in the 1950s and its link to consumer culture. During the 1950s, he writes, "a theory of games would reemerge as a cultural project at the very moment of an ever-increasing instrumentalization of libidinal desire through consumer culture." Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Robert Watts: Inanimate Objects—Inanimate Subjects," in Buchloh and Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday*, 25, n. 4.

50. Susan Hapgood, *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art, 1958–1960* (New York: American Federation of the Arts, 1994), 116.

51. Marter, 132.

52. On Kaprow and his study with Cage, see Joseph Jacobs, “Crashing New York à la John Cage,” in *Off Limits*, 66–69. Kaprow himself says that change is more difficult and more risky than chance as a method, downplaying Cage’s influence while simultaneously acknowledging it. Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments, Happenings*, 174. For an extended discussion of the relation of “chance” and “change” in Kaprow and Cage (which reaches different conclusions than those presented here), see Branden W. Joseph, “Experimental Art: John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999), esp. 271–329.

53. The work of artists such as Rauschenberg, Kaprow, and Jasper Johns in the United States, and Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, and Richard Hamilton abroad, figure into a related history of the readymade and the everyday object after World War II. See the discussions in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984); Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Ready Made, Objet Trouvé, Idée Re ue,” in *Dissent: The Issue of Modern Art in Boston* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1985); Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); William Kaizen, “Richard Hamilton’s Tabular Image,” *October* 94 (Fall 2000): 113–128; Anthony White, “Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch,” *Grey Room* 05 (Fall 2001): 54–77; and Jaleh Mansoor, “Piero Manzoni: ‘We Want to Organize Disintegration,’” *October* 95 (Winter 2001), 29–54.

54. Robert Haywood notes that Kaprow uses the word *value* in an attempt to turn the commodity against itself. Robert Haywood, “Revolution of the Ordinary: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1993), 164.

55. Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments, Happenings*, 169.

56. Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments, Happenings*, 168.

57. Lawrence Alloway, “Junk Culture,” *Architectural Design* 31 (March 1961): 122. A shorter version of this essay appears in the catalog for *New Forms—New Media I* with Kaprow’s first version of his “Assemblage, Environments and Happenings” essay. See n. 1 above.

58. Kaprow, “a Statement,” 45–46.

59. Kaprow, “Notes on the Creation of a Total Art,” in *Essays on the Blurring*, 11.

60. Descriptions of the environment can be found in “Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon,” 74; and Haywood, 183–189.

61. Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments, Happenings*, 160.

62. Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments, Happenings*, 165–166.

63. Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene,” in *Essays on the Blurring*, 18.

64. Kaprow, “a Statement,” 46.

65. For further description of these events see Marter, 8–10; and “Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon,” 69–73. Robert Frank also took photos of *Pastorale*. Robert Frank, *New York to Nova Scotia* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986).

66. The comments on “plastic panels” and Kaprow “painting himself out are in “Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon,” 71.

67. Official in that it was the first performance actually called a happening and not described retrospectively as such. Descriptions of *18 Happenings* and the script are in Kirby, 53–83.

68. Kaprow, “a Statement,” 46.

69. The painters changed from performance to performance, but they were generally

artists, including Alfred Leslie, Red Grooms, Lester Johnson, and, most famously, the pair of Rauschenberg and Johns. Kaprow, “18 Happenings in 6 Parts,” *Happenings*, 81.

70. Photographs of the Martha Jackson Gallery show it to be the quintessential “white cube” gallery. Brian O’Doherty says it is just this white-cube gallery, with its supposed neutrality, that asserts its own presence all the more strongly. Photos of the Martha Jackson Gallery can be seen in the catalog for *New Forms—New Media I*. O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, esp. 13–34.

71. Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 7.

72. Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, 154.