

Rethinking Art and Life:
The Multiple Entanglements of Allan Kaprow's Happenings

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines Allan Kaprow's Happenings of the 1960s. It focuses on the ways in which these works spread out, reached into and became entangled with the social world in which they were written, organised and performed. Rooted in archival research and attention to the multiple forms of documentation produced in each Happening, the thesis traces the numerous and developing techniques by which Kaprow brought work and world into close, reciprocal relation in Happenings throughout the decade. It details the ways in which these techniques became a means of critical, experimental engagement with a range of social questions in 1960s America, including the changes in the nature of the public sphere and the shift towards a "post-industrial" society.

The thesis explores entanglement not only as a structural principle of individual Happenings, but also as central to Kaprow's Happenings as a more broadly conceived project. It situates individual works within the context of Kaprow's writings and of his underexplored organizational and promotional work related to the form. Drawing on a tradition of scholarship that originates in Peter Bürger's influential *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1971), the thesis argues that Kaprow developed the multifaceted, intertwining form of the Happening as a tool to examine, and to interrogate the possibilities of, the changing social roles, sites, audiences and values of modern art in 1960s America. As well as opening up new perspectives on Kaprow's Happenings, the thesis contributes to ongoing debates around the "neo-avant-garde", the relationship between ephemeral performance and its documentation, and meaning-making and agency in participatory art.