# Madness and Method: Before Theatricality

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While traveling in Europe in 1964, Claes Oldenburg had a chance to take in a performance of the Living Theatre's *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*. Produced by the theater troupe in the early phase of its European exile, *Mysteries* was a departure for them and came as something of a surprise to the American artist. Previous work by the Living Theatre, most recently the critically acclaimed *The Brig,* had made use of increasingly improvisational scripts and acting but had maintained a nominal proscenium dividing audience from actor. But in the ritualistic sequence of confrontational "events" that made up *Mysteries,* this separation was eliminated, and acting, such as it was, was less the creation of convincing character than what theater historian Michael Kirby has called "pretending," a kind of enactment that presumes audience complicity.[1] To Oldenburg, who had been involved for several years in the development in New York of the "painter's theater" known as "happenings," the surprise nevertheless seemed familiar: he identified *Mysteries* as a happening.

Indeed, in its form, structure, and performance, *Mysteries* seemed allied to the painter's theater that had emerged from the New York School of painting in the 1950s. In fact, Living Theatre cofounder Julian Beck often cited happenings as crucial to the development of his group's more radical theatrical strategies. And, like the happenings, the Living Theatre, America's premiere avant-garde theater troupe, claimed abstract expressionism as an originary source.

Yet art historians and theater historians have repeatedly, if inconsistently, distanced happenings from the theater. Both repeat the assertion that early happenings had an antitheatrical bias, while simultaneously maintaining Michael Fried's 1967 understanding of happenings as, like minimalism, essentially "theatrical"—that is, as topographic, time-bound, anthropomorphic, synthetic.[2] And though Fried's argument has spawned over three decades of discussion about minimalism, there has been a resounding art historical silence with regard to happenings. Art historians generally focus on their links to composition and painting through the twinned figures of John Cage and Jackson Pollock and what Amelia Jones has called the "Pollockian performative."[3] Theater historians insist that happenings were not theater—because, unlike theater, they involved their audiences—

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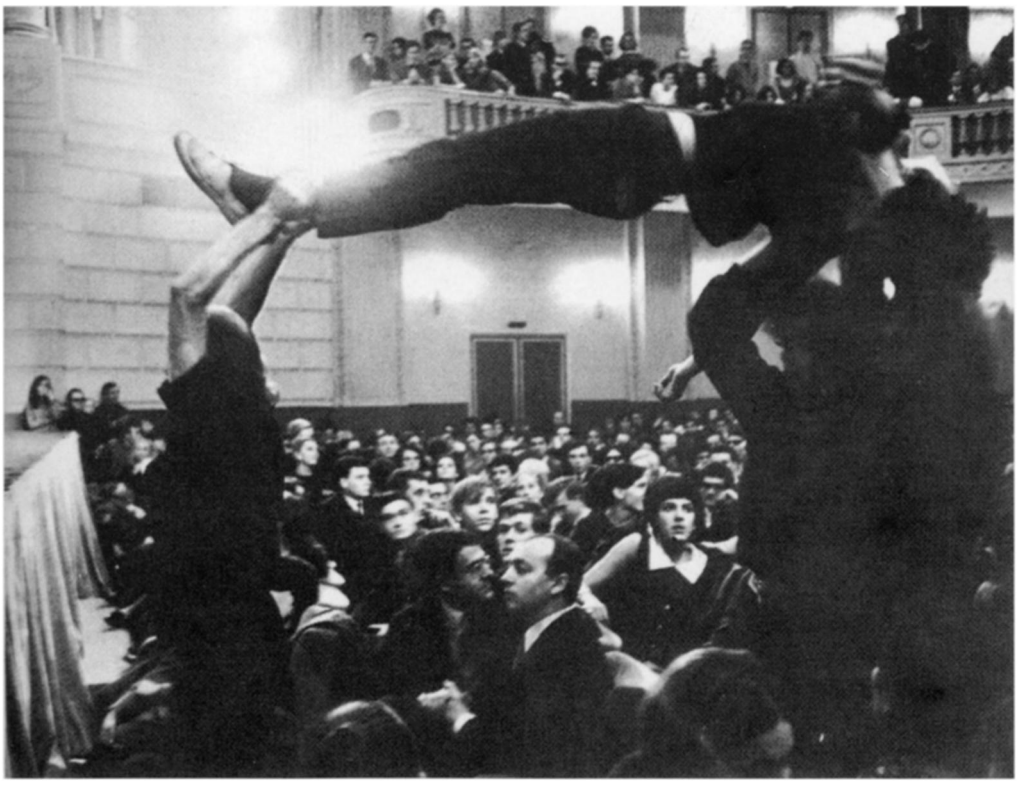
**The Living Theatre.**
***Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*,**
**1964. Photo: Jean Marquis.**



and/or that happenings were not "performance art"—because performance, like theater, distinguishes between the performer and the observer.

Allan Kaprow, originator of the term "happenings," has worked since the mid-1960s to extend the separation. But in 1961 Kaprow himself wrote:

> [Happenings] are essentially theater pieces, however unconventional. That they are still largely rejected by devotees of the theater may be due to their uncommon power and primitive energy, and to their derivation from the rites of American Action Painting. But by widening the concept "theater" to include them (like widening the concept "painting" to include collage), we can see them against this basic background and understand them better.[4]

In fact, happenings were *not* rejected by the theatrical avant-garde. Indeed, the exchange between painting, happenings, and theater in the microcosm of the downtown New York scene of 1959 to 1961 was extensive and fruitful. Many visual artists living in New York, including "happeners" such as Oldenburg, Kaprow, and Robert Rauschenberg, had repeated contacts with the Living Theatre at lectures, panels, and performances. In 1959, for example, Oldenburg and Jim Dine organized a panel at the Judson Gallery on "New Uses of the Human Image in Painting," inviting Kaprow, by then already a confirmed ex-painter exploring collage-based event-forms. In February of 1960 Dine and Oldenburg took part in a panel with the Living Theatre at the Club Avant-Garde Theatre.[5] Kaprow even gave the audiotape he had produced for an untitled 1957 environment to the Living Theatre. And in a note dated 1963—the same year that Kaprow attended the International Drama Conference in Edinburgh and the Festival des Théâtres des Nations in Paris—Julian Beck cites Kaprow's happenings (alongside jazz, John Cage, and the New York School) as crucial models for the Living Theatre's experiments in improvisation.[6]

In the argument that follows, I want to reconsider this repressed genealogical propinquity. For in outlining the mutual misrecognition and the actual historical contamination of each practice by the other, what emerges is a revised historical understanding of the problem of anthropomorphism in postwar artistic practice, read along the axis of presentness and presence. The happenings have usually been understood as a response to abstract expressionism, on the one hand, and, on the other, to an increased historical awareness of earlier vanguard performance practices of Dada and futurism. Yet, as painterly interventions into performance they have a critical dimension that must also be understood in its critically *negative* relation—that is, its dialectical relation—to theatrical and performance practices.[7]

## Some Genetic Considerations

When the term *happening* first appeared in 1958 in an article by Allan Kaprow, "It was the word which I thought would get me out of the trouble of calling it a 'theatre piece,' a 'performance,' a 'game,' a 'total art,' or whatever, that would evoke associations with known sports, theatre, and so on."[8] The "happening," then, was defined by Kaprow as the progeny of, on the one hand, action painting (his preferred term) and, on the other, negatively, of staged events.[9]

Kaprow's remarks are emblematic of two related genealogies. Kaprow had described the development of his own work (he began as an action painter):

> I immediately saw that every visitor to the Environment was part of it. I had not really thought of it before. And so I gave him occupations like moving something, turning switches on—just a few things. Increasingly during 1957 and 1958, this suggested a more "scored" responsibility for that visitor. I offered him more and more to do, until there developed the Happening.[10]

In Kaprow's formulation happenings differed from traditional theater in four essential respects.

**1.** The locus including the division between audience and participants, was fluid.

**2.** There was no plot—a happening, says Kaprow, was "generated" and impromptu, and "the artist controls it only to the degree that it keeps on 'shaking' right."

**3.** Happenings involved chance, which "implies risk and fear" and also "failure."

**4.** They were impermanent and, ideally, unrepeatable.

> Happenings are events that, put simply, happen. Though the best of them have a decided impact—that is, we feel, "here is something important"—they appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point. In contrast to the arts of the past, they have no structured beginning, middle, or end. Their form is open-ended and fluid; nothing obvious is sought and therefore nothing is won, except the certainty of a number of occurrences to which we are more than normally attentive.[11]

Not literary, not narrative. Without arc or telos: a code without a message. The happenings, said Kaprow, aimed to be as lifelike as possible, but they were art, not life.

Michael Kirby traced the origins of happenings from Dada, futurist, and surrealist performance to abstract expressionism and suggested, echoing an observation made by the critic Susan Sontag in 1962

(*avant*-Warhol), that art openings of the late 1950s had become events in themselves, serving as a model for happenings. Adopting a mode of critical description from then-current structuralist practices, Kirby theorized happenings as "a purposefully composed form of theatre in which diverse alogical elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmented structure."[12] For Kirby, participants didn't "act." Their roles were "non-matrixed," and they were given tasks. That is, the participant didn't "pretend"—either to "be" a character or to "do" an action. If anything, participants were treated like props or stage effects. Further, the audience itself—where there was one to be distinguished—was a participant.

Both Kaprow and Kirby were at pains to establish links to the historical avant-garde, Kaprow's lineage emerging primarily from the formal concerns of the traditional visual arts (that is, painting, assemblage, environment) and Kirby's pointing to earlier models of performance by vanguard visual artists.[13] Kaprow and Kirby disagreed on the links each drew between happenings and theater. Kirby eventually would argue that happenings revitalized American theater, while Kaprow soon abandoned them as hopelessly spectacular. Yet for both, the happenings were distinguished by their performative qualities—"moving something, turning switches on"—from what J.L. Austin had termed the "unhappy performative"—that is, the empty mimesis—of traditional dramatic presentation.[14]

What, then, were their performative qualities? One thesis holds that the happenings were art events that had "more to do with the art world than with alternative theater, music, or dance."[15] On this reading the happenings, in their dialogic relation to the painted canvas as a luxury commodity, "can be best assessed in terms of a refusal of product-oriented materialism, a rejection of the signature terms of mastery, originality, and authorship, and an overall subversion of the commodity- and object-oriented structure of visual art."[16] As collaborative, unique, and nonproductive efforts, happenings radically questioned the nature of authorship and the notion of art as object.

One must uphold a modernist disciplinarity, a separation of mediums, to follow this argument. But if originality, authorship, and mastery were the targets of a critique organized within an ephemeral and time-based experience, the specificity of that experience has remained for the most part unexplored.[17] To read happenings strictly as a "refusal" of commodity fetishism is to willfully maintain a blind spot with respect to a number of factors, from the material to the conceptual, that inflected their production and their consumption. Indeed, if Kaprow had invoked the potential "material plethora" of happenings in 1958—a plethora instantiated perhaps most pointedly in Claes Oldenburg's *The Store* (1961), which operated specifically through the

production and sale of commodities—within a few short years the notoriety of the "Happenings Boys" had acquired significant sign-exchange value.[18] Further, if the fetishized commodity that was easel painting had been critically eliminated, it was supplanted not by "authentic experience" (that modernist hangover) but by the reification of the ordinary language, behavior, and action—the habitus—of participants. That is, the relations between participants seemed if anything to take the form *not* of a relation between autonomous *subjects*—a "collaboration without objects"—but rather of a relation between *objects*.

The word *happening,* a gerund, suggests what Michael Fried might grudgingly allow as "presentness,"[19] but it also implies a kind of passivity—"it is happening to me." In this respect, it implies, too, an interesting desubjectification: the presence at an event of an objectified person. Indeed, one of the characteristics that was said at the time to unify happenings as a category was their use of people—audience and participants—as objects. Sontag attributed this "suprapersonal or impersonal treatment of persons" to the influence of Artaud, yet noted, too, "that this art form which is designed to stir the modern audience from its cozy emotional anesthesia operates with images of anesthetized persons, acting in a kind of slow-motion disjunction with each other."[20]

Sontag further suggested that an "abusive involvement of the audience seems to provide, in default of anything else, the dramatic spine of the Happening."[21] In one of the more sinister examples, *A Spring Happening* (1961), the small audience was packed into a narrow crate with slits cut at eye level through which could be seen, among other things, a nude and nervous young woman being chased by a spotlight. Unexpected events, at best partially visible from inside the dark crate, were triggered by flashing lights or sudden noises. Heavy objects were dropped on the low roof of the crate; a giant industrial fan blocked the exit. The audience was trapped until the finale, when, just in time, the walls came crashing down. This piece is often discussed in relation to the notion of "rebirth"—a mythic, even epiphanic reading of a piece in which the audience, cued by lights, bells, bangs, giant fans, and so on, is shunted through a sequence of alogical, nonmatrixed, and compartmental events—an experiential maze. Attendees recall the smell of fear—Kaprow himself admits he was interested in this as an element.[22] The imagery—no, the *actuality*—of confinement, as well as the assaultive violence of the audience's "liberation" by a roaring lawnmower, has as much to do with behaviorist experiments or with the imagery of the Holocaust as it does with any notion of "rebirth."[23]

**Claes Oldenburg.**
***Store Days I*, 1962.**
**Photo: Robert McElroy**

"In time," wrote Brian O'Doherty, "the Spectator stumbles around between confusing roles: he is a cluster of motor reflexes, a dark-adapted wanderer, the vivant in a tableau, an actor manqué, even a trigger of sound and light in a space land-mined for art."[24] For O'Doherty, the happenings "mediated a careful stand-off between avant-garde theater and collage."[25] That is to say, these works figured participants —*and* attention *and* senses—as objects, collage elements, exchangeable tokens. A radicalized readymade aesthetic focused its critique on collective (and individual) experience. When Kaprow wrote "[As] the 'found object' implies the found word, noise, or action, it also demands the found environment,"[26] he might as well have added "found people." Indeed, in a number of instances the encounter of the general public with happenings—Wolf Vostell's street actions, for example, involving interactive performances with billboards, or Kaprow's 1965 *Calling,* in one section of which mummified participants were deposited at the information booth in Grand Central Station—was conceived in this way.

The collage aspect of happenings has been an interpretive given since their first appearance. But theater remains a dirty word in the art historical literature, a (post-Friedian) term of opprobrium until its reappropriation by postmodern theorists. Some critics have attempted to use the differentiation between a Brechtian analytic secularism and an Artaudian mythopoetic expressionism as a heuristic wedge to isolate minimalism from other time-based work, while others have attempted to describe the Pop project in terms of a Brechtian clarity.[27] Whatever the ideological motivations of such distinctions, their structural simplification of the historical record has created an aporia in our understanding of American postwar practices and their relation to "theatricality." The argument that follows probes one area of that blind spot, the problem of figuration, by examining the relation between happenings and the theater, focusing in particular on their use of human subjects—that is, the systems of acting as deployed in the painters' theater and in the players' theater. If in teasing apart the apparent family resemblance of these two kinds of production I examine the discourse of theatrical acting at some length, I do so bearing in mind that to approach what happenings were necessitates "dwelling on what happenings are not." The New York happenings and the Living Theatre, though they shared many sources, including a grounding in collage strategies, were fundamentally opposed *not* because one was a visual art and the other a dramatic one but because the Living Theatre, in its struggle for authenticity, operated in a modernist, humanist, and epiphanic mode while the happenings, in their strategies of fragmentation and depersonalization and, most important, in their self-understanding, hailed their participants into the postmodern.

## Theater

American theater in the early-1950s was in the doldrums. In part this was a result of the chilling effect of the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee blacklists, which had suppressed more formally and politically radical European models, an effect that was redoubled by the enduring popularity of sentimental holdovers from the American tradition of didactic theater and by the flourishing of the culture industry. Yet the possibilities for radicalizing theater were already in place within mainstream film itself, for it was in Hollywood's "naturalized" acting style, ironically promoted by the star system, that certain advanced art practices of the 1950s would find their foil. This acting technique, its audience reception, and the manipulation of affect that it suggested, laid crucial ground for the collage effect, including the objectification of people, that I have identified as characteristic of the happenings.

Method acting has formed the basis of American acting technique since the 1940s, when the enormously influential Actor's Studio was founded in 1947. The Method derived from the system of acting imported to the United States in the 1920s by students of Konstantin Stanislavsky who were fleeing the sovietization of their native Russia. What they brought with them was a theory of acting that had been developed by Stanislavsky at the turn of the century based on then-current Pavlovian principles of behavior response. In its time the naturalism of this acting style, as well as its technicity, was revolutionary, and American theater readily adopted the new technique.[28]

The Method relies on something called "affective memory": the character's mother dies, the actor tries to recall an analogous event from his or her own life and the emotions it aroused and then draws on that memory, embellishing it if necessary, in order to produce (the appearance of) the appropriate affect on stage—even if the remembered life event was completely unrelated to the staged action; for example, a stray dog being hit by a bus. (This example is Stanislavsky's.) The resulting Pavlovian reenactment yields an affective rather than a scenographic mimesis; that is, the actor is a simulated "subject" with a specific repertoire of affects, each of which can be mechanically transposed at will into a variety of set pieces to produce the appropriate emotional illusion for the audience, which will then experience, at least in theory, a genuine affective response. But the Method, as Herbert Blau has observed,

> was often playing a sometimes subtle, sometimes self-deluded, or subtle because delusive, behavioral double game. For in attempting to make behavior on stage

**"I coulda been a contendah." Rod Steiger and Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*, 1954.**

> look like life, it was indeed very much that, *not* the actuality but rather the *look* of life, in attempting to *be it* keeping it at a distance.[29]

One could not ask for a simpler definition of false consciousness.

Within the discourse of avant-garde theater practice, two lines of attack against Stanislavskyan affective naturalism were opened, one addressed to reason, the other to emotion.[30] The art historical discourse that draws on these two practices has traditionally polarized them, mapping the theories of Bertolt Brecht and of Antonin Artaud onto a neat structural opposition. This critical pairing has been productive, but it is far too tidy, for it treats both practitioners *not* as practitioners but rather as dehistoricized theorists. In what follows, then, I'd like to complicate the opposition (between secular and sacral, intellectual and emotional, critical and visceral) by reinserting it into a history of practice. A rehearsal of the work of Brecht and Artaud is thus necessary in order to refresh our historical understanding of the use-value of these two practitioners.

If naturalistic acting formed the basis of movie acting and popular theater, it was a style that Bertolt Brecht had since the 1920s violently opposed. For Brecht, a dramatic practice in which "bombastic productions of the classics alternate with empty photographic replicas of everyday life," as Martin Esslin puts it, was simply "culinary," designed for bourgeois aesthetic delectation, even stupefaction.[31] Though impressed by the scientific aspect of Stanislavsky's attempt to systematize acting technique, Brecht bitingly if accurately perceived that

> reason, far from being suppressed in his "method," is the "control mechanism." [T]he hypocrisy of the Stanislavsky school with its temple of art, its service to the word, its cult of the poet, its inwardness, purity, exaltation, its naturalness which one fears and must fear flipping "out" of, corresponds to its intellectual backwardness, its belief in "man" and "ideas" etc.[32]

By contrast, Brecht's theater would be immediate, educational, indeed functional, with explicit links to science and entertainment; it would attack the notion of art as divorced from the everyday, of actor as separated by the gulf of (cultic, oracular) naturalism from audience.

A traditional Aristotelian conception of drama relied on the illusion of events taking place in the present, on identification, and on catharsis—Brecht likened it to a "branch of the bourgeois drug traffic."[33] The epic theater, by contrast, emphatically *re*-presented events as temporally particular and historical: events on stage should proceed, Brecht wrote, the way bystanders discuss an accident they have just witnessed

(that is, not by the individual feelings evoked when the dog is hit by the bus but by the collective reportorial detail: it was from this aspect of polyphonic recounting that the term *epic* was derived). Brecht developed the concept of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (a word with connotations of extranational, parasitical infestation, of territoriality), a theatrical estrangement designed above all to prevent the identification of the audience with the characters represented. Brecht proposed an acting style predicated on two ideas diametrically opposed to naturalism's mimetic construction of character. Human character, according to Brecht, was not fixed but rather was a constantly changing function of history; therefore the notion of "character" was jettisoned in favor of a more mobile decision-making representation. Unburdened from the task of a naturalistic representation, the actor—a thinking subject, a rapporteur, and above all a producer—was free to make metacritical commentary on the actions of his or her character.

In developing his theory of the alienation effect and the acting style it required, Brecht wrote:

> Actors will know what is meant here if one cites as an example of "acting without being completely transformed" what a director does when showing an actor how to perform a certain passage. Such a director does not transform himself—since the role is not his. He underlines the technical side of the business, and preserves the attitude of some one just making a suggestion.
>
> Giving up the idea of complete transformation, the actor brings forward his text, not as an improvisation, but as a *quotation*.[34]

This sense of quotation (and, it follows, montage) was most productively (that is, critically) deployed in the moments of "dialectics in standstill" that Brecht called *Gestus:* tableaux-summary points at which, ideally, the audience would engage its critical function.[35] The overall aim, for Brecht, was to give form to a politics of socially egalitarian process. Rather than the "behavioral double game" of the Method, the result was criticality; that is, not feeling but, through the duplication of feeling's signs and the demystification of its procedures, analysis.

The second line of attack, operating not through science but through empathy itself, was proposed by the other most significant antinaturalist in twentieth-century theatrical practice, Antonin Artaud. Like Brecht, Artaud disparaged the "digestive" nature of bourgeois psychological drama.[36] For Artaud, actors were also markers in space, but they were like lightning rods in that action, events, even dialogue, came down through them. They channeled the drama physically. Unlike Stanislavsky, whose theory of acting was essentially a theory of naturalistic representation achieved through affective trans-

position, Artaud proposed a different kind of induction principle: an enveloping of the audience in a machinic spectacle of movement, stutters, flashes, music, and architecture, in which the place markers of "character" were drawn through expression, paralanguage, blocking, and staging that were exaggerated far from the everyday and were therefore, precisely because of the resulting depersonalization, more authentically representative of "reality."[37] The "cruelty" of Artaudian theater was to be consummated in this loss of individual agency—a loss that Artaud took, however, to be a hyperreal reflection of reality. Artaudian theater was posed against psychologism: Artaud wanted his audience to experience terror, fear, or, better still, a visceral orgiastic delirium. This theater was a theater without memory, a theater of electroshock.

If both Brecht and Artaud disparaged naturalistic theater (in digestive and excretory terms), they both also saw the theater as the site for a new model of political engagement or praxis. Each attacked the transparency of language, albeit in different ways, the one veering toward extreme irony, the other toward incomprehensibility. Brecht used overlapping language and linguistic signs, clichés, slogans, speeches, to disrupt the "purity" of any given message. Artaud used repetition across bodies, choral interludes, and even nonsense to disrupt the easy transmission of code. Furthermore, both directors effectively denatured any naturalistic scene setting not simply by disarticulating textual linearity but also through a radical differentiation between words and meaning, between characterization and body. Constituent elements of the production—language, gesture, character—thus acquired a crucial degree of autonomy from one another. And most important, the actor in both instances was distanced from his or her "character"—in Brecht's case through metacritical rupture, in Artaud's through an effacement of self.

Thus, to summarize, we have three models of acting: the Method's behaviorist reproduction of affect calling forth audience empathy with a simulation; Brecht's foregrounding of the mechanics of reproduction in order precisely to disrupt audience empathetic identification; and, with Artaud, the hyperinflation of affect's signs in order to eliminate boundaries between actors, audience, and spectacle. These three acting techniques entered the American discourse in rapid succession, their primary texts becoming available to advanced American practice in the immediate postwar years.[38] For American avant-garde theater of the 1950s confronting the relentless sentimental naturalism promulgated by the culture industry, two possible moves suggested themselves. The first, a synthesis of Brechtian and Artaudian principles, was the route taken by the Living Theatre of Julian Beck and Judith Malina.

## The Living Theatre

A sometimes contradictory combination of Artaudian cruelty and Brechtian epic informed America's premiere avant-garde group, the Living Theatre, and its attempt to create a "poetic" theater that would subordinate realism to the exploration of language. The Living Theatre was in development by the late-1940s, and its infusion of theater practices with anarcho-syndicalist and communitarian politics (and vice versa) would be a vital influence on experimental theater (and guerrilla activism) in the 1960s. Incorporated by Judith Malina and Julian Beck in 1948, the company spent the next decade seminomadically producing avant-garde plays in venues varying from the Cherry Lane Theatre to the Becks' living room, the spaces as scavenged—and often as ephemeral—as the junk materials Beck used for his collaged sets. (Early productions included Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights,* Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi,* Luigi Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise,* as well as works by Paul Goodman and Bertolt Brecht.)

Asked in an interview why he gave up painting, Beck responded with what seems a typically Brechtian answer: "To devote my time to the more social art of the theater."[39] The theater was "social" for Beck and Malina inasmuch as it was collective, didactic, and political, and inasmuch as its practice should be embedded in everyday life—in this they followed Brecht. But for the Living Theatre this social aspect was also conjured by the immediacy of its representations and the devotion of its practitioners. If Brecht was the political theorist of criticality and alienation, Artaud was the prophet of performance. The emphasis placed by the Living Theatre on a consuming immediacy—typically American—was patently disavowed by epic theater; it was developed by the Living Theatre through the crucible of Artaud. The reception of Artaud was both more literary—perversely for someone whose theory aimed to eliminate text from the stage—and, through his appearance in films such as Dreyer's 1927 *Joan of Arc* (which allegedly moved Malina to tears in 1946), more iconic. If by the 1960s advanced American theater (led by the Living Theatre) looked significantly different in terms of staging and conception, it was at the level of the actor and the relation between actor and audience that this difference was most clearly registered.

In 1959 the Living Theatre would emerge with force with their production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection,* a wrenchingly veristic play-within-a-play about heroin, which took place in their new quarters at the northern edge of Greenwich Village on 14th Street.[40] Malina and Beck first read the play in the summer of 1958 while they were also reading *The Theater and Its Double.* The plotline of *The Connection* drew on other productions, including Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot.* Briefly summarized:

> When the spectators enter several heroin addicts are waiting on stage. Another man steps off the stage and explains that he is the producer. He introduces Jaybird as the author and explains that he has induced several real addicts to come to the theatre and improvise on Jaybird's themes for a documentary film which is being shot by the two camera men who are in attendance. The addicts have cooperated in return for a promised fix. They are waiting for Cowboy to arrive with the heroin. During intermission the addicts panhandle the audience, and in the second act Cowboy arrives and rewards each with a fix.[41]

A "jazz play," *The Connection* featured live as well as recorded music, the unfurling of the action in real time, the actual distribution of heroin, the Pirandellian conceit of a "documentary" filming, and in at least one performance the apparent actual overdose of one of the players.[42]

The play's success rested precisely on this confusion between reality and representation. In a lecture of 1961 Jean-Paul Sartre noted "the spectators' perplexity":

> Is it image, is it object? I mean this: if they are really addicts, then it is object. . . . If so, you can regard them as human objects and you are a human object to them. Or else they are not drug addicts, but actors; if so, it's something else again. . . . If they are images, if they are playing the role of drug addicts, then that takes on a universal aspect . . . ; *it becomes myth.*[43]

This last remark is crucial. Certain devices—"low" subject matter and (the textual) suspension of moral judgment, direct address of the audience, the doubling effect of the cameramen—recall aspects of Brechtian theater; more important, however, the production, in its courting of myth, attempted to put Artaudian "cruelty" into practice. The aim was to radically disturb the complacency of the audience, to produce in it not a critical distance but an abundance of feeling, a complex of revulsion and identification.

**(Knee Play)**

Speaking of his 1952 "Untitled Event" at Black Mountain College (generally acknowledged as the first happening), the composer John Cage recalled:

> We got the idea from Artaud that theater could take place free of a text, that if a text were in it, that it needn't determine the other actions, that sounds, that activities, and so forth, could all be free rather than tied together; so that rather than the dance expressing the music or the music expressing the dance, that the two

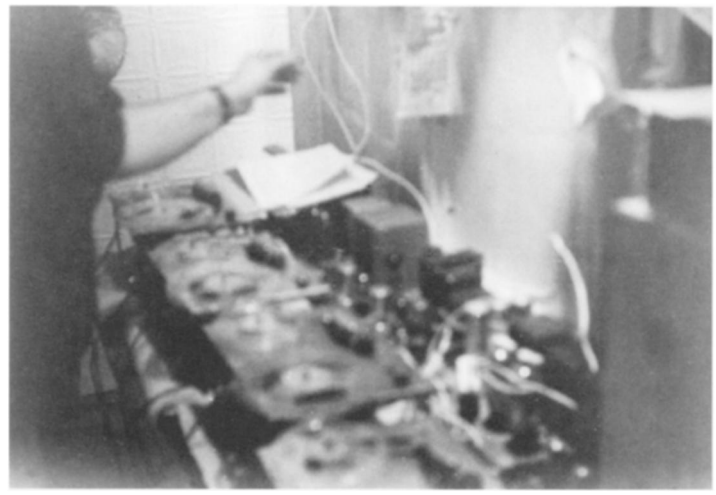
could go together independently, neither one controlling the other. And this was extended on this occasion not only to music and dance, but to poetry and painting, . . . and to the audience. So that the audience was not focused in one particular direction.[44]

Cage's remarks are telling, for while they serve as a useful description of his own scenographic practice, if we were to adduce from them any precise sense of what Artaud's theater—or his theory—were like, we would be sorely misled. Cage is correct insofar as Artaud's theorizing aimed for a "hieroglyphic" theater not reliant on the mediation of language. But Artaud's practice emerged from symbolist and expressionist theater and was still fundamentally expressive; indeed expression was its engine, and if its effect on the audience was intended to be shocking and immediate, the entire production was subordinated to that end. Artaud's theater was, if anything, a theater of total directorial control, of absolute expression—in acting, scenography, music, movement.

Yet, as with any misprision, there are elements of Artaudian practice that suggest directions that would prove immensely productive to Cage and the practitioners of happenings: the freeing of a production from text; the independence of individual production elements from one another; the sense (if not the actuality) of improvisation; the elimination of a concern for the individuation of characters.[45] Most important, Artaud—whose practice was deeply engaged in a dialogue with the cinema in terms of expressivity, montage, choreography, and juxtaposition; its ability to animate objects and the everyday; and its use of language—described as part of his project the development of a vast notational system that could include movements, facial expression, vocal tone, and so on. And it is here that the willfully selective reading process I have termed "misprision" was most fruitful for the happenings. For while aimed at directorial control, the effect of such a notational system is to render a system of equivalences across the variables of space, time, and expression.

### Its Double

Before *The Connection* opened in 1959, Beck had sent some of his actors across town to the Reuben Gallery to take part in a piece called *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. An experimental production, this was the first public happening produced by Allan Kaprow, who needed volunteers. *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* expanded Kaprow's collage experiments temporally, using a vast notational apparatus,



**Tape-recorder setup for Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1959. Photo: Allan Kaprow Archives, the Getty Research Institute.**

including choreography, sound events, slides, and spoken-word fragments, its script an elaborate assemblage of quotation. Sources included:

- for movement: ballet and calisthenics (notated by Kaprow using stick-figure diagrams);
- for sound: recorded test tones, sound effects, speeches, electronic music, old experimental tapes (cut-ups of Kaprow's cut-up audiotape compositions), as well as sound produced on site; and
- for projections: slides of body parts, scrawled word fragments and interjections, children's art, close-ups of collages.

Kaprow's "sandwich man" prop was modeled on Soviet propaganda kiosks, while other parts of the set incorporated elements cannibalized from earlier assemblages and environments (e.g., *Kiosk/ Rearrangeable Panels* of 1957–1959). The spoken fragments were compiled from sources as disparate as Baudelaire, Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dès,* Ginsberg's *Howl,* advertising, motivational speeches, newspapers, and Kaprow's own writing, itself an ironic pastiche of all of the above. Clearly in debt to Cageian techniques, and composed in part using chance principles, the piece—alogical and compartmental—was highly, even rigidly, organized. The audience, divided into groups and cued by bells and lights, moved from site to site within the simplified maze of semitransparent cubicles, taking seats to watch orchestrated nonnarrative events at carefully timed and signaled intervals.

Of the performance itself, writer Samuel Delany recalls: "I'd assumed that the work, regardless of its content, would be rich, Dionysian, and colorful. . . . The work I'd experienced had been, however, spare, difficult, minimal, constituted largely by absence, isolation, even distraction."[46] (Indeed, as Kaprow recalled of the people sent over by Beck, "They wanted to *act;* I wanted them to *do.*"[47]) "I'd been disappointed in it," Delany continues.

> [My companion] wanted his singular narrative meaning. And I still wanted my meaningful plenitude. But . . . mine was the disappointment of that late romantic sensibility we call modernism presented with the postmodern condition. And the work I saw was far more interesting, strenuous, and aesthetically energetic than the riot of sound, color, and light centered about actorly subjects in control of an endless profusion of fragmentary meanings that I'd been looking forward to. Also it was far more important: as a representation and analysis of the situation of the subject in history, I don't think Kaprow's work could have been improved on.[48]

And it is here that I would like to suggest another possible revision of the theater strategies I have described, a dialectical one: the return to

the modalities of behaviorism as reconfigured by the antinaturalism of Brechtian estrangement and Artaudian objectification. For the essentially *mechanical* manipulation of affect that "naturalism" suggested was conceptually crucial to the collage effect, including the objectification of people—not "actorly subjects" but "actors manqué"—that characterized the happenings. In rejecting "acting" in favor of "doing" and reconceiving stage space and direction as a labyrinth of indeterminate experiences, the happenings transposed the language of "operant response" into the arena of a fragmented and alienated everyday: a strategy of estrangement and objectification directed straight at the "cozy emotional anesthesia" of the "modern audience." The "behavioral double game" was reversed.[49]

The Kaprow happenings were composed through a logic of juxtaposition derived from advanced practices in the visual and musical arts. But their logic also drew from the theatrical models of Brechtian marking and quotation and Artaudian fragmentation and objectification. Where the producer of happenings differed from his theatrical colleagues was in the assimilation of these materials; for the rhetoric engaged by the happenings evinced a preoccupation with the status of affect (or expression) not as it was registered in the "unhappy performative" of the theater, or even as it was "pretended," but rather as a blank token.[50] The fundamentally mediated, split, antiempathic, and inaccessible subjectivity that produced, and was produced in, the happenings was utterly counter to the "authenticity" of both charismatic acting and unmediated experience. Indeed, what Delany characterized as the postmodernity of the happenings might provide one way of accounting for their relative lack of reception. For if distinctions between happenings and theater fall along the "unhappy" faultlines of the theatrical performative, the same distinction logically obtains between happenings and later performance practices: if happenings were distanced from theater on these grounds, they later wound up equally distanced from performance art as well, as the latter, in normalizing the performance situation itself, returned to a relatively unproblematized model of discretion between performers and audiences.

**Top: View of the set for Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1959. Photo: Allan Kaprow Archives, the Getty Research Institute.**

**Bottom: Allan Kaprow. *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1959. Shown in rehearsal. Photo: Scott Hyde.**

## Cruelty

Meanwhile, the Living Theatre was preparing what would be a triumph of verism.

*The Connection* was followed by an even more radically confrontational production based on a text that was more score than script. *The Brig* was a real-time re-presentation of time served in a Marine detention center. The script combined excerpts from the relevant military codebooks with instructions for the stage blocking—to be executed in militarily prescribed fashion—of the everyday movements of prisoners and guards. The story line, such as it was, followed the ritual humiliations endured by prisoners in their daily life, where the most ordinary movements and bodily functions were subject to execution only with the permission of the guards. Preparations for the performance included the memorization of the military code of behavior and the adoption of its protocols, which provided a virtual choreography for the actors' movements. Extensive rehearsals involved the adoption of roles of guard and prisoner so grueling, depersonalizing, and difficult for the actors that these positions had to be repeatedly exchanged to keep the power dynamics they established clearly identified with the roles and not the persons acting them.

The play was terrifying: nothing happened, yet the emotional battery enacted in front of the audience was also battering to the audience. Artaud had advocated a ritualistic and exaggerated choreography of expression. In *The Brig* the Living Theatre found a vehicle that allowed the application of Artaudian principles, including not only movement and expression but also the practice of switching roles in rehearsal, to highlight the institutional cruelty and depersonalization of the military brig and, more broadly, of hierarchical power structures in general.

After *The Brig* the Living Theatre, under the influence of their own dramatic texts but also of jazz and of the happenings, took up an improvisatory mode of rehearsal and production—in fact, Beck wrote, it was impossible (politically) to go back to earlier kinds of rehearsal. The result was a redefinition of "acting" that retained a degree of veristic intensity while dispensing with the matrices of naturalism and

character. Later repertory productions such as *Frankenstein* (1965) and, most famously, *Paradise Now* (1968) subordinated individual bodies to the status of graphemes or emblemata. (Frankenstein's monster was constructed visually by bodies-as-arms, bodies-as-face, bodies-as-parts, arrayed across a back-lit scaffolding. In *Paradise Now* actors individually confronted audience members in an attempt to break through the supposed divisions that isolated people from a collective identification.) In the mid-1960s the Living Theatre in fact developed—and cultivated—a virtual cult status. Productions took the form of ritual sequences designed to weed out the bored and the skeptical, to culminate in the extrusion of the spectacle into the street to foment revolution, and to transform the theatergoer into . . . a member of the Living Theatre.

"Life and drama are one," said Beck and Malina.

> Theatre has taken a certain importance in the contemporary revolutionary movement because we are trying to revitalize Life and we see art as an intentful experience and we want Life to become as intense as that. The theatre is a form of art of intense Living which consists of Living people and we want Life itself to become as passionate, and as engaged, as Life is presumably for the actor. We feel that the revolution could take place if everything were to become a theatrical event.[51]

The actor, then, had overthrown naturalism for verismo and had become a kind of political shaman—charismatic, even mystically endowed, yet with abilities that were transferable given the proper initiation. This, too, is the stuff of Sartrean "myth."

In the Living Theatre's work from 1964 onward, the primacy of the text to theatrical performance was displaced by the charismatic physical presence of the actor and by a sense of the immediacy of the theater "experience." Throughout the sixties these two elements were crucial to the Living Theatre's sense of political activism and agency, on the one hand, and to the troupe's cult-like recruitment of members, on the other.

### Calling Card

For happenings, the period 1958 to 1966 can be roughly demarcated by, at one end, the production of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* and the publication of Artaud's *Theater and Its Double* in English and, at the other end, the critical implosion of many of the strategies the happenings had developed. In 1966 Kaprow, with Charles Frazier, planned a three-day event in the Hamptons: *Gas*. Enlisting the help of a producer at CBS television, Kaprow was able to gain the official cooperation of local police and fire departments and businesses. The resulting documentary

**Living Theatre. *The Brig*, 1963.**
**Photo: Jonas Mekas.**

was televised, and Harold Rosenberg and Robert Scull gave learned if bemused commentary. But, as Rosenberg wrote elsewhere,

> whether art is made as a package or as an antithesis to the package, it takes on the character of the package in its mode of transmission to the public, that is, through the communications system of the press, including the art press, the museums, galleries and other distribution and educational mechanisms.[52]

One of the most wonderful examples of this phenomenon appeared in *Women's Wear Daily* in May of 1966. Reviewing Kirby's book, Carol Bjorkman also linked happenings to Stanislavsky. But in using Stanislavsky to "explain" happenings, she revealed precisely "what they are not." It's a remarkably telling passage, as it identifies the latent antinaturalism in Stanislavsky's theater, the dramatic and "lofty emotion" the happenings had sought to escape, and the elision of both with the world of fashion. I cite it in full:

> Perhaps the most profound explanation that can be applied to a HAPPENINGS [*sic*] was written by Konstantin Stanislavski in 1905: "Realism and depicting the way of life have outlived their age. The time has come to stage the unreal—not life itself, as it occurs in reality, must be depicted, but rather life as it is vaguely perceived in fantasies and visions at moments of lofty emotion. This is the spiritual situation that must be transmitted scenically, in the way that painters of the new school use cloth, musicians of the new trend write music and the new poets, poetry.
>
> "The works of these painters, musicians and poets have no clear outlines, definite and finished melodies, or precisely expressed ideas. The power of the new art lies in its combinations of colors, lines, musical notes and the rhyming of words. They create general moods that carry over to the public unconsciously. They create hints that make the most unobservant person create with his own imagination"—
>
> "Moods that carry over to the public unconsciously"—of course, at that time, little did Stanislavski know that the world of fashion would take its place in the arts as strongly as it has.[53]

Kaprow's abandonment of the form around 1966 rested on a complex of factors: from the co-optation of happenings by the culture industry to the unforeseen degree of self-consciousness (behavior modification) produced in participants—all too aware of the possibility that they might thereby gain their "fifteen minutes" of fame—by the presence of even the most benign photographic apparatus. Kaprow had ironized the situation in many early works by including a "cameraman" or designating specific moments for "triumphal" picture taking. His notes

for *Calling* instruct participants: "At any time if stopped and challenged by some authority (either produce permission letter) or wrapped up person should say its OK, it's a rehearsal for a movie."[54] But by 1966 this position was untenable. And in its annual "In and Out" feature of that year, *Esquire* magazine declared: "Where Not to Be Seen: At a Happening."[55] Kaprow's activities became increasingly dispersed, private, and willfully undocumented.

**Allan Kaprow. *Calling*, 1966. Photo: Peter Moore. © Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, NYC.**

**Notes**

1. Although "acting" did take place in *Mysteries,* Kirby points out that it was a kind of simplified acting and "did not involve character, place or situation." Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not-Acting," in *Acting (Re)considered,* ed. Phillip B. Zarrilli (London: Routledge, 1995), 43–58, 55.

2. See Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 12–23; reprinted in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–172. Though it was Fried's theorizing that polarized advanced art practice and criticism, it was Tom Hess, editor of *Art News,* rather than Fried, who first made use of "theatricality" as a pejorative critical term in the early 1960s. Hess's "theatricality"—addressed to spaces of display and used to link Pop to happenings—predicts aspects of Fried's argument. See T[homas] B. H[ess], "Editorial: Pop and public," *Art News* 62, no. 7 (November 1963): 23, 59–60; reprinted in Steven Henry Madoff, ed., *Pop Art: A Critical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 100–102.

3. See Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

4. Allan Kaprow, "Happenings in the New York Scene" (1961), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life,* ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 17.

5. See Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 107. Oldenburg has said that in the late 1950s he "felt that you could hardly create anything in New York if it wasn't somehow relating to the theater; and that even painting should somehow be related to the theater." From Claes Oldenburg, interview by Paul Cummings, Dec. 4, 1973–Jan. 25, 1974, Archives of American Art, Washington, 100; quoted in Marla Prather, "Claes Oldenburg: A Biographical Overview," in *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology,* ed. Germano Celant (New York: Abrams, Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1995), 2.

6. See Julian Beck, *The Life of the Theatre: The Relation of the Artist to the Struggle of the People* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1972), sec. 45. See also B[ernard]. Noël, "Les Happenings: Le Théâtre et la conserve," *XXe Siècle* 35, no. 41 (December 1973): 128–31.

7. For a consideration of Kaprow's theorization of happenings in relation to painting and photography that follows along these lines, see my "Foil: Allan Kaprow before Photography," in *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts—Events, Objects, Documents,* ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Judith F. Rodenbeck (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Gallery, Columbia University, 1999), 47–68.

8. Kaprow in Michael Kirby, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1965), 47. The article was "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 57 (October 1958): 24-26ff, first drafted in the fall of 1956; reprinted in *Essays,* 1–9.

9. "At first sight apparently a cross between art exhibit and theatrical performance, these events have been given the modest and somewhat teasing name of 'Happenings.' . . . To describe a Happening for those who have not seen one means dwelling on what Happenings are not." Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Octagon Books, 1982), 263–274, 263.

10. Kaprow in Kirby, *Happenings,* 46. "Scored responsibility" should dispel any notion that happenings were conceived as uncontrolled and undirected. Indeed, John Cage once referred to a happening by Claes Oldenburg as a "police situation," "politically bad," and followed this remark with a reference to Kaprow's *18 Happenings,* objecting to the degree of control exerted over audience/participants; see Richard Kostelanetz,

*The Theatre of Mixed-Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments and Other Mixed-Means Presentations* (New York: RK Editions, 1980), 56.

11. Kaprow, "Happenings," in *Essays*, 19, 16–17.

12. Kirby, *Happenings*, 21.

13. The links were quite tangible: Marcel Duchamp, Hans Richter, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Max Ernst were all seen at happenings. The notion of an art opening as a performance event clearly echoes certain surrealist and Dada exhibition strategies.

14. On the "unhappy performative," see Timothy Gould, "The Unhappy Performative," in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19–44. See also the introduction by the editors in the same volume, 1–18.

15. Johanna Drucker, "Collaboration without Object(s) in the Early Happenings," *Art Journal* 52, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 51–55, 51.

16. Drucker, 51.

17. The following analysis differs substantially from the affirmative understanding of "experience" offered in Hannah B. Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

18. Materials used in early happenings were largely scavenged from street trash (obsolete commodities) or fabricated from inexpensive bulk goods. *The Store* has typically been understood as an example of proto-poststudio practice. It must also be understood as a month-long art-life performance work. The term *Happenings Boys* is from a review by Jack Kroll, "Situations and environments at Jackson Gallery," *Art News* 60 (September 1961): 16, and refers specifically to Kaprow, Dine, Oldenburg, Whitman, and Grooms.

19. Indeed, Fried wrote, the ability of the individual arts to "defeat theater" was "perhaps nowhere more evident than within theater itself, where [it] has chiefly made itself felt as the need to establish a drastically different relation to its audience." Though his rhetoric occasionally borrows from Beckett, Fried specifically cites Brecht and Artaud, and notes: "It may have been the desire for something like presentness that, at least to some extent, led Brecht to advocate a nonillusionistic theater." Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, happenings artists, Kaprow first among them, figure in a footnote to "theatrical" practices. See Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 163; 170, n. 13; 172, n. 23.

20. Sontag, 273.

21. Sontag, 265.

22. Allan Kaprow, interview by author, 29 October 1996.

23. For a script of *A Spring Happening*, see Kirby, *Happenings*, 93–104. On violence in the early happenings, see Sontag, 263–74. See also my "Snaps and Crashes," *P-Form* 37 (Fall 1995): 8–13. This idea was further explored in my "Car Crash: 1960" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, Toronto, February 1998).

24. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1999), 41.

25. O'Doherty, 46.

26. Allan Kaprow, "Manifesto" (1966), in *Essays*, 81.

27. See, for example, Annette Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part One: The Dancer and the Dance," *Artforum* 12, no. 5 (January 1974): 57–63; and Roland Barthes, "That Old Thing, Art . . . ," in *Pop Art*, ed. Madoff, 370–374. This idea is further explored in my "Car Crash, 1960," in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, ed. Eric Rosenberg and Liza Saltzman (Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2004).

28. On Stanislavsky's system, see Timothy Wiles, *The Theater Event* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 13–68; Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present,* expanded ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 376; James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavski to Peter Brook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 6–13; and Colin Connell, *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1996), 24–78. On the history of the American adoption and transformation of the system into the Method, see also Felicia Hardison Londré and Daniel J. Watermeier, *The History of North American Theater: From Pre-Columbian Times to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 269–272; Stella Adler, "The Actor in the Group Theater," in *Actors on Acting,* ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (New York: Crown, 1970), 601–606; and Lee Strasberg, "The Actor and Himself," in *Actors on Acting,* ed. Cole and Chinoy, 621–629. Although Stanislavsky himself largely revised his teaching, moving from affective memory to something more akin to biomechanics —that is, physical exercises, and what might be thought of as a more hieroglyphic style—this shift was not registered by his followers in the United States.

29. Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 255–256, emphasis in original.

30. For a useful discussion, see Neil Kenny, "Changing the Languages of Theatre: A Comparison of Brecht and Artaud," *Journal of European Studies* 13 (September 1983): 169–186.

31. Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils,* 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1984), 111.

32. Entry for 12 September 1938 (Denmark), *Bertolt Brecht Journals,* trans. Hugh Rorrison, ed. John Willett (New York: Routledge, 1993), 18; lowercase in the original.

33. Cited in Esslin, *Brecht,* 115.

34. Bertolt Brecht, "The Alienation Effect," in *Actors on Acting,* ed. Cole and Chinoy, 309–310, emphasis in original. The essay was first published in the United States in 1949 as "A New Technique of Acting," trans. Eric Bentley, *Theatre Arts* 33, no. 1 (January 1949): 38–40.

35. The expression "dialectics in standstill" is Walter Benjamin's. Benjamin defined it (albeit somewhat vaguely) as an imagistic moment of historical self-consciousness and identified its critical operations as "the quintessence of method" for his *Arcades Project.* Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 5, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972–1988), 1035, cited in Rolf Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk,*" in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections,* ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 291 n. 18. In specific relation to Brechtian *Gestus,* see Ferenc Fehér, "Lukács, Benjamin, Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 37 (December 1985): 415–425, esp. 424.

36. Artaud was well acquainted with German theater and film, and it is likely that his early ideas about group blocking and depersonalization, the uses of film and technology, and the arrangement of audiences in relation to stage space derived to some degree from his encounters with the German experimental tradition. See Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre, 1892–1992* (London: Routledge, 1993), 92.

37. On Artaud, in addition to those general works cited earlier, see Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre,* 59–94; and Ronald Hayman, *Artaud and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). On Artaud, language, and spacing, see Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 169–195; Mikhail Yampolsky, "Voice Devoured: Artaud and Borges on Dubbing," *October* 64 (Spring 1993): 57–78; Mary Helen Kolisnyk, "Surrealism, Surrepetition: Artaud's Doubles,"

*October* 64 (Spring 1993): 79–90; Peggy Phelan, "Performing Talking Cures: Artaud's Voice," in *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production,* ed. Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass, and Nancy J. Vickers (New York: Routledge, 1997), 233–251; and Denis Hollier, "The Death of Paper," *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 27–37.

38. In 1947, 1949, and 1952 respectively. To the degree that Brechtian principles received any reception in America, this came primarily through the workshop run by Erwin Piscator in New York and only secondarily through Brecht's presence in Hollywood during the war years. The writings of Antonin Artaud were in circulation by the late 1940s, and by 1952 Mary Caroline Richards had begun work on her translation of *The Theater and Its Double.* Published in English in 1958, this text would have a major impact on the theater as well as on literature and the visual arts. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double,* trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove, 1958).

39. Cited in Andrew Nadelson, "Julian Beck as Painter," *Arts* 61, no. 3 (November 1986): 32–33, 32. Beck had been a mildly successful abstract expressionist and even showed in the autumn 1945 Salon at Art of This Century. In the 1950s his work had shifted toward assemblage and shared some features with early Rauschenberg. He gave up painting in 1958.

40. Arnold Aronson has called *The Connection* "the logical end of the naturalistic movement." See Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 58.

41. Theodore Shank, *American Alternative Theatre* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 10.

42. On *The Connection,* in addition to the diaries of Julian Beck and to the general surveys of avant-garde theater practices cited earlier, see Margaret Croyden, *Lunatics, Lovers and Poets: The Contemporary Experimental Theatre* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 89–134; and John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile, and Outrage* (New York: Grove Press, 1995).

43. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Epic Theater and Dramatic Theater," in *Sartre on Theater,* ed. Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, trans. Frank Jellinek (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 85; emphasis added.

44. John Cage, interview by Mary Emma Harris, in *Conversing with Cage,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), 104.

45. What I am identifying here is a typical case of appropriative reading in which the reader, while taking up models and challenges presented in a "master" text, leaves aside those aspects less suited to his or her own project. In this case Cage selectively dubbed from an expressionist "master." This is not to impute to Cage any "misunderstanding" of Artaud per se. Rather, it is to note that Cage's "Artaud" is an artifact of a selective *reading* (including a selective reading of performance) rather than of the wholesale reception of a tradition of theatrical *practice,* and, further, it is to locate that reading as the kind of "mis-taking" or Bloomian "swerving" that characterizes the strong poet's reception of precursors. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). In his important 1964 book *The Theatre of Revolt,* Robert Brustein proposed that modern (what we call modernist) theater has passed through several phases. Like many theater critics of the period, Brustein begins with a discussion of Shelleyan Romanticism but contends that the theater of revolt emerged from a second, Nietzschean phase and then moved (historically) through messianic, social, and existential phases. Brecht's oeuvre is split between the latter two phases. In conclusion Brustein suggests that with the revival of Artaud's theories (combined with the "hieroglyphic" theater of Genet) theater was returning to the start

of the cycle; that is, to its messianic phase. Robert Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), 1–34. At issue—and a central problematic for the reception of happenings, in particular in their resort to ritual and archetypes—is precisely the tension between this theatrical messianism and the performance practices that drew on its technical innovations.

46. Samuel R. Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957–1965* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), 110–116, 114, 116. I am indebted to Gavin Butt for drawing my attention to this passage. See Gavin Butt, "Happenings in History, or, The Epistemology of the Memoir," *Oxford Art Journal* 24, no. 2 (2001): 113–126.

47. Kaprow, interview.

48. Delany, 116.

49. The linkage to behaviorism is somewhat overdetermined, for two alternative, sometimes competing theories of subjectivity, both operative in the 1950s and both emerging from the empirical emphasis of American pragmatism, should be noted here. The first, exemplified by the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman, who regarded everyday life as "theater," presents a voluntaristic, cognitively self-critical, and eminently social subject. The second, behaviorism, emerged from the dual rhetoric of pure science—which rejected the notion of the autonomous individual—and social technology—that sustained a utopic vision of social order and was popularized by B.F. Skinner in his novel *Walden Two* (1948). Goffman's work has served as an easy reference point for discussions of performance art as well as identity politics, yet his theory of performance relies on a response to memory much like Skinner's formulation of the controlled feedback loop of "operant response." This behaviorist modality, I would argue, also forms a repressed critical kernel of the Fluxus "experience." This is hinted at by Hannah Higgins—her chapter "Information and Experience," particularly her discussions of "primary experience" and "art as a bio-behavioral necessity," are relevant here (see Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 17–68, 36–37, 61–67)—but to have acknowledged it would have undermined the book's affirmative valorization of "primary experience" over "interpretation."

50. Allan Kaprow has remarked on his own "parlor" interest in the work of Goffman and behaviorist Raymond Birdwhistell, both of whom made a practice of analyzing everyday behaviors—in the case of Goffman, the observation of what he identified as the "theater" of self-presentation; and in the case of Birdwhistell, through the frame-by-frame examination of the minutiae of body language recorded on camera. See "Allan Kaprow Interviewed by Moira Roth," *Sun and Moon: A Journal of Literature and Art* 5 (Fall 1978): 69–77; excerpted in *Performance Anthology: Source Book of California Performance Art*, updated ed., ed. Carl E. Loeffler and Darlene Tong (San Francisco: Last Gasp Press and Contemporary Arts Press, 1989), 307.

51. Julian Beck and Judith Malina on a panel, "Theatre as Revolution," as quoted in Aldo Rostagno (with Julian Beck and Judith Malina), *We, The Living Theatre* (New York: Ballantine, 1970), 25.

52. Harold Rosenberg, "Art and Its Double," in *Artworks and Packages* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 21.

53. Carol Bjorkman, "Happenings," *Women's Wear Daily*, 3 May 1966, 8.

54. On happenings and photography, see my "Foil." And note the coincidence of this linkage between power and cinema with the publication in 1967 (in Paris) of the

locus classicus of its theorizing, Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Zone, 1994).

55. Cited in George J. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 172.